

# Fact Finding Report by aicc Orissa Chapter

Contributed by AICC  
 Tuesday, 08 January 2008  
 Last Updated Wednesday, 09 January 2008

## RESEARCH & FACT FINDING REPORT BASED ON VISITS TO KANDHAMAL, ORISSA IN THE AFTERMATH OF ANTI-CHRISTIAN ATTACKS

Jan. 7, 2008

**PREFACE:** From January 3-5, 2008, a second fact finding team from the All India Christian Council (aicc) Orissa chapter surveyed extensively and visited all the villages and places in Orissa attacked since December 24, 2007. Team members included: Rev. Dr. Pran Ranjan Parichha, aicc Orissa Chapter General Secretary; Mr. Harish Chandra Arisalya, Regional Manager for Dalit Education in Orissa; Rev. Abhiram Keshari Singh, Associate Secretary, aicc Balasore District Chapter; Rev. Samaresh Naik., Secretary, aicc Balasore District Chapter.

They found that the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) instigated the attacks and carefully targeted Christians throughout Kandhamal District, Orissa. Most of the Christians were Dalits.

Here is a summary of findings from spot visits, interviews, and personal talks with victims as written by Mr. Harish. [Note: we have used the local spellings for some villages which may not be the official English version.]

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#### A. DEATHS:-

There are different figures given by different people on the number of deaths from the minority (Christian) community. No figure is wrong, in a sense. The ground reality is many people are still underground or hiding literally in the forests to escape attacks & possible death from VHP cadre. Those who are missing in the villages may be alive in the forests or at nearby villages, or killed and their dead bodies are taken away or kept secret by the VHP cadre. This truth can never be ruled out.

During our visit we have interviewed and found names of four confirmed dead.

1. Bhogra Naik &ndash; Male &ndash; 50+ years &ndash; village Barkhama. I have visited his broken house and met with his eldest son. Photograph of his son is available. He was a Christian and killed by the VHP cadre.
2. Tileshwar Mistri &ndash; Male &ndash; 42 years &ndash; village Kasupanka GP, Hatimunda. He was killed by the VHP mob.
3. Rajesh &ndash; Male &ndash; 22 years - from Alanjori GP. Christian young man killed by the VHP mob.
4. Kundan Mantri &ndash; Male &ndash; 21 years &ndash; Jholasahi village. Died of firing (gunshot).

The VHP cadre is making all efforts to hide / destroy dead bodies of Christians killed by them to avoid death record.

#### B. SERIOUSLY INJURED:&ndash;

6 (SIX) Christians were strangled and fired at by the VHP cadre. They are hospitalized.

1. Sumanta Naik
2. Abhinay Naik
3. Dipti Senapati
4. Amar Naik
5. Kishore Baliyarsingh
6. Remez Singh

#### C. OTHER VIOLENCE: DESTROYED, LOOTED, ROBBED & MOLESTED:-

We have numerous pictures of property that was destroyed, burnt, and made to ashes. You will see only heaps of ashes,

charcoal, and marks of black smoke in many churches and Christian institutions.

Total no. of churches burnt, destroyed:- 95  
This includes all village churches and churches of all denominations.

Total no. of houses set on fire and completely destroyed:- 730  
(In Barkhama village alone:- 415 houses.)

In most of the villages the VHP miscreants not only destroyed the houses but looted gold jewelry, cash, and valuables.

They did not spare ladies. Whomever they caught, they molested.

#### D. SLOGANS USED DURING ATTACKS:-

We have asked at all the villages regarding the slogans given by the attackers. Following are the slogans given by them during and after attack and killings. This is a fact.

- A) Bajrang Dal Jai [Hail Bajrang Dal! (Bajrang Dal is the youth wing of the VHP)]
- B) Hindu Hindu Bhai [Hindu Hindu Brother]
- C) Jai Shriram [Hail Shriram! (Shriram is a Hindu deity)]
- D) Jai Shiva Shambu [Hail Shiva Shambu (Shiva Shambu is also a Hindu deity)]
- E) Jai Bajrang Dal [Hail Bajrang Dal!]
- F) Only Hindus to stay here &ndash; no Christians to stay here
- G) Bharatmata ki jai [Hail mother India!]
- H) Bajrang Dal ki jai [Hail Bajrang Dal]
- I) Kill Christians

#### E. WEAPONS USED BY ATTACKERS:-

The VHP cadre attacked with guns, knives, trishuls (a tri-tipped spear), bombs, and other lethal weapons. Many of them had tied a yellow ribbon on their heads and put vermilion on their foreheads.

#### F. VHP LEADERS:-

Based on our research, the following people/groups were behind the attacks.

1. Chitta Bindhani &ndash; this man is not a local. He is not from Kandhamal district. He is actually from Jajpur district which is part of the coastal belt. This belt is the stronghold of VHP.
2. Bhagaban Panda &ndash; VHP leader of Kandhamal who co-masterminded this operation.

Both were staying adjacent to Hanuman Mandir at Balliguda town. They are not locals but settled in Kandhamal and have been instigating threats against innocent tribals and Dalits for some time.

3. Kui Samaj - local leaders of the alliance of VHP which agitates for caste and reservation status for the Kui speaking people.

#### G. DISTURBING FACTS ABOUT THE ATTACKS:-

##### FACT - 1. BARKHAMA CHRISTIANS SUFFER GREATEST ATTACK

Barkhama is a village about 12 kms away from Balliguda town sub division in Kandhamal. This village has Hindu majority but there are 450 Christian families. Out of 450, 415 houses belonging to Christians were completely smashed. This village has 7 churches of different denominations. All churches had well constructed buildings and six of the seven were seriously damaged.

##### FACT &ndash; 2. POLICE INACTION AT BARKHAMA

Barkhama village was attacked two times &ndash; on 24th & 25th December 2007. The sub division police head office is only about 12 kms away at Balliguda. But the police came only on the 25th night at 11 pm. They took no action but remained as silent spectators and went back. This was the exact repetition of the Gujarat carnage and its methodology.

At Daringbadi, people also witnessed police watching vandalism silently as if they are watching a Hindi movie. This also was reported in Baminigaon. These are clear examples of police helping the VHP in the operation.

##### FACT &ndash; 3. CONSPIRACY TO HIDE DEAD BODIES

We believe there is a conspiracy to hide the bodies of Christians killed by the VHP cadre in order to destroy evidence of

deaths in the Christian community. Many are missing -- both adults and children -- in every village.

#### FACT &ndash; 4. PLACE OF WORSHIP VS. CREMATION OF THE DEAD

Every year at Barkhama village, all the 7 churches join together and conduct a combined Christmas Eve & Christmas Day service on open ground belonging to the church. This year just as the service was over on Christmas Eve the VHP cadre attacked the congregation.

They burnt the pulpit and ransacked the church buildings. On that day an old Hindu person had died naturally. In order to desecrate the place of worship of Christians the VHP cadre brought the dead body and cremated right in front of the pulpit. The ashes of the dead body remain there until today. We have a photograph. Yesterday, 6th Jan the Hindu community had a puja (worship) to mark the 10th day of the death. [Due to curfews and other restrictions, the celebration was delayed slightly.] This was not at the church ground but was intended as an insult and disrespect to the faith of the Christian community.

#### FACT &ndash; 5. FIRST DEATH

Bhogra Naik, a Christian, was killed and his body cut into three pieces. I talked to his son, Bipse Naik, and visited his destroyed house. The dead body was retrieved by his family and buried on his own land.

#### FACT &ndash; 6. PASTOR ADAM NAIK: EYE WITNESS

Pastor Adam Naik of Barkhama village was the chief speaker of that combined Christmas service. He ran for his life and is alive today. We talked to him over the phone. Both Bhogra Naik and Adam Naik were running for their lives. But Bhogra Naik could not run fast enough and succumbed to death by the VHP cadre. Adam Naik saw Bhogra brutally killed and heard him screaming for help.

#### FACT &ndash; 7. PASTOR'S WIFE MISSING OR DEAD

Pastor Krushna Chandra Digal and his family with three kids left home and ran for their lives. All went to the nearby forest in different directions with the crowd. They lost track of each other. After two days in the forest, the pastor started searching for his family. One by one he found his three children but till today his wife, Mrs. Sabita Digal, is missing. She might be killed or alive -- nobody knows. This is only one example, and there are more people. This is the reason no one can give now a definite figure on the death toll.

#### FACT &ndash; 8. NO MEN AT BAMINIGAON VILLAGE

Baminigaon village was the epicenter of this violence against Christians. Today you will see only women at the village and relief camps, but no men. All the men have gone into hiding in the forest to save their lives and to avoid the police, atrocity, or arrest. Nobody knows how many of them are alive in the forests.

#### FACT &ndash; 9. TIGER & BEAR SIGHTED IN JUNGLE

The people of Barkhama ran for their lives to the nearby jungle (forest). The name of the jungle is Kade Dangar Hill. Many families stayed for 3 nights in the jungle. Some slept under trees and behind huge rocks. It was difficult to manage in the cold of the season. Two times they saw tigers passing by and once a bear passed by. People spent the nights unharmed. This was the testimony of Pastor Lalit's wife, Mrs. Sadhaban. She was with her 4th standard girl, Rolly.

#### FACT &ndash; 10. LICKING LEAVES FOR WATER

During their stay in the forest, people did not get water to drink. Adults managed but kids were helpless. So they licked the dew on the leaves of plants and trees to quench their thirst. The children survived and returned to villages, but many asked what is the government doing to help?

#### FACT &ndash; 11. MEDIA REPORTS

Except NDTV and ETV, the TV and print media did not seem aware of the facts. They were giving biased reports, figures, and stories from VHP sources. There was no impartial report and "news" in the true sense of the term. The ETV reporter went to the forest and covered the condition of the people hiding there. Immediately he was shifted to other place by the media. The name of the reporter is Mr. Panda. Thus, we request people to please do not rely on the facts & figure of the media.

See [http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/gentemplate\\_generic.aspx?template=orissaviolence](http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/gentemplate_generic.aspx?template=orissaviolence).

#### FACT &ndash; 12. CHURCH VANDALISED AND GOAT KILLED

In Baminigaon, the epicenter of the violence, the VHP cadre attacked the Roman Catholic church and all the adjacent houses of the priest & nuns. They took away one goat from a Christian family and butchered it to get the blood. The whole mob used that blood for Tilaks (forehead marking) and shouted "Jai Bajrangbali" [Hail Bajrang Dali! &ndash; the VHP youth wing] and "Jai Shriram" [Hail Shriram! &ndash; a Hindu deity]. Later, with that blood mark on their foreheads, they started attacking & looting other Christian houses.

#### FACT &ndash; 13. HOLY COMMUNION TRAMPLED

While destroying the Roman Catholic church building and attacking those inside, they brought out the holy communion elements &ndash; bread, grape juice, containers, and distribution cups. They crushed these articles under their feet. This is a great barbaric and insulting act.

#### FACT &ndash; 14. RECONVERSION PLOT &ndash; TONSURED &ndash; GOAT BLOOD

Under Balliguda tehsil is Kutikia GP. The Christian families are very few in number here. There was a small church that was attacked. The pastor, Rev. Kalia Mani Digal, and 12 Christians were forcibly taken to a field and were tonsured (heads shaved) because they refused to deny their Christian faith. Later all of them were told to eat raw rice mixed with goat blood in order to become Hindus.

#### FACT &ndash; 15. OFFICIAL PERMISSION OBTAINED

The youth wing of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Banik Sangha at Baminigaon applied to the government authorities and obtained the required permission to hold worship & meetings with P.A. system and a stage on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. In spite of that, the minority Christian community was attacked.

#### FACT &ndash; 16. WHO IS THIS LAKHMANANDA SARASWATI

He is not a tribal from Kondhmal district. He hails from a small village near Talcher of Dhenkanal district which is in the central part of Orissa. He murdered someone in his locality and had a fight in his family, then he ran away. Many years ago, Kondhmal was a peaceful district with tribals and Dalits. This man took shelter here and joined the VHP. He established an ashram at Chakkapada and became the mouthpiece of the VHP for Kondhmal.

#### FACT - 17. ONLY CHRISTIAN HOUSES WERE CAREFULLY DESTROYED

Their (VHP) strategy was so meticulous that if a Christian office (i.e. World Vision) was in a rented house of a Hindu, they did not attack that house but brought out everything on the road and then set it on fire.

#### H. POLICE RESPONSE:-

In all the villages we have visited, people testify that the attacks, destruction and looting was done in the presence of police. Police did not prevent the situation and they could have taken action.

There was one exception. In Balliguda town there was a police sub-inspector from the Christian community. He used to warn the Christian community of Barkhama village of a possible attack by the VHP. Even on that fateful day (Dec. 24, 2007) he told the pastors to leave the village and run for their lives. Next day the said inspector was transferred. Even today we believe the police are shielding the VHP cadre.

#### I. THE SCENARIO TODAY:-

The present situation in most villages is like a man-made desert. Everywhere there are heaps of ashes, charcoal, and broken pieces. People cannot believe the VHP's:-

- &bull; well planned attack
- &bull; organized vandalism
- &bull; pre-planned looting, arson & robbery
- &bull; meticulous destruction
- &bull; local police as silent spectators
- &bull; sheer devastation
- &bull; quick destruction
- &bull; barbaric mutilation

The situation right now feels like after a war. During this winter people will now be deprived of a roof above their heads. If you make a round through the villages, you will feel & hear testimony from victims that one of the following things is true:

a) India is not a democratic country or

- b) there is at least no rule of law in this place
- c) or Hindu fundamentalists are on the ruling throne of the nation

Many are still in hiding or missing, and there is still much fear. We appeal for assistance and justice in light of these horrible events from Dec. 24, 2007, til now, Jan. 7, 2008.