

# Religious Orientation of Christians, Muslims and Hindus in Kerala State of India: A Comparative Study

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Submitted: 09 June 2025    Accepted: 16 June 2025    Published: 23 June 2025

 <https://doi.org/10.63620/MKJGPSCD.2025.1014>

**Citation:** Madhava Chandran, K, Viswanathan Nair, P. P., Valsan, T., Jayakumar, P. (2025). Religious Orientation of Christians, Muslims and Hindus in Kerala State of India: A Comparative Study. *J of Glob Perspect Soc Cult Dev*, 1(2), 01-10.

## Abstract

Different ways through which people approach religion have collectively been termed their religious orientation. It involves presumptions about the existence and nature of God or Gods, religious prescriptions about morality and communal and personal spirituality. Measuring religiosity allows researchers to understand how religious beliefs and practices influence various aspects of lives of people. This study was undertaken by WEDO, NGO, Kozhikode, Kerala State, India to analyse the level of religious orientation of people from Christianity, Islam and Hindu religions. The study was carried out among a randomly selected sample of 90 each of Malayali Christians, Muslims and Hindus living in Kerala State of India using a questionnaire containing the measure of religiosity containing items, which are mainly oriented towards religious aspects in relation to the psychology/ behaviour of people in their life. The data was analyzed as scores, proportion of respondents reporting and through statistical tests. The results show that Malayali Hindus in Kerala have comparatively less religious orientation than Malayali Christians and Muslims, who get an almost similar and higher total religious orientation score than Hindus. Statistically significant difference observed in the scores of various religious orientation items between the respondents of the three religions also shows a comparatively lower score for the items in the case of Hindus, indicating that the level of religiosity of Hindus for the items is less than that of Christians as well as Muslims. The requirement in both Christianity and Islam to mandatory follow various religious guidelines in life may be attributed to the comparatively higher level of religious orientation observed in the case of respondents belonging to these two religions. However, Hindu religion does not impose any such mandatory guidelines, resulting in less adherence to religious practices, which contribute to more values and principles in life for Hindus. This is where importance is there for the religious Gurus, Acharyas etc. to orient more Hindus about various aspects of their religion and the relevance of following the injunctions in holy texts like Mahabharata, Ramayana etc. in order to achieve better wellbeing in their life.

**Keywords:** Religious Orientation, Malayali, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Kerala

## Introduction

Different ways through which people approach religion have collectively been termed their religious orientation. Religious orientation is the form of a person's faith. Religious orientation of an individual or community involves presumptions about the

existence and nature of God or Gods, religious prescriptions about morality and communal and personal spirituality. Such presumptions involve the study of psychology, ethics, sociology and anthropology.

Behind the behaviours, deeds, actions, and institutional affiliations related to religiosity, there are also motives, which are often inseparable from religiosity. This was the approach taken by Gordon Allport to find the orientation or motives behind the actions for understanding the deeds. He framed typology of extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity. The extrinsically motivated individual uses his religion, whereas the intrinsically motivated lives his [1].

Measuring religiosity allows researchers to understand how religious beliefs and practices influence various aspects of lives of people, including their social behaviour, health, political views, and overall well-being, providing insights into the complex relationship between religion and society at large. This could be useful for policy-making and social research across different fields.

A study reported that Intrinsic religious orientation was a significant predictor of subjective well-being via meaning in life in both the males and females. Extrinsic religious orientation was found to be a significant predictor of subjective well-being via meaning in life in the females only [2].

The findings of a study suggest that an intrinsic religious orientation is most likely to be related to a cosmic sense of purpose in life, which facilitates subjective well-being even in the face

of death [3].

It has been reported that intrinsic religiosity is positively related to positive affect, life satisfaction, and intrinsic life aspirations and negatively related to negative affect and extrinsic life aspirations. Extrinsic religiosity is positively related to extrinsic life aspirations and not related to the intrinsic life aspirations [4].

### Methodology

The study reported in this article was carried out by WEDO, NGO, Kozhikode, Kerala State, India among a randomly selected sample of 90 each of Malayali Christians, Muslims and Hindus living in Kerala State of India using a questionnaire containing the 22-item measure of religiosity [5]. The data was analyzed as scores, proportion of respondents reporting and through statistical tests.

### Results

Table 1 shows the responses of Christians, Muslims and Hindus to various religious orientation items.

Table 2 shows the mean score of religious orientation items for Christians, Muslims and Hindus, and the statistically significant difference observed between the respondents of the three religions with respect to the scores of religious orientation items.

**Table 1:** Responses of Christians, Muslims and Hindus to religious orientation items

Sl. No.	Religious orientation item	Christians		Muslims		Hindus	
		Response	Respondents (%)	Response	Respondents (%)	Response	Respondents (%)
1	Level of faith in God	Very much	44.4	Very much	55.5	Very much	55.5
		Much	33.3	Much	22.2	Much	11.1
		Moderate	22.3	Moderate	22.2	Moderate	22.2
						Less	11.1
2	Got benefits due to belief in God	Yes	77.7	Yes	88.9	Does not know	66.7
		Does not know	22.3	Does not know	11.1	No	33.3
3	Although belief in my religion is there, there are many more important things in life	Agree	11.1	Disagree	66.6	Strongly agree	22.2
		Neither agree or disagree	11.1	Strongly disagree	11.1	Agree	55.5
		Disagree	22.2	Neither agree or disagree	22.2	Neither agree or disagree	11.1
		Strongly disagree	55.5			Strongly disagree	11.1
4	It does not matter so much what one believes, so long as he or she leads a moral life	Strongly agree	66.7	Strongly agree	33.3	Strongly agree	33.3
		Agree	33.3	Agree	55.5	Agree	44.4
				Neither agree or disagree	11.1	Neither agree or disagree	22.2

5	The primary purpose of prayer is to gain relief and protection from difficulties in life	Strongly agree Agree	66.7 33.3	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree	22.2 55.5 22.2	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree	33.3 44.4 22.2
6	Church / Mosque / Temple is most important as a place to formulate good social relationships, in addition to religious activities	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree	22.2 55.5 22.2	Strongly disagree  Disagree Neither agree or disagree	11.1 66.6 22.2	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree	33.3 22.2 22.2
7	What religion offers me most is comfort when sorrows and misfortune strike	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree	44.4 11.1 44.4	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	55.5 33.3 11.1	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	33.3 22.2 33.3 11.1
8	Praying is done mainly because it has been taught to pray	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree	33.3 11.1 22.2 33.3	Disagree Neither agree or disagree  Agree	11.1 22.2 66.6	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree	11.1 11.1 33.3 44.4
9	Although a religious person, refuses to let religious considerations influence everyday affairs	Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree	11.1 44.4 44.4	Disagree Neither agree or disagree  Agree  Strongly agree	11.1 44.4 33.3 11.1	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree Strongly agree	11.1 11.1 22.2 22.2 33.3
10	A primary reason for the interest in religion is that praying at a Temple / Mosque/ Church is a congenial place for social interaction	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	11.1 11.1 22.2 55.5	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	22.2 33.3 44.4	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	33.3 44.4 11.1 11.1

11	Had to compromise religious beliefs occasionally in order to protect social and economic well-being	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree	11.1 44.4 33.3 11.1	Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree	55.5 33.3 11.1	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree	22.2 11.1 44.4 22.2
12	One reason for visit to and participation in the activities of a Temple / Mosque/ Church is that it helps to establish the identity of a person in the community	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree Strongly agree	11.1 11.1 22.2 33.3 22.2	Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree	44.4 44.4 11.1	Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree Strongly agree	22.2 22.2 22.2 33.3
13	The purpose of prayer is to have a happy and peaceful life	Strongly agree Agree Disagree	55.5 22.2 22.2	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree	11.1 77.7 11.1	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	11.1 33.3 55.5
14	Religion helps to keep life balanced and steady in exactly the same way as friendships and other memberships in organizations do	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	11.1 22.2 44.4 22.2	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	11.1 55.5 33.3	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	11.1 33.3 44.4 11.1
15	It is important to spend periods of time in religious thought and meditation	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	22.2 33.3 11.1 33.3	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree	11.1 55.5 33.3	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	22.2 44.4 22.2 11.1
16	Tries very much to abide with my religious beliefs in all other dealings in life	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	33.3 44.4 11.1 11.1	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	66.6 22.2 11.1	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	22.2 11.1 44.4 22.2
17	If not prevented by unavoidable circumstances, visits Temple/Mosque/ Church for praying	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	22.2 55.5 11.1 11.1	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	77.7 11.1 11.1	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	55.5 22.2 11.1 11.1

18	The prayers done when alone have as much meaning and personal emotion as those prayers which is done when visiting Temple/Mosque/Church	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree	33.3 55.5 11.1	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	66.6 22.2 11.1	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	22.2 44.4 22.2 11.1
19	Have been very much aware of the importance of God quite often in life	Strongly agree Agree	55.5 44.4	Strongly agree Agree	33.3 66.7	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	33.3 33.3 22.2 11.1
20	Reads publications about my religious faith	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	22.2 22.2 11.1 11.1 33.3	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	66.6 22.2 11.1	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	22.2 22.2 33.3 22.2
21	Actually, religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	11.1 22.2 22.2 22.2 22.2	Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	55.5 11.1 33.3	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	11.1 11.1 22.2 44.4 11.1
22	Because my religion answers many questions about the meaning of life, it is especially important for me	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	22.2 33.3 22.2 22.2	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree	11.1 66.6 11.1 11.1	Strongly agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree	11.1 55.5 22.2 11.1

**Table 2:** Mean score of religious orientation items for Christians, Muslims and Hindus

Sl. No.	Religious orientation item	Mean item score			Statistical significance of the difference in scores between Christians and Hindus	Statistical significance of the difference in scores between Muslims and Hindus	Statistical significance of the difference in scores between Christians, Muslims and Hindus
		Christians	Muslims	Hindus			

1	Level of faith in God	4.22	4.33	4.11	NS	NS	NS
2	Got benefits due to belief in God	2.56	2.78	2.33	NS	NS	NS
3	Although belief in my religion is there, there are many more important things in life	4.11	4.22	2.22	t = 3.11 p<0.001	t = 3.38 p<0.001	F=6.82 p<0.001
4	It does not matter so much what one believes, so long as he or she leads a moral life	4.67	4.22	4.11	t = 1.79 p<0.10	NS	NS
5	The primary purpose of prayer is to gain relief and protection from difficulties in life	4.67	4.00	4.11	t = 1.79 p<0.10	NS	F=2.53 p<0.10
6	Church / Mosque / Temple is most important as a place to formulate good social relationships, in addition to religious activities	4.00	3.89	3.67	NS	NS	NS
7	What religion offers me most is comfort when sorrows and misfortune strike	4.00	3.44	3.78	NS	NS	NS
8	Praying is done mainly because it has been taught to pray	3.44	2.44	2.89	NS	NS	NS
9	Although a religious person, refuses to let religious considerations influence everyday affairs	2.56	2.56	2.44	NS	NS	NS

10	A primary reason for the interest in religion is that praying at a Temple / Mosque/ Church is a congenial place for social interaction	3.11	3.22	3.00	NS	NS	NS
11	Had to compromise religious beliefs occasionally in order to protect social and economic well-being	3.56	3.44	3.33	NS	NS	NS
12	One reason for visit to and participation in the activities of a Temple / Mosque/ Church is that it helps to establish the identity of a person in the community	2.56	3.33	2.33	NS	t = 2.12 p<0.05	NS
13	The purpose of prayer is to have a happy and peaceful life	4.11	4.00	2.56	t = 3.19 p<0.001	t = 4.91 p<0.001	F=8.51 p<0.001
14	Religion helps to keep life balanced and steady in exactly the same way as friendships and other memberships in organizations do	3.22	3.78	2.56	t = 1.69 p<0.10	t = 3.71 p<0.001	F=5.27 p<0.01
15	It is important to spend periods of time in religious thought and meditation	3.78	3.78	2.78	t = 2.05 p<0.05	t = 2.54 p<0.05	F= 3.48 p<0.05

16	Tries very much to abide with my religious beliefs in all other dealings in life	3.00	3.56	3.33	NS	NS	NS
17	If not prevented by unavoidable circumstances, visits Temple/Mosque/Church for praying	3.89	3.67	3.22	NS	NS	NS
18	The prayers done when alone have as much meaning and personal emotion as those prayers which is done when visiting Temple/Mosque/Church	4.22	3.56	3.78	NS	NS	NS
19	Have been very much aware of the importance of God quite often in life	4.56	4.33	3.89	t = 1.69 p<0.10	NS	NS
20	Reads publications about my religious faith	2.89	3.56	2.44	NS	t = 2.48 p<0.05	NS
21	Actually, religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life	2.78	3.22	2.67	NS	NS	NS
22	Because my religion answers many questions about the meaning of life, it is especially important for me	3.56	3.78	2.78	NS	t = 2.18 p<0.05	F=2.38 p<0.10
	Mean total religious orientation score	79.44	79.11	68.33	NS	NS	NS

NS- No statistically significant difference between the scores



## Discussion

It can be seen from Table 1 that when compared to both Christians and Muslims, lesser proportion of Hindu respondents have agreed / disagreed as the case maybe with all the religious orientation items. Further, the mean total religious orientation score of Hindus (68.33) is comparatively less than that of Christians (79.44) and Muslims (79.11), even though statistically significant difference was not observed between the scores.

These findings indicate that Christians and Muslims in Kerala are more religiously oriented than Hindus. This can be attributed to the influence of mandatory strictures/ instructions in both Christianity as well as Islam, unlike in Hinduism, where it does not exist. Hence, Hindus cannot be expected to follow religious practices as well as orient its influence in their daily lives much. This is also one of the main reasons why some Hindus in Kerala do not have the habit of visiting many of the temples for offering prayers. Such a trend can be definitely expected to create negative attitudes such as ego, selfishness etc. for the Hindus in the State, which can be expected to be curtailed to some degree in Christianity and Islam due to the influence of religion, which is imposed to a great extent through the churches and mosques to the believers of these two religions. This has also contributed to more interaction and a helping mentality when required among the members of these two religions, as observed in the State. However, believers of Hindu religion in Kerala are more stratified on the basis of caste, contributing to less trust among people of different castes. This is also being exploited by the political parties in the State to some extent for their benefit during elections etc., making the caste-based divisions more problematic among Hindus.

The data presented in Table 2 indicate the following aspects with respect to the religious orientation items mentioned below:

Although belief in my religion is there, there are many more important things in life t test showed significant difference in the score of this religious orientation item between Muslims and Hindus as well as between Christians and Hindus, while ANOVA between the scores of Christians, Muslims and Hindus for this item showed a significant F value (Table 2). 77.7 % of Christians and Muslims have disagreed with this item (Strongly disagree and Disagree responses considered together). However, only 11.1 % Hindus disagree with this (Table 1). This could be the reason for the statistical significance regarding the score for this item.

It does not matter so much what one believes, so long as he or she leads a moral life t test showed significant difference in the score of this religious orientation item between Christians and Hindus (Table 2). 88.8 % of Christians agree (Strongly agree and agree responses considered together) to this concept, while only 77.8 % of Hindus agree to this item of religious orientation (Table 1). This may be the reason attributed to the statistical significance regarding the score for this item.

The primary purpose of prayer is to gain relief and protection from difficulties in life t test showed significant difference in the score of this religious orientation item between Christians and Hindus, while ANOVA between the scores of Christians, Muslims and Hindus for this item showed a significant F value (Ta-

ble 2). While all the Christians agree with this item (Strongly agree and Agree responses considered together), only 77.7 % of both Muslims and Hindus respond in this manner (Table 1). This may be the reason attributed to the statistical significance observed regarding the score for this item.

One reason for visit to and participation in the activities of a Temple / Mosque/ Church is that it helps to establish the identity of a person in the community t test showed significant difference in the score of this religious orientation item between Muslims and Hindus (Table 2). While only 22.2 % of Hindus disagree with this, 44.4 % of Muslims are disagreeing with this (Table 1). This may be the reason attributed to the statistical significance observed regarding the score for this item.

The purpose of prayer is to have a happy and peaceful life test showed significant difference in the score of this religious orientation item between Muslims and Hindus as well as between Christians and Hindus, while ANOVA between the scores of Christians, Muslims and Hindus for this item showed a significant F value (Table 2). 77.7 % of Christians and Muslims agree with this item (Strongly agree and Agree responses considered together). Similarly, 88.8 % of Muslims agree with this item. However, in the case of Hindus, only 66.6 % agree with this religious orientation item (Table 1). This may be the reason attributed to the statistical significance observed regarding the score for this item.

Religion helps to keep life balanced and steady in exactly the same way as friendships and other memberships in organizations dot test showed significant difference in the score of this religious orientation item between Muslims and Hindus as well as between Christians and Hindus, while ANOVA between the scores of Christians, Muslims and Hindus for this item showed a significant F value (Table 2). 33.3 % of Christians and 66.6 % of Muslims agree with this (Strongly agree and Agree responses considered together). However, only while 44.4 % of Hindus agree with this (Table 1). This would have resulted in the statistically significant difference in the scores mentioned here.

It is important to spend periods of time in religious thought and meditation t test showed significant difference in the score of this religious orientation item between Muslims and Hindus as well as between Christians and Hindus, while ANOVA between the scores of Christians, Muslims and Hindus for this item showed a significant F value (Table 2). 55.5 % of Christians have agreed to this (Strongly agree and Agree responses considered together), while 66.6 % of Muslims agree with this item of religious orientation. However, only 22.2 % of Hindus have agreed to this item (Table 1). This would have resulted in the statistically significant difference in the scores mentioned here.

Have been very much aware of the importance of God quite often in life t test showed significant difference in the score of this religious orientation item between Christians and Hindus (Table 2). While all the Christians have either strongly agreed or agreed to this, only 66.6 % of Hindus have responded in this manner (Table 1). This could be the reason attributed to the statistical significance difference in the scores of this item between Christians and Hindus.

Reads publications about my religious faith test showed significant difference in the score of this religious orientation item between Muslims and Hindus (Table 2). While 66.6 % of Muslims also agree to this, only 22.2 % Hindus agree to it (Table 1). This might have resulted in the statistical significance between the scores of this item between Muslims and Hindus.

Because my religion answers many questions about the meaning of life, it is especially important for me test showed significant difference in the score of this religious orientation item between Muslims and Hindus, and ANOVA showed a significant F value for the difference in the scores for this item between Christians, Muslims and Hindus (Table 2). While 55.5 % of Christians agree to this (Strongly agree and Agree responses considered together), the corresponding figure is 77.7 % in the case of Muslims. However, a very low proportion (11.1%) of Hindus only have agreed to the importance of religion in giving answers to questions about the meaning of life (Table 1). This would have resulted in the statistically significant difference in scores of this item between the respondents from the three religions.

### Conclusion

The results of the study have shown that Malayali Hindus in Kerala have comparatively less religious orientation than Malayali Christians and Muslims, who get an almost similar and higher total religious orientation score than Hindus. Statistically significant difference observed in the scores of various religious orientation items between the respondents of the three religions also shows a comparatively lower score for the items in the case of Hindus, indicating that the level of religiosity of Hindus for the items is less than that of Christians as well as Muslims. The

requirement in both Christianity and Islam to mandatory follow various religious guidelines in life may be attributed to the comparatively higher level of religious orientation observed in the case of respondents belonging to these two religions. However, Hindu religion does not impose any such mandatory guidelines, resulting in less adherence to religious practices, which contribute to more values and principles in life for Hindus. This is where importance is there for the religious Gurus, Acharyas etc. to orient more Hindus about various aspects of their religion and the relevance of following the injunctions in holy texts like Mahabharata, Ramayana etc. in order to achieve better wellbeing in their life.

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