

## Interculturalism: Ganga-Jamuna tahzeeb

The contact, mixing and coexistence of two or more cultures in a particular societal ecosystem is called interculturalism. In the hazy past of history, the migration of primordial multitudes of ethnic groups, mostly from the central, south central and north eastern parts of Asia in the gangetic plains moving southwards to the alluvial Deccan plateau was inhabited by the earliest indigenous people. This provided the first pattern of inter-ethnic mixture of this mighty generous land that was to become one of the biggest crucibles of race and culture in human history- India. The Indo- Aryan fusion which is the first major metamorphosis of Indian culture, traces its roots to 1600 B.C. when the Aryans first time appeared on the Indian scene. It is generally believed that they came from Eurasia via Iran. Initially, they were neither literate nor had a settled life. Eventually they settle down, began practising agriculture, and territorial states began to emerge from a tribal society. They first spread over the north of India and then penetrated into the south. One of the most wonderful civilizations of the world was founded by them.

Pronounced in Hindustani: गंगा जमन ु ी तहज़ीब, گنگا جمنی گنگا, Ganges-Yamuna Culture is a term used for the culture of the central plains of Northern India, especially the region of Ganges (Ganga) and Yamuna rivers, which is regarded as a fusion of Hindu and Muslim elements. The region of Awadh in the state of Uttar Pradesh is usually considered to be the centre of this culture. This Ganga Jamuna “tehzeeb” or culture is a syncretic composite of cultures and reveals a marvellous dimension in the exploration of cultural reciprocation. Here, after ages of extensive inter religious contacts and adoption of religious beliefs, religion as such was hardly ever rigid or sealed. People in most cases often follow multiple religious traditions without necessarily drawing boundaries between them, even though they may affirm their own allegiance to one religion at a given time. As the famous Indian socialist and writer Ali Asghar Engineer says: “In India its existence for almost thousand years gave rise to Indo-Islamic culture which in northern India is also called by various names like “Ganga-Jamni tehzib” or “Mili-juli tahzib” (syncretic culture) or “Sanjhi virasat” (composite heritage).

Under the current government of India, which is “flirting with fascism” ( Al Jazeera), this very syncretic composite culture is under threat. The masses are being communally polarized, and an environment of hatred and suspicion is being brewed where people have co-existed with each other for centuries. Although this Hindu Muslim unity was a major threat to the British colonizers, and the seed of hatred was sown by the colonial forces. The right wing bigoted ideological backings are trying to erode the very multi-cultural and secular ethos for which our forefathers martyred themselves. There have been concerted efforts by certain institutions to rewrite the history giving it a communal colour, there have been deliberately media manufactured propaganda which unabashedly pit people of one community against another. Thus, the significance of Ganga Jamuna tehzeeb increases manifold. The syncretism which is being ruthlessly attacked by the divisive forces should be reinforced all the more vigorously so that this cultural fascism can be publically shamed. This cultural hobnobbing which we got as natural and geo -political tribute should be valued and nurtured.

“I know there is strength in the differences between us. I know there is comfort where we overlap.” as Ani DiFranco affirms.



