

Religious Co-existence: Tolerance and Contestation amongst Hindu and Muslim Faith Groups of Indian Origin in South Africa

Sultan Khan

Department of Sociology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
E-mail: khans@ukzn.ac.za

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ABSTRACT The 9/11 bombings sparked worldwide debate on religious tolerance and co-existence amongst different faith groups. Living in a global village with porous boundaries, the movement of people to different regions and localities has added a plural dimension to the practice of religion. In the case of South Africa, such religious pluralism has existed for more than three centuries. For the past 150 years, Indians of both the Hindu and Islamic faiths have added to this pluralism, making South Africa a religious Rainbow Nation. Indians as a diaspora are not a religiously homogenous grouping although they have a common ancestry. During their early years of settlement in South Africa, they succeeded in establishing a sense of religious identity in diverse community groups, but the apartheid era fragmented their social cohesion. This disruption of community life paved the way for religious tolerance, creating new contested spaces for religious practice. This article aims to provide a socio-historical analysis of these contested religious spaces in the different phases of their social evolution and sets the foundation for future research in the context of national transformation in a democratic era and global contestations for religious identity, co-existence and tolerance.