Communal Harmony in Goa: Assessing Attitudes and Devising Strategies for Promotion

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Abstract
Communal harmony is a word that became immensely loaded with political implications for India after the Babri Masjid demolition that took place in 1992. The shock waves resulting from that game changer, were felt nation-wide. However, Goa the smallest state of India, was considerably undisturbed because it had a long tradition of peaceful coexistence that was strongly ingrained in the popular psyche. The Goans had endured troubled times during the Muslim invasions and the Portuguese colonial hegemony. Today Goa boasts of a healthy bond between Hindus, Catholics and other religious minorities. Goa's vibrant economy has also attracted tens of thousands of migrants, seeking asylum from famine and scarcity struck states of India. With a healthy literacy rate of 88.65% and an impressive enrolment rate in the institutions of higher education, a sizeable number of youths are vying for jobs in the industrial and commercial sectors that currently employ many non-Goans. With these changing demographic dynamics as a backdrop, this paper is an effort to analyse why Goa is able to absorb and adapt to its burgeoning diversity and how new strategies can be devised to change the current narrative of the Emerging Economy of India and inform policy decisions. The dominant attitude towards communal harmony was that it was critical for all participants in the study and Goa's communal peace, diversity and prevailing attitudes of mutual respect were very much valued. It was also recorded that diverse religious communities could co-exist peacefully.

Keywords: Goa, identities, tolerance, communal harmony

Introduction

We have seen communal problems in US owing to President Trump's Executive Order severely restricting visa-holders and refugees' freedom to enter the United States (Byman, 2017). UK has faced racist incidents post-Brexit (Mandhai, 2017) and we now see anti-Muslim rhetoric creeping into the French Presidential campaign (McAuley, 2017). Our Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi, on the other hand, was elected by the historic mandate of development (Pandalai, 2014). As per United Nations estimates, India's population is 1,339,853,144 as of Tuesday, May 2, 2017 ("Worldometers", 2017). India thus is home to 17.86% of the World's population, with the median age being 26.9 years ("Worldometers", 2017). India ranks third in GDP in terms of purchasing power parity and has recently overtaken China, as the fastest growing large economy, with a rising middle class and favourable demographics (Bajpai, 2017). Yet we haven't seen any research that probes the attitudes of young Indians regarding communal harmony.

Though Goan society had to face communal upheaval in the wake of the Portuguese colonial policies of Christianisation and Lucitanisation, today Goa enjoys peace despite communal diversity. As Varshney (1997) states it is important to study cases where probable communal violence did not break out, in order to produce a balanced, post-Modernist theory of communal conflict in India. Thus we decided to conduct research on communal harmony in Goa, with Ponda taluka selected as a revelatory case. Prior research on communal conflict has included some or all of the multiple facets of the conflict, including ethnic, religious, racial, minority, sectarian, linguistic and gender conflict (Bock & Anderson, 1999; Fenwick, 1981; Panagides, 1968; Varshney, 1997). We will be addressing the issue along inter-religious lines, not sectarian or intra-religious.

Ponda is an important commercial and industrial centre of Goa. The city of Ponda, situated at 15^0 24'00" North Latitude and 74^0 00' 30" Longitude, is the headquarters of the *taluka*. The total area of Ponda is 292.78 sq. km. The taluka has 28 villages and 4 towns and a population of 165,830 with a healthy sex ratio of 940. The majority of the population i.e. 62.5% resides in urban areas while only 37.5% constitute the rural population. With a host of educational institutions all over the taluka, the literacy rate is 89.21%, which is higher than that of Goa. This part of Goa is physically and culturally different from coastal Goa. While the coastal landscape is Latinised, the Indo-centric landscape of Ponda expresses itself in numerous temples, churches, mosques and Jain- Buddhist sites. The taluka also possesses the *Dharmapitha* of the *Gaud Saraswat Brahmins* at Kavle, *Madhwa sampradayi Vyasashram Math* at Bandora and a minor branch of the *Partagal Math* at Cuncoliém near Mangeshi. Out of the 27 mosques of the taluka, the most important one, the *Safa Shahouri Masjid* built by Ibrahim Adil Shaha in 1560 A. D., is situated on the outskirts of Ponda. St. Anne's Church in the town and the *Jain Basti* at Bandora reflect further on the composite culture that the taluka possesses (Kamat, 2011, p. 3). Ponda has a cosmopolitan society, whose religious specifics are denoted in the following table:

Religion	Total	Percentage	Male	Female
Hindu	1,38,705	83.64%	71,643	67,062
Christian	14,010	8.45%	6,857	7,153
Muslim	12,542	7.56%	6,684	5,858
Sikh	132	0.08%	85	47
Buddhist	92	0.06%	38	54
Jain	132	0.08%	70	62
Other Religion	21	0.01%	8	13
No Religion Specified	196	0.12%	107	89

Figure1: Religion-wise Population of Ponda Taluka

Research Questions

What are the barriers to and drivers of communal harmony in Goa?

Which strategies can be used to promote communal harmony in Goa, in the backdrop of its burgeoning diversity?

Literature Review

This literature review looks at current academic research on the various nuances of communal harmony and how it has been interpreted. Firstly, we investigate the causes of communal violence in different parts of the world, in India to identify applicable barriers to communal harmony in Goa. Next, we review drivers of peace and the strategies that have successfully been used to promote peace.

While analysing the causes of communal conflict and harmony, Park R. (1939) proposes that processes of urbanisation and industrialisation break intra-communal ties and replace them with new ties to social groups based on economic functions (as cited in Fenwick R., 1981, p. 197). Based on this theory, continuing communal conflict (after the early stages of inter-group exposure) is due to lack of inter-group ties and lack of modernity in certain sections of the groups and the social structure (Fenwick R., 1981, p. 197).

However, according to Horowitz D. (1971), Melson R. and Wolpe H. (1970) communal conflict is greatest when intergroup contacts are frequent among the educated and urbane middle classes because they highlight economic inequalities brought about by economic development (as cited in Fenwick R., 1981, pp. 197-198). Thus communal conflict was the result of strain brought about, in a multi-ethnic society, by economic development (Fenwick R., 1981, p. 198). As a result people from different communal groups come to compete for a shared set of rewards and opportunities and as these become scarce, the result is, what Melson and Wolpe (1970), call ‘competitive communalism’ (as cited in Fenwick R., 1981, p.198).

According to Hechter (1975), Walton (1976), Blauner (1969) and Gonzalez Casanova (1969), the competitive scenario is exacerbated when there has been a historical precedent of political and economic inequality, which had severely impacted the upward mobility of the subordinate communal group previously (as cited in Fenwick R., 1981, p.198). Communal conflict has both economic and political motivations, as shown by Bock (1995) in the case of real estate developers using riots to usurp property held by slum dwellers (as cited in Bock & Anderson, 1999, pp. 326-327).

Panagides S. (1968) referring to the case of Cyprus states that communal harmony cannot be brought into existence by a purely political arrangement, and any settlement must include means to bring two communities together, such as economic interdependence, which is likely to contribute to reducing the inequality co-efficient. Interaction and interdependence may lead to unity amongst the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, however this would entail acceptance of their basic differences and not elimination of their cultural traits and identity (Panagides S., 1968, p. 136). The case of Cyprus is used to suggest that when a minority's share of total resources is proportional to their population proportion, a situation more conducive to stability prevails (Panagides S., 1968, p. 141). Panagides (1968) also considers education, to be a force for reconciliation, as it can teach communities about their common bonds and economic interests.

Political exploitation of group identity for furtherance of political gain has been a commonly cited cause for communal violence in India and the rest of the world (Bock & Anderson, 1999; Varshney, 1997; Fenwick, 1981). Politicised narration of conflicts has been highly advantageous, whether it was the 'Divide and Rule' motto used by the British in the past or the more contemporary instances of communal clashes which were politically engineered (Varshney, 1997).

Varshney (1997) highlights the cases of Lucknow and Hyderabad, two cities in India, which were ruled by Muslim princes, wherein the proportion of Hindus to Muslims has been in a similar range post-Independence and yet communal violence has been almost completely absent in the first city, while it was much more common in the latter. Differences in historical legacies, political strategies and economic structures are the causes for the divergence seen in the cities (Varshney A., 1997, p. 4). Wilkinson (2004) also states that prevalence of past riots is a significant explanatory variable in riot production (Brass P., 2004, p. 4839).

Communal identity can be thought of as social-psychological phenomenon that may be unrelated to nationalism, race, ethnicity or religion (Bock & Anderson, 1999, p. 326). Political polarisation along communal lines by large-scale religious festivals and engineered rioting are tactics that have been used to gain political power (Varshney A., 1997, p. 10). Endemic riots in Hyderabad, since 1978 to the 1990s, suggested the development of what Brass (2004) calls an 'institutionalised riot system' (as cited in Varshney A., 1997, p. 10). Brass P. (2004) explores the existence of the 'institutionalised system of riot production (IRS)' in Meerut and other parts of India where Hindu-Muslim riots are endemic and how this system is activated for political mobilisation or during elections. He argues that riots aren't spontaneous and their production involves deliberate actions by key individuals and recruitment of participants to perform provocative activities, that are part of the performative repertoire (Brass P., 2004, p. 4839). Wilkinson (2004) goes even further to state that

ethnic riots, far from being spontaneous eruptions of anger, are the way to change the prominence of ethnic identities and issues amongst the electorate to win an election.

Varshney (1997) states that divergent communal identities and communal peace can co-exist, while considering the case of Kerala, in India. Varshney (1997) also notes that during India's Partition in 1947 and Babri Masjid Demolition in 1992, when riots erupted in other parts of India, Lucknow remained riot free because of peace committees, comprising both Hindu and Muslim leaders and political co-operation. Lucknow politicians tried to maintain peace, during times of communal distress (Varshney A., 1997, p.4).

The economic symbiosis in the Embroidered textiles industry of Lucknow, caused the formation of an inter-communal network which became the economic foundation of peace (Varshney A., 1997, p. 15). He also notes that local networks of engagement matter because it creates a reservoir of social trust that provides resilience to the communities (Varshney A., 1997, p. 15). Portrayals of provocative incidents can easily triumph over facts, if networks of civic engagement are not active (Varshney A., 1997, p. 4). Historically, peaceful towns have been able to stop escalations of trivial incidents into riots because of these networks of civic engagement (Varshney A., 1997, p. 4).

However, according to Brass (2004) even if civic engagement, in the form of inter-religious associations or interpersonal relations exists, it cannot withstand the power of political movements that seek to create violence. Inter-communal associations were overwhelmed in Meerut, during the 1961 and the 1982 riots (Brass P., 2004, p. 4847). He further states that, instead of directing resources toward engagement promotion, they should be directed towards identifying the producers of and participants in the IRS (Brass P., 2004, p. 4840). However, it is important to note that Varshney (1997) refers to networks of civic engagement that are based on the economic symbiosis or inter-dependence of the communities involved. He also mentions that even political leaders, of Lucknow, would not benefit from causing polarisation, as they too have vested interests in the economic rubric (Varshney A., 1997, p. 15).

Brass (2004) states that if authorities delay or take insufficient or no action in the beginning of communal violence, the situation escalates and overwhelms existing inter-communal feelings and solidarity. Wilkinson (2004) states that though political competition may lead to violence, it can also lead to peace depending upon the electoral conditions. He demonstrated that electoral incentives at the local constituency level determine where and when ethnic violence occurs, whereas incentives at the government level, determine whether state governments are able to prevent or quickly end riots, as they responsible for law and order (Wilkinson S., 2004, p. 4). He also demonstrates that the relationship between political incentives and ethnic violence remains crucial, even after factoring in socioeconomic factors, previous levels of conflict or patterns of ethnic diversity (Wilkinson S., 2004, p. 4).

Bock and Anderson (1999) identify pre-emptive and promotive tactics used by aid agencies for conflict transformation. Promotive tactics aim to create bonds of trust, between people of different identities, before, during and after violent conflicts and minimise escalation of existing conflicts (Bock & Anderson, 1999, p). Promotive activities include secular sporting or cultural events for adults and children that

feature inter-faith harmony and co-operation as an important theme. Bock and Anderson (1999) also provide instances of promotive approaches used even during violent conflict in Lebanon and after violent conflict in Pakistan. However, Bock and Anderson (1999) also note that promotive tactics alone, are in-effective in preventing communal conflict.

In contrast, pre-emptive strategies include actions that will prepare the people to identify possible issues and prevent conflict as communal tensions rise (Bock & Anderson, 1999, p. 329). Myth busting strategies have been used by Peace Committee members, to pre-empt violence by monitoring propagation of provocative rumours 'violence engineers' hired by those that have political or business incentives and taking initiatives that prevented possible outbreaks of violence (Bock & Anderson, 1999, pp. 329-330). After the Babri Masjid crisis, St. Xavier's director was successful in pre-empting violence by enlisting the help of influential Muslims to dissuade their brethren from retaliating (Bock & Anderson, 1999, p. 330).

Methodology

We chose the case study research design to probe the contemporary phenomenon of communal harmony in Goa, as it is most suited to understand complex social phenomena (Yin, 2009, p. 4). The case study design is ideal when the research questions are exploratory in nature, the researcher has little control over the phenomenon being studied and the phenomenon is contemporary (Yin, 2009, p. 11). This design has good internal validity, good construct validity though lower external validity or generalizability (Yin, 2009). In the case study research design, generalisability is not the final objective (de Marrais & Lapan, 2003), instead the aim is to identify unique connections, events and explanations in a contemporary phenomenon (deMarrais & Lapan, 2003).

The case we chose to study was of Ponda, a centrally located taluka of Goa, the smallest state of India. Ponda has had no instances of communal violence post-Liberation in 1961. As Varshney (1997) states, too often communal conflict in India is seen from the perspective of the master narrative, imposed upon us by the British and a sense of variance is missing, since researchers do not study cases where potential communal conflict was curtailed or did not occur (Varshney, 1997). With this view in mind, we chose Ponda to be a revelatory case (Yin, 2009, p. 48). Construct validity can be improved by using multiple sources of data, and the secondary data was used for data triangulation (Yin, 2009, p. 42).

Primary sources included the *Tombo Geral* of Francisco Paes of 1595 housed in the Historical Archives of Goa. We also conducted semi-structured interviews with two members of the teaching staff at PES' Ravi S. Naik College of Arts and Science, Ponda and two ex-students of the said college, now pursuing higher education at Goa University. We also conducted an electronic survey, using the SurveyMonkey platform, for the under-graduate students at PES' Ravi S. Naik College of Arts and Science, Ponda and received 34 responses. The interviews and survey were conducted after the Goa Assembly Elections, on February 4, 2017. Participant observation was also used to record insights during the course of the study. The interview and survey data was analysed by open coding to identify ideas and conceptualize the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

Findings

The state of Goa suffered immense hardships under the Portuguese hegemony as it made all out efforts to impose the policy of *cujus regio illius religio,* which implied that the religion of the King had to be compulsorily followed by his subjects. The administration and the Church joined hands to annihilate Hinduism, the faith of the majority of the population in the Old Conquest areas of Tiswadi, Bardez and Salcete. Under order of the Portuguese King, all Hindu temples from the Goa Islands were destroyed by 1540 (Paes, 1595, p. 67). According to Padre Lucena (1600), the biographer of St. Francis Xavier, Portuguese priest Miguel Vaz was the mastermind behind this temple destruction drive (as cited in Pissurlenkar, 1966, p. 92). A majority of temples from Salcete and Bardez were ravaged in 1567 and entire villages were forcibly christianised (Pissurlenkar, 1966, pp. 92, 120; Konkanakhyana, 1721, p. 33). On the sites of the ruined temples were built churches and even the properties of the temples and their servants were turned over to the churches (Pissurlenkar, 1966, p. 102). Cult objects from temples razed to ground were shifted to the Ponda taluka as it was administered by the Hindu officials of Adil Shah of Bijapur (Kamat, 2011, p. 14). Thousands of Goans migrated to the neighbouring states to protect their Hindu identity. Goa Inquisition, the holy tribunal set up in 1560 brought pressure on the secular authorities to pass discriminatory legislation and to enforce the measures with sternness and severity. Every form of bribery, threat and torture was used to effect conversions (Priolkar, 2008, p. 48).

But Ponda taluka came under the Portuguese rule in 1763 as a part of the New Conquests. Viceroy D. Manuel de Saldanha e Albuquerque Conde de Ega through his *Edital* (Announcement) of June 5, 1763, promised the people of Ponda all privileges and rights, exemptions and immunities that they enjoyed under the rule of the king of Sonda. The *Bando* of August 6, 1763 promised the people that their religious practices, rites and customs would-be respected. Rui Gomes Pereira commented, “It is thanks to this change in policy that the Hindu temples of the New Conquests escaped the devastating hands of the Portuguese missionaries” (Pereira, 1978, p. 14).

As Panagides (1968) states, an efficient economic network has to be in place, for communal harmony to remain sustainable. While economic data on different communities of Goa and Ponda was not available, it is safe to say that there are no communal ghettos in Ponda and communities are formed by families of different religions, religious sects, etc. Educational institutions in Goa are free for all communities to attend except a few Madrasas, which only enrol Muslim children (“Hasani Academy”, 2015). All Colleges and other institutions of higher studies offer secular programs.

Post-liberation Goa has not experienced any communal upheavals and Ponda has inherited a legacy of peace and perhaps this explains why communal conflict is absent (Varshney, 1997). There certainly seems to be no IRS at play in Goa, and we found no evidence of it ever having existed in Goa.

Political strategies in Goa are designed to facilitate coalition governments if necessary owing to the fact that Goa has had multiple coalition governments since 1990 (Sastri, 2005). No one political party can usually form a government on its own and though polarisation may be used before elections, isn’t useful in the long run. Most parties

will have to rely on other parties and the minorities they represent to form governments. According to Wilkinson (2004), in such a scenario politicians are less likely to incite communal violence, since it may prove to be detrimental to them. Goa currently has 15 political parties with newcomers like the Aam Aadmi Party entering the scene in 2012 (Mehrotra, 2017). The Goa Assembly results from 2012 and even 2017 show that there are two main players but there is plenty of space for smaller parties (Mehrotra, 2017). For instance, regional parties and independent candidates gained 30% of the assembly seats in the 2012 elections (Mehrotra, 2017; "Elections.in", n.d.) and 25% of the assembly seats in the 2017 elections (Livemint, 2017). The 2017 Assembly elections were peaceful and though campaigns during elections weren't based on communal hatred, as is the case in some other Indian states, religious identity may have played a subtle role (Devadas, 2017).

All participants in our survey sample and interviews were in the age group of 20-25 years. The sex ratio of the sample was skewed, with 73.53% (25) females and 26.47% (9) males. The sample respondents came from lower and middle class families with annual incomes below Rs 7,37,748. The sample's religious distribution had 17.65% (6) Muslims, 23.53% (8) Roman Catholics and 58.82% (20) Hindus, which is a different ratio from that of Ponda taluka as a whole.

Several key themes emerged in the interviews and even in the survey responses, when open coding was used regarding attitudes towards communal harmony. The most common themes were mutual respect, diversity, unity, social wellbeing, peaceful living and economic advancement. Perhaps, because of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's continual espousing of the message and importance of development (Prime Minister's Office, 2017; Sharma, 2017; PTI, 2017), the dominant attitude of the survey and interview group was that communal harmony was necessary for Goa and the whole country to achieve economic development.

The main drivers of communal harmony in Goa were mutual respect, education, festivals and Goa's unique culture, in particular. It was interesting to see that though all respondents saw the inherent potential for conflict due to religious issues, with some insisting that values of humanity took precedence over religion, they still insisted that religious festivals were an important part of the Goan communal harmony equation. Religious festivals, were seen as an important tool in inter-communal bridge building, with many, such as *Shigmo*, *Holi*, *Diwali*, *Navaratri* and Christmas being seen as important ways of strengthening existing inter-communal bonds in communities. Respondents also had a relaxed view on life, due to society being free from hyper-tensive communal issues. Goa's unique culture, described as the peaceful, tolerant, understanding, was a strong driver of peace. One respondent even stated that "Goa's communal harmony is a brand in itself and people of all religions and cultures live in peace here". Many, though not all, mentioned that the Goan Freedom struggle had united them.

The main barriers to communal harmony were political propaganda before elections and religious and caste discriminations. Another possible barrier identified was a lack of awareness/education. However, most felt that there were rarely any communal conflicts in Goa and that most conflicts tended to be local and remain local (no evidence of IRS). Most respondents had not experienced any personal incidents of

communal conflict and some even reported instances where peaceful mediation had proved successful.

Strategies suggested for promotion of peace by the interviewees and the survey respondents included promotive strategies such as, education, awareness programs, integrative religious festivals, cultural and sporting events, music and art. Two strategies that seemed to be important for most people, especially the minorities, were encouraging diversity in every sector and banning radical religious organisations in Goa. Community work and religious festivals were seen as important cultural tools for communal integration.

Conclusions

Modernisation was not seen as a cause of conflict, and communal harmony was cited as a necessity not only for personal advancement, but also for the nation's economic advancement. However, this may be because of the recent election of our Prime Minister on the historic mandate of development (Pandalai, 2014) and also because India is at the pivotal stage where economic growth is accelerating (PTI, 2016). Economic development was thus seen as a driver for, not a barrier to, communal harmony, though it was only implicitly stated. Goa's unique and all encompassing culture, education and inter-religious festivals were the main drivers of communal harmony.

Politics was seen as one of the major barriers to communal harmony along with religious and caste discriminations (which may or may not be exploited by politicians) and though religious identities may continue to play some part in voter behaviour, strong communal polarisation is unlikely as minority votes will continue to remain important in coalition politics. Another barrier identified for communal harmony was the lack of education or awareness in certain sections of the population.

Since Goa is a peaceful State, the participants had never witnessed a communal riot or a major communal conflict in Goa and thus none of them mentioned History as a causative factor for violence. At most, they saw the Goan Freedom struggle as a historical event that brought Hindus and Catholics together against the Portuguese hegemony. It is thus understandable that all respondents could only come up with promotive strategies to protect and cultivate communal harmony and they could not perceive the need for pre-emptive measures, which are critical only when a crisis is imminent. Religion and religious festivals, in particular, were an important means of reinforcing existing communal bonds in a community and also reaching out to other communities. This demonstrates that strong religious identities and communal harmony can co-exist.

Limitations and Future Scope

This research, since it relies on the case study approach, has low generalisability. Some of the findings from this study may not be transferable to other cases, such as the quintessentially tranquil Goan culture or the reliance on festivals to cultivate existing communal bonds, which may prove incendiary in other parts of India. In addition to the limitations imposed by the research design used, response bias may have been present in the survey responses and during the interviews. The survey

sample was not truly representative of Ponda as the sex ratio was skewed, religious distribution in the sample was slightly different and as all the correspondents were well educated (at least under-grad level). Future research can be conducted in Goa, in places where the religious distribution is very different (such as Salcette, which is the only Catholic majority taluka in Goa), with participants from other age groups. It would be interesting to see how the drivers of communal harmony shift, as migration to Goa, by non-Goans increases and how Goan society absorbs this new influx.

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