

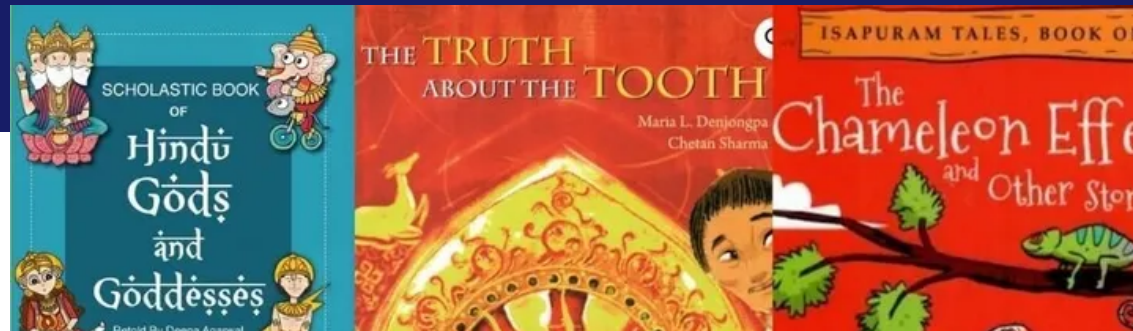
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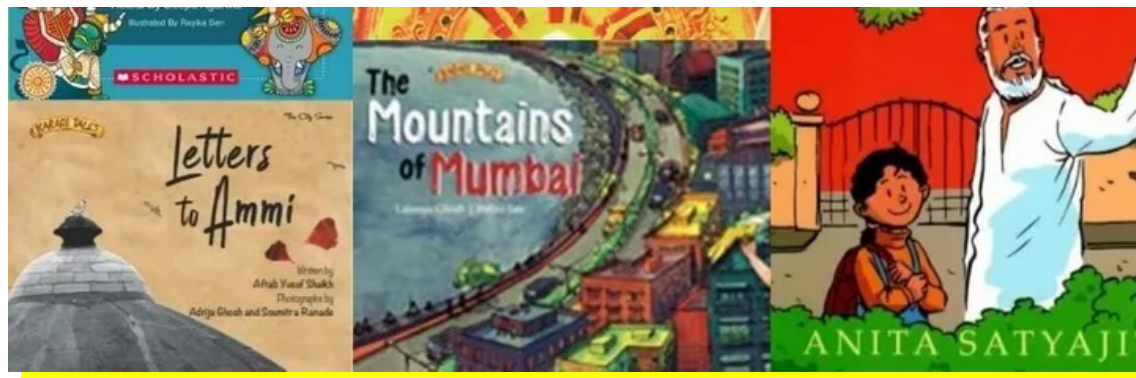
14 Great Children's Books On Religious Tolerance And Interfaith Harmony

Bringing up children in a polarised world can be a challenge. These fun, thoughtful books could help.

By **Arundhati Nath**

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While most of us would perhaps agree that all religions teach us the same principles of love, peace and goodness, it's a reality that we are living in a highly polarised world. Bringing up children in a world that often seems to throw up just bad news can be a particular challenge for parents.

When I started researching on children's [books](#) about tolerance and acceptance, I realised that there's a lot of beauty and similarity in the teachings of all faiths in the Indian subcontinent.

The rainbow on a misty sky wouldn't be spectacular if it had only one colour. It would have looked rather dull. The seven different colours add up to make the rainbow shine brighter. Can we help the next generation soak in the collective powers of all religions and their age-old wisdom to revive the 'unity in diversity' character of India that we have always been proud of?

These are some fun books that would help your child understand the variety of ways in which we pray, while being aware that there can be beauty and unity despite the differences in the forms in which one seeks to do so.



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1. **[Scholastic Book of Hindu Gods and Goddesses](#)** retold by Deepa Agarwal and illustrated by Rayika Sen: This is a collection of ten entertaining and interesting stories from Hindu religious texts retold simply for kids and has colourful and lively illustrations. This book would instantly hook children to learn and know more about Hindu Gods and Goddesses in a fun way. *Too Many Modaks for Ganesha!* is a hilarious story from this book which describes how eating too many *modaks* (sweet dumplings) made Ganesha's tummy split open, and in *Ram's Bridge*, children can read about how Lord Ram built the bridge to reach Lanka with the help of the army of monkeys led by Hanuman.

2. **[Muezza and Baby Jaan: Stories from the Quran](#)** authored by Anita Nair and illustrated by Harshad Marathe: This is a charming book which portrays the endearing bond of friendship between a little shape-shifting djinn called Baby Jaan and a beautiful cat called Muezza, who's the intelligent pet of a wise Prophet. Baby Jaan takes the shape of an inquisitive white camel in most parts of the book and Muezza narrates to him wise and lively stories from the Quran about the virtues of Islam: faith, brotherhood, sacrifice, tolerance, honesty and the need to have faith in God and good deeds. This is perhaps one of the very few books on children's stories from the Quran and is beautifully illustrated. It has vivid and detailed descriptions which would immediately transport young readers to the hot desert where the book is set.

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3. ***Guru Nanak: The Enlightened Master***, authored by **Sreelata Menon**: This biography of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism and the first of the ten Sikh gurus, is a well-researched book with descriptions that makes it appealing to children and young adults, without sounding preachy. The book opens with the story-like real event wherein people are troubled because a young Nanak disappears for three days near the river Bein, where he usually took his bath and later meditated. With adequate narratives on the political, economic and socio-religious aspects of life in India during the times of this great man, the book traces Guru Nanak's life history, legacy, and teachings about unity, tolerance, charity, peace, and the need to pay the highest regard to women in society.

4. ***The Chameleon Effect and Other Stories*** authored by **Anita Satyajit and illustrated by Manoj Vijayan**: The first book of the Isapuram Tales, this one begins with a fun poem in rhyme introducing the two protagonists: Diya, who's a lively 10-year-old girl, and an old wise sage whom everyone calls Baba. Mischievous yet sweet little Diya is always bubbling with questions about life which she frequently bombards Baba with. The wise man patiently answers them with simplicity and humour and in ways that can make a child understand complicated topics about religion, spirituality and tolerance. When Diya asks why there are

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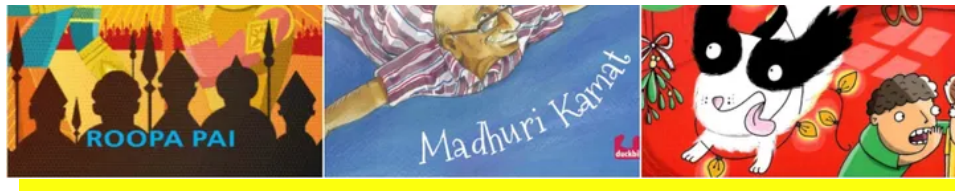
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different Gods and religions, Baba explains to her about the oneness of all forms of Gods and religions, and gives her the examples of different flavours of her favourite chocolates! The fun stories in this book and [in its sequel](#) are skillfully illustrated and help children understand compassion and kindness without being preachy or judgmental.

5. ***The Mountains of Mumbai*, authored by Labanya Ghosh and illustrated by Pallavi Jain:** This gorgeous hardcover picture book from Karadi Tales has won the [Neev Book Award this year](#) and is a sheer delight to read and flip through. Set in the bustling, chaotic and yet welcoming and vibrant city of Mumbai, this story showcases the harmony and familiarity between the lofty mountains of Ladakh and the symbolic ‘mountains’ of Mumbai, thereby bringing in an element of finding similarities within our inherent differences. Veda is a little resident of Mumbai and Doma, her friend from Ladakh, misses the mountains of her place. This is when the two girls explore and find the magical mountains of Mumbai in a story with vivid watercolour paintings that remind me of the chaos and charm of this populous city of innumerable dreams.





6. ***The Gita for Children* authored by Roopa Pai:** The Bhagavad Gita is a classic 700-verse Sanskrit text told as a narrative and is a part of the greatest Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*. The Gita has inspired millions of people worldwide and is more of a book on righteousness and wisdom than pure religious or ritualistic beliefs. The author has retold the wisdom from this ancient classic for children in a fun, humorous and interesting manner that would not only spark the interest of children, but would also serve as a means to bridge the gap that exists between the ancient and the modern by making these valuable life lessons accessible and readable to kids of today.

7. ***Flying With Grandpa* authored by Madhuri Kamat and illustrated by Niloufer Wadia:** This is an illustrated chapter book about Xerxes, a little Parsi boy, and his family consisting of his parents and grandfather, whom he fondly calls Mamavaji. This endearing story traces the gloomy and cheerful times of young Xerxes, who wants to be like his grandpa while his mother wants him to be someone extraordinary like JRD Tata. The book mentions *Ahura Mazda*, Xerxes's visit to the Fire Temple and his first Navjote, which is the initiation ceremony for Zoroastrians. This is a good read for children to get an idea of a Zoroastrian family and is a story about loving one's grandparents, understanding each other and having fun with family.

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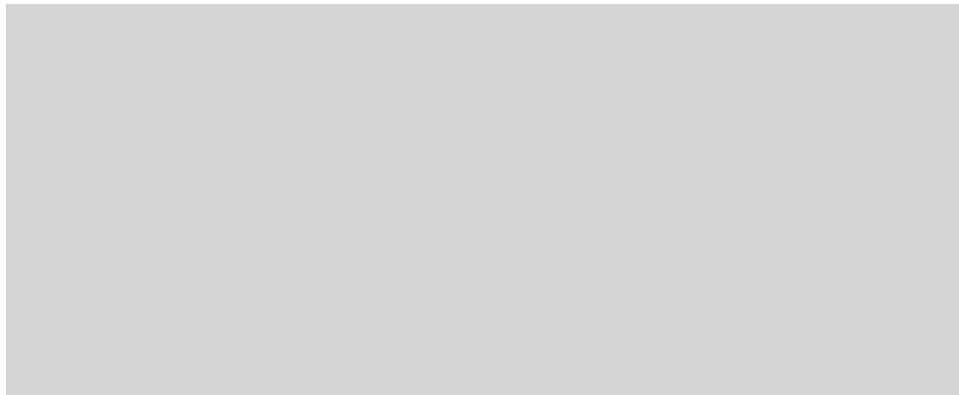
8. [*Lucky, It's Not Just a Christmas Story!*](#) by **Nalini Sorensen** and illustrated by **Shamika Chaves**: Told through the eyes of a cute black-and-white Cocker Spaniel named Lucky, this little book is a charming tale of friendship, family fun and love, and brings forth the magical allure of Christmas. There are illustrations and speech bubbles in the book which the young readers can fill in with colours and words from what they visualize and read in the story. While the book ended on a heartwarming, satisfactory close, I wished the story went on and on because it made me smile so much.

9. [*The Truth About The Tooth*](#) written by **Maria L. Denjongpa** and illustrated by **Chetan Sharma**: In this tastefully illustrated hardcover picture book, a charming Tibetan folktale about faith and love has been beautifully retold and depicted through a young man named Tashi, his old mother and her immense belief in the Buddha. Tashi is a cloth-seller from Kalimpong who often travels to Benares for work. His mother asks him to bring her something from nearby Sarnath, the city of the

Buddha's first teachings. However, Tashi continues to forget her request and one day, while returning home, he picks up an old tooth off the ground and presents it to his mother, lying that it was the Buddha's tooth. The aftermath of the story is a mesmerizing one and captures the essence of faith and the delightful illustrations bring forth the scenic beauty of nearby Sikkim and its people.

10. ***[Gautama Buddha: The Lord of Wisdom](#)***, authored by **Rohini Chowdhury**: This enlightening Puffin Lives title is a short biography of Siddhartha Gautama, who is known worldwide as Gautam Buddha, the most revered spiritual teacher and founder of Buddhism. This book isn't a regular boring or preachy read for children. It gives a lot of interesting insights and has been thoroughly researched and written with more than the popular story of the Buddha's life that we have always heard before.

It should be added that [the Jataka Tales](#), which were poems, originally 547 in number, are very interestingly retold witty fables about the previous incarnations of the Buddha in various human and animal forms, and these would be great reads for children too.



11. ***Letters To Ammi***, written by Aftab Yusuf Shaikh,
photographs by Adrija Ghosh and Soumitra Ranade:

Fatima, a young school girl, travels to Delhi from Jaipur to experience this nearly 1,000 year old city that her mother and father had often described to her. She recounts and immortalizes the stories behind the monuments, markets and memories from Delhi in the form of a series of letters to her beloved mother, who is not alive. Apart from the deep imprint of the mother-daughter relationship felt through Fatima's letters to her late Ammijaan, this book gives the reader a splendid virtual tour of Delhi's beauty, multicultural nature and diversity through stunning photography adorning every page.

12. ***A Christmas Carol***, authored by **Charles Dickens:** First published in the year 1843 in London, this classic Christmas ghost story by Dickens has been widely read and enjoyed by generations of readers and has been included in school textbooks too. The book revolves around the life of an elderly miser called Ebenezer Scrooge, whose only love is money. Even after the death of his best friend and business partner Marley, Scrooge's only worry was how to save on his funeral. A series of supernatural events occurring soon after shake his conscience and Scrooge transforms into a humble and kind person. The spirit of love, generosity and Christmas cheer this book evokes continues to entertain readers even after 177 years of its first publication.

13. **[Mahavira: The Hero of Nonviolence](#)** authored by **Dr Manoj Jain** and illustrated by **Demi**: This picture book has intricate, decorative and colourful illustrations and narrates the life story of Mahavira, the twenty-fourth spiritual teacher of the Jains. Born in an Indian royal family, the young, kind and courageous prince Vardhaman renounced the wealthy way of life just as Gautam Buddha had. The book explores the teachings of Jainism through the three pillars of non-violence, non-absolutism or pluralism and non-possessiveness or detachment. The principles of charity, kindness and love for all living beings is central to this book and the author ends it by asking the readers if we would be the next person to take forward the legacy of Mahavira by embracing non-violence and bringing forth a better and peaceful world.

14. **[A Clear Blue Sky: Stories and Poems on Conflict and Hope](#)**: With a heartwarming forward by Infosys co-founder, N.R. Narayana Murthy, this is a collection of stories and poems that explore ideas of violence and conflict, terrorism and peace, friendships beyond differences of caste and creed and assaults stemming from communal tension. From an English translation of Gulzar's poignant poem to Asha Nehemiah's story of a shocked Mubina who witnesses violence at a church to Paro Anand's story about a violent video game, this collection is worth reading for the many strands of values and ideas it represents.

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