

Centre of Arabic and African Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)
 in collaboration with the
Qutbi Jubilee Scholarship Program (QJSP)
<http://www.taqreeb.org/>

International Conference on
“Ideas of Harmonious Coexistence: Religions and Philosophies of India”
(Taqreeb Conference Series)
 (27-28 December 2017)

Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

To participate in this conference, please send your 500 word abstract by filling the online abstract submission form available on <http://taqreeb.org/call-for-papers/> by **5 August, 2017**. All abstracts must be in English. QJSP is pleased to offer accommodation and local transport for participants.

Taqreeb (taqrīb) is an Arabic word that literally means “to bring closer.” It is based on the consonant root letters Q-R-B, with the derivatives “qareeb” (close) and “qurbat” (closeness). Many Indian languages, such as Hindi and Urdu, have appropriated these words over the years. The transformation of “qarīb” to “taqrīb” in Arabic adds a verbal element that expresses an active effort to bring closer. As such, the word is well suited to be the title of this series as it succinctly conveys the mindset of building bridges and bringing people closer. The first conference in the Series took place in collaboration with the University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India in September 2016 (read more at <http://taqreeb.org/2016-conference/>). This is a call for papers for the second conference in collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, and the Qutbi Jubilee Scholarship Program (QJSP), Mumbai, invite the submission of abstracts for a conference on ideas of harmonious coexistence in the religions and philosophies of India. The purpose of the conference is to bring together scholars and community leaders to explore notions of communal harmony in India, as theorized and practiced, historically and today. The conference would create a platform to connect these notions to contemporary challenges to peace and pluralism. The Indian sub-continent across the millennia has been a cradle for the development of myriad systems of thought with regards to interfaith and intercommunity relations. For many, the sub-continent has served as a model for communal harmony, and for others, it has often been a focal point of disharmony, rioting and discrimination. Philosophical and religious luminaries, as well as rulers and politicians, have throughout its history formulated ideas of harmonious coexistence, and often implemented them. These have, frequently but not always, been erected upon edifices of faith-based ideologies. From ancient scriptures such as the Rigveda, to more recent ones such as the Bible and the Qur’an; from the religious traditions that emanated from within the sub-continent, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism, to those that made it its home, such as Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism; from the ancient philosophical traditions of the astika and nastika schools, to the later expressions of Sufi and Bhakti ideologies; from the sayings of kings and emperors such as Ashoka, Kharavela, and Harsha, and the concepts of sulh-e-kul and din-e-ilahi of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, to the provisions of the Constitution of India, the Indian Penal Code and Parliamentary Acts; from the sages of medieval India such as Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, Baba Farid, Guru Nanak, Tulsidas, Mirabai and Dara

Shikoh, to the more recent perspectives of Sai Baba of Shirdi, Mahatma Gandhi, Syedna Taher Saifuddin, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multicultural society of India represents a rich tapestry of ideas of harmonious coexistence. These ideas and their successful and unsuccessful applications across the ages represent an invaluable resource for the debate on communal relations in contemporary times. Their considerable legacy can today contribute on micro and macro levels to the mission of advancing communal harmony in modern day democracies in general, and particularly to issues of intra-societal and intra-faith relationships, interreligious and intercommunity coexistence, minority and majority rights, and nation building in India. In present times especially, two dichotomous strands of thought have increasingly taken hold and demand immediate attention: on the one hand, ultra-orthodox and other extreme ideologies are finding more and more opportunities of expression, and on the other, the more liberal voices have progressively moved from a call for tolerance and patience amongst communities to urging acceptance, appreciation and understanding. Furthermore, several distinct strategies are being put forward today in the public space for achieving harmony, and these deserve careful individual consideration: some suggest that the best way forward is to show that all religions are an expression of the same truth, while others advocate a healthy recognition of the commonalities as well as the differences, and yet others argue that the focus of individuals should be on being human, while realizing that religious boundaries are artificial and manmade. In the conference, it is hoped that questions such as the following – but not limited to these – will be closely examined and discussed particularly in the context of contributions that have come from the religions and philosophies of India: how can one define ‘harmonious coexistence’ as well as its aims and goals historically and today; how do notions such as ‘tolerance’ and ‘patience’ versus those such as ‘acceptance,’ ‘appreciation’ and ‘understanding’ shape such definitions; how can one endeavour to reconcile between competing definitions and goals; what are the prime examples of communal harmony in history and today; what are the ideas that have been put forward to achieve communal harmony, and how do they address the socio-economic, racial, religious, educational, political and caste fault lines of society; what is the role of syncretic developments in religions, ideologies and cultures in moving towards harmonious coexistence; what have been the points of failure historically and today where community relations have broken down and even disintegrated in to violence; how do such instances contribute to a search for harmonious coexistence; what have been the points of interaction between ideologies of harmonious coexistence and those that propagate divisiveness; what has been the role of politics and phenomena such as colonialism and nationalism in advancing or harming communal relations; how does one balance the seemingly divergent ideals of freedom of speech and communal harmony, as for example attempted in Section 153A and 295A of the Indian Penal Code; what is the role of the government, NGOs, media, law enforcement and the justice system in advancing this goal; how significant is harmonious co-existence in nation building and development; what are the concrete initiatives and steps that can be taken today in fostering communal harmony.

The Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi is the number one public funded university in the country, ranked second in the overall ranking of the institutions of higher studies in India. It is known for leading faculties and research emphasis on liberal arts, social sciences, foreign languages and applied sciences. Named after India's first Prime Minister, JNU was established in 1969 by an act of parliament. It consists of

ten major schools including the School of Social Sciences, School of Life Sciences, School of Biotechnology, School of Computer and System Sciences, School of International Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, School of Physical Sciences, School of Environmental Sciences, School of Arts and Aesthetics and School of Computational and Integrative Sciences. The School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies is considered the largest school of humanities in Asia. The University is located on the Aravali Ridge in the southern part of Delhi. It is spread on a one thousand acre lush green campus with unique flora and fauna.

Qutbi Jubilee Scholarship Program (QJSP), Mumbai, India: The Qutbi Jubilee Scholarship Program (QJSP) was established in 2014 by the 53rd Head of the Dawoodi Bohra Community, Syedna Khuzaima Qutbuddin, to provide scholarships for higher-education, and to foster occasions for promoting harmonious co-existence, known in Arabic as taqrīb. To this end, QJSP has initiated The Taqreeb Conference Series, an annual international gathering of scholars and leaders of communities to discuss and promote harmonious coexistence. The first conference in the series was held in collaboration with the University of Calcutta in September 2016. This conference will be the second in this series. The history of the Dawoodi Bohra Community in India and their interactions with other communities are noteworthy for the goal of taqreeb. On the one hand, their perpetual status as a minority necessitated some form of pragmatic philosophy of coexistence; on the other hand, their leaders at several points in time, initiated influential movements of taqreeb, whose effects were felt nationwide. These movements frequently drew upon the philosophy and history of the Fatimid Caliph-Imams – to whom the Dawoodi Bohras trace their heritage – to articulate a universal and divine origin to all sects and beliefs. In the modern period, a noteworthy example is that of the community’s 51st leader, Syedna Taher Saifuddin (1888-1965), who lead initiatives to nurture taqreeb among religious communities. Through more than 40 treatises and thousands of lines of Arabic devotional poetry, he presented a model of spiritual Islam that seeks to shun all forms and facets of disharmony and enmity among members of humanity over the globe.