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# FAITH AND FOREIGN POLICY IN INDIA: LEGAL AMBIGUITY, SELECTIVE XENOPHOBIA, AND ANTI-MINORITY VIOLENCE

By Chad M. Bauman 

**A**s a secular democracy, India's constitution enshrines relatively robust safeguards for religious equality and freedom. Article 25 provides all citizens the right to "freely profess, practice, and propagate" religion, and avoids assigning to Hinduism any special role or explicit privilege (in contradistinction to the situation with Buddhism in Sri Lanka, for example). Moreover, the Indian government itself has not generally engaged in any systematic or flagrant way in the direct persecution or oppression of its religious minorities.

However, India's religious minorities do face certain challenges. Among them are several legal and judicial issues. Judicial rulings in independent India have weakened the safeguards of the constitution in several ways, such as when, in the 1970s, the Supreme Court declared that the constitutional right of "propagation" did *not* include (or protect) the right to intentionally convert another. Similarly, half a dozen Indian states have now passed "Freedom of Religion" laws (called "anti-conversion" laws by their critics) that have been problematically and prejudicially implemented, as has a national anti-defamation law. Additionally, national laws securing reserved seats in Indian legislatures, civil service, and educational institutions for lower-caste Hindus (but not for lower-caste non-

Hindus) provide implicit disincentives to lower-caste Hindus considering conversion. Finally, a weak and easily corrupted criminal justice system exacerbates many of these legal issues, and is frequently used by anti-minority actors who exploit the legal ambiguity with regard to religious freedoms in India to harry religious minorities with spurious charges or unlawful imprisonment, thereby undermining the protections that Indian law *does* afford religious minorities.

In addition to these legal issues, religious minorities in India are occasionally threatened, intimidated, harassed, sexually assaulted, and attacked by their neighbors, in both small-scale, isolated incidents and in the context of large-scale riots. While the perpetrators of these incidents are not state actors, generally speaking, they do in many cases enjoy the explicit or implicit support of local or even national law enforcement and political officials. For example, local, regional, state, and even central governments have been

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accused, at various times, of intentionally responding slowly, or even inhibiting a police response to instances of anti-minority violence.

The more secular of India's two dominant political parties, the Indian National Congress (or "Congress") party, has occasionally been linked to anti-minority activities, most notably in the anti-Sikh bloodletting that took place after the party's powerful prime minister, Indira Gandhi, was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. Nevertheless, accusations of involvement in anti-minority activities are far more regularly leveled, and justifiably so, at the broad association of nationalist social, religious, and cultural organizations called the Sangh Parivar (or "Sangh"), and at the political party associated with it, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, "Indian People's Party"). It is for this reason that the BJP's resounding national electoral victory in late 2014 appears to have emboldened anti-minority social and state actors, and has caused India's religious minorities a great deal of concern.

In what follows, I provide the minimum amount of historical and contextual information necessary to understand contemporary dynamics at a basic level. After that, I describe the contemporary situation in more detail. In the final section, I provide some recommendations to US foreign policy specialists on how to intervene (and/or not intervene) productively in support of religious freedom and religious minorities in India.

## Historical Context

While this article focuses on India's minority Muslims and Christians, they are not, by any means, India's only religious minorities. They are not even the only religious minorities to experience violence or other forms of oppression. As already shown, India's Sikhs have at times been harassed, legally deprived, and attacked in independent India. Since 1984, however, they have become somewhat more integrated into the Hindu mainstream, and powerful enough to avoid blatant forms of systematic oppression. Similarly, India's Parsi (Zoroastrian) minority constitutes a quietist, small, and shrinking (read: unthreatening) community that barely registers

in India's census statistics, and is more or less left alone.

Prejudice against both Muslims and Christians has a significant historical dimension. Muslim warriors made forays into what is today India almost from the beginning of Islamic history, first as raiders, and then, after 1200, as conquerors. From that point until the establishment of the British Raj in 1858, a succession of Muslim dynasties ruled large swaths of territory in what is today India and Pakistan. There is great debate among Indians and scholars of India about whether this period constitutes one of the truly productive and "sparkling phases"<sup>1</sup> (Larson 1995, 109) of Indian and world history or, rather, one of plunder, religious persecution, and violence.

Because of these factors, the question of whether the first Mughal Emperor, Babar (1483–1530), destroyed a Hindu temple to build a mosque (the Babri Masjid), whether that temple had been dedicated to the Hindu God, Ram, and whether the location marks the actual spot of Ram's birth spot, are sensitive and symbolically potent questions that have plagued Hindu-Muslim relations for at least 160 years (and have led to some of the worst Hindu-Muslim violence, in 1992). So also are the more general questions about to what extent India's Muslim rulers engaged in coercive conversions, and what percentage of India's contemporary Muslims could trace their ancestry to Hindus (and should, therefore, in the minds of some nationalistic Hindus, be returned to their "ancestral" religion). What is absolutely certain is that the foreign origins and imperial history of Islam in India has made it a suspect and much disparaged religion among those who consider India a nation of and for "Hindus."

In similar ways, despite having a presence there no later than the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Christianity in India is popularly associated with the period of European colonization that began, slowly, a millennium later with Vasco da Gama's arrival in India in 1498, grew quickly, and in favor of the British East India Company in the subsequent centuries, and morphed into the British Raj from 1858 until India's independence in 1947. While India's European rulers are not generally accused

of physically coercing the colonized to convert to Christianity, they are justifiably blamed for mixing trade, politics, and religion, and for using their superior political and economic power to favor Christianity and Christian moral norms. As with the Islamic situation, there is a great deal of contemporary debate about the European, and particularly the British legacy in India. Moreover, because of the long centuries of Christian dominance in India, Christianity has become associated there with foreign rule and intervention, with the excesses of empire, with western wealth and power, and with the exploitation of that power for religious gain.

Because of that association, concerns about the processes of colonization and Christianization often mixed and fed one another, with destructive result. In the Indian Rebellion of 1857–1858, for example, Indian and European Christians otherwise unassociated with colonial rule were attacked along with colonial officials, suggesting that Indians generally did not distinguish between British *civilizing* and *Christianizing* missions (Wagner 2010, 39). Fifty years later, after a succession of significant mass conversions to Christianity, the concern was still palpable, as in U. N. Mukherjee's series of 1909 articles in *The Bengalee* titled "Hindus—A Dying Race," in which he used demographic data to argue that Hinduism would disappear in 420 years (Mukherji 1909; Jaffrelot 1996, 24). Not surprisingly, then, as the independence movement built steam in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became, in some strains, chauvinistically Hindu and xenophobic (though only selectively so, as implied by this article's title, because other aspects of foreign culture and technology have been, and remain, enthusiastically embraced).

Nowhere is that xenophobia more clearly demonstrated than in the writings of V. D. Savarkar's 1923 tract, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* which posited that the essential and unifying identity of Indians was and should be their Hindu-ness, or *Hindutva*. A true Indian, for Savarkar, was one who could call India both fatherland and holy land (which Muslims and Christians of course could not). Borrowing a page from Germany's waxing nationalism, Savarkar

wrote, "If we Hindus grow strong in time Moslem friends . . . will have to play the part of German Jews" (Brasted and Khan 2007, 448).

The origins of the Sangh Parivar lie here. In 1925, inspired by Savarkar's *Hindutva*, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar founded the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; "National Volunteer Organization"). Hedgewar and M. S. Golwalkar, who led the RSS from 1940 to his death in 1973, perpetuated Savarkar's ideology, and grew the RSS into a strong organization of activists eager to implement it. In Golwalkar's *Bunch of Thoughts*, first published in 1966, Muslims and Christians are identified along with communists as "internal threats" Golwalkar ([1966] 2000, 177) to the nation. Golwalkar accuses them of not participating in the independence struggle, and of adhering to Semitic religions that are weak and unattractive but inherently intolerant and expansionistic (a common theme of critics of Christianity and Islam in India) (Varadarajan 2002, 17; Kuruvachira 2006, 142, 151).

Despite being banned several times, the RSS continued to grow in strength throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, spawning dozens of regional and national social, cultural, religious, and political organizations that together comprise the Sangh Parivar (or "family of the Sangh," i.e., the RSS). The most prominent of these organizations are the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP; "World Hindu Council") and the aforementioned political party, the BJP, which, while independent in some respects, remains very much in thrall to the RSS, and to its ideological underpinnings. For example, in the wake of the anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat, in 2002, the BJP Union Home Minister, L. K. Advani renamed an airport after Savarkar, and current BJP Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, a former member of the RSS, has called Golwalkar "*Pujniya Shri Guruji*" (a "Guru worthy of worship") (Modi 2014).

The partition of British India, at independence, into Muslim-dominated Pakistan (East and West) and Hindu-dominated India, for which many of British India's Muslims had lobbied, along with the horrific interreligious violence that resulted from it, remains for the Sangh proof both of the incompatibility of

Muslims and Hindus and of the Muslim desire to weaken and destroy India. If Christians are not negatively associated with this particular history, the case of Pakistan serves as a warning for what could happen if Christianity grew too strong in India. The 1956 *Report* of the Madhya Pradesh state-sponsored Christian Missionary Activities Inquiry Committee, which continues to be influential, worried that Christians were expanding their numbers and influence in central India as part of a western-led, neo-colonial plot to dismember and destroy the nation, and establish an independent Christian state (Goel 1998). The fact that contemporary separatist movements in India's northeastern states are strong in areas dominated by Christianity, and in some cases have Christian leadership, lends credibility to the concern.

In the end, Christians and Muslims are understood and portrayed by those who espouse the *Hindutva* ideology as adherents of foreign religions incompatible with Hindu *dharma* (religion and culture), religions that are inherently intolerant and craftily expansionist, with foreign loyalties, and bent on destroying and/or claiming Hindu India for their respective religions by introducing foreign mores and norms, and gathering political power through numerical growth. In the case of Christians, that growth is believed—counterfactually, in my view (Bauman 2015, Chapter 4)—to come about primarily as a result of conversions induced through various forms of material allurements made possible through significant foreign Christian support for evangelism in India. In the case of Islam, the claim—also largely counterfactual, but politically expedient—is that Muslims inevitably reject modern forms of birth control, engage in polygamous unions more than Hindus, and have far higher than average fertility rates.

The growth of Islam and Christianity in India *does* of course represent a threat to the Sangh's homogenizing ideology and agenda by representing heterogeneity, by advocating for more secular and inclusive visions of the nation, and by converting from and making alliances with lower-caste Hindu communities, undermining, and decreasing the size of the

broader Hindu unity the Sangh hopes to forge. The harassment and oppression of Islam and Christianity in India, therefore, can be seen as a response to this perceived political threat, and an attempt to unify all Hindus, of all castes, under a Hindu banner. It can also be seen as a nativist reaction to the political and cultural challenge of globalization, westernization, and other forms of foreign intervention (e.g., terrorism, foreign support for Christian evangelism, and the building of mosques) of which India's Christians and Muslims are perceived to be the primary purveyors and beneficiaries, and for which, therefore, they come to be a kind of local proxy (Bauman and Leech 2011; Bauman 2013).

### Contemporary Dynamics

India's Christians and Muslims continue to suffer under certain legal and social forms of discrimination. Evangelistic Christians find particularly problematic the Supreme Court's exclusion of intentional conversion from the definition of "propaganda" in their interpretation of the constitution (as discussed in the Introduction) and, for similar reasons, the Freedom of Religion laws that are active in half a dozen states, and which are periodically (but so far unsuccessfully) proposed at the national level. These laws forbid conversions by force, fraud, and allurement, and in some cases also require that prospective converts and those converting them register their intent with law and order enforcement authorities ahead of time. The prohibition against conversions by force, fraud, and allurement would not generally be objectionable to religious rights activists, except for the fact that the terms are so vague that infractions can be claimed in almost any case of conversion. Christian offers of charity, or promises of eternal life, or of greater respect and more dignified treatment for members of the lower castes, for example, can be construed as forms of allurement. That these laws are used primarily to harass Indian Christians, and serve no other useful purpose, is evident in the fact that Hindus are almost never charged under them, even in cases where it becomes clear that converts have been explicitly offered financial remuneration.

Making matters worse is that easily corrupted law enforcement officers often act in collusion with local anti-Christian activists to spuriously book Christian evangelists under these laws. A common feature of violent attacks on Christians is that the victims are afterwards dragged to a police station and booked under a Freedom of Religion law. At other times, the victims are charged under Section 295a of the Indian Penal Code which threatens imprisonment for those “outraging the religious feelings of any class of citizens of India, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise” (which many forms of evangelism can be construed to do). Section 295a is that rare and curious kind of law that problematically encourages citizens to be outraged in order to be certain the law is invoked.

India’s reservation system represents another form of legal discrimination that effects Muslims and Christians equally. The reservation system reserves seats in local and national legislatures, educational institutions, and civil service posts for members of India’s low-caste and tribal communities. However, the low-caste reservations are available only to “Hindus” (a category that has been legally clarified to include Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs). A low-caste Hindu who converts to Islam or Christianity, then, forfeits his or her right to the much-desired reservations, which observers have rightly pointed out constitutes a disincentive to conversion, and in very practical terms often results in converts obscuring their new religious affiliation, or refusing to register it officially.

If the reservation system discriminates against India’s Christians and Muslims directly, India’s system of religion-specific “personal laws” do so indirectly, by providing fodder for those who claim that the secular state appeases religious minorities, kowtowing even to their most regressive tendencies. The laws governing issues like marriage, divorce, and adoption are not uniform in India, but are rather specific to each religion. This irregularity periodically becomes a

controversial political issue, particularly in the case of Muslims, whose personal law lacks certain protections for married women and divorcees that are enshrined in the Hindu personal law code. These religion-specific personal laws were originally envisaged by India’s founders as temporary measure, but they have become entrenched.

In addition to these legal challenges and forms of discrimination, India’s Christians and Muslims have their religious rights curtailed through intimidation and actual physical attack. While Sangh leaders, and particularly BJP politicians, generally do not involve themselves directly in anti-minority violence, they are

frequently suspected and accused of facilitating or inciting the violence. And rank-and-file members of Sangh organizations are prominent and prevalent among the mobs that engage in it.

The violence experienced by Muslims is considerably worse, and more deadly than that experienced by Christians. In the decades since independence, thousands of Muslims have died in incidents of mob violence. More than 7000 died in the 1980s alone. Smaller-scale riots in which at least a few Muslims are killed are an annual affair, while every recent decade has witnessed at least one larger-scale incident.

The most politically significant rioting in the 1990s occurred in 1992, after a Sangh-led mob in Ayodhya pre-empted legal and political considerations of the aforementioned Babri Masjid’s contested status, and tore it down. Around 1000 people, mostly Muslim, were killed, many of them in police firings, in the riots that subsequently spread across all of north India. The most dramatic riots of the next decade took place in the state of Gujarat, in 2002, after a train car carrying Sangh activists returning from a protest in Ayodhya was set ablaze (either by accident or a deliberate act of arson), killing 58 passengers. Between 600 and 2000 Muslims were killed in retaliatory riots by Hindus convinced that Muslims were responsible for the fire.<sup>2</sup>

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EASILY CORRUPTED LAW  
ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS  
OFTEN ACT IN COLLUSION  
WITH LOCAL ANTI-CHRISTIAN  
ACTIVISTS

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Current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the state's Chief Minister at the time, and accusations that he discouraged or even actively obstructed an appropriate police response led to his being denied a visa to visit the United States until he was elected Prime Minister in 2014.

Christians have also occasionally endured large-scale, deadly riot violence in independent India. The largest, and best known anti-Christian rioting occurred over several months in 2007 and 2008, in and around the Kandhamal region of the state of Odisha. In these riots, at least several dozen Christians and a few Hindus died (along with a beloved if controversial Hindu swami and anti-Christian campaigner, Lakshmanananda Saraswati), while around 3000 Christians were displaced, many of them permanently.<sup>3</sup> While the violence in Kandhamal received a good deal of media attention, both in India and internationally, in some ways more concerning for India's Christians is the regularity with which they experience physical attack, theft, arson, vandalism, and sometimes (but rarely) even murder at the hands of smaller-scale mobs sympathetic to the Sangh's ideology (or using it as cover for other motivations). These more local, isolated incidents, which have in recent years taken place about 250–350 times a year, disproportionately target more evangelistic Christian individuals and communities (Bauman and Leech 2011; Bauman 2015).

## Recommendations

International criticism of the discrimination and violence faced by India's religious minorities is, it seems obvious enough, perfectly appropriate, and there are many secularist individuals and organizations at work in India that would generally welcome thoughtful international interventions and support. As is perhaps obvious from the foregoing discussion, those concerned about religious freedom in India would do well to advocate for reforms and improvements in three broad areas: (1) the law in and of itself, (2) the preservation and *application* of law and order, and (3) the judicial system.

First, the legal reforms. Religious freedom in India would be well-served by clearer

constitutional protections for proselytization. The Supreme Court's argument that the right to "propagate" one's faith does not include the right to intentionally convert another leaves those who might consider it their religious obligation to convert others in legal limbo. If there are concerns about the illicit use of money or other forms of allurement in the context of conversion, then perhaps laws like the Freedom of Religious laws now on the books in several states would be appropriate, *provided* those laws possess a clarity they do not currently possess regarding the definitions of "allurement," and an explicit exemption of what might be called "spiritual allurements" (e.g., promises of dignity or reward in the next life). Similarly, Section 295a of the Indian penal code, which threatens punishment to those who outrage the religious feelings of others, ought to be stricken from the penal code altogether, or at the very least clarified to exempt mere criticism of others' religious beliefs, however, harsh it may be.

Additionally, both religious freedom and interreligious harmony would be well-served, in my view, either by abandoning the system of reservations, which, as described above, constitute a *de facto* allurement to Hinduism for members of India's lower castes, by making the basis of reservations one's economic situation rather than one's caste, or at the very least by extending the reservations to lower-caste adherents of *all* religions (as is the case with tribal reservations). Scrapping the reservations altogether would be unpopular among the many lower-caste and tribal communities that benefit from them. Nevertheless, the system of reservations, like the religion-specific system of personal law, constitutes a perpetual source of interreligious disharmony and conflict (and was, in fact, one of the precipitating causes of the anti-Christian riots in Kandhamal).

Second, India should be encouraged, and given financial support, to improve its systems of law and order. India's police officers are notoriously underpaid and under-armed, which contributes both to their corruptibility and to the likelihood that they will simply leave their posts in the face of riot violence. India's Muslims and Christians often complain that police officers



stand idly by—or, worse yet, join in—when they are attacked, or when their possessions are stolen or destroyed. Moreover, because of their corruptibility, and because they are not held accountable for abuses of authority and the law, India’s police officers frequently obstruct minority attempts to file reports against their persecutors, or even collude with the perpetrators to unlawfully detain or file spurious reports against the victims. No equal freedoms, religious or otherwise, can exist in such a situation. And no reform of the laws, as recommended above, will be effective while the police continue to knowingly and with impunity misuse the law to target minorities.

Finally, judicial improvements are necessary to ensure that those who violently attack religious minorities on any pretense, including in putative retaliation for perceived wrongs, are brought to justice. It is tragically predictable that in the context of any large-scale act of violence against India’s religious minorities, Sangh leaders and associates will claim that the violence was merely a “natural” response to some perceived provocation (e.g., conversion by material allurements, criticism of Hinduism, and the elopement of a Muslim man with a Hindu woman). Very often the provocations named are pure fiction, and in many other cases the actions that purportedly justify a violent response are not in any way illegal (e.g., eating beef in states where doing so is illegal, the consensual elopement of single adults). But even in cases where religious minorities have broken laws and thereby offended their Hindu neighbors, those who care about religious freedom in India must insist on a legal (rather than extra-legal) reaction. Those who would take the law into their own hands must be held accountable and what is perceived by India’s minorities to be a widespread culture of impunity for offenders must be addressed. One of the particularly troubling characteristics of violence against India’s Muslims and Christians is how infrequently the perpetrators are even charged, let alone convicted, and how regularly witnesses become corrupted, or are intimidated into changing their stories in order to exculpate criminals.

That these reforms are necessary is perhaps clear enough. But foreigners wishing to effectively

advocate for broader religious freedom in India would do well to carefully consider the manner in which such concerns are raised with the Indian government. To that end, then, I make three recommendations about the style, rather than the substance, of foreign intervention on behalf of religious freedom in India.

First, a healthy dose of humility will go a long way. As described above, there are certainly forms of Hinduism that incline in a nationalistic and xenophobic direction, and for this reason Hinduism cannot be said to be a universally tolerant religion. Nevertheless, India’s religious traditions do have a long and ancient history of producing and practicing tolerance for religious minorities, one that predates the origins of the idea of tolerance in the West. Likewise, the norm, in terms of majority–minority relations in India, is one of harmony, mutual friendship, and even hybridity (Gottschalk 2000).

Moreover, Indians are far more aware of current events in the United States than *vice versa*. They are aware, for example, of recent controversies in the United States about alleged police brutality and racism, and of hate crimes directed at Muslims and non-Muslims mistaken for Muslims (many of them Sikhs of South Asian origin). In fact, in proportion to the size of their respective populations, the frequency of what in the United States would be called “hate crimes” against India’s Christians is roughly the same as the frequency of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the United States. US advocacy for reform in India will sound hollow and hypocritical to Indians, therefore, if the US’s own issues with interreligious harmony are not adequately acknowledged and addressed.

Second, those wishing to improve the lot of India’s religious minorities must be certain to express equal concern for all religious minorities. There is a perception in India that American politicians and media are concerned primarily with protecting India’s *Christian* minorities. To the extent that this perception endures, US advocacy for “religious freedom” will be perceived not as a disinterested form of advocacy for the rights of all, but rather as an underhanded form of Christian boosterism. Moreover, neglecting to advocate on behalf of India’s Muslims, who suffer

far more than India's Christians, perpetuates the belief among Indians that Americans, as a Hindu hotel proprietor once put it to me, "hate Muslims, too," and thereby makes India's Muslim minorities even more vulnerable to attack.

In this regard, it is also important that the United States and others concerned about religious freedom in India apply their standards evenly. Nothing sounds more inconsistent (and prejudicially Christocentric) to those resistant to US intervention on Indian matters of religious freedom than when, for example, Americans criticize Sangh-sponsored attempts to "reconvert" Muslims and Christians to Hinduism while advocating for full freedom with regard to Christian proselytizing efforts. For example, when United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) implicitly criticizes the Sangh, as it did in its *Annual Report 2015*, for raising money to "reconvert" Christians to Hinduism, and for noting that "it cost nearly 200,000 rupees (US \$3200) per Christian and 500,000 rupees (US \$8000) per Muslim" (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2015, 151) to do so, the Sangh could justifiably cry foul, since the Sangh was (probably intentionally) employing a proselytizing and fund-raising strategy that mimics that of well-publicized Christian evangelistic campaigns. What's good for the goose is good for the gander, and the focus ought to be on preserving the freedom to proselytize and convert to and from all religions, and ensuring that any legal prohibitions against conversion (e.g., by physical force or by explicit offers of financial gain) are applied evenly across all religions.

Relatedly, US officials should avoid contributing to the unhelpful elision of the terms "allurement" and "force/forcible" in Indian law and public discourse, as USCIRF did in the instance discussed just above, where it described these Sangh-led attempts to lure Christians and Muslims to Hinduism with financial incentives as attempts to "forcibly" reconvert them. While the issue of conversion by physical force or coercion is a relatively simple matter, and nearly universally condemned, the issue of allurement through

financial or other incentives is more complex and contested. Rhetorically conflating the use of physical force with the more complex issue of allurement only serves the purposes of those who oppose proselytization of any kind. But for those wishing to preserve the right to proselytize, and for those concerned about the deleterious effects of the ambiguously defined terms utilized in the "Freedom of Religious" laws (i.e., "force, fraud, and allurement"), it is important to resist terminological confusion so that physically forcing someone to convert and enticing them to do so through promises of a better or eternal life do not come to be seen as equally problematic forms of "forcible" conversion. They are not.

Third, it is important to recognize that, at least to some extent, the harassment and suppression of Muslims and Christians in India is a manifestation of anxiety about foreign intrusion in Indian affairs (in the form of western-dominated globalization, the millions of dollars that arrive each year from western donors in support of Christian evangelistic efforts, the substantial spending of Saudi Wahhabis on mosques and *madrassas* in India, etc.). Because of this, it is almost impossible for Americans to intervene on behalf of religious freedom in India without exacerbating concerns about foreign meddling in India affairs. Only extremely careful diplomacy, therefore, will have a positive effect that outweighs the reactionary response it is likely to provoke.

## Conclusion

There is much potential for US diplomats, policy workers, and law makers to collaborate with their Indian counterparts for the preservation and expansion of religious freedom in India, and on behalf of India's marginalized, legally disprivileged, and sometimes even physically attacked religious minorities. India and the United States share a common commitment to the ideals of secular democracy, even though those ideals may manifest themselves differently in the two countries. Because of this, non-Indians are justified in calling India to be accountable to secular democratic ideals by ensuring the broadest possible forms of religious freedom, the equitable application to all religious communities of laws

governing religion, equal protection for members of all religious communities by and from abuse at the hands of police and other security officers, and equal access to a functioning and effective justice system.

Nevertheless, there are some barriers to effective American intervention on these issues, among which the most significant is the fact that the United States is popularly and problematically associated, in the minds of many

Indians, with (1) Western colonialism and its contemporary counterpart, globalization, (2) military collaboration with Pakistan, India's bitter and longstanding rival, and (3) highly visible Christian evangelistic efforts funded in great part by US donations. For this reason, the timing, style, and tone of US advocacy must be particularly carefully considered if it is to have a positive effect. ❖

## Notes

1. Larson's chapter 3 provides a useful and concise (if now perhaps slightly outdated) overview of this period of India's history.
2. It is worth noting that many Hindus are killed, also, in the context of these large-scale riots. However, the number of Muslim dead generally outpaces that of the Hindus by three or more times.
3. On the Kandhamal riots (though it is now slightly outdated), see Bauman (2010).

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