

Report of Symphony of Religions: Interfaith Holi Milan

Symphony of Religions: Interfaith Holi Milan held on 21st March 2025 - conceptualised by Inter-Religious Solidarity Council and hosted by ISKCON at their Girgaon temple - proved to be a very inspiring and learning moment. Like the colours of Holi, faith leaders from various faiths were present. Among them were Govind Prabhuji, Keshav Chandra Das Prabhuji, Braj Mohan Prabhuji from ISKCON temple; Swami Dayadhipanand ji from the *Ramkrishna Mission*; Sister Anuja from the *Brahmakumaris*; Dr. Yogiraj Mangeshda, founder of Kriya Yoga; Fr. S.M. Michael, Director of the Archdiocesan Commission for Inter Religious Dialogue, Shri Aakif Dafedar – President of *Chhatrapati Shivaji Muslim Brigade*; Prof. Surinder Kaur from Sikh faith; Shri Shatrughan Jivnani and Ms. Mahvash Rowhani from the Baha'i faith, and Roshani Shenazz from the Zoroastrian faith were present. Besides Holi, the Christians had Lent, Muslims had Ramzan, the Holy month when they fast. Eid and Easter would be celebrated in near future. The Baha'i community was celebrating their Naw-ruz after observing their month of fasting, and the Parsi community was celebrating their Jamshedi Nowruz or new year.

Addressing the gathering, Govind Prabhuji said that one should not put one's self interest, or affection for someone above justice. Dharma means one's duty towards the society. Dharma also means the natural behaviour of things. For example, if fire burns, it consumes everything with its flames, irrespective of who and what. Dharma in this sense should not distinguish based on religion or any other identity markers. Likewise, human beings have a duty and a responsibility to stand for justice, irrespective of on which side the scales of justice are – for or against our loved ones, or our interests. When affection overpowers justice, adharma happens. He further said that human relate at four different levels and therefore have four different identities – 1) one's relation with God, which is in his/her private domain; 2) next level is sanskriti, i.e. when a human being relates to regional level – i.e. immediate neighbourhood, like one's linguistic community, or state, or religious community; 3) the next level of relation is with one's country and 4) at the global level. Dharma, according to him, is doing justice to all at global level and that is indestructible.

Braj Mohan Prabhu propounded that the essential values of truth and justice are important, and not external appearances like religion, caste, creed, gender, etc. Swami Dayadhipanandaji said that there is truth in all religions and we must go towards universal acceptance. Sr. Anuja said we are all beautiful souls made of seven original qualities that are connected with 7 chakras within us – 1) peace, 2) happiness, 3) love, 4) bliss, 5) spiritual knowledge, 6) purity and 7) power. If we focus on these qualities, there will be no room for negative thoughts or emotions. Yogiraj Dr. Mangesh Da said Yoga helps us control our breath and maximise intake of Oxygen. We are all inter-connected as we breathe the same air. Nature doesn't discriminate between human beings. Father Michael said that God is the source of life. He further said that we are created in the image and likeness of God. He added, that humans have the freedom to choose between right and wrong. He also said that people have different cultures due to their geographical situations. As society develops, culture also evolves. Therefore there is diversity but we need to remain united embracing this diversity.

Shri Aakif Dafedar said that God has given us intelligence and we all should not simply follow leaders, particularly, if they propound negative values which exclude any section of

society, or preach negative attitudes towards others. He further said that we should study not only our religion but other religions as well and overcome our prejudices about others. Prof. Surinder Kaur distinguished faith in one God from the different paths we undertake to reach that God. Ms. Mahvash Rowhani said that the society develops and along with the development of the society, religion must be progressive. Shri Shatrughan Jivnani also emphasised on unity of all religions. Roshani Shenazz spoke about the power of spirituality. She affirmed that we should adhere to the core values of religion that is love and compassion. She further said that unfortunately we give more importance to cultural traditions. She further said that children in the school must be taught good practices of all religions.

Kavi Ravi recited a Hindu poem on harmony and love. Shayar Laxman Sharma 'Waahid' through his poetry took the audience to Vrindavan and the Holi celebrations there with love as its theme. Waahid's Urdu shayari sensitized the audience to violence and victims of terrorism in the name of religion saying the colour of tears and blood is same, irrespective of religion of the victim.

The programme started with the rendition of the National Anthem by children. There was a gracious dance performance by Children learning in the temple. Dance was choreographed by their teacher Mansi. The Master of Ceremony was Shri Deepak Bharwani, who works as a volunteer at the Temple. He conducted the entire programme very well and efficiently, and added his own pearls of wisdom from time to time and keeping all the audience attentive and humoured.

The ambience of the hall, well decorated with tonnes of flowers, was serene, cool, colourful and aromatic. The colours of flowers signified the colours of Holi. There were scores of volunteers to make all the arrangements, including flower decoration, sound system, and video. The meeting ended with prasad (dinner) from the temple which was nutritious and tasty. There were also arrangements for iftar so that Muslims who were fasting and attending the programme were not inconvenienced. Muslims breaking their fast with prasad from the temple was the flavour of the evening, and there was atmosphere of love and solidarity among all the participants from various religions. God must have been present amidst the programme and presiding over the entire event!