

Religion, violence and peace in India:

To what extent is communal violence in India motivated by religious belief and to what extent does religion inspire efforts to build peace?

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1. Introduction

In today's world, religion and violence are often seen as phenomena that go hand in hand. Many religions, especially Islam, are labelled as inherently violent and Western, secularised countries often condemn the close relationship between religion and politics in many non-Western countries as a breeding ground for violent extremism. A great deal of research has been done into the role of religion in extremist violence, war and rioting, which will be discussed further in this essay. Less attention, however, has been paid to the role of religion in bringing an end to violence and in promoting reconciliation. In my view, it is important to examine both together in order to fully understand the ambivalent nature of religion. Religion has been described as a double-edged sword which can promote and has promoted both violence and peace. In this paper I will examine the link between religion and violence and religion and peacebuilding, first laying out the key theories in these areas and then focusing more specifically on religious violence in India, often referred to as 'communal violence', a term which I will explain further below. I will discuss the role of religion in communal violence and the research that has already been done into its causes, whether these be related to religion or not. I will then focus on the history of communal violence in Hyderabad, India to see whether the general theories apply in this case. I will also examine the role of religion in peacebuilding in India through the eyes of the Henry Martyn Institute: International Centre for Research, Interfaith Relations and Reconciliation (HMI), a Christian ecumenical organisation based in Hyderabad whose goal is to promote interfaith dialogue and reconciliation. The aim of my research will be to answer the question: to what extent is communal violence in India motivated by religious belief and to what extent does and can religion inspire efforts to build peace? This will be split into the questions: On a worldwide level, to what extent does and can religion inspire violence or peacebuilding?; To what extent is religious belief a motivation for Hindu-Muslim communal violence in India?; How do the theories about the causes of communal violence in India apply to the communal riots in Hyderabad?; What role can religion play in building peace and promoting interreligious reconciliation in India?; What role do Christianity and other religions play in the work of HMI and are the contributions of religion valuable in their peacebuilding work?

I will use a combination of different research methods as the various sections of my paper call for different approaches. To discover current theories and past research on the relationship between religion and violence and religion and peacebuilding, both in general and specifically in India, I will

use textual research. An examination of literature from a range of disciplines, including theology, psychology, anthropology, political science and history is essential when discussing religion as it has many facets and manifests itself in all realms of life on individual, group and societal levels. It is also important to use a variety of literature as the explanations for religious violence and religious peacebuilding differ from one discipline to another and an examination of all of these provides a more nuanced and, most likely, a more accurate picture. When focusing on communal violence in Hyderabad, I have used a combination of the above-named textual research and informal discussions undertaken with Mr. Mohammed Turab, Executive Secretary of COVA (Confederation of Voluntary Associations), an NGO working towards peace in Hyderabad, and with some of the tailoring students at one of HMI's community development projects in the Old City of Hyderabad. These discussions were necessary to give an idea of the actual experience of violence on the ground and the opinions of those experiencing and working with violence. Academic literature can often give a distorted view when focusing only on broad explanations and not on individual experiences which is another reason why these discussions were necessary and also why the work of Sudhir Kakar¹, a psychologist who interviewed individuals involved in the violence, is invaluable. Given more time, I would have preferred to have undertaken interviews and discussions with participants at more of HMI's projects and also some of the projects of COVA, but what I have done will at least serve to give some idea of the benefits of further research in this area. In discussing the role of religion in motivating HMI's peacebuilding efforts, I will refer to literature published by HMI and to personal interviews undertaken with various members of staff. The literature will give an insight into the history of the organisation and their development from a focus on evangelism to being primarily devoted to interfaith dialogue and reconciliation. The literature highlights the official position of HMI while the interviews will show how the principles are applied in practice, how individuals experience the role of religion in HMI's work and what their own religious or non-religious motivations are for working there.

Before I continue, it would be useful at this point to define my understanding of certain terms which I will proceed to use throughout this paper, namely 'religion', 'violence' and 'communal violence'. 'Religion' is difficult to define and has many facets, as already explained above. In this paper, therefore, where I will be using research by scholars from many different disciplines, who may include various different elements within the concept of religion, I will limit myself to a broad definition to which they would all be able to agree. There is no room here to discuss their different

1 Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996.

understandings of religion, but they would all be able to agree that religion is a term which denotes a belief in and experience of the transcendent. Those adhering to this belief may or may not label themselves as religious, but for the purposes of this paper, I will do so. I will be referring here to a collective belief or experience rather than something only experienced by one individual, but I recognise that every individual experiences their religion differently, hence different reactions whether peaceful or violent to the transcendent, and that some scholars may wish to include individual belief under the heading of religion. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will focus my attention on the collective belief in and experience of the transcendent. 'Violence' has been defined in many different ways and the meaning of the term has been extended to include non-physical forms of violence, including structural and symbolic violence. For the purposes of my paper, however, I will focus only on the physical form of violence, between human beings, and with the intention to cause harm. 'Communal violence' is a term commonly used to describe physical violence between different religious groups in India which is why I will use it in the sections specifically devoted to religious violence in India and not when discussing religious violence elsewhere. I will be focusing on communal violence between Hindus and Muslims as this is where most of the research has been done and is also the most common form of interreligious violence in India.

2. Religion, peace and conflict

A great deal of research has been done into the role religion plays in violence and many scholars consider whether religion is in itself inherently violent. Other scholars, while not downplaying the role religion can and does play in motivating violence, focus on the way religion motivates peacebuilding efforts and how religious ideologies and religious leaders can play an important role in resolving violent conflicts. In this section I will discuss the current stage of research into what extent religion, on a worldwide level, promotes and can promote violence or peace.

In recent years, since the world wars according to Appleby, or since 1965 or the early 1980s according to two different data sets analysed by Fox, the involvement religion has in violence has increased². Some may argue that this reflects the inherent violent nature of religion. Hall argues,

2 R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000, 4 and Jonathan Fox, 'The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945-2001', *Journal of Peace Research*, 41 (2004), 715-731, 715-716.

however, that there is no explicit relationship between religion and violence, only a relationship which appears in certain contexts and under certain circumstances³. Religious violence is mainly a result of the way religion is used as a vehicle for other identity markers, such as ethnicity, and ideologies, such as nationalism and anti-colonialism, and as a sacralising force for violent acts⁴. Fox studied the rise of religious nationalism and showed that religion's involvement with violence has increased, either since 1965 or the early 1980's, depending on which set of data analysed, but that religion only exacerbates separatist, nationalist violence and plays no role on its own⁵. Appleby agrees that religion can be used to harden identity and demarcate the 'in group' and the 'out group', however differentiates between "professed belief" and "operative belief", or "dogma" and "ideology" in order to explain why religious violence can still be labelled as religious. Religion in practice is much more fluid than its central beliefs and traditions and religious leaders or ordinary individuals may come up with new interpretations of the central beliefs, traditions and texts. Individuals may come up with interpretations that are essentially uninformed by religious traditions and texts due to their own ignorance of these⁶. Even when uninformed about one's own religion, religious feeling may still motivate an act of violence:

"To interpret acts of violence and terrorism committed in the name of religion as necessarily motivated by other concerns and lacking in religious qualities is therefore an error. [...T]o define all acts of "sacred violence" as ipso facto irreligious is to misunderstand religion and to underestimate its ability to underwrite deadly conflict *on its own terms*."⁷

Here we move on, then, to motivations for religious violence. Why is it that a surge in religious violence has taken place in recent years? Many scholars agree that religious violence is a reaction to modernisation and secularisation. Religious groups and individuals feel that their traditional ways of life and values are under threat and increased religiosity and sometimes violence are the ways they feel that they can combat this⁸. Religious violence is often a reaction to the perceived failures of secularism, especially in previously colonised states where secularism is associated with

3 John R. Hall, 'Religion and Violence: Social Processes in Comparative Perspective', in: Michele Dillon (ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, (Cambridge University Press), Cambridge 2003, 359-384, 365.

4 Ibid 364, 379.

5 Jonathan Fox, 'The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict', 727-728.

6 R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 32, 60, 69

7 Ibid 30, emphasis is his own.

8 Ibid 58 and Jonathan Fox, 'The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict', 718.

the past coloniser⁹. Those carrying out religious violence are often looking to correct past wrongs and create a new, more just world order, often motivated by an apocalyptic ideology. Inherent in this is the idea that we are living in exceptional times, where exceptional measures must be taken to preserve religious truths or a religious community which might not be acceptable under normal circumstances. This makes violence permissible and even desirable even when the religion of those involved may not normally promote violence¹⁰. Here we can see that Galtung's theory of pathological cosmologies applies not only to nations and civilisations, but also to smaller religious groups. Through violence, religious groups seek to undo the perceived traumas of the past, return to a mythical golden age and fulfil their destiny as a chosen people¹¹.

If, as it seems, the modern world is a breeding ground for religious violence, what role can religion play in building peace? Appleby, as discussed already, shows how religion can motivate violence¹². However, he also points out the ways that religion can be and has been instrumental in building peace and as a motivation for pacifism or nonviolent resistance. While globalisation and advances in technology, especially related to travel and communication, have caused increased contact and sometimes competition between different religious groups, many see the increased contact and possibilities for communication between religions as an opportunity for peacebuilding. Worldwide religious organisations, such as the Catholic Relief Services, reflect the changing attitudes of many Christian denominations as a result of the increased contact between religions. The focus for many has shifted from proselytisation to providing humanitarian aid and to promoting interreligious dialogue and peace. Even outside of Christianity, various religions are reacting to the increased religious violence in the world and, motivated by their religious belief, trying to help lessen this. Engaged Buddhism encourages Buddhists, usually focused on detaching themselves from the world, to try to make the world a better place through, among other things, peacebuilding¹³. An apocalyptic ideology and the goal of creating a more just world order can motivate violence, as discussed above, but can also be a motivation to promote peace. Other religious values such as selflessness, discipline, compassion, empathy and forgiveness can motivate religious individuals

9 Mark Juergensmeyer, 'The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism', *Journal of International Affairs*, 50 (1996), 1-20, 9.

10 R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 82, 88; Mark Juergensmeyer, 'The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism', 15-17; and Israella, E. Silberman, Tory Higgins and Carol S. Dweck, 'Religion and World Change: Violence and Terrorism versus Peace', *Journal of Social Issues* 61 (2005), 761-784, 777.

11 Johan Galtung, 'Is There a Therapy for Pathological Cosmologies?', in: Jennifer E. Turpin (ed.), *The Web of Violence, From Interpersonal to Global* (University of Illinois), Urbana/Chicago 1997, 188-205, 188, 190.

12 See above.

13 R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 5-6, 135-136.

and organisations to work towards peace¹⁴. Religion is also, according to some, especially suited to peacebuilding. Appleby notes that when a society is divided along religious or ethnic lines, religion's binding force can, instead of being used to create an 'in group' and 'out group', be used to unite society. Both Appleby and Bercovitch note that the very adaptability of religious traditions can be used by religious leaders positively to choose myths and symbols and create interpretations which encourage reconciliation¹⁵. Religious leaders working towards peace have the unique advantage that they not only have this store of interpretations, myths and symbols at their disposal, but also a network of financial and organisational support from networks of religious organisations. Religious peacebuilders are often trusted members of the local community with vested interests in the resolution of a conflict and the commitment to work on it long term, ensuring lasting peace. Their position as religious leaders gives them moral legitimacy and moral leverage to bring about an agreement between parties involved in a conflict¹⁶. Bercovitch points out that religious peacebuilding is more effective when religion still plays an important role in that society, when the disputants respect the religious authority of the peacebuilders and when religion plays some part in the conflict¹⁷. Religion, therefore, has the potential to contribute towards peace and is the motivation for many to work towards it, but its widespread effectiveness is sometimes in question. This issue is an important one when discussing religion, violence and peacebuilding. The role and effectiveness of religion in peacebuilding efforts will be discussed further throughout this paper, when focusing on India and later on the Henry Martyn Institute. I will continue to ask throughout this paper whether religion is a greater force in promoting violence or peace and under what circumstances religion can play a useful role in peacebuilding.

3. Communal violence in India

Communal violence in India is a much discussed issue and the debated questions are similar to those when discussing religious violence in general. Scholars debate on its origins, did it start

14 Israel, E. Silberman, Tory Higgins and Carol S. Dweck, 'Religion and World Change', 778.

15 R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 16, 33 and Jacob Bercovitch and S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, 'Religion and Mediation: The Role of Faith-Based Actors in International Conflict Resolution', *International Negotiation* 14 (2009), 175-204, 177.

16 Jacob Bercovitch and S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, 'Religion and Mediation', 187-188 and R. Scott Appleby and David Little, 'A Moment of Opportunity? The Promise of Religious Peacebuilding in an Era of Religious and Ethnic Conflict', in: Coward, Harold and Gordon S. Smith (eds.), *Religion and Peacebuilding* (State University of New York Press) Albany, NY, 2004, 1-23, 3.

17 Jacob Bercovitch and S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, 'Religion and Mediation', 194-196.

before colonialism or during and because of colonialism; on its cause, do religious ideologies cause the violence or is religion just a tool in the hands of those who seek to gain through the violence; and on ways to prevent violence continuing. When discussing communal violence in this chapter, I will focus on Hindu-Muslim riots rather than any other form of communal violence. My motivations for this are explained in the introduction.

It is difficult to find agreement amongst scholars when it comes to the origins of communal violence. The dominant thought until recently had been that the British had been responsible for the origins of communalism during their colonial rule. However, Hinnells and King refute the oft-cited claim that Hinduism has a non-violent nature and a history of non-violence and refer to a study by Christopher Bayly which shows that communal violence in India took place long before the arrival of the British¹⁸. It is true, however, that interreligious violence has only recently begun to be labelled as 'communal' and that violence between Hindus and Muslims increased greatly during the time of colonialism and has increased even further since partition. Engineer defines communal violence as religious violence that is not spontaneous, but planned. He claims that communal violence originated after the 1857 Indian mutiny against the British¹⁹. If we use his definition of communal violence as planned religious violence, not religious violence per se, then he may be correct in finding its origins during British rule. Further research would make this argument more conclusive. If, however, we define communal violence as violence between religions in any form, it seems sensible to conclude that this also took place before colonialism, but that the divisions between religions that lead to violence were exacerbated by colonialism. Bhargava shows this clearly when discussing the role of the British in creating conditions leading to the emergence of Hindu nationalism, which often expresses itself violently and continues to play a role in communal riots. The British instituted separate laws, electorates and census categories, forcing Indians to categorise their individual religious identities more clearly than they had done before. The divisions already caused by this categorisation were further reinforced by introducing democracy where Hindus and Muslims would chose a party that represented their interests as a Hindu or a Muslim best²⁰. These factors not only explain the attitude of Hindu nationalists towards the Hindu identity, but also the enhanced divisions between Hindus and Muslims affecting the attitudes and behaviour

18 John R. Hinnells and Richard King, 'Introduction', in: John R. Hinnells and Richard King (eds.), *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice*, (Routledge), Oxon/New York, 2007, 1-7, 1, 5.

19 Asghar Ali Engineer, 'Introduction', in: Engineer, Asghar Ali (ed.), *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India*, (Sangham Books) Hyderabad, 1991, 1-9, 2.

20 Rajeev Bhargava, 'The Cultural Nationalism of the New Hindu', *Dissent* 50 (2003), 11-17, 11-12.

of all Indians.

If colonialism caused an increase in communal violence, what factors play a role today, post colonialism, in its continued prevalence? Wilkinson divides the different explanations for communal violence into instrumentalism: politicians are manipulating religion for their own ends and religious ideologies play no important role; and primordialism: primordial religious ideologies and religiously defined perceptions of the 'other' are to blame for communal violence²¹. He follows the instrumentalist view and blames communal violence on politicians seeking to gain votes. Politicians can start, prevent or stop violence and their choice will depend on the political situation in that area. It can sometimes be beneficial for them to polarise Hindus and Muslims through instigating violence, but in other situations, for example where they need to create coalitions with opposition parties, communal violence may be counter-productive²². The differing political situation is what explains state by state and area by area variation in the occurrence of Hindu-Muslim riots²³. Brass agrees with Wilkinson's instrumentalist explanation of communal violence and claims:

“that riots are dramatic productions, creations of specific persons, groups, and parties operating through institutionalized riot networks within a discursive framework of Hindu-Muslim communal opposition and antagonism that in turn produces specific forms of political practice that make riots integral to the political process.”²⁴

With this concept of “institutionalized riot networks”, he emphasises the importance of studying *how* riots occur and not just *why*, in order to draw attention to the fact that riots are created. However, he also recognises that riots have a spontaneous, uncontrollable side once the mobs are involved. Rioters themselves are also to blame for what happens for, even if they are being manipulated by politicians, they are never under their full control and still have responsibility for their own actions²⁵. Engineer also talks about riots as a political manipulation and religion as playing a role in determining the attitude of the people, acting as a useful tool for politicians, but not

21 Steven I. Wilkinson, 'Introduction', in: Steven I. Wilkinson (ed.), *Religious Politics and Communal Violence*, (Oxford University Press), New Delhi, 2008, 1-33, 4-5.

22 Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral competition and communal riots in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 1, 7.

23 Steven I. Wilkinson, 'Introduction', 19.

24 Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, 369. His italics removed.

25 Ibid 377, 380.

motivating violence on its own²⁶. Primordialists emphasise the importance of religious identities in communal violence. Although I have not found any text where Appleby refers to himself as a primordialist, I would label him as so due to his placing importance on the role of religion. Appleby, as discussed earlier, argues that the role of religious feeling and individuals' interpretations of their own religions should not be negated. He refers to the violence surrounding the Hindu nationalist claim to the site of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and claims that:

“Despite the convergence of vested interests around the Ayodhya controversy, [...] it was more than a political trick or a conspiracy of manipulative business and political interests. Such interpretations overlook the importance of religious meaning and practice in the lives of millions of believers. Without their prior devotion to places and causes perceived as sacred, no mobilization campaign stands a chance of succeeding.”²⁷

Hall points out the role of religion in constructing identities during India's struggle for freedom and argues that the tensions between Hindu and secular nationalism still play themselves out today in the form of secular-religious violence or Hindu-Muslim violence. He also refers to Kakar's work, which I will discuss further in the section on Hyderabad, where Kakar emphasises the role of religion in the construction of identities and symbols which can cause tensions to explode into violence²⁸.

I feel that there is a great deal of overlap between the primordialist and the instrumentalist view as they make room both for religious identity and for political manipulation in explaining communal violence. Religious identity is an important background for political manipulations and provides the emotion and energy which allows small acts of violence caused by politicians to escalate into large-scale riots involving huge amounts of the ordinary population.

Varshney divides theorists into four groups: essentialists, which is another name for primordialists; instrumentalists, which we have already discussed; constructivists, which claim that all ethnic and national identities are recent constructions and that identities that did exist previously were much more flexible in the past; and institutionalists, who emphasise the role of political institutions, i.e. what form of political system is in place, in both violence and peace. He sees all four approaches as

26 Asghar Ali Engineer, 'The Causes of Communal Riots in the Post-Partition Period in India', in: Engineer, Asghar Ali (ed.), *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India*, (Sangham Books) Hyderabad, 1991, 33-41, 33-34.

27 R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 114, referring to the work of Peter van der Veer.

28 John R. Hall, 'Religion and Violence', 374.

inadequate as essentialism and instrumentalism do not account for variation at all and constructivism and institutionalism do not account for variation below the national level. He seeks to find an explanation for the variation throughout India in the role of civil society. Civil society connections, especially in the form of formal associations, across religions can account for why cities with comparable Hindu-Muslim ratios do not experience the same levels of violence²⁹. I feel, however, that, while he recognises the role of political machinations, he downplays the role of religious identities and religious feeling in making the masses susceptible to manipulation in the first place. His dismissal of instrumentalism as not explaining variations in the intensity of violence is also an unfounded criticism as Wilkinson has shown that variation can be explained by the differing strengths of political parties in certain areas and whether or not they need to cooperate with the opposition group or antagonise them in order to gain votes³⁰. In my opinion, the best explanations can be found in a synthesis of the ideas of all the above authors. Communal violence is a complicated phenomenon and does not have one simple explanation, but many, whose importance varies from one situation to the next. I feel that the way forward lies in investigating the relationship between the various factors motivating and providing space for communal violence, namely primordial religious identities; recent manipulations and solidifying of religious identity and symbols (occurring at least partially as a result of colonialism, in the case of India); political machinations and institutionalised riot systems; the types of political systems that are in place; and the strength of associational interreligious civil society interactions. If we then ask what the role of religion is in communal violence in India, it seems clear that religion does play a part in the way, for example, that it hardens identities and provides enough emotion amongst the masses to allow politicians to instigate riots. Religion alone does not cause violence. If this were the case then every city with a mixed Hindu-Muslim population would experience endemic riots. This, however, does not mean that we can label communal violence in India as irreligious. In this sense, I agree with Appleby³¹ that when religious feeling is involved, even if those acting on the basis of religious feeling are badly informed about their religious texts and traditions and even when this religious feeling is being manipulated by politicians, violence *can* be labelled as religious. Labelling violence as religious, however, is not equivalent to blaming religion for violence as there are always multiple factors involved which interact with religion.

29 Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, 23-46.

30 Steven I. Wilkinson, 'Introduction', 17-19.

31 See above.

4. Hyderabad: A history of communal violence

I would now like to explore the history of communal violence in one city in India, namely Hyderabad, in order to see whether the general theories on communal violence apply in this case. Hyderabad was ruled from the seventeenth until the twentieth century by the Nizams, a Muslim dynasty. The feudal rule of the Nizams favoured Muslims who ruled as a minority over the, mainly Hindu, inhabitants of the state. Muslims dominated state employment and the official language of the state was Urdu, despite the fact that this was not the language of the majority of its inhabitants. Despite the fact that the Nizams clearly suppressed their Hindu subjects, communal violence did not break out until the first Hindu-Muslim riots in 1938. This was a result of the emergence of various rival Hindu and Muslim organisations which raised the population's religious and political awareness. The two main organisations were the Arya Samaj, a Hindu revivalist organisation, and the Majlis-e-Ittihadul Muslimin (Majlis), or Organisation for the Unity of Muslims, an Islamic organisation aimed at unifying Muslims, converting non-Muslims and supporting the Nizam unquestioningly. The years 1937 and 1938 saw a build-up of tension due to a wave of conversions from both sides, leading to the first riot in April 1938. Over the coming decade, the Nizam suppressed any Hindu or secularist organisations and gave his full support to the Majlis, a move which had disastrous consequences for Hindu-Muslim relations in the state. In 1938, the Majlis founded the Razakars, a paramilitary organisation which viewed the Muslims as the natural rulers of the state. When, in 1947, India gained its independence from the British and was partitioned into India and Pakistan, the Nizam declared himself independent from both, but was put under increasing pressure to join India. Surrounding this, the Razakars started a campaign to terrorise Hindus and committed many murders and other atrocities in the name of Islam and with full support of the Nizam. When the Indian government sent in troops in 1948 and forced Hyderabad to accede to India, the Muslim rule was at an end³². This was disastrous for the Muslims in the Old City of Hyderabad who lost their jobs in the Nizam's administration. Many migrated to Pakistan, but those who stayed were forced to live a life of economic and social deprivation³³. As well as losing their livelihood, Muslims also suffered directly after the accession of Hyderabad due to the wave of violence Hindus unleashed as retaliation for what the Razakars had done. After a lull in violence

32 Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 187-195.

33 Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence*, 12.

between 1948 and 1957, the Majlis, which had been previously disbanded, reappeared in politics and started working towards gaining votes from the underprivileged Muslims of the Old City. At the same time the BJS (a precursor to the BJP, a Hindu Nationalist party) was also trying to gain political power. The competition between the groups increased communal tensions and caused a new wave of violence. Since 1978, communal violence has increased tremendously which, Varshney argues, suggests an institutionalised riot system is in place, where politicians and gangs lead by wrestlers work together to create riots³⁴. The recent decades of violence have caused the Old City to become more and more of a ghetto as Muslims from surrounding areas who feel under threat from communal violence have moved there to be closer to their fellow religionists, while Hindus from the Old City have moved to other parts of Hyderabad³⁵. According to the 2001 census, Hyderabad has 38,29,753 inhabitants, 55.40% of which (or 21,21,963 people) are Hindus and 41.17% of which (or 15,76,583 people) are Muslims³⁶. In the Old City, the percentage of Muslims is even higher than the average for the city, although I do not have the exact figures for this.

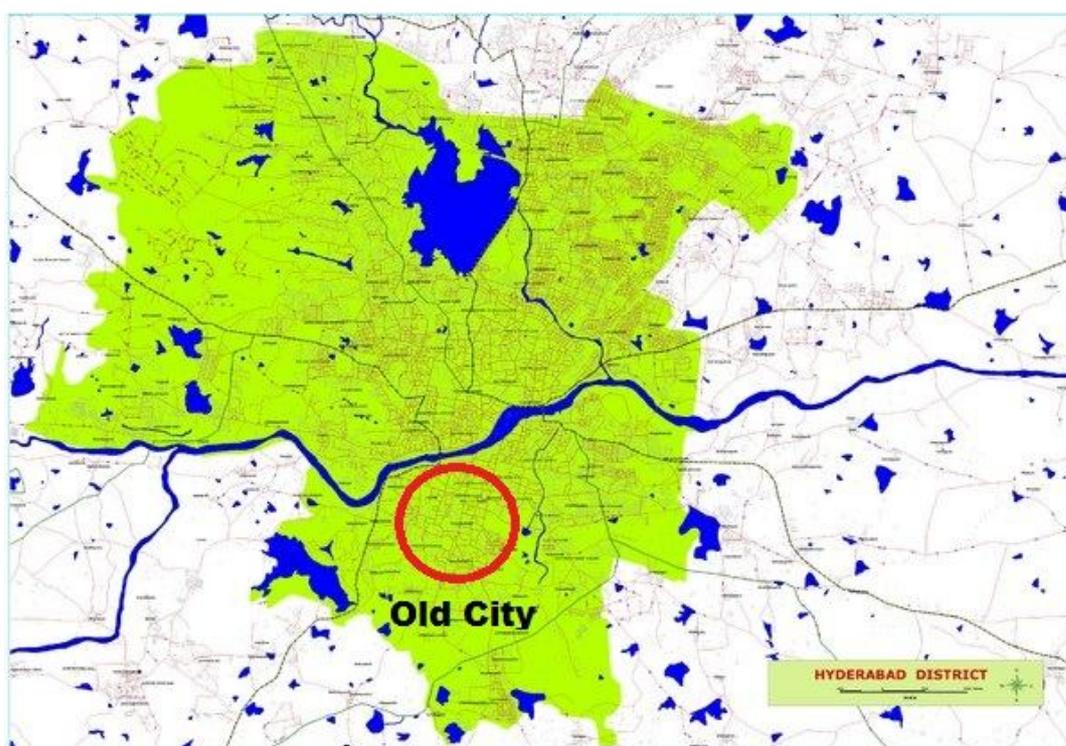


Illustration 1: Hyderabad with the Old City marked

34 Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 204-207.

35 Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence*, 13.

36 Andhra Pradesh State Minorities Finance Corporation (APSMFC), *Minority Population Census: Statement As Per 2001 Census*, <http://www.apsmfc.com/ministry-population-cenus.html> 05/04/2011.

Considering the history of communal violence in Hyderabad, I will now focus on what scholars see as the causes of its perpetuation. Of the scholars named in the previous section, I will focus on the three who have researched Hyderabad specifically: Engineer, Kakar and Varshney. These three represent the three main arguments discussed in the last section on communal violence in India. Engineer follows the instrumentalist approach and finds the explanation for communal violence in political machinations, Kakar is an example of a primordialist and argues that the antagonism between primordial religious identities causes communal violence, and Varshney rejects both views as unable to account for city-to-city variation and instead explains violence through the strength of civil society interaction between religions.

Engineer blames communal violence in India as a whole on political and economic competition between religious groups. In the case of Hyderabad, however, he explains that, due to the huge economic advantage of Hindus over Muslims, there is no economic competition between Hindus and Muslims in Hyderabad, only political competition. The BJP, a Hindu Nationalist party, and the Majlis, representing the Muslims, compete for support in the Old City of Hyderabad and instigate riots in order to polarise the population and gain votes³⁷.

Kakar, on the other hand, focuses on the role of primordial religious identities, viewing Hindu-Muslim violence as “the consequence of a collision between two collective narcissisms, between two equally grandiose group selves, each convinced of its civilizational superiority.”³⁸ Focusing on Hyderabad, he studied the religious ideologies and perceptions of the “warriors”, or ringleaders in riots, and the ordinary masses who participate in riots. He concluded that, in times of tension, religious identities become more conscious. Individuals are more likely to think of themselves as Muslim or Hindu and conform to what they associate with that identity, while also grouping all adherents of the other religion together and assigning them the characteristics of what they see as typically belonging to people of that religion. This means that any tense situation can escalate out of control with the slightest provocation of either the Hindus or the Muslims³⁹. The new identities of Hindu nationalism and Muslim fundamentalism, reactions to the perceived threat to religious identity in the form of modernisation and influence from outsiders, define themselves in opposition to one another⁴⁰. In Hyderabad, these two extremes are exemplified in the BJP and the Majlis who

37 Asghar Ali Engineer, 'Hyderabad Riots – An Analytical Report', in: Engineer, Asghar Ali (ed.), *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India*, (Sangham Books) Hyderabad, 1991, 288-295, 290-291.

38 Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence*, 26.

39 Ibid 53.

40 Ibid 184-187, 218-219.

work to strengthen religious identities and polarise the two religious groups. The politicians who instigate the riots, the warriors who orchestrate the riots, and the masses who participate in the riots are all responsible for the violence that occurs. Without negating the importance of political competition which causes politicians to instigate riots, Kakar feels that the instrumentalist approach absolves the masses, who participate in the riots and are motivated by group religious identities, of responsibility⁴¹. As mentioned above, however, Brass' theory of institutionalised riot networks does acknowledge the responsibility of the masses as not all elements of a riot can be planned and controlled⁴².

Varshney uses the comparison of cities to support his view that inter-religious civic integration is what prevents violence and makes it impossible and even undesirable for politicians to instigate riots. One of the comparisons he makes is between Hyderabad and Lucknow, cities with comparable Hindu-Muslim ratios and which were both ruled by Muslim princes over a long period of time. He discusses the history of the two cities and the emergence of mass politics in the early twentieth century and finds that different civic structures emerged in each city as a result of this. In Lucknow the divide was more along Sunni-Shia lines, rather than between Hindus and Muslims, and that is the divide along which violence occurs. Intragroup divisions have helped to minimise intergroup violence. Also, Hindus and Muslims are united within an economic structures wherein each group is essential to the other. Hindu-Muslim violence would destroy this structure and is therefore unlikely to occur even if politicians decided to instigate riots. In Hyderabad, on the other hand, the divide is along Hindu-Muslim lines and no such structure of economic interdependence exists. Festivals, which could be a source of civic interaction between Hindus and Muslims, are increasingly used by politicians in Hyderabad as a way to stir up tension and start riots. In Hyderabad, elite-level civic integration does not help to prevent riots as the masses, especially the poor in the Old City, where the riots occur, do not experience any form of civic integration. Civic interdependence and interaction between Hindus and Muslims can thus prevent violence occurring between the groups⁴³. In order to discover what those experiencing the riots see as the causes I undertook a group discussion with some tailoring students at HMI's Chandrayangutta community centre. There were 21 participants in the discussion, of which six were Hindus and fifteen were Muslims. All of the participants were female. The opinions of the group as to the causes of the riots had the most in

41 Ibid 193.

42 See above.

43 Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 171-172.

common with the instrumentalist view. They saw politicians as the chief culprits, who organise riots in order to gain votes and win elections. The common man is too busy earning money and thinking about day-to-day survival to get involved in riots and would rather that peace was kept between the communities. I asked them why, if the ordinary man wants peace, do they get involved in riots. The participants explained that most of the people who get involved are unemployed, meaning that instead of being too busy working to get involved, they have plenty of time and are easily seduced by the money that politicians pay them to participate in riots⁴⁴. The fact that people are aware that politicians are creating riots for their own benefit is encouraging, but I agree with Kakar that placing the full blame on the politicians can be counterproductive as the participants absolve themselves of responsibility that way. Increased awareness of political manipulation could, however, help towards decreasing the willingness of the masses to participate in riots. This moves us onto the discussion undertaken with Mr. Mohammed Turab, Executive Secretary of COVA (Confederation of Voluntary Associations) which works in Hyderabad towards “Social harmony, peace and justice through sensitization of all sections of society and empowerment of the marginalized and poor”⁴⁵. Mr Turab places the blame for communal violence in Hyderabad on a lack of interaction between Hindus and Muslims, reflecting Varshney's argument about civic interaction⁴⁶, and on misconceptions and mistrust between Hindus and Muslims. However, the most important role is played by the politicians, who use religion as a tool for political games, land sharks who seek to terrorise people in order to get them to sell their land and property at a low rate and religious leaders' failure to speak out about the exploitation of religious sentiments by the politicians. The nexus between politicians, land sharks and the institution, which is supposed to protect the life and property of people, is what makes violence possible. The will of the people in power plays a vital role in maintaining peace and harmony in society or in making violence possible. Despite riots being a creation of politicians and land sharks, he feels that better education, which will help people to understand their own religion in the right perspective and learn to respect the religious sentiments of the other, combined with increased interaction between Hindus and Muslims will help and is helping to prevent communal violence in Hyderabad. Once people are more aware that their religious identities are being manipulated, they are less likely to fall prey to political machinations. This is evident in the fact that Hyderabad did not witness a backlash or

44 Chandrayangutta Aman Shanti Community Centre, Group discussion, 1st March 2011.

45 Mr. Turab's Business card.

46 See above.

retaliations for the bomb blasts which took place in 2007⁴⁷.

In Hyderabad, as well as in India in general, it seems that the blame cannot solely be placed on either religion or on politics, but on a synthesis of the two. Religious identities are most easily manipulated by politicians when the religious are not well educated about their own religion, which falls back to what Appleby says about the difference between “professed belief” and “operative belief”⁴⁸, and when they are poor enough to be motivated by the money politicians are willing to pay them to participate in riots. There are thus religious, political and economic factors involved. Varshney's theory about civic interaction⁴⁹ also plays a part, as many NGOs including COVA and HMI seem to have recognised in their efforts to increase interactions between the two communities as a way to resolve violence. This brings us onto the following question: If religion plays a role in communal violence in India, can it also contribute towards peacebuilding? The potential within Islam, Hinduism and Christianity for peacebuilding and reconciliation (the first two being the main religions involved in communal violence in India and the third playing a role in many peacebuilding organisations, including HMI) will be discussed further in the following section.

5. The peacebuilding potential of Indian religions

In this section, I will discuss the potential of religion to promote peace in India. Very little has been written about the role of religion in peacebuilding in India and it was not within the scope of this research paper to conduct specific research into the various organisations motivated by religion, other than the focus on HMI. In this section, therefore, I limit the discussion to the elements of Islam, Hinduism and Christianity that give these religions the potential to contribute towards peace. I do, however, recognise that further research needs to be done into how these religions are contributing towards peace in India through various religious organisations and religiously motivated individuals.

“Every religion can foster either violence or nonviolence. It is the responsibility of those who follow a particular faith to cull these resources for nonviolence from their religious scriptures.”⁵⁰

47 Mohammed Turab, Informal discussion, 17th February 2011.

48 See above.

49 See above.

50 Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice*, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003, 183.

Abu-Nimer attempts to extract these “resources for nonviolence” in the case of Islam and comes up with a list of virtues or attributes, valued within Islam, which can contribute towards peace. These values include the unity and equality of mankind, all as God's creations⁵¹; justice and forgiveness, showing mercy regarded more highly than demanding retribution⁵²; seeking peace; avoidance of violence; and reconciliation with the enemy⁵³. In addition to this, there are many attributes which are not directly linked to peace, but can be useful in the peacebuilding process, such as patience, which helps when pursuing long-term peacebuilding goals⁵⁴; the valorisation of collaborative processes above authoritarian ones, which is something also valued by peacebuilders⁵⁵; and the concept of the Ummah or Muslim community which emphasises collective action, which can be utilised for peaceful goals⁵⁶. Besides the values which can be extracted from Islamic texts, Muslims themselves need to be prepared to work towards peace. Denny argues that, despite the reputation Islam has in the West for being inherently violent:

“[t]he overwhelming majority of Muslims in this period of globalization and constant, necessary, and inescapable international relationships sincerely want peaceful international as well as domestic religious and political relations and the institutions and agreements that can make them secure and stable.”⁵⁷

Others have attempted to extract similar values from the Hindu religious texts. Rajmohan Gandhi explains that Hindu religious texts tend to emphasise war, especially the epics, but that peace and reconciliation are also represented as worthwhile goals⁵⁸. The Ramayana also emphasises the importance of treating the enemy honourably⁵⁹ and Rama's chariot is described as having “self-restraint as one of its horses, and cords of forgiveness and compassion to harness it.”⁶⁰ The epics

51 Ibid 57-58.

52 Ibid 51, 67-68.

53 Ibid 60-62.

54 Ibid 71-72.

55 Ibid 77.

56 Ibid 73-74.

57 Frederick M. Denny, 'Islam and Peacebuilding: Continuities and Transitions', in: Coward, Harold and Gordon S. Smith (eds.), *Religion and Peacebuilding* (State University of New York Press) Albany, NY, 2004, 129-146, 139-140.

58 Rajmohan Gandhi, 'Hinduism and Peacebuilding', in: Coward, Harold and Gordon S. Smith (eds.), *Religion and Peacebuilding* (State University of New York Press) Albany, NY, 2004, 45-68, 49.

59 Ibid 58.

60 Ibid 60.

can also be used as tools for peace if taken allegorically, as a battle between the good and evil inside us instead of a battle between two armies⁶¹. Other examples, outside of the mainstream Hindu texts, are Bhakti poetry which promotes reconciliation between Hinduism and Islam; the example of Asoka, an emperor who became devoted to peace after regretting past violent acts who, despite his conversion to Buddhism, is seen as part of the Hindu past; and Gandhi who claimed that Hindus, Muslims and Christians all worship the same God⁶².

Peace is discussed very explicitly in the Bible, especially through the figure of Jesus who promoted nonviolence and forgiveness. Most Christian traditions, despite divergence on their interpretations of the Bible, value love and compassion highly. Nonviolence does not mean non-action, as many, including Dr. Martin Luther King, have pointed out. The quest for social justice has led many pacifist Christian denominations, especially the Quakers and the Mennonites, into devoting time and money towards conflict resolution and peacebuilding⁶³. Bartoli even goes so far to claim that:

“it is impossible to find a single conflict in the world in which there is no Christian serving victims, defending human rights, educating children and adults, and defending the space of civil society from the oppression of violence.”⁶⁴

Research into peacebuilding efforts would seem to suggest that Christianity has taken the initiative when it comes to peacebuilding, especially when compared to Islam and Hinduism. This may, however, only be a reflection of the limited coverage of research and is, in my mind, an encouragement for further research to be done, especially in the case of India, into the role of Hinduism and Islam in peacebuilding efforts. In this paper, however, I have chosen to focus on the work of the Henry Martyn Institute, a Christian ecumenical organisation, and will discuss the role of religion in its work further in the following section.

61 Ibid 61.

62 Ibid 62-63.

63 Andrea Bartoli, 'Christianity and Peacebuilding', in: Coward, Harold and Gordon S. Smith (eds.), *Religion and Peacebuilding* (State University of New York Press) Albany, NY, 2004, 147-166, 147-148, 157.

64 Ibid 159.

6. Henry Martyn Institute: International Centre for Research, Interfaith Relations and Reconciliation



Illustration 2: The interfaith devotion hall in HMI's campus in Shivarampally, Hyderabad

In this section of the paper, I will explore the history of HMI and its gradual change of focus from evangelism to interfaith dialogue and reconciliation. Through studying literature published by HMI and through personal interviews undertaken with many faculty and staff members at the institute, I will reflect on the role of Christianity in HMI's peacebuilding work and, considering the interfaith nature of this organisation, the role of other religious and non-religious ideologies as well.

Originally named 'The Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies', HMI was founded in 1930 with the goal of studying Islam in order to facilitate missionary efforts among Muslims and enable them to “commend Christ acceptably to Muslims.”⁶⁵ Despite its main goal being the conversion of Muslims, the work of evangelisation was not seen as an attack on the religion of Muslims, but as an act of patience and compassion⁶⁶. Members of staff at the institute befriended many Muslims, especially academics, and exchanged ideas with them from early on in the history of HMI⁶⁷. From the 1960's onwards, the word 'dialogue' was increasingly used as it was emphasised that those of other religions should not be treated condescendingly, but that both Christians and Muslims should be able to “come together as strong men, convinced that God is with both of us.”⁶⁸ Despite differing opinions on the question of the role of dialogue in evangelism amongst HMI's staff, the idea that

65 Diane d'Souza, *Evangelism, Dialogue, Reconciliation: The Transformative Journey of the Henry Martyn Institute*, Hyderabad: Henry Martyn Institute, 1998, 7, quoting the National Christian Council's (NCC) “Committee for Work Among Muslims”.

66 Ibid 8-9.

67 Ibid 11.

68 Ibid 15, quoting Ian H. Douglas, Director at the time.

religions other than Christianity should be treated with respect became more and more prevalent⁶⁹. It wasn't, however, until the 1980's that people began to question the growing difference between HMI's stated aims of evangelisation and its actual behaviour which was leaning more and more towards a form of dialogue which did not seek to convert. In 1982, a review committee made several recommendations to the board, including that the aims of HMI should be clarified and also that there should be more sensitivity to the issues of communal tension and the role that the church could play. It was not until 1987 that the recommendations made by the review committee were seriously discussed and that the board came up with a new list of aims which included the role that HMI could play in encouraging interreligious dialogue and reconciliation and in building peace between communities⁷⁰. Documents published at the time spoke of HMI as "an expression of the Church's ministry of reconciliation."⁷¹ The real test of this new commitment, however, came in the form of the devastating riots of 1990 in the Old City of Hyderabad. During previous times of communal tensions, including the post-partition violence, HMI had stood back, only noticing it as an opportunity for proselytisation to the victims. This time, however, the approach was completely different. HMI responded by arranging for the distribution of rice and clothes to the victims and holding meetings where they brought members of the different communities together, along with police officials and other guests, to discuss the causes of the violence and how it could be avoided in the future. HMI's direction was truly changed by these events⁷². In the years since then, HMI has established three community development projects in the Old City of Hyderabad (in Shankernagar, Sultan Shahi and Chandrayangutta), where Muslims and Hindus are brought together to learn skills to support their livelihood, to be schooled, to receive health care etc. It is thought that, through bringing members of the different communities together to solve common problems, inseparable links between the communities will be created and the participants' increased awareness of the commonalities between the two communities will encourage them to actively work towards preventing violence in times of tension.

69 Ibid 16-17.

70 Ibid 20-22, 24.

71 Ibid 25, quoting *The Bulletin*.

72 Ibid 26-28.



Illustration 3: Hindu and Muslim children playing team-building games at one of HMI's community centres

HMI also works towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts in other areas of India, arranging peacebuilding workshops where participants from the different groups which are at conflict with one another come together to learn about and discuss peacebuilding. These conflicts may be between different religious groups, but may instead or also be related to ethnicity or other issues. HMI's work is now divided between three teams: Academics, Community Development and Conflict Transformation. The study of religions, including a focus on Islam, continues, but now with the purpose of supporting the practical work of HMI with academic research. The practical experience gained through the other teams, supports the work of academics in teaching students about interfaith dialogue and the Conflict Transformation team offers internships to the students in the different areas of India where they work so that they can gain hands-on experience in peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue. There are currently 37 people employed by HMI, all from different religious backgrounds.

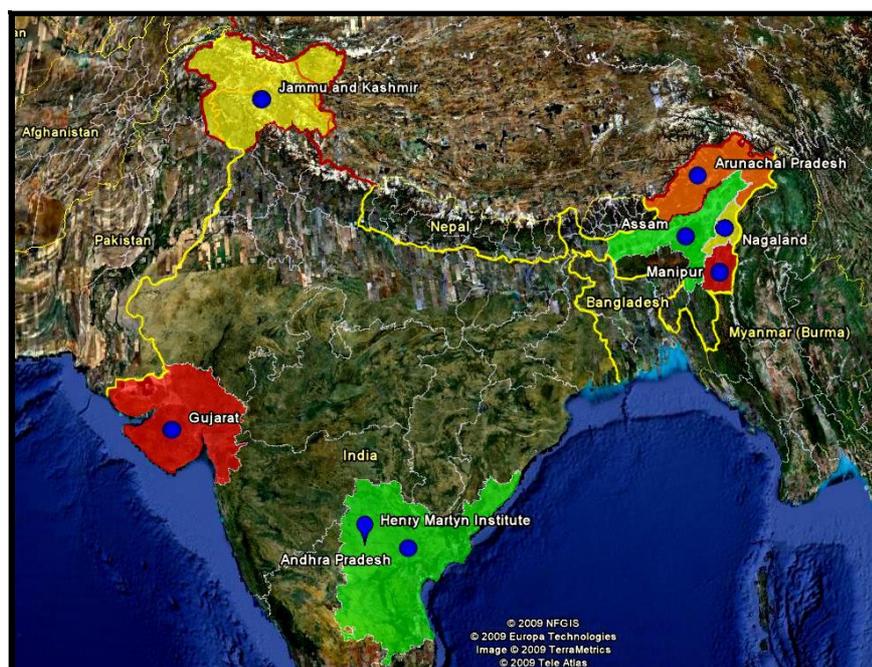


Illustration 4: Map of India showing the areas where HMI is working

HMI describes itself as:

“an ecumenical Christian and non-profit organisation promoting reconciliation between people of different faiths and cultures. It encourages the study of religions and practical grassroots involvement with the objective of improving relationships between divided groups and communities.”⁷³

Throughout HMI's transformation from an evangelical to an ecumenical organisation, it has continued to refer to itself as a Christian organisation. However, HMI is no longer solely staffed by Christians. Instead, its employees come from a variety of religious backgrounds. To discover the role of Christianity in HMI's peacebuilding work, I undertook interviews with various members of staff from different departments and different religious backgrounds (see Appendix 1). I sought to discover to what extent Christianity plays a role in their work, but also, considering the current interfaith nature of HMI, to what extent other religions influence their work as well. Can HMI still be labelled as a Christian organisation?

Many of those I interviewed agreed that HMI is Christian on an organisational and official level, but

⁷³ Henry Martyn Institute, <http://www.hmiindia.com/> (04/04/2011).

on a practical level it would be more accurate to say that it is an interfaith organisation⁷⁴. While the board members and the Director are all Christians and most of the funding and partner organisations are Christian, the staff comes from a variety of religious backgrounds and may have Christian motivations or other religious or non-religious motivations for working there. Dr. Varghese Manimala, for example, feels that it was God's plan for him to work there as the Director⁷⁵, Mr. Varghese Chakkummootil Oommen states that his motivation comes from Christ and the example of other religious and non-religious individuals⁷⁶ and Ms. Shobha Gosa, after working with asylum seekers in the UK, felt that she had been called by God to help heal broken communities⁷⁷. On the other hand, Mr. Ramesh Prakashvelu gains inspiration from many different religious traditions, recognising the underlying harmony between them⁷⁸, while Dr. Qadeer Khwaja was not motivated by religion as such, but by his desire as a faculty member to help students to evaluate the way they thought about and approached problems⁷⁹. Many mention various values which inspire HMI's work, such as love, compassion and concern for humanity, but acknowledge that these values do not only come from a Christian background, but from other religions as well⁸⁰. It seems, therefore, that while religion plays a very important role at HMI, the influence of Christianity specifically has diminished in comparison to the early days of HMI where the conversion of non-Christians to Christianity was the organisation's goal. While still clearly a Christian organisation on an official level, HMI is transforming into a multi-religious organisation where all religions are valued equally and inspiration can come from many different religious and secular sources.

Despite the diminishing influence of Christianity on its own, HMI is still very much a religious organisation. The influence of religion is evident in the celebration of interfaith festivals and in the daily interfaith devotion that takes place at the beginning of the work day. This, then, lead me to question my interviewees about whether religion has an important role to play in peacebuilding and why. Dr. Varghese Manimala argued that religion is already an important part of everyday life so it would be difficult to do peacebuilding work without involving it. Moreover, it can play a positive role in peacebuilding through drawing on values such as peace, compassion, harmony and service to

74 This was explicitly mentioned in the following interviews: Jahan Ara Begum, Personal Interview, 1st March 2011; Varghese Manimala, Personal Interview, 4th March 2011; and Varghese Chakkummootil Oommen, Personal Interview, 8th March 2011.

75 Varghese Manimala, Personal Interview, 4th March 2011.

76 Varghese Chakkummootil Oommen, Personal Interview, 8th March 2011.

77 Shobha Gosa, Telephone interview, 2nd April 2011.

78 Ramesh Prakashvelu, Personal Interview, 24th February 2011.

79 Qadeer Khwaja, Personal Interview, 7th March 2011.

80 Mentioned by Varghese Manimala, Personal Interview, 4th March 2011 and Ramesh Prakashvelu, Personal Interview, 24th February 2011.

our fellow man, which are common to all religions. Religious leaders can play an especially important role in teaching their followers about the importance of peace and harmony. Where interreligious dialogue is needed, religion is an invaluable tool in bringing this about⁸¹. Mr. Ramesh Prakashvelu argues that the most important element of religion which divides the truly religious from the rest is action. Belief isn't enough on its own and it is religious belief which can be a powerful motivation to act to try to bring about justice and peace. Religion is a rich resource for values such as love and compassion that can support peacebuilding, but can also give insights into non-religious parts of life such as the way a person thinks, how to govern well and how to create good relationships between human beings⁸². In addition to this, Ms. Jahan Ara Begum pointed out that if religion is involved in the violence in the first place, it cannot be resolved without involving religion. She does, however, emphasise the need to address other factors which contribute to violence as well, such as economic imbalance. This holistic approach is the one that the Community Development team takes in their approach to try to end Hindu-Muslim violence in Hyderabad⁸³. Mr. Varghese Chakkummootil Oommen explains how this idea applies to the work of the Conflict Transformation team, explaining that where those involved in violence are religious (such as in Nagaland) and where religion is an element in bringing about the antagonism that causes violence (such as in Gujarat and Kashmir), religion can play an important role in peacebuilding. Many of the participants in the workshops have the desire to be enriched and inspired by their religious traditions. Where religion plays no part in the conflict and where the participants clearly do not wish to involve religion, however, it is left out of the peacebuilding work⁸⁴. Religion is not always beneficial, therefore, although Ms. Shobha Gosa feels that religious peacebuilding models and rituals can be useful in non-religious conflicts as well as religious ones⁸⁵. The only member of staff who was truly against involving religion in peacebuilding was Dr. Qadeer Khwaja, who felt that religion can be a stumbling block in the peacebuilding process as the common man does not understand religion correctly and that the focus should, instead, be on human relationships⁸⁶. Religion is clearly playing a very important role in the peacebuilding work of HMI even if we only look at the way it motivates the individuals working there to devote their time and energy to promoting peace between different religious and ethnic groups in India. Whether or not religious

81 Varghese Manimala, Personal Interview, 4th March 2011.

82 Ramesh Prakashvelu, Personal Interview, 24th February 2011.

83 Jahan Ara Begum, Personal Interview, 1st March 2011.

84 Varghese Chakkummootil Oommen, Personal Interview, 8th March 2011.

85 Shobha Gosa, Telephone interview, 2nd April 2011.

86 Qadeer Khwaja, Personal Interview, 7th March 2011.

ideology should be brought into the peacebuilding work itself probably depends on the situation. Both Ms. Jahan Ara Begum and Mr. Varghese Chakkummootil Oommen mentioned that religious conflict warrants the involvement of religion in its resolution. I agree that, in this case, religion can play a useful role, but also understand the concerns voiced by Dr. Qadeer Khwaja, that religion can be a stumbling block to peace when misunderstood and misused. I also agree with Mr. Varghese Chakkummootil Oommen that religion should not be involved when the people themselves do not want it. Many people may be unwilling to accept religious values or religious solutions to their problems. Then again, even when the groups at conflict do not wish to involve religion or may not benefit by its involvement, that does not negate the importance of religion as a motivation for peacebuilding individuals and organisations such as HMI. Based on my own observations, moreover, it seems that while religion does play an important motivating role at HMI and respect for and interest in a multitude of religions is shown through the interfaith devotion and the celebration of festivals, religion does not manifest itself explicitly in HMI's work. HMI undertakes very similar community development programmes in Hyderabad to COVA, a secular organisation. They work to bring different religious groups together, but religion itself is rarely discussed. The work that HMI does in other states is based mainly upon ideas found in literature on conflict transformation and peacebuilding, focusing on relationships, peace and justice, which could be seen as religious ideas, but which are not necessarily so. As I was only able to observe the work in Hyderabad directly, and only at two of the three project sites, it would be worthwhile to do further research and observation of the work of HMI in order to discover what role religious ideas actually play. Religion is certainly present as a motivation and inspiration, but whether it directly affects the way HMI works is questionable.

7. Conclusion

It is clear that religion is something which can be manipulated either for the good or for the bad. Abu-Nimer notes the availability of resources for peacebuilding in all religions, they just have to be gleaned from the texts⁸⁷. Religions, however, also provide a wealth of values and motivations for violence against groups and individuals perceived to pose a threat to one's religious beliefs or the survival of one's religious community. India is no exception to this. Communal violence has a multitude of explanations and both the primordialists, who emphasise the importance of primordial

⁸⁷ See above.

religious identities, and the instrumentalists, who focus on the way politicians manipulate these identities for their own political gain, contribute something towards the understanding of the causes of violence. Many other explanations can also be included in order to create a more nuanced picture, for example Varshney's theory about the role of civil associations between the religions in preventing communal violence. This variety of explanations not only applies to India as a whole, but also when we focus on the city of Hyderabad. In Hyderabad, Hindu nationalism and Muslim fundamentalism interact with the everyday religious experiences of the ordinary believer to create a volatile situation, vulnerable to abuse by politicians willing to do anything to gain and retain votes. The British colonisers, with their policy of 'divide and rule' may be to blame for exacerbating or even creating communal tensions in India, but the perpetuation of communal violence is to blame on institutionalised riot systems where politicians, gangs and ordinary individuals all play an important role. What is most important in the study of communal violence in India is that no party is absolved of blame by only talking about political manipulation or colonially created divisions. Everybody involved needs to take responsibility and needs to be involved in the resolution of communal tensions. Religion is a factor in communal violence, even if it is not to blame for it. If we agree with Bercovitch⁸⁸, and with some of the staff at HMI⁸⁹, that religion is most effective in peacebuilding when religion plays a part in the conflict, then in the case of Hindu-Muslim riots, religion must be able to play a role in ending these tensions. Both HMI and COVA recognise the importance of contact between members of the different religious communities in order to help them to realise their commonalities and learn about the religion of the other, which should help ease tensions between the groups. Whether this is an effective strategy or not is difficult to say. Communal violence in Hyderabad has diminished somewhat in recent years, but the causes of this would be difficult to identify, and the violence still persists. Any efforts, however, to encourage interreligious dialogue are worthwhile, in my view. It can take a long time to change the patterns of the past, but the work of organisations such as HMI is encouraging as it suggests that more and more religious people are starting to think about dialogue and to recognise the importance of interreligious harmony and acceptance. That people from various different religious backgrounds can be motivated by their religious ideas to work together towards peace is already an achievement in itself. Moreover, even if we question the direct role of religious values in the work of peacebuilding organisation such as HMI, we cannot deny the important role religion plays as a

88 See above.

89 See above.

motivation and an inspiration for people to work towards peace.

Hopefully, through the continued study of the role of religion in violence and the role of religion in peacebuilding, the link between religion and violence can be severed and the link between religion and peacebuilding strengthened. As explained above, many people may be unwilling to accept religious values or religious solutions to their problems, but religion may still play an important part in peacebuilding by motivating individuals and groups to devote time and energy in the long term towards building a more peaceful and just society. Nobody from any religious or non-religious background would be able to deny that this is a worthwhile goal.

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Appendix 1: Interview request and question list for HMI staff membersRequest to undertake research through the means of interviews

I am currently undertaking research for my bachelor thesis on the role of religion in communal violence in India and the role of religion in peacebuilding efforts. In this study, I will be focusing on India in general, but using Hyderabad as a case study for communal violence and using the Henry Martyn Institute as a case study for religiously motivated peacebuilding efforts. The Henry Martyn Institute is an interesting case study in that it is a Christian ecumenical organisation working towards interfaith dialogue and reconciliation, but that actors from multiple religious backgrounds are involved. Not all of the staff are Christians, but Christianity underpins the work done by HMI.

I mentioned to the Director earlier in my internship that I would like to interview some staff members, with their permission, later during my stay here. I am now ready to conduct these interviews with certain of the faculty and staff members with the goal of ascertaining what role Christian theology plays in the work of the various departments of HMI, where ideas from other religions or non-religious ideologies also come into play, and how these ideologies interact. It will also be interesting for my research to see what personal motivations staff members have for working with an organisation which promotes interfaith dialogue and reconciliation, if they feel comfortable sharing this with me. It is not my goal to discover the official position of HMI in these interviews, as this can be found in the literature available and on the website, but instead to find out how these ideas work in practice and in dialogue with other religious and non-religious ideologies. I would, therefore, prefer that the questions were not discussed amongst the staff in depth beforehand as this will guide the answers that individuals give and probably result in my receiving a uniform response. This would defeat the purpose of the interviews. Any opinions or ideas expressed will not be presented as the official position of HMI in my research paper unless they are presented to me as such. If desired, I will be happy to show a copy of my paper before I submit it in order for the staff to be able to ensure that what they have said has not been misrepresented.

In order to cover all the different teams within HMI, I would like to individually interview the following people:-

Dr. Varghese Manimala: Director

Mr. Ramesh Prakashvelu: Acting Associate Director – Praxis

Mr. Varghese Chakkummootil Oommen: Coordinator (CT Team & Faculty)

Ms. Jahan Ara Begum: Coordinator (CD Team)

Dr. Qadeer Khwaja: Head of Academics

Ms. Shobha Gosa: Programme Secretary

My planned questions are as follows:-

Questions for Dr. Varghese Manimala, Mr. Ramesh Prakashvelu, Mr. Varghese Chakkummootil Oommen, Ms. Jahan Ara Begum

1. What role does Christianity play at HMI? Where does Christianity manifest itself in the work of HMI?
2. What other religious or nonreligious ideologies play a role in the work of HMI?

3. How do the CT and CD teams compare when it comes to the Christian theologies and other ideologies behind their work?
4. Do you feel that it is important to involve religion in peacebuilding?
5. What are your own motivations for working for an organisation which promotes interfaith dialogue and reconciliation?

Questions for Dr. Qadeer Khwaja and Ms. Shobha Gosa

1. What role does Christianity play at HMI? Where does Christianity manifest itself in the work of HMI?
2. What other religious or nonreligious ideologies play a role in the work of HMI?
3. Do you feel that it is important to involve religion in peacebuilding?
4. What are your own motivations for working for an organisation which promotes interfaith dialogue and reconciliation?

The interviews should last for around 60 minutes unless the interviewees wish to continue the discussion beyond that time period.

I would like to conduct these interviews before I leave HMI on Friday 4th March.

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