

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Coexistence of diverse religious faith is found in many countries of the world. In other words, religious pluralism is an attitude or policy regarding the diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in society. In modern societies, especially postmodern societies, there seems to be no one dominant religion: there are many religions, or a plurality of religions. Sociologists describe such a situation as religious pluralism. There can be inter-religious and intra-religious diversity.

Religious pluralism is distinct from other forms, such as ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity.

Indian society, for example, is composed of diverse cultures, peoples, languages and religions. Diversity of religious faiths has existed over a very long period of time as India has been a country of not only a very ancient history, but also a place where communities from outside continuously kept on coming and settling down.

Religious pluralism is both an opportunity and a problem. It can be an opportunity because when multiple religious beliefs coexist, it allows for a greater exchange of ideas and worldviews. It also enables people increased freedom to choose their personal faith because they are exposed to a variety of possibilities. Two processes happen as a result of this: a) people find that their membership of their particular group or religion no longer binds them to society as a whole; and b) the state finds it difficult to formally support one 'main religion' without causing conflict.

"Pluralism is often perceived as a threat to faith, associated with relativism and a loss of religious substance. I take a contrary position. It seems to me that pluralism is good for faith...."

...This pluralist age has important implications for religion, but they are different from those of secularity. We can speak of two pluralisms. The first concerns the fact that many religions and worldviews coexist in the same society. This is not unique to the modern era. The second kind of pluralism involves the coexistence of the secular discourse with all of these religious discourses. This pluralism, which is uniquely modern, has tended to accentuate the first kind, the pluralism of religions and worldviews. When I'm sick and my doctor is Jewish or Hindu, our shared secular vocabulary gives us a commonality that makes our religious differences something almost scandalous."

Peter.L.Berger, April, 2016

Some examples :

1. Hinduism is naturally a pluralistic. A well-known *Rig Vedic* hymn says: "Truth is One, though the sages know it variously". Similarly, in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (4:11), God, manifesting as an incarnation, states: "As people approach me, so I receive them. All paths lead to me". The Hindu religion has no theological difficulties in accepting degrees

of truth in other religions. According to Swami Bhaskarananda, Hinduism emphasizes that everyone actually worships the same God, whether one knows it or not.

2. The Sufis were practitioners of the esoteric mystic traditions within an Islam at a certain point. Sufism is defined by the Sufi master or Pir (Sufism) or fakeer or Wali in the language of the people by dancing and singing and incorporating various philosophies, theologies, ideologies and religions together (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Paganism, Platonism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and so forth with time). Famous Sufi masters are Rumi, Shadhili, Sheikh Farid, Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain, Shams Tabrizi, Waris Shah, Ghazali, Mian Mir, Attar of Nishapur, Amir Khusrow, Salim Chishti. The Sufis were considered by many to have divine revelations with messages of peace, tolerance, equality, pluralism, love for all and hate for no one.
3. Jainism : *Anekāntavāda*, the principle of relative pluralism, is one of the basic principles of Jainism. In this view, the truth or the reality is perceived differently from different points of view, and no single point of view is the complete truth. Jain doctrine states that an object has infinite modes of existence and qualities and they cannot be completely perceived in all its aspects and manifestations, due to inherent limitations of the humans. Only the Kevalins—the omniscient beings—can comprehend the object in all its aspects and manifestations, and all others are capable of knowing only a part of it. Consequently, no one view can claim to represent the absolute truth—only relative truths. Jains compare all attempts to proclaim absolute truth with *andhgajnyaya* or the "maxim of the blind men and elephant", wherein all the blind men claimed to explain the true appearance of the elephant, but could only partly succeed due to their narrow perspective. For Jains, the problem with the blind men is not that they claim to explain the true appearance of the elephant; the problem is doing so to the exclusion of all other claims. Since absolute truth is many-sided, embracing any truth to the exclusion of others is to commit the error of *ekānta* (one-sidedness). Openness to the truths of others is one way in which Jainism embodies religious pluralism.