



Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme
Research Proposal

**Faith in Action: Examining Synergies Between Faith-Based Organizations
and Interfaith Alliances for Philanthropy, Development, and Communal
Harmony in India**

Candace Sara Ciju

Dr. Aparna Sundar and Dr. Cindy Ewing

Abstract

Religion has long been a foundational element of India's societal framework, influencing its philanthropic traditions and shaping its charitable landscape. A majority of charitable donations from household income in Indian families go towards faith-based organizations (FBOs). This research project seeks to explore the potential for FBOs to work alongside newly emerging interfaith alliances to enhance their roles in philanthropy and development, while simultaneously preventing the development of a tradition of communal violence in India. The research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the activities of six Indian FBOs based on Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, focusing on their impact on social cohesion and the creation of communal harmony.

My selected FBOs are: National Council of YMCAs of India, Caritas India, Ramakrishna Math, ISKCON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness), Jamaat-I-Islami Hind (JIH), Samastha Kerala Jam'eyyat ul-Mu'allimeen Central Council (SKJMCC).

My selected Interfaith alliances are: Global Interfaith Wash Alliance (GIWA) and Interfaith Humanitarian Network (IHN).

By studying behaviours and attitudes of faith-based and non-faith-based donors, interviewing aid recipients and NGO executives, and examining educational curriculums used by FBOs in their educational institutions, the research aims to identify strategies for maximizing the positive influence of FBOs and interfaith alliances. The study aims to shed light on these complex dynamics to inform policy decisions that promote inclusive development, foster interreligious understanding, and ultimately move closer to achieve communal harmony in India.

Introduction

My interest in this research stems from recognizing religion's essential role in fostering a sense of 'fraternity' in India. Despite historical divisiveness, I hope to transform religion into a positive and unifying force through welfare dispersed through FBOs and interfaith alliances. This study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of FBOs and interfaith alliances in India, with the goal of informing policy decisions that balance politics, religion, and development. It is plausible that the study will conclude that collaborations between interfaith alliances and FBOs present the most effective approach to maximize welfare for the Indian populace. By identifying potential areas for improvement, the research can guide policymakers in creating more supportive regulatory frameworks for the collaboration of FBOs and interfaith alliances. The study seeks to analyse the educational content created by FBOs to ensure that it does not promote communalism or incite violence. It is important to flag content if there's any indication of language that can provoke violence as these curriculums are taught in primary, secondary, and high schools run by FBOs where children are being taught how to perceive the world. By identifying potential indicators of communal violence in educational curriculums, the research can help FBOs develop more responsible and inclusive educational materials that contribute to building a more harmonious society. The establishment of more interfaith alliances that bring together various faith-based organizations holds the potential to cultivate tolerance and, ultimately, contribute to religious peace—a vital missing piece in the puzzle of India.

Research Objectives & Questions

My main research question: *How can faith-based organizations (FBOs) and interfaith alliances in India mutually enhance their contributions to philanthropy and development, specifically in the prevention of communal violence, considering constitutional, religious, and political dynamics?*

1. Are faith-based donors more likely to portray behaviours of identity fusion than non-faith-based donors?
2. Do non-faith-based donors differ from faith-based donors in their display of tolerance?
3. What specific philanthropic activities are undertaken by Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and interfaith alliances in India?
4. How can Faith-Based Organizations focused on education ensure content creation that avoids incitement of violence within their targeted religious audience?
5. Which groups or organizations provide funding for Faith-Based Organizations and Interfaith Alliances, respectively? What percentage of funding comes from India and what percentage from abroad?

Secondary objectives:

1. Understand the reasons for preferring NGO assistance over governmental support among past aid recipients from FBOs or interfaith alliances.
2. Assess the satisfaction levels and attitude changes among past aid recipients after their experience with FBOs or interfaith alliances.
3. Explore the personal motivations of executives involved in FBOs and interfaith alliances and their perceived societal impact.
4. Discuss the potential role of FBO-based welfare in India with an expert in FBO regulation law to maximize its societal benefits.

Background

Religion is deeply ingrained in India's fabric, serving as an enduring element that has persisted since well before the British Raj. The contemporary understanding of philanthropy in India emerged out of opposition to British colonialism, leading to the redefinition of charitable practices as "seva" for holistic upliftment (Osella 23). Religious communities in India have long served as pivotal contributors to welfare and development, predating the establishment of the Constitution. However, its framers did not view them as agents of social development (Mahajan and Jodhka 11). In his book "A Better India, A Better World" (2009), Infosys Founder Narayana Murthy points out that only 1.7% of Indian household income is allocated to philanthropy, while a significant 35% is directed to religious institutions (Kuriakose 3). More recently, a report for the year 2020-21 by the Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy at Ashoka University reveals that religious organizations receive significant cash donations, amounting to ₹16,600 crore (constituting 70% of all charitable giving) ("How India Gives" 11). The undeniable value that people place on faith-based organisations leads us to consider religion as a major investor in social welfare.

Faith-based organisations (FBOs) in India are undergoing internal changes and debates within religious communities, raising questions about their evolving roles in broader development

contexts. In the face of challenges like poverty and social hostilities rooted in religious identity, FBOs become crucial. The current environment, marked by increased scrutiny and regulation through acts like the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2020, poses challenges for FBOs, especially those considered incompatible with the dominant political ideology to act as agents of social welfare (Pattnaik and Sahoo par. 11).

While FBOs have existed since the 1950s and 1960s, a more recent development is the emergence of 'inter-faith alliances'—a newer category of social welfare organizations. Unlike FBOs, interfaith alliances bring people from various religious backgrounds together, encouraging collaboration and providing assistance to all. An illustrative example is a 2020 state-based interfaith alliance in Mumbai, where WHO India, UNICEF, and various faith-based organizations worked virtually to coordinate efforts against COVID-19 (“Faith-Based Organizations across India Step up the Fight against COVID-19”). The exploration of the potential for inter-faith alliances, as a complement to FBOs, to align with state objectives during crises or for general welfare purposes thus warrants further investigation.

The orientation and the larger political ideology of some FBOs are contentious issues in India's FBO sector. While some promote inclusivity in education, health, and community development, others exploit initiatives, reinforcing exclusion and promoting hatred (Jodhka and Bora 85). FBOs play a crucial educational role, influencing perspectives across generations. Mishandled, it poses a risk of fostering communal hatred and inciting violence.

Methodology

Before the fixed Laidlaw research period from June 17 to July 29, I will create my participant pool for the survey and complete literature review. I will also prepare the Likert scales for identity fusion and tolerance, as well as obtain curriculums from the selected FBOs before the 6-week research period. During the research period, the survey and interviews will be carried out. I have contacts in the selected FBOs and interfaith alliances, I hope to get in contact with higher up officials through those contacts.

The study will explore five key questions, such as whether faith-based donors demonstrate higher levels of identity fusion compared to non-faith-based donors, and how the philanthropic activities undertaken by FBOs, and interfaith alliances differ. The research methodology involves a survey using snowball sampling to collect data from 25 faith-based donors and 25 non-faith-based donors. I will create my participation sample by utilizing a mix of snowball sampling from my contacts and recruiting participants from survey platforms like Prolific. Participants will complete Likert scales for tolerance and identity fusion, along with a questionnaire on demographic information and their reasons for choice of NGO to donate to. Interviews will be conducted with past aid recipients and executives from selected FBOs and interfaith alliances to gain insights into their experiences, perspectives, and everyday operations. The study will also investigate sources of funding for FBOs and interfaith alliances, analysing their impact on welfare dispersal and organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, educational curriculums from the six selected FBOs will be analysed to identify potential indicators of communal violence. Overall, the research aims to enhance understanding of faith-based philanthropy and development in India, contributing to sustainable peace and harmony.

My selected FBOs are: National Council of YMCAs of India, Caritas India, Ramakrishna Math, ISKCON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness), Jamaat-I-Islami Hind (JIH), Samastha Kerala Jam'eyyat ul-Mu'allimeen Central Council (SKJMCC).

My selected Interfaith alliances are: Global Interfaith Wash Alliance (GIWA) and Interfaith Humanitarian Network (IHN).

I. Survey - Quantitative:

- Using snowball sampling, I intend to distribute questions to 25 people from the faith-based donors' group and 25 people from non-faith-based donors' group. Non-faith-based donors primarily donate to charitable organisations that do not include those organised by faith. Faith-based donors primarily donate to those organised by faith.
- Participants will fill out a Tolerance Likert scale and an identity fusion Likert scale. They will also be provided with a questionnaire that asks for their demographic information, their personal reasons for donating to an FBO or a non-FBO and inquire if they have ever sought aid from an FBO / interfaith alliance.

II. Interviews - Qualitative:

- I will interview those who answered yes to the past aid from an FBO / an interfaith alliance (in India or internationally) in the questionnaire to gauge reasons for why they preferred NGO assistance over governmental support. I will also inquire if they felt satisfied with the assistance received, and if they feel as if any previous attitudes of theirs changed after their experience with the FBO / interfaith alliance. If I am not able to obtain any previous aid recipients from the survey, I will still look for 3 past aid recipients to interview.
- Interview 6 executives from the boards of the selected FBOs. Interviewees will be actively involved in the functioning of FBOs, and I hope to interview people with varied roles, such as event planning, trustees, international operations coordinators, education directors etc. If they are open to it, I will also inquire their personal reasons for joining the FBO and what value they think the FBO adds to society.
- Interview 2 officials from the selected interfaith alliances. Same questions that will be asked to FBO executives will be asked to interfaith executives. If they are open to it, inquire about their personal reasons for joining the interfaith alliance and what value they think the interfaith alliance adds to society.
- Interview 1 expert in FBO regulation law through ADF India. It is a legal advocacy organization that advocates for religious freedom and the sanctity of human life. During the interview, I will discuss the potential role of FBO-based welfare in India, exploring its possible impact and how it could be maximized to benefit society.

III. Obtain educational curriculums:

- Reach out to all 6 faith-based organisations to obtain educational curriculums that they use in their schools.
 1. YMCA - New Delhi YMCA Public School
 2. Caritas India - No educational institutions but carries out initiatives based on skill development.
 3. Ramakrishna Math: Taki Ramakrishna Mission High School
 4. ISKCON: Bhaktivedanta Mission English Medium School

5. Jamaat-I-Islami Hind: Centre for Educational Research & Training (CERT)
6. Samastha Kerala Jam'eyyat ul-Mu'allimeen Central Council (SKJMCC) - mainly education (through madrasas) focused.

Training/ Certifications Needed

No training or certifications are required for the completion of this research project.

Research Location

For the duration of research, I will be both in UAE and in India. I will be in UAE in June, and in India in July, flying back to the UAE in the last week of July.

Research Ethics Board

Yes, my project requires REB approval, and the application has been submitted.

Timeline

May - I need to familiarise myself a bit more with the research methodologies before starting research. I will use this time to get more comfortable with Qualtrics, which is the platform I will be using to create my survey and Likert scales. I will read guides on semi-structured interviewing and create my own topic guides for the interview. I will explore the NVivo platform, which I will be using for qualitative analysis of the interviews. I will complete my literature review in May as well. I will be in UAE this month, living at home.

June - I will prepare my survey and get it ready to roll out. I will also finalise my sample for the survey. I will reach out to the selected FBOs and interfaith alliances to obtain curriculums and fix interview timings for July. I will be in UAE this month, living at home.

July - I will carry out my two months of planning in July. I will roll out the surveys to the participants, and conduct interviews for FBO and interfaith executives, previous aid recipients and an expert from ADF India. I will be in India this month, conducting my research mostly online. If any of the interviewees require in-person meet-ups, I will travel to their state through train.

August - After I receive my primary data, I will run my findings through Qualtrics and NVivo to obtain any patterns or interesting observations. I will wrap up my final report and get it approved by my supervisors. I will be at the University of Oxford in UK for a summer abroad program in August.

Resources & Support Needed

NA

Potential Impact

This project exhibits an international and interdisciplinary focus, acknowledging the global relevance of religion, particularly in the context of increased migration from the Global South to the Global North. Research on FBOs is critical for understanding global societal dynamics, drawing on insights from religious studies, sociology, and political science. The emphasis on understanding and mitigating religion-based violence contributes to international efforts for fostering religious harmony, transcending geographical and disciplinary boundaries.

What I hope my research will reveal:

- *Identity Fusion*: I hypothesize that faith-based donors are more likely to exhibit behaviours of identity fusion to their religious community compared to non-faith-based donors. This could indicate a stronger sense of identity and connection to the causes supported by FBOs thus leading to more donations and more active involvement with activities organised by the FBO. At the same time, with high identity fusion, an attack on the group is an attack on the individual, so a connection can be made to higher likelihood of communal tendencies.
- *Tolerance Levels*: I anticipate uncovering differences in tolerance levels between faith-based and non-faith-based donors. Understanding these differences can provide valuable insights while creating recommendations for future policy in the end of the study. Ultimately, understanding tolerance levels is crucial for building sustainable peace and harmony.
- *Content Creation for Education*: Children are highly impressionable, and the content they are exposed to in educational curriculums can significantly influence their beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, it's crucial to examine these curriculums carefully to identify any elements that could potentially promote communalism or contribute to future violence.
- *Funding Sources*: Funding for FBOs and interfaith alliances comes from a mix of domestic and international sources. Understanding the distribution of funding can shed light on the influence of external factors on the activities of these organizations. It can also show whether sources of funding have any major influence on welfare dispersal.

References

- “Faith-Based Organizations across India Step up the Fight against COVID-19.” Wwww.who.int, www.who.int/india/news/detail/22-05-2020-faith-based-organizations-across-india-step-up-the-fight-against-covid19
- “How India Gives: 2020-21.” Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy, Ashoka University, 2022, csip.ashoka.edu.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/How_India_Gives_2020_21.pdf.
- Jodhka, Surinder S., and Pradyumna Bora. “In the Name of Development: Mapping ‘Faith-Based Organisations’ in Maharashtra.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2012, pp. 77–85, www.jstor.org/stable/23065580. Accessed 28 Jan. 2024.
- Kuriakose, Francis. “Religion as a Tool of Economic Development: Exploring the Idea of Social Justice through a Comparative Analysis of Religions in India.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2549414>.
- Mahajan, Gurpreet, and Surinder S. Jodhka. *Religion, Community and Development*. Routledge, 2011.
- Osella, Filippo. “Charity and Philanthropy in South Asia: An Introduction.” *Cambridge Core*, Cambridge University Press, 16 Mar. 2018, www.cambridge.org/core/journals/modern-asian-studies/article/abs/charity-and-philanthropy-in-south-asia-an-introduction/E4EB14205C1C33D2F9C91CC2ADB78C50.
- Pattnaik, Ananya, and Sarbeswar Sahoo. “The state regulation of faith-based civil society organisations in India.” *Melbourne Asia Review*, vol. 12, 22 Nov. 2022, <https://doi.org/10.37839/mar2652-550x12.8>.