

ANNEXURE G

Violence Against The Cross

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On 6th May (2007) two evangelists were beaten up by the Bajrang Dal/VHP workers and police arrested them on the charges of conversions. On the same day Christians returning from the Marathoma church in Narasapur, Kolar near Bangalore were beaten up by RSS workers and threatened that the church must close down in ten days. On 3rd May, a group of twenty Christians, who had assembled in house, were beaten up resulting in the fractures on couple of them, and police did not register the complaint on the first approach, in a place in SargujaChattisgarh. On May first, in Sikandara area of Agra, a group of BajrangDalis attacked a Christian school when the board meeting was going on.

These are amongst the few incidents of anti-Christian violence, which have come to light in the span of few days. The anti Christian violence has been going on from over a decade, on regular basis, on low scale but consistently. Few of these incidents had been very frightening and drew the attention of the nation like, the burning of Pastor Graham Stains on 22nd Jan 1998, the burning of Bibles and attack on Churches in Gujarat amongst others. Anti Christian violence has been carefully orchestrated and the propaganda which precedes these is that Christian missionaries are converting by force and fraud.

In the wake of burning of Pastor Stains many a columnists and propagandists harped on this point of conversion till Wadhva Commission appointed by the then NDA government gave the report that Pastor Stains was not involved in the work of conversions and also that the area where the Pastor was working did not see any increase in the percentage of Christian population. It is an interesting fact that while the RSS campaign through VanvasiKalyanAhsram, VHP and Bajrag Dal has popularized that Christians are converting by force and fraud, at the same time the demographic data as culled out from the Census figures show that there has been a constant decline in the percentage of Christian population during last four decades, 1971-2.60, 1981-2.44, 1991-2.34 and 2001-2.30. Apparently this is due to comparative better educational levels amongst Christians. Indian Christianity is older than the one in US or many other Christian majority countries. St. Thomas set up Churches in Malabar Coast as early as AD 52, since then the Christian missions have been working in different facets of India's social life. To them goes the credit for setting up educational and health facilities in many remote areas, as well as in many cities. Paradoxically while the Christian missionaries in the remote areas are being attacked, their counterparts working in the cities are managing hospitals and educational institutions, which are a hot favorite not only with the urban middle class but also with those who keep spewing hate against these missionaries.

Indian Christianity is very old but the issue of conversions by Christian missionaries is comparatively a recent one. It began to be raised in late fifties, but really speaking this tirade has picked up steam from mid-eighties with the rise of identity politics and the rise in the activities of VanvasiKalyanAhsram. During this period many a Babas and Acharyas went and set up camps in Adivasis areas and began their work of Hinduising them. The

GharVapsi(return home) campaign was flagged off with newly devised techniques of Hindusing them. Political calculations behind this were to get a big electoral support for the BJP, which got reflected, in the success of BJP in Adivasi areas. In later times the anti-conversion bills, started being put forward in different states, the politics behind this became clear with Jayalalitha, who got it passed in Tamil Nadu and when she lost out badly in Lok Sabha elections she got the same bill rescinded.

The Anti-Christian violence is much different than the anti-Muslim violence. The latter began in the areas where there was some competition between Muslim and Hindu traders and was taken to the intense heights on various pretexts and more so in the after math of Babri demolition and the pretext of Godhra train burning. Unlike the intense bloodbath of anti-Muslim violence Anti-Christian violence is most of the time low key and in Adivasi areas. Even in areas where Adivasis are less than 0.5% of population this is made an issue like in Gujarat.

There is a social dimension to the problem In the Adivasi areas; there is an intensified move to popularize Hanuman and Shabri as the holy deities in these areas. In urban areas Ram and Laxmi-Durga are in vogue. It is a case of giving message of social agenda, the place of Adivasi in the scheme of Hindu rashtra. It is an attempt to idolize destitution amongst Adivasis, who are asking for their land rights after their empowerment due to education. It is due to this that the attempts of Christians to spread education in these areas are not to the liking of the practitioners of identity politics. To prevent the Adivasis from getting educated may be the main agenda of VHP/Bajrang Dal and attack on Christian missionaries are meant to frighten them away from these areas. Same Christian missionaries working in education field are more than acceptable in urban areas.

As such there are multiple reasons for RSS combine to unleash the anti-Christian violence. RSS politics is built around creation of external enemies. While Indian nationalism constructs the communities in an inclusive manner, the RSS politics excludes Muslims and Christians from their concept of nation and also projects them as threats to Hindu nation. In this direction it constructs their image as external enemies. The anti-Christian violence attempts to supplement this RSS agenda. To begin, so far Muslims have been attacked and presented as a threat. With this violence aimed against Christians, one more creation of 'external enemy' is under progress. This in turn consolidates the section of Hindus and to also to mobilize larger section of Hindus around the politics of Hindutva. This politics of Hindutva is for status quo, to maintain the hegemony of dominant castes and in that direction the attacks on Christian missionaries ensures that the process of empowerment of Adivasis through the education process is averted. Thirdly this politics also wants to co-opt them to be able to use them against the 'other enemy', the Muslims. This last one was witnessed in Gujarat where Adivasis were used to do the violence for the communal forces.

The scattered attacks on the Christian missionaries working in remote places speaks a lot about the nature of the political formation carrying out these attacks, their agenda of regarding Muslims and Christians as internal threat to Nation explains the current politics which is far from the one which should be seen in a civil society!

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