Toleration - A Virtue

Human society is moving towards a fiercely conflict-ridden world in which toleration is needed badly.

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What does toleration mean?

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> - Toleration also comes up often in reference to reluctant sorts of intolerance.
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> - The view that toleration is a tolerance backed by law or judicial precedent.
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> - As religious toleration has often been imposed by law while a spirit of tolerance cannot be forced on anyone, but the distinction isn't consistently borne out in general usage.
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> - Toleration exists in a society where it is a prized personal attribute, a virtue, but toleration as virtue is not always necessary for emerging practices of toleration.
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> - Indeed, a tolerant society may well exist, at least temporarily, even amidst pervasive attitudes of intolerance.
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> - It is also present where persecution, violent confrontation or bloodshed have somehow been kept at bay.
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> - For instance, where in the aftermath of civil war, convenient arrangements of cohabitation have evolved, fostered by sheer fatigue with violence.
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How toleration can explained as an attitude?

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- **Negative toleration -** To tolerate is to refrain from interference in the activities of others, even though one finds them morally reprehensible, and despite the fact that one has the power to do so.
- This toleration is an attitude of forbearance preceded by psychological turbulence and anxiety.
- A person with more power eventually puts up with what he intensely dislikes in the less powerful.
- For instance, if cow vigilantes and their powerful backers accept the beef-eating habits of Dalits, Christians, Muslims and people of the Northeast, then they will have learnt toleration.
- **Repulsive Co-existence -** Two groups may find each other's activities morally repulsive and have equal power to interfere but both refrain from doing so because the cost of the ensuing conflict is far too high.
- They may reluctantly accept an arrangement of coexistence.
- This attitude of resignation is toleration mandated by balance of power, a modus vivendi toleration.
- **Liberal society -** Considerations of power are less relevant, disapproval exists but is mild and not acted upon.
- In large, complex societies, the business of living one's own life is so time-consuming that a concern with others is simply too onerous.
- People don't really care about what others do, as long as it is not done directly or deliberately in their face.
- All they wish is to keep out of each other's way, this is toleration as an attitude of live and let live.
- **Positive toleration -** It is best understood in contrast with negative toleration in which others are reluctantly accepted against a background of prior hatred.
- Here one tolerates not despite hate but rather because one loves the other.
- A mixture of love, friendliness, and fellow feeling is the background that sustains this conception.

- This is not quite recognising others as equals but still an admirable stance towards others, a virtue.
- For example, one might be strongly committed to a world of gods and goddesses but still be willing to acknowledge monotheists and atheists as fellow truth-seekers, following a common goal of ethical self-realisation.

Which form of toleration is best suited for India?

- Indian diverse society is inhabited by people with varying temperaments, dispositions and upbringing.
- In India one might not share the same tolerant attitude but still manage to agree on common practices of toleration.
- Those with a more empathetic disposition may well cultivate the virtue of positive toleration, embrace an attitude of critical respect.
- The many in between should easily be satisfied with an attitude of live and let live.
- To expect everyone to cultivate the virtue of toleration is unrealistic today.

Source: The Hindu