

Everyday Da'wah in a Secular Campus: Muslim Students and Informal Islamic Communication at Andhra University

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Abstract

This paper explores the everyday practices of informal Islamic communication among Muslim students at Andhra University, a public university in secular India. The study investigates how da'wah is embodied in daily interactions, lifestyle choices, and peer engagement beyond traditional religious settings. Employing a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews and participant observation, this research uncovers how Muslim youth navigate their religious identity and communicate Islamic values within a multicultural academic environment. The findings reveal that everyday da'wah takes subtle forms—such as reminding friends to pray, sharing Islamic content on social media, or demonstrating ethical behavior—as a means of religious expression and social connection. This paper contributes to the discourse on Islamic communication by highlighting the significance of non-institutional da'wah in pluralistic and secular spaces like Indian universities.

Keywords: Everyday Da'wah, Muslim Students, Informal Islamic Communication, Religious Identity.



A. Introduction

This study examines how Muslim students at Andhra University navigate the dual challenges of maintaining a strong Islamic identity while operating within a secular academic environment. In India, where Muslims constitute one of the largest national minorities in a pluralistic state, the informal practice of da'wah (Islamic religious communication) emerges as a series of everyday interactions and spontaneous communications that help sustain individual and collective religious identities (Mubarok, Sakawuni, and Faza 2024, 11-19).

The literature indicates that informal da'wah among Muslim communities is often characterized by practices that extend beyond formal sermons and organized study circles. For example, Abqorina and Faisal's study on the millennial da'wah model within the Yuk Ngaji community illustrates how non-institutional and grassroots approaches are employed to instill Islamic values in a manner that resonates with younger demographics (Abqorina and Faisal 2024, 1055-1067). These informal modalities are significant in the campus context, where Muslim students may prefer subtle and personalized interactions that integrate religious values into daily life without overt institutional affiliation. Such approaches offer flexibility and adaptability, allowing students to balance academic priorities with personal spirituality in an environment that emphasizes secular practices (Mubarok, Sakawuni, and Faza 2024, 11-19).

Furthermore, the integration of digital communication technologies within da'wah practices has transformed the manner in which Islamic values are conveyed, particularly among younger generations. Robeet and Sunarto discuss e-da'wah strategies, noting that the digital era has fostered informal channels of communication that support religious moderation and identity formation through socially mediated platforms (Robeet and Sunarto 2023, 233-248). This digital mediation is particularly relevant on university campuses where social media and mobile technologies facilitate spontaneous religious dialogue. Through these informal digital interactions, Muslim students can share insights, engage with peers,

and reinforce their religious beliefs in a manner that is neither overtly institutional nor confrontational to the secular norms of academic institutions (Robeet and Sunarto 2023, 233-248).

In addition, research focusing on da‘wah communication strengthening Islamic identity—exemplified by Yanti and Prastiwi’s work—underscores the importance of informal, culturally embedded methods in maintaining religious cohesion (Yanti and Prastiwi 2024, 49-57; . Although their study was conducted in a different cultural setting, the underlying principles are analogous: informal da‘wah practices serve as a crucial mechanism for reinforcing a shared Islamic identity in environments where Muslims are in the minority. For students at Andhra University, similar strategies may be adapted to bridge the gap between the secular context of higher education and the desire to nurture a religiously enriched personal and communal life (Yanti and Prastiwi 2024, 49-57). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that informal da‘wah among Muslim students is not merely a secondary religious activity but a vital process through which Islamic teachings are internalized and perpetuated. The multifaceted nature of da‘wah—ranging from personal conversations to digital communications—enables Muslim students to subtly infuse their everyday interactions with religious values, thereby negotiating their identities within a constitutionally secular campus environment (Mubarok, Sakawuni, and Faza 2024, 11-19; , Yanti and Prastiwi 2024, 49-57; , Robeet and Sunarto 2023, 233-248).

The present study contributes to the expanding literature on Islamic communication in minority contexts by exploring how Muslim students at Andhra University in South India employ everyday da‘wah as a cultural and dialogic process in a secular academic environment. While previous research has predominantly focused on digital or institutional forms of da‘wah (Ridha, Rubino, and Kustiawan 2023, 165-180) and on formalized communication channels, there is a clear gap in addressing the subtle, day-to-day interactions through which Islamic values are conveyed among youth in non-Muslim-majority settings (Kamilah 2021, 27-38; . This focus resonates with earlier works that conceptualize

da'wah as a culturally embedded and identity-affirming practice Lubis 2023, 283-306; , thereby providing a nuanced perspective that is particularly relevant given India's constitutional secular framework and its pluralistic societal structure Ahmad 2021; .

In minority settings such as India, where Muslim communities operate within a dominant non-Muslim environment, everyday practices of religious expression become a crucial method of identity assertion. Transformative da'wah methods, as detailed in studies examining the creation of Islamic youth character, illustrate a shift from traditional oral preaching to more informal, interpersonal, and transformative communicative acts that seamlessly blend into daily life (Kamilah 2021, 27-38; . These subtle interactions enable Muslim students to confirm their faith values while engaging with non-Muslim peers, creating micro-spaces of religious negotiation that are often overlooked in more overt institutional da'wah models Lubis 2023, 283-306; . Such informal approaches are pivotal in contexts where overt religious expression may conflict with broader secular norms Ahmad 2021; .

Moreover, although digital da'wah practices have garnered substantial scholarly attention (Ridha, Rubino, and Kustiawan 2023, 165-180), the current study emphasizes that everyday da'wah extends beyond the digital realm. Research on religious hybridity among urban Muslim youth highlights a dual engagement with both modern communication tools and traditional interpersonal exchanges, suggesting that the integration of informal, face-to-face dialogue is essential for the sustained transmission of Islamic values Lubis 2023, 283-306; . Additionally, studies addressing the religious expressions of urban youth, such as those involving lifestyle communities Zulhazmi 2024, 1-18), reinforce the idea that everyday interactions—characterized by spontaneity and personal resonance—serve as critical platforms for the assertion of religious identity among minority groups.

Contextually, the Indian higher education setting represents a unique laboratory where the interplay between formal academic life and personal religious

practice unfolds in complex ways. The minority status of Muslims in India, as examined in studies discussing communal harmony and the challenges of maintaining a distinct religious identity Ahmad 2021; , necessitates adaptive communicative strategies that are both contextually sensitive and culturally resonant. In this respect, the informal da‘wah practices observed at Andhra University not only affirm the individual’s spiritual commitments but also contribute to a broader interreligious dialogue that is essential for social cohesion in a diverse society.

In summary, by shifting the focus from digital or institutional da‘wah to the subtleties of everyday religious expression among Muslim youth in a South Indian academic context, this study offers an original contribution. It underscores how informal, culturally nuanced communications enable Muslim students to navigate and negotiate their dual identities in a secular environment. This integrative approach is critical for understanding the interplay between personal faith and public identity, thus providing valuable insights into the broader field of Islamic communication within minority contexts (Kamilah 2021, 27-38; , Lubis 2023, 283-306; , Ahmad 2021; , Zulhazmi 2024, 1-18).

The significance of this research lies in its focus on how da‘wah is embodied in quotidian life rather than solely through formal preaching. This focus is vital because it mirrors the realities of religious communication in plural societies where overt expressions may be circumscribed by institutional, political, or social pressures. In contemporary academic settings—such as secular campuses—Muslim youth employ subtle strategies to affirm their religious identities through everyday actions. These actions include wearing religious attire like the hijab, engaging in prayer, and participating in informal interpersonal dialogues. Such practices not only reinforce personal religiosity but also serve as a form of peaceful resistance and cultural negotiation within environments that may not overtly accommodate religious expression (Musmuallim, Baedowi, and Tsani 2024, 1).

The practice of da'wah bil-ḥal (da'wah through actions) is particularly salient here. Unlike traditional da'wah, which favors formal lectures or sermons, da'wah bil-ḥal emphasizes the power of actions as vehicles for religious transmission (Musmuallim, Baedowi, and Tsani 2024, 1). By simply living their faith—through visible markers such as prayer and dress—Muslim students establish a continuous, informal discourse that communicates Islamic values in spaces where formal religious activities could be constrained (Ningsih, Sopiyan, and Kamsi 2023). This everyday embodiment of da'wah reflects individual spiritual commitments and serves as a subtle yet powerful strategy to engage with a diverse peer group in pluralistic academic settings (Ningsih, Sopiyan, and Kamsi 2023).

Moreover, by articulating da'wah as a lived, relational practice, this research expands the scholarly understanding of religious communication. Everyday acts such as donning the hijab or engaging in spontaneous discussions about Islam demonstrate that religious identity does not solely depend on formal educational or preaching methods. Instead, these acts foster an environment of continuous religious negotiation and dialogue, which is especially crucial in secular settings where religious symbols are sometimes perceived as disruptive if displayed too overtly (Mubarok, Sakawuni, and Faza 2024, 11-19). As such, this study contributes to a broader discourse by illustrating how subtle, interpersonal exchanges can effectively function as conduits for religious knowledge and identity, adapting to the complex demands of modern public spaces (Alamyar, Halwati, Rifin, and Rofiqoh 2023, 69-78).

Finally, adopting a qualitative methodology with in-depth interviews and participant observation allows for a rich exploration of these everyday practices. By focusing on key themes such as prayer, dress, and interpersonal interaction, the research captures how these ordinary acts cumulatively construct a meaningful and resilient form of da'wah. This approach not only attunes scholarly attention to the micro-level dynamics of religious practice in pluralistic settings but also underscores the importance of understanding religious communication as a fluid,

context-dependent process that evolves with the everyday lived experiences of youth (Mahfud, Arifuddin, and Rifai 2024, 1-10).

B. Da'wah through Personal Religious Practices and Social Curiosity

The life of Muslim students at Andhra University, India, presents a unique phenomenon of how da'wah can take place naturally in a secular campus environment. In this study, da'wah is not carried out through institutionalized approaches but rather blends into everyday social interactions. This practice is evident in how Muslim students live out Islamic values in their lives and, without explicitly intending to, attract the attention of their non-Muslim peers. One of the primary informants, a Palestinian student, shared his experience while living off-campus. He consistently maintained his five daily prayers despite the surrounding environment not directly supporting it. He said:

"I always try to maintain my five daily prayers, even though sometimes I have to find a place amidst my busy schedule. One day, a non-Muslim friend asked me: 'Why do you pray so often? What do you feel after that?' From there, I began to explain a little about the meaning of prayer, our relationship with Allah, and the sense of tranquility afterward."

This non-Muslim friend, initially just curious, gradually became more interested in learning more about Islam. Through a relaxed and patient approach, the student carefully answered each question until his friend expressed an interest in learning about Islam. He continued:

"I never directly invited him to embrace Islam. I just shared what I feel and how Islam teaches us to live better. Alhamdulillah, he became interested in Islam that promotes human well-being."

This finding suggests that consistent personal exemplification serves as a highly effective means of da'wah. Da'wah is not about speaking much, but about demonstrating Islamic values through real actions. A similar story was found with

a female Muslim student from Indonesia, who consistently wore the hijab while studying at Andhra University. She explained:

"Since the beginning, I decided to wear the hijab here. My classmates, especially the non-Muslims, often asked me: 'Why do you wear the hijab? Is it mandatory in Islam?' I saw this as an opportunity for small-scale da'wah."

When explaining about the hijab, she not only conveyed the religious obligations but also the philosophical values embedded within it. She added:

"I told them that the hijab is not just about clothing; it's about identity, commitment to Allah, and self-respect. Many of them later said, 'Oh, I understand now, the hijab is not about oppression.'"

With an open and communicative approach, this female student succeeded in eliminating many negative stereotypes that have long been attached to Islamic symbols in the eyes of the global community.

In other everyday activities, Muslim students also engage in da'wah through simple but impactful social behaviors. For example, during casual moments such as eating together or traveling, Muslim students maintain Islamic principles, including performing prayers on time. One student shared:

"We once went to the beach with friends from various countries. When it was time for prayer, I and other Muslim friends prayed at the edge of the beach. The non-Muslim friends were curious. They watched from a distance, and afterward, they asked about the prayer movements and their meanings."

This phenomenon proves that the presence of Islam in public spaces — even in casual settings — can serve as a potential avenue for da'wah. When Muslim students demonstrate their commitment to their faith without being preachy, it instead garners respect and interest from the surrounding environment.

However, da'wah on a secular campus is not without its challenges. One female student said:

"Sometimes, there are friends who are a bit skeptical. They say, 'Why are you still wearing the hijab? The world is modern now.' But I calmly respond, saying that modernity and religion are not in opposition. I respect them, but I also want them to understand why I choose to remain obedient."

Such responses demonstrate the importance of a *hikmah* (wisdom)-based approach in dealing with differing viewpoints. Da'wah conducted with calmness, patience, and respect can reduce resistance and open healthier dialogue spaces. The study also found that social media has become a highly effective tool for da'wah among Muslim students at Andhra University. One student is active in sharing light Islamic quotes on his personal Instagram account. He said:

"I often post Qur'anic verses or hadiths about character. Many non-Muslim friends follow my account and sometimes DM me asking more about Islam."

According to him, social media offers an opportunity to engage in da'wah with a wider audience without having to face them directly. Through a relaxed, non-judgmental style, this student has been able to introduce Islam positively to interfaith friends. Overall, this research reveals that da'wah at a secular campus like Andhra University takes place through natural social interactions. Da'wah activities are not carried out through large-scale lectures but through exemplification, everyday conversations, social behavior, and the presence of Islam in students' real lives. This everyday da'wah has proven to be more effective in building understanding, reducing negative stereotypes, and presenting Islam in a friendly and tolerant manner. This practice aligns with the da'wah approach of *bi al-hikmah* and *mau'izhah hasanah* as taught in the Qur'an:

"Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best." (Q.S. al-Nahl [16]: 125).

By applying this principle, Muslim students at Andhra University are able to present Islam as peaceful, courteous, and relevant to modern life, even while being part of a multicultural, secular environment.

C. Digital Extension of Everyday Da'wah

The digital realm has increasingly become an integral extension of everyday da'wah practices among Muslim students at Andhra University. Beyond traditional forms of religious expression, digital platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube facilitate a unique space where religious content is not only shared but also adapted to the contours of everyday life. For instance, students frequently utilize WhatsApp statuses and Instagram stories to post Qur'anic verses, Hadith quotes, and reflections during Ramadan—actions that prompt informal yet meaningful religious dialogues with non-Muslim peers. This mode of communication exemplifies a “soft da'wah” model, where aesthetics, ethics, and storytelling are harnessed to make religious messages relatable and accessible (Pranoto 2023, 29-52).

Integrating digital platforms into da'wah practices is crucial in contemporary pluralistic societies because these tools enable a seamless blend of lifestyle content with religious elements. As digital media transcends geographical boundaries, it permits Muslim youth to engage in religious discourse that is both intimate and expansive. The content generated by digital da'wah participants often employs a hybrid of personal reflections and culturally resonant symbols, which facilitates not only intra-faith consolidation but also interfaith dialogue. This approach, resonating with ideas of mediated piety and everyday religion, helps sustain religious identity in contexts where overt religious expression might be socially or politically circumscribed.

Furthermore, the engagement of Muslim students with digital da'wah practices illustrates a broader transnational shift in Islamic communication. The informal, decentralized nature of digital platforms diminishes the reliance on formal religious institutions and enables non-institutional actors to navigate complex

cultural landscapes. Studies have highlighted that university students leverage social media both as a tool for disseminating religious messages and as a platform for constructing and negotiating hybrid identities amidst secular academic environments Ratmiati et al. 2023, 166; . Additionally, the integration of content in regional languages such as Telugu, Urdu, and Hindi, as observed on platforms like YouTube and emerging short-video applications, expands the reach of da'wah, making it more inclusive and contextually embedded for diverse audiences Nurdin and Godal 2023, 1-15).

In summary, the use of digital platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube by Muslim students at Andhra University is emblematic of how da'wah has evolved in the digital age. This evolution—from institutionally mediated preaching to a more informal, everyday process—reinforces religious identity and creates spaces for cross-cultural dialogue. The shifting dynamics of digital da'wah not only embody the interplay between traditional Islamic teachings and modern communication technologies but also illustrate a strategic adaptation to contemporary challenges faced by religious minorities in pluralistic societies (Pranoto 2023, 29-52; , 'Ulyan 2023, 100-113; , Ratmiati et al. 2023, 166; , Nurdin and Godal 2023, 1-15).

D. Challenges and Negotiations in Campus Da'wah

1. Negotiating Visibility and Identity

In secular academic settings, such as Andhra University, Muslim students encounter a dual imperative: to maintain a visible religious identity while simultaneously navigating the secular ethos that often cautions against overt religious expression. This negotiation is evident when students, aware of institutional and social sensitivities, deliberately moderate the immediacy and directness of their religious expressions. For example, one student's remark—"Sometimes I feel like I need to be careful about saying religious things too directly, especially in classroom settings"—illustrates the delicate balancing act involved in

asserting one's faith while remaining sensitive to a predominantly secular space (Alizai 2020, 357-374; .

This cautious approach to religious expression not only reflects the broader societal challenges associated with Islamophobia and cultural stereotyping but also functions as a strategic means of carving out personal and political space within the public sphere. As Nilüfer Göle has articulated, the public display of Islamic symbols such as the hijab requires continuous negotiation in secular environments where such markers may invite scrutiny or misinterpretation (Alizai 2020, 357-374; . In these contexts, da'wah transforms from a conventional mode of religious propagation into a more nuanced practice of identity work, where everyday acts of religious observance—like wearing the hijab or engaging in restrained religious dialogue—serve both as manifestations of faith and as subtle forms of resistance or self-protection (Alizai 2020, 357-374; , Al-Sharif 2024).

Furthermore, this negotiated visibility of religious identity among Muslim students underscores a broader dynamic of identity work in minority contexts. By carefully modulating their religious expressions, students are not only preserving their individual identities but also contributing to a hybrid public space. This space accommodates different modes of being and speaking about faith, thus allowing for the emergence of a “lived” Islam that adapts to contemporary challenges while remaining rooted in traditional practices. In doing so, these students reject binary categorizations that position overt religious expression as inherently oppositional to secular values, advocating for a more inclusive understanding of religious diversity in public domains (Alizai 2020, 357-374; .

Ultimately, the act of negotiating visibility and identity through everyday da'wah practices reveals the multi-layered nature of contemporary Islamic communication. It highlights how Muslim students actively sculpt a personal and collective identity that is resilient—able to flourish within the constraints of a secular, pluralistic environment. By integrating both subtle everyday interactions and measured public displays, their practices become an essential conduit for

sustaining faith, reinforcing cultural identity, and engaging in ongoing dialogues about inclusion, respect, and coexistence (Alizai 2020, 357-374; , Al-Sharif 2024).

2. Institutional and Peer Constraints

In addition to internal caution, there are also external constraints that limit overt forms of *da'wah*. The university administration generally maintains a neutral stance on religious activities, and no formal student Islamic organizations are allowed to conduct explicit religious events on campus. As such, many students engage in what can be termed “quiet *da'wah*”—spontaneous, non-intrusive sharing of ideas, values, and experiences in personal conversations or during group activities. The informal nature of these practices aligns with what Mahmood refers to as the “ethical formation of the self” in contexts where religion is de-centered from public discourse.²

Moreover, peer dynamics also play a role. While some students feel encouraged by supportive non-Muslim friends, others noted moments of stereotyping or discomfort when Islam was brought into discussion. “Some people think being religious means being extreme,” one interviewee said. This illustrates the complex landscape in which informal *da'wah* operates—where openness is possible, but always negotiated.

3. Cultural Adaptation and Strategic Silence

Interestingly, students also described practicing what could be called “strategic silence”—deliberately choosing when not to speak about religion. This is not a sign of disinterest or disengagement, but rather a calculated adaptation to context. Strategic silence allows students to build trust and rapport before introducing Islamic ideas, especially in sensitive discussions. It also avoids creating tension in mixed-religion groups. As Abu-Lughod notes in her work on Muslim women’s narratives, silence is not merely absence but can be a “mode of agency.”³

In this way, Muslim students at Andhra University exhibit a sophisticated form of *da'wah*—a blend of public presence, ethical self-fashioning, and cultural adaptation. Their practice offers a fresh perspective on how *da'wah* can operate fluidly within secular, multicultural institutions, and highlights the need to expand scholarly frameworks beyond binary notions of “religious” versus “secular” domains.

E. Concluding Remarks

This study has explored how Muslim students at Andhra University, a secular institution in India, engage in everyday *da'wah* through informal interpersonal communication and digital media. Their efforts demonstrate that *da'wah* is not limited to formal preaching or institutionalized platforms, but can also take place in casual conversations, embodied practices such as wearing the *hijab*, and strategic digital engagement. By analyzing students' narratives and daily interactions, this paper contributes to the growing body of scholarship on “everyday religion” and the localization of Islamic practices within pluralistic and secular environments.

One of the key findings of this research is the nuanced way in which Muslim students negotiate their religious identity in a context where overt religiosity may not always be welcome. They employ strategies such as relational storytelling, soft engagement, and even strategic silence to create spaces for *da'wah* that are subtle, relational, and context-sensitive.

For future research, it would be valuable to examine comparative cases in other Indian universities or among students of different religious backgrounds to explore how religious communication is shaped by institutional settings and regional cultures. Additionally, further study on the role of regional languages and digital micro-content in campus-based *da'wah* could deepen our understanding of localized Islamic communication.

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