

3rd Prize Essay Writing Competition
The Role of Education in the Context of
Religious Conflicts:

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In the land of ironies, there has been occurring an irony, quite a prominent one which is, 'the people fighting over the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Quran* have not read either of them.'

The above statement holds good in the context of religious conflicts that are a usual phenomenon occurring both in our country as well as in the global scenario. Religious conflicts and communal violence have been on a rise in recent years though this very phenomenon has been prevalent from primordial times. When various civilizations started to evolve, there evolved a concept of religion that divided humanity and its basic principles. Today, that concept stands as most cardinal in all aspect of life. There evolved another vital phenomenon of facilitating the skills, knowledge, talents in all humans which has been and is been considered paramount to any other; this is the process of education I.e. to learn, teach and so on.

These two concepts play an important role in everyone's life, be it a country or an individual. When everyone on planet earth follows or belongs to a particular sect of religion, only 11% of the world population doesn't comply with it. The point being made here is that the whole humanity is united as humans but is divided when it comes to belongingness to a religion or maybe an ethnic group or a particular race. This very stratification has led to humongous problems that hinder world peace and harmony. 7.4 billion People live on the planet and are divided into 4300 religions but only two major religions claim more than 1 billion adherents.

This division has led to the prevalence of anti-social element called as the religious wars/ conflicts or communal violence. With the evolution of time this antisocial element has been growing indefinitely with all major religions being in conflict with each other with maybe a

silly issue or a major reason. This happens due to the differences in religion; its origin can be traced back to 7 and 8 century invasion of Canaan by Israelites, the Christian crusades, the invasions of Islamic empire and many others.

In today's scenario we see the Israel Palestine conflict, the Syrian Civil war, India Pakistan War, the war between Afghanistan and Iraq and several others. Though these wars have been internationalized by the countries and the United Nations Organization we must understand that the very reason for the beginning of these wars was religion, racial prejudice and misunderstandings, most basically, the religion itself.

These wars kill millions of innocent people and there is no account of the deaths that have occurred amidst these wars, not just deaths but also it leads to several major predicaments like refugee crisis, it affects the economy of the country, it leads to downfall of the country's stature and so on.

We can look at the examples that have been occurring in the current times, the Israel-Palestine issue is purely racial, and it can be seen as a war between Jews and Muslims on the whole. Its effects have been devastating; primarily, the amount of deaths has exceeded the limit and it has been difficult to keep a count, secondly, since the beginning of the war nearly 8 lakh Palestinians have fled the city to take refuge in other countries. UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works for Palestine refugees in the near east) now has registered 4.3 million Palestinians refugees all around the world.

The India Pakistan division has led to deaths of millions of people, starting right from the partition of India in 1947, then the Indo-Pak war in 1965. India witnesses several infiltrations and umpteen numbers of Indian soldiers are martyred annually.

Then we can see the Sudan civil between Muslims and Christians which led to the division of the country into North and South Sudan; nearly 3 million people have lost their lives in the war that began in 1955.

Also, the Boko Haram has caused an upheaval in Nigeria, killing thousands of Christians who opposed the Muslim law being brought into the country.

The intra-faith war between Muslims is very evidently called as the Sunni-Shia conflict has led to animosity between several countries like Saudi Arabia and Yemen, Iran and Iraq and so on. Many civil wars, predominantly the Syrian Civil war is due to the reason stated above.

Asian countries like Myanmar, Indonesia, and Bangladesh have been a victim of this disease called the religious war. Myanmar is witnessing Buddhism involving itself in the war and causing dissension between two faiths.

All these are examples of religious wars that have occurred and are occurring all over the world. When we take a closer look at our inner conflicts, we can see that the intensity of religious conflicts has been on a rise in the country. India is a land where many religions and faiths co-exist or maybe just, exist. So there are many conflicts that occur in our land.

The primary conflict is between the two major religions that exist in the country, Hinduism and Islam. From the partition, the conflicts and killings have been occurring, several examples are; the Gujarat Riots in 1969 that were very deadly in their nature, the 1992 riots that were caused due to destroying of Babri Mosque and killing of 1200 Muslims, this also led to riots in Mumbai city. Then in 2002 the Godra train incident occurred in Gujarat, which killed 790 Muslims and 295 Hindus according to the report of UPA Government.

In 1984, we saw the Anti-Sikh riots in Punjab due to the demand of Khalistan and the Operation blue star amidst the Emergency. Here, lakhs of Sikhs were killed, injured and displaced both legally and illegally.

Christians have also been in the limelight when the conversion to Hinduism forced to conflicts between the two religions and deaths of many.

The Hindu majority has also been the victim of this disease; there have been several attacks on Hindu temples in various cities like Varanasi, Tripura and so on. The Kashmiri Pandits who were killed as a part of cleaning Kashmir by Muslim militants was witnessed. The Deganga conflict in West Bengal saw many Hindu residences, business establishments

being looted, burnt and destroyed which in turn killed the Hindu Population. In Assam, there was a conflict between the Assamese, Bengalis who have both Hindus and Muslims and the tribals of the place. This conflict witnessed deaths which are tantamount to the time of partition.

It is witnessed that more than 200 people die each year in India due to this conflict and several are injured, also nearly 700 reports of communal violence in one state has been witnessed over a period of 5 years. It is important to note that it affects the population psychologically.

In the context of the above mentioned conflicts, we can see that there is a sense of empathy, morality, rationality, awareness, understanding, non-violent nature, a sense of peace and good nature seems missing. How are these factors developed in humans, which will eventually lead of evasion of the problems? The answer is very simple, it is through education. Education, channelized in a right manner will develop all these aspects in a human being. Education is a very important tool in a human's life; it is a process that occurs throughout our lives. Education is not just getting knowledge from books or preparing oneself for an exam, education is something that makes us better human beings and imbibes a positive spirit in oneself. This knowledge is gained from all spheres which will lead to better development of self and gets us ready to face the world and the endeavors coming before us in the future. Education is not learning skills and acquiring knowledge, but it something that develops our morale and reasoning, it is something that makes us more rationale in our approach towards life and imbibes morality in us, it is something that fuels our imagination and lets us go places, it is something that makes us more inquisitive about everything around us, it is something that fuels your drive to get ahead in life, it is something that makes you wealthy, not in materialistic terms but mentally and psychologically. This is what education means in real.

Total educated population of the world is 83.7% i.e. those above the age of 15 who can read and write. Considering this amount of population is educated, how do we still witness these kinds of inter faith conflicts in the world, are the people doing it on purpose?

We can say that there is a lack of understanding in us and there is immense love for our caste of religion that makes us reach such extreme levels. More than education, that is

basic and understandable by everyone, what is more important is religious education, religious understanding or tolerance. It is observable that these conflicts occur due to a minute problem which is blown out of proportion by the people, this can be attributed to the concept of 'crowd behavior' or 'contagion theory' in psychology or sociology where a crowd or a group of people exert certain amount of influence on others be it negative or positive. Religious conflicts have their root in religion or race or faiths and these concepts are those that are learnt in family and taught in a single perspective rather than a larger perspective. These concepts are rarely taught in schools and educational institutions that one carries ahead in life and these are not fuelled by any sort of books but by our understanding of the world. Religion as a gift comes to us from our family and we tend to carry that ahead without further questioning and it can be said that we are imposed with it which in turn means that there is lack of clarity and understanding. Then we learn from various people, starting from our family about various aspects of the religion, this also includes the religious books and religious sermons. Everything serves its purpose but one purpose it lacks at serving is developing basic understanding in us that any religion doesn't teach to harm others irrespective of which religion they belong to.

Religious conflicts spring up when one religion goes on to attack the other due to puerile reasons and this bloats up and causes major upheavals involving other countries and various organizations. It is important for everyone to understand any religion or faith doesn't teach attacking the other religion or killing innocent people, when we get this clarity, the conflicts will surely heal. One major attribute is terrorism; Islam is often connected to terrorism due to these religious groups killing innocents and carrying out bombings, this also leads to alienation of that particular religion.

Back to the context of education, humans at every stage of development are denied religious education; religious education in this perspective is showing the goodness and the moral values that a religion teaches rather than asking people to imbibe religious values and develop hatred towards other faiths. In school, we learn moral education but are discontinued in the later stages of life; we are not able to carry forward the values that were taught to us in school time. From then, our touch with morality goes off and we are into understanding our values through the perspective of religion. Then

we try to learn and understand religion which is taught to us from one stand point but not as whole. Here, again, we lag behind in understanding that is required to us.

If we look at the world from the perspective of religion and only religion what we see, are deaths due to minor conflicts. We need to look at the world from the perspective of secularism and tolerance. Only then the problem seems to end. The major reason for the muddles around us is this, no tolerance, no secularism, no understating. If we, not fight over the religion and first read and understand what is taught there then the world can be at peace. As the quote is written above, we need to read and analyse their religious scripts to deal with today's situation. We also need to imbibe the important values that are taught by education to us apart from acquiring knowledge and acquiring skills namely, morality, rationality and empathy.

We all love our religions but we should not kill others because of our love.

Hence, it can be seen and understood that education plays a vital role in the context of religious conflicts; it not only helps to reduce them but ends them at a very basic level. This will in turn lead to a better world with less problems and more peace and harmony at every level, when there is peace and harmony at every level then there will be peaceful co-existence among everyone in the world.