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Communalism in India: An Empirical Investigation

Parathazham, Paul V.

Abstract: India is known as the cradle of world religions. Four world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism were born here, and two others, Christianity and Islam, came to this country already in the first century of their existence. Indian civilisation is a product of the dynamic interplay of different religious traditions, with their diverse creeds, codes, and life-styles. The Indian way of life was traditionally characterised by tolerance and respect for religious faiths other than one's own. The empirical research conducted for this article indicates that religious leaders appear to have become helpless spectators as politicians and criminals hijack religion to promote their vested interests. It is time for the religious leadership in this country to eschew complacency and initiate concerted action to ensure that religions serve the cause of peace, not strife.

Keywords: Communalism, Religious fundamentalism, Religious leaders, Indian religions

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Communalism in India

An Empirical Investigation

Paul V. Parathazham

Dept. of Social Sciences, JDV, Pune - 411 014

India is known as the cradle of world religions. Four world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism were born here, and two others, Christianity and Islam, came to this country already in the first century of their existence. Indian civilisation is a product of the dynamic interplay of different religious traditions, with their diverse creeds, codes, and life-styles. The Indian way of life was traditionally characterised by tolerance and respect for religious faiths other than one's own.

The British rule with its 'divide and rule' policy generated mistrust and antagonism between the Hindus and the Muslims. Communal clashes began to occur in different parts of the country with increasing frequency. Not surprisingly, India's freedom from the colonial rule on August 15, 1947 was marked by unprecedented communal violence and bloodshed. The nation-builders hoped that the constitution of India as a sovereign, secular, democratic republic would usher in a new era of peace and harmony among its religious communities. Their hopes, however, were belied. The first decade after independence was virtually free of communal disturbances, but communalism raised its ugly head again in the sixties. Since then communal conflicts have

been taking place with greater frequency and virulence. What is worse, inter-religious conflicts, which were largely confined to the urban centres in the past, have now begun to spread to rural areas too, involving not only Hindus and Muslims, but also other communities like Christians and Sikhs.

The spectre of communalism stalks the cradle of world religions today. Communalism is the gravest threat to India's unity and integrity as it enters the third millennium. It is against this background that the II B.Th. students of 1996, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, chose Communalism as the topic of their field study¹ and reflection. In the design and execution of this study the students were assisted and guided by the members of the staff of the Faculties of Theology and Philosophy. The study was financed in part by a grant from MISSIO, Achen, Germany.

From time immemorial religions without exception have preached love, unity and fellowship as their central message. Yet, paradoxically, religions appear to be the most potent divisive force in the world today. They teach peace, but create strife. How do religions become agents and instruments of hatred and violence? What are the factors that precipitate and orchestrate

communal conflicts? What kind of measures are likely to be effective in combating the menace of communalism? These are some of the questions this study sought to address.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, communalism was defined as 'a complex of negative perceptions, hostile feelings and aggressive behaviour of the members of one religious community towards another, which is assumed to pose a threat to its interests'.

Our investigation focused, among others, on the following aspects of communalism:

- issues, agents and dynamics of communal conflicts;
- communal stereotypes;
- correlates of religious intolerance;
- perspectives on certain communally sensitive issues.

The study was conducted in October 1996 at the following locations, where violent communal clashes had taken place in the recent past: Bhagalpur, Banaras, Delhi, Bhopal, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Tuticorin, Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam and Kozhikode. The conflicts in Banaras, Bhagalpur, Bhopal, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Kozhikode were between the Hindus and the Muslims, while in Tuticorin and Kollam it was between the Hindus and the Christians. The conflict in Delhi involved the Hindus and the Sikhs, and in Thiruvananthapuram the clash was between the Muslims and the Christians.

Structured interview was the prin-

cipal method of data collection. In addition to direct questions that elicited the respondents' views on how and why the conflict in question erupted and escalated, the interview questionnaire also contained composite indices designed to measure, among other things, religious intolerance, religious fundamentalism, conventional religiosity, and knowledge about other religions.

A pilot study was conducted in the city of Pune to pre-test the questionnaire. Four hundred and seventeen respondents from different communities were interviewed as part of this pilot project.

In order to ensure probability and minimise bias, a stratified, multi-stage cluster sampling strategy was adopted in the selection of respondents. At each venue of the study, the investigators first mapped out the areas that were affected by the conflict in question. Some of these areas were then randomly chosen for investigation. In each designated area, a certain number of households were first selected, and from each of these households an adult member was chosen as the respondent. At each stage, the sampling units were chosen according to the method of random selection. The sample was stratified in order to ensure adequate number of respondents from the two communities involved in the conflict.

One hundred and ten trained investigators were involved in the data collection, which was done in the second half of October 1996. In all, 6507 interviews were completed. On the average an interview lasted an hour.

Profile of the Sample

Region

As already indicated, the sample for this study was drawn from ten locations in India, where communal clashes had occurred in the recent past. Table 1 presents the region-wise distribution of the sample.

Table 1: *Distribution of the Sample by Region*

Region	Count	Percent
Banaras	664	10.2
Bhagalpur	641	9.9
Bhopal	571	8.8
Delhi	746	11.5
Hyderabad	630	9.7
Kollam	753	11.6
Kozhikode	709	10.9
Mumbai	550	8.5
Thiru'puram	473	7.3
Tuticorin	764	11.8
Total	6501	100.0

Missing cases = 6

Religion

Forty-seven percent of the respondents were Hindus, thirty percent Muslims, seventeen percent Christians and six percent Sikhs. Six of the ten conflicts we investigated were between Hindus and Muslims. Of the remaining four, two were between Christians and Hindus, and one each between Muslims and Christians, and Sikhs and Hindus. The distribution of the sample by the communities involved in the conflict is given in Table 2.

Table 2: *Distribution of Sample by Communities in Conflict*

Communities	Count	Percent
Hindu-Muslim	3752	57.7
Hindu-Christian	1517	23.3
Hindu-Sikh	756	11.6
Muslim-Christian	473	7.3
Total	6498	99.9

Missing Cases = 9

Sex, Age, Marital Status

Sixty-two percent of the respondents were male, and thirty-eight percent female. Thirty-four percent were between 16 to 30 years of age, forty-five percent between 31 to 50 years and twenty percent above 50 years. The median age was 38 years. Seventy-four percent were married, twenty-two percent single and four percent widowed or divorced.

Education and Economic Status

The distribution of respondents by education level is given in Table 3 below. Compared to the national average, the education level of our respondents is quite high. While only thirteen percent had no schooling, nearly a third of the sample had college education.

Table 3: *Education Level*

	Count	Percent
No schooling	828	12.8
Primary school	841	13.0
Middle school	932	14.5
Secondary	1054	16.4
Higher secondary	803	12.5
Graduation	1317	20.4
Post-graduation	669	10.4
Total	6444	100.0

Missing cases = 63

In terms of economic status, almost half (47%) of the respondents were from the lower middle class. About a third belonged to the upper middle or upper class; the rest came from the lower class.

Conventional Religious Practices

Table 4 gives a picture of the religious practices of the four communities in our sample. The Muslims are clearly different from the others in this respect. They are more likely to frequent places of worship, pray privately, read/recite from the Scriptures, and give religious instruction to their children. The Sikhs and the Christians are quite alike in the observance of conventional religious practices. Of the four groups, the Hindus are least likely to engage in these religious practices on a regular basis. It

should be borne in mind that the frequency of religious practices varies according to the prescriptions specific to each community; therefore, inter-community comparisons on this basis can be misleading. Furthermore, conformity to conventional religious practices is not necessarily a measure of a person's religiousness or spirituality.

Personal Loss

A large number of the respondents had personally suffered as a result of the conflict. One out of every ten reported that one or more of their family members were killed in the riots. One fifth of them said that they or their family members suffered physical injury; and nearly one third of them had their property destroyed in the conflict.

Table 4: Frequency of Conventional Religious Practices by Religion
(Percent responding 'regularly')

	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh
Go to place of worship	20.5	51.2	34.7	37.7
Pray privately	23.8	48.4	29.5	30.8
Read/recite from Scripture	8.3	33.8	15.3	13.1
Instruct the young in religion	14.2	38.9	20.3	14.8

Dynamics of Communal Conflicts

Deliberately Instigated

The overwhelming majority of the respondents (86%) stated that before the conflict erupted the relationship between the two communities was harmonious. And the majority was of the view that the conflict did not break out spontaneously or accidentally. Fifty-six percent felt that the conflict was pre-planned and deliberately orchestrated

by certain vested interests. Twenty-three percent did not share this perception, and the rest were unsure. The Muslims, in general, are more likely to believe that communal conflicts are instigated deliberately. In Delhi, almost all the Sikh respondents (91%) felt that the attack against them, in the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, was a pre-planned affair.

The majority of the respondents held religious communities and/or political parties responsible for initiating the conflict. Sixty-six percent thought that religious communities were involved in the instigation of violence. While forty-six percent singled out one religious community, usually the out-group, twenty percent felt that both the communities were responsible for precipitating the conflict.

Sixty-two percent of the respondents blamed the political parties for instigating the violence. Both the major national political parties, the Indian National Congress (Congress I) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), are seen to be involved in fomenting communal conflicts. While the Muslims and the Christians are far more likely to point an accusing finger at the BJP, the Hindus say that the Congress (I) is equally guilty of exploiting communal passions. Understandably, the Sikhs held the Congress (I) squarely responsible for the pogrom in Delhi in the aftermath of the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

Immediate Provocation

Political and/or religious issues are cited by the majority of the respondents as the immediate provocation for the conflict. Sixty-three percent indicated that the first incident that provoked the riot was political in nature and fifty-three percent felt that the precipitating factor was related to religious sentiments. Less than a third of the respondents suggested that economic issues had a role in triggering the conflict. Other factors like caste rivalry and government policies were mentioned mar-

ginally. Only in Tuticorin the caste issue was a dominant factor. Here, two castes, the Nadars and the Paravas, have an ongoing hostile relationship with each other.

Aggressors and Victims

It is not surprising that the respondents generally looked upon their own community as the victim rather than the aggressor in the conflict. An exception to this pattern is the Hindu-Sikh conflict in Delhi where almost all the respondents, Hindus as well as Sikhs, felt that the Sikhs were the victims. In general, the minority communities are more likely to see themselves as victims than the majority community. In the Hindu-Muslim conflicts, for example, while fifty-six percent of the Muslims felt that their community was on the receiving end, only thirty-six percent of the Hindus indicated that their community suffered more in the conflict.

Motives for Inciting Conflict

As indicated above, the majority of the respondents were of the opinion that communal conflicts are deliberately instigated by vested interests. What are the factors that motivate them to incite communal violence? Table 5 presents the responses of the four groups to this question.

Nearly two-thirds of the sample identified party-politics as the motive behind communal violence. Compared to the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims are somewhat more likely to suspect political motives behind communal conflicts. However, the Christians in our sample feel differently. They see retaliation as the main motive. Nearly

Table 5: Motives Behind Violence by Religion (%)

Motives	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh	All
Party Politics	64.5	71.3	45.2	75.1	64.4
Retaliation	50.8	44.9	71.9	65.3	53.3
Economic Gain	38.1	42.6	40.8	54.9	41.2
Subjugation	29.7	40.8	43.1	47.3	36.6
Humiliation	26.4	29.3	41.6	49.3	31.4

two-thirds of the Sikhs, too, cite this as a reason. A substantial number of the respondents view communal conflicts also as a clash of economic interests. Other motives like subjugation and humiliation of the other community were indicated as possible motives by about a third of the respondents. As might be expected, the minority communities are more likely to look upon communal conflicts as attempts to subjugate them.

Response to Violence

Nearly eighty percent of the respondents from the Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities acknowledged that the members of their community retaliated violently when they were attacked. However, only twenty-seven percent justified this 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' attitude. Nearly half of the respondents (47%) disapproved of their community's violent reaction, while another twenty-seven percent were non-committal on the issue. The Sikhs are an exception to this pattern. The vast majority felt that their community did not react to the violence committed against them. And a third of them said that their community should have taken a more aggressive stance.

It is comforting to know that the majority in all the four communities do

not favour violent retaliation even when their community is under attack. What is disconcerting is that it is the will of a minority, who believe in repaying in same coin, that often seems to prevail.

Escalation of Conflict

Table 6 below gives the perceptions of our respondents about the agencies involved in the escalation of communal violence.

Table 6: Agents Escalating Violence (%)

Political Leaders	72.0
Police	60.2
Criminals	55.4
Religious Leaders	37.0
Business/Landlords	22.7
Trade Unions	8.2

Once again the politician emerges as the villain of the piece in the sordid drama of communal violence and destruction. As Table 6 indicates, nearly three-fourths of our respondents have little doubt that the political leaders play a sinister role in the escalation of communal violence. Paradoxically, the police, the custodians of law and order are next in line, with sixty percent of the respondents pointing the finger at

them for the escalation of communal violence. The criminals are not far behind. The sad spectacle of the police, the guardians of the public, joining hands with criminals to perpetrate violence on innocent citizens is symptomatic of the contradictions that beset our society today. Taken together, these findings suggest that the majority of our respondents suspect that a *politician-police-criminal nexus* is behind the proliferation of communal conflicts in India.

Significantly, the minorities have virtually lost trust in the integrity of the police force. Seventy percent of the Muslims, sixty-two percent of the Christians and ninety percent of the Sikhs hold the police guilty of escalating communal strife. In contrast, only forty-nine percent of the Hindus are critical of the role of the police in communal conflicts

Relatively fewer respondents felt that the religious leaders were themselves involved in the escalation of violence.

Table 7 highlights some of the other factors that contribute to the escalation of conflict. Most often communal conflicts are exacerbated by false rumours about sacrileges of sacred places and atrocities committed against the members of one's community. About half of the respondents suggested that meetings, processions and *Morchas* organised during the conflict, and inflammatory slogans raised in them serve to aggravate the conflict.

A substantial number of the respondents were of the opinion that the newspaper reports also contributed to

the escalation of violence. In fact, when asked if the newspaper reports of the conflict were objective, two-thirds of the respondents replied in the negative.

Table 7: Factors contributing to Escalation of Violence (%)

False Rumours	69.3
Meetings	53.9
Inflammatory Slogans	53.5
Processions and <i>Morchas</i>	49.7
Biased Reports in the Print Media	40.5
Posters and Handbills	25.3

Present Situation

At the time of this study, the situation was more or less peaceful at all the field locations. In Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram and Tuticorin the overwhelming majority of the respondents gave credit to the local religious leaders for taking the initiative to restore peace, whereas in Bhagalpur, Delhi and Mumbai the majority view was that the conflict was resolved by the intervention of government agencies. The initiatives of the voluntary organisations and government agencies were seen to be equally instrumental in bringing about peace in Banaras, Bhopal and Hyderabad. Only in Kozhikode, political leaders were reported to have played a role in resolving the conflict.

As Table 8 reveals, the vast majority of the respondents from Banaras, Bhagalpur, Hyderabad, and Kollam characterise the present relationship between the two communities as 'harmonious'. Opinion is divided in Bhopal,

Mumbai, Delhi and Tuticorin, with about half of the respondents indicating that the relationship between the two communities continues to be disturbed or tense. In Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode the situation is still volatile according to the vast majority.

Table 8: Perception of the Present Situation by Place (%)

Place of Conflict	Present Situation	
	Harm- nious	Tense/ Disturbed
Banaras	68.8	31.2
Bhagalpur	81.0	19.0
Bhopal	56.4	43.6
Delhi	47.2	52.8
Hyderabad	76.5	23.5
Kollam	75.3	24.7
Kozhikode	27.8	72.8
Mumbai	56.5	43.5
Thiru'puram	5.7	94.3
Tuticorin	42.1	57.9

A large number of respondents from Banaras (43%), Bhopal (42%), Hyderabad (43%), Kozhikode (59%), Thiruvananthapuram (42%), and Tuticorin (45%) expressed the fear that a fresh conflict may break out at any time. In fact, there was already recurrence of violence in Kozhikode.

Thus, although overt conflict has ended in these places, the peace that exists appears to be very fragile. The majority of our respondents were of the view that impartial law enforcement and the intervention of religious leaders are most likely to help establish a more enduring peace.

Communal Stereotypes

Stereotyping is an important aspect of communal consciousness. Much scholarly work has been done on how stereotypes distort perception and influence behaviour. Stereotypes are a set of characteristics, positive or negative, which are assumed, without evidence, to fit an individual or a group. Such simplistic and unwarranted generalisations are an important source of prejudice. Gordon Allport has defined prejudice as "a feeling, favourable or unfavourable towards a person or thing, prior to or not based on actual experience."² Communal stereotypes undoubtedly play a key role in promoting and perpetuating antagonistic attitudes and behaviour between communities.

Our study attempted to ascertain the extent to which communal stereotypes have been internalised by the four communities under discussion. Table 9 below reveals the stereotypes the Hindus have about the Muslims, and Table 10 portrays the picture the Muslims have about the Hindus. Space does not permit us to discuss the stereotypes of the other communities here.

The data in Table 9 clearly reveal strong negative prejudice among the Hindus towards the Muslim community in India. That a significant majority of the Hindus in India do not hesitate to affirm, without adequate evidence, that the Muslims in general are fanatic, violent, and oppressors of women is certainly disconcerting. It is instructive to note that only one-fourth or less of the Hindu respondents expressed disagreement with these unwarranted generalisations about their Muslim brethren.

Table 9: Hindu Stereotypes About Muslims (%)

The Muslims:	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
are not loyal to India	41.4	27.5	31.1
are prone to violence	61.1	25.2	13.7
are fanatic	72.5	14.0	13.5
engage in antisocial activities like smuggling	41.8	22.4	35.8
oppress their women	60.4	15.8	23.8

Table 10 shows that a sizeable number in the Muslim community have internalised negative stereotypes about the Hindus. However, a comparison of the data in the two tables reveals that the Hindus have greater prejudice against the Muslims than vice versa.

Education was generally found to be inversely correlated to negative stereotyping of outgroups. This relationship, however, was not uniform in the two groups. The impact of education on prejudice was much stronger among the Muslims than among the Hindus.

Table 10: Muslim Stereotypes About Hindus (%)

The Hindus:	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
are not trustworthy	32.2	47.4	20.5
have no respect for the Muslim way of life	42.8	38.2	19.0
are against the progress of Minorities	46.3	34.5	19.2
are prone to violence	31.7	39.8	28.5

Correlates of Religious Intolerance

An index of religious intolerance was constructed for each of the four religious groups by aggregating their responses to a number of positive and negative statements about the community with which they were in conflict. Agreements with negative statements or disagreements with positive ones were taken as indications of religious intolerance.

Education

As might be expected, education appeared to be one of the most consistent predictors of attitudes to religious

outgroups. The lesser-educated respondents in all the groups displayed significantly higher levels of intolerance towards the members of the other religious community.

Fundamentalism

Conventional wisdom has it that fundamentalism and religious intolerance go hand in hand, i.e., the greater the fundamentalism, the stronger the prejudice against other religious communities. In order to test this hypothesis, a composite measure of fundamentalism was constructed using the items in Table 11.

Table 11: Fundamentalism by Religion (Percent Agreeing)

	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh
My religion is the only true religion	21.9	44.3	45.4	25.1
What is written in the Holy Book(s) is literally true	51.4	86.6	65.6	66.7
Never question the teachings of religious leaders	26.1	36.1	34.9	34.4
Inter-religious marriages should be encouraged	60.2	40.0	57.3	51.7
Children should be taught prayers of all religions	73.3	71.3	69.0	46.1

One clear indication of religious fundamentalism is the insistence that one's religion alone is true. Against this criterion the Hindus and the Sikhs are seen as least fundamentalist and most open to the truth of other religions. As we may expect, the Christians and Muslims are both more fundamentalist in this respect.

A fundamentalist attitude is also seen in the unquestioning acceptance of what one's religious leaders teach. Here too only one fourth of the Hindus agree that this is how it should be, whereas more than a third of the Muslims, Christians and Sikhs subscribe to this notion.

A literal interpretation of the Sacred Books is another sign of a fundamentalist position. An overwhelming eighty-seven percent of the Muslims believe in the literal interpretation of their Holy Book. While two thirds of the Christians and Sikhs endorse this notion, only half of the Hindus subscribe to it.

Fundamentalists generally tend to be exclusive in their relationships. They are unlikely to approve of inter-religious

marriages. On this criterion, the Muslims are the most fundamentalist, and the Hindus the least. The Christians and the Sikhs occupy the middle position.

On a more positive note, all the communities favour the teaching of prayers of other religions to their children in schools. Strangely, the Sikhs score lowest here, with less than half of them in favour of it.

We found a strong association between religious fundamentalism and intolerance of outgroups. The higher the level of fundamentalism, the greater the degree of religious intolerance. It should be noted that the index of fundamentalism was used only for within-community comparisons and not for between-community comparisons. That is to say, the more fundamentalist Hindus were compared with the less fundamentalist Hindus, the more fundamentalist Muslims with the less fundamentalist Muslims, and so on, in order to see the effect of fundamentalism on religious intolerance.

The better-educated persons in all the communities were less fundamen-

talist than the less educated ones. However, the relationship between fundamentalism and religious intolerance persisted even after controlling for the effects of education.

Knowledge about Other Religions

Does knowledge about the beliefs and practices of another religion make one more tolerant towards the members of that religion? In order to investigate this, questions were framed to discover how well informed the different communities are about the religious teachings and practices of the community with which they were in conflict. It was reassuring to see that the majority of our respondents were knowledgeable about the gods, feasts, holy books and holy places of the other religious communities. Information about the teachings of the other religions, however, was relatively low.

The data indicate that the respondents who were better informed about other religions were significantly more respectful and tolerant towards other religious groups.

Conventional Religiosity

Another question we studied is the relationship between conventional religiosity and communalism. Are those who faithfully conform to the practices of their religion more or less tolerant of other religious communities? In order to investigate this, a composite index of conventional religiosity was constructed by aggregating the responses with regard to the frequency of worship, private prayer, reading or recitation from the Scriptures and religious in-

struction of the young. Since the type and frequency of conventional religious practices vary according to the norms of particular religions, this index was used only for within-group comparisons, that is, to compare less religious Muslims with more religious Muslims, less religious Hindus with more religious Hindus, and so on.

Our analysis showed that conventional religiosity, as measured by conformity to conventional religious practices, was not related in any manner to a person's level of religious tolerance. In other words, the faithfulness to one's religious practices does not make one more or less tolerant of other religious communities.

Perspectives on Sensitive Issues

Babri-Masjid or Ram Mandir?

The Babri-Masjid at Ayodhya, the birth-place of Ram, was for long a disputed structure. The Hindus claimed that this Masjid was built over a Ram temple that was destroyed by the Muslim invaders. The BJP had been spearheading a movement to pull down the Masjid and to rebuild the Ram temple in its place. To some the Babri-Masjid stood as a symbol of India's commitment to secularism, to others it was an enduring affront to the majority Hindu community. The ruling Congress party pledged to protect it, the leading opposition party, BJP, promised to demolish it.

On December 6, 1992, a frenzied mob demolished the Masjid, triggering Hindu-Muslim conflicts in several parts of the country. In an address to the nation on that fateful night the Congress Prime Minister pledged to rebuild the

**Table 12: Perspectives on Ayodhya Dispute by Religion
(Percent Agreeing)**

	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs
Build a Ram Temple at the site of the Masjid	36.9	9.1	14.0	8.8
Rebuild the Masjid at the very same site	NA	53.4	38.7	12.8

NA= Question was not asked

Masjid in the same place. Table 12 above presents the perspectives of the different communities on this sensitive issue.

It is often claimed that the vast majority of the Hindus in this country would love to see a Ram Mandir built at the site of the destroyed Babri-Masjid. Not so, says our data. Just over a third of our Hindu respondents share this view, with nearly half (47%) rejecting it. As might be expected, very few Muslims are in favour building the temple at the site of the Masjid. Over three-fourths (76.2%) are opposed to the idea. Here the Christians support the Muslim position. Two-thirds of them (66.6%) oppose the building of the temple, and a bare fourteen percent support it. One-fifth of the Christians (19.6%), however, preferred to stay clear of the controversy.

Should the Babri Masjid be rebuilt on the very same site, as the then Prime Minister promised in his broadcast to the nation on the night of the demolition? As the Table indicates, more than half of the Muslims are in favour of restoring the Masjid at the same site. What is surprising is that as many as thirty-six percent of the Muslims themselves are against the idea, while ten percent

declined to take a stand. Christians are more or less evenly divided on this issue, with thirty-nine percent in favour and forty percent against. A substantial twenty-one percent of the Christians had no firm opinion on the issue. The vast majority of the Sikhs are opposed to both the Temple and the Masjid.

Communal Political Parties

India is a secular democracy. The constitution of the country prohibits the canvassing of votes on the basis of caste, creed or race. Yet there have been political parties who have a clear communalist bias like the Muslim League and the BJP. Should these parties be banned? The responses of the different communities to this question are given in Table 13 below.

As the Table indicates, the vast majority of the Muslims, Christians and Sikhs are in favour of banishing the BJP from India's political landscape. As for the Muslim League, less than a half of the Hindus would support such a ban. One-fifth of them were against it, while a third remained unsure. The Christians are as opposed to the Muslim League as they are to BJP.

Table 13: Perspectives on Communal Parties by Religion
(Percent Agreeing)

	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh
Bharatiya Janata Party should be banned	NA	60.7	59.3	77.1
Muslim League should be banned	46.9	NA	64.3	NA

NA = Question was not asked

Status of Women

Another communally sensitive issue is the question of a uniform civil code for India. Traditionally, different religious communities have been following their own code as dictated by their religion in matters related to marriage, succession, inheritance, etc. It has been alleged that these codes discriminate against women and therefore they should be replaced by a uniform civil code under which all men and women of India will be treated equally, irrespective of their religion. The minorities, especially the Muslims, have by and large opposed the introduction of such a uniform civil code. Thus the question

of the status of women has some bearing on the relationship between communities in India. We sought the opinions of our respondents on this question. Table 14 presents the views of our respondents on the status of women in religion.

As the Table reveals the majority in all the four communities are in favour of granting equal status to women in religion. The Sikhs are most emphatic in supporting the cause of women, with the Hindus not far behind. A third of the Muslims and the Christians, however, are opposed to granting equal status to women in religion.

Table 14: Women Should be Given Equal Status in Religion (%)

	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh
Favour	75.3	64.7	59.1	81.3
Oppose	18.5	29.6	30.4	9.3
Not Sure	6.2	5.7	10.5	9.3

Conclusion: Policy Implications

In the light of the findings discussed above, I would now like to suggest some policy initiatives that are likely to help combat the menace of communalism.

- *Education for Tolerance*

Education seems to be the best antidote for the communal virus that has infected our country. The data have consistently shown that the better educated in all the communities have greater tol-

erance towards other religious communities. Education was also found to be inversely correlated to fundamentalism, a strong predictor of communalism.

- *De-communalisation of Politics*

Appealing directly or indirectly to communal loyalties and interests for electoral gains seems to be the single most important factor responsible for the rising tide of communal clashes in our country. Electoral reforms that would effectively disallow all forms of political mobilisation on communal basis are imperative to defeat the forces of communalism.

- *Know Thy Neighbours' Religion*

As we have seen, those who are more familiar with the teachings and practices of other religions have greater tolerance of and respect for those religions. If the teachings and practices of all the religions of India are made a necessary component of the syllabus in our schools and colleges, there will no doubt be greater peace and harmony among the religious communities in our country.

- *Professionalisation of the Police*

Our respondents have made it amply clear that the police often contribute to the escalation of communal conflicts instead of combating

them. And the majority was of the opinion that effective law enforcement is the key to maintaining communal harmony in India. A more professional police force, which is capable of rising above partisan considerations and enforcing law and order efficiently and dispassionately, is an urgent need for a united India.

- *Affirmative Action by Religious Leadership*

Although religions preach love, compassion and fellowship, religious loyalties are easily exploited by unscrupulous elements to spread the seeds of mistrust, hostility and hatred among communities. As we have seen, those who practice their religion faithfully do not seem to be any different from those who do not, in their attitudes and behaviour towards other religious communities. This clearly indicates that traditional religiosity has failed to inculcate the values of universal brotherhood and respect for all. Religious leaders appear to have become helpless spectators as politicians and criminals hijack religion to promote their vested interests. It is time for the religious leadership in this country to eschew complacency and initiate concerted action to ensure that religions serve the cause of peace, not strife.

Notes

1. Five years ago, the Faculty of Theology of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth introduced the field study programme as part of the theological curriculum in an innovative attempt to make theological studies more experience-based and reality-centered.
2. G.W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, New York: Doubleday, 1958, p. 413.