

briefing

India

Religiously-Motivated Violence against Christians

FOR PUBLIC USE

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CHRISTIAN
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I. Executive Summary

Christians in India continued to be targeted in religiously-motivated violence during the first quarter of 2008, typically perpetrated by members of extremist Hindu nationalist groups in connection with unsubstantiated allegations of 'forcible' or 'fraudulent' conversions. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliated organisations, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal, continued to actively perpetrate violent attacks, with the Dharam Sena responsible for most attacks in Chhattisgarh. This is not intended as an exhaustive catalogue of such attacks, as several factors suggest that considerably more might have taken place,¹ and CSW received additional reports which could not be verified independently.

Among the most notable attacks were the severe assault of two nuns in Sahangoti village, Maharashtra, on 15 March, and the kidnapping and severe attack on two Christians in Pathigaon village, Madhya Pradesh on 17 January.

Ineffectual police responses continued to be commonplace, and at their worst in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, where in some cases, victims were detained instead of their assailants.

Of particular concern during the reporting period was the continued intimidation of the Christian minority in the Kandhamal district of Orissa, following the widespread communal violence directed primarily against that community in December 2007, with reports of forcible renunciations of faith and the prevention of churches from holding services. The state government failed to act to restore order and communal harmony in the region, and the extent of relief has been highly inadequate, despite recommendations made by the National Commission for Minorities. The situation in Kandhamal district is outlined in section 3.1 below.

2. Recommendations

2.1. To the government of India

It is recommended that the government of India should:

1. Adopt and implement the recommendations of the Justice Ranganath Mishra National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, specifically that the eligibility for membership of the Scheduled Castes should not be linked to religious status;
2. Condemn and take steps towards the repeal of Freedom of Religion Acts in Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan states;
3. Adopt the following recommendations in response to the communal violence in the Kandhamal district of Orissa, as follows:
 - a. Open an investigation into the violence in Kandhamal district by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI);
 - b. Ensure that the First Information Reports of victims of violence are properly registered, regardless of religion or caste status;

¹ The main factors which suggest this include the reticence of church leaders in remote areas to report attacks to police or NGOs (either for fear of attracting reprisals or lack of awareness about the options available to them to do so) and deficiencies in the reporting mechanisms in some states.

- c. Respond to the attacks under the provisions of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989;
 - d. Urge the Orissa state government to carry out a proper assessment of the damage;
 - e. Ensure that full and proper compensation is given to victims of attacks, in line with the provisions of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and its rules;
 - f. Establish a fast-track court to deliver justice for the victims of attacks;
 - g. Address the widespread allegations (included those made by the National Commission for Minorities) of incitement to violence by Hindu extremist groups, specifically the VHP and its local leader, Swami Lakhmananda Saraswati, and ensure that any extremist religious groups found to be complicit in inciting violence are banned in Orissa state;
 - h. Adopt the recommendation of the National Commission for Minorities that an official paper should be released to clarify the issue of conversions, which has been exploited to vilify the Christian community;
4. Ensure the full and effective implementation of all laws protecting religious minorities from religiously-motivated violence, fully investigate allegations of the abuse of these laws and bring perpetrators of violence to justice under the provisions of the law;
 5. Undertake a comprehensive programme of training of the police force, prosecutors and the judiciary, particularly to ensure the implementation of the above-mentioned legal protections, including by fully implementing the recommendations of the Dharma Vira Commission and other relevant commissions;
 6. Implement measures to guarantee the independence of the police force, prosecutors and the judiciary from political authorities (including by implementing a system of fixed tenures for senior police), and to increase their transparency and accountability;
 7. Conduct independent reviews of the effectiveness of the various national- and state-level commissions mandated to protect the rights of religious minorities, in consultation with these minorities, with a view to developing their effectiveness as safeguards against discrimination;
 8. Ensure that an active Commission for Human Rights and Commission for Minorities (in the model of their national counterparts), is operational in every state, and that members of each commission are appointed by transparent and non-partisan procedures.

2.2. To states and regional actors

It is recommended that states and regional actors should raise concern with the government about the extent of religiously-motivated violence committed with impunity, and actively engage with the government of India to encourage the implementation of the recommendations given in section 2.1 above.

2.3. To the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

It is recommended that the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief should actively pursue the implementation of the recommendations given in section 2.1 above with the government of India.

3. Additional Areas of Concern

3.1. Continued government inaction in Kandhamal district, Orissa

The first quarter of 2008 saw a continuing failure of the Orissa state government to act decisively to restore order and inter-communal harmony to the Kandhamal district, where Christians were targeted in widespread communal violence in December 2007. Sources in Orissa reported that the climate in the state continued to be oppressive of religious minorities, and extremist Hindu nationalist groups, including the VHP, which was heavily implicated in the December violence, continued to intimidate Christians. At the end of the reporting period, Hindutva figurehead, Swami Lakhmananda Saraswati, widely named as having contributed strongly to inciting the anti-Christian feeling which fuelled the violence, had not been censured for his role.

Christian activities continued to face threats and opposition from Hindu extremists. On 16 March, a crowd of armed Hindu extremists forced 180 Catholic families in Tiyangia village from conducting their traditional Palm Sunday procession. Most churches in the district have continued to be closed, and unable to conduct Sunday services. Aicc sources in Orissa reported continued verbal threats being made against Christians by Hindu extremists.

Several attempts were also made by Hindu extremists to forcibly convert Christians to Hinduism. On 14 February, VHP members threatened six Dalit Christian families with death if they would not 're-convert' to Hinduism. The Christians were forced to move from their homes in Badrikiya village to Balliguda. Thirteen men in Kutikia village, including the Rev. Kalia Mani Digal, had previously been tonsured by Hindu extremists in an attempt to forcibly convert them on 26 December 2007.

The extent of government relief for victims of the violence has been minimal and insufficient.² According to numerous reports, houses which lost their roofs during the December violence have been categorised as sustaining 'partial damage' and have therefore been eligible only for compensation of Rs. 10,000 instead of the maximum Rs. 50,000 for their complete destruction. No known reconstructions efforts have been undertaken. At least two elderly Christians are reported to have died in Barakhama relief camp: on 15 January, 65-year-old Kojuna Digal succumbed to injuries sustained during an attack during the communal violence, and Mrs Borili Digal died from a fever with no access to healthcare on 19 March, after priests and nuns were denied access to the village during a buffalo sacrifice festival. Government relief camps have since been closed. However, the Supreme Court stay on a government order stating that 'no other charitable or religious institution or NGO is allowed to carry out any kind of relief operation in the state', has permitted several agencies to become involved in distributing aid to the victims of the violence.

² The 'Report of the National Commission for Minorities visit to Orissa, 6-8 January 2008' (<http://ncm.nic.in/pdf/orissa%20report.pdf>), recommended that the state government should 'provide rehabilitation keeping in view the actual loss suffered by the victims of violence' (p. 7). The CSW briefing, 'Preliminary Report: Communal Violence in Kandhamal District, Orissa (January 2008)' (<http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=72>) called for 'full and proper compensation' for the victims of the attacks (p. 4).

3.2. Christian inter-caste conflict and brutal police response in Erayur village, Tamil Nadu

9 March 2008 saw the culmination of a concerning episode of caste-based discrimination in a Christian community in Erayur village, Villupuram district, Tamil Nadu, which included the death of two Christians in police firing. A fact-finding team led by CSW partners, the All India Christian Council (aicc), visited the village subsequently to ascertain the details of the incident.

The Catholic parish of Erayur is comprised of a majority caste community of Vanniyars and a minority Dalit community. The Dalit Christians faced consistent discrimination from the Christians of a 'higher' caste, including segregation within the church, the compulsion to use a separate burial ground. When the mother of the priest died, the Dalit Christians wanted to parade her body through the Vanniyar section of the village, but were prevented from doing so.

The Dalit Christians consistently called for the recognition of a separate parish for them; this demand was rejected by the diocese, on the grounds that parishes should not be set along caste lines. On 6 March, they began a protest to promote their demand. The Vanniyar Christians responded by attacking the homes of the Dalit Christians: they pulled out the furniture of around 200 houses, and burnt it.

Police responded to the incident by opening fire, after they had been pelted with stones. Two Vanniyar Christians, M. Periyamayagam and A. Magimai, are known to have been killed. At least 40 more were injured. Following the incident, the church was closed to all its members.

The episode was interpreted by the aicc as a tragic example of caste-based discrimination within the church, which was not resolved despite continuing for several years. Although senior members of the diocesan hierarchy denied the existence of caste-based discrimination in the church, this view was not echoed by the Dalit Christians in Erayur. The All India Catholic Union worked with the diocesan leadership in order to resolve the issue. The response of the police, which resulted in two deaths, was denounced as heavy-handed and brutal.

4. Catalogue of Atrocities

4.1. Andhra Pradesh

4.1.1. Hyderabad, 6 January: Christian preacher assaulted by BJP members

Members of the BJP in Hyderabad beat Mr Sukumar, a 50-year-old preacher, and accused him of 'forcible conversions'. Sukumar was visiting his brother and attending a church service; the pastor announced that a local BJP leader, named as Goud, was creating difficulties for him and the church, and sought the prayers of the congregants. Sukumar went to meet with Goud to mediate on behalf of the church, and explain that there were no forcible conversions to Christianity. He was received well upon his arrival; however, additional BJP members arrived and assaulted him. They reportedly said, "You look like a gentleman. Otherwise we would have finished you off".

The BJP members later went to the local police station to file a false complaint, alleging that Sudhakar was involved in 'forcible conversions'.

4.1.2. Narasingpalli village, Nizamabad district, 9 January: suspected arson attack on church by Hindu extremists

Suspected Hindu extremists set fire to a church belonging to the Calvary Gospel at midnight. Pastor B. Anandam said he did not know the motive behind the attack or who the assailants were.

A complaint was lodged at the local police station. The district superintendent of police said a senior district police officer would be deployed to the church to investigate. The outcome of the investigation is not known.

4.1.3. Tandur area, Rangareddi district, 13 January: suspected arson attack on church by Hindu extremists

Suspected Hindu extremists set fire to a church, at around 8.30pm. Pastor John Paul and Christians from the church alerted the police immediately, who filed an FIR when they arrived. The Christians believed that the incident could not have been an accident, as the church did not have electricity and the church had faced prior threats from known Hindu extremists.

4.1.4. Kakinada, East Godavari district, 15 January: pastor attacked by Hindu extremist mob; detained by police

A mob of approximately 100 Hindu extremists, wielding belts, forcibly entered a special gathering and attacked Pastor Ratnam Babu from a church called the Kristu Aseenudu Prardhana Mandiram. They left after ransacking the venue, having reportedly been deterred by the presence of the Revenue Officer. The following morning, the police sub-inspector and others came to the church, confiscated the microphone system and took the pastor and

three leaders of the church to the Endu Palem Police Station, where they were detained for some time.

When a senior officer intervened, the Christians were released. The extremists continued to threaten the pastor, saying that they had destroyed the churches and killed people, and now his fate would be the same unless he left this place. The senior police officer reportedly offered his support to the pastor, although no action is known to have been taken against the attackers.

4.1.5. Bhudhan Pochampalli village, Nalgonda district, 15 January: arson attack on church by unidentified assailants

Unidentified assailants arrived at a church at around 5am, where they forced open the petrol tanks of two motorcycles parked outside, poured petrol over part of the church building and set fire to it. The fire destroyed the two motorcycles and the whole church building, including its Bibles, furniture and electronic equipment.

Pastor Sadanamdam and other members of the church filed a complaint with the local police. The district superintendent of police and other senior officials visited the church and ordered investigations into the incident; however, the church leaders decided not to pursue the case and police dropped the investigation.

4.1.6. Pedda Reddy village, Nizamabad district 17 February: pastor beaten; threatened with death over alleged conversions; police refused to file case

Pastor P. Vijay was attacked on his way to church by Bestha Gangaram, a local shopkeeper, who approached him on a bicycle and began to beat him. Pastor Vijay fell to the ground; Gangaram then held him up by his collar, and was then joined in the attack by others. They threatened to kill Pastor Vijay if he continued to convert people; he was later admitted to hospital for treatment.

Pastor Vijay went to the local police station to file a complain; Bestha Gangaram was called to the police station and then released with a warning. The police allegedly refused to file any FIR against the attackers.

4.1.7. Kurabalakota mandal, Chittoor district, 23 February: Christian evangelists attacked by RSS and BJP members; Christians detained by police

RSS extremists and BJP members attacked a number of Christian preachers while they were distributing Christian literature. They dragged the preachers to the local police station and filed a false complaint of 'forcible conversions' against them.

The police detained the Christians.

4.2. Chhattisgarh

4.2.1. Bastar district, 9 January: Christians attacked by 25 Dharam Sena extremists; six Christians arrested

Nearly 25 Dharam Sena extremists, led by a villager named Phoolchand Patel, forcibly entered the house where a group of Christians were praying for healing with a Hindu villager known as Amru. They verbally abused them, slapped one Christian named Mankhi and beat the others, making false allegations of 'forcible conversions' against them.

The extremists had the Christians arrested for 'deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings' (IPC 295A) at Jagdalpur Police Station. Those arrested were Pastor Laxman Mankhi, Shyamlal Patel, Ramlal Patel, Malik Patel, Charan Patel and Laxminath Bharti.

Police action against the attackers is unknown.

4.2.2. Kunkuri sub-district, Jashpur district, 13 January: Christian dragged to police station by Hindu extremists

A group of Hindu Jagran Manch extremists dragged a newly converted Christian, Raju Soni, who was returning from a Christian friend's house, to the police station. They demanded that he be arrested for converting people in his neighbourhood.

Police refused to register a complaint against Soni, but he was detained for a few hours.

4.2.3. Bothli village, Durg district, 16 January: Christian meeting attacked by Dharam Sena extremists

Dharam Sena extremists attacked a large, open-air Christian meeting, organised by Mohan Khujjur Thomas. The assailants arrived in trucks at the meeting, beat Christians and other non-Christian attendees, and vandalised the makeshift structure. Over 80 people were injured, including Thomas, whose car was also vandalised. It is suspected that the Hindu extremists were emboldened by the proximity of BJP leaders, holding a public meeting nearby.

The television news channel IBN-7 broadcast footage of the extremists vandalising the tents, in which the attendees were congregating. The chief of the Dharam Sena, Chandraval, reportedly made a statement on the television news channel E-TV, threatening Christians with further attacks if meetings were held in the area again.

Police reportedly arrested Mohan Khujjur Thomas on 22 January and released him on bail the following day.

Local Christians met with the district collector of Durg the following day, in order to urge him to ensure the protection of the community. The inspector at Gurar Police Station, D. S. Bihari, said that so far only one assailant was identified and arrested but maintained that more would be arrested soon. Victims were reportedly too afraid to come forward in order to identify the attackers.

4.2.4. Dhamtari district, 17 January: missionary health camp attacked by Dharam Sena extremists

Over 200 Dharam Sena extremists attacked a missionary health camp, accusing the Christians of participating in a 'conversion ceremony'. At least a dozen people were seriously injured. The extremists also set fire to vehicles and other equipment at the camp and accused the attendees of participating in conversions.

The Dharam Sena state unit chief, Kishore Kothari, denied their involvement. The Inspector General of Raipur, Y.K.S. Thakur, later stated that one arrest had been made and that the accused were being questioned.

4.3. Delhi

4.3.1. Dilshad Garden area, Delhi, 24 February: Catholic church attacked by Bajrang Dal extremists

Approximately 30 Bajrang Dal extremists pelted St Sebastian Catholic Church with stones and vandalised vehicles of at least two church members. The assailants shouted slogans, demanding that the Christians leave the country. Reportedly, the church had received prior information that the attack would occur, and that the Sunday service was held with police protection. However, the extremists hid in a nearby temple and attacked after the police had left.

Police registered a case against unidentified attackers for causing damage (IPC 427); however, no arrests are known to have been made.

4.3.2. Kalyanpuri area, New Delhi, 28 February: Christian charity worker attacked in police station by BJP supporters; accused of conversions by 'allurement'

A mob of around 100 people, with BJP Councillor, Ms Satyeshwari Jyoti, approached Gospel Mission of India (GMI) worker, Samuel Masih, who was unloading a truck of gift packets for impoverished children, accusing GMI of using gifts as allurement to convert to Christianity. He escaped the mob to inform local GMI leader, Peter Banerjee of the situation; meanwhile, the mob took the gift packets to the police station to file a complaint against GMI. Banerjee went to the police station, where some members of the mob verbally abused him and accused him of 'forcible conversions'. Jyoti and members of the mob entered the police station where they beat Banerjee. Jyoti physically assaulted Banerjee and he struck her back, although he later apologised. He was left with a swollen arm and pain to the left side of his body. The crowd continued to grow, and police sent Banerjee to a room for his protection, where he remained overnight.

Police did not register a complaint of 'forcible conversions' against the Christians, but on the following morning, BJP supporters protested at the police station to demand action be taken against the Christians.

4.4. Haryana

4.4.1. Jind district, 1 January: Christians beaten by large Bajrang Dal mob

A mob of around 100 Bajrang Dal extremists stormed a New Year's worship service, conducted by Pastor Ashish John, where twenty Christians were gathered. The Christians fled as the assailants damaged church property and beat Pastor Ashish John and six preachers.

The Christians did not press charges. The extremists tried to file a complaint against Pastor John for 'forcible conversions', but police did not register the complaint.

4.5. Karnataka

4.5.1. Davanagere district, 15 January: church vandalised by suspected Hindu extremists

A mob of suspected Hindu extremists, pelted stones at a church at 10 pm. The church pastor was away; however, his mother, 65-year-old Pennamma, sustained an injury as a result of the attack. Pastor Jacob lodged a complaint, and police visited the site for further investigations.

4.5.2. Bangalore, 17 January: Christians protesting against Kandhamal violence attacked by Hindu extremists

Christians attending a protest calling for justice for Christians attacked in Kandhamal district of Orissa in December 2007 were assaulted by Hindu extremists. Approximately 25 people claiming to be protectors of 'mother India' shouted verbal abuse against the Christians, and attempted to snatch the microphone. They tried to assault some of the protestors. Police took no action initially but then began to disperse the crowd.

The extremists were removed and arrested by the police. Some of the protestors were taken by the police in order to register a written complaint; police filed the FIR.

4.5.3. Ullal town, Dakshina Kannada district, 17 January: Christian woman attacked by Bajrang Dal extremists

Bajrang Dal extremists attacked Baswamma Sangappa for converting to Christianity. Sangappa was making a call in a local shop when the shop owner overheard her conversation and asked her name and if she was a Hindu. The shop owner told a few people present about her conversation and a group of extremists who were present beat her up. Baswamma told him that she had converted to Christianity 15 years ago. When police arrived at the scene they also beat her with their batons and took her to the police station.

Sangappa was released when MLA U.T. Khader intervened. Superintendent of Police N. Satish Kumar ordered an inquiry into the incident but no arrests are known to have been made.

4.5.4. Hegganhalli, Bangalore, 3 February: house church members attacked by VHP and RSS; Christians forced to pray to Hindu gods

Around 20 alleged VHP and RSS extremists forcibly entered a house church and forced the Christians to pray to Hindu gods. They also forcibly took their Bibles and burned them, and beat Pastor T.K. Benny and other Christians. Three Christians, named as Vijay, Brijesh and Shyam, sustained minor injuries. Before leaving, the attackers locked up the house church and warned the Christians against holding future worship services.

Police action is unknown.

4.5.5. Bangalore, 14 March: Christian event attacked by Karnataka Rakshana Vedike extremists

A large mob of Hindu extremists belonging to Karnataka Rakshana Vedike disrupted a Christian event at a playground, which was called 'Miracle'. The extremists beat the participants, injuring several Christians.

Twenty arrests were made. Police said that the extremists mistook preaching at the event for 'mass conversion'. Soumendu Mukherji, deputy commissioner of police, told national newspaper, The Hindu, that 'the situation was tense for a while and officers made preventative arrests.'

4.5.6. Gundlikoppa village, Shimoga district, 23 March: Christians attacked by Hindu extremists during Easter Sunday service

Around 150 Hindu extremists, armed with sticks, launched an attack on a Pentecostal church during its Easter Sunday service. They accused the Christians of 'forcible conversions' and beat Pastor Mandya Nagraj and five others. They also vandalised church property, damaging the roof and musical instruments. Pastor Nagraj had received a threat the week before the incident.

Police arrested six of the assailants, and provided protection to the pastor.

4.5.7. Byapanahalli, Bangalore, 23 March: Christians attacked by Hindu extremists led by priest

Around twelve Hindu extremists, led by the Hindu priest of a local temple and his associate, launched an attack on the Grace Almighty Full Gospel Church. The extremists beat Pastor P. Isaac and nine Christians, including Jency, a seventeen-year-old girl. She was admitted to hospital for treatment. After the attack, the extremists went to the homes of some of the Christians and warned them not to attend the church. They took Pastor Isaac to the police station, where they attempted to register a complaint against him for 'forcible conversions'.

After interrogating the pastor, the police released him; however, they brokered a 'compromise' between the pastor and the extremists which required him to leave the area.

4.6. Madhya Pradesh

4.6.1. Pathigaon village, Rewa district, 17 January: two Christians kidnapped and severely beaten by Bajrang Dal extremists

Six alleged Bajrang Dal extremists stormed a house church, abducted two Christians and severely beat them. They arrived on three motorbikes, carrying saffron coloured flags, wielding swords, knives, tridents and sticks and shouting Hindu religious slogans. They accused the Christians of 'conversions'. The attackers were named as Yedupati Prasad Mishra, Hari Shankar Mishra, Ravindra Kumar Mishra, Gangadhar Singh, Yogender Mishra, and were reportedly led by local Bajrang Dal leader A.P. Sakhi.

The Bajrang Dal attackers tried to take GEMS workers, Vijaya Kumar Maurya and Keera Lal to the police station, and began to beat them after other Christians said they would like to accompany them. The assailants then took Maurwa and Lal to a forested area, where they continued to beat them. Four of the assailants then took Maurwa and Lal to a temple on a hill, known as Sahaki Pahar, where they threatened to sacrifice them to the 'god of the temple'. They received a telephone call, warning them that a police complaint had been lodged, at which point they returned the mobile phones they had confiscated from the Christians and forced them to call the police and sign a paper to say that they had not been kidnapped, before releasing them. Maurya sustained head and stomach injuries, and Lal was left with severe back pain.

The attackers tried to file a counter-complaint, contending that the Christians had kidnapped two of their people. Superintendent of police, Mohammed Shahid Absar said that the police were investigating but no formal complaints had been made by the assailants or the Christians.

4.6.2. Narsimhapur district, 14 February: Christians attacked by large Hindu extremist mob; police officer failed to act

Neelash Sony and an estimated 60 members of the Bajrang Dal, ABVP and other Hindu extremist organisations forcibly entered a Christian meeting place, by breaking open the door. They shouted verbal abuse at a 62-year-old nun and vandalised the building. A priest, Fr Anto, arrived at the scene and Neelesh Sony began to beat him and several others, in one case using a bamboo rod.

Police protection had been requested a few days earlier. However, only one police officer was present at the scene and took no action. According to one report, he 'stood amused' as he watched on. Police later claimed that officers were busy deployed elsewhere but that they intended to make any necessary arrests. A case was registered against the attackers under sections 146, 147, 294, 325 (b) and 506 of the IPC. No arrests are known to have been made.

4.6.3. Kosmi village, Balaghat district, 22 February: two Christians attacked during service by Bajrang Dal members

Twenty Bajrang Dal extremists entered a Christian gathering and physically attacked the guest speaker, Pastor Tom George. When Pastor Sunil Marawi came forward to defend Pastor George, the extremists began to beat him also. The attack lasted half an hour and

the two Christians sustained serious internal injuries. Sunil sustained multiple injuries to his body. The extremists carried the pastors in their vehicle to the Nave Gaon Police Station and pressurised the police to arrest them, falsely accusing them of conversions. The Police took Sunil and George to the Budi Government Hospital; he was discharged the next morning.

Police promised to arrest the assailants, but no arrests are known to have been made.

4.6.4. Indore, 24 February: church vandalised by RSS extremists

Around 250 RSS extremists forcibly entered a church under the leadership of Jaykar S. Kristi, where they damaged church property worth between Rs. 30-40,000 (approximately equivalent to £375-£500). The congregants witnessed the act of vandalism, which lasted about half an hour. Pastor Jaykar S. Kristi interpreted the attack as a response to an article in the local newspaper concerning the extension of reservations to Dalit Christians.

Police arrested seventeen people in connection with the attack.

4.6.5. Balaghat district, 27 February: president of Balaghat Christian Association attacked by Bajrang Dal extremists

Bajrang Dal extremists attacked Dr Robin Singh, president of the Balaghat Christian Association, allegedly because he provided legal aid and administrative help to those attacked on 22 February. The extremists beat him with their fists and wooden sticks and kicked him, and also vandalised his clinic. Reportedly, Dr Singh offered to resign from his post as a result of the attack.

A case was filed against the attackers; however, no arrests are known to have been made.

4.6.6. Maksi town, Shajapur district, 10 March: pastor attacked and kidnapped by RSS extremists; held by police for several days

A mob of RSS extremists, led by Kamal Patel, kidnapped and assaulted Pastor Tulsi Ram, accusing him of converting people. They used a copy of a Christian magazine, 'Jesus Calls', as alleged evidence of these fraudulent conversions. The extremists forcibly detained him for a few hours and beat him severely. They took him to Makshi Police Station at around 10pm, and police detained him based on accusations of 'forcible conversions'. Police initially prevented local Christians accessing Pastor Ram. He later disclosed that he had been forced to sign a paper, without being allowed to read it.

Police refused to release him for several days, alleging that this was for his protection. Reportedly, he was not given any medical attention, despite his injuries. Police failed to file and FIR against his attackers.

4.6.7. Raoti village, Mandsaur district, 28 March: four pastors attacked by RSS and Shiv Sena extremists; charged under Freedom of Religion Act

Around 10 RSS and Shiv Sena extremists attacked four pastors belonging to the Believers Church of India. They entered the house of Dinesh Damar, where the pastors were showing a film about Jesus called 'Daya Sagar' to around twelve Christians, and began to

verbally abuse and beat those present. When the police arrived, they confiscated the film and arrested Pastor Bharat Kant Patel, Sukram Dewara, Ramesh Bhuriya and Vilas Chandra Nag. They were detained in the Ratlam police control room for the night, while police interrogated them and checked the film for its content.

The following day, the pastors were detained at Raoti Police Station based on charges of conversion. At around 4.30pm, they were taken to court where the magistrate sentenced them to a three-day police remand; they were detained in Sailana Prison. The police said that two people, Kalu Singh Bhavar and Dev Singh Katiya had made a complaint against the pastors; they were charged under the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act.

4.7. Maharashtra

4.7.1. Sahangoti village, Alibaug, 15 March: nuns severely assaulted by Hindu extremists

A group of around 50 Hindu extremists attacked several St Teresa Sisters and tribal women at an event to celebrate the International Women's Day, during which an AIDS awareness programme was being conducted. The attackers particularly targeted Sr Mercy Tuscano and Sr Philomena D'Mella; they also attacked two tribal minors and a driver. Reportedly, Sr Mercy was kicked in the genital area, forced into a gutter and dragged by her hair for around 100 metres. Sr Philomena was attacked in a similar manner, and thrown onto a barbed wire fence.

The tribal women defended the nuns, saying that they had been under no pressure to convert to Christianity and continued to follow Hinduism. They were also beaten. The nuns and driver were taken to the civil hospital, where they were initially refused admittance, but the tribal girls received treatment at home, out of fear.

The Catholic Forum submitted a report about the incident to several officials and commissions at the state and central government levels. The Alibaug police did not take victim statements until the day after the attack, and filed trivial charges against a dozen of the alleged attackers, releasing them immediately on bail. Only later, under pressure from local human rights activists, were charges filed under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Vaishali Patel was subsequently detained in the Alibaug prison; the outcome of this case is not known.

4.8. Orissa

4.8.1. Budrikiya village, Kandhamal district, 14 February: Dalit Christian families threatened with death; forced from homes by VHP

VHP extremists threatened six Dalit Christian families with death if they did not leave their Christian faith and re-convert to Hinduism. The Christians belonged to a Baptist church in Budrikiya, near Balliguda, where churches had been destroyed during the communal violence in December 2007. All six families left the village and moved to Balliguda. The extremists forcibly took away their domestic animals, including cows and goats.

Police action is unknown.

4.8.2. Tiyangia village, Kandhamal district, 16 March: Palm Sunday procession prevented by large Hindu extremist mob

A crowd of armed Hindu extremists, thought to have been rallied by the RSS, threatened Christians, to prevent the 180 Catholic families of the parish from holding their traditional Palm Sunday procession. When the parish priest, Fr Praful Sadhapati, arrived at the village at around 10am to conduct the Palm Sunday Mass, he saw the huge armed mob shouting slogans, demanding that Christians leave the area and using a loudspeaker to gather more people. The mob also performed a Hindu ritual in front of the church so that the congregation could not hold their Palm Sunday meeting.

Fr Praful Sadhapati informed his seniors about the incident, who reported it to Panda, the police inspector. The superintendent of police of Kandhamal was also informed, and the police were expected to arrive at the scene.

4.9. Tamil Nadu

4.9.1. Tharamangalam, Salem district, 18 January: Dalit Christian family and church congregants attacked by Hindu extremists

Hindu extremists launched an attack on a house church of a 70-year-old Dalit Christian pastor, Abraham. A neighbour, Govindhan, and other locals entered the house church and attacked the pastor, his wife and their five children, four of whom were minors. When Pastor Abraham went to police to report the attack, members of his church, who were unaware of the attack, arrived at his house for a planned meeting and the same group of extremists assaulted them. At least three of the Christians, identified only as Ravi, Anaal, and the pastor's son Prakash, sustained injuries. Ravi's hand was fractured and Anaal and Prakash sustained head injuries. Ravi and Anaal were treated at the Mettur Dam Government Hospital.

Police registered a case against Pastor Abraham's neighbour and made four arrests.

4.9.2. 9 March: pastor attacked by Hindu extremists on train

Hindu extremists attacked Pastor Paulose on a train as he was traveling to Chennai to teach at a Bible School. As he distributed Christian literature, some extremists on the train were offended and demanded he sit with them; the pastor declined. As he settled to sleep, around fifteen extremists surrounded him, pinned him against the wall and beat him. He was rescued by other passengers and was taken for treatment at a hospital in Chennai.

No arrests are known to have been made.

5. Notes

5.1. Acronyms

ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad
aicc	All India Christian Council
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CBI	Central Bureau of Investigation
FIR	First Information Report
IPC	Indian Penal Code
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad

5.2. Reporting sources

All India Christian Council (CSW partner)
Catholic Council of Bishops, Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh
Compass Direct News
Evangelical Fellowship of India
The Hindu
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