

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND THE PRESS:  
AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-POLITICAL FACTORS  
IN THE COVERAGE OF RELIGIOUS ISSUES  
IN THE INDIAN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

The press coverage of three religious events regarding the Christian minority in India is scrutinized in six newspapers with a discourse analysis method implemented with a quantitative methodology that “transforms” concepts of the qualitative analysis into variables adapted for statistical analysis. Overall, the analysis proves that the newspapers keep their role as the watchdog of democracy and secularism that are embedded in the Indian Constitution. Though the three events had a predominant religious meaning, the newspapers framed them into a political angle. A deeper qualitative analysis of the editorials proves that the elite national newspapers were soft in condemning fundamentalists.

KEY WORDS: Christian minorities, discourse analysis, Indian newspapers, press coverage, religious tolerance.

RESUMEN

Se analiza, en seis periódicos de la India, la cobertura informativa de tres acontecimientos relativos a la minoría cristiana con la metodología del análisis del discurso complementada con la aplicación de algunas técnicas cuantitativas; para ello se “transforman” conceptos del análisis cualitativo en variables manejables en el estudio estadístico. En conjunto, la prensa ha defendido los valores constitucionales del secularismo y de la tolerancia religiosa, a pesar de privilegiar una focalización política de los acontecimientos religiosos. El análisis discursivo de los editoriales revela que los diarios nacionales, diarios de las élites cultas, han sido “blandos” al condenar las actitudes intolerantes de los fundamentalistas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: minorías cristianas, análisis del discurso, prensa hindú, cobertura informativa, tolerancia religiosa.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Secular India was shocked on December 6, 1992 as Hindu fundamentalists demolished the famous Muslim mosque Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. This was a serious blow to the age-old tolerant tradition of India. The brutal violation of the Indian secular Constitution was a shockwave throughout the world. Hindu fanatics continue to instigate the Hindu majority against minority religions. One of the major tools used by Hindu fundamentalists against the minorities is hate campaign, for which they utilize the media, specifically the print media. The idea of analysing three major events, which had a serious consequence on the political and religious atmosphere of India, developed from contemplating the responsibility of the press in a democratic, secular country. The three crucial events under analysis are: the brutal murder of Australian Christian missionary, Graham Stuart Staines, and his two children on January 24, 1999 in Manoharpur, Orissa by Hindu fanatics; the murder of another Indian missionary, Fr. Arul Doss on September 3, 1999 in Jambubani village in Orissa; and related events in India involving the visit of Pope John Paul II on November 6-7, 1999. Articles covering these events in three national and three local newspapers, particularly the attitude they maintain and convey, are the objects of study. It has been found that at least some of the major newspapers were generally committed to the spirit of a secular Constitution when reporting on Christian minority issues, with some nuances and setbacks particularly evident in the analysis of editorial texts.

## 2. NEWSPAPERS UNDER STUDY AND CORPUS OF ANALYSIS

Three national English newspapers and three regional Malayalam (of the southern State of Kerala, India) newspapers are the main source of analysis. They are The Hindu,<sup>1</sup> The Indian Express,<sup>2</sup> The Times of India,<sup>3</sup> Malayala

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<sup>1</sup> *The Hindu* started its journey as a weekly in 1878 by Subramanya Aiyer and five other young men. The basic purpose was to fight against the social evils of the Hindu Society such as the caste system. Its role in the struggle for an independent India is well known. At present it is a multi-edited national newspaper read by the educated and the elite. (Parthasarathi 47)

<sup>2</sup> *The Indian Express* has its origin in the year 1931 and was very prominent in the freedom struggle. It was the first newspaper to introduce investigative journalism in India. It has 22 daily editions in India today. Its campaign against the central governments has many times ended up in the resignation of the government. (Parthasarathy 293)

<sup>3</sup> Established in 1838 in Bombay, it is India's premier English daily. It is read by 4.42 million people. It is published from ten cities in India. It also had a prominent role in the mission of independence of the nation. *The Times of India* group is a giant in the publishing and printing world of India. (Cf. <<http://www.timesofindia.com/dmd/htmls/aboutus.htm>>)

Manorama,<sup>4</sup> Deepika<sup>5</sup> and Mathrubhumi.<sup>6</sup> Each newspaper has its own characteristics.

Analysis of the print media coverage of these events, as opposed to broadcasting and electronic media, was selected for one major reason. Newspaper articles are the dominant form of news media in India. Even various other media rely on newspapers for information. Newspapers succeed in reaching the great majority. News, reports, editorials, feature articles, interviews and other timely items appearing in the newspapers related to the previously mentioned issues were chosen for analysis.

As it happens in every country, there is a synergism between newspapers and society. Therefore, it is effective to measure a social problem through the analysis of newspapers (Stone 15-18). Since each of these events had religious and political significance, India's print media showed much interest and followed the events seriously. As a result, the number of news and reports was great. Four hundred and fifty items were studied. The focus was mainly on news (162), reports (180), editorials (22), articles (32) and letters to the editor (16). Of course, other genres such as boxes, features, news-analysis, etc., were also considered. The visit of Pope John Paul II carried special significance since a propaganda campaign against the visit was begun long before his arrival, while in fact his potential visit was yet a rumour, by certain Hindu fundamentalists. News items before and after the papal visit were thereby analysed.

## 2.1. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

There are various methods of analysis used in newspaper studies. There are quantitative and qualitative methods such as semiotics; and structural, content, narrative, and discourse analysis. The most common method of quantitative analysis used is called content analysis, "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson 18). In our analysis, a partial content analysis was used to determine the coverage of these events by the newspapers. The main method studied, however, was discourse

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<sup>4</sup> A leading newspaper of the southern State of Kerala, India, which was established in 1888, fought against the autocracy of the princely states and stood for an independent India. At present this newspaper is considered to be a popular daily, which writes for the secular credentials of the country. (Karim 50)

<sup>5</sup> *Deepika* is a Catholic daily from the State of Kerala. It was established in 1887 in Mannanam. The people of Kerala accepted *Deepika* for its serious involvement in the freedom struggle and for its efforts to uplift the poor of the society. It has multiple editions. (Puthuppally 63)

<sup>6</sup> It was established at Kozhikodu, in the north of Kerala in 1926. From its beginning it wrote for the poor sections of society, especially for the working class. Its main thrust in the beginning was for the freedom and peace in society. (Menon 58)

analysis (van Dijk, *Handbook ii* 1). One of the basic reasons why discourse analysis was chosen was because it is one of the most effective means of analyzing a social problem. The subject of analysis in this study is multifaceted, including religious, social and political dimensions. Van Dijk explains discourse analysis as addressing social problems, constituting society and culture, and performing ideological work. It is also historical and mediates the link between text and society (van Dijk, *Discourse* 258-284). In this case, a discourse analysis will bring to light whether the journalist (or newspaper) has simply reported the fact or has played a role as an opinion maker through the structure and style of the writing used. In fact, such an analysis will prove how the discourse itself becomes an integral part of the text, revealing the real intention of the author (van Dijk, *Racism* 45). The basic structure of any discourse analysis is built out of a communicative event followed by an order of discourse. The communicative event is analysed in its particulars based on the specific newspapers in which it is reported, as well as the time and space of the reports (Fairclough 56). A mixed structure was used for the analysis of this communicative event. In the first part, an attempt was made for a quantitative analysis of the events as they were reported in the newspapers. This involves a codification of different genres of news items published in these newspapers on special events. The analysis includes the macrostructure and microstructure of the news items. The macrostructure is of the overall coherence of the superstructures of the news such as summary items, setting and orientations. This social representation of the text can be a result of the ideology of the news participants as news actors (van Dijk, *News* 27). In fact, discourse analysis in this case will make clear the relations between the ideology of newspapers, characteristics of society, its cognition and the actual discourse.

## 2.2. VARIABLES OF THE ANALYSIS

A series of identifying variables in every item make up the first part of the worksheet: number of the item, name of the newspaper under analysis, date and author of the article, and the title. It is also enumerated the type of news item or different genre such as news, report, editorial, article, interview, feature, and news-analysis, as well as column, letter to the editor, box and cartoon.

Source is another variable. The credibility of a news item depends upon the reliability of sources on a particular issue. Source indicates whether the news is of first or second hand information. It is important for the reader to identify the source of a news item. A source is identifiable, non-identifiable or anonymous. The credibility scale depends much on the identity of the source. Often the source itself can be powerful and influential, determining whether a reporter or journalist will insert his or her own opinion or ideology.

The majority of readers just look at the title of a news story without continuing to the body of the text. The title, or headline, serves as an overall summary of the news. Therefore, the title is a crucial part of the news. Usually, the title highlights the main idea of the story, but it can be downplayed at times. Here, the



typology of titles is examined to determine whether they are descriptive, interpretative or quoted. Style is analysed, too, for the purpose of detecting any exaggeration or instigation in the title.

Each event is linked by context. In a broad sense, this context can be social, political, cultural or historical (van Dijk, *Handbook 13*). Depending on the context, newspapers use a hierarchy of topics when reporting an event. Every event in society strikes a theme that is of social, moral, political or spiritual nature. Thematic presentation of the news is another variable. These topics appear in summary structures such as headlines and leads and are placed in a particular order based on importance. There should be an internal coherence between these topics. This topical structure is called a thematic presentation of events (Schiller 118). There is a common way of topically structuring news on a particular event, of which the reader is also conscious about. A thorough checkout of the topical structure and frame of the news will reveal whether a newspaper is taking sides by leaning in one direction or another (van Dijk, "Analysis").

One of the major goals of this analysis is to discover the actual commitment of the press to the secular Constitution of India. To this end the variable "orientation" has been defined. Through this variable, it will be possible to determine if the text upholds the constitutional principle of secularism, especially in the case of violence or religious conflict. Of course, judgment is always up to the analyst.

The last two variables of the worksheet are "the proposition of the author" and "the protagonists" of the news. This is the pragmatic side of the analysis. Here, the judgment of the analyst derives from the real protagonist of the event and the given protagonists in the news. Whose voice is heard—a major actor or minor actor, a powerful news actor or a powerless news actor? The basic question asked in this variable is whether the author promotes religious tolerance or negates it.

### 3. GENERAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A) The Indian press has proven to be supportive of the secularist values embodied in the Constitution. The newspapers were at the service of a democratic nation. For example, in the analysis of the variable "orientation," the constitutional loyalty of the press was 87%, while the unconstitutional tendency was only 6.5%, and the category of "not clear" 6.4%.

There is something interesting to note in the category of unconstitutional. 17% of news and articles in *The Indian Express* are oriented towards the fundamentalists; *The Times of India* offers little difference (12.5%). Looking at the partial percentage, it can be seen that *The Indian Express* (33%), *The Times of India* (28%) and *Mathrubhumi* (12.5%) score the highest percentage of this tendency, and, if joined, they total 74% unconstitutional tendency. The test of Chi-square for the crossing of these two variables offers a *p* value of 0.01, which means that the differences are significant up to 99%. The reason for this difference is to be studied at the end of the chapter with a discourse analysis.



TABLE 1. PREDOMINANT "SECULAR" ORIENTATION OF NEWSPAPERS: PRO-CONSTITUTIONAL

ORIENTATION	NEWSPAPERS						
	HINDU	EXPRESS	TIMES	MANORAMA	DEEPIKA	MBHUMI	TOTAL
Constitutional	93%	71%	86%	97%	92%	87%	88%
Unconstitutional	3.5%	17%	12.5%	3%	5%	6.5%	8%
Not clear	3.5%	12%	1%	0%	2%	6.5%	4%

Statistical value of Chi-Square for the differences:  $p < 0.01$

The service of the Indian newspapers to the secular Constitution is also clear from the pragmatic analysis of the author's proposition. The percentage of the variable "promoting religious tolerance" is 75%. Here, too, when the percentage within the propositions is taken, it can be seen that among the newspapers in the study, *The Times of India* (39%) and *The Indian Express* (35%) have a major share in "negating religious tolerance," which is significantly different from the other four newspapers. The reason for this difference is proved through a discourse analysis of the editorials.

B) The political dimension has been predominant in the coverage of the religious and spiritual sides of these events. A broad examination of figures demonstrates that the papal visit and assassination of the Staines have received more attention than the murder of Fr. Arul Doss, a poor Indian missionary who was working among the tribes in Orissa. The murder of the Staines (36%) and the papal visit (52%) were reported more while the assassination of Fr. Arul Doss was reported less (11%). This variation is significant at 0.01 level on Pearson's Chi-Square. This difference is mainly due to the insufficient number of news items on the murder of Fr. Arul Doss. It was not a spirit of sympathy toward a brutally murdered innocent civilian that motivated the newspapers toward wider coverage, but rather the political relevance of the events.

C) Looking at the focus of the events, it can be seen that every news writer or news giver has a viewpoint in framing the news. This focus depends on the type of event from which news is made and presupposes the ideological framing of the news (van Dijk, *Racism* 135). Only a thorough scrutiny of the real focus of the event and news items will reveal to what degree the newspapers tried to be objective in providing the reader with the correct focus of the particular event. The following table shows how the focus of the news and reports vary according to the type of newspaper.

It is particularly interesting to observe a clear difference between English newspapers and local newspapers with regard to their perspective. Since English newspapers are widely read among the elite and have a major diffusion in all parts



TABLE 2. PREDOMINANT POLITICAL FOCUS OF RELIGIOUS EVENTS

NEWSPAPERS							
FOCUS	HINDU	EXPRESS	TIMES	MANORAMA	DEEPIKA	MBHUMI	TOTAL
Religious	14%	17%	20%	47.5%	41%	23%	27%
Political	71%	71%	74%	39%	47%	60%	61%
Socio-cultural	15%	12%	6%	13%	12%	18%	12%

of the nation, they are more likely to report religious issues from a political angle. *Mathrubhumi* also attempts a more political focus since the newspaper is more in line with the socialist democracy. The audience at large, however, is not the reason for this greater emphasis on the religious dimension of news, since *Mathrubhumi*, also a Kerala newspaper (which has many Christian readers), shows a predominant political focus in line with the national newspapers and fits with the ideological, democratic and socialistic orientation of the newspaper.

When examining the sub-themes of the items, the predominance of a political dimension is also clear. The basic running theme in these events is secularism, which is linked to religious freedom in democratic India. Naturally, in each news item there would be sub-themes introduced by the author. Four main sub-themes surfaced in this study are minority, power politics, tradition and investigation. The percentage of sub-themes introduced in reporting three events in these six newspapers were: a) Power politics (51%): Since these events greatly affected the central government and created a political crisis, including contention between the ruling party and the opposition, the political dimensions were extremely dominant. b) Minority (33%): The attacks were on a religious minority community. Since these communities are protected by the constitution, the religious (minority) dimension of the news published is relevant. c) Tradition (9%): These events affected the age-old tolerant religious tradition of India. Finally, d) Investigation (8%): The report was about the actual investigative steps taken by the government as instances of blatant violation of the Constitution.

#### 4. A DISCOURSE ON RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

The above analysis showed significant differences between certain variables. It has already been seen in frequency distribution that a high level of positive elements exist in the Indian print-media regarding democratic and secular values; however, there are also some variations in the attitude of each newspaper depending on its proprietor and the political or religious group affiliated with it. The research hypothesis demonstrated that the Indian newspapers, especially the English language papers, by and large kept a positive attitude in inculcating the princi-



ple of religious tolerance in reporting Christian minority issues. For the next stage of analysis, certain discourses were analyzed in the headlines and editorials (Lemert 46-47). In discourse analysis, there is microstructure analysis and macrostructure analysis. The first deals with the linguistic and grammatical style of the text, the second contends with social context, the main actors of the news and the topics in the news items (van Dijk, *News* 25). For that reason, it is appropriate to continue a deeper discussion on the discourse of religious tolerance through a qualitative analysis of several editorials written about the Pope's visit.

Thematic structure is the order of propositions in the news such as the main event, causes and consequences, antecedents, the political situation or conditions (van Dijk, *News* 36-37). The analysis of topics sheds light as to whether this particular event is related to previous events of the same nature and whether the newspaper is really making some effort to help people understand an overall view of the event from the standpoint of its social, cultural, constitutional and political dimensions.

Certain editorials were examined in terms of thematic structure. Editorials are opinions of the newspaper. They speak for the newspaper to the public. In investigating the protest of the VHP (*Vishwa Hindu Parishad*) and other Hindu fundamentalist groups against the visit of Pope John Paul II, an analysis of the editorials of certain newspapers makes clear what the real messages of these newspapers were. All six newspapers in this study had written an editorial before and after the visit of Pope John Paul II in India. Some interesting notes can be seen below in the editorials taken from three different newspapers: *The Indian Express* (*IE*), "Father Fixation" (29-10-1999); *The Times of India* (*ToI*), "Guest as God" (30-10-1999); *Mathrubhumi*, "Atidhidevo bhava" *Guest as God* (2-11-1999).

#### THE POPE AND THE PURPOSE OF HIS VISIT

*ToI*: The significance of the Pope's visit lies in his commanding the reverence of millions of Catholics. To reduce the status of a spiritual leader to the pomp and ceremony of a state visit would be a complete travesty.

*IE*: John Paul II will be here for a Synod, which is an internal, administrative conclave of the Church not very different in its aims from a corporate meeting in the secular world. He is very unlikely to stride through the land with the Bible in one hand and a sword in the other, as some people will have us imagine, proselytising *urbis et orbis*.

*Mathrubhumi*: John Paul II, the spiritual leader of the Catholics and the Supreme Head of the Vatican State arrives here next Friday. It is his second visit and he is coming to participate in a synod of Bishops.

#### UPROAR OF THE HINDU FUNDAMENTALISTS

*ToI*: The Protest against the papal visit reflects a regression to the worst kind of medievalism. The self-appointed guardians of Hinduism seem to be resorting to the same questionable vocabulary of the crusades that they find so objectionable in their adversaries. Apology-mongering belongs to the realm of the latter, opening the possibility of Dalits, Brahmins, Muslims, Sikhs,





Jains and Buddhists demanding expressions of remorse from each other for real and imagined “hurt” in the past.

*IE:* It is a shame that the self-appointed custodians of the spirit of Hinduism have so little confidence in its future.

One wonders who the VHP is embarrassing with its “father fixation,” the poor, persecuted Pope or the nation whose cultural interests it claims to represent, while presenting to the rest of the world a country afflicted by a religious paranoia.

*Mathrubhumi:* There are noises and uproars against the Visit of the Pope which call for anxiety.

#### HINDUISM AND THE INDIAN TRADITION

*ToI:* The alternative for the Hindu community in India would be to welcome the Pope in the spirit of *atidhideo bhava* –the guest is God like. This would amount to re-stating the elemental insights of Hinduism as well as demonstrating the faith’s self-assurance and confidence and that of its followers.

*IE:* Hinduism has withstood far more minatory threats than a near-octogenarian nursing Parkinson’s disease, a bad hip, and a bullet wound.

The *Parivar* should also realize that Christianity is now just another world religion. Proselytisation may once have been part of the colonial enterprise, but that was several hundred years ago when people were yet to distinguish clearly between the temporal and the secular spheres. There is no reason for Hinduism to repeat foreign history all over again by demonising the Pope.

*Mathrubhumi:* A land, where the Himalaya is spread out, was occupied by so many from outside the territory for 4-5 centuries. But their religious thoughts and customs could not root in our land. Nobody could pull out the roots of this *Sanadhana Dharma*. Let all the windows and doors be opened, let the wind blow from all four sides, for those who can stand courageously in this land need not be afraid.

#### CONSTITUTION

*ToI:* If godhead could be attributed to the Constitution of India, this deity must be smiling approvingly at the government’s declaration of itself as a secular body. This audacious pronouncement deserves the widest possible welcome from all sections of society.

Political leaders have justified their presence in a religious gathering by the argument that they have done so in a purely personal capacity. This is, in essence, an appeal to the first freedom of an individual in a liberal-democratic framework, namely, the freedom of expression. By extension, the freedom to spiritual choice becomes an indispensable part of the first freedom.

At first glance, these editorials clearly support the papal visit, and they do criticize the *Sang Parivar*’s agenda of protesting against the visit of Pope John Paul II. A closer analysis, however, shows some shades of malevolence. For example, the formation of in-groups and out-groups can be seen in all three editorials (Allan &



Garret 57).<sup>7</sup> There is an obvious glorification of the Indian/Hindu tradition of welcoming guests, but in depicting this hospitable nature of this Indian tradition, the newspapers wittingly or unwittingly attribute negative actions to the “they” group in the past. Here, the favourable “we” consists of the Hindu majority in India. Among these there exists a “you” group, which could be called imprudent pro-Hindu activists, the “self-appointed guardians of Hinduism” (in both *ToI* and *IE*). In these editorials, it seems that the true guardians of Hinduism (we) scold the self-appointed guardians of Hinduism (you) for not using their heads and to realize that, “Hinduism has withstood far more minatory threats than a near octogenarian nursing Parkinson’s disease, a bad hip and a bullet wound.” (*IE*, 29-10-1999).

It can be seen in this analysis of the editorial that there is an ideological communication strategy used by these newspapers. According to van Dijk (*Ideology* 267), this communication moves in the following lines:

1. Express/emphasise information that is positive about *us*.
2. Express/emphasize information that is negative about *them*.
3. Suppress/de-emphasize information that is positive about *them*.
4. Suppress/de-emphasise information that is negative about *us*.

The editorial style depicts Christianity as an out-group “they.” A lot of negative actions are attributed to them indirectly. For instance, “the protest against the papal visit reflects a regression to the worst kind of medievalism. The self-appointed guardians of Hinduism seem to be resorting to the same questionable vocabulary of the crusades that they find so objectionable in their adversaries” (*ToI*). “There is no reason for Hinduism to repeat foreign history all over again by demonising the Pope” (*IE*). “But their religious thoughts and customs could not root in our land. Nobody could pull out the roots of this *Sanadhana Dharma*. Let all the windows and doors be opened, let the wind blow from all four sides, for those who can stand courageously in this land need not be afraid” (*Mathrubhumi*). The style of writing in these opinions has become nothing but a subtle instruction to the “you” from “we,” not to repeat “their” bad example.

In a democratic country where there is a secular Constitution on its pedestal, the protest against the papal visit could have been treated in the national and local newspapers as a violation of the Constitution. Though *The Times of India* spoke in its editorial about the freedom of expression and freedom of conscience, its primary concern seems to be the glory of Hinduism and its tradition. The editorials of *The Indian Express* and *Mathrubhumi* treated the question purely from the

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<sup>7</sup> “The identifying description of groups or institutions related to ‘us’ or ‘them’ also follows the principle of ideological polarization. E.g. Theirs is ‘secret police’; ours is ‘intelligence agency’.” (Allan & Garret 57)

standpoint of a majority religious group that takes pride in its glorious tradition in order to show that we are not like others but rather “we are good.”

It is interesting to compare the above editorials with the editorials of other newspapers on the same subject of study. Since *Malayala Manorama* is of Christian ownership and *Deepika* a Catholic daily, it is important to compare *The Hindu* editorial on the same issue with the same time sequence. *The Hindu* published its editorial on 26/10/1999 with the title “The Pope’s Visit.” Its content is entirely different. It begins with praising the Home Minister L.K. Advani who condemned the VHP’s plan to protest against the papal visit. The editorial then mentions the relation within the ruling party BJP (*Bharatiya Janatha Party*) and other Hindu fundamentalist groups. It goes on to admonish the Home Minister to take active steps for a warm welcoming of Pope John Paul II as a guest of the country. The editorial further details allegations of the *Sangh Parivar* and claims that all these are only a trick of the *Parivar* to prove that the Hindu faith is in danger in India. Such propaganda will result in nothing but acts similar to the brutal killing of missionaries.

*The Hindu* does not sing in vain the glory of a tradition, while the same tradition is being attacked by fanatics who carry the same flag of Hindu. It also does not use hateful language to irritate any minority group. The protest against the papal visit is treated as an attack on the minority in India, and the newspaper dares to say that the ruling party is worsening the fear of the minority. The real opinion of the paper is that the ruling government has the moral duty to safeguard the constitutional rights of the minorities in India. An editorial most suitable to the democratic nature of the country would render a real service to the people of India as a national newspaper.

For the completion of this editorial analysis, an examination is made on one of the editorials of *Deepika*, a Catholic newspaper. The underlying ideology can be seen in its editorial pages regarding Christian issues. The editorial, just after the conclusion of the papal visit on 9, November 1999, was titled, “The Glorious Moments of Religiously Tolerant India.” The very title establishes the newspaper’s basic intention.

*Indian tradition:* India kept her great tradition. The welcome given to the Pope, the prophet of human rights and the moral conscience of the world, was very cordial and warm.

*The Pope and his visit:* He has returned after having given holiest moments to India and to the Indians. The Pope, who had come to this land of tolerance for a second time, spent three days with the people of India. He enjoyed India’s cultural ceremonies and saw the plurality of faith. He showed that religious pluralism is not a cause for distancing relations between the people.

*Appraisal of the politicians and religious leaders:* Our politicians could show the greatness of our tradition and tolerance in their way of welcoming the Pope. Mr. K.R. Narayan, the President of India and the Prime Minister Mr. Vajpayee could convince the Pope that secularism is the fundamental basis of our Constitution. If the Pope could experience religious tolerance, which is the immemorial contribution of India to the world, the credit is to our politi-

cians; moreover, the respect and friendship *that is shown by the leaders of other religions.*

*Religious freedom:* Religious freedom is the basis of human rights, pointed out the Pope. When the Pope said that each one is free to accept any religion of his conscience, which is the inseparable meaning of religious freedom, the whole of India would have accepted those words with full heart. The all-religions meeting showed that the Third Millennium will give the loving message of religious unity. This is one of the greatest achievements of the visit of the Pope.

The language and the style used in this editorial are very clear. They speak for the great tradition of India and the magnanimity of its politicians and religious leaders in welcoming the Pope. Another factor is that the editorial does not mention the much-voiced protest of certain groups before the visit of the Pope. There is only a passing mention in the beginning of the editorial, "It is not known whether the Pope was aware of the fact that there were some who were looking at his visit with suspicious eyes." Of course, as a Catholic daily, the editorial emphasis on the message of the Pope could be justified, but actually it did more to underline the positive attitude of the politicians who were alleged to be in line with fundamentalist groups against the papal visit. On the other hand, the editorial could have ridiculed the vain protest of the fundamentalists against the greatly successful visit of John Paul II. Instead of aiming for such cheap journalism, the newspaper praised the tolerant tradition of India, which is still novel to many religiously fanatical countries in the world. The editorial itself became a message of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence of the people of India in a pluralistic milieu.

## 5. CONCLUSION

An overall result of the analysis proves that the newspapers in this study, as a representation of the national newspapers in India, kept their role as watchdogs of democracy and secularism embedded in the Indian Constitution. Regarding the informative functions of the press, the national newspaper in India dedicates much space in covering the religious minority issues in India. For instance, in handling the three cases, namely the murder of the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his children, the murder of Fr. Arul Doss, and the protest against the visit of Pope John Paul II to India in 1999 by some fundamentalists, the newspapers followed a positive strategy. One of the social functions of the press is monitoring society and the government. This monitoring function was also carried out well by the national newspaper in a proper manner dealing with Christian minority issues in India. In undertaking this social function, there are some dangerous moments in which the newspaper dictates the minds of powerful sources such as the ruling party or a dominant political party or majority group (McNair 16). Though the events presented in these cases were predominantly connected with a minority religion, the newspapers were more interested in the political question involved. As the



events mainly affected the political power in the country, the newspapers were more likely to give voice to the different political leaders. Thus, the newspaper also played a significant role in power politics. On the other hand, each newspaper showed its own political affiliation in the reports and articles on the event. This is a common practice of newspapers in any democratic world. There is always a dominant group or force in any society; in other words, a majority and a minority. It is a great challenge of the national newspapers to be secular in character. In this analysis, it was found that those newspapers which have a larger circulation in the cities, where one or another fundamentalist group is dominant in the political arena, were soft in exposing the vices of those fundamental groups in their atrocities against the Christians. This tendency of some national newspapers increases the chaos in the name of religion. The newspapers could be a better platform for dialogue between religions in a secular country. The tone of peaceful coexistence has to be accented in the text, which will automatically be part of public discourse. This is the great moral responsibility of any newspaper in a democratic and secular country.



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