

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SCENARIO OF CHRISTIANS AND THEIR CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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Introduction: The word ‘religion’ comes from the Latin word *religare* which means ‘to bind together’. Religion is a unifying and uplifting force for men towards God¹. Religion can be defined as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things,” which make the believers be united “into one single moral community called a Church”². Hence religion refers to a community of believers with a set of beliefs and practices. The promise of eternity and absolute truth is also a hallmark of all religions³. Indeed, religious beliefs and practices are an expression of man’s innate and insatiable desire towards God⁴. Undeniably, religion has brought diverse groups together and provided basic moral principles upon which societies have been built⁵.

Today in the world there are many religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and so on. So, human persons require freedom to embrace any religion according to the conviction of their conscience. This freedom is known as ‘religious freedom’. Fundamentally, ‘freedom’ is understood as a state of being free particularly for making personal choices without coercion or restraint. It implies that there are two elements of freedom such as freedom to choose and freedom from obstruction⁶. This scientific paper

¹ M. FRASSETTO, “Preface”, in J. SAFRA (ed.), *Britannica encyclopedia of world religions*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., Chicago 2006, 8.

² E. DÜRKHEIM, *The elementary forms of religious life*, The Free Press, New York 1995, 44 (The original edition in French: *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse. Le système totémique en Australie*, F. Alcan, Paris 1912).

³ J. REHMAN, “Accommodating religious identities in an Islamic State. International law, freedom of religion and the rights of religious minorities”, in *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 7 (2000), 141.

⁴ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Washington 1992, n. 27.

⁵ Cf. M. FRASSETTO, “Preface”, 9.

⁶ Cf. J. MARSHALL, *Personal freedom through human rights law? Autonomy, identity and integrity under the European convention on human rights*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Boston 2009, 16.

dwells in detail the Socio-Political Scenario of Christians and their challenges in contemporary India.

1.1 Christianity at a glance in India

Christianity in India has a long history. There is a popular tradition that St. Thomas, one of the Apostles of Jesus came to India in AD 52 for his mission and was stabbed to death with a trident spear in AD 72 in south India. The presence of the mission of St. Thomas in India is substantiated by the text called “The Acts of Thomas” and “The *Thomma Parvam*” (Song of Thomas). Afterwards, when there was a religious persecution in Persia, around 400 Christians belonging to the Syrian rite came and settled in south India in AD 354⁷. Later, the Portuguese colony in India created an opportunity for the arrival of the Catholic western missionaries such as Dominicans, Augustinians, Carmelites, Capuchins and Jesuits from the fifteenth century onwards. Particularly, the Jesuit missionaries like St. Francis Xavier, Robert de Nobili and St. John de Britto had a great impact on the Catholic mission in India. Besides the Catholic mission, the Protestant mission was started in India from 1706 onwards particularly by German missionaries like Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plutschau. Moreover, the British colony too allowed the western Christian missionaries to continue their mission in India. As a result, even the Pentecostal movements started spreading in India from 1906 onwards⁸. Today Christian population in India is approximately 45 million. Among them the Roman Catholics (Latin, East Syrian and West Syrian rites) form 20-25 million, Protestants including Pentecostals have 16-25 million, the Orthodox (Malankara Orthodox Syrian and Syrian Orthodox) have 4-6 million⁹.

Even though Christianity in India has a long history, the Indian right-wing nationalists make the majoritarian Hindu community believe that Christians, particularly Christian colonies, have destroyed the ancient and golden Hindu epoch. They cleverly use historiography as a great weapon to prove their Hindu antiquity and legitimacy to subjugate Christians in India¹⁰. This has created an enormous success for them in Indian politics in

⁷ Cf. R.E. FRYKENBERG, *Christianity in India from beginnings to the present*, Oxford University Press, New York 2008, 93, 99-100.

⁸ Cf. D.B. DAUGHRITY – J.M. ATHYAL, *Understanding world Christianity. India*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2016, 15-42.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

¹⁰ Cf. F. GONSALVES, “Populism and religious nationalism in India”, in *Concilium* 2 (2019), 27.

recent years. As a result, the Indian Christians face a lot of challenges from the hands of right-wing nationalists. Let us analyse them.

1.2 Anti-conversion Law

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in its article 18, ICCPR in its general comment number 22, the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief in its article 1 guarantee the right to conversion. Moreover, ICCPR Article 18(1) and 19(2), and the 1981 Declaration in its article 6 permit the right to try to convert others (missionary activity) in various forms like teaching¹¹. However, it was reported in December 2015, 42 countries, including India have restricted conversion from one religion to another. Moreover, Heiner Bielefeldt, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the freedom of religion or belief from 2010 to 2016, expressed that violations of the right to convert have become a human rights problem of great concern¹².

In India, the Indian Constitution in its article 25(1) gives the right to profess, practise and propagate religion. But in India 8 States of 29 States namely Odisha in 1967, Madhya Pradesh in 1968, Arunachal Pradesh in 1978, Chhattisgarh in 2000, Gujarat in 2003, Himachal Pradesh in 2007, Rajasthan in 2008 and Jharkhand in 2017 have enforced anti-conversion Law, influenced by right-wing Hindu nationalists¹³. Since Anti-conversion is contrary to the Indian Constitution, Catholics expressed that propagation is the essential part of Christianity and challenged the anti-conversion Law in the Supreme Court with the case of “Rev. Stainislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh” in 1977. But the Court said that it is not the fundamental right to convert any person to one’s own religion¹⁴. Even earlier in 1969, the Supreme Court had expressed that the right to propagate in Article 25 of the Indian Constitution would not include the right to convert another person¹⁵. The decision of the

¹¹ M.G. FISCHER, “Anti-conversion laws and the international response”, in *Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs* 16 (2018) 1, 7-10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹³ N. SAIYA – S. MANCHANDA, “Anti-conversion laws and violent Christian persecution in the states of India. A quantitative analysis”, in *Ethnicities* 20 (2020) 3, 588.

¹⁴ Cf. R. PAL, “Religious minorities and the law”, in G.J. LARSON (ed.), *Religion and personal law in secular India. A call to judgment*, Indiana university press, Bloomington 2011, 26-27.

¹⁵ Cf. I. K. CHEEMA, *Constitutional and legal challenges faced by religious minorities in India*, U.S Commission on International Religious Freedom, Washington 2017, 3, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Constitutional>

Supreme Court is definitely controversial because the Supreme Court did not draw the distinction between conversion by force and conversion by persuasion or conviction. Moreover, Article 25(1) guarantees freedom of religion - a freedom which is not limited to the religion in which a person is born. Freedom of conscience in Article 25(1) implies also free choice of religion and the right to propagate religion gives a meaning to freedom of choice¹⁶.

Though anti-conversion laws in India is projected as if it exists for the noble purpose of preventing coerced religious conversions made through force, fraud or allurements, these laws are the codification of the Hindutva to prevent the conversion of the marginalized communities in India.¹⁷ Even in States like Gujarat where a person can apply to Government for conversion, the government either postpones permission or does not permit everyone. Thus, ultimately the anti-conversion laws pose a significant challenge to Indian secularism both in design and practice, violating the individual's right to convert¹⁸.

1.3 Restrictions on Christian NGOs

Non-Governmental Organizations (hereafter NGO) are the group of organizations which are engaged in development and poverty reduction work at local, national, and global levels around the world¹⁹. The voluntary efforts of social development were started by Christian missionaries in the early 1810s. Along with the missionary activity, they were also involved in the welfare and empowerment of the Indian people. The Christian philanthropy of welfare was exhibited by the efforts to establish dispensaries, hospitals and orphanages. The empowerment of the people was carried out by the efforts to establish schools and colleges²⁰. Even today Christian NGOs do a great service for rural development, combating poverty, creating awareness of human rights, establishing homes for the sick and empowering the indigenous

[%20and%20Legal%20Challenges%20Faced%20by%20Religious%20Minorities%20in%20India.pdf](#) (accessed on 5 February 2024).

¹⁶ Cf. R. PAL, "Religious minorities and the law", 26-27.

¹⁷ Cf. N. SAIYA – S. MANCHANDA, "Anti-conversion laws and violent Christian persecution in the states of India", 561-562.

¹⁸ Cf. I.K. CHEEMA, *Constitutional and legal challenges faced by religious minorities in India*, 3.

¹⁹ D. LEWIS, *The management of non-governmental development organizations. An introduction*, Routledge, London 2001, 1.

²⁰ Cf. S. SEN, "Non-profit organizations in India. Historical development and common patterns, voluntas", in *International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit organizations* 11 (1992) 3, 178.

and the marginalized. Thus, they also actively work to restore the human rights and moral values²¹.

However, the right-wing nationalists start to criticize the Christian welfare services that the Christians do all these welfares only to convert the Hindus. For example, Golwalkar bitterly criticized the Christian welfare activities, “What is the real and ulterior motive of Christians in pouring crores of rupees in all these (compassionate) activities? ...The various surreptitious and mean tactics they employ for conversion...”²². Even the Hindu nationalists go to extent of blaming Christian NGOs to be the agents of a foreign power to create religious and political unrest in the country²³. As a result, Christian NGOs are targeted often.

In India, the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (hereafter FCRA) was passed in 1976 and amended in 2010. After BJP came to power in India in 2014, almost 11,000 faith-based NGOs in India have been barred from accepting foreign funds on the basis of ‘detrimental to the national interest’²⁴. In June 2015, BJP Government put the leading Christian charity, Caritas International on its watch list under FCRA for the alleged “Anti-India Activities” in support of the Vatican²⁵. This year also the FCRA was again amended and it came into effect from 28 September 2020. This amendment reflects the demands of “the Hindu Charter” created in 2018 by some Hindu organizations like VHP, which demands to ban all foreign money inflow through FCRA²⁶. This new amendment bans the transfer of foreign funds from one NGO to another local NGO or a person. Moreover, earlier NGOs were allowed to use up to 50 percent of the foreign contribution for meeting administrative expenses. Now, the bill has reduced the limit to 20 percent. This amendment targets only the Christian NGOs²⁷. While the BJP government exploits the FCRA to limit foreign funding for some NGOs, Hindutva

²¹ Cf. C.B. SAMUEL, “Issues and challenges for Christian NGOs in the India of the twenty-first century”, in *Transformation* 13 (1996) 4, 10-11.

²² M.S. GOLWALKAR, *Bunch of thoughts*, 179-180.

²³ Cf. M.G. FISCHER, “Anti-conversion laws and the international response”, 3.

²⁴ D. DUERKSEN, “The Hindu BJP and restrictions on faith-based NGOs”, in *Berkley Center for Religion, peace & World Affair*, <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-hindu-bjp-and-restrictions-on-faith-based-ngos> (accessed on 8 February 2024).

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁶ Cf. S. CHANDRANATH, *Charter of Hindu Demands-FCRA*, <https://equalrightsforhindus.com/ensuring-uninterrupted-flow-of-foreign-funds-for-nationalistic-ngos/> (accessed on 8 February 2024).

²⁷ Cf. V. SINGH, “Government suspends FCRA clearance of 4 Christian groups”, in *The Hindu*, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/government-suspends-fcra-clearance-of-4-christian-groups/article32535766.ece#> (accessed on 9 February 2024).

supporter organizations have never come under the scrutiny of the FCRA²⁸. The restrictions on Christian NGOs limit the Christian services for the development of the country and the empowerment of the people.

1.4 Reconversion of Christians to Hinduism

In India, conversion was rarely an individual decision. Caste system, the marginalization and poverty had significant influence over many people in India to leave Hinduism. Moreover, the compassion and welfare activities of the Christian missionaries have inspired a good number of people to become Christians²⁹. But today the right-wing nationalists brainwash everybody that Christianity is not a religion but a strong organization allied with certain foreign powers. They also make poisonous propagation that Christian missionary activity is a part of uniform world policy to create Christian majority pockets in order to revive Christendom for re-establishing western supremacy³⁰. Thus, they ultimately try to polarize the Indian people 'into us versus them' projecting Christians as a threat to India and Indian culture. In such a way they create an impression among the people that becoming Christian is anti-national. Even they go to extent of reconverting Christians into Hinduism either forcefully or convincing them³¹.

The first well-organized reconversion to Hinduism was attempted roughly between 1880 and 1930 in Punjab by the Hindu nationalist movement, the Arya Samaj founded by Dayanand Sarasvati. It was a kind of reaction against the British colonialism and Christian missions, done in the name Hindu renaissance through a rite called *Shuddhi* - a ritual to regain social and religious purity³². In recent years Hindu activists belonging to VHP, RSS and VKA (Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram) started reconverting Christians and Muslims. They call it *Gar Vapsi* (homecoming). They target the disadvantaged Christians and Muslims. Since May 2014, there has been an increase of nationwide reconversion campaigns by Hindutva organizations. The

²⁸ Cf. I. K. CHEEMA, *Constitutional and legal challenges faced by religious minorities in India*, 6.

²⁹ Cf. C. JAFFRELOT, "India. The politics of (re)conversion to Hinduism of Christian aboriginals", in P. MICHEL – E. PACE (eds), *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, vol. 2, Brill, Boston 2011, 197.

³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 201, 203.

³¹ Cf. S. SAHOO, "Dealing with the intimate enemy. Civil society and ethno-religious conflict in contemporary India", in K. STEINER – A. ÖNNERFORS (eds), *Expressions of Radicalization*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2018, 192.

³² Cf. I. VANDEVELDE, "Reconversion to Hinduism. A Hindu nationalist reaction against conversion to Christianity and Islam", in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 34 (2011) 1, 35-36.

VHP leader Pravin Togadia asserted that reconversion is the part of the Hindutva programme saying, “the whole world was once inhabited by Hindus...and (we) will strive to increase the population,” and “our target is to make India a Hindu Rashtra by 2021. The Muslims and Christians don’t have any right to stay here”³³.

Their method of reconversion resembles somehow the method of Christian missionaries. They mainly aim at tribal Christians who are poor and marginalized. They go and provide services like education and inform the tribal about their Hindu roots. They try to convince them that Christianity is a sweet and slow poison and conversion is a long-drawn conspiracy to destroy Hindu culture and divide India. They finally organize for an event of homecoming publicly with certain rituals³⁴. However, there always remains an open question about whether these mass conversion camps are done with a threat or genuine conviction. The Human rights groups strongly believe that the mass conversion of poor religious minorities is carried out by Hindus using coercion.³⁵ Even in January 2019, there was a mass conversion camp in which 96 tribal Christians were reconverted to Hindus by VHP³⁶. Regarding the reconversion camps, the BJP government maintains a deep silence and even seems to encourage them indirectly. Moreover, the anti-conversion laws, which were implemented in some of the States of India to prohibit the conversion through force or allurement neither prohibit nor question these kinds of mass reconversion to Hinduism³⁷.

1.5 Media Hostility against Christians

In India, the mass media witness vast and consistent growth. However, in the World Press Freedom Index Report by the organization Reporters Sans Frontières (hereafter RSF), India was ranked 138th place out of 180 countries in 2018. It is indeed a disgraceful position. The reasons for the poor ranking are the murder and coercion of journalists, fake news, hate speech and the intimidation of editors and owners³⁸. In 2020 India is ranked by RSF in 140th

³³ H. KIM, “Understanding Modi and minorities”, in *India Review* 16 (2017) 4, 363.

³⁴ Cf. I. VANDELDE, “Reconversion to Hinduism”, 43-44.

³⁵ Cf. M.G. FISCHER, “Anti-conversion laws and the international response”, 26-27.

³⁶ R. CHOUDHURY, “96 Tripura Christians converted - not against their wish, claims VHP”, in *NDTV*, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/mass-conversion-of-96-tripura-christian-tribal-migrant-labourers-conversions-according-to-their-wish-1981223> (accessed on 11 February 2024).

³⁷ Cf. H. KIM, “Understanding Modi and minorities”, 366.

³⁸ Cf. S. THAROOR, *The Paradoxical prime minister. Narendra Modi and his India*, Aleph, New Delhi 2018, 143.

place titling “Modi tightens his grip on the media”³⁹. It means that even though India is a democratic country, the BJP, the ruling party of India, has become a great threat to the freedom of expression of media.

Many local newspapers and TV channels in India are forced to publicize what is produced and peddled by the government. The atmosphere of fear has paralyzed the autonomy and ethics of media. The eminent TV anchors who are in disagreement with government policies, have either been trolled online or abused and threatened by the right-wing nationalists⁴⁰. There are also the reports of attempts to penalize popular channels like NDTV which mined BJP’s ideology. Even globally award-winning artists like Arundhati Roy and Amartya Sen were not spared for hate speech of right-wing nationalists. Even four eminent journalists like Gauri Lankesh, who were critical of Hindutva politics were shot dead⁴¹.

On the other hand, some selective TV channels like Republic TV air the majoritarian right-wing Hindu views. For instance, the Republic TV blamed the Vatican without any proof that the Vatican along with Indian Bishops was conspiring to subvert the Hindu revival. This TV channel also misinterpreted the pastoral letters of the Archbishops of Delhi, Gandhinagar and Goa as the strategy to defame Modi’s good governance. In reality, those pastoral letters were written to ask the Catholics to pray for the country and vote for the right candidate without favouring any political party⁴².

Besides mass media, social media such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter and Internet Websites have created a great influence in India today. Their unique value is that it allows for both mass messaging and micro-targeting. But most of the time social media in India are exploited by the right-wing nationalists to make their religious propaganda, hate speech, and disinformation campaigns in a way to undermine the pluralistic foundations of Indian democracy⁴³. The report of Oxford Internet Institute in 2019 reveals that 28% of all news shared on pro-BJP Facebook pages were classed as “junk news and information” and

³⁹ RSF, *Modi tightens his grip on the media*, <https://rsf.org/en/india> (accessed on 12 February 2024).

⁴⁰ Cf. S. THAROOR, *The Paradoxical prime minister*, 157.

⁴¹ Cf. F. GONSALVES, “Populism and religious nationalism in India”, 131.

⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴³ Cf. S. MAHAPATRA – J. PLAGEMANN, “Polarization and politicization. The social media strategies of Indian political parties”, in *German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA)* 3 (2019), 1, **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** [jstor.org/stable/resrep24806](https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24806). (accessed on 13 February 2024).

34.5% of information shared in BJP WhatsApp groups was branded as “divisive and conspiratorial”⁴⁴.

Indeed, the BJP has created a powerful band of cyber goons to propagate its message of Hindu chauvinism, contempt for minorities and hyper-nationalism. Cyber cells of well-paid ‘trolls’ have been set up in India and abroad to flood the social media space at all hours and to respond ferociously to any statement or action which is contrary to the BJP’s interests⁴⁵. These cypher goons of pro-BJP continue to spread fake messages and infuriating comments about Christians and their mission through social media. And these messages have often resulted in violent attacks against Christians in several places in India.

1.6 Systematic and Indirect Legal Restrictions on the Religious Freedom of Christians

Since India is a multi-religious land, there were “Personal Laws” for a long period before the Independence of India for each religious community known as Hindu Law, Muslim Law and Christian Law. Even after the Independence of India, these laws are still in legal use and are judicially enforceable. These laws deal with the issues of adoption, succession and religious institutions⁴⁶. Though these personal laws give privileges to religious minorities in India, some laws seem to be contrary to the Indian Constitution which grants religious freedom to all the citizens.

For Instance, the Indian Divorce Act of 2001 limits inheritance, alimony payments, and property ownership of persons from interfaith marriages⁴⁷. Additionally, the Special Marriage Act of 1954 contains provisions that make converts of non-Hindu religions lose certain rights and privileges such as guardianship of the child after conversion⁴⁸. Moreover, the Constitution of India in its Article 15(4) permits reservation for the weaker sections of the society such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. However Indian Government makes reservations in

⁴⁴ Cf. M. MALBAS, “Junk news and misinformation prevalent in Indian election campaign”, in *Oxford Internet Institute*, <https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/news/releases/junk-news-and-misinformation-prevalent-in-indian-election-campaign/> (accessed on 13 February 2024).

⁴⁵ Cf. S. THAROOR, *The Paradoxical prime minister*, 144.

⁴⁶ Cf. M. GALANTER – J. KRISHNAN, “Personal law and human rights in India and Israel”, in *Israel Law Review* 34 (2000) 1, 109.

⁴⁷ Cf. B.J. GRIM – R. FINKE, *The price of freedom denied*, 148.

⁴⁸ Cf. EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR LAW AND JUSTICE, *Religious freedom and religious persecution issues in India. Report prepared in anticipation of the official visit by the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to India, in March 2008*, Strasbourg 2008, 7-8, **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** [.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/eclj/080303_Persecution_Memo_India.pdf](https://www.eclj.org/080303_Persecution_Memo_India.pdf) (accessed on 13 February 2024).

education and employment only for the Hindu marginalized and not for the Christian marginalized people⁴⁹. The long battle for the reservation for the marginalized Christians still continues.

Moreover, the BJP Government has made certain amendments to some Acts. For instance, the ruling BJP enforced an amendment to National Investigation Agency Act on 17 July 2019. This gives more power to the National Investigation Agency to arrest anybody on the ground of suspected terrorists. Even the significant Indian newspaper “The Hindu” perceived that this amendment has the potential for the misuse⁵⁰. As feared of misuse, the National Investigation Agency accused Stan Swamy, an 83 years old Catholic priest, of having a link with Maoists and arrested him on 8 October 2020. Indeed, he was working for the welfare of tribal groups in Jharkhand. Though he is very old and sick, he was not even granted bail⁵¹.

Furthermore, on 12 December 2019, the BJP Government implemented Citizenship Amendment Act which permits citizenship in India to the Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Zoroastrian migrants who entered India before 31 December 2014 from the countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. This amendment does not permit citizenship to Muslim migrants⁵². Though there is an approval of Indian citizenship to the Christian migrants, Christians oppose this Citizenship Amendment Act, because citizenship based on religion is against the Indian constitution. And this amendment is also seen as the execution of the vision of right-wing nationalists to establish a Hindu nation, which will create a serious threat to the religious freedom of the minorities such as Christians in the future⁵³. Thus, the perceived threat and indirect restriction to the religious freedom of Christians continue in contemporary India.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁰ S. NAMBATH, “The terrorist tag on the latest amendments to the NIA Act”, in *The Hindu*, **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**[www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-terroristtag/ article_28712821.ece](http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-terroristtag/article_28712821.ece) (accessed on 13 February 2024).

⁵¹ Cf. VATICAN NEWS STAFF, “Asian bishops’ solidarity with jailed Indian Jesuit”, in *Vatican News*, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-10/asia-bishops-fabc-bo-appeal-release-jesuit-stan-swamy.html> (accessed on 13 February 2024).

⁵² Cf. C. PRAKASH, “The Citizenship amendment act must be repealed”, in *Smart Companion India* 34 (2020) 1, 30-31.

⁵³ Cf. ID., “Cover feature”, in *The New Leader* 16 (2020) 31, 13.

1.7 Anti-Christian Violence

In British India and Republic India, it was Hindu-Muslim violence which received international scholarly attention until the end of the 1990s. Though there were intended attacks of right-wing nationalists over Christians even before the 1990s, they failed to receive international media attention⁵⁴. The first serious incident of violence between Hindus and Christians in the modern period took place in 1982 in Mandaikadu village in the district of Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu. Since the violence spread to surrounding villages, at least nine Christians were killed and hundreds were injured⁵⁵.

The first large-scale anti-Christian riot was registered in 1998 in Gujarat in the Dangs where there were tribal people among whom many had become Christian. Though Christians were not killed in these riots, the Hindu nationalists destroyed lots of Christian houses and places of worship⁵⁶. Between 1997 and 2007 the number of attacks of Hindu nationalists on Christians started to climb to two hundred annually. Among them, a Catholic priest, Christudas was beaten and paraded naked on 2 September 1997. On 22 September 1998, in Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh, shockingly four of the nuns were assaulted and gang-raped. On 23 January 1999 an Australian missionary Graham Stuart Staines was burnt alive to death with his two sons in Odisha. And on 1 September of the same year, another Catholic priest Arul Doss was killed with a bow in Odisha⁵⁷.

Moreover, in 2007 and 2008 anti-Christian violence reached its peak in Kandhamal, Odisha. Particularly, in a series of riots based on the murder of a Hindu radical, Lakshmananda Saraswati on 23 August 2008, more than 50 Christians were killed and thousands more were injured, and at least fifty thousand lost their homes. Many Christians were led to displacement camps where their struggle continued for two more years. Many churches and schools were destroyed. There were also cases of rape and sexual attacks on the Christians including a nun Sr. Meena Barwa⁵⁸. Pope Benedict XVI too condemned the anti-

⁵⁴ Cf. C.M. BAUMAN, "Hindu-Christian conflict in India. Globalization, conversion, and the coterminal castes and tribes", in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72 (2013) 3, 633.

⁵⁵ Cf. ID., *Anti-Christian violence in India*, Cornell University Press, London 2020, 115.

⁵⁶ Cf. ID., "Hindu-Christian conflict in India", 634.

⁵⁷ Cf. T.T. PANAGATU, *The comparative study of religious traditions of Soora tribe of Orissa and the influence of Christian traditions*, Tectum Verlag, Marburg 2009, 318.

⁵⁸ Cf. J.L. ALLEN, *The global war on Christians. Dispatches from the front lines of anti-Christian persecution*, Image, New York 2013, 13.

Christian violence in Odisha saying, “While I firmly condemn all attacks against human life, the sacredness of which demands the respect of all, I express my spiritual closeness and solidarity to the brothers and sisters in the faith so hardly tried”⁵⁹.

A survey made by the United Christian Forum for Human Rights reported that in the thirty-two years from 1964 to 1996, there were only 38 registered incidents of violence against Christians, meaning 1.18 attacks per year. By the year 2000, attacks had jumped to 116 per year and it rose to 170 in the year 2011⁶⁰. In 2018, the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) catalogued 325 reported incidents of anti-Christian violence, intimidation or harassment. If we include also the unreported incidents, it will go roughly up to 350. This means that per year almost every day an anti-Christian violence occurs in India⁶¹. Due to the increased attack of Hindu nationalists on the religious minority and the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019 based on religion, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has listed India in 2020 with the “countries of particular concern” (CPC)⁶².

Conclusion: If we analyse the anti-Christian violence in India, we can come to know that the Hindu nationalists follow certain patterns of activities such as falsely accusing Christians of involving in forced conversions or selling the banned cow-meat, attacking the individual missionary verbally or manually while he is found in the mission, vandalizing the churches and houses of the Christians, suiting a legal case against the mission field and activity, forcing the newly converted Christians to stay outside of the house or village and so on⁶³.

Thus, the right-wing nationalists in India are posing various challenges to the religious freedom of Christians. India which was earlier known for peace, non-violence (Ahimsa) and non-violent resistance (satyagraha), is now shattered with bloodshed and human rights violations based on religion. Even though the human rights violations against the religious

⁵⁹ Cf. ORISSA BURNING, *Pope condemns violence, appeals for peace*, <https://orissaburning.blogspot.com/2008/08/pope-condemns-violence-appeals-for.html> (accessed on 14 February 2024).

⁶⁰ J.L. ALLEN, *The global war on Christians*, 81.

⁶¹ C.M. BAUMAN, *Anti-Christian violence in India*, 117.

⁶² S. HAIDAR, “U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom downgrades India in 2020 list”, in *The Hindu*, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/uscirf-downgrades-india-in-2020-list/article31457624.ece> (accessed on 14 February 2024).

⁶³ Cf. C.M. BAUMAN, *Anti-Christian violence in India*, 117.

freedom of the Christians in India have received a significant international attention, the challenges of the right-wing nationalists to the Indian Christians have not subsided.

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