

# Understanding religious diversity and its implications at the workplace

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## Abstract

Globalisation, increased migration and mobility of the workforce necessitate the need to study diversity in organizations. Various dimensions of diversity such as gender, race, age, ethnicity, culture, etc. have been extensively mentioned in the literature, but diversity on the basis of religion has proven to be far less traceable. Since there is no consensus among researchers till date with regard to one particular definition of religion, the current study thus attempts to define and differentiate religions on the basis of three elements i.e. beliefs, practices and culture. Further, after reviewing the literature, the positive as well as negative outcomes of religious diversity at the workplace have been identified and it has been found that studies favouring such diversity at the workplace outnumber those that mention the negative outcomes of the same. Thus, the study presents a radical shift from 'eliminating religious diversity' to 'managing religious diversity' and further, towards 'valuing religious diversity' at the workplace. A conceptual model has been developed which proposes that accommodating religious diversity of the employees in organizations would lead to positive employee outcomes whereby employees feel satisfied and committed to the organization which ultimately leads to increased organizational effectiveness. Lastly, managerial and policy implications have been discussed.

**Keywords:** *Diversity, Organization, Religion, Religious diversity, Workplace*

## Introduction

Diversity is an innate part of our 'being', irrespective of debate and whether appreciated or not. To exemplify and emphasize, leaves of the same tree are not alike. Human texture is diverse in terms of affect, behaviour and cognition. In the corporate world, this manifested as workforce diversity, after globalization, which allowed free movement of labour across national boundaries. As a result, people flocking from diverse heritages in terms of backgrounds, demographics and appearance, brought a different shade to the organization. Such workplace diversity on the basis of diverse individual employee identities, resulted in differentiation and discrimination, which deteriorated the interpersonal relations within the organization. To deal with such bias and discriminatory behaviour, the human resource practitioners came up with the concept of 'Unity in Diversity', thereby propagating the advantages of diverse individuals working together. The idea of diversity was woven in the academic texture, as evident in the publication of articles on benefits arising out of "valuing diversity", "managing diversity" and "leveraging diversity" at the workplace (Van Buren III, 2020; Bell & Berry, 2007).

The extant literature suggests scholars from developed countries attended this topic very well; however, in case of the developing world, countries like India still lag behind in building a healthy understanding of the implications of such diversity. Multitudinous and accommodative India, acknowledged as a land of multiple religions, made us delve upon the topic of religious diversity at the workplace. In this paper, first, an attempt has been made to define religion and briefly explain the origin and extent of different religions in India. Although there has been no consensus till date among researchers with regard to one particular definition of religion, many have agreed that religion refers to a particular system of faith and worship carried on through deeply held specific beliefs, practices and historical scaffolding that passes from one generation to another (Ahmad, 2017; Lynn, Naughton, & VanderVeen, 2009; Van der Walt, Mpholo, & Jonck, 2016). While some researchers believe that religious diversity is a deep level diversity since it is not apparently visible, others contend that religion, when expressed in public workplaces through different religious attire (Grekova, Kyurkchieva, & Kosseva, 2013), or offering of prayers and decoration of workplace cubicles (Weaver & Agle, 2002), becomes a surface level diversity (Gebert, Boerner, Kearney, Jr, Zhang, & Song, 2014). Consequently, such visible religious diversity when managed or mismanaged, leads to positive or negative outcomes respectively, impacting organizational effectiveness. This academic research, which garnered immense attention of management scholars, blended with brass tacks realities of the corporate world, makes religious diversity the central theme of this paper.

This paper is structured as follows; the next section highlights the diversity of religions in India. In the third section, an attempt has been made to define religion and its constituents. The fourth section presents a conceptual model which is developed after extensively reviewing the literature. Further, practical implications have been discussed and the paper ends with a brief conclusion along with certain limitations of the research.

## Understanding the depth of Religious Diversity in India

According to the Census Data 2011, India comprises 79.8% Hindus, 14.23% Muslims, 2.30% Christians, 1.72% Sikhs, 0.7% Buddhists, 0.37% Jains, and 0.66% others. Thus, India seems to be a highly tolerant country giving birth and berth to four religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Religions in India can be best deciphered in terms of nativity, spread, and diversity of beliefs and practices that they propagate. Therefore, it would not be out of place to look into origin and expansion of different religions in India.

'Hinduism' is the religion followed by the majority in India. It is believed to be the oldest religion since its origin can be traced back to the Indus Valley civilization that existed on the banks of river Indus in the second millennium BCE. A seal has been recovered from the civilization in which a person is sitting in a position similar to one seen in the practise of yoga (Narayanan, 2013). Also, some other figures recovered from the civilization seem to be the prototype of Shiva i.e. a Hindu deity (Radhakrishnan, 1932). Apart from these historical findings, most Hindus believe that the religion started around 1500 BCE with collections of four texts known as Vedas. Not acquainted with Vedic tradition, many Hindus find its origin in epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata as well as Puranas (Radhakrishnan, 1932).

Further, the second major religion of the world and the fastest growing religion in India i.e. Islam, spread to India within a century after the demise of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE when some of the Arab Muslims came to India to propagate their religion and also to gain benefits of trade (Marrison, 1951). It is also believed that the Mughal dynasty later contributed largely in spreading and shaping the North Indian Islam (Ruffle, 2013). Islamic doctrine centers on God's uniqueness and upholds that no other divine figure should be compared to the one and only God i.e. 'Allah' (Ali, Liu & Humedian, 2004). The religion considers Prophet Muhammad as the final recipient of the prophetic message and Qur'an is thus considered the final book of law received by humanity.

However, much before Islam, the world's majority religion and India's minority religion, Christianity began in the first century CE when the Jesus from Nazareth was honoured as 'Christ'. After the resurrection of Jesus, his disciples travelled to different parts of the world to spread his teachings. It is believed that St. Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus, came to India and established churches and convinced many Indians to follow Christianity (Missick, 2000; Thangaraj, 2013). However, some Christians reject this belief and they trace their origins to the arrival of Portuguese in India (Murrin, 2003). Yet another protestant mission of Christianity in India claims to have begun with the arrival of two German missionaries (Thangaraj, 2013). However, irrespective of the origins, all the Christians consider Bible as their only holy book which advocates that 'God is one'.

The other religions in minority like Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism, trace their origins in India itself. Sikhism, the most recent of all, originated almost five centuries ago with the faith strengthened by the unique revelations of its founder, Guru Nanak, followed by nine other Gurus (Chahal, 2005). The holy book of Sikhs, Guru Granth Sahib, a sole guiding light for Sikhs, preaches one Supreme Being who is the creator of all i.e. 'Ik Onkar' (Almasy, 2018; Chahal, 2005).

Further, Buddhism originated in India when Prince Gautama Siddhartha became Buddha after enlightenment at Buddha Gaya (Bodhi Gaya), a place now in the state of Bihar. The religion mainly centers around the four noble truths with regard to suffering and the noble eightfold path that propagates correct understanding, correct intention, correct speech, correct conduct, correct livelihood, correct effort, correct mindfulness and correct concentration (Bodhi, 2010). Jainism also has its roots in India wherein the Jains worship a set of enlightened beings called Jinas. The most recent of the twenty four Jinas was Mahavir who had a very profound impact on the lives of Jains. The Jain teachings mainly revolve around the theory of 'Karma' (similar to Hinduism), monastic discipline and commitment to non-violence. This religion is mostly prevalent in the Indian states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan (Keltling, 2013).

Thus, India is sheltering almost all major world religions, some of which have their origins in India itself and probably that is why India is known as a religiously diverse country. But when it comes to Indian organizations, there is scepticism with regard to religious diversity tolerance among employees. Such religious diversity among employees can be best understood by considering their different beliefs, practises and cultures that shape their religion.

## Understanding Religion and Nuances of Workplace Religious Diversity

Numerous researchers in the past have attempted to define religion, but have failed to build consensus. This may be because, how people perceive religion, varies with the different geographies and, therefore, researchers have not conceded to one single explanation of religion that can be globally accepted. However, for the purpose of this paper, religion, in the Indian subcontinent, may be defined on the basis of beliefs, practices and culture, which strongly influence and shape Indian religions.

### Belief and practices

Belief may be defined as an acceptance or a complete faith that something exists, without the use of logic and rationale. In a systems approach, belief can be viewed as an input which is inherent and embedded in an individual; practices may be viewed as an output of that belief. The different beliefs immersed in individuals and practices they follow become the very foundation of religious diversity among individuals. The boundaries of belief are somewhat considered porous among the Hindu, Jain, Buddhist and Sikh communities, yet there are considerable differences in their practices (Moid, 2016). All these religions believe that 'God is one' (Almasy, 2018; Chahal, 2005; Krogt, 2015), however the path to realisation of God differs completely. The Hindus, for example, generally worship idols, which is completely forbidden in Sikhism which considers the holy book i.e. Guru Granth Sahib as their way to divine realisation. Among other practices, Hindus have a profound belief in their horoscopes and astrology (Narayanan, 2013) and thus begin or end any important work on the suggestions of astrologers, whereas, Muslims completely reject the idea of horoscope. The daily practice of Yoga is emphasised as a way to liberation in Hinduism, whereas the monastic discipline is believed and practiced in Buddhism to gain enlightenment and liberation (Goonasekera, 2013). With regard to dietary practice, the Hindus are vegans, Jains prohibit eating flesh and rooted vegetables, Muslims are non-vegetarians but prohibit eating pork. Interestingly, with all the dietary preferences on the basis of religion, fasting is considered supreme in all religions, a must for purification of mind and body in order to get connected with God. Thus, the practices of diverse religions differ, though the supreme belief remains the same. Hence, religion may be defined as shared collection of beliefs and practices that are communicated and transferred from one generation to another.

Further, based on religious beliefs, workplaces witness diverse and conflicting religious practises in organizations. Employees express their religion at the workplace, intentionally or unintentionally, through their appearance, clothing, jewellery etc. (King & Franke, 2017). For example, Christians prefer wearing long flowing skirts and not the formal pants as desirable at some workplaces. Muslim women wear hijab (headscarf) while Sikhs wear turbans and carry kirpans (a ritual dagger) to the workplace. Contrarily, such religious expressions are not perceived positively by some colleagues (Hicks, 2003; Scheitle & Corcoran, 2018) and therefore, impair interpersonal relations and cause friction.

According to a survey conducted by New York based Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, 76% of Muslim respondents were found to be somewhat troubled by the religious bias at work. The dress and appearance were however the major challenges they were dealing with (Wuthnow, 2007). The expression is not just limited to the attire, but also spreads to different reservations that various religions hold; for example, Jews do not prefer working during the day of Sabbath, Muslims need time and space for rendering their prayers five times a day (Dean, Safranski, & Lee, 2014) and Sikhs consider beard and turban as part of their religion (Ghumman, Ryan, Barclay, & Markel, 2013).

Religious holidays and religious decoration at the workplace (e.g. decorating cubicles with cross symbols and posters, etc.) have also been debatable issues since long. Sometimes the employees do not even ask for their religious day leave because they are made aware through informal arrangements that asking for leave might cause them problems with their employers at work and they fear getting fired. Studies found that such employees, whose religious expression and rights are curtailed, remain frustrated at work and are not committed to their organization (Grekova, Kyurkchieva, & Kosseva, 2013).

Some other researchers have found that religious fundamentalism is the main cause of such intolerance towards diverse religious expressions. Religious fundamentalism refers to the degree to which individuals adhere to a dogmatic and intolerant way of being religious and discourage religious diversity since, in their view, there is only one 'true' religion i.e. their own religion (Blogowska & Saroglou, 2011). Further, the prejudiced and preconceived notions make such individuals discriminate among their own colleagues, thus, disrupting the peaceful ambience of organizations.

### Culture

Scholars have defined the term 'culture' as a dynamic variable (Singh, 1998) that includes artefacts, which refers to the structure and set rules and regulations of a place, the espoused beliefs and values, and the underlying assumptions (Schein, 1997) that have been transferred from one generation to another.

Apart from the above-mentioned beliefs and practices, culture also seems to influence religion (Moid, 2016) wherein, it has often been witnessed that the practices of the same religion vary with the change in cultural geographies. For example, influenced by the Hindu practice of removing shoes before entering a temple, Christians at some places in India also follow the same practice before entering a church (Thangaraj, 2013). Also, the practices of Indian Muslims are somewhat different from those of Arab Muslims and similarly, the practices of Sikhs in Punjab (e.g. completely untrimmed beard) are in some cases, different from those of Canadian Sikhs (e.g. trimmed beard). Therefore, religion seems to be strongly influenced by the culture of a particular place. These cultural differences, based on beliefs and values, can also be witnessed among the different sects of the same religion e.g. Shvetambar and Digambar sects of Jainism, Theravada and Mahayana sects of Buddhism, and the Catholic and Protestant Christians.

In India particularly, religious practices evidence a very high degree of acculturation, but not assimilation i.e. people are in harmony with the religions of others without surrendering their own identity. For example, for a wedding ceremony, Indian Jews borrow an elephant from a Hindu temple nearby to convey the bridegroom to the synagogue (Katz, 2013). In a similar fashion, Hindu songs or Islamic Sufism 'qawwallis' can be heard being played at various events irrespective of the religion. Despite varying practices, beliefs, and cultures, organizations are making their mark at the global level, and this needs to be explored in terms of personal and organizational effectiveness.

It would not be out of place to acknowledge that religion which is shaped by beliefs, practices and culture, when managed appropriately within organizations, would lead to positive employee outcomes such as job satisfaction (Dodd & Gotsis, 2007; Ekpendu, Egbuta & Ikechi-Ekpendu, 2019; Marques, 2010; Petrosko & Alagaraja, 2017), commitment (Schuyler, 2007; Messarra, 2014; Farrukh, Ying, & Ahmed, 2016), and greater productivity (Hardesty, Westerman, Beekun, Bergman, & Westerman, 2010) and thus, would lead to increased organizational effectiveness (Georgiou, 1973; Quinn & Cameron, 1983) which has been the most elusive and controversial term in organization theory literature. While some researchers believe that organizational effectiveness is all about accomplishment of goals such as high productivity, morale, conformity, adaptiveness, and institutionalization (Price, 1968; Quinn & Cameron, 1983), others argue that organizational effectiveness can be explained as the ability of organizations to exploit their environment in the acquisition of scarce and valued resources (Yuchtman & Seashore, 1967).

However, with the passage of time, researchers came up with a broader definition of organizational effectiveness which emphasized satisfaction of the organization's members (Georgiou, 1973). Also, researchers have related effectiveness to productivity (Quinn & Cameron, 1983) in the form of three different performance outcomes: immediate performance outcomes, which are a function of task performance, contextual performance, commitment, satisfaction and turnover intentions; intermediate performance outcomes that result from innovative behaviour and creativity, and organizational performance outcomes that deal with the final quality and ultimate performance (Sparrow & Cooper, 2014). Further, various other variables have also been identified which lead to organizational effectiveness such as employee satisfaction (Friedlander & Pickle, 1968), commitment (Angle & Perry, 1981), goal attainment (Quinn & Cameron, 1983), productivity (Quinn & Cameron, 1983), efficiency (Adizes, 1979), communication (Quinn & Cameron, 1983) and creativity (Bratnicka, 2015) which are positive outcomes of workplace religious diversity (Ekpendu, Egbuta & Ikechi-Ekpendu, 2019; Farrukh, Ying, & Ahmed, 2016; Hardesty, Westerman, Beekun, Bergman, & Westerman, 2010).

The researchers have long debated with regard to the positive and negative outcomes of promoting religious diversity at the workplace. Many of them have agreed that the public expression of diverse religious identities, either verbally (in statements or discussions) or through religious rituals (e.g. praying, wearing religious clothes) or actions (e.g. inviting colleagues to religious events) may lead to relational conflicts within organizations (Gebert, Boerner, Kearney, Jr, Zhang, & Song, 2014; Heliot et al., 2020). Such conflicts can impair the emotional bond and synergistic collaboration, and thus, negatively affect individual and group performance (Gwal & Gwal, 2018; Rai, 2017; De Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012) which is also a measure of organizational effectiveness (Sparrow & Cooper, 2014). The adverse effects are not only limited to groups, but such expressions in public workplaces also foster interpersonal tensions (Heliot et al., 2020; King, Stewart, & McKay, 2010; Scheitle & Ecklund, 2017) since public display of religious affiliations may be viewed as proselytizing (i.e. an attempt to convert others to your own religion) by some colleagues (Gebert, Boerner, Kearney, Jr, Zhang, & Song, 2014; Ryan & Gardner, 2019). And if not viewed as proselytizing, such expression of religious affiliations might lead to discrimination (Reeves, McKinney, & Azam, 2012; Ryan & Gardner, 2019; Van Buren III, 2020). For example, many Muslim women have reported that they are treated less favourably when they wear 'hijabs' during the interviews (Essers & Benschop, 2009; Ghumman & Jackson, 2010).

However, numerous other researchers have strongly suggested that religious diversity in organizations would lead to favourable outcomes because employees associate it with the freedom to be themselves and feel respected rather than discriminated (Wuthnow, 2007). Thus, employees become more dedicated to those organizations which support their non work-life responsibilities (Anand, Vohra, Srivastava, & Jha, 2017). Also, some studies have positively found that religious practise in the workplace is negatively related to work-related stress and burnout (Carneiro et al., 2019) and consequently leads to improvement in employees' performance, productivity and well being (Kutcher, Bragger, Rodriguez-Srednicki, & Masco, 2010). Findings also indicate that employees' religious beliefs and practises tend to be positively related to job satisfaction (Dodd & Gotsis, 2007; Ekpendu, Egbuta & Ikechi-Ekpendu, 2019; Marques, 2010), happiness (Dodd & Gotsis, 2007), self-esteem (Kutcher, Bragger, Rodriguez-Srednicki, & Masco, 2010), better decision making (Dodd & Gotsis, 2007; Albrecht, 2007); well being (Achour et al., 2015); mental health (Noor, 2008) and organizational commitment (Schuyler, 2007; Messarra, 2014) which provides a meaningful explanation to the cause of less burnout in such religiously diverse organizations (Kutcher, Bragger, Rodriguez-Srednicki, & Masco, 2010).

The literature especially mentions the role of certain religions such as Buddhism in creating happy and nourishing work environments (Schuyler, 2007). Practising Bodhisattva at the workplace brings calm in employees and aids them in stress handling which results in greater satisfaction and better performance (Marques, 2010; Schuyler, 2007). The religious values inherent in employees also forbids them from engaging in deleterious and corrupt practices which further promotes collaboration and interconnectedness among them. Religious employees are also more likely to indulge in organization citizenship behaviours which includes values such as courtesy, unity and cooperation which are important for maintaining peaceful ambience in organizations (Kutcher et al., 2010). Diverse religious beliefs also serve to be a source of various other values such as generosity, integrity, justice, honesty, forgiveness, which are all very crucial in the organizational context (Van Buren III, 2020).

The literature further suggests that religiosity i.e. practising religion via meditation, prayers, visiting sacred places, reading canonical texts, etc. results in less stress, less burnout, less anxiety (Van Buren III, 2020; Carneiro et al., 2019; Kutcher et al., 2010), and boosts self esteem and self efficacy of employees (Kutcher et al., 2010).

The above discussions regarding religious practices, and personal and organizational outcomes arising out of varying religious practices need to be explored. For this, the authors propose the following model:

## A Conceptual Model

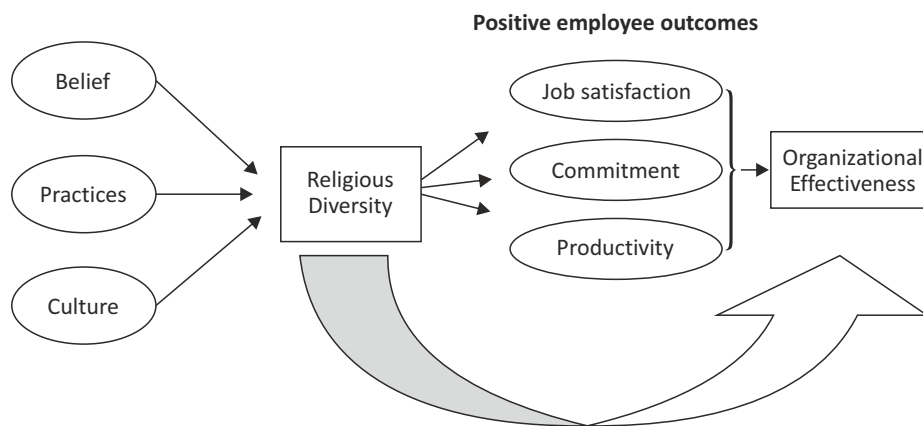


Figure 1: Proposed conceptual model: religious diversity leads to organizational effectiveness

The aforementioned model (Figure 1) with hypothesized relationship between workplace religious diversity and organizational effectiveness finds academic foothold as discussed in the ensuing paragraphs. Although there are various positive employee outcomes associated with workplace religious diversity, three most prominent and widely discussed outcomes are depicted in the conceptual model i.e. job satisfaction, commitment and productivity. Even though it is not denied that religions bring conflict, stress, friction and discomfort in the workplace (Exline & Bright, 2011), but still it is argued that banning all forms of religious expression altogether would bring in more frustration, thereby affecting the organization's performance. Therefore, a need arises to strike a balance between the right to free expression and the right not to be oppressed by another's religion (Weaver & Agle, 2002). Acculturation, rather than assimilation, should be encouraged in organizations; this will help employees to better understand religious beliefs and practices of their colleagues without indulging in interpersonal conflicts, thus creating a culture of tolerance and cooperation at the workplace that contributes towards increased organizational effectiveness.

## Discussion

Though beliefs and practices have always been known to shape religion, culture may be viewed as a newer dimension that has an impact on age-old religion. Especially in the Indian context, the understanding of culture eases the apprehension of certain aspects of religion that have remained dubious till date. Religion is viewed as a dynamic construct which can be highly concealable, controllable, disruptive and perilous (Ryan & Gardner, 2019) and therefore, it becomes a sensitive topic of discussion and expression at the workplace. Academically, religion was initially considered taboo in initial conceptualizations; however, management scholars have lately realised the sensitivity and nuances of religious diversity at the workplace. Support has been derived from scholars like Dodd & Gotsis (2007), Schuyler (2007), Albrecht (2007), Marques (2010), Messarra (2014), Kutcher, Bragger, Rodriguez-Srednicki, & Masco (2010), Hardesty, Westerman, Beekun, Bergman, & Westerman (2010), Farrukh, Ying, & Ahmed (2016) to emphasize a positive relationship between religious diversity at the workplace and employee outcomes leading to organizational effectiveness (Friedlander & Pickle, 1968; Georgiou, 1973; Quinn & Cameron, 1983). This conceptualization needs to be explored with real time data to enable organizations to leverage religious diversity for good to employees and self. This may further add to the pluralistic fervour of Indian society.

It is a well-known fact that Indian organizations accommodate various shades of diversity of employees. It is imperative on the part of management not only to promote diversity, but also to let employees get enriched with diversity and leverage it for overall betterment. Practitioners' views towards diversity have undergone tumultuous change from 'eliminating religious diversity' to 'managing religious diversity' (Kelly, 2008; Van Buren III, 2020) and further, towards 'valuing religious diversity' with a feeling of respect and empathy towards colleagues culminating into respect for diversity of religion. This idea of empathy or 'unity in diversity' leading to increased cooperation and collaboration among the employees has also been supported by Velayudhan, Gayatri Devi, & Srividya (2009). Under this context, there is a possibility of enhanced teamwork among employees (Hardesty, Westerman, Beekun, Bergman, & Westerman, 2010) improving organizational effectiveness. There is no deterrence in admitting that this kind of ambience of the organization and positivity bred by acceptance of religious diversity may result in various positive outcomes (Dodd & Gotsis, 2007; Schuyler, 2007; Albrecht, 2007; Kurian & Muzumdar, 2017; Marques, 2010; Messarra, 2014) ultimately converging at increased organizational effectiveness (Friedlander & Pickle, 1968; Adizes, 1979; Angle & Perry, 1981; Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Bratnicka, 2015).

## Managerial and Policy Implications

This study has various important implications for diversity professionals. In this dynamic world, change is inevitable and therefore, organizations need to be receptive and positively proactive in accepting change in the form of large influx of diverse individuals at workplaces. When such diversity is in the context of religion, it becomes a sensitive subject matter and thus diversity practitioners and HR managers should exercise utmost care in dealing with religious diversity at the workplace. A little misunderstanding or fallacy might hit the faith and belief system of employees and may result in lot of resistance in religiously sensitive context of India. Therefore, as argued in the paper, it is important that managers and policy makers strike a balance, wherein, religiously diverse employees feel valued and respected and at the same time, no employee should encounter religion based discrimination or proselytization.

This conceptual study found strong evidence that appropriate management of workplace religious diversity tends to benefit organizations. It suggests that favourable outcomes of religious diversity at the workplace are significantly more than the unfavourable outcomes. This makes the role of HR managers and policy makers extremely critical since they need to ensure that workplaces encounter only the positive effects and eliminate all related conflicts and friction. To achieve this, appropriate strategies need to be devised to make employees aware and sensitive towards the diversity of others. Diversity training is one



such strategy which has been advocated by various scholars in the past (Gebert et al., 2014; Heliot et al., 2020; Messarra, 2014). The literature suggests two approaches to diversity training. First is the instructional approach that includes lectures, seminars, etc. and second is the experiential approach, which is more effective and involves role playing and thus, aims to develop empathy towards others (Paluck, 2006). For best results, these diversity trainings should aim to create diversity awareness among employees on one hand, and teach diversity management to executives on the other hand. Gebert et al. (2014) further emphasize that diversity trainings should also train the employees in interpreting others' religious expressions i.e. to be able to differentiate between acts of proselytism or usual expression of faith.

Furthermore, to eliminate interpersonal friction and conflicts, respectful pluralism (Heliot, 2020) should be advocated and inculcated in the organization. The employees should be encouraged to accept diversity and be respectful towards diverse individuals. Acculturation, rather than assimilation needs to be practiced wherein the employee upholds his own identity with dignity and also regards other religiously diverse identities. Such policies and practices of acculturation, diversity awareness, diversity management and respectful pluralism would result in calm, peaceful and collaborative workplace environment.

The present decade has witnessed increasing legal cases on grounds of religious harassment and religious discrimination. This becomes a burden for organizations as it drains a lot of valuable time and resources. Therefore, the practitioners should be equipped to proactively deal with such issues. The managers, leaders and authorities should issue clear guidelines for conduct and establish vivid expectations for non-discriminatory behaviour at the workplace (Ryan & Gardner, 2019). Gebert et al. (2011) have proposed transformational leadership style as a remedy to reduce sub-group formations at the workplace which would also eventually lead to reduced discrimination.

The present study also holds enormous significance for policy makers. For creating diversity discourses and designing diversity trainings, it is imperative to understand the root cause of different employee perceptions towards diverse identities. This can be best understood via theories from sociology and psychology domains such as the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), Intergroup Contact Theory (Pettigrew, 1998), Stereotype Threat Theory (Gebert, Boerner, & Chatterjee, 2011), etc. The basic premise of these theories should be kept in mind while devising policies and strategies. For example, based on Intergroup Contact Theory, policies may be devised to promote contact and communication among employees which break their stereotypes and reduce instances of discrimination. Thus, cultural and gaming activities may be introduced to encourage informal interaction. Further, as per the Social Identity Theory, policy makers may devise policies and strategies that leave no room for groupism among employees. Religiously diverse employees should be included in work teams and training groups which may result in better understanding and collaboration among them. The literature suggests that labour turnover can be greatly reduced by devising policies that address the stigma and stereotypes associated with a particular identity in the organization. Thus, to understand employee perceptions and completely eliminate the adverse effects of workplace religious diversity, it is imperative for HR managers and policy makers to dive deep into theories from other related domains and revise strategies accordingly.

### **Applicability and Generalizability**

Studies on religious diversity at the workplace have brought forth various aspects crucial for employees as well as organizations. Various factors such as globalization, migration, urbanization, and opening up of economies have contributed towards increased diversity among the workforce. The findings suggest that workplace religious diversity, if appropriately managed, may lead to various positive employee outcomes. This holds true for all organizations such as private enterprises (Dodd & Gotsis, 2007), government organizations (Grekova, Kyurkchieva, & Kosseva, 2013), educational institutions (Achour et al., 2015), hospitals (Carneiro et al., 2019) etc., since every organization is open to diverse religious backgrounds of employees. Further, it has been witnessed that employees are no longer willing to shed their religious skin before entering the workplace and do not intend to maintain a work-self and a non-work self. Thus the religious beliefs which are embedded in individuals may find expression at the workplace.

The findings of this study are relevant to all the religiously heterogeneous countries. Globally, an upward trend in workplace religious discrimination cases has been witnessed. This is true even for the most developed countries which even have specific laws to deal with such cases. For example, in USA, employees are given protection against religious discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, 1964. The EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) in USA also protects employees against any sort of religious harassment or discrimination. Article 41 of the Portuguese constitution and the Portuguese Labour Code prohibit employers from resorting to religious discrimination among employees. Various other European countries such as Netherlands, Denmark, and United Kingdom also legally protect their employees from such workplace discrimination (Vermeulen & Belhaj, 2013). However, there are few religiously homogenous countries such as Turkey, where pluralism is not

promoted and people are less sensitive to religious diversity issues (Bader, Alidadi, & Vermeulen, 2013). Therefore, except for very few religiously homogenous countries, the findings of this study hold relevance for most developed and developing economies.

## Conclusion and Limitations

India is a land of multiple religions. Indian organizations witness an influx of employees from different religions and thus, a need arises to make employees empathetic towards the beliefs and practices of their colleagues. A biased and stereotypical thinking of managers and HR practitioners need to be completely relinquished. Diversity training may prove helpful to make employees understand and celebrate the diverse perspectives. Although it's true that diversity results in interpersonal conflicts, it is argued that eliminating diversity altogether may lead to more disruptive and severe consequences. However, some limitations need to be acknowledged. The scholarly works considered for developing this conceptual framework are mainly from the western world and thus, the focus of most of the articles has been on Christianity and Islam. Therefore, the scope of future research should be widened by incorporating more articles, especially from the Asian and African countries. Further, the conceptual model proposed in the manuscript gives an opportunity to future researchers to empirically test it and validate the present conceptualization.



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