Since the dawn of human civilization religion has played a major role in creating cohesion among the people. It works as a foundation stone for values and ethics. Thus religion has a strong normative function for the well being of the human societies. However, it has also been come to our notice that religious issues and sensitivities cause conflicts and misunderstandings among the people of different faiths. It is an established fact that a religion binds together members of the same faith or community but at the same time it separates people of a particular faith or community from the members of other faiths or communities. History of humankind has often been characterized by inter-religious conflict. Though much progress has been made in overcoming blatant forms of institutionalized religious discrimination, yet historic tensions among the followers of various religious groups in different parts of the world ensure that the question of inter-religious relations will remain an important issue for the common masses as well as for religious and political leaders and all this makes it necessary to reflect afresh upon the problems and possibilities of inter-religious relations.

In this post modern era, the world is progressively turning into a global village and different faith communities are forced, more than ever before, to come closer and closer. People have been put in a situation in which they are not in a position to ignore others. People of one faith community have to ponder over their attitudes and relations to adherents
of other faith communities. It does not mean that they had never heard and knew about religions other than themselves, but never had such a situation in which their presence been so visible and impossible to ignore as in the last few decades. Therefore, religious communities have come up with several basic paradigms of inter-religious relations. In the field of Religious Studies there are several theological positions in order to define and understand the relationship between religions, yet, the threefold typology remains dominant.\(^1\) The threefold typology\(^2\) is exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. These theological positions within religion are rooted in history of religions itself. Prior to the 1980s, the three primary positions concerning other religions were "discontinuity" (Hendrick Kraemer), fulfillment (John Farquhar), and mutual appreciation (William Hocking)\(^3\). However, the respective works of Alan Race and Gavin D'Costa have since laid the foundation for the current three-fold positions typical of the current nature of the debate\(^4\).

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In the following pages an attempt has been made to elaborate the following:

1. Religious Inclusivism
2. Religious Exclusivism (or “Particularism”)

1. Religious Exclusivism (or “Particularism”)
   “Salvation is found in only one religion.”

The Exclusivistic attitudes of some of the evangelical religions have been explained variously. The Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, defines Exclusivism in following words:

The claim that one faith is true, and that by implication other religions are more or less false to the extent to which they differ from the “one true faith”, is based upon the foundational claim that God has spoken to mankind through some public revelation, which reveals the will of the divinity. The concept of “one true faith”, though pertaining to religion, is also based on the basic philosophical law, known as the Law of Non-Contradiction. Two propositions which contradict each other cannot both be true. Therefore, various religious traditions offering contradictory doctrines cannot be affirmed as equally “true”.

The exposition of Religious Exclusivism put forth by G. Richards⁵ further clarifies the above:

“The traditional view, called exclusivism, views religious others as basically living in the darkness, out of touch with divine reality. They are hopelessly lost and if there is any hope for their salvation, they must leave their religion and convert to the only true (or revealed) religion (which is the religion of the person in question, i.e. of the exclusivist). This view has been the most common in the history of religions, especially of monotheistic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). Today it is progressively disappearing. It is still held primarily in the most conservative circles.”

The New World Encyclopedia⁶ defines Exclusivism as a ‘doctrine’ of some faith and goes on saying that the believer of this doctrine only will attain salvation and the rest will not. It explains as:

“Religious exclusivism is the doctrine that the adherents of a particular faith, or group of faiths, will attain salvation while groups that do not share this faith will not attain the blessings associated with such a state. In its more extreme form, religious exclusivism teaches that only the members of

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⁶ Retrieved from the website www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Exclusivism%2C_religious.
one religion or sect will reach Heaven, while others will be doomed to eternal damnation.”

Religious exclusivism is most prevalent in Abrahamic religions. The former teachings of the Catholic Church as well as the teachings of several denominations in Christianity advocates the idea that only those who adhere to the true faith will reach Heaven, while those outside of the true faith will go to Hell and herein we find the idea of religious exclusivism in Christianity. Whereas in Islam the acceptance of sincere Jews and Christians as people “of the Book” along with Muslims, but at the same time rejection of people of other religious traditions - as well as impious Jews and Christians – as “infidels” who will never become the part of Allah or paradise could be noted as the exclusivistic doctrine of Islam.

Such an exclisivistic idea is very dangerous for the human society/societies as it lead to the justification of religious wars, forced conversions of those who are outside that particular faith which sometimes leads to the persecution of religious minorities. It also disparages inter-religious fellowship and marriage.

However, it does not mean that those who believe and practice an exclusivist faith never respect the rights of unbelievers which always lead to war and persecution. Instead they often practice a modified form of exclusivism, in which faiths other than theirs are recognized as legitimate to a certain extent, but not as holy as the true faith of theirs.
Now a question arises that how the Idea of the Religious Exclusivism originated and developed? The origin of the idea of the religious exclusivism is rooted in the tribal society. Generally it is the tendency of the tribal societies to view people other than their own clan as inferiors, enemies, and even less than a truly human being. As we all know that in the beginning our society was nomadic and in due course of time it settled to a particular place where plane land and water were available. People started cultivation. The primitive society was tribal and the idea of kinship among them was very strong. As the population grew and comparatively the resources shrunk the competition over land and resources became the root cause of conflicts within the tribes and also among the tribes. In such conflicts or battles these tribal priests/shamans⁷ would have certainly played their own role by invoking the god of one tribe against the other. In general defeats in these conflicts were treated as the inferiority of the defeated members and their deity/deities of a particular tribe whereas the victorious members and their deity/deities of a particular tribe were treated as superiors. Some times defeats in tribal war were also taken as the wrath of the tribal god. We find an example of this in the Bible. David who invoked the name of his deity, Yahweh against his physically superior foe the Philistine champion Goliath (1 Samuel 17). The people of Israel celebrated David’s victory over Goliath as a triumph of Yahweh. Likewise, Moabite Stone inscription records that king Mesha of Moab admits that the Moabite god Chemosh had become angry with his people and allowed the king of Israel, Omri to conquer Moab until Mesha

⁷ Besides other class of people each tribe had a separate priestly class who were responsible for looking after the well being of each and every member of the tribe with the help of divine intervention.
restored Moabite sovereignty by making sacrifices to please the god Chemosh.

However, religious exclusivism, in actual sense, emerged with the combination of the concept of the Chosen People with the evolution of the idea of monotheism in the society of Israel. In ancient history of Israel Yahweh was recognized as the only God of the Israelites along with the other gods who existed for the peoples other than Israelites. It is also believed that the Israelites were chosen by the God Yahweh to occupy Canaan and establish a special tradition as “a kingdom of priests and holy nation.” Yahweh was not simply the only god for the Israelites, but was also the greatest of all the gods:

“Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” (Exodus 15:11)

It is quite understandable that for the people of Israel not only was one people’s god superior to another’s; not only was this deity superior to all other gods; but He was in reality the one and the only God which truly exists.

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8 The concept of the Chosen People stems from the idea of the Israelites being chosen by God as "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:5)

9 Monotheism refers to the belief, found in a great many cultures in a single, universal God. Particularly Judaism, Christianity and Islam are classified as monotheistic. Besides, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism and the Bahai Faith are also categorized as monotheistic religions.

10 ‘Canaan’ is an ancient term for a region approximating present-day Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, plus adjoining coastal lands and parts of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.
However, in later Jewish tradition we do find liberal attitude in such an exclusivist idea, as the Book of Isaiah\(^\text{11}\) mentions that Israel will become a “light to the nations,” so that not only Jews but Gentiles\(^\text{12}\) too would participate in the future messianic kingdom. In this way those who were normally excluded were granted a degree of inclusion through their acceptance of the true faith, or acceptance of minimal conditions associated with the faith.

So far as the exclusivistic doctrine in Christianity is concerned we have no evidence that Jesus himself ever intended or propounded it. However, right from the earliest times the Christian church has taught that Jesus is the only way to God. Such beliefs led the Christian Church at times to justify violence against heretics, pagans, and even Jews in the name of either bringing them to God or preventing the spread of false teachings among Christians. Even the Protestant Reformation did not stop the basic attitude of Christian exclusivism, as Protestants declared that Catholics were bound for Hell and vice versa. Even toward fellow Protestants, an exclusivistic attitude was often adopted, and specific Protestant doctrines were deemed essential by some and heretical by others.

After witnessing more than a century of religious war an attitude of political toleration began to emerge in the Christian Church. It was during the late seventeenth century the thinkers like John Locke, through his writings, taught that civil authorities should not interfere in matters of

\(^{11}\) ‘The Book of Isaiah’ is one of the books of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament, traditionally attributed to Isaiah, an eighth century BC Judean prophet. The book contains some of the most inspiring and most debated passages in the Bible.

\(^{12}\) A Gentile is a non-Jew. The term "Gentile" originated as an anglicized version of the Latin *gentilis*, meaning belonging to a certain clan or tribe.
religious conscience. By the nineteenth century, several denominations relaxed their attitudes of exclusivism and some began to advocate more universalistic theology of salvation. The Ecumenical Movement, started in the twentieth century, promoted cooperation and mutual understanding within Christianity, based on the ideal of mutual acceptance and inter-communion. It paid the dividends and several major denominations softened it stand of exclusivism and welcomed members of other Christian faiths to share the sacraments with them. Some even went beyond it and extended this universalistic attitude to include adherents of non-Christian faiths into the ranks of those who could be accepted by God.

From the very beginning Islam\(^{13}\) is also the harbinger of the doctrine of exclusivism. As people “of the Book,” believers in the God of Abraham were given the status of dimmi, conferring on them certain rights, including the right to practice their religions openly and not to be pressured to accept Islam. Those outside of the Judeo-Christian sphere, however, were considered to be infidels. They could be forced to convert on pain of death.

The exclusivistic ideas could also be found in religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. However, they are not much apparent in them. The propounders of the Hindutva ideals and Ārya Samāj sects of Hinduism are two examples of exclusivist attitude in Hinduism. The Hindutva movement emphasizes Hindu nationalism and opposition to Muslim influence in India, while the Ārya Samāj asserts the infallible

\(^{13}\) Islam began its history with an exclusivist attitude toward pagan religions, but an inclusivist attitude toward Christians and Jews.
authority of the Veda-s, implying the inferiority of other religious traditions. Many Hindus consider that those who commit sins such as killing animals or eating meat will not be liberated or will not get Moksha.

Exclusivistic ideas may also be seen in Buddhism. According to the teachings of Lord Buddha those who do not accept and practice his teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path, etc., are destined to repeat the cycle of suffering through endless births; while those who accept and practice his teachings can attain enlightenment, even in this very life. The newly converted Buddhists in India sometimes consider their tradition the only true path to enlightenment and engage themselves in strong evangelical efforts to influence those who are considered to be in darkness. Several sects associated with Nichiren Buddhism may be included in this category.

Followers of a particular religion generally think that only their religion is correct and provides the way to salvation. However, there are some who think that other religions are partly true, or even that God is working within all religions. But some, to whom we can call them exclusivists, contend that their religion alone have the worldview that corresponds to reality. It seems arbitrary and cruel that billions of people would miss salvation just because they were born into the wrong religion. To some extent, as described above, exclusivistic elements are present in one or the other form in almost all the major religions of the world, yet it is Christianity which practiced this attitude strictly till the eighteenth century. One merit of this view is consistency: after all, the world really is one certain way, and not also a contradictory way.
2. Religious Inclusivism

“One religion is best but salvation is possible in other religions.”

The term inclusivism needs to be explained not in isolation but to be discussed in reference to the term exclusivism. The term “inclusivism” comes from the idea of including the other; in contrast the term exclusivism comes from the idea of excluding the other or something from the other. The term inclusivism covers many possible methods and justifications for an attitude of including others in one’s faith or belief. It accepts that the other tradition might be accepted as a whole or only in part, so that one may be inclusivistic with respect to one thing, such as the truth of doctrinal claims, but not with respect to something else, such as the possibility of salvation. Inclusivistic approach of any religious community towards others has much to do with willingness to include the other or something of the others. In contrast exclusivistic attitude suggests the idea that one’s own religious community is in sole possession of all important truths and also that it is only through membership of his religious community one can attain salvation or ultimate reality. The term Inclusivism has been defined and described with different nuances by different scholars. Some of them are mentioned in the following pages.

According to The New World Encyclopedia,¹⁴ the term Inclusivism is ‘characterized by the belief that while one set of belief is absolutely true, other sets of beliefs are at least partially true.’

“Anonymous Christian” model of Karl Rahner speaks that “salvation is necessarily available universally and that all humans are always related to God. But since he feels that salvation is achieved only through Christ, and not everyone has exposure to Christian teachings, it must be possible to be saved by living implicit or ‘anonymous’ - even if not explicit - Christianity. Insofar as salvation is possible in non-Christian communities, it comes only through Christ, even if the religious others are unaware of this. The salvation described by other communities is not genuine salvation, which is properly understood only as Christians know it.”\(^\text{15}\)

Johann Figl\(^\text{16}\) in his ‘Inclusivism in New Religious Movements’ explains three types of inclusivism. One is “essentialist-mystical” type, which interprets ‘a central thrust from the foreign religion to be identical with something central in the home religion’. Figl further adds that sometimes the believers of such inclusivism justify their assertions of commonality among religions by asserting that there was an original ‘Irreligion’ from which differing forms of religion have all derived.

“Historical-revelatory” is another type of inclusivism described by Figl. This kind of inclusivists assert that ‘the home tradition is the last and most ultimate of a series of historical revelations, so that other religions


are judged as good but provisional and surpassed by the superior home religion’. For example, he cites Islam as a classic example because Islam presents Mohammed as the last and most ultimate of a series of prophets.

Figl explains a third distinct form of inclusicism among new religious movements originating since the 19th century and name it “inclusivistic universalism”. According to it ‘this form of inclusivism seeks a common essence among the religions in question, but the difference is that no one previously existing religion serves as the frame of reference for inclusion; rather in this kind of inclusivism, all traditions are supposedly relativized and transcended in favour of a newly articulated, mystical spirituality.’

Ken Keathley17 defines “Inclusivism posits that even though the work of Christ is the only means of salvation, it does not follow that explicit knowledge of Christ is necessary in order for one to be saved. In contrast to pluralism, inclusivism agrees with exclusivism in affirming the particularity of salvation in Jesus Christ. But unlike exclusivism, inclusivism holds that an implicit faith response to general revelation can be salvific. God expects from man a response proportional to the light given. Saving faith is not characterized so much by its cognitive content as it is by its reverent quality.”

He classifies inclusivism in to two different positions, i.e., (1) private inclusivism and (2) corporate inclusivism.18

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17 Ken Keathley, “None Dare Call It Treason: Is an Inclusivist a Paul Revere or a Benedict Arnold?” in Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall 2003): 101-114.

18 Different authors use different labels to differentiate between the two types of inclusivism. Carson distinguishes between “hard” and “soft” inclusivism. See D. A. Carson, Gagging of God:
According to him ‘Private inclusivism contends that one who is accepted by God apart from the preaching of the Gospel is saved in spite of whatever religion to which he may be an adherent. His religious orientation plays no part in his salvation and in fact is a definite hindrance. The non-Christian’s ignorant beliefs, if sincere, are inculpable but have no positive role in his relationship with God.” While Corporate inclusivism, according to him “in contrast, argues that the non-Christian religions mediate the work of Christ.”

The discussion on inclusivism will remain incomplete if we do not discuss the writing of the famous German Indologist Paul Hacker. He is one of the very few scholars who have written on inclusivism in the Indian context. In fact, he is of the firm opinion that inclusivism is particularly Indian form of thought and in support of his hypothesis he explores several examples from Hinduism and a couple from Buddhism as well.

Hacker\textsuperscript{19} writes that ‘inclusivism is seeing the central portion of a foreign worldview as identical to the central representation of the group to which one belongs oneself’. Hacker says that “What you mean when you say x is what we mean when we say y, and y is a better way to understand it.” He asserts that inclusivism is a method of argument in which one

polemicizes against the opponent indirectly, on the one hand accepting the other’s concepts and, on the other, subordinating them to one’s own view.

In Support of his arguments Hacker puts forth the famous proverb from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad “tat tvam asi,” or “you are that”. According to Hacker the text says that “What you mean when you speak about satya (truth), what you mean when you speak to others about ātman (self), this is precisely what I have in mind and what I here assert more precisely as Being, as an intangible subtlety in all things.” While explaining this as a classic case of inclusivism, Hacker says that we can interpret the text to be saying, “You can continue your speculation about the self or about truth, they are completely right, but bear in mind that the truth and the self (that you speak of) are included in Being (or Brāhman).” Hacker explains that this accepts others’ ātman and satya, but through inclusivism places Being or Brāhman above them.

Another similar example is from the Bhagavad Gītā 9, 23, where Lord Krishna tells those who honor other gods that in reality they are offering only to him, even if they do not realize this. Many more examples could be quoted from the same text which carries the idea of inclusivism. Some of them are the following:

“In whatever way men identify with Me, in the same way do I carry out their desires; men pursue My path, O Arjuna, in all ways” (Bhagavad Gītā:4:11).
“Whatever deity or form a devotee worships, I make his faith steady. However, their wishes are only granted by Me” (Bhagavad Gītā: 7:21-22).

“O Arjuna, even those devotees who worship other lesser deities (e.g., Devas, for example) with faith, they also worship Me, but in an improper way because I am the Supreme Being. I alone am the enjoyer of all sacrificial services (Sevā, Yajñā) and Lord of the universe” (Bhagavad Gītā: 9:23).

Some of the saying of Quran also upholds the inclusivistic ideas. For Example it states, “Those with Faith, those who are Jews and the Christians and Sabaeans, all who have Faith in Allah and the Last Day and act rightly, will have their reward with their Lord. They will feel no fear and will know no sorrow” (Qur’an, Surat al-Baqara; 2:62).

Thus we find that the Inclusivistic ideas, in one form or the other are also available in other world religions.

What is apparent from the above definitions is that inclusivistic position asserts that one religion is uniquely true but salvation is accessible to those outside of that faith. This attitude of a particular faith may be understood by an example, suppose a staunch follower of a particular religion, say for example Christianity might say “I am a Christian and I think Christianity is the most correct religion, but I also think there is saving truth in other religions like Islam and Hinduism. People of other faiths can be saved by Jesus even if they do not explicitly believe in Him.” However, Inclusivists do not claim that all religions are equal as do the pluralists do, yet they hold that truth and salvation can be found in other religions, too. In more recent years, Karl Rahner helped popularize
this perspective of Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church and several mainline Protestant denominations have also shifted toward Inclusivism in recent decades. The Roman Catholic “Vatican II Council” of the 1960s explicitly declared that people of other religions could be saved. Evangelical theologian, Clark Pinnock, too, has espoused Inclusivism.

Thus the proponents of the idea of religious inclusivism are of the view that only one religion is fully true, but true religious seekers of all religious traditions will also find salvation. But a question arises here is that each religion tends to claim exclusive truth. Then why would God send Jesus to claim he was the only path to salvation if he really wasn’t? Or if Islam is the correct religion, why would God send Mohammad to claim that his was the only path to salvation, when it really wasn’t?

Another question arises with regard to both inclusivist and exclusivist idea is that there is no neutral way to decide which religion is correct, or privileged. Some are of the opinion that religion is a matter of faith and not rational assessment. At the same time others say that a particular religion is true because its claims are warranted by evidence and argument, or because believers “just know” their religion to be true.

3 Religious Pluralism

“All major world religions lead to God and salvation.”

One of the most significant attitudes to understand the inter-religious relationship is to accept the pluralistic situation of the modern day globalized world. Religious Pluralism is the view that all major religions are equally valid and are different path which leads to God and salvation.
According to the pluralistic view, no one religion is inherently better or superior to any other major world religion. Thus all the major religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, etc., are equal and valid. There may be differences in rituals and beliefs among these religious denominations, yet, there are number of similarity among them, such as, all of them advocate love for God and love for fellow human beings. There are pious people in all major religions.

Religious Pluralism became increasingly popular in the latter half of the twentieth century. The leading proponent of Religious Pluralism in the last few decades has been John Hick.

While explaining religious pluralism John Hick says that God is like an elephant surrounded by blind men and all of them making an attempt to define it. One man touches the elephant’s tail and says “The elephant is like a rope!” Another touches the trunk and says, “No, it is like a snake!” Another man touches one of the elephant’s massive legs, and says, “You’ve both got it wrong; it is like a tree!” Another touches the elephant’s side and says “Nay, brothers, it is like a wall!” Just as the blind men experienced the same elephant in different ways, different religions experience the same Ultimate Reality in different ways. Some experience it as a personal God, others as Brähman, others as a plurality of deities, still others as nirvāṇa and so on. How we experience the Ultimate Reality depends on our culture and education and modes of thought.

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Another illustration of pluralism is borrowed from Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations. A society that has rabbits but not ducks will look at the picture on the right and see a rabbit. A society that has ducks but not rabbits will look at the same picture and see a duck.

In order to explain religious pluralism it may be classified into two views (1) inter-religious pluralism and (2) intra-religious pluralism. While the former represent the views held within one major faith tradition (e.g., Christianity) about the validity or truth of other major faith traditions (e.g., Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, etc.), the later refers to the views held by specific schools or denominations within a major faith tradition (e.g., by Eastern Orthodox Christians) about the validity or truth of other schools or denominations within the same major faith tradition (e.g., about Protestant Christianity or Roman Catholic Christianity).

There are, within pluralism, two different approaches to the nature of truth: (1) there are not one but many truths from the beginning ("hard pluralism"); (2) truth is one but it appears in many forms ("soft pluralism"). The difference between (1) and (2) is unclear because we cannot really grasp what "the truth" itself is. Pluralism must acknowledge (1) some common ground on which all humanity stands, without which any pluralism, inclusivism or exclusivism would be meaningless; (2) the fact that the same truth can appear in different religious traditions through their respective symbols and thought forms; and (3) whatever is said about pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism, the religious life is one of commitment: Christians are Christians because they hold Christianity to

be true, and so are Muslims, and so on.

In the context of (3) above, it is nearly inevitable that there would be conflicting claims to "ultimate truth". But when those claims are made, transcendence is domesticated and violated. Theology is authentic and helpful when it acknowledges that our grasp of the truth is not identical with the ultimate truth itself. What is the ultimate truth of the Buddhist dharma, Islamic shahada, Jewish shekhinah, or capital punishment, abortion, sexuality, race, nation, war-and-peace? We may have strong views on each of these.

In Hinduism, a well-known Rig Vedic\textsuperscript{22} hymn says that “Truth is One, though the sages know it variously.” (Ékam sat viprā bahudā vadanti). Similarly, in the Bhagwad Gita\textsuperscript{23} (4:11), God, manifesting as an incarnation, states that “As people approach me, so I receive them. All paths lead to me” (ye yathā māṁ prapādyante tāṁs tathaiva bhajāmyahāṁ mama vartmānuvartante manusyaḥ pārtha sarvāsah). There are many more passages available in the scriptures of Hinduism which uphold the pluralistic views.

In conclusion it may be rightly said that conceptually religious pluralism does not advocate competition but believe in co-operation among the different religions. It argues that societal and theological change is necessary to overcome religious differences between various faiths and denominational conflicts within the same religion. For most religious traditions, this attitude is essentially based on a non-literal view of one's

\textsuperscript{22} Rig Veda 1.164.46.

\textsuperscript{23} Bhagwad Gita (4:11)
religious traditions, hence allowing for respect to be engendered between different traditions on fundamental principles rather than more marginal issues. It is perhaps summarized as an attitude which rejects focus on immaterial differences, and instead gives respect to those beliefs held in common.