



# Enhancing the Scope and Opportunities for Religious Scholars: A Way towards an Inclusive Society.

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## Abstract

*In an ordinary Parlance the 'creation of opportunities for Religious Scholars' often led to the Narratives like Introducing -Modern Science, English Language, Smart Classrooms, Access to Computers and Internet, or led them to Join the So Called Mainstream through Schemes like 'Bridge Courses'<sup>1</sup>. While on the other Hand there is a Narrative that Reject the Mainstream Theory and Consider that Such thing will ultimately deteriorate the true Spirit and Purity of the Religion. In the midst of these arguments, We are Still witnessing that Even in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century an Imam of a Mosque is being Paid Rs 5000/m and Similar Wages are being Paid to 'Pandits' of a Temple in a City like Delhi<sup>2</sup> and as a Consequence they are forced to lead the life of a Flatterer of -Influential Persons, Big Businessman, Builders of the Locality. This Phenomena ultimately undermines the true essence of any Religion. In these circumstances, a serious question arises, that is **-why not to create a great Scope in their own existing System without undermining the true Essence and without diverting them to some other Stream?** In this work an attempt has been made to Explore New Scope and opportunities for Religious Scholars, how their Scholarship can be used and how the resource existing in different religions like Political Thought etc can be utilised for solving our Burning Problems in the modern times and how Peace and harmony can be established. The Work Primarily talks about, -Establishment of Research Institute Run and Managed by Religious Scholars that may Suggest the Government in Policy matters in achieving Specific Goals like How to Remove Social Evils and Crimes, How Judiciary can Work more Effectively and in Expeditionary Manner, Administrative Reforms, Policing Model and Several other areas that affect the Life of an ordinary People in the Country. Further there is a Proposal of Establishment of Society for Peace like 'Vedanta Society' across the Country (District Wise) having Representative from different Religious Communities. That will act as a Platform for Mediation and a message for Peaceful Coexistence. These Independent Set-up may gain Repute by the Passage of time in the Society that subsequently will attract Grants from different Sources.*

**Keywords-** Mainstream Theory, Policy Research Institute, Vedanta Society, Peaceful Coexistence.

<sup>1</sup> 'Bridge Course' was initiated in A.MU, Aligarh in the Year 2013, www.aninews.in updated on 15 June, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> As Per the Personal Observation of the Author in the areas of Okhla, New Delhi.

## INTRODUCTION

**Towards a Broad Understanding of Religion and Religious Scholars** Whenever the Word Religion or Religious Scholar is Spoken before us, it forces us to imagine about differences among different Communities, a Potential threat of Conflict and Religious Scholars as Leaders of the Community and much Responsible for the Wide Gap among different Communities. But there are few questions that require immediate attention:

1. How far we have Elucidated Religion as a Mechanism that Binds different Communities together?
2. Is there any Serious Attempt to Enhance the Opportunities for Religious Scholars and to use their Scholarship for the Welfare of any State?<sup>3</sup>

It is very difficult to answer the above question and it Requires much Exploration not only in India but also across the World. During the Exploration we found Some very Serious Development Going on in USA in relation to the above question. Mr. John Kerry (Former Secretary of State USA) gave a very thought Provoking Interview wherein he Said- **‘As secretary of state for the past two-and-a-half years, and before that as a senator for 29 years and also as a presidential candidate, I have met with religious leaders all across the world. I have also met with people of all religious traditions, life philosophies and belief systems. That experience has only reaffirmed my belief that there is much more that unites us, and should unite us, than divides us.** Amid the diversity of the world’s religions, there are common denominators; many are tied together by the Golden Rule. They share fundamental concerns about the human condition, poverty, human relationships and our responsibilities to each other. Many people talk about how we draw strength from the example of our religious communities—but too few actually translate those words into actions or policies. Leaders in public life need to recognize that in a world where people of all religious traditions are migrating and mingling like never before, we ignore the global impact of religion at our peril. It is not enough just to talk about better dialogue. We have to act to meet this need’<sup>4</sup>. Religion is a significant factor in the identity of one or both parts to the conflict. Religious leaders on both sides of the dispute can be mobilized to facilitate peace.<sup>5</sup>

The United Nations Organisation (UNO) acknowledge that Religion can be Used as a Mechanism to bring Peace and Religious Scholars can be Considered as Peace Makers. That’s Why their United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) Issue Guidelines for Engaging Faith Based Organisation (FBOs) and Religious Leaders (RLs) at ground level for Social Service and during the time of Conflict<sup>6</sup>. The US Congress Passed a Legislation Called United States Institute of Peace Act 1984, by Which ‘United States Institute of Peace’ (USIP) was Established with an Objective to Resolve Conflict and Promote Peace. The Institute Extensively Use Religion and Project Religion as Something that brings peace not war. The Major Work of this Institute includes “Peacework” (Religious Contribution to Peace Making: When Religion Brings Peace Not War) in different Chronology<sup>7</sup>. Besides that there are several other NGOs, International Foundations that Propagate the Broad Understanding of Religion. One Clinton Foundation Promotes Center for Interfaith Action on Global Poverty (2010). (Many Faiths, Common Action: Increasing the Impact of the faith sector on Health and Development: A Strategic Framework for Action). Washington D.C., USA. The Work Being done by these institutes cannot be Overlooked. For example, in Zambia, approximately 50 percent of all rural health facilities

<sup>3</sup> The treatment to the Religious Scholars vary from Government to Government as clearly described by Scholars at American Academy of Religion (AAR) USA, in annual meeting of AAR held at Boston, Massachusetts on November 19, 2017. (Available on Youtube).

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt Taken from the Interview of John Kerry (Former Secretary of State USA), America The Jesuit Review, September 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Johnston, President (Emeritus) of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (A Renowned NGO based in Washington D.C having Consultative Status of UN-ECOSOC that Propagate the notion of Religion as a Part of the Solution) in his Speeches and Work.

<sup>6</sup> UNDP Guidelines for Engaging Religious Scholars and Faith based organisation October 2014.

<sup>7</sup> USIP (1984) is an American Federal Institute, Independent but receiving fund only through Congressional appropriation, Promote Conflict Resolution and Prevention worldwide

are run by the Churches Health Association of Zambia, with a total of 144 health facilities (including hospitals, health centres and health posts), and eleven health training schools in 56 of Zambia's 74 districts<sup>8</sup>.

## Efforts Going on Across the World to Use the Status and Scholarship of a Religious Scholar:

The most attractive Illustration of the Use of Status and Scholarship of Religious Scholars is the creation of the 'Office of Religion and Global Affairs' at the State Department, which helps to implement U.S. President's Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement in the Year 2013. It's a Milestone in itself. Its mission is clear: to expand the understanding of religious dynamics and engagement with religious actors. The office is led by Shaun Casey, a former professor of Christian Ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary, who is one of the country's leading thinkers on religion in public life. As U.S. special representative for religion and global affairs, he is charged with growing the ability to reach out to more communities and to create greater understanding among peoples and countries. The office's mission is multifaceted. **First, it provides with high-level advice on policy matters as they relate to religion.** In many countries around the globe, a comprehensive look at almost any policy area requires attention to religious dynamics. **Second, it works with U.S. embassies and consulates to improve their capacity to assess religious dynamics** and engage religious actors. It is Required for foreign service officers to know how to work effectively with local religious individuals and groups. Finally, it serves as an initial point of contact for organizations and people interested in discussing foreign policy issues related to religion. That final charge revolves around an important skill in diplomacy: listening<sup>9</sup>.

Several Other Efforts that have been made across the globe can be analysed very briefly-

### 1. The 'HARPAS' Project (2004-2010) In Arab states:

The Spread of HIV/AIDS was Reported in Arab Region during and around the year 2004. The Issue got the attention of United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) and a Project was made called as HIV/AIDS Regional Programme in the Arab States (HARPAS). In Response to that Imam, Mufti, Ulema and Christian Religious Scholars from around the 19 Arab Countries Came together with the assistance of UNDP, at Cairo Declaration 2004. Wherein it was unanimously decided to Combat AIDS. Subsequently Multi Faith Network was formed by the Religious Scholars. The network got Recognition and trust in the Region and the People feel less Hesitant in Contacting the group for their treatment. In this Way the 'Network' Provide Service to thousands of Patients, moreover awareness against the disease was also made in the Whole Arab World through Religious scholar<sup>10</sup>.

### Lessons learned

- ♣ There are tangible benefits to the interfaith approach: by overcoming their religious differences, Religious Leaders found common ground in tackling issues affecting the health and welfare of their communities.
- ♣ On issues such as HIV and AIDS, it is important to recognize the importance of Religious Leaders in their communities and their potential to influence the success of the project, and to listen sincerely to their ideas and concerns.
- ♣ Over time, Religious Leaders can bring in other stakeholders with whom they have contact, such as parliamentarians and the media. This ensures a synchronicity of efforts and builds a genuine civic coalition.
- ♣ It may also be beneficial to include secular activists or more moderate religious leaders to create a balance of ideas.

<sup>8</sup> Data as Per the Report Issued by Center for Interfaith Action on Global Poverty 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Information as Perceived from News America The Jesuit Review, September 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Case Study appeared in UNDP Guidelines for Engaging Religious Scholars and Faith based organisation October 2014.



## 2.Zimbabwe Case:

Zimbabwe saw a Very Conflicting Era during the Year 2008-2009.The Country was going through huge crisis due to the Civil War.Here,Again UNDP came to the Rescue and through their assistance Church Leaders forum was Established in different areas around the Whole Country.The Religious Leaders associated with the forum were actually Local Religious Sholars.The Forum Established at different areas negotiate among each Other moreover the People got an Opportunity to freely Contact with the forum and Place their Grievance.Such Negotiation Yield Very Positive Results and become a major Contributor in Peace Making in the Country<sup>11</sup>.

### Lessons learned

♣ Instead of simply offering grant-making projects, UNDP can engage Faith Based Organisations in projects that build capacity and are geared towards direct implementation.

♣ UNDP support was critical in highlighting the role of Church Leaders Forum as an agent for development and peace in Zimbabwe, and strengthening the capacity of its members. Church Leaders Forum is now developing innovative strategies for engaging with government institutions as part of its collaborative programme on peace building.

After Analysing the Efforts being taken to use the Status and Scholarship of Religious Scholars Across the Globe.Few Major things that can be Concluded very briefly,one is that Religious Scholars can be engaged for Policy making even in a Secular Set-up and there is nothing to worry when their Scholarship and Status is being used for the benefit of the Masses<sup>12</sup>.Even local Religious Scholars have much to do as seen in the case Study of Arab States and Zimbabwe.There are Several Other Similar Illustrations where Religious Leaders have done a great Job at the Ground Level mentioned in the UNDP guidelines for Engaging Faith Based Organisations and Religious Leaders.

## What can Be Done in India?:

After analysing the Global Situation,some Recommendation can be made for India.It cannot be said that the government of India should do the same thing What the US Government has done.But the Idea can be brought from there and expressed in the Indian Surrounding as per our own Needs and aspirations.In India we have Hindu,Muslim,Sikh and Christian as Major Communities Residing here and Each Community has its Religious Scholars.Then there is a question.Why not to use their Status and Scholarship for the benefit of the masses that may Lead to the Enhancing the scope and Opportunities for Religious Scholars.In this way a peaceful harmonious and Inclusive society can be formed.

In Relation to the Muslim Community:

<sup>11</sup> Supra Note-9

<sup>12</sup> Shaun Casey,Head of the Office of Religion and Global affairs has given a Special lecture on the topic Religion and Government Engagement,Where he has described that he along with his team has done a tremendous work in Preparation of the Draft and policy for Paris agreement 2015,as Delivered at a Programme at Berkley Center,Georgetown University,held on-5<sup>th</sup> May 2016,available on Youtube.

There is a Claim on Behalf of Muslim Religious Scholars that the answer to each and Every Miseries and problems across the world lies inside the Sharia(Quran and Hadith)<sup>13</sup>. Then Why not to ask them for the solution of Problems like-

1. How to Remove Social Evils and Crime?
2. How to Remove Public corruption?
3. Is there any Better Model for Administration?
4. Is there any Better Policing Model?
5. How Judiciary can Work more effectively and in Expeditious Manner?

With a strict Cap Imposed Upon them that the Nature of the State will be Democratic and secular as established by the Supreme Court of India. The focus will be only upon the Solution to the Problem not the Imposition of the will of one Community over the other Community with a Clear Intention for the Benefit of the public at Large.

#### Procedure-

Muslim by themselves can Establish Research Institutes and Can also Engage the Religious scholars from other Community. They can Dwell upon the questions as described earlier along with major Issues of the Country related to health, Economy, Education etc need to be given Special attention by the Institutes. They can Choose their Own way of Working as Per their wish as Per any other Policy Research Institute. They Can also form Working group to Know the Ground Realities in response to that they can use their Religious texts which they claim to have solutions of all the Problems across the World and came up with Some Solutions. They can Propagate their Work through Books, Articles, Research Paper or Proposal before the government or make their Proposal/Report Public. They are not forced to carry any well Established Research Methodology like Case Study or Ethnography. They can Evolve their own Methodology that should be Justified and Reliable. They must Rely on Problem Solving Approach. Moreover there is no reason to wait. Trail Should be Initiated at Least in Metro cities. There is no need to Worry about the funding as most of the Policy Research Institute work with the help of Contribution. Collaboration can be made with different 'Foundations' related to Muslim Community or based in Middle-East. If they gain Reputation by the Passage of time then it may happen that the Government may Collaborate with them to carry on any Project.

#### In Relation to Other Communities-

In Relation to Other Community there is a Suggestion to Establish "Society for Peace" that will Consist of Religious scholars from all major Communities of a district. The Society can Spread itself all across the Country based in almost each and every district. Some Clue can be taken from the existing Vedanta Society across the World. The same Concept can be Enlarged in a broader Sense including Religious scholars from other Communities.

#### Major Task-

The Major Work upon Which they can proceed with is Organising seminars and Symposiums around the Whole district Propfereagating the message of "Peaceful Co-Existence" with other Communities. They can

<sup>13</sup> Claim by Several Muslim Organisations, Jamaateislamihind.org/establish deen in individual/dated-30.05.2020

also Organise Lecture Series on an Individual Basis carrying the same idea and issuing booklets, Magazines can be made a Part of their Job. The Most Important duty that should be imposed upon them is to make them to act as a Platform for Mediation during Conflict time i.e- whenever there is any clash or dispute or Riot between two different communities, then this platform can become active and initiate negotiation with the Religious scholars of Other Community and they can directly approach the common masses at the ground level and listen to their grievances. Different Religious Scholars Present on the Platform can act as Representative of their respective Communities and their Negotiation can yield Some Positive results and that can Ultimately bring Peace. It will become very easy for the government or the Administration to approach different Community through their Representative and listen to their Issues.

There is an Illustration before us-

WORK- 'World Organisation of Religion and Knowledge', Rampur, U.P, India

This Organisation is gaining Reputation very Rapidly. The Concept that has been Utilised by this Organisation is slightly Similar to that has been described earlier. They Engage Religious Scholars from major Religious Communities Just for the Purpose of Extracting Knowledge that is beneficial for the whole nation.

## **The Road Ahead:**

One can come up with several suggestions to Enhance the scope and Opportunities for Religious Scholars thinking in the manner as described in this Work. But there are Several Challenges that need to be Sorted out and addressed thoroughly.

Methodological Challenge-

The Major Challenge is to determine the Competency of any Religious Scholar. Verily it is very difficult to Evaluate any Person's Knowledge, Understanding and his Critical thinking. There is also a threat that it may happen that the Institutes may become Simply an Organisation to Receive and distribute funds and grants. Also, there are several Potential Challenges that cannot be foreseen at this moment. Therefore it is necessary to initiate the work on a trial basis and the Work can be expanded on the basis of its Performance and demand. So far as the issue of appointment of Religious scholars is Concerned, help can be sought from the already existing Muslim or Hindu Organisations that are highly Reputed. The Guidelines issued by the UNDP from time to time may also be of Some Use. No doubt questions will be raised on the issue of Muslim Religious Scholars Suggesting about the Policy for the secular Nation. Therefore it needs to be Clarified that the Religious Scholars are being asked Simply to answer those Problems that are Common to all or by Which every one is Suffering as already Elaborated Earlier. And if there is any Solution to those Problem that can benefit everyone, then there Should be no Problem in accepting those Suggestions. Why to Cover the Knowledge or refuse to accept those things that are beneficial for the Entire Humanity, Simply in the name of Secularism.

Opening New Avenues-

Through this work, the author simply wants to initiate new Conversation, there is no advancing of argument from the author's side moreover the author heartily accept that this work do not Provide a very Clear model for

Engaging Religious Scholars so that their Opportunities can get Enhanced. The Work is very Simple and Can be called as novice in terms of Understanding of Religion and Global affairs. But the Intention of the Author is not to Pour his Knowledge upon the masses but to force the Publicist, Writers, Jurists to Initiate ways so that the Revealed Knowledge Can be Utilised When the Humanity is in Crisis. The Suggested Way of Engaging Religious Scholars in this Work may not be the only way to Enhance their Opportunities and get benefited. There may be some other ways far better than this one, but they are only needed to be Explored and initiate trial. The Only Concern that is haunting the author time and again is that the Creation of Opportunities for Religious Scholars Should not lead them to deviate their Stream or gaining Some Extra Vocational Training to earn their Living. The author is trying to throw questions to its Readers like- Why do we have Restrained Ourselves to the Environment of a delightful thinking like-

- 'I want to become an Alim (Muslim Religious Scholar) as well as an Engineer'.
- 'I want to become a Mufti (Islamic Jurist) and a Lawyer'

Why not to think about a highly qualified Alim (Muslim Religious Scholar) or Mufti (Islamic Jurist) or any Religious scholar, Who only through his own Knowledge and Wisdom can Contribute a Lot to the Society? Why to gain the degree of Religious scholar Simply for Ceremonial Fashion and Earn a Living through different Sources.

The Root of the Problem Lies in the fact that Still in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century the Imams (Muslim Leaders) or Pundits (Hindu Priest) are Paid very Less Wages and therefore they do not carry their Course of study With much Seriousness or diligently. As a Result we are Witnessing a Large number of Poor Qualified Religious Scholars. In Response to that Several Efforts were made like Skill based training, Bridge Courses so that they can be deviated from their Stream and can gain Opportunities through the Other Stream. This trend only Shows that we are Undermining their Own Knowledge and Scholarship. It appears that we have already Presumed that their Stream is so much inefficient that it cannot be Compared with the modern ongoing Knowledge System that Consist of Formal Education through School, colleges and Universities. But if their own Knowledge and Scholarship Start Solving the modern day to day Problems, then Surely they will get attention and Respect and more opportunities can be created from their own Stream. The Stream of Knowledge like Arts, Science, Commerce may also recognise another stream that is 'Religion' having full Scope and Opportunities. The author Request the Learned men and Women, Scholars to Kindly Explore this stream and Promote more and more Research in this field so that the masses may be reminded about some other ways of Recovering from the Crisis.

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