

Hate and Targeted Violence against **CHRISTIANS** in India

Burnt Altar of St. Sebastian Church, Dilshad Garden, New Delhi



REPORT 2014

Cover picture: by Dr. John Dayal

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“The Commission would appreciate a public statement from the Government to reassure all minorities that their constitutional rights of safety, security and equality before the law cannot be compromised at any cost. The Government needs to send a clear signal that it is committed to the protection and security of all citizens and that no attempt at creating an atmosphere of fear and mistrust will be tolerated.”

The National Commission for Minorities
in a resolution dated 1st September, 2014

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Christian community in India is concerned at the intensity of the targeted and communal violence directed against it almost on a pan India basis. Violence against Christians picked up in independent India in the early 1990s reaching its peak in 2008 – 2009 with more than 1000 incidents of violence and hate crimes reported against the Christian community. This continues today as vicious hate campaign, physical violence, police complicity, and State impunity contribute to the persecution of the Christian community in many states of India.

Human Rights and Civil Society groups have documented the death of at least two persons in 2014, killed for their Christian faith. The Persecution data lists partially, 147 cases. The two cases of death in communal anti Christian violence were reported from Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

An analysis of the data shows Chhattisgarh topping the list with 28 incidents of crime, followed closely by neighbouring Madhya Pradesh with 26, Uttar Pradesh with 18 and Telengana, a newly carved out of Andhra Pradesh, with 15 incidents. Much of the violence has taken place after the new government of the National Democratic alliance headed by the Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, came into power on 26 May, 2014.

The violence peaked between August and October with 56 cases, before zooming up to 25 cases during the Christmas season. The violence has continued well into the New Year 2015, with more Catholic churches in the capital city of Delhi targeted as incidents continue in other states.

Much of the violence, 54 percent, is of threats, intimidation, coercion, often with the police looking on. Physical violence constituted a quarter of all cases, 24 per cent, and violence against Christian women, a trend that is increasingly being seen since the carnage in Kandhamal, Odisha, in 2007 and 2008, was 11 per cent. Breaking of statues and the Cross, and other acts of desecration were recorded in about 8 per cent of the cases, but many more were also consequent to other forms of violence against institutions. A disturbing trend was violence against Christians in West Bengal, where though one case was formally reported; there have been increasing incidents of hate speech and intimidation..

Police inaction and its failure to arrest the guilty in most cases, its propensity to try to minimise the crime, and in rural areas especially, its open partisanship has almost become the norm. Police ineptitude in forensic investigations has been seen even in New Delhi where four of the five cases in the months of December 2014 and January 2015 have seen no progress in the investigations. In the one case where there were arrests, the Church and the community have cast doubts on the police version of the motives of the suspects whose images were recorded in the Close Circuit TV cameras installed in the church.

The President of India, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, noted the rise of communalism and the targeting of religious minorities in his address to the Nation on 25th January 2015, the eve of Republic Day. President Mukherjee said *"In an international environment where so many countries are sinking into the morass of theocratic violence ... We have always reposed our trust in faith-equality where every faith is equal before the law and every culture blends into another to create a positive dynamic. The violence of the tongue cuts and wounds people's hearts. The Indian Constitution is the holy book of democracy. It is a lodestar for the socio-*

economic transformation of an India whose civilisation has celebrated pluralism, advocated tolerance and promoted goodwill between diverse communities. These values, however, need to be preserved with utmost care and vigilance.”

Mr. Mukherjee touched a point that has worried many among even those who voted for Mr. Modi hoping he would bring about a change from the corruption and economic coma in which the country had found itself in the last few years. The Union and State governments have been dismissive of the Christian complaints of targeted violence and persecution, both by political non-State actors and other elements.

We demand that the government take urgent and effective measures to restore the Rule of law and curb the targeted and communal violence. The guilty must be traced, and action under the law should be taken. Police officers must be held accountable for communal crimes in their jurisdiction.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

- Enact a comprehensive hate crimes legislation to safeguard the rights of religious minorities.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs should provide trainings on human rights and religious freedom standards and practices to the state and central police and judiciary;
- Although maintenance of public order is a state responsibility, the central government should issue an advisory to the state governments to repeal the anti-conversion laws;
- The government should ensure an active Commission for Human Rights and Commission for Minorities is operational in every state, and that members of each commission are appointed by transparent and non-partisan procedures;
- Prevent and pursue through the judicial process, all violent acts against religious and tribal minorities and Dalits.

PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

THE INDIA REPORT FOR 2014

HATE CAMPAIGNS, TARGETTED VIOLENCE, FALSE ARRESTS AND IMPUNITY MARCH A TRAUMATIC 2014 FOR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN INDIA

2 deaths in 149 cases of violence in the year. Desecration and destruction of home churches, violation of Constitutional rights of Freedom of Faith and assault on pastors dominate persecution list. But most cases go unreported, unrecorded by police. Chhattisgarh tops the list. Government silence encourages political groups espousing aggressing religious nationalism

Mr. Sakshi Maharaj, a god-man, and an influential member of the Parliament on behalf of the Bharatiya Janata party which now governs India has demanded the death sentence for persons who convert [Hindu] persons to other religions. As Indian TV and Print media quoted him, the saffron-clad ascetic politician told a religious gathering in the state of Uttar Pradesh that each Hindu woman should mother four children in order to protect the predominance of Hindus, India's largest religious group. "Wait for some time," local media him as saying. "A law will be passed in Parliament in which anyone indulging in cow slaughter and conversion will be punished with the death sentence." Maharaj said that Indians of Muslim, Christian and other religious faiths who convert to Hinduism, euphemistically Ghar Wapsi or Home-Coming, will not be subjected to the same punishment, as they were all once Hindus.

This is part of a vicious hate campaign that accompanied physical violence, many incidents of police complicity, and State impunity in the persecution of the Christian community in many states of India.

Human Rights and Civil Society groups have documented the death of two persons in 2014, killed for their Christian faith. The Persecution data lists 149 cases. An analysis of the data shows Chhattisgarh topping the list with 28 incidents of crime, followed closely by neighbouring Madhya Pradesh with 26, Uttar Pradesh with 18 and Telengana, a newly carved out of Andhra Pradesh, with 15 incidents. Much of the violence has taken place after the new government of the National Democratic alliance headed by the Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, came into power on 26 May, 2014. The violence peaked between August and

October with 56 cases, before zooming up to 25 cases during the Christmas season, including the burning of the Catholic church of St Sebastian in Dilshad garden in the national capital of New Delhi. The violence has continued well into the New Year 2015, with more Catholic churches in the city targeted as incidents continue in other states. Much of the violence, 54 per cent, is of threats, intimidation, coercion, often with the police looking on. Physical violence constituted a quarter of all cases, 24 per cent], and violence against Christian women, a trend that is increasingly being seen since the carnage in Kandhamal, Odisha, in 2007 and 2008, was 11 per cent. Breaking of statues and the Cross and other acts of desecration were recorded in about 8 per cent of the cases, but many more were also consequent to other forms of violence against institutions. A disturbing trend was violence against Christians in West Bengal, where though one case was formally reported, there have been increasing incidents of hate speech and intimidation.

The two cases of death in communal anti Christian violence were reported from Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

Nimmaka Laxmaya, 50, of Vandidi village, Rayagada, (Orissa)

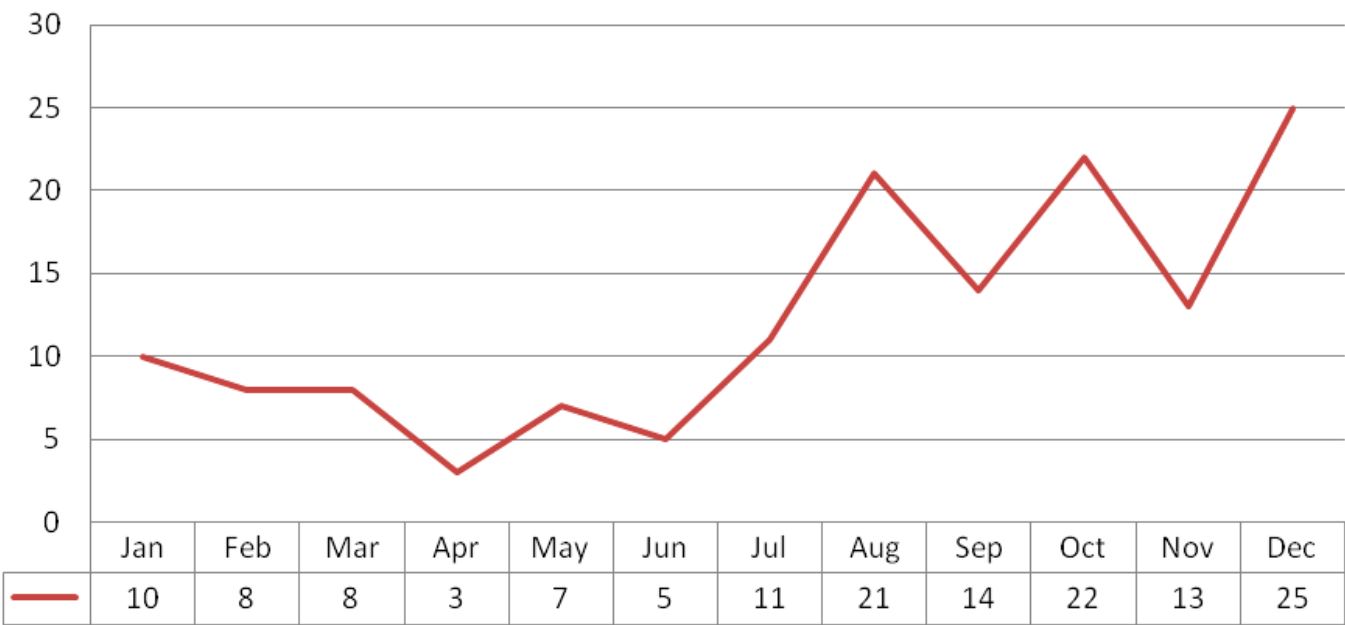
States	Number of Incidents
Andhra Pradesh	2
Arunachal Pradesh	2
Assam	4
Bihar	5
Chhattisgarh	28
Delhi	4
Gujarat	1
Haryana	1
Jharkhand	4
Karnataka	13
Kerala	5
Maharashtra	26
Madhya Pradesh	3
Odisha	6
Punjab	1
Rajasthan	1
Tamil Nadu	5
Telangana	16
Uttarakhand	18
Uttar Pradesh	1
West Bengal	1
TOTAL	147

was waylaid and bludgeoned to death in a planned attack on the afternoon of 25th May 2014 in a neighbouring village called Dherubada in Orissa. He was from a neighbouring village called Vandidi. He had attended a prayer meeting and the baptism ceremony of his nine year old son, and was going home when killers caught up with him, strangled him and then smashed his head with a big stone.

in the Close Circuit TV cameras installed in the church.

The President of India, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, noted the rise of communalism and the targetting if religious minorities in his address to the Nation on 25th January 2015, the eve of Republic Day. President Mukherjee said “In an international environment where so many countries are sinking into the morass of theo-

TIMELINE OF ATTACK AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN 2014



The second death was from Andhra Pradesh on 10th January, 2014 Where State police arrested seven of the eight members of the Hindu Vahini group accused of attacking pastor Orucanti Sanjeevi on Jan. 10 at his home in Vikarabad, 64 kilometers (39 miles) from the state capital of Hyderabad. Pastor Sanjeevi, 48, succumbed to his injuries on Jan. 13. “The key member of this module is Gandikota Srinu, alias RK, a full-time member of the Hindu Vahini, and these same people attempted to kill another pastor in Narketpally,” the police said. The Sangh group had stormed his house, and stabbed him.

Police inaction and its failure to arrest the guilty in most cases , its propensity to try to minimise the crime, and in rural areas specially, its open partisanship has almost become the norm. Police ineptitude in forensic investigations has been seen even in New Delhi where four of the five cases in the months of December 2014 and January 2015 have seen no progress in the investigations. In the one case where there were arrested, the Church and the community have cast doubts on the police version of the motives of the suspects whose images were recorded

cratic violence ... We have always reposed our trust in faith-equality where every faith is equal before the law and every culture blends into another to create a positive dynamic. The violence of the tongue cuts and wounds people's hearts. The Indian Constitution is the holy book of democracy. It is a lode-star for the socio-economic transformation of an India whose civilisation has celebrated pluralism, advocated tolerance and promoted goodwill between diverse communities. These values, however, need to be preserved with utmost care and vigilance.”

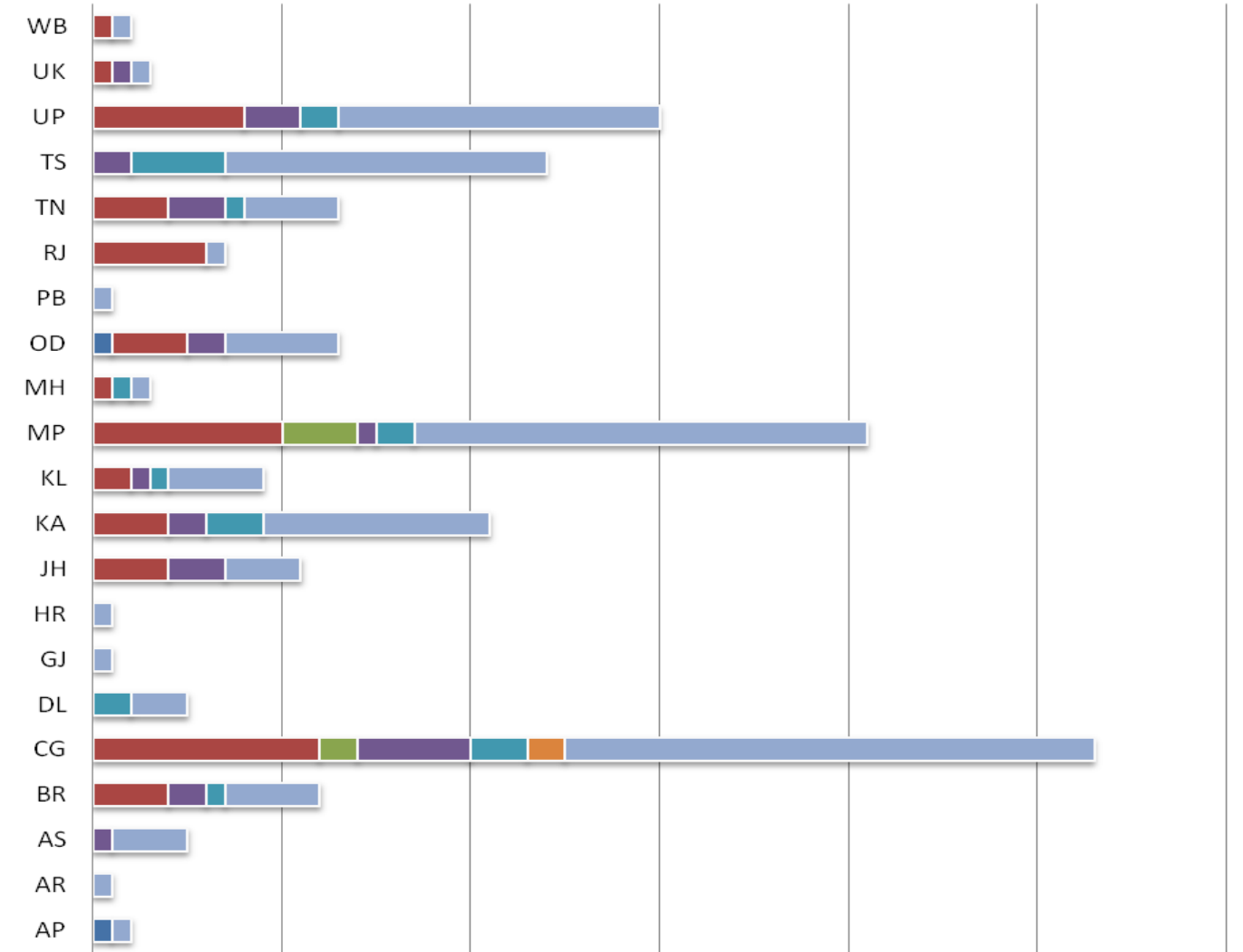
Mr. Mukherjee touched a point that has worried many among even those who voted for Mr. Modi hoping he would bring about a change from the corruption and economic coma in which the country had found itself in the last years of the Congress regime led by Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh. This was the increasing cacophony of many in the BJP, including some Ministers and Members of Parliament, who were supporting a demand that India mark itself out as a Hindu Rashtra or Nation, and stop appeasing Muslims, and Christians, both seen as enemies of the nation and the majority community. And some among them were quite stridently asking that the Constitution

be scrapped and replaced by a more “nationalistic” one rooted not in western concepts but in India’s Hindu tradition.

It is not just fringe elements or political mavericks who suggest solutions that would be deemed anti-democratic even in military dictatorships – including disenfranchisement of religious groups, or asking Hindu women to produce ten or even more children to maintain a demographic superiority. There is a raging

controversy now on a series of media advertisements by the national government that has illustrations of the illustrated Preamble of the Constitution without two crucial words “Secular” and “socialist”. These words were not there in the document that was signed on 26th January 1950, but were introduced in an amendment passed by parliament in the 1970s. Many of the social legislation that was passed in the closing decades of the last century, including employment for rural poor, and scholar-

TYPES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS ACROSS THE VARIOUS STATES IN 2014



	AP	AR	AS	BR	CG	DL	GJ	HR	JH	KA	KL	MP	MH	OD	PB	RJ	TN	TS	UP	UK	WB
MR	1													1							
PV				4	12				4	4	2	10	1	4		6	4		8	1	1
FOR					2							4									
GV			1	2	6				3	2	1	1		2			3	2	3	1	
RS				1	3	2				3	1	2	1				1	5	2		
DP					2																
ID	1	1	4	5	28	3	1	1	4	12	5	24	1	6	1	1	5	17	17	1	1

ships for Muslim youth in particular, were born of those two words. The noted lawyer and currently Union Minister for Information technology, Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad, is among those who seem to endorse the debate on this issue. In a way, this is in line with the argument that had been advanced when Mr. Vajpayee was the Prime Minister at the head of the first National Democratic Alliance of the BJP, that the Constitution needed a comprehensive review. The talk in the highest quarter that the Constitution is better off without socialism and secularism has understandably sent shock waves among the rural poor, Tribals, Dalits, as well as Muslims and Christians. There is therefore a growing demand that the Modi government heed the President Mukherjee's caution and stop political discourse becoming a competition in hysteria that is abhorrent to traditional ethos Constitutional values.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Modi, and the Home Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh, have been dismissive of the Christian complaint of targetted violence and persecution, both by political non-State actors close to the ruling political dispensation of the Bharatiya Janata party. Mr. Modi and Mr. Singh were given memoranda when the violence was peaking in September 2014, but chose to disregard it. When a Christian delegation called on him on the eve of Christmas to greet hi, he made it abundantly clear to them that he saw the "persecution" complaint as a media hype. He point blank refused to speak on "every incident." Members of Opposition parties took the matter up in December 2014 in the Rajya Sabha after the burning if the St. Sebastian Church on 1 December, 2014. But though the proceedings of the House were disrupted for several days, the government chose not to assure the religious minorities of their security. The Prime Minister, and the president sand senior leadership of the BJP, also decided not to rebuke the those among their ranks targetting Christians and Muslims in their hate speeches. On the other hand, more than one Minister in Mr. Modi's government extended support to the rhetoric of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh the umbrella organisation which has groups involved in mobilising and radicalising national sectors from Education to Tribals. Mr. Venkaiah Naidu, a firmer president if the Bharatiya Janata party and now a senior minister, supported the demand for a national law on Freedom of Religion, a euphemism fir legal restrictions on conversions to what are called non-Indic religions, Christianity, and Islam. Several others functionaries have join this cry.

The year 2014 was a watershed in the history of India and in relations between religious communities in the ancient land. Mr.

Narendra Modi, led by (the) Bharatiya Janata Party to a resounding victory in the general elections of 2014, riding a wave generated by his promise of "development" and assisted by a remarkable mass mobilization in one of the most politically surcharged general elections since the Republic came into existence in 1950.. When the results were announced on 16th May 2014, the BJP had won 280 of the 542 seats, with no party getting even the statutory 10 per cent of the seats to claim the position of Leader of the Opposition.

The days, weeks and months since the historic victory, and his assuming office on 26th May 2014 as the 14th Prime Minister of India, have seen the rising pitch of a crescendo of hate speech against Muslims and Christians. Their identity derided, their patriotism scoffed at, their citizenship questioned, their faith mocked. The environment has degenerated into one of coercion, divisiveness, and suspicion. This has percolated to the small towns and villages or (of) rural India, severing bonds forged in a dialogue of life over the centuries, shattering the harmony build (built) around the messages of peace and brotherhood given us by the Sufis and the men and women who led the Freedom Struggle under Mahatma Gandhi. The hate speeches have resonated in debates in the Chamber of the Lok Sabha – an exceptionally and aggressively provocative and virulent one by the BJP leader and lead speaker, Yogi Adityanath, in the debate on communal violence -- and in meetings, rallies and statements to the Media by leaders of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh and its associate organisations, collectively called the Sangh Parivar. Their focal points have been to rouse their cadres and others by sowing seeds of fear, listing "Love Jihad", inter-community marriage, and conversions as conspiracies by religious minorities, specially Muslims and Christians, against the existence of the Hindu faith and Mother India. Adityanath, now head of a religious cult in Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, got away with demonising the Muslim community and others. The hate campaign has mutated to a (being) more coercive and threatening, (percolating down) that has percolated to the Universities and colleges on the one hand and the villages and small towns over much of the country. One group even set up a "Hindu Helpline" to assist anyone from the majority community who is being harassed by Muslims, announcing its cadres will come to the help of any Hindu parent who suspects his or her daughter is seeing a Muslim youth.

Mr .Modi has not gone beyond an initial call for a "ten-year moratorium" on communal violence. This was in his 15th August Independence Day address, his first, in which he said:

“Communalism and casteism are an obstacle in the country’s progress. We see violence on the basis of religion and caste. How long? Who is benefiting? We have fought enough, killed enough I appeal that for the sake of country’s progress, there should be a 10-year moratorium on violence, at least for once, so that we are free from these ills.”

Inevitably, this failed to stop great violence. In just the first few weeks of the new government, by its own admission, A (a) total of 113 communal incidents have taken place in various parts of the country during May-June in which 15 people [not Christians] were killed and 318 others were injured, Minister of State for Home Affairs, Mr. Kiren Rijju told the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of Parliament. Many of the incidents of violence were directed against individuals and places of worship of the Muslim community, specially in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. The state apparatus and specially the police often became a party arresting not the aggressors but the victims to satisfy the demands of the mob, as happening in Greater Noida, part of the National Capital region. There have attempts at religious profiling of Christian academic institutions (institutions) and their students in the national capital.

Civil society and public intellectuals have noted this. “The highest in the government and the Sangh Parivar are in unison in sending across the message that Islam is un-Indian and Muslims by and large anti-national. We must take these signs seriously because the implications of linking up religion and nationalism are bound to be disastrous.” Prof. Kancha Iliaih , senior scholar

has noted that,

The internationally respected Economic and Political Weekly recently noted “If communal polarisation of the electorate to build a Hindutva vote bank was a constant presence in the general election campaign, it has only seen a sharpening in the, supposedly important, “first 100 days” of the BJP-led government in office. An important way in which this has been done is the strategy of the Sangh Parivar to calibrate

“In the three months since Narendra Modi’s spectacular triumph, many corners of the country have begun to smoulder in slow fires of orchestrated hate and distrust against India’s Muslims.... The culpability for each of these clashes lies with the communal organisations bent on fomenting animosities. But it is shared equally by the shamefully weak-kneed (or actively prejudiced) responses of the state and district administrations in these states.... ”

Social Activist, Mr. Harsh Mander

communal violence and hate campaigns in a way so as to keep it “under the radar”. One of the ways of accomplishing this is to shift the locus of violence and mobilizations from the urban centres to small towns and rural areas; another course is to keep the “dead-count” low and use variants of everyday, “routine” violence to spread tensions and create panic. Yet another scheme is to convert India-Pakistan relations into a subset of the

CHHATTISGARH AS A FOCUS STATE

Christians in Chhattisgarh, especially in the Bastar area, have been faced massive politically inspired opposition, which has manifested itself in the form of physical violence and social discrimination. The apathy, impunity and partisanship of the administration at various levels has compounded the human tragedy, and the gravity of the violation of Constitutional guarantees of Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association and Movement, and most important, the Freedom of Religion and Belief.

The current wave of incidents against Christians first came into light in May 2014 when Christian families were denied ration and ration cards after they refused to bow down to the demands set by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). The VHP had asked each Christian family to contribute 200 rupees per member towards Hindu festivities initiated by the VHP in Sirisguda village. The Christians who had always contributed money during village festivals by their free will could not comply as the money demanded was too much, and the Christians are poor. This resulted in their being denied food for more than 2 months. The village leadership kept silent. When Christians reported this matter to the district authorities, activists of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, which is also very active in the region, beat them up. The Gram Sabha, the village council, of Sirisguda passed a resolution outlawing non-Hindu from the village. A section of the Panchayat Raj Act (129 G) was used to adopt a resolution proscribing all religious activity in the village areas which did not adhere to the Hindu faith. Even the Collector of the District, Mr. Ankit Anand, who is the highest civil servant and administration of the region, admitted was against the law.

Since then, according to media reports, more than 60 villages have passed similar resolutions in the area. There have been frequent reports between July 2014 and now of Christians being beaten up in Bastar District in various places including Sirisguda, Belar, Gadiya, Parapur etc.

Hindu-Muslim relations within India (and here the conveniently timed ratcheting up of tensions and cross-border firing is proving very useful). The most prominent method deployed in recent weeks has been the issue of “Love Jihad”.

Eminent jurist Mr. Fali Nariman, a former Member of the Rajya Sabha and a Member of the National Integration Council traditionally chaired by the Prime Minister of India, expressed concern at the government’s “silence” on the hate speeches witnessed in parts of India and rued that Hinduism was “changing its benign face”. Traditionally Hinduism has been the most tolerant of all Indian faiths. But - recurrent instances of religious tension fanned by fanaticism and hate-speech has shown that the

“What we are witnessing is not just Hindu rituals in the public sphere but their use to create a predominantly Hindutva public sphere that marginalises others. Rituals are mere instruments.”

Mr. Bharat Bhushan, Noted editor

Hindu tradition of tolerance is showing signs of strain. And let me say this frankly – my apprehension is that Hinduism is somehow changing its benign face because, and only because it is believed and proudly proclaimed by a few (and not contradicted by those at the top): that it is because of their faith and belief that HINDUS have been now put in the driving seat of governance. Nariman praised Jawaharlal Nehru, saying he “never looked upon the diverse and varied peoples of India from the standpoint of Hinduism”. While dealing with minority rights, Indian courts had once conceptualised their role as that of an Opposition political party — until the BJP in the early 1990s characterised Congress policy as “appeasement of the minorities”. The label stuck; “minority” became an unpopular word. We have been hearing on television and reading in newspapers almost daily a tirade by one or more individuals or groups against one or another section of citizens (from) a religious minority. The criticism has been that the majority government at the Centre has done nothing to stop this tirade. I agree,” he said delivering the annual lecture organised by the National Commission for Minorities at the Constitution Club. It was titled “Minorities at crossroads: comments on judicial pronouncements”. Mr. Nariman urged the commission to move court by invoking the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code against those making hate speeches and publicise the action to win the confidence of the minorities.

His words did move the National Commission for Minorities. The

NCM, in a resolution posted on its website, said: “The Commission would appreciate a public statement from the Government to reassure all minorities that their constitutional rights of safety, security and equality before the law cannot be compromised at any cost. The Government needs to send a clear signal that it is committed to the protection and security of all citizens and that no attempt at creating an atmosphere of fear and mistrust will be tolerated.” Without naming hate speeches of some politicians of the ruling BJP such as Yogi Adityanath and Dr. Praveen Togadia against Muslims for so-called 'Love Jihad' campaign, the resolution said “The NCM also condemns the communally charged statements attributed to prominent people in public life which are creating this atmosphere of mistrust and heightened tension. These happenings are violating the principles of the Indian Constitution and also the call given by the Hon'ble Prime Minister that there should be a moratorium on communal riot.”

An editorial in the Indian Express asks, “So who is in charge in the BJP? And why is no action being taken against those like Adityanath and Thakur who are openly stoking communal tensions on the ground, especially in poll-bound states, in flagrant defiance of the forward-looking and development-oriented image courted by the Modi-led BJP at the Centre? Or is the party playing true to its own worst stereotype — of always speaking in two voices, carefully choreographing the interplay between them and their alternation?”

The BJP is unabashed about its links with the Sangh Parivar. Mr. Modi is himself a former RSS leader, as are several of his Cabinet colleagues. Some ranking RSS officials have in recent weeks been inducted as general secretaries of the BJP, leaving absolutely no one in any doubt of the seamless fusion of the political party and the Sangh which styles itself as a social and cultural organisations.

Mr. Seshadri Chari, former editor of RSS mouthpiece Organiser and member of the BJP national executive, who enjoys a deserved reputation as a sober and reflective commentator, is quoted in the Outlook Magazine saying that Hindus have always been a majority in India but the manifestation of majoritarianism has been reflected in the cultural and social field. “Now it is reflected in the politics of the country. A large number of foot-soldiers in the RSS-BJP do believe that the political Hindu has arrived.”

THE HATE CAMPAIGN: RSS chief Mr. Mohan Bhagwat has repeatedly asserted that everyone in India is Hindu, including

Muslims and Christians, because this is the land of the Hindu people and civilisation. This refrain was picked up by the Deputy Chief Minister of Goa, and by big and small leaders across the country, going viral on social media and the national TV News channels in their English and Hindi debates. The Sangh ideologue MG Vaidya said on 19th May, three days after the election results, that they can now tackle issues such as the building of the Ram temple on the site of the Babri mosque they demolished in 1992. Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Mr. Ashok Singhal, said "if [Muslims] keep opposing Hindus, how long can they survive?". Another leader said "Modi will restore Hindutva rule, like Prithviraj Chauhan (25th May 2014). The focus is now on Love Jihad. [See Annexure for details and Links.]

GHAR WAPSI : The political and coercive conversion to Hinduism:

Christians constitute 2.3 per cent of the national population, according to the 2011 census. They have been a focal target of the Sangh Parivar for a long time. In August 2014, 72 Valmiki (a section of the Dalit community) who had in the past converted to Christianity underwent a so-called "re-conversion" to Hinduism in Aligarh in the state of Uttar Pradesh, under the auspices of the 'Dharma Jagran Vivad' (Religious Awakening Forum). This was a "Ghar Vapasi" (literally, a "return home") ceremony through which the Sangh Parivar intervenes to claim non-Hindu members of the Dalit and Adivasi communities as Hindus. The Constitution of India guarantees freedom of religion, allowing for the free exercise of individual choice over matters of faith. However, "Freedom of Religion" laws enacted in several states presume that individuals are incapable of making their own informed decisions regarding matters of faith, and can only be manipulated or coerced into conversion. The language of the Gujarat anti-conversion law enacted in 2003 is telling in this respect. Conversion is viewed as an attempt "to make one person to renounce one religion and adopt another religion." These laws empower district administrations to oversee and regulate religious conversions, in order to prevent what are referred to as conversions by "fraud" or "force." Effectively, these laws target Christian and Muslim communities and provide opportunities for both local officials and Hindu supremacist organizations to harass and intimidate them.

The anti-conversion laws, passed by a number of states, do not apply to such 'Ghar Vapasi' ceremonies. The Sangh Parivar has a singular focus on curbing any conversions out of Hinduism, particularly by Dalits and Adivasis. In April 2013 BJP leader Venkiah Naidu, now a Cabinet minister, had publicly announced his par-

ty's intention to "bring an anti-conversion law to ban religious conversions in the country if it is voted to power in 2014 General Elections." Highlighting the primary motivation underlying his party's anxiety over conversions, he went on to add: "...The country will be safe and sound only when Hindus are in a majority."

Inspired by the party's rise to power, several Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders have launched so-called "re-conversion" drives targeting Christian communities. RSS Hindu activist, Rajeshwar Singh recently declared while converting a Christian family to Hinduism in Hasayan (140 km south of Delhi in the state of Uttar Pradesh), "We will cleanse our Hindu society. We will not let the conspiracy of church or mosque succeed in Bharat (India)." Rumors continue to circulate suggesting Christians were forcibly converted and the church has also been refashioned into a Shiva temple. These conversion efforts are directed primarily at Adivasis and Dalits, informed by a caste politics that drives Hindutva anxieties over conversion. The basic claim that all Christians, like Muslims, are converts, empowers Hindutva groups to deny the religious legitimacy of Adivasi and Dalit Christians. Moreover the claim that conversion to Hinduism is merely "re-conversion" rests on the fallacious notion that all Adivasis are "Hindu" by default, denying the legitimacy of their own distinct and autonomous religious traditions. In BJP-ruled states like Chhattisgarh, draconian laws specifically target Christians, as in the recent case of the Bilaspur High Court banning "all non-Hindu religious propaganda, prayers and speeches in the villages" in Bastar district. The message is clearly that the only religious identity permissible is Hinduism. The administration has remained silent on the growing atmosphere of repression threatening Christians in India.

On May 18, 2014 in Kundapur, Karnataka, the properties of two churches were damaged by unidentified miscreants. An ornamental pot at the entrance of the Holy Rosary church were (was) broken and a signpost leading to St. Antony Church in Koteswar also was uprooted. On June 24, 2014 in Bhilai, Durg, suspected Hindu extremists demolished an independent church. According to local sources, the church was completely destroyed. Rumors were spread among the villagers claiming that the building was destroyed by a cyclone. The area Christians, however, maintained that it was the hands of the extremists as only the church was damaged in the area by the so called 'cyclone'. Such attacks are pre-planned and pre-meditated to cause maximum damage to property, resources, vehicles, and cause damages that are very hard to rebuild.

Social Exclusion

52 families were denied ration for two months in the Sirisguda Village which was an order enforced by the panchayat head. They approached the food inspector of the district and asked for an enquiry to be conducted. On Monday, June 16, 2014, when the two representatives were sent to appease the village leaders and the complainants, both of them were chased away from the village. Then some assailants filed a false complaint at the Bandanji Police Station, Lakandi Taluk - District Bastar about the Christians beating the Hindus in the village. This was simultaneously followed up by a mob of 200 perpetrators who attacked Christian families. Most families were stoned and chased away with sticks, while 8 men and 2 women were seriously injured and hospitalized. This incident preceded the banning of non-Hindu missionaries in Bastar, as mentioned above (Sec. II, Increasing Intolerance against Christians).

Social exclusions are the one of the primary tactics to victimize minorities denying basic human rights that are common to every citizen. These exclusion orders, often make Christians vulnerable to excessive violence and denial of social privileges like access to water, electricity and work.

On July 28, 2014 a mob of over 300 persons from the Yadav community led by Swami Krishnadavananda threatened the Pastor and 30 families who were believers in the Church at Gal-laragati, Holalkara in the Chitradurga District to convert back to Hinduism. They along with the local Panchayat issued a one week deadline to decide on the same, which otherwise, would lead to the families being ostracized from the local village. Such exclusions force families into submission or are attacked for making a choice of being as a Christian.

Assaults on Church Leaders and Believers

Assaults on Church leaders and believers have augmented bizarrely. Profiling of Christians in villages and attacking them has been the most effective way of spreading terror among the minorities. A Christian along with his wife, mother-in-law and mother were beaten by Hindu fanatics at Parapur Village in Bastar, Chhattisgarh on July 26, 2014. The incident occurred when five Hindu fanatics took Shri Raguram (name changed) outside his house and started verbally abusing him. They alleged that that he had left their Gods and became a Christian to which he replied saying that he had become a Christian because he wanted to and no one had forced him to do so. On hearing this, they started slapping and kicking him. Then when they began to strangle him with the intention of killing, his mother and mother

-in-law interfered and stopped the men from trying to kill him. They then slapped and beat the elderly women and his wife. He was bleeding profusely and was later admitted to the Jagdalpur hospital. When Shri Raguram's wife went to the Lohandiguda Police Station to file a complaint, the police refrained from doing so, citing it as a family feud.

In another incident, a mob of about 10 people came and attacked a Pastor and believers in Perur, near Coimbatore while praying for a 8 year old who had a fractured her hand, on Sunday, August 3, 2014 at 7:00pm. Six men among the mob stormed into the house and beat up the pastor and the family, including women and children with vessels. According to the local police, the pastor was allegedly beaten up with sticks and dragged outside the house. He was then stripped and publicly humiliated by the gang. The FIR was filed in Perur Police station and the two men were arrested and remanded to judicial custody by the magistrate of Coimbatore Court.

Two preachers from the Jehovah Witness were arrested on allegations of conversion on August 17, 2014 at Sukhiya, Indore, which was also the day of the Hindu festival Janmashtami. They were taken to the Harsh Nagar Police Station where a (an) FIR was filed and they were charged under the MP Freedom of Religion Act, 1968 under Sec. 3 and 4. A mob of over 400 people had gathered outside the police station chanting slogans against the pastor. They were bailed out by Christian workers next day morning. Most of these incidents are not reported to the police due to fear and intimidation from the local thugs that operate for the RSS, VHP and the Bajrang Dal. Such attacks are unconstitutional and against the fundamental right to freedom on religion.

Police partiality and Inaction

However, the violence in itself fails to reveal the full picture. The impunity enjoyed by the violent mobs is a bigger cause for concern. Many victims of violence complain about the lack of police action, including hostility towards Christians. Police resist filing criminal complaints and have on several instances allegedly threatened to falsely incriminate the victims in some cases.

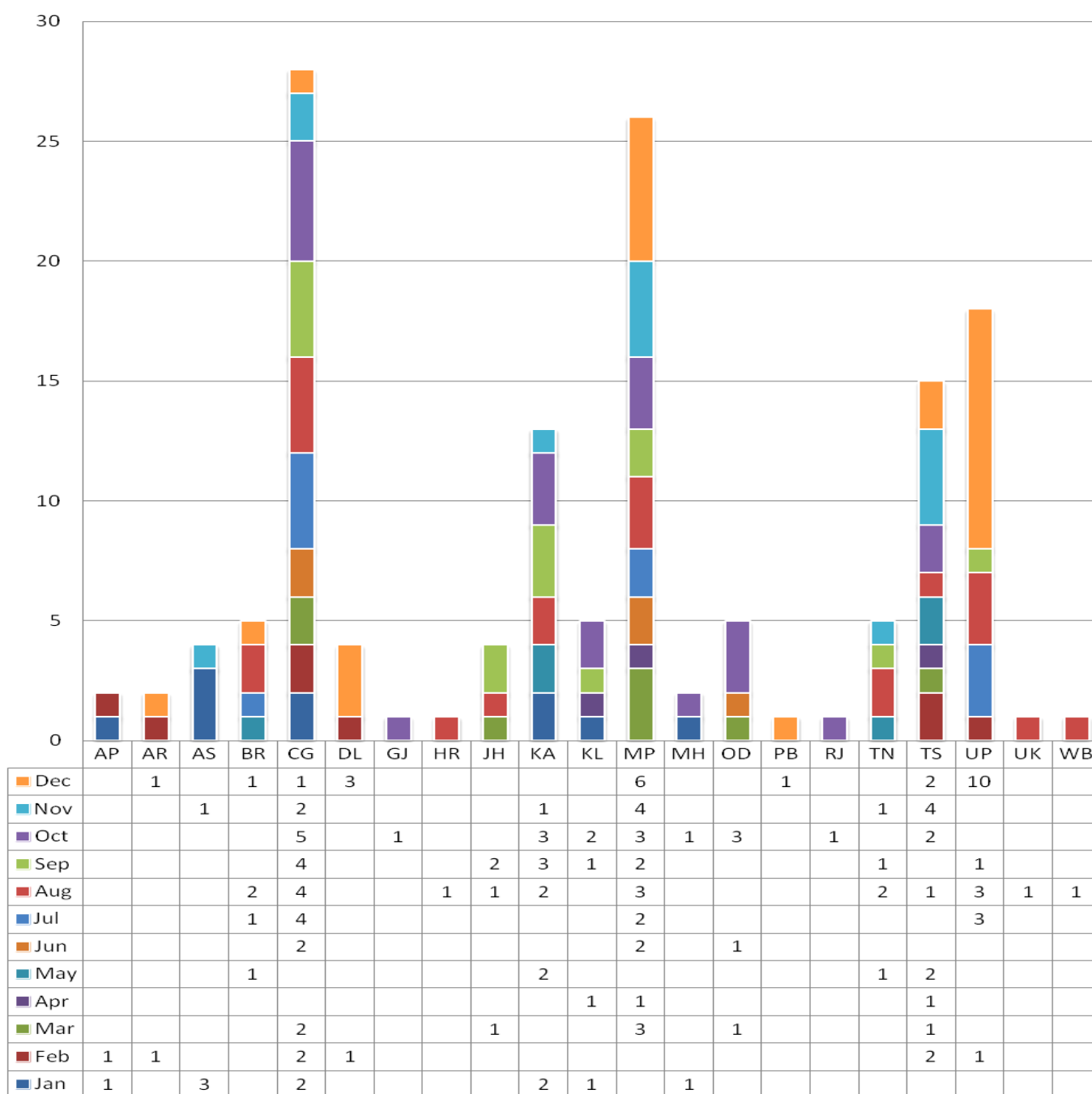
On September 6, 2014, twelve pastors were beaten at a Police station in Greater Noida on the pretext of a mob of about 150 Hindu fundamentalists that had gathered outside and demanded such action. The police obliged and thrashed the pastors. No reports were filed. It was baffling to know that the police had thrashed the pastors. Such police atrocities have led to increase

of impunity among perpetrators.

On June 30, 2014, the police manhandled a Pastor, filed a case against him and summoned him to appear before the court in Gandhi Nagar, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. It was reported that the local Hindu extremists had opposed the ministry of the Pastor and threatened to harm him several times in the past for conducting prayer meetings. However, the pastor continued to

conduct worship services and later started to build a prayer hall on his land. Subsequently, the extremists filed a police complaint against the pastor of illegal construction. Earlier, on 19 April, 2014, the police had questioned the same Pastor at his home, slapped him and told him to stop the construction work and had charged him Under Sections 107 and 116 of the Indian Penal Code.

MONTHLY DISTRIBUTION OF INCIDENTS AGAINST CHRISTIANS ACROSS THE DIFFERENT STATES IN 2014



GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION

In spite of constitutional guarantees and international commitments, there are several hostile and discriminatory laws and policies which serve to restrict the rights of individual and religious communities both at a national and state level.

The Constitution of India safeguards the freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate the religion of one's choice under Article 25. Article 19 (1) (a) of the Indian Constitution states that all citizens shall have the right to the freedom of speech and expression; Article 19 (1) (b) and (c) gives every citizen the right to assemble peaceably and without arms and form associations and unions.

India is also signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights where the freedom of religion or belief is recognised as a basic inalienable human right.

Yet, in spite of these constitutional guarantees and international commitments, there are several hostile and discriminatory laws and policies which serve to restrict the rights of individual and religious communities both at a national and state level.

The details of some key orders and legal provisions are outlined below:

1950 Presidential Order

Para 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950, states that: "No person who professes a religion different from the Hindu, the Sikh and the Buddhist religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Schedule Caste [from the Dalit community]."

Para 3 is violative of fundamental rights safeguarded in the Constitution of India as the entire premise for denying benefits and extending reservations in government jobs and educational institutions to members of the Schedule Caste origin is their religious affiliations. Furthermore, it gravely restricts the freedom of conscience of members of the Scheduled Caste community by limiting the benefits and protections available to them provided they continue to practise the Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist religion.

Approximately 70% of the Christian population in India is from the Schedule Caste backgrounds and is economically poor and engaged in menial occupations. In spite of their conversion to Christianity, they continue to suffer the same disadvantages and disabilities arising out of the traditional practice of untouchability.

The Government of India set up several commissions to investigate the conditions of socially, economically and educationally backward classes in India, which have repeatedly recognised that Dalit Christians continue to face oppressive and hostile situations due to their caste.

The Mandal Commission in its report noted that: "There is no doubt that social and educational backwardness among non-Hindu communities is more or less of the same order as among Hindu communities. Though caste system is peculiar to Hindu society yet, in actual practice, it also pervades the non-Hindu communities in India in varying degrees. There are two main reasons for this phenomenon: first, caste system is a great conditioner of the mind and leaves an indelible mark on the person's social consciousness and cultural mores. Consequently, even after conversion, the ex-Hindus carried with them their deeply ingrained ideas of social hierarchy and stratification. This resulted in the Hindu converts inadvertently acting as Trojan horses of caste system among highly equalitarian religions such as Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, etc. Secondly, non-Hindu minorities living in pre-dominantly Hindu India could not escape from its dominant social and cultural influences. Thus, both from within and without, caste amongst non-Hindu communities received continuous sustenance and stimulus..."

The High Power Panel on Minorities, SCs, STs and other weaker sections noted that: "The Christians and the Neo-Buddhist need the same kind of concessions for their converts from the scheduled castes as are offered to Hindu and Sikhs. And their plea, we have recommended, should be fulfilled with utmost sympathy. They too suffer from the same economic handicaps and social neglect and isolation as the Hindu Scheduled Castes, as is amply illustrated by us in our report elsewhere."

Similarly the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission in 2007 recommended that: "Para 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 – which originally restricted the Scheduled Caste only to Hindus and later opened it to Sikhs and Buddhists, thus still excluding from its purview the Muslims, Christians, Jains and Parsis, etc. – should be wholly deleted by appropriate action so as to completely de-link Scheduled Caste status from religion and make the Scheduled Castes net fully religion-neutral like that of the Scheduled Tribes."

In spite of the recommendations of several commission both nationally and internationally, the Government of India has failed to move for amendments to Para 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 making it religion neutral. Furthermore, the Government of India has failed to file any reply in a case pending before the Supreme Court of India challenging the constitutionality of the Para 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950.

The case has been pending since 2004.

Freedom of Religion Acts

Several states of India have enacted laws titled "Freedom of Religion Acts," or anti-conversion laws, as they are more commonly known. These laws, enacted in six states require the person converting to give details of his or her conversion to the district magistrate, either prior to the conversion "ceremony" or

subsequent to it. The law in Gujarat requires that the person seeking to convert to another religion must take prior permission from the district magistrate before any conversion “ceremony” is performed. The laws penalise any failure to report a religious conversion with jail terms upto one year and fines. The laws also penalise “conversion by force, fraud and inducement” or allurement with jail terms upto five years and fines upto Rs. 100,000.

The Acts cast an onerous burden on the converted person and the persons seeking to propagate their faith, without providing the required checks and balances to ensure protection against their misuse. They are a violation of the right to freedom of association, the right to privacy and the freedom of conscience. The laws undermine the agency of the convert and make every religious conversion suspect and liable for scrutiny.

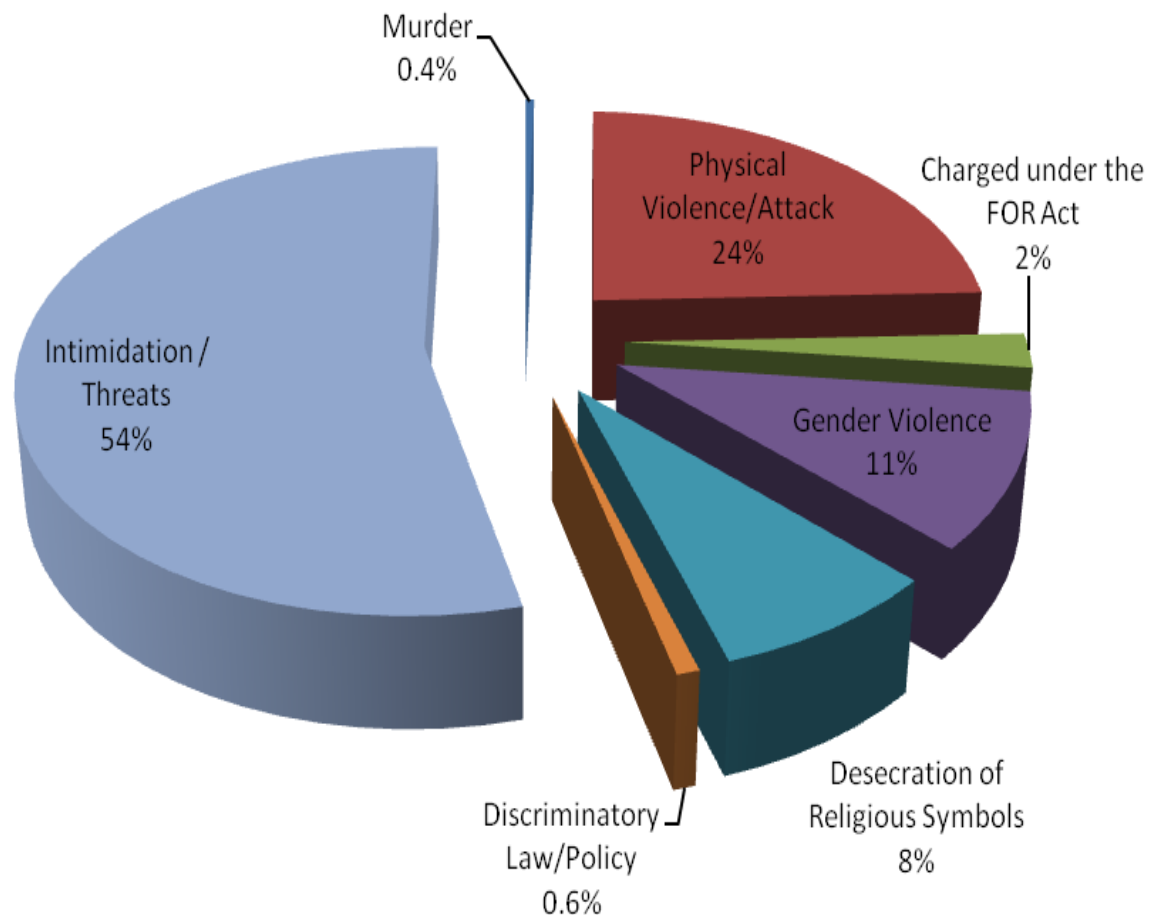
Repeatedly, these laws have been used to target and harass religious minorities. It has been noted that Hindu extremists frequently invoked the anti-conversion law as a means of inciting mobs against Christians or having them arrested without evidence. These laws have both drawn considerable adverse international attention. In September 2012, the High Court of

Himachal Pradesh struck down Section 4 of the Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, which made it obligatory for a person to give a 30-day prior notice to the district magistrate about his or her intention to convert. The Court held that the procedure is oppressive and struck it down as violative of the Indian constitution. However similar provisions remain in the other state laws.

Recent reports highlight that nine Muslims were arrested and charged under the freedom of Religion Act, for allegedly converting Dalits to Islam. The Dalits who had converted were re-converted and subsequently arrested for not providing the details of their conversion to Islam to the district authorities.

According to reports in 2014 there were six instances when Christians were allegedly accused and arrested under the Freedom of Religion acts in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. The cases are ongoing.

TYPES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN 2014



THE RECONVERSION DEBATE

Re-conversion was the flavour of the Christmas season in India this year. The season of advent never saw a day when the media did not carry the news of some re-conversion ceremony happening in India with reports of 'x' number of Christians or Muslims converting to Hinduism.

The re-conversion drive is not new although the issue came to national notice after an alleged re-conversion event in Agra organized by the Dharma Jagran Samanvay Samiti (DJSS) where in 200 Muslims from at least 57 families were claimed to have been converted to Hinduism by the DJSS.

One of the alleged converts later told television news channels that ration cards, BPL (below poverty line) cards and Adhar were promised by the organizers of the event. "We were told we will get ration card, Aadhar card, the police will not bother us. We are poor so what do we do?" he told the media.

The Agra event was followed by pronouncements from the DJSS and other groups of a planned re-conversion event in Aligarh where in they intended to convert 4000 Christians and 1000 Muslim families on Christmas day.

On December 18, the national minorities day, Raejshwar Singh, the head of DJSS told the national media that his organization will make sure that Indian is cleansed of Christianity and Islam by 2021. Mr. Singh had earlier made news when on December 12; the media reported his appeal to fund the "costly" conversion movement to Hinduism in Uttar Pradesh. Undated letters and posters addressed by him sought a donation of Rupees 5 lakh for converting a Muslim and Rupees 2 lakh for the "ghar vapsi" of a Christian.

The noise of re-conversions, this advent, was also accompanied by pronouncements from various allies of the ruling government. Mr. Mohan Bhagwat of the RSS defended the re-conversion process and designated India a Hindu Rashtra (Nation). Mr. Togadia of the VHP went further and claimed, "At a point of time, the entire world was Hindu." Sushma Swaraj, the current Minister for External Affairs also contributed to the controversy by demanding that the "Bhagwat Geeta" be made the national book of India. On December 1, the Union Minister Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti made communal remarks and used expletives in an election rally in New Delhi. BJP leader Sakshi Maharaj from Unnao, Uttar Pradesh also came under fire when he called Nathuram Godse, the killer of Mahatma Gandhi, a patriot.

When the opposition cornered the Government in the Rajya Sabha during the winter session of the Parliament and demanded that the Prime Minister give a statement on the recent happenings, the government came out with a proposal of a nation wide anti-conversion law. This demand of the government is widely supported by various allies of the BJP and offshoots of

the RSS and VHP. The council of ministers of the BJP including Parliamentary Affairs minister Venkaiah Naidu and External Affairs minister Sushma Swaraj have also come out strongly in support of such a move.

The groups that conduct the ceremony call it homecoming, or "Ghar Wapsi" and differentiate between conversion and re-conversions.

The Christmas season also saw the government calling the nation to observe Governance day in the honour of the Ex-Prime Minister Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birthday, December 25, which is also Christmas day. Schools and Universities were given notices to remain open, several government departments remained open despite contrary statements from the government, and there were massive debates on TV channels on the intention of the government and its attempt to sideline Christmas.

The country seems to be bombarded daily with communal statements coming from leaders of the RSS, BJP, VHP and their allies as they inch closer to the goal of Hindu Rashtra (Nation), one statement, one controversy at a time. Through these tactics, the camel's nose has been pushed into the tent; the body may soon follow.

The other example that demonstrates the point is the story of the boiling frog, a widespread anecdote that describes a frog being boiled alive, slowly. The idea is that if a frog is placed in boiling water, it will jump out, but if it is placed in cold water that is slowly heated, it will not perceive the danger and will be cooked to death. The story is often used as a metaphor for the inability or unwillingness of people to react to significant changes that occur gradually. In the same way the Hindu Rashtra is slowly being pushed into the consciousness of the nation for decades, and the present issues are just an indication that the water is now uncomfortably hot.

Understanding the rationale of re-conversions

But, turning our focus back to re-conversions, we must ask, what is re-conversion? What is the rationale behind it? How long has it been going on? And how is it flawed, if it is?

The idea of re-conversion is old. Dr. Koenraad Elst, Hindutva's self proclaimed advocate, writes in his book *The Demographic Siege*, that Hindutva activists from Dayananda Saraswati in the past, to Abhas Chatterjee presently advocate that Hindus must challenge alien ideologies (meaning Islam and Christianity). He quotes Chatterjee's words: "We consider these alien ideologies to be enemies of our nation. The goal is to bring our minorities back into our nation after destroying the deadly intoxication of these ideologies."

Hindutva's idea of a Hindu nation, rests on Savarkar's claims of Jati, a term he used for race, claiming that Hindus are not only a

nation but a Jati (race), determined by a common origin and possessing common blood. He said that beyond the Hindu community's differences of castes or sects there was an invisible bond of common blood, which could be traced back to the Aryans. "We are intrinsically one," he said, "transcending all superficial barriers of distance, creed, or sect." So there were four *Varnas* (Castes) but one *Jati* (Race). According to Savarkar, the nation also had a 'national soul' that he called *Chitt*. "The Chitt determines the direction in which the nation is to advance culturally."

This nation, jati or race was held together not by biological factors but by the caste system, which though based on the hierarchy of ritual purity was assimilative and integrative so that every alien group could find a place in it – at a subordinate rank below Brahmins.

Hindutva also advocates the principle of an underlying 'Hindu essence' that remains unaffected by conversions to alien faiths like Islam and Christianity. This notion is central to Hindutva's ideology of re-conversion of Muslims and Christians to its brand of Hinduism.

Savarkar argued that Muslims and Christians could redeem themselves by choosing to reject their conversion and returning to Hinduism. Golwalkar reaffirmed this thought and called it, "our duty to call these our forlorn brothers suffering under religious slavery for centuries, back to their ancestral home." He said, "In the course of time they will realize that they too were once Hindus, that it is their duty to be loyal to this land."

Hindutva demands full and enforced assimilation into this 'national race' through religious conversion and cultural integration or advocates for permanent exclusion or subjugation of the 'other' (Muslims and Christians).

Golwalkar explains this, "Muslims and Christians here should give up their present foreign mental complexion and merge in the common stream of our national life."

If Muslims and Christians chose to remain as aliens, he warned, they could only occupy a position of inferiority – 'wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen's rights.'

The process of Re-conversion

Building up on the strong opposition of Hindu leaders like Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi, to proselytization by Christian missionaries, the Sangh Parivar not only added a militant dimension to this critique but also launched the process of re-conversions encouraged by many influential leaders like Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, who has just been awarded the Bharat Ratna by the present government.

Malviya who set up the Benares Hindu University, was instrumental in the coming together of Hindu Mahasabha and Arya Samaj in 1923 to make common cause on issues like cow slaugh-

ter and reconversion.

"On one hand, Muslims and Christians are committed to bringing others into their religion, on the other, you aren't bringing back even those who want to return," he said in his speech at the 1923 session of the Mahasabha at Varanasi. "Lakhs became Christians... Many untouchables became Christians. There is so much oppression. Hindu numbers are depleting. If Hindus cease to exist, who will protect the sacred thread (janeu), religion, Vedas, Puranas, cows and Brahmins?"

Hindu organizations developed several rites of re-conversion, calling them purification or welcoming rites. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and other Hindutva organizations have deployed these rites aggressively throughout the 1980s and 1990s to counter the perceived tide of conversions to Christianity and Islam. They not only directly convert non-Hindus but also 'integrate' and 'Hinduize' the marginalized caste groups and Tribals in India.

Late Dilip Singh Judeo, Late Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati, Swami Aseemanand, Khum Singh Maharaj and L Khimun, are among the many activists who claimed large number of converts as a result of their work in tribal areas of India. Tribals, who are originally animists, have been targeted in a major way by Hindutva organizations, who are working overtime on assimilating tribal groups into their brand of Hinduism while inciting them against Christian missionaries and the Church who have been present in the tribal areas since the 19th Century.

The Sangh Parivar has targeted Tribals not only in the central, east and north west of India but also in the North-East India in a major way especially in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Tripura and Manipur. Syncretizing local religions to counter the Christian presence is a formula that works there like in the rest of India. The re-conversion ceremonies differ from place to place according to the acceptable context. So while in Chhattisgarh the late Mr. Judeo used to wash the feet of the re-converted person with holy water and declare the person Hindu again, in Jharkhand Mr. Tirkey of the Central Sarna Committee, makes the converted person taste a drop of blood of a freshly sacrificed rooster, besides washing their feet, and sprinkling water on them.

Huge numbers of converts are usually claimed by Hindu groups for e.g. Rajeshwar Singh of the DJSS claims that the DJSS has converted over 5 Lakh people to Hinduism in Uttar Pradesh alone and Radheshyam of the DJSS in Chhattisgarh lays claim to more than 57000 families that his group had allegedly made Hindus during their campaigns since the BJP government led by Raman Singh came to power in the state since 2003. However a close investigation reveals that these numbers may not be trusted and may be part of a well oiled propaganda and funding machine.

According to Dr. John Dayal, member of the National Integration Council, what Hindu extremists call "reconversion" is in most instances "a case of mere conversion at best, and forcible or

coercive conversion at worst.”

Funding and organization of re-conversions

The DJSS and its associates raise funds locally and internationally. The association between the DJSS and the United States-based International Development Relief Fund (IDRF) is well recorded, especially in relation to its activities in Bihar and Jharkhand. News magazine Frontline reported in its January 2015 issue, that ‘new funding avenues have been opened through organisations such as the Hindu Unity Front, which has units in the U.S., the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe. Organisations such as the Overseas Friends of the BJP and the VHP’s international units also support the DJS. This funding has become more intensive after the formation of the Modi government.’

At the field level, the DJSS works closely with Sangh Parivar affiliates such as the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, the Ekal Vidyalaya, the Sewa Bharati, the Vivekananda Kendra, the Bharat Kalyan Parishad and the Friends of Tribal Society, some of which have been found responsible for the forced conversions of tribal Christians in Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. Re-conversion ceremonies are often attended and endorsed by BJP legislators. For e.g. in Chhattisgarh, BJP MP Dinesh Kashyap regularly attends re-conversion ceremonies organized by the DJSS and in Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, the outspoken BJP MP openly endorses re-conversion activities.

Conversion, re-conversion and the law

Hindutva groups often accuse the Muslim and particularly the Christian minority of practicing forced and fraudulent conversions. In 1998, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee called for a “national debate on conversions” in light of Christian missionary work in tribal communities, and this call was punctuated—not coincidentally, in the view of some observers—by the brutal murder of the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young sons in January 1999 in a tribal region of Orissa.

Several states in India, since the late 1960s, have enacted “Freedom of Religion Acts” commonly known as Anti-laws in order to check conversions by force or fraud. These laws are used selectively against minorities in these states to harass the clergy and the community for years together.

However the Sangh Parivar believes that re-conversions do not attract the provisions of these acts. They describe re-conversions as “home coming” and not a change of religion, since the Hindu essence, mentioned earlier in the article, remains intact in a Christian or a Muslim. And so they propose the law to be selective – i.e. stop other religious conversions while continuing to sanction re-conversions to Hinduism.

The present government and its allies have responded to the forcible conversions of Christians and Muslims into Hinduism in a predictable manner. Venkaiah Naidu, the parliamentary affairs minister, promised an anti-conversion law, while campaigning for general elections earlier this year. He had said in Vishakhapatnam, “BJP is totally opposed to conversions and the country

would only be safe when Hindus are in a majority.”

True to his word, as soon as the opposition targeted the government over the Agra re-conversion controversy, Mr. Naidu presented the government’s intent of an anti-conversion law for the entire nation. So the current BJP government demonstrates a keen interest in enacting an all-India anti-conversion law, in spite of its ministers showing open and vociferous support for ‘re-conversions’.

It is about fundamental freedoms

Indian’s have to realize that the debate on conversions, re-conversions and anti-conversion laws is essentially a debate over fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the constitution of India. It is not only about a community or a religion but the right of citizens.

The Constituent Assembly after much deliberation and also protest from Sangh Parivar elements had cleared the Article 25 (1) which states that “all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion” subject to “public order, morality and health”.

Praful Bidwai in his article on the re-conversion offensive, remarks, “The rights to the freedom of conscience and to practise and propagate one’s religion derive from fundamental considerations of citizenship embedded in a charter of democracy. They must be decoupled from people’s religious-ethnic-linguistic identities, and also from the premise that all religions equally capture the divine truth or spiritual essence. The state must remain firmly agnostic on this and not assign equal or dissimilar values to different religions. Religion is a deeply personal, intimate matter. In a free liberal-democratic society, the state cannot be allowed to dictate or interfere with it—so long as it doesn’t infringe on other citizens’ rights.”

Hindutva groups have issued strong statements in support of a nation-wide anti-conversion law, at the same time supporting re-conversions and mainstreaming it. The government of the day prescribes the anti-conversion law and by extension the suspension of the freedom of conscience, as the price of reigning in elements who are involved in this dubious re-conversion process.

Bidwai calls it “doubly offensive”. He says, “it reveals something important. Behind the campaign isn’t a lunatic fringe of extremists over which the Parivar has lost control. It’s the BJP itself.”

The greater threat

But the concern of the community and the nation should not be merely limited to the issues of physical violence, hate campaigns, anti-conversion law and reconversions. The threat to fundamental freedoms and indeed democracy is greater than just the issue of re-conversions or hate speech so prevalent in political discourse today.

The most dangerous threat seems to be to the Indian Constitution, or at least to those sections of it that are seen as a hin-

drance in the construction or reconstruction of India according to the agenda of the Sangh Parivar. The Sangh calls the constitution, a relic of a colonial, and Christian, alien thesis which has no place in the Indian culture in which it has no roots.

Dr. John Dayal says, "The Constitution has sustained itself now for six and a half decades, but it remains a fragile document. The Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that its basic features cannot be altered. But it permits amendments to bring it in tune with the times, and to cater to new situations. Constitutional provisions for sort of suspending fundamental rights by declaring a state of National Emergency have been used in times of the wars with China and Pakistan, especially in 1971. But Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1975 showed that the Constitution could be suspended, so to say, even for political, partisan and personal reasons. After her election was upturned by the Allahabad high court for using government machinery in her campaign, she declared a state of Emergency in June that year saying there was national anarchy and peoples groups were trying to overthrow the government. Till she revoked it and called for general elections in 1977, the Emergency saw the country ruled by extra-constitutional centres of authority.

When it first came to national power in 1998, the BJP-led government set up a high-level commission to review the Constitution headed by the former Chief Justice MN Venkatachaliah. He refused to alter the basic structure of the Constitution except for calling for electoral reforms as a matter of urgency. Mr. Vajpayee never had the numbers at that time but Mr. Modi does.

So while Muslims and Christians feel that they are being encircled in a vicious and tightening noose, in the villages and small towns by Sangh cadres who seem to have the police on their side, and nationally by the Federal and State governments who seem to endorse the hate campaigns and the violence; the Civil society must also be at guard and speak up regarding the threat to the Constitution of India which has evolved as a great international democratic document that protects the subcontinent-sized country's hundreds of cultures, languages, races and faith.

Without a State of Emergency being declared, the Extra-Constitutional Centres of authority seem to be active. This is something that must worry not just Indian religious minorities, but the world.

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<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/conversions-will-continue-till-a-central-law-is-in-place-sushma-swaraj/>

Hindutva, not to be confused with Hindusim, is a political ideology that aspires for a Hindu nation. Hindutva seeks to create one nation, one culture, one people.

Bapu, Prabhu. *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India, 1915-1930: Constructing Nation and History*. Routledge, 2013.

The Sangh Parivar (translation: Family of Sangh) refers to the family of Hindu nationalist organisations which have been started by members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or are inspired by its ideas. The Sangh Parivar represents the Hindu nationalist movement.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Malviya-gets-Ratna-other-lost-icons-to-be-honoured/articleshow/45635677.cms> (In fact, Malviya, who was closely associated with bodies like Pragya Hindu Samaj, Bharat Dharma Mahamandal and Sanatana Dharma Mahasabha, and other conservatives like the first president Rajendra Prasad had found such firm foothold in the Congress that the party was forced to engage with religiously volatile issues like cow protection and the growing demand for ban on playing of music before mosques.)

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/malaviya-too-favoured-reconversion-of-muslims-christians/article1-1300415.aspx>

http://www.business-standard.com/article/elections-2014/rss-turns-arunachal-tribals-towards-hinduism-114042900231_1.html

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/tribals-torn-apart-by-religion/article5934381.ece>

https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2007/03-March/newsarticle_4796.html/

<http://www.frontline.in/the-nation/project-hindutva/article6715464.ece>

Reid B. Locklin, Up, Over, Through: Rethinking 'Conversion' as a Category of Hindu-Christian Studies

<http://www.rediff.com/news/report/bjp-will-bring-anti-conversion-law-if-it-comes-to-power/20130408.htm>

<http://www.prafulbidwai.org/index.php?post/2014/12/25/Parivar%E2%80%99s-Re-Conversion-Offensive%3A-Nasty-threat-to-citizenship>

DETAILS OF INCIDENTS

CHHATTISGARH

- On 19th January, in Navmuda, Gariyaband, Hindu fundamentalists barged into the Sunday worship meeting of Prarthana Bhavan Church, accused the Christians of forceful conversions, verbally abused them, tore Bibles, desecrated the altar, spat on the drinking water and food and forced the Christians to worship two Hindu women who were part of the fundamentalist group and who claimed to be possessed by goddess Durga.
- On 20th January in Indagoan, Gariyaband, Hindu fundamentalists accused Pastor Bhaiyalal Markam from Prarthana Bhavan Church of forceful conversion and threatened to kill him as he was returning home after conducting a prayer meeting. The pastor relocated for safety measures for about a week.
- On 23rd February in Lalkhadan, Torwa, Bilaspur, Hindu fundamentalists along with police disrupted a prayer meeting and accused the Assistant Pastor Rajkaran Ratre and about 20 women who were praying there of forceful conversion. The police took the Christians to the police station for questioning and later released them without filing any charges against them.
- On 25th February, in Khairagarh, Rajnandgon, Hindu fundamentalists barged into the second day of a three day Special Gospel Meeting conducted by Jeevan Jyoti Ashram church and accused Pastor Roshanlal Rawate and the church members of forceful conversion and allurements. The Christians were taken to the police station for questioning but released without any charges being filed against them.
- On 5th March in Bhanupratappur, Kanker, Hindu fundamentalists severely beat up a newly converted Christian, Ramsai Netam from New Mission Church and accused him of forceful conversion. Netam suffered serious injury on his head. However, the police recorded the cause of the injury to the Pastor as "injury sustained from falling from a tree". No FIR was registered against the assailants.
- On 22nd March in Pinakapar, Balod, police arrested Guman Devdas and sent him to Balod jail after he was accused of breaking Hindu idols. Hindu fundamentalists in the area thereafter summoned Devdas to a public meeting and asked him to renounce his faith in Christ. The Christian, however, refused to renounce Christ and refuted the allegations of breaking the idols.
- On 16th June, fifty two Christian families were denied ration at the local ration shop at Sirisguda village of Bastar district in Chhattisgarh due to an order enforced by the local Panchayat and were brutally attacked by a mob of over two hundred persons instigated by Hindu fundamentalists when they protested against the same before the district administration. Eight men and two women were seriously injured and had to be hospitalised as a result of this attack.
- On 24th June in Bhilai, Durg, suspected Hindu fundamentalists demolished an independent church being looked after by Pastor Santosh Roa and threatened to harm Pastor Roa if he continues to conduct worship meeting in the area.
- On 3rd July in Belar, Jagdalpur, Hindu fundamentalists tried to demolish Free Methodist church but they were stopped after the area church leaders alerted the police.
- On 8th May and 10th May the Gram Sabhas (District Village Councils) of the Belar and Sirisguda villages passed resolutions under Section 129 (G) of the Chhattisgarh Panchayat Raj Act banning all outside religious transgressors other than those of Hindu religion in the said villages. The said Resolution bans outside religious transgressors other than those of Hindu religion from religious preaching, to hold prayer meetings and to deliver religious discourse in Sirisguda and Belar Gram Panchayats.
- On 25th July in Bastar, Jagdalpur, Pagnu Pita unknowingly signed a paper under pressure from Hindu fundamentalists which claimed that his nephew Ramchand had grabbed his land to build a prayer hall. Pita later filed a police complaint against the fundamentalists for duping him.
- On 26th July in Parapur, Bastar, Hindu fundamentalists beat up a Christian family including two women. One was hospitalised with severe injuries. No police complaint was filed.
- On 8th August in Sakti, Raigarh, two Christian women, Jyoti Pal and Manju Modu were arrested under Section 4 of the Chhattisgarh Freedom of Religion Act, 1968 for conducting a healing prayer meeting. After the intervention of the church leaders, the area Christians were released on bail.
- On 10th August in Bastar, Jagdalpur, Hindu fundamentalists accused Christians of breaking idols in the local Hindu temple and threatened to harm them. Christians refuted the accusation and sought police protection.
- On 17th August at Koranga village, Jashpur, police arrested Pastor Virendar Bhaskar after Hindu fundamentalists forcefully pulled him out of the church while he

was conducting a Sunday worship meeting and accused him of forceful conversion.

- On 24th August in Tolwar, Dantewada, a mob of Hindu fundamentalists disrupted the worship service of Carmel Pentecostal Church, ordered Pastor Sushil Kurme to shut down the meeting and not to conduct Christian meetings in the area in future.
- On 6th September in Kherra, Bilaspur, a mob of eighty Hindu fundamentalists chanting Hindu Gods' names barged into the prayer hall of the Indian Pentecostal Church, accused Pastor Dinesh Prasad, Pastor Manak Singh and two others identified only as Prajith and Raju of forceful conversion and destroyed the prayer hall.
- On 13th September in Kattekalyan, Dantewada, Hindu fundamentalists verbally abused Pastor D.G Paul and church members and threatened to harm them if they do not convert back to Hinduism.
- On 15th September in Madota, Chhattisgarh, Hindu fundamentalists shouting "Isaiyon ko mara, Ramrajya leke aao" (Eliminate the Christians, bring in the kingdom of Lord Rama) beat up Pastor Sindhu Dass from the Carmel Pentecostal Church and threatened to socially boycott him and the Church members if they do not convert back to Hinduism.
- On 25th September in Bhisakata, Kanker, Hindu fundamentalists ostracised seven Christian families belonging to the Full Gospel Ministry from the village after they refused to renounce Christ.
- Hindu fundamentalists launched a series of attacks against Believers Church and a cemetery close to it on 1st and 4th October in Mahasamund. On the following Sundays i.e. 5th, 12th and 19th October, the fundamentalists loitered at the premises during Church services and threatened the Christians of dire consequences if they continued to go to the Church.
- On 19th October in Madota, Bastar, Jagdalpur, Hindu fundamentalists attacked the Sunday worship meeting of Beersheba Church and beat up Pastor Manoj Khaskap and church members including women and children. The incident occurred when a mob of over thirty people gathered outside the Church and started shouting slogans to stop the Church service. Five people from the mob then entered the Church and started beating up the worshippers who had gathered there. The mob then went to a hand pump which was outside the Church meant for drawing water and put up a picture of the Hindu God Hanuman there. They then banned the Christians from drawing water out of that particular hand pump.
- On 19th October in Farasgoan, Bastar, a mob of twenty

five Hindu fundamentalists barged into the Sunday worship meetings of Beersheba church conducted by Pastor Bhaskar Sona and beat him and the church members.

- On 20th October in Tokapal Block, Jagdalpur, a 52 year old Christian man Laxman was beaten till he fell unconscious by his three brothers for following Christ.
- On 25th October in Madota, Bastar, Jagdalpur Hindu fundamentalists attacked Christians injuring about twelve people after they were summoned for a public meeting in the morning.
- On 16th November in Rajnangoan, Hindu fundamentalists stormed the Sunday worship service of the Masihi Aradhna Church and beat up the Church members.
- On 24th November in Bastar, under pressure from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Catholic missionaries agreed that the Principals in Catholic run educational institutions normally referred to as "Father" should be addressed as "Pracharya", or "Up-pracharya", or "Sir" and put up idols of "Maa Saraswati" in twenty two schools run by the Catholics.
- On 26th December in Kavanar, Bastar, Hindu fundamentalists beat up eight Christian families after they refused to renounce Christ and further told them to leave the village. No police complaint was filed.

MADHYA PRADESH

- On 16th March in Betul, police arrested three Christians namely Pastor Sagar Ogale, Elder Dilip Mahajan, Elder Sagar Shekhar Ogale from Indian Prayer Hall after Hindu fundamentalists stopped the Sunday worship meeting and accused the Christians of forceful conversion. The Christians were released on bail on the morning of 27th March after the intervention of the area church leaders.
- On 22nd March in Depo, Bamor Town, Muriana, Hindu fundamentalists stormed into a Christian film show and accused the Christians from Operational Mobilization of forceful conversion and took them to the Bamor police station for questioning. After the intervention of area Christian leaders, the Christians were released without charges.
- On 24th March in Bagli, Dewas, police detained five Christians from Shalom Church of God after local Hindu fundamentalists accused them of forceful conversion. The fundamentalists opposed the construction of the Children Learning Centre and the ongoing tuition classes given to the local children. The police released the Christians without charges after the intervention of the church leaders. However, the tuition classes and the construction work were stopped after the incident.

- On 19th April in Gandhi Nagar, Bhopal, the police questioned Pastor Bhikanlal Dhurvey at his home, slapped him and told him to stop the construction work of his house and charged him under Sections 107 and 116 of the Indian Penal Code for abetment of a thing and abetment of offence respectively.
- On 14th June in Katni, Bhopal, Hindu fundamentalists from the Bajrang Dal beat up Pastors Robin Masih and Sushil Masih and tore up Bibles as the two were returning back home from a wedding reception. They were questioned about their activities and then beaten up.
- On 30th June in Keloda, Dewas, police detained Pastor Chimnan Lal after Hindu fundamentalists filed a police complaint against him of forceful conversion. Pastor Lal was preaching in a small independent church when the police came and took him to the police station for questioning. On the same evening, the pastor was released without any charges being filed against him.
- On 23rd July in Vatsala Vihar, Khandwa, Hindu villagers shouting "Jai Shree Ram" (Praise Lord Ram) demolished Holy Spirit School after the housing board falsely and unreasonably accused the school of causing flood even though it had been constructed with due permission from the Municipality.
- On 27th July in Nagna, Ujjain, Hindu fundamentalists accompanied by some policemen barged into an independent church Sunday worship meeting conducted by Pastor Rakesh Goyal. The Pastor was asked whether he was forcefully converting anyone into Christianity and was also told to stop conducting worship meetings.
- On 17th August in Indore, two preachers namely Alex Paul and Roshan from Jehovah Witness were arrested under the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1968 while they were preaching to some Church members.
- On 20th August in Satna, Christians who were conducting free health camp for prisoners were accused of forceful conversion. It was demanded that stringent actions should be taken against the Christians and be restricted from entering the prison in future.
- On 24th August in Mandla, police arrested Pastor Vipin Dhurvey after he told a policeman that he was going for a prayer meeting.
- On 12th September in Barwa, Khargone, police arrested five Christians from Thlarau Bo Zawngtu (TBZ, Lost Soul Seekers) after they were accused of forceful conversion and of luring people to convert to Christianity by offering monetary benefits. The Christians denied the accusations.
- On 27th September in Ghutas, Mandla, suspected Hindu fundamentalists set Believers Church on fire damaging Bibles, carpet, musical instruments and furniture.
- On 8th October in Alirajpur, after refusing permission for an annual Christian gathering in Jobat, Alirajpur, the Madhya Pradesh police served a notice to Moskha foundation, asking whether the Christian organisation was involved in terror, criminal or anti-social activities among other things.
- On 18th October, in Bhimpur, Bhezahi Taluk, Betul, a mob of Hindu fundamentalists assaulted two Christians namely Yug Raj Dhurve and Mansi Durve from an independent church after they had conducted a prayer meeting. The fundamentalists snatched away their bicycles and Raj Dhurve's mobile phone, beat them up, accused them of forceful conversion and took them to the Bhimpur police station.
- On 27th October in Barwani, Pastors Ashok Pratap and Kallu Rai Singh were arrested after Hindu fundamentalists filed a police complaint against them for attending a prayer meeting on the previous day.
- On 2nd November in Barwani, thirty Christians including women and children were beaten during a Sunday worship meeting.
- On 4th November in Bhopal, police arrested seven Christians including one pastor from Mumbai after Bajrang Dal activists beat them up mercilessly by fists and belts, causing internal injuries.
- On 7th November in Indore, a Christian was falsely accused, detained and later arrested on allegation of forcible conversion.
- On 30th November in Basinha, Annupur, Hindu fundamentalists barged into the Church meeting of Masih Kalishya and threatened Pastor Gopal Dhurve and Church members harm if they continued to conduct worship meetings in the area.
- On 12th December in Ratlam, Hindu fundamentalists along with media and police personnel stormed a Christian meeting, forced the organizers to cancel the meeting and took them to the police station. The Christians were however, released without any charges against them.
- On 19th December in Ratlam, police booked Pastor Jose Mathews after Bajrang Dal activists stormed a Christian convention alleging forcible conversions and forced the organisers to cancel the meeting. Pastor Mathew was later released on bail.

- On 24th December in Khargone, a Christian couple, Wilson and Rashmita were taken into custody under the state's anti-conversion law after they conducted a Christmas program.
- On 24th December in Ujjain, police detained Pastor Akash Sisodia after Hindu fundamentalists attacked a Christmas prayer service. The Christian was released for lack of evidence.
- On 28th December in Khandwa, police arrested thirteen Christians including three young children after Hindu fundamentalists had attacked a Christmas celebration.
- On 28th December in Indore, Hindu fundamentalists forcefully took two Catholic priests to the police station accusing them of forcible conversion because the Catholic priests had organised an inter-faith meeting. However, the two Christians were released without any charges against them.
- On 30th August in Kulesra village, Greater Noida, police detained two Pastors and 11 Christians for eight hours after one man filed a police complaint against Pastor Sanjay Singh of forcible conversion. At about midnight, the Christians were released without any charges filed against them.
- On 11th September in Rajepur, Faizabad, six police officers came to question Pastor Babalu Kumar from an independent church who was conducting a prayer meeting in one Christian's house after they received a police complaint against the Pastor. However, no charges were framed against the Pastor.
- On 16th December in Navipur, Pipraich, Gorakhpur, police arrested Pastor Amit Kumar after he was accused forcible conversion and detained fifteen Christians including four women while they were celebrating a Christmas function.

UTTAR PRADESH

- On 23rd February in Khujra, Bulandshahar, a Pastor's wife was beaten up by five Hindu fundamentalists and also verbally abused their teenage daughter. The Christians submitted a police complaint but no FIR was registered.
- On 6th July in Saraia, Madiyahun, Jaunpur, Hindu fundamentalists attacked a Sunday worship meeting of Prabhushu Masih Darbar after they submitted a police complaint against the Christians. The fundamentalists further threatened the Christians that they would stage a protest in front of the church if there was another Sunday worship meeting in the area.
 - On 13th July in Patholi, Agra, Hindu fundamentalists from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh disrupted a Sunday worship meeting, verbally abused the Christians and beat them up.
 - On 17th July in Sehkar Nagar, Bulandshahr, Bajrang Dal activists disrupted the worship meeting on Nazarene Church, beat up Pastor R.C Paul and Church members including women. They also broke the cross, Church furniture and later put up the Hindu fundamentalists' saffron flag on the Church roof.
 - On 26th August in Arsoi, Hatras, Aligarh, a mass conversion of Christians to Hinduism took place inside the 'converted church' marked by much anti-Christian sloganeering led by groups affiliated to the Hindu fundamentalist groups.
 - On 28th August in Unnoa, Pastor Vimal Kumar and one evangelist from Christ Church were slapped and verbally abused by Bajrang Dal activists when they were coming back home after a prayer meeting.
 - On 16th December in Behraich, Pastor Mahendra Kumar was arrested and kept in custody for two days after Hindu fundamentalists filed a complaint against him. However, the Pastor was released without any charges being filed against him.
 - On 19th December in Varanasi, Hindu fundamentalists disrupted a Christian fasting prayer meeting, beat up the Christians who were present, took away Bibles, literature and destroyed household furniture.
 - On 20th December in Rae Bareilly, seven people including two Pastors were arrested while they were celebrating a Christmas program conducted for people from Urai, Rae Bareilly and Kushinagar areas after BJP members complained of forcible conversions.
 - On 25th December in Barloi, Azzamgarh, police stopped a Christmas function following objections by Hindu groups.
 - On 25th December in Mainpuri, police stopped a Christmas celebration following complaint by Hindu groups alleging forcible conversions. However according to media reports, no evidence of any forcible conversions were found after investigation.
 - On 27th December in Varanasi, police arrested Pastor Ashok Prajapati after Hindu fundamentalists filed a complaint against him accusing him of forcible conversion. He was also asked to stop holding prayer meetings in future.
 - On 27th December in Amethi, Hindu fundamentalists threatened Pastor Ramchand of dire consequences if he carried on with worship services in the area. The pastor left the village for security measures and approached the local police for protection.

- On 27th December in Allahabad, Hindu fundamentalists stormed the Sam Higginbottom University alleging forcible conversions and also burnt the effigy of the University Vice Chancellor, Dr. R. B. Lall.
- On 28th December in Salempur, Deoria, police arrested Pastor Jaswant Masih and his wife after Hindu fundamentalists filed a police complaint against them of forcible conversions.
- On 30th October, police arrested Pastor S. David from Elim Fire Ministries on charges of illegal construction of a Church, sent him to jail and demolished the Church the next day.
- On 3rd October in Kodangal, Mahabubnagar District, suspected Hindu fundamentalists burned down Hebron Church and completely destroyed the roof.

TELANGANA

- On 2nd February in Malakpet, Hyderabad, anti-Christian people set on fire Bethel Church and burned down the Church to ashes. The Hindu fundamentalists had threatened to harm the Pastor of the said Church namely Pastor Christopher several times in the past.
- On 23rd February in Marepalli, Mahabubnagar, fundamentalists from the Hindu Vahini group shouting Hindu slogans disrupted a youth prayer meeting led by Pastor Devaraju.
- On 17th March in Chadurapally, Mahabubnagar, Hindu fundamentalists beat up Rev. B. Rajarathnam and his wife till she fell unconscious and also demolished their house.
- On 29th April in Hyderabad, police booked Pastor G. Prabhakar for allegedly breaking the election code after Hindu fundamentalists barged in, manhandled the Christians and accused them of using PA system without permission from the local officials.
- On 6th May in Chelkapalli, Mahabubnagar, Hindu fundamentalists shouting Hindu slogans barged into the Hebron Church gospel meeting and told them not to preach foreign religion in the village and further accused them of forcible conversion.
- On 16th August in Wanaparthy, Mahabubnagar, Hindu fundamentalists beat up two Christians from the Church of Christ while they were conducting a prayer meeting, causing them severe injuries. The Christians were further forced to put Tilak on their forehead and forcefully taken to a Hindu temple to worship Hindu idols.
- On 7th October in Gandhinagar, Cherpally, Hyderabad, anti-Christian people set on fire the church called Nirikshana Mandira and burned up half of the church.
- On 8th October in Wanaparthy, Mahabubnagar District, Hindu fundamentalists disrupted a prayer meeting being conducted by Pastor Maairiappa. He was told to stop conducting such meetings in future and a police complaint was also filed against him on charges of forcible conversion.
- On 15th November in Narayanpet, Mahabubnagar District, Hindu fundamentalists beat up two girls namely Sarita and Laxmi for regularly attending the worship meetings of Mennonite Brethren church.
- On 16th November in Tadiparthi, Mahabubnagar District, Hindu fundamentalists stopped Pastor Isaac of the Mennonite Brethren Church and told him to stop conducting Christian meetings in the area.
- On 23rd November in Wanaparthy, Mahabubnagar District, Hindu fundamentalists shouting Hindu slogans disrupted the Sunday worship meeting of Gethsemane Prardhana Mandiram conducted by Pastor R. Joshua.
- On 23rd November in Appampally, Mahabubnagar District, Hindu fundamentalists shouting slogans barged into the birthday celebration of a Christian and threatened to kill the pastor and warned him not to enter the village again. The believers were able to hide the pastor to keep the mob away from the pastor.
- On 13th December in Singareny colony, Hyderabad, Hindu fundamentalists beat up Pastor Bhim Nayak and other members of the Banjara Baptist Church while they were singing Christmas carols, seriously injuring a Pastor and nine others.
- On 31st December in Appampally, Mahabubnagar District, Hindu fundamentalists beat up one Christian while he was coming back from a watch night service. The Christian was rescued by some people in the neighbourhood.

KARNATAKA

- On 17th January in Ittige Halli, Bhadravati Taluk, Shimoga, Karnataka, Hindu fundamentalists threatened to harm Pastor Yogesh of the Good Shepherd Community Church if he continued to conduct worship services in the area. The local police also advised the Pastor to stop worship services.
- On 27th January in Jevergi, Gulbarga, Karnataka, Hindu fundamentalists disrupted the prayer meeting of Gipsy Mission conducted by Pastor Manju Nath, accused him of forcible conversions and threatened the Pastor with dire consequences if they continued to hold prayer meetings in future. The police arrived on the spot and

took the Christians for questioning. However, the Christians were released without any charges after the intervention of the area Christian leaders.

- On 4th May in Bagath Sing Nagar, Davangere, Hindu fundamentalists damaged the vehicle of Pastor Chandra Naik of the Living Hope Gypsy Church after they had filed a police complaint against him of forcible conversion.
- On 18th May in Kundupur, properties of two Churches were allegedly damaged by unidentified miscreants. The ornamental pot at the entrance of the Holy Rosary church was found broken and a signpost leading to St. Antony Church in Koteswar also was found uprooted. Police complaint has been registered, however, no arrests have been made.
- On 28th July in Gallaragati, Holalkara, Chitradurga, Hindu fundamentalists from the Yadav community disrupted a Sunday worship meeting conducted by Pastor Somman and threatened to socially boycott the Christians if they do not convert to Hinduism.
- On 12th August in Pulittadi, South Kanara, police arrested four Christian women after the local villagers accused them of forcible conversions.
- On 2nd September in Indabettu, Dakshina Kannada, some parents along with Hindu fundamentalists marched up in front of the Syro-Malabar Catholic School, Miriambika English School and demanded that the school withdraw the new uniforms that contained the school logo of a small cross.
- On 21st September in Manjunath Nagar, Karwar, police arrested Pastor Immanuel Rajasekhar of Blessing Church after the Hindu fundamentalists barged into the prayer meeting being conducted in the Pastor's rented house. The fundamentalists accused him and the Church members of forcible conversions and beat them up.
- On 25th Septemebr in Hiriur Chitradurga, a prayer hall was burned down by suspected Hindu fundamentalists.
- On 2nd October in Dindur Thanda, Kushtagi, Hindu fundamentalists accused Pastor R. Sathyappa and Nandu Rathod from the Friends Missionary Prayer Band (FMPB) of forcible conversions, beat them up and pelted stones at their vehicle, severely injuring them.
- On 18th October in Ankola, Uttara Kannadda, a police official verbally instructed Pastor Ravi from the Jeevana Jyothi Prathana Mandira that he should stop his activities of visiting homes and preaching. He was also to remove the board of the Church, do all Christian activities privately and also prohibited him from conducting

any kind of public meetings.

- On 27th October in Ittigehalli Shimoga, anti-Christian activists barged into a prayer meeting, beat up the participants, destroyed household articles, Bibles and Christian literature.
- On 23rd November in Bangarapete, Hindu fundamentalists disrupted the prayer meeting of Calvary Apostolic church, beat them up leaving eight Christians injured.

ODHISA

- On 11th March in Ranipada, Gudrikia, Kandhamal District, Hindu fundamentalists threatened to physically assault the Christians after they collected some stones to build a church in the area. The fanatics shouting anti-Christian slogans came to the spot and took all the stones away and threatened to harm the Christians if they tried to do any kind of Christian activities. The Christians thereafter locked themselves inside their homes to avoid the attack of the fundamentalists. Christian leaders from the said area approached area officials to solve the matter.
- On 25th May in Dherubada, Rayagada, alleged Hindu fundamentalists brutally murdered Nimmaka Laxmaya aged 50 years while he was returning home after attending a prayer meeting on the occasion of the baptism of his youngest son.
- On 11th June in Bhubaneshwar, the local authorities demolished a church and thirty houses belonging to Christians in the slums of Behera without giving them any compensation. According to Church leaders, the gesture "is a way to intimidate and persecute the 250 poor Christians" who were left without shelter, food and drinking water.
- On 11th October in Junagarh, Hindu fundamentalists stopped the prayer meeting of the Indian Christian Revival Mission after they accused the organisers of forcible conversions.
- On 15th October in Gumkaguda, Malkangiri, Hindu fundamentalists burned down the house of one Christian family, Irma Markami at midnight and beat them up because of their faith in Christ.
- On 25th October in Gumkaguda, Malkangiri, five Christians from one family were hospitalised with serious injuries after Hindu fundamentalists beat them up at a public meeting after the Christians refused to renounce Christ.

BIHAR

- On 25th May in Balwanazir, Kaliyanganj, Hindu fundamentalists assaulted a Christian family, blocked the

road and chased them out of the village after they refused to renounce Christ.

- On 16th July in Balwanazir, Kaliyanganj, Hindu fundamentalists locked up a church after they repeatedly beat and threatened the Christians from the said area.
- On 30th August in Balwanazir, Kaliyanganj, Hindu fundamentalists beat up a Christian couple and called them pagans while questioning them about the Christian visitors they have had from outside the village. They further restricted the couple from lodging a police complaint against the fundamentalists.
- On 31st August in Bhusala, Patna, Hindu fundamentalists beat up Pastors Chhoto Kumar, Ashok Marandi and Amit while they were showing a gospel film against which the fundamentalists had objections.
- On 18th December in Bhagalpur, three newly converted Christians were forced to reconvert to Hinduism. According to media reports, the three converts returned to the Hindu fold after they were threatened with a social boycott.

TAMIL NADU

- On 13th May in Pokkattakudi, Lalgudi, police constable attacked Dalit Christians after attending the annual church festival of Adaikalanatha Church despite being told by Hindu fundamentalists to stay away from the said festival. About fifty Dalits attended the annual church festival of Adaikalanatha Church and were later confronted by the Hindu fundamentalists asking them why they had attended the meeting when they were told to stay away from the festival.
- On 3rd August in Perur, near Coimbatore, Hindu fundamentalists barged into one Christian home where Pastor Simon Stanley from the Apostolic Christian Church was praying for a sick person. The fundamentalists locked the door and started beating up the Christians with cooking vessels and other household items.
- On 10th August in Karur, Hindu fundamentalists pelted stones at the church led by Bro. Elisha Thangaraj, Bro. Tamil Arasan and Bro. Jeba Singh at Chinnatharapuram and threatened the Christians to stop their ministry in the area.
- On 21st September in Rajakkamangalam, police filed a case against two Christians Jebamoni Selvan and Sundar Mathuselvan when members of the RSS and BJP barged into the house of Pastor Raja Kirubakaran and found them visiting the Pastor. The Christians were also beaten up.
- On 16th November in Udumalpet, Tamil Nadu, Hindu fundamentalists attacked a prayer meeting, beat up

Christians, desecrated Bibles, musical instruments and burnt more than twenty vehicles belonging to the Christians attending the prayer meeting.

KERALA

- On 24th January in Parur, Kerala, anti-Christian people accosted a nun, Sister Mersina from Sacred House (Pratheeksha Bhavan), verbally abused her and dragged her on the road till she fell down. The nun was on her way to attend Holy Mass when two anti-Christian people suddenly appeared in a bike and started to assault her. The nun was admitted to Don Bosco hospital.
- On 29th April in Murkanad, Trichur, suspected Hindu fundamentalists damaged three chapels in Irinjalakuda diocese as a fall out of the police action when they cleared the way for the 'Way of the Cross' procession of the Saint Anthony's Catholic Church. Earlier on 11th April, the Hindu fundamentalists had blocked the procession of St Antony's Catholic Church and recited Hindu hymns.
- On 28th September in Trikaripur, Karargod, anti-Christian elements forcefully disrupted the Sunday prayer meeting being conducted by Pastor Johnson James at the community hall, threatened to harm the Christians and locked the main door of the community hall.
- On 5th October in Valanchery, Malappuran, Hindu fundamentalists barged into the Sunday worship meeting of the Indian Pentecostal Church (IPC) and beat up Pastor Francis, accused him of forcible conversion and beat him and the church members.
- On 19th October in Trikaripur, Kasargod, anti-Christian elements forcefully entered into a house church meeting conducted by Pastor Johnson James, destroyed the furniture, manhandled, pushed and slapped the Christians present.

JHARKHAND

- On 5th March in Pali, Ramgarh, two Christian families fled their homes after they were beaten up, ostracized and stripped naked by Hindu fundamentalists after refused to renounce Christ.
- On 2nd August in Jasnadih, Deogarh, Hindu fundamentalists ostracized a widow identified only as Devi and some local Christians for following Christ and later beat her up for fetching water from the public well.
- On 13th September in Bindhani, Ranchi, five Bible students were held captive by villagers after Hindu fundamentalists took away Christian literature and New Testament Bibles from them.

- On 14th September in Bindhani, Ranchi, a mob of over one hundred and fifty Hindu fundamentalists attacked prayer meeting and beat about 50 Christians.

NEW DELHI

- On 10th February, Christian leaders from the Assemblies of God World Missions, Dr. David L. Grant and his wife were arrested and sent to jail in New Delhi on charges of violating Visa regulation after a police complaint was submitted against him for speaking at one meeting on his visit to Kerala.
- In the early hours of 1st December, a Catholic church in East Delhi's Dilshad Garden area, St. Sebastian's Church, was completely gutted in a fire. Later, Christians took to the streets to protest the burning, and demanded a judicial enquiry as foul play is suspected.
- On 2nd December in Rohini Sector 29, four anti-Christian elements broke into a Catholic convent.
- On 6th December in Jasola, unidentified people pelted Our Lady of Fatema Church with stones during mass and damaged windows which caused the Syro-Malabar Catholic congregation to rush out in alarm.

ASSAM

- On 7th January in Hagramari, Udalgiri, a Christian Anaru Boro and his mother were ex-communicated and chased out from their village after they refused to renounce Christ and warned them to never show their faces again if they continue to follow Christ.
- On 20th January in Birupara, Karbi Anglong, Assam a Christian woman Karangshi Basumatary was ostracized and then chased out from her village for accepting Christ.
- On 27th January in Phokripara, Udalguri, Khagen Boro and seven other Christians were forced back into their Hindu tribal religion "Bathou" after the fundamentalists warned them that they will be excommunicated from the village. The Christians were also forced to practice the Hindu rituals.
- On 26th November, Pastor of the Believers Church in Moran Amguri, Sivasagar District of Assam received threats from local Hindu leaders to vacate the building that the congregation used for Church services in one month's time or face the consequences.

ANDHRA PRADESH

- On 13th January in Vikarabad, Rangareddy, Pastor Sanjeevulu from Hebron church succumbed to his injuries after fundamentalists from the Hindu Vahini group brutally attacked him at his home with iron rods, clubs and sticks on 10th January.

On 3rd May in Warangal, Andhra Pradesh, suspected Hindu fundamentalists desecrated all the statues of the Cristu Jyoti Ashram during the absence of the Bishops. The miscreants shattered the five feet cement statues. The church authorities submitted a police complaint.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

- On 15th February in Baptist Mission field of Kameng District, Hindu fundamentalists stopped the Christian English Medium School construction and warned the Christians not to tell people about Christ and also to stop all Christian activities in the area.
- On 2nd December in Tawang District, Government officials stopped the construction of a Baptist Church and did not give any reason for disallowing the Christians to build the church.

MAHARASTRA

- On 1st January in Mangoan, Raigad, alleged Hindu fundamentalists vandalised the statue of Sacred Heart of Jesus, pelted the grotto with stones and broke the glass case and the statue. Police complaint was filed.
- On 14th July in Vile Parle West, Mumbai, anti-Christian elements desecrated a crucifix and hacked off the hand of the statue. Christian groups jointly staged a protest against the incident.
- On 28th October in Kamseth village, Nasik district, police arrested four Christians after Hindu fundamentalists beat them up, damaged their houses and shop and looted goods from the shop.

WEST BENGAL

- On 17th August in East Medinipur, Hindu fundamentalists harassed Pastor Bhobo Shankar Acharya by taking him to Hindu centres and asking him to renounce his faith. The fundamentalists forced him to chant Hindu slogans, put tilak on his forehead and robbed him of his ATM card, mobile phone and other documents.

RAJASTHAN

- On 22nd October in Udaipur, a three day youth conference organised by the Gosnar Lutheran Church was called off after Hindu fundamentalists objected to the event and pressurised the local police to deny permission to the Church to conduct the conference.

HARYANA

- On 6th August in Rohtak, suspected Hindu fundamentalists vandalized the school buses of an Archdiocesan church. Prior to the incident, the fundamentalists had collected details of persons who had converted to Christianity and planned to carry out "Shuddhikaran"-

an exercise to re- convert people to Hinduism.

PUNJAB

- On 11th December in Ludhiana, Punjab, Hindu fundamentalists attacked Calvary Church alleging forcible conversion. Police protection was given to the church.

UTTARAKHAND

- On 7th August in Jalanpur, Haridwar, Hindu fundamentalists beat up the minor daughter of a Pastor from an independent church and later pelted stones at their house.

GUJARAT

- On 7th/8th October in Ahmedabad, miscreants broke into the office of Centre for Human Rights, Justice and Peace, a Christian organisation. The Centre claimed that the attack on them was intentional as they supported minorities and their rights.
