

## **Persecution of Christianity in India**

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It is a privilege and honour for me to share about some distressing facts about Christians in India to this forum. Christians in India today are targeted and attacked by a few Hindutva forces and are being supported by the Bharathya Janatha Party government in India. In the additional sheets, 192 attacks on Christians, Christian institutions and churches are listed during this one year which shows that there is persecution of Christians in India under the Hindutva government.

I like to highlight the point that the Hindutva groups spread hatred about Christians through such unsubstantiated myths and rumours. One of such myths is the myth of conversion. According to the statistics of India, the percentage of Christians has gone down since 1991. Nevertheless many Hindutva groups including RSS (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) and VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad – World Hindu Council) claim that Christian Institutions are in the process of converting Hindus into Christianity. Many of them use various means of communication to spread hatred against minorities particularly targeting Christians. Recently some of these groups used ‘Ghar Wapasi’ as a method to forcefully reconvert Christians and Muslims into Hinduism<sup>1</sup>.

Following the spreading of hatred myths about Christians, some Hindutva forces attack the churches, Christian Institutions and Christians in many parts of India. They are driven by the ideology that Christians are anti-nationalists, supported by the overseas Christians to work against Indian Culture and also anti-development. Many of our Christian institutions and schools are closed down due to oppositions from Hindutva groups. Many Christians live in fear of an attack on their churches, schools, properties and families. The government of India and the local governments and police and judges are biased at times and remain silent in the case of justice and arresting people who attacked the minorities or minority institutions. Recently Hindu Mahashaba called the attacks on the churches <sup>2</sup>is not illegal. Recently news about the percentage of Muslims in India in 2050 saying India will have the highest number of Muslims

in the world<sup>3</sup>. There was a call from Hindutva groups asking for forcible sterilization of Muslims and Christians in order to control the numbers<sup>4</sup>.

The Government of India – state or central government – if they are allies to BJP or Hindutva forces – they either remain passive spectators of the incidents of attack or support indirectly or directly the attack on Christians. Some cases are filed against the victims who happened to be Christians by the police for wrong reasons. This has become a widespread practice under the present BJP government. The rule of law according to the Indian secular constitution is not upheld at times.

The Prime Minister Modi and his colleagues are directly responsible because they remain silent on the statements issued by a few Hindutva groups (either by encouraging their members to attack or even saying they would reward them for such attacks on the churches)<sup>5</sup>. In this way the present government clearly fails to maintain law and order situation in India by refusing to take proactive action against those who not only spread hatred and threaten to attack the Christian minorities in India.

I should make it clear that the Hindutva groups differ from the majority Hindus in India. Many of whom may not support nor sympathize with these Hindutva groups or with their ideologies. Many Hindus are educated in Christian institutions and are proud of their educational background. Many of them have a high regard for Christians. Hindutva groups do not represent Hindus in India at all! These Hindutva movements keep making sensational statements and are trying to justify their attacks on the churches.

I should also mention these attacks are not only against Christians but also against Muslims, Sikhs and Dalit and Tribal communities in India. All religious minorities should be protected and their aspirations for autonomy must be respected and endorsed.

We plead for support and solidarity with Christians in India by endorsing the following statements:

1. The present BJP government should make a clear statement against the public hatred messages of a few Hindutva groups against Christians. They should make sure that police take action against those who spread baseless rumours and unverified myths against minorities, particularly against Christians. The government should make sure the rights of all people from all religions are protected and those who try to create fear, threat and spread hatred should be held accountable according to the law of the land. The government should come out clearly with a message against such hatred and threat messages against Christians. We also recommend that laws should be amended in order to protect minorities particularly Christians against communal and targeted violence and hate campaigns.
2. A national level committee should be set up to look into the grievances of Christian minorities. The government should grant university status back to the Senate of Serampore College, Serampore, West Bengal and also give back the Foreign Currency Remittance Account to all Christian Institutions (unless they are authentically proved) so that these institutions will continue to educate and develop the poor in India. The Indian government should grant of scheduled caste status to Dalit Christians by removing part three of article 341 of the constitution which discriminates between people on the basis of religion. The government should not withdraw special status to North Eastern states because majority in these states are Christians; rather continue to support them financially.
3. The Indian government should consider withdrawing all laws against freedom of faith -- the so called Freedom of Religion acts of Arunachal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal, Gujarat<sup>6</sup>.
4. The government should lift the ban on Christian teachers and theologians from overseas to teach and engage with students in India for which they do not get opportunities otherwise (unless they are proved to spread hatred about other religions). They should get rid of the official and unofficial ban on Christians who seek visas to come to India on faith work, including seminary teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Ghar Wapsi' will continue: Praveen Togadia - Ghar Wapsi means returning to Hinduism - conversion of Christians and Muslims into Hinduism are at times carried forcefully or by threat <http://www.indiatvnews.com/politics/national/ghar-wapsi-will-continue-says-praveen-togadia-28721.html>

<sup>2</sup> Recently Hindu Mahasabha representative made this statement - Church attack not illegal: Hindu Mahasabha. Shukla said his organization would give awards and protection to Hindu youths who attack churches and marry Muslim girls. <http://www.ucanindia.in/news/church-attack-not-illegal:-hindu-mahasabah/28683/daily>

<sup>3</sup> By 2050, India to surpass Indonesia, will have largest Muslim population: Study <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/By-2050-India-to-surpass-Indonesia-will-have-largest-Muslim-population-Study/articleshow/46790174.cms>

<sup>4</sup> **India: Hindu nationalist politician calls for sterilisation of Christians and Muslims to control numbers**

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/india.hindu.nationalist.politician.calls.for.sterilisation.of.christians.and.muslims.to.control.numbers/52063.htm>

The vice-president of the All India Hindu Mahasabha party, Sadhvi Deva Thakur, was filmed saying that "the population of Muslims and Christians is growing day by day". She called for the imposition of a state of emergency, saying: "Muslims and Christians will have to be forced to undergo sterilization so that they cannot increase their number."

<sup>5</sup> **Christian cleric accuses India PM of inaction after Agra church attack** <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christian.cleric.accuses.india.pm.of.inaction.after.agra.church.attack/52480.htm>

<sup>6</sup> The Government has passed anticonversion bill in many states. Government has not taken action on those communal forces rather they try to colour it as vandals attack. A total of eight states have passed anti-conversion laws. Orissa (1967), Madhya Pradesh (1968), and Arunachal Pradesh (1978) were the early ones. Tamil Nadu (2002), Gujarat (2003), Chhattisgarh (inherited from MP in 2000, amended in 2006), Himachal Pradesh (2006) and Rajasthan (2008) were the new states to pass laws that restricted religious freedom. <http://www.kashmirmonitor.in/news-state-of-religious-freedom-in-india-84105.aspx> "Muslims also complain that most Indian states violate their religious freedom by restricting or banning cow slaughter, which is required for Muslims during Eid al-Adha (Festival of the Sacrifice)."