

Exploring the Possibility of Hindu-Muslim Dialogue

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In *Muslims in Dialogue: The Evolution of a Dialogue*, L. Swidler, ed, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY, pp. 277-291, 1992.

Available at <http://global-dialogue.com/swidlerbooks/muslim.htm>

Islam and Hinduism have been present in the Indian sub-continent for over 1,000 years. During this time there has been a great deal of violence; even today it is not infrequent. There have also been periods of peace. However, whether in war or in peace, Muslims and Hindus have not reacted in a way that indicates mutual understanding and appreciation of each other. In their day-to-day encounter, there is at most a superficial civility during peace; during confrontation they look upon each other as sub-humans. During the 1945-46 riots, I was present in Dacca (Bangladesh). As a Hindu child I was frightened and angered by the war cry of the Muslim rioters, "Allah O Akbar." I did not know that it meant, "God is great!" Similarly, I imagine, the war cry of Hindu rioters, "Bande Mataram" (hail to the mother), did not suggest maternal mercy to Muslim children. The brutal, inhuman behavior of both peoples during confrontation is all too well known.

Of course, there are a few rare cases of genuine friendship between individual Hindus and Muslims. There are even some cases of intermarriage. However, by and large, Muslims and Hindus have stereotyped understandings of each other. Muslims, in general, consider Hindus idolators and polytheists, and educated Muslims are contemptuous of the inequality of the Hindu caste system. Likewise, in general, the Hindu stereotype of Muslims is that they are meat-eating brutes who marry their sisters (cousins), and educated Hindus are contemptuous of Islamic intolerance and *jihad*.

This mutual contempt and isolation of Muslims and Hindus in India seems even more amazing in view of the fact that a large number of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent are of Hindu ancestry. Some recent anthropological studies even indicate the presence of remnants of Hindu attitudes among some Muslims of the sub-continent. For example, Adrian Mayer refers to the presence of caste among Muslims;¹ some Muslims indicate a preference for a vegetarian diet, as it is considered more pure, while Hindus venerate Muslim "pirs" as saints. However, overall, there is an attitude of competitiveness and mutual intolerance between Muslims and Hindus. Is dialogue between them even a possibility?

In order to explore what Muslims and Hindus think about each other's religion, I searched for writings of Muslims of the sub-continent on Hinduism and vice versa. So far, I have found no Muslim author writing exclusively on Hinduism. In Muslim writing, Hinduism is referred to in the context of showing its inferiority to Islam. Even a liberal Muslim such as Amir Ali in his *The Spirit of Islam*² has nothing but derogatory remarks about Hinduism and Buddhism. Aziz Ahmed, in *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*,³ displays no insight into Hinduism when he admires Schimmel's description of the contrast between Hinduism and Islam: "Hindu genius flowers in the concrete and the iconographic; the Muslim mind is on the whole atomistic, abstract, geometrical, and iconoclastic."⁴ Likewise, I found no book by a Hindu author which was written exclusively on Islam. Rammohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi-all were appreciative of Islamic monotheism. However, they wrote no works on Islam. A contemporary Hindu scholar such as Anil Chandra Banerjee refers to the Islamic Shari'a to demonstrate the intolerance of Islam, in his *Two Nations: The Philosophy of Muslim Nationalism*.⁵ It is quite evident that even the scholars among the Muslims and Hindus have not made any serious effort to understand each other's tradition.

Causes for Apathy and Indifference

There are complex historic, anthropological, psychological, sociological, economic, and political reasons for Muslim-Hindu conflict and apathy, some of which are very obvious. The first Muslims who came to India came as conquerors, and the vanquished were the Hindus. There is competitiveness between Hinduism and Christianity, but the first Christians who came to India were missionaries, not political conquerors. That is one of the reasons for lesser hatred and animosity between Hindus and Christians in the sub-continent. Buddhist missionary activity started under the patronage of King Asoka, but it did not lead to empire-building. That is one of the reasons for lesser hostility toward Buddhists by people of other faiths. The historical situation of the encounter between Islam and Hinduism is an important reason for the hostility between the two.

The Arabic culture in which Islam originated and the Indian environment in which Hinduism is nurtured are quite different. Patterns of behavior, standards of civility, attire, food, language—all are different. Meetings of alien cultures naturally produce distrust and misunderstanding. Human beings' ethnocentricity makes them distrust and ridicule the unfamiliar. Moreover, the Indian sub-continent, politically, was never one country. First, Muslim rulers, and later British, made it into one political unit. The nationalistic feeling of belonging to one political unit was a later development among the people of the sub-continent. When nationalistic feelings started to emerge, they were often colored with religious feelings, and controversy over one or two nations for the sub-continent became almost inevitable. Religion has often been used for political purposes in the subcontinent. Sometimes it was used for Hindu-Muslim cooperation against the British, as in the case of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, or against each other during pre-partition, mostly by the British, and even after partition, by various political parties. Methodical research into these factors which are causes of the conflict between Muslims and Hindus is vital to the promotion of understanding between them.

Religious Causes

The characteristics of Islam and Hinduism as religions also contribute to the isolationism of these two traditions. Their worldviews seem to be quite different. In Islam, unity of one God and uniformity in ways of belief and patterns of worship are fundamental. Islam advocates one God, one scripture, one seal of prophecy. In other words, singularity or unity is characteristic of Islam as a religious tradition. Hinduism is, instead, characterized by plurality. A Hindu can be a Hindu worshipping many gods or one God or no God. The focal point of Hinduism is not one God but to be worshipful, which is usually referred to by such a Hindu philosopher as Radhakrishnan as respect for truth-Sraddha. So, it is said there are 330,000,000 gods in Hinduism, and there may be as many ways of worshipping God. Hinduism, therefore, does not refer to one God, one scripture, or one prophet. Just as unity is characteristic of Islam as a religious tradition, plurality is characteristic of Hinduism as a religious tradition.

Islam and Hinduism are distinctive in other respects also. Islam advocates a kind of theocracy—religious law needs to be political law. The universal ideal needs to be concretized in society and in history. Human beings are vicegerents of God.⁶ The Hindu attitude is that the concrete is a stepping stone to the universal ideal but the universal can never be fully concretized in history. That is why, by and large, the Hindu ideal is ahistorical or a-political. Islam believes in a final day of judgment; Hindus believe in the cycle of creation and dissolution, the cycle of birth and death. Islam is a missionary religion. F. S. C. Northrup wrote, "For an orthodox Mohammedan, missionary zeal, military power, and political control go together."⁷ For Hinduism, the ideal is spiritual freedom, which may not be related to political freedom. This is expressed even in the leadership of the movement for independence in India. Gandhi worked for political freedom more as a spiritual leader; therefore, he never accepted any governmental post. Sri Aurobindo changed from a fight for political freedom to a fight for spiritual freedom. The majority of Hindu monastic orders do not become directly involved in political movements.

Allen H. Merriam, in *Gandhi vs Jinnah: The Debate over the Partition of India*, presented a descriptive and nonvaluational contrast between Islam and Hinduism:

It may be helpful to view Hinduism as an essentially feminine doctrine and Islam as being far more masculine in character. The Hindu worships the cow as the symbol of motherhood and fertility; many Hindu deities are female, and Hindu art is full of voluptuous female figures.... Muslims, on the other hand, worship a very masculine Allah; only men are allowed inside a mosque, and in most Islamic societies women are veiled when in public. It would be quite unusual to have a woman prime minister in an Islamic nation.⁸

He also described very clearly the contrasting concepts of social organization of Hindus and Muslims. The dominant force of Hindu society is the caste system, which is based on the conviction that different humans have different potentialities, determined by one's action in the previous incarnation. Castes and sub-castes produced a decentralized social structure which safeguarded against penetration of any outside force; thus, Hindu society could continue relatively unchanged during the years of Muslim rule. The rigid regulation of caste prohibited the intermixture of castes and of Hindus and non-Hindus, but, paradoxically, it bred an attitude whereby plurality is considered a social norm. Merriam noted that this acceptance of diversity prompted Hajime Nakamura to state, 'Toleration is the most conspicuous characteristic of Indian culture.'⁹ Islam, on the contrary, considers all humans equal by birth. Merriam noted, "All people are called to unite and conform to one community of believers."¹⁰ Islam's emphasis on dogma and a democratic social order has meant the development of a strong sense of community- particularly in India, since it is a minority there.

It is evident that the theological and social assumptions of Muslims and Hindus are different. The differences of convictions generated contempt or, at best, indifference toward each other. Muslims and Hindus feel no need to learn about or from each other. Islam proclaims that it is the only true way- the straight path. The Quran and the tradition make some concessions to the "People of the Book," of course. For example, they can gain protection by paying *jizya* (IX:29); and, after the battle of Badr, Muhammad formulated a treaty in which the Jews were included within the commonwealth of Medina.¹¹ In the eleventh century, Mawardi prescribed that the *Imam* (caliph) had the duty "to wage holy war (*jihad*) against those who, after having been invited to accept Islam, persist in rejecting it, until they either become Muslims or enter the Pact (*zimma*) so that God's truth may prevail over every religion."¹² The conditions of the pact suggest that subordination of the *zimmis* was tolerated, but at least their lives were spared. However, the Quran and tradition are vehemently opposed to idolatry. Muhammad's war was against the idolatry in the Arabia of his time. He did not meet any Hindus or witness any image-worship of the Hindus, but the Muslims who came to India considered Hindus idolators because of the image-worship. Therefore, many of them did not want to grant the Hindus the status of *zimmis*. Only some rulers following the Hanafi School of Shari'a assigned *zimmi* status to the Hindus. Hindu image-worship is one of the most important reasons for Muslim contempt of Hinduism. Image-worship, from the Islamic perspective, is a compromise with the transcendence of God-it is *shirk*. That is why Amir Ali could see nothing noble or sublime in the forms of Hindu worship:

The sacrifice could be performed only by the priest according to rigid and unalterable formulae; whilst he recited the mantras and went through rites in a mechanical spirit, without religious spirit or enthusiasm, the worshipper stood by, a passive spectator of the worship which was performed on his behalf. The smallest mistake undid the efficacy of the observances.¹³

Hinduism proclaims in many ways. From the Hindu perspective, not only can there not be just one way to truth, but also no way can be the perfect and faultless way to truth. Agehananda Bharati has often ridiculed Hindu tolerance. He has identified some modern Hindus as "essential unity" preachers who are no less competitive and polemical than are Christians and Muslims. In his article "Radhakrishnan and Other Vedanta,"¹⁴ he pointed out that Vedantists of the Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan type believe in the superiority of monism. In his chapter "Sohi Allah Wahi Ram? The Anthropology of the Hindu-Muslim Interface," he wrote:

Urban “essential Unity” Hinduism which includes the sermon of the English speaking Swamis in India and abroad-states that all religions are equal, but implies that since Hinduism is “scientific” and tolerant, it incorporates what all other religions teach, and is hence at least a *primus inter pares*.¹⁵

From the perspective of Hinduism, any claim by any tradition to be exclusively true is arrogant, although the contrary Hindu claim seems equally arrogant to others. Hindus consider ultimate truth to be beyond words and letters; hence, the Muslim claim that the Qur’an is the literal word of God is, from the Hindu perspective, a compromise with the transcendence of truth. Since all Hindus-not only the “essential unity” preachers-have been historically surrounded with plurality, they cannot comprehend or sympathize with any doctrine of “One Way.” They are contemptuous of such arrogance, or at least indifferent to it. If all ways are ways of truth, even though none is perfect, one can stick to one’s own, and there is no need to learn about or from each other.

Inclusivism often generates indifference, whereas exclusivism often generates intolerance and violence. Hindus are critical of the intolerance and violence of Islam. Hinduism as a tradition believes in the transformative quality of religion. Transformation, according to Hinduism, implies a change of personality from fear to courage, from anger to love, from violence to nonviolence. Although an individual or a group of Hindus may not be less violent than an individual or a group of Muslims -as the history of their encounter indicates -nevertheless, in Hinduism nonviolence is considered a cardinal virtue. Hence, Islamic *jihad* is looked upon with contempt by Hindus. Hindus, even the college educated, look upon Islam as an essentially militaristic tradition. One educated Hindu, although not an official “scholar,” described Muslim *salat*, in which the group prays by synchronic postures and movements, as military training in preparation for war.

It is evident that Muslims and Hindus neither understand one another nor make any serious attempt to do so. They do not try to go beyond the surface and penetrate that which may not be so apparent to the outside observer. Not only the average Muslim or Hindu but even theologians and philosophers indicate no interest in or understanding of each other. Islamic *kalam* developed primarily outside the sub-continent. Any immanentist tendency in Islam can be explained in terms of interaction with Hellenism. Sufism might have been congenial to the Vedantic point of view, but it need not be explained in terms of its influence. It seems that Muslim theologians, being repelled by Hindu image-worship, made no attempt to find out what lay underneath. In the same way, the post-Islamic Bhakti movement in Hinduism was perhaps stimulated by Islamic monotheism and devotionalism, but it need not be explained in terms of that influence. The nineteenth- and twentieth-century Hindu elites who studied and appreciated the Qur’an found nothing in it which they considered to be genuinely new or not present in Hinduism. No Hindu thinker made any attempt to penetrate Islamic exclusivism or militarism to find out what lay underneath. Muslims and Hindus have confronted each other, but they have generally felt no real challenge from one another to appreciate or learn from or about each other.

Encounter with the West

Muslim and Hindu encounter with the West is a different matter. Both felt a challenge and threat from Western civilization. Both simultaneously admired and condemned Western civilization and values. Muslims and Hindus recognize the value of the advanced scientific knowledge in the West. Apologists of both traditions try to demonstrate that scientific knowledge is part of their heritage as well, and both refer to their respective contributions in mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. Muslims and Hindus recognize and appreciate the value of democracy, individual dignity, and humanism. They do not think that these are recognized values of the West alone. Rather, in polemics, they try to show how these values have been jeopardized in the West. There is ambivalence about technology, industrialization, and material prosperity among Muslims and Hindus, but in general there is appreciation of the bountifulness, health, and hygiene of the West. Modernity, which is equivalent to “Westernity” to many people, has stimulated both Muslims and Hindus to question and reflect on their own traditions-although not about each other’s.

The Western attitude toward the sub-continent can be classified as either contemptuous and patronizing or romantic. Modernists of the West tend to highlight the superstition, backwardness, poverty, and dehumanization present in the sub-continent. Romanticists who are concerned about the negative effects of modernism-secularization, manipulation, dehumanization-display an attitude of appreciation for the spiritual and philosophical contributions of the sub-continent. Max Müller in the nineteenth century and Aldous Huxley in the twentieth may be cited as examples of the latter. Both Muslim and Hindu thinkers reacted to the negative criticism of the West with polemics and apologetics, although some self-criticism and social-reform movements were also generated. Muslim and Hindu thinkers reacted to the romantic attitude of the West with a feeling of self-congratulation and complacency. Both Muslim and Hindu writers like to quote the Western scholars who praise their traditions! Muslims and Hindus did not react jointly in their depreciation of some of the Western attitudes, nor did they appreciate each other as a result of their appreciation by the West.

What Can Be Done?

Hindus and Muslims have lived in physical closeness for years, and yet they do not dialogue with each other and show no inclination toward it. I have attempted to analyze some of the causes of this situation. The nature of the respective traditions as such is not conducive to any dialogue, yet the dehumanizing and inhuman relationship between Hindus and Muslims makes it quite evident that dialogue between us is a practical necessity. How can we dialogue? I can see a clue for it in our relationship and reaction toward the West.

In the last half of the twentieth century it is becoming increasingly fashionable to criticize Western values. Awareness of the dangers inherent in modernity is a necessity. There are many good works on this subject.¹⁶ However, when the anti-establishment becomes the establishment, there is the opposite danger.¹⁷ Uncritical condemnation of modernity may lead to uncritical acceptance of all types of superstition. It may lead to complacency, self-congratulation, and passivity. With our awareness of the dangers of modernity, let us not be blind to its stimulating and liberating effects. The history of any religious tradition would indicate how modernity revitalized it by eliminating some of the stagnation. In his lectures to the Western people, Vivekananda-who is considered instrumental in making Hinduism a missionary religion-seemed to be one of its greatest apologists, yet in his lectures to Hindus he seemed to be a vehement critic of their religion.¹⁸ After his tour of America and Europe, he indicated his appreciation and admiration of these people for their recognition of the dignity of the individual, hygiene, health, vitality, etc. Modernity generates self-reflection and can be an antidote to the dogmatic adherence to the beliefs of the forebears and mechanical repetition of what they did. Uncritical adherence to traditions can stagnate any religion, as is evident in our two religions of the sub-continent.

The question of human rights is asked and pursued in the Western context. What the rights of human beings as human are is often described in terms of Western categories. This runs the danger of ideological neocolonialism. Raimundo Panikkar is concerned about this *de facto* neocolonialism. He points out that at the present time there are three sociologically dominant cultures: technological civilization, the paneconomic systems, and what is popularly called the "Western way of life." He notes that most of the African, Asian, and Latin American cultures, for economic survival, are taking the categories of these dominant cultures for granted, but the indiscriminate adoption of methods that are alien to the local cultures is not producing the desired effects.¹⁹ There is a need to investigate the meaning of human rights, of growth and progress, not simply from the perspective of the dominant cultures-but from the perspective of others as well.

Not only contemplation but also action is needed. Living cannot stop while, we are finding out the meaning of life. Indeed, the meaning of living may emerge from living itself, as such existentialists as Camus indicate. Herein lies the contribution of such activists in the field of interreligious and interideological dialogue as Leonard Swidler. Very much aware of the strong points of Western civilization, Swidler indicates "one of the strengths of modern Western civilization has been its

stress on effective human action, both individual and corporate.” So, he thinks: “The world cannot be ‘saved’ simply by trying to ‘save’ the individual persons; the social structure within which the individual persons live must also be, ‘saved.’”²⁰ The content of “saving” is not self-evident and would need ongoing contemplation, but the situation of the relationship between Muslims and Hindus definitely calls for action. One such activity is dialogue, but we are not so inclined. The enterprise of dialogue by Western activists such as Swidler is helpful in this respect, because through such enterprise Hindus and Muslims are getting involved in dialogue.

However, Muslims and Hindus are often suspicious of the Christian initiative in dialogue, which is feared as a covert way of converting. Whatever it is, Muslims and Hindus can appreciate the greater, if not total, understanding about their traditions, understanding by more people from the West. Hans Küng may be cited as an example. His attitude toward Hinduism in *On Being a Christian*²¹—and more recently as expressed in his response to Heinrich von Stietencron in his attempts to dialogue with different world religions²²—is a clear indication of better understanding. In the first case he finds more superstition and degradation in the Hindu tradition; in the second, more appreciation of its mystical bent. This example itself illustrates the potential of dialogue for the development of mutual understanding. Thus, if we Hindus and Muslims begin to engage in dialogue, there is the possibility of better mutual understanding even if we start to do so reluctantly or half-heartedly by means of Western initiative.

The modern method of the critical approach to history and the different social and psychological sciences can also be helpful in generating an atmosphere of dialogue between Muslims and Hindus. A conventional way of writing Indian history by both Western and Indian historians is in terms of the religious traditions of its rulers. Romila Thapar, in *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History*,²³ traces this tendency back to James Mill’s *History of British India* (early nineteenth century). She indicates that Mill developed the thesis of dividing Indian History into the three periods which he called Hindu Civilization, Muslim Civilization, and British Civilization—but not Christian. Such characterization of history can and did generate misunderstanding and even hostility among the different religions. For example, Turkish, Persian, and Arab conquerors of India were Muslim, and they themselves often identified their conquest as Islamic. However, the plunder and destruction of Hindu temples by Ghazni (eleventh century C.E.) need not necessarily be interpreted as the intolerance of Islam. Thapar points out that the Hindu King Harsha even appointed an officer, *devot-patananayaka* (uprooter of gods), to plunder the wealth of Hindu temples, but this is not seen as the intolerance of Hinduism.²⁴

The fourteenth-century Muslim historian, Zia-ud-din-Barani, in his *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*, condemned the Delhi Sultans for not being zealots in their fight with the infidels and idolators:

If the desire for the overthrow of infidels and abasing of idolators and polytheists does not fill the hearts of the Muslim Kings; if, on the other hand, out of the thought that infidels and polytheists are payers of tribute and protected persons, they make the infidels eminent, distinguished, honoured and favoure... how then may the banners of Islam be raised?²⁵

Barani showed his admiration of eleventh-century Ghazni by saying that if he could come back again he “would have brought under his sword all Brahmans of Hind cut off the heads of two hundred or three hundred thousand Hindu chiefs (and) ... would not have returned his ‘Hindu-slaughtering sword’ to its scabbard until the whole of Hind had accepted Islam.”²⁶ Barani definitely seems to have been an intolerant person, but his writings may well not prove intolerance in Islam. Indeed, his indignation about the Delhi Sultans also indicates that not all Muslim rulers were Hindu inquisitors. An analytical, critical approach to the presentation and interpretation of the events of history in India is very important to generate an atmosphere of dialogue. All-India Radio sponsored a 1968 seminar on “The Role of the Broadcaster in the Present Communal Situation,” in which Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia, and Bipin Chandra presented their critical analyses to suggest the dangers of stereotyped communal understandings of history. Thapar noted that antagonistic projection of a popular group, sect, or religion in history is very harmful, but even “more harmful is the kind of historical writing which is based on communal or near communal

assumptions, but such assumptions in a generally uncritical framework are no longer questioned or challenged.”²⁷ This type of self-critical scholarship and its sharing via the mass media needs to be encouraged.

In this context, I would like to refer to a misrepresenting stereotype, even in this conference which intends to generate mutual understanding and harmony between nations and between peoples. The constant conflict between Pakistan and India is referred to as between “Muslim Pakistan” and “Hindu India.” This is a historical, political, and ideological misunderstanding of India. India never was and even now is not only Hindu. India does not recognize nationality on the basis of religion.

It is evident that critical historical research where the insights of psychology, sociology, and anthropology are taken into consideration is helpful for dialogue between Muslims and Hindus. Good history cannot be a one-sided narration and analysis of selected events. For example, A. C. Banerjee (in *Two Nations*) gave extensive documentation to suggest that Islamic Shari’a is at the root of Islamic nationalism, but in this work he referred extensively only to the Shari’as which indicate an intolerance in Islam, but not one which shows its tolerance. Thus, one-sidedness may characterize even apparently good, well-documented scholarship. The tendency toward one-sidedness is present among many scholars. Moreover, in the understanding of another’s tradition it is necessary to understand it as much as possible as the other does. Adolph L. Wismar disputed T. W. Arnold’s²⁸ view that missionary work is not an afterthought in Islam. Arnold thought that Muhammad himself, and the subsequent missionaries following his example, showed patience and forbearance in their attempt to convert the unbelievers. Arnold quoted from the Quran to prove his case. Wismar’s refutation is based on the assumption that the Quran is Muhammad’s word, not God’s, as the Muslims believe. He assigned many questionable motives to Muhammad and indicated that Islam is intolerant. Whatever evidence was to the contrary he considered nothing but trickery.

The sociological and psychological study of the phenomenon of religion can help Muslim-Hindu dialogue. James Fowler’s study, *Stages of Faith*,²⁹ describes how faith is dynamic and relational. In *Life Maps*³⁰ he points out the correlation between stages of faith-development and the capacity of the individual to take on the perspective of another and to widen the circle of those with whom one identifies oneself. Intensity of faith also leads to broadening of faith. This is clearly evident among both Muslim and Hindu mystics. Even in the field of clinical psychology, Muslim and Hindu psychiatrists have tried to apply their respective religious teachings to therapy. Elzibair Beshir Taha of the University of Khartoum, Sudan, in a paper prepared for discussion at the Parliament of Religion held at McAfee, New Jersey, November 15-21, 1985, noted that Qur’anic teachings could be utilized as a technique of cognitive behavior therapy for Muslim patients. At that conference, a Philadelphia psychiatrist mentioned his use of the Bhagavad Gita to help his patients. It is evident that Western ideology and training have stimulated many Muslim and Hindu scholars and thinkers. These people may start dialogues with each other, following the Western example, as many of them do feel the need for mutual understanding between Muslims and Hindus.

However, Muslims and Hindus need to be aware of the dangers of Western civilization as well, and a large number of Western-educated and -trained Muslims and Hindus are critics of Western civilization. They are acutely aware of secularization and its consequences which result from the so-called “scientific,” “critical” perspective of the West. Seyyed Hossein Nasr discussed this point in *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, pointing out succinctly how the Western scientific point of view reduces reality to only one layer, and the symbolic concept of nature is debased by calling it “totemistic!” or “animistic,” terms loaded with pejorative connotations. Nasr wrote that Muslims trained in modernity are “made to believe that the transformation from seeing the phenomena of nature as the portents or signs (ayat) of God to viewing these phenomena as brute facts is a major act of progress which, however, only prepares nature for that ferocious rape and plunder for which modern man is now beginning to pay so dearly.”³¹

Swami Yatiswarananda, a monk of the Rama-Krishna order, met Carl Jung in Switzerland. While he appreciated Jung's understanding of human spiritual need, he was critical of Jung's secular perspective. Jung suggested that the superconscious of the Hindu was included in the unconscious. The Swami felt that we need to reverse our secular perspective of thinking that the body is the outermost layer, and mind and spirit are within it.³²

Western scientism often leads to secularization, and scholarship of religion ends in reductionistic tendencies. Many Western scholars of religion are also critical of this tendency, such as W. C. Smith. We Muslims and Hindus who are engaging in dialogue by means of Western stimulation need to be aware of this danger; however, critical scholarship can be very helpful in eliminating some of the barriers which now prevent Muslim-Hindu understanding.

Dialogue on the Theological Level

A secular approach to fostering unity between Muslims and Hindus is neither practical nor desirable. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, had a secular view of progress and advocated unity between Muslims and Hindus on the basis of modern Western civilization. Syed Abdul Latif, who belonged to the liberal Aligarh School of pre-independence India, clearly pointed out Nehru's mistake. He noted that the peculiar philosophy of life is what provides vitality to the people and cannot and should not be overcome by the unity fostered by the steamroller of industrialization.³³ M. N. Roy found the resolution of Hindu-Muslim conflict in Communism; only that mighty economic force would have the capacity of cementing the diverse sects and religious creeds of India: "This is the only agency of Hindu-Muslim unity."³⁴ This position forgets that Muslim and Hindu believers are rooted in the transforming and life-sustaining characteristics of their traditions and that not many would want to trade spirituality for modern amenities. Herein lies the true basis of Muslim-Hindu dialogue: Both have faith in more than a secular understanding of human nature, which is expressed in Qur'anic *al-ftrah* and Hindu *sraddha*. Both trust that it is the sacred-the spiritual-which enables the human to be truly human.

The recognized distinctiveness of the two traditions need not necessarily discourage dialogue. Raimundo Panikkar and W. C. Smith³⁵ distinguish between *faith* and *belief*. They are of the opinion that contradictory beliefs may be rooted in common faith. Panikkar notes that even such contradictory statements of two persons as "I believe God exists" and "I believe God does not exist" can be rooted in faith in truth. In one instance the faith in truth expresses itself in the belief that "God exists," whereas in the other it is expressed in the contrary belief that "God does not exist."³⁶ Muslims and Hindus believe in the eternity or perenniality of truth. This is one reason for the Islamic insistence that the Qur'an is the literal word of God and for Hindus' description of their religion as *Sanatana Dharma*. This common trust in truth can enable Muslims and Hindus to undertake what John Dunne describes as "passing over" and "coming back."³⁷ We Muslims and Hindus need not define and understand our identity over against one another; that produces psychological and sociological barriers and often even spiritual atrophy.

Dialogue between Muslims and Hindus, which is a necessity, is not impossible. To begin, we Muslim and Hindu scholars may explore and investigate the parallels that exist between our two traditions, despite their differences and distinctiveness. The well-known Islamic scholar, S. H. Nasr, has written that "...the rich intellectual structures of Hinduism and Buddhism naturally present many resemblances to Islamic intellectuality, since all of them possess a traditional character."³⁸ This suggests that the parallels can be brought out effectively by a proper method of comparing common, historically initiated, congenial systems. Nasr suggests that Hindu *darsanas* can be compared with appropriate and corresponding Islamic schools with profitable results. Finding parallels and similarities, however, is not enough. The Middle Eastern situation indicates that two people belonging to two traditions which are doctrinally so close does not alone necessarily promote congeniality between them. All the reasons for conflict need to be explored. From the perspective of theology, the distinctiveness of traditions which causes confrontation needs to be recognized, together with the finding of parallels, and the possibility of accepting and appreciating the confronting ideal from within one's own tradition needs to be explored.

One important theological reason for Islam's antagonism toward Hinduism is its image-worship. Muslims may explore whether it would be possible to penetrate beneath Hindu image-worship so as not to consider it idolatry-without compromising the Islamic conviction of the transcendence of God. This is only a suggestion. How and in what way Muslims can recognize and appreciate Hinduism is a matter to be explored by them. My task is to suggest ways by which Hindus can accept and appreciate Islam.

Interreligious dialogue is also intrareligious dialogue. My suggestion that Hindus need to recognize and appreciate Islam leads to the usual Hindu response, "We do that; we recognize and appreciate all religions." Anthropological studies, such as those done by Bharati, indicate different levels of tolerance toward Muslims and Islam among Hindus. He points out that there is some tolerance among grass-roots village Hindus and primarily among "pamphlet" urban Hindus, while there is hardly any tolerance among the Sanskritists.³⁹ Even when there is tolerance toward Muslims, it is expressed neither socially in recognizing the Muslim as equal to the Hindu nor ideologically in accepting the exclusivism of Islam as equal to Hindu inclusivism. Socially or ideologically, Muslims and Islam are not considered to be on a par with Hindus and Hinduism. Hindus consider Muslims unclean. The fourteenth-century Arab traveler, Ibn Battuta, recalled the Hindu practice of breaking or giving away their utensils if they were used by a Muslim.⁴⁰ This was not done only in Battuta's time; even today many Hindus act similarly. An Afghan Muslim told about his childhood experience of interaction with Hindus. If he were to visit the store of a Brahmin-whom his own father had helped to establish the store-he knew that everything in the store would be washed after he left. This behavior is inhuman and dehumanizing-not tolerant. The Muslim animosity toward Hindus is not without provocation.

In the same way, the Hindu doctrinal tolerance of all religions is not enough, as it is often expressed as an intolerance of exclusivism. Hindu theologians need to explore how they can accept and tolerate exclusivism without compromising their conviction of the transcendence of truth. A clue can be found in the Hindu attitude toward *Ista Debata*. A Hindu who is totally dedicated and loyal to the *Ista* would not even recognize other manifestations of the same deity. This is *Ista Nistha*. The gopis of Vrndavan are examples. They were dedicated to cowhand Krsna of Vrndavan, so they would not even look at King Krsna of Dwaraka. Thus, it should be possible for a Hindu to appreciate the Qur'anic *nistha* of the Muslim.

A major stumbling block to the appreciation of Islam for non-Muslims is jihad. In our dialogue, a Hindu could ask the Muslim partner precisely what it means. Does it indicate that all non-Muslims should be killed, as Beruni suggested? Is there any room for the recognition of plurality in Islam? What is the ideal Islamic way to deal with the de facto plurality that exists in the world? Christianity, like Islam, has an exclusivistic tradition, yet it is very active theologically about the issue of plurality. Is anything similar possible in Islam?

In Conclusion

Muslim-Hindu dialogue *is* a possibility. The Western initiative for dialogue-its scientific, critical spirit-influences Muslims and Hindus to reflect critically about their own traditions. Through that route we Muslims and Hindus can start a dialogue with each other; it is a practical necessity for the Indian sub-continent. We can utilize the modern findings of the social sciences to generate that insight which would break the barriers that exist between us. We can cooperate in sharing our spiritual insights with the West in order to counteract the dangers of secularization, which leads to dehumanization. We can communicate in the depth of our spirituality-which has happened among the mystics of our two traditions. On the scholarly level we can seek parallels. On the theological level we can explore the ways by which we can accept and appreciate each other without compromising our own convictions. We can honestly ask questions about those factors about the other which we find difficult to understand or accept. Interreligious dialogue cannot solve all the problems, but it is a worthwhile effort.