Resolving Methods Inter-Faith And Intra-Faith Tensions In Contemporary Era; An Appraisal

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Abstract

The undesirable outcomes of globalization and post-modernism have generated more apprehensions about the possibilities for peaceful coexistence. Although the tensions among world religions (Inter-faith) and numerous sects of a religion (Intra-faith) have been encouraging international organizations, state governments and religious organizations to resolve faith-based conflicts for a long time but secular and Muslim communities are still in search of long term commitment for peace through local and top level programs. In this regard, it should be kept in mind that the mediating conflicts requires genuine understanding of core issues and setting up agreed principles. All this cannot be desired without considering religion as systematic body of doctrines with specific historical development since religion is not a primary source of conflict. Instead, religion is part of all solutions and policy makers should engage 'religious moderates' to plan approaches for resolving faith-based tensions. As far as the methodologies are concerned, there is no one and only best or ideal methodology to resolve these issues. Different approaches have been suggested and applied for both inter-faith and intra-faith harmony by various organizations and states. These include, for instance, community based discussions of religious groups, training of religious leaders by different states such as UK, USA, Egypt etc. and involvement in policy making process. However, different circumstances and variable demographic locales demand specific approaches also. Moreover, there is need for impact

measurement of already implemented strategies as well as new possible opportunities for peace-building procedure. So this research paper aims to explore strengths and pitfalls in policy making, methodology and implementation of ongoing models as well as new possibilities. Descriptive and analytical methodology would be utilized to present the findings of the research. Hence, this study would help to formulate practical approach(s) for policy makers and executive machinery.

Keywords: Inter-Faith, Intra-Faith, Conflicts and Tensions, Methods and Approaches, Evaluation and Monitoring

1. Introduction

Statement of the Problem:
Dealing with issues related to religions and faith does not go easy. There are certain problems which should be considered before suggesting methods and strategies for conflict resolution. Suggesting only strategies and plans of action is not the real mission. Instead, discussion about factors behind tensions and impact assessment of proposed methods is equally important. This study will be focused on finding the answers to the following questions; to what extent both terms namely interfaith and intra-faith are different to each other? Is it more fitting to declare religion as the sole factor behind tensions and conflicts among people of different faiths and various sects of a religion? Are there some uniform methods to resolve interfaith and intra-faith tensions? How important is to evaluate certain strategies to check their effectiveness in bringing positive change and peace? These research questions will help to build a comprehensive approach for resolving conflicts associated to people of different faiths and sects within a faith.

Hypothesis:
An initial investigation into documented sources and statistical studies leads to develop these certain perspectives. Firstly, Interfaith refers to relationship among people of various faiths and has gained more importance and acceptance in both Muslim and secular states and societies. Whereas, the term intra-faith is identified with relationship within sects of a same religion. But the latter needs to be developed with more emphasis especially among Muslims. Intra-faith understanding and dialogue provides strong standing and confidence for interfaith harmony as well.

Secondly, religion is not the one and only cause for all kind of interfaith and intra-faith conflicts and tensions. Religion is not the real trouble-maker. Instead, it is part of solution. There are certain theological, political, administrative and social issues which cause religious conflicts. Thus identification of reasons is a decisive factor in selection of methods for resolving these issues.

Thirdly, answer of second question is of immense importance to address the problem of selection of methods in conflict resolution. Since religion is not the only reason, multiple

methods should be adopted for peacebuilding process. There is no uniform method for diverse interreligious and intra-religious tensions. For generalization, these tensions can be solved by these three approaches; theological methods, political methods and peacebuilding methods. However, role of religious scholars and theologians cannot be avoided in any approach and framework.

Lastly, no method or strategy can be successful in bringing peace and harmony until it is evaluated and assessed. Impact of implemented plans should be analyzed. Impact measurement can be best evaluated through Theory of Change (ToC). Longitudinal studies should be carried out by state policy makers and organizations to check the effectiveness of methods. Otherwise, all the meetings would be known as 'Talking shops'.

Literature Review:
The field of interreligious and intra-faith studies is one of the promising fields of academia among Muslims and western scholars. A wide range of works are available and this list is increasing day by day.

Among these scholars, Mohammad Abu-Nimer has produced numerous valuable works focusing on possible approaches for peace building with special consideration of Islam and Muslim world.[1] For evaluation and monitoring the practices and initiatives for interreligious dialogue, the works of Reina C. Neufeldt are of immense importance.[2]

Apart from these, there are numerous other works on this research field. However, it is rightly believed that interreligious and intra-religious study is more than theory. Desired

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[1] For detail*, see* Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Dialogue, conflict resolution, and change: Arab-Jewish encounters in Israel* (Suny Press, 1999); Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Reconciliation, justice, and coexistence: theory and practice* (Lexington Books, 2001); Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and peace building in Islam* (University Press of Florida Gainesville, 2003); Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Religion and peacebuilding: Reflections on current challenges and future prospects," *Journal of Interreligious Studies*, no. 16 (2015); Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Alternative Approaches to Transforming Violent Extremism," *Transformative Approaches to Violent Extremism* (2018); Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict resolution in an Islamic context: Some conceptual questions," *Peace & Change* 21, no. 1 (1996); ibid.; Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict resolution approaches: Western and Middle Eastern lessons and possibilities," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 55, no. 1 (1996); Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Education for coexistence and Arab-Jewish encounters in Israel: Potential and challenges," *Journal of Social Issues* 60, no. 2 (2004); Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Amal Khoury, and Emily Welty, *Unity in diversity: Interfaith dialogue in the Middle East* (US Institute of Peace Press, 2007); Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Renáta Katalin Smith, "Interreligious and intercultural education for dialogue, peace and social cohesion," (Springer, 2016).

[2] For detail, *see* Reina C Neufeldt, ""Frameworkers" and "Circlers": Exploring Assumptions in Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment," (2007); Reina C Neufeldt, "Just Policing and International Order: Is It Possible?," *Just Policing, Not War: An Alternative Response to World Violence* (2007); Reina C Neufeldt, ""Frameworkers" and "Circlers"–Exploring Assumptions in Impact Assessment," *Advancing Conflict Transformation: The Berghof Handbook II, Opladen, Germany: Barbara Budrich* (2011); Reina C Neufeldt, "Interfaith dialogue: Assessing theories of change," *Peace & Change* 36, no. 3 (2011); Reina C Neufeldt, "Doing good better: Expanding the ethics of peacebuilding," *International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 4 (2014); Reina C Neufeldt, *Ethics for peacebuilders: A practical guide* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Reina C Neufeldt, "Vying for Good," *and Dialogue* (2021); Reina C Neufeldt et al., "Gaps in knowledge about local peacebuilding: a study in deficiency from Jos, Nigeria," *Third World Quarterly* 41, no. 7 (2020).

outcomes are expected after practicing it. So there are some links missing between the efforts and expected goals. Thus, there is an immense need to demonstrate the importance of selecting appropriate methods, their execution and lastly evaluation and monitoring of these practices for long-lasting peace and solidarity.

Methodology:

Predominantly, this study will be descriptive and analytical in nature. Strengths and weaknesses of given methods will also be discussed.

2. Defining Interfaith and Intra-faith

Two terms are used to elaborate the relationship between people in majority and people in minority. Interfaith means relationship among different religions and faiths and intra-faith refers to relationship within the sects of the same religion. For instance, the relationship between Shia and Sunni within Islam is called intra-faith. [3]

Starting with the definition of interfaith, there are many ways to define it. Generally, it is a process in which an effort is made to develop a mutual understanding with different faiths and religions. Most of the time, it is referred to as interfaith dialogue and interreligious dialogue. Latter two terms have a positive connection as they present respect and honor for others. Another term, comparative religion, is used by academics and scholars. Christian institutions usually refer to Ecumenism for internal dialogue among Christians. [4]

Ecumenism, originally, is derived from the Greek word oikos (House, household). It is a secular term which is mainly used to resolve and address divisions and sects within a religion. But later on, this word was applied for unifying different Protestant denominations who were very hostile to each other. This was referred to as the Christian Ecumenical (family unit) Movement. The purpose was to discover mutual ground to ease tensions and develop better relations among themselves.[5]So it is the 20th century concept given by Christians for intra-faith dialogue and they in this way, developed the World Council of Churches (WWC). [6]

The main purpose of interfaith and intra-faith dialogue is to develop mutual understanding and solidarity among people of different religions and within a religion in order to create an atmosphere of coexistence and harmony to achieve agreed upon goals.[7]

Intra-Faith Dialogue is key to the success of Interfaith Dialogue:

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[3] Aziz Ullah Jan and Ashfaq U Rehman, "Assessment of Interfaith Harmony between Muslims and Hindus in Socio-Cultural Activities in Swat," *Burjis* 6(2019): 77.

[4] Dr. Qadir Bakhsh and Maqsood Ahmed, "Interfaith Dialogue: An Islamic Perspective," (2014): 21.

[5] Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith dialogue: A guide for Muslims* (International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2007). 11-12.

[6] Ibid., 13.

[7] Dr. Qadir Bakhsh and Ahmed, "Interfaith Dialogue: An Islamic Perspective," 24.

Undoubtedly there is a great emphasis on the need for interfaith dialogue to resolve conflicts among the people of different religions. But on the other hand, it is essential to conduct intra-faith dialogue to make the former more successful. Intra-Muslim dialogue is a missing link that can help Muslims to understand and resolve conflicts and tensions within Islamic society and with non-Muslims as well. Both Muslims and Christians should engage themselves in a dialogue among their sects in the same way as they get involved in dialogue with other religious groups. Same practice can be beneficial for other religious communities in order to get a better understanding of each other. Interfaith dialogue is more practiced and intra-faith dialogue is more ignored.[8]

In this era of extremism in both secular and religious minds, there is an urgent need to work on bridging the gaps within the sects of a religion. For Muslims, it has more important to start dialogue and consultation among themselves. This missing link of intra-Muslims dialogue must be addressed as its absence is posing serious challenges of representation for interfaith dialogue also. Dr. Ataullah Siddiqui has identified this shortcoming among Muslims in an appropriate manner. According to him, Muslim representation is a serious mistrust among Muslims. Most of the time, interfaith dialogue organizers approach to Ulama and the governments nominate their Ulama which are labelled as 'official Ulama'. This shows representation issue as there is a communication gap among the Ulama of various sects within Muslims.[9]

There are considerable challenges in incorporating religion into a peacemaking effort, several of which are listed below:

1) Religious accounts are often supposed to be incompatible with one another.

2) Even if religion is not a primary cause of conflict, religious cleavages often strengthen or confuse other causes, such as ethnic-racial identities and/or economic-power discrepancies.

3) Religious institutions that preach can seriously worsen conflicts.

4) Some will not engage in interfaith dialogue, either because they believe such practices are not allowed by their faith or because they hold severe hostility towards other faith groups.

5) Secular governments, including Western governments, may be nervous about engaging with religious institutions.

6) Interfaith dialogue and other forms of religious peacemaking may open old abrasions.

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[8] R Ty and A Alonto, "Intra-Faith Dialogue: The Missing Link in Interfaith Dialogue" (paper presented at the Proceedings of the African American Latino (a) Conference, 2007), 142.
[9] Ataullah Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim dialogue in the twentieth century* (Springer, 1997). 52.

Those who would attempt to incorporate religion into peacemaking efforts are advised to proceed carefully.

3. Methods for Resolving Interfaith and Intra-Faith Tensions

Generally, religion is considered as the root cause of violence extremism and conflicts. It can be found one of the causes of these conflicts as investigations suggest that there are many factors which contribute in violence. It is evident by the findings of a study conducted by Isak Svensson at Uppsala University's Department of Peace and Conflict Research. It suggests religion is not a primary and the only reason. Only 22% of the total conflicts have religious factors during 1989 to 2003. [10]

Types of Methods for Resolving Interfaith and Intra-Faith Tensions:

There are many types of methods adopted for peace building process among the people of different religions. These methods and frameworks are important today to evaluate the change in society. It must be remembered that there is no uniform methodology to end the tensions caused among people of different religions and sects. In general, these methods can be grouped into these three main types named theological methods, political methods and peacebuilding methods.[11] Here comes the brief overview of these approaches focusing on their nature, factors for initiation, aims and examples.
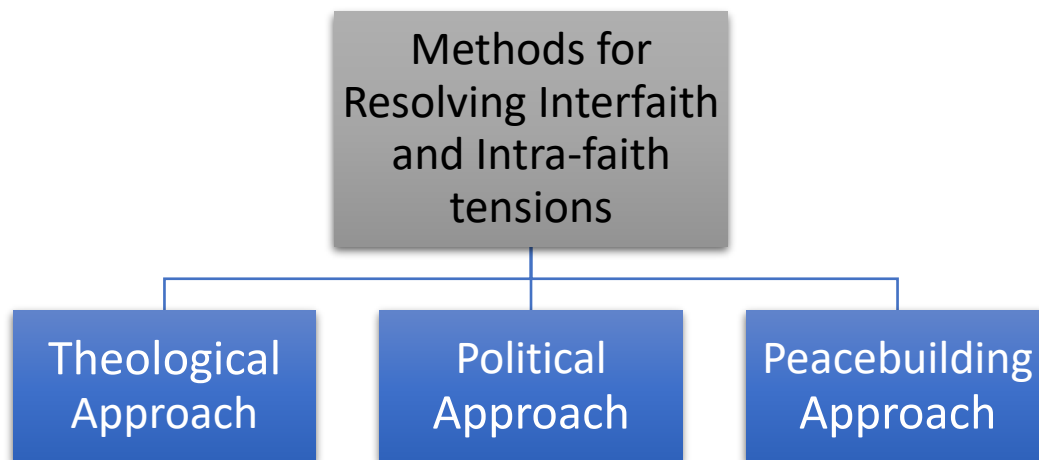
Theological Approach

This approach is considered the central mode of dialogue. It is focused on Theological discussions. This method is mainly led by the people who have expertise in religious studies, theological knowledge and practice. It aims to develop a relationship of understanding common areas between faiths through discussions on beliefs, practices and value systems. For instance, the "Thinking Together" series, conducted during 2000-2009,

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[10] Irén Frändå, "Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Peacebuilding in the Middle East," (2016), 15.
[11] Neufeldt, "Interfaith dialogue: Assessing theories of change."

that was structured by the World Council of Churches Office on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue was an example of this method. These talks involved comparatively a small group of principal contributors to discuss difficult theological questions. These comprised individual sharing and worship ceremonial.[12]

Primarily, this approach brought forward valuable religious experience and encounter. Sukhsimranjit Singh comments that Religious intermediation urges individuals to adopt modesty and conciliation in their approach to others. It adds more carefulness and reverence. [13] With respect to above mentioned example, its group members shared personal change and new ideas and insights with each other. Moreover, they were also concerned about how to increase the effectiveness of their efforts. In order to expand their ideas and output on wider scale, they published their debates in numerous collective volumes.[14]

Political Approach

This methodology is associated with the practice of formal political groups and parties in response of any conflict occurred among religious or ethnic groups. In this approach, politicians tend to get support of religious leaders for politically originated peace negotiations. This helps to expand the peace process to grassroots level. Primarily, such kind of practices are sponsored and hosted by governments and both political and religious leadership is involved. Although it is political in nature, but theologians still remain the part of whole process. Their main aim is to assist political government or party in terms of religious doctrines related to peace, harmony and conflict resolution. Religious leaders mainly target the followers of their faiths.

There are numerous examples of politically originated peace and interreligious dialogue. For instance, the administration of former government of George W. Bush organized many interreligious dialogues in the USA and across the globe during 2005-2007. This initiative was led by Karen Hughes, then-Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. Basic objectives of these dialogues were to provide counter-narrative to terrorism, promote interreligious harmony, believe in the sacredness of human life and to highlight true picture of American Muslims in the world. A notable venture of such kind of approach for interreligious peace was witnessed in 2005 at Istanbul, Turkey. This meeting was hosted by Hughes and the participants included the Syrian metropolitan, the Mufti of Istanbul, the Chief Rabbi, a Catholic Bishop and a member of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Chief objective of this joint meeting was to urge to work for peace.[15]

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[12] Neufeldt, "Vying for Good," 63.
[13] Sukhsimranjit Singh, "Best Practices for Mediating ReLigious ConfLicts," *From the ChairBy Harrie Samaras* 202(2018): 15.
[14] Neufeldt, "Vying for Good," 64.
[15] Ibid., 64-65.

http://www.webology.org

However, this method focuses on bringing political stability with the help of religious moderates. This helps to address the followers of different faiths for long-term peace. It emphasizes on worldly benefits more than spiritual prospects.

Peacebuilding Approach

This model works on a wider prospect of religious harmony in a society. Interreligious dialogue is a part of this method. However, along with dialogue, multiple other strategies are also adopted for peaceful change. Numerous initiatives are taken to enhance mutual working relationship and respect among community members. It aims not only to address political or theological conflicts but to overcome social and economic causes of conflict and unrest also. Thus it covers broader range of conflict motivators and consequently, attempts to counter prevailing violence on political as well as religious level. Joint and interactive activities are organized to get maximum benefit of political initiatives.

There are various examples of peacebuilding method. One of these is Bishop-Ulama Conference (BUC). Basically, this platform was named the Bishop-Ulama Forum which included both Muslim and Christian clerics. Its format has been changing over the years. Starting as a political dialogue occurred in 1996 with the Moro Liberation Front, it also involved different peacebuilding processes in following years. For instance, peace education and other projects were also initiated. Apart from this, some other peacebuilding groups were formed with wider goals and activities. Episcopal Commission for Inter-religious dialogue and Ustadz – Priests - Pastors dialogue are also examples of this approach.[16]

Considerably, this method also engages faith and religion in conflict resolution. However, this approach is not motivated on an active political or religious conflict among different faiths and sects. It is an ongoing process to promote solidarity and to discourage violence and hatred. Comparatively, this method is more comprehensive and involves socio-economic perspectives as well.

Several points are clear enough to demonstrate here to conclude the discussion of existing and practiced methods of resolving interfaith and intra-faith tensions.

Firstly, religion is not the sole factor of conflict in interreligious conflicts. Political and economic disparities have greater role in conflicts associated with faiths and sects. So a range of methods are utilized to resolve these.

Secondly, engagement of religious actors and mentors is essential for achieving positive results of any interfaith and intra-faith dialogue and peace process. Responsible religious leaders are doing their best for peaceful working relationship as well.

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[16] Ibid., 66-67.

Lastly, all initiatives take guidance from divine doctrines to persuade followers of all faiths for participation in numerous activities. It leads to encourage the role of religion in social and political aspects of life also.

4. Evaluation and Monitoring of Methods

Since the field of interreligious and intra-faith dialogue is emerging as one of the promising areas of research and academics, there is an urgent need to evaluate all the practices and plans conducted on the name of 'religious harmony'. These evaluators would bring maturity and usefulness for better future and peace. There are two important motives for evaluation and check and balance. Firstly, this assessment is intended to introduce accountability among organizers, trainers, donors and religious actors. Thus effectivity of such methods and programs can be enhanced. Moreover, evaluation would develop responsibility among patrons and thus they would keep working until change is achieved.[17]

In order to understand the significance of assessment and evaluation of effectiveness of peace initiatives, Shana Cohen has rightly quoted the words of her professor at Woolf Institute, Cambridge saying "Interfaith dialogue is not a field of study, it's a practice." One of the recent and relevant example of such evaluation projects is Casey Review (2016), initiated by the Conservative Government (2016-17), UK and it produced a report on religious and ethnic diversity, under the leadership of Dame Louise Casey. It made the Government responsible for its negligence in peace initiatives and demanded more funds allocation for this cause.[18] So interfaith and intra-faith activities and projects should not be just a 'tea party' or 'meet up'. It must be useful and leading to bring change in behavior and conduct.

Now coming to the question of evaluation criteria and methodology, there are various proposed methods of evaluation of interfaith and intra-faith initiatives. One of these, Theory of Change (ToC) can be used to measure the impact of strategies. Impact measurement can be explained in three sections; identification of objectives of an initiative or programme, expected outcomes and working on all required conditions (external factors like policy making, resources and institutional working) thus finding causation between the two to make the goals possible.[19] In this way, this theory is basically a demonstration of how and why an expected change is desired to happen in a particular project.

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[17] Mohammed and Nelson Abu-Nimer, Renáta Katalin, *Evaluating Interreligious Peacebuilding and Dialogue: Methods and Frameworks* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2021). 1-2.
[18] Shana Cohan, "Assessing the Impact of Interfaith Initiatives," in *Evaluating Interreligious Peacebuilding and Dialogue: Methods and Frameworks*, ed. M. a. N. Abu-Nimer, Renáta Katalin. (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 197-98.
[19] Ibid., 198-99.

5. Recommendations and Concluding Remarks

The following endorsements for policymakers are some general guidelines for achieving desired outcomes.

• The role of religion should be incorporated with other factors and dynamics in order to resolve conflict or peacemaking initiatives.

• It should be remembered that role of religion cannot be ignored for other approaches to finding solutions to problems. In all methods, religion cannot be underestimated.

• Governments should not take a purely influential approach to religious groups, leaders and NGOs. The legitimacy of faith-based actors remains undamaged.

• Academically, there is no best or ideal method or approach for full understanding of what religion is and how it works. So, debate about the 'scientificity' of quantitative in contrast to qualitative approaches for the learning of religion are incorrect.

• Looking for a cause and effect relationship between religion and violence, and between religion and peace is impractical.

• Diagnosing that religion can play a vital role in conflict resolution does not mean just consulting with faith-based NGOs or religious leaders.

• At the policy level, there is a need for great discernment to appreciate the ways in which different components of the broad phenomenon of religion come into play in conflicts, and to recognize those situations when religion is actually not a primary.[20]

At the end, it can be concluded that long-term mutual understanding and solidarity among different faiths and various sects of a religion cannot be obtained without engaging religious leaders and stakeholders. Moreover, there is no best or ideal method as there are numerous factors behind conflicts among religious communities. So appropriate method should be adopted as per nature of the conflict and tension. Last but not the least, evaluation and impact measurement should take place to monitor the working and execution of that certain peacebuilding initiative.

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