Preface

No battle is fought to perpetuate violence but motive is always the restoration of peace, as all human beings want to live in peace. Even the persons inflicting most devastating attacks on the enemy claim to be working for peace through annihilation of the troubling other. But hatred and violence, generally, are reciprocated. Religion being one of the oldest and most effective sources of providing identity to various groups who may have different social, political and economic clashing interests, therefore, quelling the religious hatred is most important so that problems having their origins somewhere else are analysed and rationalised to be solved instead of indulging into the blame game and demonising the other to perpetuate the endless conflicts. Therefore, peace by peaceful means is the need of the hour as today the destructive power of man is immense, as mere a push of a button can cause irreversible chain of violence which may stop in nothing less than destruction of all life on this earth. Dialogue is an endeavour to know and understand not only the hated other but the suffering other who is a fellow traveller.

The title of this work: “Inter-religious Dialogue: An Instrument to Curb Religious Violence,” made it imperative to make critical examination of “religious violence” as a problem and the suitability of “inter-religious dialogue” as a tentative solution to that problem. My sources have been mainly textual which range from books on topics such as religion (including scriptures), violence, religious violence, social, political and economic issues, peace research, dialogue and inter-religious dialogue etc., newspapers, magazines and journals (both national and international), which have been accessed through libraries, internet, or acquisition.

The nature of the subject matter is such that it transcends all time and space boundaries, as such, the field of research is very vast in expanse, both in space and
time frame, all of which may not be covered in any work of the nature of the present work. However, all out efforts have been made not to leave any major local, national or international concern or event untouched. The research methodology has been critical descriptive and analytical engagement on the sources available.

The whole work consists of six chapters, the first five of which contain the main body of the conceptual and analytical description of the subject matter and the sixth concludes the findings. The chapter-wise brief of the issues taken up in the work is as follows:

First Chapter - Religious Violence: Story so far: In this chapter the basic and initial task of defining the concept of religious violence has been done. Various forms of violence, which have abstract violence in the form of its metaphorical usage on one side and ritualised violence on the other to bracket the central concept and semantics of violence in its cultural perspective through its various manifestations via agents – direct physical/ psychological violence, via institutions – institutional violence and then via structures – structural violence along with such overlapping forms – against people/ objects, legal/ illegal, legitimate/ illegitimate, open/ concealed, progressive/ reactionary etc. Religion itself operates through creating collective identities – of “us” and of “other(s)”. I have attempted to find out which forms of violence, religious violence is related to. It is considered as a cultural construct with its most common manifestation in direct physical violence but forms of institutional and structural violence are not uncommon. Attempt has also been made to bring out how religious violence has emerged as the major problem of the world today.

Second Chapter- Religious Violence: Sacrifice to Human bomb: In this chapter the phenomenon of religious violence has been explore further. Here, concepts of
sacrifice, circumcision, holy-war, crusades, Jihad, Dharma-yudh, traditionalism, fundamentalism, communalism, terrorism, martyrdom and suicide bombers have been examined. Some of these terms such as sacrifice and circumcision are forms of ritual violence, and some such as holy-war, crusades, Jihad and Dharma-yudh were coined at different junctures in history of different traditions to conceptualise the typical manifestations of violence in human behaviour vis-à-vis some of their own sects or the people of other religious traditions; whereas, the others such as traditionalism, fundamentalism, communalism, terrorism and martyrdom etc. are the concepts which represent the phenomena that are not tradition specific but some times efforts are made to portray certain traditions more prone to some of them, thus demonising them. All these concepts have been defined not only to provide terms of reference in my work but also to determine their origins, relevance and meaning in the total discourse about religious violence. Effort has been made to delineate the nuances of the meanings of these concepts some of which we often find used wrongly as synonyms by less discriminating users.

Third Chapter- Political, Economic and Social Undercurrents in Religious Violence: In this chapter effort has been made to ascertain why the factors other than religious culminate into communal and sectarian strife, and also how and why, on the one hand, the conflicts on account of the secular issues relating to political, social and economic factors get religious hues, and on the other, the religious conflicts get explained in their political, social and economic dimensions. While examining the social factors such as caste system, racism and ethnocentrism in the historical perspective with regard to their origin and manifestations in the problem area leading to religious violence, special emphasis has been given on contemporary cases of religious violence arising out of these social factors. The role of political factors such as
nationalism, proto-nationalism, appeals to past, forced assimilation, regionalism and use of religion for petty political interests etc. in causing and escalating religious violence has been critically examined. Similarly, roles of economic factors such as poverty, inequality, control over human resources with various skills and qualifications, man-made means of production, land, depletable resources such as minerals, fossil fuels – coal and petroleum, rare metals, and capital in causing and escalating religious violence have been examined critically.

Fourth Chapter- Ways to Resolve Religious Violent conflicts and Role of Dialogue:
In this chapter critical examination of the various ways to resolve violent conflicts, such as direct power confrontation (war/counter-violence), negotiation (bargaining), judicial settlement, arbitration, mediation, conciliation, good offices, humanitarian intervention operations, role of civil society, Gandhian way of Satyagraha has been made. The whole spectrum from violent, direct power confrontation (war) to non-violent, Gandhian Satyagraha has been examined not only with regard to conceptual nuances but also with reference to instances from the contemporary conflicts where these methods have been applied with their achievements as well as drawbacks, the biggest of which evolved as the problem of lack of proper communication. This leads to the dialogical process which involves communication in totality. Attempt to define the essence of dialogue and the parameters for inter-religious dialogue has been made.

Fifth Chapter – Inter-religious Dialogue in the Contemporary World: This chapter starts with the concepts of multiculturalism and pluralism, and historical instances from India evidencing the presence of inter-religious dialogue, mutual toleration and peaceful co-existence. The critical assessment of the dialogical process among religions initiated at various international platforms starting with Parliament of
World’s Religions 1893 at Chicago and subsequent Parliaments of 1993 at Chicago, 1999 at Cape Town, 2004 at Barcelona and 2009 at Melbourne has been made. Some of the presentations at these Parliaments along with some background documents such as “Global 2000 Revisited: What Shall We Do?” and “Declaration Toward a Global Ethics” during 1993 Parliament and “A Call to Our Guiding Institutions” during 1999 Parliament, have also been examined critically. Work of some other forums such as the World Congress of Faiths, the Elijah Interfaith Institute, the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and bilateral dialogue at micro level along with work being carried out by the academic fraternity has also been examined. The issue of conversion, as it relates to the inter-religious dialogical process, becomes relevant where the proselytizing religions are involved.

Sixth Chapter – Survey and Conclusion: This chapter concludes the findings of the research where inter-religious dialogue evolves as the major effort worthy of being carried out to resolve the issues involving religious violence but it is to be supplemented by social, political and economic measures also and the work concludes with the hope for a peaceful future for religious communities with more mutual understanding and respect. And this work is a small effort in the same direction to exhort the humanity from slumber and pave way for peace through peaceful means and nothing else qualifies for the same more than dialogue.

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