

**Religion and Violence –
Use Indian Languages and English Textbooks to
Cultivate Religious Amity**

Dr. Ramanadham Ramesh Babu and Dr. P. Sreenivasulu Reddy

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Real Religion

Love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance are a few synonymous words for the sacred sound 'Religion'. Violence, intolerance, abhorrence, etc., are exactly the opposites. The very utterance of certain words instantaneously invokes some lofty feelings and holy imagery. *Religion* is one such term that rings in us all righteous thoughts and right vibrations. In fact, the moment one becomes religious in the true sense, it should virtually be the end of greed and egotism, corruption and exploitation, pomp and pageantry, as described in religious scriptures of various religions.

Religion in Indian Languages and English

Indian languages have several terms to denote the concept of religion. Some of these are *marga*, *dharmic* or *dharma and matam*. *Maṭam* is used frequently in Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada. *aasṭik* or *aasṭikam(u)* may also be used.

In English, the term *religion* is borrowed from Latin through Old French. www.dictionary.com suggests "1150-1200; Middle English religioun (< Old French religion) < Latin religiōn- (stem of religiō) conscientiousness, piety, equivalent to relig(āre) to tie, fasten (re- + ligāre to bind, tie; cf. ligament) + -iōn- -ion".

"c.1200, "state of life bound by monastic vows," also "conduct indicating abelief in a divine power," from AngloFrench *religiun* (11c.), Old French *religion* "piety, devotion; religious community," and directly from Latin *religionem* (nominative *religio*) "respect for what is sacred, reverence for the gods; conscientiousness, sense of right, moral obligation; fear of the gods; divine ser

vice, religious observance; a religion, a faith, a mode of worship, cult; sanctity, holiness," in Late Latin "monastic life" (5c.)" (Religion. (n.d.). *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved December 20, 2017 from Dictionary.com website <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/religion>)

Synonyms

Like in Indian languages, English also has many words to refer to religion and religious belief and life, etc. www.dictionary.com presents the following synonyms:

- Church
- Creed
- Cult
- Denomination
- Doctrine
- Morality
- Myths
- Mythology
- Prayers
- Rituals
- Sects
- Spirituality
- Superstition
- Theology
- Communion
- Devotion
- Observance
- Orthodoxy
- Pietisms
- Piety
- Preference
- Religiosity
- Rites
- Sacrifice

- Sanctification
- Standard
- Veneration
- Higher Power
- Spiritual-Mindedness

Made into a Breeding Ground for Hateful Emotions

But, strangely religion is becoming a breeding ground for all sorts of hateful emotions and has become the biggest contributor of violence on the planet. In the human history, millions of lives are lost and maximum amount of pain on the planet is inflicted in the name of religion. The number of deaths caused by the religious fights could be far more than all the wars of the world and the two World Wars combined. The unusual aspect is that the “religion” has become a major instrument to instigate all sorts of irrational clashes and for building indestructible walls between individuals and nations, instead of it being a unifying force.

Ownership Tendency

Each religion has its own description and explanation of how human beings lost their relationship with their Creator and how such loss leads to terrible consequences. Conviction of individuals, social groups and ethnic communities, etc. that their own religious belief alone reveals truth or Truth is one of the reasons for conflict between religions. In addition to beliefs and practices, socio-economic interests also could become part of the conflict, as we have noticed in sectarian conflicts between sects in India.

The most painful point is that people are pregnant with their own conceived notions, ideas and concepts about creator and religion. And these come into conflict with one another.

Assumed Superiority of One Religion over Another

The major problem is that most people tend to project themselves as exceptional beings and satisfy their vanity. That which one desires to become or yearns to achieve will be imaginarily identified with something or somebody and people unconsciously start seeking psychological refuge in some personality, community, cult, or group. The ultimate identification

is with religion which readily invokes a torrent of intense emotions which are invariably mistaken for ‘devotion’. Emotion could also generate a disease. Indeed, distilled and purified emotion is devotion - the juicier part of the elevated emotions; but that which we call ‘devotion’ is often a result of our own crazy and irrational emotions.

Need to Recognize the Possible Role of Language Textbooks

Since we have many religions and innumerable sects practiced in India, conflict could be easily generated. Thus it becomes important that we take steps to avoid such conflicts and generate mutual love and respect. We believe that our language textbooks (Indian languages and English) and language classrooms have an important role to play here.

Poetry in Language Textbooks

Our Indian languages textbooks often focus on imparting information relating to the culture, history and traditions of the state. Poetry selected and offered becomes an important tool for this purpose. There are certainly attempts made to include pieces from various religions practiced within the state which has several religious communities. This may be strengthened using poetic and prose pieces that focus also on the importance of maintaining peace among the religious groups. Suggestions as to how this could be done are easily available in modern poems written in recent decades. These may be looked into and proper pieces chosen for inclusion in the textbooks. In addition such choice should also consider the beauty and elegance of language used, symbols, narrative methods, and the story content, etc. If some of these chosen pieces are available in translation (or if some of the chosen pieces could be translated into English), such pieces should be included in our English language textbooks. Poetry works of Sarojini Naidu and Tagore are used more often. It is time for other post-Independence poetry focusing on religious coexistence in Indian languages find a prominent place in the English language textbooks.

Prose Pieces

Prose pieces of Indian Writing in English certainly find their presence in English language textbooks. But these do not seem to focus on religious diversity, mutual respect for one another, etc. Focus seems to be on writings of well-known authors such as Tagore, R. K.

Narayan and others. How about choosing more recent writings of authors who write and live in India, and not focus on diaspora?

For the Prosperity and Peace of Multi-religious Nation

Language learning, both first and second/foreign languages must be linked to the social needs of the present time even as we focus on cultivating efficient language skills in our students. Teachers should be trained through periodic workshops to write their own creative pieces for inclusion in class discussion and practice.

For a multi-religious nation, religious camaraderie, mutual respect and understanding between religions, becomes an important requirement for socio-economic prosperity and also for peace.

To Conclude

Let us bear in mind what Shadhguru, a leading practitioner and leader of religious understanding says about the possible failure on our part. Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev identifies this as the root cause for such conflicts: “People believe in something that is not a reality for them. They believe in things that they have never seen and experienced. This has become the basis of all the conflict” (Sadhguru, *Pebbles of Wisdom*, 2009). We could use our language curriculum of both Indian languages and English to bring in better appreciation of one another.

References

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2. www.dictionary.com
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Dr. Ramanadham Ramesh Babu

Assistant Professor

ramanadham_rameshbabu@yahoo.com



Dr. P. Sreenivasulu Reddy

Assistant Professor of English

sreenupydala@gmail.com

GITAM University

Visakhapatnam – 530041

Andhra Pradesh

India