

# साहस 2016 SAHAS 2016



*dhanak*



**STRENGTHENING ALLIANCES  
FOR HUMANITY AND SECULARISM**

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# Introduction

Editor : Dr. Rahul Das

When DHANAK began its journey on a thorny path a few years back, who could have guessed that that this caravan for humanity would gain tremendous momentum. Like an engine that starts, sputters and then catches on, DHANAK has faced travesties with fortitude.

These years have been full of action, with Dhanak bringing unbridled joy on the faces of deeply troubled couples who have been forced to run from pillar to post. That smile of youth as they realize their dream turning into reality has been the biggest success for Dhanak.



As time passed, its annual event SAHAS turned into a red-letter day for all those who believe in peace, secularism and harmony.

SAHAS is today an annual jamboree for all those believe that this wonderful world revolves around love. It's a day for deliberations on prickly issues and to introspect on where we are headed. Not to forget a generous dose of fun-filled activities.

Some say, focus on the destination. Others say, the journey is the destination. But for Dhanak, the destination as well as the journey is one seamless whole.

Activist and humanitarian Martin Luther King at his acceptance speech, on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, December 10, 1964 said: "I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word."

A good 50 years later, those words still ring true. And Dhanak, through SAHAS, is striving to ensure that unconditional love indeed has the final word.

# I will talk about intolerance because I want to protect people I love!

Shweta Verma

**T**he year 2015 was extraordinary. I was very surprised with the way social media was used to promote biases and opinions. From the posts that people were writing and sharing, and the manner in which news was worded and selectively promoted, I felt that some people were more loyal to their opinions instead of being loyal to the larger good of society. Any criticism of Government was being perceived by some as being anti-national. Any focus on rights of minority groups was also being dismissed as an example of anti-Government activity instead of being perceived as a genuine concern. Terms such as 'pseudo-secular' was often being used and everyone seemed to be using their own definition of 'secularism' and promoting themselves as 'true seculars' while labelling others to be the one having no idea of secularism.

The debate on tolerance and intolerance in this country reached a new height. Some felt that this 'intolerance' was a new thing that was being publicised to tarnish the Government's image. Some felt this 'intolerance' had in fact increased since the new Government was formed at the centre. Some felt that 'intolerance' was actually not a new aspect and had existed for long in our country. This was the first time that I saw jokes being circulated on tolerance/intolerance and secularism.

But what makes some of us believe that intolerance

and discrimination are absent in our country or that the conversations on these issues are nothing else but a political stance taken for one political party and against the other one? Why should every perspective be reduced to a conspiracy theory? I believe that discrimination has existed in our society and continues to be present today as well.

It becomes evident when a Hindu refuses to give his home on rent to a Muslim family. And when I state this, it is not just an opinion, it is part of my experience. As my family faced problems in finding a house on rent in 2007 (the year I got married), I suddenly became more aware of how strongly communities are divided and how Hindus see Muslims with mistrust.

The scenario has not changed. Recently, in our current locality of residence (where we own a flat), a person engaged in casual conversation with my family mentioned how he was trying to give his flat on rent and although a family did come, he decided not to give them his flat on rent as they were Muslims. This person, evidently forgot that my family member is a Muslim too! Probably, he felt that as this family member did not look like a 'typical Muslim aligning with his own stereotypes', he must be a Hindu! It did not seem to occur to him that our locality, inspite of being a Hindu majority one, could include other religious groups as well. Now, some

people I know would just state that giving a house on rent is just a 'personal choice' and nothing to do with discrimination or intolerance. But then my question is- what does this personal choice reflect? Does it not make it evident that we discriminate on the basis of religion and our stereotypes? And why should this discrimination not be considered an example of intolerance and lack of acceptance of 'others' around us?

I believe that discrimination is an example of or is a part of intolerance that exists in our country. Just as this discrimination is not new, the conversations on this discrimination are also not new. People have always spoken against discrimination and intolerance in one way or the other. It may be just that others probably did not give so much attention to their protests and dissent in past. I find it odd that while we believe in our right to voice our opinions and justify our own methods of dissent, we seem to have problems when others voice their dissent. I believe that with social justice as our core value, we must respect spaces for dissent. People have right to protest as long as they are not using violence to prove their point I think.

When people state that there is no intolerance in our country, I am not sure about their reasons for saying so. Because their opinions are almost always supported by a series of so-called-facts which present one side of story and that aligns with their opinions.

I am not sure what people gain by selectively focusing only on the information that aligns with their opinions and why some people do not budge from their stand even when the other kind of information (not aligning with their opinion) is



presented to them? Is it because of their focus on their own definition of justice? Is it because of their love or loyalty for the present Government? Is it because of their love for the country, whose image should not be tarnished at any cost no matter what all happens here? Is it because of their need to oppose anything that did not match their own views even when their views concurred with multiple realities of this country? I am not sure. But we must remember that presence of intolerance and discrimination does not mean absolute absence of justice and tolerance.

The reality of our country is that all these are part of our country: justice as well as injustice, discrimination as well as equality, secularism as well as non-secular activities, and tolerance as well as intolerance. We are not living in an either-or world. We need to, however, promote the aspects that will be better for our country and challenge the aspects, which are harming it.

We must introspect more as sensitive human beings and find real reasons for sticking to one point of view. Just stating one's opinion is not enough. It is

# रंज

Jamal

हर चेहरे पे आज रंज नज़र आता है  
 यहाँ हर शख्स मे मेरा अक्स नज़र आता है  
 हर हाथ मे है पत्थर.. हर सर पे ज़ख्म भी है  
 इस बस्ती मे हर इक बेचैन नज़र आता है  
 नफरत भरी निगाहे दिन रात टोकती है

मेरी गफलत मे भी शायद, मेरा कसूर नज़र आता है  
 है सीने पे बोझ कैसा..साँसे थमी सी क्यूँ है  
 गुबार हर दिल मे है ये साफ नजर आता है  
 लुत्फ.ए.कफस क्या जानो...जो आजाद घूमते हो  
 इन बंदिशो मे भी 'जमाल' महफूज़ नजर आता है

necessary to also state why do you think so? For example, I am sure about my reason to state that discrimination and intolerance does exist. And that reason is- I want to protect people I love. I feel angry when people randomly share their opinions about Muslims without thinking of them as equal human beings. I feel angry because these random opinions automatically become applicable to my husband and dear friends. I feel angry because these random opinions rarely seem to be based on personal experiences and often dismiss experiences of discrimination and marginalization of my Muslim husband and friends. If I do not challenge these random opinions of my Hindu community by reminding them that discrimination and intolerance does exist, then how else will I challenge them?

I do not want anyone to hate, hurt or marginalize people I love.

There are several sensitive people in my Hindu community who would agree with me and would respect human beings for who they are. But there are also those who say or write very insensitive statements. At those moments, all I have for them is hatred and anger! What else would you have for

those who hurt people you love? Often, my first thought on those occasions is, 'How dare you say that?'

I have a son who is not even a month old yet. I wonder how would people treat someone like him who is born to a Hindu mother and a Muslim father? Does he deserve a society, which does not respect him for who he is and ensure his safety? Whether you believe it or not, in our country people do get killed because of their identities, i.e. because of who they are. So should my son grow up here or somewhere else?

Unfortunately, we are living in a country where even statements like these from concerned parents are treated as anti-national and you are reminded to go to Pakistan if you have any thoughts of living somewhere else. If I want to protect my son, my family - what problem do you have? I am not going to prove my patriotism to anyone by saying anything. I do not need do.

But I and my family deserve a safe society that celebrates diversity. And if such a society does not exist right now, we will have to create it by fighting for it. If we cannot create such a society, then we will



have to explore other places which can offer what we want. There are many things we do for people we love.

To understand people like me who would continue to state that, 'yes, intolerance does exist', you need to first respond to these questions- What all do you think can hurt or harm people you love? What all do you want to protect them from? What all will you do to protect them? Problems do not vanish just because you think that they do not exist. They are very much there and I will do what I can to protect people I love. I will challenge you and your opinions. I will question

your discriminatory behaviour and your stereotypes. I will remind you that don't treat others the way you don't want others to treat people you love.

I hope as my son grows up, he experiences a different kind of society, a caring and compassionate one which is full of people who love him for who he is. A society that does not discriminate against him for being different. A society where spaces for dissent are not destroyed and a society, which is open to change for benefit of each human being. A society which does not repeat scenarios like 2015.

## आज मैं हिन्दू नहीं

— दीपक शर्मा

आज मैं हिन्दू नहीं  
हिन्दुस्तानी बन कर बोल रहा हूँ।  
दिल के रिश्तों में पडी गाँठो को  
चुन चुनकर खोल रहा हूँ।  
भाई मेरे तुम बात मेरी  
हिंदुस्तानी बनकर ही सुनना।  
राष्ट्रहित में जो उचित हो  
उसी राह को तुम चुनना।।  
इक बगिया के फूल हैं हम  
बागबाँ जिसकी भारत माँ।  
अपने बच्चों में भेद कभी  
करती है क्या, कोई भी माँ।  
छलनी हुआ आँचल उसका  
उसने तो शिकवा किया नहीं  
अकेले बैठी बिलक रही जो  
तेरी माँ वो मेरी माँ।।

धर्म के नाम पर लडते हैं हम,  
उसकी तो कोई खता नहीं।  
अपनो के खून पर खुश हो,  
वो कौन सा धर्म है, पता नहीं।  
हिन्दू, मुस्लिम, सिख, ईसाई मिलकर,  
क्या अद्भुत वतन बना देते,  
वृक्ष से अलग होकर फूले, फले,  
एसी तो कोई लता नहीं।।  
भारत के बेटे, भाई मेरे  
इक बात मुझे तुम बतलाओ।  
मजहबी, खूनी हुडदंग में जो,  
तमगे मिले तुम दिखलाओ।  
वे कौन सा भगवान, खुदा है जो,  
अपनी रक्षा खुद नहीं कर सकता  
उस परमशक्ति की हिफाजत तुम,  
कैसे करोगे सिखलाओ।।

सियासतदारो की चिनी दीवारें,  
इतनी उँची कैसे हो सकती है।  
झूठ के खंजर से दिल की जर्मी पर,  
लकीरें कैसे खिंच सकती है।  
शिकवे गिले तो हम,  
बतलाकर भी हल कर लेते।  
सीनों में गडी तलवार,  
कोई निष्कर्ष कैसे हो सकती है ।।  
मजहब कमरा हो सकता है  
पर घर तो वतन ही है मेरा।  
प्यार भरे दो बोल पे वारी धन क्या,  
तन मन भी मेरा।  
दिलवालों के देश भारत में,  
रहते मिलजुलकर हम सभी।  
फिर किस बात का झगडा भाई,  
क्या तेरा क्या मेरा।।

# Decoding an interfaith alliance

Sehar Tahir

**W**orld as well as India is going through a transition phase; old beliefs are being questioned and new understandings are being created. As we look around, relationships are undergoing radical changes and marital equations are also being redefined.

In India, on one hand, we are still struggling to deal with Khap Panchayats and Kangaroo courts where boys and girls are being bludgeoned to death over their right to choose, whereas on the other hand, our urban population is quite comfortable using dating apps to choose the right one for them.

Now where does an inter-faith alliance, with its more complicated nuances stand in these war times?

As far as I can think, since younger generation is turning more and more assertive and choosy, such alliances will become all the more common in coming times. But the question here is, though assertiveness can drive us to take decisions, sometimes even against our families, but it alone cannot be a formulae for a successful and everlasting relationship.

As it is said, it takes little to jump into a marriage, but more to sustain it.



Thus, I'd say that though an inter-faith relationship undergoes more trials and tribulations, but it too has the same basic rules to succeed as in any conventional marriage.

To quote my own example, I was in an inter-faith relationship for 14 years before tying the knot. I am not suggesting anyone to give so much of time to every such relationship, but I'm definitely suggesting a judicious and mature decision where both partners discuss and plan things beforehand. They should decide upon things like, will they be taking the SMA (Special Marriage Act) route and what stand they will take in front of their families etc.

Taking support from DHANAK and having discussions with more such couples will also definitely help.

But the very basic gaffe that most of us tend to commit in such scenarios is expecting the other person to change. What we must understand here is that we cannot change anyone, except ourselves.

And moreover trying to change the other person will make him/her unhappy and an unhappy partner cannot help us to build a happy alliance.

Sometimes we also tend to turn a blind eye to our differences as 'ignorance is bliss', but rather than closing our eyes we must sit back and think that whether these difference are going to affects our lives that much or not. We must prepare ourselves to amicably deal with them rather than assuming that they will vanish in the thin air once we will be together.

Marriage is a very important decision of our life and it should be judicious, mature and not just emotional. Moreover, such inter-faith alliances teach us to respect other's opinions, be tolerant and in the end lay the foundation of a considerate and humble society; so they are definitely worth the effort.



# An interfaith relationship - "Right or wrong"?

Kaukab Khan

If there is "love", then truly as it has been pointed out everything is taken care of. For example, if one partner is strictly vegetarian and the other person's menu cannot remain deprived of non-veg even for a single day, then one of them will have to sacrifice or just understand and let the other partner carry on as before.

It all started between Ojaswini and me one year ago when we met in Gurgaon and from then on our love story started.

I tried to explain to my parents that she loves me a lot, but I don't know why they started me telling about the difference between a Muslim and Hindu, traditions, customs, religious belief and lot more.

I was amazed at that point of time because my father taught me: "We are citizens of India and all human beings are precious gift of God, love them always, respect them". I don't know why their ideology changed when I kept my point to marry a Hindu Brahmin girl.

They say love is blind but is it also agnostic? Still like all others, I have not left hope and I want to marry



Ojaswini, with their blessings and hopefully will. But, the society of today will treat me as a "criminal". Criminal in inverted comma states I'll be looked differently in this society. People won't allow me to live happily with my partner, so they'll receive non-bearable comments that would hurt their respect and prestige they have earned.

I just want to make my parents and this society realise no matter how couples' may have grown up under different economic conditions, there may be difference in race, age, political views, language, country of origin, education, goals and religion but going by Hindu

dharma, every soul has its own journey. All relations are like two pieces of wood floating in Ocean where they come together by one wave and they move apart in another. Even in Muslims, as I realise I have been always taught to respect 'humanity'.

Let's come together, remove all evil causes behind interfaith relationship and this only can be done through positive thinking, education and right approach.

'Long live humanity, Long live equality'

## मेरे हाथों में अपना जो तुम हाथ दो

Ojaswini

मेरे हाथों में अपना जो तुम हाथ दो  
उम्र भर साथ देने का वादा करूँ  
दो कदम जो चलो तुम मेरे साथ में  
चलने का सारा जीवन इरादा करूँ.  
तुम मिले तो लगा जैसे प्यासी थी मैं  
बाद मुद्दत के मुझको नदी मिल गयी  
थी अधूरी अमावस की रातों सी मैं  
रात को चाँद की चाँदनी मिल गयी।  
एक अल्हड़ नदी सी मैं बहती तो थी  
उस बहाव में भी लेकिन सीमाये थी  
तोड़कर वर्जनाओ के सारे नियम  
पूरी तुमने करीं मेरी इच्छाये थी

कुछ अधूरे से लफ्जों सी बिखरी थी मैं  
थामकर तुमने मुझको गजल कर दिया  
मेरे श्रंगार को पूर्ण तुमने किया  
मुझको सिंदूर, बिंदिया, महावर दिया  
तुझमें ऐसे मिली जैसे कोई नदी इक समंदर  
में मिलकर मुकम्मल हुयी  
प्रीत की रीत में, हार में जीत में  
साथ तेरे मेरी मुश्किलें हल हुयी, अब तो  
ख्वाहिश यही, इर्तजा है यही  
साथ तेरे मेरी हर सुबह हो नयी तेरी परछाई  
बनकर रहूँ उम्र भर  
गुजरें रातें मेरी तेरी बाहों में ही।

## Let's build a better marriage today

Shabana Siddiqui

**S**ome points that will help you become a better partner:

Adjustments are required in all marriages. Like any other marriage, little more love and concern is required here as in these marriages, family acceptance is quite low. You need to stand firmly for your partner in your family, i.e. girl needs to tackle her family and the boy needs to tackle his, especially the boy as girl is in his family. Instead of leaving her

to fight for her own space and value, the husband must stand along with her. The same holds true for the girl when it comes to her family.

Explore positivity in partner's religion so that you actually respect the religion and you don't need to fake it in front of your partner. Your acceptability of her/his religion will increase her faith in you.

{As we all know, all religions are positive in the core. You just need to respect, not necessarily follow it.}



without hurting any one's sentiments. As it's the rituals more and the religion less which disturb. Try giving full personal space to your spouse, especially when it comes to appearance and clothing. Your partner would love dressing herself/himself in your colors/choice but that shouldn't be religiously influenced. Every heart is intelligent and sensitive enough to understand. Never try fooling it. It never helps in any relationship.

Only loving your partner from the core of your heart is not enough. Understand her/him, listen to her/his silence and then work for betterment of married life. Only having emotions will not help. Let all the positivity of your partner which attracted you, be portrayed in front of your family. Let it be showcased that your partner values everything related to you, most importantly being your family.

Let your parents communicate their feelings. Understand them and make them also understand and relate to you. You don't need to agree always, but never fail to stand firm for your views of acceptance of your spouse (in terms of religion specifically).

Try lessening the unnecessary rituals tactfully

Respect the identity and individuality of your partner. Remember you loved her/him the way she/he was. Thus, changing name, surname, religion etc. will not increase your love rather put her/his love at stake.

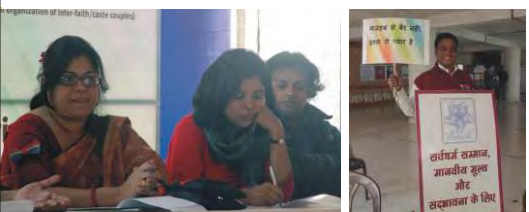
This is not the end but the start. These are few things that will help you. Lot more you will be trying yourself. There is no set criteria for all the relationships. It depends from family to family and individual to individual. In the same family too, dealing with different family members needs to be different. One needs to be very sensitive. These points will help you understand and tackle some of the problems, but you are the best judge in your case. Only thumb rule is to understand your partner and stand by her/him.



# Glimpses 2015







# Civil marriage in USA

Shailaja Rao

Last year was a big year for us. We witnessed our daughter's marriage to her best friend on August 13, 2015.

Their union crosses the boundaries of religion and race.

To our utmost delight they opted to have a court ceremony and kept the marriage celebrations simple. I could not help but compare the process of their marriage, which took place in the US, to ours that took place three decades ago in India.

Living in the US, where marriage between two people is really nobody else's business except the couple's; makes it phenomenally easier. Compared to the Indian society, interfaith and interracial marriages are better accepted by the American society. This undoubtedly is the biggest difference.

Indians residing in the US are a microcosm of the larger society in India. It consists of the few liberal/open minded families as well as conservative families, and all shades in between. Since the larger society in the US is accepting and law is strictly enforced, it makes it easier for the few children from conservative backgrounds to break away, unlike in India where children from a conservative background who try to break away are taunted, hunted down and worse, possibly end up becoming a victim of honour killing.

The process from filing papers to marriage solemnization in the US is extremely simple. It may differ slightly from state to state, but overall the requirements are similar. Here's a brief description of the process my daughter and son-in-law followed.

There are two steps: 1) obtaining a marriage license and 2) marriage solemnization.

The marriage license application consists of affidavits, which are signed by each applicant. This is mainly to verify the name, age and their present and previous addresses. The applicants are also required to disclose whether they are single, widowed or divorced. Both partners should be 18 years of age or above. Interestingly, one can get married below the age of 18 with parental, guardian or court waiver. This requires a supplemental application. The license is not valid for three days from the date the application is filed and is void if the marriage is not solemnized within sixty days of the issuance. If the marriage date is known, it may be added on the license form. These notarized papers are required to be presented by the partners for marriage solemnization that takes place in the court. For a small fee (extra), the couple can have their marriage solemnization in a private setting.

We have a long way to go before we can reach a stage where a uniform civil code in India can replace the various marriage acts that we currently have. There are many hurdles to jump before we can get to it.



First, for this to happen religious and caste identities need to be banned from public space. Secondly, educating and uplifting the various strata of society would result in creating awareness and open minds. Thirdly, accountability from judicial processes and police forces. And, last but not the least, is the empowerment of women.

As the saying that is attributed to the Ghanaian scholar Dr. James Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey (1875-1927) goes: "If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation)."



Recently, saw a dream where I went out for shopping, and was trying on some skirts and addresses, when the saleswoman told me that I may not be allowed to buy it, and I should buy a Burqa instead. The dream broke instantly, and I was terrified that what would have happened if

I won't have the 'Right to Choose', be it my choice of clothing, eating, lifestyle, friends, or life partner. Along with this thought, another thought struck me, that it is me who is actually fighting for this Right to Choose my life partner, and it is not a privilege I had by default. My parents have severed their relationship with me as I decided to go with my choice of selecting the life partner. Besides this, I am also one of the privileged one who had the capability and courage to take this daring step, as many others have succumbed to the pressure, and considered that they don't have the right to choose.

In this world, it has become important to understand

that it is human nature that we don't like to be forced into decisions we're capable of making for ourselves. It is unfortunate, that our country is still engulfed with so many taboos related to issues like Casteism, Religious Intolerance, Dowry, Honour killings etc., that even the decision to choose the person to spend our life with, becomes a question of life and death. Marriage being one of the serious decisions of life, it is important that we choose for ourselves or at least our say should matter in this decision. In the long run, there will be consequences for this choice-both good and bad, and it is important to understand that it will be us who have to deal with it, instead of the people who are forcing the decision on us. In fact, marriage requires freedom and trust to sail smoothly. The role of parents and society should be of providing guidance, not to force their decisions.

Over the ages, Indian parents have taken it as a matter of pride to get the opportunity to decide the appropriate marital alliance for their child. And the

moment, the child shares that he has found someone suitable himself/herself, that pride shatters, and the child becomes culprit of doing it.

Marriage is considered as a moral parameter for families by the society we live in. Any marriage where parents are not the deciding parties, the new couple gets the tag of being immoral. It is important for parents to realize that is not fine to trample on your child's freedom in pursuit of our own. Even when you feel your way of thinking is backed by experience and may be best for your children, it's important that your children also have their right to share their own opinion and beliefs.

Along with this need of change among the mindset of parents, another need for change is required among the people who seem to take pride in never taking a stand or making a hard choice. They think of themselves as being respectful or tolerant or take it for granted that they don't have any choice. Being respectful to other people and tolerant to other's attitude can be good traits, and also one's own choice for themselves, but doing nothing is not a very good choice in itself. Neither is letting other people,

society or political institutions make decisions for you. For example, just considering all people of a particular sect are violent, as your surrounding people have fed it to you since your birth, doesn't actually mean that you should start being intolerant/aggressive to any person of that sect, without knowing him.

Don't clog your mind on conceptions, decide for yourself. One should stand up for what they believe, regardless of prevailing opinion. It may not be easy, popular, or fun. Sometimes taking a stand may subject you to ridicule, slander or even physical abuse. But, not taking a stand at all will give you more pain each day of your life.

God has endowed us with wisdom, love and affection, we must make use of it all by making own choices based on our best judgment and without any discrimination. Life is good, enjoy it and don't spare it for meagre reasons.

Make world a better place by making your choices count.

*Freedom of Love.  
Relationship and Choice.  
If that annoys people, our  
mission continues...*

Shailaja Rao for Dhanak

# The story of my struggle for love....

Mohd. Suaib

**R**ecently I started thinking of what is the purpose of life and why is it so difficult for parents to understand their son's/daughter's choice, keeping discriminations on caste, creed, religion or anything aside.

I belong to a middle class family and I respect my family for the stand they took for my education, especially when they were surrounded by people who had the thinking of 'More children-More earning hands in family'. My parents gave me healthy environment where I got good education and great values.

Later, I got a decent job and after about a year, I met the most special person of my life-

Akanksha. I met her in office cafeteria and got introduced to her on the day after my birthday and since that day I have never looked back. Before I met her, my visits to hometown were really frequent, almost every weekend; but then it started changing along with change in some priorities. I realized that though this change was different from my nature and routine but I was happy. I had fallen in love and that too love at first sight.

Very soon in the relationship I got a question from her that where are we heading to with this and what's the future of our relationship and then I told her that we should give ourselves some time and I believe I can make things happen; though I was not myself sure

that it could be true. Our relationship started growing and very soon the question of marriage started bothering our minds and then came the realization that how this marriage would be possible as our families would never agree for this and what can be the consequences.

Then started days when her parents started asking her for seeking prospective grooms for marriage and



she asked me what she should do. She was very confident of our relationship and even I was, but I was afraid and so could not reply to her. Even when I was willing to go forward with her, I was so scared of consequences and thus, those days were hardest days of my life.

Every time I went to my home I tried discussing with my parents, but time passed by and I couldn't do it, the pressure kept on increasing and the situation worsened.

She was very strong and then one day she told her parents that she wants to marry me and then the real narrative unfolded. Her parents gave a straight forward - NO, and asked her to distance herself from me, but that couldn't happen. Our relationship grew stronger day by day. During this time, my nature and behavior changed at home, which started bothering my parents. I was a guy who once entered home could cheer up all, but due to situation and fear, I was not even able to speak to my parents.

One day I gathered all my courage and told my mom about it and she was shocked after listening, then a big NO came again, this time from my family. Then parents started counselling me every time I went home. With each passing day my pain kept on increasing and I felt no one could understand me.

I asked my parents, why is it so difficult to understand that we can choose someone for us, why we don't have the right to do so and the answer I got was that we have brought you up with so much difficulty and in return, we deserve the opportunity that you marry according to us.

We have a society where these kinds of marriages are not allowed and it will never be accepted by anyone.

Earlier my parents use to applaud me for each and every thing and suddenly this disappeared when I told them that I am in relationship with a girl who is from a different religion. It was like it's a crime and told me things that I never expected from them. Why parents want a line of control and children have to abide by it? The day you divert from that line, you become the worst child.

With all this going on and after trying a lot to convince our parents, we decided to get married.

We then began looking at possible options. She on the other hand was fighting bravely with her parents as we both knew we can't be divided over religion. I became weak several times and but she never gave up and instead she boosted me up every time I was indecisive.

Our search led us to Special Marriage Act, and SMA to DHANAK, and we were happy to realize that there is actually this possibility of getting married where neither of us had to change the religion. We initiated the registration process, and with the support of our friends and guidance from Dhanak, we got married.

All I would say is follow your heart and make your life a better one by choosing what is right for you. I agree that parents are important and we should respect them, but to do it your way always gives more satisfaction. We did the same and now we are a happy couple. Yes, we have the sadness that our parents are not in talking terms with us as our marriage is against their will, but now we live for each other and try to make each day special. And truly, religion never comes in between this relationship, like it is said- "Love conquers all".

Life is very small, live it happily.

# Marriages registration & SMA in Delhi

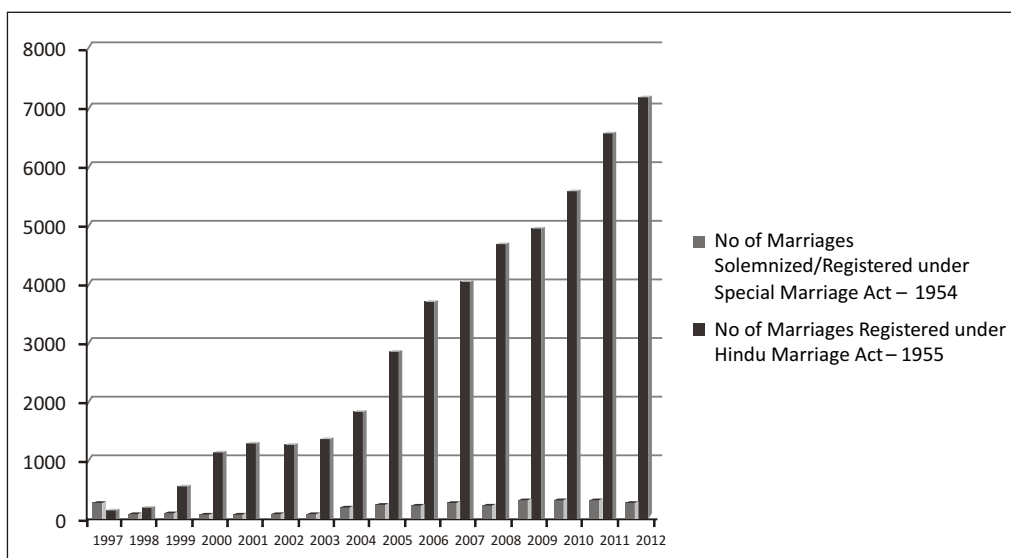
DHANAK is collecting secondary data related to marriage registration in Delhi and other states. It is using the Right to Information Act, for collection of the required information.

There are a few limitations in collection of information through RTI. Getting of response to the RTI depends largely upon the attitude of state administration. Moreover, one needs to be very particular about documentation of the send and received letters and about the period of 1st and 2nd appeals under the Act. The response time gets further delayed as most of the states respond in their regional language which takes time in getting it translated.

However, data collection from Delhi is comparatively easy as various districts and appellate authorities are

physically approachable. Data received from 9 districts of Delhi is given below:

S.No.	Year	No of Marriages Solemnized/Registered under Special Marriage Act - 1954	No of Marriages Registered under Hindu Marriage Act –1955
1	1997	9	85
2	1998	14	116
3	1999	18	489
4	2000	13	1091
5	2001	29	1228
6	2002	47	1212
7	2003	46	1335
8	2004	151	1794
9	2005	174	2808
10	2006	197	3630
11	2007	221	3992
12	2008	186	4596
13	2009	257	4860
14	2010	263	5554
15	2011	269	6545
16	2012	229	7139
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2,123</b>	<b>46,474</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		<b>48,597</b>	



A part of Dhanak study of Marriage Registration in Delhi conducted by Asif Iqbal.



# A Matter of Choice

By Vasuda Arora

Politics of hate  
Control and fear,  
Quoting differences,  
To part those near

See what they eat  
How they behave,  
How can you like her  
Despite the values we gave

Think of our family  
What will people say  
You must cross my dead body  
On the ground I lay

You'd not have our blessings  
If you dare to step out  
You are too young to know  
What marriage is all about

They live so differently  
How would you adjust  
Love is an illusion  
It will soon gather dust

Our values our thinking

Nothing is the same  
Excuses galore  
not one was not lame

It was scary to decide  
To make a choice  
Is it betrayal?  
Asked an inner voice

Is it selfish to love?  
Will our marriage be brief?  
When our family disowns us?  
Are we giving them grief?

I wonder why  
It is so tough to take a call  
Love and let love  
Should be motto for all

Differences are real  
Not good not bad  
If all of us were the same  
It would really be sad

How does it matter  
What we eat, how we pray



Between black and white  
Are many shades of grey

In the name of culture  
Society and pride  
Behind all this drama  
Hypocrisy we hide

It's not the religious differences  
that make marriages work or break  
It's the love that you share  
It's the care that you take

How awesome it would be  
If region religion or caste  
Were immaterial and irrelevant  
Things of the past

## "I am a Muslim, a Hindu, an Indian and I love Harry Potter."

Natasha Badhwar

I found this doodle in my daughter's diary when she was 8. On the back page of her rice-paper diary, she had put all the significant parts of herself together in one sentence. An eight-year-old's bio.

Aliza is now 10. Last week she was in a beauty salon, getting a haircut, when the hairstylist noticed her name and asked her if she was a Mohammedan.



Aliza did not understand the question. She looked at me to ask what he meant.

"He is asking if you are a Muslim," I said to her. Aliza looked up at him in the mirror and nodded a yes. Aliza's younger sister, Naseem, felt the need to elaborate. She is 7.



"We are Hindu and Muslim," she said.

"You cannot be both. You can be one of the two," said the hairstylist.

"But we are," said Naseem. "Mamma, we are both Hindu and Muslim, right?" she turned to me for confirmation.

"You cannot be both," he repeated.

"Maybe in your family you cannot, but in our family we can," I said to him. "We can be whatever we choose to be."

"Are you Muslim?" he asked me directly.

I wanted to stay calm. If my children detected anger or strain in my voice, they would pick up the conflict immediately. I tried to stay calm. To his credit, the hairstylist gave Aliza a really good haircut. It is unlikely that we will visit his salon again.

The next morning, Kanta brought the morning newspaper to me. There was a photo of crying, grieving, screaming women on the cover. Kanta wanted me to read out the news to her.

"This is in Dadri, Kanta," I say. "It is your neighbourhood."

"I know," says Kanta. "It happened last night."

"A mob has lynched a man in his own home with bricks. His son is in hospital." We are alone at home. Kanta is a sensitive and loving person, and I am almost relieved that I don't have to keep this news bottled up inside me.

"But, bhabhi, they killed a calf," says Kanta.

"It was a rumour, Kanta."

"No, it wasn't." Kanta's voice rises. "A calf was stolen in the middle of the night."

"But you cannot kill a man so brutally even if he did kill a calf." My frustration is making me sound like I am yelling.

"It was a bachhra, bhabhi," she repeats. "A calf!" This is self-explanatory for her.

I get up and walk out of the house. What is the point of directing my hostility towards Kanta? If I had been among my own family and friends, I would still have heard the same tone-deaf responses disguised as rationale and analysis from people whom I otherwise respect for their intellect and empathy.

I walk out into the park next to my home. Young men from the local Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) shakha come here every morning to exercise. From his voice, it often seems as if the youngest among them is the one who bellows the instructions and slogans into the dark morning air.

"Bharat Mata Ki Jai. Vande Mataram."

It coincides with the time when my husband and I wake up to receive our yoga teacher in our home at dawn. Sometimes we go for a walk in the park after yoga. These boys look just like the cousins and friends I grew up with. I wonder if I look familiar and friendly to them too.

A friend calls me in a state of agitation. "What is the worst that can happen in this country?" she asks rhetorically.

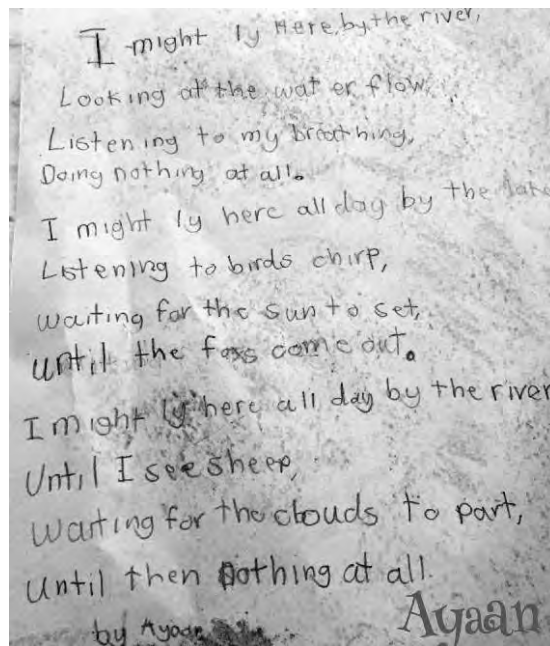
I live less than 10km away from Dadri, where Mohammad Akhlaq and his family were accused of slaughtering a cow and attacked by a murderous mob. A sewing machine from their own home was used as a weapon to bludgeon Akhlaq to death. His son Danish has had multiple brain surgeries in hospital by now. An older son, Sartaj, is a corporal in the Indian Air Force.

I hear my friend's question differently. What is the worst they can do to my family and me?

What will I do when a mob comes towards my home?

I feel ashamed of my paranoia. Yet, my brain is stacking up plans by default. In case of emergency, what will be our strategy to survive? Who will we call? Where can we hide?

Ashok, who works as a driver for my family, is also from Kanta's village. He brought me versions of what really happened at the scene of the crime much before I began to read the same details in the news.



By 10 year old Ayaan

There had been no cow slaughter. Only the slaughter of man.

I had thought that I would not talk about this incident in front of my children. I was thankful that my husband was travelling so we could deal with our shock and pain in separate spaces.

But this isn't just an incident. Something intangible, yet precious has shattered. We are standing in debris and rubble. As politicians, leaders, administration and people continue to react and respond to what happened, the extent of the dystopia reveals itself.

I allow Aliza and her sisters to overhear my conversations with Ashok as he describes the brutality of the mob. Aliza reads the rest of the details on the front pages of the newspapers that I have left untouched.

Ashok laughs and reassures me that it will not happen to us. "It is all vote politics," he says.

"They need to consolidate the Hindu vote, so they are demonizing Muslims."

I remember Aliza's words on the back page of her diary. I am a Muslim, a Hindu and an Indian.

Will Aliza's India survive? I know that the child's own version of her identity and where she belongs is already contaminated. This page will fade with time. I take a photo of it to hold on to.

# Lives touched in 2015

Amir

Dr. Samir

Vijesh

Rachel &  
Rahul

Harmeet &  
Ahmar

Anish & Juhi

Rishi

Sofi & Bharat

Umang

Anamika & Asif

Malik

Shikha &  
Faizan

Atul and Farha

Vidhi

Tanvi

Shamina &  
Rishi

Kurudi

Neelam & Noor

Arjun &  
Shagufta

Sanjay &  
Rachna

Vishal &  
Shikha

Nazia & Rohit

Preeti & Harris

Shazia &  
Chandan

Divya & Rahul

Vishal

Saima &  
Paritosh

Samir

Shalini &  
Rizwan

Sumit

Nividita &  
Saifullah

Satish

Azhar & Meenu

Vasi

Akansha &  
Shoaib

Sandhya &  
Irfan

Raise

Veeranjali &  
Manab

Kriti

Sofie

Ani

Yogesh

Jaideep &  
Nayana

Ketan

Shyam & Pooja

Fauzia

Swapn & Farha

Neha

Sanya &  
Abhishek

Ruby & Anis

Shahista

Kashifa &  
Rajeev

Leela

Kausar & Bishan

Chanchal

Dr. Aashish &  
Dr. Mehraj



# साहस 2016

# SAHAS 2016

## Dhanak Pledge for Humanity

I take this vow today  
That, with every individual  
I will have a relation of humanity.

I will not differentiate with any individual  
over caste,  
religion,  
colour,  
language,  
region,  
sex etc.

Neither will I consider myself  
superior or inferior  
due to societal differences.

I will not hate anybody elder to me  
due to difference of opinion

And

I will always allow  
those younger than me  
to put across their views  
and thoughts without any fear.

I will never resort to violence  
in human relations.  
My every thought and deed  
will be based on human values.

Long live Humanity  
Long live Equality  
Long live Peace  
Long live Love  
Long live Humanism



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