

Shaping Pluralistic Cohesive Societies

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Abstract

This paper aims to prepare an individual to function effectively in a constantly changing multi-faith, multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-everything society with minimum conflicts. Pluralism is a new subject with a focus on its effect on different aspects of life in building cohesive societies where no one has to live in apprehension or fear of the other.

Pluralism means respecting the otherness of others in religion, culture, politics, and the workplace. You may see people of different faiths, races, cultures, and ethnicities interacting, working, studying, intermingling, playing, and marrying each other. A decade from now, you may not see the monopoly of a race or cultural groups in the workplace, place of worship, school, bus, train, theater, library, or other public gatherings.

These interactions between people not familiar with each other's culture lend themselves to misunderstandings and are bound to create conflicts.

As responsible members of society, we must prepare ourselves to prevent possible challenges and lay a foundation for the effective functioning of institutions where every human feels secure about his faith, race, ethnicity, culture, language, political or sexual orientation, or any other uniqueness.

Exclusive communities will become a thing of the past. If you live amidst others, you should also respect the otherness of others, as you expect them to do the same for you.

Keywords: pluralism; cohesive societies; cultural pluralism; political pluralism and religious pluralism

Shaping Cohesive Societies

Ten years from now¹, you will not find a Metropolitan city where you don't see people of different faiths, races, cultures, and ethnicities interacting, working, studying, intermingling, playing, and even marrying each other. These new interactions are bound to create conflicts, pit one group of people against the other, and develop long-lasting biases and stereotyping that would disturb harmony.

¹ <https://theconversation.com/3-big-ways-that-the-us-will-change-over-the-next-decade-126908>

As responsible citizens, we must prepare ourselves to prevent such conflicts so that each member of the society can live securely with their faith, culture, gender, race, sexual, political orientation, or ethnicity. New societal norms are emerging, and we have to deal with them.

We have witnessed human progress in almost every dimension of life, from economics to medicine, automation to information technology, and set the world on the course of self-rule, which is the people's government by the people for the people. *Now we must apply our ingenuity to building cohesive societies*².

Cohesive Societies are designed for each one of the members to feel secure about their uniqueness. One's peace of mind and tranquility hinges on the stability of the political, social, and economic environment surrounding him. Similarly, his safety relates to the security of the people around him. It behooves us to build societies where everyone feels secure about themselves; it guarantees a shield and tension-free life.

Cohesive Universe

The world we see can be broadly classified into two categories; matter and life.

The matter is programmed to be in balance, indeed, every planet in the solar system is precisely programmed to stay on its course, and the planet earth is designed to tilt periodically at certain angles to give different seasons and sustain life. Imagine if any one of these planets veers off even half a degree, a disaster could come in the proportions of the big bang.

The Quran about this cohesiveness;

The Quran³

55:5 **الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ بِحُسْبَانٍ**

[At His behest] the sun and the moon run their appointed courses.

55:6 **وَالنَّجْمُ وَالشَّجَرُ يَسْجُدَانِ**

[before Him] prostrate themselves the stars and the trees. Prostrate here means obedience and doing what they are programmed to do.

55:7 **وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ**

And the skies has He raised high, and has devised a measure. Measure here means all things are functioning in their designated place as they are programmed to do.

² Harvard University - <https://pluralism.org/news/opinion-secularism-essential-cohesive-society-religious-symbols-promote-individualism>

³ The Quran - <https://www.islamicity.org/quransearch/?q=chapter:55>

55:8 أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ

so that you [too, O men,] might never transgress the measure [of what is right] – meaning everything is set to be in balance, so should human interactions be.

The human body also works cohesively. All the organs of the body work with each other for a human to function normally. Much of the universe is programmed to run in harmony. Harmony is the natural state of things. All things find their balance for their survival.

Category: Life

Life is not programmed to be cohesive and in balance, unlike the matter. Our interactions with each other can bring peace or create chaos in relationships between family members, communities, society at large, and even the nations. Human effort is required here.

When life forms came into being, particularly the human form, the first thing that got uploaded into the DNA was free will. Unlike the matter, cohesiveness was not programmed into human life, they were given the free will to create their own cohesiveness.

God says in the Quran chapter 49, verse 13⁴, that he has created us into many tribes, communities, nations, and by extension, faiths, ideas, shapes, and colors and that all of us can trace back our origins to a single couple referred to as Adam and Eve. Given that diversity, we are bound to have conflicts and compete for resources. So, HE adds that the best ones among you are those who will take the time to know one another. HE knows that knowledge leads to understanding and understanding to acceptance and appreciation of different points of view for people to learn to live in harmony.

The source of disharmony in society is free will.

God told Adam not to eat the fruit, but if he were to eat, he would have no place in paradise anymore. Adam chose to eat; the story goes that he was booted out of the heavenly abode to the world of conflicts, where he had to hunt for food, fight with the animals, live in tension, and even go to the bathroom. The angels perhaps argued with God that it was not fair; God could have stopped him from eating the fruit. Then God probably said, look, my angels, I am the God, and if I don't honor my word, then who will? I gave a choice to Adam, didn't I? And he chose.

God: "O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in this garden, and eat freely thereof, both of you, whatever you wish; but do not approach this one tree, lest you become wrongdoers." "According to some of the earliest commentators, Garden is an earthly

⁴ The Quran - <https://www.islamicity.org/quransearch/?q=chapter:49>

abode alluded to namely an environment of perfect ease, happiness, and innocence.” And “This tree is alluded to elsewhere in the Quran as “the tree of life eternal,” and in the Bible (Genesis 2:9) as “the tree of life” and “the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (Quran 2:35)

Choices we make

Indeed, we plan our lives about our incomes, families, homes, retirement, and the future of our kids and grandchildren. We also prepare our businesses to deal with the economic vagaries to sustain and grow. We have a choice to reluctantly accept what comes our way or choose to shape the future we want.

How do we create cohesive societies?

When we face difficulties, we resort to blaming someone or the other, take our frustrations on each other, and aggravate the situation further instead of finding solutions. “Turn the other cheek,” said Jesus; among different interpretations, it is not to add fuel to the fire. If the other person curses and you do the same, the conflicts multiply. If the other person hits you, and you hit back, he comes after in ending the war. Jesus says solutions come from turning the other cheek and choosing the words to mitigate conflicts and nurture goodwill.

Let’s take the American example, applicable to all nations and societies. When the economy goes south, we have witnessed a hostile attitude from our fellow Americans who have been here for more than five generations towards new Americans who have lived for a generation or two. It is not a phobia but a natural fear of losing one’s way of life and resources. The racial conflicts and the supremacist feeling among a few are the products of the non-acceptance of the other. Then some of us are inflicted with Anti-Semitism, Homophobia, Misogyny, Islamophobia, Hinduphobia, Xenophobia, and other phobias. How long will we let these diseases consume us and continue to give us tensions? We need to extricate ourselves and be free people again to live in peace.

Most of us have heard things about others from our friends, news, social media, or our knowledge of others, and we instantly form opinions about others. As responsible individuals, we must strive to strip stereotyping and build pathways to ensure our society’s smooth functioning, whether in the workplace or in our neighborhoods.

We have no shame in poisoning our kids and destroying their lives. Through our actions, our kids imbibe our prejudices towards others, particularly against women, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Blacks, Whites, Conservatives, Atheists, liberals and people from ‘other’ ethnicities. It must be painful for our children when they grow up and have to work with very people, they have learned to be lesser human than

them, and they will have difficulty trusting them. It is a loss for everyone and hence work place cohesion is critical. Otherwise, the organization loses productivity when employees don't work cohesively with others⁵. Secondly, they bring those tensions home. They cannot give 100% of themselves to work or their families and live a fuller life. It has to change.

We must break away from our biases toward fellow humans to live a more vibrant and happier life.

We need to reassure each other, particularly the disconnected ones, that we are committed to safeguarding the American way of life. No American needs to worry about losing his way of life. Together as Americans, we uphold, protect, defend, and celebrate the values enshrined in our Constitution, a guarantor of the way of life for each one of us.

Knowledge leads to understanding and understanding to acceptance of each other. If we can learn to respect the otherness of others and accept the God-given uniqueness of each of us, then conflicts fade, and solutions emerge. Creating model programs, a strategy applied by the Center for Pluralism, facilitates people to open up to each other. The interfaith, inter-racial, and intercultural weddings are a superb example of creating one America. Indeed, such weddings are very patriotic to build one nation under the blue sky. I admire all such couples telling the world, through their actions, look, we are two different people with different upbringings, faiths, and races; if we can accept each other and live in harmony, so can you.

In annual flagship programs like Unity Day⁶, Holocaust & Genocides⁷, Thanksgiving⁸ and Festivals of Faith, Essence of Religions, and other programs, we have found fellow Americans walk out of the event with a lesser bias towards the other. The more we learn about each other face to face, the fewer the conflicts would be.

We urge the caring social and political leadership of every nation to organize a Unity Day program. Invite and bring in people from different faiths, ethnicities, races, cultures, and other uniqueness to come together and rededicate their pledge to be one nation again and again.

Nothing will change unless someone takes the initiative and commits to bringing the corrective course. To quote Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of

⁵ Michigan State University - <https://workplace.msu.edu/boosting-workplace-cohesion/>

⁶ Unity Day USA - www.UnitydayUSA.com

⁷ Holocaust and Genocides - <http://holocaustandgenocides.com/>

⁸ Thanksgiving Celebrations - <http://thanksgivingcelebrations.blogspot.com/>

thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."⁹ Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."¹⁰

In trying to pursue the building cohesive societies, building a cohesive America, an America where each one of us feels secure about ethnicity, faith, culture, race, political and sexual orientation and other uniqueness, becomes a focal point, which' success may enlarge and reinforce the efforts of all social development catalyst on a global scale.

If the vision for nations is built up under these pillars and reflects these ideas, following up innovative strategies and tools, not simply on a replica principle, might bust the myths between Jews-Christians, Christians-Muslims, Muslims-Jews, Hindus-Muslims, and others. In one case, faith works; in others it may be the different ethnicities or cultures that need busting the myths so people can see each other as fellow humans just like them and nothing less, which is a strong base for social cohesion.

We have already witnessed how old citizens feel about new citizens, immigrants, or new members of any society. It is not a phobia, but a natural feeling of losing one's way of life, control, and world.

Every religion, government, and society has one unstated goal; to create communities where every member of the society feels secure about their faith, race, ethnicity, culture, political or sexual orientation, or any other uniqueness. But the primary responsibility to create such societies falls on each of us. Indeed, every element in nature is programmed to seek balance except humans, who must work on creating harmony to live in peace.

We need to reassure each other that we are committed to safeguarding the way of life of every member group of society. No one needs to worry about losing their way of life. Together as Americans, Bosnians, Russians, Chinese, Indians, and others can uphold, protect, defend, and celebrate the values enshrined in our respective constitution, a guarantor of our political and social structures that each one of us wants.

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⁹ Margaret M., Planetary Citizen of the Year Award, 1978

¹⁰ The collected works Mahatma Ghandi, Volume Thirteen : (Mar 12, 1913 - Dec 25, 1913)

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