

Article

A Forgotten Minority: The Christians of India and Religious Persecution

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Abstract

This paper seeks to study the religious persecution faced by Indian Christians. To address the topic, the researcher interviewed 30 members of the Indian Christian community living in Canada. The participants were asked questions about their familiarity with anti-Christian discrimination followed by questions on whether they had experienced discrimination, felt pressure to convert away from Christianity, or seen vandalism against churches and other sites. The participants were also asked whether they believe Christians are a forgotten minority. Results showed that while participants were aware of anti-Christian discrimination in the country, few experienced it, witnessed vandalism, or felt pressure to convert. The participants were divided on the question of being a forgotten minority in India. The paper revealed that tensions between Indian Christians and the government appear centred more on political issues rather than religious differences.

Keywords: religion in India; religious persecution; Christianity in India; Hindu-Christian relations; BJP; Narendra Modi

1. Introduction

In reflecting on the religious landscape of India, one immediately thinks of Hinduism. In India, there are over 966,257,353 Hindus thus comprising 79.8% of the total national population ([Census of India 2011](#)). The overwhelming presence of Hinduism in India has certainly had a role in influencing and shaping the country. In addition to Hinduism, one must not neglect the additional sizable religious communities typically associated with India, including Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains. One religious minority that is often not associated with India are the Christians. It is believed that St. Thomas travelled to India in 52 CE arriving on the Malabar Coast in the southwestern part of the country ([Raj and Dempsey 2002](#), p. 1). In honour of the martyred apostle, Christians of India are often referred to as St. Thomas Christians. Today, there are over 27 million Christians in India with concentrations in the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the northeastern states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland ([Kramer 2021](#), p. 32).

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the current governing party in India, emphasizing Hindutva or a Hindu-nationalist ideology. Under the BJP's rule, there have been several instances of discrimination against various religious and ethnic minorities in India ([Human Rights Watch 2025](#), pp. 222–23). Since the BJP assumed power in 2014, India's Christian community has seen a rise in attacks ([Saiya and Manchanda 2020](#), p. 590). These attacks have included physical assaults during religious services, destruction of religious symbols and churches, displacement, mob violence, and even death ([Aggarwal 2023](#); [Akkara 2023a](#); [Shih and Irfan 2023](#)). In fact, there is speculation that 2023 will be one of the most violent years for Christians witnessing a significant number of attacks ([Sen 2023](#)). The



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Christians of India have not only suffered physical attacks but have also had to contend with discriminatory legal obstacles. For example, 12 state governments have gone so far as to enact anti-conversion laws prohibiting individuals from changing their religion (Wilson 2023, p. 1). The laws seem to target “disfavored religions” in India, namely Christianity and Islam, which both actively seek to recruit converts (Wilson 2023, p. 2). There is an added level of complication with conversion that is brought about by the Hindu caste system. Individuals are born into the caste system and expected to follow the rules that are associated with their caste. However, the untouchables or Dalits are born outside of the caste system and occupy the lowest strata of Indian society. The issue is that the 70% of Christians in India have come from a Dalit background, also referred to as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Louis 2007, p. 1410). The significant number of Dalits who converted to Christianity has likely resulted in the anti-conversion laws, given that in many Indian states, it is considered an aggravating factor to convert someone from a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe (Wilson 2023, p. 2).

The purpose of this research project is to understand the nature of the religious persecution faced by Indian Christians. The project involved interviewing adult members of the Indian Christian diaspora in Canada. The participants will be required to identify as Christian from any denomination. Individuals who are of Indian parentage were also permitted to participate. The participants need not to have experienced religious persecution in India. By interviewing members of the Indian Christian community in Canada, this paper will provide a snapshot of the Christian experience on the subcontinent. The major research question is what factor or factors are motivating this religious persecution? The research hypothesis is that persecution is being motivated by political reasons rather than religious ones. During the interviews, participants were asked about their general knowledge of religious discrimination against Christians in India; whether they experienced religious discrimination personally; whether they felt pressure to convert from Christianity; whether they experienced witnessing anti-Christian vandalism on churches or other sacred sites; and their perspectives on Christians in India being a forgotten minority. The results will show that the participants were aware of the trials and tribulations facing Christians in India, but only a few had firsthand experience with these difficulties.

2. Methods and Materials

The research project made use of structured interviews that took anywhere between 25 min to over an hour, depending on the participant. Since the project involved interviewing human participants, the University of Windsor’s Research Ethics Board approval was sought and granted. The call for participants was advertised through posters, email, websites, social media, and word of mouth. Various cultural associations, churches, educational institutions, student clubs, and other organizations in the area helped to disseminate the call-for-participants poster. Interested participants were asked to contact the researcher directly rather than have the researcher contact participants. This procedure was used to minimize undue pressure. Participants met with the researcher either in-person or online. The researcher endeavoured to meet the participants at venues where they would feel comfortable. In many cases, the participants met with the researcher in his office to ensure privacy given the sensitivity of the interview questions. The participants were presented with the informed consent form and asked to review it with the researcher. Following any procedural questions, both the participant and researcher signed the informed consent form. The participant was given a copy of the informed consent form. Within the informed consent form, participants were made aware of the purpose of the study, time commitment, potential risks involved, maintenance of confidentiality, right to decline to answer any

question, and retention of data. In addition, for the participant's time, they received a \$20 gift card.

The structured interview questionnaire contained eight items on Christianity in India. There were six closed-ended and two open-ended questions. The researcher did not stop participants from expanding upon their answers in closed-ended questions. In most instances, participants would expand upon their answers. The first question asked participants about their level of familiarity with Christianity in India. The participants had four answers based on a Likert scale, including very familiar, familiar, somewhat familiar, and not familiar. This question was needed as it would determine the reliability of participants' responses. The second question explored what might be motivating anti-Christian discrimination in India. This question was left open-ended to allow for varied responses given that the researcher suspected that there would be many possible answers depending on each participant's experience. The third and fourth questions were yes or no questions on discrimination. Participants were asked if they personally experienced discrimination and whether they knew of others who experienced discrimination. If the answer was no, the researcher moved on to the next questions. However, if the response was yes, participants were welcomed to expand upon their response. The researcher was careful not to probe too intensely given the difficult nature of this question. Question five asked participants if they have seen Christian sacred sites vandalized, graffitied or destroyed in India and why this might be happening. Question six raised the question of forced conversion and whether the participants were pressured to convert from Christianity to another religion. The penultimate question harkened back to the title seeing whether participants felt that Christians in India are a forgotten minority. The final question was open-ended and asked what the future would be like for Christianity in India. The response rate was 100% with no participant declining to answer any of the eight questions or opting to withdraw from the study entirely.

3. The Participants

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked short demographic questions, including gender, age, level of education, branch of Christianity, home state in India, number of years in Canada, and number of years in India. The study included 30 participants that were interviewed directly by the researcher. There were 22 males and eight females. The participants were generally young with the average age being 28.47 years. The youngest participant was 18 years old and the oldest was 70. Most of the participants were recent arrivals to Canada with some being in the country for only a few months. The number of years in Canada ranged from less than a month to 50 years with an average of 6.27 years. The fact that many participants recently arrived in Canada makes them an ideal sample because they would be intimately aware of the issues facing Christians in India. The sample was highly educated with all participants either pursuing or holding post-secondary credentials. The participants came from nine states, including Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana. The majority came from states in the southern part of India, which has historically been viewed as the centre of Christianity in the country. Of all the participants, only one was born outside of India. Finally, despite the sample size, there were 12 Christian branches represented, including Anglican, Assyrian Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Malankara Catholic, Mar Thomas, non-denominational, Pentecostal, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Syrian-Chaldean, and Syro-Malabar (Table 1).

Table 1. Research Participant Demographics.

	Gender	Age	Education	Branch	Home State	Years Canada	Years India
1	M	33	GRAD	Roman Catholic	Maharashtra	<1	32
2	M	20	SUNDER	Roman Catholic	Kerala	1.5	18.5
3	M	28	SGRAD	Assyrian Catholic	Kerala	1	5
4	M	20	SUNDER	Pentecostal	Telangana	2	2
5	F	44	GRAD	Roman Catholic	Kerala	10	24
6	M	54	GRAD	Non-Denominational	Dehli	50	4
7	M	24	SGRAD	Roman Catholic	Tamil Nadu	<1	23
8	M	22	SGRAD	Anglican	Tamil Nadu	<1	21
9	F	56	GRAD	Protestant	Tamil Nadu	25	28
10	M	35	GRAD	Protestant	Telangana	11	24
11	M	23	SGRAD	Roman Catholic	Tamil Nadu	<1	22
12	M	21	SUNDER	Mar Thoma	Kerala	19	2
13	F	29	UNDER	Roman Catholic	Karnataka	29	0
14	F	24	GRAD	Roman Catholic	Tamil Nadu	2	22
15	M	22	UNDER	Roman Catholic	Kerala	3	19
16	F	26	GRAD	Protestant	Rajasthan	<1	25
17	M	70	DOC	Malankara Catholic	Kerala	24	46
18	M	19	SCOLL	Pentecostal	Kerala	<1	18
19	M	21	SCOLL	Syrian-Chaldean	Kerala	<1	20
20	M	25	UNDER	Roman Catholic	Kerala	1	24
21	M	26	GRAD	Syro-Malabar	Maharashtra	2	24
22	M	23	UNDER	Protestant	Andhra Pradesh	<1	22
23	F	22	SGRAD	Protestant	Tamil Nadu	<1	21
24	M	28	SGRAD	Lutheran	Andhra Pradesh	<1	27
25	M	23	SGRAD	Syrian-Orthodox	Kerala	1	22
26	M	19	SCOLL	Protestant	Gujrat	<1	18
27	F	32	GRAD	Roman Catholic	Kerala	<1	31
28	M	22	SGRAD	Baptist	Andhra Pradesh	<1	21
29	M	25	SGRAD	Lutheran	Andhra Pradesh	<1	24
30	F	18	SUNDER	Roman Catholic	Maharashtra	<1	4

SCOLL = Some College/SUNDER = Some Undergraduate/UNDER = Undergrade Degree/SGRAD = Some Graduate/GRAD = Graduate Degree/DOC = Doctoral/MD Degree.

4. Religious Discrimination

The first question that began the interview asked participants how familiar they were with anti-Christian discrimination in India. The participants had four options: very familiar, familiar, somewhat familiar, and not familiar. With the exception of four participants, the remaining 26 participants all had a degree of familiarity with the treatment of Christians in India. In the subsequent question, participants were asked what might be motivating anti-Christian discrimination in India. At the outset, participants seem to feel that anti-Christian persecution and sensitivities for religion in general are a relatively novel phenomenon that developed in the past decade. One participant shared that “there was no problem until 2010. Hindus and Christians would visit each other. Christians would make donations to Hindu temples and festivals” (Participant 17) The supportive relationship between Christians and Hindus is encouraging and a step forward for interreligious dialogue but seems to be part of an idealized past. Another participant said that “in my schools and social settings, we didn’t care about religion growing up. Now it is a bit sensitive. We don’t even talk about it” (Participant 27). This response prompts the question as to what has changed from this friendly past to the tense and traumatic present.

In answering this question, the most repeated response revolved around the current political climate in India, namely the ruling government. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP, India has emphasized its Hindu heritage despite being the largest secular

nation in the world. The participants were aware of this Hinduization under the Modi government and BJP:

The prime minister has brought religion into the political system. He's trying to stay in power using religion. He's bringing in Hinduism. This is a Hindu nation, and Hindus must remain in power. A lot of people are brainwashed by his speeches and persecution of Christians. (Participant 8)

The participant's comment that religion is being used as a tool by the current administration begs the question as to how this is being accomplished. As the participant suggested, Modi's speeches are littered with religious rhetoric despite India being a secular state. To mark an airport improvement in Maharashtra, Modi shared his remarks: "Today, by the grace of Lord Vitthal, his devotees have also received a precious gift. The work of upgrading the airport to connect Solapur directly with air connectivity has been completed" (Modi 2024a). Here, Modi is referring to a manifestation of the Hindu god, Vishnu. In a secular state, like Canada, referencing Jesus Christ at the expansion of a new airport by the prime minister would be considered inappropriate. The rhetoric used by Modi is not solely confined to emphasizing India's Hindu culture but also targeting religious minorities. For example, in a speech he gave in Bihar, Modi criticized the Congress Party's position on India's largest religious minority: "The Congress manifesto released two days ago also bears the imprint of Muslim League ideology. Congress has issued not a 'manifesto' but an 'appeasement document'" (Modi 2024b). In this case, Modi seems to suggest that Congress capitulated to Muslims. In the same speech, Modi referenced how his party eliminated "the anti-woman practice" of triple talaq where a Muslim man can divorce his wife simply by repeating a statement of divorce (Modi 2024b). He also broached a highly sensitive topic of the Ayodhya temple to Ram and how under his leadership it was finally built (Modi 2024b). There is a long dispute between Hindus and Muslims over the land in which the temple was to be built as it was, prior to 1992, a mosque built during the Mughal period. This speech is just one example of Modi's religion-laden commentary; however, does this extend to Christians?

In the case of Christians, Modi has spoken quite favourably of the community. On Christmas Day in 2023, Modi invited Christian religious leaders to his residence where he emphasized the message of Jesus, reminisced about a meeting with the pope, and praised the Christian community (Modi 2023). While on the surface, Modi's welcoming gesture and words appeared supportive of the Christian community of India, the treatment of Christians is another matter that was discussed by the participants. In some cases, the discrimination of Christians is quite overt and violent. One participant cited "government policies" (Participant 10) were motivating anti-Christian religious discrimination in India:

It varies by state. The minister in charge of my state is Christian. They [Hindu militants] removed church flags and put Hindu god flags. They [Christians] gave out Bibles outside of Hindu temples. The Hindu temple had a one-on-one conversation then the Hindu temple congregates put oil in the church and burned it the next day. (Participant 10)

This type of aggressive violence has not solely been confined to Christian places of worship but has descended into attacks against Christian leaders: "The pastors and preachers are being killed by Hindus. It has been difficult to preach and distribute Bibles. In the coming days, it will be difficult for Christians to live in India" (Participant 22). Again, the attempt to proselytize has been met with severe repercussions in India. The participant has alluded to a major issue in this study and with Christianity in India, namely the conversion question.

Like in other parts of the world, there are Christian branches within India who seek converts to Christianity. After all, Jesus did encourage his disciples to "Go, therefore,

and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28: 19–20). The problem with this exhortation is that it is indeed dangerous in India and other countries hostile toward proselytizing. In a sense, one can understand why Indians might be sensitive toward proselytizing efforts given the country's long history with colonialism under the British. The participants were aware of the connection between the British's efforts during the colonial period and Christianity, but added a nuanced response:

Most Indians don't know the history of Christianity in India. They think of the British who ruled us for 400 years. They think the British brought Christianity to India. If you talk about the history, they will ignore it. They are not trying to understand the history. They think Christians helped the British. (Participant 20)

While Christianity arrived in India centuries before the British Raj, the idea that Christianity was imported was mentioned by the participants. One participant was told that "there are no original Christians in India, so we are all converts. They are saying convert back to Hinduism" (Participant 2). There were several other participants who shared similar experiences. Another participant confirmed that even government officials were making disparaging comments about Christian leaders: "Even yesterday, the Governor of Tamil Nadu in his speech, condemned the early missionaries Mr. Caldwell and Mr. Pope as illiterates and came to change India from Hinduism to Christianity and did nothing for the people or community" (Participant 9). In this case, the participant is referring to a speech made by Governor R.N. Ravi in March 2024 about missionaries, Bishop Robert Caldwell (1814–1891) and G.U. Pope (1820–1908) who ministered in southern India. In the controversial speech, Ravi suggested that Caldwell and Pope were "school dropouts" with the former authoring a "fake book" on Dravidian languages (Madhav 2024). The issue is not solely confined to certain state leaders where Christians are present but rather was perceived to be a national issue reaching the premiership. Throughout the interviews, the personage of Prime Minister Modi remained a reoccurring topic. The participants seem to conclude that the prime minister has an animus for Christians. It is interesting that unlike the case of the Governor of Tamil Nadu, Modi's hostility is manifested less with words and more with actions. One participant identified a conflict that continues to plague India and has captured the attention of several human rights organizations: "The people are mostly Hindu, and the prime minister doesn't like Christians. He has a grudge against Christians. He did nothing to help the Manipur situation" (Participant 22). The participant is referencing an ongoing religious-ethnic conflict in the northeastern Indian state of Manipur between the predominately Hindu Meitei and the Christian Kuki. Here, there were 250 churches destroyed, 60,000 people displaced, and 140 killed (Ellis-Petersen 2023).

One may wonder as to why there would be persecution against a tiny minority that only forms 27 million people against a population of over one billion. One participant stated that "there are other religions that don't want the spread of Christianity in India" (Participant 16). One may wonder who these religions are and why they wish to stop Christianity's growth. This participant's response was not unusual during the interviews but rather was mentioned by others. One participant helped to illuminate this question by arguing that the issue is not particularly focused on today, but rather tomorrow:

There is a fear of Christianity flourishing. There are large Christian outdoor services in India. There are a lot of conversions. There are public baptisms where people walk to the river or lake. There are many middle and lower caste mass conversions to Christianity. (Participant 6)

The question as to whether Christianity is indeed growing is a matter of debate. In the recent 2011 Census of India, Christians comprised 2.3% of the population, which is

the same percentage as revealed in the 1951 census (Kramer 2021, p. 7). However, though the percentage of the population has remained the same over the span of six decades, the number of Christians did increase from eight million in 1951 to 28 million in 2011 (Kramer 2021, p. 13). The second part of the participant's response suggests that there are mass conversions to Christianity with public baptisms being commonplace. The data does not seem to suggest that individuals are leaving Hinduism in large numbers to convert to Christianity. A Pew Research Center study found that of the 81.6% of Hindus who were raised Hindu, 81.7% remained in the faith (Sahgal et al. 2021, p. 30). In the case of Christianity, there was only a slight difference. Of 2.3% of Christians who were raised in the faith, 2.6% are currently Christians (Sahgal et al. 2021, p. 30). The increase is inconsequential and does not warrant a prediction that Christianity will one day overtake Hinduism in India. Nonetheless, 12 Indian states have enacted anti-conversion laws (Wilson 2023, p. 1). These laws are perceived to violate the Indian Constitution, which guarantees that "all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion" (The Constitution of India 2024, Sect. 25). In addition to being a potential violation of the constitution, scholars have pointed to the violence that has erupted. Saiya and Manchanda's (2020) quantitative study discovered that there is a correlation between the existence of anti-conversion laws and the propensity for violence against Christian communities (588). Selvaraj (2024) has recently compared the anti-conversion laws to a form of "structural violence" against Christians vis-à-vis Johann Galtung's tripartite violence model (791–792). Others saw the persecution in a religious light. One participant explained that it is "mentioned in the Bible that if you are a Christian, you will face discrimination" (Participant 4). The participant is alluding to the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven (Matt 5: 11–12). While this question asked participants to speak generally about religious persecution against Christians in India, one wonders whether the sample personally experienced discrimination firsthand.

5. Experiencing Discrimination

The next two questions revolved around personal experiences with religious discrimination. The first question asked if the participant ever experienced any discrimination in India because of their Christian faith. The second question explored whether the participant knew of others who experienced discrimination because of their Christian faith. At this point, one might hypothesize that given the sample's knowledge of anti-Christian discrimination in India, they likely derived it through personal experiences. However, only five participants personally experienced discrimination because of their Christian faith. What is particularly interesting is that all five participants came from areas outside of Kerala. Participants from Kerala did not report any instances of discrimination, despite being the state with the largest number of Christians or 6.14 million adherents (Census of India 2011). In some cases, participants alluded to this when they answered no to this question with the explanation that they were from Kerala. The researcher took this to mean that the prevalence of Christianity in Kerala has mitigated anti-Christian discrimination.

From those who did experience discrimination, the incidents are best classified as incivilities. In responding to this question, a younger participant provided an example from their days in high school: "When I was in high school as a teenager, there was a lack of knowledge in the household which lead to conversations that made children say things that made you feel small or inferior" (Participant 16). The participant seems to be suggesting that parental biases are being passed on to their children who in turn are using them against their peers in school. Another participant, from the state of Andhra Pradesh

in India's south, had a similar experience though not in a school setting. The participant experienced anti-Christian discrimination but noted that it was "not directly" (Participant 24). The participant went on to explain that "most of the people are Hindus and we have to be with them all the time. They don't attack us directly, but when there is a post about Christians, they try to pull our legs about it" (Participant 24). Again, there is no specific charge levelled against the participant for being a Christian. One might have expected that there would be a criticism against some aspect of Christian belief or practice. For other participants, the matter was much more focused on a specific practice.

The indicators of one's religion can vary significantly from country to country. For example, if one were to drink wine in a country where Islam is the official religion, then it would be an indicator that one is likely not Muslim or a non-practicing Muslim. This type of situation emerged in this research but focused on vegetarian and non-vegetarian diets. It is important to note that India has the largest number of vegetarians in the world with nearly 30% of the country observing vegetarianism or approximately 276 million ([Vegetarianism by Country 2024](#)). It is interesting that vegetarianism would be identified as a form of discrimination by a few participants. One participant said how consuming a meat-based product caused a negative reaction among non-Christian neighbours: "I'm Christian. Most Hindus are predominantly vegetarian. My mom's area was Jain, and people would make faces when we made meat curries" (Participant 6). The sneering at another's culinary choices is certainly a form of intolerance but does not seem to be a severe enough issue to be considered a form of discrimination. However, perhaps there is more at play here than mere discourtesies between neighbours. This propensity for something more emerged in another interview. In this case, the participant had a similar situation related to vegetarianism; however in this case, a relative provides a warning: "When I go to visit my grandma, she suggested not to eat non-vegetarian food outside of the house. It is frowned upon, and people will not approach you" (Participant 4). The decision to eat meat not only produces frowns, but also social ostracization. In a similar vein, the participant said that Christian culinary differences have resulted in more isolation. The participant said that they "never seen a non-Christian guest at my house in India" (Participant 4). The social ostracization may be because of the use of meat in the Christian household, but it may also mean that the non-Christian guest is concerned with how others will perceive their visit, which in turn can result in a diminished reputation, marginalization, or loss of livelihood. The type of discrimination that the sample was reporting seemed to revolve around the home.

The sample not only reported that there were issues with the Christian inclusion of meat in the diet, but something more severe. The use of discriminatory practices in housing to ensure that one neighbourhood remains free from a certain religious group has historically been practiced around the world. One participant reported that "when we would move houses, we didn't get into a good neighbourhood because other religions [Hinduism] would not allow us" (Participant 26). It is unsurprising that housing discrimination would emerge within the study. In a Pew Research Center's study, one question asked Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain participants if they would accept having neighbours from other religions than their own. The study discovered that 31% of Hindu participants would not accept Christian as neighbours ([Sahgal et al. 2021](#), p. 10). The study further demonstrated there was a high level of unacceptance among the religious communities surveyed. For example, among Hindu participants, 45% would not accept a neighbour from at least one of the non-Hindu traditions in the survey ([Sahgal et al. 2021](#), p. 10). These tensions between Hindu and non-Hindu minorities have spilled over into the need to "return" to the "original" faith of India.

6. Pressure to Convert

The study has unearthed several claims that Christianity is a foreign import to India that resulted in forced conversions to the newfound faith. In the interview, participants were asked if they had experienced pressure to convert. The purpose of this question was to determine whether the sample was under pressure to convert to Hinduism. However, the results revealed that there were only three participants who experienced mild pressure to convert.

The first participant was asked by a Hindu “why don’t you show up for mandir (temple)” (Participant 6). Again, this represents a subtle attempt to convert the participant to Hinduism. By attending temple services, it might spark an interest in Hinduism and help move the prospect away from Christianity. What was fascinating about this question is that it yielded unexpected results with pressure to convert to religions that the researcher did not predict. Perhaps the open-ended wording of this question lent itself to a variety of responses. The question that was asked was, “Have you expressed pressure to convert from Christianity?” It did not specify anything about India or mention a conversion to Hinduism. The question’s openness was by design to allow for freedom to express how the participant wanted, but more important not to lead the participant into a specific response, such as suggesting that they were pressured by Hindus in India to convert to Hinduism. Interestingly, in one of the responses, the researcher received an answer that he was not expecting. When asked this question, the participant indicated that they had received pressure to convert to Islam, but it took place in Canada (Participant 4). Since the context of this study was based on India, the researcher did not ask further questions. However, Islam did emerge a second time. In answering this question, a participant shared a case of attempted religious conversion on the backdrop of romance: “My girlfriend at the time wanted me to convert to Islam. She wanted me to convert because of her dad and [she] knew no conversion, no marriage” (Participant 21). Upon hearing this statement, one might be reminded of the so-called “Love Jihad” campaign promoted by right-wing Hindu nationalists and others. The campaign started to emerge in 2009 and first appeared in popular press in southern India (Strohl 2019, p. 29). It presupposes that Muslim men will court Hindu women for the purpose of converting them to Islam (Chacko 2020, pp. 214–15). However, this participant’s response does not fit into the Love Jihad belief. Instead, the response seems reminiscence of frequent attempts of partners to convince the other partner to convert to placate the family. This type of conversion is common and is not particular to the case of India.

Up to this point, the discussion has focused on the relationship between two religious traditions. However, what about potential conflicts within Christianity, namely the pressure to convert from one branch to other? During the interviews, one participant did mention this case and provided detail on converting from Catholicism to Protestantism:

On a personal front, I have never faced this issue because I have never really entertained such questions but yes, the Protestant community would ask Catholics to leave the faith and become a Protestant just by quoting Bible verses and interpreting it the way they feel is correct. I’ve not seen this kind of behaviour in Canada which is good. I would say it’s more about the attacks against the Christian community that’s causing a serious issue these days. I don’t think my love for Catholicism would ever change so even if anyone would try to convert me it wouldn’t work. (Participant 1)

The participant’s detailed response provided insight into a new dynamic in the study. Instead of focusing on inter-religious tensions, the participant highlighted tensions within Christianity, namely between Catholics and Protestants (New American Bible 2010). The intra-Christian dynamic should be expected given the diversity of Christianity in India.

The sample not only reflected this diversity, but was in a position to speak about possible conflicts between Christian branches.

7. Vandalism

The study has focused on the participants' experiences, namely experiencing discrimination, seeing others being discriminated against, and facing pressure to convert from Christianity. The study also enquired about the treatment of Christian sacred spaces. Participants were asked if they had ever seen Christian sacred spaces, such as churches, vandalized, graffitied, or destroyed. In the same question, participants were asked why this might be happening. The responses can be divided into three groups. The first group comprises those who have seen sacred sites attacked. The second group is composed of those who have not personally seen sacred sites vandalized but have heard about it or seen it through various forms of media. Finally, participants in the third group, the smallest one, either answered no to the question or never heard of such events happening in the country.

There were very few participants who had personally seen vandalism against churches and other Christian spaces. One participant shared that information about an incident where a "Mary statue was stoned, and it broke resulting in the closing of the church to repair" (Participant 14). The attacks on Christian figures were reported by other participants as well.

A statue of St. George was vandalized. The statue was chopped, glass shattered, and the chapel destroyed. Hindus are attracted to St. George because of his miracles. Hindus often go to churches to pray and light candles. (Participant 27)

The attack on the St. George statue is especially egregious for Indian Christians given the popularity of this saint in the country. The vandalism has not only been confined to statues but has extended to desecration of Christian cemeteries. One participant shared that St. Michael's Church cemetery in Mumbai was desecrated (Participant 1). St. Michael's, regarded as one of the oldest Catholic churches in India (Bose 2023), had 18 crosses in its cemetery broken in 2023 (Mumbai 2023). The vandalism does not seem confined to one region of India, but even in areas with large Christian populations: "In Goa, I like to visit rural areas and saw a chapel graffitied and saw a grotto in Delhi damaged" (Participant 21). One of the questions that begs for a response is why is this happening according to the participants? One participant helped to shed light on this question:

Of course, because we have missions in east and northern Indian. One of the churches in Uttar Pradesh was vandalized and burned and someone even died. Only people in India would know about it because the government whitewashes events. (Participant 18)

The missionary activities in the country, particularly in the northern states of India was mentioned several times by those interviewed. Participants made short comments such as "It mostly happens in the northern part of India" (Participant 24), "northern part is against Christians" (Participant 5), "near Chinese border" (Participant 17), and "not in Kerala, but in the northern states there is pressure" (Participant 18). One person had a relative who experienced this type of discrimination: "I have heard from one of my relatives who is a priest in northern India. His church was damaged by some people at night" (Participant 20). These responses prompted the researcher to investigate more about the state of Christianity in India's northern states. India has three states where Christians form a majority, including Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Mizoram, all of which are in the northeastern region of the country (Census of India 2011). The participants did not name a particularly northern state when answering this question, so it is difficult to determine what examples of vandalism they are referring to in their responses. In some cases, these states have been seen as a Christian sanctuary rather than a state of violence. For example, given the political strife

in Myanmar, many Myanmaris are going to and welcomed in Mizoram ([Akkara 2023b](#)). The authorities in Mizoram report that many of the Myanmarian refugees are Christians ([Akkara 2023b](#)). These types of stories are often unheard of outside of India.

Many participants who answered this question did not personally witness vandalism but were aware of it. The participants provided a myriad of responses such as, “heard stories in India (Participant 9),” “heard from church elders (Participant 10),” “not in person, but in videos (Participant 8),” and “in the news, but not personally” (Participant 13). One of the messages repeated during their interviews was that churches were being demolished: “So many. Now, there are churches burned and demolished. Now a days, they are no new churches being built up” (Participant 29). The participant is correct as in 2023 there were considerable attacks on churches. Archbishop Dominic Lumon of the Catholic diocese of Imphal in Manipur reported that there were 245 churches destroyed within a short span of 36 h ([Coppin 2023](#)). Again, these acts of violence do not seem to be known around the world leading to the possible conclusion that the Christian community of India is of little interest.

8. Forgotten Minority

Toward the end of the interview, the participants were asked if they believe that the Christians of India are a forgotten minority. The researcher did not define the term “forgotten” allowing the participants to interpret what forgotten might mean to them. At the outset, a response that emerged previously reemerged. In several responses, participants qualified their responses by noting that the location in India determined whether the Christians were a forgotten minority. Again, participants clarified that those in the south were not a forgotten minority, but Christians in India’s north were forgotten. Despite Christians forming a majority in three northern states in India, the conditions in these conflicted states has rendered the south more favourable. However, for another participant, the entire country was not suitable for Christians prompting an exodus: “Of course, it is a forgotten minority. Many [Christians] are moving out of the country because of the BJP. The BJP will win again not Congress and make matters worse” (Participant 1). The participant is correct about the movement of Indians out of the country. The World Migration Report 2024 reported that as of 2020, India was ranked the country with the highest number of emigrants with 17.79 million or 1.3% of the population ([McAuliffe and Oucho 2024](#), p. 124). The report provided some indicators as to what is motivating this significant emigration rate. India has the second largest number of students studying abroad surpassed only by China ([McAuliffe and Oucho 2024](#), p. 41). The high emigration rate of students from India exposed another issue shared by the participants.

There were several participants who described issues with the university admission process in India. In replying to this question, whether Christians are a forgotten minority, the participants stated, “At times. Most of the colleges in India give the majority and selected seats to the Hindus. The Christians will get the leftovers, if there are seats remaining” (Participant 30). The question of seats at universities and colleges emerged several times in the interviews, but with contradictory opinions. While the previous participant noted that the Christians would get the remainder, other participants saw this seat reservation system as an indicator that Christians are included in India: “Christians cannot be a forgotten minority because of reservations. We cannot say that we are a forgotten minority” (Participant 5). In contrast to other countries, there are several Christian colleges and universities in India that would provide a space for Christians. One participant remarked that, “we still have minority institutions. I went to a Catholic school and Christian college. There are still minority institutions that prevail in the country” (Participant 14). Perhaps the existence of Christian places of learning challenges the notion that the government seeks to eliminate

Christianity completely from the subcontinent. If the government were completely hostile to Christian post-secondary institutes of learning, they would have been immediately closed. However, in doing so, the government would also have to close additional minority post-secondary institutes, particularly those belonging to the country's largest religious minority, the Muslims.

Again, the focus is on post-secondary education and the reservation of seats, but other issues quickly emerged. One participant identified a discriminatory practice between Muslim and Christian post-secondary applicants: "The focus is on the Muslim minority because they are about 35% and get scholarships, financial aid, jobs, and admission to colleges. Christians are not on par with the Hindus. We get a big zero" (Participant 17). Before continuing to analyze this participant's response, it is important to note that Muslims do not form 35% of the population in India. Rather, they comprise 14.2% of the Indian population (Kramer 2021, p. 7). Perhaps the participant might have been referring to the number of applicants received by a particular university or college. In another response, a participant acknowledged the smaller size of the Christian community by focusing on the hiring practices of Hindu and Christian colleges:

Now, yes. It [Christianity] is only 2.3% of the population. The management of colleges are now completely able to hire who they like. They only hire people from their religion. The Hindu management colleges will hire Christians and other non-Hindus but require a donation or bribe. Christians will very rarely hire non-Christians. (Participant 27)

It appears that both cases are unfavourable with one requiring a bribe and the other being exclusionary. Given the younger age demographic of the population, one can easily understand why education is of the utmost importance.

Throughout the interviews, the participants tended to focus on the relationship between Hindus and Christians. In this question about forgotten minorities, the relationship between Muslims and Christians manifested itself. In fact, given that Muslims form the largest non-Hindu minority in India, it seems that they are perceived as the minority of the country whereas other, smaller minorities are ignored. One participant declared that Muslims are the default minority in India: "When people talk about the minority, they talk about Muslims, but there are also other minorities. Modi did invite priests and bishops to his home during Easter as a way to get votes and will visit Kerala" (Participant 15). The currying of favours among the Christian hierarchy coupled with a special visit to Kerala is certainly nothing more than common political pandering during election season. However, while one might charge Modi with political opportunism, the fact that he did invite Christian leaders to his home during an election cycle indicates that he recognizes the Christians as an influential voting bloc. This position may not resonate with all participants in the study.

9. Result

This paper has offered a picture of Christianity in India with emphasis on what might be motivating anti-Christian discrimination in the country. The initial hypothesis that the motivating factors were likely political rather than religious proved to be correct. In examining how participants responded to questions on perception and experiencing discrimination, pressure to convert, vandalism, and being seen as a forgotten minority, one can conclude that politics dominates the discussion. One trend that emerged repeatedly in the study was the current government's perceived animosity toward Christians. The study was conducted during the 2024 Indian national election. The participants seemed to expect that Narendra Modi's BJP was on course to get easily re-elected. While the party was re-elected and Modi did retain the premiership, he lost the majority government status that he previously held. Now that the government is in a more precarious position, one

might speculate how this will affect the Christian minority. Will the government take a more inclusive position toward Christians, or will the antagonisms of the past continue?

10. Conclusions

As the government settles into its new minority government role, a future study of Christianity in India will need to explore what effect this political outcome has had on the Indian Christian community. While the political environment dominated the discussion, one must not discount the role that religious factors played in causing tension between Christians and other religious communities in India. Hostilities remain over issues related to Christianity's missionary activities in India and the perception of Christianity as a foreign religion. In some cases, these hostilities turned into interreligious violence. One trend that continued to emerge in the study was the difference between the treatment of Christians in the north and south. The experience of a Christian practicing their faith in Nagaland would be completely different than a Christian practicing in Kerala or Tamil Nadu. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to find participants from the northern states of India. A future study on Christianity in India should endeavour to include northern Christians as their voices are often unheard and their experiences appear unique in comparison to the Indians of the south. The discrepancy between the two leads the researcher to conclude that there is almost a tale of two "Christianities" in India. As India approaches its eightieth anniversary since its independence, one hopes that the world's largest democracy will not garner a reputation for religious discrimination. Instead, one expects that the pluralistic traditions that have defined India for generations will continue to be exemplified again.

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