

## **KANDHAMAL RIOT, THE FOURTH COLOUMN AND THE TRAGEDY OF DEMOCRACY**

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The cursed night of 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2008: Octogenarian Swami Laxmananda, the *margdarshak* of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the commander of Hinutva Brigade in Kandhamal was gunned down at Jaleshpata Ashram, District Kandhamal. Four of his associates were also killed along with him. It happened just after eight months of the communal conflagration that had erupted on 25<sup>th</sup> December 2007 on the pretext of an attack on Laxmananda at Brahamanigan. Consequently, hundreds of churches were destroyed and thousands of people were rendered homeless. This large scale violence shows that communal division has gone deep in the society of Kandhamal. As a result, the minority community was repeatedly facing attacks. It is but natural that Laxmananda was at the forefront of the oppression of the minority. Two Ashrams, Chakapada and Jaleshpata, set up by him were used to intensify the anti-minority campaign of Sangh Parivar. After December, 2007 communal violence, Laxmananda and his followers were constantly at work to keep the communal fire burning. Hence, instead of dying out, the fire was smoldering underneath.

In such a backdrop, Laxmananda was assassinated. The Maoist had left clear evidences of their involvement. More so, they had, time and again, claimed responsibility for the act. Still, the innocent minorities of Kandhamal were made the villain and rumours were spread all across the state that Christians of Kandhamal have killed Laxmananda. This led to widespread attack on Christians all across the state. The final tally of this mayhem is like this: 50 people killed; thousands of houses burnt down; 40 thousand became refugee in their own soil and took shelter in relief camps; many more left their home and hearth for safer places in Bhubaneswar and outside the state. And Sangh Parivar and its followers proudly declared it as a revenge for the killing of an old Sannyasi.

One year after the riot, when dusts have, apparently, settled down, we are attempting to look at Kandhamal. Needless to say, many individuals and groups had specific role in the riot. People of different strata in the society were, both positively and negatively, involved in it. Sangh Parivar, Church leadership, political parties, administration, police, State and Central Governments, intellectuals and civil society of Orissa and above all Media (Electronic and Print) have played some role. It is difficult to assess the role of all of them. We would attempt to discuss the specific role of media in the backdrop of Kandhamal riot. It is worth mentioning that after the December 2007 riot we had prepared a long report on the role of Oriya Media (1).

Before discussing the specific role of media in the context of Kandhamal, a few words need to be said about the role of Media to put the things in perspective.

- **Media has a unique role as the conscience keeper of the society and state.** Along with Legislative, Executive and Judiciary, Media has been playing the role of the Fourth Column in a democratic polity. In the post-independent India, there

are very few studies to show whether the Media has been successful in playing this role or not. In the national level there are found to be a few attempts in this regard; however, in case of Orissa there is none.

- **An impression is created that Media is apparently free and responsible.** In Orissa, media is, literally, controlled by a handful of political families and under the ownership of a few individuals. Still, none considers it proper to study and analyze the role of media in Orissa. (2)
- **Media plays a vital role not only in influencing the public opinion but also in moulding it.** Hence, all sorts of political forces try to control it. A fearless, independent and efficient media is a must for a democratic polity. Unfortunately, this aspect of media has, to a large extent, been neglected in the post independent India. Instead of giving prominence to the opinion of the public, the energy of media has been invested to propagate the opinion of particular influential groups. Many times it is found to bend its knees before the powerful. The Emergency declared in 1975 is a case in point. A large section of media had, then, accepted the dictatorial attitude of Mrs. Indira Gandhi with bending knees. But it is more dangerous when media goes communal than be in the pockets of influential. To patronize the seat or the groups seeking the seat has, still, a limited political impact. But, once media becomes communalized, it impacts all sections of the society. As a consequence, national integrity and social harmony get affected. This apprehension has accentuated when one sees the media reporting and analysis of communal carnage of Gujrat in 1998 and of Kandhamal in 2007. It seems media, specifically regional media, has, gradually, been entangled with communal forces; media reporting is toeing the communal line and pandering to their ideas. A comment in this regard is worth quoting: “Unfortunately, there is a significant contribution of some vernacular newspapers in the attack being let loose on the minorities in Gujrat. It is as if these newspapers had decided beforehand that Muslim and Christians are anti-social elements and it is necessary to teach them a lesson. These newspapers have continuously printed opinions, thoughts and advertisements of the VHP, the Bajrang Dal and all other similar organizations in such a manner as if these were opinions of the newspapers themselves”. (3)

On the basis of these rudimentary understanding, we can see the role of Oriya media. One thing is very clear from the study of nearly 5000 reports and reviews on Kandhamal that the Oriya media has played a very narrow, irresponsible and unprofessional role. Facts and information have, many times, been dished out to provoke the public. Even, no care has been taken to quote the sources these facts and information. It seems as if media is unaware of the social impact of a piece of news. After Laxmananda’s assassination, an emotionally charged atmosphere developed in the state. And media played an important role to add fuel to it. Since 24<sup>th</sup> August to 31<sup>st</sup> August, nearly 70% of the print media-space was occupied by Kandhamal; 90% of the prime time of Electronic Media was devoted to it. But all these were not meant to establish the truth behind the communal

carnage in Kandhmal, rather to help wipe out the minorities of the District. Sufferings and traumas of the riot-victims did hardly find space in the Media. The Electronic Media, though, showed the footage of destroyed churches and burnt-out houses, but advocated that conversion and prosperity of Christians are the causes of the riot. When Maoists had categorically claimed their hands behind the killing of Laxmananda, Media played a sinister role by creating a doubt in the minds of the public. Who has killed Swami Laxmananda? – In seeking an answer to this question, Media in its own trial found the minority community guilty. For example, see the report, “Sobs of Kandhamal” filed by Mr. Kirtidhar Rout in ‘Weekly Samaj’ 3-9<sup>th</sup> September 2008. The very language of the report is largely anti-minority and the underlying tone of the report puts Laxmananda in the role of a Messiah in Kandhamal. Hence, all that happened in Kandhmal after his killing is natural. Though the report largely reflects other newspapers, still it can be said that it has a vital role in fomenting disturbances in Kandhamal. As an example, we are quoting some portion of the report.....

“The Govt. doubts the involvement of Maoists in the killing of Laxmananda. But the question is, if the Maoists have done it, have they done it on their own or at the behest of others? Security experts argue that generally Maoists do not poke their nose into religious affair. It is not in sync with their philosophy and ideology. It would not be wise of experts to ignore the fact that during last couple of year degeneration in principles has set in in Maoists’ struggle also. The struggle has gone astray. The strong ideological bind has loosened up. In course of time, the Red Brigade has, in many cases, turned out to be a gang of goons. Ambition for power in the struggle has resulted in sharp factional fight. This has been seen before in the Maoists’ stronghold in Bihar and Jharkhand. This is also not new in Kandhamal. In the communal riot of last December 2007, it was seen that Maoists had raised arms in support of Christians. But the Govt. had, then, failed to assess the situation correctly. In that phase, Maoist began to enter Kandhamal. On the day of the riot that had taken place at Brahmanigan, some people with black head-band had participated in burning the houses of Oriya hamlet and had given a challenge for one and half hour to Mr. Amitendranath Sinha, the then S.P. of Gajapati District. They had resorted to firing though the S.P. was on the spot with 30 OSAP jawans. The S.P. was surprised to see this bold attack. The cultural troupe from Berahampur which was to perform on 1<sup>st</sup> January at Brahamanigan was witness to this attack and had informed that Maoists’ women cadres were involved in it. They were standing behind the miscreants. The idea that Maoists are not involved in religious conflict proved wrong on that day. After this, a letter from Naxal commander Sunil had reached the media condemning the religious fundamentalism. It was, then, a matter of discussion. In Nepal, Maoists have captured power by dethroning the Hindu king Gyanendra. Thus, it is not abnormal that Maoists see in Laxmananda an enemy who has, through out his life, tried to protect Hinduism. They had killed Santikali in Tripura and Haridas in Manipur. After the communal tension that had triggered on the issue of cow slaughter at Malipada, Swami Laxmananda was the first and last enemy of Christian fundamentalists and Maoists. It was known that Maoists have stronghold in Kotagarh, but on 15<sup>th</sup> August at Tumudibandh they raised the black flags to establish their presence. The police had captured it, but did not give much importance. Had it done so, a large mishap would have been avoided “.

If we closely study the language and content of the report, one thing clearly emerges that the reporter is carried away by his emotions. He is writing in such a fashion as if he were eye-witness to every incident. Neither is he presenting specific information nor is he quoting persons involved to establish his arguments. This kind of reporting has been published in hundreds in The Samaj, The Dharitri and E-TV, O-TV. This report is only a small example. Newspapers have, more often, crossed their own limit and ethical line. Here is another example. The caption of the news report runs like this: “Fight against Pana perpetrators won’t stop” (The Samay, 18-09-2008). It is not mentioned who has made this statement. Then, would the readers assume that it is of the newspaper itself? Though it is mentioned inside the story that the statement has been given by Lambodar Kanhar, from the caption anyone can think that the statement is made by the newspaper. Don’t the journalistic ethics get affected by this sort of caption? While scrutinizing reports on Kandhamal riot, we find three broad characters of Oriya journalism:-

1. Facts and information lack the basis of any research or authentic sources. It depends on the reporter’s own emotion and fertile imagination.
2. The state capital is more attractive for the newspapers than the place of occurrence. More space in the media was given to people who are sitting in the capital and trying to capitalize Kandhamal than the people of Kandhamal themselves. Media was playing a prominent role to add more colour to the politics of riot. However, it had completely failed to understand the political fallout of the riot. Media had no clue about the division between BJP and BJD and at later phase the decision of the BJD to be dissociated from BJP on the issue of Kandhamal. During the last one year, the media is near silent on the political impact of Kandhamal riot.
3. Lack of secular and democratic thinking in Media. It shows that our media is gradually going bankrupt at the level of ideation. Instead of a particular idea or thought, it is spending more energy on presenting provocative and emotive issues with its juicy details. Even incidents like violence and killings have become the means of media profession. Instead of empathizing with the suffering human beings, media is inhumanly trying to capitalize it. While in Kandhamal 25 thousand people were rotting in relief camps, Media was raving about a lesser issue of conversion instead of being sensitive to their sufferings. A few reports have been published on the wretched condition of the relief camps. Rather, Media was giving importance to ridiculous statements of some of the Sangh Parivar intellectuals that minorities are enjoying luxurious life in relief camps. Degeneration in thinking leads to degeneration in morality. Our Media is increasingly going down and down in this direction.

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Media is so wide-spread in our times that it is difficult to discuss all of them. However, for the purpose of discussing Kandhamal communal violence, we can divide it into:- (1) newspapers and magazines published in Orissa in Oriya language; (2) telecasting in Oriya by Regional Centre of Door Darshan, O TV and E.TV; (3) Orissa Page/Edition of National Dailies like The Indian Express, The Times of India,

The States Man, The Hindu, The Pioneer. People also to watch other Hindi and English channels. Besides, Internet, SMS and Telephone are being used as a mode of communication. We can divide the news, published and printed, relating to Kandhamal into two parts: Sangh Parivar sponsored saffronised news; media believing in secular and democratic ideas, however little and feeble it may be. Nearly 80% of the Newspapers and news channels belong to the former; they support the majoritarian views. For them the killing of Laxmananda is not a criminal act; rather an attack on hindu sentiment. It is motivated by consideration of profit in business. Because, they have calculated that to cater to majoritarian views will create more consumers for their Newspapers and channels; business will grow. As a result, only 5% minority (Muslim and Christian) in the state feel insecure. It would be clearer in the context of Kandhamal.

**BLOOD STAINS IN THE NEWS PRINT:-** After the killing of Laxmananda on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2008, the way the Headlines of News Papers were prepared and the kind of provocative news were telecast, it was clear that it would create a very serious situation. Perhaps, the memory of the riot of December 2007 was not alive in the minds of media. So, they tried to highlight the killing more and more. Not only that. They unconditionally supported the Sangh Parivar's view that Christians are involved in it. Daily News Paper "The Sambad" on 24<sup>th</sup> morning published quite a sizeable picture of the dead body of Laxmananda with blood stains around. The red ink spilled on News Print on that day by The Sambad, later flowed in the jungles as warm blood of minority of Kandhamal. The News Papers and News Channels did not care to present such provocative news with restraint and discipline as required. For them, it was nothing but a beautiful play to play with the sentiments of the people. Not a single media representative did care to think that it would affect the life and property of Christian community constituting only 2.44 of the state population. Many of the reporters sitting at Bhubaneswar blamed the minority community for the incident. For example, The New Indian Express wrote on 25<sup>th</sup> 2008, "The State Government again harped on the Maoist theory a day after the brutal killing of Swami Laxmananda Saraswati. But is it not too convenient to be true? The Left radicals have always stayed clear religious issues and there has been no precedence of any attack on such grounds. Why would the Maoists, whose armed struggle thrives on the very faith of the local and indigenous populace, target a leader who enjoyed such support base in a tribal district? This is something that defies logic. While the Government has a point behind masquerading the reason, it is about time it came to terms with the rise of Christian militancy in the state. If Naxals had to eliminate the leader, they have had several opportunities in the past since Laxmananda mainly operated in forest areas. Why should he be targeted inside the ashram at this point of time? It only appears that the killing was an act of revenge and to make a point, the sources said". The source of this news is nowhere mentioned; hence the readers are kept in the dark. More so, the finger of accusation of the killing is directed at the Christian community. How would one judge this kind of journalism if not irresponsible and motivated?

**MEDIA: WHERE LENSES ARE DIFFERENT:-** During Kandhamal riot, Sangh Parivar tried to draw a dividing line between national and local media portraying the

former as anti-hindutva; though there is hardly any difference between the local and national media located in Orissa. A booklet, "The Real Assassin of Swamiji" was widely circulated by them after the incident. The Sangh Parivar conducting an enquiry in its own style had found the Christian community guilty for the killing. A chapter in the booklet, National Media vs. Local Media has to say this:-

- Two characters of media emerge if we look at them in the context of this incident.
- Local media presented the facts as they were, but national level electronic media and English News Papers twisted it. The local media highlighted the killing of Swamiji, attacks on him in the past, role of Christians, conversion, failure of security and conspiracy behind the killing.
- On the other hand, under the pressure from Christians and so-called secularists, the national media presented one-sided news. As if nothing had happened in Kandhamal except attacks on Christians. They remained silent on the issue of Swamiji's killing.
- Initially, the national media had depicted Swamiji as the leader of VHP but they forgot it later.
- Even, not only did they cut the news short sent by local journalists but also did add false facts to support Christians.
- Communist-influenced national media, so called pseudo secularists and self-proclaimed intellectuals portrayed hindus as the villain.
- Nowhere did they say that culprits are not yet apprehended.
- News channels like ND TV 24 X7 and News X presented fabricated news. They showed the footage of people tonsured in the occasion of last rites as Christians tonsured being converted to Hinduism.

The certificate given to the local media by Sangh Parivar shows their true character: they are nothing short of the Oriya editions of Shiv Sena mouth piece "Samna" or RSS' "The Organiser". The language of the Sangh Parivar has become the language of the media. Who would be blamed for this degeneration? After the Gujurat riot, psychologist Ashish Nandy had analyzed this symptom in media as the degeneration in middle class consciousness. According to him, the self-seeking middle class value system has crept into media which do not hesitate to profit from the helplessness of the minority community. (5)

On the one hand, Sangh Parivar was showering praises on Oriya media, on the other, minority leadership was losing its faith in it. In the words of Archbishop Raphael Chinath, "The Sangh Parivar has all the intellectuals at their disposal to monopolize the media, to manipulate the truth, to twist the facts, to neutralize the issue and to present a lie as truth and convince the simple masses that the minorities are dangerous people, anti-national, and enemies of the country so they should be destroyed etc.

Do we have efficient machinery that is on duty day and night in order to tell all, especially, the Hindu brethren the truth? Or are we shy of telling the truth not once but continuously? Since the attack on Christian in Kandhamal, Sangh Parivar was almost

every second day in the media. If we don't forcefully tell the truth before all, the lie will shine brighter".

Media has hardly given any importance to the views of the minority. Even, views of the people who stand by secularism have been neglected. Many concerned citizen groups have tried to put forth their views on Kandhamal riot but there is little space for them in the media. On the other hand, since 25<sup>th</sup> August to 25<sup>th</sup> December 2008, monks, sadhus, VHP functionaries, BJP leadership and King of Puri have remained the main attraction in the media. Minority leadership has casually been asked something, but their answers have not been faithfully presented. To malign minority community in Kandhamal incident media has unbelievably stooped low. See for example, the editorial of The Samaj, 26<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

"It is justified, if one argues that real interest groups are being covered up by propagating Maoist hand in this barbaric act. Swamiji who was charting a new path for adivasis cannot be an enemy of the Maoist. If Maoist involvement is still claimed, then it would be assumed that someone has used them for his own benefit in exchange of huge money. It is natural to doubt organizations that are spending huge amount to convert adivasis."

The fingers of doubt are being raised at whom? The seeds of doubt were planted in the minds of 5 lakh readers; later they became the supporter of Hindutva and began to hate minorities. Instead of sending a message of fraternity, a news paper became a vehicle for hatred. It is worthwhile to mention that The Samaj was established by Utkalmani Gopabandhu Dash one of the tallest figures in the freedom movement. What would we say to the editor, the legatee of Gopabandhu Dash? Editorial reflects news papers' own view. Then would it be said, The Samaj has turned out to be mouth piece of Sangh Parivar?

Meanwhile one year has passed by. The investigation into the killing of Laxmananda is not yet complete. Still, Maoists have categorically claimed the responsibility. In a booklet, "Why Laxmananda was awarded death sentence?" they have clarified their motive. Police and administration have also accepted it. Then, who would compensate the damage that has been done by that editorial? Is the paper ashamed of its anti-minority view?

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Life and society of Kandhamal is full of diversities and complexities. Hence, while discussing Kandhamal we have to look into various aspects of it. Adivasis constitute more than 50% of the total population; 90% of them are below poverty line. For the last three decades, there has been an atmosphere of distrust among adivasi and dalit community of the district. Since 1995 it has increasingly turned more bitter. With the set-

up of Ashram by Laxmananda at Chakapad an atmosphere of violence and lawlessness has begun in Kandhamal. Any body can construe it an anti-Lamananda statement. But the reality is that till 1970s there was hardly any conflict in Kandhamal between Kandha and Pana. It began with the set-up Ashram at Chakapad in 1969. Though these two incidents are apparently separate, there is a connection between them. The efforts of Sangh Parivar for years together to hinduise adivasi and to inculcate the idea of hindu state among them, courtesy Chakapada Ashram, has reflected in the form of caste conflict (between Pana and Kandha). However, it demands a lot of effort to analyze the political, social, economic and cultural life of Kandhamal in its entirety to have a grasp over the problem. Here, specifically, in the context of Kandhamal riot, media was expected to take up a specific role. Lamentably, that was not to be. The whole perception of media on riot of Kandhamal can broadly be summarized:-

1. Huge Increase in the number of churches and large scale conversion.
2. Conflict between Kandh (adivasi) and Pana (dalit).
3. Attack on and killing of Laxmananda.
4. Fake caste certificate.
5. Majority Kandha leadership politically neglected.
6. Failure of developmental programs in Kandhamal
7. Large scale revengeful activity of Sangh Parivar

Apparently, media has found these seven causes for the unrest in Kandhamal. No wonder, these findings have been collected from the Memoranda of Nikhil Utkal Kui Samaj or leaflets of Sangh Parivar. Not a single media house has done any research in this regard. Since 19<sup>th</sup> century many writings are available on Kandhamal. During meriah suppression in colonial period, colonial army officials, Colonel Macpherson and Colonel Campbell in their memoirs have documented many aspects of the life and society of Kandhamal. During 1960s and 70s, F.G. Bailey has written a number of books on social system of Kandhamal. Surprisingly, the media of Orissa has not referred to any researcher or political commentator to analyze the political and social situation of Kandhamal. Rather, it is dependent on the statements of the leaders of Sangh Parivar or Lamodar Kanhar, the Secretary of Kui Samaj Union. It would not be out of place to go back a little into the past of Kandhamal and to bring into light some of the aspects of its life and social reality.

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**1836: Kandhamal:** In 1836, to escape from the clutches of company rulers, the king of Ghumsur took refuge in the indigenous people – called themselves Kui , popularly known as Kandh since colonial time. They lived in the deep jungles of Kandhamal, fiercely militant and full of self-pride. They never wanted to submit to any ruler or king. It is said, Alap Kanhar, the hero of Kui community had fought with the king of Baud. The king thought that Alap Kanhar was a fool. But he was terribly fearless. The rule of the king was dependent on his physical prowess. Once, Alpa proposed the hands of daughter of the king. This enraged the king. For the king, Alap belonged to low class. So he did not deserve his daughter. As usual, the relationship between high and low class is based on opportunism. So long as Alap could be used to secure power, he was a hero. But when he

wanted equal status in terms of matrimonial relationship he became a villain. Deceitfully, the king married off a maid of the daughter as his daughter with Alap. When Alap knew about this, he openly declared war against the king. He established an independent kingdom. We are not going into the historicity of the story. But it sufficiently suggests the self-pride and the struggle-full life of Kui tribe. For centuries, they have been fighting against the king and the establishment. They had also fought against the British administration. When they took the Ghumsur king into refuge, the Kui tribe and subjects of Kandhamal invited the wrath of British administration.

To capture to Ghumsur king, the company administration had discovered a terrible fact: the practice of meriah in Kandhamal. Kui community believed that *Dharni Penu*, the Earth Goddess would yield good crop of turmeric if she were offered human blood. To suppress this barbaric practice, company army official Macpherson and Campbell were deployed. With this, the civilized world entered Kandhamal; so also entered the barbarism of civilized world. To abolish this barbaric practice, the activities of Campbell were no less barbaric. Kandhas were killed mercilessly, hundreds were beaten on the street, their houses and crop fields put into fire. Panas were the most trust worthy and helping hands for the Kandhas. Their relationship was of father-son or King-Minister. Kandh was always dependent on Pana. Role of Pana was most important for the Kandha kings living in the hills. So, the company rulers painted Pana community deceitful, exploiters and untrustworthy. They had earned these infamies because they had stood by their Kandh kings. The company administration had neatly calculated that the key to suppress Kandha is to cut the Pana community into size. So, since the time of company rule, attempts were made to create a rift among Kandha and Pana. The result is seen today.

**CONFLICT BETWEEN KING & MINISTER:** Kandha and Pana have lived together for years; so also have managed their livelihood together. The entire land of Kandhamal belongs to Kandh or Kui community. They have fought many battles for land and Goddess of land. Always Pana community was with them like their shadows. But, there is another community living comfortably in Kandhamal, locally, who are known as Oriya – the upper caste people. They are the real competitor of Kandha in Kandhamal in terms of political and economic power. Control over land and worship of Goddess was the main bone of contention between Oriya and Kandha. Traditionally, there have been many bloody fights between them over the right to worship of the famous Baral Devi at Balaskumpa. After Macpherson and Campbell, the exploitation of Oriyas increased in Kandhamal. Because, during this period Dinabandhu Pattanaik joined as a Tehsildar of Kandhamal. He was a resourceful administrator. To curtail the dominance of Kandha and to finish their cultural life he hatched a well-planned conspiracy. During his period, upper caste Oriyas were employed as Mutha head violating the provision of employing Kui people as Mutha head. (Mutha is both a political and economic unit. Entire Kandhamal sub-division was divided into 50 muthas). Secondly, the act that was passed to protect the land of Kui was openly flouted during his rule. This process led to alienation of land from the hands of Kui to the hands of upper caste Oriya.

After independence and till 70s, both Pana and Kandha were in one camp and Oriya was in the opposite camp. There have always been minor conflicts in Kandhama. But it was never between Pana and Kandha. But when today it is said in many circles that there was age old conflict between Pana and Kandha, the study of history does not support it. The conflict between Pana-Kandha is apparently recent and it has been created at a later phase for the opportunism of the upper caste people.

In the context of today's bloody conflict, it needs to be once again emphasized that since ages Pana and Kandha have been living together. Leaders of both the communities claim to be coeval brothers and give importance to their unity. But in real time, nothing is to be seen. In colonial literature, Kandha has been depicted as the king of Kandhamal and Pana as advisor, subordinate to the King. But Panas are more educated than Kandhas. So in colonial literature they have been painted as clever/deceitful. This misrepresentation has done immense damage to both the communities in subsequent period. Economically and socially, both the communities are at a vulnerable position. By creating rift between two weaker sections some vested interest groups are trying to reap political benefit. This political conspiracy is the main cause of the riot in the district. As per 2001 Census, total Kandha population of the district is 3,14,356, Pana 85,331. As minority, Panas are no better either politically or socially. In terms of education, health, social security, security of life and livelihood both the communities are neglected. More than 50% of panas are illiterate and land less. But, an economically weaker community has repeatedly been depicted as criminal and exploiter.

**1960-1970s:** The traditional conflict between Kui and upper caste people has taken a new form in the post independent period. During this phase, famous social scientist F. G. Bailey was at Bisipara to study the social life of Kandhamal. His two books, "Tribe, Caste and Nation: A Study of Political Activity and Political Change in Highland Orissa" and "Civility of Indifference" have focused on this. He has mentioned about the first conflict between Pana-Kandha at Baderi near Bisipara. But it was a minor one. It centers round a marriage feast. In the caste hierarchy, Panas are untouchables. They are the outcast of Hindu society. Though, they live in a society dominated by tribal population, the tag of untouchability did not leave them. In the post-independent period, such minor conflicts did take place between Pana and Kandha on the issue of untouchability. Kandhas always wanted Pana community to be their subordinate as they had given them shelter and opportunity for livelihood. But this relationship started changing in the post-independent period. Panas took to small trade and started earning independently. The upper caste people tried to create a rift between them taking the alibi of economic improvement of Pana. Bailey has given a detailed account of this in his book Caste Tribe and Nation. The small conflict that had started in the year 1956 assumed a big form subsequently. In the year 1994, a bloody fight started between Pana and Kandha on the issue of entry of a Pana boy into a Shiva temple. As a result, 20 people were killed and hundreds of people were driven out of their villages. It would be worthwhile to mention that Tehsildar Dinabandhu Pattanaik had built up the first Shiva temple in Kandhamal District. As a Hindu temple, it had the caste bar in regard to entry. Adivasis were nature worshippers; they worshipped rivers, hills, earth, sky and the spirit of their dead kith and kin. They had no such caste discrimination. For the hinduisation of tribal society and

culture, untouchability surfaced as a problem. With the infiltration of brahminic values into the society of the nature worshippers, a terrible picture emerged out of a divided society. That ghost is haunting the Kandhamal society today.

## : 5 :

We shall discuss some of the specific roles of media in creating a majoritarian sentiment and over-zealousness in publishing news relating to Kandhamal. Laxmananda was killed on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2008. VHP gave a state-wide Bandh call on 25<sup>th</sup> protesting the killing. On 24<sup>th</sup> August, the dead body of Laxmananda was taken in a procession from Jaleshpata to Chakapada. Though there was a shorter route, the procession was intentionally taken in a circuitous way covering 250 KM. The state administration chose to remain a silent spectator only. It started from Jaleshpata via Kurtumgarh, Baliguda, Mahasinghi, K.Nuagaon, Gunjibari, Raikia, Mandakia, Katingia, G. udaygiri, Paburia, Firingia, Phulbani, Shankrakhol, Tikabalit to Chakapada. If one closely watches the road map of the procession, it would be clear that Sangh Parivar had carefully planned to wipe out the minority in the name of this procession. This procession had passed through all the sensitive areas of the district. Along with the procession, Sangh Parivar leaders were giving provocative speeches. And every thing was telecast to arouse passion of the people. The media had not maintained the kind of restraint that was required while publishing/telecasting the event. Rather it was justified in the name of reflection of popular sentiment. Secondly, rumor was let loose. Through leaflets and SMSs rumor was spread that Christians were the killers of the Swamiji. An impression was created that Christians living in every village were the killers. RSS became successful in hammering into the brains of innocent adivasis that Christians are the enemy of hindu religion and against the nation. And media, without analyzing all these, turned into campaign machinery for Sagnh Parivar.

VHP's bandh call on 25<sup>th</sup> was nothing short of an example of violence and goondaism. Common citizens were harassed during the *band* by RSS and BJP cadres: people were beaten on the street; their vehicles broken. These ugly scenes were televised. But they were made out to be something natural in *band* day. Writing on the *band* on 26-08-2008, a 100 point font headline of The Samaj says, "Bandh spontaneous, two dead and hundreds arrested". But why were two people killed and why was such a large scale arson and burning in the so called spontaneous *band*? The paper doesn't give any answer. The self-contradictory reporting of the paper runs like this: The state-wide band call given by VHP was unprecedented. BJP and Bajrang cadres had participated in it. The call was spontaneously supported. So, the movement had completely stopped in the state. Bus and train journey had absolutely stopped. Mr. Mishra, the Home Secretary, informing media, stated that it would not be exaggerated to say the bandh was absolute. During this bandh, one woman and old man are killed. The bandh supporters set fire to an orphan centre at Khuntapalli, 12 km from district Bargarh. An inmate is burnt alive. She could not escape the fire.

Let us see the headlines of other news papers. “Bandh successful in Capital, fire on the road, people beaten” – The Samay. “Orissa bandh successful: Fire of protest everywhere” – The Prajatantra. The Metro page of The Dharitri was full of pictures relating to bandh and atrocities of Sangh Parivar. But nothing is mentioned about that in the news reporting. Analyzing these reports, we can ask some questions-

1. If bandh were spontaneous and natural, why were people beaten up?
2. Who did media think responsible for the violence and killing during bandh?
3. Why did media try to give clean chit to Sangh Parivar?
4. By showing more and more violence, is not media responsible for provoking more violence?

: 6 :

When the air of Kandhamal is reeking of blood, questions are also being raised about the role of media. During the last one year, I have closely scrutinized the role of many individuals and organizations connected with media in the context of Kandhamal riot. As a journalist, I have attended many meetings and discussions on communalism, secularism, peace, and harmony. There, I have faced many burning questions relating to the role of media. Whether they are Christians uprooted from their villages for riot, or concerned citizens, journalist or politicians of Kandhamal, everybody has a lot of questions on the character of media. During last few years, quite a number of institutes have developed in Orissa to teach journalism. It would have been natural for them to discuss the whole gamut of journalism. Unfortunately, that is not the scene. Neither does one see any thing of this sort among intellectuals and academia of the universities of Orissa. As a result, a handful of journalists are trying to impose their fascist thinking upon the readers. There have been many allegations of false and irrelevant reporting on the riots in Kandhamal. Unfortunately, all these are confined to only meetings and discussions. Not a single civil society body has tried to analyze these and to take the media into task. The intelligentsia utterly lack moral courage to establish that mass media is not above mass scrutiny.

**RIOT & POLITICS:** Needless to say, media is controlled by a few political families. All political parties and groups have their own media houses. They have used news papers and electronic media to control the mass communication system in their own way. As a result, we get to read the language of political interest more in news papers than that of the language of humanity. Against this backdrop, the political fallout of the post-riot period can broadly be summarized as:-

1. Division between Biju Janta Dal(BJD) and Bharatiya Janta Party(BJP) on the pretext of secularism
2. BJP won two Assembly constituencies in Kandhamal but almost got wiped out in the state
3. It is a re-enactment of what happened in Indian politics after Gujurat riot: Capitalizing the Gujurat riot Narendra Modi came to power. But they had to pay heavily at the national level. Despite the powerful ‘India Shining’ campaign, BJP was defeated. The then Prime Minister had aptly said, “We

won in Gujarat but lost in India for Gujarat. BJP won the Baliguda and G.Udaygiri seats in Kandhamal. But it had to pay heavily in the rest of the state. Its number of seats in the assembly got reduced to 6 only and the percentage of votes also heavily decreased.

4. BJP tried its best to make the killing of Laxmananda an election issue. Media also covertly helped BJP in this mission. But the people of state totally rejected BJP's communal card.
5. Media had projected BJP politically more powerful than it was. Narendra Modi was in charge of Orissa during election. Though BJP's communal card was totally rejected by the people of the state, media had hardly criticized BJP for its communal politics. When the defeat was clearly for its communal politics, some sections of the media, till today, has been attributing it to EVM scam.
6. BJD as a coalition partner should have been rejected by the people for communal riot in Kandhamal and Naveen Pattanaik as chief minister should have been held accountable. But BJD played very successfully the secular card and returned to power.
7. Media analysis of BJP's electoral debacle was nothing but ridiculous. For example, O-TV, owned by Baijayanta Panda, one of the top leaders of BJD, had telecast a discussion programme in the evening the election result was declared. It had organized a special discussion on the victory of BJP in Kandhamal when it was almost wiped out in the entire state. Participants were four journalists from OTV and Mr. Ashok Sahu, the defeated MP candidate from Kandhamal. Ignoring BJP's massive defeat, OTV was unreasonably enthusiastic to highlight the victory in Kandhamal.

None of the media chiefs in Orissa is a BJP leader or worker. Important News Papers are owned either by BJD or Congress leadership. Only chief of ETV of Andhra Pradesh was a former BJP MP. Still, there was an undercurrent of sympathy towards BJP both in electronic and print media. Undoubtedly, BJP has been able to create a crop of journalist sympathetic to it. Hence, it is almost rare to see a writing criticizing the role of BJP in Kandhamal. Afraid to say, this marks a sort of ideational vacuum in the entire state in such a terrible time.

### **SAFFRON: THE NAME OF THE COLOUR**

For any media analysis it is more important to watch how is it being written than what is being written. (4) From this point of view, during the last one year media of Orissa has proved itself to be the supporters of Hindutva. Of course, some writings and comments have, here and there, been published upholding secular and democratic values. But the number is miserably less. On the other hand, most of the media space, during Kandhamal riot, was occupied by the leaders of Sangh Parivar. It can reasonably be said that Ashok Sahu, the then leader of Hindu Jagaran Samukhya, has benefited most out of it. Media had projected him as the spokesperson of Hindutva. Since then, his statements have been regularly published in newspapers in big size letters. He has been appearing regularly in

the screen of OTV. To capitalize on his media persona, he joined BJP and contested parliamentary election from Kandhmal. Subsequently, OTV projected him as the star-campaigner of BJP in the general election. This underlines the fact that media has not hesitated to project an individual known for its anti-minority and anti-secular stance. Not only Mr. Sahu. During the riot, statement of Puri Sankarcharya Swami Nischalananda Saraswati, VHP leader Gourishankar Rath, Laxmananda Sradhanjali Committee Chairman Ratnakar Chaynee and Indulat Das, one of the *margdarshikas* of Sangh Parivar have been given much importance in the media. They were the main protagonists of Kandhamal in newspapers. Though, none of them was remotely connected to Kandhamal. Still, there statements were given ample space. The motive of the media behind this has been pretty clear. Media had unconditionally supported the Sangh Parivar agenda to oppress the minority community and to show them in poor light. No wonder, Sangh Parivar sang paeans for local media.

Lack of thoughtful analysis in tele-journalism can be termed as a terrible mishap in the history of our journalism. In the national television channels, at least, an atmosphere was created for non-partisan discussion on Kandhama. But two private channels of Orissa were absolutely biased and one-sided. They were offering more and more scopes to BJP and Sangh Parivar leaders in discussion programmes. . From the beginning, Puri Gajapati and Puri Shankarcharya were given opportunity in OTV to give statements so that the killing of Laxmananda can be seen as a matter of hindu sentiment. Though in the very first day Puri Jagapati called for peace and harmony, later he was seen in Sangh Parivar sponsored programs. During that period rallies were organized by leaders of temples and *maths* and attempts were made to create an emotionally-charged atmosphere. Media was not unhesitant to highlight them. On the other hand, it was not sensitive to the problems of minority community or their apprehensions about their security. During that period civil society groups were trying to build up communal harmony not only in Kandhamal but also in other parts of the state. But the media was totally indifferent to their views or statements.

What happened in Kandhmal after Laxmananda's killing was not a riot; it was, literally, genocide. In riot, both parties have some role to play. But in Kandhamal the minority was at the receiving end. More than 50 people were killed; more than 25 thousand Christians became refuges in their own land. But Sangh Parivar played a cruel joke on them when it declared in a number of Press conferences in Bhubaneswar that hindus in Kandhamal were the worst oppressed lot. And media, without enquiring into the veracity of this statement, published it. On the other hand, TV channels were trying to prove that whatever is happening in Kandhamal is natural and consequences of the hindu sentiment.

It seems as if the TV channels are out to promote Sangh Parivar and BJP in the riot and post-riot politics of Orissa. During last one year, one of the reporters of OTV in one of its particular programs has repeatedly given space to Sangh Parivar leaders irrespective of the issues – mining scam, Jagannath cult, communalism or film 'Kamine'. On the one hand, BJD leader and Chief Minister demands, "every bone of mine is secular"; on the other hand, OTV, owned by one of the top leaders of the same party, has increasingly been saffronised. Media of the state including TV channels has thoroughly been exposed

in another incident also. In the last Assembly election, BJP candidate Mr. Manoj Pradhan won the G.Udyagiri seat from the jail. He was presented as a hero in the media when he came out of jail on bail for a brief period. It is important to note that the state Govt. has filed charge sheet against him as one of the chief conspirators of the Kandhamal riot. He has been charged with seven serious offences including murder, attempt to murder, arson and loot. Still, he has been painted as a hero in the media. He was given a special treat in one of the important programs of OTV. As usual, he had given his anti-minority statements in the program. Many baseless statements were given implicating minority community in the Kandhamal riot. It would not be wrong to say today media is giving more importance to individuals having criminal and doubtful characters. Villain is today's hero. It seems to have been the motto of the electronic media in the context of Kandhamal riot.

**ANNIVERSARY OF A CRIMINAL ACT:** 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2009 – one year to Kandhamal riot. Before this, the first death anniversary of Laxmananda was observed on Janamstami - the birth day of Lord Sri Krishan as per Hindu calendar. Before the election, Sangh Parivar was quite vocal about demanding the arrest of the conspirator and killer of Laxmananda. But that is not being noticed any more. Perhaps, the failure in achieving political benefit out of the pictures of the dead and blood-splattered body of Laxmananda and his followers, Sangh Parivar has decided not to give much importance to it. Meanwhile, the passion has cooled off. For the death anniversary of Laxmananda there was not much arrangement from Sangh Parivar. But the media of Orissa was much more enthusiastic about it. Representatives of news papers and TV channels had camped at Kandhamal much earlier. Every tit bits of the ceremony were directly telecast. One has to find out why media is so over-zealous about it. Is it that the media of Orissa is not only being controlled by the thinking of the Sangh Parivar but also by the organization of Sangh Parivar itself?

23<sup>rd</sup> August 2008 is not only a day to recall the death of Laxmananda. It is a day, at least for the people of Orissa, to recall that we are human beings with human empathy. What happened in Kandhamal from 23<sup>rd</sup> August to October 2008 still make us tremble in fear today. But media had no word of sympathy for riot victims of Kandhamal. Rather, they were more concerned that the killers and conspirators of Laxmananda not yet apprehended. But this whole theory of “killers and conspirators” has been manufactured by Sangh Parivar. It has categorically blamed the minority community for the killing. So, it is duty of Hindus to wipe out the minority community. Thousands of leaflets have been distributed by Sangh Parivar all across the state with this message. Their leaders were uttering the same line in meetings. Unfortunately, media offered more space to these statements.

(This one is the draft copy of my report on the media role in Kandhamal riot-2009)

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