

Difference between diversity and pluralism

Key concepts

- Diversity simply means variation and can occur within any religion in response to cultural, political and other historical factors. Pluralism however is the existence of different groups of people with distinguishing beliefs or practices co-existing within the same society with the collectively agreed view that this is a good thing.
- Hinduism accepts that there is a range of ways for people to engage and develop their spirituality in order to live successful and fulfilling lives such as the four Yoga Paths. There are also variations in the cultural traditions through which Hinduism is practiced in the community. According to the Rig Veda, the challenge before humanity is to live well together in a world where even the wisest see the truth differently to each other.
- A good example of Hindu pluralism in action is the Sarvodaya movement started by Mahatma Gandhi. Sarvodaya intended to elevate the most deprived and re-unite all sections of society in mutual compassion and care by focussing on principles which enshrine care and respect for all whilst also honouring differences.
- Exclusivism is the doctrine that only one religion or belief system is true and 'right'. This is the opposite of the pluralistic principle underpinning Hinduism. This can lead to conflict between Hinduism that wishes to be inclusive of all faiths and those faiths which see themselves as exclusive carriers of the 'True Message'
- Hindus believe that whichever deity people pray to, they engage with the same spiritual consciousness. There is also an openness with which Hindu knowledge and spiritual tools are shared with people of all faiths.
- Hinduism supports the concept of ishta deva. That is the freedom of the individual to engage with the one divine reality (Brahman), by worshipping or praying to whichever deity is most inspirational or engaging for them.
- Hindus believe that the level and quality of spiritual development will depend on the individual's own choices and actions on the journey of their own life.
- Most Hindus are respectful of deities, not only as being part of a unified consciousness (Brahman), but because they are sacred to others, even if they do not worship that deity themselves.

Key quotes

"In Practical religion, Hinduism recognises that there are those who wish to see God face to face, others who delight in the endeavour to know the truth of it all. Some find peace in action, others in non-action." **Radhakrishnan, S., 'An Idealist View of Life', Mandala.**

"Earth provides enough for every man's need not greed." - **Pyarelal, N., 'Mahatma Gandhi: The last Phase' Navajivan Trust (1956).**

"As people approach me, so I receive them. All paths lead to me." **Bhagavad Gita 4:11.**

"If we are to respect others' religions, as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty." **Mahatma Gandhi, from Rao, K.L. S, 'Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion', Motilal, (1990).**

"As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take, through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee!" **Vivekananda, World Parliament, 1893 speech extract.**

Key words

Diversity	Pluralism	Yoga Paths	Rig Veda	Sarvodaya
Exclusivism	Gandhi	deity	spiritual	ishta deva
Brahman	sacred	cultural	humanity	

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some would argue that Hinduism is a pluralist tradition.
 Others would argue that it is diverse rather than pluralistic.
 Some would argue that it depends on the traditions within Hinduism rather than Hinduism as a whole.

Key questions

Is Hinduism an inclusivist tradition?
 To what extent does the concept of Sarvodaya influence Hindu attitudes towards other religions?
 In what ways are exclusivist and pluralist worldviews similar and different?