

Heresy Unveiled:

**Navigating the Theological Landscape of
Judaism, Islam, and Christianity in Contrast to the
Harmonious Tapestry of Hindu Dharma**



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Introduction

This monograph will concentrate on the phenomenon of heresy and deviant beliefs within the Abrahamic religions, namely Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, examining their historical development over time. It will delve into the comparative analysis of how the successor religions of Judaism exhibited a more orthodox stance and a less rational approach to scientific and philosophical thinking. The discussion will also explore the distinctive feature of Hindu Dharma, highlighting its historical inclination towards tolerance for diverse thoughts and philosophies, contributing to the rich tapestry of philosophy of Bharat.

The paper will elucidate instances demonstrating the Hindu Dharma tradition's aversion to persecution and punitive measures for dissenting views. Throughout the ancient to modern eras, it will be demonstrated as a rare occurrence for an individual to face persecution for their thoughts, in stark contrast to Abrahamic religions, where dissent often led to widespread persecution and loss of life. The narrative will underscore the erroneous characterization of Bhartiya culture by certain European civilizations as overly orthodox or irrational, countering the misconception.

Examining historical records, the paper will contrast the Bhartiya civilization's tolerance with the instances of mass persecution in Europe, where individuals were condemned and executed for questioning religious norms. This is particularly evident in the persecution of women accused of witchcraft and the binding nature of religious authorities' decisions for the entire populace. The absence of such cases in Bhartiya civilization will be emphasized. Additionally, the monograph aims to debunk the claim of intolerance in Bharat, responding to instances where some ideological based-scholars returned awards citing perceived intolerance. It will assert that heresy has never been a pervasive phenomenon within Hindu Dharma, thereby contributing to the understanding of Bharat as a historically tolerant nation.

What is Heresy?

The term “heresy” finds its etymological roots in the Latin word *‘haeresis,’* which is a linguistic derivation from the Greek term *αἵρεσις*.¹ Initially, its semantic connotation pertained to the act of making choices, decisions, or determining a particular course of action.² In a broader sense, it encompassed the identification of a sect or school of thought. Over the course of the first century, the term underwent semantic evolution, expanding to encapsulate the notion of warring factions and the divisive spirit prevalent among different groups.³

The inquiry into the presence of “heresy” in the Bible reveals its derivation from the Greek term *“haireomai,”* signifying “to choose”. This term is encountered 10 times in the biblical text, manifesting in two nominal forms:⁴ *Hairesis* (Acts 5:17, 15:5, 24:5, 14, 26:5, 28:22, 1 Cor 11:19, Gal 5:20, 2 Pet 2:1).

In certain instances, particularly in Acts, denoting various religious groups such as the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Nazarenes. In this context, it appears to convey a sense analogous to our contemporary use of the term “denominations” in characterizing distinct Christian groups. Alternatively, it is translated as “heresy” on occasions (1 Cor 11:19, Gal 5:20, 2 Pet 2:1). In these instances, the term conveys implications of false teachings, doctrines, or any repudiation of fundamental tenets within the Christian Faith.⁵

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary “The term ‘heresy’ denotes dissent or departure from a prevailing theory, opinion, or practice, encompassing viewpoints, doctrines, or

¹ J.P. Mallory and D.Q. Adams, *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 543.

² Alister McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (United Kingdom: HarperCollins, 2009).

³ Robert M. Royalty, *The Origin of Heresy: A History of Discourse in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2013), 3.

⁴ Dr Jeffrey Khoo, *Heresies ancient and modern*, 1.

⁵ Dr Jeffrey Khoo, *Heresies ancient and modern*, 1.

practices that diverge from established truths or generally accepted beliefs and standards.”⁶

These delineate pivotal definitions of heresies within the realm of public discourse. Subsequently, our following section will scrutinize heresies within various Abrahamic religions, seeking a profound comprehension of the subject matter.

Heresy in Judaism

Heresy in the Jewish context is not just about making false claims; it is about teachings or actions that directly oppose the teachings of Torah. Throughout history, Jewish individuals, groups, and even entire communities have sometimes been labelled as heretical. Take the Karaites, for instance, who are seen as heretics in mainstream Judaism due to their refusal to accept the Oral Law.⁷

There are various principles and concepts which are against or contrary to *halakhah* consider as heretical beliefs. *Halakhah*⁸ is the rich tapestry of Jewish legal and cultural heritage, encompassing the sacred laws of the Bible, the profound insights of the oral tradition recorded in the legal section of the Talmud, and the evolving legal codes that adapt timeless principles to meet the needs of today's world.⁹

When we are talking about the Heresies in Judaism, firstly we find the *min*. *Min* is the term used in the Talmud and Midrash for a Jewish heretic or sectarian.¹⁰ The main argument here is that the term “*min*” is a label used in Jewish texts to refer to different groups or sects that deviate from mainstream Jewish beliefs. This label has been applied to various groups throughout history, such as the Samaritans, Sadducees, Gnostics, Judaeo-Christians, and others, depending on the time period. The term “*min*” is primarily used to describe Jewish sectaries, not non-Jews, and it

⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heresy>

⁷ Karesh Sara E., and Mitchell M. Hurvitz. *Encyclopedia of Judaism* (Infobase Publishing 2005) 206.

⁸ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/halakhah>

⁹ Sara E, *Encyclopedia of Judaism*, 206.

¹⁰ <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10846-min>

has been used in different contexts to identify and discuss these various sects and their beliefs.

There is another term for heretic in Judaism is *Epikoros*. According to the Mishna (It is the earliest significant written compilation of Jewish oral traditions, commonly referred to as the Oral Torah, and serves as the inaugural major work in rabbinic literature) it is

“All Israel have a share in the world to come as states: Your people are all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, wherein I glory. And these are the ones who do not have a portion in the world to come: He who maintains that there is no resurrection of the dead derived from the Torah, and [He who maintains] that the Torah is not from the Heavens, and an Epikoros”¹¹

Epikoros is the term derived from Greek philosopher Epicurus whose views contradicted Jewish scripture- the strictly monotheistic conception of God in Judaism and the Jewish belief in the world to come. It later became a guiding principle for those whose beliefs contradicted Judaism.¹² There were various responses towards these heretical beliefs. According to the Talmud heretic should be treated in a way

“...and one may not lower them into a pit. But the heretics, and the informers, and the apostates [vehameshummadim] are lowered into a pit, but not raised out of it.”¹³

Daf Shevui commented about the Heretic “there are types of people who may actively be murdered. It is hard to know exactly who these people are, especially what the difference between “heretics” and “apostates” is. There are also other versions of this list. “Informers” seems to be akin to what we call “traitors” a

¹¹ Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Christian Classics Reproductions, 2022).

¹² <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1640-apikoros>

¹³ Avodah_Zarah_26b.

https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Talmud/Bavli/Modern_Commentary_on_Talmud/Daf_Shevui.

crime that is still considered extremely serious and for which one can be executed or jailed for an extremely long time.”¹⁴

In the realm of Jewish theology, heretical tendencies are often described using the Hebrew terms “*kefira*” and “*apikorsus*”. Throughout the course of Jewish history and philosophical evolution, a diverse array of theological interpretations has emerged. However, there are certain doctrinal positions that lie outside the boundaries of accepted Jewish orthodoxy.¹⁵ This presentation aims to explore the concept of heresy within the Jewish context, employing both historical and scholarly perspectives. Over time, the initially warm sentiments turned into intense animosity, as the sectaries distanced themselves from the Jewish community and spread writings that the Rabbis viewed as more threatening to the unity of Judaism than even those of the pagans. According to R. Tarfon, the writings of these sectaries should be destroyed, even if they contain the holy name of God, because their beliefs are more perilous to Judaism's unity than paganism. Pagans may lack understanding of Jewish truth due to ignorance, but these sectaries, known as ‘minim’, knowingly deny what they should know.¹⁶

Across the expanse of biblical epochs, traversing the realms of Rabbinic scholarship and extending into the tapestry of contemporary thought, the intricate books of Jewish theology has been marked by a dynamic interplay of shifting paradigms pertaining to the delineation of heterodox beliefs and practices. Within this rich intellectual tradition, the venerable Rabbinic compendium, most notably exemplified by the Talmud, offers profound and discursive elucidations on the subject of heretical doctrinal assertions and the individuals who championed them.

We also find two major heretical sects in the Judaism, i.e., Karaites and Sabbateans. In the medieval epoch, a distinctive

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https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Talmud/Bavli/Modern_Commentary_on_Talmud/Daf_Shevu

¹⁵ William Horbury, The Benediction of the ‘Minim’ And Early Jewish—Christian Controversy. *The Journal of Theological Studies* 33, no. 1 (1982): 19–61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23957556>.

¹⁶ <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10846-min>

sect known as the Karaites came into being, marked by their rejection of the Rabbinic Oral Tradition in favour of an exclusive reliance upon the Hebrew Scriptures. Although not fitting the quintessential definition of heresy, they often found themselves viewed through such a lens by the prevailing Rabbinic authorities.¹⁷ Sabbateans was a movement led by Sabbatai Zevi (1626-1676 CE). It was a result of emerging ideas of the 17th century that witnessed the emergence of messianic movements, prominently led by figures such as Sabbatai Zevi. This movements, marked by their profound departure from conventional Jewish orthopraxy and theological doctrine, faced widespread censure and rejection from the Rabbinic establishment. Sabbatai Zevi himself was heralded as a Jewish messiah.¹⁸

In Judaism, the delineation of heresy extends beyond the confines observed in other Abrahamic religions. It transcends conventional classifications encompassing not only atheists and deists but also individuals dissenting from specific Jewish religious practices or those positing the absence of divine intervention in human affairs. It is noteworthy that the inception of heretical tendencies within Judaism has permeated into its successor religions, namely Christianity and Islam. The contemporary era, characterized by the emergence of Jewish denominations such as Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Judaism, has engendered a broadened conceptualization of heretical perspectives. While Orthodox Judaism remains tethered to a tradition-centric belief system grounded in Rabbinic treatises, alternative denominations have undertaken hermeneutical reinterpretations of Judaic doctrine.

Heresy in Christianity

In the Christian context, heresy denotes the formal repudiation or questioning of a fundamental doctrine intrinsic to the Christian faith, as prescribed by one or more Christian denominations. Throughout the expansive history of Christian intellectual

¹⁷Polliack Meira, ed. *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to its History and Literary Sources* (Brill, 2003).

¹⁸ Scholem Gershom, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton University Press, 1973).

inquiry, the term 'heresy' has consistently signified theological or doctrinal propositions perceived as divergent or discordant with the orthodox interpretation maintained by the prevailing ecclesiastical establishment.¹⁹ These deviations, chronicled in the annals of Christian historiography, have recurrently prompted impassioned polemics, intricate theological disputes, and, on occasion, precipitated substantial socio-political upheavals.

In his 1908 work 'Orthodoxy' G. K. Chesterton claims that differences in beliefs have existed since the time of the New Testament and Jesus. However, he emphasizes that the Apostles, as well as early church fathers such as Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and Polycarp, consistently opposed altering the teachings of Christ.²⁰ The narrative of Christianity's development, spanning from its early inception through the transformative events of the Reformation and the intricate complexities of the Modern era, has been punctuated by recurrent encounters with doctrinal interpretations that had the potential to unsettle prevailing agreements or seemingly imperil the fundamental tenets of the faith.

In the investigation of heresies within the Christian tradition, historical documentation discloses instances where individuals, holding divergent beliefs and doctrines, met fatal consequences. In the early epochs of Christianity, Dualism was branded as a heretical tenet; however, it is salient to acknowledge that in the present Christian milieu, Dualism has garnered broad acceptance among the faithful. Throughout antiquity, numerous heretical sects flourished, yet a significant proportion encountered forceful suppression orchestrated by both ecclesiastical and governmental entities. This segment will undertake an analysis of select heretical groups.

Harold O. J. Brown asserts that the Gnostic movement, encompassing church-affiliated Gnosticism, exhibits such notable divergence from the principles and teachings of the New

¹⁹ J.D Douglas (ed), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1974).

²⁰ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Heretics: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012).

Testament that it defies categorization as heresy within the framework of Christianity. Instead, he characterizes it as a distinct alternative religious paradigm. Within this context, Brown posits that Gnosticism introduced Docetism, marking it as the inaugural heretical deviation firmly situated "within" the Christian tradition. Nevertheless, he maintains that Gnosticism cannot be deemed a genuinely Christian phenomenon, as its overarching objectives and doctrinal orientations substantially deviate from the tenets of biblical faith. Notwithstanding these disparities, Brown observes a shared interest in the nature of Christ between Gnosticism and traditional Christianity, wherein Gnosticism's influence played a pivotal role in the development of Docetism. This theological stance emerged from Gnosticism's contention that a purely spiritual entity like Christ could not endure human suffering, ultimately leading to the conclusion that Christ's humanity was merely superficial.²¹

If we focus on some heretical beliefs, firstly we find Arianism, basing its theological argument on the teachings of the Alexandrian clergyman Arius, Arianism posited that the divinity of the Son (Jesus Christ) did not equate to that of the Father, thereby proposing a temporal precedence of the Father.²² In their perspective, Christ did not possess divine nature; instead, they asserted that Christ was a product of human creation. But these people were destroyed by the emperor Gratian (367- 383 CE) and Theodosius (379-395 CE).

Other Heretical belief was Pelagianism that was developed by Pelagius (355-420 CE). Pelagianism was rooted in the theological teachings of the British ascetic Pelagius, this soteriological perspective challenged the traditional concept of ancestral sin, emphasizing human autonomy and often diminishing the role of divine intervention in the process of salvation. This theological divergence triggered conflicts with prevailing orthodoxy, especially Augustine's interpretations, resulting in various ecclesiastical condemnations, notably the Council of Carthage in 418 AD. One notable proponent of Pelagianism, Julian of Eclanum, critiqued Augustinian notions of

²¹ Dr Jeffrey Khoo, *Heresies ancient and modern*.

²² Dr Jeffrey Khoo, *Heresies ancient and modern*.

predestination and the indispensability of divine grace, advocating for humanity's inherent capacity for righteousness without divine assistance.²³ This principle was against the teaching of Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 CE)

Catharism was a heretical religious movement rooted in the belief of cosmic dualism, which posited the existence of both a benevolent spiritual deity and a malevolent material one, alongside beliefs in reincarnation and ascetic practices. It gained prominence in 12th-century Southern France. In historical context, Catharism is chiefly remembered for a prolonged period of conflict and religious persecution, often described as a form of genocide, as the Catholic Church vigorously pursued the suppression of this heretical sect and its adherents.²⁴

Ebionism, Marcionism, Montanism, Donatism, Sabellianism, Apollinarianism, and Socinianism were also classified as heresies by the ecclesiastical authorities.²⁵ However, it is noteworthy that the comprehensive catalogue extends over hundreds of pages, offering an extensive array for elucidation. Our endeavour, nevertheless, has been to concentrate on those deemed significant, due to their distinct societal impact.

Heresy in Islam

Within the expansive realm of Islamic intellectualism, pivotal terms such as *bid'ah* (innovation) and *kufr* (disbelief) function as crucial instruments in defining orthodox beliefs from heretical doctrines. The dynamic evolution of Islamic thought, paralleling the developmental trajectories observed in other profound religious traditions, has given rise to a myriad of theological and jurisprudential perspectives. Significantly, a spectrum of Islamic scholars and jurists has identified a range of beliefs and practices as heterodox or heretical.

The lexicon associated with heresy and heretics in Islam is diverse. First and foremost, *bid'ah*, or innovation, emerges as a prominent concept. *Bid'ah*, denoting innovation, pertains to

²³ Everett Ferguson, *Pelagius: To Demetrias, An Analysis and Commentary* (Peter Lang, 2002).

²⁴ Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars* (Blackwell, 1998).

²⁵ Dr Jeffrey Khoo, *Heresies ancient and modern*.

beliefs or practices lacking precedent during the era of the Prophet in Islamic tradition. Diverging from the Sunna, *bid'ah* is akin to terms such as *mubhdath* or *hadath*.²⁶ While certain factions within the Muslim community historically regarded all forms of innovation as inherently erroneous, a more nuanced perspective recognized the necessity for accommodations to adapt to evolving circumstances.

Etymologically, the term '*bid'ah*' traces its semantic roots to notions of "creation" or "initiation." Within the epistemological framework of Islam, *bid'ah* denotes religious accretions not traceable to the Prophetic traditions of Muhammad or his immediate disciples.²⁷ Such accretions are often perceived as deviations from the core tenets and practices of Islam. Bid'ah, in essence, is seen as impeding Islam from introducing new principles or innovations.²⁸

Ilhad constitutes second significant category of heresy within the Islamic context. The term '*mulhid*', signifying a deviator, apostate, heretic, or atheist, derives its religious connotation from the inherent meaning of its root, l-h-d, connoting 'to incline' or 'to deviate'.²⁹ Its documented usage within a religious context lacks pre-Islamic evidence, with its incorporation into Islamic discourse attributed to specific Quranic verses. Notably, Surah VII:180 references 'those who deviate (yulhiduna, var. yalhaduna) in regard to His names'; Surah XLI: 40 discusses 'those who deviate in regard to Our signs (yulhidüna ft ayatina)'; and Surah XXII:25 addresses 'Whoever seeks in it (sc. the sacred Mosque of Mecca) to perpetrate deviation (bi-ilhad) wantonly, we shall make him taste a painful punishment'.³⁰

In his seminal work, '*Makalat al-mulhidin*,' Al-Ash'ari undertook a comprehensive exploration of cosmological theories

²⁶ H.A.R. Gibb, and E. Levi-Provencal, eds. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1986) V-1, 1199.

²⁷ Gibb, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V-1, 1199.

²⁸ Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Usul al-Fiqh* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²⁹ Gibb, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V-7, 546.

³⁰ Gibb, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V-7, 546.

proposed by ancient thinkers. Within this discourse, he defined the term '*mulhid*', encapsulating diverse groups such as the '*mutazila*' (those rejecting God's attributes), '*zanadika*' (heretics), '*thanawiyya*' (dualist) and others who demonstrate a repudiation of the Creator and a denial of prophethood.³¹

A distinct category within Islamic heresy is the *zindiq*. In the Islamic context, the term "*zindiq*" originally denoted individuals who clandestinely adhered to dualistic doctrines rooted in Iranian religious traditions, particularly Manichaeism, while outwardly professing allegiance to Islam. Consequently, a *zindiq* was identified as a heretic, accountable for *zandaqa* or heresy.³² During the Abbasid Caliphate, the term "*zandaqa*" underwent expansion to include agnosticism, Gnostic dualism, and atheism. *Zindiq*, those regarded as heretical, faced challenges as individuals commenced critical examinations of religious authorities, the state, governance systems, and the essence of piety.³³

Hartaqa, a contemporary term, serves as a modern designation for heresy in Islam. While various terms have historically existed to signify heresy within the Islamic context, *hartaqa* has emerged in modern Arabic parlance for this purpose.³⁴ Certain orthodox Islamic radical factions have adopted it as a foundational premise for the punishment of dissenting individuals.

There are various groups labelled as heretics in Islam, in which first was Kharijites. Among the primordial Islamic factions, the Kharijites emerged with distinct radicalized paradigms. Their ecclesiastical convictions, particularly the assertion that egregious sins rendered a Muslim apostate, were underscored by an unwavering literalistic exegesis of the Quran. Such

³¹ Gibb, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V-7, 546.

³² Gibb, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V-7, 546.

³³ <https://medium.com/@arshiaunis/heretic-traditions-in-islam-why-they-are-vital-for-dissent-today-e904264c1b3>

³⁴ Bernard Lewis, "Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam," *Studia Islamica*, no. 1 (1953): 43–63. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595009>.

convictions subsequently catalysed their insurrections against those they deemed compromised Muslim sovereigns.³⁵

The second prominent classification of heretics pertained to the *Mutazilites*. In the Islamic milieu of the 8th century, the *Mutazilites* emerged as a notable faction renowned for their inclination towards rationalistic theological perspectives. They promulgated the contingent nature of the Quran and advocated for the integration of human rationale in deciphering divine edicts. The contentiousness surrounding their convictions culminated in the ‘*Mihna*’ (Inquisitorial period) under the aegis of the Abbasid dynasty³⁶. This particular doctrinal framework, identified as heretical, incurred censure from the *Asharites*. The *Asharites*, subscribing to a viewpoint contrary to rationality, posited that religion transcends the bounds of rational discourse. Notably, proponents of this divergent school of thought faced punitive measures for their ideological stance.

Certain Sufi saints faced categorisation as heretics due to their adherence to principles conflicting with the Quran and Hadith. Sufism, functioning as the esoteric facet of Islam, has periodically encountered juxtaposition with canonical Sunni dogma. Critiques from mainstream scholars have arisen in response to specific Sufi rituals and the reverence accorded to ascetic luminaries, deeming such practices as *bid'ah* or compromises to monotheistic purity.³⁷ Further exploration reveals numerous instances where Sufis faced execution for expressing views contrary to prevailing norms.

The Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan similarly garnered heretic classification. Initiated by Mirza Ghulam Ahmed in the 19th century, who declared himself the promised *Messiah*, this movement has been subjected to persecution since its inception.

³⁵ Julius Wellhausen, *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam* (Georg Olms Verlag, 1975).

³⁶ Josef Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology* (Harvard University Press, 2006), Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim* United States: Prometheus Books, 1995) 245-250.

³⁷ Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Shambhala Publications, 1997).

³⁸ Despite the contemporary discourse on democracy, the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan experiences second-class citizenship, being deemed non-Muslim by the Islamic Republic and even receiving non-Muslim status from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.³⁹

The aforementioned examples underscore the prevalence of heretical categorizations within Islam, indicative of the complexities inherent in religious doctrinal interpretations.

Punishments for the heretic in the Abrahamic religion

The ways in which heretics were dealt with in the Abrahamic traditions varied significantly, influenced by factors such as historical context, geographical location, and the specific beliefs of different religious groups. Let us explore these diverse approaches in more detail.

Initially, we will discuss the methodology employed in addressing heretics within Judaism. During antiquity, violations of the Judaic canon, such as idolatry, could lead to capital punishment as prescribed by biblical mandates. However, with the advent of the Second Temple era, the imposition of such severe penalties diminished significantly within the Jewish legal framework. Subsequent historical epochs, particularly the Medieval period, witnessed the predominance of excommunication as the principal sanction for heretical transgressions. This ecclesiastical censure resulted in the individual's isolation from active participation in Jewish society and a prohibition from communal liturgical engagements.

There are some regulations in the Jewish society to deal with the Heretics. Upon the demise of an individual embracing heretical convictions, a conspicuous departure from the customary mourning rituals was observed within their family circle. Instead, they adorned themselves in celebratory garments, partaking in feasts accompanied by libations. Items of religious significance, such as Torah scrolls, tefillin, or *mezuzot*, crafted by the heretic,

³⁸ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/pakistan-persecutes-a-muslim-minority-1512087028>

³⁹ Constitution (Second Amendment) Act, 1974". The Constitution of Pakistan. pakistani.org. Archived from the original on 17 July 2017.

met a fate of deliberate destruction. Meat derived from animals subjected to ritual slaughter by the heretic was deemed unsuitable for consumption under kosher laws. While books authored by heretics did not bestow ritual impurity, a Sabbath conundrum arose, as they were ineligible for rescue in the event of a conflagration. Furthermore, within the hallowed precincts of Jewish jurisprudence, the testimony proffered by a heretic remained categorically inadmissible. Should an Israelite chance upon an object belonging to a heretic, ethical constraints dictated a prohibition against its restitution.

A thorough examination of Jewish heretics reveals a comprehensive roster of individuals who, at the behest of Rabbinical authorities, underwent various forms of censure, including ostracism, excommunication, and, in certain instances, execution. Illustrating this historical trajectory is the case of Elisha ben Abuyah (70-135 CE), an emblematic figure from the 2nd century whose dissenting perspectives led to his expulsion from Jewish society. This poignant example serves as a testament to the far-reaching consequences of deviating beliefs, where contrary views resulted in the severe disciplinary measures of expulsion or even execution.

Similarly, the ninth-century biblical critic Hiwi al Balkhi found himself designated as a heretic due to his dissenting views, further exemplifying the stringent consequences faced by those challenging prevailing orthodoxy. Notably, Maimonides (1138-1204 CE), a distinguished Jewish philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer, encountered allegations of heresy on account of his rationalist viewpoints. The ongoing theological debate surrounding his standing underscores the enduring complexities associated with divergent theological perspectives.

The compendium of Jewish heretics also includes figures like Kalonymous Ben Kalonymous (1286-1328 CE) and Solomon Maimon (1753-1800 CE), further illuminating the recurrence of individuals grappling with heretical accusations across different epochs within the Jewish tradition. The inclusion of these individuals underscores the persistent nature of theological debates and the nuanced responses to dissent within the historical continuum of Jewish thought. One notable appearance of this heresy was the excommunication of the philosopher

Baruch Spinoza by the Jewish conclave of Amsterdam in the 17th century, serving as a salient application of the interdict and a testament to the recurrent challenges posed by dissenting perspectives within the rich tapestry of Jewish intellectual history.⁴⁰

In conclusion, an examination of punitive measures within Abrahamic religions reveals a discernible trend in Judaism towards leniency and increasing tolerance over time. While historical records may indicate fewer instances of capital punishment in comparison to Christianity and Islam, the prevalence of exile emerges as a significant form of censure. The Jewish tradition, evolving across epochs, demonstrates a trajectory of growing tolerance, marked by a shift from execution to the imposition of exile as a consequence for divergent thoughts. This nuanced approach to dissent underscores the dynamic nature of religious responses to heresy within the tapestry of Judaic history.

When considering punitive measures within the context of Christianity, an extensive catalogue emerges, documenting the execution of thousands of individuals for their dissenting views, acts of apostasy, and adherence to heretical beliefs.

Turning our attention to the ecclesiastical response to heresy, it is noteworthy that heretical beliefs were criminalized by Roman emperors who embraced Christianity. These rulers decreed that heresy warranted the ultimate penalty, leading to the execution of thousands of individuals during this period. Within the context of these executions, Ramihrdus (d. 1077) emerges prominently, having been summoned to court due to his belief that the priesthood was morally compromised. As a consequence, he confronted the outcome of being immolated as a heretic, potentially establishing a historical precedent as the inaugural individual subjected to such a punitive measure.⁴¹ The second noteworthy instance pertains to Botulf Botulfson (d. 1311), who

⁴⁰ Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴¹ Lambert, Malcolm, *Medieval heresy: popular movements from Bogomil to Hus* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1977), 41.

faced allegations of heresy from the Catholic Church.⁴² His offense was rooted in his denial that the wine and bread used in communion possessed a literal transformation into the blood and body of Christ. His contention rested on the principle that if the bread and wine were indeed the body of Christ, he would refuse to partake in such consumption. This seemingly inconsequential divergence in belief ultimately culminated in his demise, as he was subjected to execution by burning at the stake on charges of heresy.⁴³ Preceding this era, numerous instances occurred, yet given the constraints of brevity, the highlighted cases serve as pivotal examples that contribute to a nuanced comprehension of Christian heresy.

In our exploration of medieval Christianity during the Dark Ages, a crucial aspect to consider is the establishment of the Inquisition, a significant procedure for addressing heresy. Emerging in the latter part of the 12th century, the Roman Catholic Church instituted the Inquisition as a formal mechanism dedicated to suppressing heretical beliefs. This institutional development represented an expansion and intensified implementation of preexisting ecclesiastical authorities, resulting in an augmentation of authority vested in the pontiff.⁴⁴ The Inquisition exercised its influence across varied European regions, particularly in locales where it garnered steadfast support from secular authorities. This comprehensive measure underscored the Church's commitment to maintaining doctrinal orthodoxy and combating perceived deviations within its ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The Spanish Inquisition distinguishes itself through notably severe methodologies, exemplified by the gruesome practice of burning heretics at the stake. The Albigensian Crusade, spanning from 1209 to 1229, constituted an integral component of the Catholic Church's efforts to suppress the Cathars, interweaving with what is now recognized as the Medieval Inquisition. Another illustrative manifestation of heretical movements during the medieval period is the Hussite uprising in the Czech lands in the early 15th century. It is

⁴² <https://peoplepill.com/i/botulf-botulfsson/>

⁴³ <https://peoplepill.com/i/botulf-botulfsson/>

⁴⁴ Edward Peters, *Inquisition* (Univ. of California Press, 1989).

noteworthy that the final individual subjected to the distressing fate of being immolated at the stake under the auspices of Rome was Giordano Bruno. His execution unfolded in 1600, encompassing a spectrum of heretical convictions, including, but not limited to, Copernicans, belief in an infinite universe replete with numerous inhabited worlds, and divergent theological perspectives concerning the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the Incarnation, all of which contradicted Catholic doctrine.⁴⁵

Numerous individuals faced execution on charges of heresy, particularly scientists and social reformers who espoused theories conflicting with Biblical and Christian tenets. Prominent figure such as Galileo was subjected to execution for their teachings. Additionally, notable figures like Marcion and Martin Luther emerged as individuals who challenged the ecclesiastical establishment and its perceived unfounded principles, including but not limited to matters such as tithing. A comprehensive list exists of individuals who underwent execution or excommunication due to their divergent views. However, the aforementioned examples are salient instances that focused consideration.⁴⁶

Giordano Bruno, a visionary philosopher, proposed a groundbreaking cosmological theory suggesting that stars were distant suns with their own planets, advocating cosmic pluralism and asserting the infinitude of the universe without a central point. Despite the potential significance of his ideas, Bruno faced execution for holding opinions contrary to Catholic doctrine. Charges included dissent on the Trinity, divinity of Christ, and the Incarnation, challenging beliefs about the virginity of Mary, and supporting the existence of multiple worlds. Bruno's tragic fate highlights the paradox of a distinguished thinker whose innovative theories, illuminating the path for future European intellectual advancements, led to his demise due to ideological differences with the prevailing religious orthodoxy

⁴⁵ <https://brewminate.com/a-history-of-heresy-in-ancient-and-medieval-christianity/>

⁴⁶ Francisco Bethencourt, *The Inquisition: A Global History 1478-1834* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

We also encounter a notable inquisition case wherein an ordinary individual became the subject of heresy due to his perspectives. In the textual work "*Cheese and the Worms*" authored by Carlo Ginzburg, a narrative is presented involving an ordinary individual named Menocchio (1532-1599 CE), who worked as a miller.⁴⁷ This account unfolds in the year 1599, culminating in Menocchio's gruesome execution by burning at the stake, a dire consequence stemming from his religious beliefs and practices. The impetus behind this tragic episode can be attributed to the Inquisition, an institution promoted by the Roman Pope of Italy. It was influenced by Menocchio's engagement with literature, particularly the holy book of Christians that led him to develop unconventional perspectives on Christianity. His inquiries extended to the wealth of the Church, urging people to reflect upon it, while also challenging the supremacy of Latin and advocating for the reading of holy texts in vernacular languages. There exists a contention that Menocchio even undertook the translation of religious texts into common language.⁴⁸ Regrettably, these actions were deemed heretical by the Pope and his associates, resulting in the execution of an ordinary miller who had posed fundamental questions, all ostensibly in the name of God.

Within the annals of Christianity, a historical epoch unfolded characterized by the severe persecution of individuals, a persecution often manifesting in brutal executions. This punitive trajectory was predominantly instigated by deviations in religious practices, encompassing dissenting views, ideas, and philosophical perspectives held by certain individuals. This nuanced examination is facilitated through the analysis of specific instances, as exemplified by the aforementioned cases. The exploration aims to illuminate the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by those who, in the course of history, encountered persecution within the Christian framework due to their divergence from established norms and beliefs.

⁴⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2013).

⁴⁸ Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*.

Our scholarly inquiry now directs attention towards comprehending the disciplinary measures within Islam and the historical evolution of how heretics were addressed within the Islamic context over time. This investigation seeks to delve into the intricate mechanisms, judicial frameworks, and societal responses that characterized the treatments of individuals and groups deemed heretical within the Islamic tradition. By exploring the historical nuances and developments associated with the punishment of heretics in Islam, we aim to glean a nuanced understanding of the dynamics governing theological orthodoxy and divergence within the Islamic milieu.

The Islamic jurisprudential stance vis-a-vis heresy or apostasy is multifaceted, shaped by the vicissitudes of time, topography, and sociopolitical milieu. Canonical Islamic jurisprudence known as *Sharia* ostensibly prescribes capital punishment for apostates. However, the enactment of this mandate evinced marked heterogeneity across epochs and territories. Heretical denotations in select eras elicited societal marginalization, while in others, precipitated graver consequences such as incarceration or execution. Contemporary discourse witnesses a proliferation of scholars and reformists contesting these traditionalist edicts, championing the cause of religious liberty and freedom of expression within the Islamic ambit.⁴⁹

The inaugural instance of heresy resulting in execution on charges of *zandaqa* occurred with the punishment of Zad Ibn Dirham by order of the Umayyad caliph Hisham in the year 743.⁵⁰ Zad Ibn Dirham was purported to repudiate divine attributes, asserting, among other assertions, that “God did not speak to Moses, nor take Abraham as his friend.” His beliefs were aligned with materialism, and his adherents were reputed to impugn the veracity of the prophet Muhammad and reject the notion of resurrection.⁵¹

In the pursuit of comprehending these instances, a pivotal scholar in the realm of Islamic history, Goldziher, posits that

⁴⁹ Abdullah Saeed, *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam* (Ashgate Publishing, 2004).

⁵⁰ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 251.

⁵¹ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 251-252.

beneath the outward semblance of tolerance within Islamic societies exists an underlying and unequivocal intolerance towards unbelief. This theological stance is manifest in the imposition of severe penalties, including the sanction of death, upon those adjudged guilty of transgressing established religious norms within the Islamic framework. Goldziher's scholarship provides a critical lens through which to examine the interplay between apparent tolerance and the stringent repercussions faced by individuals diverging from accepted beliefs within Islamic jurisprudence. This intolerance extends beyond unbelief to include individuals labelled as extremists within various Islamic sects, encompassing *Shi'ites*, *Kharijites*, *Mutaziltes*, as well as Sunnis deviating from orthodox doctrine by denying fundamental tenets such as prophecy.⁵² Goldziher underscores that even those who engage in fantastical beliefs, such as reincarnation and metempsychosis, fall under this strict censure. Of particular significance is the exclusion from the Muslim community of those who deny the unity of God, cast doubt on the prophethood of Muhammad, or question the divine origin of the Quran. Such individuals, according to Goldziher, are regarded as standing beyond the acceptable boundaries of Muslim adherence. Thus, Goldziher's analysis reveals a dual aspect of Islamic doctrine—embracing differences within the community while simultaneously maintaining a stern stance against unbelief and deviations from essential theological principles.⁵³

An elucidation of these perspectives can be furthered through illustrative examples. Our initial consideration in this regard is directed towards the *Qadarites*. Those advocating the tenet of free will within Islamic theological discourse became identified as the Qadarites, a designation reflective of their limitation of predetermined fate, or *qadar*. In contrast, their adversaries earned the appellation of *Jabriya*, signifying proponents of blind compulsion (*jabr*).⁵⁴ According to Goldziher, the Qadarite movement holds historical significance within Islam as it

⁵² Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 241.

⁵³ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 241.

⁵⁴ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 245.

represents an initial stride towards emancipation from entrenched traditional notions. The Qadarites faced a notable lack of favor, evidenced by a plethora of hadiths, or traditions, that disparaged their perspectives. This attestation underscores the limited sympathy accorded to their doctrinal stance within the Islamic community. Particularly during the era of the Umayyads, political apprehensions contributed to a heightened aversion to Qadarite doctrines, as the Umayyad rulers perceived the potential for disruptive consequences emanating from the Qadarite movement. The Qadarites assume significance within the historical evolution of Islamic thought by virtue of their pioneering role in initiating a departure from the established tenets of simplistic Islamic orthodoxy.⁵⁵

The comprehension of Islamic heresy is enriched through the examination of individual exemplars. Our forthcoming example is poised to broaden our understanding and illuminate the intricacies associated with this theological phenomenon.

Ibn al-Muqaffa (d. 759 CE) emerges as a noteworthy figure within the spectrum of Islamic heresy, being summoned by the Caliph Mansur for a distinct purpose. The caliph, Mansur, engaged Ibn al-Muqaffa's services with the specific task of formulating an amnesty on behalf of Mansur's uncle⁵⁶ However, Mansur was displeased with the language employed by Ibn al-Muqaffa in the final document, which is commonly believed to have been the catalyst for Mansur's decision to subject Ibn al-Muqaffa to a gruesome execution. This involved the systematic severing of his limbs, each subsequently consigned to a raging fire.⁵⁷ Ibn al-Muqaffa is also celebrated for his translations from Pehlevi or Middle Persian literature into Arabic. Particularly noteworthy is his rendition of the Book of “*Kalila and Dimna*”, ultimately derived from the Sanskrit Fables of *Pancatantra*, regarded as an exemplar of refined stylistic expression.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 245.

⁵⁶ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 252.

⁵⁷ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 252.

⁵⁸ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 252.

Next important personality was Ibn Abi-al-Awja (d. 772 CE), who emerges as a particularly intriguing figure among the zindiqs, asserting a belief system wherein light is posited as the creator of good, and darkness as the progenitor of evil. Notably, he levels accusations of falsehood against certain prophets delineated in the Quran, singling out Abraham and Joseph.⁵⁹ In commonality with many contemporaneous zindiqs, Ibn Abi-al-Awja casts doubt upon the established dogma regarding the inimitability of the Quran. While a direct linkage between the aforementioned discourse and the historical persona of Ibn Abi-al-Awja remains elusive, it nonetheless provides a representative insight into prevalent zindiq convictions. His eventual capture led to his execution in the year 772.⁶⁰

Bashshar ibn Burd (d. 785 CE), stands out as a poet who faced apprehension, *zandaqa* charges, physical abuse, and ultimate submersion in a swamp. According to Vadja, he identified with the Shiite sect of the Kamiliyya and anathematized the entirety of the Muslim community.⁶¹ The charge of *zandaqa* stemmed from allegations of Bashshar's deviation from orthodox prayer practices. His verses suggest a potential denial of resurrection and the last judgment, with indications of a belief in metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls.⁶²

Salih, accused of Manichaeism and executed in 783, presents an intriguing case where his surviving poetry exhibits no heretical content. Nicholson suggests that Salih, possessing a speculative disposition, likely fell victim to the prevailing Muslim bias associating “philosophic minds” with outright disbelief.⁶³ Hammad Ajrad, affiliated with a community of freethinkers centered in Basra, although not occupying a prominent position within the Manichaean religious hierarchy, displayed sympathies toward the movement. His religious poetry even found

⁵⁹ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 253.

⁶⁰ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 253.

⁶¹ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 254.

⁶² Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 254.

⁶³ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 255.

incorporation into Manichaean liturgy. Ultimately, he faced capital punishment at the hands of the governor of Basra.⁶⁴

Abdallah al-Ma'arri (973-1057) stands out as an eminent rationalist who consistently champions “the prerogatives of reason in opposition to the assertions of convention, tradition, and authoritative doctrines.” His poetic expressions reflect a pervasive pessimism, with frequent contemplation of death portrayed as a highly desirable state and a critical stance on procreation, deeming it a sinful act. On occasion, he appears to disavow the concept of resurrection.⁶⁵ Central to al-Ma'arri's philosophical framework is the conviction that no living entity should suffer harm or injury. Embracing vegetarianism from his thirtieth year onward, he vehemently condemned the killing of animals for sustenance or recreation. In his poetic works, al-Ma'arri fervently advocates for abstention from consuming meat, fish, milk, eggs, and honey, grounded in the belief that such practices constitute an injustice to sentient beings capable of experiencing pain. He posits that it is morally reprehensible to inflict unnecessary harm upon fellow creatures.⁶⁶

Al-Ma'arri directs critical scrutiny at various tenets of Islam, notably denouncing the Pilgrimage as a “heathen's journey”.⁶⁷ His overarching perspective characterizes Islam and organized religion in general as human constructs, inherently flawed and corrupt. He contends that the architects of these religions pursued personal gain in wealth and power, while their leaders pursue secular objectives. The defense of these religions relies on dubious documents attributed to divinely inspired apostles, and adherents uncritically accept prescribed beliefs.⁶⁸

He incurred sanctions for his ideological convictions, illustrating the punitive consequences that may befall individuals who embrace rationalism within the framework of Islamic theology. The repercussions he faced were not a consequence of

⁶⁴ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 255.

⁶⁵ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 282-289.

⁶⁶ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 282-289.

⁶⁷ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 255.

⁶⁸ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 255.

widespread popularity but rather indicative of a recurrent impediment to his life imposed by religious scholars (ulema) on account of his rationalistic inclinations.

It is noteworthy to acknowledge the enduring persecution experienced by the Ismailis. Abbas, the ruler of the city of al-Rai, is reported to have eradicated more than 100,000 Ismailis.⁶⁹ Additionally, the Khubmesihis, a heretical sect active in Istanbul during the seventeenth century, espoused the belief that Jesus surpassed Muhammad in significance. Adherents of this sect faced the prospect of imprisonment and execution, and its origins were attributed to the executed heretic Kabid, who held similar convictions in 1527.⁷⁰

Scholars such as Qays bin Zubayr, Muti bin Iyas (704-85 CE), Abul Atahiya (748-828 CE), Babak (d. 838 CE) Abu Isa Muhammad bin Harun Warrak (d. 861 CE), Al-Mutanabbi (915-65 CE), and Abu Hayyan al-Tauhidi (d. ca. 1023), as well as Al-Rawandi (827-911 CE), suffered severe consequences, including execution, for their philosophical ideas or were subjected to punitive measures due to their intellectual pursuits.⁷¹

In examining the historical context of the treatment of heretical individuals by Muslim rulers in Bharat, it is evident that a significant number of unnamed individuals faced execution as a consequence of their perceived divergence from orthodox beliefs. This discussion will delve into notable instances, beginning with Mahmud of Ghazni (971-1030), who demonstrated a comparable ferocity towards individuals deemed heretical, akin to Dawud of Multan.⁷² In the year 1010, Mahmud launched an invasion into Dawud's realm, resulting in the mass slaughter of a considerable population identified as heretical.⁷³

A second noteworthy case involves Firuz Shah, who similarly exhibited severity, particularly when motivated by religious

⁶⁹ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 286.

⁷⁰ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 286.

⁷¹ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 207.

⁷² Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 221.

⁷³ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 221.

fever. ⁷⁴ According to Vincent Smith, Firuz Shah's actions were most brutal when driven by religious zeal. He undertook the apprehension of numerous Shias, subjecting some to execution, while others received lectures, and their literary works were consigned to flames. Firuz Shah also orchestrated the ulama to execute an individual purporting to be the Mahdi, earning commendation for this perceived virtuous act. ⁷⁵

Aurangzeb (1618-1707) implemented the execution of Sarmad, a Jewish Sufi saint, on grounds of heresy and apostasy. ⁷⁶ Sarmad, closely associated with Dara Shukoh from whom he gleaned significant insights, faced execution due to his assertion questioning the traditional belief that Muhammad did not ascend to heaven during the *miraj*. ⁷⁷ Aurangzeb, in an act reflecting a charge of *Ilhad*, deemed Dara Shukoh (d. 1659 CE) a *Mulhid* and sentenced him to death. This decision was prompted by Dara Shukoh's endeavor to incorporate positive aspects of Hindu dharma into his way of life, which was perceived as a departure from orthodox Islamic beliefs and practices.

In the contemporary era, including the 20th century, Ayatollah Khomeini, who was a Shia Muslim supreme leader of Iran, levied accusations against the Bhartiya novelist Salman Rushdie, asserting that he had insulted the Prophet. In response, a fatwa was issued, condemning Rushdie to death. This occurrence unfolded during a period in the 20th century when the right to liberty is considered an indispensable component of human existence.

In conclusion, our exploration has sought to shed light on the inherent intolerance within the Abrahamic religions, namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as evidenced by historical instances of widespread persecution and violence. The highlighted cases represent only a fraction of the broader

⁷⁴ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 221.

⁷⁵ Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 222.

⁷⁶ Natalia Prigarina, "Ghalib and Sarmad." *Indian Literature* 46, no. 5 (211) (2002): 154-176.

⁷⁷ Shahid, Latif & Abdul Qadir Mushtaq. "Dara Shikoh: Mystical and Philosophical Discourse," in *Muslim Saints of South Asia: the eleventh to fifteenth centuries*, Anna Suvorova (Routledge, 2004).

historical narrative, and an exhaustive account would span millions of pages and centuries to encapsulate the full extent of such occurrences. This glimpse into the past underscores the complexity and gravity of the challenges posed by religious intolerance within the Abrahamic traditions throughout history.

Hindu Dharma and Heresy: An overview of Bharat

Hindu Dharma emerges as a globally distinguished religious tradition due to its unparalleled tolerance, as illustrated by a notable dearth of historical occurrences involving the execution of individuals or groups dissenting from established religious norms. This ethos not only reflects a profound comprehension of human nature but also emphasizes the inherent human inclination to interrogate both terrestrial and transcendental realms. Within the Hindu dharma, a culture of inquiry is actively promoted, providing individuals the liberty to articulate and explore their religious concepts, philosophical perspectives, and ritual practices.

The absence of the concept of heresy within the Hindu framework is substantiated by the lack of instances wherein individuals faced execution for holding divergent beliefs as outlined in sacred texts and established traditions. Hindu Dharma consistently exhibits an ability to assimilate potentially divisive doctrinal variations. The assertion that “It is quite difficult in Bharat to be completely heretical” underscores the formidable challenge associated with embracing overt heresy within the cultural and religious milieu of Bharat.

In the realm of Hindu dharma, the lexicon for heresy lacks precise terminology, though certain terms, such as “Pasanda,” have historically been employed to categorize individuals who diverge from traditional beliefs. It is crucial to note that these designations were utilized for categorization rather than societal alienation, and historical evidence indicates an absence of executions based on categorical distinctions or divergent beliefs. The ethos of Hindu society embraced a pluralistic outlook, accommodating diverse perspectives.

Despite this inclusive ethos, some academicians with left-leaning perspectives and Hindu phobic inclinations have sought to draw parallels between caste and heretical categories, casting

aspersions on Hindu dharma. Such comparisons are, however, fundamentally flawed, as “*Mulhid*” in Islam represents a religious category, distinct from the social construct of “caste” in Hindu Dharma.

The coexistence and tranquillity inherent in Hindu Dharma can be discerned through illustrative instances, one of which is the Charvaka philosophy attributed to Brihaspati. This atheistic school of thought gained prominence during the 6th century BCE. This philosophical tradition boldly rejects the conventional belief in a supreme deity. At its core, Charvaka espouses a hedonistic worldview, emphasizing the pursuit of pleasure and the enjoyment of life. Additionally, it dismisses fundamental concepts such as the transmigration of the soul and the idea of rebirth. Notably, the adherents of Charvaka philosophy openly reject ritualistic practices, further distinguishing their perspective from prevalent religious norms. Remarkably, the propagation of such contrarian beliefs did not incur the customary responses of persecution, punitive measures, or societal censure often witnessed in the context of Abrahamic religions. The founder of Charvaka philosophy, Brihaspati, as well as its proponents and followers, did not face ostracism or judicial consequences for their divergence from prevailing religious and philosophical doctrines. This historical reception of Charvaka philosophy underscores a unique facet of the cultural and intellectual milieu in the land of Bharat, where coexistence and convenience were ingrained in the roots of Hindu dharma. The ethos of embracing diverse perspectives and dissenting philosophical viewpoints characterized the societal acceptance of Charvaka thought.

Similarly, the Ajivika philosophy, founded around the 6th century BCE by Makkhali Gosala, presents another noteworthy instance of philosophical dissent in ancient Bharat. The Ajivikas adhered to a deterministic worldview, asserting that all events are pre-determined and that free will is non-existent. Despite the inherent contradiction between their beliefs and prevailing philosophical perspectives, the followers of Ajivika philosophy did not encounter persecution, religious censure, or judicial inquiries. The divergence of their beliefs from existing societal and religious norms did not result in punitive measures or suppression. These historical instances collectively underscore

the pluralistic ethos of Bharat, where philosophical dissent was not met with coercion but rather with acceptance. The intellectual landscape of ancient Bharat, as evidenced by the reception of Charvaka and Ajivika philosophies, reflects a remarkable openness to diverse thought and a willingness to accommodate dissenting viewpoints within the broader fabric of Hindu dharma.

Further examination reveals attempts to portray Jainism and Buddhism as distinct heretical categories. However, these sects, integral to the cultural fabric, emerged organically over time, developing unique practices. Importantly, Gautama Buddha and Mahavir Swami, founders of these sects, did not face inquisition or legal repercussions for their philosophical tenets. On the contrary, their teachings garnered widespread acceptance among both the populace and ruling elites, extending beyond geographical confines. Challenging misconceptions, it is imperative to scrutinize claims that Pushyamitra Shunga targeted Buddhist temples due to religious disparities. Historical evidence contradicts this narrative, as Pushyamitra Shunga not only supported but contributed to the construction of the Bharhut Stupa during his reign. The notion that he was a perpetrator of religious persecution stands in stark contradiction to his documented role in the establishment and financial backing of the stupa. These counterarguments serve to challenge and rectify the dissemination of misleading assertions propagated by certain segments of academia with ideological predispositions.

If we focus towards Harsha Vardhana a notable king of Bharatavarsha, it is noteworthy that he initially adhered to the worship of Lord Shiva, yet concurrently demonstrated a supportive stance towards other sectarian beliefs. Harsha Vardhana refrained from harming individuals based on their divergent religious thoughts and practices. Notably, during an encounter with the Chinese pilgrim Huiyen Tsang at his court, Harsha Vardhana extended all possible amenities, cognizant of Huiyen Tsang's distinct practices and objective of collecting Buddhist texts. This exemplifies the benevolence extended by Harsha Vardhana toward diverse beliefs. Thus, the cultural milieu of Bharat has consistently exhibited an inclination

towards fostering knowledge, with no historical instances of persecution in this regard.

Upon scrutinizing the era subsequent to the aggressive incursions by Arabs and Turks, numerous instances reflective of a similar trend emerge. Despite being exposed to the concept of heresy as understood within Abrahamic religions, Hindu Dharma remained resilient to its influence. This resilience is visible through upcoming examples.

An illustrative example can be drawn from the Lingayat sect within Hindu dharma, distinguished by its distinctive ritual practices. As adherents of Shaivism, they venerate Shiva as the principal deity and carry a Shivalinga with them as a symbol of devotion. Furthermore, upon closer examination, their cremation practices diverge from those of other sects, as they prefer burial over cremation. Remarkably, in the annals of history, there is no recorded instance of Hindu states suppressing the Lingayat sect or persecuting its members due to their unique beliefs and ritual practices. This exemplifies the inclusive and accepting nature of Hindu dharma.

An illustrative instance is found in the persona of Kabir, a significant figure with considerable influence on Bhartiya society. Kabir expressed dissent toward prevailing societal norms, yet he did not face persecution for his divergent thoughts; instead, he is revered as a sacred figure for his verses and teachings. The manifestation of this reverence is evident in the existence of temples dedicated to Kabir in the sacred city of Benaras. This nuanced response exemplifies the distinctive nature of Hindu Dharma, wherein dissenting thoughts are not only tolerated but also respected, as evidenced by the construction of a temple in acknowledgment of Kabir's contributions within the city.

Hindu Dharma, in contrast to the stringent principles found in some other religious traditions, does not impose rigid constraints on the thoughts of individuals. Rather, it provides a broad framework that allows individuals the freedom to contemplate, preach, and act according to their inclinations. This stands in contrast to Abrahamic religions, which often prescribe adherence to a singular path dictated by a named deity. Hindu Dharma, on

the other hand, centers around the concept of *Trimarga*, encompassing three paths of yoga: *Karma Marga*, *Bhakti Marga*, and *Jnana Marga*. This signifies that an individual can attain spiritual liberation through any of these paths, without strict limitations.

In Hindu Dharma, the principles articulated are designed not to restrict thought or mete out punishment, but rather to guide individuals toward acquiring knowledge and achieving salvation. Hindu Dharma places a strong emphasis on the plurality of thoughts and cultural diversity, fostering an environment that allows for a wide range of perspectives and beliefs.

Conclusion

Within Hindu Dharma, the concept of heresy is notably absent, reflecting its overarching and tolerant religious principles. In contrast, major global religions such as Christianity and Islam have grappled extensively with heretical beliefs, placing significant emphasis on the adherence of their followers to specific doctrinal tenets rather than solely their actions.⁷⁸

The historical precedent of applying the death penalty for apostasy and related offenses is not exclusive to Islam; it finds antecedents in both Judaism and Christianity, particularly during the medieval period. Contemporary instances of such legal measures persist in certain Islamic countries, exemplified by Pakistan, where blasphemy can lead to the imposition of the death penalty for those expressing dissent against the religion.

In the historical context, the execution of Mansur al-Hallaj in Baghdad stemmed from his assertion of divine identity, notably his proclamation, “*Āna al-haqq*” (I am the truth). Subsequently, he was summoned to the court, and influenced by the recommendations of religious scholars (ulema), he faced execution due to his declaration of unity between God and humanity originating from a common essence. This relatively minor doctrinal variance became the catalyst for his demise.

⁷⁸ Chas C Clifton, *Encyclopaedia of Heresies and Heretics* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1998) xi

In contrast, within the Sanatana tradition of Bharat, Upanishads hold a central position as philosophical texts that delve into profound existential inquiries. Notably, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad contains the mantra “*Aham Brahmasmi* (1.4.10 of Yajur veda)” (I am divine), an assertion of one's divinity. This assertion represents an exceptionally transcendent philosophical inquiry. However, it is significant to note that no historical records document executions or persecution by religious authorities, the state, society in response to such declarations. Instead, these philosophical discourses were embraced and even nurtured by society, persisting through successive ages. The stark contrast between the suppression of similar expressions in Baghdad and the promotion of such ideas in the culturally rich land of Bharat underscores the remarkable tolerance inherent in the Hindu dharma, contributing to its enduring significance.

In the context of religious perspectives, Judaism perceives Christianity as a form of heresy, and reciprocally, Christianity regards Islam as a deviant branch of its own faith, warranting capital punishments for adherents. This stands in contrast to certain religious doctrines that advocate the idea of enduring consequences for not venerating a particular deity. Hindu Dharma, in particular, does not endorse such a concept. Rather, it places emphasis on self-realization and upholds the philosophical principle of “*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah*,” underscoring the collective well-being of all beings.

In summary, our analysis leads us to the conclusion that Hindu Dharma stands out for its unparalleled tolerance within religious practices. This emphasis on tolerance is intricately linked to the broader objectives of societal well-being and even the animals, aligning with the principles of benefiting both society and the natural world.

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