

From Kandhamal To Karavali: **The Ugly Face Of Sangh Parivar**



A Report on the attacks
on Christians
in Orissa & Karnataka

March 2009

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**The Ugly Face Of
Sangh Parivar**



A fact finding report of nine Human Rights Organisations
that visited Orissa & Karnataka
in Sep.-Oct. 2008

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In Brief

This is a report prepared jointly by a number of Rights Organisations and individuals on the large scale violence against Christians in Orissa and Karnataka during August-September 2008. The violence was committed by Sangh Parivar organisations, mainly the Bajrang Dal. Their political wing, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) happens to be in power in both the States, and that has ensured that the police watched benignly as the arson and murder took place in public. The ideology and the organization of their mentor, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), pervades the media in both the States to such an extent that with a few honorable exceptions, the Press has reported the violence in a manner that puts the onus on the victims: they were at fault and had it coming.

All the signatories to the report did not participate in every phase of the extended fact finding, but by consensus the report is brought out collectively. In relation to the attacks in Orissa, the team/teams visited victims who have taken shelter at Visakhapatnam on 18th September, the affected areas of Kandhamal during 20th - 22nd September, the displaced victims staying in camps at Bhubaneswar and Cuttack during 25th - 26th October and the displaced victims living in the Mandasa area in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh on 30th October. In relation to the more widely dispersed though less severe attacks in Karnataka, teams visited the districts of Dakshina Kannada (including Mangalore, the headquarters), Udupi, Davanagere, Chikkaballapur and the affected areas of Bengaluru city on various dates in September and October, the last being a large team's visit to Mangalore city during 10th-11th October. The People's Front of India, Mangalore, accompanied the team dur-

ing the visit to Mangalore. Debranjana Sarangi, social activist of Orissa, was part of the teams throughout.

Press conferences were held immediately at the conclusion of most of these visits, notably at Berhampur (Brahmapur) in Orissa on 22nd September and Mangalore on 11th October. What follows is the detailed report that was promised on those occasions.

Apart from our own observations, we have relied on reports on previous instances of attacks on Muslims/Christians engineered by the Hindutva forces in the two States, on scholarly articles, Government Gazettes, credible newspaper reports, etc. In the matter of understanding and analysis of the social context and background of the respective areas, a note prepared by PUCL, Orissa and articles in Kannada and English written by Prof. Muzaffar Assadi of the faculty of Political Science, Mysore University have been very helpful, though we alone are responsible for the conclusions drawn.

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From Andhra Pradesh:

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Human Rights Forum (HRF)
Organisation for Protection of Democratic Rights (OPDR)

From Karnataka:

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From Puducherry:

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Terms Of Reference

The attacks on Christians, their homes and churches in the States of Orissa and Karnataka by the Bajrang Dal and other associates and affiliates of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (usually referred to as Sangh Parivar) in the months of August and September 2008 (it continued further, well into November, in Orissa) has understandably caused anger, and not only among Christians.

But it could not have caused surprise. The attacks were due, given the pathology of the idea and the political strategy of ‘laboratories’ of murder, rape and arson. After the Gujarat carnage of 2002, the leaders of the Sangh Parivar - not merely the rabid Praveen Togadia but the smooth talking types such as Arun Jaitley and Jaswant Singh and the uncle-ji and aunty-ji types such as Venkaiah Naidu and Sushma Swaraj - went on TV saying brazenly that the ‘Gujarat experiment’ was a great success and would be replicated all over India. Insofar as Orissa is concerned, Subhash Chouhan, State Convenor of the Bajrang Dal, has been quoted as having said to social scientist Angana Chatterjee, that ‘In India, Orissa is the second Hindu Rajya’ (Gujarat being the first).

The replicable element of Gujarat was that the minorities would be brutally beaten down into accepting their subordinate status in Bharat that would be Hindu India. They have achieved it over considerable parts of the northern and western parts of India. Karnataka has long been spoken of by them as the gateway to the South, and the Kandhamal district of Orissa opens to the South or the East, depending on where one looks from. Indeed the refugees from the Kandhamal of August-September 2008 have run both ways: South or South-East to Visakhapatnam and North or North-East to Cuttack and beyond.

There is an odd link between the two attacks, which speaks of the brazenness of the Sangh Parivar in relation to their crimes. The attack in Orissa started on 24th August. On 29th August the Christian educational institutions in Karnataka closed down for just one day in protest against the attacks in Orissa. Such protests probably took place elsewhere too, but Karnataka has a Sangh Parivar government, which took serious objection to the protest and called for an explanation, citing a complaint by the Bajrang Dal! This well publicized objection, in the eyes of the Christian community of Karnataka, set the stage for the attacks that took place in the middle of the next month. The attackers were evidently waiting for some such occasion ever since Yeddyurappa's seating on the gaddi in Bengaluru.

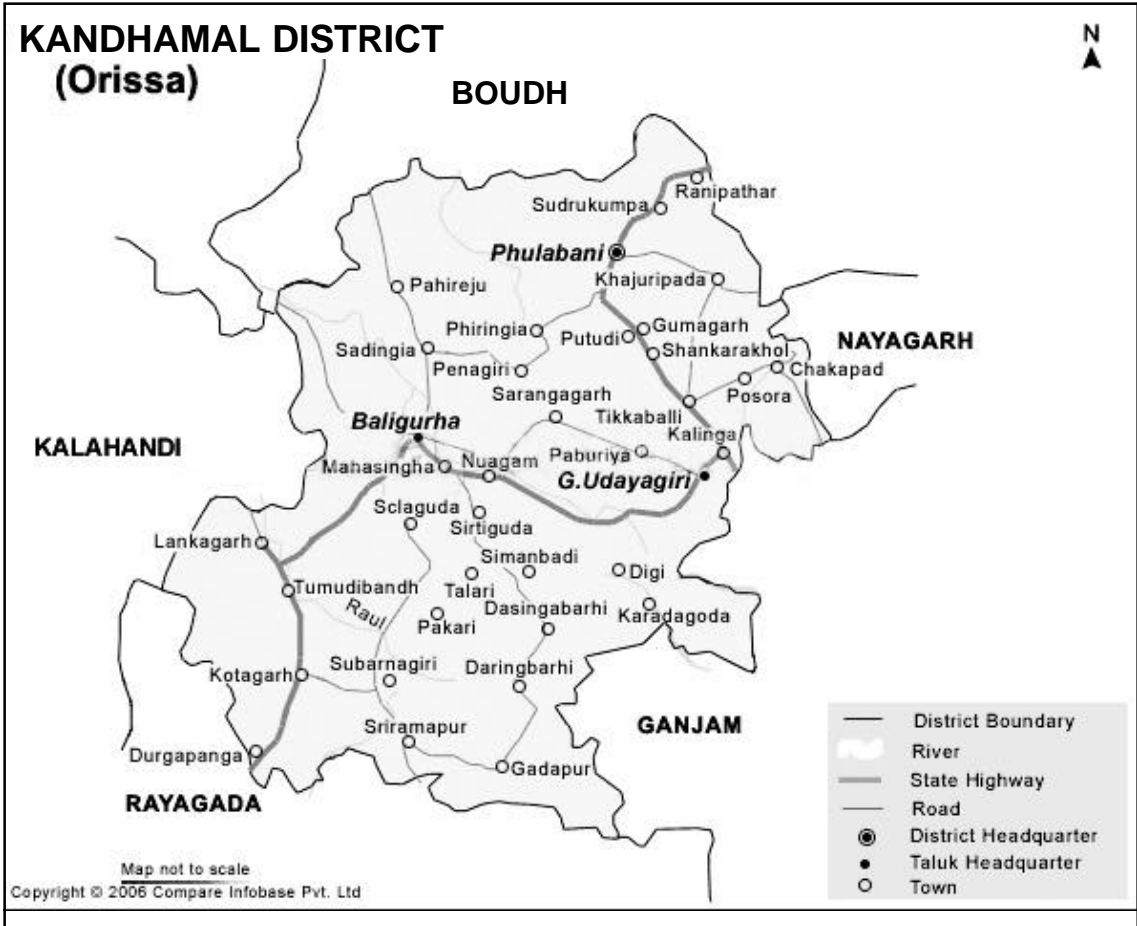
In the Sangh Parivar, democratic India faces an enemy who rides on the relentless spread of systematic falsehood, and brutal execution of planned crime. The spread of falsehood is not just through published literature but also the word of mouth through the medium of the brahminised social strata that goes well beyond its actual membership and encroaches into political spaces supposedly occupied by other and even avowedly secular forces. What is spread thus is falsehood about the country's history, falsehood about our society, and falsehood about contemporary persons and contemporary events. It invents lies and piles them one upon another before beginning an attack. By the time the attack comes, all the lies are in place.

But it does not begin with violent attacks. It bides time talking of culture and Indian-ness, conducting Ganesh immersion and Durga puja as public demonstrations of its vision of Hindu cultural assertion accompanied by speech-making and commentary of saffron vintage, until the atmosphere is propitious to pull out the trishuls and the talwars. For that it often awaits the ascendancy to power of its political wing, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the particular State or region, which would put the administration - in particular the police - in their control.

The organisations that are signatories to this report know this to be the truth about the heirs of Hedgewar and Golwalkar. We begin with this knowledge of the evil we are confronted with, which need not be discovered again and again. Fact finding in

the jungles of Kandhamal or the hills and plains of western Karnataka is not to prove this truth but only to study the ways in which it operationalises itself, and to identify the chasms in our social make-up that it makes use of for its purpose so that one may learn what to look for in other likely 'laboratories' and how to stop the 'experiment' before it takes off.

The fight against the Sangh Parivar, whether on the political terrain or in civil society, whether in the realm of power or that of values, is the fight over the idea and the reality of the India we want. A humane society committed to political, social and economic justice, freedom from fear and want, liberty of thought, belief and practice, inalienable dignity of person, opportunities of equitable growth, peace in its relations with other societies and nature (all of which add up to the foundational value of *equality*) or an aggressive power-mongering polity based on a hierarchical and monolithic society? The insecurities of life and its inhumanity wrought by traditional structures of oppression and the crises of the growth-hungry polity, make a sane choice less easy than it would otherwise be, and the Sangh Parivar takes advantage of the fears and the want to whip up a frenzy among even social classes and communities that would otherwise lose rather gain from the hierarchical and monolithic society of its choice. Concrete work is needed to halt this destructive practice, and that needs an understanding of how it works. That understanding is what we have aimed at in preparing this report. For that reason we begin with some relevant background concerning past events, perhaps too meager to be graced with the title 'history' but yet historical in nature.





Orissa: The Relevant Background

The vicious attack in Orissa took place principally in the district of Kandhamal. It could have taken place elsewhere, but for the fortuitous fact that Kandhamal is the theatre of the activity of Lakshmanananda Saraswati and it was his killing that set off the violence. The RSS has been actively pursuing its agenda in the entire State of Orissa for fifty years and more, and its political face, the BJP, has shared power with the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) for the last two terms. The BJD has chosen to close its eyes to the sectarian depredations of the other affiliates of the RSS, the Bajrang Dal, the Viswa Hindu Parishad, etc. The political reason for this is evident. The brazenness of the Sangh Parivar's claim that it represents all the Hindus (for the present we use this expression in its common sense without going into definitional intricacies) has rendered other political formations, which are in truth not wholly convinced of the pluralist/secular values they profess, insecure. They themselves think there is something unnatural about their professed commitment to plurality and secularism, and are therefore afraid that if they oppose the BJP too severely their Hindu voters may desert them. In ideological terms, a considerable section of the upper caste middle class, in Orissa as elsewhere, has strong affinity with the RSS in outlook, and most political formations of our country are dominated by this stratum of society. This is one of the factors that render secularism in Indian politics fragile. In an article published in the *Economic & Political Weekly* on 2nd August 2003, Pralay Kanungo has described how the growth of the RSS in Orissa has been aided by Congressmen and persons of prominence in Oriya society who were not formally its members. This is true of much of the country.

The ideology of the RSS which turns around the values of chaturvarna, sometimes explicit and sometimes dressed up in seemingly modern terms, for its aims are quite modern, would in its own terms be attractive only to the brahmins and the brahminised upper castes. But in its search for an extended mass base the RSS, through its affiliates such as the VHP, has made use of the cults of gods and goddesses popular with the toiling people for overcoming the barrier its ideology imposes. Kanungo, in the article referred to above, speaks of the RSS acknowledging the adivasi (vanavasi, in the language of the RSS) roots of the popular deity of Orissa, Jagannath of Puri. Such acknowledgement/identification would provide a powerful reason for the adivasis to identify themselves with Hinduism, for after all Jagannath is the most popular Hindu deity, practically the symbol of Hinduism, in the State. And it must be remembered that the State is almost one-fourth adivasi. Elsewhere the cults of Ganesh, of Durga etc have played this role with the other oppressed communities. This is a process of aggressive Hinduisation of communities which are not, in their self-consciousness, part of Hindu society as understood by the RSS, and would have to locate themselves, if at all, at the demeaning bottom if they did see themselves thus.

But from the beginning this Hinduisation was not just an object in itself but a tool withal for countering the spread (in Orissa) of Christianity, which was more substantial in the predominantly adivasi areas than in the coastal plains. And this, in turn, was again not only an end in itself, but a tool for consolidating the created Hindu identity among the adivasis and consolidating the Sangh Parivar's hold on them for the purpose of achieving the Sangh Parivar's goal for India. Attract the dalit/adivasi/ OBC communities by privileging the place of cults popular with them in Hinduism, set up the Muslim and the Christian as the enemy of Hinduism thus defined, and therefore traitors to India which is the abode of this Hinduism, egg them on against the traitors and in the process make the identification of those people with this Hinduism stronger and their attachment to the Sangh Parivar stronger, and make that the basis for its ascendancy over the country for reshaping it in the image of its choice - this is a conscious and destructive strategy the RSS has been following in all parts of the country, with the more plebian wings of its Parivar as its instruments, to help overcome the limits its own avowal of the ideology of Manu would impose on its desire to spread wide and deep, without at any point giving up the guiding and controlling role of itself with its Manuwadi ideology over the entire Parivar. But what it aims for at the end is not just a Hindu Rashtra where the religious minorities will be second class citizens but an India that is centered on values of power, hierarchy and dominance, which is the enemy of all but a handful of the social and economic elite, and an enemy of humanity. That is why the fight against the Sangh Parivar is not just a fight for minority rights but a fight for the country, the society, the nation if one wishes to use the term, that we want.

This strategy can be seen reflected in the Kandhamal violence. The initial rhetoric of the Sangh Parivar after the murder of Lakshmanananda Saraswati (at Jalespeta on 23rd August 2008) was that the Christian missionaries had killed him or got him killed because he was doing what they claimed they were doing, namely educational and health service, and thereby preventing the adivasis from turning to them. But if indeed it was acknowledged that this is what the Christian missionaries were doing, how had they become traitors and enemies of the country? However, there were three crucial differences between the educational and other services the Christian institutions gave and that which Lakshmanananda gave. While the missionaries did proselytize, that was not the invariable object of the service they gave. With Lakshmanananda the conversion of adivasis to Hinduism was an invariable object, an ever-present aim of his mission. Two, the missionaries gave secular education that would help the students get on in life, even if they taught the Bible as an addition. Lakshmanananda's schools taught Sanskrit language and Hindu lore as understood by the Sangh Parivar. Three, the missionaries never used violence to convert, or to prevent the conversion to Hinduism. Lakshmanananda on the other hand used very violent methods to avert the Christianisation of the people, including a humiliating ritual of conversion of the converted to Hinduism. This should have been easy to see, but the pervasive assumption that dalits and adivasis of India are Hindus (evidenced by the ease with which the silly expression re-conversion – ghar-vaapasi or home-coming – came to be used by the media in reference to the Hinduisation of Christian dalits undertaken by Lakshmanananda) has blinded many of even those who do not approve of what that man did.

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Adivasis of India are not Hindus, even if their cults have over the years got Hinduised to some extent, as not only ethnology but even the law recognises: all the personal laws of the Hindus codified by Parliament explicitly say that the word Hindu does not include the Scheduled Tribes. And dalits who are *avarnas*, are outside the four corners of Hindu society. Their Hinduisation is as much conversion as their Christianisation, and not re-conversion. If anyone had to be arrested in Kandhamal under the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967 (see box in next page) for using force to convert, it was Lakshmanananda, who developed a violent ritual for it: That this needs to be spelt out is an index of not merely the general difficulty of seeing majoritarianism as sectarian as much as minoritarianism, but more specifically the difficulty of cutting through the ide-

‘Freedom Of

Orissa has an Act that purportedly prohibits conversion 'from one religion to another by the use of force, inducement or fraudulent means'. It has an Orwellian name: it is called the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967. As the Sangh Parivar gleefully recalls, it was enacted by a Congress government. Conversion by force need not be newly penalised since the use of force against a person to make him/her do what he/she is not otherwise willing or bound to do, is in any case an offence under Secs 352 and 506 of the Indian Penal Code IPC. The same is true of the use of fraud to that end, which is an offence under Sec. 417 of the IPC. The catch comes with the word 'inducement: it is defined as 'the offer of any gift or gratification either in cash or in kind and shall also include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise'. 'Benefit, pecuniary or otherwise' is a very wide expression. Any reason other than the purely philosophical which attracts a person to another religion can fall within the meaning of this expression. That the religion does not practice untouchability is undoubtedly a benefit, 'otherwise' than pecuniary? Likewise, that the religion permits entry into the place of worship for all?

Whatever may be the justification offered for such laws, they have nothing to do with any legitimate concern of governance. Their only purpose is to prevent the downtrodden at the bottom or outside the pale of Hindu society from taking to other religions, especially Christianity or Islam. That is why 're-conversion' or the conversion of the converted to Hinduism is put on a different footing. The laws on 'Freedom of Religion' enacted by Chattisgarh and Rajasthan explicitly exclude the conversion back to one's 'forefather's religion' from the definition of conversion, and while Orissa has not done so, the administration has made good the gap by

ological identification of India with Hindu, which has been successfully done by not merely the RSS but a considerable part of seemingly innocent nationalist thinking too.

But let us state a few more facts first. The victims of the violence in Kandhamal are Panos who have converted to Christianity. Panos are a dalit community, of whom many though not all, have converted in the district. The assault on them was the work of the Bajrang Dal, which mobilized principally the community of Konds or Kandhas, the main adivasi community of the district. Kandhamal is a hilly district located at about the center of Orissa. It gets its name from Kandha. It was originally one half of the Boudh-Kandhamal district. Boudh was made a separate district on 1-4-1994, and the remainder

Religion

refusing to see Lakshmanananda's activity as conversion under the State's Freedom of Religion Act.

The High Court of Orissa, in *Yulitha Hyde vs State of Orissa*, reported in AIR 1973 Orissa 116, struck down the Act as unconstitutional for the reason that propagating the religion is an essential part of Christianity, and therefore the Act violates Art.25(1) of the Constitution of India, which guarantees the freedom to profess, practice and propagate any religion. The matter would have rested there but for the fact that a similar law made by Madhya Pradesh was upheld by the High Court of Madhya Pradesh, and both the cases went before the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court agreed with the High Court of Madhya Pradesh and disagreed with the High Court of Orissa in a judgement reported in *Rev. Stainislaus vs State of Madhya*

Pradesh, AIR 1977 SC 908. For a detailed comment on the shallow reasoning of

this judgement, see the Karnataka part of the report.

As has been widely commented, notwithstanding the vicious allegation of forcible

was named Phulbani. That very year Phulbani was renamed Kandhamal. The renaming was deserved, since the district is predominantly populated by adivasis, of whom the overwhelming number are the tribe of Kandhas, but it took place through the pressure exerted by a very ugly communal conflict, which is in some ways a precursor of the recent violence.

Adivasis are 52.7% of the population of Kandhamal, of whom 89% are Kandhas (the others are Gonds and Saoras). Dalits are 16.9%, most of them Panos (the others being Dom, Ghasi, etc). The rest (about 30 %) are caste Hindus, described by the Kandhas as well as Panos not as such, but as Oriyas. This could be because they speak Oriya which

is not the tongue of either the Kandhas or the Panos. Prominent among them are the Sundhis who have prospered with liquor trade, but there are Brahmins, Karans, Komtis (a Telugu speaking 'twice-born' community of traders), etc.

The district is divided into two sub-divisions, Baliguda and Kandhamal. Kandhamal sub-division lies mostly on a 500 meters high and thickly forested plateau girdled by hills, whereas Baliguda is hilly, and its altitude can go upto 1100 meters at places, but towards the east it has wide and well cultivated valleys. It is said that it snows in winter at Daringabadi, which is one of the highest points of Baliguda sub-division. That must make it the only place in the Eastern Ghats which sees snow fall. For this reason, it seems Daringabadi is called the Kashmir of Orissa; a commendation made singularly if dolefully apposite by the fear that now haunts the place.

The violence of 2008 took place mainly in Baliguda sub-division, comprising the tahsils of Baliguda, and G.Udayagiri, in turn divided into the blocks of Baliguda, Chakapad, Daringabadi, G.Udayagiri, K.Nuagaon, Raikia, Tikabali and Tumidibandha. Since the soured relation between the Kandhas and the Panos is one of the contexts (even the sole reason, if we are to believe the Sangh Parivar) of the violence, we may put on record what we could glean of the social relation between the two communities. It appears that while the Kandhas are without doubt local to the area, the Panos are immigrants from the coastal areas. But they are not recent immigrants. Their presence goes back to 200 years if not more. In anthropological literature they are referred to as Dom as well as Pano. The Gazetteer of 1908 describes them as tenants working the lands of the Kandhas (the Gazetteer uses the word 'serf' and other British writers of the period also use the words serf and servile, which probably reflects extreme subordination rather than any precise resemblance to the social categories that the English authors were familiar with). It is said that there was a Pano settlement attached to most Kandha villages. The closeness of Panos with the Kandhas - in those days when there was neither anything to be gained nor lost in acknowledging it - was such that Thurston, in his *Castes and Tribes of South India* (Vol.VI, p 72-75) says that the Panos who remained in the plains were distinguished as 'Desi Panos' as against those who migrated to the Hills, described as 'Kondh Panos'. He adds that in the 1891 Census, many Panos returned their identity as Kondhs, for which there could have been no dubious motive in those days.

Even today, while the other non-tribals live mostly in towns or big villages on the thoroughfares, it is the Panos alone who live in the interior along with the Kandhas. At Damikia near Baliguda, a Kandha who is not hostile to the Panos informed us that the tenancy continues in a different form to this day: the Pano cultivates some land with the permission of the tribal village committee for a year or two and then gives it back. It is possible that the Panos were landless outcastes who came to the hills in search of livelihood, and persuaded the tribal people who were mostly food gatherers to put their land

at the disposal of their greater expertise. A pamphlet issued by a leftist organisation suggests that the British encouraged such settlements, may be in the interests of greater produce and better land revenue. In the area that now falls within the Kandhamal sub-division, the Panos were regarded as untouchable by the Kandhas, but apparently not in the area of the Baliguda sub-division, where the notion of a Kui Samaj of which both were part was prevalent until quite recently (see below for more on this).

The Gazetteer of 1908 also says the Panos were creditors and advisors to the Kandhas. In general, they were the mediators between the Kandhas and the non-tribal outer world. Being plainspeople, they would be suited for the role. However, the Panos appear to have had an uncomfortable role in the ritual human sacrifice which the Kandhas undertook in appeasement of the *Dharni Penu* (earth god). They had to abduct or purchase the sacrificial victims (called *meriahs*) from the plains towards the east and sell them to the Kondhs, or else offer their own children in default (*The Sacrifice of Human Being: British Rule and the Konds of Orissa*, Felix Padel, Oxford University Press, 1995). The victims were not killed immediately. They lived and grew up in the Kandha village, and were apparently well looked after till they were ritually sacrificed.

In summary, the relation between the Kandhas and the Panos must have been often tense and uncomfortable. The Orissa District Gazetteer of 1983 however takes objection to the description of the Panos as 'wicked, cunning and unscrupulous' by the Gazetteer of 1908. But perhaps allowance has to be made for the fact that those were days when communities were called 'races' and were attributed traits wholesale. It is however possible that the Colonialist Gazetteer merely reflected the adivasi distrust of the plainsmen, even as they may have employed plainsmen as tenants to produce a better harvest. Verrier Elwin has been quoted as saying about this relation that : 'Konds use them (the Panos) as a buffer against the world....They (the Panos) exploit the Konds undoubtedly but they also save them....Konds despise the Panos socially as much as they rely on them materially...' (Felix Padel, *supra*, page 133). A senior Government officer of the State, who is not very sympathetic to the Panos, expresses the Kandhas' distrust of Panos in modern terms accurately perhaps when he says that the 'Panos are not very well off, but they are upwardly mobile'.

It is possible that the Panos were landless outcastes who came to the hills in search of livelihood, and persuaded the tribal people who were mostly food gatherers to put their land at the disposal of their greater expertise.

The present situation appears to be mixed. Orissa is among the poorest States of India. The mean per capita expenditure per annum is Rs 790 in Orissa, which is higher than

only that of Bihar. For SCs/STs it is Rs 558, which is lower than even that of Bihar. The same figure for rural areas is Rs 422, again the lowest in the country (estimates based on 61st round of NSSO, cited in the Report of the High Level Committee on the Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim community, better known as the Sachar Committee). Kandhamal in turn is one of the poorest districts of Orissa. It stands 29th out of the 30 districts on the scale of the Human Development Index prepared by UNDP. Out of Kandhamal's total geographical area of 8,02,000 hectares, only 12% is cultivable (the net sown area is 1,15,000 hectares, or 14.33%), and 5,71,000 hectares (71.19%) comprises forests, the rest (about 1,16,000 hectares, or 14.5%) being barren Government land. The Dalits, of whom the Panos are overwhelmingly the most numerous, do not have much land, and are mostly labourers. The landless among them are 80 to 90 per cent, according to most observers. While their population is 16.9% of the district, they hold only 9% of the cultivable land. The adivasis, who are the original inhabitants of the district, own only 77% of the cultivable land, and the caste Hindus (the 'Oriyas' in local parlance) who entered the district mostly as rulers, traders and exploiters, hold 14%. But all this is within the 12% of land that is cultivable.

The presence and the prominence of non-tribals in the area reflects the historical process of subjugation of the Kandhamal hills by the British. The British campaigned to put an end to the '*meriah*' sacrifice on the ground of inhumanity, but the very fact that the campaign was conducted with the use of armed force and ended with the administrative subjugation of the Kandhamal hills, indicates that it was also a means of imperialist incorporation (as argued by Felix Padel, *supra*). The non-tribals who helped the British in this process were given positions in the revenue administration that followed. Part of today's Kandhamal was in the old Bengal Presidency. There the British established the *Mutta* system wherein a cluster of villages were constituted as a *Mutta* under a *Sardar* or *Muttadar* who had the power of policing and of collection of revenue. His commission out of the revenue he collected was 12 ½ %. In quite a few places a non-tribal was made the *Sardar* or *Muttadar*. The *Baliguda* part of today's Kandhamal was in the *Ganjam* district of the old *Madras* Presidency. It was at that time a *Zamindari*, but was later (in 1839) brought under the *Mutta* system under the *Collector* of *Ganjam* district. These *Muttadars* were empowered further to collect nine varieties of exactions from the people, described as *mamuls*.

Commercialisation and communications that developed as a matter of British policy also encouraged the influx of non-tribals into the tribal area. Liquor trade brought the *Sundhi* community. That the influx of non-tribals led to land alienation is reflected in the regulations made by the British in both the areas (in 1902 in the *Bengal* area and 1917 in the *Madras* area), restricting land sales from tribals to non-tribals. Shorn of details the rule common to both the parts was that tribal land shall not be purchased by a non-tribal without prior permission of the representative of the Government, the *Deputy*

Commissioner in the Bengal area and the District Collector in the Madras area. But the ineffectiveness of these regulations is attested to by a survey conducted in the Bengal part a quarter century after the 1902 regulations, which showed that 1/4th of the land of tribals had passed into non-tribal hands in that period. After independence, the Orissa Scheduled Area Transfer of Immovable Property (by Scheduled tribes) Regulations, 1956 was enacted for the same purpose. That this too could not stop alienation of tribal land, is likewise attested to by the fact that the Regulation was amended in 2002 to provide for verification of all the transfers of tribal land to non-tribals that took place since the enactment to test their legality, putting the burden of proving the legality on the non-tribal purchaser. The upshot of this history is that non-tribal caste Hindus (Oriyas, in local parlance) own 14% of the cultivable land in the district, whereas the much maligned Panos who did not enter the district as exploiters but as servile labourers of the adivasis, and that too centuries ago, own only 9%.



Given the scarcity of cultivable land and alienation to outsiders, there was bound to be scramble for land. Along with the Kandhas some of the Panos have cut down forests to clear a plot of land for cultivation. There are instances where a Pano has been accused of occupying land cleared by a Kandha. Some of the Panos are, however, in petty trade, including cattle trade. Their position as creditors for the

Kandhas appears to be continuing, and there is probably some truth in the allegation that there are cases where Panos have taken over adivasi land for failure to repay a loan. In fact, at Jugapadar basti of Nuagaon, we were told by the local Pano leader himself that there are many cases where Panos have lent money to Kandhas, backed by mortgage of land. The mortgage is of the possessory form, where the creditor enjoys the land until the loan is repaid, usually without interest. The fruits of the land enjoyed by the creditor will be his interest. It is known that possessory mortgage, which is common in poorly monetised economies, is a most exploitative form of mortgage and often leads to permanent alienation of the land to the creditor. No wonder that one of the strongest demands of the Kandhas is that all loans accompanied by such mortgage should be abrogated.

This may not add up to a picture of an exploitative relation between the two communities because, as said above, the overwhelming majority of the Panos are landless labourers. Even among the landholders, the proportion of small and marginal farmers

(95%) is very high among the dalits (the corresponding figure among the adivasis is 84%). And in any case, as admitted by a senior official of the State Government, there is more tribal land grabbed by caste Hindus than by the Panos, against which there has never been any agitation by the Sangh Parivar which has been organizing the Kandhas on an exclusively sectarian basis. But it is universally acknowledged that there is a distinct difference in the level of education. Panos, though not highly educated, are on the average better educated than Kandhas. This is attributed to Christianity, and though the schools run by the Christian missionaries have never been sectarian, Christianity definitely gives a fillip to education among the converts. While no one can blame the Panos for this, it appears to be cause of some heartburn among the adivasis.

Another allegation against the Panos is that they are pushing for inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list and that they have obtained an order from the High Court to that effect. This is based on a misunderstanding of what the Panos sought and what the Court ordered. The fact is that in the year 2002, a community called Kui has been included

In Madras there was a notion of Hill tribe which received special protection in the Agency areas against non-tribals. In the Telugu speaking parts of Madras the untouchable communities living in the Agency areas were recognized as Hill tribes.

in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list of Orissa. Now, Kui is a language and also designates the culture of the people who speak the language. It is spoken in the habitations of Baliguda sub-division by the Kandhas as well as the Panos. The Panos claimed that since there is no community called Kui and the expression can only refer to the people associated with the Kui language and culture, it should include the Panos of Baliguda sub-division.

There was in fact a notion of Kui people or Kui Samaj that included both the Panos and Kandhas until not very long ago. The Nikhil Utkal Kui Samaj Union formed in the year 1929 included both Kandhas and Panos. At least one person - pastor Sukhdev Digal of Kotingia, G.Udayagiri Block - said to us that in this area the non-Christian Panos are sometimes referred to as 'Harijan Kui'. On this ground they sought recognition for Panos domiciled in that area as a Scheduled tribe.

We were told by Hemanta Nayak, an activist at Bhubaneswar, that Panos of the Baliguda sub-division were recognized as a Hill tribe prior to independence and it was only after independence that they lost the status. This could be true, because Baliguda sub-division, as said above, was part of the Ganjam district of the Madras Presidency prior to independence. In Madras there was a notion of Hill tribe which received special protection in the Agency areas against non-tribals. In the Telugu speaking parts of Madras the untouchable communities living in the Agency areas were recognized as Hill tribes. So it is quite possible that the Panos of Baliguda sub-division were a Hill tribe

before independence. And all over the erstwhile Madras State, the untouchables were recognized as SC and not ST after independence in the respective Presidential Orders, whether in the Agency or outside.

The Panos - or rather, a certain Phulbani Kui Janakalyan Samiti acting on their behalf - moved the High Court of Orissa seeking an order to the Government to recognize the Panos of Baliguda as the Kui community now included in the State's ST list, and the High Court appears to have directed the Government to consider their plea and take a decision in the matter. It is still for the Government of Orissa to decide whether the community Kui referred to in the amended ST list signifies all the people who are associated with the Kui language and culture as claimed by the Panos. The Government has taken no decision, and in fact it appears to be of the opinion that (from what we were told informally by a senior official of that Government) such was never the intention.

Recent news suggests that the Government of Orissa intends to get Kui deleted from the State's ST list. It will have to put that proposal before the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, get their opinion, and then request the Union Government to delete the name, for only Parliament has the requisite power.

However, whatever the outcome of the plea of the Panos, the perturbation this may have caused among the Kandhas is understandable, since any addition to the list of STs without increasing the benefits given to STs as a whole would eat into their rights, especially if the new entrants are already relatively better placed. But the predicament of the Panos is no less understandable. An anomaly of the definition of Scheduled Castes in the Constitutional (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 issued by the President of India is that Scheduled Castes who convert to religions other than Hinduism are no longer counted among Scheduled castes ('no person who professes a religion different from the Hindu religion shall be deemed to be a member of the Scheduled Castes'). Apart from the implicit assumption that the SCs are Hindus, for which there is no basis in fact or dharmic law, this exclusion is anomalous because mere conversion has never liberated the dalit people from the stigma of untouchability insofar as the Hindu social order is concerned. And it is untouchability that is the root of recognition as



Scheduled Caste (SC). This fact is implicitly acknowledged by the subsequent amendment which permits conversion to Buddhism and Sikhism without loss of SC status. But adoption of Christianity and Islam continues to be discriminated against.

Due to this anomaly whose origin lies in politics of a dubious variety rather than any sustainable rationale, the Pano Christians have lost the reservations and other special benefits given to SCs. As a matter of fact, a seemingly serious allegation levelled against the Panos, which has received wide circulation, is that they have used fake community certificates, which only means that they are using SC certificates inspite of being Christians and therefore ineligible to get jobs in the SC quota. There is no information as to how widespread is this practice, and we were told by Bijoy Digal, pastor and resident of Budrukia, Baliguda block, that in the last ten years it has become very difficult for Christian Panos to get SC certificates. However, the practice is known to be prevalent in all States and is rooted in the

If alienation of land and economic exploitation is to explain the anger of the Kandhas, there should have been a more severe attack on the caste Hindu communities in the district ('the Oriyas' as the Panos as well as the Kandhas call them). There were none, and on the other hand in many of the attacks the caste Hindus took part along with the Kandhas.

unreasonable character of the denial referred to above. But since this disability does not apply to STs, that is to say an ST person who converts to Christianity or Islam continues to legally be an ST person, the recognition as STs under the rubric of Kui would enable the Panos to overcome the barrier set up by the anomaly in the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950.

These, in summary, are the points of difference or conflict between the Kandhas and Panos. They are real but they do not add up to any thing that would even remotely explain the vicious violence unleashed on the Panos. As said above, if alienation of land and economic exploitation is to explain the anger of the Kandhas, there should have been a more severe attack on the caste Hindu communities in the district ('the Oriyas' as the Panos as well as the Kandhas call them). There were none, and on the other hand in many of the attacks the caste Hindus took part along with the Kandhas. And there should have been attacks on the unconverted Panos too, but not only were they spared, some of them even participated in the attacks on the Christian Panos in some places. And finally, and clinchingly, there would have been no attacks on Christian Kandhas, but there were such attacks and there are many Christian Kandhas in the refugee camps.

The real reason requires analysis, not of the socio-economic conflicts between the Kandhas and Panos, but of what Lakshmanananda did ever since he took charge of the

Sangh Parivar's programme in Kandhamal. It is generally accepted that he entered the district in the year 1969. His headquarters is Chakapada where he set up the Gurukul Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya. The Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, intended as an instrument to Hinduise the adivasis, took over the running of the Chakapada ashram in 1979. While the eulogies of the Sangh Parivar say that Lakshmanananda opened up educational opportunities for tribal children whose needs in this area were neglected by the State, the education given here was in Sanskrit, which could hardly have added to their abilities in moving up in life, and withal served the purpose of inculcating the ideological slant of the Sangh Parivar. There is no reason to see it as any different from the much vilified madarasa education given to Muslim children. In fact the very purpose of Lakshman Sethi (as he originally was) going to - or being sent by the Sangh Parivar to - Kandhamal was the spread of the Sangh Parivar ideology and the hindering of the spread of Christianity. The Sanskrit Kanyashram at Jalespeta for girl students, also a Sanskrit school, came into being in 1985. In both the Chakapada and the Jalespeta institutions, shakhas of the RSS are compulsorily held, and so are satsangs of the VHP ideologues who propagate their version of the problems the country faces, in which the principal share of the blame is borne by the minorities and the 'minorityism' of the secular parties and their policies. We also heard it said that while credit is given to Lakshmanananda for setting up the Jalespeta institution, the school was actually set up by the villagers and Lakshmanananda took it over, sacked the seven teachers working there and brought his own persons to teach a saffronised syllabus.

Almost from the beginning, Lakshmanananda went around the tribal villages inculcating brahminical practices in the name of the right way of life. It is also commonly acknowledged that Lakshmanananda organised yajnas and sankirtans periodically. 'We persuaded the people to observe Hindu dharma and avoid Christianity. We told them that India is Hindu Rashtra', says Shivaram Digal of Katingia, G.Udayagiri block, a Pano who never took to Christianity and is an ardent follower of Lakshmanananda. The effect on impressionable tribal villagers of the systematic inculcation of the falsehood that India is Hindu Rashtra, and that too in a militant tone aimed against the Christians, can be imagined. Sometimes the ritual of a bath, adorning the 'sacred thread' to the accompaniment of reciting the gayatri, would also follow.

Lakshmanananda also campaigned viciously against Christianity. He would say to the Kandhas, 'you are poor but the Christians are rich because they have foreign money'. In every meeting he would ask people who were ready to attack churches to raise their hands. Every year, some trouble would be created at the time of Good Friday and Christmas to prevent happy celebration of the festivals. And off and on, the local people egged on by his incitement, would catch hold of Christians and force them to covert. A ritual was devised by Lakshmanananda for this. We got a graphic description from an eye witness, Simon Nayak of Pirigada, K.Nuagaon block, who was in a camp at Cuttack

when we met him on 11th October. The victim would be tonsured and tilak put on the forehead. He would have to consume 'gobar paani' (cow dung mixed with water) and would then be fed ghee rice. He would have to tear or burn the bible and put his signature to a paper declaring that if he ever went to a church again, it was the same as if he was dead. Interestingly, there is no wearing of the sacred thread and recitation of gayatri when a dalit Christian is forcibly converted, unlike when an enthusiastic adivasi is given religion.



Being converted to Hinduism

The exertions of Lakshmanananda resulted in violence against the Christians from about 1986. He appears to have undertaken a rath yatra in 1987, and conducted yajnas in many villages during 1986-87. Regular incidents of violence have been reported thereafter, in which the caste

Hindus and the Hinduised Kandhas assaulted Christians. However preacher Bijoy Digal of Budrukia, Baliguda block, said to us that he was attacked as far back as 1982 by Kandhas instigated by Lakshmanananda. At that time he was in Santikia in Kutikia panchayat. In response to this attack, he shifted to Budrukia, where he was again assaulted in 1987.



The 'Ghar-Vaapasi' ritual

We would be doing less than justice to the Kandhas if we showed them as pas-

sive implements in the hands of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad or Bajrang Dal. We have indicated above that they were susceptible to incitement against the Christian Panos because of the socio-economic relations between the two communities. We will see later that there were more than a few Kandhas who resisted the depredations of the violent Bajrang Dal gang, some of them losing their lives in the process. For the present we will only refer to the Kui Samaj Samanvaya Samiti (Kui Samiti, or just Samiti, in brief) which is the organisation of Kandhas that has campaigned aggressively against the Panos. We have referred earlier to the Nikhil Utkal Kui Samaj Union formed in 1926, whose aim was 'to preserve the dignity of the Kui community'. The notion of Kui in those days referred to the language and culture of the Baliguda region and not to a particular community. Hence both Panos and Kandhas were part of it. Opposition from some Kandhas to the inclusion of Panos came up from about 1945, and the Kui Samaj Seva Samiti was formed with exclusively Kandha membership in 1945 in Phulbani. The Kui Kula Samiti was formed in Baliguda in 1982. The Kui Samaj Samanvaya Samiti was formed in 1998 to coordinate the activities of these organisations.

A detailed analysis of the relation between the Samiti and the Sangh Parivar must be undertaken someday, for though it is closely associated with the VHP, it is not altogether subordinate to it and its leader Lambodar Kanhar is a character with a mind of his own, advocate by profession, with quite clear political ambitions. While the campaign against the sins of the Panos listed above was led by the Samiti, the attack on the Christians took place in the name of the Bajrang Dal, though Kandhas participated in the attack in large numbers, and in some places it appears that the Kui Samiti participated in its name. Yet the Samiti has come up with apologies for the attack, in language that partly reflected the talk of the Sangh Parivar (about conversions, etc) and partly stuck to its own litany of grievances.

Lambodar Kanhar has never led the Kandhas against exploitation by the non-tribal plainspeople. He has also said that the adivasis are animists and not Hindus. But on other occasions he has echoed the Sangh Parivar's talk against Christianity and Christian missionaries.

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Lambodar Kanhar appears to have come into focus in the year 1994. There was a conflict over entry of a Pano youth into a Shiva temple at Khudutentuli in Khajuripada block on 14th January 1994. He was not a Christian Pano but one of the unconverted, whom the Sangh Parivar likes to show as Hindu. Some Adivasis, who were the main worshippers at the temple, objected to the entry of the Pano, and there was trouble because the Pano youth stuck to his rights. Kanhar's explanation, which few accept, is that it was not an expression of untouchability, but that some of the Panos refused to give contribution to the building of the temple. When one of them insisted on worshipping at the temple

after it was built, the devout Kandhas objected. The mutual intransigence turned into a riot between the Kandhas and Panos with Lambodar Kanhar entering the fray and mobilising his community. The Panos too were mobilised in large numbers by their leaders. Kanhar was at that time booked under the National Security Act (NSA). It was a weird spectacle: a tribal-dalit fight over the right of dalits to enter a temple, which is a brahminical objection. The riots went on till June, leaving 18 dead and pushing a large number of Panos into refugee camps at Phulbani. At a rally of 5000 Kandhas taken out under the leadership of Lambodar Kanhar on 6th April, the slogan 'come out and kill the Panos with whatever weapons you have' was given. The demand to rename Phulbani district as Kandhamal was voiced vigorously in these processions, and succeeded.

It is worth recording that Lambodar Kanhar has never led the Kandhas against exploitation by the non-tribal plainspeople. After the recent violence Kanhar has some times sought to differentiate himself from the Sangh Parivar. For instance he has gone on record saying that the Kandhas as much as the Panos are beef-eaters and they are not happy with the Sangh Parivar's campaign against beef, which is in any case the cheapest meat available. He has also said that the adivasis are animists and not Hindus. But on other occasions he has echoed the Sangh Parivar's talk against Christianity and Christian missionaries. Perhaps he only wishes to get the best political mileage out of the tragedy. ■



Orissa: The Violence



Before we go on to describe and analyse the recent violence, we must comment on the violence that shook Kandhamal in December 2007, stretching into January 2008. Indeed, in any conversation with the victims, their narration keeps shifting from ‘last December’ to ‘this August-September’. The Sangh Parivar's account too sees the latter as a continuation of the former, though each of the events is turned upside down. The Maoists alone appear to have not noticed the continuity. If they had, the vicious beating the Christians took on the earlier occasion for a completely invented cause would have - or at least should have - deterred them from making as they did a fatal attack on Lakshmanananda. In the violence that started just before Christmas 2007 and went beyond the festival, it is estimated that between 600 to 700 Christian houses, about 90 churches and about a hundred other institutions were destroyed. Many suffered grievous injuries with trishuls and talwars. The death toll has been unofficially put at 11 (*Angana Chatterji, Communalism Combat, Jan 2008*).

The Sangh Parivar's story of the December 2007 violence begins with the attempt of the Christians to set up an arch in the village of Bamunigaon (Brahmanigaon) in Daringabadi block, in front of a place of worship of the goddess Durga. It was not an arch across the road, but one along the road margin. A Christian leader, ex-MLA Saluja Pradhan, says on the other hand that the place of worship was frequented only during Navratri, and this arch was a temporary one, for the duration of Christmas celebrations. He also says that the arch was put up with the proper official permission, taken from the Sub-Collector, Baliguda on 19th Dec. The arch had been put up in 2006 too, and there had been no objection. The shops on the roadside where the arch was put up were mainly of Christians. Ram Madhav, one of the vocal spokespersons of the Sangh Parivar, says in a statement issued



Kesomati Pradhan did her best to stop the violence

on 8th January that the resentment was because it was a second arch and was unnecessary since there was already one at the place where one is usually set up. One would like to know which religious celebration ever observed such rationing. Certainly not the Ganesh mandaps and Durga mandaps set up by the Sangh Parivar where 'the more the merrier' is the guiding principle.

It may be added that it is one of the strategies of the Sangh Parivar that in explanation of mass violence they come forward with inane arguments that have no proportion to the destruction: they make it seem as if what is being discussed is a brawl in a tea shop and not large scale physical attacks, arson and murder. It is a method of dragging the others into a petty discussion that demeans the suffering of the victims and tires out their anger.

The further complaint of the Sangh Parivar is that an attempt was made on the life of Lakshmanananda, which enraged his followers. We will see below that it is doubtful that any attack at all took place, and in any case he did not suffer any serious injury. But these seemingly genuine causes do not explain even a fraction of the violence, since the violence did not begin in Bamunigaon with its objectionable arch and did not wait for the attack on Lakshmanananda. The attack said to have taken place on Lakshmanananda was after the attack on Bamunigaon, and not before. The attacks were well organized and spread over a wide area even before the alleged attack on Lakshmanananda, with participation of persons from many blocks and even outside the district in the major incidents. They carried deadly weapons and petrol/diesel in cans for burning, all of which is not possible without prior planning.

Barakhama in Baliguda block was one of the places attacked. Angana Chatterji (supra) estimates the participants as 4000, from various villages of Baliguda and other blocks, and even as far away as Berhampur (Brahmapur). We heard at length about this attack from Kesomati Pradhan, a determined Kandha woman of Kajuri in Sukudbadi panchayat, Raikia block who had gone to visit her relatives in Barakhama on 21st December and stayed on till the 25th, the day of the attack. She is President of Kandhamal Nari Jagran Samiti, and is an eye witness to the Barakhama attack. She did her best to dissuade her fellow adivasis from participating in the violence. Supplementing her account with that given by sociologist Angana Chatterji (supra), and John Dayal, National President of the All India Catholic Union, the following broad picture of the December 2007 violence emerges.

A campaign was planned by the Sangh Parivar with the usual demand of stopping Christian Panos from obtaining SC certificates. That it was started from 22nd December and a call for a bandh on the 25th was given shows that the intent was to disrupt the Christmas celebrations (or else Ram Madhav should explain why a call should be given for a bandh on a major festival day merely because the devout set up two arches where one was sufficient). As Christmas neared, processions shouting anti-Christian slogans and plainly calling for the killing of Christians were taken out in various villages. The violence of these slogans can hardly be explained by the prosaic demand that Christian Panos must not be given SC certificates, a demand that could emotionally move only non-Christian SCs, if at all, and not the caste Hindus and the adivasis who were mobilized behind them.

Unlike the recent violence where the role of caste Hindus was underplayed to suit the theory that it was an adivasi upsurge against Christians who had killed their benefactor, though the victims themselves, especially in the worst affected villages of Raikia and Nuagaon blocks, identified the leading role of the ‘Oriyas’, the role of caste Hindus appears to have been explicit in the Dec 2007 attack. Kesomati speaks of ‘Oriyas’ guiding the Kandhas in the use of petrol, etc., putting tilak on their foreheads and tying the headband proclaiming the Bajrang Dal identity. They carried a banner which read ‘come with whatever weapons you have, to attack the Panos’. ‘Kill the Christians’ was the cry of the Bajrang Dal mobs throughout these attacks. The other slogans were ‘Jai bajrang bali’, ‘Bharat mata ki jai’ etc.



A Christian couple outside their destroyed home in Kosanga village of Tikabali Block

The attack in Bamunigaon took place on 24th December, wherein a mob numbering thousands attacked the Christmas decorations and arrangements, burnt a Church and injured villagers. The village was attacked again on the 25th. The Christians had apprehended the attack and repeatedly approached the Sub-Collector and Sub-divisional Police Officer (SDPO), Baliguda from 21st onwards but there was no protection when the mob finally came. Even if we grant that the Hindus had a genuine grievance about a Christmas arch, temporary by its very nature, being set up in front of a temple of Durga, the scale of the attack is grotesque and its timing - on Christmas eve - calculated to enrage. It is on the evening of that day that Christians allegedly attacked the car Lakshmanananda was travelling by at Dasingbadi on the way to Bamunigaon. (But why was the saint going there?). We say ‘allegedly’ because nobody other than the Sangh Parivar appears to believe that any attack at all took place. John Dayal says that what

happened was a scuffle when Lakshmanananda's guards attacked Christian youth putting up decorations at Dasingbadi where the car had stopped due to an altercation with the staff of a bus. But the rumoured attack was enough to set off a trail of violence. The Sangh Parivar organizations gave a call for a 36 hour bandh and vicious attacks such as the one at Barakhama followed. They used trishuls, petrol, rods, talwars, etc. Houses and churches were burnt and people attacked. Churches were attacked in Baliguda also by large mobs of 500 or more carrying trishuls and talwars. As in the recent violence, then too the victims ran away into the forests and stayed there in the bitter cold without food or adequate clothing until they felt safe enough to return. Some moved to the relief camp set up by the Government at Baliguda. There was some retaliation by the Christians, especially in and around Bamunigaon, but it was nothing in comparison to the injury they suffered.

This brings us to the violence of August-September 2008. A group of armed persons attacked the Kanyashram at Jalaspeta in Tumdibanda block at about 8-30 pm of the evening of 23rd August 2008 and killed Lakshmanananda along with four of his followers. There is no doubt at all that it was the Maoists who committed the killing, but to this day the Sangh Parivar pretends to disbelieve the Maoists' own claim that they killed Lakshmanananda. Their case is that it was the Christians who killed him. This must be the only occasion in the history of the RSS, which has explicitly prided itself as being anti-Communist as much as it is anti-Muslim and anti-Christian, where it has defended Communists against any allegation, that too the allegation that they murdered one of its own prominent leaders, and even after the deed was owned up by the Communists themselves! It is an opportunist denial, motivated by the desire to grab a heaven-sent excuse for massacring Christians.

The Sangh Parivar insisted in taking the dead body of Lakshmanananda to Chakapada by road. They wanted to make a spectacle of it, and were prepared - as events were to prove - to take full advantage of the passions that would arouse. They did not even go



Terrified and shelterless in the forest

by the shortest route, but meandered across Baliguda sub-division. The procession went to Baliguda, K.Nuagaon, Raikia, G.Udayagiri, Papuriya, Phulbani, Tikabali, back to Papuriya, again to Tikabali and finally Chakapada. The National Commission for Minorities has commented in its report of 13th September that allowing the dead body to be taken on a lengthy procession was certain to result in inflammation of passions, and if for any reason the followers of the deceased could not be convinced to complete the last rites at

Jalespeta, arrangements could have been made to airlift the body to Chakapada. Moreover, the route actually taken was not the route agreed upon. The followers of the slain Lakshmananda at K.Nuagaon put pressure upon the organizers of the procession to take the body by a lengthier route so that all could have darshan. The administration should have realized, given the history of Lakshmanananda's activity that this would multiply the damage that could be caused by the exhibition of the dead body. But then we found that the administration in Orissa was handling the rioters most gingerly, as if not



Trees felled and placed across the road by Bajrang Dal enroute Raikia

upsetting them was the first principle of riot-control. For instance, when we complained over telephone to the Relief Commissioner (Southern Region) on 22nd September about the wretched condition of the relief camp at G.Udayagiri which was located in water-logged open land and asked him whether it was not proper to locate the camp in a pucca structure, his reply was that it was not possible because the 'other communities' were objecting to the allotment of any government building for the refugees. Considering that it was the 'other communities' that were responsible for the plight of the refugees, this was a strange consideration.

The processionists gave angry slogans and burnt shops of Christians at Raikia, G.Udayagiri, Tikabali and Papuriya. But the real violence would come the next day, inspired by the funeral orations. The last rites at Chakapada were attended by leaders of the Sangh Parivar including Praveen Togadia, who spoke in his usual manner, inciting violence against Christians. Togadia is the privileged criminal of Indian politics. Anyone else who says half as violent things in public speeches would spend much of his time in jail, but not this man. Which is a telling comment on the bias that has over the years entered the Indian polity unannounced.

The mob coming back on 25th August indulged in large scale arson, destruction, assault, murder and rape. It is best captured by stories of the victims who survived. We will narrate a few here, but in fact to even get people to talk is - or at least was, in mid-September 2008 - very difficult. Nothing speaks of terror like the fear it causes, and that was palpable in the highlands and forests of Baliguda sub-division. We found Saluja Pradhan, ex-MLA and member of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), a Pano Christian, in the bazaar of Daringabadi on the evening of 20th September. It was close to dusk and the town's bazaars were teeming with crowds. Saluja Pradhan smiled vaguely when we introduced ourselves and responded only with gestures. Then he hinted to us to follow him and sped away on his motor cycle. We chased him out of the town, hoping we had



The exodus of Christians from their villages in Kandhamal

understood him right. As soon as he was out of sight of the town his vehicle turned left and moved towards what we were later told was a 'view point' from where tourists could enjoy the surrounding hills and valleys. Its merit for his purpose was that it was out of sight of not only Daringabadi but also the road from Daringabadi to Baliguda. He stopped at the 'view point' (alas, there was too little light for us to enjoy the view, even if we were in the mood for it) along with some associates of his who had also followed him, and only then did he open up. What he said was less remarkable

than the precautions he - an ex-MLA belonging to the ruling party - had to take to say it.

The next day, we were moving towards Raikia, the worst hit block, from Baliguda. We had some telephone numbers of Pano Christians of Raikia who were active members of the community, and we called them. They said it was impossible to talk in Raikia, and we should stop a couple of kilometers before Raikia where they would come and meet us. They came, but would not talk even by the roadside. They got onto their bikes and led our vehicle into a kuccha road to the left, adding that it leads to a hamlet which the Bajrang Dal did not frequent. Only after we were properly out of sight of the road did they sit on the dirt track and talk. And even then, after some time, they became nervous because they had been away from Raikia for more than an hour now, and people could get suspicious. Any leisurely narration of even the injury they had suffered was possible for the victims only in the places of refuge, not the camps in Kandhamal but in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack or the informal places of refuge in Visakhapatnam or elsewhere. Here are a few of the incidents.

*Ravindranath Pradhan is an ex-serviceman, resident of Gatargaon near Chakapada. He is a Christian Pano. On the 24th August, even before the dead boy of Lakshmanananda reached Chakapada a mob of 350 persons came to his village shouting 'Jai bajrang bali', 'Jai mata', 'Bharat mata ki jai', carrying swords. They lit torches and demolished the village church. Then they started torching the houses of the Christians. The Christians ran away but Ravindranath's brother Rasananda Pradhan (35) who was paralysed could not move out. He shouted to the attackers to drag him out of the house and do what they wanted to the house. But the attackers called out to Ravindranath who was looking on from a distance and said watch, we are killing your brother, and set the house on fire with Rasananda inside. He was burnt alive. In all, 37 houses were burnt that day. The people who had run away, including Ravindranath, hid in the forest that night and two more days and nights, and then walked out of the district to finally end up

in the refugee camp at YMCA, Bhubaneswar in a starved condition. Ravindranath went back on 8th October to his village and found it written on the walls of his house: 'Christian rule will not be allowed. In Hindustan only Hindus will live. If Christian rule is attempted, then the fires will burn'. On the walls of the broken church, it was written: Jai Shri Ram, Jai Bajrang Bali. He found two bones of his brother and cremated those remains.

*The case of Pushpanjali Panda, a Brahmin woman who married a pastor of K.Nuagaon has received some publicity. She got converted to Christianity and married Dibyasundar Digal, a Christian Pano, who was a teacher like her at that time. Digal later accepted the position of pastor at Drepana in K.Nuagaon block and shifted residence to Raikia. They were living there with their daughter Mona Lisa. Pushpanjali too got a job locally as tailoring teacher. On 23rd August, Digal went to the church as usual. On the 24th he came to know of the killing of Lakshmanananda and sent Pushpanjali a message saying he would not come home that day, and she must take care of herself and the child. On the night of 24th the attackers banged on her door repeatedly and threatened to set the house on fire with kerosene but she pleaded with them and saved herself. On 25th night Digal called her again and said he would come the next day. Seeing as she had the violence at Raikia, she apprehended danger and took her child and moved towards the village that night itself. When she was at the outskirts of the village, she was informed by some Hindus going out that the pastor had been killed. With her child, she went back to the Raikia relief camp but the RSS persons in the town pressurized her to convert back to Hinduism. Her father too agreed to take her back only if she converts. She refused, and to avoid their pressure, she slipped out of the Raikia camp one night with her child and walked 20 to 25 kilometers in the dark before she could get a vehicle to reach Bhubaneswar, where she is now in the camp at YMCA.

*Bulgan Digal, also an ex-serviceman and a Christian Pano, lived in Sulesaru in G.Udayagiri block. On the 25th September he and the other Christians of the village (a total of 22 families) saw a procession of vehicles going through the village, with people sitting in them shouting violent slogans. The Christians got scared and took a tent and moved up a neighbouring hill. They counted the vehicles. Later in the evening the vehicles started coming back. Two were missing. The Christians waited for those



Pushpanjali Panda and her daughter Mona Lisa



Bulgan Digal whose brother Akbar Digal was hacked to death by a Sangh Parivar mob

two to come back before returning home. They came down part of the way but did not return home. That saved them. The two vehicles - they were tractors - came late, at about 9-30 pm, and the persons traveling in them set on fire all the 22 houses of Christians. The Christians went up the hill again and walked and walked until they reached G.Udayagiri camp next evening. But Bulgan Digal's brother Akbar Digal (47) of Totomaha was not so lucky. He was a pastor. The attack on his village took place on 26th September. Seeing the attack he first sent away his family. After a

while he too moved out, trying to take the cover of vegetation, but he was late. The attackers surrounded him from all sides and as he stood up, they caught him and first chopped off his legs. Later they slit his throat and killed him.

*Pramod Kumar Pradhan is a Christian Kandha. He is resident of Bakhikamba, G.Udayagiri block. He is employed as Junior Assistant in the Soil Conservation Department. There were quite a few Christian Kandhas in the village. Being Kandhas, perhaps, they were not immediately attacked but pressure was put upon them to give up Christianity. One of them succumbed to the pressure and gave up Christianity, and on his persuasion four more did the same. Pramod Kumar says that these five were relatively well to do and had no desire to leave the village. Their renunciation of Christianity took place on 16-17 September. From that time the others were in danger. The attack took place on the night of 23rd September. The paramilitary forces that were patrolling the area came that way but the assailants misled them and sent them away. Then the houses of those who refused to give up Christianity were attacked at about 10 pm. Six houses were burnt. The inmates including Pramod Kumar ran away to the outskirts of the village. The attackers came looking for them. These people stepped into a flowing river and stood in the water. When the assailants shone torches, they dipped their heads into the water and held their breath to avoid being seen. Afterwards they went to G.Udayagiri and asked the fire station for assistance in putting off the fire but they were told that the fire station would respond only if the police made a request. Then all of them went back to the village and picked up a quarrel with the fellow-advaisis but they reacted aggressively saying that they were innocent and it was the outsiders who had attacked them. Seeing their aggression the Christian Kandhas decided to leave the village. The non-Christian villagers tried to surround them and prevent them but they managed to escape. However, at the Udayagiri relief camp they found that RSS persons were freely coming and going. Complaints made to the police had no effect. So they shifted to the relief camp at Janla

Saffron Mouthpieces?

The role of the media was most dubious, to say the least. Analysis of the coverage by *Samaj*, *Sambad* and *Dharitri* shows that the main Oriya language Press reported very little of the violence, gave extensive coverage to the excuses offered by the Sangh Parivar and the blame they put on the Christian missionaries in the teeth of the Maoists' claim, described the rampaging violent mobs as 'agitationists', and ignored the pathetic conditions in the refugee camps.

Samaj, the leading Oriya daily, said that even if Maoists committed the murder, they must have been hired by the Christian missionaries. 'That should not cause surprise, for have they not spent lumps of money on proselytisation?' Even when the violence was reported, it was invariably reported as 'violence caused by the killing of Lakshmanananda', leaving no scope for any doubts as to its planned character. Likewise, the loaded - and ultimately false - expression 'ghar-vaapasi' used by Lakshmanananda for the conversions conducted by him was adopted by the media and thereby legitimised.

The views expressed by the Shankaracharya of Puri, Praveen Togadia, Ashok Singhal, and other VHP leaders attacking Christians and demonising them was reported on page 1, while the victims of the violence had to trek down to Bhubaneswar for weeks through the jungles and meet the Press in the Capital to have their stories reported in at least some papers. There was no report of the sexual assault on Sister Meena Lalitha at K.Nuagaon until a correspondent of *The Hindu* came down from outside the State to write about it. The substance of the reporting by the local Press is that (a) It was not the Maoists but Christian missionaries who killed Lashmanananda, (b) conversion is the root of the problem, (c) Lakshmanananda was the saviour of the tribals, (d) adivasis are Hindus and conversion to Christianity is polluting, (e) Panos are outsiders and they have grabbed the lands of the Kandhas, (f) Christians - i.e. the converted Panos - have fraudulently grabbed the benefits given by the law to the tribals, (g) tribals are becoming a minority in the district due to the conversions, (h) Christian leaders are exaggerating the happenings to give Orissa a bad name in Europe and the US, and (i) re-conversion is an essential activity.

near Bhubaneswar.

*Simon Nayak belongs to Pirigada of K.Nuagaon block. He is a Christian Pano. On 24th August, the 15 Christian families of the village ran into the jungle upon being told that the Bajrangis were coming. They stayed in the jungle without food for three days. On the 27th some non-converted Panos of the village came there and persuaded them to go back to the village. They went back. On the 28th they were asked to attend a meeting at Dharampur. Simon Nayak understood what it means since Dharampur is a known stronghold of RSS leaders who are non-tribals. There they were all pressurized to convert, or 're-convert' in the Sangh Parivar's language. A piece of paper was brought and it was written on it that they were giving up the foreign religion and coming back to the Hindu fold. All of them signed. Then they were tonsured, tilak was put on the forehead and they were made to drink gobar pani, i.e., cow dung mixed with water, followed by ghee bath. Afterwards, they chose to go to the relief camp and not home, an indication that the so-called re-conversion was not voluntary. But they felt insecure in the camp at K.Nuagaon also and left for the Love Truth Faith Centre, Cuttack where a camp had come up.

*Sipaeju in Kotingia panchayat of G.Udayagiri block is an interior village where 50 of the 110 families are Christians. Being in the interior they seem to have thought nothing would happen. But on 26th August a mob of 150 persons came to the Christian basti. All the Christians ran into the jungle. All their houses were burnt down. The mob chased them into the jungle. Pastor Sukhdev Digal who was hiding behind bushes was seen by them and dragged out. They beat him with lathis. He survived only because they were in a hurry to finish the job. They stayed in the jungle without food and water for four days and then slowly moved out to Banjnagar on the highway. They did not go to the relief camp at G.Udayagri which was territorially theirs (!), 'because there are a lot of Hindu villages on the way', says the pastor. Instead they went to Bhubaneswar where they are now staying in the relief camp at YMCA.



Prabhaseni Nayak and her husband Anthony Nayak

*Prabhaseni Nayak of Pirigada, K.Nuagaon block is a gritty woman. On the 24th of August the Christians of the village heard violent slogans and did not cook food, expecting that they may have to leave the village. They all ran into the jungle. But she did not leave, since her husband Anthony Nayak was very unwell. On the 25th the attack took

place. Anthony was beaten with iron rods. After that the non-Christian Panos advised them to leave the village. She took her sick husband and 9 year old son to a hospital in Baliguda. On 17th September she went back to the village since their belongings were there. She found that all their houses had been burnt down, together with the belongings. She salvaged a half-burnt copy of the Bible and came back.

These instances give an idea of the nature of the attacks. While the killing of Lakshmanananda could not have been anticipated by the Sangh Parivar, their response on 24th and 25th August shows general readiness to indulge in rioting. Raikia block is an instance, where attacks went on unabated from 24th to 28th August. A mob went round Katingia first, then Gudrikiya, then Kitangia, and then Mondekia. Among the arrests made by the police for the killing of Lakshmanananda, there are many from this block. Neighbouring K.Nuagaon block has also witnessed a similar planning. On the 24th itself, even as the body of Lakshmanananda was arriving at K.Nuagaon, rumour was spread that the police already caught four persons of this block who had confessed to the murder, which led to a large number of people (about 2000, according to Surath Nayak, pastor) gathering at K.Nuagaon. They set on fire and destroyed a Catholic church, a Pentecostal church and two church-related social service institutions, namely Jan Vikas & Divya Jyothi. The house of our interlocutor, the pastor Surath Nayak, at Jugapadar basti attached to the town of K.Nuagaon was also destroyed completely. But his was not the only one. After the mob dispersed on 24th, local people gathered in groups of 200-300 on the 25th August, and went on rampage armed with swords, petrol and diesel and destroyed all the Christian houses and churches in eleven panchayats. Surath Nayak is emphatic that in this attack the 'Oriyas' (i.e., the caste Hindus) participated along with the Kandhas in sizable numbers. The victims ran into the relief camps which started coming up from 26th August. Having reached the camp, the victims tried to give complaints in the police station but their experience was distressing. One person we spoke to is Sadananda Nayak of Sirtiguda who went to the K.Nuagaon police station and found that the police were unwilling to register a case.

It is worth remarking that these attacks took place while prohibitory orders were in force. Prohibitory orders under Sec.144 Cr.P.C were promulgated all over the district on 25th August, and curfew was in force in the troubled areas thereafter. But this made no difference to the assailants. Hundreds of well grown trees were felled and the main roads were all blocked. The Press reported that as of



Refugees at the Daringabadi relief camp

9th September, the officials had counted 500 trees felled by the assailants for this purpose. Burning of churches went on unabated even after the frequency of killings tapered off. A series of incidents of arson took place along the main road connecting Baliguda to G.Udayagiri on the 18th of September. One of the villages burnt was Lakebadi in Raikia block where the houses of the Panos are set well apart. The Church in this village was burnt in the first round of arson on 25th August. On 18th September, at nightfall a mob came armed with guns, shouting 'Bharat mata ki jai,' 'Jai shri ram,' etc. The Panos got scared and ran into the forest nearby. The entire colony of 40 houses was looted and then burnt at leisure by the mob.

What were the police doing?

Almost nothing. We have given the instance of Sadananda Nayak of Sirtiguda. That was the experience of all the people. It was only after the Rapid Action Force (RAF) was deployed that there was response to complaints. The local police ignored not merely



Victims of Sangh Parivar violence

complaints of offences that have taken place, which they have to register as offences and investigate, but even more unpardonably complaints of impending assault which it is their duty to prevent. The Christians were left to the mercy of the marauding Sangh Parivar mobs. One reason would seem to be their own ideological inclination in favour of the Sangh Parivar way of looking at the matter. From what the victims say, many of the police personnel appear to share the same attitude towards minorities. A second reason could be that the BJP, the political wing of the Sangh

Parivar, is sharing power in Orissa, and the police were not sure how far they could go against the Bajrang Dal. One quote has been attributed to the police by many people, namely 'the guns are in our hands, but the bullet is in Naveen Patnaik's hands. If he gives written orders we will control the riots in two days'. The third reason sometimes given is probably an excuse: many of the victims have quoted the police as saying 'our lives are as precious to us as yours are to you'.

The result is that the Christians got little help from the police when the attacks were taking place, and also expect little help to enable them to come back and live in their villages. The Sangh Parivar's condition for their return is clear and categorical: they should give up Christianity ('re-convert' in the language of the Sangh Parivar). It is remarkable that the overwhelming majority of the displaced Christians are not willing to abide by this condition, even if it means living the lives of refugees for ever. Perhaps there is no

better answer to the charge that these people converted due to inducements. We met Gabriel Nayak of Badimunda, Tikabali block, at the relief camp at Janla on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar. There had been a natural death in his village on the 25th August and the cremation was on the 26th. The attack by the Bajrang Dal took place when most of the people were at the graveyard. A mob of 500, including persons from that village and outsiders attacked and demolished the community hall and three houses. All the 80 families of Christians ran away into the jungles. The assailants then broke the church and went away to Domaguda where they burnt a lot of houses. Later the Christians went back to the village. After two days they received further threats: that they should give it in writing that the church fathers and sisters had given them money to convert and that they were now voluntarily converting to Hinduism. 33 persons agreed and have stayed back, and the others realized that they had forfeited their right to stay in the village. So they moved to Tikabali camp. A Hindu friend warned Gabriel Nayak that there was a plot to attack the Tikabali camp and kill the pastors. Gabriel being a pastor left the camp and moved to Janla.

About the meaning of restoration of peace, he says in striking terms: ‘the day those 33 persons declare that they are Christians, that day we will believe that peace has returned’. Unfortunately, the Government of Orissa does not think so. Its concern is to show that the numbers of displaced have comedown, and so the camps should be rapidly downsized and the people forced to go back. As said above, the official relief camps started on 26th August. By the 30th there were 7500 persons in the camps. By the 1st September there were 12,500, and by the next day the number was 19,642. By the 3rd September the numbers rose to 23,746. The rapid increase of displaced persons located in the identified camps in a matter of hours is the best indicator of the massive tragedy. But after that the numbers started falling sharply. By the time we went to Kandhamal on 20th September the numbers had come down to 13,000 though the basic impediment to the return of the refugees, namely the insistence that the Christians must agree to give up Christianity and practice Hinduism, had not changed. The secret behind this sleight of hand was revealed when we spoke to the Relief Commissioner (Southern Region). He explained the Government's stand: only those whose houses have been destroyed have a right to be in



Gabriel Nayak at the Janla relief camp near Bhubaneswar



Namita Digal with her baby boy at Kudamsingi village in Mandasa mandal, Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. She gave birth to the boy on September 3rd at the Baliguda relief camp in Khandamal district. The boy is being called 'Rilu'

the relief camps. Those whose houses are intact but have run away from the village out of fear have to go back - because their houses are intact. This is perversity with a vengeance. The result is that those who have been forced to leave the relief camps are now staying at some other place in the State or outside. They are bereft of the slight help they got from the Government when they were in the camps. And there is no precise count of their numbers.

The casual way the official could say 'run away out of fear' as if it was a whimsical decision shows the callousness of the attitude of the establishment. Each batch of persons who finally ended up in a relief camp spent days on end without food, water and shelter in the forests before smuggling themselves into the camp. They could easily have said 'Jai bajrang bali', 'Jai shri ram' and stayed back, and may be even feted by Lambodar Kanhar. It was a strong sense of dignity that drove them to undergo the trauma. Some have gone quite far away, to Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, where they do not know the language and where the Government gives no assistance because it is not seen as its problem. About 112 persons ended up at Kudamsingi in

Mandasa Mandal and 140 persons at Savara Kulligam in Melityaputti Mandal, both in Srikakulam district. They are originally from different villages of Baliguda sub-division. Following the attack of 25th August they first ran into the forests with very few belongings, and after a week in the wilderness they moved to the relief camps. However, they found life insecure in the camps. Bajrang Dal and Durga Vahini persons were able to walk into the camps and threaten them. There were also rumours of poisoning of the water supply to the camps. After ten to fifteen days in the camps they again moved to Berhampur (Brahmapur), and sought the help of a church, the Bible Centered Ministries (BCM). The BCM had infrastructure only in Srikakulam and shifted them there, where they were leading a subsistence life when we met them on 30th October. Today's situation is that about 100 persons have gone back out of the 252, half of them again to the relief camps. It is common sense that people do not undergo all this trauma for no rea-

son. A government that is incapable of understanding and respecting this sense of dignity cannot obviously do justice to them.

The anger of the victims at the injustice of their condition comes through very strongly in the midst of the desperation and depression. When we went to the relief camp housed in the Mother Teresa Centre, Janla, Sister Sujith who was in charge was in a bad mood and refused to let us talk to the inmates for a long time. We could understand her anger after hearing what she had to say about how she and 12 girl trainees escaped the depredators. She was in a convent of the Missionaries of Charity in Sukananda, G.Udayagiri block at the time the rape of a nun, Sister Meena Lalitha of K.Nuagaon, which has caught national attention, took place. She was in charge of the training of the 12 girls. The next day, 15th September, people of Sukananda told her that it was not safe and she should take the 12 girl trainees and leave. They left the village just in time, for it was attacked the very next day and the convent was destroyed. They stayed in the jungle for four days and then moved to the G.Udayagiri relief camp. Finding that place uncomfortable because of the threatening ambience they moved from there after four days to Bhubaneswar. However, once she realised our purpose and unburdened herself of the memory of her escape, she became friendly and allowed us to talk to the inmates of the camp.

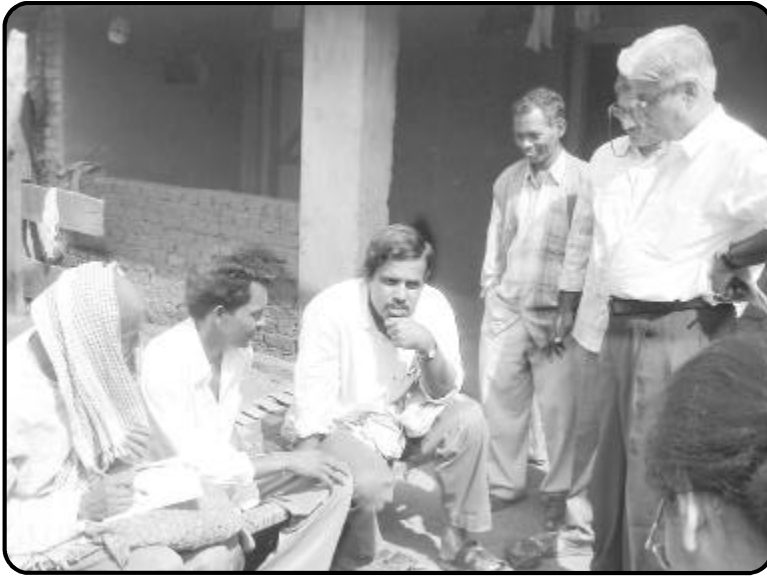
Having seen the qualitative picture, we may see the official statistics of the magnitude of the violence. At the end of December 2008, the government of Orissa says that 698 FIRs have been registered, naming 11,348 accused and eight times that number of 'unknown' participants in the attacks. The number arrested are just 700. As for deaths, the Government adamantly sticks to the number 39 though concerned activists put it at 58. The number of displaced persons has been reduced from the high of 23,000 to no more than 10,000 but that is by forcing them to leave the relief camps without ensuring that they can go back and live with dig-



Food line at the YMCA shelter in Bhubaneswar

nity in their villages, professing the faith of their choice. Few of them have gone back. They are living at their own expense with their friends, relatives or strangers, or just in road-side camps. The number of the displaced is no less than 40,000.

The best way to end this sad tale is to point to the humanity of ordinary people, adivasis who went against the current and protected the lives of Panos. In any communal violence such instances deserve to be dug out and spoken of. What is heartening is that there are sizable number of such instances in Kandhamal, considering the high pitch of the communal passion generated by Lakshmanananda, in life as well as in death.



Dandapani Mallik (second from left) speaking with team members at Damikia village

Close to Baliguda is the village of Damikia in Budrukia gram panchayat. Dandapani Mallik, a Kandha, is husband of the sarpanch of the village, Lourdu Mallik. Her name suggests that she may be a Christian but he is not. He has taken it upon himself to ensure that Damikia and the neighbouring villages remain free of the communal cancer. During December 2007, there was a rally in Baliguda on 27/28 against reservations to Panos. The rally was

organized by the Kui Samaj. It turned violent, with the participants attacking Christian villages. (Dandapani says: the RSS people infiltrated into the rally and attacked Christian villages). At that time he gathered together the Kandhas and the handful of Panos of Damikia, Sipanjari, Muskul and Biraguda and formed a committee aimed at preventing such incidents in the four villages, whether by persons of the village or outsiders. The committee came in handy this time: on 27-28 August, when the Bajrang Dal procession entered villages of this area and attacked Christians, the procession was not allowed to enter these four villages. Dandapani had an interesting answer to a question that we put to many people: since when have the adivasis been calling themselves Hindus? Some said from the time of Lakshmanananda's aggressive campaign. Some said from much earlier, by a gradual process of assimilation. But Dandapani Mallik says that after the Christian converts started calling themselves adivasi Christians 'we started calling ourselves adivasi Hindus'. When we express appreciation of his role in stemming the vio-

lence in at least these four villages, he smiles wryly and says ‘my own people now say I have become an enemy of the community’.

We had earlier referred to Kesomati Pradhan of Kajuri, Sukudbadi panchayat, Raikia block. She had gone to Barakhama on 21st December 2007 and stayed on till the attack of 25th December. She is a Kandha, and President of Kandhamal Nari Jagran Samiti. When the attack took place she observed that it was led by ‘Oriyas’ i.e. caste Hindus who were guiding the Kandhas, putting tilak on their foreheads and giving them Bajrang Dal headbands. She tried to persuade the Kandhas of the village not to join the mob, saying ‘it is no good to us’. Though she could not stop that day's attack, she persuaded the adivasis to prevent a recurrence of the attack. This time she had better success in her own village, Kajuri. The Bajrang Dal led a mob on to that village. When she protested, they said she had given money to the Maoists for killing Lakshmanananda, that she encouraged conversions, supports Panos, etc. They threatened repeatedly that they would kill her. She however retorted that she was doing good and would continue to do good. She persuaded the 7 Christian families of her village not to leave the village and go away because if they went away their lands would be grabbed, and then persuaded the Kandhas of the village not to attack the Panos.



One of the relief camps in Kandhamal

At Tiangia in G.Udaygiri block, when the Bajrang Dal mob came on 25th August, it was resisted by Dasarath Pradhan, a Kandha. The Bajrang Dal hacked his legs and killed him. In the same village, two days later, Jagannath Pradhan said to the Bajrang Dal mob: if you want to attack the Kandhas, you destroy my house first. The mob attacked his house and demolished it.

At Raikia, Sarangdhar Pradhan, a Kandha, and a Government employee, gave shelter to two or three Christian families in the midst of the most vicious attack on Christians. When the mob came to him, he said you kill me first and then kill them. Reluctant to kill him, they hit him on both his arms with swords and went away.

At Banjnagar on the highway we were told of a nameless Brahmin who opened his door one morning and found a large number of famished Christians in his frontyard, on the run from G.Udayagiri block to Berhampur (Brahmapur) and perhaps Bhubaneswar. He gave them water to have a wash and food to eat so that they could proceed further.

DAKSHINA KANNADA DISTRICT MAP





Karnataka: The Relevant Background

We have spoken of a grotesque link between the violence in Orissa and Karnataka. The Christian educational institutions closed down for one day on 29th August 2008 in token protest against the attacks by the Bajrang Dal on Christians in Orissa. It appears that this was in response to a call given by the National Council of Churches, the Catholic Bishops Conference of India and other Christian bodies, and perhaps honoured all over India. In Karnataka, however, the Yeddyurappa Government of the BJP took serious objection to the protest. The Minister for Primary and Secondary Education issued directions to his Department to seek explanation from the Christian institutions as to how they had closed down for a day without prior permission of the Government. And in some instances at least, the subsequent notice issued by the Deputy Director of Public Instruction cited a complaint by the Bajrang Dal as the basis of the notice! Most of the Christians we spoke to saw this as the signal for the series of attacks by the Bajrang Dal and other Sangh Parivar organizations that took place thereafter. The loss of life and forcible displacement is less than in Orissa, and the violence came to an end sooner, but it was geographically more widespread, and equally significant for the ascendancy of Hindutva in the Indian polity.

But there is a background to the violence in Karnataka that is as necessary to understand as that in Orissa, for it reveals a different path - or paths - for that ascendancy. The RSS has spread its influence over Karnataka society quite extensively over the years, and the ideologues have been spoiling for a fight with Muslims over any and every issue. (And now it is Christians too). Communal conflicts started occurring regularly from the

late seventies, and a total of about 80 conflicts of substantial size have been counted in the State till the year 2004. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the unrest among the Muslims that it generated led to rioting in Bangalore, Mysore, Gulbarga, Bidar, Hubli-Dharwar and Dakshina Kannada districts, leaving 78 dead, forty percent in police firing and sixty in the sectarian killings that were spread over a month.

It is not that the fault in such sectarian conflicts is always on one side. If we are looking at the particular issue which is at the starting point of a conflict, the fault could lie with any one, unless the issue is itself intentionally contrived. But what makes it a riot is preparedness and organization to convert the conflict into a riot or worse still an assault, and of that there is plenty with the Sangh Parivar. In many cases there is no issue at all but an intentional creation of a riot, or even a one-sided assault on select targets. The proportion of such incidents has increased with the growth of the Sangh Parivar's political face, the BJP, first to importance, then to half power and finally to full power

Communal conflicts only serve to scare the minorities and give confidence to the cadre. They do not fully serve the 'larger' purpose of consolidating the Hindu community behind the Sangh Parivar to attain its goals. That requires strong and emotive symbols that go beyond local importance.

under Yeddyurappa. But communal conflicts only serve to scare the minorities and give confidence to the cadre. They do not fully serve the 'larger' purpose of consolidating the Hindu community behind the Sangh Parivar to attain its goals. That requires strong and emotive symbols that go beyond local importance.

For a long time the Idgah Maidan at Hubli was made a *cause celebre* by the Hindutva forces but it was bound to run out of steam. From 1992 to 1995 (and again in 2001) repeated attempts were made to hoist the Indian National Flag in the Idgah Maidan whose title has been in dispute. The civil appeal by special leave filed by the Anjuman-e-Islam which claimed to have received lease on the land for exclusively religious use, was at that time pending in the Supreme Court, and the Court had injuncted all parties from entering the land. Moreover, the insistence on hoisting the tricolor on the maidan was sheer cynicism since it is never hoisted in Sangh Parivar meetings and they have little love for its symbolism, namely peace and pluralism. However, the police were not as partial as they have now become to the Sangh Parivar, and they would step in to stop them. And there is a limit beyond which the National Flag cannot be exploited for communal purposes.

But the Sangh Parivar has found a more suitable cause, following in the foot steps of the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute. With this the slogan that a 'second Ayodhya' or 'southern Ayodhya' would be created in Karnataka has taken off as a rallying point, and is

being used to generate an aggressive and destructive Hindu identity. The issue around which it is built has Muslims as the reference, but once given shape it can and does feed on hatred for Christians, and any other enemy of the Hindu nation as defined by it. An account of this attempt, and the substantial work done by the Karnataka Koumu Souharda Vedike (Karnataka Communal Harmony Forum, the Vedike in brief) against it would be useful for understanding the recent violence. Indeed, the activity of the Vedike is a heartening instance of effective mobilisation against the Sangh Parivar and is worth studying since it may have some lessons for other parts of the country.

The 'second Ayodhya' is a shrine called Baba Budangiri in Chikmagalur district abutting the Western Ghats. It is the dargah of a Sufi saint, Baba Budan* (Hazrath Dada Hayaath Meer Kalandhar), located 30 kms from Chikmagalur. It has been a sacred place for not only Muslims but the dalit and shudra communities among the Hindus as well, as is indeed true of most Sufi shrines. The State Government's decision to proclaim it a Wakf led to litigation in which the final result appears to be that its sacred character for Muslims as well as Hindus was recognized and so was the trusteeship of the Muslim family which was managing it. Status quo as obtaining prior to 1975 was directed to be maintained.



Baba Budangiri dargah

The Sangh Parivar however claims that the holy place is the seat of a Swami called Dattatreya (hence it is described as Datta Peetha). From about 1984 they have been formally organising the birth celebrations (Datta Jayanthi) of the Swami. This activity attained a different significance after the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6th December 1992, and the Sangh Parivar leaders stepped up their activity. The Datta Jayanthi has become an emotive event, and from 1998 the Sangh Parivar has been

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**Incidentally, it was this preacher, who was an Arab, who brought coffee to India. He brought a few coffee seeds and planted them near Chikmagalur. To this day, Chikmagalur remains one of the important centres for cultivation of coffee in India.*

declaring the intention to 'liberate' the place. In 1999 they undertook a jeep yatra to publicise their version of the shrine's story and mobilize hatred around the sectarian theme. After the Gujarat carnage of 2002, they have called for making it a second Babri Masjid, and making Karnataka a second Gujarat.

The Vedike (for further details, see *Karnataka: under Saffron siege?*, an undated publication - probably of the year 2006 - of the Vedike) began in initiatives taken from the year 1999. Today it consists of a wide spectrum of progressive and secular-minded individuals and organisations: writers, theatre personalities, journalists, dalit organisations, human rights organisations, women's organisations, etc. It got its present name in the year 2004. The Vedike has pointedly said that condemnation of sectarian or communal violence after the event is not sufficient and that positive or pro-active efforts must be made to counter its strategies on the ground. When the Sangh Parivar mobilised 15,000 people in a Shobha Yatra held in Chikmagalur in 2002, the Vedike responded by mobilizing 10,000 people for a march in the very same place soon thereafter. In the year 2003 it undertook a three month door-to-door campaign in different parts of the State explaining the false nature of the claims of the Sangh Parivar in the Baba Budangiri issue, and the character of the ideology of Hindutva in relation to dalits and women.

When the Congress Government headed by S.M.Krishna granted permission to conduct the Shobha Yatra and undertake the Datta Jayanthi celebrations in Dec 2003, the Vedike proceeded to hold a rally for communal harmony in Chikmagalur on 7th December. Though the Government refused permission for the rally, about 1500 members entered Chikmagalur and got arrested. In 2004, as soon as the Sangh Parivar announced its programme of Datta Jayanthi, the Vedike announced a parallel rally for communal harmony at the same place and time, forcing the Government to ban both. Since the purpose of the Vedike was to stall the Datta Jayanthi celebrations, they had succeeded. This happened again in the year 2005.

February 2006 saw the BJP come to power in coalition with the Janata Dal (Secular) in the State. They tried to revive their attempt at holding a yatra at Chikmagalur and the Datta Jayanthi at the Dargah. The former was facilitated by the Government, which arrested many protesting Vedike members, but it did not dare permit the Datta Jayanthi celebrations inside the shrine. Recently the Vedike has approached the Supreme Court and obtained stay orders not to permit any religious activity in the shrine except what was prevalent prior to 1975. The Vedike continues to conduct regular activity in the State aimed at keeping alive the values and the practice of pluralism and secularism, even as it mobilizes people in sizable numbers to counter the mobilisation by the Sangh Parivar and put pressure upon the Government.

The cow is a third symbol around which hatred could be built and has been built against Muslims. Sale of cattle for beef has been made into a cause of attacks against

Here as all over India, the poor especially those belonging to dalit communities, eat beef for the pragmatic reason that it is the cheapest meat available, and their own belief systems do not prohibit the eating of beef, except where the process of brahminisation has set in deep.

Muslims in recent years. In fact there is no ban on selling cattle or on the eating of beef in Karnataka, and while many of the cattle traders are Muslims, Muslims are not alone in selling cattle or eating beef. As all over India the poor, especially those belonging to dalit communities, eat beef for the pragmatic reason that it is the cheapest meat available, and their own belief systems do not prohibit the eating of beef, except where the process of brahminisation has set in deep.

And all over India, farmers including those who belong to communities quite central to the Hindu social structure, do sell cattle that can no longer work or which they can no longer feed.

Yet the symbolic association of Muslim with beef is kept live, and is enough to cause physical assaults. The assault on a father and son, Hajabba (60) and Hasanabba (29) residents of Mooluru in Udupi district, on 13 March 2005 near Udupi is a brutal case in point. For the sin of transporting a calf, Hajabba was caught by the Hindu Yuva Sena and thrashed in public. A crowd gathered and looked on without interfering. Coming to know of the assault on his father, Hasanabba came there, only to be thrashed along with his father. Both of them were stripped naked and beaten while hundreds looked on. They were severely injured and were in a hospital for weeks. Hasanabba's leg was fractured and Hajabba's spine was damaged. In October 2006 a rumour that a vehicle carrying cattle had hit two cars and injured a woman led to the Bajrang Dal giving a call for a bandh on 5th October 2006. The bandh resulted in riots and curfew in Mangalore, and the murder of two Muslims.

The attacks on Christians are recent, for there appears to be no reported attacks prior to 2006. But once the notion that India is the country of Hindus had set in, it was a matter of time before it started. It needed an ideological excuse and a social context. If 'anti-national' is the theme of the ideological campaign against Muslims, 'conversion' came in handy with Christians. The social context - the basis on which mob hatred has been mobilised - needs further analysis. The answer may not be the same for the west coast as for the rest of Karnataka. Insofar as Christianity and its spread are concerned, the

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west coast of the country, from Kerala up through western Karnataka, Goa and beyond exhibits a different trajectory. In the rest of central and south India Christianity has taken into its fold mostly the dalit and adivasi communities and some very backward castes like the fishing communities. Conversion is more properly seen as their right of self-assertion and search for dignity than the right of Christian missionaries to propagate their religion. And it is when one sees it that way that an important meaning of the opposition to conversion is revealed.

The west coast, which has a longer history of the spread of Christianity (going back to the first century after Christ), reveals a different social complexion. Christians are not

It should never be lost sight of that in dealing with the Sangh Parivar we are dealing with an agency that uses sectarian hatred as an instrument of mobilization and has no scruples whatsoever in identifying sources and means of incitement. It matters little to them that the hatred they generate and rely on is destructive of the best values handed down to our society by its history, and the most humane attitudes generated by the life conditions and struggles of the people.

just the 'wretched of the earth' here. Some Christians and some churches are quite well off. The significance of this for the ways in which hatred may be generated against Christians, as for instance the relative wealth of the trading community of Bohras in Gujarat made it possible to incite the poor adivasis against them in the villages of Chotaudepur in Vadodara district in the course of the Sangh Parivar's anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002, will have to be analysed and understood. It should never be lost sight of that in dealing with the Sangh Parivar we are dealing with an agency that uses sectarian hatred as an instrument of mobilization and has no scruples whatsoever in identifying sources and means of incitement. It matters little to them that the hatred they generate and rely on is destructive of the best val-

ues handed down to our society by its history, and the most humane attitudes generated by the life condition and struggles of the people.

The southern part of the west coast of Karnataka, known as Karavali, has its own distinct socio-political culture which has been hospitable to the ideology and propaganda of the Sangh Parivar. It has not seen any substantial movements with progressive character, and has not been influenced by Kannada nationalism. Its links are more to commercial Mumbai than to the rest of Karnataka. The Brahmins and Bunts are the dominant communities, and they have had close affinity with the RSS for long. Caste status and privilege apart, banking and hotels, in addition to landholding, are the source of their economic power. Unlike in the rest of the country, private banking controlled by these communities flourished in the west coast and rose to prominence in the banking industry in the country: Canara Bank, Syndicate Bank, Vijaya Bank, Corporation Bank, Karnataka

Bank. They were nationalised in or after 1969, leading to the further alienation of the elite of the two communities from the Congress and their further closeness to the Sangh Parivar which was a vocal opponent of the nationalization.

The Brahmins are numerically small as everywhere, and while the Bunts are greater in number, they alone would not have sufficed to provide the Sangh Parivar with foot soldiers for street violence. It found them in the Billava and the Mogaveera communities. The Billavas (also referred to as Murathedars) are toddy tappers and the Mogaveeras are fishing people. They are the most sizable among the backward communities of the region. Many of the Billavas also have small extents of land. The very same process of reform and development which enriched the Brahmins and pushed the Bunts, and to a lesser extent the Malabari Muslims (known as Bearis), up the socio-economic ladder, left these communities in a state of unrealized expectations and consequent resentment, because it by-passed them in the actual realization of its fruits. The tenancy reforms initiated by Devraj Urs as Chief Minister of Karnataka has earned him a respectable place in recent history, and it is generally believed that the reforms were more thorough in Dakshina Kannada district than elsewhere.

The main beneficiaries however were the bigger tenants who could prove their status and also often had some land of their own to supplement the land leased in. These were mostly Bunts by caste, who moved on, on the basis of the security provided by the reforms, to undertake commercial cultivation and consequently a greater place in urban business, especially trade and hotels. Brahmins, who were the principal community among the landlords, already had a foothold in education, employment and the hotel business. They moved on further into urban occupations and vocations.

The tenancy reforms and the political process that accompanied it gave Billavas a sense of social identity but not economic security. The social identity could thereafter be exploited by those who wished to turn the resentment born of continued economic deprivation in destructive directions.

The smaller tenants either could not benefit from the reforms because they could not prove the tenancy, or else obtained rights to meager extents of land which did not suffice to undertake commercial cultivation that should have been the logical benefit of the reforms. This was the situation with most of those Billavas who were tenants. The tenancy reforms and the political process that accompanied it gave them a sense of social identity but not economic security. The social identity could thereafter be exploited by those who wished to turn the resentment born of continued economic deprivation in destructive directions. Toddy-tapping itself began to be seen as an unattractive and harsh mode of livelihood by the younger generation, and in any case toddy slowly gave way to more sophisticated drinks. These factors combined to leave the Billavas on the margins of development, in a restive state. The situation with the fisher-folk, the Mogaveeras, was similar. They are fish-catchers, while the lucrative fish-trade is in the

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hands of the Beari Muslims. The trade which has made the rich among the Muslims next to the Brahmins and Bunts in social advancement has left its suppliers behind. As for the Christians, they have a sizable middle class and their educational institutions and well endowed Churches have given them a degree of economic strength, or at least apparent symbols of prosperity, which are more important for the politics of hate than actual prosperity. Migration to the Gulf for employment is

another source of advancement which was taken advantage of most by the Muslims and then by the Christians.

These circumstances fostered a strong sense of injury in the Billava and Mogaveera communities, which is perfectly understandable since development was never supposed to be meant only for the few. Given a progressive political climate, the resentment could have been channeled into a constructive challenge to unequal and iniquitous development. Instead, it was fodder for the Sangh Parivar's politics of hate. The Parivar, led mainly by Brahmins and Bunts who are the principal beneficiaries of the iniquity, channeled it into hatred against the Muslim and the Christian, shown as alien communities that have usurped the benefits of development which ought to have belonged to the Billavas and Mogaveeras. We have seen the consequence of this in the violence against Muslims in the previous years, and we will see it below in the attack on Christians in the year 2008.

Conversion is the theme of the justification or explanation offered by the Sangh Parivar for the violence against Christians. The issue of conversion has two - or perhaps three - facets. One is how much of conversion has in fact been there. It is a matter of record that as per the census of 2001, the Christian population of India is about 2.4%, and that of Karnataka just 1.9%. It is true that the proportion of Christians is much higher in Dakshina Kannada district, where a considerable part of the violence took place, but this is not because of any sudden upsurge of proselytising activity, but because as said above the west coast of India has a longer history of spread of Christianity, to the extent that Christianity is very much part of the texture of society here and not just a peripheral phenomenon confined to the dalit or tribal hamlets.

The second is what the Constitution says about the right to propagate religion, of which we will speak at some length below, because the issue is cluttered up with misrepresentation and misunderstanding, much of it caused by the Supreme Court and gleefully seized upon by the Sangh Parivar. The third is whether conversion should be seen from the side of the organisations who are converting and their right to do so, or the ones who are getting converted and their freedom of choice. Even if there can be some argu-

ment about the right of Christian missionaries to convert people, there can be no doubt about the right of the oppressed communities beyond the pale of or on the margin of Hindu society to choose to become Christians or Muslims. There is indeed every reason to suspect that the real grouse is not that Christian missionaries are taking away putative Hindus, but that the *avarnas* at the bottom of Hindu society are freeing themselves from the burden of the *chaturvarna* that has been sitting on their sense of dignity and self-respect for millennia.

The right to propagate religion

Let us return to the second issue. The Constitution, in Article 25, clearly gives three rights in relation to the freedom of religion: the right to profess, practice and propagate the religion of one's choice. Words used in the Constitution cannot be regarded as a meaningless surplus. If the right to propagate one's religion is given in addition to the right to profess and practice, it cannot be confined to again professing or practicing the religion. It necessarily includes the right to spread one's religion by inviting others to join it. The makers of the Constitution had no doubt about it, as the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly shows (see pp 257-271 of Vol. 5 of *The Framing of India's Constitution, Second edition, Universal Law Publishing Co.Ltd., 2004*). The sub-committee on fundamental rights of the Constituent Assembly initially included only the right to profess and practice religion in the draft Art 19 (which was to become Art 25). The sub-committee on minorities' rights however insisted that the right to propagate religion should also be added, *on the specific ground that Islam and Christianity are proselytising religions and they must be permitted to propagate their faith*. This suggestion made by Mr M.Ruthnaswamy, a member of the sub-committee on minorities rights was accepted by all, and recommended for acceptance by the Constituent Assembly. After considerable discussion, the amendment was accepted and incorporated in Art.25 of the Constitution. Even though it was argued by some in the Constituent Assembly, that if some people want to proselytise they may do so and there is no need to make it a fundamental right, the Constituent Assembly felt that without the right, the fundamental right of freedom of religion would be incomplete. It was also understood that in actual reality what is involved is the right of the oppressed communities of Hindu society to choose a religion that will treat them with dignity, as the speech by T.T.Krishnamachari in the Constituent Assembly shows. The liberality of the Constitution in this matter is shown by the fact that the right in Art.25 is assured not merely to citizens but to 'any person'. Even a foreigner can propagate religion in India. This is in contrast to other freedoms such as freedom of speech, expression, movement, association etc.,

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which are granted only to citizens by the Constitution.

Considerable damage has been done to the clear intent of the Constitution, and a slogan handed over on a platter to the Sangh Parivar by the Supreme Court in a very carelessly written judgement in *Rev. Stainislaus vs State of Madhya Pradesh*, reported in AIR 1977 SC 908. H.M.Seervai has described the judgement as 'clearly wrong' and 'productive of great mischief' (*Constitutional Law of India, Vol 2, paragraphs 12.73 to 12.81, Universal Book Traders, New Delhi, 1999*). These words written in 1999 have turned out to be prophetic. What the Supreme Court said in that judgement is that the right to propagate religion does not include the right to convert, because to convert is to impinge on the other person's freedom of conscience. It is not clear how that can be, since freedom of conscience includes the right to be convinced of the truth of another person's ideas and change one's own beliefs accordingly. But the Supreme Court said that while you can spread your religion, you cannot ask another person to accept it. This is plainly absurd. Moreover, as we have said above, it is precisely as the right to proselytize that the right to propagate was included in the Constitution, on the recommendation of the sub-committee on minorities' rights (K.M.Munshi, a member of the sub-group on minority rights explained it thus in his speech in the Constituent Assembly: 'So long as religion is religion, conversion by the free exercise of the conscience has to be recognized'). Interestingly, the judgement in the Rev. Stainislaus case was written by the then Chief Justice of India, A.N.Ray who was handpicked as a progressive judge by Indira Gandhi for appointment as Chief Justice, overlooking three of his seniors in 1973.

This view that 'the right to propagate does not include the right to convert' has enabled the Sangh Parivar, which has gleefully converted it into a slogan, to paper over a dishonest use of language. When they have to offer a seemingly reasonable argument, they talk of forcible conversion (which every one would condemn) or conversion by inducement (which is more problematic because what constitutes inducement is ambiguous). But in their loud street campaign and in their attacks on preachers and pastors they criminalise conversion per se, unqualified by the allegation of use of force or inducement. However, for a wider audience they have emphasised the objectionable language and imagery said to have been used by some Christian preachers in the depiction of Hindu gods and goddesses, as for instance, in the present context, the evangelical group called New Life.

This jugglery is unavoidable because the politics of the Sangh Parivar is essentially undemocratic but living as they do in an open society they are forced into dialogue with others, which obliges them to seek out rational/morally sustainable arguments. And the lie is exposed when the list of establishments they have attacked this time round is seen to include only one New Life church, the rest being Catholic, Pentecostal, Baptist, CSI and other churches, as well as a prayer house of cloistered nuns who do not proselytise at all. And worse still, even the very friendly police of Karnataka admit that they are still investigating who published the offensive literature, and there is not a single complaint about the New Life having used it in its campaign.



Karnataka: The Violence

If the year 2008 appears to have been a particularly bad year for the Christian community in Karnataka, that is partly because the attacks were more intense, with a number of attacks taking place in a short space of time and were more severe, including instances of grievous injury; but partly also for other reasons as well: not only new and small churches with an evangelical agenda but established ones too were attacked, and that too when the attention of the country was on the Sangh Parivar vis-à-vis Christian community, because of Orissa. However, the previous year did give some indication of what was to come.

Forty eight incidents of attacks on Christians have been counted in the year 2007, in districts as wide apart as Davangere, Bagalkot, Gulbarga, Hubli-Dharwar, Chitradurga, Dakshina Kannada, Kodagu, Mandya, Kolar, Udupi, Belgaum, Tumkur, Shimoga, Haveri, Bijapur, Hassan, Mysore, and Gadag, in addition to the State capital, Bengaluru, which has seen the largest number of attacks. Almost all of these are physical attacks on pastors of small churches on the allegation of ‘conversions’. And in all the cases the attackers were of the Bajrang Dal, the Hindu Jagarana Vedike or Sri Rama Sene. It is evident that preaching per se is seen as conversion and punished by the guardians of Hinduism. Interestingly, while the Sangh Parivar sees the small unorganised churches which are more inclined to evangelism as vehicles of conversion - a veritable conspiracy of conversion - at least one person born into the Christian faith said to us that people are tired of organized religions of all faiths, which have become corrupt, and in the case of Christians, are reaching out to the unostentatious small churches. He says that this phenomenon has been evident for about ten years now. And some members of the Christian community said to us at Mangalore in an interactive session that they would have stood more firmly for their

rights if the leaders of the established churches (they pointed out specifically to the Bishops of the Catholic churches) had not been co-opted into the power structure of society, which made them soft-pedal the protest of the community. May we not conclude that the independence of the smaller churches which have not become part of the power structure and were therefore not manageable is one reason for the attacks on them in the name of their evangelism?

In comparison to 2007, the attacks in the year 2008 were massive. Twenty eight attacks took place at various places in the State between 17 August and 21 September, including 12 on a single day, the 14th of September, in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts. Though the New Life church and its objectionable propaganda literature was the ostensible reason for the attacks, only one of the twenty eight attacks, as said above, was on a New Life church. What was striking about these attacks, especially in Mangalore, is that the police acted in tandem with the Bajrang Dal. The pattern we observed was that the Bajrang Dal would attack Christian places and cause injury to persons and damage to property. Then the police would step in, not to chase and arrest the assailants, but ostensibly to prevent any violent retaliation by the Christians. And in the course of the alleged preventive activity, they would assault the Christians further. The premeditation and planning involved in the whole matter is evident if one follows the sequence of events carefully.

Kodical, a suburban locality of Mangalore city is one of the 12 places attacked simultaneously on 14th September. As we entered the locality, we saw a big saffron-coloured banner hailing Lashmanananda Saraswati, strung across two trees. Kandhamal, it was evident, would not leave us. There is a CSI church in Kodical whose members are Tamils (dalits, apparently) who have settled here long ago. The 14th of September was a Sunday and prayers were scheduled for the afternoon. So there was no one in the small and homely church when a group of 30 to 35 persons, their faces covered with yellow cloth, came into the locality on motor cycles at 10-15 am. They attacked the church with iron pipes and cricket stumps and broke every thing that could be broken. As the shocked people gathered courage and came towards the church they sped away, raising slogans 'Jai Bajrang bali' and 'Bharat mata ki jai'. Strangely, even before the people could think of giving any complaint, a police team led by the Superintendent of Police came there. They cleaned up the damage without performing any inquest and took away the damaged material. Thus, they effectively suppressed the evidence.

Another place in Mangalore city attacked at the same time is the Adoration Center at Milagres. It is not a church, much less a proselytizing center. It is a place of prayer for cloistered nuns, who pray all the day. They go out only on two occasions: to hospital, when needed, and to vote at election time. At about 10-10 am, 15 to 16 persons came on motor cycles shouting 'Jai Bajrang bali' and 'Jai Shri Ram'. They carried lathis and their faces were covered. At that time there was a couple called Andrew and Irene in the

Media: Communal Divide?

The role of the media came in for sharp comment in the interactive session the team had with Christians on the last day. Two major Kannada language dailies, *Udayavani* and *Vijaya Karnataka* were accused of deliberate partisanship in their reporting. *Vaaritha Bharathi*, which is apparently owned by a Muslim, was commended for its balance. A characteristic feature of the partisan publications was that while reporting the brutal lathi charge of 15th September, the blame was put on the Christians: they threw stones at the police and so the police caned them. There was no reference to the preceding attacks on churches, the outrage at the desecration at Milagres Center, and the peaceful nature of the protests, which could have led to the conclusion that the lathi charge was unprovoked.

When the Akhil Bharthiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) called for a boycott of educational institutions in protest against the killing of Lakshmanananda Saraswati, some of the Christian institutions refused to allow the boycott. The ABVP gave a statement to the Press accusing the institutions of converting their students. The Press carried this statement, but the denial and protest expressed by the institutions was not reported.

Regarding the attack by the police on St. Sebastian Church we heard the specific complaint that local media persons guided and directed the police. If true, this goes beyond mere partisanship. The police too targeted *Vaaritha Bharathi* for its fair reporting. At Udupi, the police beat a reporter of *Vaaritha Bharathi* for distributing back numbers of his paper which contained details of police brutality, saying that he had a right only to distribute that day's papers!

prayer hall. The nuns were praying in the cloistered chapel, as usual. The attackers hit the couple, damaged their car and thoroughly ransacked the prayer hall. The plaster of paris figure of Christ was badly damaged (made famous by *Tehekka* magazine which carried the broken figure on the cover). Glass panes were shattered. The sacrament which was hit fell into the chapel where the nuns were praying. They completed the destruction within five or ten minutes and ran away, telling each other in the Tulu language to make haste.

The neighbours who heard the commotion came there and the police were informed. The police came but showed more interest in interrogating the nuns than in investigating the offence. They were asked whether they had license (to pray?), and whether they regarded themselves as a national or international community. The second question is



The damaged plaster of paris figure of Jesus Christ at the Adoration Center, Milagres in Mangalore

perhaps of significance considering the widespread comment about the saffronisation of the police. The suspicion of the nationalist credentials of the minorities is the trade mark of the Parivar. Indeed, some of our team members faced a question from the policeman standing guard outside the Adoration Center, which would have been expected from a Sangh Parivar member but sounded odd coming from him. When they explained that we were a human rights team, his immediate response was: have you been to Assam? That was the period when clashes between Bangladeshi immigrants and Bodo tribals in Assam were being reported in the Press, and the Sangh Parivar's gloss on the violence, namely that the illegal Muslim immigrants were responsible for the clashes, was carried prominently, especially in the substantially pro-Sangh Parivar Kannada Press.

The nuns also told us that after the policemen left the Center, one of them, identified as Manikanthan, came back and advised them not to inform the Press or allow videos and photos of the destruction to be taken. There was a protest by Christians on the road outside the Center that afternoon. They seem to have attempted a roadblock. The police chased them and burst tear gas shells. The Christians ran into the compound of the Center. Teargas shells and stones thrown by the police fell in the compound of the Center. More glass was shattered, but the people threw back the stones. The evening ended thus, but later the police came and quietly removed the broken glass pieces in the compound.

Worst in rural areas

The attacks were worse in the rural areas. On the same day, at about 10-45 am, at the Assembly of God Church located in Nettana P.O., Puttur taluka, Dakshina Kannada district, about 30 persons carrying swords and sticks entered the church premises. Four of them caught hold of the pastor T.I.Joy and beat him. There were about 30 to 35 persons in the church. All of them were thrashed. The pastor was beaten all over the body and two fingers suffered fracture. They insisted that he should shout Jai Shri Ram. Julia, the 2 ½ year old daughter of the Asst. Pastor was lifted by the limbs and thrown out. The pastor had to be carried to his house. Soon however the assailants came to his house and banged on the door. When he opened the door he was beaten again. As they had already called the police, the assailants went away. Joy took treatment for four days at the civil

hospital at Puttur and for another 8 days at Mangalore. He added while talking to us that his church runs a school called Mt Sion Public School in which all the teachers are Hindus and so are ninety percent of the students. But a year ago he had been threatened by persons of the Hindu Jagaran Vedike that if he did not stop conversions he would have to face the consequences.

These three attacks took place at about the same time, on the same day, in the same fashion. The other places attacked at the same time are: Believers Church at Bannur in Udupi district, New Life Fellowship Hall in Udupi town, the Life and Light Ministry Prayer Hall in Shiroor in Udupi district, the Carmel Ashram Church in Koteswar village of Udupi district, the Mission One Million Life Center in Mudur village of Udupi district, Assembly of Prayer Fellowship in Kavoor in Mangalore city, the Jesus Christ Church at Shaktinagar in Mangalore Rural taluk, Dakshina Kannada district, the Assembly of God Church at Bilinele village in Dakshina Kannada district, the Indian Pentecostal Prayer Hall at Kalanja village in Dakshina Kannada district, and the Mahima Prayer Hall at Madanthyar village in Dakshina Kannada district. At Shiroor, Mudur, Udupi, Kalanja and Madanthyar the assault resulted in injuries to persons, in some cases quite severe injuries. Just a few hours before these attacks, on the intervening night of 13/14 September, a small Church was attacked and vandalised at far away Chikkakedigenahalli in Chikkaballapur district near Bengaluru. And in all the places the churches were vandalized and extensive destruction was caused.



Pastor T.I. Joy was beaten up in his church premises at Nettana, Dakshin Kannada Dist.

The attacks perturbed the Christians. The Inspector General of Police (IGP), Western Range, himself admits that the Catholics regard the Adoration Center at Milagres with high regard and the attack on it enraged them. It appears that there were protests outside some of the big churches of Mangalore city, apart from the Milagres Center itself, on the afternoon of the 14th, seeking action against those who had attacked the Adoration Center. The police claim the pro-

The Inspector General of Police (IGP), Western Range, himself admits that the Catholics regard the Adoration Center at Milagres with high regard and the attack on it enraged them.

testors attempted road blocks. It may be so. At the St. Joseph The Worker Church, Vamanjoor, some Bajrang Dal activists came and attacked the protestors. Later in the evening some more came and threw a cross at the gate of the church. The police were present when this happened. The priest told the police to apprehend them so that their youth may not get enraged. But no action was taken.

The next day, the 15th of September the Christians gathered in the churches to discuss what to do and may be to plan protests. Three churches in Mangalore city saw sizable gatherings: St. Sebastian Church, Permannur, Holy Cross Church, Kulsekhar and St. Joseph The Worker Church, Vamanjoor. The police imposed prohibitory orders under Sec.144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and demanded that the people who had gathered in the church compounds should disperse. At Permannur, the crowd reached 400-500 in the course of the day. At Kulsekhar, where there is a school inside the church compound, the crowd swelled to 1000. And at Vamanjoor the gathering was about 500. The



SP Satish Kumar (left) also took part in the brutal lathi charge by the police at St. Sebastian Church in Permannur

police stood outside the church compounds, and wanted the protestors to disperse. Had they accepted the legitimate character of the protests, there would have been no difficulty in handling them. They could have discussed with the church leaders and ascertained what mode of protest they intended to undertake and regulated it. But the police behaved as if they expected the Christians to fire Kalashnikovs or plant RDX in the city. It was not a case of misunderstanding, but unwillingness to see that they were the injured party and had the right to protest.

So the police indulged in brutal force to clear the churches.

At Permannur the police came after the mass, which was over at 11-45 am. The S.P of Dakshina Kannada district came there and so did the local M.L.A. The S.P wanted the names of those who had organised the protest of the previous day. In the meanwhile some cameramen started photographing the crowd. Perhaps taking them to be police photographers who wanted to record the identities of the leaders, the people objected. There was stone throwing from both sides. Each has blamed the other for starting it. Seeing that the stones were being thrown at the cameramen, the S.P ordered lathi charge. The police burst teargas shells and entered the compound beating people in front of them with lathis. Those who stopped and surrendered were beaten with lathis and rifle butts. The raid lasted 45 minutes, at the end of which 113 persons were arrested. They were made to sit on the ground and an inspector taunted them saying, 'now tell your prayers'.

The police broke the window panes of the church. The beating was savage. At the end the police have registered a case against the protestors and the protestors in turn have registered an FIR against the police, naming the S.P Mr Satish Kumar and Inspector of police, Ullal, Mr Jayanth Shetty.

The same picture was presented at the Holy Cross Church, Kulsekhar. As the crowd who had gathered in the Church started to go out after mass at about 7-30 to 8-00 am, the police, perhaps apprehending that they would block the road again, lathi charged them into the compound. The crowd meanwhile started swelling, with neighbouring people joining through other gates. At about 9-30 am, the police again lathi charged the crowd inside the compound. Teargas shells were fired inside the compound and people were chased into the school and church premises. Bajrang Dal and Sri Rama Sene persons stood outside the gates along with the police and taunted the Christians inside. They threw stones inside and the Christians threw the stones back. Sister Demisa (71) and Sister Sehna (61) are among the elderly persons to be beaten by the police. Sister Demisa, whose eyes were smarting with the teargas, was washing her eyes at a wash basin when she was beaten on her back with a lathi. She then ran and hid herself in a toilet. Nishel D'Souza, a student who came to pray and was caught in the attack, went into the school for shelter from the lathis and the teargas. The police pulled her out, beat her and told her to go home.

From the Kulsekhar Church the police went to the Vamanjoor Church. The gathering inside the church had black flags in their hands. Some Bajrangis who were at the gate snatched one black flag and ran. The Christian youth chased them. They were beaten by the Bajrangis with rods and came back. The police entered the church behind them, taking advantage of the fracas intentionally created by the Bajrangis. The police started hitting the people. They wanted custody of the youth who had chased the Bajrangis. The people protested but the police insisted and even entered the Father's residence to search for them and broke the glass panes in the process. Ultimately 12 of them were arrested.

In the midst of the terrifying assault some people managed to get a good video of the attack by the police at Permanner. It shows the police chasing the people to every nook and corner of the compound and church, and beating them like animals. This action was entirely unjustified. The Christians would at the most have undertaken a procession or a rasta roko, which they had a right to do, given the wanton assault of the day before, and



Police caning at the Holy Cross Church, Kulsekhar in Mangalore



Christian youth dragged out of the St. Sebastian Church and taunted by the police

the police could have ascertained their plan and persuaded them to keep it peaceful. The police instead revealed their bias by treating the wronged as the wrong doers, even as the Bajrang Dal persons accompanied the police in this suppressive activity, and created excuses for the police to enter the fray with their lathis.

The report of the National Minorities Commission (NCM) shows that in the first one week the

police arrested more of the Christian community than the Bajrang Dal. The Government informed the NCM that they had arrested 83 persons, of whom 47 were Christians and the other 36 were Bajrang Dal members. As for the loss caused to the Christian community, the Government's own estimate is that in Dakshina Kannada district the number of attacks on prayer halls is 11, and the loss caused is Rs 6,01,000. In Udupi, 4 prayer halls were damaged and the loss caused is Rs 5,85,000. In Chikmagalur, 6 prayer halls were damaged, and the loss caused is Rs 1,12,000. The total damage in the three districts comes to Rs 12,98,000.

The collusive attitude of the administration towards the Sangh Parivar is not confined to the police. We were told at Mangalore about a statue of Mary that stood atop an elevation on government land at Pachanady. The Christians used to worship at the place, and a path had formed, lined with wooden crosses. Desiring to obtain permission to establish a regular place of worship there, the Christians repaired the crosses, and about a year ago applied to the Government to give them title to the land and regularize the occupation. The Administration slept over the matter. Meanwhile, in July 2008 one day the statue of Mary disappeared and a Bajrang Dal flag appeared in its place. The Christians complained to the police and the revenue officials. As they were prior occupants of the land and their application for regularization of the occupation was pending with the authorities, no later occupation could be treated on par with theirs. The Administration assured them as much, saying that they would be put back in possession. Instead, prohibitory orders preventing both sides from entering the land were proclaimed under Sec. 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The Bajrang Dal's aim was thus realized by the Administration in the guise of exercise of administrative prerogative and powers.

Davangere district again saw a number of attacks on pastors of local churches or prayer groups in the year 2008. These, as before, are incidents where the very act of con-

ducting prayers was described as conversion, and all conversion was stigmatized as objectionable. Fourteen attacks have been referred to by the Christian Welfare Association, Davangere, in a memorandum submitted to the authorities. While, as in the previous year, these attacks were the handiwork of Shri Rama Sene, Hindu Jagarana Vedike and Bajrang Dal, the police and the executive magistrates stepped in to initiate security proceedings against preachers for disturbing public order. The memorandum says that 13 pastors of Davangere have been subjected to such security proceedings under Sec. 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. That provision enables the executive magistrate to seek a bond for keeping peace from a person who is likely to commit breach of peace or disturb public tranquility. If any one has been committing breach of peace or upsetting public tranquility it is the Sangh Parivar organisations and not the pastors or preachers who are propagating their faith. Initiating security proceedings against them is sheer abuse of power.



Sister Demisa who was beaten up by the police at Holy Cross Church, Kulsekhar in Mangalore

We have referred above to the attack on a church at Chikkakadigenahalli in Chikkaballa- pur district on the intervening night of 13/14 September. A similar attack took place on 20th September on the Roman Catholic Church at Mariyannapalya near Hebbal, Bengaluru. In both the places unidentified and unknown persons came, and broke, ransacked and vandalized the churches, pulling down the cross on the top in the first case and throwing out the eucharist in the second. These attacks more than any indicate planned involvement of motivated organizations. For alone among all the places attacked, nobody knew or could guess who committed these attacks. At Chikkakadigenahalli the Hindus are also unhappy with the attack and every one is sure that nobody from the village participated in it. As for Mariyannapalya, it was a wholly Christian village till a decade ago, and is now 1/4th non-Christian. Again, every one is sure no one from the village has taken part in the attack. It was evidently done by some Bajrang Dal gang from outside. ■

Andhra Pradesh: Bhainsa & Vatoli, A Case In Point

Even as we were touring Dakshina Kannada district to see for ourselves the physical, psychological and social devastation caused by the Sangh Parivar, a riot shook the town of Bhainsa in Adilabad district in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh on 10th October 2008, and a horrible killing occurred that night in the neighbouring village of Vatoli. Though it was not Christians but Muslims who were involved, we are commenting on the incident here because it makes evident one point that we have been at pains to stress. This is the use of cults popular with even those communities located farthest from the twice born elite of Hindu society to mobilize brutally against the non-Hindu minorities.

The occasion of the riot was an immersion procession of three of the 14 idols of Durga set up at various mandaps in the town. As with the Ganesh mandaps and the immersion they culminate in, this too is not a tradition or custom but an innovation of the Hindutva forces as part of their political mobilization. In fact, Telangana has a tradition of women taking decorated pots symbolizing the goddess in joyful processions to the accompaniment of songs to be immersed in a tank or stream, but that would not serve the purpose of the Sangh Parivar.

The Ganesh procession is a source of considerable tension in all towns with a concentration of Hindus and Muslims. Bhainsa which is nearly 40 percent Muslim, is one such place. The communalization on the Hindu side is matched in the town by the Majlis Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (MIM) on the other side, a political formation as aggressively communal as the BJP. For these reasons, the police seem to have let the guard down after the Ganesh immersion of the year 2008 went off peacefully. They did not notice that the Durga mandaps had gone up this year.

The procession from the three mandaps was to go past the masjid at the Panjesh Chowk in the town. Refusal of permission would have resulted in more trouble - or so the administration decided - and felt that the best was to control it. They made sure that the noon namaaz was over and all the namazis had left the masjid by the time the procession reached the place. The Sub-Inspector of Police, Bhainsa Town P.S was present at the masjid. The crowd stopped opposite the masjid and went on dancing for half an hour to the tune of recorded music. At that time the music was only devotional songs in praise of the goddess. As it went on for half an hour, the Muslims living near the masjid got restive and came out of their homes. The SI of Police first tried to reason with the processionists, asking them to move on, but the response he got was the question: 'Is this not our country?' The words are significant, and indicative of the crux of the idea drilled by the Sangh Parivar into the minds of the people emotionally charged with religiosity: India is the country of Hindus and others must live by that knowledge. The SI then went towards the Muslims to assure them that the procession would soon move on. Taking

advantage of his moving away, the processionists suddenly changed the recorded cassette to 'Mandir wahin banayenge, Ram teri kasam', sung in aggressive tones. The reference, of course, is to the Ram temple at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid at Ayodhya. The SI of Police then went back and told the processionists to change the cassette. The reply again was: 'Is this not our country'? When he tried to tell them that it was their country too, the further question was: 'Are you not a Hindu?' Then the



Charred debris being cleared from the house where six Muslims were burnt alive on Oct. 10, 2008 in Vatoli village near Bhainsa in Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh

Muslims who had gathered there picked up stones and threw them at the processionists and all hell broke loose. At the end of the day three had died due to stab wounds, two Muslims and one Hindu. Interestingly, when we went to Bhainsa and tried to elicit opinions, the only thing the Muslims said was: 'please tell them not to play that song'. The vocal among the Hindus, on the other hand, spoke of 'ISI agents' throwing chappals at the Devi's procession, and shouting 'jihad'. The police are categorical that there was no such throwing of chappals or shouting of any such slogans. Interestingly, while the role of the MIM was referred to even by those who were not particularly against the Muslim, nobody said that an organisation called the Hindu Vahini was active in the town for the last year or so. The omission may not have been conscious. It is taken as part of the natural order of things that Hindu organisations with intolerant and violent agendas are there in society. What becomes worthy of remark is the presence of Muslim organisations with a similar agenda.

That night, Vatoli saw the burning to death of the only Muslim family in the village. The village is a few kms from Bhainsa. The head of the family, Mahboob Khan was a tailor and a very hardworking and respected man. Nobody had any complaints against him. That night, a considerable section of the village was awake because right behind the house of Mahboob Khan, a ceremony was being observed in a Hindu household. In the midst of the noise of the bhajans and kirtans accompanying the ceremony, the house of Mahboob Khan was set on fire, killing all the inmates, three adults and three children. Their limbs were fractured, and all the bodies lay at one place, giving rise to the suspicion that they were first killed and then the house set on fire, which makes it even more horrible. ■

By Way Of A Conclusion

As we have said in the beginning, we are looking not only at the instances of violence by the Sangh Parivar, the inaction/collusion of the State machinery and the crude justification offered by both, but more importantly at the mechanisms employed by the Sangh Parivar to gather sizable sections of people behind it in the execution of its design. It has used the social-historical cleavage between the Kandha and Pano communities in Orissa, a veritable fault-line in the bottom rung of Orissa society. In Karnataka it has used emotive symbols: the National Flag, the seat of a swami and the cow. And has also cynically exploited the resentment of social groups left out of the process of development to incite selective and sectarian hatred. Everywhere it has sought to appeal to the insecurities of a crisis-ridden society by depicting the Christian (and the Muslim) as the wicked 'other' who is out to destroy and destabilise India, set up as the land of Hindus. Thus the very existence of Christianity (and Islam) in India and the very practice of Christianity (and Islam) become objects of hatred so that it is not conversions but Christianity that is attacked. All the pastors and preachers who were attacked, abused, beaten and vilified must have understood this.

The question before all those who believe in a vision for India that is different from that of the ideological progeny of Golwalkar, is whether we are alert to these devises and active in countering them by working among the sections of the people vulnerable to them. That is not just a question. It is a task and a practical task of great urgency. ■



The fight against the Sangh Parivar, whether on the political terrain or in civil society, whether in the realm of power or that of values, is the fight over the idea and the reality of the India we want.

A humane society committed to political, social and economic justice, freedom from fear and want, liberty of thought, belief and practice, inalienable dignity of person, opportunities of equitable growth, peace in its relations with other societies and nature (all of which add up to the foundational value of *equality*) or an aggressive power-mongering polity based on a hierarchical and monolithic society ?