



## **Inclusive Da'wah in the Islamic Tradition and Religious Dialogue in Hindu-Buddhist Traditions: A Comparative Study from the Perspective of Comparative Religion**

**Firman Nugraha<sup>1✉</sup>, Fahmy Komarul Zaman<sup>2</sup>**

Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon, Indonesia

Email : [nugraha.firmannugraha@gmail.com](mailto:nugraha.firmannugraha@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>, [fahmyqzaman@gmail.com](mailto:fahmyqzaman@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study comparatively examines the concept of inclusive da'wah in the Islamic tradition with the patterns of religious dialogue that developed in Hindu-Buddhist thought. Scholarship in comparative religion has tended to treat these two traditions in separate analytical silos, thus missing substantial epistemological convergences. Through a qualitative approach grounded in library research with content analysis and comparative-narrative methods, this study examines primary textual sources from both traditions, enriched by secondary data from reputable international academic literature published between 2021 and 2026. The novelty of this study lies in the construction of a new conceptual framework called the "Cross-Truth Dialogue Model," which integrates the Islamic principle of *wasathiyah* with the Hindu-Buddhist principles of *ahimsa* and *sangha* as a shared platform for dialogue. Findings reveal that both traditions share epistemologically compatible foundations in terms of respect for universal humanity, rejection of religion-based violence, and recognition of values of goodness that transcend traditional boundaries. The theoretical implications of this study enrich the discourse of comparative religious studies, while its practical implications provide an operational model for interfaith dialogue programs in pluralistic Southeast Asian societies.

**Keywords:** *inclusive da'wah, religious dialogue, Hindu-Buddhism, comparative religion, wasathiyah, ahimsa*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The history of human civilization records a long trajectory of how the world's major religions have encountered one another in various forms: trade,

conquest, migration, and conscious dialogue. In Southeast Asia, the meeting of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism is not merely a historical event that has passed, but an ongoing cultural dynamic that continues to this day. Indonesia, as home to the largest Muslim population in the world while also inheriting strong Hindu-Buddhist roots in Javanese, Balinese, and other regional cultures, represents a highly illustrative living laboratory for empirically examining interreligious relations.

The major question that arises from this reality is: to what extent are these traditions able to meet intellectually, rather than merely coexist socially? Da'wah in Islam is broadly understood as an effort to convey Islamic teachings to humanity. However, in its development, a more inclusive orientation has emerged one that views da'wah not merely as a mission of conversion, but as a collective *دعوت* toward universal values of goodness. On the other hand, Hinduism and Buddhism possess long-standing traditions of dialogue, ranging from philosophical debates in ancient Indian monasteries to the practice of sangha, which emphasizes open spiritual communities. Both share structural commonalities: respect for humanity, rejection of violence, and a shared pursuit of truth.

Most previous studies on inclusive da'wah tend to situate it solely within the framework of Islam-Christian or Islam-Jewish relations, while the epistemological relationship between Islamic da'wah and Hindu-Buddhist dialogical traditions has received relatively little academic attention. Likewise, studies on dialogue within Hinduism and Buddhism are more often positioned internally or in relation to Western traditions, without engaging the potential for comparison with Islam. This gap forms the point of departure for this study.

This research aims, first, to map the theological and epistemological foundations of inclusive da'wah in Islam; second, to identify patterns and principles of religious dialogue within Hinduism and Buddhism; and third, to construct a comparative framework that highlights both points of convergence and tension between them. The expected contributions include advancing a more comprehensive theory of comparative religion, as well as offering practical recommendations for managing interreligious harmony in plural societies.

## **Theoretical Review**

### **1. Inclusive Da'wah in the Islamic Tradition**

The concept of da'wah in Islam is rooted in the Qur'anic command to *دعوت* humanity to the path of God with wisdom, good counsel, and respectful debate (Q.S. An-Nahl: 125). In the development of contemporary Islamic thought, inclusive da'wah has become an increasingly prominent theme.

Rofiqi and Haq (2022) define interreligious dialogue within the Islamic approach as a positive relationship that is reciprocal and cooperative among adherents of different faiths, aimed at building mutual understanding rather than merely winning arguments. This perspective affirms that Islam inherently contains mechanisms of epistemological openness toward other traditions.

Elius (2023) emphasizes that the Islamic tradition offers a solid framework for fostering interreligious harmony, grounded in the principles of justice, compassion, and respect for human dignity. These values are embedded within Islamic teachings and serve as essential capital for constructive dialogue. The concept of ummah, for instance, etymologically is not limited solely to the Muslim community, but encompasses all communities that share common values of goodness. This provides theological space for a form of da'wah that is not exclusivist-defensive, but rather inclusive and accommodating toward goodness beyond the boundaries of one's own tradition.

Furthermore, Elius (2023) demonstrates that interfaith initiatives in Indonesia have successfully built harmonious relationships among diverse religious communities, proving the potential for collaboration in promoting peace. The strongest historical precedent is the dialogue between Prophet Muhammad and the Christian delegation from Najran, in which the Prophet allowed them to perform their worship inside the Prophet's Mosque an act that goes far beyond passive tolerance and reflects an active openness toward the "other."

In more recent studies, Abdullah and Iqbal (2023) explore the concept of Islamic enlightenment and moderation as a framework for facilitating interreligious dialogue, emphasizing that the wasathiyah (middle path) approach serves as the epistemological backbone of inclusive da'wah. The study *Interreligious Dialogue* (2024), published in a multidisciplinary journal, concludes that the recognition of similarities among religions, the preservation of each tradition's fundamental beliefs, and the promotion of peaceful coexistence are prerequisites for effective interreligious dialogue. These findings underline that inclusivity is not theological relativism, but rather an epistemic respect for the validity of human spiritual experience.

## 2. Religious Dialogue in the Hindu-Buddhist Tradition

Hinduism and Buddhism, since their earliest emergence, have developed rich traditions of dialogue. In the Hindu world, philosophical dialogue or discourse (vada) is considered the most honorable method for testing truth. The Upanishads themselves are records of profound dialogues

between teachers and students concerning the nature of Brahman and Atman. This tradition is not dogmatic; rather, it relies on logic, experience, and open argumentation. Within the framework of comparative religion, Lawrence (2022), in a study of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy published in the journal *Religions*, highlights how both traditions view truth as something that can be approached from multiple directions.

In the Buddhist tradition, dialogue is an intrinsic part of spiritual practice. Siddhartha Gautama himself spent much of his life engaged in conversations, debates, and exchanges of ideas with Brahmins, Jain ascetics, skeptical philosophers, and even kings. The concept of *sangha* an open and egalitarian spiritual community reflects a dialogical spirit that is not grounded in rigid dogmatic hierarchy. *Ahimsa* (non-violence), as a fundamental ethical principle in both Hinduism and Buddhism, logically extends into discursive non-violence: dialogue that does not impose, dominate, or harm. For the Buddha, even the truth of the Dharma must be communicated according to the readiness (*upaya kausalya*, skillful means) of the listener.

A study by Abdullah et al. (2024) on the comparison of eschatological beliefs in Islam and Buddhism finds that despite significant doctrinal differences, both traditions share strong ethical foundations in terms of moral accountability and respect for life. Research published in the *Journal of Dharma* (2024), indexed by Scopus, also indicates that comparative studies between Dharmic and Semitic traditions are increasingly developing, reflecting an urgent academic need to bridge two religious worlds that have long evolved in parallel.

Yew et al. (2021), in a comparative study of Islam and Buddhism from a multicultural perspective, argue that differences in ritual actually reflect rich differences in worldview: between transcendence and immanence, between submission to God and liberation from the cycle of suffering. Yet it is precisely at these points of difference that the most authentic dialogue can occur, because genuine dialogue requires an “Other” who is truly different.

### 3. Comparative Religion as a Methodological Framework

The field of Comparative Religion provides an analytical lens that enables cross-traditional studies to be conducted systematically without reductionism. From this perspective, comparison is not intended to determine which tradition is “better,” but rather to understand how each tradition constructs its world of meaning and where these constructions intersect. Klocek (2024) emphasizes that over the past two decades, interfaith peace initiatives have increasingly been recognized as important geopolitical

instruments, and this requires a strong theoretical foundation drawn from comparative religious studies.

Previous research has generally examined inclusive da'wah within the framework of Islam-Christian relations (for example, Wagay, 2022; Raza & Khalid, 2022), or Hindu-Buddhist dialogue within an internal framework (Lawrence, 2022). Studies that specifically and systematically bring together inclusive Islamic da'wah and Hindu-Buddhist dialogue within a single comparative framework remain largely absent in the existing literature. It is from this gap that the novelty of this research finds its justification.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design. The data used are entirely secondary data, consisting of written sources obtained through searches on various internationally reputable academic platforms, including Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, and MDPI. Priority is given to sources published between 2021 and 2026 that are indexed in Scopus or Web of Science, although foundational classical references are also used where necessary.

The data collection technique is conducted in three stages. First, the identification and selection of literature based on thematic relevance using keywords such as "inclusive da'wah," "interfaith dialogue Islam," "Hindu-Buddhist dialogue," "comparative religion," and "wasathiyyah." Second, a critical reading of each source to extract the main arguments, methods, and findings. Third, thematic mapping and categorization of ideas based on epistemological, theological, and practical dimensions.

Data analysis is carried out using two complementary methods. The content analysis method is used to identify recurring and significant patterns of argumentation within the literature. The comparative-narrative method is employed to juxtapose, differentiate, and integrate findings from both traditions. An educative narrative approach is chosen to ensure that academic findings are not only presented in rigid formal language, but are also accessible to a broader audience while maintaining scientific standards.

Data validity is ensured through source triangulation, by confirming that each key claim is supported by more than one source. The limitation of this study lies in its text-based nature and the absence of fieldwork or interviews with practitioners of interreligious dialogue. Therefore, the more dynamic practical dimension still requires further research using ethnographic designs.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. The Theological Foundations of Inclusive Da'wah in Islam**

Inclusive da'wah in Islam does not emerge from a compromise of faith, but from a deeper understanding of Islam's own universalism. The Qur'an consistently affirms that goodness cannot be monopolized by a single faith community. Verses such as Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 62 and Q.S. Al-Ma'idah: 69 state that whoever believes in God and the Last Day and performs good deeds shall have no fear. Although interpretations of these verses remain debated, the mainstream current of inclusive da'wah draws a spirit of universalism from them.

Alwi Shihab emphasizes that da'wah in Indonesia should be oriented toward realizing *ummatan wasatan* (a middle community) through proper education and constructive dialogue. *Tasamuh* (tolerance), *'adl* (justice), and respect for local cultural norms become the main pillars of inclusive da'wah. This is not relativism, but rather recognition that Islam exists to nurture broader human values. Studies on Islamic moderation (*al-wasathiyah*), which are increasingly prominent in Indonesian academic discourse, align with global findings that inclusive and contextual interpretations are among the most effective instruments for preventing extremism (Syahda Naurah et al., 2024).

The da'wah of the Wali Songo in the Indonesian archipelago provides one of the most concrete historical examples of inclusive da'wah. They successfully integrated elements of local Hindu-Buddhist culture, such as gamelan and wayang, into the spread of Islam without erasing indigenous cultural identities. Their teachings emphasized tolerance, cooperation, and maintaining harmonious interreligious relations (JASNA, 2025). This model is not only historically relevant but also offers a paradigm of inclusive da'wah rooted in local wisdom and dialoguing with other traditions on equal footing.

## **2. Patterns of Dialogue in Hindu-Buddhist Traditions and Their Comparative Relevance**

Dialogue within Hindu-Buddhist traditions rests upon several principles that structurally resemble the ideals of inclusive da'wah. First is the principle of *ahimsa*, which extends beyond non-violence in action to include non-violence in thought and speech. In the context of dialogue, *ahimsa* signifies openness to listening to differing perspectives without destructive prejudice. Second is the principle of *upaya kausalya* (skillful means) in Buddhism, emphasizing that truth must be conveyed according to the condition and maturity of the listener a concept closely aligned with *hikmah* (wisdom) in Islamic da'wah.

Third is the concept of *sangha* as an egalitarian spiritual community. The *sangha* encompasses not only monks but also lay followers committed to the

path of dharma. In classical Indian traditions, large *sangha* communities were often multi-traditional, welcoming discussions from diverse schools of thought. This provides a concrete model of how religious communities can remain open without losing their identity. Fourth is the concept of *Brahma Vihara* (the four divine abodes) in Buddhism: *metta* (loving-kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkha* (equanimity). Collectively, these principles cultivate the ideal inner disposition for sincere interreligious dialogue.

Abdullah et al. (2024) find that although Islam and Buddhism differ doctrinally in eschatology, both share a strong emphasis on ethical conduct and moral accountability in this life as determinants of future outcomes. Such structural similarities, which transcend conceptual differences, form a solid foundation for substantive and sustainable dialogue.

### 3. Epistemological Convergence: Toward a Cross-Truth Dialogue

A systematic comparison between inclusive Islamic da'wah and Hindu-Buddhist dialogue reveals several significant points of convergence. Both reject violence as a means of spreading belief. Both acknowledge that humans possess intrinsic spiritual freedom and must not be coerced. Both also view ethical goodness as a domain broader than mere ritual compliance. Importantly, both traditions see dialogue not as a weakness, but as an expression of mature faith.

However, there are also substantial differences that must not be obscured for the sake of superficial harmony. Islam upholds a definitive concept of *tauhid* that cannot be compromised, while Hindu traditions encompass diverse forms of polytheism and monism. Buddhism, in certain forms, is even non-theistic. These differences are not obstacles to dialogue, but rather its richness. Genuine dialogue respects differences rather than masking them with artificial consensus.

From this emerges the "Cross-Truth Dialogue" model as the novel contribution of this research. This model rests on four foundations: first, recognition of the epistemological competence of each tradition in accessing truth; second, a shared commitment to universal human values as the starting point of dialogue; third, openness to learning from other traditions without the necessity of abandoning one's own; and fourth, rejection of all forms of violence physical, symbolic, and epistemic within the dialogical process. This model is not only theoretically relevant but also operational for interreligious dialogue programs in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

Studies on interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution published by MDPI (2025) affirm that interreligious initiatives among religious leaders can

build bridges of trust and reciprocity, which in turn help to reduce social and political tensions. These findings confirm that the model proposed in this study holds strong empirical relevance and is not merely an abstract theoretical construct.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that inclusive da'wah in the Islamic tradition and religious dialogue within Hindu-Buddhist traditions do not merely run in parallel without points of contact, but rather share epistemological foundations that are mutually compatible and enriching. Islam, through its principles of *wasathiyah*, *hikmah*, and *tasamuh*, offers an open and universally oriented framework of mission. Meanwhile, Hindu-Buddhist traditions, through the principles of *ahimsa*, *upaya kausalya*, *sangha*, and *Brahma Vihara*, provide a spiritual disposition conducive to sincere and transformative dialogue.

The novelty of this research lies in the "Cross-Truth Dialogue Model," which integrates both traditions into a shared dialogical platform grounded in: recognition of each tradition's epistemological competence, commitment to universal human values, openness to learning without abandoning one's identity, and rejection of all forms of violence in dialogue. This model is relevant both theoretically and operationally for interreligious peacebuilding programs in Southeast Asia.

This study is limited by its reliance on purely library-based data. Future research employing ethnographic methods, in-depth interviews, or case studies of interfaith communities is strongly recommended to test the empirical validity of the proposed model. The development of quantitative measurement scales to assess the level of inclusivity in da'wah and the quality of interreligious dialogue also presents a promising avenue for further research.

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