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‘Sacralising the Secular’: Philanthropy in Christian, Hindu, and Islamic Organisations[1]

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1 This study was originally titled “‘Sacralising the Secular”: Religion and Philanthropy in India’. However, the research findings revealed that religion is not external to or separate from the institution of philanthropy; rather, the notion of philanthropy along with several other pre-modern forms of charity inhere within different religious belief systems. Hence, the title has been changed to reflect this understanding.

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Abstract

What motivates religious groups to participate in philanthropic activities? What kinds of categories and idioms do they deploy to describe their humanitarian activities? How do they negotiate the essentially 'legal-rational' character of the philanthropic sector? This research has tried to interrogate the motivations for religious organisations to participate in philanthropy and understand how they negotiate the largely secular space of philanthropy, getting secularised in the process. The empirical data for the study was largely drawn from twenty-four semi-structured interviews that were conducted with stakeholders (devotees, priests, and administrative staff) across Christian, Hindu, and Islamic organisations and with one official of the Income Tax Department. The findings reveal that despite the obvious secularisation of the philanthropic space, religious organisations continue to frame their subjectivities through different kinds of epistemic and ontological principles that pose a challenge to secular rational thought. While the study shows that religious organisations have triumphantly survived the onslaught of secularisation, a more careful analysis also reveals accommodation of several secular principles by religious groups. This study argues that the discourse on philanthropy needs to step outside the linear, teleological imagination where 'religion' is perceived not as a remnant of primitive forms of charity but as a legitimate partner in the philanthropic space that is grounded in its own ontology and epistemology.

Keywords: religious giving, secular philanthropy, dana, zakat, caritas

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1. Introduction

To be charitable or philanthropic?

> Accordingly, it is found that private charity is by no means the bright part of a Hindoo's character: religious persons, or those who assume that character, certainly are liberally supplied; but this must be the offspring of superstition rather than the dictate of humanity. On some particular occasions, such as opening a new Serai, most extensive charities are distributed, to the multitude which is invited there. But this is mere ostentation: neither in its principles nor in its effects does it come up to the rational idea of charity. The necessitous poor are more happily directed for relief to the door of an European, than to their brethren in the faith. Pagodas indeed are raised, Choultries built, and on great occasions thousands are fed by a wealthy native; but all this may be done in compliance with the interested advice of the Brahmins, or to gratify ostentation: and we ought not to confound what is extorted by the fears of superstition, or what is lavished by vanity, with the charitable benefactions dictated by a sound understanding and a benevolent heart. (emphasis added)
> —Tennant 1803, 124

The above excerpt is taken from the account of Reverend William Tennant, who was appointed as a chaplain of the Bengal Army in eighteenth-century colonial India. As is evident, Tennant, like several other contemporary Britishers (Ward 1818, Vol. 1, 7), made no attempt to disguise his contempt of what he defines as 'Hindoo' charity. The term 'Hindoo' was a metaphor for all indigenous forms of giving that had existed since pre-modern times in the Indian subcontinent, and one of the enduring features of the colonial rule was the denigration of these forms of giving as 'irrational' and 'superstitious'. Driven by the principles of utilitarianism, the British had little regard for those forms of giving that did not conform to institutional charity. As a result of this, the history of modern philanthropy quite problematically views the trajectory of philanthropy as a linear and teleological progression, which has moved from more personal forms of giving, often dubbed as 'charity', to more public ones. With growing secularisation of society and the firming up of a liberal modernist imagination that favours a rights-based approach to development, more sacred and spontaneous forms of giving have been marginalised in the popular discourse on philanthropy and charity. More importantly, the dominance of a 'CSR mindset', which prioritises 'tangible outcomes' of giving, has further stigmatised the role of religion in development as 'irrational' and 'thoughtless' for entrenching traditional gender and caste norms (Eade 2002; Rakodi 2011; Tomalin 2013; Clarke and Ware 2015).

Had William Tennant been alive today, he would have been taken aback by the scale of Indian philanthropy and the global recognition that it has come to acquire. The India Philanthropy Report 2021, published by Bain & Company and Dasra, claims that in the fiscal year 2020, private-sector philanthropy funding totaled to about INR 64,000 crore, which was almost 23 per cent more than the funding received in 2019. Corporate philanthropy has emerged more strongly since the last few decades, especially after the introduction of Section 135 of the Indian government's Companies Act 2013, which has made it mandatory for companies with certain fiscal metrics to direct 2 per cent of their profits to

corporate social responsibility (CSR). The CAF World Giving Index 2021 reveals that India appears in the list of top 15 countries , with 44 per cent of the people devoting at least one month to charity in 2020. While these reports may give the impression that Indian philanthropy seems to have become more 'secularised' since pre-modern times and finally come of age, fit enough to appear 'rational' and 'modern' to the secularised world, the data on individual and everyday giving and religious giving throws up a surprise.

One of the earliest surveys on charitable giving conducted in India by the erstwhile Sampradaan Indian Centre for Philanthropy in 2000 found that 96 per cent of upper- and middle-class households collectively donated INR 16.16 billion (1 billion equals 100 crores) for a charitable purpose. Of this, 87 per cent of the funds were donated to religious organisations, and only 51 per cent were given to secular organisations. Religious organisations emerged as the primary recipients of charity, garnering 30 per cent of the total donations, while secular organisations received only 21 per cent of the funds. The Everyday Giving Report in India, published by Sattva in 2019, found that in 2017, everyday giving (which entails giving to community, religious organisation, and disaster-relief and charitable purposes) contributed to USD 5.1 billion. An interesting finding of this report is that in contrast to developed economies, such as the USA and China, 90 per cent of India's everyday giving is dedicated to religion and community. An analysis of the FCRA data from 2009–10 to 2018–19 reveals that the proportion of the contribution of religious funding to overall funding has steadily increased from 2014–15 onward, averaging 7 per cent in 2014–15 to 2018/19 versus 2 per cent during 2009–10 and 2013–14.[3]

As is obvious, the role of religion in philanthropy has not only survived but has been growing with time in India. What does this trend tell us about Indian philanthropy? Is the secular philanthropic space becoming more sacralised or is religion becoming more secularised? How have the motivations of religious organisations, if at all, changed since the past few decades?

This study will attempt to find answers to some of these questions in the subsequent sections. The paper is organised into three parts. Part I provides a background and rationale to the study, the broad literature covered, the conceptual framework, research questions, and methodology. Part II consists of the findings of the study. Part III consists of the analysis and the conclusions that have emerged from the study.

3 FCRA data sourced through CSIP website.

2. Review of Literature and Rationale for the Study

The process of engaging with this research study has been hugely rewarding as it allowed me to dive into a rich and diverse body of literature that revolves around the idea of giving. There are broadly six types of literature that have helped shape this study and helped identify the gaps that exist in the field with regard to religion and philanthropy in India.

The first body of work that has been relevant to this research revolves around the religious roots of and the influence of colonisation on modern philanthropy. Henry Allen Moe (1961) reminds us that 'religion is the mother of philanthropy'. This is evident from the categories of tzedakah (in Jewish texts), caritas (in Christian theology), zakat (in the Quran), and dana (in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain scriptures). Recent studies (Barnett 2011; Fassin 2012) have traced the origins of philanthropy to a 'culture of compassion' led by Christian Evangelism in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Elizabeth Ferris (2005, 313) too draws attention to the fact that long before international humanitarian law was formalised in treaty law, faith communities provided assistance to those afflicted by disasters, persecution, and war. While these studies contribute enormously in building our understanding of how colonisation aided the evolution of modern philanthropy, it problematically ignores the role of pre-modern charitable institutions that were creatively transformed due to the colonial encounter. A common thread that runs across these studies is an understanding that all forms of 'indigenous philanthropies' across the world emerged in response to the colonial encounter.

Depriving it of any indigenous agency, the birth of Indian philanthropy too is often seen as a reactionary initiative either to emulate Christian missionary service activities or as an effort by local notables to build better relationships with the imperial authorities in order to enhance their own reputation. J.N. Farquhar (1998[1915]), a Scottish missionary deputed to India, suggested, for instance, that the Indian philanthropic movement was primarily triggered by the service activities of Christian missionaries. In an interesting study on gift making and philanthropy during the colonial period in Surat, author Douglas Haynes (1987) shows how Hindu and Jain merchants, accustomed to religious charity until then, started diversifying their charitable activities to a number of public welfare activities such as donation for schools, hospitals, and libraries in order to 'accommodate' Victorian values of social welfare and 'progress' to build good relationships with the British. In recent times, however, another body of work has challenged this assumption by suggesting that Western colonial modernity was only one of the many influences that impacted indigenous humanitarian movements. Carey Watt (2005) and Gwilym Beckerlegge (1999) have argued that social service and the associational initiatives of Indian groups in the early twentieth century drew on deep-rooted Hindu 'living traditions' such as dana, karmayoga, sannyas, and brahmacharya and neo-Vedanta principles. Similarly, Pichamon Yeophantong (2014) has suggested that 'Asian humanitarianisms' are deeply embedded within Asian religions and considers the role of Christian missionaries as only one of the several other important factors that led to the emergence of philanthropy in Asia.

Irrespective of these differences, scholars across the board have acknowledged the centrality of the role of religion in the development of modern philanthropy. In common perception, however, the humanitarian and philanthropic space is imagined as a 'secular' and the more inclusive space which is, or rather should be, dominated by 'secular' organisations such as the state, international development bodies, and 'non-religious' civil society actors. Part of the reason for this marginalisation of religion in the philanthropic domain stems from the understanding that religious giving is largely embedded in patriarchy and entrenches caste and religious identities and also because it is suspected to have a proselytising agenda while engaging in humanitarianism. Despite this misgiving, and contrary to the advocates of the secularisation thesis, the contribution of religious organisations to disaster relief and recovery, educational and health services, livelihoods, and environmental issues has been steadily growing since the end of the Second World War. In India, while socio-religious groups were the pioneers of the philanthropic movement during the colonial period, their contribution to humanitarian causes continued even after Independence, even though the Indian Constitution remained skeptical about their role in the backdrop of the Partition of the country on religious lines (Mahajan 2010, 9).

The second body of literature that has contributed to this study is on religious philanthropy across the world. This is a vast body of work that comprises special issues such as 'Religious Philanthropy in Asia' (2015), edited by Khun Eng Kuah-Pearce and Jayeel Serrano Cornelio, and other individual case studies. The former is a collection of six papers that explore the motivations and the broad environment within which religion and philanthropy engage with each other in Asia through different case studies of faith-based organisations working in India, China, Philippines, Japan, and Taiwan. Another significant special issue titled 'Charity and Philanthropy in South Asia' (2018) brings together papers from a diverse group of scholars that examine forms of giving across South Asia and the diaspora, institutional mechanisms, regulatory frameworks, and the politics of compassion that surround the practices of giving. This study particularly resonates with the introductory chapter of the issue by Filippo Osella, who questions the modernist teleology of philanthropy. John Godfrey, Elizabeth Branigan, and Sabith Khan's study (2017) is the third important article in this strand that provides a good review of literature on Hindu, Islamic, and secular forms of giving during the colonial period. The authors contend that Indian corporate philanthropy is, in fact, both 'old' and 'new', as it embraces long established cultural practices and norms in Indian religious and charitable giving and more recent globalised philanthropy and CSR practices. The analytic about reciprocal and non-reciprocal dana is a particularly interesting insight provided by the paper.

Amongst individual case studies, Samta Pandya's (2016) work on the social philosophy and social service of Sri Aurobindo Society is interesting in that it examines how the social and rural development projects endeavor to translate the organisation's philosophy into action and how beneficiaries are able to fulfil their material and spiritual needs through these projects. Amy Singer's work (2008) is another fantastic resource for those researching on Islamic practices of giving. The book analyses how Islamic practices of giving such as zakat, sadaqa and waqf evolved historically both as religious ideals and as social rituals. The works of Amanda Lucia (2014) and Maya Warrier (2005) are also interesting contributions towards analysing the seva ethic in Mata Amritanandamayi Mission, while Beckerlegge (2006) and Raphael Voix (2011) examine the institution of seva in the Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha (BSS) respectively. While many of these studies help us understand the moral and religious motivations behind giving, they do not satisfactorily address the question of how

religious organisations engage with the secular philanthropic space.

The third important strand of literature that has benefitted this study entails the debates surrounding the idea of a 'free gift'. There exists a vast body of literature on the impossibility of a 'free gift' which engages with Marcel Mauss' celebrated text titled The Gift. In this influential work, Marcel Mauss reminds us about the impossibility of a 'free gift'. While Mauss acknowledges that humans possess more than a 'tradesman morality' (1990, 83), the 'gift', he argues, necessarily places an obligation on its recipient to reciprocate it. Following the publication of this text, other French social theorists such as Levi Strauss, Pierre Bordieu, and Derrida have also written extensively about the 'gift'. While apparently this discourse on the gift seems too theoretical for the said study, there are obvious connections with how the act of giving can be seen as a rational, calculative act vis-à-vis a spontaneous act of altruism that is impulsive and seemingly irrational. In Given Time (1992, 137), Derrida even builds a case for the impossibility of any gift, be it impulsive or rational. According to him, any 'gift' is part of an economic cycle, thus making it an impossibility. Several scholars have applied the Maussian idea of the gift while analysing dana in the Indian context. Maria Heim (2004), Erica Bornstein (2009), and Laidlaw (2000), for instance, have challenged Mauss's central thesis about all gifts being reciprocal and have argued that in certain contexts, gift making may not entail any exchange or an expectation of any reward. Heim (2004, 144) suggests in her study that by reducing all forms of giving to an exchange relationship, we may run into the risk of overlooking other motivations like 'reverence' which runs against the grain of reciprocity. In her study of dana in New Delhi, Erica Bornstein (2009, 14) has suggested that dana is a 'liberating mechanism that releases the giver of social obligation and eventually frees the giver of the constraints of the material world'. Bornstein, however, acknowledges that when a gift is regulated, it becomes instrumentally rational. Similarly, Laidlaw (2000) has also challenged Marcel Mauss's central thesis of gift-making by arguing that the idea of reciprocity, to the extent that it exists in dana (in the context of Jainism), is not 'this worldly' and that there are no social obligations between donors and recipients. While Diana Eck's (2013) work draws attention to how the nature of dana, its motivations, the choice of the recipient, etc. reflect a moral sentiment that is outside of the Maussian theory of reciprocity, it is vague in certain parts and does not demonstrate how indigenous forms of giving stand outside relations of exchange. Ritu Birla's work (2018), which outlines the modern Indian governmental coding of charity as a function of profit, is another important contribution in this arena. The most palpable gap in this body of work is an analysis of how the idea of the 'gift' as a rational institution applies to religious giving. The whole question of religious subjectivity remains unanalysed.

A fourth strand of literature that is relevant to this study consists of comparisons between religious and secular organisations and those between different religious groups. Jill Mcleigh's dissertation (2011) is a useful study in the former category where she analyses 428 international NGOs (INGOs) to find that results-oriented operational INGOs were more likely to be religious and that organisations with development objectives and foci on advocacy were more likely to be secular. Bekkers and Wiepking's study (2011) finds that religious individuals, especially those associated with networks of religious organisations, are more likely to give money for charitable purposes than non-religious persons and groups. Another research by Clarke and Ware (2015) draws on 50 studies to present the dominant typologies by which faith-based organisations are understood in relation to secular NGOs. They advocate for an alternative model that looks at faith-based organisations as constitutive of communities, NGOs, civil society, and religious organisations. An underlying tension that cuts across these

studies is the 'religious-secular' binary and the implications for the same on philanthropic behaviour. While these are useful studies in providing a bird's eye view of the larger philanthropic sector and the possible typologies that one can frame therein, they are somewhat reductionist and oversimplistic in essentialising the differences between the 'religious' and the 'secular'. Another important comparative study that looks at forms of giving within religious groups is by Christine L. Carabain and René Bekkers (2012), who compare different forms of giving between Hindu, Islamic, and Christian groups in the Netherlands. While the study throws up interesting findings with regard to the philanthropic behaviour of different religious groups, it comes across as being judgmental in certain parts and does not address forms of giving as being distinctive to each culture.

As is evident, there is a vast body of literature that is connected to this study, albeit indirectly. Given the 'untouchability' of religious institutions in the 'sanitised' and 'secular' philanthropic domain, it is not surprising that there is little academic discourse on how religion entangles with philanthropy. More importantly, philanthropy is essentially perceived as a modern phenomenon and a clear break from pre-modern religious forms of giving. There is hardly any substantive body of work on the religious roots of modern philanthropy and how these apparently distinct worlds engage and entangle with each other, especially in the Indian context. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic provides an interesting entry point to interrogate the relationship between religion and philanthropy, especially because religious groups have had an age-old tryst with disasters and crises. As the pandemic wreaked havoc across the world, one witnessed an array of civil society groups, including religious groups, who plunged themselves into providing relief to the affected families. From oxygen langars run by Sikh groups in Delhi and Dawoodi Bohra community kitchens in Maharashtra and Gujarat to the distribution of masks by Tibetan monasteries in Dehradun, and Hindu monasteries (mathas) and churches providing relief kits to affected families, cultural and faith-based institutions have been at the forefront in serving people.

Research Questions:

The proposed research study attempts to interrogate the following question:

How do religious organisations[4] negotiate the essentially 'legal-rational' character of the philanthropic sector while retaining their own 'religious' identities?

Other related sub-questions that the study will examine are the following:

- What motivates religious groups to participate in philanthropic activities?
- What kinds of practices have they adapted over a period of time to appear more 'secular'?
- What kinds of categories and idioms do they deploy to describe their humanitarian activities (dana, seva, charity, zakat)? Does the category of 'philanthropy' adequately capture these forms of 'giving' or should we envisage new categories?
- How are the beneficiaries selected? Do they cater only to 'in-group' members or also include 'out-group' members and why?

4 While there is no universally accepted definition of religious organisations, this study draws from Elizabeth Ferris' (2005) framework where she mentions that faith-based organisations are characterised by one or more of the following features: affiliation with a religious body; a mission statement with explicit reference to religious values; financial support from religious sources; and/or a governance structure where selection of board members or staff is based on religious beliefs or affiliation, and/or decision-making processes based on religious values. All religious organisations included in the study are formally registered under some act.

Conceptual Framework

Contrary to the expectations of the advocates of the secularisation thesis, similar to other modernising societies, economic development and democratic governance have not been obstacles to the prevalence of religion in the public sphere in India. The influence of religion has been evident not only in the political, cultural, and social realms, its contribution to philanthropy has also proven to be very significant. This is evident in the significant rise in the number of religious and cultural organisations that participate in the philanthropic and development spheres despite the hegemony of the 'secular' in this arena since India's Independence.

The conceptual framework for the study is inspired by several strands of work that have been outlined in the 'Review of Literature' section. However, it is largely drawn from Barnett and Stein's (2012) examination of the dynamic relationship between secularisation and sanctification. In their work, Barnett and Stein (2012, 8) have drawn attention to the twin processes of secularisation and sanctification in the humanitarian space. While secularisation is evident in the increasing professionalisation of this space, as can be seen in their adherence to standard operating procedures, greater accountability, and emphasis on 'impact', sanctification is equally evident in the resilience of a humanitarian moral ethic that is frequently invoked by various stakeholders. They also suggest that, contrary to popular belief, the secular and the religious are not necessarily 'linked at each other's expense', that is, an increase in sanctification does not by definition entail a retreat of the secular and vice versa. In fact, they argue that the secular and the religious mutually constitute each other 'by treating each other as multi-layered, multidimensional, and nonlinear' (Barnett and Stein 2012, 9).

While the humanitarian sector is not synonymous with the philanthropic sector in that the former is largely populated by actors who respond to crisis situations, there are important resemblances with the same. The conceptual framework as represented in the Venn diagram below draws from this idea of the intermeshing of the sacred and the secular in the philanthropic space. The two circles represent the domains of the religious and the secular which have a fair amount of commonality in some aspects of their modus operandi as represented by the shaded region.

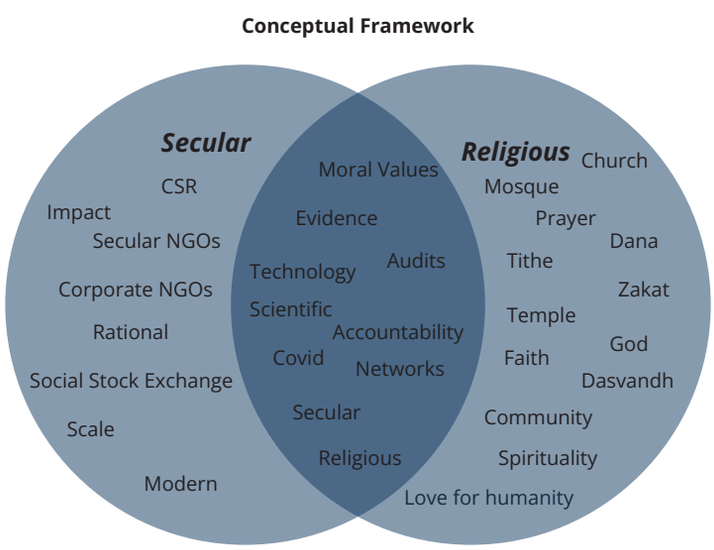


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Author.

Methodology and Limitations to the Study

This study adopts a qualitative approach for exploring the question at hand as it attempts to make sense of forms of giving from the point of view of the respondents. It is driven by a constructivist philosophical approach that attempts to understand the meanings, idioms, beliefs, and emotions of the respondents by making sense of the specific contexts in which they live and work.

The study was initially conceived of in a comparative framework in order to understand forms of giving across three different religious groups, namely Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. However, as the study progressed, one came to realise that the comparative framework was inadequate, simply because it is not possible or even fair to compare institutions like philanthropy that are deeply embedded in religious worldviews. While comparison as a form of inquiry is useful in certain disciplines, it offers little value when studying cultural phenomena. In exploring the motivations that underlie giving, the purpose of this study is not merely to understand how they are similar or dissimilar to other forms of giving, but also to understand the individual contexts within which they operate.

The underlying assumption of this study draws from the hermeneutic understanding of the 'plurality of historical worlds' which emphasises embeddedness (Mahajan 1992, 50). Therefore, when we make sense of the practices and the motivations of the lived experiences of people, we need to study them in the context of the historical world that they are in and the shared values that they practise without applying our own normative ideas of good or bad (Mahajan 1992, 50). It draws inspiration from the philosophy of the eighteenth-century thinker Johann Gottfried Herder (1969, 188), who argued that as each culture was complete in itself, it cannot be treated as a steppingstone for another more 'progressive culture'.

The empirical data for the study was largely drawn from twenty-four semi-structured interviews that were conducted with stakeholders (devotees, priests, and administrative staff) across Christian, Hindu, and Islamic organisations. The pool of respondents was drawn from Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), Catholic Diocese in Karnataka, JIH, Lifeline Foundation, Bharata Sevashram Sangh (BSS), International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), Catholic priests, a nun, and independent Catholic social workers through a snowball technique that began by establishing initial contact with a few identified key informants. One interview was conducted with a representative of a Sikh organisation named Dasvandh Network to gain additional perspective, even though it was outside the scope of the study. One interview was conducted with a senior income tax officer and one with a chartered accountant who handles accounting and taxation related matters for a religious organisation. The interviews were conducted over telephone, email, and virtual platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The names of all the respondents have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

Apart from this, data was also drawn from primary sources such as pamphlets, newsletters, budget utilisation reports, and websites of the above-mentioned organisations. Secondary literature comprising books, journal articles, and articles in popular press have also been consulted to review the existing literature and for arriving at the appropriate methodology and conceptual framework for the study.

One of the obvious limitations of the study stems from the fact that no on-the ground field work was possible due to the ongoing pandemic. It was impossible, therefore, to make any observations of how

religious organisations work or how they go about their daily routines. Several respondents who had been contacted never responded or declined to give an interview because they were directly or indirectly impacted by Covid. This also led to the shrinking of the pool of respondents.

3. Findings

The following section discusses some of the central themes that have emerged from the interviews conducted across devotees and representatives of nine religious organisations comprising Christian, Hindu, and Islamic faiths. As mentioned above, one interview was also conducted with a representative of a Sikh organisation in order to gain additional perspective. While going through the websites of the organisations I have studied, and while transcribing the interviews of my respondents, I came to realise that organisational motivations and perspectives are mostly a reflection of the collective motivations and perspectives of the people associated with them. Organisations are, to a large extent, reflective of how and what people think and feel in their individual lives. As mentioned earlier, the sample is not representative and, therefore, the findings cannot be generalised. However, like other qualitative studies, the value of these findings lies in that they present a rich slice of in-depth understandings, experiences, and worldviews of stakeholders who are deeply connected to the ecosystem of religious organisations.

Service to Humanity a Natural Corollary to Being Religious or Spiritual

When asked about their respective motivations for engaging in philanthropic work, most of the respondents mentioned that they had been drawn to spirituality since childhood, either because of the influence of their parents, school, or some family friend or a relative who had inspired them. In common parlance, we tend to see philanthropy and religion as separate entities.[5] This research, however, shows that for a majority of people associated with religious organisations, either as devotees or as full-time employees, giving was a natural extension of their religious and spiritual beliefs. Respondents frequently invoked verses from scriptures, religious parables, and specific institutions from their religion associated with giving. The Hindu ideas of dana and seva, the Islamic concepts of zakat, wakf, and sadaqa, the Christian idea of caritas, and the Sikh idea of dasvandh were frequently cited by respondents who celebrated the act of giving to the needy. Expressions such as 'love for humanity', 'personal connection with God', 'moral values', and 'sense of solace' were also invoked to explain their motivations for being part of religious organisations and engaging in philanthropic work.

Satyajeet Das,[6] a middle-aged devotee of the BSS, underlined that he (along with several other devotees) was inspired by the life of Swami Pranavananda, the founder of BSS, who epitomised the idea of giving and compassion. He narrates an account of how as a child Swami Pranavananda went

5 While some analysts have argued that spirituality and religion are different in that the former is not associated with any kind of institutionalisation and the latter is only concerned with the relationship between the individual and her God, the respondents did not make any such distinction.

6 Satyajeet Das, Telephonic interview by author, 6 June 2021.

fishing one day and after a prolonged wait when he finally happened to catch a fish, he could not bear to kill it as his heart was filled with compassion to see the poor creature. He expressed that the aatma (soul) needs to achieve sadgati, that is, it needs to be purified, and that purification is possible only through helping others. In his words, 'Dana is for the purification of one's own self; there is a massive peace involved in helping someone. We feel mentally and physically better; you can sleep better if you help someone. I see parents spending a fortune for their children's birthdays and unwilling to spend anything on the poor. This is appalling!' Das also recounted that the Bhagavad Gita mentions that dana works like a magnate, where one act of kindness leads to the other. Maharaj Gokulananda,[7] a representative of BSS, added in a similar vein that God is inside all of us and when we serve other humans, we serve God. He also spoke about how the founder of BSS, like Swami Vivekananda, constantly reminded all his sanyasi disciples to not be content with self-liberation through meditation but to actively serve the society.

Daljeet Singh,[8] a representative of a Sikh organisation, mentioned how his association with the Sikhi faith has always been through seva. Speaking of the Sikh diaspora in the USA, he explains how different people connect differently to Sikhi. He says, 'Some do kirtan, play instruments, some come through politics and human rights violations such as the episodes of 1984 Sikh riots, the violent Partition of Punjab, etc. For me, it has always been about seva. My primary objective has been to answer the following: How can I inspire Sikhs to give more Dasvandh'. He also invoked the idea of sarbat da bhala in Sikhi, meaning 'may everyone prosper'. He mentioned how, contrary to popular understanding, seva is not manifested only through grandiose acts of giving or in public spaces such as gurudwaras, which organise langars, but also exists in micro forms in everyday life. Recounting some experiences from his own childhood, he narrated how his parents were always welcoming of relatives and acquaintances from India who came looking for work in the USA. Many of these people would be welcomed to stay in their house before they found a job or shelter in the new country. He also mentioned how his father continues to help relatives in India with money when they build homes or have to incur any other major expenditure.

Most representatives and volunteers of Islamic organisations also resonated with similar sentiments with regard to Islamic notions of giving. A senior representative of an Islamic organisation, Mohammad Shafiq,[9] mentioned that philanthropy is embedded in Islam. He elaborated on how there are five pillars in the religion,[10] four of which entail the relationship between the individual and God. Only the fifth pillar, that is, zakat, he said, where every Muslim above a certain income capacity is mandated to donate at least 2.5 per cent of his wealth annually to the poor, entails the relationship between man and man. The primary aim of the institution of zakat, he reflected, is aimed at purifying the soul of the giver.

Another representative, Javed Siddiqi,[11] added that the 'divine guidance in the Quran creates a balance between your capacities; Islam requires that you not only pray, but work, take care of children, parents, neighbours, that you live your life honestly and strive for excellence'. Earning wealth by honest means, he added, is equally important. A third representative, Feroze Abbas[12], also drew attention to other institutions of charity within Islam such as the institution of baytalmal, a

7 Maharaj Gokulananda, Telephonic interview by author, 12 June 2021.
8 Daljeet Singh, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 13 May 2021.9. Mohammad Shafiq, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 10 April 2021.
10 The five pillars of Islam include shahada (profession of the idea that 'there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God', salat (prayer), zakat (giving alms), sawm (fasting), and hajj (pilgrimage).
11 Javed Siddiqi, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 20 March 2021.
12 Feroze Abbas, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 23 May 2021.

a financial institution responsible for administering revenues and taxes in early Islamic states that would give out pensions and other safety nets to the elderly and widows, organise philanthropic insurance, endowment, and welfare budgets. He also explained the concept of waqf (an endowment) and lamented as to how it is underutilised and mismanaged in contemporary India. He spoke of sadaqa, which, according to him, is an expansive and omnibus term for all forms of charitable giving including *zakat* and *wakf*.

An important motivation of charitable giving in Islam that was highlighted by all respondents was explained through the concept of 'hereafter'. Nabeel Ahmed[13] mentioned, 'All Muslims believe that God is one, all creations are one. This world is transcendental: the real world is life after death'. Many others mentioned that Islam preaches that the generous will go to paradise if they do good on earth and that is a primary motivation for most Muslims to contribute generously for others.

Representatives of Christian organisations invoked the ideas of service and charity from the Bible. Joseph Dsouza,[14] a social activist who has been associated with the Catholic Church for the past 30 years, invoked St Thomas Aquinas in saying that 'charity is the foundation of all Christian values'. He also drew attention to Bible Corinthians, chapter 9, verses 6–8, where Christians are explicitly encouraged to be generous: 'Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver'. He further added that the Christian injunction to 'love one another, love your neighbour as you love yourself' were fundamental to making charity an integral part of Christianity. Father Jacob[15] similarly added, 'It is not that good work helps you find God. God is already in you and so it is your responsibility to do good work'.

However, a few respondents came up with slightly different perspectives about their understandings of religion's relationship with philanthropy. Mark Smith,[16] a senior representative of a transnational Catholic humanitarian organisation, revealed that while the organisation embodies Catholic social and moral teaching, he thinks of religion as being more cultural. In his words, 'I believe in some form of higher power and relate it to karma; you do good to others, and you get paid back in full....When you see a smile on a child's face, or when you see a woman give birth or a father recovering from malaria; it is incredible and more satisfying than any other job in the world'. Father Mulligan, a Catholic priest–turned–social activist,[17] mentioned that he saw philanthropy and social activism as a refreshing break from ecclesiastical work. He expressed how institutionalisation of religion has led to identity politics and diminishing of spirituality. His solution to the problem was that 'we need a religion less initiative, not a Godless one'.

What is interesting to observe here is that while there seem to be some commonalities between the responses, each respondent connected to the idea of giving associated with his religious beliefs differently. Though the motivations seem to be similar, they originate from different normative imaginations of what is good, bad, fair, or unfair. The idea of religion is also not uniform and, as is evident from the observations of the last respondent, a deeply personal and contested one.

13 Nabeel Ahmed, Telephonic interview by author, 26 June 2021.
14 Joseph Dsouza, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 30 May 2021.
15 Father Jacob, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 11 June 2021.
16 Mark Smith, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 25 April 2021.
17 Father Mulligan, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 16 June 2021.

Being 'Secular'

A persistent theme that emerged from a majority of the interviews in this regard has been the emphasis on being 'secular'. While all organisations appeared to be unapologetic about being guided by social and moral teachings of one religion or the other, they would begin by underlining that they are a 'secular' organisation. When prodded about what that means, all of them said that their organisation did not discriminate amongst beneficiaries based on religious identities. As Shoaib Hasan, the trustee of a Bangalore-based Islamic organisation[18], eloquently put it, 'My enemy is poverty. I don't care if the recipient is Hindu or Muslim'.

Mark Smith, who represents CRS, spent a considerable amount of time explaining this with regard to his organisation. He said that while his organisation is guided by Catholic moral and social teaching, 'we are also informed by the other great religions'. In his words, 'We say that we do it [the humanitarian work] because we are Catholic but the people we serve don't have to be Catholic'. He went on to elaborate that while they are sometimes perceived by critics as an evangelical organisation trying to gain 'rice Christians', they speak by their actions. 'Only when actions are not enough', he says, 'do we use words'. He says that while the organisation is inspired by Jesus Christ as the idea of someone who gives their life to service for the betterment of people without any expectation, it does not make it a point to only recruit Christians. In fact, over the years, it has tried hard to maintain enormous diversity in its employee base, so much so that Catholics are now a minority in the organisation and Muslims form most of their employee base. He narrates that the people who work for the organisation do it for the mission of helping the poor and not necessarily because of theirs or the organisation's religious identity. He summed up his point passionately by saying, 'We have come to some understanding and peace and if you are a member of a religion and you have come to some understanding and peace too, we can work together'.

Jaideep Rawat,[19] who works for CASA that represents over twenty-four Orthodox and Protestant churches, mentioned that though Christian values form the core of the organisation they are no apologetic about it because it never comes in the way of their work; rather, it makes them more equitable. A Hindu himself, Rawat mentioned how he had never witnessed any discrimination based on religion or caste as an employee. The philosophy of non-partisanship was also palpable, he argued, in the ways in which the organisation chose its beneficiaries. The poorest and the most under-privileged were targeted irrespective of their religious or caste affiliations. He also highlighted how the organisation worked with the community and the smaller grassroots NGOs that they funded as equal partners.

Feroze Abbas,[20] a representative of the JIH, explained that the core value of Islam is the 'need to consider entire humanity as the progeny of one father and one mother'. As a natural extension to this, he said, 'No one is allowed to discriminate while doing aid'. Abbas further added that the Quran clearly outlines that while sadaqa should be non-sectarian, one section of zakat funds can also be utilised for non-Muslims. He invoked the idea of la iqra ha fideen, which means that Allah's will is not to force anyone to accept His religion. He mentioned how the JIH follows the same spirit when providing aid to non-Muslims through their microfinance programmes, especially to non-Muslim women and students. He also mentioned that during the Kerala floods, the JIH built houses for several non-

18 Jaideep Rawat, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 22 May 2021.
19 Abbas, Interview.
20 Shoaib Hasan, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 24 May 2021.

Muslims.

What is interesting to observe in this section is the conflation of 'secular' with 'tolerant' by the respondents. None of the respondents demonstrated any understanding of how one could be deeply religious and tolerant at the same time. More importantly, it is important to interrogate through further research the potential advantages of refraining from the 'religious' tag and examine why being 'secular' in the philanthropic scenario is still considered more legitimate and inclusive.

Emphasis on 'Values'

When asked how they perceived their organisation to be different from other 'secular' organisations engaged in philanthropy, some respondents underlined that their core values were different. Father Benoy Karippal[21] from CRS mentioned that while CRS is as professionally organised as any other secular NGO, 'our faith-based value system forms the foundation of our work. If there is a conflict between work and values, values are always given more importance'. He explained how subsidiarity is an integral value of CRS and 'how the community is always more important than us'. Karippal further explained that the concept of human dignity triumphs over everything else and is given more preference than the other values in CRS's work.

Other respondents expressed that secular organisations did their work without being genuinely empathetic to the recipient. In the words of Maya Sudhakar,[22] who is a devotee of ISKCON, secular organisations were 'not in the business of touching the soul'. Father Paul,[23] a Catholic priest, argued in a similar vein that in order to help the poor, one has to experience hunger and violence that they go through every day. In his words, 'The secularists sitting in their AC rooms can never experience that'. Others, who had the experience of working in both secular and religious organisations, complained of excessive bureaucracy in the former and a lack of trust that led to an obsession for accountability procedures. A volunteer of an Islamic organisation mentioned how while secular NGOs 'start off with a good intention, within a few years their decision-making processes start crumbling down due to infighting and lack of trust'.

Contrary to popular expectations, Soumya Das,[24] a devotee of BSS, interestingly mentioned that accountability is higher in religious organisations as devotees can question authority without fear. In his words, 'I have been part of a few NGOs. While many of them start with a good intention, within a few years the decision-making process breaks down. In the ashram, I can ask my Maharaj how the money is being utilized'. Maharaj Gokulananda,[25] a senior representative of the BSS, stressed on the absence of corruption in the following words, 'We are completely dedicated to our cause; we have no family and so no vested interests. Everything is for the benefit and welfare of the society and my ashram. When you are genuinely doing seva for people, you are not running after material interests'. He also added how the lack of corruption helps build trust with large sections of people which further helps in fundraising in times of calamities. This was reiterated by Professor Chinmay Dutta[26], a long-time devotee of the ashram. In his words, 'We trust the Bharat Sevashram Sangh far more than any other organisation because we know that our money will not be mis-utilised'. He also added that in most secular organisations 'materialism is creeping in, in the name of "professionalisation"'.

21 Father Benoy Karippal, Online interview by author online video conferencing, 8 April 2021.
22 Maya Sudhakar, Interview by author over email, 24 June 2021.
23 Father Paul, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 19 June 2021.
24 Soumya Das, Telephonic interview with author, 13 June 2021.
25 Gokulananda, Interview
26 Professor Chinmay Dutta, Telephonic interview with author, 11 April 2021.

Keshav Pandey,[27] an ISKCON devotee, provided another interesting perspective when he was asked how ISKCON is different from other secular organisations. Pandey expressed that while other organisations attacked poverty by trying to get people jobs and livelihoods, ISKCON aimed at the spiritual transformation of its beneficiaries. In his words, 'If a person is poor, he is poor because of his own karma. If you give him money, it won't help, if you get him a job or some means of earning, that too won't help in the long run because he will ultimately get stuck in karma again. It won't change his inherent qualities'. Pandey expressed that to change one's karma, one has to try to spiritually transform themself. He said that the prasad (devotional food offered to God) distributed by the organisation is potentially transformative and works like a medicine for the recipient. He also drew attention to how the absence of onion and garlic in the prasad has shown miraculous results. While these claims maybe deeply unsettling or uncomfortable to those coming from a liberal-secularist paradigm on the grounds that it potentially rejects the agency of the recipient, it is important to acknowledge these as alternative imaginations of the purpose behind giving.

The other strand that could be discerned from the interviews is the absence of any sense of reciprocity in giving. Feroze Abbas[28] explained how Islam mandates that the 'right hand should not know what the left hand gives'. He also underlined how all kinds of show-off is unacceptable in Islam and, therefore, the names of donors, however big or small, are never revealed or displayed publicly. Father Mulligan[29] also argued that, unlike the common perception of their being 'no free lunches', it is 'one hundred percent possible to give without expectation of any return. There is space for genuine altruism when you make a deliberate choice'. Two respondents (one representing an Islamic organisation and the other a devotee of a Hindu organisation) also expressed their dissatisfaction with non-religious intellectual traditions because they found it incomplete, insipid, or unidimensional. They also mentioned that the category of 'philanthropy' is inadequate and fails to capture the spiritual essence of dana or zakat.

The common thread reflected in most of these responses seems to be that from their perspective, religious organisations entail a certain affective or even spiritual and metaphysical dimension that the respondents feel is lacking in NGOs. While this may not be factually true, these perceptions give us a better sense of what draws people to religious organisations while they engage in philanthropy.

Advantages of being a Religious Organisation

Several respondents mentioned that while religious organisations engaged in philanthropy are often stigmatised for being 'unprofessional', 'biased', or even accused for allegedly being 'driven by an agenda', there are some advantages of being faith-based. One respondent who had worked in other NGOs before joining a Christian charitable organisation mentioned that it is relatively easier to motivate people to contribute towards charity. In his words, 'when you are irreligious, you are only rational'. That people associated with religious organisations give more spontaneously was a universally agreed idea amongst all res pondents. Another respondent added that secular organisations are overtly bureaucratic in that everything takes much more time than in religious organisations where people have more trust in the organisation. Others mentioned how religious organisations have better networks within the community which allow them to undertake relief work during emergencies far more effectively.

27 Keshav Pandey, Telephonic interview with author, 12 June 2021.
28 Abbas, Interview.
29 Father Mulligan, Interview

Father Jacob,[30] who started working in the humanitarian sector as a young adult, said that it is much easier to raise funds in a religious organisation as compared to a secular one. Having worked in both, he says, 'It is so much easier to raise money in the church. People will give generously as long as the cause is good and noble'. He also added that the church can easily mobilise volunteers and other resources within a short span of time as they have far more autonomy than secular organisations who get stuck in too many bureaucratic processes.

Feroze Abbas[31] stressed how 90 per cent people involved in JIH are doing voluntary work. He mentions, 'Our volunteers just pick up kits and get to work; they work with emotion and genuine empathy for the poor'. He mentioned that before any activity, the JIH reads a few verses from the Quran and then explains the impact of this service activity. The idea of spiritual reward is invoked to inspire people. He also drew attention to how, unlike other secular organisations, the levels of trust that donors repose on JIH are very high. In his words, 'Many of our donors do not even want receipts, even if we take extra care to provide them. They believe that we will not misuse their money and put it to right use'. He mentioned that this also makes fundraising much easier as most funds are raised through word of mouth and JIH does not have to undertake any fancy campaigns or marketing programmes.

On the other hand, there are also specific difficulties associated with being 'religious' or 'faith-based'. Father Jacob mentioned how it becomes challenging to negotiate situations where some organisers want the money to be spent only on Christians. Shoaib Hasan[32] pointed out that t here is a negative perception that exists about minority religious organisations which is not always true. He mentioned how religious minority organisations are viewed suspiciously by the government and seen as being involved in proselytism and 'anti-national' activities through their philanthropic work. Mark Smith[33] from CRS made an interesting comment about how 'several institutional donors give us funds despite the fact that we are Catholic'. He explains that with growing secularisation and along with it the idea that if you give to religious organisations they may only spend it on a certain community often comes in the way of donors giving to faith-based organisations. Other potential points of conflict with donors arise because CRS does not support abortion as a matter of principle. However, he said, CRS has been largely supportive as it is run professionally and its voluneteers know that the organisation does not support any one religion.

Several claims made by respondents in this section have been supported by existing literature on this subject. Jan McGirk (2005), for instance, draws attention to how Jihadi Islamic groups were the first to respond to the Kashmir earthquake in 2005 owing to their embeddedness in the community, their vast networks, levels of trust that they enjoyed, and their familiarity with the physical terrain where the earthquake had struck. What most respondents did not touch upon in their observations though is the incredible authority that they command over their devotees and supporters that gives them an upper hand over secular actors.

Emphasis on 'Scientific' Process

Though the birth of secularisation is associated with a scientific and rational way of understanding the world, a majority of the respondents expressed that their religious teachings about philanthropy

30 Father Jacob, Interview.
31 Abbas, Interview.
32 Hasan, Interview.
33 Smith, Interview.

were not only 'scientific' but also in perfect harmony with the rational discourses of development. While a volunteer from an Islamic organisation drew attention to how zakat was a scientific institution that prevented hoarding in society, a devotee of a Hindu religious organisation added that the spiritual transformation of society through the dana of knowledge is a scientific process. Father Paul,[34] who is a priest in an archdiocese of Bangalore, went further and mentioned that the distinction between the 'secular' and the 'religious' has been overemphasised in popular discourse. In his own words, 'Science is not contrary to religion, the secular human rights discourse is impossible without religion. The story of humanitarianism is a human story and cannot compartmentalise the secular and the religious like this. I cannot think of human rights without empathy and compassion. Even the Pope is talking about climate change'.

Sister Nora,[35] who was earlier part of a Catholic congregation and then decided to work independently because of ideological differences, mentioned how Christianity is very strongly ingrained in rights-based theology. She expressed that Jesus himself did 'empowerment healing' and that more contemporary rational approaches to giving have always been implicit in Christianity and there is no contradiction in their approaches. While she did not explicitly mention liberation and salvation theology in her interview, she seemed to be drawing attention to the underlying principles of the same. She mentioned that one of the reasons for her differences with other nuns in her congregation was precisely around this question. While she agreed with her colleagues that emergency relief forms an important part of the church's work, she strongly feels that in the long term, rights-based approaches to development will make things more sustainable. In her words, 'Our banner should not be charity; it should be empowerment, that will give people confidence. Charity is not wrong, it is a must when people are facing difficulties, but that cannot become a normal course of functioning'. Interestingly, her arguments regarding who is a more deserving recipient exposes the familiar trope that conservatives and liberals have forever been contesting over and the question continues to remain unsettled.

Mohammad Shafiq explained how the objectives of sharia and the sustainable development goals of the UN are very similar. He said that zakat prevents the concentration of wealth in a few hands and encourages money to be circulated amongst the poor. Capitalist economy, on the other hand, he argued, is concentrating money in a few hands. The Quran, he said, mandates that money cannot be kept idle; it should be invested and donated or else one will be punished. He also underlined how the prohibition of interest is a rational economic principle as reduction of interest leads to more money being circulated in the economy. In his words, 'From an economic point of view, Islam discourages accumulation of wealth. The Quran prohibits interest on loans and prescribes that money should circulate in society. It is useful to understand this through the metaphor of blood flowing through the body; blood should reach all parts of the body in order for the body to remain healthy. If any one part gets more blood, the body will be sick'.

Drawing attention to how the spiritual prescriptions of ISKCON are 'scientific', devotee Maya Sudhakar[36] mentioned how it's impact can be tested through evidence. She said, 'If you interact with any devotee of ISKCON and ask whether prasad, chanting, and authentic literature have helped them, they will all be in agreement. Those who stop eating onions and garlic also demonstrate a newer self, particularly in the way they think. Instead of grabbing from others, they become more selfless and

34 Father Paul, Interview.
35 Sister Nora, Telephonic interview with author, 17 June 2021.
36 Sudhakar, Interview.

start doing service for the poor'.

Another distinctive strand that was observed in conversation with several other respondents was their emphasis on being 'transparent', 'accountable', and in sync with technological innovations that have been adopted by secular organisations. Keshav Pandey[37] an ISKCON devotee, mentioned how Sri Prabhupada, the founder of ISKCON, had mandated that for every donation, big or small, a receipt had to be issued. All receipts are audited by an external agency in order to ensure accountability. He mentions, 'When the architecture is accountable, even if there is a black sheep in the organisation, he or she cannot do any damage'. Daljeet Singh[38] explained how Dasvandh Network uses online crowd-funding programmes and creates strategic campaigns that help amplify the work of the organisations affiliated to them, thereby also helping in raising more funds.

The emphasis on 'being scientific' perhaps has to do with the tendency of religious organisations to defend themselves from being judged as 'irrational' and 'unscientific', labels that have been used perennially by their critics since the rise of the liberal-secular project. At the same time, it is also reflective of how the emulation of the character of the secular, despite their misgivings against the same, is also considered important for their own legitimacy in the philanthropic space. The other important inference that may be drawn from this section is the pervasive influence of internet-based technologies that have come to envelope all kinds of actors involved in philanthropy, be they religious or secular. New technologies that catalyse fundraising, help in mobilising volunteers, and enhance networking are being embraced by religious organisations as much as by secular groups.

Governmental Control and Religious Autonomy

While studying the tensions between the 'religious' and the 'secular', one of the most contentious aspects is the control of the 'secular' over the 'religious' which is manifested in how government regulations impact the autonomy of religious groups. When probed about how these regulations impact autonomy of religious groups engaged in philanthropy, there were mixed responses. All respondents associated with religious organisations began by speaking about how a certain amount of regulation is desirable as that helps in preventing corruption. A representative of an Islamic organisation mentioned how complying to legal regulations helps the organisation improve its legitimacy and build a brand for itself. A devotee of BSS spoke of how the civil society space has allowed for rampant corruption to thrive in the past and, hence, it was important that the government imposes some regulations to monitor this sector.[39] Another ISKCON devotee said, 'If I have not stolen money, I will not care about any number of regulations. People who complain about excess regulations want to actually engage in corrupt practices'.

Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) Concerns

A few other respondents mentioned that since the past few years, the government has been deliberately targeting religious minorities with the recent amendments to the FCRA and the increasing stringency in the Income Tax Act. A Catholic priest mentioned that it was unfortunate that though his

37 Pandey, Interview.
38 Singh, Interview.
39 Debraj Nandy, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 27 March 2021.

organisation was doing the work that should have been done by the government, the latter was making their life more difficult with newer regulations. The question of 'growing politicisation' in regulating the voluntary sector was highlighted by other respondents too, who felt that the new FCRA regulations were arbitrary. In a similar vein, another Catholic priest mentioned how the 'compassion projects' associated with churches were arbitrarily stopped by the Ministry of Home Affairs on the grounds that these projects allegedly converted people to Christianity.

A representative of a Muslim charitable organisation[40] mentioned that if you are registered as a religious organisation, the government does not allow you to claim benefit under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act. If one is registered as a charitable organisation, one has to demonstrate that relief and charity work was deployed without any discrimination. For organisations like his own, which work in Muslim ghettos, he feels that this becomes an unfair imposition.

A devotee of a Hindu organisation mentioned that it is difficult to keep an account for every purchase and 'miscellaneous' costs form a very important part of the ashram's expenditure. This sometimes raises uncomfortable questions from the Income Tax department. He says, 'While government regulations are good to the extent that they discourage corruption, they also create hindrances sometimes. In our ashrams, for instance, we feed hundreds of people on a daily basis and the miscellaneous costs are sometimes very high. We need cash for everything and it is not possible to account for every small purchase'.

Some respondents felt that a clear gain of the recent FCRA amendments has been that now local fundraising will become more popular. An employee of a Christian organisation expressed that though sub-granting was no longer possible with the new FCRA regulations, on the positive side, local philanthropy has now become more popular. A member of JIH said, 'We do not need FCRA as we do not require foreign funds. Local fundraising will help build better community connect and help increase our value also'.[41] A similar sentiment was expressed by Sister Nora, who mentioned that she did not 'believe in the foreign funding model'. 'There is a lot of money available locally', she says, and that needs to be mobilised for us to be sustainable.

Others mentioned that the government needs to be less confrontational and trust religious organisations as they are doing the 'government's work'. A Catholic priest mentioned, 'Our aim is to empower the government system and see that the government is working well. The government alone cannot provide for all welfare measures. Important to have faith in religious organisations. The government also needs to see the opportunities to collaborate instead of confronting us'. Another representative of a Hindu organisation mentioned that while transparency is always welcome, restrictions can become a hindrance when the government is not understanding. In his words, 'The government

40 Hasan, Interview.
41 Siddiqi, Interview.

Income Tax Concerns

Nitish Agarwal,[42] a chartered accountant who takes care of the all tax-related matters for a Hindu religious group, explained how recent changes in the income tax regulations have impacted the autonomy of religious organisations. He says, 'Religious organisations are dependent on donors for funds. Devotees are many times not aware of the nitty gritty of the regulations. Under the current rules of the government, the PAN and Aadhaar card numbers of the donors have to be furnished. This violates the idea of gupt daan (secretive or anonymised giving); many times organisations do not want to reveal the identity or the source of the funds'. He also mentioned many organisations, especially those based in smaller towns or rural areas, do not have skilled professionals to h elp them do basic things such as filing tax returns or even help them understand the new rules and laws, which becomes a hindrance to their smooth functioning. Agarwal's observations are in line with what smaller secular organisations often express about the reporting burdens of organising big philanthropy. Further, it is also important to highlight that accountability can also be achieved without these kinds of 'bureaucratic' barriers.

He further adds that while growing digitisation has reduced corruption, it has also made the Income Tax department totally faceless. When people are faced with any difficulty, he says, they do not know where to go to seek clarifications or explanations. Hence, they become fully dependent on the drafting skills of the chartered accountant. Another important income tax regulation that is likely to make things more difficult for religious and charitable organisations is that if any one activity of an organisation is found to have a link with a bogus fund, the registration of the organisation could potentially get cancelled. Once the registration is cancelled, the net worth of the organisation is taxed at market cost, which can cause a lot of trouble to the organisation.

Government's Perspective

The point about how excessive digitisation was creating some difficulty was also stressed upon by Partho Chatterjee,[43] an income tax commissioner who handles exemptions. Chatterjee mentioned that while the 'young and savvy' group is usually technology savvy and faces no difficulty in navigating through the website of the Income Tax department, the senior group struggles. The latter still stick to filling up forms manually and often seek the help of income tax officers, he said.

Chatterjee also provided an interesting perspective about the need for governmental control. He also helped in explaining the difference between religious organisations and charitable organisations and the ways in which the provisions of the income tax regulations apply to both. Religious organisations, he said, are usually not registered under 80G of the Income Tax Act but only under the 12 (A) provision. Section 12 (A) gives exemption to the income of the trust and not the donor. Therefore, a religious organisation is exempted from paying taxes if 85 per cent of the money collected is spent for religious activities (temple maintenance, maintenance of deity, distribution of prasad, etc.) or the purpose for which the trust has been created. Charitable organisations are registered under 80G, which provides their donors with tax exemptions. However, the restriction on them is that once registered as a charitable organisation, they cannot spend money on a specific community, caste, or

42 Nitish Agarwal, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 19 March 2021.
43 Partho Chatterjee, Telephonic interview with the author, 19 June 2021.

religion. More importantly, they are required to maintain the receipts of all funds received along with the PAN and Aadhar numbers of all their donors. Despite this restriction, he explains, most organisations prefer to register as charitable trusts as fundraising becomes much easier. Religious organisations, on the other hand, have no incentive to register as a charitable organisation as they seldom do any relief work. Governmental regulations, he mentioned, are far more stringent on charitable organisations as the scale of misuse is very high. In his words, 'In the garb of charitable organisation, a lot of money is coming in from inappropriate sources and a lot of black money gets pumped into the system. While these restrictions pose difficulties for the organisation, it is important for the government to have some sort of control to monitor where the money is coming from and where it is being spent'.

The findings in this section reveal diverse perceptions about the issue of governmental control. While respondents felt that some governmental regulations are necessary and even desirable, members of minority religious groups felt that many of these regulations are deliberately aimed at targeting them. The officer of the Income Tax department, on the other hand, felt that the regulations were necessary as the social sector was ridden with corruption.

4. Conclusion and Implications

If one were to imagine the phenomenon of philanthropy as a continuum, 'development-centric' giving, which follows a rights-based and rational approach, would perhaps occupy one corner of the spectrum, while the other corner would be occupied by more pre-modern forms of 'charitable' or 'compassionate' giving. It would not be incorrect to say that while the former is seen as being secular, the latter is mostly associated with religious forms of giving. While religious organisations have been criticised by development practitioners for abstaining from a rights-based approach, the philanthropic approach has been considered problematic by religious groups for being too bureaucratic. Despite these differences, the voluntary sector today witnesses the flourishing of both these forms of giving leading to a situation where both 'sanctification' and 'secularisation' seemed to have become enduring features of the philanthropic space. It is also important to bear in mind that it is becoming increasingly difficult to neatly demarcate the 'sacred' from the 'secular' aid providers, as both these actors have intermeshed with each other, undergone transformations in their characters, and have imbibed the qualities of the other through prolonged interaction.

This research has tried to interrogate the epistemic motivations for religious organisations to participate in philanthropy and understand how it negotiates the largely secular space of philanthropy while getting transformed in the process. As one would have intuitively guessed, the findings reveal that, far from the expectations of the adherents of the secularisation thesis, religion has remained a resilient actor in the philanthropic space. This is evident in the growing influence of religious actors economically, socially, as well as culturally in the philanthropic sector.

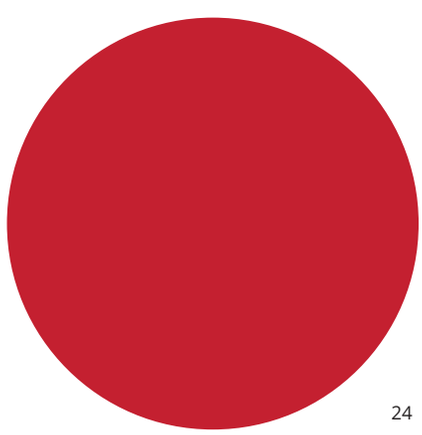
The findings reveal that despite the obvious secularisation of the philanthropic space, religious organisations continue to frame their subjectivities through different kinds of epistemic and ontological principles that pose a challenge to secular rational thought. A majority of the respondents mentioned that they give because of their spiritual beliefs. They frequently used expressions such as 'love for humanity', 'personal connection with God', 'moral values', and so on instead of invoking liberal values of 'justice', 'equity', or 'human rights'. What also becomes evident is that the fundamental ideas underpinning religious giving present an alternative model of social justice that is similar to but also different from secular ideas of equity. For example, while zakat is seen as a powerful tool to induce a more equitable distribution of wealth and provide a safety net for the poor, it is also seen as an institution that purifies the soul and ensures a more peaceful life after death for the donor. Dana, dasvandh, and caritas are similarly presented as spiritual obligations that devotees of the respective faiths are expected to fulfil. Similarly, the distribution of prasad is seen as a means of reducing karmic reaction amongst the beneficiaries while the idea of chanting is seen as a means of making people less violent. For most devotees and representatives of religious organisations, being 'charitable' or 'philanthropic' is a natural extension of their moral and ethical selves. For most of them, giving was an opportunity to seek redemption and transform themselves ontologically. To dismiss these subjectivities as irrational and uncritical would be unfair and a demonstration of imposing a preconceived (in this case a secular-liberal-modernist) framework onto something that is grounded on a very different episteme.

In the same vein, many religious organisations also consider their forms of giving to be more spontaneous and 'agenda-free' than secular organisations' philanthropic initiatives. While this may or may

not be true, the important point for reflection here is the imagination of how giving is construed as an act of 'self-liberation' rather than as a rationally thought-out activity that is expected to yield certain predictable outcomes. The respondents constantly expressed discomfort with the idea of there being 'no free gift' or the idea of reciprocity analysed in the Maussian framework. Many of them felt that while politicisation is common these days, it is certainly possible to give 'without any strings attached'. And yet there is also accommodation. While the aforementioned analysis may give the impression that religious organisations have triumphantly survived the onslaught of secularisation, a more careful analysis also reveals accommodation of several secular principles by religious groups. Almost all religious organisations use the word 'secular' to define their approach to humanitarian work. Many of them also stress on the idea of how their approach is 'scientific' as it is based on adopting transparent practices of book- keeping, maintaining all accounts of income and expenditure, and adhering to all state regulations in order to maintain accountability.

The other strand of overlap is with regard to adaptation to technology and adoption of modern techniques of networking, fundraising, and online forms of doing outreach with relevant stakeholders. This is, however, a complex terrain. On the one hand, we may get the impression that religious groups have accommodated certain values that largely belong to the secular sphere to survive. On the other hand, some respondents expressed that there is no contradiction between being the 'religious' and 'scientific'. Respondents belonging to Christian and Islamic organisations, in particular expressed that the religious approach already entails the 'rights-based approach', which is at the heart of contemporary philanthropic and development discourse. In fact, they also mentioned that contemporary philanthropy has its roots in religion. This interesting finding led the title of this study to be revised as 'Philanthropy in Christian, Hindu, and Islamic Organisations', since one came to realise that religion is not external to or separate from the institution of philanthropy. In fact, the notion of philanthropy along with several other pre-modern forms of charity inhere within religion.

This study has found that through service, religious organisations, and people working in them, build their own subjectivities, construct their own identities, and seek to leave an imprint of their philosophy in the lives of their beneficiaries. It has also found that devotees of religious organisations consider secular philanthropy to be insipid and incomplete and relate to their own ways of giving as a way of connecting with their God and the larger universe. This study argues that the discourse on philanthropy needs to step outside the linear, teleological imagination where 'religion' is perceived not as a remnant of primitive forms of charity but as a legitimate partner in the philanthropic space that is grounded in its own ontology and epistemology. It echoes Hanna Kim's important conclusions on the Swaminarayan movement where she argues that 'to be dismissive of religious subjectivity on the grounds of its perceived moral and philosophical limitations is to submit to an unexamined teleology, one with its own historical and intellectual location' (2010: 224).



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ANNEXURE 1

Websites Consulted

- Jamaat-e-Islami Hind: https://jamaateislamihind.org/eng/
- Bharat Sevashram Sangh: https://www.bharatsevashramsangha.org/
- Catholic Relief Services: https://www.crs.org/
- Church's Auxiliary for Social Action: https://casa-india.org/
- ISKCON: https://www.iskconbangalore.org/
- Dasvandh Network: https://www.dvnetwork.org/
- Income Tax Department: https://www.incometax.gov.in/iec/foportal
- Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) : https://www.incometax.gov.in/iec/foportal
- Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy, Ashoka University: https://csip.ashoka.edu.in/

Break-up of Respondents:

- Jamaat-e-Islami Hind: 4
- Bharat Sevashram Sangh: 5
- Catholic Relief Services: 2
- Church's Auxiliary for Social Action: 1
- Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax: 1
- ISKCON: 3
- Dasvandh Network: 1
- Catholic Priests: 4
- Nun: 1
- Catholic Social Worker: 2

Interview Details

1. Father Benoy Karippal, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 8 April 2021.
2. Daljeet Singh, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 13 May 2021.
3. Father Jacob, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 11 June 2021.
4. Father Mulligan, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 16 June 2021.
5. Father Paul, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 19 June 2021.
6. Feroze Abbas, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 23 May 2021.
7. Jaideep Rawat, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 22 May 2021.
8. Javed Siddiqi, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 20 March 2021.
9. Joseph Dsouza, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 30 May 2021.
10. Keshav Pandey, Telephonic interview with author, 12 June 2021.
11. Maharaj Gokulananda, Telephonic interview by author, 12 June 2021.
12. Mark Smith, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 25 April 2021.
13. Maya Sudhakar, Interview by author over email, 24 June 2021.
14. Mohammad Shafiq, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 10 April 2021.

15. Nabeel Ahmed, Telephonic interview by author, 26 June 2021.
16. Nitish Agarwal, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 19 March 2021.
17. Partho Chatterjee, Telephonic interview with the author, 19 June 2021.
18. Professor Chinmay Dutta, Telephonic interview with author, 11 April 2021.
19. Satyajeet Das, Telephonic interview by author, 6 June 2021.
20. Shoaib Hasan, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 24 May 2021.
21. Sister Nora, Telephonic interview with author, 17 June 2021.
22. Soumya Das, Telephonic interview with author, 13 June 2021.
23. Debraj Nandy, Online interview by author through video conferencing, 27 March 2021.
24. Swami Smarananda, Telephonic interview by author, 18 April 2021.

Interview Tool

Section 1: Background information

Date of Interview: / /2021		
Location of Respondent:	**Religion:**	**Gender:**

1. Respondent Name (Optional):
2. Relationship with Organisation:
Please tick the options that apply:
Management Staff
Field Staff
Donor
Sponsor
Volunteer
Beneficary
Any Other? (Please specify) _____
3. Number of Years of Association with the Organisation:
<1 year
1–2 years
3–5 years
5–10 years
>10 years
Please specify, briefly, the nature of your responsibilities with regard to your association with World Vision.....
4. Respondent Qualification:
10th Grade
12th Grade
Graduation
Post Graduation & Above

Section 2: Motivations for Philanthropy

1. From where did you hear about your organisation first?
2. What appealed to you about the organisation most? OR What drew you to work/donate/volunteer for the organisation?
3. How do you think your organisation is different from other kinds of philanthropic organisations?
4. What does philanthropy mean to you?
5.Do you think it is important to give to or care for the poor/underprivileged persons?

If your response to the above question is 'yes', please answer the next three questions.

6. Who inspired you to think this way? (family members, friends, school, teachers or a combination of all). Please elaborate on how specific influences shaped your ideas about giving.
7. As a child or during your youth, were you introduced to any particular religious teachings, book or spiritual leader who inspired you to be a more generous person?
8. Do you think there is an equivalent word for philanthropy in your culture or religion? If yes, do you think it captures the idea of giving more accurately than the word 'philanthropy? Please explain.

Section 3: About your Organisation's Motivations behind Philanthropy

1. What was the rationale behind founding your organisation?
2. What are the values that inspire the work of your organisation?
3. Given that the organisation is doing work in several different regions, has it adapted to local traditions or cultures of philanthropy? If yes, please describe how with suitable examples.
4. Does your organisation believe that certain forms of philanthropy are more superior than others? For example, does it believe that giving to children or the elderly is more noble than to young adults? In other words, how does it prioritise where to focus its interventions?
5. Has the work of your organisation evolved ever since it was established? If so, how did it impact its philanthropic work?

Section 4: Modus Operandi of Work (Some of the questions in this section may not be relevant for you, please skip those).

1. Please provide details about the geographical spread of your organisation's work?
2. How are the beneficiaries chosen? Please provide details about specific target groups if any, such as Dalits, tribal groups, transgender groups, backward classes, persons with disabilities, religious minorities, etc.
3. How do beneficiaries 'give back' to the organisation? For example, do beneficiaries sometimes become volunteers for the organisation?
4. How are donors (both within India and outside the country) mobilised?
5. What models of fundraising does your organisation work with?
6. Are there any partner organisations that your organisation works with? If so, please specify some names that the organisation partners with in India.
7. How are partner organisations chosen? Please specify the criteria deployed.

Section 5: On Negotiating the 'Secular' Realm of Philanthropy and Resistances Faced in India (Some of the questions below are sensitive in nature but your candid responses would greatly benefit the study).

1. Under which act is your organisation India registered?
2. Given that the philanthropic space is essentially 'secular' in character, does World Vision face any challenge in negotiating this space?

3. Does your organisation face any resistance on the ground in India given their religious affiliation? (This is particularly relevant under the current regime). If yes, please give examples such as newer regulations under FCRA, etc.
4. What kinds of practices has your organisation adapted over a period of time in order to appear more 'secular'?
5. Are there any specific codes of conduct that the organisation has adopted in order to demonstrate its 'secular' credentials?
6. Is your organisation comfortable with the label of a 'religious organisation' or would it prefer being labelled as a 'secular' organisation? If so, please explain why.