

BBC 'favours' Muslims ... or so says the Daily Telegraph. In a report by Ben Farmer on 8th September 2008, it was noted that Hindu and Sikh leaders had complained over the 'disproportionate number of programmes ... made about Islam, at the expense of their own faith'. Statistics gleaned from the BBC's Religion and Ethics department claimed that since 2001, the BBC has made 41 programmes on Islam, 5 on Hinduism and 1 on Sikhism.

While this reveals a considerable comparative over-concentration on Islam, whether it amounts to 'favouring' Islam and Muslims is, of course, another question entirely. The starting point for the statistics (2001) might be taken to suggest not so much a desire to understand Islam as a religious system, as to situate Islam and Muslims within the usual 'frame' of issues having to do with security, 'otherness' and threat.

Of course, it would be of tremendous benefit to have a wider and deeper understanding of all the main religions through the medium of television. However, the limitations of the debate are indicated through the scant nature of the statistics. How many of these programmes about Islam were to some degree hostile? We are not told. It is unlikely that leaders of other communities would be comfortable with the same degree of microscopic and often critical scrutiny. Overall, however, what the report seems to teach us is not so much – in the misleading word of the title – that broadcasters 'favour' Muslims, but rather that a quantitative, rather than qualitative view of religious coverage does not take us very far.