



Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme
Research Report

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

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Sincerely,
Candace Sara Ciju

1. Introduction

Religion is deeply ingrained in the Indian subcontinent, 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.¹ Faith-based service initiatives have existed long before the emergence of non-profit organizations, and most religious traditions incorporate elements of philanthropy and peacebuilding. This is evident in practices such as *charity* in Christianity, *zakat* in Islam, and *dana* in Hinduism. 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.² 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.³ More recently, a report for the year 2020-21 by the Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy at Ashoka University revealed that religious organizations receive significant donations, amounting to ₹16,600 crore (constituting 70% of all charitable giving).⁴ The undeniable value that people place on faith-based organizations leads us to consider religion as a major investor in social welfare.

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) are non-governmental organizations grounded in the values and ideologies of one specific religion, and their functions include philanthropic, social, and moral activities. 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

¹ Filippo Osella, "Charity and Philanthropy in South Asia: An Introduction," *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 1 (January 2018), 23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x17000725>.

² Gurpreet Mahajan and Surinder S Jodhka, *Religion, Community and Development* (Routledge, 2010), 11.

³ Francis Kuriakose, "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, 3, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2549414>.

⁴ Swati Shresth and Shaivya Verma, "How India Gives - 2020 to 2021," Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy, 11, https://csip.ashoka.edu.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/How_India_Gives_2020_21.pdf

challenges for FBOs, especially those considered incompatible with the dominant political ideology, to act as agents of social welfare.⁵

A more recent development in the landscape of Indian social welfare is the emergence of 'inter-faith alliances'—a newer category of social welfare organizations. Although formal interfaith alliances are a 21st century development, interfaith dialogue and cooperation has been part of India's past. Taking place between 1919 and 1922, the Khilafat Movement was initiated by Indian Muslims to protest the British dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, specifically the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate, which was a symbol of unity for Muslims worldwide. While the movement began as primarily Muslim, Gandhi recognized it as an opportunity to unite Hindus and Muslims against British colonial rule. He believed that supporting the Khilafat cause would not only strengthen Hindu-Muslim unity but also advance the broader struggle for independence. Under Gandhi's leadership, the Indian National Congress, which was predominantly Hindu, adopted the Khilafat cause as part of its larger non-cooperation movement against British rule. During the peak of the Khilafat movement, cries of '*Long Live Hindu-Muslim Unity!*' ('*Hindu-Musalman ki jai!*') echoed from India's different corners.⁶ This alliance between Hindus and Muslims during the Khilafat Movement was a significant moment in the Indian independence struggle. It demonstrated how interfaith cooperation could be harnessed for a common political goal.

Both faith-based organizations and interfaith alliances engage in philanthropic work. However, unlike FBOs, interfaith alliances unite organizations and religious leaders from multiple religions to collaborate on societal development initiatives. An illustrative example of an interfaith alliance is a 2020 state-based interfaith alliance in Mumbai, where the World Health Organization India (WHO), UNICEF, and several faith-based organizations worked virtually to

⁵ Ananya Pattnaik and Sarbeswar Sahoo, "The State Regulation of Faith-Based Civil Society Organisations in India," *Melbourne Asia Review* 12 (November 22, 2022), par. 11, <https://doi.org/10.37839/mar2652-550x12.8>.

⁶ Shabnum Tejani, "Re-Considering Chronologies of Nationalism and Communalism," *South Asia Research* 27, no. 3 (November 2007): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026272800702700301>.

coordinate efforts against COVID-19.⁷ 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 exploration.

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.⁸ Religious leaders and faith-based organizations play an integral role in India, functioning as powerful influencers within society. Their reach extends far beyond the spiritual realm, impacting social, educational, and health outcomes across communities. Faith-based organizations have significantly contributed to India's development, serving as key agents in areas of poverty alleviation, education, disaster relief, and conflict resolution. Religion is a powerful social factor that shapes an individual's beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and practices. Health promotion initiatives that involve faith-based organizations and enlist faith leaders as advocates for disease prevention and treatment are effective in improving community health outcomes.⁹

As agents of change, religious leaders and faith-based organizations are not only custodians of tradition and belief but also dynamic forces shaping India's social and developmental landscape. FBOs play a crucial educational role, influencing perspectives across generations. Mishandled, this poses a risk of fostering communal hatred and inciting violence. Such are the legacies of some *Ekal Vidyalayas* in rural India. These private, single-teacher schools are affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and number around 80,000 across the country. The RSS presents itself as a cultural, and not a political organization that advocates for a Hindu nationalist agenda. However, this claim of being faith-based is highly questionable, given its historical

⁷ "Faith-Based Organizations across India Step up the Fight against COVID-19," World Health Organisation, May 22, 2020, <https://www.who.int/india/news/detail/22-05-2020-faith-based-organizations-across-india-step-up-the-fight-against-covid19>.

⁸ Surinder Jodhka and Pradyumna Bora, "In the Name of Development: Mapping 'Faith-Based Organisations' in Maharashtra," *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 7, 2012, 85, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2012/01/religion-and-citizenship-special-issues/name-development-mapping-faith-based>.

⁹ Gopal Krishna Soni et al., "Engaging Faith-Based Organizations for Promoting the Uptake of COVID-19 Vaccine in India: A Case Study of a Multi-Faith Society," *Vaccines* 11, no. 4 (April 1, 2023) 10, <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines11040837>.

alignment with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India. The RSS operates both commercial and philanthropic educational institutions, such as the *Ekal Vidyalayas*, which provide free non-formal and vocational education to children from diverse backgrounds, including Hindu upper castes, lower castes, Adivasis (indigenous people of India), and Muslims. An investigation by The Diplomat into *Ekal Vidyalayas* in Uttar Pradesh revealed that their curriculum intertwines nationalism with Hinduism.¹⁰ The textbooks contain manipulated narratives depicting Muslims as forcibly converting Hindus to Islam, and children are taught to identify perceived enemies of Hinduism from an early age.¹¹ While students receive instruction in subjects like math, science, and life skills, they are also exposed to the hateful ideology of Hindutva nationalism. This has led some students to be inspired to join Hindu paramilitary groups like the Bajrang Dal, which has been implicated in the murders of several Muslims and has advocated for economic boycotts against Muslims, threatening their livelihoods throughout India.¹²

2. Research Objectives

The research examines how donors differ on levels of religious tolerance, social identity fusion, and social identification influence based on their religion and their preference for contributing to faith-based organizations, non-faith-based organizations (NGOs without religious affiliations), or interfaith alliances. Furthermore, the research seeks to explore the functioning, operations, and challenges faced by faith-based organizations in India. Finally, the study intends to identify strategies for potential collaboration between faith-based organizations and interfaith alliances, as well as avenues for cooperation with the state.

Initial hypothesis: *Interfaith alliances are crucial for the effective functioning of faith-based organizations (FBOs), serving as a powerful deterrent against the influence of extremist FBOs and the escalation of communal tensions.*

¹⁰ Tarushi Aswani, "In India, Hindutva Schools Are Indoctrinating Poor Children," The Diplomat, September 19, 2023, 4, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/09/in-india-hindutva-schools-are-indoctrinating-poor-children/>.

¹¹ Aswani, "In India, Hindutva Schools Are Indoctrinating Poor Children," 4.

¹² Aswani, "In India, Hindutva Schools Are Indoctrinating Poor Children," 6.

3. Method

This study utilized two research tools: Interview and Questionnaire.

The faith-based organizations of interest to this study are:

- National Council of YMCAs of India (Christian),
- Ramakrishna Math (Hindu),
- Jamaat-I-Islami Hind (JIH) (Muslim).

3.1 *Interview:*

Top-level officials and executives from the boards of all the selected faith-based organizations and interfaith alliances were invited to participate in hour-long interviews to discuss the operations and services of their respective organizations. Officials from YMCA India, Ramakrishna Mission, and Jamaat-I-Islami Hind responded to the invitations and agreed to a virtual interview. Each of the three religious leaders interviewed holds a top-level position at both the state and national levels within their respective FBOs. Unfortunately, no responses were received from the two interfaith alliances - Global Interfaith Wash Alliance (GIWA) and Interfaith Humanitarian Network (IHN).

3.2 *Questionnaire:*

Using snowball sampling, 82 respondents completed a digital questionnaire that assessed social identification, social identity fusion, and religious tolerance using 5-point Likert scales.

Eligibility criteria to participate in the Questionnaire:

- Needs to be 18+,
- Must be Indian,
- Basic literacy in English,
- Must be donating to an INDIAN faith-based organization / non-faith-based organization (can be Indian or international) / interfaith alliance (can be Indian or international).

4. Results:

4.1 Interviews: To maintain anonymity, the interviewee from YMCA will be referred to as **C**, the interviewee from Jamaat-I-Islami Hind as **M**, and the interviewee from Ramakrishna Mission as **H**.

4.1.1 *YMCA Madurai*

Founded in 1891, the National Council of YMCAs of India is a part of the global World Alliance of YMCAs and is a non-profit organization that focuses on youth and is centered around Christianity. C is an executive member of YMCA Madurai, Tamil Nadu, and has been at the forefront of ecumenical and dialogue movements in Madurai for more than thirty years. C discussed the church's crucial role in providing essential services, particularly in education and healthcare. He emphasized that the church is a vital institution in the community, dedicated to serving marginalized groups regardless of religious affiliation. He highlighted YMCA Madurai's operations, which include running schools and hospitals with a strong focus on supporting the poor and underprivileged. He proudly mentioned the YMCA Kamak Higher Secondary School for the Hearing Impaired and the successes of its graduates in securing well-paid jobs. Notably, a teacher from the school received the Tamil Nadu government's 'Best Differently-Abled Teacher' award in 2022.

The church's spiritual mission is deeply integrated with its social services. C emphasized that the church's activities go beyond providing material aid; they fulfil a spiritual calling to help others, regardless of religion, colour, caste, or creed. This spiritual motivation drives YMCA's commitment to education, healthcare, and interfaith dialogue, aiming to build bridges between different communities and reduce tensions. C also mentioned that it is not only Christians who donate to YMCA; Muslims, Hindus, and people from other religions regularly contribute. Additionally, YMCA membership cards are available to everyone.

C highlighted that what sets YMCA apart from other organizations is its emphasis on Christian values, ensuring that each project and endeavour embodies the spirit of Christ, making it "alive." He spoke about the Christian values of love, charity, and being "other-centred," which guide all

of YMCA's activities. He explained that faith-based organizations like YMCA do more than simply complete projects, such as distributing monetary benefits; they include an empathetic component that seeks to address the root cause of problems. Using the example of someone begging for food, C described how, while the felt need might be food, the real need is a job. Guided by Christian love, YMCA aims to meet the real need.

Regarding challenges, C revealed that YMCA Madurai is currently unable to access its donations from outside India because their Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) bank account has been frozen for the past year. Although YMCA Madurai responded to the FCRA inquiry, they have yet to receive a reply. As a result, they can only rely on limited local donations, which are insufficient for the expansion of upcoming projects, such as building an old age home. While C remains positive about the FCRA regulation and acknowledges its importance for maintaining NGO security across India, he is uncertain about future policy changes under the newly formed National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition government, elected in June 2024.

When asked about recommendations for maximizing philanthropy and welfare work, C suggested that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs collaborate with faith-based organizations like YMCA to fulfil their CSR obligations. With proper government supervision, this collaboration could benefit both the FBO and the company, allowing the company to meet its statutory requirements while the FBO benefits from the company's extensive resources.

4.1.2 Jamaat-I-Islami Hind

Jamaat-I-Islami Hind (JIH) is a socio-religious organization in India, established in 1948 following its split from the Jamaat-I-Islami during the Partition of India. The organization is rooted in Islamic principles and is dedicated to promoting education, social service, and ecumenical outreach. M, a senior national executive of Jamaat-I-Islami Hind, began his involvement as a member of the Students Islamic Organization of India (SIO), JIH's student wing. While in college, M was deeply influenced by Jamaat-I-Islami Hind's literary works and found that the organization's ideologies, mission, and activities resonated with his own values. He has now been working with JIH for approximately 25 years.

M elaborated on the structure and operations of Jamaat-I-Islami Hind, highlighting its volunteer-driven nature and the importance of ideological alignment for membership. JIH offers two types of membership: "*rukhn*" (full members) and "*karkun*" (activists). There are around 18,000 *rukhn* and approximately 1 million *karkun* actively working with Jamaat-I-Islami Hind. While anyone can become a *karkun*, one can only achieve *rukhn* status if the national leadership is fully satisfied with their ideological commitment, alignment, and character. JIH operates across nearly every state in India, with the exception of regions where the Muslim population is minimal. All donations to JIH are sourced domestically, with each member contributing at least 2% of their monthly income to support the organization's operations.

M explained that JIH's services are widespread across India, focusing on welfare activities such as disaster relief, operating around 4,000 educational institutions, and providing interest-free microfinance. The organization is committed to inclusivity, serving individuals from all religious backgrounds, which is evident in their educational and social services. During communal riots, Jamaat-I-Islami Hind works equally for both Muslims and non-Muslims. In 2023, JIH launched Zakat Centre India, aiming to alleviate poverty, generate employment and livelihood opportunities, and provide pensions for widows and orphans. Discussing JIH's educational philosophy, M emphasized the importance of both spiritual and secular education for every individual. He asserted that students in Madrasas should also receive a secular education, while those in secular institutions should acquire basic knowledge of the Quran, Hadith, and other Islamic teachings.

When asked about what sets JIH apart from other faith-based organizations, M stressed that JIH is not just an NGO, but an ideological movement. In addition to its philanthropic work, JIH focuses on interfaith dialogue, research, and publication. He highlighted JIH's efforts in organizing interfaith dialogue, particularly during times of communal tension, where local leaders from different faiths come together at JIH's invitation to foster mutual understanding and harmony. However, M noted that JIH faces challenges due to the current atmosphere of communal tensions in India, which can limit the reach and effectiveness of their programs. He spoke about the resistance JIH encounters in some regions, a challenge that the organization had not previously faced to this extent.

M offered recommendations to maximize welfare distribution, urging the government to support and encourage welfare activities. He pointed out that India, still one of the poorest countries in the world, has a significant portion of its population in need of assistance. While the government bears the responsibility for welfare, M argued that the non-governmental sector, particularly faith-based organizations, can play a crucial role in uplifting people and meeting their needs. However, he expressed concern over the government's current attitude, which he finds discouraging, particularly regarding the registration and support of NGOs. M emphasized that welfare activities should be driven by a humanitarian outlook, free from political exploitation or vested interests, with the sole purpose of easing people's lives.

4.1.3 *Ramakrishna Mission*

The Ramakrishna Mission (RKM) is a spiritual and philanthropic organization headquartered in Belur Math, West Bengal, renowned for its extensive medical, relief, and educational programs. Founded in 1897 by Swami Vivekananda and named after the Indian Hindu spiritual guru Ramakrishna, the mission is driven by the motto "*Atmano Mokshartham Jagat Hitaya Cha*," which means "For the emancipation of oneself and the good of the universe." This guiding principle emphasizes that the mission's philanthropic efforts are not just acts of compassion but are seen as service to God in humanity.

H, a senior monk who has been with RKM for 35 years, shared insights into the mission's multifaceted work. Ramakrishna Mission ashramas features a temple for spiritual activities, a public library with 25,000 books, educational facilities including free coaching centres and schools, and charitable dispensaries. The mission operates over 250 centres in India and has a presence in 26 countries worldwide. In addition to its educational and spiritual initiatives, RKM is deeply involved in healthcare, operating numerous dispensaries and large hospitals that serve thousands daily. The mission also reaches out to indigenous communities in remote areas, providing agricultural education to improve their livelihoods. RKM's extensive publication work includes some of India's oldest magazines, and the mission is actively involved in disaster relief efforts, especially in coastal regions.

H explained that while the monks of RKM externally identify as Hindu, the core of their work is the realization of God, transcending specific religious identities. This belief that they are performing “*service of God in man*” imbues all their welfare activities with a spiritual significance. H highlighted RKM’s transparency, particularly in adhering to FCRA regulations, and its apolitical stance. While political leaders are welcomed at Belur Math, RKM remains strictly neutral, emphasizing that it is not a “vote bank.” H also stressed the mission’s focus on “*man-making*,” which involves developing not just intellectual growth but also character, empathy, and resilience.

When asked what distinguishes RKM from other faith-based organizations, H noted that RKM seeks to connect humanity with a spiritual goal, not just promoting goodness but understanding its divine source. The inclusive spirit in which RKM conducts its welfare work is vital, ensuring that the focus remains on the divine presence in all, rather than on supporting a single religion.

4.2 Questionnaire: The questionnaire received 123 responses, but after data cleaning, there are 82 responses that fit the eligibility requirements.

Based on the **type of organization** donated to:

Faith-Based Organizations	39%
Non-Faith-Based Organizations	51%
Interfaith Alliances	10%

Based on the **religious affiliation** of the donor:

Hindus	54%
Christians	33%
Muslims	12%
Undisclosed	1%

Through the use of 5-point Likert scales, this questionnaire measured social identification, social identity fusion, and religious tolerance. All scores range from 5-25.

- The **Self-Categorization score** indicates how strongly respondents identify with their respective groups. The higher the score is, the more the individual identifies with their group and its other members.
- The **Social Identity Fusion score** assesses the degree of identity overlap between the respondents and their group, with the highly fused individual completely basing their sense of self in their group's identity. The higher the score is, the more fused the individual's identity of self is with the identity of their group.
- The **Religious Tolerance score** measures respondents' acceptance and comfortability interacting with those from different religions. The higher the score is, higher is religious tolerance.

Score Range	Classification
5 - 9	Extremely Low
10 - 14	Low
15 - 19	Moderate
20 - 24	High
25	Extremely High

Table 1: Score classification for social identification, social identity fusion, and religious tolerance.

4.2.1 Scores for Faith-based donors, non-faith-based donors, and interfaith alliance donors:

Category	Average	Median	Standard Deviation	Number of Respondents	Average Score rating
Self-Categorization Score					
Faith-Based Donors	19.53	21	4.74	32	Moderate
Non-Faith Based Donors	16.00	16	5.18	42	Moderate
Interfaith Alliance Donors	16.63	17	3.80	8	Moderate
Social Identity Fusion Score					
Faith-Based Donors	10.83	10	4.75	32	Low

Non-Faith Based Donors	9.14	8	3.71	42	Extremely Low
Interfaith Alliance Donors	9.75	7.5	4.96	8	Extremely Low
Religious Tolerance Score					
Faith-Based Donors	19.93	20.5	3.17	32	Moderate ¹³
Non-Faith Based Donors	20.19	20	3.07	42	High
Interfaith Alliance Donors	19.75	19	3.19	8	Moderate

Table 2: Classification based on the type of organisation donated to: Faith-Based Donors, Non-Faith Based Donors (regular NGOs), and Interfaith Alliance Donors

FBO Donors show the highest average Self-Categorization score (19.53) and the highest median (21), indicating a strong identification with their religious group. Non-FBO Donors have the lowest average score (16) and median (16), suggesting weaker self-identification compared to the FBO group. Interfaith Alliance Donors' scores (Average: 16.63, Median: 17) are close to the non-FBO group but slightly higher, suggesting a moderate level of self-identification.

FBO Donors show the highest average Social Identity Fusion score (10.83), indicating a strong identity fusion with their group. The high standard deviation suggests a wide range of fusion intensity within the group. Non-FBO Donors have the lowest average score (9.14) and median (8), indicating weaker identity fusion. Interfaith Alliance Donors have their average score (9.75) closer to the FBO group but with a lower median (7.5), indicating a moderate level of identity fusion, with some variability.

FBO Donors show slightly lower average tolerance (19.93) compared to non-FBO donors (20.19). However, they have a slightly higher median (20.5) than non-FBO donors (20),

¹³ Note: Average score rating shown in red are scores that lie outside of the suggested score classification.

indicating a slight tendency toward higher tolerance levels among the FBO group. Non-FBO Donors have the highest average tolerance score, but the difference is minimal compared to the other groups.

4.2.2 Scores for Christians, Muslims, and Hindus:

Religion	Average	Median	Standard Deviation	Number of Respondents	Average Score rating
Self-Categorization Score					
Muslims	21.60	21.5	2.84	10	High
Christians	19.03	20	4.29	27	Moderate
Hindus	15.68	16	5.27	44	Moderate
Social Identity Fusion Score					
Muslims	11.20	11.5	3.08	10	Low
Christians	9.70	10	3.52	27	Extremely Low
Hindus	9.90	8	5.16	44	Extremely Low
Religious Tolerance Score					
Muslims	23.00	23.5	2.40	10	High
Christians	20.07	20	2.83	27	High
Hindus	18.50	19	6.68	44	Moderate ¹⁴

Table 3: Classification based on the religion of the donor: Muslims, Christians, Hindus

Muslims have the highest average Self-Categorization score (21.6) and the highest median (21.5), suggesting that Muslims in this sample identify strongly with their religious group. The relatively low standard deviation (2.84) indicates that this strong identification is consistent across respondents. Christians have a moderate average score (19.03) with a median of 20, indicating a strong but slightly less intense identification compared to Muslims. The variability is

¹⁴ Note: Average score rating shown in red are scores that lie outside of the suggested score classification.

higher (St Dev: 4.29), suggesting some variation in identification strength among Christians. Hindus show the lowest average Self-Categorization score (15.68) and a median of 16, indicating weaker self-identification with their religious group. The higher standard deviation (5.27) reflects a broader range of identification levels within this group.

Muslims have the highest Social Identity Fusion score (11.2) and median (11.5), indicating a strong fusion between their personal and religious group identities. The relatively low standard deviation (3.08) suggests this fusion is consistent among Muslim respondents. Christians show a moderate level of identity fusion with an average score of 9.7 and a median of 10. The variability (St Dev: 3.52) is relatively low, indicating some consistency in identity fusion within this group. Hindus have an average fusion score of 9.9 but with a lower median of 8, indicating a less strong fusion on average. The higher standard deviation (5.16) suggests more variability in how strongly Hindus identify with their religious group.

Muslims show the highest Religious Tolerance score (23) with a median of 23.5, indicating a very high level of tolerance. The low standard deviation (2.40) suggests that this high tolerance is consistent among Muslim respondents. Christians have an average tolerance score of 20.07, which is close to the overall average, with a median of 20. This suggests moderate tolerance levels, with relatively low variability (St Dev: 2.83). Hindus exhibit the lowest average tolerance score (18.5) and a median of 19. The high standard deviation (6.68) indicates considerable variability, suggesting that some Hindus in the sample are highly tolerant, while others are less so.

4.2.3 Collective scores for all respondents:

Category	Average	Median	Standard Deviation	Number of Respondents	Average Score rating
Self-Categorization Score	17.43	18	5.11	82	Moderate

Social Identity Fusion Score	9.93	9.5	4.44	82	Extremely low (0.7 points away from low)
Religious Tolerance Score	20.07	20	3.06	82	High

Table 4: Collective scores for all respondents of the questionnaire.

5. Discussion

This research explored the dynamics of social identification, social identity fusion, and religious tolerance among donors associated with various organizations and religions. The findings, drawn from qualitative interviews and a quantitative questionnaire, provide valuable insights into how these elements influence philanthropic engagement in a multi-religious context.

Self-Categorization scores revealed that Muslims identified most strongly with their religious group, followed by Christians and Hindus, underscoring the significant role of religious identity in shaping social behaviors and attitudes toward philanthropy. The high average Self-Categorization score among Muslims (21.60) suggests a robust community identity that fosters a strong sense of belonging and mutual support, likely influencing their philanthropic contributions. For instance, the interview with the representative from Jamaat-I-Islami Hind highlighted that a minimum of 2% of the monthly income of JIH’s approximately 1 million members is allocated to zakat for charity.

Social Identity Fusion scores showed that Muslims exhibited the highest level of fusion with their group identity, while Christians and Hindus reported lower levels. This suggests that a deeper fusion between personal and group identities may correlate with a stronger sense of community responsibility and engagement in philanthropy. Notably, while high to extremely high scores in social identity fusion can be concerning for extreme activities during communal tensions, the participants in this study - all scoring within the "low" range - do not present such risks.

Religious Tolerance scores were highest among Muslims and Christians, with Muslims showing the highest tolerance. Hindus displayed moderate tolerance but with more variability, indicating polarizing data within the group. This variability suggests two poles within the Hindu identity: one highly fused and identified with their religion, and another less so.

Faith-Based Donors had the highest average Self-Categorization score (19.53), indicating a strong religious identification. They also had the highest Social Identity Fusion score (10.83), reflecting a strong overlap between personal and group identities. Non-Faith-Based Donors, however, exhibited slightly higher Religious Tolerance scores (20.19) than Faith-Based Donors (19.93), confirming that strong religious identification and fusion does not necessarily translate into higher tolerance toward other religions.

Ideally, social identity fusion should remain in the "extremely low" to "low" range, indicating that while individuals identify with their groups, they do not completely merge their personal identity with that of the group. This balance promotes personal autonomy and a more inclusive view of other groups, reducing the risk of in-group bias and inter-group conflict. The study's findings indicate that social identity fusion among all respondents, regardless of religious affiliation or donation preference, consistently falls within this desirable range, which is positive for fostering peaceful coexistence and interfaith dialogue.

Religious tolerance, ideally, should range from "high" to "extremely high." However, the study found that tolerance scores among faith-based donors and Hindu respondents were only moderate, highlighting an opportunity for improvement. Policy initiatives should target these groups to elevate their tolerance levels from "moderate" to "high," which is crucial in today's politically and communally charged environment.

6. Recommendations

This study initially hypothesized that interfaith alliances are essential for the optimal functioning of faith-based organizations (FBOs) and for countering the influence of extremist FBOs. However, the research revealed that while extremist FBOs may exist in India, the majority of the

organizations studied and interacted with demonstrated inclusivity and tolerance in their religious work. Interfaith alliances, although valuable, are relatively few in number across India and lack the resources and reach that many long-established FBOs possess. The research highlights that, regardless of religious affiliation, FBOs carry out their work guided by spiritual principles - whether it be Christian love, Islamic zakat, or the Hindu concept of service to God in humanity. These organizations also play a crucial role in fostering interfaith understanding and communal harmony, bridging divides, and promoting peaceful coexistence among different religious communities.

To further enhance the positive impact of FBOs and address the challenges they face, the following recommendations are proposed:

- ***Integrate Interfaith Understanding into FBO Activities:*** All FBOs should incorporate an interfaith understanding component into their activities, helping to reduce the need for separate interfaith alliances by fostering empathy, collaboration, and mutual respect among different religious groups.
- ***Simplify FCRA Licensing for FBOs:*** The government should simplify the FCRA licensing and renewal process for FBOs with a consistent track record of compliance and transparency. A tiered system could be introduced, allowing for more straightforward renewals for these organizations.
- ***Promote Collaboration for Interfaith Initiatives:*** Encourage collaboration between FBOs and other NGOs to conduct interfaith initiatives on a larger scale. Such partnerships can pool resources and expertise, making interfaith activities more impactful and widespread.
- ***Incorporate Interfaith Education in FBO-Run Schools:*** Schools run by FBOs should incorporate interfaith education into their curricula. This could include lessons on the basic tenets of different religions, the history of interfaith relations, and the importance of mutual respect and understanding.
- ***Government Support for Interfaith Dialogue:*** The government should offer grants or financial incentives to FBOs that actively promote interfaith dialogue and education.
- ***Public-Private Partnerships for Interfaith Harmony:*** Encourage public-private partnerships where the government, private sector, and FBOs collaborate to promote

interfaith initiatives. As ideated by C from YMCA, this could be part of the Corporate Social Responsibility programs that companies are obligated to enact.

- ***Programming to boost religious tolerance among FBO and Hindu donors.***

By implementing these recommendations, faith-based organisations can continue to play a pivotal role in building a more inclusive society, leveraging their influence to promote peace and understanding across religious and cultural divides. This research underscores that while the strength of faith-based organizations lies in their spiritual undertaking, their true power emerges when they actively embrace and promote interfaith understanding, transforming potential divides into bridges of unity and peace.

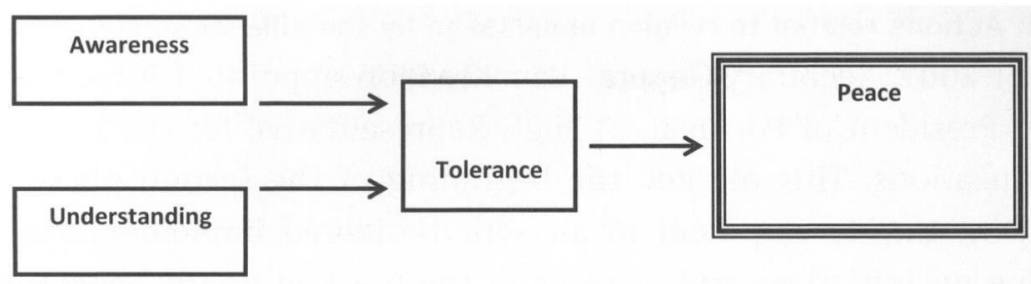


Fig. 1: A Path to Intercultural Peace¹⁵

¹⁵ Thomas Uthup, “Bringing Communities Closer: The Role of the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC),” *CrossCurrents* 60, no. 3 (September 1, 2010) 402–18, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cro.2010.a782471>.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Consent Form

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

Principal Investigator: Candace Sara Ciju
Undergraduate student at the University of Toronto

Supervisors:

Dr. Aparna Sundar
Course Instructor, Contemporary Asian Studies
University of Toronto

Dr. Cindy Ewing
Assistant Professor of Contemporary International History
Department of History
University of Toronto

Research Sponsor: Laidlaw Scholars Program – The Laidlaw Foundation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Candace Sara Ciju from the University of Toronto. This study seeks to explore the potential for Faith-based organisations (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.

By studying behaviours and attitudes of faith-based and non-faith-based donors, interviewing aid recipients and NGO executives, and analysing educational curriculums used by FBO-run 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.

Please allocate 10-15 minutes to carefully read the questionnaire and provide accurate answers to all questions. You have been selected for participation in the study as you meet all the inclusion criteria of the study:

- Above 18 years of age,
- Is an Indian citizen,
- Has basic literacy in English,
- Donates to a faith-based organisation (Indian only), or non-faith-based organisation (can be Indian or international).

Conditions for Participation:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate, withdraw at any time, and decline to answer any question without any negative consequences. If you decide to withdraw, any data collected up to the point of withdrawal will be kept for analysis unless you request otherwise. Your collected data will remain strictly confidential.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study. However, by participating, you contribute to a better understanding of the role of faith-based organisations and interfaith alliances in India's social welfare landscape. After completing the questionnaire, you will be given the option to enrol yourself in a raffle to win a Rs.2000 Amazon Gift card.

Confidentiality:

Only the Principal Investigator of this study will have access to all information provided. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity will be protected in all reports or publications resulting from this study.

Publication of Results:

The results of this study may be published or presented at conferences. However, your identity will remain confidential.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions about the study or your rights as a participant, you can contact the University of Toronto's Research Oversight and Compliance Office – Human Research Ethics Program at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Consent:

I have read and understand the above information. I agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please keep this form for your records.

Appendix B – Questionnaire

Demographic information:

- Age: (18-27), (28-37), (38-47), (48-57), (58-67), (68+)
- Gender: [Male, Female, Non-binary, Genderqueer, Genderfluid, Agender, Transgender, Prefer not to say, Other (please specify)]
- Do you donate primarily to faith-based organisations? (Yes, No)
- What is your religion? [Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Sikhism, Other (please specify)]

Affective Commitment Items - *sense of belonging to the group. – more you agree, higher is social identification.*

1. “Do you feel a strong emotional connection to your religion?”
2. “Do you feel lucky and proud to be a follower of your religion?”
3. “Do you believe that you have created strong bonds with other followers, or community leaders of your religion?”
4. “Do you have a strong sense of belonging to your religion?”
5. “Would you be sad if you were no longer a member of your religious community?”

Self-Categorization Items - *defining oneself as a member of the group – more you agree, higher is social identification.*

1. “Do you see yourself as a member of your religious group?”
2. “Do you identify with other members of your religion?”
3. “Is being a follower of your religion an important and integral part of your identity?”
4. “Do you feel accepted by others in your religious community?”
5. “Do you think that your personal qualities reflect your religious beliefs?”

Identity Fusion Items - *degree to which individuals perceive themselves as interconnected with the group - more you agree, higher is social identity fusion.*

1. “Is your religion and religious group more important to you than yourself?”
2. “Do you think you would do anything to defend your religion, even if it is taking up violence?”
3. “Do you feel as if your religious group's successes and failures are your own?”
4. “If someone criticizes your religious group, do you feel like it is a personal insult?”
5. “Do you prefer the company of believers of your own religion, over the company of non-believers, or believers of other religions?”

Religious Tolerance Items: - *more you agree, higher is religious tolerance.*

1. “Do you feel comfortable to interact with people who have different religious beliefs than your own?”
2. “Do you support policies that promote religious tolerance in society over policies that directly benefit only your religious group?”
3. “Do you believe it is important to celebrate religious holidays and traditions from other religions?”
4. “Do you actively seek opportunities to learn about different religious traditions?”
5. “Do you agree that diversity of religion contributes positively to society?”

Appendix C – Questionnaire Participant Recruitment

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Chance to enter 2 X INR 2500 lucky draw!! WILL YOU BE THE LUCKY WINNER!?

RESEARCH SANCTIONED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO - LAIDLAW
SCHOLARSHIP RESEARCH

Student Researcher: Candace Sara Ciju
Supervisors: Dr. Aparna Sundar, Dr. Cindy Ewing

Time to participate in research: July 20 to July 26

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

Requirements to fill the questionnaire:

- Needs to be 18+,
- Must be Indian,
- Basic literacy in English,
- Must be donating to an Indian faith-based organisation / non-faith-based organisation (can be Indian or international) / interfaith alliance (can be Indian or international)

Abstract of research:

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 faith-based organizations (philanthropy through a single faith) to work alongside newly emerging interfaith alliances (philanthropy through a multitude of faiths) to enhance their roles in development, while simultaneously preventing the development of a tradition of communal violence in India.

Type of Research: Questionnaire measuring social identification, social identity fusion and tolerance.

- Faith-based organisations: Organisations that carry out social service and welfare acts to the general public, but the work is guided by the values and ideologies of a SINGLE religion. Eg: YMCA, ISKCON, Jamaat-I-Islami Hind etc.
- Non-faith-based organisations: Organisations that carry out social service and welfare acts to the general public, but the work is NOT guided by the values and ideologies of a religion. These are otherwise known as NGOs. Eg: Oxfam, Save the Children, Smile Foundation etc.
- Interfaith Alliances: Organisations that carry out social service and welfare acts to the general public, but the work is guided by the values and ideologies of MULTIPLE religions. Eg: GIWA - Global Interfaith Wash Alliance, Interfaith Humanitarian Alliance etc.

All participants will have the chance to enter Rs. 2500 raffle with two winners!
Will you be one of the lucky two? Answer the questionnaire and try your luck!

****ALL YOUR INFORMATION WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL****

Appendix D – Interview Questions

- 1) When did you join the Faith-based organization?
- 2) What position did you start with and how long have you been working with the organization?
- 3) What prompted you to join the organization?
- 4) How many volunteers does the organization have?
- 5) What is your current position? What do you oversee?
- 6) How much money is donated to the FBO / Interfaith alliance annually?
- 7) Out of those funds, what percentage comes from within India and what comes from outside the country?
- 8) Is there any political interference in the activities of the organization?
- 9) Where do donations come from? Do people from various religions donate to your organization?
- 10) How has been your experience working at the organization?
- 11) What specific activities are carried out by the organization?
- 12) Does your organization promote interfaith understanding and religious tolerance through its programming?
- 13) Does your organization have its own schools in India?
- 14) If yes, what syllabus is followed by the FBO-run school?
- 15) What has been the impact and successes of the welfare carried out?
- 16) What do you think of faith-based organization regulation in India? Do you find it to be supportive or unsupportive?
- 17) If any persist, what challenges are faced by the organization in day-to-day operation?
- 18) What makes your organization and the work it does unique from other FBOs or NGOs?
- 19) Do you have any personal suggestions to improve and maximize welfare distribution across India?
- 20) Do you think welfare should be distributed through religious or non-religious channels in India?
- 21) Do you have any questions for me?