

**Azim Premji University**

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**From the Selected Works of Vikas Kumar**

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## My biases: A note on my articles in Mainstream (2003-05)

Vikas Kumar



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## **My biases: A note on my articles in *Mainstream* (2003-2005)<sup>1</sup>**

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The treatment of the relationship between religion and conflict in some of my articles in *Mainstream* needs substantial revision. The major problems are discussed below.

1. *Definition Bias*: Some of these articles deal with long stretches of history without taking into account the fact that religion underwent dramatic changes during the period under consideration. These articles, however, deal with religion as if it were a monolith, invariant in space and time. This leads to two related problems. The relationship between religion, community, and individual identity is not explained. The second problem is a consequence of the first. Since the very idea of *identity* is contested, one has to be careful in assembling individuals into groups and linking them to group action. The Hindus of Indonesia and the tribes of Bangladesh are converting to Christianity. So are some high caste Hindus and many low caste Hindus in India. Each of these groups is converting for very different reasons and has different degrees of commitment to the new faith. How do these diverse constituents of Christianity contribute to *Abrahamic* aggressiveness of Christianity? In more recent work, I show that it is not monotheistic (which is equal to the category Abrahamic in my articles in *Mainstream*) belief per se that causes conflict. Rather it is the belief about the nature of externalities of religious practices and beliefs of other religious communities and the degree of confidence in one's own belief that matter for conflict. Monotheism can at most exacerbate conflict over externalities. *Monotheism is neither necessary nor sufficient for conflict* (Kumar 2012a). Unfortunately, most of my articles in the *Mainstream* seem to assume that monotheism is sufficient for conflict.

2. *Selection Bias I*: Most of these articles deal with Abrahamic faiths without explaining why non-Abrahamic faiths in the concerned regions should be left out. May be there are reasons for distinguishing between the Abrahamic and Cosmic/Pagan faiths. However, those reasons, if any, need to be explicitly defended. I have also dealt with Hinduism (see Kumar 2004, for instance), which might partly address Selection Bias I.

3. *Selection Bias II*: These articles discuss a number of conflicts where Abrahamic faiths are deeply involved and support the hypothesis relating religion and conflict. But these articles do not check if the results hold after controlling for the spatio-temporal spread of Abraham's 'warring' children. Abraham's 'warring' children are involved in conflicts in parts of the world (East Timor, Middle East). But there are conflicts where they are not involved (Tibet) and there are some regions where Abrahamic faiths co-exist peacefully (contemporary West). These articles do not explain these differences. Furthermore, if some conflicts predate the adoption of Abrahamic faiths in a region, then it would be a grave error to attribute the conflict to Abrahamic faiths.

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<sup>1</sup> Later some of these articles appeared in *Separatism in North East India: Role of Religion, Language and Script* (2008) co-authored with Kunal Ghosh. Two related articles appeared in the journal *Bharatiya Samajik Chintan*.

4. *Omitted Variable Bias*: It is possible that linguistic rootedness (i.e., attachment to local languages) and lesser propensity to religious extremism are together determined by a third underlying factor that these articles have ignored (Kumar 2012b).

5. *Choice of analytical framework*: All the articles rely on subjective assessment of case studies and anecdotal evidence. Social scientists have debated the issue of appropriate analytical techniques. Here it is sufficient to note that the articles under consideration do not justify the choice of analytical technique.

Having said this I should add that the articles were written for a weekly and, therefore, space was a constraint.

## References

Kumar, Vikas (2012a), 'Does Monotheism Cause Conflict?' *Homo Oeconomicus*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 17-45.

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