

# **Crossed and Crucified**

**Parivar's War Against  
Minorities in Orissa**

A report by  
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&  
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Delhi

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*We shall witness  
Witness, for sure, we will  
The day that has been promised  
The fate that has been preordained  
The day when the enormous mountains of tyranny  
Will blow away like wisps of cotton  
When the earth will tremble thunderously  
Beneath the feet of the oppressed  
And on the heads of the tyrants  
Streaks of lightning will strike  
We shall witness*

Faiz Ahmad Faiz

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# Introduction

Poverty, dispossession, land alienation, conflict between two socially and economically underprivileged groups—Christians and Kandho Adivasis—aggressive Hindutva assertion, electoral politics, detrimental state policies, along with the perceived threat of growing Maoist presence by the state have made Kandhamal a seething cauldron.

After the killing of Laxmanananda Saraswati on 23 August 2008, a Hindutva-led pogrom against Dalit Christians started in the Kandhamal district of Orissa. Till now, according to official reports, 39 people have been killed. Nearly, 50,000 people have been hounded out of their villages, their houses have been gutted and their belongings have been looted. When all this was happening, the Orissa Government and the district administration, to put it mildly, looked the other way and allowed the pogrom to continue for almost two months.

## The Social Underbelly

In Kandhamal, more than 30 percent people are landless and 75 percent live below the poverty line. Kandhamal is ranked 29 among the 30 districts of Orissa in terms of the Human Development Index and has the highest Infant Mortality Rate at 169 per thousand (State Human Development Report prepared by the UNDP). Female literacy rate among the Scheduled

Castes is 40.3 percent and among the Scheduled Tribes is 23.4 percent. According to government reports, the highest number of deaths due to malaria has taken place in Kandhamal during the last year. The Orissa Government is only busy “modernizing” Orissa through huge, capital-intensive industrial projects that displace millions of poor people from their livelihoods. In this carnage, the government’s tacit support and partisan role of the local administrative machinery oversaw one of the worst communal carnages of the country, where the affected have been historically the most disenfranchised from the basic needs that today’s urban society takes for granted. This report attempts to contextualize this exploitation in history and document how dominant interests have used this situation of chronic poverty in Kandhamal to suit their agenda.

Our understanding of the Kandhamal context is also deeply linked to the mounting people’s resistance against a series of coercive “development” measures led by the Orissa Government and capital, foreign and national. Large-scale alienation of lands and livelihood is the reality of a large number of displaced and dispossessed Women, Adivasis, Dalits, OBCs and other poor sections in Kashipur, Niyamagiri, Jagatsinghpur, Keonjhar and Kalinganagar. The BJP–BJD alliance gave a free hand to the Hindutva forces

to dispossess yet another 50,000 people in Kandhamal and in the process consolidate majoritarian politics and terrorize the disenfranchised.

Kandhamal is associated with *meriah* (human sacrifice) in our school book knowledge. Till the mid-19th century, the Kandhos, one of the oldest Adivasi communities in India, had sacrificed human beings in a turmeric field with the belief that the *Dharni Penu* (Mother Earth) would give a good yield. Now, the Dalit and Adivasi Christians have been made the *meriah*. Which crop will yield better with this sacrifice? And, who is going to harvest the crop?

Issues in Kandhamal are complicated and multi-layered. We do not claim to handle them in all their ramifications. We have only tried to capture the broad pattern of related events and issues, underlining in the process our own concerns and questions. To do this, between September and November 2008, we talked to the victims in some relief camps (G. Udaygiri, Bhubaneswar and Cuttack), survivors who sought refuge in Berhampur, victims in the hospital at the MKCG Medical College, Berhampur, leaders of the Kandho and Pano communities and journalists. We also tried to draw upon some secondary sources, accounts of scholars on Kandhamal and media reports.

We are presenting this report with a view to:

- Document the systematic targeting and hounding of the Adivasi and Dalit Christians and the sharpening

of conflict between Panos and Kandhos. The Dalits of this region are referred to as Panos.

- Provide a glimpse of this century-long conflict, which has been used by the dominant forces such as the state, its policies and institutions, institutionalized religion and Oriyas (who are the caste Oriyas), along with other players.

- Generate an informed debate on the Kandhamal context.

# I. Kandhamal Violence: Role of the Government and Others

## 1.1 The Sinister Prelude: The Violence of December 2007

Before dealing with the current violence in Kandhamal, we need to mention the events of December 2007. In hindsight, these events seem to be a prelude. The Kui-Coordination Committee (KCC), an umbrella organization of the Kandhos of Phulbani, has been agitating on a set of demands: snatching of reservation benefits by Pano Christians through forged caste certificates; demand for ST status by Kui-speaking Dalits and grabbing of tribal land by Dalits. In this connection, the KCC had called for a two-day *bandh* (24 and 25 December 2007) in Kandhamal. On 24 December 2007, Laxmanananda was alleged to have entered into an altercation with Christians at Darsingbadi, which resulted in a fisticuff. After this incident, Christians and their institutions were attacked in some parts of Kandhamal. Although Lambodar Kanhar, the Secretary of KCC, issued a statement that KCC had nothing to do with the communal violence and that “opportunists” had taken advantage of the *bandh* call, it is not difficult to see that both sections (KCC and Hindutva groups) joined hands against Dalits, particularly, the Dalit Christians.

Four people were killed in the violence of December 2007. Several churches and houses were either burnt or damaged.

In one village, houses of the Hindu community were also set on fire. The Orissa Government had instituted a Judicial Commission of Inquiry, headed by Justice Basudev Panigrahi, a retired judge of the Orissa High Court. The Judicial Commission was still working when the August 2008 violence began.

The National Commission for Minorities had visited Kandhamal in January and April 2008. Among others, the commission had recommended the following:

➤ *The State Government must look into the speeches of Laxmanananda Saraswati to determine whether they amount to incitement of violence and take appropriate action.*

➤ *The State Government must issue a White Paper on the conversion issue to dispel fears and suspicions that have been assiduously raised about the Christian community and the role of its institutions.*

➤ *The State Government must take the necessary steps to set up a statutory Minorities Commission for safeguarding the rights of the minorities.*

➤ *The confusion created by the High Court Order needs to be swiftly cleared to prevent further outbreak of tensions between STs and SCs.*

➤ *The confidence of the people in the impartiality of the law-enforcing administration and the sanctity of the rule*

*of law must be re-established through speedy and concrete measures to bring to book the guilty in the riots. The guilty must be identified and named as early as possible.*

The Orissa Government had not cared to implement any of these recommendations when the second phase of violence, of a far greater magnitude, began in August 2008 in the district.

### **1.2 How the Pogrom Started in August 2008**

On the night of 23 August 2008, Laxmanananda Saraswati was killed in his Jaleshpeta ashram along with his four disciples. A few days ago, he had informed the local police station about the threat to his life. A letter, reportedly signed by the Maoists, had reached Laxmanananda. The letter had warned that unless Laxmanananda stopped his communal activities, he would be killed. The police was informed of this letter. But, the police failed in providing security, and Laxmanananda was killed. Reportedly, a crowd of 40-50 armed men came to the ashram and shot dead Laxmanananda and his disciples.

The police sources immediately suspected the hands of the Maoists in these killings. Next day, all local newspapers reported about the Maoist involvement, quoting police sources. The Sangh Parivar, however, invented and publicized the theory that “extremist Christian groups” were responsible for the killing. And, neither the government nor any enlightened individual, group, body of

educated middle-class, or any political party with claims to secularism came forward to contest this theory. Rather, senior BJP ministers issued statements saying that Maoists were not the real culprits (Biswabhusan Harichandan, Minister of Law, quoted in *The Samaj* on 26 August 2008), which in a way, was the government’s position on the issue of killing.

In Kandhamal, the Sangh Parivar used the killing as an excuse to carry out its politics of hate. It took out a funeral procession, carrying the dead bodies from Jaleshpeta ashram, where Laxmanananda and his disciples were killed, to Chakapada, his main ashram. The procession covered a distance of nearly 150 km, passing through many sensitive areas, such as Baliguda, Raikia, G. Udaygiri, Tikabali, Phulbani and Phiringia. The administration had invoked Section 144 in the district, but didn’t stop the procession. Instead, the procession was allowed to pass through some areas, which did not fall in the route between Jaleshpeta and Chakapada. The communally charged crowd in the procession attacked the Christian settlements and religious places on the way and thus, the Sangh Parivar fanned the anti-Christian frenzy.

In Kandhamal, attacks on Christians had begun since the morning of 24 August 2008 and continued till the end of September. It is difficult to provide a complete picture of such large-scale violence. However, to understand its nature, we are presenting some of the incidents narrated by the victims themselves.

### 1.3 The Saga of Violence and Barbarity

Families of Christians in Rupagaon, located at a distance of 2 to 3 km from the Chakapada ashram, were warned by the local police to be alert of attacks by Hindus. But, the police didn't take any steps to protect the Christians. "We contacted the SP over the mobile phone for police protection. But, he wasn't there. As we heard that 20,000–30,000 had gathered at the ashram and were coming to attack us, we fled to the forests. The sheer number was scary; we cannot resist them as we had done in December 2007. Hiding on tree-tops, we saw nearly 300–400 people marching towards our village with swords, clubs and *mashals* in their hands; some had tied a red head-band. Even 20–30 women were in the crowd; some with swords in their hands. All of them were shouting, *Bajrangbali ki jai*. Rasananda Pradhan, a paralytic patient couldn't come with us. From our hiding place in the forest, we could see that our houses were being burnt. They didn't spare Rasananda. They burnt him alive." In fact, these people were among the first groups of people to reach Bhubaneswar and sheltered in the YMCA building. "We walked through the forests for days, without food and water, carrying little children," they told us.

A woman from Sipaiju village in Katingia Gram Panchayat (GP), who had taken shelter in YMCA, Bhubaneswar, narrated how the riots started in her village. "Prior to the attacks, there was a meeting on Sunday in which RSS

people from the GP as well as outsiders participated. We got to know about the meetings from some people. We all fled to the forests, hiding from the attackers. Walking through the forests, we reached G. Udaygiri, and from there, we came to Bhubaneswar. There are about 45 Christian families and about 50 Adivasi families in our village. All the houses were burnt. Ranjit Pradhan is an Adivasi Christian. His cousin, Anatha Pradhan, who lives in the same village, is not a Christian. He was told by the Hindu groups to attack his own relatives."

A woman from Tiangia, sheltered in the same camp, said, "For the first time, there was conflict between the two communities in the village after the December riots, which took place in other parts of the district. But, the sarpanch, who was a Hindu, was supportive of the Christians. So, there was no attack on the Christians last time. This time, we were told how the sarpanch could not do anything. Trinath Nayak of Prisubali village (of Tiangia GP) was hacked to death. Parikhit Nayak of Tiangia-Gudaripada was hacked to death in the forest. Bikram Nayak, a Hindu, of Tiangia was killed because he was mixing with the Christians."

"Mahadev, (a Sundhi, caste Hindu) the shopkeeper, was the main organizer of the attacks against the Christians in our GP. He supplied kerosene to burn the houses. When the attackers came to attack us, they shouted slogans, *Bharatmata ki jai* and *Bajrangbali ki jai*. They threatened us saying, 'We will do to your young women what you have



done to our *mataji*'; 'wherever you see Christians, kill them'; 'even if you return after 20 years, we will kill you'; 'we will kill all children of Christians so that they will not be there to take revenge'."

An elderly man of about 70 years, who lives in a hamlet near Baliguda, said, "On 24 August 2008, around 8 P.M., nearly, 50-60 people (Paika, Brahmin, Patra and Majhi of nearby places who are not personally known to him) came with axes, crow-bars, *barchha* and lathis shouting the slogan, 'kill the Christians, chase them out.' There were also women with them. Except me, rest of our family members (his wife, son, daughter-in-law and grand daughter) fled to the jungle. They did not give me time even to ask what my fault was or why they have come. They fixed the axe on my neck and slapped and asked, 'Will you renounce Christianity?' I said no. Again, they slapped and asked, 'Will you renounce Christianity?' I said no. Then, they dragged me to the nearby mango tree and tied me to it. The beating continued and the same question was asked repeatedly, and I was giving the same answer. Finally, they dragged me to a muddy area (it was a rainy day) and thrust my face into it and tonsured my head (*a violent symbolic assertion of conversion to Hinduism*). They were not only rioters, but also looters. They took away two of my goats."

In the MKCG Medical College, Berhampur, we met several people grievously injured and brought there by the police. They had no one to look after them and they had no idea where they

would return and with what means. Some had a couple of local relatives who were in fear of visiting them. Local church people would get these patients some food once a day.

A 35-year-old daily wage worker from a village in Raikia block was pushed to the ground and a huge stone thrown on his chest on 27 August 2008 as a mob attacked his village. His rib cage was fractured and he had difficulty walking or talking. He was most worried when he would begin working because his family was penniless. His wife said they only want some fare to go back to the relief camp. She had received the news that her two children were in the Bhubaneswar relief camp and three children were in yet another relief camp that she did not know. She was anxious to locate them. The local newspaper had reported how the 75-year-old Lallaji Naik from G. Udaygiri succumbed to his injuries in Berhampur. His 65-year-old wife, whose head and neck bore deep cuts, was still in a precarious condition. She had just been told about her husband's death and she silently showed her scars and cuts. They were from Goddoguda in G. Udaygiri and attacked on 1 October 2008. Such assaults were continuing even more than a month after the violence had begun.

Children were also brutally assaulted. A 42-year-old woman was nursing her 8-year-old son who had received deep cuts in his head from an axe. He had miraculously survived. The woman shut her eyes and said I pray to god to forgive them. She said

how they would have known that we were still grieving my husband's death that happened only a month ago. She said she is lucky that her daughter is safe. Yet another 15-year-old girl was in the next ward whose left side was completely burnt and in bandages. Her mother only wept silently and said there is nothing to say; they pulled her hair, put kerosene on her and struck a match.

Similar stories of torture, violence, burning, killing, damage to houses and Christian institutions and loot of property pour out from village after village. Ultimately, all this human loss and suffering become cold government statistics: **39 deaths, 3 missing, 415 villages affected, 3,776 houses and 195 churches and prayer houses damaged and 25,177 people in relief camps**. Based on the accounts of the victims and the local people, who have not suffered so much of violence, we will attempt to map the broad patterns of the pogrom:

1. Before the attack, the local RSS units conducted meetings in the panchayat offices, schools, anganwadi centres and distributed notices, informing the time at which the Hindutva groups will come and attack the village.

2. The Christian families were served this ultimatum: consider entering the Hindu fold or be prepared to be killed.

3. Almost all families sought refuge in the nearby jungles.

4. The Sangh Parivar masterminded, provoked, organized and planned the pogrom.

5. Neighbours and nearby villagers actively participated in the violence.

6. Women, with weapons, got directly involved in the pogrom. The traders provided kerosene and transportation to the rioters. And, the rioters were rewarded with food and, in some places, with alcohol each evening.

7. A rumour heard in several areas was, "Christians from our villages had participated in the killing; they had brought swamiji's flesh and blood and celebrated in the churches."

8. The district-level government machinery, at least for a month, did not take any effective steps to protect the life and property of the people.

9. Everywhere, Christians irrespective of their caste or tribe were selectively targeted. All those who made phone calls to the *thanas*, approached the *thanas* and, in rare cases, tried to register FIRs, got no response from the police.

10. Loot and damage of property was methodically carried out, with the motive being economic ruination of the Christian community.

While the victims, in large numbers, were in search of refuge in relief camps, hospitals and relatives in other towns, the perpetrators had begun registering their victory marks. Saffron flags were flown atop the destroyed churches. *Jai Sriram* and *Om Ram Rajya* were written on the walls. In one case, the cross was removed from the church building, and it was converted into a Hindu *mutt*. Saffron flags were flown on shops not

only in trade centers of G. Udaygiri, Raikia, Tikabali, but also in the interior villages atop the undamaged Hindu houses. As someone in G. Udaygiri shared in fear, "Every one did not want to put the flags on rooftops; out of the fear of the VHP/RSS people we had to."

The violence was not confined only to Kandhamal; it spread to other parts of Orissa as well. Christian communities and their institutions were attacked in Gajapati, Koraput, Bargarh, Sambalpur, Kalahandi, Rayagada, Sundargarh, Khurdha and Balasore districts. In Gajapati, near Kandhamal, a number of churches and Christian houses were burnt. One man was burnt alive. School buses, jeeps and motorbikes were set on fire. In the Golamunda block of Kalahandi, a day-care centre and a prayer hall were burnt. In Bargarh, the Missionary Training Centre at Khuntapalli, near Padampur, was attacked. Here, Rajni Majhi was burnt alive and a Christian priest was brutally beaten up. Institutions were also attacked in Sohela and Gaisilat in this district. Christian orphanages and schools were torched in Muniguda of the Rayagada district.

#### 1.4 Response of the Government of Orissa

"From the very start of these horrible and shameful incidents of communal violence, my government has taken whatever steps it possibly could to bring normalcy and peace back to that disturbed district," said Naveen Pattnaik in an interview on a TV channel with Karan Thapar in early October. Let us

examine how the BJD-BJP coalition government responded to the situation in Kandhamal.

When the Sangh Parivar gave the call for a *bandh* across Orissa on 25 August 2008, the BJP, a coalition partner in the state government, announced to join the *bandh*. All that the Chief Minister did was to appeal for a "peaceful" *bandh*. During the *bandh*, Christians across the state suffered brutal violence in the hands of the Sangh Parivar. The Chief Secretary to the Orissa Government, said the *bandh* was "complete, under control and peaceful." When one half of the government (the BJP) participated in the *bandh*, thereby in the anti-Christian violence, could one expect the government to protect the Christians? No wonder, it simply chose to allow the attackers to have a free hand. And, the police remained mere onlookers, or worse still, friendly with the perpetrators. "The police failed to stop the crimes and did not protect me from the attackers; they were friendly with the attackers. They tried their best that I did not register an FIR or make any complaints against police. The police did not take down my statement as I narrated in detail. I was raped and now, I don't want to be victimized by the Orissa police. I want a CBI enquiry." Sister Meena, who was raped on the 25 August 2008 in K. Nuagaon said this in a written statement to the press. Both this rape and the killing and burning of Rajni Majhi happened on the same day.

The government, as a routine, suspended the Superintendent of Police, Kandhamal and the Officer-in-Charge of

the Tumudibandha police station for failing to provide security to Laxmanananda. Some high-ranking officers were sent to Kandhamal to take charge of the situation. The government also announced the instituting of a Judicial Commission of Inquiry to look into the killing of Laxmanananda and the violence that followed. It has become a habit of the BJP-BJD government to institute a judicial commission and forget about it. The commission set up to inquire the 2007 December communal violence in Kandhamal is yet to submit its report. The judicial commission set up for the Kalinganagar police firing is yet to submit its report, though more than 3 years have gone by.

Unprecedented as it is, the government didn't allow political leaders, human rights organizations or relief agencies to enter the district till 2 September 2008. Only media agencies were allowed. Sriprakash Jayswal, Minister of State, Home Affairs, Government of India returned to Delhi without being allowed to visit Kandhamal. Reportedly, the Orissa Government advised him not to visit the district as it was risky. On the contrary, VHP leaders like Praveen Togadia and BJP leaders were allowed to travel through the district and attend the funeral rites of their leader at Chakapada. On 3 September 2008, Shivraj Patil, the Home Minister, Government of India, visited the district.

Despite these visits of central and state government leaders, the violence in Kandhamal did not stop, rather a blame game started between the leaders on the need for the number of paramilitary

forces. In any case, Christian families, to save their lives, were running to relief camps or leaving the district for other towns and cities. A look at the wretched conditions of the relief camp would testify to the government's indifference to the plight of the inmates.

The failure of the government to curb the violence forced people to leave their villages and take shelter in police stations. When the attacks intensified and spread to more villages, more and more people fled from their villages. The district administration had no option but to accommodate people in school buildings or in make-shift camps in school premises or in the nearby open fields. It was raining those days and one could imagine the condition of the relief camps. In the absence of sanitary facilities and non-availability of usable water, the conditions worsened. Small children were defecating in the campsite itself and dogs and cows were freely roaming around the camp. As a result, gastroenteritis and fever spread very fast. People had to run away from their houses with whatever they had on their body. In the relief camps, they had to manage with only one set of clothes provided by the government (one saree, one petticoat and a blouse for women; a dhoti, a shirt and one pant for the men; and a shirt or frock for children). People often complained of the rotten rice and dal given in the camp. The condition of women was more precarious. They were not provided with sanitary napkins or clothes during the time of menstruation. Due to the trauma and the long trek in the forests, some pregnant women

suffered miscarriages. According to news reports, 26 babies have been delivered in the relief camps till mid-October. Despite all these horrible conditions in which people were living, the government was stubborn enough not to allow other groups to provide relief material. It only left the people to suffer and rue their fate.

People had fled to the relief camps for physical security. But, even in the relief camps, they were not secure. Bombs exploded near the relief camp in G. Udaygiri and K. Nuagaon. Reports of water tanks being poisoned and yet another incident of a mob of lathi-wielding women trying to forcibly enter the Raikia relief camp further intensified the trauma of the people.

While Christian people, particularly from Kandhamal, were going through all these, the Sangh Parivar was gearing itself to intensify its anti-Christian campaign across the state in the form of the *Kalashyatra* (soil from Laxmanananda *samadhi* would be taken to each village in Orissa). Again, the government did nothing and chose to remain tight-lipped. Only when the Supreme Court, hearing a Public Interest Litigation, asked the state government what measures it had taken to contain further violence, the government submitted an affidavit stating that the *Kalashyatra* would not be allowed to take place. However, the government allowed the Sangh Parivar to organize the *Shradanjali Sabha* in Bhubaneswar where the Hindu fundamentalist leaders vowed to wipe out the

Christians from Kandhamal. The meeting was attended by the BJP state president, among others.

The government's inaction in the beginning not only led to the rise in the death toll, but also to the increase in the attacks. Victims complained that the local police stations refused to accept the FIRs. In certain cases, when the FIRs were accepted, the accused were not arrested. Rather, some of the accused became members of the so-called peace committees sponsored by the district administration. When the pressure mounted in the national and international level against the failure of the government to protect Christians and the issue of the imposition of Article 355/356 rose, the government was forced to take some actions. It is worthwhile to mention that 38 days after the lodging of the FIR by the nun, the government arrested some people and handed over the case to the Crime Branch. Some arrests also took place in the first week of October. The Chief Minister himself admitted in an interview to CNN-IBN in early October that many of the arrested people belong to VHP and Bajrang Dal.

By the beginning of October, there was a decline in the incidents of overt violence. And, the government began to claim that normalcy was being restored in the district. However, the situation was far from normal. The perpetrators of violence were still at large. But, the government claimed that people were leaving the relief camps and returning home. It also claimed that the number

of people in the relief camps had come down to 13,000 from nearly 24,000. However, all people were not returning home. Thousands of people left the relief camps and went to several towns and cities in search of work so that they could survive. These people had no confidence to return to their villages and rebuild their lives. One section of people did return to the villages, but only after accepting the Sangh Parivar's condition that they convert to Hinduism. While most of the vernacular media was silent on this, some of the national dailies did highlight the fact. *Conversion to Hinduism a condition for Christians to return home in Kandhamal*—The Hindu reported on 10 October 2008. Photocopies of application forms, expressing one's desire to return to Hinduism, were circulated in the relief camps. People were asked to sign and return it to the local RSS leaders. Without addressing this issue of forced conversion to Hinduism, the administration continued to persuade people to return to their villages. The only thing the government did was to supply a register in each relief camp for people to record complaints of forced conversion, if there were any.

The violence intensified as the government was hesitating to take any resolute action to stop it. Only after international pressure, arrests began. Some innocent people were also arrested in the process by the police. Even some school children, it is alleged, were arrested. The situation worsened with the midnight raids on the villages by the Central Reserve Police Force. On the one hand,

thousands sought safety in the relief camps. On the other hand, an equal number, in fear of police atrocities, sought refuge in the jungles nearby.

Even continued clamping of curfew affected normal life adversely. Daily wage earners were the worst affected. The lack of mobility and employment meant that their meager savings got exhausted. Due to curfew, the peasants also could not market their vegetable and it was wasted. Thus, it was a huge humanitarian crisis as well.

The Orissa Government announced the setting up of two fast-track courts in Kandhamal for expediting the trial of cases related to the violence. However, these courts are yet to function till the time of writing this report. The government declared the following relief and rehabilitation measures for the victims: Rs. 2,00,000/- (two lakhs) to the next of kin of the deceased; Rs. 20,000/- for partially damaged houses and 50,000/- for fully damaged houses; Rs. 15,000/- to Rs. 40,000/- for damaged shops and Rs. 2,000/- for loss of bicycle. On the advice of the Supreme Court, the government also declared assistance for building churches and prayer houses. In addition, the government announced to open 8 new tehsils in the district to hold special camp courts at the Revenue Inspector headquarters to look into the land issue, to appoint a team of 10 police inspectors to inquire into the allegations of fake caste certificates and to recruit 500 Adivasi youths as Special Police Officers.

While the state's response in preventing and containing the violence in

Kandhamal was a failure, other parties, such as the Sangh Parivar were active in many ways to perpetuate the violence. The media too through its silence on certain issues and its assertions validating the incidents largely, failed to place people's suffering or the barbaric violence in perspective. We look at the role of the Sangh Parivar first.

### 1.5 Role of the Sangh Parivar

From the beginning, the Sangh Parivar rejected the police's suspicion of Maoist involvement in the killing of Laxmanananda and his disciples. It continued to reiterate that he was killed by Christian groups for opposing conversion and cow slaughter. Even after the Maoist leadership admitted on camera on 5 October 2008 on NDTV about its role in the killings, the Sangh Parivar refused to accept the fact. After the communal violence of December 2007, the Sangh Parivar had emphasized the Maoist connection with the evangelists. *The Organiser*, the Sangh Parivar's mouthpiece, (13 January 2008) had written, "*Involvement of Maoists in the Kandhamal violence is becoming increasingly clear. They were summoned by the missionaries of this district to attack the Hindus. The nature of attack and arms and ammunition being used for that purpose make their suspected involvement more clear.*" But, after the killing of Laxmanananda, the Organiser (7 September 2008) took a complete u-turn. It wrote, "*It is a well-known fact that the Naxals generally attack such rich people who possess much money, property or ammunition. In order to snatch them away*

*from them, Naxals make them target. But Swami Laxmanananda who dedicated his entire life for the poor, downtrodden, Harijans and Vanvoasis did possess nothing so valuable, then why would the Naxals attack him? Naxals have no business with religious matters. All the previous 10 attacks were made by the Christians, not by Naxals. It will not be out of place to mention here that in 2006, in an interview with this correspondent Swamiji had narrated about some true incidents how Naxals used to come to his reformation programmes and attend his religious, cultural programmes. Swamiji had no rivalry with Naxals. Hence the government's Naxal attack plea is not at all believable.*"

After the Jaleshpeta incident, senior leaders of Sangh Parivar started visiting Orissa and Kandhamal. Praveen Togadia of the VHP landed there even before 24 hours had elapsed to participate in the last rites. We have already discussed the consequences of these visits. The Sangh Parivar lost no time to announce a series of programmes to spread the anti-Christian venom and hatred in the entire province of Orissa. The first one in the series was the "Orissa Bandh" on 25 August 2008. As already mentioned, during the *bandh*, there were attacks on the Christians and their property and institutions. This made the Organizer say, "the swamiji is even more powerful in death." The next in the series was the plan of a *Kalashyatra*. Under pressure from the Supreme Court, the Orissa Government did not allow this. The third issue was the *Shradanjali Sabhas* —

memorial meetings—throughout the province. In all these meetings, anti-Christian hate speeches, threats and provocative statements were made consistently. Almost all the meetings made the following demands: End to conversion and end to cow slaughter to restore peace in Kandhamal. On 6 September 2008, the *Shradhanjali Sabha* held to pay homage to Laxmanananda passed four resolutions. These were: (1) conversion will not be allowed (2) people who converted to Christianity will be brought back to Hinduism (3) cow slaughter will not be allowed and (4) cattle transportation to slaughter houses will not be allowed. Later in the month, BJP leader L.K. Advani visited the state and condemned the violence in the district, but called for a national debate on conversion.

The fourth set of programmes was about mobilizing *sadhus*, *sanths* and the Maharaja of Puri, Shankaracharya for a hate campaign against the minorities. The *sadhus* sat on a *dharna* and demanded: (1) the murderers of Laxmanananda be arrested and (2) action be taken against Sister Meena because her allegation of rape is false. The objectives of the *yagyanas* organized by them were to eliminate the enemies of Hinduism.

The Gajapati Maharaja of Puri and Shankaracharya of Puri Govardhan Pitha have been vociferous in demanding an end to conversion and cow slaughter in the state. “The killing of swamiji is not an attack on this person; it is an attack on the Indian culture. It is

a ‘do or die’ situation for our religion and culture. If we don’t understand it, fifty years from now, we Hindus will not be able to come out of our homes,” said Divyasingh Dev, the Gajapati of Puri, presiding in one of the *Shradanjali Sabhas*. The Nikhil Utkal Matha-Mandiradhish Seva Sangh, an organization of assorted Hindu religious organizations, demanded, among others, the expulsion of non-Hindus from Orissa.

In the long campaign of violence against minorities, the Sangh Parivar used its pet slogans as “minority appeasement,” “religious conversion” and “Hindus becoming a minority in India.” It will not be out of place here to talk about its strategy of violence and spreading myths and lies.

Since the colonial times until the Gujarat pogrom, the Sangh Parivar has always attacked minorities with two-fold objectives: (1) to terrorize the minorities and (2) to push them into misery. As this is not widely opposed, the fears and vulnerability of the minorities intensify and consolidate. Therefore, religious identity becomes their sole defence. They then develop a parochial mindset where the religious, or sometimes even fundamentalist, leaders influence minority opinion and gain further legitimacy. In addition, the basic questions of livelihood and development become less important or unimportant. On the other hand, the Sangh Parivar by spreading the myth of the threat from minorities gains acceptability and emphasizes a



monolithic Hinduism. Thus, it successfully glosses over the caste-class divide within Hinduism.

It is common knowledge that the Sangh Parivar looks at Hitler and Nazis as its ideals. Hitler's Propaganda Minister Goebbles had the following strategy: *repeat a lie a hundred times and it will become the truth*. This is most religiously followed by the Sangh Parivar. The issue of religious conversion thus was cleverly manipulated in Kandhamal as the only issue that the Sangh Parivar is out to set right. Through this campaign, they rendered basic issues as secondary in Kandhamal.

### 1.6 The Kui Coordination Committee (KCC)

As in the violence of 2007, the KCC's role during the violence of August-September 2008 needs to be seen critically. As mentioned earlier, the Sangh Parivar and the KCC converged in seeing the Dalit Christians as their enemy. Before commenting further on KCC—an organization proclaiming to protect the interests of Adivasis of Kandhamal—it needs to be told that except Lambodar Kanhar, no other voices are coming from KCC, at least in the media. Some Adivasi leaders have informally told us that he is the self-proclaimed secretary, and nobody has elected him. In the light of this, we need to see the shifts in his statements as the position of KCC.

At a *yajna* organized by the VHP in April 2006 at Chakpada, Lambodar Kanhar

had issued a leaflet emphasizing a separate religious identity of the Adivasis and thereby, contesting the VHP's position that Adivasis are Hindus. He had even gone to challenge the VHP to allow Adivasis to pour liquor into the pit of the *yajna* (because Adivasis use liquor in *yajna* as opposed to the Hindu practice of using ghee). But, to maintain a separate identity, the KCC, led by Kanhar, neither followed any consistent plan of action in the past nor did it do anything later. Rather, KCC's anti-Dalit position, primarily, on the question of fake caste certificates veered towards an anti-Christian position without considering the fact that a large number of Adivasis (whose interest KCC wants to protect) follow Christianity. The KCC's position manifested itself in a *bandh* call on the occasion of Christmas in 2007, though it denies any communal connection.

In the present communal violence, Lambodar Kanhar, giving interviews to various people or organizations, told that he was not against the Christians. However, he blamed the Christians for Laxmanananda's murder (*The Sambad*, 9 November 2008), endorsing the view of the Sangh Parivar. He even went on to say, "the 2007 communal violence was the result of the exploitation and torture by the Panos and Christians (*The Sambad*, 15 October 2008)." Although he had said that opportunists had taken advantage of the *bandh* call, he claimed that no Adivasi was involved in the recent communal violence (*The Hindu*, 1 October 2008). "We have urged our tribal

brothers to keep a safe distance from both the warring groups.” But, in another interview, boasting that he could stop the violence, not the gun of the government, he says, “so, I gave the message, don’t burn and break churches. The attack stopped” (Tehelka, 14 February 2009).

When in early October, large-scale arrests started, he raised his voice against the arrests and demanded the withdrawal of CRPF from Kandhamal. And, so did the Sangh Parivar. It is pertinent to mention that in the 2008 communal violence, several Adivasi Christians have suffered, but KCC did not utter a word about it. When questioned about this issue, Kanhar has remained evasive.

### 1.7 Role of the Media

It is commonly perceived that the duty of the media is to question, investigate and report facts. In the context of Kandhamal, the unquestioning acceptance by a large section of the media of what the Sangh Parivar wanted people to accept is a matter of serious concern. For example, the New Indian Express (25 August 2008) reported, “*The State Government again harped on the Maoist theory a day after the brutal killing of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati. But, is it not too convenient to be true? The left radicals have always stayed clear of religious issues and there has been no precedence of any attack on such grounds. Why would the Maoists, whose armed struggle thrives on the very faith of the local and indigenous*

*populace, target a leader who enjoyed such a support base in a tribal district? This is something that defies logic. While the Government has a point behind masquerading the reason, it is about time it came to terms with the rise of Christian militancy in the State.*”

On the same day, *The Samaj* questioned the Maoist connection and gave its own theory. It argued, “the activities of Laxmanananda were not opposed to Maoists’ interests. So, why would the Maoists attack Laxmanananda and his disciples? On the other hand, there were attacks on Laxmanananda several times in the past. His dedicated work to stop conversion and bring back the Christian converts to Hinduism had become a problem for some people, particularly for those who, by taking advantage of the poverty of the Dalits and Adivasis, were converting people through many kinds of allurements.”

A large section of the media refuted the Maoist connection and blamed the Christian community without any credible evidence. The remarkable feature of this reporting was the striking similarity it had, in terms of language, logic and details, with the reports of the RSS mouthpiece, *The Organizer*. So, can’t we say that these reports wanted us to believe what the RSS wanted?

Let us now see what a section of the media wanted to and could hide. By relying on the baseless theories of religious conversion and blaming the Christian community, rather cunningly, it could camouflage the organized role

of the Sangh Parivar in the violence. This role was not analysed with any objectivity. During the campaign of barbarity and violence against the minority, the forced conversions conducted by the Sangh Parivar did not find any mention in the media. Instead, citing VHP statements, it was said, people converted voluntarily (*Dharitri*, 30 August 2008). Why was not OFRA applied in this case—this remained uncontested in the media. The media had no scruples in believing and propagating that during a phase of intense violence, people chose to “return” to the Hindu fold “voluntarily.” Finally, when the Maoists distributed their pamphlet, gave statements in the electronic media, owning responsibility of the death of Laxmanananda, none in the media—who had been slandering the Christian community—thought of owning moral responsibility and tendering an apology.

The rape of the nun on 25 August 2008 initially did not find the prominence it deserved. After *The Hindu* reported it in detail on 30 September 2008, the local dailies picked up the thread. *The Samaj* (24 October 2008) carried the headline, “The Nun’s Rape is a Big Lie,” and went on to say, “that the two lady doctors have said the nun is in the habit of sexual intercourse.” *Dharitri* (28 October 2008) opined that “the said nun is used to sexual relations.”

The rape charges are to be decided in the court of law. Before that, why is the media engaged in a slander of this kind? Further, the allegation of rape and the

private sexual life of the victim—how are the two related? And, with what objective has it been presented to the public by the media? Does that mean women with a sexual life can never bring about charges of rape? Or, is it that raping sexually experienced women is justified?

There were pictures of consequences of violence shown in newspapers, but it did not represent the situation of the victims in the relief camps. Statements made by Sangh Parivar leaders found lots of place. But, when it came to the voice of the victims of the violence, it was miserly. The Press Council of India stipulates that the media during violent riots should primarily be the vehicle of peace and goodwill. But, in the Kandhamal violence, the media completely ignored the people who were brave to fight for human values and some of them gave their lives for it.

On the whole, the role of the media was anything, but professional. Here, we would clarify that the lack of professionalism does not rest on the poorly paid or unpaid reporters and journalists. Rather, it is the work of the owner-editor-publisher that we are referring to. As has been opined by Professor Mrinal Chatterjee of IIMC, Dhenkanal, (Oriya Language Press: Status, Problems and Prospects, presented at the University of Pune in February 2007) that the major vernacular dailies are always partisan, and are mostly controlled by the politicians. And on this occasion, we would like to add that their partisanship bordered on the unethical and the fascist.

## 1.8 Human Solidarity

Amidst the madness of violence, hatred and mistrust, there have been a number of instances of human fellow feeling and solidarity that stand out as beacons of hope. One such instance is that of the response of the people of Malikapodi Panchayat. Jamesh Chandra Pradhan, the sarpanch of this panchayat, said, "After the killing of Laxmanananda, the incidents of violence started pouring in from various places. The atmosphere was so scary that people did not venture out after sunset. I decided not to allow any kind of violence to happen, at least, in my panchayat. I toured village to village and organized meetings, met Christians and assured them of full security. We organized night vigils at various places. Despite all this, some Christian families went to the G. Udaygiri relief camp. It saddened me. Each day, I went to the relief camp to talk to them and to persuade them to return to the village. After three days, they returned. In their absence, their houses remained untouched. Neither is a house damaged nor is anyone physically injured in my panchayat. I feel very happy about it; I was able to do my human duty. Some evil elements (did not say clearly who they are) were trying to create mischief; they even threatened me. I did not care. I think God will judge me if I have done right or wrong."

Dandapani Mallick of Damikia (Bodukia Panchayat, Baligurha Block) says, "In 2007 December, the RSS people were

planning to attack Christians. Sensing this, we formed village committees in 4 villages and did not allow anybody to enter. This time also after Laxmanananda's killing, we sat on the road and did not allow the RSS people to enter our villages. They came on 27 and 28 August 2008, but we did not allow them."

Santanu Pradhan, Vice President, Nikhil Utkal Kui Samaj Union (G. Udaygiri), Kanbageri says, "In the periphery of G. Udaygiri NAC, we organized meetings and told people not to participate in the violence. We also took a decision not to allow anybody to create mischief in our area."

As people poured out from Kandhamal and sought refuge in nearby kasbas and towns, relatives living on scarce means themselves began sheltering many families each. We met people living in groups of 30–35 each and *incognito* for fear of being traced by the local Bajrang Dal elements. Relatives outside Orissa too were taking in people. With the current reality of high cost of living and unaffordable housing options, one can well imagine to what extent village acquaintances and relatives stretched their resources to stand up in support. And, they too shared the anxiety and trauma they felt as well as the risks involved.

## II. The Issue of Land: A Historical Sketch

The Orissa Government in one of its reports to the Centre on the Kandhamal situation has said that *“the ongoing conflict in Kandhamal district has its genesis in the age-old ethnic divide and discord between Kandha (one of the Scheduled Tribes) and Pana (one of the Scheduled Castes) communities... There are long standing disputes between Kandhas and Panas on issues arising out of land alienation and certain other perceived discriminations... The ethnic divide between the Pana and Kandha communities got accentuated on religious lines due to conversion of large number of Panas to a different religious community. The communal riot in the district in December, 2007 was also a fall out of such issues. In this backdrop of mutual distrust and animosity, the tenuous bonds of peaceful coexistence between the two communities got destroyed by the brutal murder of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati, who was in the forefront of the campaign against the alleged forcible conversion of Hindus”* (Communal and Ethnic Conflict in Kandhamal District, Government of Orissa).

There are a few recurring themes around the situation in Kandhamal that lead to differences in perspective whether it is with some intellectuals, the Sangh Parivar, the Orissa Government, journalists or even among people in Kandhamal. These pertain to issues of land, ethnic tension between Kandhos and Panos, the politics of Hindutva, and the religious conversion

and reservation politics. These themes or issues, it appears, have long histories. We shall provide here a glimpse of the histories beginning with a brief history of Kandhamal.

### 2.1 A Brief Note on Kandhamal

As an administrative unit, Kandhamal today, has a much shorter history than that of the Kandhos and Panos. It is quite chequered also as its territory and boundary underwent changes repeatedly by those in power. A few points from that history are as follows.

Till the colonial period, the social history of Khondmals (the Kandhamal subdivision of the present Kandhamal district) is hardly known except for some sketchy references here and there. During the process of the *Meriah* suppression, the British annexed Kandhamal on 15 February 1855 as part of the Feudatory State of Boudh. “It is noteworthy that the maps prepared under the directions of the Surveyor General of India shows that even up to the year 1903 there was no line of demarcation between Baudh and Khondmals. The name of Khondmals does not even find a place on that map. It is only later that the southern hill tracts of Baudh have been designated as Khondamals by Government” (Completion Report of the Baudh Settlement of 1907 quoted in Boudh-Khondmals District Gazetteers 1983).

After this conquest, the British Government appointed a Tahsildar (Dinabandhu Pattanaik) to administer the tract under the charge of Superintendent of Tributary Mahals. In 1891, it became a sub-division under the Angul district and continued to remain under it till 1936. It became part of the Ganjam district after Orissa became a separate province in 1936. The Baliguda sub-division of the present Kandhamal district was part of the Ganjam Agency Area under the Madras Presidency since its occupation by the British. In 1949, it was attached to the Boudh-Khondmals district.

The Kandhos and the Panos, in their dispersed hamlets and settlements, it is often said, were relatively autonomous. In 1837, Mr. Ricketts reported that the Boudh Raja had no power over his Khond subjects, and in 1844, Mr. Mills, another administrator of the region, stated, "the Khonds had long been at feud with him (i.e. the Boudh Raja), paid no revenue, were under no kind of control, and were in the habit of making encroachments on the lands of the Raja" (O' Malley, Bengal District Gazetteer, Angul, 1908). But, this statement was made at a time when the British were trying to systematically bring the subjugation of the Kandhos and Panos as revenue producers. And, it has been seen at times that such statements were bargaining statements by the Raja (and other intermediaries) to give less to the British, despite collecting regularly from the Kandho and Pano peasants. Madhaba Kanhara and Nabaghana Kanhara were two influential chieftains

who defied the authority of not only the Raja, but also the British authorities during this time.

## 2.2 Socio-Economic Contours of Kandhamal

Kandhamal, or the *hills of kandhos*, was part of the erstwhile Boudh-Phulbani. After the reorganization of districts, it became Phulbani on 1 April 1994 with two sub-divisions, Baliguda and Kandhamal. Later, in June 1994, it was again renamed as Kandhamal. It is one of the centrally located districts with Rayagada in the south, Ganjam in the southeast, Nayagarh in the east and Kalahandi in the west. The entire district is full of hills and forests; cultivable land is scarce. According to Orissa Agricultural Statistics 2006–07, published by Director of Agriculture and Food Production, Bhubaneswar, out of the total geographical area of 8,02,000 hectares, 571,000 hectares (71.19%) is under forest cover and the net sown area is only 1,15,000 hectares (14.37%).

Demographically, Kandhamal is a tribal majority district. According to the 2001 census, tribals constitute 52.7%. Among the tribes, Kandhos are numerically superior though there are Gonds and Saoras. Dalits account for 16.9% of the total population of which Panos form the majority. Others include Ganda, Ghasi and Dom. The remaining 30.4% consist of Christians (mostly Dalit Christians) and various other Hindu caste groups, such as Khandayat, Karan, Brahmin, Sundhi and Suda. In Kandhamal, these caste groups are referred to as Oriyas.

In spite of scarcity of cultivable land, agriculture has remained the mainstay of the district's economy. It is dominated by marginal and small peasants (for details, see pp. 25–26). The majority of the workforce (cultivators 33.47% and agricultural labourers 36.1%, Census 2001) is engaged in agriculture. Despite the region being in the KBK zone, no efforts have been taken to effect any change in agriculture or in the pattern of land ownership. So, the agricultural economy of the region has remained crisis ridden and at subsistence level.

Collection of forest produce and its trade is another major economic activity. Slash-and-burn cultivation is one of the main occupational activities of the landless Adivasis. Beside *kandulo* (pulses), turmeric and ginger are largely grown in forest lands. Siali leaves, sal seeds, tamarind and mangoes are also collected from the forest by the Adivasis. Though we cannot precisely assess the number of people dependent on such minor forest products or the proportion of earning as constituted by these products from the district or state level data, there is some indication of it in village level statistics. A study of village Buluburu (Belghar) conducted by the Tribal and Harijan Research and Training Institute, Bhubaneswar states how Adivasis of the village depend on fruits, tubers and leaves collected from the forest for almost eight months in a year for their survival (Orissa's Kandhos, pp. 396). We have also learnt from the victims of violence that many earn their living by collecting and selling firewood from the forest.

However, the marketing of these minor forest products is not under the control of the Adivasis. Places like Tikabali, Raikia and Baligurha are important trading centres for forest products. According to the Gazetteer, Tikabali is noted for trade in minor forest products like tamarind and siali leaf. Raikia is noted for trade in turmeric, hill-brooms and tamarind. Baligurha is known for pulses, niger and mustard. The traders at these places are mostly non-Adivasis and "outsiders," known as Oriyas, who determine the prices of the products.

### 2.3 Land, Alienation and Contention

Over centuries, the Adivasis have cleared forests and made them cultivable or agricultural lands. Later, they were pushed out of these lands by more powerful people and resented to less fertile hilly lands — whether it is the 'dangar' cultivation in Rayagada district or the 'mal' as in Kandhamal. According to anthropologists and historians, this process of pushing the Adivasis to interiors began in the 10th and 12th century A.D. F. G. Bailey, who studied the Kandho culture during the 1960s, has said, "the Oriyas from the plains have settled here for 900 years and many of the new settlers are land-grabbers" (Caste, Tribe and Nation by F.G. Bailey). One can get similar information from the myths and lore of the Kandhos that have developed around it. (Religious Ceremonies, Ordeals and a Legend about Oriya infiltration in Kondh Hills - U. N. Pattnaik, *Adibasi*, January 1970).

Moreover, when land defines economy, it not only becomes the source of livelihood, but also the source of dignity and power. F. G. Bailey observes, "The large Oriya villages are sited in the wider valleys, where the greatest amount of land suitable for rice cultivation is to be found. They occupy the best cultivating sites in the valleys, while the Konds occupy sites which are smaller and in remoter valleys. The fact that they occupy the best land indicates that Oriyas have established a dominance of some sort over the konds, who were unable to retain the best cultivating sites."

### 2.3.1 Under the British Raj

When the British forced its way into Kandhamal in the early part of the 19th century to suppress the *meriah* sacrifice and abolish female infanticide, it encountered stiff resistance from the Kandhos. The resistance was due to the fear that the British snatch their land and impose a tax on them. After this conquest by the British, the political and revenue administration of Kandhamals was organized through the *Mutha* system.<sup>1</sup>

The period from 1830 to 1870 saw a spate of rapid changes in the Adivasi society. After the entry of money economy and excise duties on the Kandhos' liquor production, we see increasing indebtedness among the Kandhos. This process was engendered largely by the colonial state. Poor Adivasis were further impoverished and were forced

to give up their land while the domination of the money lender or the buyer of land began to grow. New courts or the judiciary did not help the poor Adivasis. The Kandhos were tricked into parting with their lands as is the case with Adivasis across the country under the colonial regime. The Kandhos rejected the modern colonial judiciary and viewed it with suspicion because they were being coerced to part with their land. With justice inaccessible and further impoverished, they were left to the despotism of the money lender and *shundhi*, the liquor trader. Most certainly, the Oriya *shundhi* was the worst exploiter of the Kandhos.

In 1902, the colonial administration passed an order that no land can be transferred to non-tribals without the prior consent of the Deputy Commissioner. Again, Angul Laws Regulation of 1913 was promulgated to that effect. Despite these legal protections, tribal people lost land to non-tribals because they did not have record of rights and due to the sustained unscrupulousness of the revenue officials.

In 1921–25, the first survey and settlement operation was undertaken in Kandhamal. Out of the 50 *muthas* in Kandhamal, all villages in 9 *muthas* were surveyed because in those villages, non-Kandhos owned land. A survey revealed that more than one fourth of the land held by the tribals had passed on to the non-tribal. (District Gazetteer, 1983)

<sup>1</sup> A *mutha* is a cluster of villages with a Sardar as its head with one or two assistants called Mallik. The head of the *Mutha* was appointed by the colonial administration to collect revenue and maintain law and order in the *Mutha*. In return, the Sardars were getting 12.5% of the gross demand of the land revenue as commission.



We are constrained by fragmentary historical evidence to talk of the Baligurha sub-division only and not the Phulbani sub-division, as it was under a different administrative authority during the British times. The revenue administration in Phulbani may not be a replication of that of Baligurha, but the fate of the peasant producers, it appears, was not greatly different from those in Baligurha. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the British tried many permutations and combinations of revenue administration: the muthadar system, the zamindari system, then back to the Collector as revenue administrator and so on. Many land surveys were necessitated by these experiments, though the surveys were not covering the entire region or not completed at times (as in 1924). Land alienation from the Kandhos continued. Finally, the British passed The Agency Tracts Interest and Land Transfer Act I of 1917 that “prohibited all transfer from hill men to non-hill men without express permission of the authorities.”

### **2.3.2 Independent India**

To protect tribal land, the Orissa Government passed the Orissa Scheduled Areas Transfer of Immovable Property (by Scheduled Tribe) Regulation 1956. Despite such acts, the question of land alienation surfaced repeatedly and became contentious. In 1966–68, a land grabbing movement had started under the leadership of Ugrasena Mallick in

Khajuripada area against *sundhis* (interview with Krushna Majhi, one of the leaders of the Kui Samaj Seva Samiti). The District Gazetteers (1983) mentions, “In 1970, the Adivasis of the Khondamals subdivision had started an agitation for the restoration of the agricultural lands of their forefathers which had been allegedly usurped by the non-Adivasis. They were being instigated by the Kui Samaj Samiti to commit offences of trespass and forcible reaping of paddy involving the lands under the occupation of the non-Adivasis. This for sometime had given rise to a serious problem of law and order in the district.” In the present state of historical research, it is difficult to know more about land movements. However, after independence, the first survey of land started in 1977–78, but that too was not completed.

The issue of land remained unresolved. In 1994, when the Panos of Linapada entered the Shiv temple, it triggered an ethnic riot and spread to Phiringia, Khajuripada. During this riot, the Adivasis occupied the land of many Panos. After the riots subsided, the government announced the setting up of Camp Courts to settle land disputes as well as promised to set up review committees to monitor the situation every two months. Krushna Majhi said, “some Panos went to the High Court regarding the disputes and after the riots the government also showed little interest to settle the land disputes. No progress was made in that regard.”

Again, in 1998, to make the review committees work, the KCC organized a demonstration of 7000 people. In 2000, there was tension between the Adivasis and the Dalits on the issue of land in Kotgarh block (Subarnagiri, Majaguda, Judabali). Shyam Patmajhi, leader of the Pahadi Sangram Manch, says, "The sub-collector, after inquiries into records, returned the land to the real Adivasi owner. But, during the harvesting time, by the provocation of Nakula Nayak, local Dalits did not allow the Adivasis to reap the crop. As a consequence, there was a riot in which Adivasis damaged the houses of the Dalits and attacked them physically." Again, in June 2002, such a conflict arose in Daringabadi Block (Jhinjhiriguda and Brahmanigaon panchayats). Around 500 Adivasis with 80 pairs of bullocks started cultivating the land under the possession of Dalits. The district administration did intervene, but had to bow down to the wishes of the organized Adivasis; the Dalits left their village in fear, seeking refuge in the police station (*Prajatantra*, 7 July 2002).

In Gahana (Gadaguda panchayat of G.Udaygiri), Binod Mallik said, "there is no land conflict in our Panchayat. Poverty

drove the Adivasis to sell their lands." Budhia Singh, the former Chairman of G.Udaygiri block claims that there are no land disputes in Padangi.

During the 1990s, small radical groups had organized landless people around the issue of land. Perhaps, the government, due to pressure, tried to change the 1956 Regulation in 2002 by making a provision that all land transfers from ST to non-STs between 4 October 1956 and 4 September 2002 must be verified to ascertain their genuineness, and the persons possessing such land must prove to the sub-collector by 4 September 2004 (later extended to 2005) that the transfer was legal. In all probability, this was in response to the growing tensions around land transfer from the Kandhos and the insistence of the KCC to look into these matters.

A look at the tables below will indicate the systematic transfer of land from the Kandhos.

### Scheduled Tribe

S.No.	Size of Holding	Individual Holdings		Joint Holdings		Total Holdings	
		(in ha)	Number	Area	Number	Area	Number
1	Marginal	29980	17600	180	116	30160	17716
2	Small	18475	25764	210	297	18685	26061
3	Semi-Medium	7576	19981	155	402	7731	20382
4	Medium	1525	8358	35	198	1560	8556
5	Large	145	2024	0	0	145	2024
6	All Classes	57701	73727	580	1013	58281	74739

### Scheduled Caste

S.No.	Size of Holding	Individual Holdings		Joint Holdings		Total Holdings	
		(in ha)	Number	Area	Number	Area	Number
1	Marginal	9892	4129	65	33	9957	4162
2	Small	2028	2676	65	86	2093	2762
3	Semi-Medium	503	1256	30	67	533	1323
4	Medium	80	446	0	0	80	446
5	Large	5	74	0	0	5	74
6	All Classes	12508	8581	160	186	12668	8767

## Others

S.No.	Size of Holding (in ha)	Individual Holdings		Joint Holdings		Total Holdings	
		Number	Area	Number	Area	Number	Area
1	Marginal	9612	4715	70	28	9682	4743
2	Small	3099	4169	20	26	3119	4195
3	Semi-Medium	1015	2707	25	66	1040	2773
4	Medium	255	1472	5	37	260	1509
5	Large	30	348	0	0	30	348
6	All Classes	14011	13411	120	157	14131	13568

Marginal: Upto 1 ha., Small: 1 ha. to 2 ha., Semi-medium: 2ha. to 4 ha.

Medium: 4ha. to 10 ha., Large: 10 ha. and above (Source: Agricultural Census 2000-01).

From the above tables, it can be seen that nearly 77% of the total land held by these three groups (ST, SC and Other) is in the hands of STs, 9.03% with SCs and 13.97% with Others. Again, if we analyze the land holding pattern within the social group, the disparity is obvious. For example, among the STs, the Medium and Large holdings constitute to 2.91% of the total holdings, whereas they hold 14.19% of the total area. On the other hand, the Marginal and Small holdings constitute 83.80% of the total holdings, whereas they hold 58.56% of the total area. As regards SCs, Marginal

and Small holdings constitute 95.12% of the total holdings, whereas they hold 78.97% of the total area; Medium and Large land holdings constitute 0.67% of the total land holdings, but they account for 5.93% of the total area. Among Others, Marginal and Small holdings constitute 90.58% of the total holdings, and they hold 65.87% of the total area. Medium and Large holdings constitute 2.05% of the total holdings, whereas they hold 13.69% of the total area.

From the above account, it is evident that Adivasis constitute about 52.7% of the

population and own 77% of total land in Kandhamal. On the other hand, Dalits are about 16.9%, but they own about 9.09% of total land. As the Dalit Christians are included in other categories, the percentage of Dalit ownership of land may increase marginally. A study conducted by a government research institution states that the *sundhis* have grabbed land. And, therefore, how true is the allegation that Dalits (Panos) are land grabbers? The tables also show that in all categories, there is small section that owns a large amount of land. But, in Kandhamal, there is no struggle against large land owners, which is generally seen in other land movements. The official statistics on the land holding pattern does not clearly reflect the ground reality. It is therefore obvious that no proper survey of land or settlement records have taken place. Who should be blamed for this lapse, the state government or the Dalits in Kandhamal?

Further, though Lambodar Kanhar, alleges that Panos are land grabbers, he could hardly cite cases of land grabbing. This is despite the fact that he submitted a list of 503 fake caste certificate cases to the district administration. Interestingly, Brahmananda Behera, Secretary of Pana Kalyan Samiti in a written memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister of Orissa dated 2 October 2008

has invited KCC to cite cases of land grabbing by Panos so that the land can be returned to the Adivasis. But, KCC is yet to respond to that.

Finally, for the sake of argument, one may concede that there are a few cases of land grabbing by Panos. But, does that justify blaming an entire community and creating an atmosphere of hatred?

### III. Politics of Domination: Past and Present

#### 3.1 Social Equation: Adivasi, Pano and Oriya

Panos, numerically the minority social group in Kandhamal and judging by economic indicators the most depressed as well, is made out by the media to be the villain of the drama that is taking place in Kandhamal. They are always referred to as thieves, cheats, molesters and rapists, or even in the memorandum dated 29 September 2008 submitted by the Secretary, KCC. This social ostracization runs deep in history too.

Macpherson, the British Officer in charge of *meriah* suppression in Kandhamal, wrote in 1865 “ the Panwa is proverbially indispensable to every Khond hamlet. His duties are to provide human victims.... ; to carry messages, such as summons to council or to the field; to act as a musician at ceremonies, and to supply the village with cloth... They use both the khond and Oriya languages.... They are treated with great kindness, but as an inferior and protected, perhaps a servile race. They are never neglected at a feast; any injury done to them is promptly resented. But they are never allowed to bear themselves as equals”. This graphically maps their status in the society. And this reflected in their material possessions and existence as well.

O’ Malley, another British official, observed in 1908, “In the Khondmals, the Pans were the serfs of the Khonds.

They worked on their farms and wove cloth for them, in return for which they obtained a small area of land, grain for food and all their marriage expenses; they used also to procure victims for the *meriah* sacrifices. Their serfdom was so well recognized that if a Pan left his master and worked for another, it caused serious dissensions among the Khond community. To this day there is a settlement of Pans – a kind of Ghetto- attached to every large Khond village, where they weave the cloth the Khonds require and work as farm labourers”. This is indicative of the wretched existence the Panos were condemned to largely by the neglect of the civil society and the state.

A century after Macpherson’s observations, the Boudh- Khondmals Gazetteer 1983 confirms, “*the picture remains more or less the same today except for the Meriah sacrifice*”.

Yet, the equation of master-serf, patron-client between Kandho and Pano communities is more metaphorical than real. In Kandhamal, the agrarian economy of the hilly and least fertile terrain could barely support both the Kandhos and the Panos even at subsistence level. Economy apart, their degree of mutual dependence in matters relating to socio-cultural life was quite considerable. The equations between these communities were different in different areas. For example, in Kandhamal (blocks like Phulbani,

Phiringia, Khajuripada), the Panos are untouchables to Adivasis so also to Oriyas; the social segregation is quite sharp. But in Baligurha subdivision (Kotagarh, Raikia), it is difficult to distinguish between Pano and Kandho. Economically and culturally, in matters of language, food, and so on, they are similar. Untouchability was non-existent between these communities. So when Nikhil Utkal Kui Samaj Union was formed in 1929, many people from Pano community were also its members (interview with Krushna Majhi).

It is but natural and human to break the yoke of subordination. In the absence of any political process to redeem the situation, sometimes, individuals take to stealing as a strategy for survival. To label the entire community of Panos as thieves is unjustified and exaggerated. But the image of Panos as cunning and unscrupulous persists and is perpetuated by political leaders too; bureaucrats too talk in the same language though informally.

The Panos being outcastes of Hindu society were forced to migrate to these less fertile and rocky terrain. Some of them were also bought by Kandhos to work as their farm labourers. And it had been happening for over a century, as testified in the records of the British times.

During the British period, the opening of the roads and communication, regular markets offered opportunities. Panos took to small trades, worked in government-sponsored works as daily labourers, supplementing their work as farm labourers. On the other hand,

though some Kandhos availed of such opportunities, relatively they remained less exposed to the changes and remained confined to their material and cultural moorings. Some of them, of course, thought it was beneath their dignity to take to trading activity, noted F.G.Bailey. The colonial state certainly subverted the clan structure of social order of Kandhos, the Mutha system etc, substituting it with modern bureaucracy and judiciary. This meant a decline in their political power. Moreover, it was difficult for the Kandhos to interact with such institutions because of their language. Panos, on the other hand, were conversant in both languages. Therefore, their importance grew. However, it was the Oriyas who could make the best use of the modern education that the colonial administration provided. In addition, Oriyas benefited most from colonial arrangements in terms of the economic and political power. During the campaign against *meriah* suppression, some of them had rendered their services to the British. This created an opportunity for them to be close to the administration. After the conquest, Dinabandhu Pattanaik, the de-facto ruler of Kandhamal went to the extent of appointing some Oriyas as Mutha Sardars, thus combining economic and political power in one hand. He opened up liquor trade in Kandhamal and gave licenses to Sundhis which became a cause of land alienation of tribal people. This became so much of a problem that in 1872 some Kandho Sardars appealed to the administration to impose tax on liquor shops.

Besides these changes in economy and political power, Christianity had a bearing on the social situation in Kandhamal during colonial period. Kandhos had suffered defeat at the hands of the British in the course of *meriah* suppression and they saw the missionaries as part of the foreign power. Secondly, culturally they were a much settled community having their own religious practices. So, initially a few of them embraced Christianity. But the situation for Pano was totally different. Even in a tribal set-up, the tag of untouchability did not leave them. They had to suffer social exclusion. Here Christianity offered a sense of meaning and identity to their existence. It was truer in case of the poorest in the community. During colonial times, it was the Dalit community that was attracted to Christianity more than any other community.

After independence, a new set of rules and institutions were in place to emphasize a sense of equality which undermined the old equations. Mutha system was completely abolished, thereby abolishing the powerful symbol of the old power structure. The Temple Entry Act was passed in 1949. This provided the Pano community, who were not allowed to enter the temple, with an opportunity to assert their rights by entering the temple. But this assertion was strongly opposed by the village Oriya community. It did not result in any physical conflict; rather the matter ended with Pano community building their own temple. However, this cultural assertion clearly shows the shifting equation in the social relations: *subservience*

*is no more acceptable*. The reservation in government jobs and education had a role to play also. Compared with Adivasis, Dalits fared better. But again the lion share of education and job-reservation went to the Oriyas.

Significantly, the temple entry attempt was the reason behind the 1994 Kandho-Pano conflict. Even the Pano Kalyan Committee, in a pamphlet of 14 June 2006, states, "even now, at many places in the district, people are prevented entry into the temples. This social malaise should be opposed soon." This means temple entry has been a point of cultural assertion by the Dalits. The emergence of the traders as an "influential" community in the 1960s and 1970s in Kandhamal is an important dimension of the social reality. According to the District Gazetteer of 1983 (p. 50), many people migrated into the Phulbani, Baliguda and G. Udaygiri regions during 1961–71, which was the boom time for trade and commerce. This was one of the reasons for the sudden spurt in the district population. The traders in Raikia and Tikabali are also immigrants. These people are known as Kumuti, Patro or simply Oriyas. These people solely control the marketing of both agricultural and forest products of the Kandhamal district. Their economic position made them influential both socially and politically. Commenting on the communal tensions in Phulbani during the 1980s, Nazir Akhtar says, "though rioting was led by men of VHP and missionaries, there is another set of people behind the scene.... They are the businessmen and money-lenders, who



have been exploiting the Advasis since many decades. Their invisible hand has fanned the flames of communal riots. To spread their influence in the region, they are engaged in fierce competition which has led to the communal tension and conflict. The businessmen of the neighbouring districts also have actively participated in this. To safeguard their own vested interests, they systematically pushed the Advasis into a communal cauldron. The invisible hand of the traders is becoming sharper in relief. In the destruction of the Catholic Church in Raikia on 26 August 2004, some traders had actively participated" (The Indian Express, 17 March 1989, Communal Tension in Phulbani).

The victims testify to the role of the businessmen in the recent riots. When asked why the businessmen were against Dalit Christians, a riot victim of Baliguda said, "I opened a provision store in our lane. Previously, people used to go to the shop of the Kumuti. Now they are coming to mine. So there is a drop in his sales and profit. The grudge is due to that only." A journalist in G. Udaygiri, said, "you see the shops of Kumutis, Patros and Brahmins in towns. Now in panchayat headquarters, harijans have opened shops. Earlier people only used to buy from the shop in the towns. So there is a drop in profit of these town-based people."

### **3.2 Christianity in Kandhamal**

Christianity is nearly one-and-a-half century old in Kandhamal. After the British conquest, Baptist missionaries started their activities during 1859–63 in

Kandhamal from Russelkonda (Bhanjanagar). Working in Kandhamal was not easy for them. *Kalazar* and smallpox took a heavy toll. In the early 20th century, the Baptist missionaries set up camp at G. Udaygiri. The Roman Catholics worked from their stations at Digi and Katingia in the 1880s. After several years of work, in 1914, Bisi and his family members first converted to Christianity (Barbara M. Boal, *The Khonds*). And, in 1920, on the Kumbharikupa hill, the foundation for the first church building was laid.

These missionaries were the pioneers in setting up modern centres of education and health in Kandhamal. Any achievement that the district has today in these fields is because of the efforts of the missionaries. The first Middle English school in the whole of Boudh-Khondmals was established in 1914 at G. Udaygiri (Gudripari) and two Upper Primary schools were established in Malikapodi and Konbagiri and two high schools, O. J. Milman High English School and Hubback High English School, were established in G. Udaygiri by the Baptists. For medical facilities, they set up the Moorshead Memorial Christian Hospital in 1939. The Roman Catholics also established Primary, Middle English and High Schools in Raikia area. These schools went a long way in providing education not only to Christians, but also to non-Christians (The District Gazetteer, 1983).

In the colonial times, it was Dalits who mostly converted to Christianity in the G. Udaygiri, Raikia and Tikabali areas. Post-Independence, Christianity spread

to other areas of the Baliguda sub-division like Kotagarh, Tumudibandh and Daringbadi where mostly Adivasis adopted Christianity. Discussing Kandhos' acceptance of Christianity in post-independent India, anthropologist Felix Padel writes, "Christianity offers a strong support system, including skills of literacy and an ideology of justice and equality that helps counteract exploitation by non-tribals. Since these, including the majority of Government officials now, are mostly Hindus, Christianity offers an alternative identity that has a powerful appeal" (*Sacrifice of Human Being*).

However, he further says it created some frictions in the tribal community, especially at the time of observing rituals and festivals. And, Barbara Boal observes, "to be a Christian in these hill tribes is still on the whole to gain prestige, though joining a local congregation undoubtedly leads to fragmentation within the village."

But, Christianity in Kandhamal grew, and so did the churches. The charge that missionaries, taking advantage of poverty, are converting Adivasis was raised during 1960s. The then Swatantra Jana Congress Government passed the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967 and declared to take action against the missionaries. As a result, several of the English missionaries were arrested in 1968 and later released.

During our visits to Kandhamal, we heard some allegations against Christians having disrespect towards traditional customs and practices of the Adivasis. Jamesh Chandra

says about an incident in Nilungia, "Sukanta Nayak, a teacher, is an influential man in the village. He is a Dalit Christian. He cut down two trees disregarding the opinions of the Adivasis of the village. That was a sacred place for them. Although they did not do anything, they resented this action. Secondly, the Christians disrespect their traditions. When a person dies, they do not use the usual bathing place till the ritual is over. But, Christians do not follow this practice and use the bathing place". Santanu Pradhan questions, "Why do they (Christian preachers) have to tell in a derogatory way the Adivasis are worshipping stones, trees, hills and jungles?"

These allegations are few and far between and there was no case of violent antagonism between Christians and non-Christians till Hindutva politics gained ascendancy in Kandhamal. It is not uncommon to see Hindu Adivasis marrying Christian Adivasis or observing rituals and festivals together. We had a chance to meet the villagers of Gahana (Gadaguda GP) when a Mada (death) ceremony was about to begin. "The deceased was a Hindu and his wife is a Christian. They would perform the rituals according to their tribal tradition and there is no conflict over this," the villagers told. Binod Mallick of the same village said, "My grand father, a Hindu had given land for the church here. I am also a Hindu and have given land for the graveyard because the earlier one was near the roadside and children feared to go by that road. We lived in harmony."

From Church sources, it has been learnt that by the year 2006, there are about 521 churches and prayer halls in

Kandhamal. (Communalism in Orissa, IPT Report,2006) In Kandhamal, the Christian population, according to the Census report of 2001 stands at 1,17,950, which is 18.19 percent of the total population of the district. It has been argued that the percentage of Christian population is increasing at an “alarmingly higher rate” and unless they put an end to conversion, the Hindus or Adivasis are going to be a minority in a few years time. It is true that there has been an increase in the proportion of Christian population in Kandhamal and the growth rate is higher than that of the Hindus. However, their percentage rise of their population is exaggerated wildly, willfully ignoring that it is due to a low base starting point. (See Table below.)

While discussing the growth rate of a particular community, the normal population growth should also be taken into account. We are giving these pictures to show the real state of affairs

and for an informed discussion to begin so that wild exaggerations and prevarications being paraded as “fact,” “truth” in a Goeblean style can be checked. It is important to note that there has been an increase in the Christian population in some districts of Orissa. (See Table on p. 34.) However, the growth of population of a faith does not per se give rise to communal violence. Had it been so, Gajapati, Sundergarh would have seen violence of the same magnitude as that of Kandhamal. What distinguishes Kandhamal from other regions is the interplay of Hindutva politics in the district for a considerable period. Following is an account of the role of the Hindutva politics.

### 3.3 Hindutva Politics in Kandhamal

While understanding the exponential rise of Hindutva politics in Kandhamal, we need to understand how Hindutva politics entered Kandhamal.

#### **Decadal Population Growth of Kandhamal District**

<b>Year</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>2001</b>
Total Population	393773	448914 (14.00)	546281 (21.68)	648201 (18.65)
Christians	40406	42152 (4.32)	75597 (79.34)	117950 (56.02)
Percentage of Christian population to district population	10.26%	9.38%	13.83%	18.19%

(Figures in brackets indicate decadal growth rate of the community)

(Source: Census of India)

As the Dalit movement of the 1960s alerted the RSS to the fact that Hindu society was not as homogenous as it seemed, the RSS started talking against untouchability.

Name of the District	Percentage of Christian population to the total population of the district
Gajapati	33.47
Kandhamal	18.20
Sundergarh	16.85
Rayagada	6.64
Sambalpur	4.15
All Orissa	2.44

Secondly, Adivasis who did not form part of the institutionalized Hindu religion began embracing Christianity. Thus, RSS created the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in 1966 to systematically work among these sections to create a Hindu consciousness to convert them to Hinduism. Anti-Christian missionary propaganda was part of the RSS agenda since its creation (Swami Shradhananda, *Hindu Sangthan: Saviour of the Dying Race*, 1926). The Bharatiya Jan Sangh, the political front of the RSS, organized an anti-foreign missionary week in November 1954. It seemed to the RSS that by providing educational and medical facilities, the Christian missionaries were able to convert Adivasis, and so the RSS followed suit to win Adivasis over to the Hindu fold.

In 1969, with this agenda, Laxman Sethi, known as Swami Laxmanananda

Saraswati, came to Chakapada, nearly 50 km from the district headquarters, Phulbani. He had already been part of the *Goraksha Andolan* (Save the Cow Campaign) and was a member of the VHP. He set up an ashram and a Sanskrit school in a predominantly Adivasi area. (In 1979, Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, another outfit of RSS, specifically created to work among Adivasis, took over the management of this ashram.) Interestingly, this place is within a range of 30–40 km from G. Udaygiri, Raikia and Tikabali where Christianity and its institutions developed in the initial phase. Secondly, these were emerging as trade centers of the district and remain so even today and traders, who were mostly upper caste Oriyas, sensing economic opportunities, rushed to these places from Ganjam, Aska, Nayagarh, etc.

In this ashram-run school, though students from other social groups are admitted, Adivasis constitute nearly 90 percent and 80 percent of the students reside in the ashram. Students get a stipend and teachers their salary from the state government. All of them participate in the *shakhas* conducted outside the ashram premises. The inmates get regular training in the RSS doctrine. They also propagate Hindu religious practices, rituals and festivals and campaign against aspects of Adivasi culture, such as *dhangda-dhangdi* dance in which unmarried boys and girls dance together, which is also a social mechanism to choose partners. This was viewed by the ashram as *kusanskar*. Besides this, the ashram organizes religious congregations like *nam sankirtan and yajnas* once or twice a year

and campaigns against liquor consumption with the support of the administration. The ashram also helps local peasants in farming and cattle rearing. (Pralay Kanungo, *RSS' Tryst with Politics*).

In 1989, a Chakapada-like ashram was set up at Jalespeta, for girls only, called *Shankaracharya Sanskrita Kanyashrama*. Again, it was a Sanskrit school run on the lines of Chakapada. Here too, the students, the majority of them Adivasi, get a stipend from the state government. They have been made members of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, the women's wing of the RSS. They propagate various Hindu rites and rituals among Adivasi women. The pass-outs of the ashram schools help in spreading "Hindu consciousness" across Kandhamal, and a number of them, subsequently, become Sangh Parivar activists (Interview with Kedar Mishra, a journalist of Oriya daily *Anupam Bharat* who has extensively written on Kandhamal).

Besides these, *Malanchal Chhatrabas*, a hostel for tribal students at Raikia and two dispensaries at Cutingia and Kurtamgad were opened by *Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram* (VKA).

In the 1970s and 1980s, VHP/VKA concentrated on the campaign against beef eating and other anti-Christian propaganda. Most people had regarded Laxmanananda as a Baba who is doing something good. But his campaign incurred resentment from some Kandhos as well as Panos in areas like Kotagarh, Tumudibandh, and Ghati area of G. Udaygiri as it was their food.

(Interview with Krushna Majhi). However, it was the anti-Christian propaganda that kept growing. Nazeer Akhtar in a report in *The Indian Express* (17 March 1989) writes that the anti-Christian voices *became strident in 1981 due to the efforts of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati. The Swami gave a concrete shape to an organized agitation against Christianity. With a view to arouse religious consciousness among the tribals and Harijans, the Viswa Hindu Parishad had been taking out in procession, a Jagannath Rath, to different villages.*" They also organized satsangs in villages where they discussed national problems blaming the two minorities, Muslims and Christians. During the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign, when the Sangh Parivar was organizing anti-Muslim campaign all across India, VHP/VKA was trying to intensify anti-Christian propaganda in the tribal dominated areas of Phulbani, Gajapati, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Sundergarh (Pralay Kanungo – *RSS's Tryst with Politics*). Finally, the VHP/VKA went for the reconversion or paravartan drive. For the first time in 1987, attacks against the Church began in Kandhamal (Interview with Bijay Pradhan, a RSS *sakha* leader till 1992, now works in an NGO- World Vision). As a result of these concerted efforts, communal violence increased in Kandhamal (specifically Raikia, G. Udaygiri, Tikabali, Bamhunigan areas).

This report also mentions, "in 1985, there were 12 clashes, but in 1986 and 1987, the number of clashes rose to 13 and 20, respectively." It also states, "A leader of

VHP, Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati, has so far reconverted about 18,000 converted Christians into Hinduism.” The twin activities of the Hindutva forces (attacks on churches and reconversion) continued in Kandhamal. Some of the incidents given here are collected from the book, *Faith Under Fire*.

1. On 2 and 3 October 1988, Christians were brutally attacked in Katingia.

2. On 24 January 1989, a priest and a church were attacked in the Sadingi village, Pobingia GP.

3. Churches were attacked in Sahaliguda, Duringpodi, Budaguda, Nuagan and Madhiguda.

4. In 1997, in the Betticola village (G. Udaygiri) Christians and a church were attacked.

5. On 26 August 2004, the Lady of Charity Catholic Church, Raikia was vandalized.

6. In Chakapada, around April 8-10, 2006, about 342 Christians were reconverted to Hinduism on the occasion of the birth centenary of M. S. Golwalakar, the second RSS Chief. The ceremony was attended by Biswa Bhusan Harichandan, the Minister of Law and other ministers, MLAs and MPs.

The trend continued to 2007 December and then to 2008 August with more virulence.

### **3.4 The Conversion “Debate”**

The invoking of the debate on conversion by the BJP and its allies is

done each time a brutal assault on Christians happens anywhere in the country. However, converting or getting converted cannot be a reason for barbaric violence on large sections of a particular community. Even as a few reports and voices against this injustice get expressed, the larger goal of Hindutva is fulfilled — casting a doubt among the silent majority of this country of India being the land of Hindus and people of all other religions as being extraneous to this identity. This undermines the latter’s citizenship, rights, and freedom of expression and simultaneously exposes them to the tyranny of populist opinion that is engendered by conservative and divisive forces. It is therefore imperative to address a few crucial points of the so-called “debate”.

The concept of conversion as invoked by the Sangh Parivar and its allies is quite problematic. Firstly, conversion has been dealt with as an act by which somebody is made to change one’s faith. The role of the preacher and missionaries becomes dominant in this definition. The one who changes faith is robbed of her/his agency and becomes a non-entity. Her/his voice, thought, imagination and experience are relegated to the background. Primary to the act of changing one’s faith should ideally be the considerations of the person who decides to change her/his faith.

If the convert were the famous singer Suman or author Kamala Das, the matter might be different. But, in the Sangh Parivar-sponsored debate on conversion, the consideration, experience and imagination of the

Kandho or Dalit convert has no place at all. Following is the account of a few experiences of the converts.

A Christian Adivasi, an old man from Baliguda, said "I became a Christian since I was young. I gave up alcohol since. I have become a good man. I have never fought with anybody. I have learnt to live in peace and with truth. Our Adivasi religion also has peace and truth. But its festivals/celebrations are expensive."

A middle-aged man from Kalinga panchayat says, "I was ill. I was vomiting blood. I was with my brother. Doctors tried hard, but my vomiting did not stop. It was early in the morning. I dreamt of a bearded old man with a stick standing beside me. After that I recovered. I remember having seen a similar dream during my school days. I believed Jesus has cured me. And I became a Christian. I was the secretary of the Shiva temple committee of our village for seven to eight years. When I converted to Christianity, of course, my village folks were sad."

A woman of Katingia said, "we became more clean after converting to Christianity. We had good clothes. And had education."

A 67-year-old-man from Raikia said, "I was not forced to be a Christian in 1956 as we are being forced today to become Hindus. It was only after conversion that we were able to raise our heads in society. And please do not ask me how life was before becoming a Christian."

Do these voices figure in the "conversion debate"? And, do they not tell us of the

deep-seated inequality of the oppressive caste structure from which people stepped out?

Secondly, it undermines a citizen's right to choose one's own faith and to practice, profess and propagate one's own religion as guaranteed by the Constitution of India (Article 25.1). Therefore, citizenship and nationality are not based on religion. But, in the definition of the Sangh Parivar, *dharma bhumi* is *pitrubumi*—nationality is based on religion. People following religions that originated outside India, such as Islam and Christianity, are foreigners or outsiders. Therefore, they must be eliminated or at the least reduced to second-rate citizens. Madhusudan Das was a Christian and he was the founding father of Oriya nationalism. Will the Sangh Parivar call him an outsider or a foreigner?

Allurement is another plank in this "debate". People who level such charges do not define what allurement is. They only allege that conversion is happening only because the Christians take advantage of the poverty of the Dalits and Adivasis. They also point fingers at the Christian-aided schools and hospitals. But, such debates do not ever address the fundamental question as to why the Adivasis and the Dalits are so poor.

In cities in Orissa, there are Christian-run schools and other institutions of higher education. And, children from affluent families study there. But, the motives of those schools and institutions are never questioned. Is it because those institutions cater to the needs of the rich?

Hinduism is eulogized when people from the West embrace it as their faith or when new temples are built. No allegation of allurements is brought forward then. Pralay Kanungo writes how 10,00,000 Christians have converted to Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam and Buddhism. Since 1960s, the Hare Krishna movement and shakhas have proliferated in huge numbers. How does one interpret this? Will it be justified to say that these conversions happened through deceit or were forced conversions through allurements?

## **2.8 Politics of Reservation**

There have been caste and ethnic tensions in Kandhamal in the recent past. It is alleged that Panos, identifying themselves as Kui-speaking (Kandho speak the Kui language), are demanding ST status and privilege. According to the press note (dt. 26 September 2007) of the Phulbani Kui Jan Kalyan Sangh, "In 1980–81, when the Kuis were registered as Panos on revenue documents, there was protest. Consequently, the Government of Orissa wrote to the Government of India, recommending inclusion of Kuis in the list of tribes. This recommendation has become a Presidential Order since the last 23 years."

The Presidential order of 2002 accorded tribal status to the Kuis, and it was subsequently notified in the Orissa Gazettee (12 June 2003). Following this, the Kui Jan Kalyan Sangh moved the Orissa High Court praying that the revenue records wrongly mention Kuis as Panos, and this may be corrected. The

High Court granted them relief, asking the Orissa Government to make corrections in the revenue records.

But, which community in Kandhamal should be called Kui became a controversial issue. Kui Jan Kalyan Sangh states that Kui is the name of a tribe that is different from Kandhos and others. The KCC states that Kui is the self-reference of the community referred to variously as Kandho, Khond, Kond, Cond by the Britishers in the 19th century. That means Kandhos are Kuis. Kui is also the name of the language spoken by the Kandhos. KCC alleges that the Kui-speaking Panos, in the desire of cornering the reserved government jobs and land for the Kandhos, want the ST status for themselves by being named Kuis. The administration did not resolve the issue and the KCC agitated and the atmosphere became tense. The National Minority Rights Commission had suggested the government to resolve the issue after the 2007 riots as mentioned in the beginning of this report.

Baliguda, we mentioned earlier, was under the administrative jurisdiction of the Madras Presidency. In that presidency, administrative records do refer to some "hill tribes" and Panos are included in it. Till 1950, the Doms and Panos of the Kandhamal district were included in the list of Schedule Tribes (*The Kondhs: A Handbook for Development*, R.K.Nayak, Barbara Boal, Nabor Soreng). In 1951, by a presidential order, they were included in the list of Schedule Castes, along with the implementation of the reservation policy.



The problem actually lies in this reservation policy. Although public sector jobs are reserved for both STs and SCs, religion has been added only to the schedule castes. If members of SC convert to Islam or Christianity, they lose their SC status and become ineligible for reservation benefits. People of SC remain religiously discriminated in a policy of positive discrimination. At the national level though, many organizations are demanding recognition of Dalits across religious communities. In Orissa also, Dalit organizations are making similar demands. The National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, in its report of 2007, has recommended SC status for Christian and Muslim Dalits.

In Kandhamal, Kui Jan Kalyan Sangha raises the issue as one to set right a historic treachery. KCC, on the other hand, thinks the meagre government jobs and other benefits under reservation policy becomes less if another community is added to the list of beneficiaries. Two most disenfranchised communities are at loggerheads because of the reservation policy. This kind of conflict is also witnessed in other parts of our country. Since the 1990s, under the new economic policy, the employment opportunity in public sector is becoming lesser by the day. On the other hand, the serpentine queues of the educated unemployed people in front of government offices are becoming longer. Kandhamal is also witnessing this, despite the fact that education is not that widespread in

Kandhamal. Even going by government records, by the end of 2003, there were 4648 unemployed educated among the Advasis and 3077 amongst the schedule castes. (District Statistical handbook). Given the state of the economy, it is not surprising that the recognition as STs or 'grabbing' of caste becomes a volatile issue.

Forged caste or tribe certificates have added to this social conflict. KCC complains that Panos, are cornering the benefits meant for the Advasis by using fake caste certificates. The Pano Kalyan Samiti also states that if there has been such a case of forgery, the culprits should be booked but the entire community of Panos should not be slandered. After the August–September 2008 riots started, the government announced appointment of 10 police inspectors to look into the alleged cases of certificate forgery. According to newspaper reports so far, 801 cases have been brought before the special inspectors, who are investigating the matter. (*Samaj*, 10 March 2009)

The Sangh Parivar has made efforts to capitalize on the situation. It has used even this contentious issue for anti-Christian campaign. The Organizer (13 January 2008) used the following headline, "The demand for reservation benefits by converted Panos is the root of the problem."

### III. CONCLUSION

After presenting an account of the Kandhamal violence and examining its historical roots, we raise the following points.

**First**, in Kandhamal, people have been opting to follow Christianity since 1914. But, conflicts along religious lines took place only in the 1980s, after a decade of Laxmanananda's activities and when Hindutva was raising its venomous head in national politics. The rise in population of any faith or religious group does not by itself lead to communal conflict. Had it been so, shouldn't the districts of Gajapati and Sundergarh in Orissa have witnessed anti-Christian violence because the Christian population in these districts is higher than Kandhamal in terms of absolute numbers? It is our belief that social division or difference, be it caste or religion, does not lead to communal strife. Rather, strife happens when that difference is manipulated to create an atmosphere of hatred against the perceived 'other' community, exactly as Hitler and his followers targeted the Jews in the 1930s. Isn't there a frightening similarity between these two?

The state government allowed Laxmanananda's funeral procession to pass across the district when Section 144 was imposed and allowed Pravin

Togadia to participate and make inflammatory speeches in the funeral rites. However, neither the Central Minister of State and opposition leaders of the state were allowed into the district nor was relief by NGOs and others allowed in. The state not only abdicated its responsibility of protecting the lives and belongings of the people, but also gave a free hand to anti-Christian elements to further their heinous agenda of Brahminical Hinduization and hatred. What transpired is not a saga of failure of the state but its connivance in the butchering of Christians. As this report is going to press, the coalition of the BJD and BJP has broken down. And the Secretary of the BJD has made a public statement, "As per its hidden agenda, the BJP sowed the seeds of hatred in Kandhamal, Gajapati, Sundergarh and Mayurbhanj and the Kandhamal riots are a consequence of this... Being part of the cabinet of ministers, the BJP leaders put pressure on the government not to arrest the perpetrators of violence." (*The Samaj* 21 March 2009). This statement only reconfirms the connivance of the government in the violence for over two months.

**Second**, the violence was so methodical and organized that the so-called "spontaneity" is nothing but a lie. This theory tries to rationalize the violence as a spontaneous reaction to the murder

of a very popular saint. This was largely mouthed by the right wingers of all varieties. Before an attack, a meeting of the perpetrators was held in nearby schools or anganwadi centres and the violence was carried out as planned. Houses of Christians were selectively destroyed and their belongings looted, but the neighbouring Hindu houses remained untouched. The motive was to ruin the Christians economically so thoroughly that they would not be able to stand on their feet for years to come; in our view, in some ways, it's a replication of the Gujarat carnage of 2002. It is interesting how Tumudibandh Block, where Laxmanananda and his disciples were killed, remained by and large peaceful.

Blocks like G. Udaygiri, Raikia and Tikabali that are between 80 to 100 km from the place of killing are the worst affected areas. These are the areas where we see the first Christian converts during the British Raj. These also developed as important trade centres of the district. In the 1970s, traders from nearby areas of Ganjam, Nayagarh, Bhanjanagar, sensing economic opportunities, immigrated into this district. They continue to dominate the trade in these areas. Around the same time, Laxmanananda set up his ashram at Chakapad and started his campaign against cow slaughter and Christian missionaries. The immigrant traders supported Laxmanananda's project. Over the last 40 years, Laxmanananda managed to have a sizeable following in the area. His supporters played different

roles in attacking the Christians after Laxmanananda's killing.

**Third**, the ethnic theory, peddled by the government and endorsed by sections of the media and some intellectuals as the entire saga being an Adivasi-Dalit conflict seems far-fetched. Such an approach not only undermines the actual ground realities but also overlooks the planned and systemic violence on Christians and the range of injustices inflicted on them by the Sangh Parivar, irrespective of whether they are Dalit or Adivasi. Barring a few incidents, Christians everywhere, both Adivasi and Dalit, bore the brunt of communal attacks in Kandhamal.

Yet another explanation of the violence rests on the assertion that Dalit Christians have grabbed the lands of Adivasis in the region. However, nowhere has land been forcefully occupied by the aggrieved party, as was seen in the 1994 ethnic violence. Though land remains a contentious socio-economic issue in Kandhamal, it has little to do with the present communal violence. The present and all previous governments are solely responsible for not conducting a thorough land survey and issuing Records of Rights to the original owners of the land.

**Fourth**, the absolute indifference of the government of Orissa towards the removal of abject mass poverty in Kandhamal, has left the field open to various vested interests to manipulate the situation to their advantage. It's the duty of the government to provide

education, health-care for the people. When there is a vacuum of any real development with people as the centre of the development paradigm, there's only marginal economic relief or a modicum of spiritual fulfillment provided by other social forces. However it is never an emancipatory agenda leading to the dignity and self-emancipation of the Dalits and Advasis. Though both the Christian missionary organizations and the Hindu fundamentalists claim that they are working for the poor, neither of them have really ever addressed the question of land and forests, which are primary for the life and livelihood of people.

No tools or measures have been provided ever by anyone for the people of Kandhamal to go beyond their poverty. With mass poverty as the background, it can hardly be said that conversion or change of faith has contributed to anything beyond symbolic changes in the material life of people. That conversion does not change the economic life has already been attested to in the PUCL report on the Kilipal (Jagatsinghpur) conversion case. Rather, this has led to social ostracization of the converts. Therefore, the Hindu allegation of conversion through allurements is baseless.

**Fifth**, the CPI (Maoists) killing Laxmanananda was like a spark to dynamite. Their method of combating communal and right wing politics actually contributed to 39 deaths and 50,000 people being displaced. Whatever

semblance of life or family or livelihood people had put together through hard labour over years were wiped out overnight. Did the Maoists have any idea of the ground reality or anticipate what would follow their action? Where were they when village after village was raided by sword-wielding mobs of 300 to 400 in the most planned and systemic manner? More than a month later, CPI (Maoist), Orissa State Organisational Committee issued a booklet, *Why was Laxmanananda awarded death sentence?* claiming responsibility for the killing. The booklet gives justification for the "death sentence". We ask whether death sentence is the only means to deal with ideological and political opponents – in this case Laxmanananda? Had the ordinary Christians who suffered most authorized the Maoists in any way to do it? In the entire booklet, neither have the Maoists mentioned anything about the loss of lives or property of Christians nor uttered a word of apology to the victims and living survivors of the dead. Presumably then, these are the calculated losses in the "war" they wage.

At the same time, for those who are skeptical of Maoist violence as a means of checking the rapid, sinister spread of the Sangh Parivar and its Hindutva politics, we need to think hard how best to strategize against the right wing both ideologically and otherwise. The violence in Kandhamal continued unabated for over two months. Yet, barring a few sporadic protests, people across Orissa and the rest of the country remained quiet. Is it because the victims

were Adivasis and Dalits? If it were to happen to some influential Pattnaik or Mohapatra or a Jachuk, would the middle-class have remained as silent? Is it class or caste prejudice that was at work or both? As women, sexual minorities, workers, Dalits, peasants and Adivasis, we have a lot at stake for our own selves and the future generation in combating communalism. The silence around Kandhamal is far too deafening for us to remain quiet anymore.

**Finally**, aggressive capitalism characteristically paves the way for conservative forces and the ruling class gives them a free hand. As Orissa is on the brink of “modernization” with the ushering in of mega mining projects and entry of multinationals, the leading party in power turned a blind eye to events in Kandhamal as its coalition partner called the shots. Looking back, we have seen too closely in the last many years the hand-in-glove nature of the rise of Hindu right and the agenda of aggressive neo-liberalism. It was the defeat of the Bombay textiles strike in

1982 that struck an enormous blow to the consciousness of the working people and enabled the champions of Hindutva to make inroads in wide areas. A decade later, the economic policies brought in by the Congress at the centre, coincided with the demolition of the Babri Masjid and assault of Muslims across the country followed by the Gujarat carnage in 2002. Since then the attack on the Christian community in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Karnataka and other places has been well planned and carried out with impunity. The tentacles of Hindutva ideology have meanwhile become all-pervasive, and all institutions of the Indian “democratic” polity are today infested by these inimical forces. To combat the rise of communalism and carve a way forward, we need to learn from our historical experiences and lessons. And it can happen as we unite with all progressive and democratic forces in the struggle for a society of our own making. We make history or history makes us.

*‘It is not the violence of a few that scares me,  
it is the silence of many.’*

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Martin Luther King Jr



**KANDHAMAL**  
(Orissa)

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Maps not to scale

हम देखेंगे  
लाज़िम है के: हम भी देखेंगे  
वो: दिन के: जिन्न का वादा है  
जो लौहे-अज़ल पे लिखा है  
जब जुल्मों-सितम के कोहे-गराँ  
रुई की तरह उड़ जायेंगे  
हम महकूमों के पाँव-तले  
जब धरती धड़-धड़ धड़केगी  
और अहले-हिकम के सब ऊपर  
जब बिजली कड़ कड़ कड़केगी  
हम देखेंगे

फैज़ अहमद फैज़

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