

WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

The Official UN Observance in the 1st Week of February



EVENT REPORT

Common Ground – The Interfaith Education Project



World Interfaith Harmony Week 2025

About the Initiative

Common Ground: The Interfaith Education Project began as an initiative to encourage interfaith dialogue among students. However, 11th grader Gauri Gupta, the founder of Common Ground, soon spotted the opportunity to take fleeting interfaith conversations and turn them into long-lasting and impactful discourse. She realized that for it to be truly effective, the dialogue needed to stem from educators and teachers and become integrated into academic curricula. The insight led to a shift in the project's goal. As part of UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2025, Gauri pivoted Common Ground into a platform for educators to collaborate, share strategies, and build a strong foundation for interfaith education in their classrooms.

To celebrate this event, the initiative partnered with the local NGO Aawaaz Foundation to bring together over 40 educators from seven schools, fostering critical discussions on religious literacy, inclusive pedagogy, and respect for diverse faith traditions. While Common Ground had achieved some progress as a student-led movement, after its transformation, interfaith dialogue has become positioned as an institutional effort that ensures interfaith education and exploration as part of school curricula.

The four-day event held during the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2025 provided educators with tools and methodologies to create tangible modifications in the way that students engage with religion and faith. The structured workshops and collaborative discussions demonstrated how religious diversity can be integrated into and beyond classroom education and how traditional aspects of Indian religions can be approached through modern and inclusive perspectives.

DAY1 : TALES OF MANY FAITHS – PUPPETRY & STORYTELLING WORKSHOP

FEBRUARY 5, 2025 | 10 AM | NEERJA MODI SCHOOL



The first day dug into the power of storytelling in interfaith advocacy. The Tales of Many Faiths—Puppetry & Storytelling Workshop explored the traditional art of puppet theatre, which originated in its cultural form as the Rajasthani Kathputhli centuries ago, and how it can promote religious diversity. Ms. Nandini, an expert in narrative-based learning, began the session with a captivating hand puppet performance about The Lost Traveler. This ancient folktale depicts a merchant from one faith finding kindness in a foreign land, representing themes of hospitality, shared humanity, and moral responsibility—values embedded across different religious traditions under different names. Following the performance, educators analyzed how religious narratives across cultures mirror each other in their ethical principles. The discussion traced similarities and comparisons between The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Christianity, the Sikh concept of Seva (selfless service), the Islamic account of Prophet Muhammad and the Old Woman, the Buddhist principle of Karuna (compassion), Hindu teachings on Dharma (moral duty), and Jewish principles of Tikkun Olam (repairing the world). In examining these concepts through different lenses, educators were able to not just recognize the multicolored moral threads running through different religions, but find ways to stitch them into stories for children.

DAY 2- TRAINING: TEACHING & CURATING INTERFAITH NARRATIVES

FEBRUARY 6, 2025 | 11 AM – 1 PM | NEERJA MODI SCHOOL LIBRARY



On the second day, Common Ground introduced a professional development workshop for educators. It was designed to propose various strategies to incorporate interfaith narratives into academic subjects such as history, literature, and philosophy. The session was led by Ms. Mitakshi Gill, an expert in religious studies and history, alongside Mr. Chandraditya, a curriculum development specialist. Educators were guided to examine real-world classroom case studies in which students exhibited misconceptions about different faiths. Working in small groups, they also investigated excerpts from sacred texts including the Bhagavad Gita, Quran, and Bible, along with Buddhist sutras and Jewish wisdom literature. Apart from identifying recurring themes of justice, morality, and compassion, educators were encouraged to address subtle biases present in textbooks and how prejudiced content and divisive government-sanctioned material can negatively impact students. The session concluded with a reflective discussion on how we can collectively formulate a more inclusive curriculum to build an educational environment that nurtures curiosity and religious pluralism.

DAY 3: CHAI & CHARCHA – OPEN DISCUSSION & RESOURCE SHARING

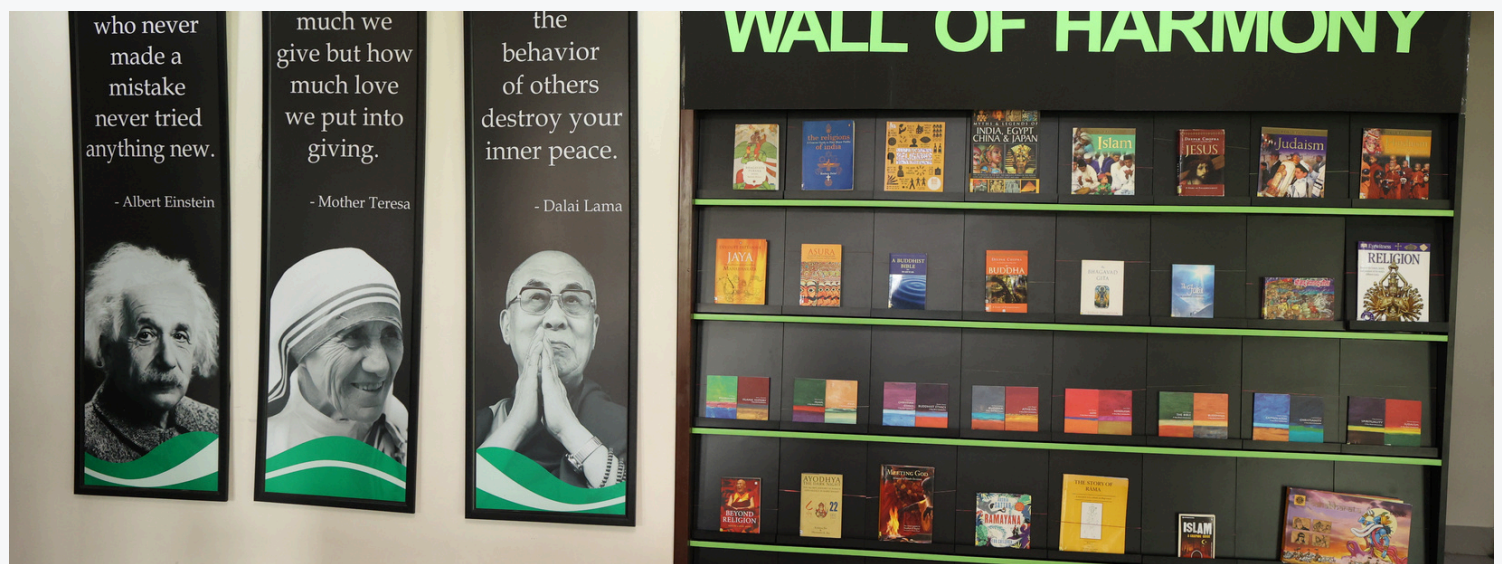
FEBRUARY 7, 2025 | 10 AM | NEERJA MODI CAFETERIA



On the third day, Chai & Charcha—Open Discussion & Resource Sharing furnished an informal, inspirational space for educators to share their personal stories concerning interfaith discussions in the classroom. Hosted in the serene ambiance of the school library, the session prompted honest conversations over hot cups of chai and canteen refreshments. Educators spoke about their experiences and challenges, identifying key obstacles in promoting in-class interfaith dialogue. They contemplated how the lack of structured resources, institutional hesitation, and social stigmas and sensitivities about religious topics could be detrimental to the overall growth of young pupils. Participants also exchanged proven strategies like using debate formats to prime students for communal tolerance and the merit of using literature-based approaches to interfaith dialogue. The session underlined open conversations as the key to understanding religious coexistence and emphasized collaborative knowledge-sharing to make interfaith education approachable, inclusive, and sustainable.

DAY 4. WALL OF HARMONY – A SYMBOLIC CELEBRATION OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

17 FEBRUARY 8, 2025 | NEERJA MODI SCHOOL LIBRARY



On Saturday, the last day of the event, Common Ground launched The Wall of Harmony—A Symbolic Celebration of Religious Knowledge. Installed in the Neerja Modi School Library, this bookshelf is a symbol of enduring interfaith discourse, offering a vast collection of educational resources for students and educators alike. The books, magazines, and digital content provide a multilinguistic, multicultural, and multifaith exploration of religious plurality in India and beyond. Through The Wall, many educators discovered texts beyond their personal traditions, deepening their appreciation for religious diversity and their ability to spread that appreciation among their students. By the end of the day, the library had transformed into a space of learning, dialogue, and reflection, with participating schools pledging to expand the bookshelf annually by adding new books, reflections, and perspectives. This commitment ensures that interfaith education is a continuous, evolving effort, rather than a one-time event.

This is just the beginning. The success of Common Ground during the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2025 has provided an impetus for a broader reach. Along with laying a strong foundation for sustained interfaith education in schools, the initiative aims to equip more educators with the tools needed to integrate interfaith perspectives into their teaching. Plans are underway to expand training sessions in different languages, ideate and develop multimedia curriculum resources, and foster year-round open discussions so interfaith education is accessible. Common Ground aspires to extend discourse beyond classrooms as well, by inviting parents and community leaders to engage with educators to create a culture of understanding, empathy, and respect. Through these efforts, the initiative will continue to ensure that schools become spaces where religious literacy, pluralism, and tolerance are cultivated and students are empowered to be informed, open-minded, globally conscious citizens.

