## UNIT 4 RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

#### **Contents**

- 4.0 Objects
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Religious Tolerance in Western World
- 4.3 Western Philosophers on Religious Tolerance
- 4.4 Religious Tolerance in Islam
- 4.5 Religious Tolerance in India
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Further Readings and References

## 4.0 OBJECTIVES

The unit surveys the historical events and moments highlighting the religious tolerance. The unit gives details of both these accounts in both the West and in the Indian situations.

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In a discourse on philosophy of religion, the historical factors that are presented in the present unit would not be out of track. It would be a useful tool as a background and foundational data for making a speculative and idealistic discourse on religious tolerance. The unit gives a concrete instances and efforts taken by various personalities, traditions and governments where religious tolerance was necessitated and practiced in reality. It gives the philosophers a concrete practice of a theory or discourse on religious tolerance.

# 4.2 RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN WESTERN WORLD

The practice of deliberately allowing on permitting a thing of which one disapproves also been defined as "to bear on endure" or "to nourish, sustain or preserve". Toleration may signify "no more than by the adherent of a dominant religion for other religious to exist even through the latter are looked on with disapproval as inferiors, mistaken or harmful." (Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration came to the West.* Princeton University Press 2003, pp. 5-6 quoting D.D. Raphool et al.) Historically, most incidents and writing pertain to toleration involve the conflict between a dominant or state religion and minority or dissenting viewpoints. In the 20<sup>th</sup> and present century analyses of the doctrine of toleration have been expanded to include political and ethnic grips and other minorities.

It is recorded in the Old Testament the Persian king Cyrus the great believed to have released the Jews from captivity in 539-530 B.C., and allowed their return to their land (Book of Ezra, King James Bible). The book of exodus levities and Deuteronomy in the Old Treatment, refer to toleration of strangers. The texts are frequently used in sermons to place for compassion and tolerance

of those who are different from us and less powerful. In 331 BC Alexandria, the Hellenistic city witnessed peaceful co existence of a large *janish* community along with a large Greek and Egyptian population indicating practice of multiculturalism. The Roman Empire encouraged conquered communities to continue worshipping their gods. Roman Empire promoted the propagation of the gods of conquered territories to enjoy the benefits of worship within the empire. However, early Christians were persecuted as they rejected the Roman pantheism and refused to honour the emperor as a god. Roman emperor, Galerius issued on edict of toleration of Christianity in 331 AD and edicts of Licinius and Constantine (who converted to Christianity in 332 AD) later became a solace for Christians.

## Late Medieval Period and the Renaissance Age

Latin concept toleration was a highly developed politics and judicial concept in medieval ideology and common law, self-restraint in civil power in the face of outsiders like infidels, Muslims or Jews, also social groups like protestants and lepers. Under protestant reformation discussion came up to permit dissenting religious thought toleration as a Govt. sanctioned practice is not evident the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1348, it was publically pleaded with Catholics not to murder Jews, whom they blamed for the Black Death. He explained that Jews also died by plague like and Black Death flourished in areas where there were no Jews. Yet, these calls failed.

Johann Reuchlin (1466-1522) a German humanist and a Scholar of Greek and Hebrew is known for his opposition against forklike conversion of Jews to the Catholic religion. Despite occasional episodes of killings and persecution, especially during the Black Death, Poland was relatively tolerant for the Jews in the medieval period. The stature of Kalisz guaranteed safety, personal liberties, freedom of religion, trade and travel were for Jews. Pomlus Vladimiri (C. 1370-1435) a Polish scholar and rector at the council of Constant in 1414 publicized a famous document. He argued that pagan and Christian nations could co exist in peace and criticized wages of Conquest.

Julia Kristina elucidated a philosophy of political and religious toleration based on our mutual identities as strangers. Roger William, a Baptist Theodosius and founder of Rhode Island supported state-toleration of all the heretics in the world against civil persecution. Instead it was God's duty to judge in the end, not man's. Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), was a Dutch Renaissance humanist and Catholic whose works laid a foundation for religious toleration. For example, in De libero arbitrio, opposing certain views of Martin Luther, Erasmus noted that religious disputants should be temperate in their language. Thomas More (1478–1535), Catholic Lord Chancellor of King Henry VIII and author, described a world of almost complete religious toleration in *Utopia* (1516), in which the Utopians can hold various religious beliefs without persecution from the authorities.

Sebastian Castellio (1515–1563) was a French Protestant theologian who in 1554 published under a pseudonym the pamphlet Whether heretics should be persecuted (*De haereticis, an sint persequendi*) criticizing John Calvin's execution of Michael Servetus: "When Servetus fought with reasons and writings, he should have been repulsed by reasons and writings." Castellio concluded: "We can live together peacefully only when we control our intolerance. Even though there will always be differences of opinion from time to time, we can at any rate come to general understandings, can love one another, and can

enter the bonds of peace, pending the day when we shall attain unity of faith."

Jean Bodin (1530–1596) was a French Catholic jurist and political philosopher. His Latin work *Colloquium heptaplomeres de rerum sublimium arcanis abditis* ("The Colloquium of the Seven") portrays a conversation about the nature of truth between seven cultivated men from diverse religious or philosophical backgrounds: a natural philosopher, a Calvinist, a Muslim, a Roman Catholic, a Lutheran, a Jew, and a skeptic. All agree to live in mutual respect and tolerance. In 1571, Holy Roman Emperor Maximillian II granted religious toleration to the nobles of Lower Austria, their families and workers.

#### **The Warsaw Confederation**

Poland has a long tradition of religious freedom. The right to worship freely was a basic right given to all inhabitants of the Commonwealth throughout the 15th and early 16th century, however, complete freedom of religion was officially recognized in Poland in 1573 during the Warsaw Confederation. Poland kept religious freedom laws during an era when religious persecution was an everyday occurrence in the rest of Europe. The Warsaw confederation was a private compact signed by representatives of all the major religions in Polish and Lithuanian society, in which they pledged each other mutual support and tolerance.

#### **Edict of Nantes**

The Edict of Nantes, issued on April 13, 1598, by Henry IV of Frances, granted the Protestants of France (also known as Huguenots) substantial rights in a nation still considered essentially Catholic. The main concern was civil unity; the Edict separated civil from religious unity, treated some Protestants for the first time as more than mere schismatics and heretics, and opened a path for secularism and tolerance. In offering general freedom of conscience to individuals, the edict offered many specific concessions to the Protestants, such as amnesty and the reinstatement of their civil rights, including the right to work in any field or for the State and to bring grievances directly to the king. It marked the end of the religious wars France during the second half of the 16th century.

The era of Enlightenment beginning in the 1600s, politicians and commentators began formulating theories of religious toleration and basing legal codes on the concept. A distinction began to develop between civil tolerance, concerned with "the policy of the state towards religious dissent" (John Coffey, Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689. Longman Publishing Group 2000)., and ecclesiastical tolerance, concerned with the degree of diversity tolerated within a particular church. John Milton (1608–1674), English Protestant poet and essayist, argued for free according to conscience and above all liberties (applied however, only to the conflicting Protestant sects, and not to atheists, Jews, Moslems or even Catholics). In 1609, Rudolph II decreed religious toleration in Bohemia.

#### In the American Colonies:

In 1636, Roger Williams and companions at the foundation of Rhode Island entered into a compact binding themselves "to be obedient to the majority only in civil things". Lucian Johnston writes, "Williams' intention was to grant an infinitely greater religious liberty than then existed anywhere in the world outside of the Colony of Maryland". In 1663, Charles II granted the colony a charter guaranteeing complete religious toleration (Johnston, Lucian, Religious

Liberty in Maryland and Rhode Island (Brooklyn: International Catholic Truth Society, 1903), p. 30, 38). In 1649 Maryland passed the Maryland Toleration Act, also known as the Act Concerning Religion, a law mandating religious tolerance for Trinitarian Christians only (excluding Non-Trinitarian faiths). Passed on September 21, 1649 by the assembly of the Maryland colony, it was the first law requiring religious tolerance in the British North American colonies. The Calvert family sought enactment of the law to protect Catholic settlers and some of the other religions that did not conform to the dominant Anglicanism of Britain and her colonies. In 1657, New Amsterdam granted religious toleration to Jews (Hasia R. Diner, The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000, 2004, University of California Press, pp. 13–15).

## 4.3 WESTERN PHILOSOPHERS ON RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

#### **Spinoza**

Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) was a Dutch Jewish philosopher. He published the Theological-Political Treatise anonymously in 1670, arguing (according to the Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) that "the freedom to philosophize can not only be granted without injury to piety and the peace of the Commonwealth, but that the peace of the Commonwealth and Piety are endangered by the suppression of this freedom". English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) published A Letter Concerning Toleration in 1689. Locke's work appeared amidst a fear that Catholicism might be taking over England, and responds to the problem of religion and government by proposing religious toleration as the answer. Unlike Thomas Hobbes, who saw uniformity of religion as the key to a well-functioning civil society, Locke argued that more religious groups actually prevent civil unrest. In his opinion, civil unrest results from confrontations caused by any magistrate's attempt to prevent different religions from being practiced, rather than tolerating their proliferation. John Stuart Mill's arguments in "On Liberty" (1859) in support of the freedom of speech were phrased to include a defense of religious toleration.

#### **Act of Toleration**

The Act of Toleration, adopted by the British Parliament in 1689, allowed freedom of worship to Nonconformists who had pledged to the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy and rejected transubstantiation The Nonconformists were Protestants who dissented from the Church of England such as Baptists and Congregationalists. They were allowed their own places of worship and their own teachers, if they accepted certain oaths of allegiance. François-Marie Arouet, the French writer, historian and philosopher known as Voltaire (1694–1778) published his "Treatise on Toleration" in 1763. In it he attacked religious superstition, but also said, "It does not require great art, or magnificently trained eloquence, to prove that Christians should tolerate each other.

## Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789), adopted by the National Constituent Assembly during the French Revolution, states in Article 10: "No-one shall be interfered with for his opinions, even religious ones, provided that their practice doesn't disturb public order as established by the law.

#### The First Amendment to the United States Constitution

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution, ratified along with the rest of the Bill of Rights on December 15, 1791, included the following words: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." In 1802, Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to the Danbury Baptists Association in which he said: "...I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church and State (Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists (June 1998) – Library of Congress Information Bulletin. Loc.gov. Retrieved on 2011-06-15). In the nineteenth century the process of legislating religious toleration went forward, while philosophers continued to discuss the underlying rationale.

#### **Catholic Relief Act**

The Catholic Relief Act adopted by the Parliament in 1829 repealed the last of the criminal laws aimed at Catholic citizens of Great Britain.

#### **UN Declaration**

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." Even though not formally legally binding, the Declaration has been adopted in or influenced many national constitutions since 1948. It also serves as the foundation for a growing number of international treaties and national laws and international, regional, national and sub-national institutions protecting and promoting human rights including the freedom of religion.

In 1965, The Roman Catholic Church Vatican II Council issued the decree *Dignitatis Humane* (Religious Freedom) that states that all people must have the right to religious freedom("*Dignitatis Humane*", Decree on Religious Freedom, 1965, retrieved 1 June 2007) In 1986, the first World Day of Prayer for Peace was held in Assisi. Representatives of one hundred and twenty different religions came together for prayer to their God or gods ("Address of Johan Paulii to the representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Reglions" (1986) retrieved 1 June 2007). In 1988, in the spirit of Glasnost, Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev promised increased religious toleration.

## 4.4 RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN ISLAM

Other major world religions also have texts or practices supporting the idea of religious toleration. Circa 622, Muhammed established the Constitution of Medina, which incorporated religious freedom for Christians and Jews. Certain verses of the Qu'ran were interpreted to create a specially tolerated status for People of the Book, Jewish and Christian believers in the Old and New Testaments considered to have been a basis for Islamic religion: "Verily. Those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians, and Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and do righteous good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."

Under Islamic law, Jews and Christians were considered *dhimmis*, a legal status inferior to that of a Muslim but superior to that of other non-Muslims. Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire held a protected status and continued to practice their own religion, as did Christians. Yitzhak Sarfati, born in Germany, became the Chief Rabbi of Edirneand wrote a letter inviting European Jews to settle in the Ottoman Empire. Michael Walzer observes that the established religion of the [Ottoman] empire was Islam, but three other religious communities—Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish—were permitted to form autonomous organizations. These three were equal among themselves, without regard to their relative numerical strength. They were subject to the same restrictions vis -a-vis Muslims—with regard to dress, proselytizing, and intermarriage, for example—and were allowed the same legal control over their own members. The Supreme Court of India has ruled that Sharia or Muslim law, holds precedence for Muslims over Indian civil law(The Hatreds of India; Hindu Memory Scarred by Centuries Of Sometimes Despotic Islamic Rule. New York Times, Published: December 11, 1992). (Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists (June 1998) – Library of Congress Information Bulletin. Loc.gov. Retrieved on 2011-06-15).

## 4.5 RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN INDIA

#### **Early Period**

India has largely been a land of religious tolerance. It has tradition of nonviolence and peaceful co-existence. The Aryans who came from central area, established their culture and superiority other northern India between 1500 B.C and 500 B.C. The Aryans imposed Vedic religion but also incorporated element of indigenous religions, of the post-Harappa society that survived the downfall of the Indus Valley civilization. If the cults of Agni, Varun, Mitra, Nasatya characterized the early Vedic religions, Atharva Veda, the fourth and final book in the series of four sacred Vedas reveals non-Vedic religious elements like amulets, charms and importantly, the cult of Rudra (late on the cult of Shiva) Amults, Charms and Cult of Rudra were borrowed from the Harappa civilization. The famous Pashupati seal depicting the lord of animals –a male yogi surrounded by four animals – deer, elephant, rhinoceros and tiger is representative of a male god popularly came to be know as Shiva or Rudra (the malefic from of Shiva) in the Indian civilization. Hence, the Indigenous religions expressed religious tolerance by magnanimously the Vedic Society. Although scholars interested in upholding Vedic religion try to say that it was Vedic society that expressed religious tolerance. Realistically speaking, it was the great gesture of indigenous religious community to accept with open mind and heart the invading Aryan religion and culture.

#### Rise of Heterodox Socio-religious Sects

Vedic society began to be hierarchical and becoming vividly discriminatory by Varna system. Challenge to social inequalities of Varna-based Vedic society and complexities of ritual-based Vedic religions came from the philosophers and thinkers of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The most world famous thinkers who rose to the occasion to preach newly reformed religions based on religious-tolerance were Mahatma Buddha, Mahavira and Maskasi Gosalaputra who introduced Buddhism, Jainism and the Ajivika-sects respectively. Buddha and Mahvir Jaina taught, preached and practiced religious-tolerance and non-violence significantly. In his philosophy of eight fold path, Buddha emphasized upon

'Middle path' to highlight peaceful co-existence among different sects. Mahavira Jaina practiced severe austerity but also believed in a philosophy of religious tolerance. Early Christianity in India also witnessed a similar Phenomenon when it centered around the popular and venerated saint, St. Thomas and his traditions.

## Puranic Hindu Religion and Emergence of *Teerthas* (Pilgrimage centres)

Counter revolution by Brahmanical religion led to five sects of the Puranic Hindu religion the sect of Vaisnavism, Ganesha and Surya. The process of absorption to tribal rural and folk cults into the Puranic religion continued trenchant early and medieval centuries in the subcontinent of India. At the popular level, different communities participated in each others' religious festivities. It is important that many religions sects of medieval India came out of popular Hinduism and Islam

#### Islam in India and Sufism

Early Islam in India was characterized by the rise and popularity of its liberal school and Baba Farid, early sufi saints like Ganj Shakar in Punjab, Muinuddin Chisti in Ajmer, Nizamudden Aeeliya, and Nasiruddin Chirag-I Dilli Dreq. These popular saints set high standard of life-style by following simplicity and austerity. They preached the language of peace, harmony and love reducing the conflicts between the Hindus and Muslims. Sufi saints made visits to sacred shrines popular which attracted women into the folds of Sufi sects.

The close interactions between Hindus and Muslims in Rajasthan is clearly evident from the popularity of the title of Hamueira among the Rajput dynasties of medieval Rajasthan. Brahmanas patronized by the Sultans or Brahmanas families with contemporary sultans devised a new Sanskrit term, *Suratrana*. *Suratranas* are praised in Sanskrit inscriptions composed by the Brahmanas in medieval Northern and Western India. This evidence is indicative of close client-patron relationship between indigenous agents of legitimacies of Brahmanas and emerging sultans.

#### **Bhakti Movement**

Bhakti movement coincided with Sufi movement in northern India. Bhakti movement appeared earlier in South India, than in the north. Bhakti movement is southern and northern India accomplished similar goals by removing dominance of priestly class, reducing religious and sectarian conflicts, introducing personal devotees (*Bhakti*) as means of direct communion between God and lay devotees medieval Bhakti saints like Mirabai, Ravidas, Kabir, Dadudyal, Jambhoji, Ekantha, Tukaram, Nrisimha Mehta, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu epitomized the message of love and religious tolerance.

Romila Thapar in her recent work quotes an inscription from the Somanath Temple of Gujarat where temple-priests gave away land to an influential Muslim Arab trader for the building of a mosque next to the temple. It shows that there was no religious animosity between the Hindus and Muslims at the popular level. Hindus and Muslims worshipped some of the popular socio-religious reforms alike popular Gurus like Kabir, Mirabai and Jambhoji in Northern India attracted both the Hindus and Muslims just like the medieval Sufi saints.

The Mughal emperor, Akbar contributed to religious tolerance largely. Just like Ashok, Akbar was aware of inter-sectarian tension and the need to address it in view of the recent establishment of the Mughal Empire which was of central Asian origin. Akbar made it on official policy to enter into matrimonial alliances

with the Hindu Rajput dynasties of Rajasthan. Both Emperor Akbar and his son, Emperor Jahangir had Hindu Rajput wives who were accorded full religious freedom of worship and practice within the Mughal royal palace. Akbar also recruited a considerable number of Hindu Rajput courtiers, officials and military commanders in the Mughal-service. The most striking achievement to contain religious harmony was Akbar's policy of *Suleh-Kul* or universal peace and invited religious leaders and priests from Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Jainism among other at Ibadal-Khama, Fatehpur Sikri. Priests from all these classical religions discussed and debated meritorious points of their individual religious. However, this conference was inconclusive. But Akbar, dismayed at priestly points of difference.

Prince Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, known for his liberal and intellectual disposition, got translated the Sanskrit work Upanishad into Persian, setting an example of religious tolerance in India. Later India witnessed a new chapter with the 'Divide and Rule' policy of the British colonial regime. The British administration introduced communal regiments/contingents in the Indian Army on the basis or religious denomination: Hindu, Sikh, Muslim following the sepoy mutiny or the first war of independence of 1857. This development disturbed communal harmony and encouraged sectarian identities. Sectarian movements heightened tensions between the Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs. National Congress party in the twentieth century Indian freedom movement led by Gandhi in the early century fought against rising communal tensions fuelled by the British policy and encouragement to Muslim league and idea of the birth of Pakistan. Communal rites following the partition of the subcontinent of India into two nations are the worst memories of 1947. The constitution of independence India adopted the concept of 'secularism' in preamble to give constitutional legitimacy to religious tolerance in India.

## 4.6 LET US SUM UP

The unit gave a background description from the historical point of view the existence of religious tolerance from both Western and Indian contexts. However, the unit should have developed philosophical analysis and view point of religious tolerance. Still the historical background gives a foundation for such discussion and discourse. The students of philosophy taking the contextual facts as a basis for reflection of why and how of religious tolerance.

## 4.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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## Student Satisfaction Survey



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3.	Supplementary study materials (like video/audio) available						
4.	Academic counselors explain the concepts clearly						
5.	The counseling sessions were interactive						
6.	Changes in the counseling schedule were communicated to you on time						
7.	Examination procedures were clearly given to you						
8.	Personnel in the study centers are helpful						
9.	Academic counseling sessions are well organized						
10.	Studying the programme/course provide the knowledge of the subject						
11.	Assignments are returned in time						
12.	Feedbacks on the assignments helped in clarifying the concepts						
13.	Project proposals are clearly marked and discussed  Results and grade card of the examination were provided on						
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15.	Overall, I am satisfied with the programme  Guidance from the programme coordinator and teachers						
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