

Religious Identity and Religious Orientation of Hindus and Muslims in Traditional Schools

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ABSTRACT

The study examined religious identity and religious orientation in Hindu and Muslim girls in the context of their schooling. The study was conducted with 30 Hindu and 30 Muslim girls, aged 17-22 years, drawn from traditional Muslim and Hindu schools situated in the city of Varanasi. The participants were given scales for the assessment of religious orientation and religious identity. Findings revealed that Muslim groups exhibited stronger religious identity than Hindu group. With respect to religious orientation, the two groups differed on intrinsic religious orientation and personal extrinsic orientation. No significant difference was found on the scores of social extrinsic religiosity and fundamentalist orientation between the two groups.

Keywords: *Religious Orientation, Religious identity, Traditional schools, Hindu-Muslim groups*

Religion is a large component of Indian life and has huge effect on who they are, how they interact with others, and how cultural standards are passed down from one generation to the next (Madan, 1991). It is very important to look at how people relate to their faith during their young age and imbibe that in their self-concept. Religion forms an integral part of social identity among youth in India (Bano & Mishra, 2014). Allport and Ross (1967) found that religiosity can be understood by two different orientations which are on two different poles, intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. The Intrinsic orientation theoretically operationalises a sincere faith in which religion serves as an individual's master motive. The Extrinsic orientation reflects instead the use of religion to other ends. Its Extrinsic Personal factor assesses the use of religion to achieve personal well-being whereas the Extrinsic Social factor records the use of religion in order to obtain social benefits (Kirkpatrick & Hood, 1990).

Religion is a fundamental component of Indian society, but A series of large-scale surveys by Pew Research Centre found that 84% of Indian adults regard religion as "very important" in their lives (Evans, & Sahgal, 2021). "Religion and Its Role in Society" by Nath and Phil (2015) argues that religion is indispensable to Indian society because it forges collective identity and provides socio-psychological stability in a diverse, rapidly changing nation. For

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Indians, religion is not merely spiritual but a cultural backbone. Surprisingly not much psychological study has been done on how different religious groups and institutions deal with and understand their religious identities (Bajpai, 2022; Chatterjee, 1991; Kaul & Adhikary, 2014). When one talks about socialisation of religion, there are few studies done in India, which delve into the dynamics of religion in plural societies through an indigenous lens (Bano, 2024; Bano et al., 2022; Tripathi et al., 2014). This study aims to explore the lesser studied sample of traditional school and specially the women studying in such schools because women have a huge role in passing on cultural and religious beliefs from one generation to the next (Mahmood, 2009; Narayan, 2013). It is important to study this sample of traditional school because they are often marginalised from the mainstream society and looked as “too traditional” to become a norm but an exception. Such traditional schools often operate at the fringes of the society and stereotyped for being different from regular schools, often harbouring children from low socio-economic status and providing them with opportunities for education, lodging and boarding, charging a nominal or no fees at all. These schools are not the typical definition of a conventional school but often the torch bearer of religious studies and preserving its tradition and culture they also serve as a saviour not only for the poor children, orphans, women who might have been exempted from education at all. Exploring traditional schools opens new opportunities to analyse what values are promoted and transmitted and how are issues of difference and diversity being dealt with. To put it differently, the focus on such institutions allows the researchers to better grasp how the different actors involved in traditional schools understand notions of difference and diversity.

Religious socialisation is also strongly gendered. For instance, students at Islamic Madaras and Hindu Maths learn about religious rules in quite different ways, using very different ideological and teaching methods. Madaras in a lot of places prioritise memorising the Quran, being moral, and acting humbly (Sikand, 2005). Students in these situations balance their religious commitments with the goals of their official education. Kushwaha and Vandana (2014) remark that this is like "walking on tight ropes." Bano (2012) states that some people think madrasas are overly strict, but they do give students an organised place to learn and practice their religion while also following societal standards. They teach how to understand the Vedas in a rational way, how to be morally strong, how to be spiritually strong, and how to empower women (Kaur, 2011).

Both religions stress piety and discipline, but their divergent ideas about gender roles and how to get involved in public life affect how people practice their faith in various ways. Religious orientation in these schools underlines the different aspects of religious motivations, religious segregation and attitudes towards religious diversity, which is when people strictly follow sacred texts, feel superior to others in their own group, and reject beliefs from other groups (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Hood et al., 2009). Juergensmeyer (2008) claim that religious fundamentalism is growing in India among both Hindus and Muslims because of political and social divisions, perceived cultural challenges, and communal identity politics.

The purpose of this study is to fill this vacuum by looking at both internal and external religious beliefs in young girls who attend Madaras and Maths schools. It wants to know What are the differences between the religious beliefs of Hindu and Muslim girls who go to conventional religious schools?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a correlational research design to investigate differences in religious identity and religiosity and among Hindu and Muslim participants.

Sample

A purposive sample of 60 undergraduate students were recruited from traditional schools, Madarsas and Maths, from Varanasi city in Uttar Pradesh. With equal representation from both religious groups, 30 Hindu and 30 Muslim participants age ranged from 17 to 22 years were selected based on their self-identified religious affiliation.

Measures

Data was collected using self-report questionnaire which was translated into Urdu and Hindi for Muslim and Hindu groups respectively. Religiosity was assessed using a 17-item adapted composite scale based on the *Religious Orientation Scale* (Allport & Ross, 1967), the *Religious Fundamentalism Scale* (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). This instrument measured four dimensions of religiosity: personally extrinsic, socially extrinsic, intrinsic religiosity, and religious fundamentalism. Religious identity was measured using a distinct 7-item scale designed to assess individuals' strength of identification with their cultural and religious heritage. A 5-point Likert scale was used in both instruments, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of the construct. Internal consistency reliability for all scales was acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha values. Data collection occurred in classroom settings with informed consent, and participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Descriptive statistics and independent samples *t*-test were conducted to compare group differences across variables. All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 20, with statistical significance set at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to examine differences in religious identity and religiosity between Hindu and Muslim participants. Religiosity was assessed across four dimensions: personally extrinsic religiosity, socially extrinsic religiosity, religious fundamentalism, and intrinsic religiosity. Results revealed that Muslim participants scored significantly higher than Hindu participants on personally extrinsic religiosity ($M = 14.57$, $SD = 1.22$) vs. $M = 11.57$, $SD = 2.57$), $t=5.78$, $p < .001$, and intrinsic religiosity ($M = 27.67$, $SD = 3.92$ vs. $M = 23.80$, $SD = 4.19$), $t=3.69$, $p < .001$. No significant differences were found between the groups for socially extrinsic religiosity ($p = 0.517$) or religious fundamentalism ($p = 0.632$). In addition, religious identity scores were significantly higher among Muslim participants ($M = 34.87$, $SD = 0.73$) compared to Hindu participants ($M = 33.80$, $SD = 2.61$), $t=2.16$, $p = .038$. Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the assumption of equal variances was violated for personally extrinsic religiosity and religious identity, and therefore Welch's *t*-test was used in those cases. These findings suggest that Muslim participants in the present study exhibited significantly greater levels of internalized religious commitment, personal reliance on religion, and cultural identification compared to their Hindu counterparts.

Table 1 Summary of Group Comparisons (Hindu and Muslim participants) Across Variables of Religious orientations and Religious identity.

Variables		Hindus	Muslims	t-value	p-value
Religious Identity	Mean	28.24	34.87	11.87	< .001
	SD	5.06	0.73		
Intrinsic Religious Orientation	Mean	23.80	27.67	3.69	< .001
	SD	4.19	3.92		
Personally Extrinsic Orientation	Mean	11.57	14.57	5.78	< .001
	SD	2.57	1.22		
Socially Extrinsic Orientation	Mean	10.33	10.87	0.65	0.51
	SD	3.53	2.76		
Religious Fundamentalism	Mean	13.57	13.80	0.48	0.63
	SD	2.03	1.71		

DISCUSSION

Religious identity, under the parameters of this study, can be characterised as the sense of joy, pride, and belonging derived from one's religion. A significant divergence in religious identity occurs between Hindu and Muslim groups. Both groups have attained elevated ratings on the religious identification measure, signifying that they get joy and pride from their unique religious identities. The Muslim group surpassed the Hindu group (Bano, 2024). The Muslim group demonstrated a low standard deviation, signifying that all 30 individuals replied consistently to the seven questions about religious identity. They have deeply internalised their religious identity, making it a fundamental aspect of their self-concept and crucial to all areas of their life. The 2021 Pew India poll reveals that 91% of Indian Muslims regard religion as "very important" in their lives, above the proportions of practically all other religious groups analysed.

The divergence in religious identity between the two groups can be attributed to their distinct environments, wherein institutions foster a sense of religious (Deeni) identity through Qur'anic education and the encouragement of visible expressions of piety—such as clothing(hijab/burqa), prayer, and behaviour—as markers of devout Muslim womanhood (Borker, 2023).

Perceived risks intensify reliance on Islamic identification as a safeguard, thereby strengthening Muslim collective identity. Pasek and Cook (2019) discovered that in the United States, when religious minority, such as Muslims, experience religious discrimination, their religious affiliation strengthens, acting as a protective mechanism against stress and maintaining self-esteem. Research in India regarding anti-Muslim hate speech circulated through WhatsApp reveals that such fear-inducing content exacerbates perceived dangers, hence psychosocially strengthening collective Muslim identity as a protective mechanism (Saha et al., 2021). The reason why Hindu group has strong religious identity but not at par with Muslim group could be that Hindus being the majority do not feel the need to explicitly assert their religious identity as public life already has mass representation of Hindu symbolism and norms and Hinduism as a religion caters to various schools of thoughts and is decentralised in the sense that it has less centralized doctrine and more flexibility in choosing the form and extent of religious engagement, resulting in heterogeneous expressions of identity (Tripathi & Mishra, 2016; Bano, et al., 2022).

Intrinsic Religious Orientation

A significant difference was observed in the intrinsic religious orientation ratings between the Hindu and Muslim groups. Muslims received higher scores on the Intrinsic scale, characterised by beliefs on the existence of God, the importance of private prayers, and the worldview influenced by one's religion, including interaction with religious books.

The Hindu group attained an average score on this propensity, whereas the Muslim group exceeded the standard. This conclusion might be attributed to Indian Madrasas, which, similar to those studied in other cultures, emphasise daily prayer, Qur'anic inspiration, and personal spiritual importance, hence promoting the internalisation of religion over mere procedural practice. Religious schools foster communities united by shared beliefs and objectives, developing an inner motivation in students to fully embrace and practise their faith. Math's cultivate intrinsic motivators such as scriptural knowledge and communal ethics; yet, Indian empirical studies often reveal that Muslim students demonstrate consistently higher levels of internal religiosity in similar institutional contexts.

Muslim students exhibited the highest level of intrinsic religiosity, deeply internalising their faith and valuing it for its intrinsic worth, while Hindu students demonstrated a more balanced orientation, neither predominantly intrinsic nor extrinsic; similar findings were noted in prior research (Buzdar & Ali, 2014). Evaluating the Religious Maturity of Hindu, Christian, and Muslim Secondary School Students. Students in religious institutions develop deep personal commitments to their faith, viewing religious concepts as meaningful on an individual level rather than solely as institutional mandates (Srinivasan et al., 2019)

Socially Extrinsic Religious Orientation

No significant difference is observed between Hindu and Muslim groups, as both attained above-average scores in social extrinsic religiosity. This indicates that, collectively, religion in India serves both as a spiritual link to the divine and as a social bond that unifies community members. Hindu and Muslim organisations engage in religious practices—such as rituals, festivals, and communal worship—primarily for external social benefits, including affiliation, community support, and social validation. This conclusion aligns with Indian studies (Vats et al., 2021), suggesting that extrinsic religious motivation is prevalent among youth and often associated with communal and societal reinforcement rather than individual devotion.

Personal extrinsic religious orientation

A significant difference exists between Hindu and Muslim groups, with the Muslim group attaining a higher score on this dimension than the Hindu group. Field observation highlights how madrasas in India shape girls to embody Islamic womanhood through formal curricula and observable practices (e.g., discipline, veiling, rituals), hence reinforcing extrinsic religiosity as a component of religious identity (Van Camp et al. (2016).

In the context of the study, it is crucial to acknowledge that two faith-based schools demonstrate divergent religious practices and their resultant effects. The Hindu traditional schools emphasise meditation, Havan, and many rituals aimed at fostering gratitude, pursuing moral strength, and uncovering life's truths through rational interpretations of the Vedas. In contrast, Muslim traditional schools primarily stress adherence to Islamic principles, promoting the observance of five daily prayers and instilling the belief that faith in Allah and submission to divine will guarantee peace and resolution to all challenges, fostering the conviction that reliance on a singular supreme power resolves all issues.

Fundamentalist Religious Perspective

In this domain, no significant difference is observed between Hindu and Muslim groups. Both groups attained heightened scores in this respect.

This study defines fundamentalism as rigid beliefs concerning one's religion, particularly the notion that religious laws take precedence over national laws, the imperative for individuals to revert to their traditional roots, and the existence of a sole correct interpretation of religious texts that all followers must comply with. This sentiment provoked a diverse reaction among Hindu participants.

Hindu and Muslim girls in religious institutions are taught to embrace literalist interpretations, see their own traditions as supreme, and prioritise religious law above secular values. When religious laws identify a threat from secular or national norms, both groups amplify their religious fundamentalism as a defensive response, thereby reinforcing similar emotions across many faiths. Both Hindu and Muslim traditional schools uphold conventional lives and often promote strict adherence to religious doctrines as the ideal way of living. Both Matha and Madarasa school traditions have conformist and conservative traits, such as textual literalism (strict devotion to the Vedas and Quran as the exclusive truth), exclusivity, moral rectitude, and authoritarian religious governance (Simha, 1903; Abdul-Raof, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Both Hindus and Muslims have exhibited stronger religious identity and high scores on both extrinsic and intrinsic religious inclination. Allport and Ross (1967) characterise these dimensions as two contrasting poles. Individuals with a pronounced extrinsic orientation employ religion for superficial purposes, fostering social ties, whilst those with a strong intrinsic orientation prioritise the internalisation of religious beliefs, but as observed in the findings, students from both the religious groups have scored high on both the orientations, the reason could possibly be that Indian culture lays great emphasis not only on the spiritual side of the religion which is practiced in private and helps the person delve deeper into their faith by probing them to find meaning and ways to lead life (intrinsic) but also exhibit importance on social practices, people pray in masses, participate in religious processions and celebrate festivities, this enhances their sense of community and is often promoted by the religious leaders and elders of the family. These social gatherings are often disguised under religious gatherings, people like to participate in social events which centers around their faith, irrespective of the religion. It has been observed that display of religious practices and religious social gatherings are often seen in positive light and participating in them is a socially desirable act. This finding adds to academic literature on how culture influences people's extrinsic and intrinsic religious orientation and challenges the notion that extrinsic and intrinsic religious orientation are on two diametrically opposite poles (Mambo, 2018). Children are often told by elders to worship God or engage in performative rituals because doing so will guarantee them peace and happiness in life, it will protect them from evil. These practices are not only rooted in fulfilment of personal needs but help the individual anchor their faith in the supreme power, to submit oneself to the power of God. As a result, extrinsic participation may be positively valued and institutionally promoted, rather than being seen merely as superficial or utilitarian. Over time, regular participation in community rituals may lead to genuine personal commitment, illustrating how behavioural engagement can precede and foster deeper belief. The approach could rather be to define religious orientations as a continuum but poles, how in a highly religious and collective society the religious performative actions, the need for social belongingness and security are learnt as

part of socialisation and as development progresses, most people start internalising the religious doctrines and move to a position where religion itself serves as an end but means (Kahoe, & Meadow, 1981). This opens new possibilities and questions to be researched further to get more clarity. It is hoped that its outcomes will affect educational policy, interfaith dialogue, and community integration in a society that is both religiously diverse and ideologically split.

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Conflict of Interest

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