

A Study of the Concept of Pluralism

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Abstract

Pluralism opens the way for actual and different religious commitments. A few people express an opinion that pluralism definitely waters down an individual's own doctrinal ideology by way of acknowledging that rest of others have faith in differently. Aside from this, a few wrongly think that a pluralistic position points out to develop no real diversity between many religious cultures, traditions and their principles. Besides this, a pluralist culture or society is a hub of encounters actual commitments as well as original differences. The great kingdoms and empires have face up to this reality. Muslims have also confronted this phenomenon at the time of their rule in various parts of the world.

Keywords: Pluralism, religious, ideology, differences, society, phenomenon

Introduction:

The concept of Pluralism is very much earlier as like the origin of the term. It can be used as an ideology in addition to as a methodology. Pluralism concerns with the questions of harmony and co-existence in a society which have too many religions, cultures, languages, racial and ethnic groups. As an ideology it accepts and welcome to diversity and as methodology pluralism focus to deal with the complications arising out of diversity, religious, cultural, linguistic, racial and racial. In Reader's Digest Reverse Dictionary: "The word "plural" is an adjective, which means, "containing more than one kind", things or class – a plural society." Plurally" (adverb came from) Middle English via French from Latin pluralis, (plus) meaning "more." Pluralism is defined as "Social co- existence of several racial, religious or cultural groups."¹Dale F. Eickelman mentions that in Arabic "*ta'addudīyah*



means Pluralism. It has many forms such as *dīnīyah* (religious), *thaqāfiyah* (cultural), *siyāsīyah* (political), *Iqtasādīyah* (economic) Pluralism is the essence of Islām. There are many dominant views among Muslims concerning religious and ethical pluralism”.² And also, “In Arabic speaking countries pluralism has been indigenized into the term ta‘addud since 1980s and has become one of the buzzwords of the 1990”.³ Muhammad Legenhausen explains that: “The term pluralism was first used to manifest a metaphysical doctrine by Christian Wolff”.⁴ In Arabic, a very close word that take place in these sources is: *al-samah* and *al-tasāmuḥ*, generally translated as “tolerance”, that is may be accurate. The Oxford English Dictionary defines: “tolerance as the action or practice of enduring or sustaining pain or hardship; the power or capacity of enduring.”⁵

Muḥammad ‘Abd-ul- Ḥalīm talks about these words as: “*Samah* and *tasāmuḥ*” thus signify two distinctive meanings, namely generosity (*jūdwkaram*), and ease (*al-tasāḥul*). This would distinguish *samah* from ‘tolerance’, which indicates a superior party grudgingly ‘bearing’ or ‘putting up with’ the different other. “*tasāmuḥ* denotes generosity and ease from both sides on a reciprocal basis.”⁶ About the same time, John Locke opines that: “pluralistic values focus on the individual and public level. Though there were many other philosophers at that time, Locke’s philosophy comes most contiguous to Western and Islamic pluralism. Later, the word was popularized by William James”.⁷ So also in other languages such as Indonesian (*kemajemukan*) and Malay (*majmuk*) the term has been indigenized. “In Muslim countries the response of pluralism is varied. Some of them see it as “antithetical to” Islām, some of them see it as “compatible with” Islām, and the rest see it as “the very essence of Islām.”⁸

Definitions of Pluralism:

In the twenty-first century Pluralism is differently defined as political, legal, and/or religious, it shows a vigorous ideal that tries the answer how could to get together in the world which marked by competing forms of difference and distinction. Pluralism, in a way, conveys a commitment to understanding, recognizing and living with others who are not like us. In this sense, it is a regulatory view that allows norms for acceptable identity and behavior, creating new possible ways for social engagement and halting others.

Entangled and embedded in a wide range of institutions, whether religious, civic, pluralism is never neutral in its instructions. Public and academic discussions of its significance and importance, therefore, are often attended by a spate of concerns regarding changing political, religious and moral authorities. As with all such concepts/views, it has both its critics and its champions. Dictionary describes pluralism as: “The condition of being plural: A condition of society in which numerous ethnic, religious, or cultural groups remain distinct but coexist within one nation.”⁹

Pluralism Means Peaceful Co-Existence:

Pluralism needs the effective and fruitful dialogue which opens different point of views. Dialogue does not require that everyone or anyone would be agree with each other in discussion. The procedure of people’s discussion will surely expose in the spheres of agreement as well as disagreement. So, Pluralism engages views at the time of conversation with an individual’s own views and commitments. Here some definitions of pluralism are given below: Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary describes Pluralism in these words:

“The existence of many different groups of people in one society, for example people of different races or of different political or religious beliefs: cultural Pluralism, The belief that it is possible and good for different groups of people to live together in peace in one society.”¹⁰ BBC English Dictionary says: “Pluralism is the existence of a variety of different opinions or principles within the same society, system, or philosophy.”¹¹ In Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Pluralism means: “A condition or system in which two or more states, groups, principles, etc. co-exist.”¹² Same meanings of Pluralism explained by another English Dictionary i.e.: “Peaceful co-existence of people with different ideological or religious group in a society.”¹³ Diana L. Eck talks about it in religious sense, says: “This means that in a country, there are many different faiths which are all active. In short religious pluralism is all about statistics and data. People of different faiths hold on to their faiths and explain to others how they want to be understood. Real pluralism is the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference without being ignorant of other religion.”¹⁴ Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics define Pluralism as follows: “Pluralism is currently defined as the metaphysical doctrine that all existence is ultimately reducible to a multiplicity of distinct and independent

beings or elements.”¹⁵ The Oxford Dictionary also describes that: “A form of society in which the members of minority groups maintain their independent cultural traditions.”¹⁶ So, we can say that Pluralism did not deducible to solidarity, unity and harmony, and did not advocate to this concept that there would be only one religion which is universal and which is common for all. But, Pluralism is a matter of fact of behavior or attitude which having realized the irreducibility of the many to unity, tries to engulf the whole without reducing it to the sum total of its parts or to a formal unity of whatever kind.¹⁷ However, there are many definitions of pluralism but the one here that, I think, most useful is to define it as: “A theological and philosophical perspective on the world that emphasizes diversity rather than homogeneity, multiplicity rather than unity and difference rather than sameness. Pluralism, as I desire to investigate it, looks for truth as truth wherever it is found recognizes that the investigation for truth is in all human communities.”¹⁸

Therefore, as being a descriptive term, Pluralism presence a lot of diverse angles inside the same culture or society. By its very nature, Pluralism does not bring about relativism; it directly implies mention the divergence. Furthermore, the word pluralism is also used for diversity. Pluralism depicts the reality which can be find in modern western societies, it’s a diversity of views, moral and religious —exists. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica says: “Pluralism, in political science, the viewpoint that in liberal democracies power is divided among a variety of economic and ideological pressure groups and is not held by a group of elites. [Pluralism](#) assumes that diversity is [beneficial](#) to society and that autonomy should be enjoyed by [disparate](#) functional or cultural groups within a society, including trade unions religious groups, ethnic minorities and professional organizations. A view that different ethnic, religious, racial and political groups should, be allowed to flourish in a single society”...¹⁹

Pluralism as an Ideology

Newbigin here makes an important distinction among pluralism being an ideology and as a fact of life which is a faith that pluralism is to be encouraged and desired, those normative allegations that reality is to be censurable as divisive and imperialist. The basic phenomenon of pluralism, then, is nothing novel. What is new is the intellectual and wise response to

this phenomenon: “the suggestion that plurality of beliefs is not only a matter of observable fact, but is theoretically justified—in intellectual and cultural life in general, and in relation to the religions in particular. The claims by an individual or any one group have any exclusive hold on ‘truth’ are thus treated as the intellectual equivalent of fascism. Importantly, the first casualty of the pluralist agenda is truth. Pluralism, in a way, a general emphasizes diversity rather than homogeneity/concord, multiplicity rather than unity, difference rather than homologous. It treats the universe explicable in terms of many principles or much ultimate substance.”²⁰ There is another thing that: “It considers the universe explicable in terms of many principles or many ultimate substances.”²¹ Syed Farīd Alatas talks about it: “Would it be right to say, as one observer questioned that Islām wants its adherents/ followers to merely tolerate living side by side with the adherents/ followers of other religions and to tolerate the hardship and pain of such co-existence? The given answer is that the perspective of the Islamic stand as one of mere tolerance is not arguable. The Islāmic model goes beyond tolerance.”²²

Pluralism in the context of Religion:

The term pluralism is used in the context of religion. Thus, pluralism is the idea that (i) diverse religious groups can live together in one society under their own lawful religious systems, and (ii) that no single group has a monopoly on “salvation”. “Pluralism” is differentiated from “inclusivism” as such: while an advocator of the former recognizes the salvific validity of other religions, the latter tolerates the existence of diverse opinion but believes itself haughty. ‘Exclusivism’, however, refuses completely any divergence of opinion/viewpoint and asserts stressfully its own opinion as true. One of the biggest perceptive analysis of western modern culture is Lesslie Newbigin, he remained bishop and a pastor and latterly a renowned figure in the “public truth of the gospel” a United Kingdom’s movement. Giving commentary on the subject “the gospel in a pluralist society”, Newbigin describes: “It has become a commonplace to say that we live in a pluralist society—not only a society which is in fact plural in the variety of religions, cultures and lifestyles which it grasp but pluralist in the sense, that this plurality is celebrated/enjoyed as things to be cherished and approved”.²³

Those who have contemporary context and also interested in religion and politics, Pluralism is the element which recently emerged them. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary: “It was used as a term in philosophy in 1882 and in political science only from 1919. In 1933 it is recognized as referring to a theory which opposes monolithic state power and in the general sense of toleration of diversity within a society or state. One can do addition to this that major philosophical works dedicated to the view of pluralism have been introduced in the twentieth century and are clearly typical in current times and the issues or problems that have appeared within them”.²⁴

Merriam-Webster explains it that: “A situation in which people of different social classes, religions, races, etc., are together in a society but continue to have their different traditions and interests the belief that people of different social classes, religions, races, etc., should live together in a society.”²⁵

And The American New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy says about it: “A conviction that various religious, ethnic, racial, and political groups should be allowed to thrive in a single society. In metaphysics, pluralism can also mean an alternative to dualism and monism. A pluralist asserts that there are more than two kinds of principles, whereas the dualist maintains there are only two and a monist only one.”²⁶Pluralism has importance in the present world. “First, it provides cultural and spiritual resources for the survival of different people in their search for freedom, vanity, self-respect and human dignity. Second, Rajnī Kotharī (Noble Prize Winner) points out, “a plurality of religions, cultures, ethnic groups and languages can be a guarantee against racism because it will resist the imposition of any “one and only” religion or ideology on all people”. Third, pluralism introduces or advocates an element of choice by allowing alternatives visions of reality/truth and ways of life. It makes the life comfort and peace beyond the shackles of cast, color and creed. It speaks about equality and harmony”.²⁷

Pluralism and Diversity:

Pluralism demands some knowledge of our differences. Tolerance is vital factor of pluralism but it should not be a block for engagement. Patel reminds us that: “Pluralism is not a default position... Pluralism is an intentional commitment that is imprinted through action. It requires deliberate engagement with difference, outspoken loyalty to others, and

proactive protection in the breach. You have to choose to step off the faith line onto the side of [religious] pluralism, and then you have to make your voice heard. To follow Robert Frost, it is easy to see the death of pluralism in the fire of a suicide bombing. But the ice of silence will kill it just as well.”²⁸ So, Pluralism is an active commitment with the diversity and plurality. It’s not more the fact of diversity and plurality alone. It require commitments and participation. Diversity, in the present scenario means the isolation and the formation of ghettos with light connection among them. The subject of pluralism is exchange, meeting and two-way traffic. So an inclusive definition of pluralism is not an easy task i.e., we cannot stand on the static one dimensional definition. According to D. A. Carson: “Defining pluralism sometimes is “tricky.”²⁹The reason is that the camp adoptive pluralism faces that it is the fine stand and most tolerant school of thought, allowing folks to live in harmony, balance way regardless of what religion they follow. R. Kent Hughes explains: “This kind of thinking...demands that you don’t only make space for a neighbor to believe what he believes, but that you also refrain from publicly disagreeing with him.”³⁰

Conclusion

We can say that Pluralism is an ideology or worldview that accepts and recognizes the existence of "Plurality" or "Diversity" in a society. Plurality is e.g., in terms of religion, ethnicity, customs, race etc., aspects of this is usually the basis for the formation of a vast variety of small groups, limited and distinctive, as well as the different one group to another group, in a pluralistic society. So, we find out the meaning living in a society, the followers of different religions and convictions should live together with tolerance, peace, love and gentility. Everyone can enjoy the freedom of conviction and practice. While considering all aspects and derive a combine thought that whatever will be the definition of pluralism, the main aim is that followers of every religion should take care and tolerate other religions with peace and tolerance.

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