Living Gurus, Their Ministries and Altruism as a Value: The Enterprise of Faith-Based Social Service

Samta P Pandya, Ph.D.
School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai
pandya.samta@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article is based on a study of altruism as a value in Hindu inspired faith-based organizations. Based on data obtained from 1080 members of the monastic order or key office bearers of four contemporary Hindu inspired faith-based organizations, I attempt to understand their notions of altruism. All these organizations engage in social service and humanitarian activities in tangible ways. Findings showed that members of the order understood altruism as service to others, philanthropy or giving, having a global view and generous mindset, greater common good and general seva or social service sentiment. Altruistic experiences were derived from existing social projects of the organizations or developing new initiatives. The majority said that the purpose of altruism was spreading the message of the guru/teacher through service and some said it meant serving society at large. For that majority, the message of the guru/teacher was believed to encompass altruistic values and related practical sentiments. For social work in India, this paper argues that it is important to recognize these organizations as crucial actors contributing to the social welfare mandate.

Keywords: Altruism, Hindu inspired faith-based organizations, monastic order, gurus, social work, values

Introduction

Altruism is the principle or practice of concern for the welfare of others. It is a motivation to provide something of value to a party who must be anyone but one's self. Pure altruism consists of giving or serving with no expectation of any compensation or benefits, either direct or indirect. Much debate exists as to whether "true" altruism is possible. The theory of psychological egoism suggests that no act of sharing, helping or sacrificing can be described as truly altruistic, as the actor may receive an intrinsic reward in the form of personal gratification. The validity of this argument depends on whether intrinsic rewards qualify as "benefits" (Batson, 2012).

Sociologists have long been concerned with how to build the good society. The structure of our societies and how individuals come to exhibit charitable, philanthropic, and other pro-social, altruistic actions for the common good is a topic within the field of public sociology. This type of sociology seeks contributions that aid grassroots and theoretical understandings of what motivates altruism and how it is organized, and promotes an altruistic focus in order to benefit the world and people it studies. How altruism is framed, organized, and carried out, and what motivates it at the group level, is an area of focus that sociologists seek to investigate in order to contribute back to the groups it studies and "build the good society" (Moen, Dempster-McClain and Williams, 1992).

There is also a wide range of philosophical views on man's obligations or motivations to act altruistically. Proponents of ethical altruism maintain that individuals are morally obligated to act altruistically. The opposing view is ethical egoism, which maintains that moral agents should always act in their own self-interest. Both ethical altruism and ethical egoism contrast with utilitarianism, which is the view that every individual's well-being is of equal moral importance. A related concept in descriptive ethics is psychological egoism, the thesis that humans always act in their own self-interest and that true altruism is impossible. Rational egoism is the view that rationality consists in acting in one's self-interest (without specifying how this affects one's moral obligations) (Batson, Ahmed and Stocks, 2011).

Altruism is thus a value, and it is often referenced in religion and faith (Lysenko and Hulin, 2007; Koenig, McGue, Krueger and Bouchard, 2007). Faith-based human services are aligned to organizations founded on principles of faith. Values such as altruism emerge from this position of faith. Several studies have examined altruism and the voluntaristic spirit with respect to churches and congregations in the western context (eg, Wuthnow, 1990; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1993; Yeung, 2004).

Some of the recent literature has linked altruism to giving not merely material or tangible goods or objects but also doing an act, doing something for others in which one has no stake or claim. In other words, the giving involves giving something from the depths of oneself, for the 'good' of another, without expecting anything in return (Lakshmi, 2013; Doepke, 2013; Carter, 2014). Huber and MacDonald (2012) investigated the relations between altruism, empathy, and spirituality in a sample of 186 university students in the United States. Zero-order and partial correlations controlling for age, sex, and social desirability indicated that altruism was most strongly linked to spiritual experiences, followed by spiritual cognitions. Gantt and Burton (2012) draw on the works of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas to discuss the question of altruism. The focus is on an examination of the ontological necessity of a genuinely social and moral understanding of personhood that preserves the possibility of altruism. Whereas most scholars have taken a positive view of altruism, some have also argued that from a consequentialist standpoint, acts of altruism done without careful consideration may not always be in the larger good (D'Souza and Adams, 2014).

This paper is based on a study of altruism as a value in Hindu inspired faith-based organizations, typically headed by avatar gurus or teachers, an important dimension of whose earthly mission is setting up institutions. Gurus and their movements are prominent in contemporary times. The guru is charismatic and s/he forms the bedrock of the movement. Recent literature places them more generally in the context of their multiple roles in South Asian society (Huffer, 2011; Martin, Zablocki and Gunten 2012). The focus is on the domaining effects and the expansibility of the gurus, a discourse which has further been enhanced by their diaspora presence. Gurus clearly break with the more established orthodoxy in terms of the hybridized teaching traditions they transmit in their practices; their criteria for and methods of initiating devotees; and the disciples they are initiating as future lineage holders of their individually crafted teaching traditions. Maya Warrier (2003b) says that the language of guru recognition and choice is highly nuanced. There are exclusivists who see their attachment to the guru as precluding the possibility of simultaneous attachments to other gurus and inclusivists who attach themselves to several gurus (Fuller and Harris, 2005).

There is an upsurge of literature on guru-led and Hindu inspired faith-based organizations talking of their involvements in modern, secular, developmental activities such as relief work after major disasters, setting up hospitals and colleges, and so on (Shah 2006, Beckerlegge 2006, Srinivas 2008, Copeman 2009). Providing free eye operation and checkup camps and blood donation activities forms part of the common repertoire of social services undertaken by new guru-led organizations. Glorification of the guru and promoting his/her

spiritual message is an important constitutive component of these services. For those who actually do this service, it is seen as a component of spiritual development—a "meritorious activity that wears down the egotism and selfishness of modernity" (Warrier, 2006, p 186). It is a form of "practical spirituality," which essentially placates the individual's existential struggles and hence could have psychotherapeutic implications (Van Hoecke, 2006). It could also be a form of impure altruism as it entails consuming "clubbiness" (being a part of the guru/teacher coterie and gaining the benefits of his/her grace for oneself) as a private good along with altruism as a public good (Bowman, 2004).

Hindu-inspired faith organizations thus have elaborate mechanics of institution building and it has been observed that the ethics of seva, or "service," are crucial to the spirit of institution building (Warrier, 2003a). It has been argued that seva is done with an altruistic motive and spirit and is essentially an evangelical import. Hence there are aspects of "mission"-isation, spiritual rejuvenation and re-creation of communities (Gupta, 1973; Beckerlegge, 2000, 2010). Altruism and social service are essentially seen as strategies of proliferation and world affirmation across guru-led movements (Walliss, 2007; Locklin & Lauwers, 2009; Srinivas, 2010; Zavos, 2012). Seva is an important characteristic of these institutions where quite frequently guru seva is equated to *manav* seva (service to humanity) (Copeman and Ikegame, 2012) or more precisely *manav* seva is done so as to obtain proximity to and grace of the guru who is believed to be divine. Altruism which finds its expression in this service is a value that is rooted in communal orientation.

Altruism in practice for the Hindu inspired guru-led organizations is their mandate of social service. Social service may be either serendipitous or planned and systematised. Social service is justified through the faith ideals. There is a need to create a world of shared meanings and practices through tangible service. Social service efforts of the guru led movements have also meant a paradigm shift from the traditional private role of faith with a focus on the spiritual and sacred towards a more public role which embodies social capital.

The idea/mandate is to bring faith to the public realm in a visible way—beyond rituals, towards a community orientation. Here we can draw parallels to Isaac's (2003) proposal that the faith-based initiatives are a promising "civil society" approach to public policy in a post-liberal, post-welfare state political moment. It is looked at as part of a broader strategy of "third way" public policy pioneered by Bill Clinton in the U.S. and Tony Blair in the U.K. The mandate also entails a "re-authoring" where guru led movements navigate the process and reconfigure socialities through their faith knowledge. The mission is to respond to a religious calling and cultivate a faith-informed vision of care.

Based on a study done with members of the monastic order or key office bearers of four contemporary Hindu inspired faith-based organizations, I attempt to understand their notions of altruism as a value. All these organizations engage in social service and humanitarian activities in tangible ways. The study offers a picture of living gurus, their ministries and the nature/nuances of altruism as a value expressed through the enterprise of faith-based human services.

Methodology

The broad objective of the study was to understand altruism as a value in faith-based organizations through the lenses of the core coterie of the organizations comprising members of the order and office bearers.

In the absence of any large-scale surveys on altruism among Hindu faith-based organizations in the Indian context, this study adopted the cross-sectional, quantitative questionnaire survey. The specific objectives were to understand the perceptions of members of the order and/or office bearers on: 1) meanings of altruism; 2) altruistic beliefs, practices, and experiences; 3) scores on the self-reported altruism and philanthropy scales; and 4) background profile predictors of the purpose of altruism. Through that I formed an understanding

of gurus, their ministries and the enterprise of faith-based human services.

I selected four contemporary Hindu faith-based organizations headed by living gurus, namely Swaminarayan Sanstha, Chinmaya Mission, Mata Amritanandamayi Mission and Art of Living. The Swaminarayan Sanstha, popularly known as BAPS (Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha), is a branch of the Swaminarayan sect. It is headed by Pramukh Swami and currently is headquartered in Shahibaug Ahmedabad with centres across the globe. The Chinmaya Mission, started by Swami Chinmayananda, is currently headed by Swami Tejomayananda and has one of its core centres in Sandeepany Sadhanalaya Powai, Mumbai. The Mata Amritanandamayi Mission is headed by the charismatic woman teacher Mata Amritanandamayi, also known worldwide as "the hugging saint." It is headquartered in Kollam Kerala and has branches across the globe. The Art of Living Foundation was started by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and is popularly known for its Sudarshan Kriya. It is headquartered in Udayapura Bangalore. BAPS, Chinmaya Mission and Mata Amritanandamayi Mission have a coterie of members of the monastic order. Art of Living Foundation has trained teachers of Sudarshan Kriya and office bearers who comprise the core group. All the organizations are actively engaged in social service activities and have large scale projects in the areas of education, health and livelihood development. Social service is a mandate within each of their vision-mission statements. The rationale for selecting these organizations is that all of them have a presence in India and have engaged in social welfare activities which enable the possibility of studying altruism in their ministries. Further, the members of the order and the office bearers were willing and inclined to share data and views on the subject. Since most of these organizations are relatively commune oriented and at times even closed on certain matters to the larger public, access to data and permissions also played a key role in determining their selection.

Lists and contact information for members of the order and office bearers were obtained from each of the organizations. The total number of members of the order and office bearers was 1358 for BAPS, 1310 for Chinmaya Mission, 1329 for Mata Maritanandamayi Mission and 1299 for Art of Living. Using systematic sampling (k=5), an equal number of respondents (270) were sampled from each of the organizations. With an average response rate of 87.88% (across the four organizations), a total of 1080 members of the order and office bearers across the four organizations comprised the sample.

I used a self-administered questionnaire with questions pertaining to their socio-demographic profile, reasons for joining the organization/order, duration of association and work profile, meaning of altruism, beliefs, practices, experiences and purpose of altruism. The questionnaire was prepared in English and Hindi. All the respondents were well versed in either one or both of the languages. The questionnaire also included two scales—the self reported altruism scale and the philanthropy scale. Questions on meaning of altruism, beliefs, practices and experiences and purpose of altruism were open-ended and I manually coded the answers obtained prior to further statistical calculations. The respondents were asked four open-ended questions: a) What is the meaning of altruism? b) What are the altruistic beliefs that you firmly have? c) What are the altruistic practices that you generally follow under the aegis of the organization? and d) What are the experiences that you have had of practicing altruism? The responses obtained were then coded to arrive at thematic categories as mentioned in Table 1.

The self-reported altruism scale developed by Rushton et.al. (1981) is a Likert type scale containing a list of 20 statements describing altruistic behaviours. Higher total scores on the scale indicates greater altruism. In this study, I use the adapted self-reported altruism scale developed by Peter Witt and Chris Boleman (2009) as a more generalised and universally applicable version of the original Rushton scale. The adapted scale has 14 generalised items to understand altruism (eg. I would give directions to someone I did not know, I would make changes for someone I did not know). The scale is a Likert type scale where respondents

check the responses from 0 = never to 4 = very often. A higher total score indicates greater altruism. The Cronbach α for the scale for this study is 0.82.

The philanthropy scale developed by Schuyt, Smit and Bekkers (2006) is a Likert-type scale containing a list of seven items of which three are reverse coded. The statements are: 1) We have to leave this world a better place for the next generation. 2) Each generation has to solve its own problems (reverse coded). 3) Society is in danger because people are less concerned about each other nowadays. 4) The world needs responsible citizens. 5) The world community relies on international politics and corporations, and that is a good thing (reverse coded). 6) I give money to charitable causes, no matter what the government does. 7) Charity and public benefit should be supported by the government, and not by citizens and business corporations (reverse coded). Ratings are done on a five-point scale ranging from Completely Disagree to Completely Agree. A higher total score indicates greater belief in social responsibility.[1] The Cronbach α for the scale for this study is 0.83.

Both the scales were checked for replicability in the Indian context and a pre-test was administered to ensure the possibility of its execution with the study respondent group. The justification for using the scales developed in different cultures in the Indian context is twofold: 1) unavailability of similar measures and 2) the need to define the contours of the key concept of the study (altruism) beyond the respondents' definitions and voices towards a more universal measure. The latter is in keeping with the quantitative paradigm of the study.

I completed univariate and bivariate analysis with specific focus on the meaning, purpose, beliefs and practices of altruism and the scores on the two scales. Responses to the open-ended questions on the meaning of altruism, altruistic beliefs, practices and experiences, were coded into themes and then subjected to further statistical calculations. Meaning of altruism, altruistic beliefs, practices, and experiences scale scores have been cross tabulated with background profiles to bring out the differentials. The association significance was analysed through chi-square measures. Further I have utilized a logistic regression analysis to determine the predictors of the purpose of altruism (i.e., whether it was spreading the message of the teacher/guru or serving society). Through the analysis, I attempt to bring out the nuances of altruism as a value by members of these faith-based organizations.

Respondent profile

Equal numbers of respondents were identified from all the four faith based organizations. The majority (58.80%) were in the age groups 30–59 years. The respondents comprised 67.59% men and 32.41% women. While all respondents had completed training programs within their organization, most (51.31%) also had a bachelor's degree and over a quarter (27.59%) had a master's degree. In the sample, 44.54% were full time members of the order and 55.46% were office bearers and had other occupations outside. Most had a fairly long association with the organization (i.e. 5–10 years [18.89%], 10–20 years [63.06%] and 20 years and above [18.06%]). Further, most of the respondents said that they had joined the organization as they were attracted by and attached to the guru/teacher's charisma and teachings (76.94%). Some, however, said that their families urged them to join the organizations (23.06%). In terms of work profile, 52.31% did work related to faith proliferation and social service while 47.69% undertook seva of all kinds, ranging from routine tasks to managerial work and specialised tasks such as managing the computer centre.

Limitations

The main limitation of the study is the use of a quantitative paradigm for a subject like altruism. This entails collapsing definitions and meanings of altruism, altruistic beliefs, practices and experiences as well as the purpose of altruism as specified by the respondents. A qualitative exploration would have highlighted the nuances of these meanings. However, the present study does fill in the gap of the absence of any large scale quantitative data on ministries of living gurus and the views of the order members on altruism emanating from social

service, the raison d'être of most of them in the contemporary times.

The other limitation is that the analysis has been mostly descriptive in nature, discussing the views of the respondents on the various parameters along with simple measures of association and logistic regression. Advanced renditions would have further brought out the nuances. However, given the nature of the data as obtained through open-ended questions, the size of the sample and the reduced possibilities of developing any hypothesis, the following section on findings and analysis does open spaces for further exploration. Lastly, the general limitations of using a cross sectional survey type design with probability sampling are also applicable for this study.

Findings

Meanings of altruism

Several meanings of altruism existed among the respondents: service to others (14.44%), philanthropy or giving (33.80%), global view and generous mindset (21.48%), greater common good (15.46%) and a general seva sentiment (14.81%) (Table 1). Organizational affiliation had a significant association with the meaning of altruism ($c2(12) = 38.63$, $p < 0.00$). For 20.37% of the MAM associates, altruism meant service to others. For 41.11% of the CM associates, it meant philanthropy or giving and for 21.85% of the BAPS and AOL associates respectively, altruism meant a global view and generous mindset. Further for 21.11% of the BAPS associates, altruism meant a greater common good and for 17.04% of them it was a general seva sentiment. Age of the respondents also had a significant association with meaning of altruism ($c2(24) = 4305.59$, $p < 0.00$). For all the respondents in the age group 30–59 years, altruism meant philanthropy and giving, a global view and generous mindset and a greater common good. For all the respondents in the youngest age group (20–29 years), altruism meant service to others. Gender also had a significant association with meaning of altruism ($c2(4) = 9.68$, $p = 0.04$). More of the women (36.29%) said that altruism meant philanthropy and giving than men (32.6%). A higher proportion of men (17.4%) said that philanthropy meant greater common good vs. 11.43% of the women.

Educational qualifications also had a significant association with the meaning of altruism ($c2(8) = 37.29$, $p < 0.00$). Among those who had a master's, 44.63% said that altruism meant philanthropy and giving and 15.44% said that it meant a greater common good. Of those who had bachelor's degree, 16.8% said that altruism meant service to others and 22.13% said that it meant a global view and generous mindset. Around 19% of those who had formal (secondary) school level qualifications said that altruism meant a general seva sentiment.

Being a member of the monastic order or being an office bearer also had a significant association with the meanings attributed to altruism ($c2(4) = 51.77$, $p < 0.00$). Members of the monastic order generally felt that altruism meant service to others, global view and generous mindset and a general seva sentiment. Office bearers generally proposed that altruism meant philanthropy and giving and a greater common good.

The reasons for joining the organizations (guru or family) also had a significant association with the meaning of altruism [$c2(4) = 11.66$, $p = 0.02$]. Most of those who had joined due to attachment to the teacher/guru said that altruism meant service to others, global view and generous mindset and general seva sentiment. Those who had joined the organizations due to the influences of their families said that altruism meant philanthropy and giving as well as a generous mindset.

Altruistic beliefs

In terms of altruistic beliefs, some respondents said that it meant helping others (51.02%) and some said that it meant doing a good deed a day (48.98%). Gender had a significant association with the nature of altruistic beliefs [$c2(1) = 8.51$, $p = 0.003$]. A higher proportion of women (57.43%) said that altruism meant helping others and 52.05% of the men said that it meant doing good deed a day. Work profile of the respondents within the organizations also had a significant association with altruistic beliefs [$c2(1) = 8.03$, $p = 0.00$]. Among those who

did seva of all kinds, 55.53% held the altruistic belief of helping others while 53.10% of those who did faith proliferation and social service held the altruistic belief of doing one good deed a day.

Altruistic practices

For the majority (90.46%), altruistic practices meant organizational efforts of social service and philanthropic engagements and few said that it meant participating in large scale social projects. All the male respondents and 82.51% of the female respondents said that altruistic practices mean organizational efforts of social service and philanthropic engagements. Roughly 89% of the full-time members of the order and 92% of those who had joined the organization as they are attracted and attached to the charisma and teachings of the guru/teacher were in favour of organizational efforts. Promoting organisational efforts of social service and philanthropic engagements as an important altruistic practice was attested by 79% of those whose work profile was faith proliferation and social service and 89% of those who did seva. On the Pearson's chi-square test of significance of association, gender [$c2(1) = 11.12$, $p = 0.00$], work profile [$c2(1) = 15.08$, $p = 0.00$] and type of membership (full-time member of the order or office bearer) [$c2(1) = 17.14$, $p = 0.00$] were significantly associated with views on altruistic practices.

Altruistic experiences

Altruistic experiences were derived from existing social projects of the organizations (51.20%) or developing new initiatives (48.80%). Gender had a significant association with altruistic experiences of the respondents [$c2(1) = 7.31$, $p = 0.00$]. For women (57.14%) the experiences were generally derived from existing social projects of the organizations and 51.64% of the men said that it was through the development of new social service initiatives. Being a member of the monastic order or being an office bearer also had a significant association with altruistic experiences [$c2(1) = 5.25$, $p = 0.02$]. Interestingly, 55.09% of the monastic order members derived their altruistic experiences through joining existing social initiatives. A majority (51.92%) of the office bearers gained experiences through new initiatives. This could be due to the reality that members of the monastic order have as their first mandate the proliferation of the organization's faith while social service or seva is contingent on factors such as interest, time availability and other predispositions. Essentially, committing to monastic life may not necessarily ensure committing to social causes. Similarly, the work profile of the respondents was also significantly associated with altruistic experiences [$c2(1) = 6.74$, $p = 0.009$]. Among those whose work profile was faith proliferation and social service, 52.57% said that their core altruistic experiences were derived out of joining existing social service projects of the organizations while 55.34% of those who undertook seva of all kinds said that their core altruistic experience was derived out of undertaking new social service initiatives.

Table 1: Altruism Meaning, Beliefs, Practices and Experiences

	Frequency	%
Meaning of Altruism		
Service to Others	14.44	**156**
Philanthropy- Giving	33.80	**365**
Global View and Generous Mindset	21.48	**232**
Greater Common Good	15.46	**167**
General Seva Sentiment	14.81	**160**
Altruistic Beliefs		
Help Others	51.02	**551**
Good Deed a Day	48.98	**529**
Altruistic Practices		
Organizations' social service Efforts	90.46	**977**
Participating in Larger Projects	09.54	**103**
Altruistic Experiences		
Joining Projects	51.20	**553**
New Initiatives	48.80	**527**
Purpose of Altruism		
Spreading the Guru Message	74.81	**808**
Serving Society	25.19	**272**
Altruism Scale		
0 – 14 low	09.07	**98**
15 – 42 average	45.46	**491**
43 – 56 good	45.46	**491**
Philanthropy Scale		
19-20 low	14.35	**155**
20 – 21 average	43.24	**467**
22- 23 good	42.41	**458**
Total	100.00	**1080**

Scale scores

Most respondents (74.81%) said that the purpose of altruism was spreading the message of the guru/teacher and some said it meant serving society at large (25.19%). A little less than half (45.46%) had moderately good and very good scores, ranging from 43–56, on the adapted self-reported altruism scale (Table 2). Around one tenth of the respondents in the youngest age group (20–29 years) and the oldest (80 and above) age group had low scores. Roughly half (49.70%) of the respondents in the age group 50–59 and 48.74% in the age group 30–39 years had good scores while 35.14% in the oldest age group had good scores. Looking at gender, 9.45% of the men and 8.29% of the women respondents had low scores while 45.75% of the men and 44.86% of the women had good scores. On the Pearson's chi-square test of significance of association sex of the respondents had a significant association with scores on the altruism scale [$\chi 2(2) = 18.14$, $p < 0.05$]. A higher proportion of the respondents with a bachelor's

degree had good scores (46.04%). A slightly higher percentage of members of the order than office bearers, 45.74% and 45.24% respectively, had scores in the good range. Further, 47.69% of those who were associated with the organizations for longer (i.e., 20 years and above) had scores in the good range. Among those who were associated for 5–10 years, 11.76% had lower scores. More of those who had joined the organization due to the charismatic influence of the guru (45.85%) than those who had joined due to their family influences (44.18%) had good scores. Finally, 45.66% of those who did faith work and social service and 45.24% of those who performed seva of all kinds had better scores on the altruism scale.

Table 2: Adapted Self Reported Altruism Scale Scores

Background Variables	Altruism Scale Scores			Total
	0-14 low	15-42 average	43-56 good	
Organization				
BAPS	8.89	45.56	45.56	**270**
CM	9.26	45.56	45.19	**270**
MAM	8.89	45.56	45.56	**270**
AOL	9.26	45.19	45.56	**270**
Age				
20 – 29	10.9	44.87	44.23	**156**
30 – 39	9.24	42.02	48.74	**238**
40 – 49	9.13	49.13	41.74	**230**
50 – 59	5.98	44.31	49.70	**167**
60 – 69	9.38	46.25	44.38	**160**
70 – 79	9.78	43.48	46.74	**92**
80 and above	10.81	54.05	35.14	**37**
Sex				
Male	9.45	44.79	45.75	**730**
Female	8.29	46.86	44.86	**350**
Education				
Formal bachelor's degree and org course	9.05	44.91	46.04	**619**
Formal masters degree and org course	8.73	46.31	44.97	**298**
Formal schooling and org course	9.82	46.01	44.17	**163**
Occupation				
Full time member of the order	8.11	46.15	45.74	**481**
Office bearer and other work	9.85	44.91	45.24	**599**
Duration of Association				
5 – 10 years	11.76	43.63	44.61	**201**
10 – 20 years	8.08	46.84	45.08	**681**
20 years and above	9.74	42.56	47.69	**195**
Reasons for Joining				
Guru	8.42	45.73	45.85	**831**
Family	11.24	44.58	44.18	**249**
Work Profile				
Faith Service and Social Service	8.67	45.66	45.66	**565**
Seva of all Kinds	9.52	45.24	45.24	**515**
				1080

In terms of the philanthropy scale, 43.24% had average scores and 42.41% had good scores (Table 3). Roughly half the respondents aged 70 and above (51.35%) and 47.31% of the respondents in the age group 50–59 had good scores. Looking at gender, 43.14% of the female respondents and 42.05% of the male respondents had scores in the good range on the philanthropy scale. Considering education, 46.64% of the respondents having master's degree, 39.58% with bachelors' degree and 45.40% having secondary school level education had scores in the good range. In terms of duration of association, 43.47% of those who were associated with the respective organizations for 10–20 years, 38.97% of those associated for 20 years or more and 42.16% of those associated for 5–10 years had good scores. On the Pearson's chi-square test, duration of association of the respondents had a significant association with philanthropy scale scores [$\chi 2(2) = 29.25$, $p < 0.05$]. There was little difference between those who had joined the organization due to the charismatic influence of the guru (42.36%) and of those who had joined due to family influences (42.57%) with good scores. Of those who did faith work and social service, 42.65% had good scores while among those who did general service of all kinds including admin work, 42.14% had good scores. On the Pearson's chi-square test, work profile had a significant association with philanthropy scale scores [$\chi 2(2) = 27.18$, $p < 0.05$].

Table 3: Philanthropy Scale Scores

Background Variables	Philanthropy Scale Scores			Total
	Low	Average	Good	
Organization				
BAPS	14.44	41.96	42.59	**270**
CM	14.81	42.96	42.22	**270**
MAM	14.44	42.96	42.59	**270**
AOL	13.70	42.07	42.22	**270**
Age				
20 – 29	14.1	38.46	47.44	**156**
30 – 39	15.55	44.96	39.50	**238**
40 – 49	12.61	44.78	42.61	**230**
50 – 59	16.77	35.93	47.31	**167**
60 – 69	15.63	51.88	32.50	**160**
70 – 79	13.04	41.30	45.65	**92**
80 and above	5.41	43.24	51.35	**37**
Sex				
Male	14.25	43.70	42.05	**730**
Female	14.57	42.29	43.14	**350**
Education				
Formal bachelor's degree and org course	16.48	43.94	39.58	**619**
Formal masters degree and org course	11.41	41.95	46.64	**298**
Formal schooling and org course	11.66	42.94	45.40	**163**
Occupation				
Full time member of the order	13.93	42.41	43.66	**481**
Office bearer and other work	14.69	43.91	41.40	**599**
Duration of Association				
5 – 10 years	12.75	45.10	42.16	**201**
10 – 20 years	14.39	42.14	43.47	**681**
20 years and above	15.90	45.13	38.97	**195**
Reasons for Joining				
Guru	15.28	42.36	42.36	**831**
Family	11.24	46.18	42.57	**249**
Work Profile				
Faith Service and Social Service	14.87	42.48	42.65	**565**
Seva of all Kinds	13.79	44.08	42.14	**515**
				1080

Logistic regression: Predictors of the purpose of altruism

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to understand the purpose of altruism (spreading the Guru message or serving society) (Table 4). A test of the full model against a constant only model was statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set reliably distinguished between perceptions on purpose of altruism [LR $\chi2(12) = 104.46$, prob > $\chi2 = 0.0086$]. Prediction success was 57.60% (pseudo $R^2 = 0.5760$). The z test showed that age, duration of association, reasons for joining, work profile, meaning of altruism, and altruistic beliefs, practices and experiences, made a significant difference to the prediction of whether the purpose of altruism was spreading the guru message or serving society. To look at the effect size of the predictors, the odds ratio of predictors such as age, sex, duration of association, reasons for joining, work profile, meaning of altruism and altruistic beliefs, practices and experiences is greater than one. This means that for young male adults who joined because of attraction and attachment to the charisma and teachings of the guru and were associated with the organizations for 10–20 years; whose work profile combined faith proliferation and social service; who defined altruism in terms of general good and service sentiment; had a core altruistic belief in helping others and altruistic practice of individual efforts; and whose altruistic experiences were derived from joining existing projects of organizations; the core purpose of altruism was spreading the guru message which was believed to encompass altruistic values and related practical sentiments.

In general, the results showed that members of the order understood altruism as service to others, philanthropy or giving, global view and generous mindset, greater common good and general seva or social service sentiment. Altruistic beliefs were helping others and doing a good deed a day. The majority felt that altruistic practices meant efforts of the organizations in social service. Altruistic experiences were derived from existing social projects of the organizations or developing new initiatives. All the respondents had relatively

Table 4: Purpose of Altruism: Logistic Regression (Odds Ratio) (spreading the guru message or serving society)

Purpose of Altruism	Odds Ratio	Std. Error	z	P>|z|	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Constant	1.12	0.08	-3.10	0.00	0.0334	0.4648
Organization	0.98	0.08	-0.16	0.87	0.8416	1.1581
Age	1.00	0.05	0.98	0.02	0.9014	1.1116
Sex	1.32	0.35	1.05	0.29	0.7832	2.2324
Education	0.86	0.08	-1.38	0.06	0.7134	1.0601
Occupation	0.83	0.14	-1.08	0.28	0.5996	1.1603
Association Duration	1.04	0.12	0.36	0.02	0.8285	1.3123
Joining Reasons	1.07	0.21	0.34	0.03	0.7278	1.5723
Work Profile	1.05	0.25	0.19	0.04	0.6500	1.6898
Altruism Meaning	1.02	0.06	0.78	0.03	0.8919	1.1651
Altruistic Beliefs	1.23	0.18	1.42	0.01	0.9256	1.6286
Altruistic Practices	1.17	0.28	0.65	0.01	0.7338	1.8581
Experiences	1.28	0.18	1.74	0.01	0.9693	1.7081

good scores on the self reported altruism scale and the philanthropy scale. The majority said that the purpose of altruism was spreading the message of the guru/teacher and some said it meant serving society at large. For that majority, the message of the guru/teacher was believed to encompass altruistic values and related practical sentiments.

Concluding Remarks

The results of the study have shown that members of the order and office bearers of the faith-based organizations under study had construed different meanings of altruism, altruistic beliefs, practices and experiences as well as the purpose of altruism. The two core purposes of altruism discerned through the data are spreading the guru message and service to society. In contemporary times, this effort on the part of faith-based organizations is a move in the direction of asserting their presence in the realm of the third or nonprofit sector, the main distinction being their ideological frame of reference and guru charisma as the core of all operations and outreach. In that sense, they forward a model of faith-based social work through the projection of altruism as a value.

This enterprise of faith-based organizations to engage in altruistic endeavours is a move to develop culturally relevant theology—influencing behaviours, worldviews and lifestyles. The findings of this paper show that for the members of the order of these organizations, altruism is a desired value which enables simultaneously a spiritual maturation for self/associates and contribution to social development at large.

The idea is that altruism is a kind of social learning process for the faith-based organizations which links their faith to society at large. The guru or teacher is the authority, the faith-based enterprise/organization is the context and altruism then serves to be the moral behaviour pattern. Altruism enables transcending existential struggles towards a social emancipation based on the logic of the greater common good. Using the terms of existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, this is the exploration of the limits of individuality (in this case that of the faith-based organizations) and using altruism's yardstick for surmounting the limits (Zheng, 1997).

Hence in general, altruism is a manifestation of the social values of the living gurus and their ministries. It enables maintaining a social stake for these organizations and at the same time spreading the guru/teacher message. Certain shifts take place through this—from a general value orientation to the charismatic guru/teacher's authority orientation; from individual choice to perform social service to the follower's drive to do so to gain proximity to the teacher; and, from morality of altruistic values to defining the positivity of altruism through benefits of self-transcendence as determined by the ideals of the guru and hence the faith-based organizations. Messages promoting altruism go beyond simple instilling/extolling of virtues, but rather portray as vanguards of fulfilling social obligations. The operational ontology contains communitarian notions of social citizenship. There is a stylised form of faith-based altruism logic and public good.

What is of course prominent is a form of impure altruism as it entails consuming "clubbiness" (proximity to the guru/teacher and being part of his/her coterie) as a private good along with social service engagements and hence altruism as public good. Members of the order and key office bearers claim a personal gain in terms of becoming "wiser from the experience," which propels them to continue. It becomes their way of responding to the guru/teacher and to the needs of others (including followers and beneficiaries). Further, altruism helps to form beneficial relationships with significant others and provides other personal gains such as subjective-psychological well-being.

Faith-based organizations in turn are institutional actors in civil society, having the requisite material and symbolic resources for organising meaningful action entailing prudent citizenship, civility and rights. It can be said that a combination of liberal and communitarian notions prevails—wherein there is a simultaneous emphasis on the associates' self transcendence and freedom and the faith-based organization's community sentiments. Faith thus becomes the epiphenomenon of civic life.

Altruism is beyond instrumental action or rationality for these organizations – it is a sort of a process-oriented experience. Both the organizations themselves and society mutually unfold through this act of altruism. In fact, through this altruism one can begin speaking of an increased orientation of the "other" (outside their ambit) of these living guru driven faith-based organizations or enterprises as sources of defining themselves, of relational intimacy, shared subjectivity and social integration.

The large-scale discharge/dissemination and conduct of social services is a driving force behind their object-centered altruism. Here, the object is the society and the cultures and subcultures which are not their own. The final purpose of this is the notion of integration. The fact that the normative consensus and shared values and traditions which the organizations seek through altruism is not possible in the growing, diverse cultural and ethnic consciousness, makes adequate room for the arguments of hegemony and domination which are part and parcel of their altruism.

Nevertheless, what guru led movements manage on the social playground is a socioculturally engineered consensus. Due to their resource endowments and partnering in the development goals in an essentially resource limited setting, the metaphor of 'in thought collective' (with civil society, state and market) may be applicable. One can assume that this kind of an objectual (Cetina, 1997) (focused on a common object) integration then gives the faith-based organizations an adequate grounding to be critical and powerful civil society actors.

Implications for social work

Several authors have promoted the enterprise of faith-based initiatives in social work (Ebaugh, Chafetz and Pipes, 2005; Harris, Hutchison and Cairns, 2005; Smith and Teasley, 2007; Harr and Yancey, 2007; Graham and Shier, 2007; Belcher and Deforge, 2008; Williams and Smolak, 2009; Gocmen, 2013; Crisp, 2013; Lee and Barrett, 2014). The findings of this study further corroborate that the ministries of living gurus and the mandate of social service pursued by their organizations promote altruism as a value which has immense potential.

For social work intervention, this has multiple implications. There are micro level implications for stakeholder groups that benefit from the altruistic sentiment. For social work in India and the empowerment of vulnerable groups, the findings of this study have implications specifically as they open up a sector of intervention which has resources to work with the poor. Particularly in a resource limited social welfare scenario such as India, this becomes critical. As the findings of this study have shown, the purpose of altruism, according to the members of the order and office bearers, is to serve society and spread the guru message. Even though spreading the message may have aspects of embedded hegemony, service to society remains a primary agenda. This opens up scope to evolve partnerships and collaborations with and to extend the social welfare and empowerment mandate of faith-based organizations.

The macro level implications highlight an argument in favour of faith-based and altruism driven social work by guru led faith-based organizations who place a premium on altruism as a value. This makes a case for social work practice to work in and with faith-based organizations as a part of social work practice and hence the discourse for developing an accompanying skill set among learners. Finally, this has epistemic implications for the social work discipline.

The social work discipline in India needs a generosity to do practical work with organizations whose aims, values and structures have arisen from a philosophical and value basis other than professional social work. This may mean interacting with the order-power, associates-adherents and possibly collaborating with them in a systematic way as non-state actors. Further, this entails utilising the altruistic sentiment and minimising/erasing the sense of antagonism/othering which may occur due to the faith-based organizations firm ideologies.

The epistemic implication for social work is the affirmative recognition of faith-based social work through the lynchpin of altruism as a value.

This would effectively mean an incorporation of and generosity towards faith-based worldviews, discourses on 'being', social ethics and visions of social transformation. Practice implications for social work in India are the consideration of living guru led faith-based organizations as potential sites of and for intervention and trainings thereof. Tackling the value based antagonisms-contradictions and skill set development are the crucial accompaniments. The exercise may entail at once a self reflexivity on the part of trainees in terms of their own faith belief system and faith organizations' stances, and an active engagement with their worldviews.

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Footnotes

[1]The seven items blend together attitudes about intergenerational solidarity (items 1 and 2); the decline of solidarity in society (item 3); and personal responsibility for others' well-being (items 4–7). Altogether, the authors contend that these components form the foundations of social responsibility. (The authors do not separate the scale into these three factors; rather, they measure the seven items together as a single factor.)