

Kandhamal Riot and Mass Media-2008

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“To be true to my faith, therefore, I may not write in anger or malice, I may not write idly. I may not write merely to excite passion”

- Mahatma Gandhi, Young India

“Khondmal is Burning,” “Church Torched in Khondmal”, “Khondmal is Simmering Again”, etc. made headlines in the newspapers of Orissa. Here I make an attempt to study the way the mass media has depicted the life devastated in the Khondmal riot of December 2007 and analyse it and the role it has played in the state politics centring the riot-affected people. In trying to make an analysis of it I have taken into consideration the news and articles on Khondmal riot, the interviews with the journalists involved in it, clippings of electronic media, the news on the net and reports of fact-finding groups. The mass media unanimously agree that the riot affecting the Christmas in last December is out and out communal in nature and is based on intolerance.

Even if a dividing line was attempted to be drawn between international, national and local media, both electronic and in print, on the nature and cause of this riot, all of them had established it the same way. The Hindu fundamentalist Rastriya Syamsevak Sangh had made one such attempt in the local and national media. The report on January 3, 2008 in www.sanghaparivar.com ran:

“Many media, mostly the national and international, without a reality check – went overdrive to paint a wrong picture about the entire sequence of events. Very few investigated the reasons of the violence put the blame squarely on the Hindus. Only burning of churches and prayer houses were reported, not the lethal attack on the Hindu seer Laxmanananda Saraswati found due place in the newspapers. Not the death of a Hindu - which was immediate provocation for the communal clash – was properly highlighted. Even Maoists joining hands with Christians in attacking tribals was ignored by the international and national media.”

However, the vernacular press predominantly reflected what actually happened on the ground and found Christians being the initiator of the latest hostility between the communities. The followers of Christ faith were in the forefront of attack and they attacked Hindu hamlets and attacked the police and even collaborated with Maoists in attacking the kondh tribals, they reported.

Warning for the Local Media

This news of RSS is untrue and motivated. Almost all the local newspapers and TV channels have clearly stated that the Christians were worst affected in this riot and that they were the victims of the hatred-based politics of RSS. Here are mentioned a few excerpts from the newspapers :

“The Brahmanigaon and Daringbadi are tense due to mutual distrust. There are clashes and house-burnings. No particular community can be blamed for this. The minority community had to face the wrath and violence of the majority. Even after getting the intelligence report the Administration did not take necessary steps. As a result of which the riot spread to nearby regions. The Viswa Hindu Parishad played a major role in the worst affected village, Brahmanigaon; so did the majority of Christians in Daringbadi. After its primary investigation the Samaj reported that the Viswa Hindu Parishad and the controversial Collector of the district, Bhabagrahi Mohapatra were solely responsible for the communal riot that began on the last twentyfourth. The Parishad says that the riot ensued after its leader Swami Laxmananda was attacked which is not true. Rather, it was the VHP which first initiated it in Brahmanigaon”.

(The Samaj, December 30, 2007)

On 25th evening more than 3000 supporters of VHP and RSS came to Barakhama with weapons and lathis. They began with looting and ended with damaging property. The houses of 285 Christians were burnt within an hour. 215 houses were half-burnt or damaged. Lakhs of rupees, golden ornaments and costly home appliances were looted. Even the pet animals were not spared.

These two reports have clearly held Sangha Parivar responsible for riot. Both the electronic media and mass media have firmly condemned the role of Sangha Parivar. There is yet a conspiracy in branding the local media as the sympathizer of the Sangha Parivar. A dividing line was also drawn regarding the true nature of the local and national media in the Gujarat riot. The Gujarati media was said to be the blind supporter of the Sangha Parivar. This divisive role of the Sangh Parivar is nothing new. The Sangh Parivar lauded the local media to have used local identity as a weapon.

THE MENTAL CONFLICT IN MASS MEDIA

If one looks at the reports of all the three TV channels from Orissa. i.e. ETV, OTV and Doordarshan and Oriya dailies it will be clear that the true causes of the riot have not been deeply analysed. Its one reason is the religious meanness and elite mind set. It is alleged by some Christian organisations that as the local media is in the hands of the highcaste Hindus the Christian minority has not got its due. This allegation is not absolutely baseless. No doubt, the Sangha Parivar has been implicated in this riot. Yet at the same time the Christians have been held accused for their role in conversion. Another aspect of these reports is its lack of study and analysis. One can very well discern the mental conflicts of the reporting journalists. Even if they report that the Sangh Parivar is responsible for the riot they somehow entangle the Christian minority in it.

The purported attack on Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati on the 24th was grossly exaggerated in the media. The journalists took Swamiji's words as the base of their reporting. The opinions of both the parties present there were not taken into consideration. The ETV report gave so much importance to it that the later incidents were ascribed to the ETV's reporting. The mass media is equipped with the power to unearth the conspiracy of communalism and has the responsibility to abate it. The local media has failed in this role. Our journalists have made the maximum utilization of their imagination in describing the plight of the riot-affected people. All that the affected people said lacked the element of suffering in it. It is a matter of shame. The statements of Swami Laxmananda and the leaders at Sangh Parivar occupy prominent position in the news reports. The statements of the affected Christians have been deliberately ignored. Our local media seem to be totally ignorant of the sense of dignity and sympathy which is there for the minorities in a democracy.

On the other hand, all those national dailies which have local editions give importance to the statement of the government officials. The reportings for the Times of India, Indian Express, The Pioneer, The Hindu, etc. were done from the Secretariate in Bhubaneswar. By giving importance to what the Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary, the Home Secretary and Director General, Police said the national dailies overlooked the true nature of the incident. Very few journalists visited the riotaffected area.

Khondmal burnt from Christmas to new year. All the political parties and the Sangh Parivar tried to fish out of the troubled water. Ironically, the mass media boosted their image. It has been stated earlier that the local media lacked sensitivity to deal with communal feelings. No newspaper or electronic media tried to analyse the situation. Instead, their erroneous reporting stoked the riot.

THE CONSPIRACY OF THE SANGH PARIVAR

“There is no use burning tyres on the road. Tell me, how many houses of the Christians you have burnt? There will be no peace without revolution. Narendra Modi brought about revolution in Gujrat. That is why peace is there.”

In response to the so-called attack on him, the eighty-two-year-old Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati had made this statement from the Daringbari Health Centre in the very presence of the police and journalists. Surprisingly it was given more prominence in the national media than in the local ones. The reason is obvious. The local media did not want to displease the Swami and the Hindu majority reader as a whole. The proprietors of the Oriya dailies who are more interested in making profit than upholding ideals preferred indifference to neutrality in such a sensitive issue. The Fourth Estate had not come

forward to give protection to the minority community. After the riot when it was compared with that of Gujarat at the national and international level, the Sangh Parivar used the local media. They had argued that it was caste-based and that it was not communal in nature. Radhakant Nayak, the previous administrator and present Congress M. P., was implicated in it. Another matter of surprise was that his reaction was not sought in this regard. At the time of riot the Sangh Parivar demanded the arrest of Radhakant Nayak who was staying at Delhi. The local media seemed to give importance to the unjustified demand of the Sangh Parivar. The opinions of all the sections of the society were not taken into consideration at the time of the riot or after that. The local media did not bother as to why the Sangh Parivar was demanding the arrest of Radhakant Nayak. All of them competed to present their reports in a manner conducive to the BJB-BJP coalition government. The ex-Minister Padmanav Behera who was made a scapegoat was not given adequate scope to express his opinion.

At the time Khondmal was burning The Samaj carried a report based on the interview with Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati, in which it was stated that conversion was the root cause of unrest at Khondmal. This report published from Cuttack rather than abating the Khondmal riot fuelled it. The report ran like this :

The Government as well as the missionaries engaged in conversion are responsible for the situation in Khondmal. They could be the trouble-shooter. The path-finder for the VHP, Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati has stated that the Hindus are only defending themselves. After the alleged attack by the Christians on 24th, Swami Laxmanananda being treated in Cabin No.3 of the Surgery Department gave an exclusive interview to The Samaj in which he said that the missionaries are trying to establish special Christian zones in the divided districts of Bhulbani, Koraput, Kalahandi, Bolangir and in Bhanjanagar of the district Ganjam, Khandapada of the district of Nayagarh and in Anugul and Athamalik. For this money flows from such Christian countries like the U.S. and the U.K. The Swami and his supporters are working towards the preservation of Hinduism. Their efforts have resulted in the drastic reduction in conversion and many converted Christians have come back to the Hindu fold. Infuriated at it, some people have attempted to kill him. Asked about the possible solution to this problem at Khondmal, Swamiji has said that this was the spontaneous protest of the Hindus. No government can stop this. The age-old dissatisfaction of the Hindus are now ventilated. In it he had no role to play. After massive protest the missionaries desisted from conversion but after the Congress Party came to power they have become active. If the conversion comes to an end there will automatically be no unrest in the state. Giving information on the event of the 24th, Swamiji who does not want to reveal his past said that day he along with his five supporters set out by a Marshal Jeep from Jalespeta to Brahmanigaon. At Daringbari which is five kilometers from Daringbari there stood a bus obstructing traffic. Despite repeated horns when the bus did not move the driver of Marshal jeep Naresh Kanhr and Kishore Pradhan accosted the bus driver. That was when they were attacked by the people in the bus along with the villagers who rushed there. It was by his presence of

mind that Naresh had a narrow escape. Out of three hundred families in that village only one was a Hindu family. From this figure one can realize the grave situation in Khondmal, says the Swamiji who has been active against conversion in Khondmal.

The language and tone of this report must have suited the Hindu fundamentalists. The local media has made tremendous effort to establish Laxmanananda Saraswati as the symbol of Hinduism. Praising him, The Organiser, the mouth piece of the Sangh Parivar wrote. "Four-decade-long sadhana at Chakapad has successfully awakened the spirit of Hindutva among the Vanavasis and drawn them away from the clutches of missionaries." But this Sanyasi is more immersed in power politics than in meditation. It is due to his leadership at Chakapad that Khondmal is kept burning. No media has questioned Laxmanananda. All of them have been showing respect to this old sanyasi. There is no problem in showing respect to a religious man. But the role of Laxmanananda is that of a villain since in the name of stopping conversion and ensuing a process of purification he has only created an atmosphere of religious intolerance. We get the hint of it from the description of the turn of events. The media is agog in the description of events as it is laudatory in highlighting Laxmanananda. The mental inflict in media is due to this paradoxical stand.

Tehelka 19, January 2008 described Laxmanananda as belonging to washerman community and that he established an ashrama at Chakapad in 1969, from where he started propagating Hinduism. As the Hindu Sanyasis keeps his past a secret one could not have got to know anything about Laxmanananda from his own mouth. Laxmanananda Saraswati has been publicly saying that he has been trying since 1969 when he established an ashram at Chakapad to save Khondmal from being a totally Christian dominated area. Even as his statements are loaded with elements that is prone to creating tension the local media has been lionizing him. Before riot ensued at Brahmanigaon, Laxmanananda repeatedly held meetings there and provoked the public to attack the Christians. Although he has been directly or indirectly involved in stoking riot he has not been arrested. This old sage plays a clear role in speaking ill against the Christian missionaries and the Dalit Christians of Khondmal, in blocking roads and in staging hunger strikes and above all keeping Khondmal in unrest.

The 2007 Khondmal riot was not all unpremeditated. It was aimed at eliminating the minority Christians from Khondmal. Laxmanananda played a leading role in the agitation to establish a Hindu rashtra. On the occasion of the birth centenary of one of the leaders of Sangha Parivar on April 2006 the Sangh parivar organized Astamatruka Rath Yatra in Khondmal. Indians are suffering yet from the poisonous reaction of Lal Krishna Advani's Rath Yatra in the context of Ram Janmabhumi. There has been repeated Ratha Yatras in Khondmal. The anti-christian slogans are kept alive through Yajna, Yatra and Purification process. The Sangh Parivar rose in protest against the breaking of Rama Setu in Tamil Nadu. Regular conspiracies were hatched in Chakapad Ashram. The local Administration was aware of it yet no perceptible steps were taken. Instead of projecting Hindu Sameelan of April 2006 as communal in nature it was showcased as a religious jamboree. The local minority had to face its consequences in December 2007. It was not an end in itself. Even today Khondmal remains an insecure place for the minorities. On

July 8, 2008 there was tension in Khondmal which centred round the slaughter of a cow.

The Dharitri, July 10, 2008 writes on it

“Again Khondmal is burning. No sooner the people of Khondmal have forgotten the trauma of the riot of December 2007 than there has risen tension in Tumuribandh. That to, it centres around the slaughter of a cow. The conflict within the communities is simmering in Mattipara of Tamudibandh Block. At this time due to the opposition of a Baba in Jalespeta to the slaughter of a cow he has been attacked. Opposing this incident the VHP has called for a strike in Khondmal. So far the Bandh is peaceful.”

In another report The Samaj says,

“It has been noticed that Tumudibandh Block of Khondmal district is going to be a site of another riot. Only one kilometer away from the headquarters of this Block, where the cow was slaughtered and against which there was protest, Bulubaba alias Brundaban Nanda who is the chief disciple of Laxmanananda Saraswati was attacked. It had a state-wide reaction. With the spread of the news of Bulubaba’s camera being snatched away, the blood of the slaughtered cow being smeared on him and the attack on him, the Bandh was observed in G. Udaygiri, Raikia, Baliguda and Tumudibandh and VHP called for a twelve-hour Bandh throughout the State.

As in previous riots, the media did not play a neutral role in this riot. The allegations that Swami Laxmanananda and his disciples brought forward were blown out of proportion. The non-Hindus eat beef; no Hindu has any right to snatch away that right from them. The motif behind Laxmanananda’s and his brigand’s protest is only to create tension. In a secular state it is a matter of irony that sanyasi should be encouraged in mass media to indulge in mean activities like blocking the road by cutting down trees, holding hunger strike abusing the minority and blaming the Administration if it is not supportive of his activities.

EDITORIAL IRRESPONSIBILITY

The local media has failed utterly to analyse and evaluate the Khondmal riot. So did the Administration, civic society, political parties, local leadership and the police. If one analyses the reports and editorials of the local papers it will show clearly how they have failed to hint at the failure of others. The Khondmal riot started on 24th. The Samaj in its 30th and 31st December 2007 and 1st January 2008 editions carried three reports under the title “Postmortem”. Those three reports were full of contradictions, and were misleading. While The Samaj blamed in its first report the VHP, it blamed the Christians in the second and the Naxals in the third report for the riot at Khondmal. One thing that is clear from it that The Samaj was not sure about its stand in this issue. The most interesting thing was that there was not even a single statement of any affected person in their one thousand and five hundred-word article. Nor were the opinions or reactions of

the minority community placed in it. The report on 31.12.2007 ran like this :

Getting foreign fund, support of two retired IAS Officers and encouragement of local MPs the Christians in the sensitive district of Kondhmal are said to be getting more and more strengthened. As a consequence, the caste-based conflict of Kondhmal has taken the shape of communal riot. The Kondh-Paan conflict was the main conflict in Kondhmal but two retired IAS Officers and the local MP have started encouraging the Christians. The pouring of foreign fund has acted like ghee in fire. In no circumstances the tribals of Kondhmal fall victim to the allurements of the Christians to get converted. The two retired IAS officers are exercising their power and contact to get funds for tempting the tribals. It has come to such a stage that if there are five wards in a village there are five churches or prayer halls in that village. With their blessing from those officers and MPs the Paans try to show off their affluence to the tribals and poor Hindus. This has resulted in a large scale dissatisfaction even among the tribal Christians. While the tribals are Baptists the Paans are Roman Catholics. Only in Siarigaon of Katingia Panchayat and in Saraguda some tribals are Roman Catholics. Baliguda, Ghumusar, Udayagiri, Nuagaon and Daringbadi Blocks have a large number of Christians in comparison to other Blocks of the district.

What could be the purpose of this report ? It is childish to claim that riots become frequent with the increase of numbers of prayer halls and organizations of the minority community. It is still more ridiculous to make issues out of it in prominent newspapers. Due to baseless and misleading reports people become biased. It is surprising that the journalist who asks the minority community people about their foreign funding does not ask the same question to the Hindu fundamentalists. Nobody asks whose assistance has helped the Chakapad Ashram grow in the last twenty years. Where from do crores of rupees come to support the Hindu organization and its movement ? Before bringing Radhakant Naik, John Naik and Issac Behera to the witness box our journalists should not forget to ask the same question to the Orissa branch of BJP. While Kondhmal was burning how did the newspaper publish in bold letters the BJP's irresponsible statement "Kandhmal Riot is the creation of Christian NGOs?" The BJP leaders have not been questioned further about this statement in press conferences. The Prajatantra on 17.1.2008 ran the following report :

The BJP has alleged that some organizations run by the Christians are responsible for the present riot at Khondmal. For this purpose the names of some organizations and NGOs operating there have been published. Jewel Oram, a senior leader of BJP, in a press conference on Wednesday said that a deceptive news is given currency. It is said that the Christians there are a minority. The Hindus have been oppressing them and that this not is created by VHP and BJP. But this is absolutely false. The truth is that the Hindus are a minority there and they are being oppressed instead. In Brahmanigaon Christians numbering about 5000 attacked the Hindus. Their houses were burnt. Visiting that area Jewel Oram came to know that those Christians were armed and supported by such

NGOs as Action Aid, NISWAS, SFDC, Aama Gaon, CPSW and Alok Grama.

The communal politics operates on baseless and misleading facts. We get to hear such a voice from Jewel Oram. Here the question is whether the journalists should have quoted him in verbatim ? He has only lied. He is not supported by facts when he is alleging anybody. It is nothing but political motivation to bring changes against any organization without facts and proofs. By encouraging such sick mentality the mass media is setting a dangerous trend.

On January 10, 2008 The Sambad carried an editorial essay by Banabihari Panda, the former Director General of Police. Such type of editorial page articles are supposed to be based on facts and analysis of those facts. But it was nothing but a collage of reports, rumours and so-called news. Banabihari Panda wrote :

The event following it is attack on Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati. It was reported in the newspapers that about 200 people armed with lathis, sticks and spears stopped his vehicle and attacked him. This incident is solely responsible for the riot in Khondmal. Many opine that had this incident not happened the riot would not have spread so rapidly. Therefore those who attacked him should be booked and punished. Some churches were burnt. That is to be condemned. Church is a prayer hall, where God is worshipped. Those who committed this crime should be punished. Likewise it is reported that five temples have been razed. Those who did it should be equally punished. Burning a church or breaking a temple is unpardonable. All those miscreants should punished.”

It was never considered whether such an article should be carried as an editorial piece. There is no official report that any temple was razed in Khondmal. The media did not report from this angle either. Some leaders like Jewel Oram have shamelessly claimed that the Christians are not a minority in Khondmal. The population of the district of Khondmal is 6,48,201. Out of that while 5,27,757 are Hindu 1,17,950 are Christian. Instead of refuting misleading facts of the leaders the media has highlighted them. Excepting a few stray villages in Khondmal the rest of the villages have a minority of Christian population. The Sangh Parivar claimed that it is a caste-based conflict not a communal riot : so did the mass media.

The Sangh Parivar have repeatedly changed its role in the context of the Kondhmal riot. If now it claims that Kondhmal unrest is due to conversion then it would say that it is merely caste-related conflict. In order to suppress the event the spokes person of the Sangh parivar, Ram Madhab had written in rediff.com on January 8, 2008, “We must not ignore the fact that Kondhmal is for that matter many such incidents have been a localized incident; not a phenomenon as the candlelightwalas should want us to believe.”

The Sangh Parivar had advised the civilized society to take it lightly. Further, that it was not a communal riot; rather there are many political reasons involved in it. And the local media knowingly or unknowingly acted as a facilitator. Within a week only three persons died while hundreds went missing. 71 churches, 48 prayer halls, 5 convent schools, 7 hostels, 2 vocational centres, more than 500 houses and 126 shops were burnt. Fire was

the greatest weapon in it. In this heinous attempt to wipe out the minority the media did not even play a neutral, not to speak of a deterrent role.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RIOT?

The wound of the riot of December 2007 is yet to heal. Finding ever other excuse the Hindu fundamentalist organizations and the organizations at the district level at Khondmal, supported by them have been blocking roads and staging demonstrations. Trying to analyse their causes the media have only misled the public opinion. They lack data. Even if they might have it they do not analyse it. In preparing this project I have collected and analysed more than 200 reports, articles, editorials and interviews. Some of the reports have already been analysed. The reports I have analysed have clearly reflected the mental conflict of the journalists and how they have confused the general public. The journalists never concentrated on certain required points. Those reports repeatedly blamed conversion and appropriation of land as main causes of riots. In its article, "Behind the Unrest of the Kondhmal" on July 11, 2008 The Sambad wrote :

"Appropriation of land of the Adivasis is one of the major reasons which contribute towards conflict in Kondhmal. It is for years that deceptive methods have been taken to appropriate the lands of the Adivasis, thereby displacing them. As a result, they are like refugees in their own native place. The provision has it that a non-Adivasi cannot buy an Adivasi's land. As per the Regulation II, 3 and 4, 1956 a special court has been created under the Sub-Collectors of Phulbani and Baliguda. Such cases are to be tried on priority basis in these courts while many cases of appropriation of Adivasi Lands by non-Adivasis are pending in this court. There are many instances when the Adivasis who won the decree have not been able to get back their lands due to lack of assistance of Administration and police. As there is a dearth of household and cultivable lands in Kondhmal its inhabitants are facing a lot of difficulty. If they get their household land and cultivation land much of their problems could be solved. In Kondhmal the loss of caste is another root cause of unrest."

Reports of this kind have created a wrong idea among the people that it is caste-related conflict and not due to communal feeling. There is an attempt to draw a divisive line among the Paans and the Kondhs. Seventeen percent of the population of the district is of Dalit caste. Ninety percent of them are Christians. Eighty percent of them are landless. Without mentioning concrete cases our journalists have built a context. According to 2001 Census, of the total population of the district, i.e. 6,48,201, 3,36,809 are Adivasis. They constitute 52% of the total population. Another section has created conflict between 52% Adivasi and 17% Dalits. The mass media is precisely silent about them. It is a worth-mentioning fact that majority of the journalists of this district represent that third section. They are not the original inhabitants of the district. Coming from other districts they have bought the lands of the Adivasis and are settling there. Another strange fact is that in Kondhmal there are not much lands under the ownership of the raiyats. 88% of the

land of the district is in the ownership of the government. Out of that 71% is reserved forest and 17% un-reserved forest. There is only 12% of the ownership of the land by the individuals. Those who benefit most from the 12% of the land are the ones who have come to and settled in Khondmal. If an analysis of population growth of this district from 1961 to 2001 is made it will be like this : Adivasis 70%, Dalits 60%, whereas non-Adivasi and non-Dalit Hindus are 134%. This unnatural growth is the root of all problems. The Adivasis and Dalits are exploited; their lands are snatched away from them. In this regard both are victims of exploitation. The mass media has never given importance to it.

As there is no cordial relationship between the Khonds and Paans a fictitious history about them has been spread by the local Hindu fundamentalist organizations and political parties. Regarding it L. S. S. O'Malley says in his Bengal District Gazetteer, which was published in 1908 :

In the Khondmals, the Paans were the serfs of the Khonds. They worked on their farms and wove cloth for them, in return for which they obtained a small area of land, grain for food and all their marriage expenses; they used also to procure victims for the Meriah sacrifices. Their serfdom was so well recognized that if a Paan left his master and worked for another, it caused serious dissensions among the Khond community. To this day there is a settlement of Paans – a kind of Ghetto – attached to every large khond village, where they weave the cloth the Khonds require and work as farm labourers. The picture remains more or less the same today except for the Meriah sacrifice. In lieu of Meriah, buffaloes are being procured for sacrifice.

The Adivasis and the Dalits are having a long history of living together. After the emergence of the fundamentalist Hindu organisations in the seventies there has been an ebb in their relationship. Consequentially there has been more than five riots in Khondmal since 90s. There have been repeated attempts to suppress the Christian organizations operating in this district. It has already been mentioned that there are more than five lakh Hindus in this district. Basically the Adivasis are not Hindus; they have their own customs and tradition. They have been constantly projected on the official as well as non-official levels as Hindus. When the Sangha Parivar started this programme in Orissa it chose Khondmal as it is dominated by the tribals. It tried to inculcate in the Adivasis a feeling through different ways that they too are Hindus. Some local leaders who used adivasis to gain political mileage joined the Sangh parivar. The nexus between the Sangh parivar and the leaders of the Adivasis came to light during the riot. The joint efforts of the Kui society and the Sangh Parivar made the riot more complicated. That complication is yet to be untangled. Even today Khondmal is tense and the lives of the minority community is threatened.

CONCLUSION

An internal feud has already been noticed between Khondmal and mass media. The life story of the tribals and Dalits has rarely been rightfully portrayed in the local newspapers

owned by high caste and higher class people. Different political parties have used the media very often to further their interest. The first newspaper to be published from Orissa, which was one hundred and fifty years ago and run by Christian missionaries was Prabodh Chandrika. It had carried news of the conflict between the Kondhs and the administrators of the colonizers. It ran like this :

“The news has reached us that in Khondmal early at dawn on December 6, many Kondhs armed with arrows attacked the Agent Sahib. The Agent had with him the Laskars. As the Kondhs shot arrows at him he ordered the Laskars to fire at them. One of the Kondhs died on the spot. Frightened, they retreated and are gathering at a distance. The reason as to why the Kondhs are acting like this is not yet clear.”

At that time the Christian Missionaries could not lay a finger at the problems of Kondhs. They could dare to mention the incident clearly because they could not understand their problems. At a later period the missionaries had remarkably joined the colonizers in helping them in the field of health and education. That is why the number of Christians increased in Khondmal. It was not just the Dalits who were converted. The Adivasis also followed the Dalits’ footsteps. It was possible due to the selfless service of the missionaries. There was no communal tension in Khondmal till 70s of twentieth century. It was only after the appearance of the Sangh Parivar at Kondhmal that the poisonous seed was sown there, which has later sprouted into riots.

The Editorial Guild of India has laid out categorical rules which should be followed while reporting the riots. I have already discussed how the media has failed to follow those rules in reporting riots from Khondmal. Finally here I sum up some pertinent points regarding the reports of the media on riot at Khondmal :

1. In the context of the Khondmal riot, the media committed a major mistake by doing a wrong analysis of the basic facts regarding the district.
2. The language used in the media for the minority was one of disdain and pity, which is to be condemned.
3. No importance was attached to the opinion of the minority community. On the contrary, the statements of the fundamentalist Hindus and their organisations were dealt with in a great detail.
4. The intellectuals and experts in the field were not asked about their opinions on the riot. Whatever articles by the eminent persons that came out in the newspapers were by the retired IAS or IPS officers.
5. The opinions of the ones affected in the riot were never published. Another matter of regret is that the hearts of the journalists did not melt to present the sad tale of the

victims. Very often the journalists wrote as per their whim. There was not much effort by the editors to look into it.

6. By mentioning the involvement of the Naxals in the movement against the industrialization and globalization the journalists have been only showing their true colours. There is no proof of the Naxal's involvement in the religious or communal conflicts. The media unnecessarily tried to show the involvement of Naxals in the Khondmal riot. In that ignoble effort they also tried to rope in some voluntary organizations and secular intellectuals.

7. In stead of following the journalistic norms, most of the reports were driven by political compulsions. It seems every newspaper reflected a particular party's stand or an ism. In this case the tendency was more towards achieving political benefits rather maintaining high standard of humanitarianism. It has only left a stigma on the morality of the local media.

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