

Status Paper on Interfaith Connotations in Humanitarian Assistance



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Status Paper on Interfaith Connotations in Humanitarian Assistance

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Foreword

Nepal is a multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country. Notwithstanding these diversities, the country has been able to foster and maintain religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic harmony for centuries. Despite sporadic cases of minor conflict triggered by external factors, the Nepalese society has remained peaceful since long.

One of the causes of religious tolerance and cooperation is the social cohesion in which the entire Nepalese society is interwoven into a single social fabric. Cooperation among neighbors during the normal and in emergency differs. We carried out a study in order to find out how people of different religions behave during an emergency and how do they support each other to recover from the tragedy.

The main objective of this documentation is to find out the common best values and practices of different major faiths in regards to humanitarian assistance, and to share those values and practices among wider actors for further replication. This study has attempted to document the connotation of the principles of humanitarian assistance – humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality across different religions.

In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of April 2015, Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW), Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal and BATAS Foundation funded by Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) of the UK implemented a comprehensive earthquake response project over a period of three years in remote mountain villages of Rasuwa.

The uniqueness of this project lies in the fact that two Christian and Islamic faith-based NGOs - LWF and IRW respectively - joined hands to respond to the crisis in a district with predominantly Buddhist and Hindu communities, solely guided by the humanitarian imperative which closely relates with the values embedded in various faiths around the globe. This is a good example of faith-sensitive joint humanitarian assistance provided by the organizations in an area where other faiths are dominant.

Such a model inspires religious tolerance, promotes peace, and introduces a culture of inter-faith religious cooperation during a humanitarian crisis. This also dispels stereotypes, and increases mutual acceptance and respect. Hence, in order to document all the common values and practices of the major faiths viz. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, the two organizations have come up with a joint status paper drawing upon the experience while successfully implementing this DEC-funded earthquake response project.

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1. Context

In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of April 2015 which killed approximately 9000 people, injured nearly 22,000, and destroyed property worth more than \$10 billion, LWF Nepal, IR Nepal and Batas Foundation funded by DEC responded comprehensively to emergency and recovery needs in the remote mountain villages of Rasuwa district over a period of three years. The range of sectoral response consisted of shelter (temporary, transitional and permanent), drinking water and sanitation, farm- and non-farm-based livelihood with strong emphasis on disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction. The project emphasized on building local capacities through mason training in earthquake-resilient shelter construction and community level preparation of disaster management plans and mitigation activities. The project followed a Build Back Better (BBB) approach beyond infrastructure construction in disaster response.

Uniqueness of this project lies in the fact that two Christian and Islamic faith-based NGOs - LWF and IRW - joined hands to respond to the affected people in a district having predominantly Buddhist and Hindu communities. Such a model of humanitarian response by faith-based institutions responding to the life-saving needs of affected community from different religions while ensuring the humanitarian principles results in building trust and respect for each other by dispelling various negative stereotypes. Such a model inspires religious tolerance and fosters a culture of interfaith religious cooperation during humanitarian crises.

In this context, both the organizations planned to develop a joint Status Paper by documenting all the best common values and practices of different major faiths predominant in Nepal namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

2. Objectives

The objective of this documentation is to find out common values and practices of different major faiths in regards to humanitarian assistance and share those values and practices for further replication.

1. To identify and list out common values and practices across different faiths in regards to providing humanitarian assistance.
2. To document the connotation of principles of humanitarian assistance - Humanity, Impartiality, Independence and Neutrality across different religions.

3. Methodology

First of all, three previous research documents namely “The Experiences and the Challenges of Interfaith Relations in Nepal”, “Interfaith Collaboration in Nepal” produced jointly by Mr Uttam Niraula and Prof. Dr David Seddon for LWF Nepal and IRW, plus "A Faith-sensitive Approach in Humanitarian Response: Guidance on Mental Health and Psychosocial Programming" prepared by Mr Michael French (LWF), Mr Atallah Fitzgibbon (IRW), Ms Wendy Ager, Ms Rebecca Horn and Mr Alastair Ager were studied.

Holy Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagawat Gita, Holy Dhammapada and Tripitak, Holy Quran, Holy Bible and other books/reports on Interfaith Relationships in Nepal were referred in order to find out the common thread among major faiths in Nepal on humanitarian assistance during humanitarian emergencies. Related Internet sources were also browsed. Name of the books and Internet resources studied are given in the foot notes and reference section. Relevant quotes have been taken from them.

Interviews were conducted with various faith leaders, Mr Damodar Gautam, President of Interfaith Council of Nepal (IFCN) and Chief Advisor to World Hindu Federation (WHF); Mr Shrawaner Ananda, a monk of Shangharam Vihara at Dhalko, Kathmandu (who was also the member of First Constituent Assembly of Nepal); Mr Khurshid Alam, President of Islami Sangh Nepal (ISN) and Mr Najarul Hussain,

ex-president of ISN and Founder Member of IFCN along with Pastor Sushil Shashanker of Free Kirtipur Church. These interviews were useful in getting interfaith connotations in humanitarian assistance in Nepal's context.

4. Situation and Inter-relationship of Different Faiths in Nepal

Nepal is a multi-religious nation forged in the migration of various ethnic groups with different faiths over a long period in history. Mongoloid population group (having Buddhist, Kirati or shamanic faith) migrated from the north and east, and Caucasoid groups (with Hindu, Muslim and Christian inclination) migrated from the south and west. It is generally believed that by the time the Caucasoid groups arrived in, what is now the territory of Nepal, some Mongoloid groups were already present (Sharma, 2008). However, the process of Hinduization/Nepalization of the whole population by the Hindu ruling class has been going on in Nepal over the past several hundred years since the beginning of the Lichchhavi period in the 5th century up to the present (Gaige, 1975). Consequently, there has been assimilation of different faiths and cultures in the melting pot of the dominant ruling elite.

According to the 2011 national census, 81.3 percent of the population is Hindu followed by 9.04% Buddhists, 4.4% Muslims, 3.05% Kiratis and 1.4% Christians. Table 1 provides the statistics on the changing trend of religious composition of Nepal's population.

Table 1
Trend of Religious Composition of the Population in Nepal

Faiths	Year 1952/54	1991	2001	2011
Hindu	88.8	86.5	80.6	81.3
Buddhist	8.6	7.8	10.7	9.04
Islam	2.6	3.5	4.2	4.4
Kirati	-	1.0	3.6	3.05
Christian	-	0.2	0.5	1.42
others	-	0.3	0.4	0.76

Source : Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)

LWF Nepal and IRW Nepal implemented a comprehensive earthquake response project in Rasuwa district. Rasuwa is the only district in Nepal having Tamang majority with 69% of the total population, followed by Hill Brahmin (15.1%), Gurung (3.1%). The rest are Chhetri (2.5%), Newar (2.3), Ghale (2.3), Kami (1.9), Magar (1.3) and Damai (1.1%). Rasuwa is predominantly a Mahayana Buddhist in terms of faith (70% as per 2011 census). The Hindus constitute 15.1%, Christians 4.3, Muslims 0.02 and others 0.34% of the total population (Intensive Study and Research Centre, 2014).

Notwithstanding the fact that the Hindu religion has been absolutely predominant for many centuries, interfaith social tolerance and interrelationship has remained commendable in Nepal in comparison to our neighbors in South Asia, namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Significant religious tolerance in Nepal might be the result of predominance of migrated people in the country and the general psychology of the people emerging therefrom, absorbing attitude of dominant Hindu scholars and rulers in Nepal, and peace-loving tendency of the religious minorities. Combination of these three factors has produced an amazing phenomenon of religious assimilation in Nepal which cannot be seen in the rest of South Asian countries. Shiva, Buddha, Ganesh, Bhairava, Swayambhu and Matsyendranath have emerged as the common gods of the Hindus, Buddhists and the Kiratis alike. The deities are worshipped by the people of these faiths with equal reverence and devotion. Gautam Buddha, who never believed in the existence of any god in the world, has been regarded by the Hindu scholars as the ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu himself. The two major mosques at Ghantaghar, Katmandu - namely the Jama Masjid and Kashmiri Takia - are located not farther than half a kilometer from the former Narayanhiti Royal Palace, an abode of the then only Hindu monarch of the world, reflects in the tolerance and respect for other religions.

The remarks of Mr Dor Bahadur Bista, one of the eminent anthropologists in Nepal, are often quoted in this regard. He says in his famous book - Fatalism and Development, Nepal's Struggle for Modernization:

“There is practice of worshipping Pashupatinath as Buddha, for example, on a full moon day of November every year. Similarly, recognizing him

as an incarnation of a Bhairava, Shiva is offered blood sacrifice and frequently offered buffalo meat on a number of occasions. Many people, particularly the Tamang Lamas, consider Avalokiteswora (Chen re si) to be an incarnation of Shiva (Holmberg, 1989). The Tantric rituals were mixed with Vaishnava; Vaishnava with Shaiva, and Shaiva with Buddhist Vajrayana. For example, there is a Krishna statue in the Buddhist temple compound of Kwa Baha in Patan, and there are statues of Vishnu, Rama and Buddha in Pashupatinath temple premises. Many deities in a number of temples in the Kathmandu Valley are worshipped as different deities of various cults with separate backgrounds outside Nepal. Matsyendranath is worshipped by Shaiva, Buddhist, and tantric Nepalis with equal zeal and devotion. (Bista, 2001:34)

However, it does not mean that the interrelationship between different faiths has always been peaceful in Nepal. History of conflict between major faiths can be traced since the Lichchhavi period. Mr Dor Bahadur Bista mentions the instances of the Pashupat-Shivaite Kirat being driven away by the Lichchhavis, the suppression of the Buddhists by the Shaivite and Vaishnavite Hindus, and the rebellious struggle of Ghantakarna against the stratified caste system which has not been well documented. There is a declaration by Amsu Varma, the renowned Lichchhavi King of Nepal, in Bungmati, dated 604 A.D., which stated that disputes between different religious groups were to be adjudicated by the royal court itself (Vajracharya, 1988) which suggests both that such religious conflicts did exist and were serious enough to require the king's personal attention (Bista, 2001:30-31).

Bhikshu Sudarshan, a renowned Buddhist monk of Nepal, has mentioned in a booklet named "Buddha Janmabhumi Nepalma Buddha Dharmapratī Asahisnuta (Religious Intolerance towards Buddhism in Nepal, the Birthplace of Buddha)" that Hindu King Jayasthiti Malla had imposed a coercive rule for Buddhist monks to marry compulsorily in his regime. A recorded instance of expulsion of 4 Buddhist monks and 4 Shrawaners of Thyervadi Buddhism from the country by the Hindu Prime Minister Rana Juddha Shumsher in 1943 A.D can be found in the modern history of Nepal (Sudarshan, 1991). Both the events had stirred up a big dissatisfaction among the Buddhist populace.

After the revolution for democracy in 1950, Nepal faced a few violent religious conflicts. The first recorded major communal clash between the Hindu and Muslim took place in 1958-59 in Bhawarpur village in the central Tarai district of Mahottari, when the majority community desecrated a mosque and also indulged in arson and looting the Muslims.

During 1959-60, when the first elected Nepali Congress Government was in power under the Prime Ministership of Mr BP Koirala, another incident of communal violence took place in Adhyanpur village in Mahottari district. Riots broke out while a Hindu religious procession was making the rounds of the village. Two people were burned to death and more than 100 houses were set on fire. The situation was brought under control by giving adequate compensation to the bereaved side.

The Gai Kanda (The Cow Scandal) riot in the central Tarai districts of Rautahat and Bara in 1971 was the first major case of Hindu-Muslim riot after the return of the direct rule of the monarchy in 1960. This was the bloodiest Hindu-Muslim riot in the history of Nepal to date. The riot was sparked off by a rumor about a cow being killed in Bhusaha in Rautahat which caused the loss of 51 lives (27 in Rautahat and 24 in Bara) and the destruction of property worth 6.4 million rupees.

The incident of September 1, 2004 was first in the country's history in which Muslim institutions and mosques were targeted by angry mob protesting against the killings of 12 Nepali hostages by Islamic militants of Ansar al-Sunna in Iraq. Another violent incident took place on September 16, 2007 at Shivpur-4 in Kapilvastu district where Mr Moin Khan, a local Muslim leader was killed by gunmen (Pandey, 2010).

But still the beauty of Nepali culture seems to be that in some of the violent conflicts in the contemporary history, if not in all, state intervened, riots were quelled, compensation paid and the torch of religious tolerance did not extinguish altogether.

Moreover, on 18th May, 2006 Nepal was declared as a secular state by the reinstated House of Representatives that came into existence after the historical People's Movement of April 2006, and the second Constituent Assembly enshrined the provision of secularism in the new constitution once and for all in September 2015.

5. Interfaith Connotations in Humanitarian Assistance

Although there are many religions in the world, the common thread running among four major faiths - Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity - is humanism and impartiality. All of the faiths teach the same thing in common: love, compassion, humanitarian assistance to all of the afflicted with complete impartiality, neutrality, independence without any regards to caste, color, class and creed.

“Vasudaiva Kutumbakam” (the entire world is one family) - says Hinduism, the oldest creed on earth.¹ This clearly upholds the virtue of humanism, peace and tolerance. Hinduism advocates compassion for all on the ground that all the living being are part of the whole universal family. Since, everyone and everything in the universe is a part of nature, it becomes necessary that same feelings of love and compassion should be rendered to all.

Gautama Buddha says the same thing in a different language, “As a mother protects her life - her child, so with a boundless heart, should one cherish all living beings; radiating loving kindness over the entire world.”² Buddha, in this quote, asks human beings to render loving kindness and compassion to the entire world and to all of the living beings irrespective of caste, creed, gender, richness or poverty as a mother renders her loving kindness to her offspring equally.

In the same way, Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) preached, “Amongst humans, god loves those who help their fellow men.”³ His saying goes on to the extent that “God created people with the predisposition to be helpful to others...”⁴

¹ “अयं निजः परोवेत्ति गणना लघद्रचेतसाम्

उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥”

Meaning: Those who have narrow consciousness say – this is mine and this is yours. For those who are generous, the whole world is the abode of relatives.

² Metta Sutta: 149

Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ

āyusā ekaṃputtāṃ anurakkhe,

Evampi sabbabhūtesū

mānasāṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇāṃ

³ Al Sayuti, “Al Jami’e Al Kabir”

⁴ Tabarani compilation.

Thus, we can find the spirit of universal humanism, compassion, non-discrimination and impartiality inherent in Islam. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) taught to render love and compassion to all of the human beings, irrespective of religion, caste, class, color and creed. "Practice of Islam is such that be it an emperor or a pauper they are obliged to sit and bow side by side during Namaz, the Muslim prayer," says Khurshid Alam, President of Islami Sangh Nepal (ISN), an umbrella organization of the Muslims in Nepal. He states further, "Humanism, independence, impartiality and neutrality is a must in Islam in all of its humanitarian acts."⁵

"My command is: Love each other as I had loved you," says Jesus Christ. The universal humanist connotation is same here as in other major faiths of the globe. In the New Testament, Jesus taught much about the subject of humanist charity. He commanded all the Christians of the world not to discriminate and differentiate between human beings and treat all with love and compassion. In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus called upon people to love not only their friends but also their enemies,⁶ as well as those rejected by society, poor, crippled, lame, blind and the sick.⁷

Regarding charity and assistance during humanitarian crises, all of the four major faiths have many things in common.

Hinduism has clearly defined the principle of virtue as to work for the wellbeing of others and defined sin as harming others. Shiva Purana says: "Synthesizing the 18 Puranas, Sage Vyaasa has two conclusions: It is virtuous to work for the wellbeing of others, and it is sinful to trouble them."⁸ The implication is that there is no bigger virtue in the world than helping the human beings at the time of distress; there is no worse sin than harming others at the time of their difficulties. Thus, altruism and humanitarian assistance at the time of distress is the basic value of Hinduism.

The core principle of Hinduism is: Brahma or soul is one in all beings. So, never turn anyone away from your door. Gather enough food and invite

⁵ In an Interview with Khurshid Alam, President of Islami Sangh Nepal on April 11,2018

⁶ Holy Bible, New Testament, Luke 6:35

⁷ Holy Bible, New Testament, Luke 14:13

⁸ The lines of Shiva Purana in Sanskrit is as follows:
"Ashtadasha puraneshu, vyasasya vachana dvayam,
Paropakara punyaya, papaya parapeedanam"

the stranger in to eat. When you feed the hungry, you serve the Lord, from whom every living being is created. When you help others at the time of distress with piety, you get God's help in return.⁹

“When you feel the suffering of every living being in your own heart, that is Pragma, empathy,” says Krishna in Bhagawat Gita. He further says: “Do everything you have to do, but not with greed, not with ego, not with lust, not with envy, but with love, compassion, humility, and devotion.” The core value of humanitarian assistance in Hinduism is to feel the suffering of others as the suffering of your own and help the people in distress selflessly. Herein lies the basis of the notion of humanism, impartiality, neutrality and independence in Hinduism.

Isha Upanishad states that moral life is a God-centered life, a life of divine love and respect for humanity to seek the infinite through the finite. It states that love of human is love of God. Human love leads to divine love. Upanishads hold that moral life is a life of selfless devotion to man.¹⁰

Bhagawat Gita teaches man to be neutral and independent in the process of rendering humanitarian service (karma) to the mankind. It holds the view that the soul is immortal. These words of Bhagawat Gita are often quoted:

"vasamsi jirnani yatha vihaya navani grhinati naro parani
tatha sarirani vihaya jirnani anyani samyati navani dehi" ¹¹

which means:

As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, similarly, the soul accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and worn-out ones.

That is why one should be independent and neutral equipped with unwavering faith and free of sorrow at the time of defeat, and free of pride and ego at the time of victory. One should perform his social duty and action independently. Only the duty and action are in person's control, not the consequence of it.¹²

⁹ <http://www.hinduwebsite.com/divinelife/essays/compassion3.asp>

¹⁰ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/69506/9/09_chapter%203.pdf

¹¹ Bhagawat Gita 2.22

वासांसजिरिणानयिथा वाहीय नवानीगृह्णातनिरोऽपराणी ।
तथा शरीराणविहीय जीरणान्यानसियातनिवानदिही ॥

¹² Bhagawat Gita 2.47

करमण्येवाधीकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्धभूरमा ते सङ्गोऽस्तत्त्वकरमणी ॥

Buddhism addresses all kind of sufferings of humankind. The four main principles (noble truths) of Buddhism are that there is suffering in the world; there are causes of suffering; suffering can be eliminated by eliminating its causes; there is indeed a way to end suffering. That is Ashtanga Marga, the eightfold path. Buddhism is called a faith of compassion to all beings who have sufferings, whether it is generated from natural calamities or lack of proper knowledge. Providing humanitarian assistance during humanitarian crises is an inextricable part of Buddhism. It further strives to make human beings get rid of all kinds of suffering by removing the root cause.

“Teach this triple truth to all: A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion are the things which renew humanity,” says Buddha.¹³ These triple truths are the crux of Buddha’s humanism. They can be termed as three major principles of humanitarian assistance.

Buddha was the greatest psychologist of his time. That is why he emphasizes on three things while providing humanitarian assistance to the affected people: 1) A generous heart-to help people in distress selflessly. 2) Kind speech- your words of loving kindness to sooth and provide hope to human beings who are in distress. 3) Life of service and compassion- you should serve the people in distress with dignity and compassion. These three elements which Buddha preached 2,500 years ago, echoes with the humanitarian principles.

One of the Buddha’s famous sayings is: “One who has served the sick people has served me.”¹⁴ Several instances can be found in Buddha’s biography and Jatak katha in which Buddha enjoyed serving the sick people himself. That is a great message for humanitarian assistance.

Buddha preached, that all people should make four divisions of their income: one part for food, clothing and subsistence; two parts for investing in business or agriculture, and the last part for use at time of humanitarian distress.¹⁵

¹³ www.keepinspiring.me/buddha-quotes/#ixzz5AMXX8lBx

¹⁴ यो गिजानं उपद्दति सोमं उप उपद्दति
Bhikshu Ashwaghosh. 2046 B.S. Maile bhujheko Buddha Dharma
(Buddha Religion which I have understood) p.52

¹⁵ Bhikshu Ashwaghosh:
Ekena bhoge bhunjeyya dwihikammam payojaye
Chatutham cha nidhapeyya aapadaasu bhavissati

This clearly emphasizes on the need for preparedness and to mitigate sufferings during humanitarian crisis.

The core of Buddhism is the principle of impermanence (*anityavodha*). According to Buddha, everything is changing in the world and nothing is permanent. Whatever comes into being has an end.¹⁶ From this principle emanates compassion and loving kindness to all the living beings and the notion of humanitarian assistance with humanism, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Buddha has mentioned four states of mind that is essential for providing humanitarian assistance to the afflicted people: “The Four States of Mind consist of ‘*Metta*’ for loving kindness to all fellow humans; ‘*Karuna*’ for compassion towards people in need without limits; ‘*Muditha*’ for sympathetic joy when other people are happy or safe from harm; and ‘*Upekkha*’ for equanimity to see others without prejudice and bias. These are ways to bring peace and understanding among all human beings irrespective of race, nationality and religion.”¹⁷ The fourth point ‘*Upekkha*’ is mentionable here because it emphasizes on impartiality and independence in humanitarian assistance.

Islam has rich traditions on charity and for providing humanitarian assistance at the time of humanitarian crisis. The Quranic and prophetic texts calling for humanitarian assistance, defining and ordering it are numerous. They are either of an obligatory or an inciting nature and do not exclude the non-Muslims from humanitarian aid. That is why it is impartial in essence.

“Humanitarianism is one of the fundamental principles of the Muslim religion. The act of giving money or helping someone in distress is not left to the free choice of the belief, but is instead an obligation in the same way as is prayer, fasting during the month of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Acts of humanitarianism, whether limited to a donation in money or in kind, or of a more practical nature, such as distributing

¹⁶ Dhammapada 277

Sabbe Sankhara anichaati yeda panyaya passati Sanyutta Nikaya 1.1.11; Digha Nikaya 2.221
Anichchawat Sankhara uppdayadhammino Upajjitwa nirujjhanti tesam bupasamo sukho

¹⁷ www.unhcr.or.th/en/news/UNHCR_Buddhism_discussion on 4 May 2016. UNHCR holds talk on humanitarianism in Buddhism with Thai renowned Buddhist monk the Venerable V.Vajiramedihi

aid, are an essential element of religious practice for the Muslim,” says Mr Jamal Krafess, Director General of Islamic Relief - Switzerland.¹⁸

He writes further, “The Muslim religion considers both humanitarian actions and the duty to help as religious obligations by which all Muslims, rich and poor, are bound. Quranic texts and Hadiths (words and deeds of prophet as reported by his companion) sometimes have an exhortatory tone encouraging charity works. “The first to enter 'Paradise' are those who do charitable works”.¹⁹ The Holy Quran decrees: “Rescue prisoners, feed the hungry and look after ill...”²⁰ It is remarkable that this obligation to humanitarian assistance is not applicable only to Muslims in distress. The principle of humanity, impartiality and independence has been made obligatory in Islam as Quranic texts and Hadiths do not exclude the non-Muslims from humanitarian aid. This principle was often given tangible form. In the early years of hijra (the Hegira era, or Muslim calendar), there was a famine in Modar (Saudi Arabia). The Prophet organized a humanitarian convoy to help the inhabitants who were not Muslims.

The Muslim religion considers to err as human. The religion, however, forcefully recommends him to correct his mistakes and puts a series of means to do so at his disposal, such as repentance, submission to justice, and reparation for damage caused to others. Islam also has established a system of erasing sins by performing humanitarian acts. In this regard, the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) has said: “Alms extinguish sins exactly as water extinguishes fire...”²¹ For example, in the case of voluntary failure to observe one of the days of fasting during Ramadan without a valid reason, the Muslim must fast for sixty consecutive days or feed sixty needy people. This is called ‘Kaffara’ in Islam.

“Zakat, the mandatory Muslim practice of giving 2.5% of one's accumulated wealth for charitable purposes every year, is one of the

¹⁸ www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/irrc_858_krafess.pdf

¹⁹ Al Bukhari

²⁰ The same

²¹ The same

main tools of Islamic social financing for humanitarian assistance,” says Khurshid Alam, President of Islami Sangh Nepal. “It is an Islamic mechanism for collecting resources for humanitarian assistance.” Zakat is mainly used to reduce inequality and is widely used in Muslim countries to fund poverty-reduction efforts. He further says, “There is also a mechanism called ‘Waqf’ for donating fixed assets for humanitarian work or religious activities.”

Zakat is not merely a religious obligation but also a right of the poor, as the Quran confirms: “And in their properties there was the rights of the beggar and the need...” This notion of rights returns in another verse: “And those on whose wealth is a recognized rights...” This relates to the principle of humanitarian imperative as enshrined in the model code of conduct for ICRC and the NGOs. The principle states about the right to receive and offer humanitarian assistance. The right to receive humanitarian assistance by the victims of natural and human-induced disaster accords them the dignity which is a very important aspect of providing humanitarian aid.

The study of Quranic and Hadith texts gives a clear idea of the intensity of the force with which the Muslim religion has emphasized humanitarian action. This is both a ritual and an obligation. The mechanisms put into place by the religion (e.g. zakat, waqf, kaffara, sadqah) have an unequalled impact on the lives of the population who are most vulnerable.

Christianity equally extolls the virtues of humanitarian assistance. Christian humanism has its roots in the traditional teaching that humans are made in the image of God. Bible, the holiest text of all Christians, is full of quotes which inspire human beings to be generous in humanitarian assistance to the afflicted people irrespective of caste and color. “If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday,” says Holy Bible.²² The afflicted person might be Christian or non-Christian, European or non-European, it does not make any discrimination.

²² Bible. Isaiah 58:10

The core principle of Christianity is that there is only one God in the world; God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient; God is the Creator of the universe and is sovereign over it; God is love; Every person, male and female, of every race and nationality, is an image bearer of God and is equal before God. Christianity teaches Christians not to “hate” anyone, but rather teaches to be compelled by the love of Jesus Christ to love God and neighbor; the most hardened sinner, specifically those who hate and abhor God and God’s laws, are also not outside the reach of the grace of God.

Jesus Christ says in the Holy Bible, “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.”²³ He strictly teaches not to make any differentiation based on wealth and family title, country and creed, virtue and sin in humanitarian assistance during crisis. He teaches even to love and forgive hardest sinner. That is why humanism, impartiality, neutrality and independence are the major features of Christianity, too.

The concept of Christian humanitarian aid has emanated from the teachings of the Bible. Charity and the concern for providing assistance to the poor is a concept established from the Old Testament.²⁴

6. Conclusion

Principles and teachings are varied in words in four major faiths in Nepal, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity but the common thread or values running across all the major religions is humanism, compassion and loving kindness to all the afflicted people and principle of serving the people in distress irrespective of religion, nationality, gender, caste, class and color. They teach the same values of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence in all the acts of humanitarian assistance at the time of humanitarian crisis. All these faiths hold the common principle that every human being has the same body and soul, they teach to love and treat every human being of the world as their own kith and kin whether they are virtuous or sinner, rich or poor, male or female, of any nationality or of any creed. It upholds human dignity and emphasizes on the rights of the

²³ Bible. Mathews 10:8

²⁴ Loewenberg, Frank M, 2001.

people to give and receive humanitarian assistance. All the faith-based-inspired organizations draw upon these common values to render high quality humanitarian assistance which confirms with the code of conduct and humanitarian principles. Further, the faith-based organizations are working to bring in faith sensitivity while responding to the humanitarian need as one of the several quality standards.

Discrimination based on gender, religion, caste and socio-economic status is rampant in Nepal. Exclusion of women, Dalits, minority ethnic groups, poor/working people and marginalization of disadvantaged communities is a major social disease of Nepal which can be perceived in every arena of society and in general polity. The social issues such as discrimination and exclusion can be seen and felt in the area of humanitarian assistance, too, specially at the time of natural disaster. Elite, male and so-called 'upper caste' people of ruling community usually get humanitarian assistance faster, better and more than others. Such social issues can be effectively addressed through interfaith responses because all the four major faiths equally discourage discrimination based on gender, caste, class, creed and nationality in humanitarian assistance. Humanism, impartiality, independence and neutrality are inherent features of all the four religions.

The Build Back Better approach advocates for the restoration of communities and assets in a manner that makes them less vulnerable to disasters than before and strengthens their resilience. It upholds that reconstruction is an opportunity to build back better. Faith-sensitive humanitarian response promotes cohesion, coordination and tolerance among the people of different faiths in humanitarian assistance by identifying common humanitarian thread across different religions. When all the people of different faiths find out common humanitarian thread across their religions, they demonstrate unity, cohesion, coordination and tolerance in the post-disaster reconstruction scenario, thus contributing to building the society better than before and strengthening the social resilience.

There are some challenges to faith-based organizations as they are often perceived as the propagator of specific religion. It creates a biased attitude among the common people which makes humanitarian assistance difficult at the time of humanitarian crisis. However, the opportunities for faith-based organizations in humanitarian response are immense in Nepal. Notwithstanding the fact that Hindu religion has been absolutely predominant for many centuries and there have been some instances of

sporadic religious conflicts in the past, inter-faith social tolerance and inter-relationship have remained commendable in Nepal in comparison to many South Asian countries. Moreover, Nepal has been defined as a secular nation since 2006. Hence, the state is constitutionally neutral and impartial on the questions of religion. It does not favor any religion and does not intervene in religious matters. Nepal provides conducive environment for faith-based organizations to provide high-quality humanitarian assistance in conformity to the humanitarian principles which resonates with the core values of humanity as espoused by various religions.

The partnership between IRW and LWF is the first of its kind of inter-faith partnership to promote faith-sensitive humanitarian program. The partnership aims to uphold the sensitiveness towards faith of each individual that these organizations serve for. Both these organizations also intends to join hands together with other faith-based organizations to uphold the humanitarian principles – Humanity, Impartiality, Independence and Neutrality enshrined in different religion.

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