

Communal Violence in Orissa : Hindu Fundamentalist attack minority Christians

Background

Kandhamal is adivasi dominated district. As per 2001 census, out of total population 6,48,201; Hindus are 527,757; Christians are 117,950; Muslims are 2,253; other religious people are 95 and people did not mention any religion are 147. Total dalits(SC) are 1,09,506 (16.89%) and adivasis are 3,36,809 (51.96%). 43% are literates, while in 1991 it was 37.23%. As per 1991 census (Boudh and Kandhamal districts were not separated), total population was 863903; Hindus 786327; Christians 75725. Among Hindus adivasis have been included, basically they are nature worshipers. Adivasis were 2,81,386 and Dalits (SC) were 99,499. Others' Population was 165,396 in 1991 and 201,886 in 2001. Decadal growth of SC is 10%, ST is 19%, others are 22% and total is 19%.

Out of total geographical area 753608; forest area 438268 (58%) and cultivable area 177179 (24%). Out of total private lands recorded, 56% belonging to Adivasis, 9% belonging to Dalits and rest 35% lands belong to others (31%) including local odiya communities, business communities, government officials basically outsiders. Every year lands are being sold to outsiders.

Dec 2007 Violence

With a purpose to convert Orissa as their second poster state after Gujarat, Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and its frontal organizations unleashed their attacks against minority Christians, Dalits and Adivasis on 24th December, the very next day the Modi Government came back to power in Gujarat.

It started with an attack by these organizations on a make-shift gate by the Christians to observe Xmas Day on 25th, which was erected after obtaining necessary permission from the Government. With a well-knit design, RSS spread the rumour that Laxmananda Saraswati the local RSS leader, the mastermind of the riot was attacked.

On this pretext, within three hours the entire district was thrown into the cauldron of communal riots, which continued for 15-days. By this riot about 8000 families of 68 villages were affected causing murder of 6 persons, wide spread house burning, damage of several churches, educational institutions, hospitals, molestation of several women including nuns, forced the people belonging to minor communities to hide themselves inside forests for days together under severe cold-waves.

The fundamentalists succeeded in widening the division among the most marginalized sections of the society, which gives a blow to the democratic aspirations of the adivasis and dalits. In stead of taking adequate steps against the riot engineers, the BJD-BJP government is trying to cover these rioters by identifying this riot as a conflict in between Adivasis and Dalits at one time and Maoists are behind the conflicts at the other time.

Recent Violence – August 2008

Causes

The inhuman and mysterious killing of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati along with his four disciples on 23rd night while celebrating Janmastami festival at his Ashram at Jalespata in Tumudibandha block of Kandhamal District can be taken as the immediate cause.

With a purpose to turn Orissa as their poster state after Gujarat, RSS has been in constant search of opportunities this murder incident was successfully used against Christians.

. Although the Police DG immediately hold was used by the Sangha Parivar as a pretext to unleash the dance of terror throughout the State, particularly in Kandhamal and neighboring districts.

Who murdered the VHP leader and followers?

It still remains a mystery as to 'Who killed' and 'why did he/they do so'. While the Police DG Mr.Gopal Nanda Govt. of Orissa preferred to hold the Maoists as responsible for the killings, the Sangha Parivar announced this is the act of the Christians and declared that the Hindus would retaliate. At the same time some other people doubt the Sangha Parivar/BJP designing a plot to outweigh BJD and other parties in the coming election and some are there not to rule out the possibility of involvement of rival elements among the disciples of Ashramites behind the tragic incident.

The Maoist leader Azad had claimed the responsibility of the killing twice.

The government has set up a one-man judicial commission led by the retired HC Justice Saratchandra Mohapatra to enquire the murder.

The Church leaders, opposition political parties and Civil Society have been demanding for CBI probe of the murder of VHP people and subsequent killing and arson against Christians. One PIL has been filed in Supreme Court for this by All India Christian Council.

As media reports, there was no post-mortem done for any the bodies of four deceased persons.

Violence – impacts

As per the Chief Secretary, Orissa press statement on 01.09.08, over 558(543 in Kandhamal)houses and 17 places of worship have been burnt since August 23. A total of 35 people were injured. 185 people were arrested on charge of rioting, arson and other offences. 12,539 people were being fed in 10 relief camps.

Actual loss is more than what is stated by the Govt. Non officially 50 people have been killed. And several people got injured. Among the killed ones, disable persons, women and children are there.

Everyday houses are burnt and people were chased and killed. In Dec 2007 riot people were hiding in jungles, but forest are also targeted by the VHP people.

This violence has succeeded in polarizing the Kandhamal area to some extent.

The offices of 5 NGOs have been damaged by the arsonists.

The Christian families are given mortal threat either re-convert or die. With violence continuing with little or no police protection, Christian leaders said many fearful believers have been forcibly “reconverted” to Hinduism. According to *The Indian Express*, more than a hundred Christians “reconverted” to Hinduism in Raikia, Baliguda, Barakhama and others areas of Kandhamal on Friday and Saturday (Aug. 29-30).

Role of Govt

Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati was provided with special security by the Home Department. Again he had filed an FIR before 48 hours of the attack and sought adequate security arrangements viewing the letter from an unknown person threatening to his life. The Police could not protect his life.

The Administration have allowed the funeral procession from Jalespata to Chakapada (about 130 kms) passing through communally sensitive places like Tumudibandh, Baliguda, Nuagan, other places with thousands of already agitated and armed mob and the leaders of BJP, RSS, VHP without taking adequate security arrangement. This mob led by Mr. Pravin Togadia and three Ministers of the present Orissa Government Ministers of Orissa government caused severe violence against minority in almost all the places it passed through.

Although the statewide bandh on 25th August was announced by RSS, VHP supported by BJP on the 23rd August night itself, the government did not adequate measures to take all the measures to prevent communal violence during the bandh as because everybody knows about the Kandhamal bandh on Dec 25th 2007. The hooligans under the direct command of BJP and RSS leaders did all kinds of nuisance on bandha day. Without any slightest resistance they could burnt down shops, houses of Christians, ransacked and looted several Churches, burnt down some NGO offices, lynched a girl student of a Kanyashram and a Father at Baragarh, killed 3 persons in Kandhamal and everything was happening in the presence of Police forces. Why could not the police stop them or take any action? Why did not the government ask/mobilize adequate number of police forces? Are not these intentional?

Immediately after the murder of the Ashramites, the Sangha Parivar announced the bandh call for 25th. The just before a day of Bandh the government ordered the suspension of the Kandhamal Police Superintendent Mr. Nikhil Kumar Kanodia along with the local Police Inspector without posting any substitute to him and too knowing well what would happen on the next day. The same SP and his Team prevented a communal riot on July 22, 2008 following the tension centring round the RSS's opposition to beef eating by scheduled castes and tribes of Malipada village and RSS/VHP leaders had demanded his transfer.

The post-mortem was not conducted.

Mr. Pravin Togadia, VHP national leader who had been disallowed by different state governments to enter into their territory for his roles during Gujarat riot 2002, was allowed by the Orissa Government during a very sensitive period to land on 25th and escorted to travel a 300 km long distance on road from Bhubaneswar to Jalespata and lead the procession, while several passengers were suffering a lot being struck in the airport because of the bandh. What makes the government to behave in such an insensitive manner? Or was the Govt. confident enough to tackle the situation even if such people lead the procession of already agitated mob?

Under the leadership of Mr. Pravin Togadia and in the presence of BJP Ministers and leaders accompanying the funeral procession, the attacks on minority community people was going on. Has the administration filed any FIR against such leaders and their followers?

It looked as if there was no administration, no law, no government on 25th August.

Even if the govt. is telling time and again 'situation is control), forcible re-conversion and house burning, killing is going on in several areas inspite presence of police forces.

The government is barring CSOs and opposition parties to enter into Kandhamal; BJP leaders (Dharmendra Pradhan) and VHP leaders have visiting villages of Kandhamal.

The rioters were given a freehand to do/undo whatever they like - it reminded of the Gujarat pogrom.

Role of Civil Society

Several processes have been in motion.

- The Citizens' Committee on Communal Harmony submitted a memo to the Guv and demanded for adequate steps to stop violence.
- Intellectuals, artists etc. have staged Peace March on 1st. submitted a Memo to the Guv.
- Women Organisations organized a peace rally on 2nd Sep
- NCDHR invited personalities like Swami Agnivesh, Justice Suresh, Shabnam Hasmi and others to address a press and make visit to affected area (they were not allowed to visit)
- INSAF conducted a press conference.
- HRLN and ALVM filed a PIL in Orissa HC praying for CBI enquiry.
- HRLN also filed another PIL in SC.
- The NGOs and others formed a forum and reviewing the daily information.
- ODAF is playing a critical role in organizing several events and participates in the meetings to condemn the violence leashed out by the hindu fundamentalists.

Political Parties:

Besides BJP and BJD, other parties are raising their voices against the government.

Congress leaders tried to enter into Kandhamal on 1st and were arrested.

CPI-CPM leaders were not allowed to enter.

CPI, CPM, SUCI, CPIML have organized 7 protest rallies/demonstrations separately or jointly.
But, their opposition is not up to expectation.

Role of Media

Local media (some national media also) played very negative role in fanning violence. However, some national media are trying to bring out the truth.

People vs. violence

There is no study/review to realistically assess the minds of the people. Whatever we gathered from media and informal communications, it has been found the most of the people did not like the killing of VHP leaders and at same time they are happy with subsequent murders and arsons. The terror tactics of RSS have succeeded in impacting the some people to the extent of re-conversion, participating in arsoning and killing of their own neighbours.

Fortunately, the common people are not communally divided unlike Gujarat and except the Sangh Parivar leaders, their Ministers, their employees (Saraswati Sisu Mandir school teachers) and hired hooligans; no body else participated in the 25th's devils' dances.

Several places people have started opposing communal rioters.

If this way the state is run, what will be the fate of our democracy and jurisprudence? I am afraid, if the state fails to give protection and justice to its innocent citizens, then we should not be surprised if they will resort to counter terrorism.

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Biswamoy Pati

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In a crucified state

Orissa is in the news yet again. Except that unlike in December 2007, the news of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati's death is real. Nevertheless, very much like the last time, the VHP has gone berserk again. Political murders and killing of Christians (as 'imagined murderers') or vandalising churches is unacceptable to any democratic society. The violence inflicted has been meticulously planned and executed over two-three days

when the Orissa government and its affiliated agencies seemed overwhelmed by what was going on.

When Mahatma Gandhi had visited coastal Orissa in 1921 he had said: "I was prepared to see skeletons in Orissa but not to the extent I did. I had seen terrible pictures but the reality was too terrible." (Young India, April 1921). In fact, if he had visited western Orissa or the Kandhamal region today, he would have echoed this sentiment.

We are talking about a region that has a predominantly tribal and Dalit population, with 70-75 per cent of the people living below the poverty line. In fact, western Orissa is an amazing 'hinterland' of contradictions. Along with acute poverty, the region also harbours mega-projects associated with the mining of bauxite needed to produce aluminium. Unfortunately, successive governments in Orissa have been extremely careful about saving their 'marriage' with international capital, but have ignored the serious impact of these mega-projects on people's lives and the region's environment.

The current BJD-BJP government has suppressed popular initiatives that have questioned the displacement of people and highlighted hazards to the environment. At the same time, it is puzzling that the government is neither interested in nor is serious about maintaining law and order in this western hinterland. And going by Saraswati's murder and the subsequent killings, political scientists may well argue that what is being witnessed today indicates the breakdown of civil society. However, the deeper question is: has this tract ever seen civil society?

Whoever is responsible for the murder of Saraswati is definitely not interested either in tribals or Dalits. This heinous act would most certainly boost the VHP in a manner comparable to LK Advani's rath yatra. After all, Saraswati was a major Sangh parivar functionary who had been working among poor tribals since the late 1960s. He had been associated with the schools and ashrams, working with the idea of improving the lot of the poor tribals.

This needs to be located in a context where the government has virtually abdicated its responsibility of providing basic features of civil society like education and health. In the absence of any land reforms or serious governmental interventions to improve the condition of the poor, the schools and ashrams provide meagre alternatives, along with institutions run by Christian missionaries and NGOs.

Ironically, the activities of the VHP correspond to what they accuse the Christian missionaries of doing in western Orissa. Both work to attract and convert people to their respective faiths – something that is allowed under the Indian Constitution. Moreover, both have access to resources — internal and external — to be used towards the uplift of the poor. But then how does one explain the way in which the term 'conversion' appears to be synonymous with Christian missionaries? This might appear to be a profound question. But this is precisely where the Sangh parivar's hegemonic hold needs to be loosened.

This is sustained by poverty, lack of land struggles and reforms and the virtual non-existence of either civil society or the state in this area; further clothed by a finely-crafted 'reality' created by the VHP. One could cite two clear examples to illustrate this point: (a) that tribals are Hindus and Christian missionaries are the villains, who are spreading Christianity through inducements and converting the poor and ignorant tribals;

and (b) that the VHP has the right to re-convert them to their original faith. It is indeed amazing that most of the reports on Kandhamal wrongly assume that tribals are Hindus. In fact, what the Sangh parivar has been attempting in Orissa — their post-Gujarat laboratory — is large-scale conversion of tribals to Hinduism.

This is skilfully combined with terrorising sections of Dalits – who had opted to convert to Christianity after suffering social discrimination – to reconvert to Hinduism. This 'common sense' makes the conversion of tribals appear as 're-conversion'. And this has been skilfully woven with terror directed against Dalit Christians over quite some time. More significantly, the majoritarian orientation of such conversion drives and their ancillaries – viz the ghee-burning shuddhi karan (re-conversion) rituals as seen through the electronic media — hides the real agenda.

This 'common sense' has enabled the VHP to make serious inroads in Orissa, even as the world debates the conflicts among Dalit (Panasi) Christians and the adivasis (Kandhas) over diverse issues. The real problem in Kandhamal is related to the aggressive drives to convert tribals to Hinduism, including terror directed at Dalit Christians, who are the stumbling blocks in the path of the Sangh parivar and the VHP.

(Biswamoy Pati is the author of *Identity, Hegemony, Resistance : Towards a Social History of Conversions in Orissa, 1800-2000*)

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print.aspx?Id=6d2a5ff7-1561-44f9-aa73-45a5dc770179>

UPDATE INFORMATION ON JEYPORE COMMUNAL HATRED SITUATION__ - Date : 02-09-08, Jeypore.__

On Saturday the 30th of August 2008, when our college students entered into the college premises, they found objectionable graffiti on the college notice board and walls. They alongwith the concerned Municipality councilor reported the matter to the College Principal who rubbed the writings and smelling a communal problem suspended the college for the day and accordingly informed the town police to keep a vigil on the developments. __The section of the students associated to ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad – All India Students Council) informed the situation to their leaders in the town who forthwith rushed to the college located on the National Highway No. 43. They covered-up the circumstances on communal colours and brought allegations against our boys indulging in mis-behaviours demanding that they all must be brought to books. To register their protest, they started burning tyres on the roads, blocking vehicular traffic and flaring up communal slogans against Christian community. Shops in the town were all closed and congregated the people of the town in their grip to facilitate their organized action to march towards the church area. __In the meanwhile, our boys briefed the incident to the Bishop, JELC who suggested them to lodge an FIR with the police. As the boys were narrating the happenings, a police van came and picked up 7 of our boys standing outside of the church with the assurance to resolve the issue. The news flashed to the Christian street. The family and friends of the boys run to their wit's end towards the church. __At 1:00 pm, Mr Babu Sarangi, a representative of the Central Hindu Religious Leaders Organisation broke the police cordon at the college area-end to trespass into our side 400 m away but a couple of our boys escorted him back thereby averting a blood-shed. The police, administrative officials, people's

representative reached to the demonstrators and appealed them to maintain peace. They refused to heed anything rather fuming inside with violence. Sensing the volatile situation, the police was forced to order for lathicharge, reacting to which the irate mob attacked even the police. The action of the police fueled the violent mob of the non-Christian community to spread to the whole of Jeypore town. __At 4:30 pm again they re-assembled at the traffic junction to attack the JEL Church, Jeypore. First they attempted demolishing the JELC school in the very presence of the police force. The sight was beyond the tolerance limit of some of our people who run from the church entrance gate area towards the demolishing site of JELC school. This prompted the police to burst teargas, resort to lathicharge and finally opening of 52 rounds of firing in which 2 of their youths sustained injuries and hospitalized. Even the SP, Koraput and Sub-Collector, Jeypore are also injured by their stone pelting. __To out-burst their anger, they set on fire a truck, one OSRTC bus, one APSRTC bus, 2 fire service tenders besides 5 dozen vehicles even belonging to the police. They also attacked the town police station and ransacked the OMM church of Jeypore where a meeting was in progress of the staff of Compassion India Projects of Koraput district. However, all our people in these incidents had miraculous escape. __The deployment of 10 companies of CRPF, OSAP, RC and RB forces conducted flag-march at many sensitive places of the town and curfew was clamped to restore normalcy in the town. All educational institutions are declared close for 3 days. The strife-torn college remains closed for a week. __On Sunday, the 31st August 2008, under the chairmanship of the district collector, Koraput a Peace Committee Meet was convened at Police station, Jeypore participated by police, representatives of the 2 communities, political leaders, media persons who all heard the narrative from the college principal and students, condemned the incident as unfortunate that hit the news headlines of the nation for wrong reasons, unheard of in the history of Jeypore. In principle, all agreed to bring back peace at Jeypore and other places. But the leaders of VHP, Bajrang Dal and RSS of Jeypore Unit boycotted the meeting, first creating all out effort to disturb the holding of the meeting and then reasoning that the Hindus are minority community at global context and attempts are being made by non-hindus to reduce them into further minority status which cannot be allowed at any cost. __Defying the curfew, the rioters are getting organized into groupings, burning tyres on the roads and fighting with the police. As arson spreads, the Christian community in and around Jeypore are reeling under fear. Since 24-08-08, 6 churches in Boipariguda, 10 churches in Kundra, 30 houses in Bondhugaon are reported to be attacked by the saffron brigades. These figures are over and above to the aftermath attacks to Christian Community of Bissamcuttack, Narayanpatna and other places of JELC in the wake of slain of Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati. For the first time all the shops of our street were closed in solidarity and support for the Orissa Bandh of 25-08-08 humbly heeding the outcry made on the day by the Hindus. __Because of the camping of the police platoons, somehow our community people are not that tension which is against their wish. That is the reason they are pressurizing the political leaders to demand for lifting the curfew on the plea of the Ganesh Puja of 03-09-08. Today, the 3rd day of the imposed curfew, which was relaxed partially from 6 am to 11 am and then again from 2 pm to 6 pm. __This morning 4 of our youths allegedly involved in the happenings at the college were summoned by the police for a compromise solution that will pave the way for release of the 7 of our other innocent juveniles detained by the police. We hear that even leaders of the stature of Prabin Togodia are contacting the hindu youths over phone advising them not to compromise and continue flaring up the communal situation for hindutwa cause. __We have lost our hunger and sleep for reasons we are not responsible for. __

Amar Thomas, 3rd September 2008, Jeypore, Orissa

Supreme Court of India gave judgement not to hold the Ash Jatra by Praveen Togadia, a VHP leader.

A quick update on Orissa Communal Violence: Christians in Orissa:

As of September 3rd 2008:-

- 4014 houses are burnt in 300 villages
 - 50,000 people are displaced
 - 2 pastors killed
 - 6 priests severely injured and hospitalized
 - 1 nun gang raped
 - 1 lady a hindu burnt alive by hindu fundamentalists
 - 24 christians killed
- from All India Christian Council

The Maoist had put hit list posters naming the people who were engaged and giving them final warning that if they involve again in communal violence that they will be eliminated by them.

The Orissa Government has not taken stern action against the culprits, while we condemn the brutal killing of Swamiji and his associates we also demand a CBI enquiry on the killing and the aftermath of communal violence that was leashed out on the Christians by the Hindu fundamentalists.

Kandhamal: Hindutva's terror

Charting the history of sangh parivar violence in Orissa

BY ANGANA CHATTERJI

"Before the mob came we heard the sound of people approaching. The sound of hatred. Our lives, our faith, our existence is under attack and neither the neighbours, the police nor the state care." – Dalit Christian woman in Kandhamal

"We are waiting for the next riot. We do not know where it will happen but we know that Kandhamal was a warning, not the end." – Christian labour organiser

Event

December 25, 2007: Seven churches, Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, independent... burned in Barakhama village, in west Kandhamal/Phulbani district, central Orissa. December 23: Hindutva-affiliated Adivasi organisations organised a march, supported by sangh parivar groups, rallying: 'Stop Christianity. Kill Christians'. They called for a strike on December 25 and 26, demanding that Dalit Christians be denied scheduled caste status. A Dalit Christian leader from Barakhama testified: "On December 22, hearing of plans to create trouble during Christmas, we went to the local police and informed them of the situation. They assured us that things would be under control. On

December 24, in the daytime, we heard voices of Bajrang Dal, VHP, RSS, Shiv Sena people, chanting: 'Hindu, Hindu, *Bhai, Bhai*', 'RSS *Zindabad*', 'Lakshmanananda *Zindabad*'. They shut down shops. That night they felled trees to block roads, severed power and phone lines. On the 25th, we went to the inspector in-charge of police again. On the 25th, at 2.30, about 200 of us sat down to Christmas prayer at our church and around 4 p.m. we heard the mob approach."

The mob, about 4,000 persons, many bearing symbolic *tilaks*, belonged to various sangh parivar groups named above, incited local Hindus into rioting. Estimates state 20 per cent of the mob comprised of people from Barakhama, 80 per cent from surrounding Balliguda, Raikia, Phulbani, as far away as Behrampur. In Barakhama, Christian homes were selected for destruction by the mob, Hindu homes spared. A Dalit Christian woman testified: "They broke the door to our church. We ran. We fell and kept running." Women and men were intimidated and assaulted. Cries of '*Jai Bajrangbali*' rent the air. 'Christians must become Hindu or Die. Kill Them. Kill Them. Kill Them. Gita not Bible. Destroy their Faith.'

The crowd carried rods, *trishuls* (tridents), swords, kerosene. They used guns, a first in Orissa, weapons available in the market and makeshift local fabrications. Predominantly middle class caste Hindus participated in looting, destroying and torching property. They threw bombs to start the fire. The breakage was systematic, thorough. Women and men hid for days in forests in winter temperatures, later seeking shelter in the Balliguda town relief camp, returning to decimated Barakhama on January 2. Engulfed in soot and sorrow, people attempted to function amid charred remnants. A woman said: "Everything burns down and we are left with nothing. How little our lives are made (of). How alone we are, so far away from everything."

In Balliguda, in one church, furniture was dragged out, lit into a grotesque sculpture. The private violated in public, made spectacle. A Catholic church burnt, opposite the street the fire station witnessed the incident but did not intervene. A cow, dragged from a shed, set afire, was beaten to death, identified as 'Christian'.

Earlier, on December 23, Hindu activists organised a conversion ceremony for Pastor Digal from Kutikia *gram panchayat* and 12 members of the Christian community. Pastor Digal was beaten, forcibly tonsured and then paraded naked as he refused to reject Christianity.

On the morning of December 24, at approximately 11 a.m., activists from various Hindutva groups, including Bajrang Dal, VHP, RSS, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, organised vandalism of Christmas symbols erected on the occasion of Christmas and unleashed turmoil in Brahmanigaon/ Bamunigaon village in central Kandhamal. Some among the 3,000-person mob of Hindutva activists were armed with guns. Reportedly, shots were fired on Christians, wounding two young boys. The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes was decimated. Unarmed police, present near the spot, failed to act. *After* these events, on December 24, sources state, the car in which Lakshmanananda Saraswati, the influential, octogenarian Hindu proselytiser who was travelling to the site of the incident to organise a *yagna* to rouse Hindu sentiments against Christmas, was stopped by Christians. The vehicle and driver were knocked around. Saraswati claimed to the press that he had been injured while eyewitness accounts and doctors' statements contradict this and his own activities point to the contrary. Following Saraswati's allegations, Hindutva groups

called for a 36-hour strike on the evening of December 24. Then followed the violence across Kandhamal, stretching over a three-day period in which Christian communities were attacked by Hindutva groups and their cadre.

It has been stated by members of the Hindu community that Christian display of religiosity, and the economic privilege that allowed for such exhibition, led to the rioting. It has been a focus in the press that Christians in one area in Brahmanigaon responded with violence. It must be noted that Christians in one area did respond with some, *not* proportionate, violence. In the absence of state action in curbing Hindutva's aggression, this might have aided the Christian community in checking Hindutva's violence. It must be noted that Christian retaliation in Brahmanigaon did not endanger bodies but focused on destroying property even while Hindutva's violence explicitly sought to endanger Christian bodies.

Minority failure to submit to state and majoritarian (by the majority community) subjection becomes a manifestation of 'evil'. Dominant rationale reduces this to majority vs minority communalism. This position appeals to liberal notions of 'balance' and fails to scrutinise state violence (often greater than, and inciting of, group violence). Rather than focus on systematic targeting of Christians, their overwhelmingly peaceful submission to Hindutva's violence and vast structural injustices and differences in relations of power between majority and minority, the scrutiny appears to be focused on the failure of *all* Christian groups to simply submit to dominance.

Impunity

'*Bharatmata ki Jai* (Hail to Mother India)' – Hindu nationalist and militant organisations

Targeted: Balliguda, Brahmanigaon, Barakhama, Bodagan, Chakapad, Daringbari, Goborkutty, Jhinjirguda, Kalingia, Kamapada, Kulpakia, Mandipanka, Nuagaon, Phulbani, Pobingia, Sindrigaon, Ulipadaro villages... Convents and presbytery in Balliguda, Pobingia, Phulbani, Brahmanigaon... Two hostels each in Balliguda, Brahmanigaon, Pobingia. Minor seminary and a vocational training centre in Balliguda. Organisational offices, as that of World Vision, destroyed. Across Kandhamal, approximately 632 (some place the number at 700) Christian homes, 80-95 churches, mostly in villages, and 94-96 institutions were destroyed, vandalised and torched. Homes and institutions were robbed, cash, jewellery, implements, machinery and other valuables looted. A Hindutva mob surrounded Tikabali police station, two jeeps were torched.

In the week following the attacks, hundreds of people were missing. Some remained lost to their families three weeks after the event. Large numbers sought refuge in the nearby forests, including children, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, including mental illnesses. Some sustained burn and other injuries. Women were molested. Death counts remained inaccurate, the unofficial number of deaths noted at 11, four died under police fire. Following the violence, the administration neither documented the devastation nor participated in its expeditious clean up. The police refused Christians seeking to file FIRs while Hindutva activists filed charges against members of the Christian community. As well, Christians attempting to file FIRs are confronted with Hindu religious symbols ever present in (hostile) public places. The Balliguda relief camp was skeletal, its distribution discriminated against women.

As people returned to rows upon rows of uninhabitable homes, the administration offered people one blanket and a shawl, some clothes, rations. Despite continuing tensions, police presence abated within a week of the riots. Confidence-building steps are absent.

The sangh parivar's charge that the riots are a part of ethnic violence is contradicted by the timing of the violence. Certain members of sangh parivar organisations, especially the Bajrang Dal, claim in private that some Hindutva activists had come from Gujarat to offer support in Kandhamal. Sangh parivar activists charge that they will resume their attack against the Christian community once the Central Reserve Police Force withdraws, to 'teach them a lesson'. Immediately following the event, relief, compensation, reparation measures, were incommensurate with the extent of social, psychological and economic losses and segregation experienced by communities.

Judicial inquiry commission

The extent of the violence and coordination of attacks across mountainous terrain lead independent investigators to conclude that the violence was planned, that the police had prior knowledge of Hindutva groups' intent to riot. The pertinent district collector and superintendent of police have been transferred, not discharged. A Judicial Inquiry Commission (JIC) chaired by a former (not sitting) judge has been appointed by the Government of Orissa to investigate the riots. Its power/legitimacy is in question. Its mandate is not binding on the government. The central government did not appoint an inquiry by the CBI, even as it is apparent that the very administration that failed to contain the riots and delayed deploying adequate forces, and whose officials at the district level may have been involved in its execution, cannot administer justice.

It is important to note that Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's celebration of his party's 10th anniversary coincided with the riots. The celebration had required that large numbers of the state's police forces be moved out of districts to the state capital, Bhubaneswar. This made it difficult for the police to respond to the emergent situation in Kandhamal on December 24-25. Certain bureaucrats allege that the Orissa government initially directed forces against intervening.

Hindutva activists have lobbied the JIC to organise its terms of reference premised on the claim that an attack on Lakshmanananda Saraswati by Christians in Brahmanigaon propelled the riots which they allege to have been spontaneous. This timeline, as explained above, is falsified.

Hinduisaton of Kandhamal

The Kandhamal riots were not unexpected. The progressive Hindutvaisation of Hindus in Kandhamal has enabled the sangh parivar to act with impunity. Lakshmanananda Saraswati has been overseeing Hinduisation there since 1969. Adivasis, Dalits, Christians, Muslims, are targeted through social and economic boycotts, forced conversions to Hinduism (posed as 're'conversion which presupposes that Adivasis and Dalits were 'originally' Hindus even while they may/do not self-identify as Hindus) and other violences. The Orissa Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act, 1960 deployed against Muslims; the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967, against Christians. The district witnessed Hindutva's violence in 1986, followed by the sangh parivar's growth in the

area. An Adivasi sangh leader from Phulbani, a close associate of Lakshmanananda Saraswati and a Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram teacher as well as a self-proclaimed expert at lathi-wielding, echoes the sentiments of colleagues from the Nikhil Utkal Kui Samaj, a sangh-affiliated Adivasi organisation that works in the district: "We are promoting Hindu rituals amongst *vanvasis* ('forest dwellers', derogatory naming of Adivasis) who are all Hindus. Lakshmanananda Saraswati has been a restraining force on the Christians who were doing the conversion work."

Through the Kandhamal riots of 2007, Hindutva's discourse named Christians as 'conversion terrorists'. In September 1999, Catholic priest Arul Das was murdered in Jamabani village in Mayurbhanj, followed by the destruction of churches in Kandhamal. In August 2004, Our Lady of Charity Catholic Church was vandalised in Raikia and eight Christian homes burnt. Then too, as this Christian leader stated: "They broke everything in the church, the idols, and burnt the holy book. They burnt some of our houses. The parish priest saw all this helplessly. The people who entered the church were traders and other RSS activists but many were outsiders, maybe from Kattingia, where there is an RSS stronghold. The police were there but did not do anything." The Raikia incident led to the economic and social ghettoisation of the Christian community.

Raikia is proximate to G. Udaigiri town where sangh parivar mobilisations significantly increased between 2000 and 2004. In May 2007, Pastor Pabitra Kumar Kota was beaten. In October 2005, converting 200 Bonda Adivasi Christians to Hinduism in Malkangiri, Saraswati stated: "How will we... make India a completely Hindu country? This is our aim and this is what we want to do. The feeling of Hindutva should come within the hearts and minds of all the people."

In April 2006, celebrating RSS architect Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar's centenary, the sangh organised the Asthamatruk Rath Yatra, aimed at converting Christians to Hinduism. Saraswati, with VHP and RSS leaders in attendance, was triumphant, as eight chariots, named after female deities, travelled through Orissa carrying sanctified water and soil from a multitude of villages, calling on Orissans to assemble 'Akhand Hindu Rashtra'. Presided by Saraswati, seven *yagnas* were held, culminating at Chakapad in Kandhamal district, at the Sammelan attended by 30,000 Adivasis from across the state. Hinduised Adivasis are required to work with both sangh parivar groups and ruling political parties. On April 9, 342 Christians, and on April 10, nine Christians from over 74 families were converted to Hinduism. In September 2007, the VHP organised a road and rail blockade in Orissa, against the supposed destruction of the mythic 'Ram Setu' (bridge). Hindutva militants, Praveen Togadia and Subash Chouhan, returned to Orissa, rousing sentiments for Hindutva's political and spiritual victory. Between July and December 2007, sangh-organised rallies travelled across Kandhamal, raising sentiments against Christians in the district.

Hindutva organisations have charged that Christian conversions in the area and the interventions of Maoist groups led to a spontaneous outburst from Hindus, culminating in the Kandhamal riots of 2007. Maoist groups are not operational in the areas where the violence took place, even as sangh parivar groups have witnessed an upsurge in recent years in those exact areas.

Numbers and rates of conversions to Christianity are inflated by the Hindu Right and circulate in retaliatory capacity even within progressive communities who fixate on such

conversions as contributing to the communalisation of society. Christian conversions are storied as debilitating to the majority status of Hindus in Orissa while Muslims are seen as ‘infiltrating’ from Bangladesh, looting livelihood opportunities from residents and dislocating the ‘Oriya (and Indian) nation’. Hindu nationalists place Christians and Muslims in the liminal in-between, as concurrently internal and external to the nation/as enemy. Non-Hinduised Adivasis and Dalits are perceived as ‘unruly’.

Hindutva leaders rumour: ‘Phulbani-Kandhamal is a most important Christian area in Orissa with rampant and forced conversions’. However, the Christian population in Kandhamal district is 1,17,950 while Hindus number 5,27,757. Sangh leaders claim: ‘By the VHP data there are 927 churches in Phulbani district built on illegally taken land’. Church leaders respond that there are 521 churches in the district, on legally acquired church property, and estimate as few as 200-300 consensual conversions and baptism ceremonies annually in Phulbani town with a faintly elevated figure in rural Kandhamal (per the All India Christian Council, AICC, statement of 2005). Many of these churches are administered by the Church of North India, which was inaugurated in Nagpur in 1970 and is registered as a society under the Societies Act XXI of 1860. While few members of certain Christian sects, such as some Pentecostals, may preach in public places, most, such as Catholics, do not. Conversions to Christianity do not occur with the intent to destabilise the Hindu or other communities, and the content and programme of church-based education does not foster communal hatred or divisiveness in thought or deed.

The sangh parivar makes claims that are unsubstantiated – that Christian missionaries (who are mostly of Indian descent) and Muslim traders have caused the destruction of tribal culture and undertaken the illegal acquisition and encroachment of tribal lands since the early 1980s. While the delegitimisation of Adivasi rights to lands and their displacement from customary and communitarian property are serious and righteous grievances, Christian missionaries and Muslim traders are not the primary reason for the land grab and the paucity of land reforms in Orissa. Such rumouring is acceptable to the dominant caste groups, even as general caste land grab is the primary reason for the disenfranchisement-displacement of Adivasis from traditional rights to land. In 1998 there was an agitation for land reforms that did not translate into practical implementation.

The situation is compounded by a decline in the actual number of available employment and income generating opportunities in the area. Kandhamal remains socio-economically vulnerable, with a large percentage of the population living below the poverty line. In addition, 60 per cent of state-operated schools are without teachers while schools operated by Christian organisations are usually available in townships. In a context of disenfranchisement and poverty, and the need to work and the unfeasibility of acquiring employment after basic schooling, the rate of student attrition within Adivasi communities, for example, in G. Udaigiri, is very high at the school level, with only three per cent continuing through completion.

The Christian community too is economically disenfranchised in Kandhamal. A majority of the Christian population, local Christian leaders state, is landless or marginal landholders, with an average holding of half an acre per family. Christian leaders said that the church does not convert under duress or offer money in lieu of conversions. In

the 1960s and 70s, when there was a thrust in conversions, Adivasis benefited through accessing health care, education and employment offered by Christian missionaries.

The politicisation of Adivasis and Dalits leads them to claim that Hinduism is distant to them, 'outside' to them. This is dangerous to the sangh parivar's ideology which uses the notion of 'Adivasis as Hindus' to connect Hinduism across time in the space named India and 'Dalits as Hindus' to maintain its numeric dominance. Politicised Adivasis and Dalits are named 'terrorist', 'Maoist', 'militant'. Hindutva rumours that Dalits are exploiting Adivasis and that land is a major contention between them. Dalits are posed as 'dangerous', as the claiming of the identity of 'Dalit' is a politicisation debilitating to the sangh parivar. (Dalit: Marathi for oppressed or 'broken', from the root 'dal', which denotes dispersion (symbolic and literal, of those that mistreatment has violated). Term used by Dalit peoples and groups for self-identification in politicised contexts.)

Hindutva rumours that Dalits have acquired economic benefits, augmented by their Christianisation. This is not borne out in reality, as Dalits remain landless – in Kandhamal, approximately 90 per cent of Dalits are landless. Hindutva rumours that the 'success' of the Dalit community is causing economic rift in the area and the success of Christian Dalits is causing communalisation. In reality, it is the Hindu caste business community that maintains economic privilege/dominance in the area. Their economic power is however justified in the interest of maintaining and growing the ('shining' Hindu/Indian) nation.

In Hinduising Adivasis and polarising relations between them and Dalits in the area, the sangh parivar has engineered rivalries between Kandha Adivasis and Pana Dalit Christians in Kandhamal, instigating against the latter's campaign for scheduled tribe status. Dalit Christians, under current law, forfeit their right to affirmative action. In current law, Paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 held caste and religion to be mutually exclusive: 'no person who professes a religion different from the Hindu (later amended to include the Sikh or the Buddhist) religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste' (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2006).

Functioning against the right to freedom of religion, per these provisions, Dalits who convert to Christianity or Islam, Jainism and Zoroastrianism, and other faiths, are divested of scheduled caste status and affirmative action afforded by the state via the 'reservation' system for scheduled castes and tribes, and refused benefits granted those that identify as Hindu Dalits. This, Christian leaders contend, impacts the ability of Dalit Christians to secure resources routinely controlled by those from upper caste backgrounds. Dalit converts to Hinduism are not denied such rights.

Discriminated against on the basis of religion, marginalised peoples that discard or function outside Hinduism are barred from equal access to affirmative action that their ethno-cultural and class status allocates. This rejection disregards that benefits reserved for scheduled castes and tribes are premised on feudal, colonial and post-colonial structural mistreatment of such peoples, not religion alone. Religion functions in a Hindu dominant nation as race did under colonial rule, informing hierarchies that define purity and impurity, belonging and un-belonging, 'norm' and 'other'.

State institutions are in internal disagreement over the issue of affirmative action for religious minorities. Responding to a writ petition (No. 180 of 2004) filed by the AICC

via the Centre for Public Interest Litigation, the Supreme Court of India asked the Government of India for arguments and guidelines on broadening the assistance of 'reservation' to scheduled castes that convert to Christianity. Muslim organisations too have campaigned for the inclusion of Muslim Dalits in diverse forms of affirmative action. The government deferred the issue to the Ranganath Mishra National Commission for Linguistic and Religious Minorities, even while the Commission's jurisdiction was advisory and did not extend to decision making on such matters. The Mishra Commission's report was released to the press on May 21, 2007 and its recommendations advocated that the benefits of 'reservation' be extended to Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam and that religion be dissociated from scheduled caste status in implementing affirmative action. On July 19, 2007 the Supreme Court referred the matter back to the central (Congress) government for its decision which remains pending.

Fascisation of Orissa

Hindutva mythologises the demise of Hinduism in 'Hindustan', legitimating violence as just response, patriotic and pro-national. Majoritarianism (assertions by the majority, here Hindu, community toward acquiring and maintaining social, economic, cultural, political, religious, legal and state-nationalistic power, where majoritarian aspirations are linked to 'truth' and 'freedom') operates with an explicit mandate to maintain dominance and Hinduise non-Hindus and other marginal and secular groups, including Christians, Muslims, Adivasis and Dalits, with the goal of creating a Hindu state in India. The record of majoritarian group violence against disenfranchised sections of society in India poses a threat to internal peace and security. These communal groups and their affiliates and cadre often operate outside the purview of the law.

The sangh parivar titles itself as an adjunct and/or adversary to the state that offsets governmental failure by dispensing 'morality' and 'progress' to citizens. The sangh's governance in Orissa parallels that of the state and collaborates with it. In the last decade, violence against minority groups in Orissa has included social and economic boycotts, forced conversions, intimidation, murder, arson, rape, looting and other extralegal actions. The sangh uses local militarism (as in Kandhamal) as consort to state controlled militarisation (as in Kashipur, where in December 2000, three Adivasis were killed in police firing, and Kalinganagar, where in January 2006, 12 Adivasis and a policeman were killed in police firing).

Hindu cultural dominance organises Hindu nationalism. Orissa amalgamated as a majoritarian/Hindu state between 1866 and 1936, consolidating its position as the earliest linguistic province. The absence of structural reforms and assertion of Hindu elites defines post-colonial governance. The sangh has proliferated into 10,000-14,000 impacted villages through sectarian relief work in the aftermath of the 1999 cyclone that left 10,000 dead.

The sangh parivar seeks to build a cadre comprised of Hindus, men and women, and targets Christians, Muslims, Adivasis and Dalits and other disenfranchised and progressive and secular groups in Orissa. Orissa has a population of 36.8 million (Census 2001). Of this, 7,61,985 – 2.1 per cent – are Muslims. Orissa Christians number 8,97,861 – just 2.4 per cent of the state's population per the census of 2001 (in 1991, it was 2.1 per cent and in 1981, 1.7 per cent). There are 6.08 million Dalits in Orissa, 16.5

per cent of the population. Adivasis are 8.14 million in number, 22.1 per cent of the population, the largest among all states in India.

The sangh has amassed between 35 and 40 major organisations with numerous branches (including paramilitary hate camps) in 25 districts in Orissa, with a massive base of a few million operating at every level of society, ranging from, and connecting, villages to cities, and Orissa to the 'Hindu nation'. Conscripted into Hindu activism is coordinated through political reform, propaganda/thought control, cultural and religious interventions, developmental/social service and charitable work, sectarian health care, unionisation and revisionist education. The sangh has inaugurated various trusts and branches of national and international institutions in Orissa to aid fund-raising, including the Friends of Tribal Society, Samarpan Charitable Trust, Sookruti, Yasodha Sadan and Odisha International Centre.

The RSS operates 6,000 *shakhas* in Orissa with a 1,50,000+ cadre. RSS graduates take an oath affirming allegiance to the RSS as national duty: 'I will devote my body, mind and money (*tana, mana, bhana*) to the motherland.' The sangh also hires paid operatives to undertake mob activity. Led by the RSS, Vidya Bharati (known as Shiksha Vikas Samiti in Orissa) directs 391 Saraswati Shishu Mandir schools in Orissa, including in Balangir, Kalahandi, Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Nuapada, Kandhamal and Rayagada districts, with 1,11,000 students preparing for future leadership.

Training camps in Bhadrak and Behrampur aim at Adivasi youth. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram runs 1,534 projects and schools in 21 Adivasi concentrated districts. The sangh has initiated 1,200 Ekal Vidyalayas in 10 districts in Orissa to target Adivasis. In March 2000, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-Biju Janata Dal (BJD) coalition came to power. In October 2002, a Shiv Sena unit in Balasore district formed the first Hindu 'suicide squad'. The Hindu Suraksha Samiti organises against Muslims. Revolting slogans, '*Mussalman ka ek hi sthan, Pakistan ya Kabristan* (For Muslims there is one place, Pakistan or the grave)', perforate neighbourhoods.

Political economy

The sangh parivar's agenda is enabled by the staggering inequities present in the state, where severe social and institutionalised forms of caste, class, gender and heterosexist oppressions and caste, class, gendered and sexualised violence are rampant. Unemployment is on the rise in Orissa and abysmal daily wages prevail; 47.15 per cent of the total population lives in poverty while 57 per cent of the rural population is poor (87 per cent of the state's population lives in villages currently and per the 2001 census, there are 51,352 villages in Orissa). Among the Adivasi population, 68.9 per cent are poor while 54.9 per cent of Dalits live in need. Among the Muslim population, 70 per cent are poor in Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur and Puri districts, where they are concentrated.

The female to male ratio is a problematic 972 per 1,000 in Orissa and the Human Rights Protection Committee and the Orissa Crime Branch reported that in the last decade (1990-1999) the state has recorded a 460 per cent increase in dowry related deaths relative to the previous decade.

In Orissa, about 2.5 hectares of irrigated agricultural land is required for a family of five to meet subsistence requirements while the average family owns about 1.29 hectares.

Women seldom hold joint or individual title to land, which debilitates their ability to independently secure livelihood resources. Additionally, only 21 per cent of all land available for cultivation is irrigated. The cyclone of 1999 and the droughts of 2000 and 2003, the floods of 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2007, have presented overwhelming challenges for the environmental and economic well-being of the state.

In Orissa, efforts at land redistribution and reforms have been insufficient and state and bilateral development, anti-poor and pro-corporatisation politics and practices and the privatisation of resources and development have systematically deprived the poor of rights to decision making over livelihood and survival resources, led to rampant displacement, police brutality and even deaths and denied them their customary rights to public resources such as forests and water.

Recommendations for action in Kandhamal

In Kandhamal, Hindu militant groups, neighbours, the police, the chief minister, the central government, acted with egregious impunity. The activities propagated by Lakshmanananda Saraswati and his followers are of serious concern to the health of society and prompt seditious, anti-minority propaganda and hate actions. The BJD-BJP coalition government in Orissa refuses to honour the constitutional mandate to maintain the separation of religion and state. Political parties, focused on politicking the issue, are ill-equipped to respond to immediate and long-term needs of people. The communal situation in the state remains at par with an emergency. The Government of Orissa has failed to respond to these issues and the serious concerns they pose to democratic governance in the state.

The state government has halted individual relief measures, stating that such action escalates tensions in the area. Church leaders organised to provide relief, which has been targeted as an act of missionising. The police have been reticent to act against Hindutva activists who mobilise Hindu contingents in and around relief camps, or take action against sectarian relief organised in the 'Hindu Relief Camp' in Karadavadi village in adjacent Ganjam district. State-organised relief and rehabilitation measures have discriminated against the Christian community and not met local needs.

The state government must provide adequate short-term supplies to the families whose homes have been destroyed. Compensation must match the values of demolished homes and enable people to rebuild and restock their dwellings. Surveys to determine losses must be undertaken collaboratively with local people, rather than ethnocentric treatment of them as a hindrance to the process, as 'thieves' intent on profiting from the situation.

Initially, in response to queries, the Orissa state government had claimed that as many as 4,000 trees may have been felled to allow for the blockade of roads and breakdown in communications. According to the forest department, it appears that as few as 351 trees may have been felled. This indicates negligence on part of the state's ability to respond and points to the frailties in communication and infrastructure networks. Faced with this, the government must undertake the necessary steps to provide adequate security to the Christian community in Kandhamal. The centre and civil society groups must monitor such action.

The CBI must immediately investigate the activities of the Bajrang Dal, VHP and RSS, and apply, as appropriate, relevant provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. Section 2G of the act, ‘unlawful association’ denotes: (1) ‘that which has for its object any unlawful activity, or which encourages or aids persons to undertake any unlawful activity, or through which the members undertake such activity’; or (2) ‘which has for its object any activity which is punishable under Section 153A or Section 153B of the Indian Penal Code 1860 ([Central Act] 45 of 1860) or which encourages or aids persons to undertake any such activity; or of which the members undertake any such activity’.

The status, actions and finances of communal groups and their affiliates and cadre, and the actions of their membership must be identified and investigated. These groups must be investigated and monitored, and, as appropriate, requisite action must be taken and sanctions be imposed on their activities, and reparations be made retroactively to the affected communities and individuals.

Certain organisations, such as the VHP and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, have been registered as charity organisations. As their work appears to be political in nature, they should be audited and recognised as political organisations. A serious concern is whether the activities of these fall within the objectives of a trust; whether in fact these organisations should have been registered as social trusts given the nature of their activities; whether the monies collected are indeed used for the purposes for which they were collected; and whether illegal and political activities are being carried out in the name of social work. Given these concerns, the charitable status and the rights and privileges enjoyed by these groups must be reviewed.

The right of individuals to undergo religious conversions is constitutionally authorised, unless under duress. Historically, conversions from Hinduism to Christianity or Islam have occurred for multiple reasons, such as being a form of resistance among the elite and as a way to escape caste oppression and social stigma for Adivasis and Dalits. Societal or Hindu ‘feelings’ about conversions to Christianity or Islam does not render these conversions inappropriate, invalid or illegal. It is only in circumstances where conversions occur coercively or are undertaken with the intent of mobilising a culture of hate, as, for example, undertaken by Hindutva activists, that conversions must be disallowed.

It must be noted that ‘reconversion’ strategies of the sangh parivar appear to be shifting in Orissa. In Kandhamal, for example, public and exhibitionist conversion ceremonies that particularly targeted (primarily Dalit and Adivasi) Christian community members and non-Christian Adivasis, forcing them to submit to Hinduism, have been fewer in number in 2007 than between 2004 and 2006. Converting politicised Adivasi and Dalit Christians to Hinduism is proving difficult for the sangh parivar. The outcry against such ceremonies from the Christian community and certain human rights groups might have influenced a shift. The sangh parivar has instead increased its emphasis on the Hinduisation of Adivasis by making them a part of Hindu rituals and ceremonies (as during the Sammelan) which, in effect, ‘convert’ Adivasis into Hinduism by assuming that they are Hindu. Such ‘conversion’ tactics are diffused and no longer have to negotiate certain legalities which public and stated conversion ceremonies did. On converting/’reconverting’ to Hinduism, Adivasis are expected to join Hindu caste

society as Sudras, a 'higher' placement than Dalits in the caste hierarchy, sangh activists say.

Dalit Christians are doubly discriminated against, as Dalits and as Christians. Post-Hinduisation, Adivasis are being mobilised against Christian groups. Adivasis are incited into targeting Dalit Christians, both fomenting Adivasi-Dalit divides and vitiating the historical solidarities between them. This is crucial to Hinduisation. It also acts to warn non-Christian Dalits against conversion to Christianity.

The Hindutvaisation of the Hindu community, and Hinduisation of the secular, allows the sangh's escalation. This process unfolded in Brahmanigaon, for example, where the growth of the business community has supported the rise of the sangh parivar. Hindutva conversions served to terrorise the Adivasi and Dalit community, via which the sangh parivar achieved its preliminary expansionist goals. While ceremonial conversions continue sporadically, a more protracted and dispersed strategy of Hinduisation through incorporation and assimilation is aggressively pursued as effective methodology.

The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967 must be repealed. Provisions for preventing and prohibiting conversions that commence under duress and coercion already exist under the Indian Penal Code (IPC). There is no basis for the existence of a separate law, especially one that sets draconian parameters and has been used by communalists to target and prohibit voluntary conversion within minority, especially Christian, communities. The Orissa Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act, 1960 too should be repealed. Provisions for preventing and prohibiting cruelty to animals already exist under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and there is no basis for the existence of a separate law, especially one which is utilised to intervene on the livelihood practices of economically disenfranchised groups with detrimental effects, such as among Adivasis, Dalits and Muslims, who engage in cattle trade and cow slaughter.

Postscript

The Kandhamal riots story betrayal, indifference, negligence – of nation, government, humanity, disregard for law and order, gendered violence enacted with impunity. 'Minorities' and other disenfranchised are denied self-determination. The state endows the 'victor', the hegemon named 'majority'.

The Kandhamal riots of 2007 barely registered in the nation's memory. Muslims targeted in the Bhadrak riots of 1991 still await justice in Orissa. The history of state accountability in preventing and administering justice in instances of majoritarian violence is frail. The incapacity of the Communal Violence (Prevention, Control and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill, 2005, introduced in the Parliament of India in December 2005 and approved by the union cabinet in March 2007, attests to this. The bill, advocated by citizen motivated efforts for the prevention of genocide and crimes against humanity, in its official formulation as introduced by the Congress government, remained deficient in defining procedures for state and public answerability. It failed to address issues of negligence displayed by state authorities in preventing and controlling communal violence, and in disbursing timely and just compensation and psychosocial rehabilitation, as well as establishing parameters for witness protection and for soliciting and recording victim testimonies. It failed to chart measures to bring justice and

accountability with regard to gender and sex-based crimes in the event of communal violence (which is not effectively addressed by the IPC or separate legislation), and in imposing checks and balances on the state and its police and security forces, whose inertia and majoritarianist complicity in communal collisions have been consistent.

In 2003, Subash Chouhan, then state convenor of the Bajrang Dal, had stated: "Orissa is the second Hindu *Rajya* (to Gujarat). Whatever happens here, say politics happens, it will have to be Hindutva politics, with Hindutva's consent." In December 2007, Narendra Modi, Gujarat chief minister, in command over police and law enforcement machinery and as such culpable for the participation of the Gujarat government in the genocide of 2,000 Muslims, was re-elected. On December 31, 2007, Prasant, upper caste RSS worker in Orissa, stated: "Gujarat remains the guiding light for Hindutva and our conscience as Hindus." Recent atrocities in Kandhamal confirm his assertion. n

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Note:

Readers will notice certain statistical and other discrepancies in the two reports on the violence in Orissa's Kandhamal district. A possible explanation for this is the time-lag between the two pieces. The preliminary report by the fact-finding team was brought out within days of the violence whereas Angana Chatterji's piece was written some weeks later.

Given the nature and inaccessibility of the terrain as well as the current status quo in Orissa, exact figures will probably not be available until some time later.

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Hindutva's Entry into a 'Hindu Province': Early Years of RSS in Orissa

Orissa retains some unique features of Hinduism manifested in particular in the Jagannath cult. Structures of pre-colonial legitimacy were reinvented by colonialism, acquiesced to by the nationalist and the post-colonial leadership/discourses and appropriated by an identity-seeking Hindu upper caste-middle class. Together these offered a congenial climate for the development of Hindutva. This paper broadly outlines the cultural, social and political climate of Orissa at the time of the entry of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and examines how this organisation, intelligently and strategically, interacted with and adapted itself to the peculiar conditions in this 'Hindu province' during the early years of its existence in the state.

by Pralay Kanungo

Various regional traditions constitute the core of India's tradition. A region is not just a specific physical entity. More importantly, it involves historical, linguistic, cultural,

social, structural, and/or the interrelations among these kind of variables.¹ Hence, it becomes important to understand how the homogenising and overarching ideology of Hindutva manifests itself in different regional contexts. Jaffrelot² makes an exhaustive and excellent study of central India, while Hansen³ focuses on Maharashtra, Jayaprasad⁴ on Kerala, and Rudd⁵ on West Bengal. Though Hindutva has made deep inroads into Orissa, there is hardly any study explaining how and why this phenomenon has had such an immense impact on this region. This paper broadly outlines the cultural, social and political climate of Orissa at the time of the entry of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the fountainhead of Hindutva, and examines how this organisation has, intelligently and strategically, interacted with and adapted itself to the peculiar conditions in this 'Hindu province' during the early years of its existence in the state.

I

Orissa: Diversities and Contradictions in a 'Hindu Province'

The formal starting point of this history is 1936, when the province was created, uniting most of the Oriya-speaking territories. Since this coincided with the carving out of a separate Muslim province ó Sindh ó it appeared as if Orissa had been created only to appease the Hindus.⁶ Indeed, this act had wider intellectual meaning for a section of the Oriya middle class, which not only embraced it but also internalised it.⁷ The colonial census, which polarised religious identities in the subcontinent,⁸ indicated that Orissa was predominantly Hindu. This was emphatically reinforced by the census department of free India as well; the 1991 Census puts the 'Hindu' population of Orissa at 94.67 per cent.⁹ Thus, working on these assumptions ó colonial categorisations, the perceptions of a section of the Oriya middle class, and free India's census assessments ó the RSS regards Orissa as a 'Hindu province'. Hence, it is pertinent to outline some of the features of this 'Hindu province' and examine how Hindutva fits in here.

The early history of modern Orissa remains rather obscure. The territories that constitute the present-day state were known under various names in different historical periods: Utkala, Kalinga, Kosala and Udra. Orissa's topography and geography shaped its history to a large extent. It comprises mainly two regions: the coastal plains and the highlands. If the forests and mountains of the highlands made the region inaccessible, the river system of the coastal plains was not friendly either. This gave the impression that Orissa was always terra incognita, by reason of its geographical position, and local circumstances.¹⁰ Besides this, in comparison to north and central India, parts of Orissa came under 'Muslim rule' three centuries later, in 1568. Even the victorious general of Akbar reportedly did not find it a fit subject for conquest, or for schemes of human ambition.¹¹ Thus, Orissa's geography and topography helped to preserve its indigenous cultural identity to a large extent. But at the same time it remained very much connected with its neighbours, absorbing a series of cultural waves from the north and the south into its indigenous culture; Aryans and dravidians both intermingled here with the natives. The Sadhabas of coastal Orissa, a sea-faring community, established enduring commercial as well as cultural links with south-east Asia, particularly Indonesia.

The Kapila Samhita describes Orissa as the 'Holy Land' of the Hindus: 'Of all the regions of the earth India is the noblest; and of all the countries of India, Utkala boasts

the highest renown. From end to end it is one vast region of pilgrimage.¹² But Orissa had also experienced the strong influence of both Jainism and Buddhism. The Khandagiri and Udayagiri inscriptions reveal that Jainism flourished here much before the advent of Buddhism. According to Jain literary sources, the king of Kalinga was a disciple of Parsavnatha (eighth century BC), the 23rd Tirthankara, and Mahavira himself had visited Kalinga. Jainism reached its peak during Kharavela's reign (first century BC), after which it slowly died out. Buddhist literature claims that after the Buddha's death, one of his tooth-relics was carried to the capital of Kalinga. Buddhism spread extensively in Orissa after the Kalinga War (third century BC) and remained predominant till the fifth century AD, particularly in Odra, Kalinga and Kosala, and then gradually disappeared by the 10th century AD. Saivism triumphed over Buddhism in the fifth century AD; an Asokan pillar was converted into a colossal shivling at the Bhaskaresvra temple in Bhubaneswar, indicating a violent struggle between the two faiths. The Madalapanji, the chronicle of the Jagannath temple, records that the Ganga rulers, the great patrons of brahmanical Hinduism, persecuted the Buddhists. Along with persecuting non-Hindus, attempts were also made to assimilate them into the Hindu fold. Jayadeva's Gita Govinda (12th century AD) describes the Buddha as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu. Although both Buddhism and Jainism completely disappeared from Orissa, their legacy of non-violence and religious meditation deeply influenced its people.

Consequently, Hinduism in Orissa had never been a monolithic discourse; rather it represented a confluence of diverse cults and sects, such as Saivism, Vaishnavism, Tantrism and Saktism, reflecting a marvellous mosaic: sanskritic and non-sanskritic, all-India and regional/local,¹³ textual and popular,¹⁴ urban and village.¹⁵ The coastal region and the river valleys were home to innumerable Hindu temples and monuments, all testifying to the magnificent indigenous architectural genius. This assertive sub-region had strictly upheld brahmanical traditions and the rituals of ceremonial purity. It was also home to many repugnant superstitions¹⁶ and obnoxious caste prejudices for centuries; the dominant caste Hindus like the brahmanas, the karanas, and the khandayats controlled the lives of the subaltern lower castes and the untouchables.¹⁷

In contrast to the coastal plains, a fairly large adivasi population lived/lives in the forests and highland areas throughout Orissa's history. Even today, the state has as many as 62 adivasi communities, which constitute roughly one-fourth of its population.¹⁸ The adivasi population is substantial in districts like Mayurbhanj (57.9 per cent), Koraput (54.3 per cent), Sundargarh (50.7 per cent), Keonjhar (44.5 per cent) and Phulbani (37.3 per cent). These adivasis have their own pantheon of gods and goddesses and their own shamanic practices.¹⁹ In contrast to the brahmanical vedic rituals, some adivasi communities like the khonds practised ěmeriahí or human sacrifices till the mid-19th century. Hence, in Orissa the gods of brahmanism are worshipped along with the minor deities outside the brahmanical pantheon, and the great traditions coexist with the little traditions.

The most significant feature, however, is the unique position of Jagannath of Puri in the religio-cultural and political traditions of Orissa. Although the cult has a rather recent history, its ěancientnessí is projected since it is a major component of the process of homogenisation.²⁰ Though Jagannath is identified as ěOrissa's god/cultí there are major complexities that need to be delineated. First, although Puri is the chief seat of brahmanical power in eastern India, Jagannath has a strong adivasi connection.²¹ It is

widely believed that originally the savaras worshipped Jagannath as Nilamadhaba in the Nilakandara (Blue Caves). The iconography also speaks of the adivasi origin of the ětrinityí ó Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra. Further, the etymology of Madalapanji suggests its roots in the Mundari word ěmudalaí, which means to establish with evidence, confront with proof.²² Thus, the Hinduisation of Orissa needs to be seen as a two-way process in which not only were some features of Hinduism incorporated into the adivasi cults, but also vice versa. Second, the decision of Anantavarman Codaganga, a saivite, to build a temple in Puri in the middle of the 12th century for Jagannath, an incarnation of Vishnu, was based on political considerations; it was a pragmatic response to the rising tide of Vaisnavism in Orissa. Thus, from its very inception, the cult of Jagannath was conceived of as a legitimising agency for the rulers of Orissa.²³ Eventually, Aanangabhima III dedicated the Orissan empire to Jagannath and proclaimed himself as godís ědeputyí (ěrauttaí). Jagannath was elevated as ěthe king of the kingdom of Orissai (Madalapanji); a similar description is found in the ěKanchi Kaverií, the legendary poem of Purusottama Das. Not surprisingly, all those who ruled Orissa ó the Mughals, the Marathas and the English East India Company ó sought legitimacy and hegemonic control by acknowledging the supra-temporal authority of Jagannath, at least notionally.

The emergence of a virtual ěcommon senseí (going back to the colonial period) makes it appear that since the Afghan subjugation of Orissa in 1568, Jagannath emerged as a key player in the political arena of the province. After this ědrubbingí, the Oriya-speaking territory was divided into several political and administrative units, which split further during the periods of Mughal, Maratha and British rule. However, throughout these centuries Jagannath remained a potent rallying symbol, reinforcing the collective regional and ethnic identity of the territorially fragmented Oriyas. Consequently, an identity incorporating Jagannath as a crucial unifying element took shape.²⁴

Inventing Identities: ěOriyai, ěHindui and ěIndiani

The quest for uniting the Oriya-speaking areas into a single territory gained momentum in the late 19th century. The search for Oriya identity found a powerful expression in Oriya literature and the Oriya language agitation. Two other variants of identity also emerged during this period: ěHindui identity and ěIndiani identity. Thus, Orissa experienced the interplay of three types of identities that developed around three forms of nationalism: Oriya, Hindu and Indian.²⁵

Radhanath Rayís epic Mahajatra and Ramashankar Rayís play ěKanchi Kaverií projected a sort of vague ěHindui nation. As Orissa had a predominantly Hindu population and since Jagannath was a powerful symbol of Oriya identity, obviously, these perceptions did not much distinguish between Hindu nationalism and Oriya nationalism. Even the advocates of Indian nationalism in Orissa, like Gopabandhu Das, swore by Jagannath. As Das wrote: if the world were a tank and India a lotus in it, then the filament of that lotus would be the holy Nilacala (Puri).²⁶ Gopabandhu, a devout Hindu, became president of the Hindu Mahasabhaiís Orissa branch in 1927. For Madhusudan Das, an ardent champion of Oriya nationalism, Jagannath was not merely a Hindu deity but was also an embodiment of the Oriya nation. Das, a Christian, was twice elected president of the All India Christian Association. However, his religious faith did not stand in the way of his efforts to unify the Oriya-speaking tracts, with Jagannath as

the pivot. In 1928 he passionately appealed to all Oriyas to utter in one voice, 'Save us, Lord Jagannath' and to pray to him to end the darkness and usher in a period of progress and prosperity.

Thus, all the three variants of identity complemented each other and were woven around Jagannath and his cult. Consequently, Oriya identity was shaped not only by the Hindu religion but also by a host of other elements, including Orissa's specific regional and cultural traditions in which Jagannath was made to play a crucial symbolic role. This identity could be harmonised with the broader 'Indian' identity as well as with the search for autonomy that saw the formation of the province.²⁷ This symbolically freighted tradition has continuities even today and remains an important component of the process of political mobilisation.²⁸

Non-Hindu Others

Let us now examine the way in which non-Hindus have been located in the social landscape of Orissa, a feature that perhaps explains why the task of the RSS has been made relatively easy. What we will illustrate here is the way in which a history of Orissa has been virtually invented, and also examine the problems and complexities raised by drawing upon colonialist and nationalist representations in the reconstruction of this history.

Muslims

As this history reveals, Orissa's permanent relationship with Muslims began only in 1568 when Kalapahar, the general of the Afghan ruler of Bengal, defeated Mukunda Deva, the last independent Hindu king of Orissa. The Mughals replaced the Afghans in 1578 and continued to rule for about two centuries.²⁹ In 1751, Orissa passed into the hands of the Marathas³⁰ and it finally came under the British in 1803. The 'Muslim conquest' of Orissa was not only late chronologically compared to other regions of India, but it also failed to attain the strength and permanence as it did in neighbouring Bengal.³¹ Islam failed to penetrate among the native population. The minuscule Muslim population of Orissa included a few people of Afghan descent, but the rest were largely the descendants of common soldiers, camp followers and low-caste converts.³² It does not appear, however, that the Mohammedans or any other invaders, ever completely occupied or colonised the province, which still remains one of those in which Hindu manners are preserved in their greatest purity, and where the smallest proportion of Mohammedans is to be found.³³ Thus, unlike Bengal, ³⁴ in Orissa, conversions did not take place on a large scale; Islam could make few converts in this 'stronghold of Hinduism'. As this history shows, during the two centuries of the Muslim occupation of Orissa, Lord Jagannath and Puri were subjected to attacks beginning from the time of Kalapahar,³⁵ and continuing under Mutquod Khan (during Shah Jahan's reign) and Taki Khan (during Aurangzeb's reign). Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that temples had been the natural sites for the contestation of kingly authority well before the advent of the Turks in India.³⁶ In the 1460s, Kapilendra, the founder of the Suryavamshi Gajapati dynasty in Orissa, sacked both Saiva and Vaishnava temples in the Kaveri delta in the course of conquering the Tamil country.³⁷ Thus, an act of temple desecration sometimes was also an act of asserting power over the enemy king.

Moreover, there were exceptions, even during the period of ėMuslimí rule. The Mughal emperors, from Akbar onwards, began to treat temples within their sovereign territory as state property and undertook to protect both the physical structures as well as their brahman functionaries.³⁸ Akbarís commander Mansingh forced the Afghans to undertake a guarantee not to attack the Jagannath temple. Mansinghís wife built the Mukti Mandap, the seat of brahman authority, inside the temple. Mir Habib, the confidant of Murshid Quli Khan, also promoted the cause of the Jagannath Temple. Although he embraced Islam, the Raja of Khurda Rama Chandra Deva II (18th century) tried to protect Jagannath from falling into the hands of the invading army of the Subedar of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Interestingly, as the Madalapanji records, he was allowed to perform ritual services to Jagannath despite being a convert.

Moreover, Sufism gained popularity in Orissa and led to the emergence of the Satya-Pir tradition.³⁹ Even today Hindus worship Satyanarayan and Pir together, an example of the synthesis of Hinduism and Sufism in the province.⁴⁰ Large numbers of Hindus visit Sufi shrines like Kadam Rasul in Cuttack and Bukhari Sahib in Kaipadar, near Khurda. Even today one can see a few wandering fakirs, the Sufi followers, who have been unfortunately forced into begging. ėMuslimí rule also left an indelible imprint on Oriya language and literature. Many Persian and Arabic words remained foreign no longer and were very much internalised by Oriya writers and readers.⁴¹ Before the 18th century, their use by Oriya writers was negligible, probably for two reasons: either because of their bitterness towards Muslim rule or due to their insufficient knowledge of these languages. However, in the late 18th century they began using these words more frequently. Fakirmohan Senapati, the father of modern Oriya literature, used many Persian and Arabic words like ėmamlái, ėchalaní, ėlaikí, ėgafliyatií, ėadmií, ėdaulatí, ėmehenatí, ėkhodí, ėmalikí, ėbabadí, ėkhatarí, ėdastakhatí, ėlashí, ėpeshí, ėtarafí, ėkhalasí, ėtadarakhí, ėustadí, and ėmeherbanií in his novels and stories.⁴² Salbeg, a very popular Oriya poet, who had a Mughal (Muslim) father and a Brahman mother, composed innumerable bhajans dedicated to Jagannath, which are recited every morning at the Jagannath temple even today.

Furthermore, the Hindu-Muslim relationship was not one-sided. Muslims, who were mainly local converts, continued to observe some of their old religio-cultural practices. Though the urban Muslims consciously adopted Persian, the Muslims of rural Orissa retained Oriya as their mother tongue. Even the Persian used by the urban Muslims was heavily loaded with Oriya, thus creating a distinct local variant of Persian. At certain places Muslims continued (and still continue) to be associated with certain Hindu religious practices. For instance, during Durga Puja, the ėkatwalí of Tapang in Khurda district, a Muslim, actively participates in the Hindu rituals. Sporting a ėpagrií and a ėtilakí, he leads the religious procession to his home where the goddess accepts ėbhogaí (offerings).

These instances of a syncretic culture do not of course deny the occasional assertion of ėHinduí identity over the Muslims. However, Hindus and Muslims by and large lived in peace and harmony in Orissa. In contrast, the rationale of Hindutva is primarily based upon the reification of enemy symbols: the demonisation of minorities like the Muslims and the Christians as the ėotherí. As the Muslim population is very small in Orissa, Hindutva does not find here a tailor-made ground for its easy propagation, prompting the RSS to assert that its expansion in Orissa is not based on an anti-Muslim thrust. The Orissa unit claims to be more positive and constructive in its approach than its

counterparts in other provinces where Muslims are found in substantial numbers.⁴³ However, this projection seems to be only partially true if one closely examines the history of the various stages in the evolution of Hindutva in Orissa.

Christians

Coastal Orissa came in contact with Christian missionaries towards the end of the 18th century when it became a maritime centre for European traders ó English, French, Dutch, Danes and Portuguese. A Catholic church came up in Jaleswar and a Wesleyan church in Ganjam. The Serampore missionaries of Bengal translated the New Testament and a few other Christian tracts into Oriya and sent a Bengali convert to Cuttack and Puri to distribute literature and preach Christianity, but with no success.

When the British took control of Orissa from the Marathas in 1803, Lord Wellesley, the governor general, issued instructions to employ every possible precaution to preserve the respect due to the Pagoda, and to the religious prejudices of the brahmins and the pilgrims.⁴⁴ The British were pragmatic enough to take over the superintendence and management of the Puri temple and to continue with the Maratha practice of collecting the pilgrim tax. The missionaries, on the other hand, vehemently opposed the government's association with the temple and put constant pressure on it to sever its connection with idolatry. They ridiculed the pilgrimage to Jagannath as 'the greatest scourge' and deplored the gruesome acts of self-immolation and the many deaths that occurred during the car festival, citing highly exaggerated statistics. To them, Jagannath epitomised 'vice, suffering, loss of life and other evils' and the government's decision to become the 'church warden' of Hindu deities was 'unchristian'. After a long struggle, the missionaries finally succeeded; in 1856 the government severed all connections and formalised its decision to hand over the superintendence and management of the temple to the raja of Khurda.

Though the sole aim of the missionaries was to evangelise Orissa, it became a Herculean task to find a convert among the followers of Jagannath. The first mission was set up in Orissa in 1822, but it took six years to convert a native. In 1827 Erun Senapati, a Telugu-Oriya weaver, was baptised; but in a real sense the first Oriya convert was Gangadhar Sarangi, a brahman of Tangi in Cuttack district. Gangadhar, who was baptised in 1828, was a disciple of Sadhusundar Das, a Hindu ascetic who preached monotheism and anti-idolatry. Though Christianity impressed Das and he encouraged his followers to read Christian theology, he himself never wanted to be converted. However, some of his followers embraced Christianity, boosting the morale of the early missionaries. But Orissa never experienced a large-scale conversion to Christianity. Initially, each convert had to be won individually. And contrary to conventional wisdom, most of the early converts were from the upper castes and their motive was not material gain. They converted only after a thorough reading of the Christian scriptures and comparing these with the Hindu shastras. Subsequently, the missionaries won some converts through their schools and orphanages. In later stages, they moved into the tribal areas where they had a better success rate. And here, unlike the early stages of the evangelisation movement, the decision to convert was based on many motivations, including the material.

The missionaries confronted many obstacles in their attempt to evangelise Orissa: rigid social customs, illiteracy, unfavourable climate, lack of communication, and more

importantly, the overarching spiritual influence of Jagannath. Undaunted by these heavy odds the missionaries continued their work. They vehemently attacked idolatry, female infanticide and human sacrifice; educated the illiterate; opened asylums, orphanages and hospitals for the poor, the homeless, and the sick; and served the destitute during famines. Their evangelical mission ushered in a new Oriya literary movement. The Reverend A Sutton compiled an Oriya-English grammar, an Oriya Dictionary, translated Gita Govinda, Amarkosa, Batrish Singhasan, and edited the Oriya Gazette; W C Lacey composed Oriya Grammar and J Phillip authored Geography of Orissa. A number of newspapers and journals sprang up. The missionaries opened schools and hospitals in the inaccessible tribal areas. Though evangelisation was their primary objective, their philanthropic role also needs to be underlined.

Thus, Hindu-Muslim and Hindu-Christian encounters in Orissa, despite occasional hostility, were never inimical. There was no large-scale conversion among Oriyas either to Islam or Christianity, and Muslims and Christians hardly ever appeared threatening to Hindus in terms of their numbers or their éothernessí, since both these communities, despite their different religions, were part of the same Oriya cultural traditions. Against this backdrop, it is interesting to observe how Hindutva made its entry into present-day Orissa.

II. Hindutva and the Jagannath Culture

The RSS considers the Jagannath-Oriya-Hindu-Indian interconnection an ideal framework for the spread of Hindutva. It understands very well the positive implications of the pre-colonial/colonial/Oriya Hindu upper caste-middle class construction of the Jagannath cult and its symbolic importance in the religious, social, cultural and political life of the Oriyas. Hence, it depicts the culture of Orissa as Jagannath Sanskruti because this overarching culture surpasses and dominates all other sects and little traditions. True, many counter traditions and critiques like the Mahima Dharma did emerge, but ultimately these were absorbed into the broad fold of the Jagannath cult.⁴⁵ Hence, the RSS realises the futility of projecting Hindutva as an alternative; it claims, rather wisely, its ideological affinity with the Jagannath culture.⁴⁶

The RSS characterises Jagannath as a évanavasií (tribal) deity and Orissa as a vanavasi province; the Oriyas, it believes, possess a vanavasi character, still retaining the primitive innocence, simplicity and honesty of a tribal society. Hence, the RSS claims to find the popular character (élok charitraí) of Orissa receptive to its ideology. What perhaps guides this line of thinking is that it is easier to influence the bulk of the poor, illiterate, deeply religious, unassuming and non-assertive people of this economically backward province. However, the Oriya character, if such a thing does exist, should not be seen as monolithic and unchanging. Within Orissa, it not only differs from one region to another, but also varies from one class to the other. Moreover, peopleís character is not fixed and immutable; it very much changes over time. While Kingsford⁴⁷ praised the courage and fearlessness shown in 1730 by the peasant militia of Balasore district, A. Stirling⁴⁸ characterised the Oriyas in the plains as the most mild, quiet, inoffensive, and easily managed people in the Companyís provinces. If one could speak of a monolithic Oriya character at all, then it must be conceded that it has been shaped by a host of factors: topography and the furies of nature, emergence and decline of different religious sects and cults, long absence of an encompassing dynastic rule, fragmentation and annexation of its territory, strong influence of neo-Vaisnavism under Chaitanya,

tyrannies of Muslims, Marathas and native Hindu rajas, British colonial intervention, struggle for an Oriya identity, Indian freedom movement, and the post-colonial experience. Hence, the formation of the Oriya character is the result of a complex historical process, and is not based on a fondly imagined unspoiled, pure and innocent vanavasi identity, as the RSS romantically portrays.

The RSS further argues that bhakti (devotion) constitutes the core of the Jagannath culture and that the Oriyas are devout Hindus. As devotion to the nation is the theme of Hindutva, the RSS regards this ideology to be in consonance with Oriya traditions. However, the RSS differentiates between these two forms of bhakti. As a senior pracharak observes, though the Oriyas are a deeply spiritual people, they emphasise the personal aspect of religion, and hence they concentrate on puja (worship), bhajan (devotional song), upavas (fasting), etc, for the self-realisation of god and for personal salvation. But they do not display a similar devotion to the nation. The major challenge for the RSS is to channelise the devotional and spiritual energy of the Oriyas towards the Hindu Rashtra. Surely, bhakti constitutes the core of the Jagannath tradition, demanding the devotee's personal identification with and submergence into the Lord. The Bhaktisutra of Narada defines this as parama prema, highest love for the Lord, possessing immortality in itself, gaining which a person becomes perfect, immortal and satisfied, attaining which a person does not desire anything, does not hate, does not exult, does not exert himself or herself (in furtherance of self-interest).¹⁴⁹ Though the RSS demands bhakti or a complete surrender to the Hindu nation, there exists a fundamental difference; while the Jagannath tradition is broad and flexible and allows the maximum philosophical and ontological autonomy to the devotee to attain selfless spiritual bliss, the political Hinduism of the RSS variety is precariously narrow and rigid, training its followers to tread the mundane path into the murky world of desire, conflict, hatred and otherness.

Samanwaya (harmony) and catholicism remain at the core of the Jagannath culture as well as of Hindutva, claims the RSS, since both are integrationist in nature. The RSS argues that there is no polarisation of castes despite the prevalence of the caste system in Orissa. While the interplay of caste politics is intense in other provinces, the RSS does not find it a threat here; hence, it is easier to propagate Hindutva. True, every Hindu sect and creed can seek shelter under the broad canopy of Jagannath, but there is also an extended list of exclusion.⁵⁰ The temple not only prohibited entry to Muslims, Christians and Jews, but it also shut its door to low caste Hindus, flesh-eating aboriginals and even fallen women's practices which reveal a close resemblance between brahmanical Hinduism and Hindutva. But this exclusion was partly based on the notion of purity and pollution in religious practices, and is certainly not akin to Hindutva's cerebral engagement with the other. Philosophically, Jagannath (Lord of the Universe) symbolises everything that is broad and universal. He lives in Badadeula (grand temple), strolls along the Badadanda (grand road), bathes in the Mahodadhi (grand ocean) and eats Mahaprasad (grand food). Even in practice, Mahaprasad, the rice that has once been placed before the god can never cease to be pure nor lose its reflected sanctity. 'The lowest may demand it from, or give it to, the highest. Its sanctity overleaps the barriers, not only of caste, but of race and hostile faiths; and a Puri priest will stand the test of receiving the food from a Christian's hand.'⁵¹ Jagannath is patitpavan, the god of the down-trodden; he comes out on the street during the rath yatra, breaking all barriers of caste, creed and even religion. In contrast to Jagannath's message of universal brotherhood and love, Hindutva propagates a limited vision of the

saffron brotherhood and its catholicism does not even embrace all the Hindu sects and traditions, but is confined only to the believers in the Hindu Rashtra. More importantly, these two traditions vary significantly in their approaches towards the non-Hindus. Hence, it would be useful to examine the evolution of communal politics in Orissa.

III. Emergence of Communal Politics: Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League

Soon after its creation in 1936, Orissa also experienced the competitive communal politics that characterised this period. The capital Cuttack obviously became the epicentre. The Orissa branch of the Muslim League was opened in Cuttack in February 1938. Fazlul Haque, chief minister of Bengal, addressed the Muslim Students Conference in Cuttack on May 20 and 21, 1938, calling for the creation of a compact organisation. The Jamait-ul-ulema organised a meeting in Salepur, Cuttack district in December. Nor were the Hindus silent. On January 24, 1940, the Hindu Mahasabha opened a branch in Puri, the famous Hindu pilgrimage centre, with the raja of Madhupur as its president. Just a month later the Orissa branch of the Muslim League became affiliated to the All-India Muslim League.⁵²

Pro-war and anti-war politics caught up in Orissa as well. The All Utkal Hindu Mahasabha strongly criticised the Congress policy of non-violence, advocated assistance to the government in its war efforts and also called for the enrolment of Hindu youth in the army. In a meeting held in Cuttack on September 15, 1941, Manmohan Choudhury, a Hindu Mahasabha leader from Bengal, called upon the Hindus to strengthen organisations like the Ram Sena and the Mahabir Dal for the advancement of military power and underlined the necessity of establishing a national militia in every district to protect the legitimate interests of Hindus. The Muslim League's response was identical. Nawab Ismail Khan, Choudhury Kaliquat Zamam and Muhammad Isa Khan of the All India Muslim Defence Committee arrived in Cuttack on May 15, 1942 and contacted the prominent Muslims of the town. They opened a branch of the Defence Committee and appealed to the Muslim youth to enrol. The visitors explained the Pakistan scheme to the Muslims and exhorted them to open branches of the Muslim League to safeguard the interests of their community. The Hindu Mahasabha was no less active; Sadasiva Nanda Sharma, its organising secretary, toured different parts of Orissa in September-October 1943, urging Hindus to organise and assert their religious, political and cultural rights. The All India Hindu Dharma Seva Sangha was formed in Puri⁵³ in May 1944; the Sangha called upon Hindu youth to enlist in the army in large numbers so that they might be equal to the Muslims in military achievements⁵⁴ and also advocated measures for doing away with untouchability and reconversion of ex-Hindus.⁵⁴

Some Muslims observed Direct Action Day on August 16, 1946 in Cuttack and characterised the Congress as a Hindu organisation. The meeting called upon the Orissa Muslim title holders to renounce their titles in protest against the Cabinet Mission Plan. The Muslim League organised meetings and processions in Sambalpur and Balasore seeking Muslim support for Jinnah. In its meetings held on September 16 and 17, 1946, its working committee passed a resolution urging the Bihar government to take measures for the relief and rehabilitation of riot-affected Muslims and began raising money for the victims. The atmosphere was further surcharged after the riots in East Bengal and Calcutta in October 1946. A section of Hindus in Orissa proposed to form a Hindu militia and set up defence committees in each village. Printed leaflets in Oriya entitled *ējatir dakaí* (community's call) were circulated in Cuttack urging Hindus to boycott

Muslims in all respects. As a result, panic spread among the Muslims. Protesting against the Noakhali riots, the Hindus did not celebrate Diwali with their customary gusto in most parts of Orissa and instead observed hartals in many places. Some Hindus urged the Muslims of Orissa to appeal to the Muslims of Bengal to refrain from indulging in communal riots as it might lead to disastrous consequences in Orissa, where the Muslims were in a minority.⁵⁵ In 1947 the Muslim League in Orissa decided to collect a sum of Rs 20,000 to set up its own press and also to raise a 'Pakistan Fund'. It also set up a committee to acquaint the members of the constituent assembly from Orissa with their grievances.

It is clear that much of the Hindu-Muslim tension arose primarily in response to communal situations outside Orissa. Unlike people in other provinces, the Oriyas were neither violent nor vicious and hardly harboured communal hatred. On certain occasions, tensions between the two communities did emerge as a result of internal socio-economic dynamics. For example, during the 1943 famine, the conflict between the Muslims wage earners and the Hindu landlords in Bhadrak resulted in police firing on a 'Muslim' gathering which obstructed a 'Hindu' procession.⁵⁶ Moreover, all Muslims did not support Muslim communal politics. For instance, in June 1939 the Muslim Youngmen's Organisation was formed in Balasore (for lending service to the Communists when needed); the 'Nationalist' Muslims, in a meeting held in Cuttack on April 4, 1940, condemned the communal policy of Jinnah and extended support to the Congress.⁵⁷ Similarly, a large majority of Hindus shunned the Hindu communal politics of the Hindu Mahasabha. As a result, despite the occasional eruption of communal tensions, to the immortal credit of Orissa, 'not a single drop of human blood was shed on her sacred soil'.⁵⁸

RSS in Orissa

Meanwhile, the RSS was looking to make its entry into this recently created province. But due to its expanding activities in west, north-west and north India, there were not enough pracharaks to begin full-fledged work in Orissa. Hence, at this stage it could not treat Orissa as a separate province (prant) from its organisational standpoint. However, during the 1940s, the pracharaks working in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar initiated Sangh work in the border areas of Orissa which abutted their state boundaries.⁵⁹ Anantalal Shrivastav introduced a shakha in Sambalpur in western Orissa and Purnananda Swami in Ganjam in southern Orissa. Mukund Rao Moonje, a nephew of B S Moonje, came from Bilaspur, Madhya Pradesh to start a unit (shakha) in Cuttack. These initial organising activities received a severe jolt after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination and the subsequent banning of the RSS. The large-scale arrests of the RSS cadres all over the country created fear and panic among its sympathisers in Orissa. Even some active supporters severed their links with this organisation.

Soon after the lifting of the ban in 1949, the RSS declared Orissa as a separate province (prant) and Golwalkar deputed Baburao Paldhikar⁶⁰ as the first prant pracharak. When Paldhikar reached Orissa there was practically no RSS presence in the state. He arrived in Cuttack, the political and commercial centre of Orissa, and made this city his base of operations. He hired a one-room tenement in the Jaunliapati marwari basa (rest house). Mukund Rao Moonje introduced him to some non-Oriya businessmen who were RSS sympathisers. Paldhikar started a morning shakha at the Marwari Club grounds of Manik Ghosh Bazar.

Disseminating Hindutva

Initial Strategy of Penetration

Paldhikar adopted the usual style of RSS operations in a new area ó establishing and extending its sphere of influence through the local notables (ēbishista byaktisī).⁶¹ In accordance with his strategy, he first met Nilakantha Das, an important political figure who had been a member of the central legislative assembly for more than two decades (1924-45). Nilakantha was initially sceptical, but Paldhikar was able to convince him of the RSS mission. His second meeting was with Godavaris Misra, a noted educationist and a former minister of Orissa. Paldhikar found that he had a soft corner for the RSS. Godavaris provided him with a list of prominent Oriya educationists and lawyers.⁶² Accordingly, Paldhikar contacted Jadumani Mangaraj, Laxminarayan Sahu and other notables and found them quite favourably inclined towards the rss. None of these notables blamed the rss for Gandhiís assassination; and to Paldhikarís surprise Mangaraj even went to the extent of describing Nathuram Godse as God Se (from god).⁶³

Why were these notables sympathetically inclined towards the RSS? Their socio-political background probably influenced their decision. Nilakantha and Godavaris belonged to the powerful brahman community of Sakhigopal of Puri; Mangaraj⁶⁴ belonged to the militant khandayat (kshatriya) caste; and Sahu hailed from a resourceful native trading community. All of them were also Congress dissidents. Nilakantha and Godavaris were Swarajists and also had links with the Hindu Mahasabha. Nilakantha was expelled from the Congress in 1941 for his propaganda against Gandhiís policy of non-violence and for advocating participation in the British war effort.⁶⁵ In 1941, he was instrumental in forming a coalition government with the Muslim League in Orissa on the advice of Subhas Chandra Bose.⁶⁶ Along with Godavaris he actively campaigned for raising subscriptions to the war fund. In 1943, Nilakantha was elected president of the Utkal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha⁶⁷ and made an unsuccessful attempt to bring the entire Swaraj Party in Orissa into the fold of the Hindu Mahasabha. In 1944, while the Congress supported Rajgopalachariís proposal for Hindu-Muslim unity, the notable exceptions in Orissa included Nilakantha Das and Laxminarayan Sahu.⁶⁸

Nilakantha provided some tangible help to the infant organisation; he permitted the RSS to hold shakhas on his Navbharat Press grounds at Banka Bazar, Cuttack. Reciprocating the gesture, the RSS invited Nilakantha to preside over its prestigious Vijaya Dasmi Utsav held in Nagpur in October 1950. This was significant for the RSS for two reasons: first, the participation of a well known Congressman in its major annual function, soon after the lifting of the ban, would erase the taint of its alleged involvement in Gandhiís assassination to some extent; and second, close association with a leading Oriya notable would help the RSS to gain the benefit of his socio-political links in the state, where it was struggling to establish a foothold. Nilakantha accepted the invitation, and Golwalkar himself received his guest of honour at the Nagpur railway station. Nilakanthaís speech was inspiring to the RSS.⁶⁹ He said that the term Hindu was not communal; it was only another name for Arya which means shreshtha or the highest. It stands for iall that is good and noble in life and there was no reason why we should be ashamed of calling ourselves Hindus.î Nilakantha reminded his audience that the Bhonslas of Nagpur had saved Utkal province from being overrun by ēalien raidersí. He predicted great glory for the organisation: iThe RSS, born in Nagpur, was once again going to be the redeemerî,

with this difference, that this time it will be the behaviour not only of Utkal province but of the whole India.⁷⁰ Here it is pertinent to briefly examine the place of Maratha rule in the history of Orissa, a somewhat controversial subject. Colonial historiography refers to Maratha rule, oppression and bloodshed and describes the advent of the Berar Marathas as 'the greatest of all calamities'.⁷¹ However, the Madalapanji is silent on this aspect; rather it mentions, though briefly, the contributions and grants made by the Marathas to the Jagannath Temple and their help to the raja of Khurda. The Marathas, as Stietencron observes, 'energetically patronised a revival of Hindu culture' in Orissa.⁷² It is interesting to note that the debate between the Socialists and the RSS in Orissa also occasionally refers to Maratha rule; while the RSS attacks the bigotry of the Mughals, the Socialists remind them of the terror perpetrated by the Maratha bargis which is still fresh in the collective memory of the Oriyas.⁷³

Another Oriya notable Prana Krishna Parija, a distinguished scientist and educationist, also presided over the Vijaya Dasmi function in Nagpur. Both Parija and Golwalkar were the products of the Benaras Hindu University. Parija introduced the RSS into Oriya intellectual circles. During Golwalkar's visit to Orissa, he organised a meeting at his residence at which prominent Oriya intellectuals interacted with the RSS chief.⁷⁴ The third Oriya to preside over this function was Dinabandhu Sahu, a prominent Congressman.

Shaping the Organisation

Besides his liaisons with the Oriya notables and Marwari businessmen, Paldhikar toured extensively and set up new shakhas. While keeping command at the Cuttack headquarters, he strategically positioned an army of efficient non-Oriya, mainly Maharashtrian, pracharaks: Sadanand Pantawane in Balasore, Vasant Rao Bapat in Puri, Vasant Rao Agarkar in Cuttack, Pravakar Shastri in Berhampur, Shridhar Acharya in Bolangir, Narayan Mandal in Rourkela, Chintamani Kavthekar in Sambalpur and Baburao Deshpande in Sundargarh. These dedicated pracharaks interacted with the local notables, established shakhas, and recruited young boys with their innovative methods.⁷⁵

The RSS in Orissa regularly invited its central leaders and organised public functions to propagate its ideology and encourage the new recruits. Golwalkar's annual visits were quite inspiring and motivated the recruits and activists. These visits also offered useful opportunities to interact with the notables at the state and district levels. Deendayal Upadhyay once addressed a public meeting at the Cuttack Town Hall which was attended by many notables. Deendayal's frail physique and young age did not initially impress Nilakantha, who presided over the meeting. But his speech turned out to be so impressive that Nilakantha endorsed the RSS ideology in his presidential address. Godavaris, extending the vote of thanks, suggested that Deendayal's speech be printed and dispatched to prominent Oriya notables.⁷⁶

In 1956, commemorating the 51st birthday of Golwalkar, the RSS launched a 51-day 'ġjan samparak' programme and also raised a fund ('ġsampark nidhi') from the public. The Orissa unit organised an impressive function in Baripada town in which many 'ġprant pracharaks' and 'ġprant sanghchalaks' participated. L N Sahu wrote a small pamphlet on Golwalkar. At the all-India level, the RSS contacted more than 40 lakh people and collected a sum of Rs 21 lakhs. The Orissa unit reached out to 23,000 adults

and contributed Rs 9,417.77 The notables and the Marwari businessmen facilitated the collection.

During the 1966 ěgo raksha andolaní the RSS undertook a campaign and reportedly collected more than 20 million signatures from around the country. It was easy to mobilise popular support on the issue as the cow is venerated all over the state. Incidentally, the Orissa government had already passed the Orissa Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act in 1960. Nilakantha and other notables took the initiative in the signature drive; reportedly the governor of Orissa was the first signatory to the memorandum.

Side by side, the RSS laid the foundation of the Sangh parivar. In 1964, Deendayal Upadhyay started the Orissa unit of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) in Jharsuguda and appointed Shridhar Acharya, a veteran pracharak, as the state organising secretary. Also in the same year the RSS launched Rashtradeepa, an Oriya weekly, to propagate its ideology. In 1967, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) inaugurated its Orissa unit by organising the first state conference in Puri. Saroj Mitra, a pracharak, was appointed the state organising secretary. In 1966, about a hundred delegates from Orissa went to Prayag to attend the first Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) conference, which incidentally was inaugurated by Bishwanath Das, governor of Uttar Pradesh, an Oriya who was also a prominent congressman and Vedic scholar. The VHP opened its Orissa chapter soon after, with Kanakalata Devi, the Rajmata of the former feudatory state of Narasinghpur, as the president and Bhupendra Kumar Basu, then prant karyavah of the RSS, as the vice president. A RSS pracharak Raghunath Sethi was appointed as the secretary and a well known businessman Narasingh Das Bhavsingha became the treasurer. The executive committee comprised many distinguished personalities. The VHP organised the first state conference in Chandikhol in 1968 and constituted a reception committee under the chairmanship of an influential baba, Bhairabananda.⁷⁸ Pabitra Mohan Pradhan, deputy chief minister in the Swatantra-Jana Congress government, inaugurated the conference and promised to act against the Christian missionaries who were engaged in conversion activities.⁷⁹ Next year, Puri was the venue of the second VHP conference, emulating the Chandikhol pattern ó providing a platform for sadhus, feudal chiefs, politicians, businessmen, bureaucrats, notables, and above all RSS activists.

The Sangh parivar entered into the tribal areas through the VHP. With the aim of ěHinduisingí the tribals and to counter the activities of Christian missionaries, it deputed a Hindu missionary Laxmanananda Saraswati⁸⁰ and a Harijan RSS pracharak Raghunath Sethi to the tribal district of Phulbani.⁸¹ The state government passed the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act 1967 and introduced penal provisions for those who converted or attempted to convert by use of force, fraud or allurement/inducement. While the Orissa Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act 1960 encouraged the RSS to step up its anti-Muslim campaign, the 1967 Act provided a convenient handle to intensify anti-Christian propaganda.

Communal Riots and the Possibilities

Rourkela and Cuttack

Although communal tensions had existed between Hindus and Muslims in the 1940s, Orissa did not witness any communal riots. For the first time, in March 1964, it experienced a communal riot in the industrial town of Rourkela. Special trains carrying East Pakistani Hindu refugees from Howrah, West Bengal to Madhya Pradesh had been stopping at Rourkela to take on food supplies. During this stopover the refugees narrated their tragic experiences to the public as the government encouraged people to offer foodstuff to the passengers. The RSS took the lead in supplying food to the refugees, an act for which it gained much publicity. On March 11, some RSS men used a loudspeaker on the railway platform in order to appeal and arouse Hindu sentiments and openly condemned Pakistan and its policies.⁸² This practice went on for almost a week, brewing tension. The spread of rumours further complicated matters. The trouble began on March 18 and the climax was reached on March 20. Hindu crowds comprising Punjabis, Biharis, Bengalis, Oriyas and Adivasis attacked the Muslims. In this communal riot 72 people were reportedly killed. The RSS blamed the Muslims for what they regarded as an unprovoked attack on the refugees and accused them of causing the riots. But it was the RSS which had provoked the Hindus against the Muslims. All the RSS pracharaks, including Paldhikar and Deshpande, were arrested.⁸³

Cuttack, the commercial capital of Orissa, experienced the second major riot. Curiously, this riot was the result of a Supreme Court judgment. The Hindus of Alkund and Nuagaon villages in Jajpur sub-division filed a writ demanding the right to play music before a mosque and pleaded that they should not be bound by the agreement between the two communities reached in 1931 which denied the Hindus this right. The Supreme Court, in a verdict delivered on October 29, 1968, allowed the Hindus to take out both religious and non-religious processions to the accompaniment of music on the highways passing through these villages subject to the magistrate's directions and traffic regulations.⁸⁴ This judgment came during the Kartikeswar Puja. The Hindus deliberately delayed the immersion procession to enjoy this newly bestowed right. The Muslims of Cuttack opposed this judgment, arguing that there was no tradition of playing music before the mosques in the city. However, after negotiations, they allowed the immersion procession to pass in front of their masjids.

After a week, on November 25, 1968, some football players of Christ College were allegedly stoned and beaten up by Muslims near the Sutahat Masjid, Cuttack. Then the riots spread throughout the city. Unlike the Rourkela riots, there was hardly any killing in Cuttack.⁸⁵ A different trend was noticed here; the rioters were mainly engaged in looting and setting fire to the shops and houses of Muslims.⁸⁶ Though the leaders of the opposition parties mainly blamed anti-social elements for the riots, the CPI leader Lokanath Choudhury denounced the role of the RSS and criticised a provocative article published in its mouthpiece, *Rashtradeepa*.⁸⁷ However, R N Singhdeo, chief minister of the Swatantra-Jana Congress government, exonerated the RSS and the BJS of these charges.⁸⁸

These riots undoubtedly rejuvenated the RSS, at least in some important urban centres like Cuttack. Shakhas multiplied and attracted increasing numbers of urban Hindu boys. The urban middle and lower middle classes began to appreciate the discipline of the

swayamsevaks, their behaviour and mannerisms and above all their organised strength aimed at defending Hindus in case of a Muslim attack. Soon after these riots the RSS tightened up its organisation in Orissa. The Orissa RSS was singled out for national recognition when Golwalkar visited its training camp (ĕsangha shiksha vargaí) in Rourkela in 1967 and conferred on it the status of an independent camp. Henceforth, the swayamsevaks no longer needed to go out of the state for training. Native Oriya pracharaks had already started replacing their non-Oriya counterparts.⁹⁰ Realising its growing strength, the central RSS leadership recognised Orissa as a developed province in 1970 and appointed Bhupendra Kumar Basu⁸⁹ as the first sanghchalak and Harihar Nanda, a dedicated Oriya pracharak, as the ĕprant karyavahí.

Expansion

The rejuvenated RSS started expanding in the 1970s, particularly after Balasaheb Deoras became the ĕsarsanghchalakí. The Orissa unit activated its affiliates: the BJS, the ABVP and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) in accordance with the Deoras strategy.⁹¹ The BJS had a negligible support base in Orissa; and the BMS had hardly any presence. However, the ABVP was emerging as a promising affiliate. The Sangh parivar in Orissa joined the movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan in accordance with the central directive; the BJS and the ABVP became very active. Soon after the Emergency was declared many leaders and members of the Sangh parivar were arrested; Basu was jailed but Paldhikar went underground. The RSS cadres undertook satyagraha at various places and courted arrest. The RSS leaders who were underground ran an efficient propaganda network. They translated, printed and distributed anti-Indira Gandhi pamphlets among the students, intellectuals, officials and other educated sections, building up a strong anti-Congress public opinion. They organised secret late night meetings in temples and other places where the police would not normally enter and maintained close contacts with other anti-Emergency political forces, including the Socialists, the Gandhians, and even the communists.

The anti-Emergency agitation established the political credentials of the Sangh parivar in Orissa. The leaders of the ABVP, after their release from jail, captured the studentsí unions in important colleges and universities. Four members of the BJS were elected to the Orissa legislative assembly as Janata Party candidates in 1977; Biswabhusan Harichandan, president of the erstwhile Orissa BJS, became a cabinet minister. The RSS brought in some talented young non-Oriya pracharaks to expedite its expansion drive in this favourable political climate. Shyamji Gupta was appointed the ĕsah-prant pracharakí in 1978; he demonstrated his ability by organising a jamboree in Cuttack in 1981, in which 10,000 swayamsevaks participated. Suryakant Kelkar, another dynamic young pracharak, was appointed organising secretary of the ABVP.

Thus, the RSS entered Orissa relatively late and pursued a policy of ĕadhocismí till the late 1960s. Due to the Marwari connection and an over dependence on non-Oriya pracharaks, the RSS acquired a negative image as a ĕMarwari organisationí, thereby receiving a lukewarm response in Orissa. Moreover, its elite-centric approach, although it paid dividends at the time of its entry, failed to carry its message beyond the upper caste-middle class confines. As a result, it had a very slow growth, being restricted mainly to some urban pockets. But the communal riots in Rourkela and Cuttack, in a sense, rejuvenated the RSS and spurred its expansion. The RSS consolidated its organisational machinery, recruited Oriya pracharaks, and strengthened its links with

civil society through its affiliates the BJS, the VHP, the BMS, and the ABVP. But the political fallout of the Emergency provided the ideal opportunity for its rapid expansion.

Patronage and Resistance

In its infancy, the RSS received crucial political and social patronage from the leading Oriya notables belonging to the conservative socio-political segment and economic patronage from the Marwari businessmen. In the phase of rejuvenation, particularly during the Cuttack riots, it managed to get a clean chit from the chief minister R N Singhdeo; in fact, many ministers in his Swatantra-Jana Congress government were sympathetic to the RSS. In the phase of expansion, the RSS received patronage from Hare Krushna Mahtab, a veteran Congressman who had earlier been Orissa's chief minister, a central minister, and the governor of Maharashtra. Mahtab, himself a fitness freak, always appreciated the body-building culture and the discipline of the RSS. He drew even closer to the RSS during the Emergency; some swayamsevaks who were lodged along with Mahtab in Bhanjanagar jail endeared themselves to him by keeping him constant company and extending personal services to him. After his release, Mahtab praised the role of the RSS in his popular column 'Gaan Majlis' and provided them with generous coverage in his newspaper Prajatantra. Mahtab presided over important RSS functions, attended the camps, and helped its cadres in many ways. He even wore its uniform and wielded the lathi (ganavesh) and joined the RSS rally in Cuttack in 1981. Mahtab remained a strong RSS patron till his death. Well-known Sarvodaya leaders like Malati Choudhury and Rama Devi also became RSS sympathisers mainly due to its role during the Emergency. Association with these leaders enhanced its respectability.

Despite this patronage the RSS faced resistance from a section of Congressmen and Socialists. As Paldhikar recollects, many freedom fighters and Congressmen shut their doors, accusing his organisation of Gandhi's murder. The stiff opposition mainly came from the Socialists, a key figure being Bishwanath Pandit.⁹² In the early 1950s, the RSS leader Baba Saheb Apte was scheduled to address a public meeting at Ramachandra Bhawan, Cuttack. Pandit and other Socialists occupied the hall before the commencement of the meeting, shouted 'Gandhi's murderers, go back!', and prevented Apte's entry. Though Paldhikar along with a few swayamsevaks entered the venue forcibly, the meeting had to be cancelled. During the Rourkela riots, Biren Mitra's Congress government ordered the arrests of the RSS pracharaks. Nandini Satpathy, the Congress chief minister during the Emergency, also had many leaders and cadres of the RSS arrested. But patronage to Hindutva certainly far outweighed the resistance to it.

Conclusion

As this paper shows, the history of the early years of Hindutva in the 'Hindu province' of Orissa, despite being similar in many respects to its history in other provinces, is quite novel in its own way. Orissa, a region of many diversities and contradictions, still retains some unique features of Hinduism, manifested in particular in the Jagannath cult. What we saw were the ways in which structures of pre-colonial legitimacy were reinvented by colonialism, acquiesced to by the nationalist and the post-colonial leadership/discourses, and appropriated by an identity-seeking Hindu upper caste-middle class. Together these offered a congenial climate for the development of Hindutva. In fact, an influential section of the Congress which courted the Hindu Mahasabha provided succour to the RSS as well, facilitating its entry into Orissa. However, Hindutva experienced a rapid

expansion only after the communal riots, a completely new experience for the people of Orissa. Organisational ingenuity, crucial political patronage, and unconventional political experiments during the Emergency also contributed significantly towards establishing Hindutva in Orissa.

Notes

1 See Bernard S Cohn (1966): 'Regions Subjective and Objective: Their Relation to the Study of Modern Indian History and Society' in Robert I Crane (ed), *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: An Exploratory Study*, Monographs and Occasional Papers Series, Monograph Number Five, Duke University, Durham.

2 Christophe Jaffrelot (1996): *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s: Strategies of Identity-Building, Implantation and Mobilisation* [with special reference to Central India], Viking, Delhi.

3 Thomas Blom Hansen (1999): *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

4 K Jayaprasad (1991): *RSS and Hindu Nationalism: Inroads in a Leftist Stronghold*, Deep and Deep, New Delhi.

5 Arild Engelsmen Rudd (1996): 'Contradictions and Ambivalence in the Hindu Nationalist Discourse in West Bengal' in Stein Tonnesson and Hans Antlov (eds), *Asian Forms of the Nation*, Curzon Press, Surrey, pp 150-80.

6 In fact, the retreating colonial bureaucracy located it along this framework. For example, governor Trivedi described Orissa as a 'Hindu province' in his letter to Lord Wavell. Cited in Biswamoy Pati (1993): *Resisting Domination: Peasants, Tribals and the National Movement in Orissa 1920-50*, Manohar, New Delhi, fn no 105, p 241.

7 As outlined, politically it was 'a by-product of the then new province of Sind', with poor Orissa being 'thrown out by the English rulers as a Hindu province to pander and palliate the communal propensities of the Indian people in the process of dividing them to rule'. Pandit Nilakantha Das (1959): 'Oriya Language and Culture', *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, Vol 8, No 1, April, p 39.

8 See Kenneth W Jones (1981): 'Religious Identity and the Indian Census' in N G Barrier (ed), *The Census in British India: New Perspectives*, Manohar, New Delhi, pp 73-101.

9 Thus, the population in terms of religion in 1991 was as follows: Hindus 94.67 per cent, Christians 2.10 per cent, Muslims 1.83 per cent, Sikhs 0.05 per cent, Buddhists 0.03 per cent, Jains 0.02 per cent, and others 1.30 per cent. Among the states, only Himachal Pradesh has a higher percentage of Hindus, i.e., 95.90 per cent.

10 Mano Mohan Ganguly (1912): *Orissa and Her Remains: Ancient and Medieval (District Puri)*, Eastern Book House, Patna, 1987, p 6.

- 11 W W Hunter (1956): ěJagannathí in W W Hunter, Andrew Sterling, John Beams, N K Sahu, A History of Orissa, Vol I, Sushil Gupta (India), Calcutta, p 5.
- 12 Kapila Samhita, Chapter 1, Verses 8-9. Quoted in W W Hunter, ěJagannathí, ibid, p 3.
- 13 See M N Srinivas (1952): Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India, Asia, Bombay.
- 14 See L S S OíMalley (1935): Popular Hinduism: The Religion of the Masses, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and C J Fuller (1992): The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India, Penguin, New Delhi.
- 15 McKim Marriot (ed) (1955): Village India: Studies in the Little Community, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- 16 Though Oriya society is quite superstitious even today, an exaggerated interpretation is given in F B Laurie (1850): Orissa, The Garden of Superstition and Idolatry: Including an Account of British Connexion with the Temple of Jagannath, R N Bhattacharya, Calcutta, 2000, 2nd rpt.
- 17 According to the 1991 Census, the scheduled castes constituted 16.2 per cent of the population of Orissa.
- 18 According to the 1991 Census, the scheduled tribes constituted 22.2 per cent of the population of Orissa, with the major tribes being the khonds, kols, santals, savaras, and gonds.
- 19 For a description of the religious beliefs and practices of the Hill Saoras of Ganjam and Koraput, see Verrier Elwin (1955): The Religion of an Indian Tribe, Oxford University Press, Bombay.
- 20 See Anncharlott Eschmann et al (eds) (1986): The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa, Manohar, New Delhi; Hermann Kulke and Burkhard Schnepel (eds) (2001): Jagannath Revisited: Studying Society, Religion and the State in Orissa, Manohar, New Delhi; Ishita Banerjee Dube (2001): Divine Affairs: Religion, Pilgrimage, and the State in Colonial and Postcolonial India, Shimla, IAS.
- 21 Prasanna K Nayak (2001): ěJagannath and the Adivasis: Reconsidering the Cult and Its Traditionsí in Hermann Kulke and Burkhard Schnepel (eds), Jagannath Revisited, op cit, pp 25-48.
- 22 Biswajit Mohanty (2000): ěPolitics of Rehabilitation: A Case Study of the Indravati Projectí, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Delhi, p 78.
- 23 Hermann Kulke, ěEarly Royal Patronage of the Jagannath Cultí in A Eschmann et al (eds), The Cult of Jagannath, op cit, pp 139-55.

24 Prior to the colonial period the Oriyas did not have a strong consciousness of their identity. See B N Mohapatra (1996): 'Ways of Belonging': The Kanchi Kaveri Legend and the Construction of Oriya Identity, *Studies in History*, Vol 12, No 2, ns, pp 203-21.

25 For a discussion on these three forms of nationalism, see G N Dash, 'Jagannath and Oriya Nationalism' in A Eschmann et al (eds), *The Cult of Jagannath*, op cit, pp 359-74.

26 Gopabandhu Das (1923): *Bandira Atmakatha*, Cuttack, quoted in G N Dash, *ibid*.

27 See Bishnu Narayan Mohapatra (1990): 'The Politics of Oriya Nationalism 1903-1936', Unpublished DPhil. thesis, Oxford University, p 187.

28 For instance, Mahatma Gandhi's decision to start his padyatra from Puri was perhaps influenced by the Jagannath factor. The raja of Parlakhemundi, after taking his oath as the first prime minister of Orissa in 1937 (in the interim ministry), visited the Jagannath Temple although his ancestors had stopped visiting Puri due to dynastic rivalry. Biju Patnaik, one of the architects of modern Orissa, sought directions from Jagannath before his bid to return to political power in the state in 1990. J B Patnaik, who served as chief minister for a long time, has composed many poems dedicated to Jagannath.

29 For details, see Bhabani Charan Ray (1989): *Mughal-Orissa: Itihas O Sanskruti* (in Oriya), Vidyapuri, Cuttack.

30 For a sympathetic account of Maratha rule in Orissa, see B C Ray (1993): *New Lights on Maratha Orissa*, L Ray, Bhubaneswar.

31 L S S O'Malley (1984), *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Puri, rpt, Usha, New Delhi, p 73.

32 *Ibid*.

33 Brajasundar Das, comp, *Orissa in Hamilton's Hindostan* (1820), p 7.

34 See Richard Eaton (1993): *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier: 1204-1760*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Chapter 5: 'Mass Conversion to Islam: Theories and Protagonists', pp 113-36.

35 In the popular perception of Oriyas, Kalapahar is a destroyer of idols. See G N Dash, 'Kalapahar, the Iconoclast: The Making and Message of a Legendary Tradition: Reconversions in Medieval Orissa and Bengal' in Hermann Kulke and Burkhard Schnepel (eds), *Jagannath Revisited*, op cit, pp 227-51.

36 Richard Eaton (2000): *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p 107.

37 *Ibid*, p 106.

38 *Ibid*, p 116.

39 The Satya Pir tradition also exists in Bengal. See Tony K Stewart (1995): "Satya Pir: Muslim Holy Man and Hindu God" in David S Lopez, Jr (ed), *Religions of India in Practice*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp 578-97.

40 However, like Bengal, Muslims in Orissa have almost ceased to worship Satya Pir, perhaps conceiving this as an impediment to their identity. Conversely, the Hindus continue with this practice as Satya Pir could be comfortably accommodated into the hegemonic theological structure of the vaishnava avatara theory, *ibid*, p 580.

41 For a glossary of such words, see Bansidhar Mohanty and K B Tripathi (1967), "Perso-Arabic Influence on Oriya", *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, Vol XV, Nos 1 and 2, pp 65-112.

42 See Biswamoy Pati (2001): "The High-Low Dialectic in Fakirmohana's Chaman Athaguntha: Popular Culture, Literature and Society in Late 19th Century Orissa" in his *Situating Social History: Orissa (1800-1997)*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, pp 26-49.

43 RSS leaders observe that due to this reason the growth of the RSS in Orissa is slow, but it is steady and consistent without any sudden fluctuation in membership.

44 See Dasarathi Swaro (1990): *The Christian Missionaries in Orissa: Their Impact on Nineteenth Century Society*, Punthi Pustak, Calcutta, p 92.

45 A Eschmann, "Mahima Dharma: An Autochthonous Hindu Reform Movement" in A Eschmann et al (eds), *The Cult of Jagannath*, *op cit*. Also see Subhakanta Behera (1997): "Jagannath and Alekh: A Study in Juxtaposition", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XXXII, Nos 33 and 34, August 16-23, pp 2096-97.

46 In its formative years, the RSSs could not penetrate into Orissa due to its failure to gauge the hold of the Jagannath cult among the Oriyas. Interview with Bhupendra Kumar Basu, the first prant sanghchalak of Orissa.

47 D H Kingsford, *Settlement Report of Balasore*, quoted in L S S O'Malley (1933): *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers*, Cuttack, 2nd edition, E R J R Cousins, Patna, p 58.

48 A Stirling (1822): *An Account (Geographical, Statistical and Historical) of Orissa Proper or Cuttack*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1904, p 25.

49 Quoted in Klaus K Klostermaier (1989): *A Survey of Hinduism*, State University of New York, Albany, p 211.

50 See L S S O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Puri, *op cit*, p 98.

51 W W Hunter (1877): *A Statistical Account of Bengal: District of Puri and the Orissa Tributary States*, Vol XIX, Trubner and Co, London, rpt, D K Publishing Company, Delhi, 1976, pp 42-43.

52 H K Mahtab, chief ed (1957): *History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa*, Vol IV (1930-47), State Committee for Compilation of History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa, Cuttack, pp 55-56.

- 53 Sushil Chandra De, comp (1966): *Diary of Political Events in Orissa: April 1, 1936-August 15, 1964*, The Committee for Compilation of 'Who's Who' of the Freedom Movement, Bhubaneswar, p 51.
- 54 Ibid, p 55.
- 55 H K Mahtab, chief ed, *History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa, Vol IV (1930-47)*, op cit, pp 132-33.
- 56 Biswamoy Pati, *Resisting Domination*, op cit, p 221.
- 57 Sushil Chandra De, comp, *Diary of Political Events in Orissa*, op cit, pp 27, 30.
- 58 H K Mahtab (1960): *The History of Orissa, Vol II*, Prajatantra Prachara Samiti, Cuttack, p 456.
- 59 Interview with Baburao Deshpande, the senior Maharashtrian pracharak in Orissa.
- 60 Paldhikar was born in 1921 in Arvi, Maharashtra. Hedgewar's visit to his hometown inspired him to join the RSS. After graduating from Nagpur's Maurice College in 1940, he became a pracharak and left for Punjab where he spent a decade. In 1949, Golwalkar sent him to Orissa as the first prant pracharak. Paldhikar is known as the founder (pratisthata) of the Orissa RSS.
- 61 Jaffrelot discusses how the RSS made its entry into central India through the local notables. See Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, op cit.
- 62 The name of Harihar Singh Mardaraj, an erstwhile feudatory chief, figured in this list. Paldhikar persuaded him to become nagar sanghchalak of Cuttack city. Interview with Baburao Paldhikar.
- 63 Interview with Baburao Paldhikar.
- 64 Mangaraj presided over the Khandayat Conference held in April 1947 at Bhubaneswar.
- 65 H K Mahtab, chief ed, *History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa, Vol IV (1930-47)*, op cit, p 71.
- 66 See Nilkantha Das Papers, NMML, New Delhi.
- 67 Hindu Mahasabha Papers, File No 17 (1943), NMML, New Delhi. In 1943, the total primary membership in the province was 2,507. Ibid. To enlist new members and to do publicity work, the All India Hindu Mahasabha paid monthly remuneration to a retired publicity officer of the Orissa government. See 'Orissa Provincial Hindu Sabha Papers', Hindu Mahasabha Papers, File No 58, NMML, New Delhi.
- 68 H K Mahtab, chief ed, *History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa, Vol IV (1930-47)*, op cit, p 107.

69 For the text of this speech, see Hitavada, October 20, 1950.

70 Ibid, p 7.

71 Revd A Sutton (1850): Orissa and its Evangelisation, Derby, England, p 48; also see A Stirling, An Account (Geographical, Statistical and Historical) of Orissa Proper or Cuttack, op cit, p viii.

72 Heinrich von Stietencron, 'A Congregation of Gods: The Dolamelana Festival in Orissa', in Herman Kulke and Burkhard Schnepel (eds), Jagannath Revisited, op cit, p 398.

73 The British constructed a negative image of Bargi to perpetuate their policy of 'divide and rule'. See B C Ray (1995): New Light on Maratha Orissa, L Ray, Bhubaneswar, p xv.

74 Interview with Baburao Paldhikar.

75 For more on RSS pracharaks, see Pralay Kanungo, 'Pracharaks of Hindu Rashtree', Contemporary India, Vol 1, No 2, April-June 2002, pp 175-97.

76 Interview with Baburao Paldhikar.

77 Shri Guruji: Man and His Mission [On the Occasion of His 51st Birthday] (1956): Bharat Prakashan, Delhi, pp 91-92.

78 In Orissa babas and gurus enjoy considerable clout among politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen. Bhairabananda's selection was very useful for purposes of fund raising and in cultivating the right contacts for the future. Moreover, he was sympathetic towards the RSS. For more on the links between gurus and Hindu nationalism, see Lise McKean, Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996.

79 See Arun Kumar Panda (1990): 'Odissare Vishwa Hindu Parishadara Agragatira Itikatha', Hindu Vishwa (Oriya Section), Vol 25, No 12, August, pp 27-30.

80 Laxmanananda, an inmate of an ashram in the Himalayan foothills, participated in the goraksha andolan. Then he joined the VHP and came to Orissa. After consulting the RSS leaders he set up his base in Chakapada, Phulbani. For more on his mission, see Pralay Kanungo (2002): RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan, Manohar, New Delhi, Chapter V.

81 Phulbani has been bifurcated into two districts: Kondhmal and Boudh. Kondhmal (Phulbani) has the following population ratio: scheduled tribes, 54.23 per cent; scheduled castes, 18.20 per cent; and general category, 27.57 per cent. See Panchayati Raj Department Publication (1994): Government of Orissa, Bhubaneswar.

82 See B B Chatterjee, P N Singh, G R S Rao (1967): Riots in Rourkela: A Psychological Study, Popular Book Services, New Delhi, p 30.

83 The government of Orissa served a legal notice to Paldhikar. Despite his reply he was jailed for four months. Later he was released on Nilakanthaís intervention. Baburao Deshpande was imprisoned for 11 months. After his release he was externed from Orissa for a year.

84 Quoted in Samaj, December 5, 1968, p 2.

85 Some analysts blame the non-Oriya communities in the industrial city for the Rourkela killings. They argue that Cuttack did not witness such killings because of their absence, thereby suggesting that the Oriyas are a docile people.

86 During the violence 59 houses and 106 shops were looted and set on fire. Samaj, December 12, 1968.

87 Samaj, December 13, 1968.

88 Ibid.

89 Basu was born in 1913 in a Bengali zamindar family of Cuttack district. Vivekanandaís ideal inspired him in his childhood. After completing his study of the law, he started his practice. The exemplary discipline of the swayamsevaks impressed Basu. His association with the RSS began when Paldhikar approached him to become the secretary of the Orissa unit of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee. Basu successfully managed the fund-collection drive; the government of Orissa donated a sum of 1 lakh rupees. But Golwalkarís stay at his house proved to be decisive; Basu was deeply impressed by his personality, intelligence and punctuality. At Golwalkarís suggestion he attended an OTC at Vardhman. First, he was appointed nagar sanghchalak of Cuttack, then prant karyavah in 1964, and finally prant sanghchalak in 1970, a post which he relinquished in 1999 due to ill health. Basu was not a nominal RSS head; along with Paldhikar he masterminded the RSS strategy in Orissa.

90 Jagdish Patnaik was the first Oriya pracharak.

91 For details on the Deoras strategy, see Pralay Kanungo, RSSís Tryst with Politics, op cit, Chapter VI: Quest for Political Power: Balasaheb Deorasí, pp 178-223.

92 Pandit, whose grandfather had migrated from Kashmir, was a freedom fighter and a committed socialist. He remained a bachelor and led a spartan life, dedicating himself to the cause of the scavengers and sweepers. Pandit, a devout Hindu, rejected the RSSís Ram but had complete faith in Gandhiís Ram, whom he described as the poor manís god. He opposed the RSS because he held them responsible for Gandhiís assassination. Interview with Bishwanath Pandit.

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Dr. John Dayal

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Government of India

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25 August 2008

URGENT FAX

TO PRESIDENT OF INDIA

SEEKING ARMY / CENTRAL FORCES INTERVENTION TO PROTECT
CHRISTIANS IN
ORISSA AS NUN IS RAPED, PRIESTS INJURED, CHURCHES AND OFFICES
BURNT IN
PRESENCE OF POLICE

Hon'ble Mrs., Pratibha Patil
President of India

Dear President

Greetings from a grieving community.

You are aware of the still continuing carnage against the Christian community, mostly Dalits and Tribals, in the Kandhamal district of Orissa and in several other districts including the state capital of Bhubaneswar since 23rd August 2003 following the killing of Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati, reportedly by Maoist groups who have been operating in the state for some time.

The Christian leadership in the country has unequivocally condemned the killing of the VHP leader and his four associates.

The Christians of Kandhamal are still nursing their wounds from the Christmas 2007 violence, with hundreds of them still living in a refugee camp in Barakhama. Most of the more than One hundred churches then destroyed remain in ruins, and the burnt houses are still to be

fully rebuilt.

And yet local Sangh leaders have targeted the community in a second wave of macabre violence.

A nun has been raped in Kandhamal, a Catholic father grievously injured, scores of houses in villages destroyed, apart from Churches and institutions. I attach herewith a partial list of the damage in the violence in the past two days. We in Delhi are overwhelmed with panic messages from Priests, pastors, nuns and common people who look to New Delhi for help as the State machinery has collapsed once again.

Changing of superintendents of police as a knee jerk reaction does not provide security to Christians. In fact, much of the violence is taking place with the insufficient police force looking on. This had been the case in 2007 December, as has come out in the on going hearings of the Justice Basudeo Panigrahi Commission. Christian delegations have informed the State Governor, the State Chief Minister and the Home Minister of India of the dire situation of our community in Orissa.

Dear Madame President,

This is to request you to use your powers as President of India, and the tremendous force of your good offices, to impress on the Central Government to rush adequate Union forces, including contingents of the Armed Forces if required, to restore law and order and governance in the Kandhamal region.

The consequences of any further delay, I fear, may be catastrophic for our Christian community in the State in particular, for peace in Orissa in general, and for the fair name of India as a secular country.

God Bless you

John Dayal

Attachments:

1. Incomplete list of death and damage in violence of 23rd-25th August 2008
2. Christian condemnation of killing of Sw. Lakshmanananda Saraswati

ORISSA ANTI CHRISTIAN VIOLENCE UPDATE 25th August 2008

:

1. CHRISTIAN WOMAN TEACHER REPORTED BURNT ALIVE: A Christian woman

teacher, possibly a nun [BUT NOT CONFIRMED], was reported burnt alive on 25th August 2008 by a group of Vishwa Hindu Parishad mob which stormed the orphanage she ran in the district of Bargarh (Orissa). Police Superintendent Ashok Biswall has told this to news reporters. A priest who was at the orphanage was also badly hurt and is now being treated in hospital for multiple burns.

2. NUN RAPED: A young Catholic Nun of the Cuttack Bhubaneswar diocese working Jan Vikas Kendra, the Social Service Centre at Nuagaon in Kandhamal was reportedly gang raped on 24th August 2008 by groups of Hindutva extremists before the building itself was destroyed.

3. SENIOR PRIEST AND NUN INJURED: Fr Thomas, director of the Diocesan

Pastoral Centre in Kanjimendi, less than a kilometer away from the Social Service Centre, and another Nun were injured when the centre was attacked. They were taken to the police station in a disheveled state as the armed mob bayed for their blood. The Pastoral centre was then set afire.

4. BALLIGUDA CHURCH BUILDINGS DESTROYED AGAIN: On 24th August 2008

evening lynch mobs at the block headquarters of Balliguda, in the very heart of Kandhamal district, which had seen much violence between 24th and 26th December 2007, attacked and destroyed a Presbytery, convent and hostel damaging the properties.

5. The mobs in Balliguda caught hold of two boys of the Catholic hostel and tonsured their heads.

6. PHULBANI CHURCH DAMAGED: On 25th August 2008 morning followers of

the late Lakshmanananda Saraswati damaged the Catholic Church in Phulbani, the district headquarter town.

7. MOTHER TERESA BROTHERS ASHRAM ATTACKED: mobs attacked the Mother

Teresa Brothers' residence and hospital in Srasanada, destroyed once before and rebuilt two months ago, and beat up the patients.

Fundamentalists have targeted Priests, religious and also the Faithful in Pobingia also.

8. BHUBANESWAR BISHOP'S HOUSE ATTACKED: On the morning of 25th August

2008, violent mobs made several attempts to enter the compounds of Catholic Church and Archbishop's house in the heart of the Capital of the State of Orissa. They could not enter because of the police presence. They threw stones at the guesthouse of Archbishop's House, damaging windows.

9. DUBURI PARISH; Another group of fundamentalists entered presbytery in Duburi parish, managed by the SVDs and destroyed and damaged property. Two priests of the parish are missing.

10. Mr. Jamaj Pariccha, Director of Gramya Pragati, is attacked and his property, vehicle etc. damaged, burnt and looted.

11. A Baptist Church in Akamra Jila in Bhubaneswar is also damaged.

12. Christian institutions like St. Arnold's School (Kalinga Bihar), AND NISWASS report some damage.
13. BOUDH DISTRICT [Adjoining Kandhamal]: Fundamentalists enter the Catholic parish church and destroy property. People are fleeing to safer places. But nothing seems safe.
14. Muniguda Catholic Fathers and Nuns' residence have been damaged.
15. Sambalpur HM Sister's residence (Ainthapalli) has suffered damage.
16. Padanpur: One priest is attacked and admitted to a hospital. Hostel boys and the in charge have moved away from the place.
17. Madhupur Catholic Church currently under attack.
18. SMALL CHURCHES: Attempted violence on small churches in various districts, including Padampur, Sambalpur near GM College, Talsera, Dangsoroda, Narayanipatara, Muniguda, Tummiibandh, Tangrapada, Phulbani, Balliguda, Kalingia, Chakapad, Srasanranda.
19. VILLAGE CHRISTIAN HOUSES ATTACKED: Houses attacked on forest hamlets of Balliguda, Kanjamandi Nuaguam (K.Nuaguam), Tiangia (G.Udayagiri), Padangiri, Tikabali.
20. KALAHANDI DISTRICT: houses burnt even though the district is more than 300 kilometers from the place where Swami Lakshmanananda was killed.
21. Pastor Sikandar Singh of the Pentecostal Mission beaten up and his house burnt in Bhawanipatna.
22. Kharihar: 3 Christian shops were looted and burnt. Pastor Alok Das and Pastor I M Senapati beaten up.
23. Aampani: Pastor David Diamond Pahar, Pastor Pravin Ship, Pastor Pradhan and Pastor Barik beaten up and chased away with their families.
24. Naktikani: Mob surrounds village to attack Christians. The government has sent forces, it is reported.

[This list is compiled with assistance from Archbishop's House, Bhubaneswar and other sources]

 URGENT
 From John Dayal
 25 August 2008

INDIAN CHURCH CONDEMNS KILLING OF ORISSA VHP LEADER

The Church in India has unequivocally condemned the killing of Vishwa Hindu Parishad [VHP] Orissa leader Lakshmanananda Saraswati and his four colleagues in the Tumiliband region of Kandhamal district by Left wing extremists. Still recovering from the worst ever anti Christian violence in Indian history in December 2007, Christian organisations have appealed for peace as the community braces for another round of violence in the state from Hindutva groups who have sworn to avenge

Saraswati death by attacking Churches, institutions, clergy and nuns.

The following is the text of major statements issued by Church groups condemning the VHP leaders' death:

ARCHBISHOP RAPHAEL CHEENATH, SVD
Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar

24 August 2008

I, on behalf of the Christians of Orissa, particularly the catholic Christians, strongly condemn the dastardly attack and violent killing of Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati and five of his associates. We the Christians abhor violence and condemn all acts of violence and terrorism and are against all groups of people taking the law into their own hands. We condole the death of Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati, a religious leader and his associates. At this critical juncture I appeal to all for peace and communal harmony. We want good relationship with all the communities with whom we live.

We are also concerned at the immediate outbreak of communal violence against innocent Christians in nearby districts. Early reports suggest that least one prayer hall in Sundergarh District has been burnt and vehicle belonging to Daughters of the most Precious Blood has been burnt near G. Udayagiri.

We urgently appeal to the Chief Minister and the Governor of Orissa and at the Indian Home Minister Mr. Shivraj Patil to take whatever steps are require to maintain peace and harmony in all areas of states, to prevent further attacks on Christians and to bring to book those responsible for the death of Lakshmanananda Saraswati and his associates.

ALL INDIA CHRISTIAN COUNCIL:

Press Statement by Dr John Dayal, Secretary General, and Dr Sampaul, National Secretary for Public Affairs

The All India Christian Council is deeply concerned at the attack on an ashram near Tumiliband in Kandhamal District of Orissa last night in which the Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Lakshmanananda Saraswati and four of his associates were killed. This is the latest of a series of attacks in recent months by political extremists which have left dozens of policemen and others dead in several districts of Orissa.

We are also concerned at the immediate outbreak of communal violence

against innocent Christians in nearby districts. Early reports suggest at least one prayer hall in Sundergarh has been burnt, the van of some Catholic Nuns destroyed and the sisters themselves injured.

We urgently appeal to the Chief Minister and the Governor of Orissa and at the Indian Home Minister Mr. Shivraj Patil to take whatever steps are required to maintain peace and harmony in all areas of states, to prevent further attacks on Christians and to bring to book those responsible for the death of Lakshmanananda Saraswati and his associates.

The Christian community abhors violence, condemns all acts of terrorism and is against groups of people taking the law into their own hands. We have had major differences with the dead VHP leader. It has been the hate campaigns of the VHP and Sangh Parivar which led to untold misery to Christians in the violence last Christmas. Refugees from that violence are still living in government camps in Barakhama under miserable conditions. But we wish peace to everyone. We pray for peace in Orissa, one of the most undeveloped states in the country,

CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF INDIA:

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) is sad to note that Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Lakshmanananda Saraswati and five others were murdered on Saturday August 23 allegedly by Maoist group in Kandhamal Dist of Orissa. The Church leaders in Orissa and other parts of the country have condemned the killing of Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati and his associates in the Ashram. We have also appealed for peace and harmony in the state.

However, we are extremely sorry to find that some organizations have pointed finger at the Christian community in Orissa for the alleged murder of the Swami and his associates. Consequently there have been unprovoked attacks on Christians and their institutions in Kandhamal and surrounding areas. School at Bhadrak Town, Convent and the computer centre at Baliguda in Kandhamal Dist, Pastoral Centre at Baliguda in Kandhamal Dist., Social Development Centre (Jan Vikas Kendra) at Baliguda in Kandhamal Dist., Catholic Church in Phulbani and a Convent of the religious women at Phulbani have suffered in the attacks which took place after the murder of Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati.

We are sad to note that the extremists are attacking and vandalizing our institutions without any reason. Incidents of arson and burning of vehicles belonging to the Church have also been reported at Udaygiri. Some of our religious nuns, girls and boys in the hostels have fled from their places and taken shelter in the forest, particularly in

Kandhamal Dist. We are seriously concerned about the safety and security of our frightened people who are innocent and yet find themselves in a very precarious situation. The State Government has deployed police forces in some of the areas and yet the violence has not been contained. We request the Central Government to urgently intervene in the matter and send additional forces to bring situation to normalcy.

-- Rev. Dr. Babu Joseph, SVD, Spokesperson, CBCI

EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP OF INDIA:

Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) denounces the killing of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati and his four associates by suspected Maoists in Orissa state's Kandhamal district on August 23. While deeply saddened by the weeklong spate of attacks that hit Kandhamal district during last Christmas, EFI, as a representative of the evangelical church in India, stands against every act of violence and terrorism.

EFI also regrets that vested interests among the various Hindu nationalist groups are trying to blame local Christians for the act, as reflected in the acts of vandalism and arson reported from Kandhamal after the attack on Saraswati ashram.

EFI appeals to the central, state and district authorities to take all possible measures to maintain peace and calm in Kandhamal. EFI also calls for the Christian community in India and abroad to pray for protection of the Christians in Kandhamal and other parts of Orissa.

-- Rev. Dr. Richard Howell, General Secretary
Evangelical Fellowship of India

Prashant. A Centre for Human Rights, Justice and Peace, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

We condemn the killing of Swami Saraswati and four of his associates during the attack on the VHP Ashram in the Kandhamal District of Orissa on Saturday 23rd August 2008. We sympathize with the bereaved members of the families who have lost their loved ones.

We call upon the Orissa and the Central Governments to do all in their power to bring to book immediately, those responsible for this dastardly act; that anti-social elements do not take law and order into their own hands and above all, to ensure that peace and calm prevail in the area, and in other parts of Orissa.

Violence, for whatever the provocation, is non-acceptable, and will definitely not help achieve the goals for which these acts are committed. We therefore call upon all those responsible for these acts

and to eschew violence immediately. No violence can be justified, for whatever the reason. However, for the last several months, the Government of Orissa has allowed some fascist and fundamentalist forces to terrorize the poor, the marginalized and the minorities of the State. These forces have carried on their virulent propaganda and their violent acts with apparent immunity.

There has been a total abdication of responsibility by the Government of Orissa and the concerned authorities, like the police. They should now also be held totally responsible for these deaths and for allowing the situation to go out of control. Sufficient warning has been given to the Orissa Government, of the deteriorating situation, as early as in September 2006, with the publication of "Communalism in Orissa" - the Report of the Indian People's Tribunal on Environment and Human Rights - headed by Justice K. K. Usha (Retd.) former Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court. It may still not be too late to ensure that the Constitutional Rights and Freedoms of the people of Orissa are not merely guaranteed by also protected by the State.

Fr. Cedric Prakash sj, Director

Documented by William Stanley.