

## **Fundamentalism/Religious Fundamentalism**

Fundamentalism refers to one's unwavering belief in the infallibility of the religious/philosophical scriptures in all matters of faith, religion and philosophy. The attachment or belief is such strong that the believer takes a militant stand sometimes. Its purpose is to reaffirm the key theological tenets of one's religion and stress on inerrancy of every word of his/her scriptures. Fundamentalism is generally understood to have religious connotation but it can be non-religious also.

Religious fundamentalists believe in the superiority of their religious teachings, and in a strict division between righteous people and evildoers (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 1992, 2004). This belief system regulates religious thoughts, but also all conceptions regarding the self, others, and the world.

Religious fundamentalism is the movement based on belief of a community (or individuals) in absolute authority of the sacred texts of its own religion or faith. They believe that their own religion is beyond any fault and thus, should be forced on others. There is no scope for scrutiny or even criticism of the scriptures on logical explanations and scientific evidences.

Religious fundamentalism is a countercultural response to changes in society, especially with respect to the "secular modern world." Fundamentalists call for a return to what they consider the core ideas of their religious system. They typically focus on the authority of sacred texts, as understood by strict, narrow interpretations, and are often known for their active involvement in the public sphere. While the term first applied to certain Protestant movements at the beginning of the twentieth century in the USA, the term has since been applied to religious movements in most of the world's major religious traditions.

### **Origin of religious fundamentalism**

Modern religious fundamentalism as a movement is thought to have started in United States among the conservative Presbyterian theologians in the late 19th century. It soon spread to the Baptists and other religious by 1920s. The key objective of this movement was to reaffirm five theological tenets including infallibility of every word of the Bible; virgin birth of Jesus; bodily resurrection of Jesus, that Jesus's death was the atonement for sin and historical reality of Jesus's miracles. Those who subscribed to these five fundamentals were called Fundamentalists.

However, soon this word was also used for Protestant Christians who had a separate attitude from modernity. Later, this term was used for extreme believers of any community. Today, most religions of the world tend to be associated with fundamentalist elements.

## **Fundamentalism in Various Religions**

### **Christian Fundamentalism**

Apart from the Five Fundamentals mentioned above, the Christian fundamentalists don't accept the theory of evolution and some of them believe in the so called premillennial eschatology which says that world is doomed till Jesus returns and defeats the antichrist.

### **Jewish Fundamentalism**

This is prevalent in Israel. The Jewish fundamentalists make effort to establish strict adherence to orthodox Jewish culture and Jewish Law (halacha) in all aspects of Israeli life.

### **Islamic Fundamentalism**

Islamic fundamentalists believe in literal interpretation of the Quran and Hadith and attempt to enforce the Sharia law into every aspect of the Islamic Life. One of the early Islamic Fundamentalist was Ibn Taymiyyah (13th century) who not only initiated a reform movement but also triggered a Jihad against Mongols. However, the modern Islamic fundamentalism originated in 19th century as an Arabian (Wahabi Movement) fundamentalist movement and got nurtured with the overt and covert support of western powers. The western powers (UK & US) nurtured them as potential hedge against expansion of Soviet Union. Thus, Wahabi movement supported by Saudi Arabia is often described as being responsible for the popularity of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism

### **Hindu Fundamentalism**

Unlike most other religions, Hindu Fundamentalism does not assign supreme authority to one scripture, one god or Prophet or one belief. It is a complex set of multiple beliefs, attitudes, faiths, scripts, sects and sub-sects. This is one of the reasons that the Fundamentalism in Hinduism is more subdued than other major religions though not fully non-existent.

### **Sikh Fundamentalism**

Sikhism is one of the youngest religions of the world and has been particularly associated with Hinduism. However, the Khalistan movement of late 1980s was seen as a Sikh Fundamentalist Movement whose main aim was to achieve an independent Sikh homeland.

### **Buddhism and Jainism**

The followers of these religions exhibit little fundamentalism due to peace and non-violence being their basic tenets. However, some sections such as Buddhists of Rakhine state in Myanmar, Buddhists of Sri Lanka, Soka Gakkai sect of Nichiren Buddhism in Japan etc. have been labelled as being fundamentalists due to variety of reasons.

### **Difference between Fundamentalism and Communalism**

Fundamentalism has gained wide currency in the contemporary world and it refers to a variety of norms, values, attitudes which either judge the fundamentalists or condemn them outright. This word is sometimes used in place of communalism. However, there is subtle difference between the two in below aspects:

- While communalism is all about political or economic interests of a particular community, fundamentalism is enforcement of sectarianism with all rigidity for political mobilisation of a community for the power-goals of its elite.
- While communalism is the exploitation of sentiments of a religion-based community for a secular goal (i.e. political power) fundamentalism is enforcing narrow sectarian practices for strengthening religious orthodoxy as well as achieving political power.

Thus, there is a very thin line that differentiated the fundamentalism with communalism. However, in today's context, both are political instruments and try to mobilize people on religious grounds.