

REFLECTIONS

One transplanted heart: A bridge across faiths

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Abstract

This reflective narrative traces a heart transplant in Kolkata, India, between a 21-year-old Hindu donor and a 27-year-old Muslim recipient, a surgery that was as much a spiritual milestone as a clinical success. Drawing on Indian philosophical and spiritual traditions that revere the heart as more than a biological organ, this account reflects on how such stories of organ transplantation can transcend religious boundaries and inspire social unity. Ultimately, the piece calls for greater awareness around organ donation and emphasises the need to reframe religious discourse around shared human experiences — centring the literal and metaphorical heartbeat.

Keywords: organ transplantation, heart transplantation, communal harmony

Facts

On a fine evening of June 2025 in Kolkata, the “City of Joy”, a WhatsApp notification alerted us about a 21-year-old Hindu youth who had been declared brain dead and was a potential heart donor. Within hours, a 27-year-old Muslim man in end-stage heart failure was selected as the recipient. The surgery that followed, in its cold sterility, bridged centuries of belief, ritual, and identity with the clinical precision of scalpel and sutures. As we implanted a Hindu boy’s heart into a Muslim man’s chest, we transplanted more than valves and ventricles; we transferred a deep, silent code of humanity.

As of this writing, the recipient has recovered well. More importantly, he is rejuvenated in spirit. His religion hasn’t changed, but his faith has. It is not because a Hindu youth saved his life, but because life itself has become sacred again. He now prays with his hand on a heart that once beat to a different rhythm — a rhythm that knew other prayers, other chants, other silences.

Ancient Indian philosophy has always regarded the heart as more than a muscular pump. In Hindu thought, the *Hridaya* [heart] is the seat of consciousness. In Islam, the *qalb* [heart] is the mirror to the divine [1, 2]. This heart transplant became an anatomical and spiritual bridge between these two faiths.

Modern medicine often prides itself on detachment. But this moment offered something far more intimate — a connection between two prayers. From a socio-surgical perspective, this act mattered. In an era when headlines often highlight religious divides [3, 4, 5], organ donation creates a silent and powerful revolution.

This is not mere romanticisation. There was grief. There were hard conversations. There was interdisciplinary coordination. The donor family’s consent was an act of profound moral courage; just as the recipient’s acceptance was an act not only of spiritual surrender, but also of firm belief in applied science.

India needs more hearts, not only in the clinical sense, but also in a metaphorical one. The shortage of hearts is not just technical, it is cultural. While these stories inspire us, they must also provoke policy, stimulate dialogue, and demand a re-imagining of our collective ethics.

Perhaps the next time we speak of religion in any region of India, we might begin not with dogma, but with a heartbeat. For in that rhythmic contraction, there is no name, no caste, no fight, and no creed — only the pulse of a beautiful life.

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