

## **Mumbai Parliament of Religions: Religion and Social Challenges**

The second edition of the Mumbai Parliament of Religions took place on the morning of the 27th of September, 2025 Saturday at the Bahá'í Centre in Marine Lines, Mumbai. The Mumbai Parliament of Religions was organized jointly by the Inter-Religious Solidarity Council, The Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism and The Bahá'í Centre in Mumbai. The topic of this year's parliament was "Religion and Social Challenges," with speakers from different faiths and walks of life. The panel this year at the parliament consisted of Rajni Bakshi (Gandhian Scholar & Author), Dr. Surinder Kaur (Educationist), Prabhu Govind Das (Hare Krishna Spiritual Leader), Tahirih Mahija (Bahá'í Representative), Roshani Shenazz (Spiritual Author & Guide), Mufti Yahya (Islamic Scholar), Father Gilbert De'lima (Catholic Priest), and Swami Dayadipananda (Ramakrishna Mission Monk).

The event was moderated by Urmi Chanda from the Inter-Religious Solidarity Council. Prabhu Keshav Chandra Das, Convenor of the IRSC opened the Mumbai Parliament of Religions by stating that religion has consistently acted as a moral compass and spiritual anchor, guiding humanity through times of turbulence. He emphasized that genuine religion is rooted in service, compassion, equality, and truth—not exclusion or oppression. According to him, the misuse or misunderstanding of religion is what leads to division, but when it is practiced at its core, religion has the potential to heal, unite, and transform society. He highlighted the urgency of this year's theme, "Religion and its relevance in addressing social challenges today," and raised direct, pressing questions: Can faith traditions respond meaningfully to gender equality, support the rights and dignity of LGBTQIA+ communities, and help break barriers of caste and social inequality? He concluded by affirming the Inter-Religious Solidarity Council's vision of an equal platform for all denominations—urging participants not to debate superiority, but to listen, learn, and build together for social good.

Each speaker addressed different societal challenges religion can help overcome in 10–15-minute talks. Rajni Bakshi gave the keynote, emphasizing that sentiment without action is meaningless and stressing the importance of embracing the otherness of others. Dr. Surinder Kaur highlighted social challenges and religious attitudes addressing them, focusing on the plight of women in conflict zones like Manipur. Prabhu Govind Das spoke about the environment's challenges and its deep connection to charity and compassion. Tahirih Mahija from the Bahá'í community spoke on crisis and victory, illustrating humanity's progress toward unity and equality through spiritual renewal.

Radhika Sood Nayak, singer and vocalist, mesmerized the audience with two soulful songs that brought a profound silence over the hall. Roshani Shenazz spoke about the importance of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Father Gilbert De'lima emphasized the role of religion in countering communal violence, citing examples from Nagaland and Manipur, and called for religion to be used as a force for unity. Islamic scholar Mufti Yahya discussed the significance of family and relationships through the Islamic perspective. Swami Dayadipananda stressed recognizing the divine power within all of us, noting that in every religion there are those who may not believe in divine power but hold it through their experiences.

The event, which saw participation of approximately 150 people, including students, concluded with a solidarity lunch that fostered a sense of community and shared commitment to peace and harmony among all attendees. The gathering ended on a hopeful note, affirming the collective responsibility to build bridges of understanding and compassion across different faiths and social backgrounds.