

The Self and Toleration in Indian Traditions

Ashwani Peetush

I would argue that toleration is one of the cornerstones for a just social order in any pluralistic society. Yet, the ideal of toleration is usually thought to originate from within, and most often justified from a European historical and philosophical context. It is thought to be a response to societal conflict and the Wars of Religion in the West, which is then exported to the rest of the world, by colonialism (ironically), or globalization. The West, once again, calls upon itself to teach the rest of the world how to be more ethical. I think that this not only plays into the hands of cultural and ethical relativists, but that this picture is far from accurate; it ignores rich indigenous sources for toleration that already exist and have existed in India for millennia. In this chapter, I explore three central and predominant ideas in India as providing justification for distinctly Indian forms of toleration. I examine how toleration, and indeed, more strongly, respect for difference and pluralism, emerge through three influential Indian self-understandings: the theory of *anekāntavāda*

or non-absolutism; the concept of *ātman* or self; and the idea of *pratītyasamutapāda* or interconnectedness.

In contrast to various Euro-Western legal and political ideals that may have little resonance, I think indigenous sources offer a far more promising alternate ground upon which to build an overlapping convergence on basic human rights in India. Of course, how such ideals are justified, articulated, and practiced may be varied, and this is desirable. Values, norms, and legal practices that resonate with people's self-understandings and traditions have a better hope of success than those that are externally imposed. As Jacques Maritain (1948) argued and Rawls later developed: what is crucial in a global convergence on human rights norms is to arrive at an agreement on basic ethical standards, such as freedom from discrimination, civil and political freedom, equality before the law, assuring the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, clothing, and education for all, without the insistence that these can only be justified from a Euro-Western metaphysical, philosophical, or legal framework. As Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1955), Gadamer (Pantham 1992), and James Tully (1995) contend: the purpose of such convergence is not uniformity in diversity, but rather, unity in diversity. Perhaps the lessons that one can draw from the Indian context might be helpful to the neo-colonial bent of mind that continues to thrive in the West.

Indeed, I would argue that simply because a community is not organized around Euro-Western liberal legal and economic principles, or articulate these in the language and discourse of individual rights and private property, or because a community may be organized around more substantive views of the good life, does not mean that it does not have ethical standards against various abuses such as rape, torture, genocide, and slavery. It does not mean that such communities do not have ethical ideals such as care and compassion, trust, respect, justice, and fairness. In addition, it does not mean that such societies do not have respect for the life, integrity, and basic well-being of their members. Europeans did not invent morality or justice (to which the history of European Imperialism, colonialism, fascism, slavery, and current forms of Western neo-liberalism bear testimony). Difference does not necessarily entail opposition; to be non-liberal does not mean to be anti-liberal.

Now, I recognize that texts and traditions are internally diverse and contested; they speak with a multiplicity of voices and are formed by histories of conflict and struggle between the powerful and the oppressed. As such, I would argue that there are and can be no 'raw' uninterpreted texts or traditions, free from the histories of such power struggles. We are, thus, always in a position of having to interpret and reinterpret, to invent and reinvent, to construct a coherent account that puts texts and traditions in their best possible light, given what we have come to learn about ourselves. As such, my aim here is not to recover the 'original intentions' or 'original meanings' of the various authors and texts I examine. I am suspicious of those who make such claims, as interpretation is deeply implicated in a web of teleology. However, my development is not purely anew, of course; I would contend that it has historical and philosophical precedence. Where my interpretation does diverge from tradition and constructs justification anew, I find nothing to lament. My view is that traditions do in fact change and must in the face of arguments about basic equality and justice. Indeed, as responsible citizens of the world, we must be agents of such change. If certain ideas and practices do not stand up to what we know about the integrity of sentient beings, then they must be contested and, ultimately, dropped, no matter how sacred. This is as it should be; in the face of oppression and domination, we must dream and build better worlds.

Let me also point out that I am in no way arguing that India has a perfect or ideal history of tolerance or anything of this nature. My task here is to seek, and if need be, explicitly construct, sources for toleration and other basic values from within various Indian traditions. But, moreover, I should point out that various contradictory values and practices always exist in large and complex societies. Indeed, Locke himself justified the theft of indigenous land on a liberal basis because natives did not have a notion of private property and representative government, and Mill justified the colonization of India because Indians did not understand the key value of individual autonomy. Neo-liberals continue to interpret liberalism in a manner that leads to some of the grossest economic inequalities in history, despite Rawlsian liberals who insist that individual freedom is meaningless without certain basic social and economic conditions. If it is legitimate for Westerners to debate, reconstruct, and reimagine

the nature of liberalism and human rights, why should not the same freedom be afforded to other traditions? To ask this is not to deny the critical importance of human rights and freedom in the name of some abstract ethical relativism or ‘Western Imperialism’ or parochialism as the West would charge; it is to demand the freedom that Westerners repeatedly arrogate for themselves. Nor is it the demand for some kind of exceptionalism accountable only to itself, as some Western nations repeatedly claim for their countries. The demand is for a seat at the table, to which formerly colonized nations surely have a right and something for which they have paid in full—on all fronts.

Toleration: From Enduring to Respecting the Other

Let me start with the idea of toleration in the context of religious and cultural diversity. Tolerance is regarded as an ethical virtue; it requires choosing to restrain ourselves from hindering that with which we do not agree. As a political value, toleration requires adopting such a virtue at a societal or national level towards those with whom we diverge regarding their self-understandings, institutions, and beliefs. Minimally, toleration is a species of endurance: I make the choice to put up with and endure you, your people, and your beliefs. The reasons for why I may do so are varied, culturally, historically, and conceptually. It may be a concern for your individual autonomy and the importance of freedom of conscience. It may be for pedagogical reasons, knowing that belief is difficult to coerce. It may arise from a form of compassion, or a form of epistemic humility, as well as scepticism about what we can know about the world.

Toleration exists on a continuum; it resides between a *modus vivendi* on the one side and recognition and respect on the other end. Enduring differences may be the result of a kind of *modus vivendi* (Rawls 1999); a form of stability that is sustained by a balance of power. I leave you alone, I put up with and endure you, your people, your beliefs, out of pragmatic necessity; this is because you have equal power and are a potential threat to my well-being, as I am to yours. This fits particularly well with a Hobbesian contractual view of moral and political relations; the potential threat that others represent gives rise to mutual agreement on basic legal and political rules

of interaction and the limits of individual and collective freedom, as well as the limits of tolerance. The toleration that emerges out of such practicality is rather tenuous; it is grounded in self-interest and lasts as long as there is a balance of power. It is not genuinely an ethical form of toleration, as I do not interfere only because I lack the power to overthrow you.

At the other end of the continuum exist more robust forms of toleration that are tied to recognition and respect of differences, of plurality, as legitimate forms of being in the world. No one perspective embodies all that is valuable and worthy of pursuit in life. Such forms of toleration are also, at times, connected with a sense of epistemic humility. That is, an acknowledgement that what we can come to know is often limited and that our self-understandings may not be the only legitimate perspectives. Even though your practices may not be in accord with my own, I do not interfere with you not simply because I respect your autonomy, but because your practices and understandings may be as legitimate as my own. This opens the door for dialogue and the attempt to understand the other.

These more robust forms of tolerance would suggest that we provide an environment that is hospitable not only to individual differences, but collective differences as well, so that these are not suffocated by poverty and prejudice. Along these lines, drawing on First Nations traditions, James Tully (1995) remarks that the weaving together of different threads brings about the strength of a cloth. For these forms of toleration, as recognition and respect, understanding and respecting difference and diversity is not simply for its own sake, but because difference and diversity represents the horizon, breadth and richness, and potential of the human spirit. This potential is understood pluralistically.

Before we turn to such forms of toleration in the Indian tradition, I should point out that toleration does not imply that we value or tolerate everything. What we value requires a critical engagement with the other; this is a project in which we learn not simply about others, but ourselves also. And it may be that even after the best effort at understanding, we may not consider particular practices to be of value, and sometimes we may think that they are blatantly unjust. We have a framework for such judgments: although human beings and cultures are different in numerous ways, we also share

much in common. As Amartya Sen (2009) and Martha Nussbaum (2006), as well as many others, argue, we share basic needs, such as food, shelter, nurturance, love, the opportunity for social engagement, play, and meaningful work. Certain kinds of actions and practices can threaten the most basic of such needs.

The Manifold Nature of Reality and Tolerance: Anekāntavāda and Ahiṃsā

The acknowledgement of the legitimacy and value of differing self-understandings other than our own has deep historical and conceptual roots in the concept of *ahiṃsā* or non-violence, and the idea of *anekāntavāda* or the manifold nature of reality as developed by the Jaina school. I would argue that it is difficult to overestimate the value of these ideas. They continue to permeate Indian landscapes and constellations of thought and practice; indeed, they structure many of the various self-understandings from Aśoka to Gandhi to the lives of present-day villagers in India.

How does one deal with competing claims when it comes to comprehensive questions about meaning and purpose, and the nature of the self and its relation to the divine? One response is to show why others are wrong and why we are right; this is the approach that many people take, especially when it comes to philosophical and religious claims. The *anekāntavāda* theory is entirely different: it attempts to show that various competing claims may only appear contradictory; such claims need to take into account the *nayas* or perspectives of the person making such claims.

This particular theory grows out of an overarching ethical commitment to *ahiṃsā*, which is thought to be fundamental to enlightenment for the Jaina school. The emphasis on the value of *ahiṃsā* greatly influenced both the Upaniṣadic and Buddhist traditions, although their metaphysical justifications for non-violence differ. Jaina ontology divides the world into two basic categories, of which there may be innumerable manifestations: the *jīva* (self) and *ajīva* (matter); the essence of *jīva* is perception, knowledge, bliss, and energy, and *ajīva* includes the mind, the senses, and speech. The basic ontological division is thus between consciousness/sentience on the one hand and matter on the other. The nature of the self is bliss

and omniscience, yet it is enmeshed in matter (as gold in ore). The aim of existence is to free the self from this bondage; the greatest hindrance to this aim is causing violence, in all its forms. The perfection of the self lies in the pursuit of knowledge and ethical virtue, of which non-violence is the highest form. Violence, however, is not limited to action that physically harms other living beings, but also consists of thought and intention, and applies to the entire realm of one's existence and attitude, including how one intellectually approaches the differing viewpoints of others.

Indeed, since on the Jaina view, reality is thought to be composed of an innumerable/infinite number of modifications of *jīvas* and *ajīvas*, each with an innumerable number of qualities and modifications, knowledge of such a reality is almost always limited and partial. As Malliṣeṇa argues in his celebrated work of logic entitled the *Syādvādamāñjarī* (a thirteenth century commentary on the famous work of Jaina philosopher Hemachandra), '[S]tandpoints are infinite because of an entity's infinite modifications and because of the standpoint-view of the speaker's meanings which are satisfied by one modification, and so the elders say: "As many are the ways of speaking about a thing, so many are the statements of the standpoint-method." (Malliṣeṇa 1979: 268)'.

Malliṣeṇa thus argues that the truth of a particular claim must thus be indexed to substance/subject, time, space, mode/quality (Malliṣeṇa 1979: 264). Hence, the Jainas emphasized the idea of *anekāntavāda* or the thesis of not-one-sidedness. On this view, truth claims must be qualified by perspective, by the term *syāt* or conditionally. The resulting doctrine of *syādvāda* or conditional predication takes into consideration the multisided and multidimensional nature of reality. Thus, instead of asserting that x is y , on this account, it is thought that one could only assert that from such a perspective, x is y , or that, conditionally, x is y . This is to take into consideration the multisided and multidimensional nature of reality.

The Jaina approach to divergent views about the nature of existence provided a model of thinking about differences that fostered a sense of mutual tolerance and respect among various schools in ancient India. Certainly, it was grounded in a sense of epistemic humility, although, at the same time not being a form of relativism, as reality exists as a unitary whole, yet it is multisided. One must thus

approach other perspectives not necessarily as false, but as, perhaps, only partially true—let me point out that, significantly, the same attitude is adopted towards one's own view. Therefore, differences may not necessarily be seen as opposing or contradictory or wrong (or inherently evil, needing to be destroyed or colonized), but simply a description of reality from another, equally legitimate, although incomplete, perspective—which could be said to be true of one's own point of view. As Siddhasena Divākara (fifth century) argues in his *Sanmati Tarka* (1973), '1.28...A man who holds the view of the cumulative character of truth (*Anekāntajña*) never says that a particular view is right or that a particular view is wrong. (quoted in Saṅghavi and Doshi, 2000: 23)'

for, '1.23...every *naya* [aspect, standpoint] in its own sphere is right, but if all of them arrogate to themselves the whole truth and disregard the views of rival *nayas* then they do not attain the status of a right view. (quoted in Saṅghavi and Doshi 2000: 23)'

as, '1.25...if all the *nayas* arrange themselves in a proper way and supplement to each other, then alone they are worthy of being termed as "the whole truth" or the right view in its entirety. But in this case they merge their individuality in the collective whole. (quoted in Saṅghavi and Doshi 2000: 20)'

Thus, one ought not to immediately condemn others' views, but try and see these for what they may have to offer. In fact, the Jains attempted to synthesize the Advaitan view that reality is monistic pure consciousness with the Buddhist ideas that reality is constantly in flux. The Jaina affirmed that things, qua their substance/essence, or *svabhāva*, are unchanging, yet, their forms or modes are constantly in flux (Divākara, 1973: 269–71).¹ Hegel, much later, would develop a similar intuition whereby the synthesis of thesis and antithesis give rise to a higher or more complete truth.

The theory of *anekāntavāda* had an enormous impact on Indian self-understandings. Indeed, Gandhi was not only influenced by an Advaitic reading of the Upaniṣads, but he was also strongly influenced by the Jaina interpretation of the principle of *ahiṃsā* and the theory of *anekāntavāda*.

I am an *Advaitist* and yet I can support *Dvaitism* (dualism). The world is changing every moment, and is therefore unreal, it has no

permanent existence. But though it is constantly changing, it has something about it which persists and it is therefore to that extent real. I have therefore no objection to calling it real and unreal, and thus being called an *Anekantavadi* or a *Syadvadi*.... It has been my experience that I am always true from my point of view, and am often wrong from the point of view of my critics. I know that we are both right from our respective points of view. And this knowledge saves me from attributing motives to my opponents or critics.... I very much like this doctrine of the manyness [sic] of reality. It is this doctrine that has taught me to judge a Musalman [Muslim] from his standpoint and a Christian from his. Formerly I used to resent the ignorance of my opponents. Today I love them because I am gifted with the eye to see myself as others see me *and vice versa*. I want to take the whole world in the embrace of my love. My *anekantavad* is the result of the twin doctrine of *Satya* and *Ahimsa*. (Gandhi 1981: 30).

The theory of *anekāntavāda* continues to mould popular ideas of how to understand differences and tolerance to this day in India. This can be seen, for example, in how the theory is made accessible by the ancient Jain metaphor used to discuss various pursuits of truth: and *andhgajanyāyah* or that of a group of blind men attempting to determine what an elephant is from their various perspectives. The fellow closest to the elephant's feet declares that an elephant is like a pillar, the one who strokes its ears argues that an elephant is like a fan, the person who grasps its tusk deems the elephant to be like a pipe, the one who strokes its trunk believes it to be tree-like, the one who caresses its belly argues that the elephant is like a wall, and the man who squeezes its tail thinks the elephant is like a rope. The descriptions the blind men provide are, of course, partially true but incomplete. Yet, they take their partial knowledge as the absolute truth and become engaged in a heated debate over the essence of the elephant. They take their partial knowledge as a description of the whole, which they are unfortunately unable to see. As such, they are unable to recognize or appreciate, much less even tolerate, each other's view. Although this story has its origins with the Jainas, both the Upaniṣadic and Buddhist schools, and later the Sufi schools, have their own versions.

Thus, I would argue that the theory of *anekāntavāda* gives rise to a particularly strong form of tolerance based on the ethical consideration of *ahiṃsā* or non-violence as applied to differences. The other is not

someone to be overcome and beat down with argument, or worse, converted or slaughtered by the sword; the other is someone with whom we need to be fully and actively engaged. In addition, the ethical justification for tolerance here is grounded both at the level of epistemology and metaphysics. This is a particularly strong form of tolerance interpreted as giving due consideration to the other since it is based on the axiom that the other's view may indeed be correct, given her perspective. As such, it requires us to place ourselves on equal footing with that of the other, as, in the end, our views may be either plain wrong, or, at best, incomplete, as we ourselves occupy a limited and partial *naya* on reality as it is. That is, it is not simply that we have epistemic limits on what we can know to be true, and, thus, we should refrain from attacking the other, but, that rather, the truth itself can be plural or innumerable or infinitely modified. This is something that we must understand if we are to make any progress in acquiring knowledge.

The Self as other: Ātman

The school of Advaita Vedānta and its interpretation of the Upaniṣadic concept of self or ātman has had an enormous impact on modern Indian self-understandings. Its metaphysical conception of the self, drawn from the Upaniṣadic texts, is different from the Jaina school; this conception provides a justification for tolerance and respect on a distinct basis. Let us take a closer look. On the one hand, the self as *jīva*, that is, the self of ordinary experience, is unique. It is the *ahaṃkāra* or I-ness (or I-maker). This is the self as a psychophysical entity, as an individual, a person with a unique history and characteristics, capacities, abilities, likes and dislikes, and needs. The ethic of enlightenment that goes along with this picture is, in one sense, staunchly individualistic; the individual is responsible for her own emancipation, it cannot be granted or given to her, as an act of grace. It has to be earned through work and merit, or karma, on the basis of individual effort.

On the other hand, according to the Advaitic or non-dual reading of the Upaniṣads, although the self of ordinary experience (the *jīva*) is unique, the self at an ontological level, the real self (the ātman) is the same in all things. It is characterized as pure consciousness, as *draṣṭā*,

the seer, or *sākṣin*, the witness. *Ātman* here is not understood as a kind of substance or mind that lies behind experience, like a type of Cartesian soul/ego; rather, *ātman* is the state of seeing, or awareness, or the presence of consciousness in-itself, individuated. Furthermore, on the Advaita account of the self, although the self, persons, and the world are experienced as a multiplicity, they are ultimately grounded in brahman or the unity and the wholeness of being. Brahman is the substrate of existence or reality; the manifest world is a partial glimpse of this enduring wholeness of existence upon which it is founded and for which it has its source. Brahman thus both transcends and is immanent in the world (as is the spider to the web).

The goal of existence is the realization of the ultimate identity of the self and Brahman; *mokṣa* or enlightenment is the experience of the oneness or wholeness of infinite being as the nature of oneself, or the self as other, and the other as self. It is the inward realization of something that is there all along, which is pure consciousness. The theistic conceptions that arise from this view are rather different from those of Abrahamic religions: God is not distinct from the self, but, indeed, God is one's deepest self, as one's very own nature. As the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* asserts: *ahambrahmāsmi*, I am Brahman (1.4.10). That is, it is I that is God; God is not outside us, but is our higher self, which we share in common. God is not outside of us, not some external reality who created and judges us, but rather, the most intimate and best part of ourselves.

Let us see how one might justify various ethical values on this view: it is not simply out of fear of karmic consequences that one fulfils one's *sādhāraṇa dharma* or duty to uphold universal values such as *dāya* or compassion or *ahiṃsā*, but rather that, on a deeper level, the self is intimately connected to the other. To harm the other is to harm the self. As the *Īśa Upaniṣad* says: 'he who sees all beings in his own self and his own self in all beings does not feel revulsion by reason of such a view' (Radhakrishnan 1953: 572). This is precisely the reason why there are negative karmic consequences of harm. Indeed, it is the practice of virtues such as compassion in everyday life, while stemming from the wholeness and unity of existence that leads to its ultimate realization. For, in the practice of compassion, not only does one empathize with the suffering of another, but one experiences that suffering as one's own. The boundaries of the individual self become

more permeable, as one begins to see the self as the other and the other as self, even though this may start at the level of the *jīva* or everyday self, it leads to a recognition of the identity of the same *ātman* in both the self and the other.

Now, tolerance, especially theistic, has been historically and conceptually grounded in an Advaitic interpretation of the Upaniṣads in a number of ways. In one respect, it follows the idea of the self, qua *jīva*, or the self of ordinary experience, as being a unique individual, with a specific set of needs, likes, and dislikes. The seeker's make-up and spiritual needs, her characteristics, or *guṇas*, determine the *mārga*, or path, from the many available, given what suits her unique nature. As Rāmakṛṣṇa (Abhedānanda 1903), a central figure in the Bengal and Hindu Renaissance who combined *bhakti*, or devotion, with the Advaita school, explains, 'As one can ascend to the top of a house by means of a ladder or a bamboo or a staircase or a rope, so diverse are the ways and means to approach God, and every religion in the world shows one of these ways. (quoted in Abhedānanda 1903: 10)'.
for:

As a mother, in nursing her sick children, gives rice and curry to one, and sago and arrowroot to another and bread and butter to a third, so the Lord has laid out different paths for different people suitable to their natures.... Dispute not. As you rest firmly on our faith and opinion, allow others the equal liberty to stand by their own faiths and opinions. (quoted in Abhedānanda, 1903: 73–4).

Rāmakṛṣṇa's chief pupil Vivekānanda, a neo-Vedāntin, also laid out the implications of this view by quoting verse seven of the Śiva Mahimnaḥ Stōtram in his address to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, 'As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee. (Vivekānanda 1999: 20–1)'.
Thus, individuals cannot be coerced to follow a path that they did not choose, which is not of their making. This not only violates their integrity, but will not work, for each has specific needs. As such,

each should be allowed to work out his/her salvation in his/her own way, at his/her own pace. This sort of reasoning accounts for wide acceptance and tolerance of a large variety of divergent doctrinal differences and practices among Hindus. It also explains in part why Hindus do not proselytize and why their conversions are difficult. It is interesting to note that tolerance here is grounded on a model similar to the liberal model: respect for individual freedom requires a tolerance of difference, but this is in a rather different metaphysical context.

Indeed, religious pluralism and freedom is not simply a theoretical matter, but plays a vital role in the way that Hinduism is practiced. It is not only thought to be perfectly legitimate to be a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, Veṅkaṭeśavara, Rāma, mother Kālī, or any of the other various manifestations, but it is not unusual to find non-Hindu deities, such as that of Jesus or Mary in Hindu altars. Many Hindus will pray in a church or at a Sufi shrine without the least bit of hesitation. There are some communities in India that define themselves as Hindu-Muslims or Muslim-Hindus; members of the Salam Girasia Rajputs traditionally have both a Hindu and Muslim name for each person in the community (Parekh 2008).

Apart from such diversity being grounded in the acceptance of individual differences, tolerance is further grounded on the idea that various paths lead to the same ultimate destination—the various streams merge in the same sea. Although methods and practices may diverge, the end goal is the same. A famous passage in the Ṛigveda states that ‘The wise speak of what is one in many ways’ (*ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadantyaighniṃ yamaṃ mātariśvānamāhuḥ*) (Ṛigveda 1.164.46).² In the Bhagavad Gītā, Kṛṣṇa, an Avatāra, in discussing with Arjuna the question of which path is best suited for enlightenment, says: ‘In whichever way men take refuge in me, I love them. All men, Arjuna, follow my path’ (*ye yathā māṃ prapadyante tāṃs tathaiva bhajāmyaham*) (The Bhagavad Gītā 4.11). At the time when the Gita was composed, there was a rich diversity and pluralism in thought and practice: there were yogic ascetics, Buddhists, Jinas, brahmanical sacrificers, philosophical dualists, monists, theists, atheists, and so on (Davis 2008: 371). Kṛṣṇa proclaims that these divergent paths are all his and lead to ultimate realization. On this sort of view, then, the idea that there is only one true path or religion

is intrinsically flawed. Hence, one must be respectful of others' understandings and practices.

Historically, despite the rise of religious extremism and Hindu nationalism post-independence, as Bhikhu Parekh argues, Hindus have generally shown a great deal of respect and tolerance towards other religions. At times when Jews were being persecuted by Christians in Europe or treated unjustly in Muslim countries, they were welcomed in India. They were given official patronage and financial support; in the Hindu kingdom of Cochin, they were provided their own self-governing district. Indeed, Christians arriving in the fifth century, Muslims in the eighth, and the Zoroastrians in the tenth, were all embraced with freedom of religious belief (Parekh 2008). But, of course, I am not asserting that the history of India is, even prior to British colonization, free from sectarian religious tensions and violence. However, it is less than that found in other contexts. Moreover, we should note that it is not that Hindus tolerate all differences. Often, one hears the slogan 'unity in diversity', as a common theme in contemporary India, both in religion and politics. That is, perspectives that unconfusedly and unmistakably infringe on basic ethical values, around which there must be unity, are not regarded as legitimate and constitute the limits of toleration.

But, for a tradition that has been able to deal with such diversity for much of its history, how is it that violence grounded in religious doctrine and practice seems to be on the rise, fuelled by Hindu nationalism? I think that one of the key things to note here is that current forms of Hindu nationalist movements developed during and after British colonialism, where Hinduism became much more of a reified identity, a political marker, that is strategically pitted against Muslims, for example, by the British Raj, in an attempt to divide and conquer. Many Indian political theorists, such as Ashis Nandy and T.M. Madan argue that such movements have little to do with the soteriological aspirations of Hinduism at all; rather, they are political instruments to attain power and privilege.

In his insightful study of Hindutva nationalism, Partha Chatterjee (1998) shows that current Hindu national movements are rather odd. What one may think of as theocratic movements are anything but theocratic. Unlike the older Hindutva conception that developed around independence, like the Hindu Mahasabha, new movements

rest on purely political and secular agendas. Apart from a few voices, Hindutva movements do not seek to ground theocratic institutions on Vedic injunction; they do not seek religious education, or censorship of science, or the teaching of evolutionary theory, or anything of the like. Instead they distinguish themselves from Islamic fundamentalists in this manner; they pride themselves on being the voice of rationality, secularism, and reason, and attack their opponents as 'pseudo-secularists'. Indeed, one wishes that perhaps these nationalists were more religious and took to heart some available sources for tolerance in the Hindu tradition. In short, I would argue that Nandy is right here; Hindutva represents the instrumentalization of religion for the sake of political power.

I should also mention that the Advaitic reading of the Upaniṣads has been used not only to ground tolerance, but also to ground basic notions of equality. Indeed, many contemporary critics, including Gandhi, argue that the caste system and the oppression of women with its hierarchical underpinnings are inconsistent with the central teachings or spirit of Hinduism or Advaita. Indeed, Gandhi's objections against the caste system were often based on ideas of equality grounded in Advaitic notions of ātman or on the idea that the same self exists in all; thus, there can be no inherent superiority or inferiority of one individual or group over another (Government of India 1969: 103–7).

Certainly, the caste system has a long history of being criticized and contested on various grounds indigenous to Indian traditions. It is not that somehow British liberals showed Indians the utter incivility of such a system (as some might have it); in fact, to the contrary, the British reified the system as it was to their advantage, not to mention the external 'caste' system they imposed on India, in which they were the superior race, and thus had a natural right to rule over the inferior Indians (N.B. Dirks 2001). In present day India, caste discrimination has much the same status as racism against Blacks in America and the history of slavery; although, discrimination by caste is deemed unconstitutional and there are stringent laws against such discrimination, it continues to exist socially despite affirmative action plans and reserved seats for members of oppressed castes in government and educational institutions. I contend that the battle against the caste system in India is making headway, as is the

battle against racism that Blacks currently experience in America. I think that arguments grounded in indigenous sources, such as the Upaniṣads, are likely to have the strongest impact, as they resonate with people's self-understandings.

Interconnectedness as Pratītyasamutapāda

The third central idea from which toleration emerges is pratītyasamutapāda or dependent origination in various Buddhist perspectives. Although these views share much in common with the Jaina and the Advaitan and other Upaniṣadic schools, they also diverge in important aspects. They emphasize ahiṃsā and tolerance, but they frame these notions in the theory of anātman or no-self, and pratītyasamutapāda or the theory of interconnectedness. While Buddhists agree with Advaitans that the self of ordinary experience (the jīva) is unreal, most think there is nothing that underlies this experience. On dominant Buddhist interpretations, there is no ātman or pure consciousness, so to speak. The self is merely an aggregation (*skandhas*) of physical, mental, perceptual, and volitional processes, along with the processes of consciousness. There is nothing over and above these processes that we can call a self, as there is no river over and above the flowing of the water. Indeed, according to the theory of pratītyasamutapāda or interconnectedness, nothing has essence (*svabhāva*) or separate or unique existence. Existence is marked by a continual process of change that is the result of interactions of various processes. Suffering and violence is a result of clinging on to the delusion of self as separate and permanent. Virtues such as ahiṃsā help one to overcome this delusion.

The ever-changing stream we associate with the self is closely intertwined with the stream of others, given pratītyasamutapāda or the interconnected nature of reality. With the realization of this interconnection, as the Dalai Lama asserts, we begin to understand that our interests converge in a profound sense:

We begin to see that the universe we inhabit can be understood in terms of a living organism in which each cell works in balanced cooperation with every other cell to sustain the whole. If just one of these cells is harmed, as it is when disease strikes, that balance is

harmed, and there is danger to the whole.... Such an understanding of reality also allows us to see that this sharp distinction between self and others arises largely as a result of conditioning.... Indeed, within this picture of dependently originated reality, we see that there is no self-interest completely unrelated to others' interests. Due to the fundamental interconnectedness which lies at the heart of reality, your interest is also my interest. Thus my happiness is to a large extent dependent on yours. From this, it becomes clear that "my" interests and "your" interests are intimately connected. In a deep sense, they converge. Because of this, if we wish for our own happiness, we have to consider others. (The Dalai Lama 1999: 46–9).

Thus, my reason for respecting you, or, at least putting up with or tolerating your views in the minimal sense and not inflicting harm on you, or depriving you of the basic means of economic subsistence, is that to harm you is to harm myself in some deep sense. On the Advaita model, we share this deeper sense of self, while in the Buddhist picture, even though there is no such same self in common, the ever-changing stream we associate with the self is intimately tied to the stream of others, given the web-like nature of reality.

This organic model is in stark contrast to the liberal contractualist view in which ethical and political norms arise on the basis of separation of self from other. On the contractual picture, it is because you present a threat to me that I agree to contract with you and give up some of my freedom, as long as you do the same, whereas on the organic model, the other is seen as intimately connected, and thus her interests are not separate from one's own. Nevertheless, I think that both approaches can converge on some of the same basic norms. Of course, there will be differences. For example, the self of Indian theorizing is not limited to the human being, but, includes animals and the environment. There is no reason to assume, a priori, that when there are divergences, it is somehow the liberal contractualist who is always in the right. Perhaps, it is the West that has something to learn from India here.

Indeed, I would argue that one of the earliest articulations of political toleration emerges from the principle of *ahiṃsā* or non-violence interpreted as a political principle, in contrast to merely an individual ethical virtue. This is first developed by the Indian Buddhist emperor Aśoka (269–32 BC), and later by Gandhi. This is one of the first

appearances—if not the first—of the idea of political toleration as such. As early as the third century BC, Aśoka's edicts declared respect for all perspectives, philosophies, and religions as an implication and requirement of the principle of *ahiṃsā*. Here the idea of non-injury is explicitly related to the positive aspect of respecting, recognizing, and honouring others' *dharma* or philosophy/religion at a political level:

King Priyadarshi honors men of all faiths, members of religious orders and laymen alike, with gifts and various marks of esteem. Yet he does not value either gifts or honors as much as growth in the qualities essential to religion in men of all faiths. This growth may take many forms, but its root is in guarding one's speech to avoid extolling one's own faith and disparaging the faith of others improperly or, when the occasion is appropriate, immoderately. The faiths of others all deserve to be honored for different reasons. By honoring them, one exalts one's own faith and at the same time performs a service to the faith of others. By acting otherwise, one injures his own faith and also does disservice to the faith of others. But if a man extols his own faith and disparages another because of devotion to his own and because he wants to glorify it, he seriously injures his own faith. Therefore concord alone is commendable, for through concord, men may learn and respect the conception of *Dharma* accepted by others. King Priyadarshi desires men of all faiths to know each other's doctrines and to acquire sound doctrines. Those who are attached to their particular faiths should be told that King Priyadarshi does not value gifts or honors as much as growth in the qualities essential to religion in men of all faiths. Many officials are assigned to tasks bearing this purpose—the officers in charge of spreading the *Dharma*, the superintendents of women in the Royal household, the inspectors of cattle and pasture lands, and other officials. The objective of these measures is the promotion of each man's particular faith and the glorification of *Dharma*. (Rock Edict XII; Nikam and McKeon 1959: 51–2).

Now, one of the interesting things to note here is that political toleration, recognition, and respect for various philosophical and religious doctrines and practices arises from principles internal to these Buddhist traditions, not despite them. This is radically different, both conceptually and historically, from how political toleration and the related notion of secularism emerged in Europe. As the quintessential political ideal, toleration grows out of the bloodshed

of the Reformation and the Thirty Years Wars (1618–48). It emerges from religious factions within Christianity and its inability to cope with internal differences as a result, in part, of claims to absolute truth. The birth of political neutrality and the separation of Church and state, secularism, and indeed liberalism itself, have roots in this bloody conflict. But this is not the case here. Āsoka realizes the importance of tolerance as it is intrinsic to Buddhist practice. Indeed, it is after his conquest of Kalinga and the horrors of war, for which he himself was responsible, that Āsoka constructs a political interpretation of *āhiṃsa*; he expands the principle from a personal virtue to a political virtue. Toleration emerges as a result of ideas central to dominant philosophical and religious doctrines and practices, not as an antidote to them.

What this means is that one needs to be careful when one attempts to graft Western forms of toleration to the Indian context, which may lack relevant similarities. As Nandy (2004) points out, to presume to teach tolerance through secularism to Indian villagers is not only indicative of Western arrogance, it misses something crucial. Not only does it smack of a grave historical irony, it ignores rich and diverse sources that have existed and continue to exist in Indian self-understandings. These are most likely to succeed, as they resonate most with people's senses of self. And while secularism is an absolute necessity in the Indian context, particularly due to the kinds of reified and dangerous communal identities that continue to exist post-independence, one needs to investigate which forms of secularism will have the most favourable outcome. As Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, a philosopher and former President of the Republic of India, argues:

When India is said to be a secular state, it does not mean we reject the reality of an unseen spirit of the relevance of religion to life or that we exalt irreligion. It does not mean that secularism itself becomes a positive religion or that the state assumes divine prerogatives. Though faith in the Supreme is the basic principle of the Indian tradition, the Indian State will not identify itself with or be controlled by any particular religion. We hold that no one religion should be accorded special privileges in national life or international relations for that would be a violation of the basic principles of democracy and contrary to the best interests of religion and government.... No group of citizens shall arrogate to itself rights and privileges which it

denies to others. No person should suffer any form of disability or discrimination because of his religion but all alike should be free to share the fullest degree in the common life. This is the basic principle involved in the separation of Church and State. The religious impartiality of the Indian state is not to be confused with secularism or atheism. Secularism as here defined is in accordance with the ancient religious traditions of India. It tries to build up a fellowship of believers, not by subordinating individual qualities to the group mind but by bringing them into harmony with each other. The dynamic fellowship is based on the principle of diversity in unity which alone has the quality of creativeness. (Radhakrishnan 1955: 202).

On the Indian model of secularism and state neutrality, impartiality is interpreted as equal or an even-handed treatment respect of all religions; the state does not favour one over the other but recognizes the importance of religion in the life of each citizen. Rajeev Bhargava has explored these ideas in detail in his various works (Bhargava 2010). This model of secularism is unlike the case of France (and Quebec), where secularism has been interpreted as a complete wall of separation model, where religion ought to play no part in the political or the public sphere of life (thus, for example, forbidding the *hijab* in public schools on such a basis and throwing children off soccer teams because of their turbans). On the Indian version then, religious belief is accepted as something that may be a constitutive part of the lives of citizens, and the manifestations of such an identity are accepted as a part of the public sphere. As Radhakrishnan argued, such a model of secularism, and, indeed, respect for diversity and pluralism, is rooted in and emerges from the ancient historical, conceptual, and political self-understandings and traditions of India, three of which I have explored here.

* * *

The problems that India faces, such as gender inequality, casteism, ableism, religious extremism, communal violence, poverty, and pollution, are not unlike the problems faced by other nations around the globe. India has modernized, liberalized, industrialized, corporatized, and, as such, individuals are open to various standard threats by the state and numerous neo-liberal multinational corporations.

Indeed, there is a growing collective global consciousness, a raised awareness, of the sorts of abuse and exploitation to which the weak are vulnerable. It would be unwise, to say the least, not to make use of the economic, legal, and political insights of others. However, one needs to remember that such solutions need to be articulated and understood in the vernacular. Importantly, we should take advantage of the freedom to avail ourselves of the distinct rich indigenous sources and self-understandings that may help to guide and sustain our futures—a freedom often denied to the colonized imagination. To the dismay of some Westerners, there is no singular historical and conceptual trajectory along which modernity and ethical progress move forward and there is no place where this is more obvious than in India, where the ancient continues to live alongside the modern. In building a greater India and a stronger republic, in dreaming together, we must not only imagine our futures, we must imagine and reimagine our pasts, weaving threads from the fabric of those who have dreamed before us.

Notes

1. ‘There cannot be a thing which is devoid of its modifications of birth and decay. On the other hand, modifications cannot exist without an abiding or eternal something—a permanent substance, for birth, decay and stability (continuance)—these three constitute the characteristic of a substance of entity’. (Divākara 1973: 269).
2. The full verse is:

*indram mitraṃ varuṇamaghnimāhuratho divyaḥ sa suparṇo gharutmān |
ekaṃ sad viprā bahudhā vadantyaghnīm yamaṃ mātariśvānamāhuḥ ||*
(Rigveda 1.164.46).

References

- Abhedānanda, Swāmi. 1903. *The Sayings of Ramakrishna*. New York: The Vedānta Society of New York.
- ‘Bhagavad Gītā.’ www.sacred-texts.com/hin/bgs/bgs04.htm (accessed 12 June 2012).
- Bhargava, R. 2010. *The Promise of India’s Secular Democracy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- 'Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad.' http://is1.mum.edu/vedicreserve/upanishads/fifteen_upanishads_11_brihadaranyaka.pdf (accessed 31 July 2013).
- Chatterjee, P. 1998. 'Secularism and Tolerance', in *Secularism and Its Critics*, pp. 345–79. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Dalai Lama, His Holiness. 1999. *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World: Ethics for a New Millennium*. Great Britain: Little, Brown and Company.
- Davis, R.H. 2008. 'Tolerance and Hierarchy: Accommodating Multiple Religious Paths in Hinduism', in J. Neusner and B. Chilton (eds), *Religious Tolerance in World Religions*, pp. 313–7. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Dirks, N.B. 2001. *Castes of Mind*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Divākara, S. 1973. 'Sanmati Tarka', in S. Radhakrishnan and C.A. Moore (eds), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, pp. 269–71. Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Gandhi, M.K. 1981. *Young India. Volume 7*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, New Order Book Company.
- Government of India. 1969. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XXXV*. India: Publications Division, Government of India.
- Jaini, P. 1979. *The Jaina Path of Purification*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kirloskar-Steinbach, M. 2002. 'Toleration in Modern Liberal Discourse with Special Reference to Radhakrishnan's Tolerant Hinduism', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 30: 389–402.
- Kymlicka, W. 1995. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Madan, T.N. 1998. 'Secularism in Its Place', in R. Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and Its Critics*, 297–320. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Malliṣeṇa. 1979. 'Syādvādamañjarī', in S. Radhakrishnan and C.A. Moore (eds), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, pp. 260–8. Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Maritain, J. 1948. 'Introduction', in UNESCO (ed.), *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations, a symposium*, pp. 1–9. www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001550/155042eb.pdf (accessed 18 May 2010).
- Nandy, A. 1998. 'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Toleration', in R. Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and Its Critics*, pp. 321–44. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 2004. 'A Billion Gandhis', *Outlook India*, 21 June 2004. <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/A-Billion-Gandhis/224252> (accessed 5 September 2013).

- Nikam, N.A. and R. McKeon (ed. and trans.). 1959. *The Edicts of Asoka*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Nussbaum, M. 2006. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, and Species Membership*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- O'Flaherty, W.D. (trans.). 1981. *The Rig Veda*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Pantham, T. 1992. 'Some Dimensions of the Universality of Philosophical Hermeneutics: A Conversation with Hans-Georg Gadamer', *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, 9: 123–35.
- Parekh, B. 2000. *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2008. 'Hindu Theory of Tolerance', in P. Bilimoria, J. Prabhu, and R. Sharma, *Indian Ethics*, pp. 337–50. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Radhakrishnan, S. (ed. and trans.). 2000 [1953]. *Īśa Upaniṣad*, pp. 565–78. New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers.
- . (ed. and trans.). 2000 [1953]. *The Principal Upanisads*. New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers.
- . (ed. and trans.). 2000 [1953]. *Vajrasūcika Upaniṣad*, pp. 933–8. New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers.
- . 1955. *Recovery of Faith*. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers.
- Ram-Prasad, C. 2007. *Indian Philosophy and the Consequences of Knowledge*. Hampshire, Guildford: Ashgate.
- Rawls, J. 1993. *Political Liberalism*, 1996 paperback ed. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 1999. *The Law Of Peoples: With The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 'R̥igveda.' www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rvsan/rv01164.htm (accessed 12 June 2012).
- Saṅghavi, S. and B. Doshi. 2000. *Siddhasena Divākara's Sanmati Tarka with a Critical Introduction and an Original Commentary*. Ahmedabad: L.D. Institute of Indology.
- Sankara, A. (trans. by S. Mayeda). 1992. *Upadesasahari*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Sargeant, W. (trans.). 1994. *The Bhagavad Gita*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Sen, A. 1998. 'Secularism and Its Discontents', in R. Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and Its Critics*, pp. 454–85. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 1999. 'Human Rights and Economic Achievements', in J.R. Bauer and D.A. Bell (eds), *The East Asian Challenge For Human Rights*, pp. 88–99. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Sen, A. 2009. *The Idea of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Sharma, A. 1979. 'All Religions Are: Equal? True? Same?: A Critical Examination of Some Formulations of the Neo-Hindu Position', *Philosophy East and West*, 29(1): 59–72.
- Smith, H. 1958. *The Religions of Man*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Tully, J. 1995. *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vivekananda, Swami. 1999. *Chicago Addresses*. Delhi: Advaita Ashrama.