

Religious Tolerance: Possible Models and Moral Ways Model

Abstract

With the reassertion of religious identity in the recently discussed multicultural global era, religious tolerance is intensively needed. Tolerance is mental disposition to tolerate some thing which is neither desirable nor enjoyable but at the same time it ensures the disciplined freedom of speech, belief and actions. As specific to religious tolerance it becomes peculiar for it is not merely compromise and tolerance of acquisition of material things or momentary pleasure and requirements but it is tolerance on the part of religious beliefs to accommodate and accept the entirely alien and sometimes entirely opposite religious beliefs.

Keywords: Religious Tolerance, Possible Models, Religious Faith

Introduction

The need of religious tolerance is unavoidable in the present era. Keeping in mind the need of religious tolerance, this paper has been designed to discuss the meaning and implications of religious tolerance firstly to begin with. Secondly, I shall try to present the models and philosophical foundations to understand the pragmatic forms and it take the reference from Leibniz for western concept and Ashoka from the Indian perspective. And, thirdly we shall try to understand the mechanism of religious tolerance in terms of virtues and qualities to mold the human behavior which broadly could be called moral attitude for acceptance and reverence. In the conclusion we shall try to show that any thinking on the line of equal feeling for all religions and good feeling for all religions requires religious tolerance as its presupposition and it ensure peace, harmony and co-operation for a better living in the society. But before we ponder on the central theme of the paper, it is essential to understand the conceptual framework of tolerance and religious tolerance.

Implications of Tolerance and Religious Tolerance

As stated earlier tolerance is mental disposition and psychological attitude to response positively to the undesirable situations and reality. As a matter of fact tolerance, of course if we try understand it from common point of view is neither alien nor impossible, rather we keep on tolerating certain unusual and undesirable situations in day to day life and than imbibe it in our habit as it has been narrated in the following words: "Most people, though, realize that we live in a world of increasing diversity and that attitudes of tolerance are, in the long run, much more adoptive."¹ Coming to the question what is tolerance, it is essential to understand tolerance in general and tolerance with reference to religion. In general tolerance may defined as " Tolerance stands for an attitude of mind and indicates a virtue bordering on graceful acceptance of the different and hostile; but in ordinary uses it also slightly smacks of supercilious condescension."² As a matter of fact tolerance is often taken as pragmatic virtue and is generally supposed to ease the frictions which unyielding dogmatism often causes. From the practical point of view the word "tolerance" means to permit a person of an alien culture to live his or her life within the terms of reference established by the host culture. But the analysis this implications of tolerance has certain difficulties like 1. It reflects a condescending attitude of the host culture towards the alien culture and secondly it does not tell us any thing about the receptive ability of the host culture to make the necessary changes in its ideology and structure in order to accommodate the new culture- it portrays the host culture as rigid, monolithic, and never-changing. It is in this reference "Tolerance may be defined as the ability of culture to absorb alien thought pattern without adversely affecting it own ethos."³

The above definition of culture indicates that the host culture is seen in terms of its resilience, flexibility, and ability to absorb cultural shocks when faced by different ideological and thought pattern, thus consequently it may be said that tolerance is the ability of a society to absorb or neutralize cultural shocks while still maintaining the ideology which gives meaning to the culture. And in this sense, tolerance is an

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existential state of behavior, not a virtue or something good in itself. Tolerance is good only up to the degree at which it can permit culture change without destroying the cultural ethos. Unqualified tolerance can dilute the strength of a culture's ideology to the extent that it makes the truth appear **relative**.⁴ But here it is necessary to make quite clear that tolerance is a great virtue as well as an abominable vice. In both aspects tolerance has had its impact, favorable and otherwise. As a virtue, tolerance manifests itself in activities intended to promote and encourage all kinds of individual diversity that is at the back of creativity. The other and opposite side of tolerance finds expression in such degenerate traits of character as fatalism, callous, indifference to important changes taking place in the environment, eclectic tendencies, submissiveness, indiscriminate acceptance of good and bad, and so on.⁵

Religious tolerance is slightly different from the tolerance used in the common sense and understanding the essence of religion. Robert N. Bellah says: "By religion I mean man's attitudes and actions with respect to his ultimate concern. This ultimate concern has to do with what is ultimately valuable and meaningful, what we might call ultimate value; and the ultimate threat to value and meaning, what we might call ultimate frustration. It is one of social functions of religion to provide a meaningful set of ultimate value on which the morality of a society can be based. Such values, when institutionalized, can be spoken of as the central values of a society."⁷ The simple implication is that religion represents what is perceived as ultimate and central to life.

As a matter of fact democratic institutions claim to maintain and regulate a minimum of collaboration among groups who may have different economic, social and political views and convictions. But at the religious level, all that is asked for is co-existence. And here we can visualize two different kinds of tolerance as it has been narrated by M. Amaladas; "At the economic, social and political levels, one has to be tolerant of different views, but one still has to work together at a minimum level outlined in constitution of India. But at the level of religion, one has to be respectful and tolerant of the other; but one can ignore him. Religion is the private affairs of individuals and groups."⁸

It is clear on the basis of the above facts that religious tolerance is quite different from the tolerance in the other spheres of life for it address the entire gamut of individual grooming in a particular kinds of religious faith and rituals which are usually taken as the identity thus has a piquant types of attachment. In such scenario searching implications of religious tolerance requires clarification as well as justification of the requirement of religious tolerance. Freedom of expression and believe is one of the fundamental requirements almost every civilized society but ensuring the freedom of the every member of human community in general and religious freedom in particular again justifies the requirements of religious tolerance either one takes it as a virtuous behavior or a state of social behavior and human mental dispositions. And in this sense Prof. Murthy describes the implications of religious tolerance in the following

words: "Tolerance implies recognition of three aspects of human freedom: the freedom to think and believe what one likes, the freedom of leading one's life as one likes within society, and the freedom to unite in corporate activities for realizing certain ends, religious or secular, without endangering Homonoia and what it involves."⁹

Requirement, Grounds and Models of Religious Tolerance

After describing the meaning and implications of religious tolerance now we require to present the logical requirements of religious tolerance, and it draws our attention towards two vital facts of firstly the different adherence of metaphysical nature of different religions and wide difference of the religious expressions in rites, ritual, myths, sacred objects, symbols, cosmologies and sacred places and dogmatic attachment to all these by the follower of the particular religion.

As matter of fact religions differ in their metaphysical nature. A religion is theistic another atheistic, a religion is monotheist another is pluralist and so on. The matter of search becomes prominent where is the common point between a godless religions and theistic religions? Where are the meeting points between a monotheistic and pluralistic religion? For example no agreement is found among the followers Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam as it has been narrated by K.P Mishra in the following words: "Hinduism is pluralistic in nature as it prescribes worship of many deities; Shinto religion is dualistic in nature; but no agreement is found among the followers of these. Every religion have faith and respect in their own religious scriptures as they hold them to be true and of divine origin but actually they do not have faith and respect for the scriptures of the other religions and faith as they have for their own religious scriptures. Every religion believes in the conception of salvation or liberation from suffering but they are not ready to agree the conception of other faiths."¹⁰ In such scenario many thinkers feels that the imaginary reconciliation religious faiths and believe is not practical and pragmatic option. This is so because; "to maintain that all religions are paths leading to the same goal... is to maintain something that is not true. Not only on the dogmatic, but on the mystical plane too, there are the doctrines of law of Karma and rebirth but other religions reject it. Hinduism prescribes idol worshiping but others condemn it. In this way the difference found among religions are hard and naked truths that can not be denied."¹¹

Secondly we find the different expression of religious practices in different religions and it is quite possible that dogmatic emotional attachment to ritual and rites to one's own religion does allow normally thinking rationally and consequently it makes us unable to appreciate the significance and purpose of the rituals plasticized by the followers other religions.¹²

The difference and existence of different metaphysical adherence and different ritual and rites practices are the realities of this world and one has to accept the existence and freedom of the other because every belief has its own worth and values as

it has been narrated: "Each is valuable for two things it tells us: because it is hierophany, it reveals some modality of the sacred; because it is historical incident, it reveals some attitude man has towards sacred."¹³

This is the critical juncture which invites the need of religious tolerance because for accepting some different and alien to one's faith, believe and practices is not an easy exercise to adopt in moment. First it needs the inculcation and development of the tolerance of the one which is not similar to one's own. And the religious tolerance originally springs from two fundamental assumptions:-

1. The concept of religious tolerance as peaceful co-existence. This was a result of the religious wars in the 16th and 17th Century. It is the modern concept, meant to end strife and bring about peaceful co-existence between the different warring religions. I may not like your religion, but because both have to survive, let us agree to live peacefully. This concept springs from the fundamental understanding that these religions are different from each other and cannot be reduced to a simple religious order. It is a practical way of reducing strife.
2. But this is not the religious tolerance of the Renaissance Humanists. For them religious tolerance sprang from their conviction in the fundamental unity of all religions. This means that, at the fundamental level, all religions were one, though they may mean and say different things to different people at different times. Different religions were but different pathways to reach the same goal.

The two assumptions lead towards the paths of searching models for inculcating and developing religious tolerance. On the basis of the first assumption, we may proceed to search the models for avoiding strifes and conflicts on the basis of the second assumption it becomes imperative moral requirement for each one to reach to the essence of religious deliberations. The best way to understand the models of religious tolerance would be to look to philosophical and historical thinking/ models.

In the first category we have models of Spinoza, Leibnitz and Locke and in the second category we Indian model presented by the King Ashoka. Let us first try present the model presented by in the first category:

1. The first model of tolerance, presented by Prof. Murty takes the reference of Spinoza who thought; "All religions which lead their followers to conform to this rational standard of behavior and do nothing opposed to it should be fostered; and people must be free to believe what they like and choose any sort of doctrinal basis they like for their behavior." The inherent implication of Spinoza's opinion is; "the belief that it is possible to recognize a certain pattern of conduct as the right one even though one may start with different presumption. Since man is rational and reason is uniform, it is impossible for reason not to arrive at the same **conclusions.**" ¹⁴
2. The second model which is provided for the conception of tolerance is related to the

philosophy of Leibnitz. Leibnitz justified tolerance on the ground that truth can be known and expressed in many ways, and that these do not contradict each-other, but only correspond to each-other to reduce truth to unity and deny the possibility of a multiple conception of truth leads to intolerance. To conclude, Leibnitz hoped that man's reasonableness and tolerance would lead him to refashion the actual world in conformity with rational world discovered by **reflection.**¹⁵

3. The third model is the conception of Locke who argued for tolerance on the ground that human knowledge is limited and is liable to errors; so no body could be certain about the absolute truth of any religion and we should do well to commiserate our mutual ignorance and endeavor to remove in it all the gentle and fair ways of information; and not instantly treat others as obstinate and preserve because they will not renounce their own and receive our opinion. Locke while discussing the conflicts between civil and natural rights opines that the 'toleration should not be extended to those who are not prepared to extend it to others. And this is an important point because; "If a religious or secular ideology which does not tolerate any thing that is at variance with it is tolerated, it may soon become dominant in society. Thus complete toleration may lead to its own **destruction.**"¹⁶ The similar feeling has been expressed by Descartes in his Book 'The Passions of the Soul'. Descartes held that the persons who are not ready to change his stand whenever it is required and ready to impose his own ideal whenever gets the opportunity for the same, ' have no right to expect toleration from others, as that might lead to an end of all toleration. And final position is that toleration must be coupled with commitment to some principle, and any principle other generosity would be **arbitrary.**'¹⁷

The models presented in the first category, we can see, based on the conceptual assumption that human being is incomplete but equipped with rationality for Spinoza and Leibnitz; he may and should behave in manner which in conformity to rationality. But Locke while adhering to empirical standard of tolerance asserts the limitations of knowledge as reality, possibility of committing errors and possible attempts to reduce and remove the ignorance. But Locke also discusses the practical limitations also. Now let us see the models presented in the second categories, and for this purpose we have the model presented by The King Ashoka.

In this series he take first of the example of King Ashoka and writes about his conception of tolerance in the following words; "Reducing the core of the Dhamma to the minimum, without mentioning God, soul, or the Buddha, Ashoka was able to conclude that every religion approximated to this ideal more or less, and so mutual conflict between them were futile and foolish. Ashoka advocated freedom of thought and belief on the ground that all such sincere efforts aim at the same goal and men follow the same pattern of conduct on different theoretical grounds and it implies that the ultimate goal and pattern of life can

be known in varying degrees of clarity by various men. And so long they conform to a common norm of behavior bases on good-will and respect for others, persons as well as their opinions, everyone can have the freedom to think and act as he likes.

These models of tolerance are presented by Prof. K Satchidanad Murty, although he advocated that homonoia or brotherhood is the first condition or base for acquiring and maintaining peace, but at the same time he was aware that harmony requires tolerance. Tolerance itself is very complex notion and Prof. Murty presents the Indian and western models of tolerance. And this opinion of Prof. Murty seems to be true because rational conformity of behavior involves the possibility of being subjective and empiricist arguments and model involve relativity to situations and understanding of the individual persons. The model for the possibility of religious tolerance presented by the King Ashoka seems to involving imperative compulsions but many of the thinkers have denied such possibilities. As it has been narrated in the following words, "Collecting religion is no better. The only tolerable way of engaging in the work is to let one's self be enthralled by man's ceaseless quest for something supernatural and eternal which the ordinary life of this world will never give him, and to try to put one's self into the place of those who are obviously enthusiasts for a religion which one's own."¹⁸

After presenting the brief sketch of the existing models for invoking and inculcating the feelings and motive for the religious tolerance let us see how it is possible or in other words what would be mechanism of human being in these spheres and up to what extent it should be developed.

Moral Mechanism to Develop Religious Tolerance

It is true that religious plurality is a fact which neither could be changed nor could be reduced and every religious groups have to live with other either happily and in co-ordination or in a situations strife and conflicts. Strife and conflicts is not acceptable for many dangerous and negative consequences. Thus one has to develop the tolerance mechanism for comfortable living in vivacity and plurality of religious faiths and practices. The rationalist models proposes the mechanism of cognizing the behavior conducive to the rational standards and it assumes as well as leaves to be solved by the rational standard for cognizing the one essential and unitary truth and existence. Locke model presents the pragmatic criteria of acknowledging the ignorance, pursuing the cognitive ventures for promoting right and good things and restricting the unlawful and wrong doings and this mechanism will develop the tolerance for the other religion and reduce the dogmatic faith to one's own religions. The King Ashoka, who advocated the assimilation of good points of every religion with mentioning the God and expect every community to accept the particular assimilated religions. And King recommended the behavior pattern with specific instructions as follows' "By learning control of speech, avoiding praise of one's own religions, contempt for others and irrelevant talks, one contributes to the strengthening of all religions. It is interesting to note what Ashok conception of Dhamma was. Service of parents; respect for life; truth; freedom from lust,

desire for future life and ignorance; doing good to others compassion and purity constitute Dhamma. Regulation of life according to Dhamma and mediation on it increase Dhamma."¹⁹

The above narration exhibits the behavior therapy of human conduct and it focuses mainly on the enhancement of the services and welfare of the self and the people in surrounding. Out six major of behavior therapy only one is mentioning others in terms of doing good to them. As a matter of while talking about the religious tolerance the term "Other" comes in the center and Other is not welcomed for being different and alien; is not accepted for being unacquainted, not appreciated for challenging our own beliefs. The second fact is religious tolerance is required for co-operation and co-ordination among the religious communities and groups. Since the problem of religious intolerance spring from the wrong attitude and narrow vision of the persons and individuals, the rectification of the attitude and wide vision with open mind is going to be effective mechanism for developing religious tolerance. And for this purpose, we humbly propose three fold behavior therapies for molding the attitude towards positivistic and openness for accommodation. First level involve the mechanism for mental preparation, second level involves resolution and third level involves the decision to act for religious tolerance. All these could be abbreviated ART for involving three alphabets.

While discussing the first step of psychological preparation of tolerance involves three steps again that is acceptance, accommodation, and appreciation.

Acceptance

Arrival of new situations, realities, result or for our purpose new religious beliefs which not comfortable invokes the feeling of non-acceptance. We hardly bother in not accepting the uncomfortable one if we can afford and our non- acceptance does not make any difference. We can do it in the practical affaires of the day to day life. But suppose if we do not have the option of non-acceptance, or our non-acceptance originates harmful consequences, then we have to accept the apparently non-acceptable. With the development of the concept of global connectivity and commutation the members of the different religious communities have compulsion of living together and one can afford to reject and negate others. It would be better to develop the attitude of discriminating what new and uncomfortable one can afford to reject and what one cannot. Religious plurality has to be accepted. Thus first step towards the preparation of attitude could acceptance of religion than one's own.

Accommodation

After one has accepted new one in terms of religious tolerance, it does not merely the matter of acceptances and not affecting our day to day lives. It will require to be accommodated in terms of sharing beliefs, sharing worshipping places, material and allowing the ritual to be followed. Thus accommodation becomes the second requirements of attitude.

Appreciation

Acceptance and accommodation may be developed but unwillingly and if is opted unwillingly it may prompt the critical expressions for being different. One has to be mentally prepared for the objective thinking and getting over the obsession one's own religious faith to which he/or she has been conveniently attached. It requires having appreciative expression, if any good is visible in the new religion. One has to develop an eye and vision to explore the positive points because every religion has certain positive moral instruction and peace generating religious practices.

With the three A of acceptance, accommodation and appreciation one becomes mentally prepared and psychologically comfortable for overcoming the anxiety and emotional instability. At this stage, the hostile attitude is almost reduced to being non-affective. Thus he able to think rationally and can resolve the dilemma and difficulties of the differences. And with this he may opt the steps of respecting the others revising his own faiths and reorganizing the practices of ritual of all the communities. First let us take up the first step.

Respect

The mutual consent on certain controversies and dialogue for the same presuppose the mutual respect for each-other. The participants of the religious dialogues must adopt the attitude and respect to the other rather than being critical. They must be mentally prepared to accept that he/she might have the little knowledge about other religion thus he should resolve respectfully to listen and learn about positive elements of the other religion. Instead of being critical, one must respectfully try to understand the implications of different metaphysical views and ritual attached to particular faith. Once if the attitude of acceptance, accommodation and appreciation, it can inculcate the feeling of respect for other religious belief on logical and practical ground.

Revising the Existing Religious faith

If the habit of respect and appreciation for the other religious beliefs, is practiced and developed in day to day life, even the staunch devotee of particular religion would be ready to compare and contrast his own religious faiths and religious existing in the surroundings. He or she may able to have critical scrutiny of the faiths to which he dogmatic attachment. He would be ready to revise his vision for a wider purpose of care, co-ordination and concern for every one.

Reorganizing of Faiths and Ritual

Once we have respect for other faith and religions and revise our faith accordingly, this provides the grounds for reorganizing the faiths and ritual actions in order to accommodate the faith and ritual practices of others. Re-organization to provide the space for the ritual practices of the other will definitely invite the confidence and respect from the other side also. It will prepare the foundations for mutual understanding- the long cherished objectives.

After developing the feeling respect for other religion, revising one's own faith and reorganizing the ritual function to accommodate the various religions in a harmony and co-ordination, one is able to proceed

on teachings of every religions and accumulate at least similar points of teachings.

Teaching

Teachings by accepting and doing has greater effects than mere preaching. And the person who striving to search ways and elements to develop tolerance can easily see the similarities on the five points such as; essential truth, aim of religion as to benefit and welfare of human beings; believe in supernatural power; respect for the founders; and moral ideals.

Temperance

Teachings through actions the varieties of instruction of multiple religious cultures, one tends to develop the attitude of temperance which is considered one of the cardinal virtue in Greek period. Before we tolerant to any unwilling situation, we have to develop the temperance towards our attachment if is rigid and dogmatic. Even in Indian systems almost all the tradition have adherence to the virtue of temperance for enhancement of rational and intuitive vision for realizing the nature of reality. Temperance is taught for the healthy co-ordination and to avoid the undesirable deviations. With reference to religious tolerance temperance is the presupposition of the tolerance.

Tolerance

Temperance towards the liked one provides space for the toleration of others. This is true about the religious tolerance. Religious tolerance is neither legal compulsion nor moral obligation in its pure implications but it is the requirement of the multicultural world having varieties of religion. It differs from the tolerance of heat and cold in its true sense as it not directed towards the external situation, atmosphere and conditions rather it depends upon rectifying our attitude to make us fit to live in the multicultural world. Since religious tolerance is more complex than understanding the simple notion of tolerance thus it requires peculiar psychological mechanism. And, nine point attitudes molding practices could be one option to my limited understanding. But all this presupposes the generous approach and wider outlook.

Concluding Remarks

On the basis of the above analysis, we may conclude that religious tolerance is a beautiful possibility for the comfortable and harmonious living of various religious groups. One may follow the path of behavior conformable to rational behavior, despite having subjectivity may lead to co-ordination for having concern for other, similarly the empirical attempt in term of cognizing the limitation leads towards the accommodation and unity the teaching of all religions will provide a common platform for the inter-action the only need to change the attitude towards the existing reality. The attitude of religious tolerance is necessary for interaction and harmony and expanding the individual identity. As stated disciplined tolerance is helpful in maintaining co-ordination but one should be vigilant to maintain the essence of his faith, believes and identity as well.

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REMARKING : VOL-1 * ISSUE-10*March-2015

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