

# BIG LIES

Investigation exposes vilification campaign  
of Christian persecution in India



भारत नीति प्रतिष्ठान  
**India Policy Foundation**

**I**ndia Policy Foundation is India's leading Think Tank based in Delhi. It has been engaged in research, publications, seminars and panel discussions on national and international issues. It functions as a platform for inclusive dialogue in the society.



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**India Policy Foundation**

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# PREFACE

India is a civilisational nation. It draws her strength, ideas, values and futuristic vision from the dynamics of her cultural legacies. One of them is her own way of life based on unstoppable quest for truth. It did not discard or attack materialism. On the other hand it blended both materialism and spiritualism as two manifestations of the transcendental consciousness. *Para Vidya* and *Apara Vidya* have been considered essential in the quest for truth. This rational characteristic to perceive life and mission gives India a distinctive place in the world community. This inclusiveness is unheard and unseen in Western tradition which has been elaborated by none other than Bertrand Russell.

Our land is cradles to multiple philosophies, ideas and systems. We consider it as perennial as the flow of Ganga. New religions, sects, philosophies neither evoke fear, nor terrorise howsoever aggressive it might have been in the historical context. Hindus as a society welcomed even Semitic religions and facilitated them. Cheraman mosque was built near Kodungallur in Kerala, for Muslim traders. It is one the oldest mosques in India. This is not an exceptional case but one of the umpteen examples of religious liberalism. However, over the centuries liberalism got crushed when systematic and organized efforts were made to squeeze the space of '*neti-neti*' and to supplant it by 'final word'. Therefore, there is not one idea of secularism which is undoubtedly not a singular concept but multiple perspectives of secularism.

Hindu way of secularism is qualitatively and critically different from the western secularism. It does not stop, does not question possibilities of new sect, philosophy, messenger of God or even new God! However, there are institutions which consider pluralism merely in terms of their right to expand at the cost of cultural space and creed of celebrating diversities.

Such institutions and ideologies enjoy pluralism on one hand and simultaneously consider basic principles of their religion uncriticisable. In other words, secularism is left for others to observe and practice as interpreted by these institutions that are colonial fundamentalists to the core.

We have to preserve cultural space for posterity. This has to be protected from religious expansionist's 'final word' based way of life. Your book can be one of the books of the land not only book! Those who are vigilant to inner threat posed by

ideologies and campaigns have been the target of internal lobbies who are in alliance with external forces. Challenges have been common, but disguised, powerful and detrimental in nature.

Those who carry out their onslaught against Indian traditions should remember Spanish Roman Catholic priest, late Raimon Panikkar who observed on his great eastern pilgrimage including Himalayas that "I left Europe (for India) as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be Christian." published in New York Times, September 6, 2010. The propagandists of 'big lies' discarded icons such as Raimon Panikkar, Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux, and Bede Griffiths, who would have paved their path of ideological stimulus and spiritual inspiration.

Intellectuals of the country predominantly neo-colonialists, pursue, propagate and campaign for selective secularism. It is this fragmented idea that gave birth to concepts like "minority" and "majority" based on mode of worships. Those who inherit a bloody legacy of crusades and colonialism cannot gift secularism to humanity. Here I will conclude, this is complete negation of our world view of oneness of humanity which was also aired in constituent assembly debates. As Tajamul Hussain suggested, the term minority was British creation and asked to throw the term from dictionary.

In independent India, secularism became minority rights centric. It fractured discourse, socio cultural mobility and religious freedom. An imaginary concept of majoritarianism was amplified. A clever attempt was made to shift the debate from qualitative dimension of secularism to quantitative dimension. Qualitative debates always lead progress, expose inaccuracies, breach uncritical zones while quantitative debates give identities narrower sense of majorities and minorities. The contemporary debates dominated by neo-colonialists do not allow to get liberated from colonial secularism based on competitive sense of religious communities which undermines cultural, civilizational legacies.

In political discourse, secularism lost substance and symbolism dominated, and this disease also infected intellectual debates. Whenever any incident of violence involving religious groups takes place it is amplified as a majoritarian onslaught.

In 2014, after the Lok Sabha election when Modi government was formed, a chain of incidents came into light concerning Christian places of worship. Surprisingly they appeared in a close span and in series, that too in the capital of India and its neighbouring state. Before the police could come into action, the political and intellectual debate centred on majoritarian politics against minorities. Conclusions were drawn in a society where politics of perception dominates the psyche.

As the special police team started investigations, the Catholic Church, certain

ideological lobbies and human rights groups charged that Hindu organizations are behind the incidents. They were in a hurry and did not show the patience to await the investigation reports. Protests were taken to the streets by the Catholic Church. A section of Indian and western media hyped the incidents as Christian persecution.

While addressing an audience of students and other invitees at the end of his visit to India on January 28, 2015, it led the US president Barack Obama to fall pray of his co-religionist's propaganda.

Former DGP of Punjab Julio Ribeiro's emotional outburst in *the Indian Express* on March 17, 2015 that in his 86th year, he felt threatened, became unwanted, and is reduced to a stranger in his own country by 'Hindu chauvinism,' perturbed many. It was in this context that India Policy Foundation decided to probe incidents with an open mind and objective manner. It constituted a facts finding committee. The major objectives were to investigate whether the incidents were planned, or were unorganized stray events. The team successfully completed their task after interacting with various strata and multiple cross sections in Delhi. This report is the outcome of the investigation.

The report comes to the conclusion that incidents were not the result of ideological polarisation or majoritarian onslaught as they were alleged, and which led Obama-Ribeiro to question a democratically elected government and ideology and followers of Hindutva. It shows strong biased mind in intellectual, spiritual and political fields operating with a project.

The report is an eye opener. It also shows how there are many columnists, reporters and editors who are hand in gloves and always waiting to use incidents to attack majoritarianism which does not exist either in theory or practice in contemporary India.

Blaming the media singularly is not solution. Self introspection might help in our course correction. "Big Lies" were construed to damage the Indian state, an injury that is trivial in comparison to the trauma wrecked on the image of the Indian nation. This might be restored but certainly shall take time to heal. However, the million dollar question is whether such elements contemplate or pursue this long term agenda?

The IPF is grateful to Shri RNP Singh and Dr. B.S. Harishankar for their assistance. Our sincere thanks are also to Suman Jha, Shiv Kumar and Sudhir Kumar Singh who sincerely worked in bringing out this report.

New Delhi  
20-10-2015

Prof. Rakesh Sinha  
Hon. Director, IPF

PRESENCE AT CHURCHES ADEQUATE, BUT PERSONNEL ILL-EQUIPPED  
**Christians worried about lack of security at schools, colleges**

They expressed their concerns and called for more security at schools and colleges. The Christians are worried about the lack of security at schools and colleges. They expressed their concerns and called for more security at schools and colleges.

**JULIO RIBEIRO**  
 RETIRED IPS OFFICER

**Attempts to Make India from Pak We**

... is enough to fringe right embolden

**Modi 'concerned' about attacks on Christians**

**UNITED IN PROTEST**  
 Politicians, civil society and prominent members of the Christian community condemn the attacks on churches and the gangrape

**SC judge expresses anguish**

**Secularism says secularism being tinkered with**

Justice Kurian Joseph expressed his anguish over the way secularism is being tinkered with. He said that the secularism is being tinkered with and that it is not being treated as a sacred day of all religions.

**Kindly show equal importance and respect to the sacred days of all religions**

**Is it institutional interest or individual interest one should give preference to?**

**KURIAN JOSEPH**  
 SUPREME COURT JUDGE

**H.L. DATTA**  
 CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA



**Churches get police cover**

259 churches and institutes under protection after recent spate of attacks



**Christians feel insecure: Cardinal**

He did not single out any organisation over these incidents but criticised the Modi government for observing Christmas Day, Good Governance Day, saying good governance should be done everyday and the Christian festival should be respected. The BJP government had defended the exercise, saying it was to mark the birthday of its stalwart Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

**Hisar church attacked**

**Priest, villagers hit at each other**

Police lodged an FIR based on Kumar's complaint against some people for allegedly vandalising the church.

**will succeed so long as it is not based on sectarian lines: Obama**

Obama praised 'Sambhar', again

India takes on WTO over chicken legs



**Obama praises 'Sambhar', again**

Obama praised the 'Sambhar' festival, a traditional Indian dish, during his visit to India. He said that it was a great example of Indian culture and heritage.

**POLICE LODGED AN FIR BASED ON KUMAR'S COMPLAINT AGAINST SOME PEOPLE FOR ALLEGEDLY VANDALISING THE CHURCH**

Police lodged an FIR based on the complaint of a priest, Subhash Kumar, against some villagers for allegedly vandalising the church. The priest said that the villagers had damaged the church and that he had been hit during the attack.

**as The Right Their Faith'**

Obama's visit to India was a significant event in the history of US-India relations. He praised the Indian people for their resilience and their commitment to democracy.

**Big Lies**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**he field research and documentation undertaken by the IPF team was completed through several visits to the Catholic Churches in Delhi which include St Sebastian's Church at Dilshad Garden, Church of Our Lady of Grace at Vikaspuri, Blessed St' Alphonsa's Church at Vasant Kunj, Syro Malabar Church at Jasola, Church of Resurrection Rohini, Holy Child Auxilium Convent School at Vasant Vihar all in Delhi and Believer's Church at Hisar in Haryana.

In the investigation procedure, Police reports and information from Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) were referred. There were discussions with the Honourable Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh and the Church authorities. The team also visited various police stations, met police officials, and people from other communities residing near these Churches.

The Delhi Police after their primary investigation ruled out communal involvement in the incidents. They identified attempts of petty thefts and crimes. The Delhi Police also identified 240 Churches in the capital and assessed their security arrangements by installing CCTV cameras and creating a new Facebook page. Delhi Police commissioner told the Home Ministry that more cases of thefts were reported from temples, gurdwaras and mosques. The abstract of the police investigation and IPF team report is given below:

- At the St Sebastian's Church, as per report of FSL, Fire Department and Electric Department, it can be safely concluded that fire has not been caused by implantation of any inflammable material or an act of sabotage or vandalism. The priest of the Church did not blame any particular group associated with the incident.
- At Church of Our Lady of Grace at Vikaspuri three alcoholics were arrested who have no links with Sangh Parivar. According to Rev. Arnold David of the Church there was no communal involvement.
- Investigations are under progress at Blessed St Alphonsa's Church at Vasant Kunj. The team interviewed Parish Priest Vincent Salvatore and concluded that the media blew the incident out of proportion and created misconceptions.

- At the Syro Malabar Church in Jasola, it was found that some minor boys playing in construction area were indulged in throwing stones and the case was closed. The priest Dr. Jacob Nagelimalil abstained from discussing with the team.
- At the Church of Resurrection, Rohini, according to the experts of FSL Rohini, fire brigade and electrical inspector, the cause of fire has been found to be melting of electric wire and there is no evidence of arson or foul play. The priest told the IPF team that media gave unrestrained hype and foreign press unnecessarily intervened and no Hindu organisation seemed to have been involved in the incident.
- At the Holy Child Auxilium School, Vasant Vihar the Police concluded that the motive could have been theft and not vandalism. Investigations by Special Task Force of South District Police proved a 19-year-old boy Rahul Moirangthem from Manipur was behind the theft.
- Believer's Church in Haryana under construction was vandalized after the priest's efforts to convert local residents. Police registered a case against 14 people and investigation is in progress.

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## Introduction

**T**he print and visual media reports stunned Delhi, India's national capital. It shook the nation. Within nine months the new Central Government assumed power, like a childbirth it seemed, the policies and programs of the government manifested in the national capital as a chain of alleged attacks on the Catholic Christian Churches. Were these attacks an expression of acute intolerance to thwart the beliefs and practices of a religious community which has never been the tradition of India along her long history of five millennia? Are they communalized truculence or antagonism of religio-politics displayed, providing explosives to the propaganda by certain political groups, ideological lobbies and sections of print and visual media in India and outside? The problem although outwardly singular had multiple questions to be answered.

## Objectives

IPF constituted a fact finding team to unravel truth.

- One of the major objectives was to investigate the role of individuals and groups involved in the incidents.
- We intended to know whether the incidents were planned, organized violence, anti- minority drive or unorganized stray events.
- We proposed to find out the role of clandestine groups and political undercurrents in the events.
- The team aimed to analyze the role of evangelists, missionaries and Church leaders in the incidents.
- Finally we intended to ascertain the gap between the reports published/ telecasted by Indian/ foreign media and the ground realities.

## Methodology

Two brain storming sessions were conducted in March 2015 by the India Policy Foundation under Shri R.N.P. Singh, a retired intelligence officer and Dr. B.S. Hari

Shankar. The sessions were chaired by the Hon. Director Prof. Rakesh Sinha. The depth and extent of the problem was presented and discussed from various perspectives.

The team included Sh. Bhanu Kumar (DU), Kumari Aisha Singh (DU), Sh. Digvijay Singh (JNU), Sh. Anant Prakash (DU), Sh. Ayush Anand (DU) and Sh. Vaibhav Chadha (DU), Kumari Vaishali Raj, Sh. Atul Prakash, Sh. Kiran Kumar S. from Bengaluru send us valuable documents. The field research and documentation undertaken by the IPF team was completed through several visits to the Catholic Churches in Delhi and its periphery where the incidents took place. The Churches include --

- 1) St Sebastian's Church at Dilshad Garden
- 2) Church of Our Lady of Grace at Vikaspuri,
- 3) Blessed St' Alphonsa's Church at Vasant Kunj
- 4) Syro Malabar Church at Jasola
- 5) Church of Resurrection at Rohini
- 6) Holy Child Auxilium Convent School at Vasant Vihar all in Delhi
- 7) Believer's Church at Hisar in Haryana

Police reports and information from Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) acquired by this team has been a considerable source for preparing this report to understand whether there was any kind of hate campaign, divisive propaganda, circulation of seditious literature against a particular community and their institutions, anti social manipulation, communal hatred or riot sponsoring operations behind these alleged attacks.

India Policy Foundation organized a fact finding team from February to August 2015 to visit the Churches at Dilshad Garden, Vikaspuri, Vasant Kunj, Jasola, Rohini, Vasant Vihar, all in Delhi and Hisar in Haryana and discuss with the Church authorities multiple aspects of the incidents. However, some Church authorities politely refused to talk with the team. In certain cases where they interacted, they denied the hand of any political or social organization involved in the incidents.

The team also visited various police stations to understand the multiple dimensions in these cases. The IPF team also held formal and informal talks and interviews with various police officials, churchmen and people from other communities residing near these Churches to have a bird's eye view of the incidents.

The report also includes information collected from various leading national dailies, journals and press statements.

## Church Reacts- Media Hypes

With alleged attacks on St Sebastian's Church (Dilshad Garden), Church of Our Lady of Grace (Vikaspuri), Blessed St Alphonsa's Church (Vasant Kunj), Syro Malabar Church (Jasola), Church of Resurrection (Rohini), Holy Child Auxilium Convent School (Vasant Vihar) all in Delhi and Believer's Church at Hisar in Haryana, the Catholic Church unleashed a strong accusation that Hindu organizations are behind such attacks targeting minorities<sup>1</sup>. Even the 27th Plenary Assembly of the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India held on February 2015 at Bengaluru levelled the same accusations.



"The fundamentalist groups involved in the attacks had the government's "blessing and encouragement"."

Rev. Bernard Moras,  
Bengaluru Archbishop in The New  
Indian Express 7th February 2015.

From the beginning of organized protests by the Catholic Church, Hindu organizations were accused as culprits behind vandalisms. We put forward six major statements and press releases by Christian organizations in which they squarely targeted and blamed Hindu organizations for directly and indirectly conspiring and sponsoring the alleged Church attacks in Delhi. John Prabhudoss President of the federation of Indian American Christian organizations of North-America (FIACONA) said they are concerned about violence on Christian institutions and charged that the accused are protected by powerful political groups<sup>2</sup>. The findings of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), was largely based on the accounts of religious leaders of the minorities and non-government organisations in India. It was put forward by the Evangelical Fellowship of India in November and December 2014 which included the vandalism of Churches in Delhi as reported by Times of India April 30, 2015.

The India Today reported on April 19, 2015 that a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has been moved in the Delhi High Court by Reagan S Bell seeking protection of religious rights of Christians. The PIL said that a Special Investigation Team (SIT) appointed should comprise members of the minority community or the National Minority Commission as it alleged that the government had failed to prevent such attacks. Reagan S Bell has also sought a status report from the Centre, Delhi government and city police on the action taken by them regarding the attacks and efforts made by them to secure these places against such incidents in future.

<sup>1</sup> The Indian Express, Feb. 5th 2015; Hindustan Times, Feb. 6th 2015; the Archdiocese of Bombay, released on feb.6th 2015

<sup>2</sup> The times of India, March 20, 2015

The PIL of Bell had been criticized as "communal"<sup>3</sup> by the central government counsel. Following heavy criticism from public, Reegan S. Bell filed a plea to protect "all religious places and said it was not only for Churches". The Indian Express also reported that the Centre told a single bench of the High Court that the government was protecting all religious places, and the attacks are not only on Churches but also on the temples, gurudwaras and mosques.

Without waiting for the Police report to come out, the Catholic Church accused Hindu organizations behind the vandalism. To vindicate the charges, there were no evidences on incidents of hate speech, emotional issues or communal clashes in and around Delhi for a sudden and spontaneous outbreak of alleged attacks on Churches. Outlook, December 29, 2014 reported that Paul Thelakkat, spokesperson of the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala, remarked that Christians are fearful and anxious all over India as BJP government attempts to suppress the rights of minorities.

Times of India January 15, 2015, reported that Delhi Catholic Archbishop Anil J T Couto found "a clear pattern of orchestrated attacks on Churches to weaken the social fabric" and assistant parish priest Father Balraj Lourduswamy sniffed a "conspiracy" behind the incident. On the St Alphonsa's Church vandalism at Vasant Kunj, Anil Couto said the "attack" reflected government's failure to give protection to minorities and their religious structures. He said it was another act of vandalism, and targeted attacks on Christian Churches are a reflection of hate campaign and false propaganda by groups<sup>4</sup>. The Delhi Archbishop did not put forward any single evidence to justify his charges.

National Human Rights Commission member Justice Cyriac Joseph who visited the St Alphonsa's Church, later, said in the notice that the Priest of the Church alleged the desecration as an attempt to instil fear in the mind of religious minorities. Justice Cyriac Joseph has been vehemently accused of visiting Forensic Science Laboratory, Bengaluru when he was Karnataka High Court Judge and evaluated the entire records of the murder case of Sister Abhaya of Knanaya Catholic Church while the investigation was going on under the monitoring of the Chief Judicial Magistrate Court, Ernakulam, Kerala.

"FIACONA will hold individual leaders of these violent groups along with state and national leaders of the ruling BJP party personally responsible for this incident. We will hold them fully responsible for their tacit support to radical sister organisations and also for their failure to put an end to such violence."

Federation of Indian-American Christian Organisations of North America,  
March 20, 2015

<sup>3</sup>The Indian Express, April 30 2015

<sup>4</sup>India Today, February 2, 2015

National Human Rights Commission member Justice Cyriac Joseph who visited the St. Alphonsa's Church later, said in the notice that the priest of the Church alleged the desecration as an attempt to instil fear in the mind of religious minorities<sup>5</sup>. Justice Cyriac Joseph has been vehemently accused of visiting Forensic Science Laboratory, Bengaluru when he was Karnataka High Court Judge and evaluated the entire records of the murder case of Sister Abhaya of Knanaya Catholic Church while the investigation was going on under the monitoring of the Chief Judicial Magistrate Court, Ernakulam, Kerala as reported by The Hindu October 29, 2009.

Later on February 21, 2015, speaking to Business Standard, Delhi Archbishop Anil J.T. Couto said that the country was expecting PM Modi to speak up, especially in the wake of a disturbing turn of events such as attacks on Churches, resurrection of Ghar Wapsi programme and utterances of some of his colleagues. He alleged that Modi's senior colleague Sushma Swaraj said that the Geeta should be made the national holy book above the Constitution, directly in line with the Hindutva ideology, which believes that followers of all other religions (other than Hindus) are second class citizens. There was a sense of insecurity not only among Christians but among Muslims as well, according to the Archbishop.

According to Outlook December 1, 2014, the Christian community threatened to stage a protest at the offices of the Police Commissioner of Delhi to draw attention to the "attempts to polarize the people in Delhi which goes to the polls soon and the continued persecution of Christians in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and other tribal and rural areas". The Tribune reported on February 13, 2015 that Delhi

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PRESS RELEASE

"...unfortunate incidents that happened in the past few months in various parts of our country have hurt the sentiments of the Christian community and have shaken the faith in the secular fabric of our Nation. The shocking incidents that have taken place against Churches, clergy and laity in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi have caused great concern for the Christian community. The recent controversies in the name of religious reconversions portray a negative image about India. Communal polarization and the bid to homogenize India are posing threat to all minorities - women, dalits, and all linguistic, cultural and religious minorities. The Ghar Wapsi programs, the saffronisation of education and culture, and the demands for a Hindu Rashtra are again posing challenges to the secular ethos of our beloved country. Conversions of a religious nature are an exercise of one's free will and one's constitutional/ fundamental rights and freedom of conscience and of religion. Ghar Wapsi is a political process, carried out by the powerful exponents of religious nationalism - much against the principle of Secularism. It does not even have the legitimacy of freedom of political expression".

Catholic Bishops Conference of India - Press Release 21, January 2015

<sup>5</sup>The Telegraph, February 4, 2015

Archbishop, Anil J.T. Couto urged both the Central and State Governments to ensure proper security for all Christian Churches and institutions in the city and bring to book the culprits who indulge in targeting minority religious places and institutions.

The press release by the CBCI on 21 January 2015 focused on the traumatic incidents that happened in various states in India.

Later in a press statement released on 5th February 2015, Delhi Catholic archdiocese listed the vandalized Churches in Delhi.

The press statement of the Archdiocese of Bombay released on February 6, 2015 said that elsewhere in the country, the targeted and communal violence continues with its vicious hate campaign, physical violence, police complicity, and state impunity in the persecution of the Christian community in many states of India. Much of the violence has taken place after the new government of the National Democratic Alliance headed by Narendra Modi came into power on 26 May, 2014. The violence peaked between August and October with 56 cases, before zooming up to 25 cases during the Christmas season. The violence has continued well into the New Year 2015, with more Catholic Churches in the city targeted as incidents continue in other states. Much of the violence (54%) is of threats, intimidation, coercion, often with the police looking on. The two cases of death in communal anti Christian violence were reported from Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

Just two days before Delhi votes to elect a new government in the city, the Christian community took out a protest march to Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh's residence supported by civil societies, religious leaders and political parties<sup>6</sup>. The protest marches, rallies and emotional outbursts took place 48 hours before the assembly elections.

The Hindu reported on February 5, 2015 that some protesters and a prominent activist of the Aam Aadmi Party were detained by the Delhi Police from the Sacred Heart Cathedral as Christians staged protests seeking action against those involved in the recent spate of "attacks" on Churches in Delhi. The protesters blamed the Church attacks at Delhi on Hindu organisations according to The Indian Express February 5, 2015 and the Hindustan Times February 6, 2015.

<sup>6</sup>The India Today on 5th February 2015



"Modi has not only made no effort to control or deactivate the Sangh Parivar, which is the main force behind the campaign against Muslims and Christians, by not naming and shaming them, he is encouraging them."

John Dayal, Spokesperson,  
United Christian Forum for  
Human Rights; Business Standard  
March 19, 2015.





"Minorities in the country have been living in fear of persecution owing to rising violence against their places of worship."

George Antonysamy,  
Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore ;  
The Hindu, April 11, 2015.

Following Church attacks in Delhi, reports were given to newspapers by Church allied organisations highlighting Christian persecution in India. Statistics compiled by the Catholic Secular Forum (CSF) and Evangelical Fellowship of India, based in Delhi (EFI) were released by Hindustan Times, March 15, 2015. The statistics argue that states such as Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu continue to top the list in anti-Christian violence "The first half of 2014, when the Lok Sabha campaign was in full swing, saw the highest number of attacks," says Vijayesh Lal, Director of the Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India. He alleged that the violence was used to polarise the electorate. Joseph Dias - the author of the CSF reports, which found that 7,000 Christians faced threats across the country in 2014 - also points to the attacks on Churches ahead of the Delhi elections.

Joseph Dias, general secretary of Catholic Secular Forum (CSF), told Hindustan Times earlier on February 10, 2015 that the details of the report on threats faced by Christians in India had been shared with human rights groups across the world. The CSF's 2013 report, which counted 4,000 offences against Christians in India, was used by Indian Christian groups in California to lobby for minority protection as one of the terms of reference for India-US talks. In a February 2013 memorandum, these groups sought a "house resolution that would make human rights and justice for religious minorities a priority in US-India talks." Former judge of Bombay and Karnataka high courts Michael Saldanha told Hindustan Times that representatives of countries such as France, UK, Australia, Italy as well as the Vatican have approached them for information. These countries have then proceeded to take these matters up with the Indian government as reported by Hindustan Times.

John Dayal former national president of the All India Catholic Union charged the Sangh Parivar behind the attacks. He said "much of the violence has taken place after the NDA government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi came into power in May last year."<sup>7</sup> John Dayal who is also spokesperson, United Christian Forum for Human Rights, said the RSS has made it clear that they do not recognize Christians and Muslims as Indians.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The Telegraph March 17, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Business Standard March 19, 2015.

Fr Savarimuthu Sankar, spokesperson of the Archdiocese of Delhi told The Telegraph, March 22, 2015 that "The repeated and frequent remarks by the RSS and the VHP and also by BJP parliamentarians have created an atmosphere where even criminal elements feel encouraged. They feel we are soft targets that they can get away with these crimes." "As an Indian Christian, I feel insecure and threatened," says Deepak Mukherji, a senior communications and public affairs professional and chairman of the Delhi-based Indian Christian Youth Conference.

Even before police reports came out, articles by some senior citizens started pouring in major dailies that Christians felt threatened in their own country. We put forward two case studies. Former DGP and IPS stalwart Julio Ribeiro wrote in the Indian Express (March 17, 2015) that in his 86th year, he felt threatened, became unwanted and, reduced to a stranger in his own country by the proponents of the Hindu Rashtra. He asked whether it is a coincidence or a well-thought-out plan that the systematic targeting of Christians began after Narendra Modi came to power. 'Ghar Wapsi', the declaration of Christmas as 'Good Governance Day', the attack on Christian Churches and schools in Delhi, were behind the Church attacks according to Ribeiro. Today, the Indian Civil Society is curiously awaiting top cop Julio Ribeiro's response to the police reports on Church attacks. As a former top police official Julio Riberio did not even wait to read the police investigation report. Mary Marcel Thekaekara wrote in The Hindu, March 27, 2015 that the new war on Christianity is counterproductive for the NRIs, who funded the Modi campaign, since the backlash might affect them sooner or later, as news spreads to Churches abroad about the vandalising of Churches, the rape of nuns in Kolkata and the burning down of a Delhi Church. Sections of the media reported that cow protection bills worked as catalyst behind Church attack in Haryana.<sup>9</sup>

## Investigation Moves Ahead

The Delhi Police after their primary investigation at the allegedly attacked Churches ruled out hate propaganda or organisations associated with the alleged cases of vandalism. According to Delhi police, investigations have revealed that in Delhi at least, most of the incidents of vandalism of Christian institutions were nothing but petty crimes<sup>10</sup>. "One was a short circuit, one the work of drunken men, one a

"The miscreants at St. Alphonsa's Church probably didn't even know what desecration means," said Deputy Commissioner of police (Delhi), Joy Tirkey, who has been appointed nodal officer to liaise between the Christian community and the police in the wake of the crimes. "The reaction of the Christian community has been an emotional one", says Tirkey who himself is a Christian.

<sup>9</sup> The Frontline on April 17, 2015 published an article under the title "Church under Attack" reported that On March 15, the day before the Bharatiya Janata Party government got the Haryana Gauvansh Sanrakshan and Gau Samvardhan Bill, (Cow protection and Cow expansion bills) 2015, passed in the Assembly, some village residents climbed on to the roof of the Church and broke the cross. They then installed a statue of Hanuman inside the main hall.

<sup>10</sup> The Telegraph reported March 22, 2015



"Our government is committed to protect each and every citizen of the country. The delegation of Christian leaders met me and I assured justice to them. Freedom of religion is not only a fundamental right but also integral part of our age old civilization which we are proud to cherish."

Union Home Minister  
Rajnath Singh in conversation  
with India Policy Foundation Team,  
June 2015

professional burglary... And the miscreants at St Alphonsa's Church probably didn't even know what desecration means," said Deputy Commissioner of police, Joy Tirkey, who has been appointed nodal officer to liaise between the Christian community and the police in the wake of the crimes. "The reaction of the Christian community has been an emotional one<sup>11</sup>," says Tirkey who himself is a Christian.

Delhi's Lt Governor Najeeb Jung set up a special investigation team (SIT) to probe into the fire at St Sebastian's Church at Dilshad Garden. The team was to be led by a Joint Commissioner of police as reported by The Hindu, December 2, 2014. The Delhi Police have identified 240 Churches in the Capital and assessed their security arrangements in the wake of recent attacks. They have also plotted their respective buildings on a map. Of the 161 Churches, which have CCTV cameras installed, 54 got these after police insistence<sup>12</sup>. Delhi Police Commissioner B.S. Bassi appointed Joy Tirkey for the said post and asked him to regularly interact with the members of the community and ensure safety and security of the establishments<sup>13</sup> run by its members.

On February 17 2015, The Indian Express reported that Delhi Police commissioner B.S. Bassi told the Home Ministry that more cases of thefts were reported from temples, gurudwaras and mosques. He presented the data with Home Ministry officials after he was summoned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The ministry asked Bassi to solve cases

of five Churches and a Christian school immediately.

The Home Ministry also told the Delhi Police that police personnel must be posted outside

alleged vandalism

NUMBER OF THEFTS				
Year	Temples	Gurudwaras	Mosquos	Churches
2012	36	8	1	3
2013	69	11	2	3
2014	206	30	14	3
2015*	14	5	2	1

\*Delhi Police data till February 2

Source-Indian Express-February 17 2015

<sup>11</sup>Telegraph March 22, 2015.

<sup>12</sup>The Hindu March 16, 2015

<sup>13</sup>A new Facebook page "Minority Brethren" was created by the Delhi Police for posting problems related to any institution or school.

Churches and other Christian establishments to act against fringe elements and provide a sense of security to minority communities. The Delhi Police has also been told to install CCTV cameras at minority institutions and raise the height of boundary walls. Details of the action plan were sent to all police stations.

At New Delhi in a function associated with Sainthood of Catholic Church, Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured that his government will ensure that there is complete freedom of faith and fanaticism and bigotry shall not be tolerated as reported on 17th February 2015 by Times of India. Earlier, U.S. President Barack Obama said that India will succeed as long as it is not splintered along religious lines<sup>14</sup>. He was addressing an audience of students and other invitees at the end of his visit to India. Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh assured that the government would not tolerate any discrimination on the basis of caste or religion, and directed the Delhi Police to ensure security of Churches and other places of worship<sup>15</sup>.

## Autopsy Report: Case Studies

A detailed note<sup>16</sup> of the incidents of Churches was submitted on 02-09-2015 for perusal of the Home Minister of India by B.S. Bassi, Commissioner of Delhi Police. We have included here the present status of the cases given in the note.

### 1. St Sebastian's Church Dilshad Garden, Delhi

A substantial part of St Sebastian's Catholic Church here in northeast Delhi's Tahirpur area was gutted when a fire broke out at its premises. Senior officials of Delhi Police, Special Branch and Forensic Crime unit reached the spot. The Delhi Catholic Archdiocese has alleged that the samples retrieved from the Church smelled of fuel oil.

Delhi Archbishop Anil Couto, sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh seeking a judicial enquiry into the incident, in which the entire interior of the Church

<sup>14</sup>The Hindu January 28, 2015

<sup>15</sup>The Hindu February 6, 2015

<sup>16</sup>(No. 2034/ P.Sec./ CP, Delhi)



"India will succeed as long as it is not splintered along religious lines."

Barack Obama, President, U.S.A  
The Hindu January 28, 2015

In the early hours of the day, a part of the Church gets burnt. Authorities cry foul, claims this is a case of vandalism. Police investigation claims it an accident.

including the Altar, the Holy Bible and Cross were reduced to ashes according to an official statement from Delhi Catholic Archdiocese said as reported by Outlook on December 1, 2014. The Catholic Church is located between a temple, a community hall and an Orthodox Church, none of which has been affected by the fire as reported by The Hindu, December 2, 2014.

"Apart from the judicial enquiry, the government must repair the building before Christmas, ensure that policemen guilty of dereliction of duty are punished, and special police investigation teams are set up to trace the guilty," Couto said<sup>17</sup>.

Sandwiched between St Stephens Orthodox Church and a Ganesha temple, St Sebastian's Church in Dilshad Garden was the first case of alleged attacks on sacred institutions in Delhi.

### Investigation: Police Reports

As per report<sup>18</sup> of FSL, Fire Department and Electric Department, it can be safely concluded that fire has not been caused by implantation of any inflammable material or an act of sabotage or vandalism. At best, an inference can be drawn that fire started from the room of the priest, which was housing huge storage of candles to be used for purpose of worship. However, intensive efforts are still continuing and thorough meticulous investigation is being undertaken to unveil the truth.

### Conclusion: Facts Found

- The researchers visited the Dilshad Garden area and the St Sebastian's Church. The team interviewed the priest and found that the media and political leaders were giving communal colour to these incidents to fulfil their agenda.
- Though the priest did not accept the short circuit theory, he did not blame any particular group and had no clue about the culprit. He also referred to attacks of Churches in Orissa in 2009-10 when Delhi was peaceful.
- The media reports mostly concluded that religious institutions of the minority community were being selectively targeted because a BJP-led Government now ruled at the Centre.



St Sebastian's Church, The Indian Express, December 2, 2014

<sup>17</sup> Outlook December 1, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> St Sebastian's Church Dilshad Garden GTB Enclave, Delhi incident--Case FIR No 770/14 dated 01-12-2014 U/S 436 IPC PS GTB Enclave Delhi

- The timing of such an upheaval over the incident is very significant. It is just before the Delhi Polls that these events took place. The importance of the time cannot be completely ruled out.
- Our team found out that the police actions were taken without any delay, unlike the media allegations over the slow proceedings in the case.

## 2. Our Lady of Grace, Vikaspuri, Delhi

The Church of Our Lady of Grace at Vikaspuri was vandalised on January 14, 2015 by two unidentified men in Vikaspuri on Wednesday, weeks after the ministry of home affairs ordered Delhi Police to install CCTV cameras inside and around all religious places.<sup>19</sup> A CCTV captured a miscreant smashing the glass pane encasing a grotto of the Church of Our Lady of Grace in Vikaspuri at 4.18 am before coming back with another man to topple a statue of Mary<sup>20</sup>. Both fled immediately. An FIR under section 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention), 295 (injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class) and 427 (mischief causing damage to the amount of fifty rupees) of IPC was filed. Father Savarimuthu Sankar, spokesperson of the Delhi Catholic Archdiocese, said that there is a clear pattern in these attacks and a "political strategy" to instigate religious feelings ahead of the upcoming Delhi elections cannot be ruled out.<sup>21</sup>

In the early hours of one of the chilling winter mornings in Delhi, a man parks his scooter outside the Vikaspuri Church, walks in the premises, punches down the glass windows and drives away. Soon, he comes back with another man, topples a statue of Mary, inspects the whole scenario and departs. The movement of these two men along with another person, wearing a dress, who crosses the grotto, gets recorded in the CCTV camera of the Church. Assistant Father Balraj, who manages the Church, came to know about the incident when he saw the broken grotto. The shocked man informed the police about this attempted vandalism of the Church that took place at 4.18 a.m. on January 14, 2015.

The Church of Our Lady of Graces was established in 1985. A Catholic Church, it is situated in Vikaspuri, a thriving hub of the Punjabi Sikh community. The Church is adjacent to the Outer Ring Road, and it shares the boundary with an Arya Samaj temple.

### Investigation: Police Reports

Three persons were arrested in this case<sup>22</sup> there was no past criminal record of these accused persons. They were not found to have any linkages with the BJP or its

<sup>19</sup> The Hindustan Times on January 15, 2015

<sup>20</sup> The Times of India January 15, 2015

<sup>21</sup> Outlook, January 14, 2015

allies. Charge sheet has been filed against all the three accused persons. The above crime was committed by them in an inebriated state of mind.



Our Lady of Grace, The Hindustan Times, January 14, 2015

### Conclusion: Facts Found

- In an interview with IPF's team, Father Arnold David of the Church completely rejected the allegations on BJP and Sangh Parivar as reported in the media. Pointing out that every religion preaches peace and harmony, he said the Vikaspuri Church and the Arya Samaj temple were located next to each other as a perfect example of the flowering of the country's religious diversity. He also described how he and the temple priest participated in each other's festivities. They also visited each other's places of worship.
- "By focusing only on the communal angle, the media was diverting the attention of the people from the real causes." said Father Arnold David. The security provided to the Church and other measures taken by the government went completely unmentioned by the media. The team after engaging in informal conversations with the residents of the place found out that there was no conflict between any communities. The individuals involved in the attack were not related to any political party.

## 3. Blessed St Alphonsa's Church Vasant Kunj, Delhi

The Blessed St Alphonsa's Church at Vasant Kunj was vandalised by some unidentified persons today in South Delhi's Vasant Kunj area<sup>23</sup>.

Police said the unidentified persons entered the Church premises at around 1 AM by breaking open its main gate and damaged a number of sacred items. Delhi Archbishop Anil J.T. Couto expressed concern at the attack and said in a written statement that it is a reflection of the hate campaign and false propaganda by groups whose sole aim is to break the religious harmony<sup>24</sup>. The Archbishop also said the attack reflected on the government and its failure to give protection to minorities

Some unidentified persons trespassed into the Church by climbing the walls, damaged the Eucharist, and stole the chalice. In the adjacent Sacristy, objects like sacred vestment, clothing and other holy items were found scattered.

<sup>22</sup> FIR No. 48/15 dated 14.1.2015 u/s 295/427/34 IPC PS Vikas Puri

<sup>23</sup> India Today, February 2, 2015

and their religious structures. Vivien Ashima Kaul, a retired history professor, said, that the Church episodes were being incited by "fringe fundamentalists".<sup>25</sup>

### Investigation: Police Reports



Blessed St Alphonsa Church Vasant Kunj, The Hindustan Times, February 2, 2015

The case<sup>26</sup> was registered on the basis of statement of the priest of the Church. Later, section 295 IPC was added on the subsequent statement of the priest. Investigation into all aspects of the case is under progress.

### Conclusion: Facts Found

- The team interviewed Parish Priest Father Vincent Salvatore and concluded that the media yet again blew the incident out of proportion which resulted in the formation of misconception among the masses.
- In a statement to news agency IANS, Father Salvatore said that some sacred items and a DVD player were stolen from the Church. However, the Church authorities stood firm on their statements that this was the case of vandalism and not mere theft.
- The police statements clearly see no links and patterns in this case and other cases registered for Church attacks. Possibility for a larger conspiracy was ruled out. Also, both the police officials as well as the Church authorities agree that it has nothing to do with the BJP government. Until proven, no one can be considered guilty.
- Media reports again projected the series of events in histrionic expressions.

## 4. Syro Malabar Church Jasola, Delhi

Stones were thrown at a Syro-Malabar Catholic Church at Jasola in Okhla on 6th December 2014. Though no-one was injured, windowpanes on the first floor of the Church were shattered.<sup>27</sup>

The Church authorities claimed they did not file any formal complaint, but a police source said that they did seek help on spotting 'an unusually large gathering of local boys' in front of the Church. It is alleged that stones might have been thrown by one of the boys, who was playing on the road. According to the Home Ministry, "the Church authorities didn't lodge any formal complaint with the police."

<sup>24</sup> The Hindu, February 2, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> The New York Times, February 2, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> FIR No. 126/15 dated 02/02/2015 U/s 457/380/295 IPC P.S. Vasant Kunj South

<sup>27</sup> The Hindu December 7, 2014.



## Investigation: Police Reports

No criminal act has been found to be committed<sup>28</sup>. It seems that some minor boys were playing in construction area and were indulging in throwing stones in nearby drain at the time of incident. On examination it was found that a small piece (6X6 inches) of a window pane of the Church was broken and one small stone (1-1/2X1 inches) was lying nearby. After due inquiry, the matter has been closed.

## Conclusion: Facts Found

- The researchers went to Syro-Malabar Church at Jasola. We tried to fix an appointment with the priest Dr. Jacob Nagelimalil of the Church and its authorities, but they refused to talk to the team. "With all due respect, I don't want to share my personal views with anyone," the priest said.
- From the police reports and the visits to the place, the team concluded that it indeed was a trivial incident. No political dimension was seen in this case.

## 5. Church of Resurrection Rohini, Delhi

A minor fire was reported in the Christmas crib at the Church of Resurrection in Rohini, Sector 6.<sup>29</sup> As sources in the fire department claim that they did not receive any call from the Church. The fire was limited to the crib and doused by the members of the Church, they added. The incident in Rohini occurred at noon during a nativity scene that showed infant Jesus in a crib. "There was hay and dry grass inside the crib along with decorative lights and a CFL bulb, which could have led to the fire. Further, no call was made to the department by the complainant," said a fire official. Church officials argued that malfunctioning electrical equipment could not have caused the fire as reported by The Hindustan Times.

The Christmas crib catches fire. All the idols kept in it turn to ashes. The case attracts an allegation of conspiracy but investigation leads to a completely different scenario.

The police have registered a case under sections 295 (injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class) and 436 (mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to destroy house, etc) of IPC.

## Investigation: Police Reports

CCTV footage was minutely examined<sup>30</sup> and forensic team collected the exhibits. From the opinion of the experts of FSL Rohini, Fire brigade and Electrical inspector, the cause of fire has been found to be melting of electric wire. There is no evidence

<sup>28</sup> D.D. No. 3A dated 6.12.2014 PS Sarita Vihar

<sup>29</sup> Hindustan Times January 4, 2015.

of  
or foul play from the  
investigation conducted and  
the case has been sent to  
court for cancellation.

a r s o n

### Conclusion: Facts Found

The team had a discussion  
with the priest who was  
benevolent to give time.  
Excerpts from the  
conversation:



Church of Resurrection Rohini, Delhi, NDTV, January 3, 2015

- Besides Catholic Churches, there were attacks on Churches of other Christian denominations (as in Haryana).
- There were former incidents of theft at this Church but this is the first incident when the whole crib was reduced to ashes. Some chemical was thrown from outside into the wooden crib which had a grass board with over a dozen statues.
- In India, media unnecessarily hypes reports and compete against each other to attract people. Foreign media has unnecessarily intervened in this issue of Church attacks. It is our country and we would have solved the problems without their intervention.
- There is no insecurity in this area. Police have given a good response and cooperation.
- Hindu organisations are not involved in the incident.
- People who are a failure in studies and career, transforms into Christian priests in new generation Churches seeing it as the best opportunity to channelize money. At Hisar in Haryana, a Church was opened although there is not a single Christian in that area. But Catholic Churches are different since they have a strong foundation and vast network.
- The central Government and Modi may not have been involved in these attacks but they are still blamed since there are presumptions on the BJP.

## 6. Holy Child Auxilium Convent School, Vasant Vihar

The Tribune reported on February 13, 2015 that Holy Child Auxilium School, a convent school in South Delhi's Vasant Vihar, was allegedly vandalised. The Delhi Police, however, has denied that it was a hate attack. Vatican Radio reported<sup>31</sup> that a Catholic school was vandalized by a group of men in Delhi, sparking outrage

<sup>30</sup> FIR No. 7/15 Dated 3.01.2015 U/S 295 / 436 IPC PS Rohini North Delhi

among Christians who allege a series of such attacks is part of a "hate campaign" by right-wing groups. Father Savarimuthu Sankar, spokesperson for the Delhi Catholic Archdiocese, said this was an attack on the minority community.<sup>32</sup>

On February 12, 2015, some unknown people broke the window of the Holy Child Auxilium School's Principal's room in Vasant Vihar and damaged the CCTV cameras.

"This is not a matter of desecration. It is a case of theft." stated Delhi Police Commissioner B.S. Bassi.<sup>33</sup>

Prime Minister Narendra Modi summoned Delhi's Police Chief and asked him to investigate the half-a-dozen incidents of vandalism at Christian institutions. Modi spoke to Union Home Secretary LC Goyal and directed him to pay special attention to rising incidents of crime and vandalism in the city over the past two months after the convent school was vandalized.<sup>34</sup>

### Investigation: Police Reports

In the statement<sup>35</sup> given to the Police, the school Principal has doubted that someone acquainted with the school campus might be involved in theft. The CCTV footage and CDR of suspects are being analyzed and a thorough investigation is in progress. All the religious artefacts present in the room of the Principal as well as in the lounge, were not at all disturbed, thereby implying that motive could not have been vandalism and it seems to be a plain case of theft.

### Conclusion: Facts Found

- The researchers went to the Holy Child Auxilium School and sought a meeting with the school authorities, but they refused.



Holy Child Auxilium Convent School, Vasant Vihar, Live Mint, February 16, 2015

- Most headlines tried to project it as a case of vandalism, but the media reports also recorded that the school authority and

<sup>31</sup> February 13, 2015

<sup>32</sup> Hindustan Times February 14, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> India Today February 13, 2015

<sup>34</sup> Hindustan Times February 14, 2015

<sup>35</sup> FIR No. 175/15 dated 13-2-15 u/s 457/380/34 IPC P.S. Vasant Vihar

police considered it as a case of theft as has been the case at St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara Church, Harinagar in West Delhi.<sup>36</sup>

Investigations by Special Task Force of South District Police proved a 19-year-old boy Rohul Moirangthem from Manipur was behind the theft. He was responsible for the theft of Rs 12,500 and two cell phones from the principal's room at the Holy Child Auxilium School.<sup>37</sup> During investigation, a team from the CFSL (Central Forensic Science Laboratory) lifted 26 prints from different places in the principal's room. While the probe was going on, a similar incident was reported from Mount Carmel School in May, in connection with which three persons, including Rohul, were apprehended. Reports of chance prints in both incidents matched that of Rohul Moirangthem. On receipt of this critical scientific evidence, the STF team, under the supervision of Inspector Rajendra Singh, started searching for Rohul, who had been granted bail in the Mount Carmel case and had gone back to Manipur, he was called in connection with South Campus case and was subsequently put under arrest, Indian Express reported.

## 7. Believer's Church, Hisar, Haryana

Believer's Church under construction in Hisar at Haryana was vandalised. The villagers were angry over the priest's alleged efforts to convert some of the local residents.<sup>38</sup> Police have registered a case against 14 people named by the priest and started investigation into the matter. No arrests have been made so far. A panchayat was held in the village and the members decided to take the issue to the Deputy Commissioner of Hisar district. They claimed the priest, Subhash, had bought the piece of land to build a house but started constructing a "Believers Church". Village sarpanch Dalbir Singh told Times of India March 16, 2015 that there is not even a single Christian family in Kaimri village. Priest Subhash is trying to convert some of the families by luring them with money, food and other facilities.

The priest skirted the issue when asked whether he had the permission to build the Church, saying, "I am on my way to Ambala for some work. Our senior priest will talk about this matter. I was out when some villagers demolished the wall of the Church. I informed the police, who

The residents of this village were surprised when they noticed a 'cross' on an under construction building. The priest of the Church is accused of converting poor people to Christianity and in one incident is said to have offended religious sentiments of the majority of the population that happens to be Hindu. Already upset with his previous evangelic activities, people were provoked into vandalizing the premise by damaging parts of the building, putting inside it an idol of Lord Hanuman, a photo of Lord Rama, and a red pennon in place of the cross.

<sup>36</sup> The Hindu May 29, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> The Indian Express July 14, 2015

<sup>38</sup> The Times of India March 16, 2015

registered a case against 14 people. The village has two or three Christian families." <sup>39</sup>

According to Kaimari village head Satya Narain the pastor had moved to the area more than a year ago. He purchased two plots and started preaching and attempted religious conversions. <sup>40</sup>

Haryana Police arrested the main accused Anil Godara in the vandalism of an under construction Church in a village



Believers Church at Hisar, India Today, March 17, 2015

in Hisar district. <sup>41</sup> The Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar presented before State Assembly details of a complaint made by a village youth who alleged that Chand had made objectionable comments about Hindu gods. The CM also told the assembly that the priest was luring Hindu youths to his faith by promising to get them brides. <sup>42</sup>

CM Khattar also noted in his statement that some residents of the village had approached the Deputy Commissioner of Hisar to complain that religious conversion was being carried out by Fr. Subhash in the village. <sup>43</sup> He had also cited the complaint of one of the residents, Umesh Singh, who had claimed that he was assaulted by the Father when he tried to run away from a prayer meeting where Hindu gods were insulted.

Our team visited Kaimri village, (Hisar) in Haryana for fact-finding. The team interviewed Umesh Singh and also consulted some villagers to get a clear picture of the incident.

<sup>39</sup>Times of India March 16, 2015

<sup>40</sup>Catholic news source UCANEWS March 16, 2015.

<sup>41</sup>Times of India, March 17, 2015.

<sup>42</sup>Times of India, March 17, 2015

<sup>43</sup>The Hindu on March 17 2015

## UMESH SINGH'S STORY

Subhash Chand Maseeh (the Priest) lived in their neighbourhood and used to come along with his wife and a girl to purchase milk product. That's how he got familiar with the villagers. The couple promised Umesh help to deal with poverty, gave him a Book to read, and called him repeatedly to attend their prayer meetings at the nearby Church.

A year later on February 16, 2015, Umesh visited the Church in the evening. The Priest gave him a book and asked him to read it. But, he did not know how to read. Later, the Priest told him if he wanted to get rid of his loans and problems, he should hit the idol of Lord Hanuman with his feet seven times-or hit whatever idol he worshipped. The Priest also instructed him to have the Holy Water.

After he refused to kick the idol of Lord Hanuman, two men started punching him. They said if Umesh did not cooperate, it will be difficult for them to rope in others from the village in the service of the Lord. Scared, Umesh fled the scene on getting the first opportunity.

On February 17, 2015, Umesh went to lodge a complaint to the nearest police chowki (mangali chowk) with some fellow villagers. Hours later, Father Subhash visited his house and asked him to settle for a compromise. The compromise was reached in the Panchayat. Father Subhash accused those in the FIR who signed for the compromise and warned him against building the Church. Umesh Singh's name was not in the FIR lodged by Subhash!

Umesh's story provides us the other side of the picture. While the media and Church accused Hindu organisations of vandalising Believers Church at Hisar, it has conveniently kept under the carpet the Kerala State Home Ministry's report on huge financial irregularities by Believers Church<sup>44</sup>. India Today reported on May 29, 2008 that the Believers Church owns vast properties, including schools, theological colleges and even rubber plantations. According to the Home Ministry's annual report on organisations receiving foreign contributions, Believers Church received more than Rs 130 crores in 2005-06, ostensibly for charitable work.

## Delhi Assembly Elections and Church Attacks

Until the election results were declared the Catholic Church blamed Hindu organisations for the alleged attack on Delhi Churches. With elections results declared and AAP assuming power in Delhi, the Catholic Church charged that voters have given a befitting reply to BJP for persecuting minorities.

<sup>44</sup>The Telegraph reported on July 13, 2008 that topping the list of Churches accused of amassing considerable property by the state criminal investigation department's special branch is Bishop K.P. Yohannan's Believers Church in Thiruvalla. According to (former) Kerala home minister and CPM leader Kodayeri Balakrishnan, the Church, formed under a trust called Gospel for Asia, has received Rs 1,044 crore in foreign donations in the last 15 years. Using that money, the former home minister says the Church has bought nearly 2,800 acres of land, including a 2,200-acre rubber estate.



"My government will ensure that there is complete freedom of faith and that everyone has the undeniable right to retain or adopt the religion of his or her choice without coercion or undue influence. My government will not allow any religious group, belonging to the majority or the minority, to incite hatred against others, overtly or covertly. Mine will be a government that gives equal respect to all religions. "

Prime Minister Narendra Modi  
at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi  
on February 17, 2015

We put forward some statements, by Church spokespersons especially by Delhi Archbishop Anil Couto after the results of Delhi assembly elections came out in February 2015.

- The Vatican radio released Delhi Archbishop Anil Couto's statement. Couto stated that the people of Delhi voted against the BJP and its attempt to polarize the voters in the name of religion. "The result of these elections is a message to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He should think seriously about his behaviour", said Anil Joseph Thomas Couto, Archbishop of Delhi, commenting to Asia News. "These elections were negatively affected by the attacks on Churches. Five attacks on five different Churches and the BJP, which was in power, stood by in silence. What's worse, it said that what happened was normal that in many other places similar incidents were happening".<sup>45</sup>
- Miko Morelos reported the statement of Delhi Archbishop Anil Couto in the Ecumenical News on 10th February 2015 titled 'Delhi archbishop: Voters dumped Hindu nationalists due to Church attacks'.
- UCANEWS, major Catholic news source published on February 10, 2015 that AAP victory in its wake will bring greater security to religious minorities in general and Christians in particular according to Father Dominic Emmanuel, a political observer and Delhi archdiocese spokesman.
- Archbishop Anil Couto said they (Catholic Church) are very happy that Arvind Kejriwal got such a big mandate. The speech Kejriwal made at the swearing-in gives an impression that he is ready to take all sections along. Kejriwal has a message of humility. "He is simple and accessible." reported Business Standard February 1, 2015.

<sup>45</sup> (en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/02/10/archbishop\_of\_delhi\_"the result is a vote for change)

- Earlier The Sunday Standard reported on 23rd March 2014 under the title 'Christians seek Kejriwal' to bear the cross in Delhi that Christians who were traditionally supporters of the Congress are now looking at AAP as an alternative in Delhi and members of the community approached AAP for a meeting with senior party leaders. Pastor M.M. Singh of the New Cavalry Church in south extension met party volunteers at Kejriwal's Tilak lane residence according to Sunday Standard. Evangelist Daniel Mohan of Baptist Church Met AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal as reported by evangelical bulletin Charis Times on 8th May 2015.

## Post Election Scenario: Catholic Church Denies Sangh Parivar's Involvement

Delhi Archbishop Anil Couto changed his earlier stand after the Delhi elections were over. When asked whether he suspected Sangh Parivar behind the vandalization of Churches in Delhi, Delhi Archbishop Anil J.T. Couto denied that he named any political party or organisation. "How can I blame someone when I don't know the truth? It is the media reports that gave a suggestion to the effect that some organisations might be behind this. It is for the police to do a thorough investigation and book the culprits". The Archbishop was speaking to G. Sridathan of Business Standard on February 21, 2015.

On the question that police have reported temples, gurudwaras and mosques which were vandalized in Delhi, Archbishop Anil Couto replied that if there is a pattern in attacks against Churches, temples and other religious places, that means there is a deliberate attempt to vitiate communal harmony. A comprehensive investigation should be done and culprits be brought to book.

When emotions ran high during Church related incidents, the Church itself revealed quite hesitatingly that no organisations are behind these incidents. According to Father Suresh, Delhi's St' Sebastian's Church gutted in fire has been by anti-social elements. "We are not blaming any particular group for the act but it has been done

When emotions ran high during church related incidents, the church itself revealed quite hesitatingly that no organisations are behind these incidents. According to Father Suresh, Delhi's St' Sebastian church gutted in fire has been by anti-social elements. "We are not blaming any particular group for the act but it has been done by anti-social elements. He said. Father Savarimuthu Sankar, spokesperson for the Delhi Catholic Archdiocese said it is possible some elements are trying to create troubles to malign the present government. On the alleged vandalism at Delhi Holy Child Auxilium Convent school, Father Mathew Koyickal, member of the Delhi archdiocese, who went inside the church after the incident said, it looks like a case of theft. It is too early to say it a case of vandalism.





"I didn't name any political party or organisation (behind Church attacks). How can I blame someone when I don't know the truth? It is the media reports that gave a suggestion to the effect that some organisations might be behind this. It is for the police to do a thorough investigation and book the culprit."

Anil Joseph Thomas Couto,  
Archbishop of Delhi;  
Business Standard,  
February 21, 2015.

by anti-social elements." He said.<sup>46</sup> Father Savarimuthu Sankar, spokesperson for the Delhi Catholic Archdiocese said it is possible some elements are trying to create troubles to malign the present government.<sup>47</sup> On the alleged vandalism at Delhi Holy Child Auxilium Convent school, Father Mathew Koyickal, member of the Delhi archdiocese, who went inside the Church after the incident said, it looks like a case of theft, it is too early to say it a case of vandalism.<sup>48</sup>

Meenakshi Singh, vice president of the National Federation for Christian Unity, wondered if the rising attacks on Christians and the controversial statements by right-wing fringe element "could be a political conspiracy" against the Modi government.<sup>49</sup> She added that this could also be orchestrated by elements who want to project the ruling party in a "bad light".

The Pioneer reported on 1st April 2014 that S P Udayakumar, the Aam Aadmi Party candidate at Kanyakumari, who also heads the People's Movement Against Nuclear Energy (PMANE), has the support of the Roman Catholic Church in the region. The anti-nuclear agitation itself is sponsored by the Church. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in an interview to a magazine hinted that protests around Koodankulam were often funded by some NGOs based in the United

States and Scandinavian countries for which Udaya Kumar send legal notice to the former Prime Minister of India.<sup>50</sup> The former PM observed: "There are NGOs, often funded from the United States and Scandinavian countries, which are not fully appreciative of the development challenges that our country faces".<sup>51</sup>

The New Indian Express reported on 5th April 2015 that Justice K T Thomas, a reputed former judge who served in the Supreme Court, has defended the All-India Chief Justices Conference being held on Good Friday, saying, "what the chief justices are doing is also a holy act and Jesus Christ will bless them because they are implementing justice for the people on the holy day". Justice Thomas was

<sup>46</sup> Outlook December 1, 2014

<sup>47</sup> The Hindustan Times February 4, 2015

<sup>48</sup> The Times of India, February 13, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Business Standard March 19, 2015

<sup>50</sup> The Times of India February 28, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> India Today February 24, 2012.

responding to sitting SC Judge Justice Kurian Joseph's letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in which he expressed reservation over the conference being held on Good Friday. Justice Kurian Joseph also expressed his anguish to Chief Justice Dattu. Justice Thomas remarked that the criticism only shows that some people have become intolerant. Thomas also pointed out that "on an earlier occasion in 2007, the Conference of Chief Justices was held (on a Good Friday), nobody even bothered. This is because today there are people who want to show that there is Christian persecution in India, to which I don't agree. There is no persecution of Christians in India. I am a Church-going Christian. For the last 12 years, I am delivering sermon on Good Friday. That is my personal thing and belief," Justice Thomas added as reported by the New Indian Express.



"Today there are people who want to show that there is Christian persecution in India, to which I don't agree. There is no persecution of Christians in India. I am a Church-going Christian. For the last 12 years, I am delivering sermon on Good Friday. That is my personal thing and belief."

Justice K.T. Thomas,  
Retired Supreme Court Judge;  
The New Indian Express,  
April 5, 2015.

# CONCLUSION

India is a civilisational nation which draws her strength, ideas, values and futuristic vision from the dynamics of her cultural legacies. It is the perennial flow of life based on an eternal quest for truth. Hence it evolved as the land which milked multiple philosophies, ideas, and systems. New religions, sects and philosophies neither evoke fear, nor terrorise howsoever aggressive it might be in the historical context. Hindus as a cultural community welcomed even Semitic religions and facilitated them. But there are institutions which consider pluralism merely in terms of their right to expand at the cost of cultural space and creed of celebrating diversities.

The report is an eye opener. It also shows how there are many columnists, reporters, editors who are anti Hindutva and always waiting to use incidents and events to attack majoritarianism which does not exist either in theory or practice in contemporary India.

The premeditated reaction of the Church authorities on the alleged Church attacks in Delhi and the low profile maintained by them after the investigations are published, questions the ethics and integrity of the Catholic Church in targeting Hindu organizations. Similarly, even before the police reports came out, anti Indian propaganda was given by India and foreign media. Further significant is the occurrence of these incidents as a chain of events close to New Delhi assembly elections. The response of the Delhi Archbishop and other Catholic Church spokespersons stands as testimony.

After the New Delhi assembly elections, the Catholic Church also closed down its agitation against Church attacks and ruled out any involvement of Sangh parivar in the incidents. But matters cannot be conveniently opened and closed with swinging political pendulum. Now the Catholic Church of Delhi cannot simply walk away denying Sangh Parivar's role and blaming

the media for blowing events out of proportions. It has to accept the police investigation and is answerable to the nation.

Truths can be clouded for a short time, but it shall brightly re-emerge like the glazing sun. History is an eye opener for all. The media cannot be singularly held responsible, although its role in blowing events out of proportion is no less. Self introspection might help in our course correction. "Big Lies" were construed to damage a government, an injury that is insignificant in comparison to the wound caused on the Indian nation. This might be restored, but certainly shall take time to heal. But the crucial question is whether such elements contemplate or pursue this agenda in their DNA?

# APPENDIX

## 1. Jhabua Revisited

It is a town and a municipality in Jhabua district in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. On September 23, 1998, the Christian nuns in Preetisharan Ashram in Nawapura village, Jhabua district, were gang raped by more than a dozen men. The news sent shockwaves across the country and outside.

The Frontline (Vol 15, No 21, October 10-23, 1998) reported that the gang rape of three Catholic nuns and an attack on a Christian missionary centre in Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh lead to allegations of a communal mobilisation to target minorities. Chief Minister Digvijay Singh charged that ever since a Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition assumed power at the Centre, there had been evidence of a plan to target Christian missionaries.

On September 29, the Auxiliary Bishop of Delhi, Rev. Vincent Concessao, and the Archbishop of Delhi and the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, Archbishop Alan de Lastic, met former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and submitted a memorandum seeking action to stop the atrocities on Christian minorities in India.

The international body, Human Rights Watch, highlighted the Jhabua case on a global context. Francois Gautier, South Asian correspondent for Le Figaro, France's largest circulated newspaper visited Jhabua and wrote in Hindustan Times February 1, 1999, that the massive outcry on the atrocities against minorities raises also doubts about the quality and integrity of Indian journalism. He added that still the Indian press is reporting it was a religious rape. At Jhabua the four nuns and the Bishop George Anatil admitted to Gautier during his visit that the rape has nothing to do with religion. It was the doing of a gang of Bhil tribals. Yet, Gautier highlighted that the Indian press, Christian hierarchy and politicians continue to include the Jhabua rape in the list of atrocities against religious minorities.

In December 1998, former union home minister L.K.Advani revealed in the Parliament that out of the 24 arrested in Jhabua case, 12 are Christians. Although this was denied by Christian organisations, they did not put pressure further for a CBI enquiry. The Hindu reported on December 15, 1998 that Union Home Ministry clarified that the Home Minister, L.K. Advani's information given recently in Parliament on Jhabua nuns rape case was right and based on the report submitted by the Madhya Pradesh Government.

The Indian Express reported on November 1, 2014 that a Jhabua court issued a bailable warrant against Digvijay Singh former MP Chief Minister and 14 others for alleged remarks on the nuns' rape case accusing Hindu organisations of being involved in the incident. Earlier The Hindu reported on December 27 2003 that a local court today cancelled the warrant issued against the former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh, after he appeared in person and furnished a surety bond for Rs. 5,000. The suit filed by lawyer Shripati Khidwarkar and others alleged that the leaders had accused the RSS, the VHP and other Hindu organisations of being involved in rape of nuns at Jhabua.

## 2. Holy Deeds or Sins: Unanswered

Those who make outcries on Jhabua rape case as communal mobilisation to target minorities and Christian nuns should look into the Outlook cover story of 2012. Outlook cover story published in July 23, 2012 titled *To Cast The First Stone--Sex, violence, corruption, insider exposes rock the Kerala Church* portrays Sister Mary Chandy, who raises the hackles of the Catholic Church. Her autobiography is littered with pregnant nuns and wayward priests. Following close behind was Father Shibu Kalamparambil's effort in 2010, which described in excruciating detail the depraved lives that many priests and nuns, led in Churches and seminaries. Sister Jesme in her book *Amen: the Autobiography of a Nun*<sup>52</sup> details the humiliation, sexual abuse and mental torture at the seminary of Congregation of the Mother of Carmelites in Thrissur district of Kerala. It was reviewed in Indian Express February 22, 2009. In The Hindu November 14, 2009, Sister Jesme revealed Jesus chose her to do the needful. "My story had to be told. He chose me to let the world know the truth. I hope there will be a change for better." She said.

Let us look into two instances. Two years back, the India Today published a feature on March 5, 2013 titled 'Deadly Sin'. It reported that at the Kollam district Sessions Court in Kerala a 5,000-strong crowd greeted the verdict - broadcast over loud speakers - with loud applause. The main accused, Father Antony Lazar, and his "hired goonda" Nelson alias Sasi, were awarded the death sentence for the murder of Marykutty, a 27-year-old nurse. Seven others were given life imprisonment.

<sup>52</sup> published by Penguin in 2009

Sister Angeline Nirmala Reena, a 26-year-old nun of St John De Britto Church at Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu committed suicide by consuming poison. Relatives of the deceased refused to accept the body after the post-mortem at the Coimbatore Medical College Hospital alleging that she was tortured by Church authorities as reported by The Times of India April 1, 2013.

On all these ghastly and notorious murders of nuns and young girls there were no emotional outbursts, press conferences, national protests and rallies against ruling governments, demonstrations by human right activists, demand for CBI enquiry and memorandums asking protection of Christian nuns. In all these cases even the primary evidences blamed high ranking Church officials. When a deliberate silence was maintained by the Church authorities and the organisations on all these incidents, the hue and cry unleashed on the gang rape of a nun at Kolkata was surprising.

### 3: The Rape of a Septuagenarian Nun at Ranaghat

After Jhabua, the much hyped gang rape of a septuagenarian nun at Ranaghat in West Bengal in March 2015 was hyped by the Catholic Church. Even before the investigation reports on the rape came out, the Church, human rights groups and secular lobbies decided the culprits and passed the verdict. The blame for gang rape of the elderly nun at Jesus and Marys Convent in Ranaghat, West Bengal and subsequent robbery was put on Hindu organisations as reported by India Today on March 15, 2015. "We are feeling very, very vulnerable," said John Dayal, on the sidelines of a conference of Indian Christian groups as reported on 18th March 2015 by New Indian Express.

Responding to rallies held in Kolkata, the Archbishop Thomas D'Souza told that the rape comes amid concern in India's Christian community at a spate of recent attacks mostly on Churches as reported by Business Insider March 16, 2015. Priests and other Christian leaders have blamed the rape of the elderly nun on religious hardliners who have become emboldened since Prime Minister Narendra Modi swept to power at general elections, the Hindustan Times on March 16, 2015 reported.



Ranaghat Convent robbed and septuagenarian Nun raped by Salim Habbibul, Aslam Sohaad and Nazrul Aka Nazu from Bangladesh (Source- IBT-March 18, 2015 and TOI, April 1, 2015)

Father Savarimuthu Sankar, a spokesman for the Delhi diocese, told AFP that it was not an isolated since the atmosphere and background was set up for the incident (rape of the elderly nun) as reported by The Guardian on March 15, 2015.

Maria Fernandez, vice chairperson of the West Bengal State Minority Commission said she will not be surprised if investigations reveal that the motive of 'ghar wapsi' was behind the rape of the nun as reported by the Indian Express March 17, 2015.

The Times of India reported on April 1, 2015 that Ludhiana Police arrested the criminals charged with the gang rape and dacoity who were identified as Salim, Habibul, Aslam Sohad and Jinnat. Nazrul aka Nazu prime accused in the rape case was arrested from Sealdah railway station at Kolkota. Similarly the culprit behind vandalizing of St Thomas Catholic Church at Barasat-Christianpara area in Taherpur at



St. Thomas Catholic Church Nadia vandalized by Church Caretaker Tapan Mandal (Source-Ndtv.com- July 10, 2015 and The Indian Express, July 11, 2015)

Nadia district of West Bengal was identified as Tapan Mandal, care taker of the Church as reported by The Hindu on July 10, 2015 and The Indian Express July 11, 2015.

The Christian organisations which tie the inhuman rape incident in West Bengal with Hindu organisations, should also remember some of the nefarious murders in India, from the recent (September 17, 2015) homicide of Sister Amala, Sister Jyothis in 1998, Sister Liza in 2007, Sister Anupa Mary in 2008, Sister Josephine in 2009 to the notorious murder of Sister Abhaya in 1992 in which the primary investigation pointed at high ranking Church officials. The Christian organisations who cried Christian persecution recently, held a spectacular silence with no demand for further investigations on all these notorious homicide on nuns.

The India Today published a feature titled 'Sins of the Fathers' on February 26, 2009 in which it highlighted that when Justice Sreedevi, Chairperson of Kerala State Women's Commission issued guidelines to end the exploitation and miseries of nuns, it was bitterly opposed by the Catholic Church alleging an encroachment on minority rights.

#### **4. Clashes and Violence within and between Church Denominations**

The Malankara Varghese murder case is an episode regarding the death of T. M. Varghese, a member of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church's managing committee and a timber merchant on December 5, 2002. He was hacked to death near



Perumbavoor in Ernakulam district of Kerala. Though the murder was initially described as a result of business rivalry, his relatives suspected involvement of a rival Church faction. According to Times of India, May 9, 2010, the CBI charged Father Varghese Thekkekara, a priest and manager of the Angamali diocese in the rival Jacobite Syrian Christian Church with conspiracy in the murder of Malankara Varghese and named him as the prime accused.

Internal feud between Malankara Orthodox Church and Jacobite Syrian Church has a long history in India especially in Kerala. The Malankara Orthodox Church is theologically and traditionally a part of the Oriental Orthodox communion of Churches. The Indian Orthodox Church accepts the Christology of St Cyril of Alexandria and uses the Malankara rite, a local variant of the western Syrian rite. The Church has close relationship with the Persian or East Syrian Church. From the Persians, they inherited East Syrian language and liturgies and gradually came to be known as Syrian Christians. In the sixteenth century, Roman Catholic missionaries tried to unite the Syrian Christians under the Roman Catholic Church and this led to a split in the community. Those who accepted Catholicism are the present Syro-Malabar Catholics. Catholic Church is guided by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, while Orthodox Church functions through World Council of Churches.

The conflict between the 'reformation group' and the 'orthodox' which opposed it, was a serious development in the Orthodox Church during the 19th century. The bone of contention is the ancient Church in Kolencherry, in Ernakulam district which both warring Orthodox and Jacobite factions claim as theirs. The high priests of both factions, Catholicos of the East Baselios Poulouse II, of the Orthodox faction, and Catholicos Baselios Thomas I, of the Jacobite faction who are uncompromising on the claim to this Church at Kolenchery, are also on dispute on the status of 70 other Churches in Kerala.

India Today on September 24, 2011, New Indian Express on July 17, 2012 and The Hindu on June 19, 2015 reported recent violent clashes between the two factions at various places in Kerala. In Madhya Pradesh clashes between two factions resulted in burning down of Chhawani Church at Indore in MP as reported by Hindustan Times on September 15, 2008.

However, feuds are also steaming between Catholic and Pentecostal Churches in India. The India Today reported in August 28, 2000 that when John Joseph, was appointed member, National Commission for Minorities by the NDA government, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), refused to accept Joseph as a representative since, he belongs to the Indian Pentecostal Church of God.

Problems also started following an outflow of a number of believers from Catholic to Pentecostal Churches. India Today reported on April 30, 2011 how at Wanjawala area of Amritsar the St James Catholic Church was shut down due to shift of

believers to the Pentecostal Messi prayer group. In another incident, on January 15, 2008, youth of the Orthodox Church attacked a Pentecostal convention held by Maranatha Gospel Church at Puthur in Kollam district of Kerala for abusing Mother Mary.

Shafi Rahman of the India Today also reported in the article 'Freelancers of God-Independent Churches mushroom across India attracting foreign funds' on April 30, 2011 that in Kerala the continuing exodus from their flock has shocked the state's traditional Churches. The Kerala Catholic Bishops Council (KCBC)- has made a fervent appeal to its flock to keep away from the "new generation Churches" and prayer groups.

Indian Express reported on June 17, 2008 about K.P.Yohannan who set up Believers' Church at Thiruvalla, in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala. On this occasion, this preacher voluntarily donned the garb of a bishop and hired the service of K.J. Samuel, a bishop of a sister Church. Both the Church of South India and the Church of North India pulled up their bishops for conducting the installation ceremony, the nature of which had been unprecedented in Christian circles.

There have been numerous instances of attack on Dalit Christians by upper class Catholics especially in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The Catholic Church made no protests on persecuted dalit Christians. We are presenting a handful of such instances.

The Frontline (Volume 25 - Issue 08, April 12-25, 2008) carried a detailed report that the week that precedes Easter Sunday in 2008, was observed as "untouchability protest week" in parts of northern Tamil Nadu. This was in response to a call given by the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) and the Dalit Christians' Liberation Movement to highlight the plight of Dalits in the Christian community. On March 9, 2008 angry Vanniar Christians carrying sticks, poles, iron rods, stones and other weapons stormed the Dalit colony at Eraiyur in Tamil Nadu's Villupuram district. Over 30 Dalits were injured and about 80 of their houses were damaged. The two Vanniar Christians killed in police firing were innocent onlookers, it is said. In the mob retaliation, seven police personnel, including the Superintendent of Police, A. Amal Raj, were injured. The State government has ordered payment of compensation to the families of the firing victims, although the Dalits, who were injured and lost property, are yet to receive any assistance from the government. There were no nationwide protests rallies and memorandums to PM or President of India for protection of the life and property of Dalit Christians.

Swaminathan Natarajan reported for BBC on September 14, 2010 that in the town of Trichy, in Tamil Nadu, a wall built across the Catholic cemetery clearly illustrates how caste-based prejudice persists. Those who converted to Christianity from the formerly "untouchable" Hindu caste groups known as Dalits are allocated space for

burial on one side of the wall, while upper-caste converts are buried on the other side. The separating wall was built over six decades ago. Nirmala Karvalho reported for evangelical newsletter Asianews on 3-10-2008 that two Christians died and many more were wounded by police who intervened to stop clashes between Dalit Catholics and upper caste Catholics in the diocese of Pondicherry-Cuddalore. Fr G Cosmon Arokiaraj, secretary to the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, told Asia News about inhuman discrimination for Dalit Christians in Churches who cannot sit with upper caste members in the same Church and have separate cemeteries and separate roads .

On May 25, 2013, The Hindu reported that Anbuselvam, writer, researcher on Theology and member, Intellectual Circle for Dalit Actions, Puducherry, told that “caste is an existing reality in Christian society and a principal social problem in Churches today in the State. Dalits form the majority in the Madurai diocese but still they don't have a bishop”.

A year later, on December 15, 2014, The Hindu reported that Kudanthai Arasan of the Viduthalai Tamil Puligal Katchi, who led a protest, in front of the Vatican Embassy in New Delhi, said that Dalit Christians face segregation in cemeteries and are grossly underrepresented in the clergy. The New Indian Express reported on 19 December 2014 that Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi leader Thol Thirumavalavan accused the Catholic Church of discriminating against Dalits. Addressing a joint press meet along with the coordinators of the Dalit Christian People Federation (DCPF) here, he alleged that Michael Raja from Sivaganga diocese was not being conferred a degree in theology which would qualify him for priesthood. The Hindustan Times reported on August 2, 2015 that in January more than a hundred Dalit Catholic families were forced to spend a night in the fields to hide from a rampaging mob of upper-caste Catholics, at Harobe in Karnataka.

## **5. Serial Blasts in Karnataka Churches in 2000 : A Larger Analysis**

The Hindu reported on August 21, 2000 that ISI directed Deendar Anjuman to attack Churches in Karnataka and Andhra as the states were receiving massive foreign investments. Deendar Anjuman based in Hyderabad is inclined towards Sunni Sufi School and has a deep-rooted history since the beginning of 20th century during the era of Asif Jahi dynasty in Deccan Hyderabad. Maulana Siddiq Deendar along with Bahadur-Yaar-Jung played a key role in the establishment of a non-political platform named as Bainul-Ittehaad-ul-Muslimeen. Later, the organisation took its political shape after Hyderabad was acquired through police action and is today known by the name Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul Muslimeen (MIM).

Times of India on November 30 2008 reported that Siddiqui's eldest son Zia-ul-

T I M E L I N E	
<b>JUNE 8, 2000</b> <b>TWO BOMB</b> <b>BLASTS AT</b> <b>ST. ANNE'S</b> <b>CHURCH, WADI</b> <b>IN KALABURAGI</b> <b>DISTRICT</b>	<b>JULY 8, 2000</b> - A blast rocks St. John's Luthern Church in Hubballi
	<b>JULY 9, 2000</b> - Bombs at St. Peter Paul Church in J.J. Nagar, Bengaluru. The same night, bombs accidentally go off in a van carrying some of the accused on Magadi Road, killing two of them on the spot
2001 - Deendar Anjuman organisation declared a banned outfit by the Union government ■ Charge sheets filed in all the blast cases by investigating officers V.S. D'Souza, M.B. Appanna, G.R. Hiremath, and B. Mahantesh. Many of the accused were common in the four charge sheets	2008 - Special Court convicts 23 accused and imposes death penalty on 10
	2012 - High Court acquits 17 people, including four who faced death in the van blast case, but convicts one and sentences the person to 10 years' imprisonment
<b>DECEMBER 17, 2014</b> <b>22</b> people convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in Wadi, Hubballi & Bengaluru cases	■ Syed Mohammed Ibrahim was sentenced to death in Bengaluru blast case
	■ Mohammed Akil Ahmed sentenced to death in Hubballi blast case
	■ Izahas Baig, Syed Abbas Ali, Mohammed Sharfuddin, Mohammed Khalid Chowdhari and Sheik Hashim Ali sentenced to death in Wadi blast case

Timeline of Church Blasts in Karnataka by Deendar Anjuman

(Source- The Hindu, December 18, 2014)

in the investigation of the latest bomb blast at a Church in Bengaluru reveals the involvement of a fanatical sect that shares anti-Christian sentiments. Books and pamphlets found in his house revealed that Ibrahim is a member of a small cult organisation called the Deendar Channabasaveshwara Siddique Firqa. According to DGP of Karnataka, C. Dinakar, although the involvement of the ISI has not been firmly established it had been identified that the particular sect had connections in Pakistan and that the leader of the sect, Syed Zia-ul Hasan, is settled in the city of Mardan near Peshawar.

The Times of India reported on November 30 2008 that a local court awarded capital punishment to 11 people and life sentence to 12 others in connection with the 2000 serial blasts in Churches across Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa. All the convicts belonged to the Deendar Channabasaveshwara Anjuman sect. The group had triggered six blasts in Andhra Pradesh, one each in Maharashtra and Goa and four in Karnataka.

Joint investigations by the Intelligence Bureau and the Police in Karnataka, Goa and Andhra Pradesh into the Church blasts first achieved a breakthrough with the arrest of Ibrahim. Pamphlets warning the Christian missionaries to quit India and other anti-Christian literature were seized. The Bengaluru residence of Ibrahim and from the Vijaywada office of Deendar Anjuman were raided as reported by The Economic Times on July 15, 2000.

Interestingly, of the anti-Christian literature recovered from the Anjuman, a booklet

Hasan migrated to Mardan, Pakistan. Zia-ul-Hasan and his children h o b n o b b e d w i t h extremists in Kashmir and the members of Jamat Hizbullah Mujahiddin in Pakistan. Whenever they visited the Ashram, they would hatch conspiracies to carry out serial blasts in India.

Parvathy Menon and T.S. Subrahmanyam reported for the Frontline (Volume 17 - Issue 15, July 22-- August 4, 2000) that the first breakthrough made by the Karnataka police

was never circulated. The booklet denounces Christianity as paganism and defames Jesus Christ and the Bible. It has been published by the Saudi Arabia-based World Assembly of Muslim Youth. This, however, was kept out of circulation. The accused instead chose to distribute two pamphlets bearing the inscription 'Om'. The investigators are convinced that the motive of the Islamic outfit was to turn the attention to Hindu organisations which have campaigned against conversion by missionaries. Both the 'Om-marked' pamphlets warn that missionaries would be forced to quit the country if they did not stop converting people to Christianity according to Economic times.

The accused were made to believe that blasts at Churches in India would trigger a civil war between Hindus and Christians. A religious leader from Afghanistan would invade and conquer India, which would be converted into an Islamic country, TOI reported on November 30, 2008.

The conspiracy was hatched in October 1999 in Hyderabad, during the death anniversary of its founder Hajrath Moulana Siddiqui. Siddiqui's son, Zia-ul-Hasan and his four sons, who migrated to Pakistan, had visited Hyderabad during Siddiqui's death anniversary.

On June 8, 2000 two bombs had exploded at St Anne's Church, Wadi in Gulbarga district of Karnataka. On July 8, 2000, bombs exploded at St John's Lutheran Church, Hubli. Next day, bombs exploded at St Peter Paul Church, J J Nagar, at Bengaluru. The Hindu reported on November 22, 2008 that the special court tried cases registered for explosions at the Churches at Wadi in Gulbarga district and Keshavapur in Hubli. It tried one case with regard to a van blast that took place on July 10, 2000, near Minerva Mills in Magadi Road police station limits in Bengaluru.

The official Catholic Church bulletin Asia news reported on November 26, 2012 that at Bellary in Karnataka, Islamic fundamentalists attacked an Anglican clergyman and tried to destroy Christian Churches, and institutions as pointed out by Global Council of Indian Christians in 2012.

Let us look into some Church blasts in Punjab and Kashmir .The Tribune reported on 14 September 2010 that a local Church at Malerkotla town in Punjab was set on fire by a violent Muslim mob after rumours that Quran was burnt in USA. The Times of India reported on January 19 2012 on Sharia courts of Kashmir issuing fatwas against all missionary schools. Times of India also reported on January 23, 2012 that missionary schools in Kashmir have been asked to include Islamic prayers in curriculum and foreign missionary NGOs have come under Islamic

scanner.

## 6. Church Attacks in India-Case Studies

We present instances of Church attacks where the culprits arrested were either Church employees, criminals or due to personal rivalries.

A strange phenomenon among Christians worshipping Satan by attacking Churches, desecrating sacred objects and vandalizing cemeteries is gaining fast momentum in India. Known as Black Mass or Satan Worship, the



Destroyed church graves, Tura, West Garo Hills by black mass denominations (Source- Meghalaya Times, April 22, 2012)

adherents of this rite have started attacking Churches especially in north-eastern state of Mizoram as reported by Times of India on May 9, 2012. They vandalized a Presbyterian Church and Pentecostal Church both in Kolasib district of Mizoram. A Catholic Church has been desecrated in Thingdawl also in Mizoram on April 30 2012 as reported by Times of India. The Huffington Post associated with Times of India has reported on Satan worship in Nagaland on July 8, 2013. The Times of India has reported on July 15, 2014 on desecration of cemeteries in Meghalaya by Satan worshippers. The Sunday Standard reported on October 6, 2013 the desecration of the tabernacle at St' Antony's Monastery Church at Aluva in Ernakulam and St Francis Assissi Church in Aalappuzha districts both in Kerala. The Hindu has reported on November 8, 2013, about this growing anarchist cult of desecrating Churches especially at Kochi in Kerala.

Numerous internal issues within Churches have been interpreted as attacks by Hindu organisations. We are presenting five instances across India where initially they were interpreted as attack on religious minorities.

Let us look into an incident in Bengaluru. Father Arockiadass accused that the desecration of St' Antony's Church at North Bengaluru was pre planned to hurt the religious sentiments of Christian minorities as reported by The Hindu on November 9, 2009. Later The Indian Express reported on 14th December 2009, that four persons including three juveniles who are drug addicts have been arrested for breaking into

St' Antony's Church and stealing valuables.

The glass panel of CSI Immanuel Church at Anna Nagar west in Chennai was damaged. It led to tensions and allegations. But the Church authorities complained that they suspected a former employee Yesuraj who was removed from job as reported by The Hindu on October 11, 2008.

We should not forget how at Mangalore on 2009 March 19, Christians were arrested for rampaging banana plantation belonging to Babbukatte Nityadhar Church. It was aimed to malign the majority community, by hoisting saffron flags in Church campus during Hindu Samajotsav and trying to disrupt communal harmony. Ullal policemen arrested the culprits, Jayson Verghese, Vijit Sunny Rozario, Araki Alfred, Roshan Cutinho, all from Nityadhar Nagar and Ronald Roshan a resident of Kuttar Prakash Nagar, all Christians. They were produced in the court. Under the guidance of the city rural inspector Lingappa Poojary, Ullal sub-inspector of police Shivprakash has been conducting investigation.



St. Anthony's Church, Bangalore vandalized by drug addicts (Source-The Hindu, November 9, 2009 and The Indian Express, Dec. 14, 2009)

Print media plays a negative role in hyping news before the culprit is identified. Anand, a painter was arrested for pelting stones at St Josephs Vaz Centre at Deralakkote in Mangalore for not given desired remuneration by Church authorities as reported by The Hindu on March 11, 2015. Before his arrest, it was widely publicized by Hindustan Times on February 25, 2015 that Church was vandalized in Mangalore despite PMs vow to protect all religious minorities.

Similarly the highly publicized vandalizing of St George Catholic Church at New Panvel, Mumbai in March 2015 was charged on Hindu organisations. The culprits were arrested and identified as notorious gamblers, Rahul Patil, Muhammad Shaikh, Lakshman Sugwekar and Anil Chawan as reported by The Times of India and Indian Express March 24, 2015.

The Times of India reported on April 24, 2015 that the much hyped Agra St' Marys

Church attack in UP on April 16 was solved with the arrest of an auto driver Hyder Ali who admitted that he vandalized the place of worship because his love for a Christian girl was rejected.



St. George Catholic Church, New Panvel, Mumbai vandalized by notorious gamblers Mohammad Sheikh and Rahul Patil (Source- Deccan Herald, March 24, 2015)

Numerous instances of vandalizing Churches and associated institutions by major political organisations such as the Congress and CPM occurred in India.

Surprisingly there were no incidents of Christian councils and Bishops conferences holding rallies, protests and submitting memorandums to PMO accusing major threat to socio cultural survival of Christian community. We present few instances of vandalism on Church by major political parties reported by leading dailies.

The Hindu reported on December 22, 2005 that a group of people wielding weapons led by Congress member of Ajmer Municipal Council, Naresh Satyavana attacked Carmel Church of Pentecostal mission. Numerous incidents involving CPM and its allied groups vandalizing Churches have occurred in Kerala. The Hindu also reported on March 27, 2008 that at Thiruvalla in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala, a Satyagraha was led by priests and the faithful, against AISF and SFI vandalism on Mar Athanasios College for Advanced Studies. Christian Today published on 17 June 2009 that educational institutions of the Catholic Church in Kerala were

In Rajasthan, a group of people wielding weapons led by Congress member of Ajmer Municipal Council, Naresh Satyavana attacked Carmel Church of Pentecostal mission. Numerous incidents involving CPM and its allied groups vandalizing churches have occurred in Kerala. At Thiruvalla in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala, a Satyagraha was led by priests and the faithful, against left student organisations AISF and SFI for vandalism on Mar Athanasios College for Advanced Studies. Educational institutions of the Catholic Church in Kerala were attacked during a protest rally by CPM. Two CPM activists were arrested for the barging into the St. Joseph church at Karumadi in Aalappuzha district of Kerala and assaulting the priest Fr. N J Thomas. The Central Kerala Diocese of the Church of South India called the CPM's student wing SFI a gang of street goons". Bishop Thomas Samuel said SFI, was "a challenge to Christian humanity", and should be banned "considering its criminal culture". The Church of South India has accused the SFI of being a "terror outfit". However, despite these incidents, there were no protests unleashed by groups and organisations concerned about the ethnic and cultural survival of minorities.



attacked during a protest rally by CPM. Indian Express reported on 18 Mar 2010 that two CPM activists were arrested for the barging into the St. Joseph Church at Karumadi in Aalappuzha district of Kerala and assaulting the priest Fr. N.J. Thomas. In another instance in Kerala, as reported by The Indian Express June 28, 2010, the



Central Kerala Diocese of the Church of South India (CSI), called the CPM's student wing SFI a "gang of street goons". Bishop Thomas Samuel said SFI, was "a challenge to Christian humanity", and should be banned "considering its criminal culture". The Hindustan Times June 28, 2010 reported that the Church of South India (CSI) has accused the SFI of being a "terror outfit". However, despite these incidents, there are no protests unleashed by groups and organisations concerned about the ethnic and cultural survival of minorities.

Statues of Virgin Mary and infant Jesus vandalised at St. Mary's Church, Agra by Auto Driver- Haider Ali (Source- The Hindu, April 24, 2015)

The observations of Joseph Pulikkunnel, septuagenarian Biblical scholar and Director of Indian Institute of Christian Studies Kottayam was reported by The Hindu on February 18, 2005. He said that "we talk about the 2000-year-old heritage, but no Church could boast of a history of a few centuries. Every Church was pulled down by Christians themselves," he said. "By pulling down the Ramapuram Church, they are trying to destroy yet another symbol of heritage," he said. Joseph Pulikkunnel was referring to the problem regarding conservation of a traditional Church at Ramapuram in Kerala.

Interestingly, the Orthodox Churches have not accused Hindu organizations behind the Church attacks. Instead, the Catholic Church has marshalled the accusations. Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church Moran Mor Ignatius Aphrem II met Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He was accompanied by a nine-member delegation, comprising senior members of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church as reported by Outlook February 17, 2015.

Accusations, especially concerning communities should be made through candid evidences that should not be refuted or changed according to convenience or new investigation reports. Societies survive in a nation with mutual understanding harmony and self respect, which should not be fractured by convenient allegations.



All India Congress Committee general secretary Digvijay Singh has condemned the attack on St. Alphonsa's church in Vasant Kunj of South Delhi in the early hours of Monday and attributed the incident to the failure of the the Narendra Modi government at the Centre to protect religious institutions belonging to minority communities.

Pointing out that this was the fourth such attack on churches in the national capital during the last few months, he said that these attacks were a direct consequence of the aggressive propagation of Hinduism by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party at the Centre.

- **Digvijay Singh**  
The Hindu, February 3, 2015



"It is possible some elements are trying to create troubles to malign the present government."

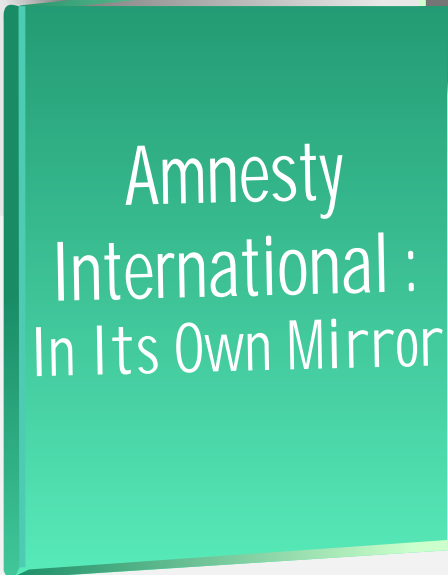
- **Father Savarimuthu Sankar**,  
spokesperson for the Delhi Catholic Archdiocese,  
The Hindustan Times February 4, 2015



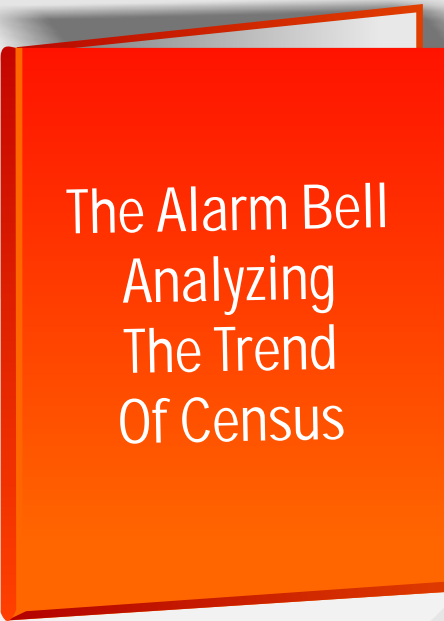
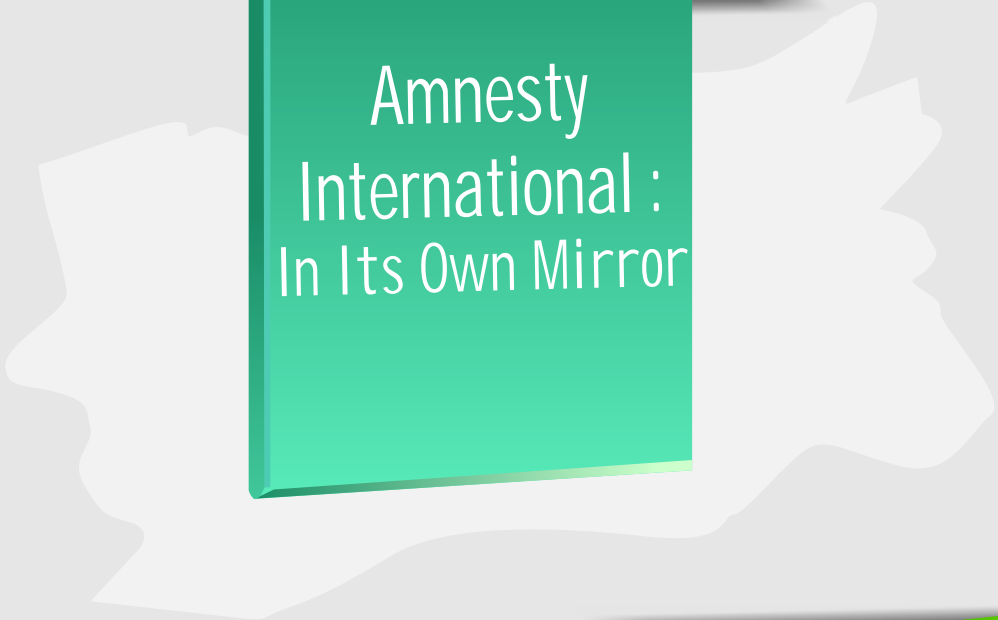
"We appreciate and thank the role played by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indian government in securing his (Jesuit Priest Alexis Prem Kumar's) safe release after his kidnapping by Taliban in June 2014."

-**Anil Joseph Thomas Couto**,  
Archbishop of Delhi, The New Indian Express,  
February 24, 2015

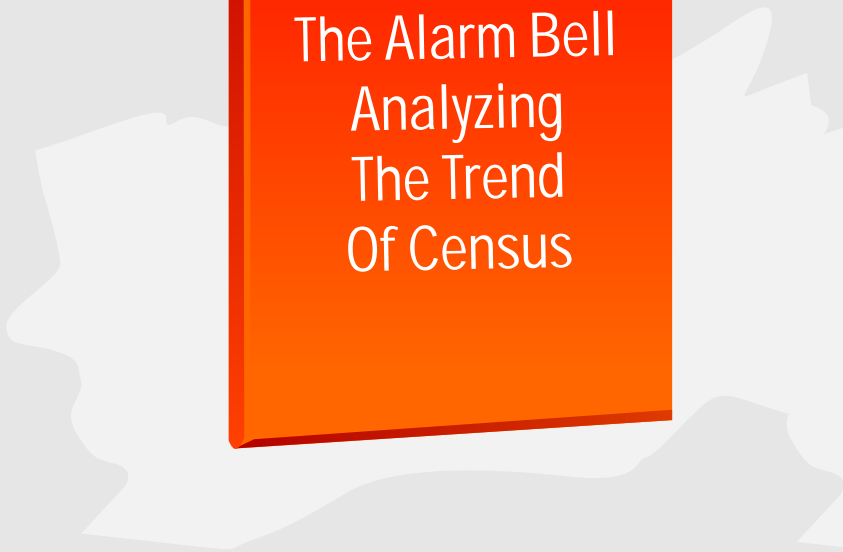
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