



Beyond Tolerance: Creating a Shared Vision for Peace through Interfaith Collaboration

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ABSTRACT

In today's globalized world, we are more linked than ever through technology, but we frequently feel more divided by our own values. As technology reduces physical distances, the psychological and spiritual divides between various worldviews appear to expand. This study investigates the "theme of diversity" not as an abstract idea, but as a lived reality ingrained in the historical fabric of societies such as Indian civilization. While many modern civilizations seek simple tolerance—merely "putting up" with one another—this study argues that in a vulnerable global context, we must shift toward active collaboration. By focusing on shared goals like social justice, environmental sustainability, and communal peace, we may transform religious differences from a source of contention to a source of collaborative strength. The debate focuses on how "Interfaith Dialogue" as a transformative tool for breaking down long-held preconceptions and creating a shared vision for the future. We think that by engaging in a disciplined and polite discourse, we are not attempting to prove one belief superior, but rather to better comprehend both the "self" and the "other." Finally, the purpose is to demonstrate that accepting someone else's faith does not imply abandoning your own; rather, it improves

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our collective humanity, promotes peaceful coexistence, and results in a more stable, harmonious society for all current and future generations.

Introduction: The Paradox of the Modern Village

The twenty-first century is defined by a profound paradox. Through the marvels of digital technology and globalized trade, humanity has effectively shrunk the planet into a “global village.” Information travels at the speed of light, and people of different cultures are physically closer than ever before. However, as the physical distances decrease, the psychological and spiritual gaps between different worldviews appear to be widening. As noted in the foundational concept of this seminar, diversity is not merely an option or a modern political preference; it is a fundamental fact of human existence. From the ancient civilizations of the East to the diverse democracies of the West, the plurality of identities has always been the fabric of society. Yet, we are currently witnessing a global “retreat into isolated identities.” Instead of embracing the richness of a multicultural world, many societies are withdrawing into silos of “us versus them.” This retreat is often fueled by fear—the fear that engaging with the “Other” will lead to a dilution of one’s own faith or cultural heritage. This tension has led to a rise in intolerance, misconceptions, and, in tragic cases, open conflict.

This paper argues that the traditional model of “tolerance” is no longer a sufficient shield against these modern challenges. Tolerance, in its basic form, implies a passive endurance of the neighbor. It is a “cold peace” where we agree to exist in the same space without truly interacting. To achieve the “World Peace” mentioned in the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam tradition, we must transcend this passive state and move toward Active Collaboration. This paper will explore how interfaith dialogue serves as a transformative tool—not to convert or convince, but to create a shared vision for a stable, harmonious future.

The Indian Context: A Legacy of Pluralism

India serves as a unique laboratory for interfaith dialogue. For millennia, it has not just “tolerated” different faiths but has woven them into its social fabric, creating a “lived reality” where diversity is the norm rather than the exception.

Historical Exploration: The Vedic and Sufi Foundations

The philosophical groundwork of Indian pluralism is famously encapsulated in the *Rig Veda*: “*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*” means Truth is one, sages call it by various names (*Rig Veda* 1.164.46). Also in Islamic tradition Qur’an warns against divisions:

“ *Do not be of those who associate partners with God , those who have divided their religion and become sects .* ”(*Al- Qur’an* 16:125)

This suggests that diversity is not a deviation from truth, but a proof of its infinite magnitude. In this framework, different religious traditions are viewed as various "standpoints" (*Nayas*) reaching toward the same Absolute. This Vedic inclusivity found a historical mirror in the Sufi traditions that later flourished in India. Rumi provided the mystical vocabulary for this collaboration, asserting that while the "lamps" (religious forms) are different, the "light" (Truth) they shed remains singular. This historical fabric allowed leaders—from Ashoka’s Edicts to the architects of the *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb*—to implement policies that recognized the "Other" as a fellow seeker. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan later echoed this in the Aligarh tradition, viewing the search for truth as a unifying human endeavor that aligns with the "Work of God" in Nature. (Ahmad Khan, 2007)

The Problem of Modernity: Technology and the Crisis of 'Being-With'

While technology reduces physical distances, it has paradoxically expanded the psychological and spiritual divide. Martin Heidegger argued that modern technology (*Technique*) changes our fundamental mode of existence. Instead of seeing the "Other" as a unique human presence, technology often reduces the neighbor to a "standing reserve" of data points and preferences.

- **The Effect of an Echo Chamber:** In the digital age, social media algorithms prioritize engagement over understanding. This creates "echo chambers" that amplify misconceptions rather than fostering the "disciplined and polite discourse" mentioned in the abstract.
- **Disruption of Historical Peace:** This digital fragmentation disrupts the historical harmony of the Indian fabric. When we only interact with those who mirror our own values, we lose the ability to "comprehend both the self and the other." We fall into what Heidegger calls "inauthentic" existence, where our connectivity is broad but our human connection is dangerously shallow.

The Indian Legacy: Pluralism as a Lived Experience

To understand the power for interfaith collaboration, one must look at the historical and philosophical foundations of the Indian civilization. For millennia, the Indian subcontinent has served as a sanctuary for diverse religious traditions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and later, Islam, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. This was not a result of modern policy, but a “lived experience.” The philosophical root of this pluralism can be found in the ancient Vedic dictum: “Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti” (Truth is one, though the sages call it by various names). This perspective suggests that different religions are not competing truths, but different paths toward the same ultimate reality. Historically, this allowed for a unique social fabric where mosques, temples, and churches could exist in the same neighborhood for centuries. However, the modern era brings new pressures. The “technological existence” described by philosophers like Heidegger has changed how we perceive the world. We often see the “Other” through a screen, filtered by algorithms that favor conflict over harmony. The “lived experience” of sharing a marketplace or a festival is being replaced by digital echo chambers. Therefore, we must intentionally return to the roots of our pluralistic history and adapt them for the 21st century. We must recognize that diversity is a source of innovation and social biodiversity, essential for the survival of a healthy society.

Deconstructing Tolerance vs. Collaboration

In contemporary political philosophy, “tolerance” is often hailed as the ultimate achievement of a secular society. However, this study contends that tolerance is merely a starting point—a minimalist virtue that is insufficient for the complexities of the 21st century.

The Limits of Tolerance: The “Cold Peace”

Philosophically, tolerance (from the Latin *tolerare*, “to endure”) often manifests as a “cold peace.” It functions as a ceiling where different communities agree not to engage in overt conflict but do not necessarily interact. This state is inherently fragile because it is often based on mutual ignorance or “indifference.”

- **The “Silo” Effect:** Tolerance allows groups to live in parallel universes. While it prevents immediate violence, it does nothing to dismantle the “psychological and spiritual divides” mentioned in the abstract. It creates a society of “co-existence without co-relation.”
- **Heidegger and Inauthentic Existence:** Following Martin Heidegger’s (*Being and Time*), critique of social relations, simple tolerance can be seen as a form of *Das Man* (the “they”). In this mode, we follow

social scripts of "getting along" without ever truly encountering the "Being" of the other. It is a "distant" form of care (*Sorge*) that lacks the authenticity required to build a shared future. It is a peace that exists only as long as it is not tested by economic or political crisis.(Heidegger,1962)

The Power of Collaboration: Cross-Cultural Epistemology

Collaboration, by contrast, requires active engagement through Interfaith Dialogue. As the research objectives suggest, this is not a competitive arena for proving superiority or an instrument for seeking conversion. Instead, it is a form of "Cross-Cultural Epistemology"—a way of knowing and experiencing the world through the eyes of another.

- **The Dialogical Exchange:** This follows Raimon Panikkar's theory of "Dialogical Dialogue." Unlike "Dialectical Dialogue," which seeks to defeat an opponent's argument, Dialogical Dialogue seeks to understand the "Other" from within their own framework.(Panikkar,1999)
- **The Rumi Perspective:** This echoes Rumi's mystical epistemology, where he suggests that "The beauty we see in the 'Other' is a reflection of the Divine." In this light, collaboration is a spiritual necessity; we cannot fully know our own "Self" until we engage with the diversity of the human experience. As the abstract notes, "accepting someone else's faith does not imply abandoning your own; rather, it improves our collective humanity."(Rumi,2004)

Shared Values: The Common Ground of Action

The transition from tolerance to collaboration is best achieved by focusing on Shared Goals. When diverse faith communities shift their gaze from "dogmatic differences" to "universal suffering," they find an immediate common language.

- **Social Justice (Adl and Dharma):** Whether it is the Islamic concept of *Adl*, the Sikh *Sewa*, or the Christian *Caritas*, the mandate to serve the marginalized is a universal philosophical baseline. Collaboration here creates a "Functional Unity."
- **Environmental Sustainability:** The ecological crisis provides a shared "Work of God" (to use Sir Syed's terminology) that requires a unified response. Protecting the Earth becomes a collaborative act of worship that transcends sectarian boundaries.
- **Comprehensive Education:** Collaboration in education ensures that "future generations" are not just technically skilled but ethically grounded. By teaching "Interfaith Literacy," universities like AMU and

DU can ensure that students possess the tools to navigate a pluralistic world without falling into the "echo chambers" of modernity.

In most modern discourse, "tolerance" is hailed as the ultimate goal of a peaceful society. However, a critical examination reveals that tolerance is a fragile foundation for peace. To tolerate someone is to permit their existence without necessarily respecting their value. It is a state of "non-interference" that functions only as long as there is no stress or competition for resources.

The Limitations of Passive Tolerance:

While tolerance is often presented as the "gold standard" of a secular democracy, a rigorous philosophical deconstruction reveals it to be a minimalist and fragile state. Below are the three primary limitations that render passive tolerance an insufficient foundation for a stable society.

The Epistemological Void: Tolerance as a Mask for Ignorance

The first and most pervasive limitation of passive tolerance is that it requires absolutely no intellectual or empathetic effort. One can "tolerate" a neighbor's religious practices, dietary laws, or social customs while remaining in a state of profound ignorance regarding their significance.

A. The Growth of Stereotypes: In this vacuum of knowledge, the mind naturally relies on "pre-understandings" and media-driven tropes. Following Martin Heidegger's critique of "idle talk" (Gerede), when we do not engage in "disciplined and polite discourse," we settle for the superficial opinions of "the they" (Das Man).

B. The Failure of Recognition: Tolerance without knowledge is a refusal to recognize the "Other" as a subject with a valid worldview. This ignorance leaves the door wide-open for misconceptions to flourish, eventually turning a "tolerated" neighbor into a "suspicious" stranger. In the Aligarh tradition of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, this intellectual laziness is the antithesis of the rational inquiry required to understand the "Work of God" in the human collective.

The Sociological Barrier: Tolerance as Enforced Distance

Passive tolerance functions as a "buffer zone" rather than a bridge. It creates a society of "parallel lives"—a phenomenon where different faith communities occupy the same geographic space but inhabit entirely different spiritual and social universes.

A.The “Silo” Impact: This distance prevents the “Being-with” (Mitsein) that is essential for a healthy society. Tolerance allows us to live in “silos” where we never truly meet, share, or collaborate.

B.The Illusion of Connectivity: As the abstract notes, technology reduces physical distances, but if we only use that technology to stay within our own “echo chambers,” we are merely practicing a digital form of distance. Without active collaboration, these parallel lives never intersect, meaning that the “shared vision for the future” remains an impossibility. We become, in Heideggerian terms, “inauthentically” connected—linked by infrastructure but divided by essence.

The Moral Instability: Tolerance as Fragility

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of passive tolerance is its inherent fragility. Because it is a “negative peace” (the absence of war) rather than a “positive peace” (the presence of justice and understanding), it is the first social contract to dissolve during a crisis.

A. The Scapegoat Mechanism: When a society faces an economic recession, a pandemic, or political upheaval, passive tolerance provides no protection for the marginalized. Without the “collaborative strength” built through shared goals, it is historically easy for populist or radical movements to turn the “tolerated” group into a scapegoat.

B. The Need for ‘Peace Infrastructure’: Active collaboration, by contrast, builds “Social Capital.” When diverse groups have spent years working together on social justice, environmental sustainability, and holistic education, they create a resilient bond. This “Shared Vision” acts as a social vaccine, ensuring that the community remains stable and harmonious even when external pressures are high.

The Shift to Active Collaboration: Active collaboration, on the other hand, is a “warm peace.” It is based on the “Interfaith Dialogue” outlined in the seminar’s objectives. Collaboration requires us to identify common goals that transcend religious boundaries. Whether it is the fight against climate change, the struggle for social justice, or the effort to provide holistic education to the youth, these are challenges that no single faith can solve alone. When people of different faiths work together on a physical project—like building a school or protecting a local forest—the “theological walls” naturally become secondary to the “human bridge.”

Philosophical Conundrums: Faith, Reason, and the Other

To move beyond tolerance, we must address the philosophical challenges that keep faith groups apart. One of the primary “Broader Areas” mentioned in the seminar theme is Cross-Cultural Epistemology.

Epistemology is the study of how we know what we know. In an interfaith context, conflict often arises because different traditions have different ways of “knowing” the truth.

However, a deeper study reveals a shared “intellect of the heart.” Whether one looks at the mystical traditions of the East or the philosophical inquiries of the West, there is a common recognition that human reason has limits, and faith begins where reason reaches its boundary. By acknowledging that all religious traditions are attempting to describe the “Infinite” through “finite” human language, we can foster a sense of intellectual humility. This humility is the foundation of dialogue. Instead of viewing another’s faith as a “wrong answer,” we see it as a different perspective on the same mystery.

Furthermore, the problem of Theodicy—or the problem of evil—serves as a powerful unifier. Every religion must grapple with human suffering, death, and injustice. When faith leaders come together to discuss the “Problem of Evil,” they find that their theological differences are often outweighed by their shared compassion for the suffering. This “Philosophy of Coexistence” (Ahimsa) becomes practical when we realize that the goal of religion is not just to explain the world, but to heal its Practical Frameworks for Peacebuilding.

Practical Frameworks: Education, Ecology, and Gender

For interfaith collaboration to be successful, it must be applied to the "real-world" challenges mentioned in our seminar objectives.

A. Holistic Education and the Youth The future of interfaith harmony depends on how we educate the next generation. We must move toward Philosophies of Inclusivity in our schools. This does not mean teaching children to forget their own faith; rather, it means teaching them "Religious Literacy." When a student understands the basic symbols, festivals, and values of their neighbor's faith, the "Other" stops being a mystery and becomes a friend. Education should focus on "detangling prejudices" before they become rooted in the adult mind.

B. Faith-Based Approach to Ecology and Sustainability Climate change is a global crisis that does not recognize religious boundaries. Droughts, floods, and pollution affect everyone regardless of their scripture. This is a perfect area for Active Collaboration. Almost every major religion has a concept of "Stewardship" or "Sacred Earth." By launching interfaith environmental projects—such as "Green Temples" or "Faith Forests"—we turn the abstract idea of dialogue into a physical reality. As we work together to save the planet, we naturally learn to respect one another.

C. Religion, Gender, and Feminist Philosophy A crucial, often overlooked dimension of interfaith dialogue is the role of gender. Historically, interfaith discussions have been dominated by male voices. However, Feminist Philosophy within religion often emphasizes care, nurturing, and community—values that are essential for peacebuilding. By involving women as lead negotiators in interfaith dialogue, we bring a "Philosophy of Coexistence" that is grounded in the daily reality of family and community life.

Overcoming Barriers: The Communication of Peace

Communication is the "bridge" of interfaith work. As outlined in our aims, we must empower participants with effective communication skills for conflict resolution. Dialogue is not a debate; there is no winner or loser. In a debate, we listen to find a weakness in the other person's argument. In a dialogue, we listen to understand the other person's heart. The "Philosophy of Non-Violence" (Ahimsa) must be applied to our speech. In a multicultural society, our words can either be seeds of peace or sparks of conflict. By practicing "Structured Dialogue," we create a safe space where misconceptions can be shared and corrected without anger. This is particularly important in our "Modern Technological Existence," where digital communication is often fast and aggressive. We need to slow down, meet face-to-face (even in a hybrid mode), and recognize the human being behind the belief.

Conclusion

the present study highlights that diversity, far from being a mere sociological condition or ideological slogan, constitutes a dynamic and lived reality that shapes human interaction in historically plural societies such as India. In an era where technological advancement has compressed spatial distances yet intensified ideological fragmentation, the need to re-imagine diversity becomes increasingly urgent. The findings suggest that the transition from passive tolerance to active collaboration is not only desirable but necessary for sustaining peaceful coexistence in a fragile global order. Interfaith dialogue emerges as a constructive and transformative process through which entrenched prejudices may be questioned, mutual understanding cultivated, and shared human concerns foregrounded. By engaging in reflective and disciplined dialogue, individuals and communities are enabled to transcend narrow exclusivist positions and participate in the co-creation of a more inclusive social ethos.

Furthermore, this study underscores that the recognition of religious plurality does not entail the dilution or abandonment of one's own faith commitment; rather, it enriches moral imagination and deepens the ethical foundations of collective life. When diversity is approached as a resource for cooperation—particularly in addressing global challenges such as social injustice, ecological crisis, and communal discord—it becomes a

catalyst for building resilient and harmonious societies. From a broader philosophical perspective, interfaith engagement fosters a dialogical consciousness that situates identity not in opposition to the “other,” but in relational coexistence with it. Thus, the cultivation of collaborative pluralism may serve as a viable pathway toward sustainable peace and global solidarity, ensuring that future generations inherit a world shaped not by divisions of belief, but by shared commitments to dignity, responsibility, and humane coexistence.

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