

# Intellectual Tolerance (Vaicharik Sahishnuta)

by Dr. Ramendra

Department of Philosophy, Patna University.

(Keynote address presented at the inaugural session of the 61<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Akhil Bhartiya Darshan Parishad at the Wheeler Senate Hall, Patna University, on 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2016.)

It gives me great pleasure that a topic of contemporary and practical relevance like “intellectual tolerance” has been chosen as a theme of this Conference. Intellectual tolerance is an essential pre-requisite for the existence of democracy and secularism in a multilingual, multireligious and multicultural society like India. In absence of intellectual tolerance, which includes religious tolerance, our society will be torn into pieces!

The issue of intellectual tolerance has become very relevant at present, because intellectual *intolerance* has increased manifold in our country in the last few years. Some authors-thinkers of our country have been killed, just because their killers did not like their views! I am talking about Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and M. M. Kalburgi. This is nothing but height of intellectual intolerance!

Instead of waxing eloquent about ancient times, it is important for us to focus on what is happening at present in our social and political life.

In last few years, some people have even tried to glorify Godse, the killer of Gandhi. On the other hand, some persons from the highest echelons of the ruling establishment have demanded enactment of law banning religious conversions.

Coming closer still, in 2015, ‘Ambedkar-Periyar Study Circle’ organized by students of I. I. T., Madras, was derognized by the institution. This was done after the Central Human Resource Ministry intervened on the basis of a complaint by an “anonymous” person. The study circle was restored after massive protests throughout the country.

The events in the Hyderabad Central University climaxed in the suicide of Rohit Vemula, a dalit research scholar in January, 2016. Earlier, the university had stopped paying the amount of Rs. 25 thousand per month, which was being paid to Rohit Vemula as fellowship. Rohit Vemula was associated with Ambedkar Students Association. The local B. J. P. Member of Parliament had written a complaint to the then Human Resource Minister in the month of August, 2015, alleging that the Hyderabad University had become a stronghold of “casteist, extremist and anti-national politics”. In the month of September,

2015, the University had suspended five students, including Rohit Vemula. Consequently, in January, 2016, Rohit Vemula committed suicide!

Even when the protests regarding Rohit Vemula's suicide were continuing throughout the country, the elected President of J. N. U. Student Union, Kanhaiya Kumar, was arrested on the charge of "sedition". At the time of his production in the court, some persons, related to the ruling party at the Centre, manhandled him. Later, the court released him on bail. When Kanhaiya went to the Hyderabad Central University to express his solidarity with the protesting students of the university, the authorities banned his entry into the university campus at the last moment.

There have been many such incidents violating intellectual and political freedom in other universities as well. There is no need to go into details here. The incidents narrated above are more than sufficient to illustrate the attitude of the present Union government.

In September, 2015, before the last Bihar Assembly elections, Mohammad Aklaq was lynched to death in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh, after being "charged" with eating beef. In July, 2016, about more than a month ago, some dalits were beaten up in Una in Gujarat by the so-called "cow-protectors", just because they were skinning dead animals.

A strange environment of intellectual and religious intolerance is sought to be created in the country. If the Union Government does not agree with any idea or ideology, the persons subscribing to that ideology are being charged with "treason" in a very light manner. Hate campaigns are being carried on against religious minorities. Writers-thinkers are being killed, and Gandhi's assassination is sought to be justified.

Someone may disagree with Gandhi's ideas. Gandhi can be and has been criticized from a humanist point of view as well, particularly, his views on religion and *varna-vyavastha* (See, Ramendra, *Why I am Not a Hindu*). But, what is the meaning of justifying Gandhi's assassin, Godse? This can only mean that if you don't agree with someone's ideas, shoot him! In fact, this is what has been done with Dabholkar, Pansare and Kalburgi.

Therefore, according to me, **the role of Philosophers in the present context ought to be the main issue of discussion before this conference.**

Whether it is Philosophy or any science, knowledge grows by critical thinking. There is no place for intellectual intolerance in scientific method. If scientists are not tolerant towards different hypotheses, then science will not be able to move even a step forward.

Philosophy, in particular, grows out of critical thinking. This was true in ancient times and is true at present also. Today, in Analytical Philosophy central place is given to clarification of concepts and logical evaluation of beliefs. If we

are not tolerant enough even to listen to one-another's arguments, how are we going to logically evaluate it?

In fact, in Philosophy knowledge grows out of clash of opposite ideas and intellectual struggle. In western philosophy there has been a long intellectual struggle between materialism and idealism. In India, Astika (orthodox) and Nastika (heterodox) struggle has been going on since ancient times, and is still continuing in 21<sup>st</sup> century. In fact, the conflict has sharpened further.

Whether we are Nastika or Astika, we ought to be ready to listen to and to evaluate one another's arguments. If possible, we should try to remove or minimize our disagreements by using logical and scientific method. Where there is no sufficient evidence to come to a definite conclusion, we ought to suspend our judgments. If it is not possible to remove our disagreements, then we ought to learn to live peacefully and gracefully *with* our disagreements. In no case, we should turn our intellectual disagreement into personal enmity, conspire against one-another and even indulge in violence.

This is the essence of intellectual tolerance.

In absence of such intellectual tolerance the future of philosophy will itself be endangered. Therefore, **Philosophers ought to be in the forefront of the fight against intellectual intolerance.**

Hopefully, this philosophical conference will discuss the subject of intellectual tolerance in an atmosphere of intellectual tolerance.