

Religion as a Force of Social Cohesion and Contestation in Contemporary West Bengal: Evidence from a Household Survey

Ananya Ganguly^{1*} | Dr. Arun Kumar²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Singhania University, Pachheri Bari, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Singhania University, Pachheri Bari, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India.

*Corresponding Author: gangulymisti210@gmail.com

Citation: Ganguly, A. & Kumar, A. (2026). Religion as a Force of Social Cohesion and Contestation in Contemporary West Bengal: Evidence from a Household Survey. International Journal of Education, Modern Management, Applied Science & Social Science, 08(03(II)), 120–129. [https://doi.org/10.62823/IJEMMASSS/8.3\(II\).9393](https://doi.org/10.62823/IJEMMASSS/8.3(II).9393)

ABSTRACT

Religion remains deeply embedded in the social and political life of India despite processes of modernization, urbanization and secularization. This article examines the simultaneous integrative and disintegrative roles of religion in contemporary West Bengal, with particular attention to attitudes, religious practices, social welfare, interpersonal solidarity, conflict, political neutrality and strategies for reducing religious intolerance. The analysis is based on an observational household survey of 450 heads or eldest adult members drawn from rural and urban locations in Darjeeling, Howrah and South 24 Parganas. A semi-structured interview schedule and a Likert-type attitude scale were used, and the original study applied descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to examine associations between selected social characteristics and religious perceptions. The results reveal a strongly pro-religious orientation: 65.55% of respondents were classified as favourable or highly favourable towards religion. Religious practice was also widespread, with 90.67% reporting daily prayer. At the same time, respondents distinguished between religion's constructive social potential and its politicized or competitive forms. A large majority believed that religion promotes human love (87.34%) and contributes to life satisfaction (77.56%), yet 95.11% perceived contemporary religious competition as a source of tension. Reform-oriented responses were equally strong: 93.11% supported confining religious practice to the personal domain as a means of reducing conflict, while 95.56% supported equal governmental distance from all religions. Religious education and harmonious inter-religious activities were the most frequently preferred strategies for preventing intolerance. The findings suggest that religion in West Bengal is neither simply declining nor uniformly conflict-producing; rather, it operates as an ambivalent social institution whose effects depend on leadership, institutional competition, social context and the relationship between religion and political power.

Keywords: Religion, West Bengal, Social Cohesion, Religious Conflict, Secularism, Social Functions, Religious Attitudes, Pluralism.

Introduction

Religion is among the most durable institutions of social life. It organizes beliefs about ultimate meaning, but its significance extends far beyond metaphysical questions. Religious ideas can shape moral conduct, family practices, community obligations, charity, collective identity and political behaviour. In a plural society, religion can also provide symbolic boundaries through which groups define themselves in relation to others. For this reason, the sociological and political study of religion must address a central paradox: the same institution that produces solidarity, welfare and ethical restraint may also become a vehicle for exclusion, competition and conflict.

This paradox is especially important in India. Religious traditions have historically interacted with caste, region, language, kinship, education and political authority. Indian secularism therefore operates in a social environment in which religion remains publicly visible and institutionally significant. The central question is not whether religion exists in the public sphere, but how religious commitments are translated into social relationships and how the state, political actors and religious organizations manage pluralism.

West Bengal provides a particularly useful setting for such an inquiry. Its religious culture has developed through long interaction among Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, folk and indigenous traditions. Bhakti and Sufi currents, reform movements, colonial modernity, the Bengal Renaissance, Partition, migration and changing patterns of urbanization have all shaped the region's religious landscape. Public festivals, devotional traditions and faith-based institutions continue to serve cultural and social functions, while political mobilization and communal tensions periodically expose the divisive potential of religious identity.

The empirical problem addressed in this article is therefore not whether religion is beneficial or harmful in the abstract. Instead, the analysis asks how ordinary respondents evaluate religion's social functions and dysfunctions, how strongly they remain attached to religious beliefs and practices, and what measures they consider appropriate for limiting conflict. This approach treats religion as an institution with multiple consequences rather than as a single ideological variable.

The study is particularly concerned with five interconnected dimensions. First, it assesses general attitudes towards religion and the persistence of religious practice. Second, it examines religion's perceived integrative functions, including social solidarity, human love, psychological satisfaction and moral regulation. Third, it considers perceived dysfunctions, especially religious competition, material accumulation, gender inequality and political manipulation. Fourth, it evaluates whether social background is associated with differences in religious attitudes. Finally, it considers reform preferences, including religious education, inter-religious cooperation, the personal-public boundary of religion and governmental neutrality.

The article contributes an empirically grounded account of religious ambivalence. The evidence indicates that positive religiosity and concern about religious conflict coexist rather than cancel one another. Respondents can value religion as a source of meaning and social solidarity while simultaneously demanding limits on its political and competitive expression. This distinction is important for debates on secularism because it suggests that support for religious life need not imply support for religious domination of the state or public institutions.

Theoretical Background and Context

Classical sociological approaches provide a useful framework for interpreting this dual character of religion. Durkheim's account of religion emphasizes the distinction between the sacred and the profane and, more importantly, the capacity of shared beliefs and rituals to produce a moral community. From this perspective, religious symbols do not operate only at the level of private belief; they reaffirm collective values, strengthen group identity and contribute to social integration. Ritual participation can therefore be understood as a mechanism through which society represents and renews itself.

Malinowski shifted attention towards the psychological and adaptive functions of religious practice. Rituals and beliefs can reduce anxiety, provide emotional security and help individuals respond to uncertainty, crisis and death. This perspective is relevant to the present findings because respondents frequently connected religion with contentment, moral cleanliness and personal stability. The psychological and social functions of religion are not mutually exclusive: emotional reassurance can reinforce social participation, while social belonging can itself provide psychological support.

Radcliffe-Brown similarly emphasized the contribution of religion to social order, arguing that religious sanctions and obligations strengthen norms on which collective life depends. Merton's distinction between functions and dysfunctions is especially valuable for the present analysis. A social institution may have consequences that contribute to adaptation and cohesion while also generating outcomes that produce tension, inequality or maladjustment. Religion can thus be functional for solidarity and welfare but dysfunctional when institutional competition, sectarian leadership or political mobilization transform group identity into antagonism.

The historical development of Bengal reinforces the usefulness of this framework. Religious pluralism in the region emerged through interaction rather than isolation. Buddhist and Hindu traditions overlapped in earlier periods; Islamic expansion was accompanied by Sufi networks; Bhakti movements

challenged rigid social boundaries; and later reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda reinterpreted religious traditions in dialogue with modernity. The result was not a conflict-free society, but a social field in which synthesis, accommodation and contestation repeatedly appeared together.

Modernization has not simply displaced religion. Urbanization, education, migration, technological change and mass politics alter the forms through which religion is expressed. Religious belonging may become less dependent on traditional ritual authority in some settings while becoming more visible as a marker of identity in others. The household-level evidence examined here is therefore interpreted through an institutional lens: religion persists because it performs valued functions, yet its public consequences depend on the organizational and political contexts in which it is mobilized.

This framework also clarifies the relationship between religiosity and secularism. Secular governance need not require hostility towards religion. In a plural democratic setting, it can instead refer to equal treatment, non-domination and institutional distance between state power and sectarian claims. The strong support in the survey for governmental neutrality, alongside favourable attitudes towards religion, illustrates this distinction. Respondents appear to separate personal or community religiosity from the legitimate role of the state.

Objectives and Research Questions

The analysis pursues four objectives: (1) to assess the overall orientation of respondents towards religion and selected forms of religious practice; (2) to evaluate perceptions of religion's integrative functions and social dysfunctions; (3) to examine selected associations between social background and religious attitudes using the statistical results reported in the underlying survey; and (4) to identify preferred strategies for reducing religious intolerance and strengthening social harmony.

Accordingly, the article asks: How favourable are household respondents towards religion? To what extent do they perceive religion as promoting solidarity, human love and life satisfaction? Do respondents simultaneously perceive religious competition as a source of social tension? Which reform measures receive the greatest support? Finally, what does the coexistence of positive religiosity, concern about conflict and support for state neutrality imply for the management of religious pluralism in West Bengal?

Methodology

The study used an observational survey design. The target population consisted of households in West Bengal represented by the household head or eldest adult member. The empirical sample comprised 450 households. For sampling purposes, the study divided the field into northern, middle and southern zones represented by Darjeeling, Howrah and South 24 Parganas. Within each selected district, one rural and one urban location was included. Urban wards were selected through randomization, while rural locations were selected through a multistage procedure involving panchayats and wards. The design allocated 75 households to each rural and urban location, producing the final sample of 450 respondents.

The source document contains some contextual discussion of Bankura in its broader description of West Bengal; however, the methodology and the reported empirical sample identify Darjeeling, Howrah and South 24 Parganas as the survey districts. To preserve methodological accuracy, the statistical analysis in this article is therefore described as a three-district household survey.

Primary data were collected through interviews with household heads or eldest adult members. The methodology reports the use of a semi-structured interview schedule addressing respondents' experiences and perceptions of the functions and dysfunctions of conventional and contemporary religious forms. The source also records fieldwork periods in more than one place; the detailed data-collection section states that interviews were conducted between October and December 2023. Because the article is derived from the reported dataset rather than a new round of fieldwork, no attempt is made here to reconstruct or alter the original field records.

Attitude towards religion was measured through a Likert-type scale. Scores were grouped into four categories: indifferent (35-50), lukewarm (50-65), favourable (65-80) and highly favourable (80-95). The study used descriptive statistics to summarize response distributions and non-parametric chi-square tests to examine associations between categorical variables. The analysis reported here reproduces selected percentages, frequencies and chi-square results from the original dataset and reorganizes them around a journal-article argument.

Several limitations should be considered. The sample is geographically bounded and should not be generalized to all of India. Religion is a sensitive topic, so social desirability and guarded responses may affect interview data. The design is cross-sectional and observational; consequently, statistical association does not establish causality. In addition, the equal representation of three religious affiliation categories in several tables is analytically convenient but should not be interpreted as a population estimate of West Bengal's religious composition. The value of the study lies primarily in comparing patterns of attitudes and perceptions within the surveyed households.

Results

• General Orientation towards Religion

The overall distribution demonstrates that religion retains a strong positive orientation among respondents. Of the 450 participants, 217 (48.22%) were classified as favourable and 78 (17.33%) as highly favourable. Together, these categories account for 65.55% of the sample. A further 30.67% were classified as lukewarm, while only 3.78% fell in the indifferent category. Thus, the dominant pattern is neither religious disengagement nor indifference, but a generally affirmative stance with a substantial middle group whose attachment is more moderate.

Age was significantly associated with attitude towards religion (chi-square=19.76, df=9, $p < 0.05$). Positive attitudes were particularly visible among the youngest and oldest age categories. Among respondents up to 30 years, 48.68% were favourable and 18.42% highly favourable. Among those aged 60-75 years, the corresponding proportions were 51.02% and 28.57%. The 30-45 age group displayed the largest lukewarm share (37.41%). This pattern complicates a simple secularization narrative in which younger cohorts are assumed to move uniformly away from religion.

Religious affiliation also showed a strong association with attitude (chi-square=93.71, df=6, $p < 0.01$). The combined favourable/highly favourable proportion was 82.67% among Muslims and 70.66% among Christians, compared with 43.34% among Hindus in the reported table. Among Hindu respondents, 48.00% were classified as lukewarm. These differences suggest that organizational traditions, patterns of worship and community structures may shape the intensity with which religion is experienced, although the cross-sectional data cannot determine the causal mechanism.

Table 1: Overall Attitude towards Religion

Attitude Category	n	%
Indifferent	17	3.78
Lukewarm	138	30.67
Favourable	217	48.22
Highly favourable	78	17.33
Total	450	100.00

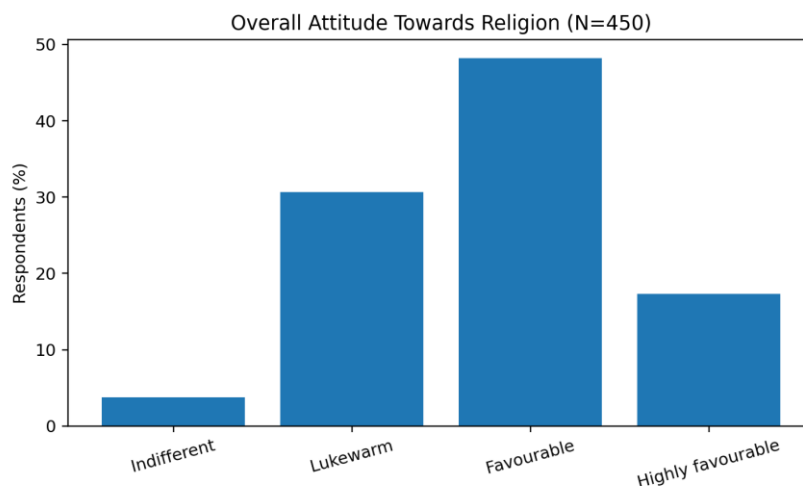


Figure 1: Overall Distribution of Attitudes towards Religion

Religious practice was widespread. The survey reports that 408 respondents (90.67%) prayed daily. Daily prayer was reported by 95.15% of women and 88.07% of men. By religious affiliation, the corresponding percentages were 82.67% for Hindus, 95.33% for Muslims and 94.00% for Christians. Visits to religious places were also common, reported by 421 respondents (93.56%). These behavioural indicators reinforce the attitudinal finding that religion remained socially active within the surveyed population.

- **Religion as Solidarity, Humanism and Psychological Support**

A major theme in the responses is the perception that religion performs integrative functions. On the question of religion's unifying role, 36.89% strongly agreed and 32.45% agreed, producing a combined positive response of 69.34%. The strength of this perception varied across religious affiliation. Strong agreement was reported by 16.00% of Hindus, 54.00% of Muslims and 40.67% of Christians, while the combined agree/strongly agree proportions were 40.00%, 86.00% and 82.00%, respectively.

The humanistic dimension was even more pronounced. Overall, 55.78% strongly agreed and 31.56% agreed that religion promotes human love, a combined 87.34%. Only a relatively small minority disagreed, strongly disagreed or expressed no opinion. Gender differences were statistically significant in the reported analysis (chi-square=14.02, df=4, $p < 0.01$), although the combined positive proportions for women and men were similar. The distinction lay more in intensity: 61.75% of men strongly agreed compared with 45.45% of women.

Religion was also linked to subjective well-being. The survey found that 43.56% strongly agreed and 34.00% agreed that religion contributes to contentment with life, giving a combined positive response of 77.56%. The relationship between general religious attitude and this perception was especially strong. Among respondents with a highly favourable attitude towards religion, 93.59% strongly agreed that religion instils contentment in life. The reported association between attitude category and life satisfaction was significant (chi-square=191.44, df=12, $p < 0.01$). This is consistent with the functionalist expectation that religion can provide meaning, emotional reassurance and a framework for coping with uncertainty.

These results should not be interpreted as clinical evidence that religion improves mental health. The survey measured perceptions, not diagnosed psychological outcomes. Nevertheless, the data demonstrate that respondents themselves attribute emotional and relational benefits to religion. In sociological terms, perceived benefits matter because they help explain the persistence of religious institutions even under conditions of modernization.

- **The Dysfunctional Side: Competition, Inequality and Gender**

Table 2: Selected Indicators of Religion's Social Functions and Dysfunctions

Indicator	Positive/Affirmative Response (%)
Religion promotes human love (agree + strongly agree)	87.34
Religion contributes to life satisfaction (agree + strongly agree)	77.56
Religious competition increases social tension	95.11
Religion should be restricted to personal domain	93.11
Government should maintain equal distance from religions	95.56

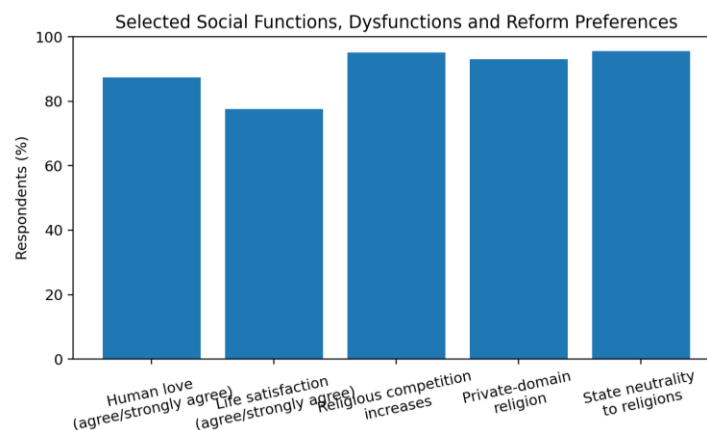


Figure 2: Selected Integrative, Conflict-Related and Reform-Oriented Responses

Positive evaluations did not prevent respondents from expressing strong concern about religion's dysfunctional consequences. The clearest finding concerns religious competition. A total of 428 respondents (95.11%) believed that religious competition increases social tension, compared with only 4.89% who believed it does not. This perception was reported by 89.70% of women and 98.25% of men. It was also widespread across religious affiliations: 90.67% of Hindus and 97.33% of both Muslims and Christians agreed that competition increases tension.

Education and marital status were significantly associated with this perception. Among respondents educated up to SSLC level, 99.00% believed that religious competition increases tension; the figure was 90.00% among higher-secondary respondents and 95.19% among college-educated respondents ($\chi^2=7.75$, $df=2$, $p<0.05$). Among married respondents, 96.21% held this view compared with 90.12% of unmarried respondents ($\chi^2=5.28$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$).

Economic activity associated with religious organizations also generated concern. In one set of results, 54.22% believed that such activity enhances economic injustice and 38.67% believed that it offers no benefit to the poor; only 7.11% selected the view that it benefits the poor. The pattern varied by affiliation: 66.67% of Hindu respondents selected the economic-injustice response, while 47.33% of Christian respondents selected the view that such financial activity does not help the poor. These findings reveal scepticism about material accumulation in the name of religion, even within a sample that is generally favourable towards religion itself.

Gender equality represents another area of ambivalence. Overall, 44.00% believed that religion gives equal importance to men and women, whereas 50.22% believed that women receive secondary importance; 5.78% refused or did not provide a substantive response. Among women, 52.12% selected the secondary-importance category. The relationship with religious attitude was notable: among respondents with highly favourable attitudes, 70.51% selected equal importance, while among indifferent respondents only 11.76% did so. The finding suggests that positive religiosity may be associated with a more egalitarian interpretation of religious teachings for some respondents, although this does not establish that religious institutions themselves operate equally in practice.

• **Reform Preferences and Secular Governance**

The strongest evidence of respondents' ability to distinguish faith from its public misuse appears in the reform measures. When asked how religious intolerance or competition could be prevented, 40.44% selected religious education, 33.56% selected harmonious religious activities involving different groups, 17.78% selected spiritual knowledge, 2.22% selected punishment and 6.00% gave no response. The preference for education and cooperative activity suggests that respondents generally favoured preventive and normative strategies over coercive ones.

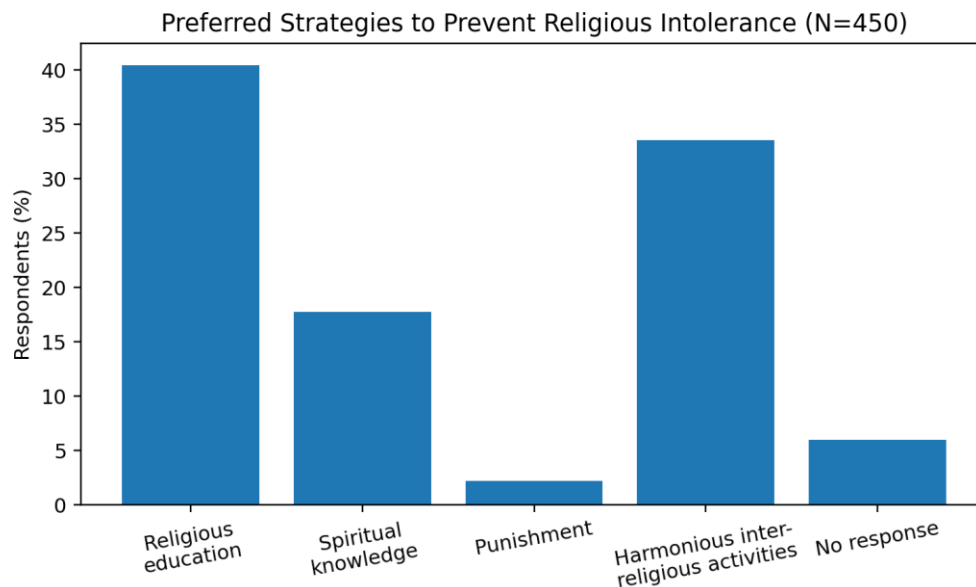
Views about religious leadership were consistent with this approach. The most frequently selected quality of a religious leader was the recognition that all human beings share a common divine origin (35.56%). Other respondents emphasized wisdom, social harmony, spirituality and mental equilibrium. The implication is that leadership is perceived as a mechanism through which religion can be directed either towards cosmopolitanism or towards insularity.

A striking 93.11% of respondents supported restricting religion to the personal domain as a means of preventing its destructive consequences. Support was 92.67% among Hindus, 99.33% among Muslims and 87.33% among Christians. Importantly, support increased across the attitude scale: 82.35% among indifferent respondents, 89.13% among the lukewarm, 95.39% among the favourable and 96.15% among the highly favourable. Thus, stronger positive attitudes towards religion did not translate into greater support for unrestricted public religious competition.

An equally strong 95.56% supported the proposition that government should maintain equal distance from all religions. This included 94.00% of Hindus, 100% of Muslims and 92.67% of Christians. The result is central to the interpretation of the study. The respondents were not choosing between religiosity and secularism. Instead, they largely endorsed both: religion was valued in personal and social life, while the state was expected to remain religiously neutral.

Table 3: Preferred Strategies to Prevent Religious Intolerance

Strategy	n	%
Religious education	182	40.44
Spiritual knowledge	80	17.78
Punishment	10	2.22
Harmonious inter-religious activities	151	33.56
No response	27	6.00

**Figure 3: Preferred Strategies for Reducing Religious Intolerance**

Discussion

The findings reveal a pattern of institutional ambivalence rather than contradiction. Respondents express strong religious attachment, high levels of practice and positive evaluations of religion's contribution to love, solidarity and life satisfaction. At the same time, they overwhelmingly identify religious competition as socially dangerous and support both personal restraint and governmental neutrality. These positions become coherent once religion is separated analytically into faith, social function, institutional competition and political mobilization.

The first implication concerns secularization. The data do not support a simple expectation that modernization necessarily produces widespread religious indifference. Only 3.78% of respondents were classified as indifferent, and daily prayer was reported by more than nine in ten participants. Moreover, the youngest group displayed a substantial favourable/highly favourable share. This does not disprove secularization theory in general, because the study is geographically limited and cross-sectional. It does, however, show that contemporary religious change in West Bengal cannot be described adequately as linear decline.

Second, the results strongly support a functional interpretation of religion at the level of public perception. Respondents associate religion with human affection, unity and contentment. Durkheim's emphasis on collective solidarity and Malinowski's focus on emotional reassurance are therefore relevant, not because the data directly test those classical theories, but because respondents describe precisely the kinds of social and psychological consequences those theories identify. Religion appears meaningful partly because it is perceived to connect individuals with moral communities and to provide interpretive resources for everyday life.

Third, the survey demonstrates the importance of Merton's concept of dysfunction. The same respondents who recognize constructive functions are acutely aware of conflict-producing mechanisms. The near-consensus that religious competition increases tension suggests that the problem is not

perceived as religion per se but as rivalry among organized groups, especially when wealth, influence and politics become central. This distinction helps explain why respondents can remain personally religious while supporting institutional limits.

Fourth, the results complicate assumptions about secularism. In public debate, religiosity and secular governance are sometimes treated as opposite ends of a single continuum. Here they coexist. More than 95% supported equal governmental distance from religions, while almost two-thirds held favourable or highly favourable attitudes towards religion. Furthermore, highly favourable respondents were among the strongest supporters of keeping religious practice within personal boundaries. The survey therefore points towards a model of "religious secularism" in everyday political reasoning: faith is accepted as legitimate, but state capture and inter-group competition are rejected.

Fifth, social background matters, but not uniformly. Age and religious affiliation were associated with attitude towards religion, while education and marital status were associated with perceptions of religious competition. Other analyses in the source study reported that religious affiliation, education, occupation, income and attitude were among the variables most frequently influencing dependent measures. Yet many relationships were issue-specific. This cautions against reducing religiosity to a single demographic profile.

The findings on gender require particular care. Half of the sample believed that religion assigns women secondary importance, and women themselves were slightly more likely to hold this view. At the same time, respondents with highly favourable attitudes towards religion were much more likely to perceive religious treatment of men and women as equal. This gap may reflect differences between idealized religious principles and lived institutional practices. Future research should therefore distinguish scriptural interpretation, household practice, organizational leadership and access to religious authority.

The policy significance of the findings lies in the preference for constructive rather than punitive intervention. Religious education and harmonious inter-religious activity together accounted for nearly three-quarters of preferred responses to intolerance. This suggests that social harmony may be strengthened through structured contact, ethical education and shared civic activity. Such measures are consistent with West Bengal's historical traditions of cultural synthesis, but they must be designed in a way that avoids privileging one community's doctrine over another.

The study also suggests that religious organizations can be important partners in welfare and social development if accountability and inclusion are maintained. Faith-based networks possess organizational capacity, local legitimacy and volunteer resources. These strengths can support education, health, disaster relief and poverty reduction. However, the survey's concern about economic injustice indicates that financial transparency and equitable access are essential. Welfare should not become a mechanism for sectarian competition or political patronage.

Finally, the strong preference for governmental neutrality reinforces the constitutional logic of equal citizenship. In a religiously diverse society, the state can protect freedom of religion while preventing the conversion of religious numerical strength into political privilege. Neutrality in this sense is not social indifference to religion; it is a framework for ensuring that multiple religious and non-religious identities can coexist without domination.

Policy Implications

Several practical implications follow from the results. Interfaith dialogue should move beyond ceremonial meetings and include recurring local forums in which religious leaders, educators, youth groups, women's organizations and civil-society actors address shared problems. Cooperative projects in health, environmental protection, disaster preparedness and community welfare can convert inter-group contact into visible public benefit.

Value-based education should emphasize constitutional morality, human rights, gender equality, critical media literacy and knowledge of India's religious diversity. The survey's preference for religious education should not be interpreted as support for sectarian instruction in public institutions. A more defensible policy interpretation is comparative, ethical and civic education that enables students to understand different traditions while strengthening common democratic values.

Religious leadership is another key intervention point. Training and dialogue programmes can encourage leaders to address gender equality, communal harmony, public health, environmental responsibility and misinformation. The survey indicates that respondents expect leaders to emphasize common humanity and social harmony; institutions can build on that expectation.

Political actors and public institutions should avoid the instrumental use of religious identity. Legal protections against hate speech, incitement and discrimination should be applied consistently. At the same time, policies addressing unemployment, unequal access to education and local deprivation can reduce the socio-economic grievances that may be reframed as religious antagonism.

Media institutions and digital platforms also shape contemporary religious relations. Conflict-sensitive reporting, verification practices and public education about misinformation are increasingly important. The objective should be to reduce amplification of inflammatory claims without suppressing legitimate religious expression or democratic debate.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings should be interpreted within the boundaries of the design. The sample includes 450 household representatives from selected rural and urban locations in three districts and is not a statistically representative survey of the entire state or country. The equal numbers shown for Hindu, Muslim and Christian respondents in affiliation-based tables should not be read as demographic estimates. The data are self-reported and may be affected by social desirability, especially on sensitive questions involving religion, gender and communal relations.

The source documentation contains minor inconsistencies in descriptions of fieldwork timing and broader district coverage. This article follows the detailed methodology for the empirical scope and does not infer information that is not supported by the reported survey. Future studies should use a preregistered sampling frame, clearly documented field dates, validated multi-item scales, multivariate models and district weights where population inference is intended.

Longitudinal research would be especially valuable because religious attitudes can change in response to elections, communal events, migration, economic shocks and digital media. Qualitative interviews could also explore why respondents simultaneously favour religion and support keeping it outside competitive politics. Further research should examine youth religiosity, gendered religious authority, folk and indigenous traditions, digital spirituality, environmental ethics and the role of faith-based organizations in disaster resilience.

Conclusion

Religion remains a powerful social institution in the surveyed areas of West Bengal. The evidence does not fit a binary narrative in which religion is either a source of harmony or a source of conflict. Instead, respondents attribute substantial social and psychological value to religion while drawing a sharp distinction between constructive faith and competitive, politicized religious organization.

The empirical pattern is clear. Most respondents hold favourable attitudes towards religion and participate regularly in religious practice. Large majorities believe that religion promotes human love and contributes to life satisfaction. Yet an even larger majority believes that religious competition increases social tension. Respondents therefore support reform through education, inter-religious cooperation, responsible leadership, personal restraint and state neutrality.

This combination has important implications for democratic pluralism. Social harmony is unlikely to be achieved either by attempting to remove religion from society or by allowing religious organizations unrestricted political competition. A more sustainable approach is to protect religious freedom while strengthening equal citizenship, interfaith cooperation, institutional accountability and constitutional neutrality. In this framework, religious diversity can remain a source of cultural meaning and community support without becoming a basis for domination or exclusion.

References

1. Ahuja, R. (1999). *Society in India*. Rawat Publications.
2. Bellah, R. N. (1976). New religious consciousness and the crisis in modernity. In C. Y. Glock & R. N. Bellah (Eds.), *The New Religious Consciousness*.
3. Broom, L. (1954). *Sociology: A Text with Adapted Readings*.
4. Douglas, M. (1968). *Purity and Danger*. Praeger.
5. Dube, S. C. (1994). *Tradition and Development*. Vikas Publishing House.
6. Durkheim, E. (1954). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. George Allen & Unwin.
7. Durkheim, E. (1965). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Free Press.

8. Firth, R. (1971). *Elements of Social Organization*. Tavistock Publications.
9. Fromm, E. (1941). *Escape from Freedom*. Rinehart.
10. Gandhi, M. K. (1980). In *Search of the Supreme* (Vol. II).
11. Geertz, C. (1947). Religion as a cultural system. In R. Bocock & K. Thompson (Eds.), *Religion and Ideology*.
12. Herberg, W. (1960). *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (Rev. ed.). Anchor Books.
13. Horton, P. B., & Hunt, C. L. (1968). *Sociology* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
14. Malinowski, B. (1948). *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*.
15. Malinowski, B. (1954). *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*.
16. Merton, R. K. (1957). *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Free Press.
17. Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1952). *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*.
18. Schneider, H. W. (1952). *Religion in Twentieth Century America*. Harvard University Press.
19. Spiro, M. E. (1968). *Religion: Problems of definition and explanation*.
20. Young, K. (1954). *Handbook of Social Psychology*.

