On the Streets of Bangalore

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Mysore Palace

The rhythmic sound of the bus engine on the narrow snaky road should have brought sleep to all of our eyes, but the weather and the environment proved to be too much of a novelty to remain unnoticed.

Actually, when we reached Bangalore on an Easy Jet flight, it seemed to be the perfect place to have a discussion on interfaith issues. To my curious mind, it was only a beginning. Even more interesting, captivating places awaited those of us who had gathered in South India to participate at a workshop aimed at promoting greater understanding of one another's religion. Twenty-nine of us from across South Asia had congregated in Bangalore to attend an interfaith training. Fifteen of us were in each minibus travelling around South India's best-known historical places. We were singing in all different languages as we were playing *antakshari*.



Chamudeswari Temple

I was among a young and vibrant group of people who made me see life from a different vantage point. On our way to see the Mysore Palace on the road I saw a sari-clad woman riding a motorbike with two children at her back. This is a scene captured in my mind's lens worth making into a post card even though it was a common scenario for the people living in South India; any part of India for that matter.

We saw a procession with some drums playing, there was a small altar made of flowers carried by four men. Immediately we thought they must be carrying a deity; but to our surprise we saw that they were in fact carrying a dead body in sitting position. Upon enquiry we found out that there is a community in Karnataka who carry the dead in sitting position before cremating them.

This was my first visit to Bangalore, the fourth largest and fastest growing city in the India. It is known as the Silicon Valley of India as it accounts for 35 per cent of India's software exports. Bangalore is also known as the "Garden City of India" because of its lovely climate, greenery and the presence of public parks, including the Lal Bagh and the "Festival of Lights" which transcends demographic and religious lines and is celebrated with great zeal.

These young representatives of five different countries resided at Fireflies Ashram for 10 days. There were people who were religious or secular or spiritual. The training was jointly organised by World Church Council and Meeting Rivers.

The people in South Asian countries have cohabited with one another for hundreds of years without any conflicts. It was their colonial rulers who, through their infamous 'divide and rule' policy managed to create irreconcilable differences among them. The seeds of religious conflict were sown by the British during 1947 when India and Pakistan gained their independence, resulting in growing distrust between Muslims and Hindus.