

## Role of Libraries as Agents of Interfaith Harmony and Peace Building

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### Abstract

*The role of libraries and information centers is very crucial as cultural heritage, knowledge disseminator, learning and skill development center, research promoter, and a space for spending leisure time in a positive way. Reading is the best way to spend leisure time and to avoid all types of worries and negative thoughts, while enhancing knowledge and skills. The current era is multi-dimensional in the sense of cultural mix. Libraries and information centers are the hub for all levels of persons without any discrimination of sect, breed, color, race, or community. Even though an illiterate person can also use libraries by listening audios, watching videos, films, and many more. The present study is qualitative in nature and a systematic literature review related to the function of libraries in promoting interfaith harmony. The study focuses on an insight into the literature on how libraries are playing their role in promoting peacebuilding in different sites. The present study explored the activities of libraries in organizing reliable information for the promotion of dialogue and ways to facilitate universal interfaith harmony. Firstly, it elaborated the points of view of some of the largest religions of the world on equality, brotherhood, living in peace, and the lesson of toleration to their believers. Secondly, the functions and duties of libraries in the light of international organizations such as UNESCO, the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). Thirdly, the libraries play their roles in different situations in different countries for the promotion of interfaith harmony.*

**Keywords:** Libraries, Interfaith Harmony, Peace building, Social Inclusion, Cultural Dialogue, Information Access

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## **Introduction**

When believers of all religions and different faiths respect one another's beliefs, traditions, values, and norms for the promotion of peaceful coexistence based on tolerance, it is a sign of prosperity. Patience, along with understanding and tolerance, is called interfaith harmony. The charter of the United Nations (1945) ensured that all states work together for the promotion of peace, respect, and security for human rights (Khan & Zaman, 2025). The function of the libraries is not only acquiring, organizing, and disseminating, but also has many other roles. Organizations of seminars, workshops, discussions, and dialogues among persons having different points of view and different schools of thought. Libraries are cultural centers and perform different activities for the promotion of society and healthy activities. It is the psychology of humans that persons having no job use their minds in thinking.

Often, it has been observed that positive and creative thoughts do not come to mind when a person spends most of their time without any work. It is essential to have a place where a person spend his time with learning and development of positive thinking. Religion is a most powerful force, and people have the most dominant bond with their religion. All the religions provide directions towards interfaith dialogue and stress harmony. Libraries where reading material of all religions and schools of thought is collected, organized, and disseminated to all types of religions without any discrimination. Libraries, along with the dissemination of knowledge, also organized discussions among forums, seminars, dialogues, and lectures of scholars.

## **Research Objective**

To investigate the role of libraries as neutral and inclusive spaces that facilitate peaceful learning, dialogue, and interaction among people of different faiths.

## **Significance of the Study**

The current situation all over the world is multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi- ethnic. People seeking jobs, getting admissions in different disciplines, and traveling for the purpose of tourism, travel, and staying for a long time. In this way, their interaction and dealings for the purpose of business, education, and experts' opinions, remain continuous. At the same time, information is ethnic information is required. Libraries and information centers are the hub of knowledge and center for cultural heritage, and through preservation of these knowledge assets, and providing them to the community. All types of libraries, especially public libraries, significantly

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play an important role in the preservation of cultural heritage. From the perspective of the role of libraries, libraries can play a role in promoting interfaith harmony by organizing events like providing opportunities for dialogue, documentary transmissions, art exhibitions, and developing collections that boost understanding between diverse faith communities.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The qualitative research method is used, and the study is based on a systematic literature review (SLR). The SLR method was chosen to ensure an evidence-based, unbiased, and comprehensive synthesis of literature from library contexts and disciplines. SLR is particularly suitable for understanding complex social roles, such as how libraries serve as agents of interfaith harmony and peacebuilding. The SLR followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure quality and reliability.

The study has focused on literature produced between 2020 and 2024, especially in the field of library information sciences, to analyze the contribution of libraries, content, and strategies to this in-depth issue. The extensive literature was explored on local and international levels. Only peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers, were included in this study written in English language focused on library perspective solely. Non-academic sources such as blogs, opinion pieces, newsletters, and books were excluded from this study.

### **Discussion**

All the religions and sects have moral values and confidence in the development of harmony, not only among themselves but also with the rest of the religions and faiths. Waqar and Naeem (2025) stated that all of the early Christian writings, including the New Testament, utilize the term "agape," which describes a selfless love that transcends friends and family to include strangers and adversaries. Jesus' extremely bold command to "love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). The Lord's Prayer asks God to "forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors," and it is impossible to separate the heavenly act of forgiveness from the obligation of humans to provide forgiveness to others. Jesus literally said that forgiveness has no boundaries, even when it comes to people who repeatedly perpetrate the same offense against you, when he instructed us to forgive "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22).

Naeem and Waqar (2025) described Judaism and Justice (Tzedek). The prophets go beyond that. In Amos 5:24, the Hebrew Bible's God declares, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream"—more significant than any rituals you carry out in my name is this. In just one sentence (6:8), Micah encapsulates everything of the Jewish moral teaching: "What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8. These teachings establish Tzedek as a form of divine communication, and as such, it ought to be done by all people, regardless of their religious affiliation. Tzedek is at the center of interfaith efforts led by Jews today. As we can see from the Psalm writers' exhortation to seek and pursue peace (Psalm 34:14), shalom is likewise closely related to interfaith handling. Creating connections between communities is part of this ongoing pursuit of peace.

According to one of its adherents, Hindu ethics is the philosophy of ahimsa, or the absence of violence, which holds that anything that endangers the life of another being is illegal and will always stay illegal because criminal activity cannot occur at all. Ahimsa has roots in the Vedas, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Upanishads, although having societal and personal moral implications." May all beings look upon me with the eye of a friend; I look upon all beings as friends, not foes," is a quote from the Yajur Veda that illustrates how non-violence can lead to peace.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ framed the principles of interfaith dialogue with a durable ethical basis embedded in ethics like admiration for diversity, fairness, and kindness for all humans. These principles were not only philosophical but were dynamically practiced, setting examples for relations with all other religions in a diverse society. The said approach was based on tolerance and inclusivity, empowering passive coexistence among varied religious societies (Golestani, 2019).

The first noteworthy treaty was between Muslims and non-Muslims, both living together under Islamic control. This accord was made between Muslims, other tribes of Medina, and Jews. It provided assurance of equivalence for all residents and stressed that attaining peace was a shared obligation of all stakeholders. The *Constitution of Medina* is often quoted as the first example of Islamic interfaith collaboration and dialogue. This revolutionary deed provided the responsibilities and rights of all residents, including Jews, Muslims, and other tribes (Wildan, 2023).

The goal of peace education is to provide individuals with the abilities, mindsets, and information necessary to establish, preserve, and mend relationships at all levels of interpersonal communication.

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- To create constructive strategies for resolving disputes, both domestically and globally.
- To establish emotionally and physically secure surroundings that support each person.
- To establish a secure world founded on human rights and fairness.
- To create a sustainable environment and safeguard it against violence and exploitation (Harris & Synott, 2002).

Gule (2025) pointed out that all scholarly works that directly address the problem of interfaith tensions, with an emphasis on the lack of knowledge about religious moderation and its effects on students' social relationships, are the primary sources for all research, education, and studies. Scholarly books, respectable national and international journals, and indexed scientific journals are used as supporting sources. These include theories and earlier research findings on the ideas and application of religious moderation, social harmony, interfaith tolerance, and the role of students in the multicultural context of every educational level (Schoonenboom, 2023).

IFLA/ UNESCO (1994) Manifesto for public libraries provided a broad explanation about public libraries; that the public library structure is a divine power for all walks of life. Public libraries' structure plays a role as an intermediary among the encouragement of harmony and advancement through all the ways, through the thoughts of all types of members of society. Public libraries' role is as a mediator among all types of information and its users. The public libraries fulfill the information desires of all kinds of users irrespective of any personal identities.

According to the American Library Association's (ALA) 2016 Bill of Rights (Library of Congress, 1948), a person's "right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or view," Additionally, the library should encourage the use of its meeting spaces for cultural and social events as well as for the discussion of contemporary public issues. All community groups should have equal access to these meeting spaces, regardless of their members' affiliations and beliefs (Library of Congress, 1948). Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable development, libraries have a responsibility to preserve, store, and provide religious texts to refugees. This is in line with the UN 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, which is to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable" (UN, 2015). Therefore, it is the fundamental responsibility

of libraries to protect and preserve the unique documentary heritage in all of its forms for the benefit of future generations (IFLA, 2018).

According to Echezona, Ozioko, and Ugwuanyi (2011), libraries and information services are crucial for granting unrestricted access to vital information resources for cultural and economic development. People and leaders are made aware of potential crises and their causes, developments, repercussions, and solutions through efficient information sharing on the internet and libraries. Theological librarians can play a vital role in fostering religious tolerance and understanding by giving people access to resources that support interfaith conversation, which is a feature of our times (Pratt 2020).

By giving people access to resources that encourage interfaith discourse, theological librarians can play a vital role in fostering religious tolerance and understanding in Nigeria. Their role in fostering interfaith dialogue is substantial (World Council of Churches, 2012). According to Hundu (2024), libraries, information centers, and librarians can strategically distribute information by incorporating library resources and activities, such as talk shows, symposiums, library week, book exhibitions, book fairs, and mobile libraries in rural areas. It is believed that several previous conflicts would have been avoided if there had been adequate communication between combatants and peacemakers prior to the start of hostilities. Again told that if there had been widely available lines of communication, catastrophes would not have happened.

As stated by Igbokwe, Enem, Oparaku, and Akpom. (2017) The library can work with any media outlet, including radio and television, to produce propaganda that effectively intervenes during a crisis by presenting a group's beliefs and philosophy. Early information tools that libraries can use to increase public knowledge of upcoming issues include the internet, community radio, television, video conferencing, email, print media, and reference services. In addition to hosting and publicizing lectures and talks to encourage discussion among participants and motivate them to take easy steps to promote peace and resolve crises, libraries can work with NGOs to plan outreach programs for the distribution of educational materials.

Arisman et al. (2023) state that all students support university policies that guarantee religious groups equal rights, engage in interfaith communities, and produce educational content for digital platforms. It has been demonstrated that programs like

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multicultural seminars, interfaith social work, and tolerance training effectively increase students' capacity to effect change.

Sihombing et al. (2020) provided an essential context for promoting interfaith harmony in academic institutions in a sophisticated manner. Podcasts, vlogs, and social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc., may be used as creative ways for the dissemination of tolerant thoughts. These approaches can help in fostering the improvement of a peaceful campus atmosphere.

Discussion forums developed by libraries provide an international platform for religious and theological studies, and are also a beneficial instrument; the programs in library culture may also focus on boosting the creation and exchange of knowledge of different religions. For the promotion of interfaith dialogue and in order to provide further latest perspectives, the libraries can work as generative spaces. As the libraries are supporting agents for research and innovation, they may also encourage novel ideas for the encouragement of researchers and readers to write on peace building (Adjei, 2024).

The author Klinenberg (2018) also stated that public libraries served as community reading clubs. Different reading groups in the public libraries focused their attention on diverse points of view of general opinions on burning issues. Through these discussion groups, continuous, detailed discussion for a long span of time is another way to foster civic engagement and promote literacy. The "social infrastructure" that public libraries and their programs can provide can be advantageous to communities. Libraries facilitate the development of new relationships and concepts through reading and conversation by providing these kinds of activities. What if these reading selections caused controversy? How can the study of multiple world religions be provided in a safe, open setting?

Parrott and Pun (2017) described the New York Public Library (NYPL) as a research library that hosted a series of religion and literature discussion groups in the spring of 2013. This concept was inspired by the NYPL's "Three Faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam" exhibition, which aimed to highlight collections that explored the differences and parallels between these three religious traditions. In addition to exhibitions, the discussion series offered a platform for contemplation of this and other faiths. For the first time, the library's reading themes addressed many religious organizations, such as the Religious Right, Christian faith, and Jewish/Muslim identities. This allowed community members to engage in these conversations. The

librarian asked insightful questions of the participants and acted as a facilitator to get them talking about these subjects. There will be arguments, strong ideas, and thoughts on particular subjects, just like in any other reading group.

Obodoruku (2023) worked through interreligious discourse by using focus groups and interviews, stating that libraries may effectively assist refugee populations by shedding light on the experiences, abilities, and inventiveness of refugees. In addition to preserving, protecting, disseminating, and conducting interreligious conversations with refugees—all of which are critical for Sustainable Development—this study aims to shed light on the lack of religious document housing in libraries, reading group got together at the library once a month to discuss the particular book and subject.

According to the study of Bhatti (2010), libraries and information centers ought to offer pertinent print and electronic resources as well as services that are specifically designed to meet the urgent needs of their local communities. Library exhibitions and book fairs, the display of new books on the subject, the maintenance of clippings, seminars, conferences, lectures, and translation services are all ways that libraries can help to improve the situation. The best places to promote democracy and advance societal understanding and growth are said to be libraries and information centers. Bibliotherapy is a method for raising awareness and using books to promote healing. The respondents strongly advocated using modern technology to promote peace and engage in rational and constructive communication with international populations.

The advent of the internet and different social media tools changed the world as well as the thinking of the people. Now, the world is a global village and fast travelling modes have made migration for study and employment purpose made to easy and quick. The people have relations with each other globally. It assembled diverse social, cultural, and religious having different thought and perception levels. In an increasingly fragmented world, where societies face growing tensions among diverse religious and cultural groups, the role of libraries as neutral and knowledge-based institutions offers immense potential for nurturing interfaith harmony and peacebuilding. Unlike spaces burdened with ideological or political affiliations, libraries function as open arenas where diverse communities can access pluralistic knowledge without prejudice or coercion. Because of their distinctive characteristics as secular, welcoming, and community-focused platforms, they are in a prime position to promote mutual understanding among religious communities by exposing people to one another's cultural narratives, values, and beliefs (ACCORD, 2020).

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Access to knowledge and peace are inextricably linked. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that people are much more likely to develop empathy and tolerance when they are exposed to reliable, well-rounded, and multifaceted information sources (Ndinde et al., 2023). Libraries provide a secure and trustworthy environment for this kind of research with their carefully chosen collections of religious texts, interfaith literature, historical documents, and peace education resources. By providing equal space to all faith traditions and promoting interreligious dialogue without imposing any one viewpoint, public libraries that are purposefully inclusive aid in the creation of an informed, tolerant, and respectful multicultural society, according to Bashir (2020).

Furthermore, the emergence of libraries as community learning hubs is redefining their traditional passive roles. Instead of merely being repositories of books, libraries are actively becoming facilitators of social cohesion by promoting programs and dialogues rooted in pluralism and peaceful coexistence (Bhatti, 2010). The growing integration of digital platforms has expanded this potential even further, making libraries accessible across geographic and social divides. Scholars argue that by providing community members, especially youth, with access to verified content and peace-oriented resources, libraries play a preventive role against misinformation and extremism (Hameed & Adnan, 2024).

This evolving role is particularly vital in contexts where social trust has been eroded by sectarian narratives. Abbas et al. (2022) stress that peace education, when detached from political biases and presented within impartial institutions like libraries, can serve as a powerful tool for cultivating interfaith understanding. Similarly, Shakeel et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of local, community-based knowledge networks such as public libraries for bridging postmodern religious and social realities and for supporting grassroots-level collaboration across faiths.

As societies worldwide search for sustainable, non-coercive pathways to peace, the library's role in enabling interfaith literacy and inclusive community engagement remains underexplored but undeniably vital. This study seeks to examine and highlight how libraries, through their unique structure and accessible knowledge systems, can be positioned as strategic agents of peace and interfaith harmony.

The literature on the role of libraries in fostering interfaith harmony and peacebuilding is steadily growing, revealing how institutional practices and inclusive collections can support social cohesion.

**Table 1:** *Previous Studies on Libraries and Interfaith Harmony*

| <b>Author(s)<br/>&amp; Year</b>                              | <b>Focus of Study</b>                                         | <b>Key Findings</b>                                                                                               | <b>Relevance to<br/>Libraries &amp;<br/>Interfaith Harmony</b>                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bhatti<br/>(2010)</b>                                     | Peace education through libraries in Pakistan                 | Libraries hosted seminars, exhibitions, and book fairs promoting peace and safe spaces for dialogue.              | Demonstrates libraries as platforms for peace education and informal conflict resolution.                |
| <b>Bashir<br/>(2020)</b>                                     | Public libraries in Pakistan and their societal role          | Libraries act as mediators between society, culture, and users; they promote cultural responsiveness & equity.    | Libraries foster mutual respect across religious/ethnic groups through inclusive collections & programs. |
| <b>Hussain &amp; Ahmed<br/>(2021)</b>                        | Bibliometric analysis of interfaith dissertations in Pakistan | Over 136 academic works produced (2011–2015), showing rich academic interest.                                     | Libraries can curate interfaith-themed collections and support knowledge exchange.                       |
| <b>Khan<br/>(2022)</b>                                       | Public commentary on Lahore’s public libraries                | Libraries are viewed as “third spaces” against ignorance, misinformation, and for civic engagement.               | Libraries can nurture interfaith respect and intellectual discourse.                                     |
| <b>Abbas et al. (2022)</b>                                   | Peace education and inter-sect harmony in Pakistan            | Challenges: biased curricula, lack of training; Opportunities: integrating peace-oriented materials.              | Libraries can serve as archives of peace education material.                                             |
| <b>ACCORD<br/>(2020)<br/>(Published<br/>2022<br/>report)</b> | “Library of Peace” initiative in Darfur, Sudan                | Libraries enabled reconciliation, access to heritage, and civic discourse; they gained international recognition. | Libraries in conflict zones can aid social trust and coexistence.                                        |

|                                  |                                                        |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Manj et al. (2023)</b>        | Interfaith dialogue in universities                    | Inclusive spaces encourage youth engagement, critical thinking, and long-term harmony.                        | Academic libraries can replicate such spaces for interfaith understanding.                     |
| <b>Ndinde et al. (2023)</b>      | Role of libraries in Zimbabwe for peacebuilding        | Libraries are underutilized for dialogue/peacebuilding; recommended reconfiguration for mutual understanding. | Offers lessons for Pakistani libraries to engage communities more directly.                    |
| <b>Shakeel et al. (2023)</b>     | PCWR FF initiative in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa               | Faith actors used neutral spaces (mosques, temples, halls) for dialogue.                                      | Libraries can similarly act as neutral meeting places for interfaith collaboration.            |
| <b>Hameed &amp; Adnan (2024)</b> | Social media usage and religious tolerance in Pakistan | Positive correlation between digital media use and interfaith harmony.                                        | Libraries with digital outreach (webinars, forums) can extend tolerance beyond physical space. |

In summary, while the existing scholarship may not always foreground libraries explicitly, the evidence strongly supports their potential as institutional spaces for peace education, interfaith dialogue, and cultural respect. Drawing from both local case studies and international examples, it is clear that libraries can and should be central to strategies promoting interfaith harmony and communal resilience.

## Conclusion

Almost all religions have fundamental teachings for building relations among persons having different religions and direct their believers to adopt good deeds, norms, and values for the proliferation of a healthy society and community. The basis

of every religion is on good deeds, moral values, and bonding people in a harmonious way. Libraries have an excellent blend of diverse knowledge related to religions. The educational institutions have libraries, and these libraries can develop forums for religiously unbiased studies. Development of curricula and outlines of studies with the support of libraries, students can provide tolerance-based leadership preparation opportunities for the promotion of better societal harmony.

The role of professional librarians is also important and could offer community-conscious services, and the reason behind this is their training, knowledge, and work experience. This role of library professionals will promote library professionals' constructive role and contributions towards the expected positive social change. In view of this, the prospect of using library services to encourage inter-religious negotiation in society must be considered.

This denotes that library and information experts have a precious role in promoting interfaith negotiation in any type of community, particularly in parts where religious clashes are likely to happen.

Library and information science professionals are expected to play a variety of roles in interreligious dialogue initiatives, such as planning campaigns for interreligious dialogue, collaborating with media outlets to distribute information that supports and facilitates such initiatives, and contacting religious leaders to establish long-term partnerships for successful and long-lasting interreligious dialogue initiatives. Low collaboration motivation, a negative impression of librarians and library services, and the stereotypical training librarians receive in library schools are some of the obstacles to using libraries and information services as a tool to reduce religious conflict. Suggestions were made in accordance with the difficulties that were discovered. The study concludes that preventing religious conflicts through interfaith discussion is an essential component of any society's growth if it hopes to accomplish significant goals. As an essential part of any society's information infrastructure, libraries cannot be disregarded in interreligious dialogue initiatives. The paper concludes that reducing religious violence through interreligious dialogue is a non-negotiable factor in the development of any society that wants to achieve meaningful development.

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