Bangalore SKEPTIC

No.1/10 October 2008

**First they came for the Dalits,
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Dalit.**

**Then they came for the Muslims,
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Muslim.**

**Then they came for the Christians,
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Christian.**

**Then they came for me -
and there was no one left to speak for me.**

**RESIST HINDUTWA FASCISM
before it is too late!**

Bangalore SKEPTIC

No.10 October 2008

editor & publisher

manoj

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Yours Skeptically....

The last couple of months have seen numerous attacks on Christians and their properties in various parts of India – especially in Orissa and Karnataka. The fundamentalist Hindu outfits such as Bajrang Dal have advanced strangest arguments to unleash these fascist attacks.

*In Kandhamal district of Orissa, at least 30 people lost their lives in the communal violence that erupted following the killing of Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati, a local chieftain of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) who was trying to bring Christian converts back into the Hindu fold (**Frontline**, September 26, 2008). Though the Communist Party of India (Maoist) owned up responsibility for the murder of the VHP leader, the Sangh Parivar blamed it on Christians and unleashed violent attacks on Christian community.*

*In Karnataka, the excuse given for the attacks on Christians was "forcible conversion of Hindus" and publication of a book denigrating Hindu gods. Though it is a fact that conversions do take place, the Sangh Parivar failed to produce any evidence of "forcible conversions" of Hindus into Christianity. The Christian sect who was blamed for the publication of the book has stated that they have nothing to do with the book Apart from baseless allegations, the Sangh Parivar did not produce any proof linking the Christian group with the publication of book. It turned out that the book was printed at a press that was closed down a decade ago (**Deccan Herald**, Bangalore, September 18, 2008).*

All these points to a single conclusion: these attacks are premeditated attempts to communalize the Hindu society and terrorize the minorities. It is time for the secular forces as well as the ordinary Hindus to come out of their stupor and resist the fascist criminals.

- manoj

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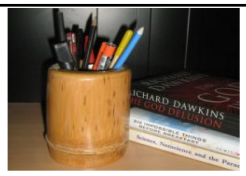
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First they came for the Communists,
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists,
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews,
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me -
and there was no one left to speak for me.

- Martin Niemöller -

Anti-Nazi activist



… and then they came for the Christians!

Narendra Nayak

The Sangh Parivar had promised to use Karnataka as its laboratory in the south. The Gujarath experiment is being conducted in full vigour here. In the run up to the assembly elections, Muslims were the guinea pigs. Now, it is the return of the Christian community. In the month of September, 2008, churches were attacked all over Karnataka, but mainly in the district of Dakshina Kannada. A number of churches were attacked, icons damaged and some devotees were also assaulted. The Roman Catholic community protested against this by assembling in churches and 'peacefully' carrying out sit down strikes on the roads. These peaceful expressions of their outrage also included throwing stones at the policemen. The police reacted in a manner befitting the charges which



are being hurled at them that they are the B team of the Hindutva camp. They came down brutally on the protesters beating them up mercilessly, hauling them to police stations and slapping very serious charges upon them like attempted murder etc. This happened on a Sunday and the next day was a bundh and all activity in the city of Mangalore came to a stand still. On the



next day there was one more general strike called by an organization called Sri Rama Sena and the whole city remained paralysed for one more day. In the month of September almost every human right organization, minority cell, functionaries of the central government have made trips to Mangalore and have made their own recommendations including transfers of the police officials, registering police cases against them and so on.



Christians in Mangalore protest against attacks on churches

Following these there were visits by politicians of all parties. While those belonging to the Bharathiya Janatha Party justified the attackers, the rest shed crocodile tears, condemned the incidents and blamed the ruling party for being hand in glove with the attackers. The Vishwa Hindu Parishath and Bajarang Dal called press conferences and declared that the attacks were carried out by them to protest the conversions by the Christian organizations. They were particularly against an organization called new life, which they alleged was trying to convert Hindus by various types of threats and blandishments. They also warned that unless this activity would stop more such attacks would follow. When all this was going on those in charge of law and order were silent spectators, in many situations acted like agents of the ruling party and came down heavily on the victims who were protesting. The publicity in the media finally spurred the state government into action and some steps like providing protection to churches and token arrest of the state convenor of the Bajrang Dal followed. But, the attacks continued. Most of the action was confined to damages to property and desecration of religious icons.

Now comes the important question of the implications of all these. The Christians are no angels when it comes to violence in the name of religion. The Spaniards have wiped out whole tribes and have converted millions of so called heathen and pagans. The Portuguese came to India with "a sword in one hand and a bible in the other". There is a history of conversion by means fair or foul by the so called missionaries. But, the history of all religions is similar. Islam advocates any means for the spread of their form of belief. The infamous crusades have resulted in blood shed of Christians and Muslims. In our country so called "Hindus" have converted and killed each other in the name of religion as the Saivite-Vaishnavite conflicts show. The caste conflicts between "Hindus" have shed

enough blood and continue even today. The very Hindu organizations who are claiming that Christians come to India to convert are conveniently forgetting what their so called Hindu missions do in the Western countries. They manage to convert some white skins who are brought to India to be flaunted as" how the west is now looking towards India for its ancient wisdom" show pieces! Again, those who have been "converted" to other religions are being welcomed back to their "mother religion" by so called purification rituals. Here is a sterling example of double standards! When one converts to Hinduism, it is presumed to be voluntary or a sort of home coming. When the traffic is in the reverse direction it is presumed to be due to coercion or inducement of some sort.

It is high time for the so called guardians of Hindutva to examine why the conversions are taking place in the first place. The domination of the whole scenario by the upper castes is one of them. The rituals, the

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It is high time for the so called guardians of Hindutva to examine why the conversions are taking place in the first place. The domination of the whole scenario by the upper castes is one of them. The rituals, the gods, the festivals are all run according to the dictates of the upper castes. The daliths in particular are targeted for discrimination. The many so called swamis talk of uplifting the exploited and so on, but are actually perpetuating the exploitation. The funds are wasted on gold, diamond ornaments for the gods and elaborate rituals involving heavy expenditure. Perhaps, if they were bothered about the sufferings of the down trodden they could have diverted these funds towards welfare measures for such people. It is here that the missionaries score. They have given



A scene of protest in Mangalore

medical aid, education, land and also jobs to these sections who naturally converted to their faith.

Apart from these issues, the Hindutva brigade maintained that their targets were not Roman Catholics, but a new sect called the New Life movement. These are a section of Christians who claim to cure diseases, confer mental peace and can even bring back the dead to life believe in powers of prayer. Their belief goes to the extent of having high decibel prayer meetings running for long hours not bothering about the inconvenience caused to others. They were also supposed to be distributing literature denigrating Hindu gods and xeroxed copies of one such tract were also circulated by some of the Hindutva gangs.

The Roman Catholic Church authorities reacted to this with conflicting signals. While the Bishop of Mangalore diocese reacted in a weak kneed manner, sending his representative to a joint press conference along with Vishwa Hindu Parishath and the Bajrang Dal, the Arch Bishop at Bangalore acted rudely with the Chief Minister Yeddyurappa shouting at him for desecrating churches and the holy sacrament. It looked as if the Mangalore Bishop was more anxious to protect the properties of the church while the Bangalore one wanted to make his resentment known to the public in the presence of the media. It also looked as if the Mangalore Bishop had bowed down to the dictates of the saffron brigade from his statements on not carrying out conversions and respecting sentiments of Hindus and so on. It should be noted that the Roman Catholic Church is one of the largest owners of real estate in Mangalore owning huge tracts of land in the heart of the city including many highly profitable ventures like wedding halls, hospitals, commercial complexes etc.

It was also alleged that the incidents in Karnataka got much more publicity than what was happening in Orissa. In the latter state, there have been assaults, murders, rapes and arson while in the former there have been only damages to property. Perhaps the very influential sections of the community of Mangalore have a better access to the media and the region is easily accessible by air, rail and road.

Finally, is the question as to why the rationalists should bother about what happens to the places of worship of the Roman Catholics. Like all other religious bigots this institution has been at the forefront of persecution of all voices of reason and dissent. The voices of reason from time immemorial have been silenced by this church. They talk of secularism and tolerance only when they are a small minority. Should we rationalists rejoice because they are getting a dose of their own medicine? Definitely not. We are not like those who believe in suppressing voices of dissent by force. Unlike the fascist forces, we use the force of reason and not the reason of force. No one has the right to suppress dissenting points of view by force. Let us recall what was said in Nazi Germany when Hitler was in peak form and his agents the Gestapo suppressed all voices of disagreement by torture and physical elimination.

First they came for the Communists,
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists,
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews,
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Jew.

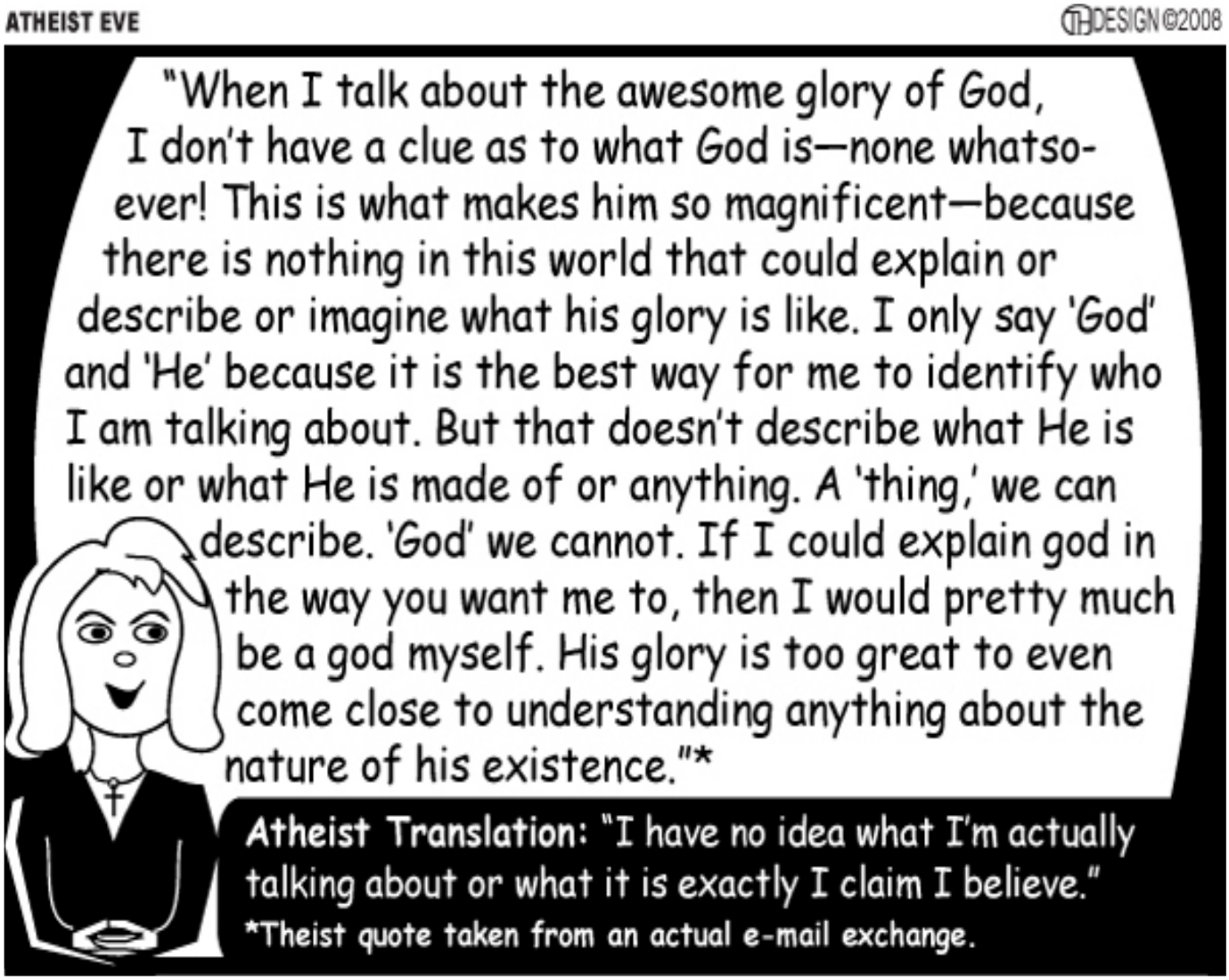
Then they came for me -
and there was no one left to speak for me. .

Though the Christians have not spoken for us at any time, we believe in speaking up for them because every one who values democratic values should oppose fascist forces.

BS

ATHEIST EVE

Tracie Harris



Tracie Harris is a graphic designer in Austin, Texas, US. According to the website, http://www.atheist-community.org/, "her long, slow recovery from a rabid fundamentalist upbringing led her to the creation of *Atheist Eve*".

Tracie Harris has been publishing *Atheist Eve* since 1 October 2004 and all her earlier works are archived at: http://www.atheist-community.org/atheisteve/. *Atheist Eve* is reproduced by *Bangalore Skeptic* with the author's permission.

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Why I Criticize Hinduism The Most

T V Manoj

Why do you criticize Hinduism more than any other religion? This is a question often posed to us - the rationalists, secularists and atheists in India- by the proponents of Hindutwa.

The first time I heard this question it was not from a hardcore Hindutwa proponent, but a medical doctor in Kerala. It was in the late 1980s, when we, a group of young rationalist activists, approached this doctor for financial contribution towards a conference organized by our Association. We tried to explain our position telling him about the number of occasions when we had led campaigns against fundamentalists belonging to other religions, the number of publications brought out by rationalists in Kerala criticizing the religious texts as well as the obscurantist practices followed by Muslims and Christians. Our doctor, however, was not willing to lend his ears to our arguments and we were thrown out of his clinic with him refusing to give us any money.

Over the last two decades since then I have faced this question quite often, forcing me to think about it frequently. Let me hence enumerate the reasons why I find myself criticizing the beliefs and rituals of Hinduism more often than those of other religions.

1. The very first reason that comes to my mind is a question of statistics. More than 80% of the Indian population is Hindu. Naturally, more than 80% of our criticism would also be directed against the belief system of Hindus.

This is precisely the case in other countries too. I read quite a few well-known rationalist periodicals published from the US and Europe. In all these periodicals, most of the articles are devoted to criticizing Christianity, because that is the religion that the majority of their population follows. Wouldn't it be irrational to criticize the rationalists of these continents as prejudiced against Christianity?

2. Second is my familiarity with the religion I was born into. I am more familiar with the beliefs, tenets, rituals, and practices of Hinduism than those of any other religion, and hence I am more confident of criticizing it.

So is the case with other rationalists, who were brought up among people adhering to other religious denominations. The writings of a Salman Rushdie, an Ibn Warraq or a Taslima Nasrin, for instance, are more frequently directed against Islamic fundamentalists than those belonging to other religions. (It should be emphasized here that I am not trying to elevate myself to the stature of these eminent writers).



Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasrin wrote extensively against Islamic fundamentalism

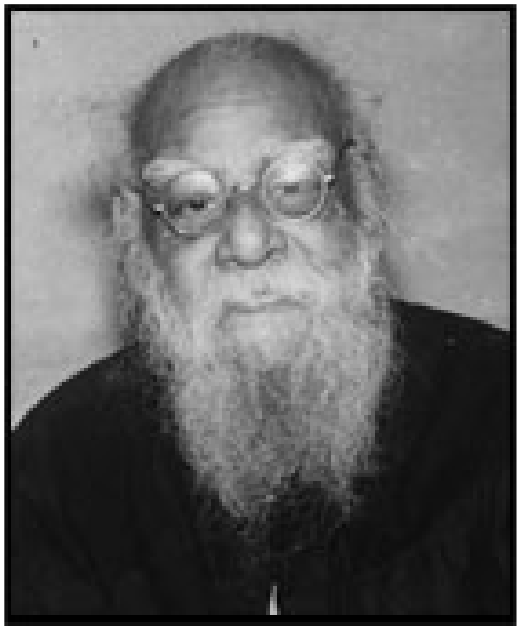
The question of statistics referred to above once again comes into play here. Assume that one percent of any religious community in India become rationalists and start criticizing their parent religion. In India, according to Census-2001, we have 80.4% Hindus, 13.4% Muslims, and 2.3% Christians. This percentage would naturally get reflected in any given group of rationalists and, as a consequence, in the rationalist literature produced in India.

3. Third, there is a possibility that the liberalization or secularization of the religion of the majority in a country has a positive impact on the religion of the minority itself.

For instance, I have noticed, in Kerala, where I was born, the followers of Islam are much more liberal than many other parts of India. It is not possible for any section of a people, religious minority included, to be completely outside the sphere of influence of the society they are part of, however much the fundamentalist leadership is against it.

4. Fourth, the criticism coming from within a community is much more effective than those coming from people outside the fold. This is because criticism, however constructive they be, coming from people from outside a community would tend to be construed as xenophobia or even outright communal. In a perfect liberal-secular society, this should not be the case and every criticism, wherever it comes from, would be adjudged on its innate worth. But ours is not such a society. It still has a highly conservative, semi-feudal setup with a significant presence of religio-fascist elements intolerant of any kind of criticism.

For instance, in Karnataka, at the time of my writing this, a violent intimidation is being unleashed against Christians by fascist Hindu outfits such as Bajrangdal. Churches were ransacked, religious statues broken, and nuns physically abused. One



E.V.R's acerbic criticism of characters in Ramayana did not elicit any violent reaction from the Hindu fundamentalists

of the ostensible reasons cited for this attack was that a certain Christian sect allegedly had published a book in Kannada (*Sathya Darshini)* denigrating Hindu religious figures. Excerpts from the book reproduced in *Deccan Herald* (September 18, 2008, Bangalore) shows that they are nothing in comparison to the celebrated rationalist-reformer E.V.Ramaswamy Naiker's acerbic textual criticism of characters in Ramayana. Though the Hindu-right did agitate against EVR and his *Periyarana*, it never took such a violent turn as has been happening in Karnataka at present. One of the reasons for the less-violent reaction to EVR's work was he was seen as an "insider" as against the Christian critique of Hindu religious texts. (I am not suggesting even for a moment that the intimidation of Christians seen in various parts of Karnataka today is a Hindu-reaction to this book. It is not. According to *Deccan Herald*, the book was printed in a press that was closed down a decade back. The attack in fact is a pre-meditated attempt of the Sangh Parivar to communalize Hindu society in Karnataka on the lines of Narendra Modi's Gujarat).

5. The fifth and most important reason is the brutal fact that the Hindu fundamentalist forces (RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, Durga Vahini, etc) have been on the rise since the late 1970s.

The formation of Janata Party government (which included such disparate political formations as socialists and rightwing Hindutwa elements) in 1977 after the infamous emergency gave legitimacy to forces such as RSS. Since the 1990s, Hindutwa forces have used extreme violence to intimidate minorities and secularists. The violence in 1990 following the *Ratha Yatra* of L.K.Advani, the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992, the state-sponsored violence (in which more than a thousand people were murdered) against Muslims following the burning of a train in Godhra in Gujarat in 2002, the continuing (even at the time of penning this essay) violence against Christians in various parts (especially in Orissa and Karnataka) of the country, the attempts to saffronise education and secular institutions during the NDA government, the attacks on exhibition of paintings of MF Hussain, etc are ample evidence of the presence and rise of Hindutwa fascism in the country. There is no point in calling myself a rationalist if I do not take a stand against this fascist intimidation and violence and speak for the rights of the intimidated.

BS



Babri Masjid demolition & recent attacks on churches: There is no point in calling myself a rationalist if I do not take a stand against fascist intimidation and violence and speak for the rights of the intimidated.

The Guardians of Morality

Narendra Nayak

• Two teenage girls, their mother and maternal aunts were shot and buried when still breathing- their crime? The girls were proclaiming that they would marry persons of their choice- their mother and aunt supported them.

• A married woman in her twenties was shot dead after being pulled out of her lawyer's office; the lawyer was also shot at but had a providential escape. Reason- the victim had gone to consult her about divorcing her husband who was inflicting cruelty after cruelty one her. The only eye witness who had seen her being shot by her husbands people was her mother who later on testified that she did not see anything ,hear anything or do anything! The dead woman's father justified his daughter's murder on the grounds of family honor!

• A married woman was escorted by her friends her son nearly half her age. That was construed as spending time with an alien man. The punishment? The boy's sisters were raped by the woman's husband and his brothers.

• Genital mutilation is carried out on many pre-pubertal Muslim girls in some African countries to prevent them from "enjoying" sex! Since it is forbidden in all civilized countries some parents try to take their girls back to the 'home' country where it can be performed.

• A couple was ordered to be separated by their caste panchayath. Reason? According to some ancient rule they are of the same gothra and hence are considered as brother and sister and hence their marriage amounts to incest.

• A girl commits suicide as she is harassed by a local "sena" for speaking to her neighbor who belongs to another community. Her pleas that he is twice her age and had got her a job fell on deaf ears.

• An auto rickshaw driver is assaulted with deadly weapons because he was transporting a woman belonging to another community at night. Her pleas that she was being taken to a hospital in an emergency were ignored.

• A boy and a girl belonging to different minority communities were going together. They were attacked by a boy belonging to the girl's community who was supported by a local sena, whose members belong to the majority community!

The only thing in common with all these happenings is that the cause for the each of these is treatment of women as a commodity

The only thing in common with all these happenings is that the cause for the each of these is treatment of women as a commodity. The more barbaric of the incidents as we would have already guessed have happened in Islamic states where the state is in support of such happenings. When the incident of murders of the girls, their mother and aunt was

brought up in the Pakistan parliament the MP of that constituency was protective of the murderers and said that tribal customs should not be interfered with!

We are not far from such situations in our district. The constitution of India which is a secular democratic republic guarantees fundamental rights to all the citizens - the right to follow a religion of one's choice or not to have one; the right to marry any one of one's choice (though same sex marriages are not allowed!); the right to live with any one whom one chooses to live with whether married to that person or not. These do exist on paper and for those who can afford the due process of law. But, according to the various Senas and Dals belonging to various religions the constitution of India has been suspended in our district

The impression created by the authorities is that they are not upholders of law and order or the rights of the individuals, but are servants of the various communal organizations. The highest police official of the district has gone on record that the moral policing is a social problem and not a law and order issue! Well Mr. Superintendent of police, when a person's constitutional rights are infringed it is a law and order problem. The role of the police is to uphold law and order. They are not social reformers or moral authorities.

That reminds us of an incident which had taken place a few years back when another person was occupying the same chair. In Puttur a huge crowd of the local sena had assembled outside a cinema theatre to "catch" a couple who were inside. They were waiting for the show to be over and when it was, the offending couple was brought to the police station nearby. As to be expected the woman was belonging to the community of the sena and the man of a minority community. The woman admitted that she was a major, in love with him and had gone to see the movie out of her own free will. But, the crowd was not satisfied with that. They were baying for the man's blood and wanted the police to book a case. The superintendent of police who had then arrived on the spot told the members of the sena that if a case was to be booked, it was against them and not the couple. He told them that the couple was well within their rights to see a movie of their choice. He also informed the goons of the sena that it was the duty of the police to protect the couple and that it would be done at any cost. The heroes of the sena beat a hasty retreat when they were replied to in the very same language which they were fond of using!

While they have no qualms about attacking the lower middle class and the economically backward sections, all their moral posturing disappears when it comes to dealing with the rich and the powerful.

The so called moral police had also got one couple of their own community arrested for staying together in a hotel room. The so called 'arrest' was accompanied by media publicity. When it turned out that the couple were engaged to be married and were staying together with consent of all concerned the 'bold exposure' became a damp squib! Even if the couple were not engaged to be married, even if they were belonging to different communities, they had not committed any offence under any law of the land. There is no law which considers sexual activity between two consenting adults of the opposite sex as an

offence, unless the woman is married. In that case it would be adultery. Even if that were to be an offence, the complainant should be her husband and not any sena or dal which claims to be guardians of the morals of the society.

These guardians of morality have been very selective. When the offenders belong to their cadre or leadership, they are not to be seen any where. If the male happens to belong to their community then there is not a whimper of protest as if the morality is only for women. There have been many embarrassing incidents which have been swept under the carpet. Once the members of a sena, saw a boy and girl sitting and talking in a restaurant, gathered their lumpen cadres and attacked the boy for corrupting an innocent female belonging to their community! It turned out that they were members of the same minority community and it was not the one whose interests were being 'protected' by the sena! But, the protectors of the interests of their community also have a tendency to protect purity of lineage of others too! For example a Christian lady was attacked for having dinner with a Muslim, not by the members of her community but by the cadre of a Hindu sena! Again, the selectivity of these organizations has many other limitations. While they have no qualms about attacking the lower middle class and the economically backward sections, all their moral posturing disappears when it comes to dealing with the rich and the powerful.

While there are any number of such romances and marriages and even liaisons among the so called elite, to which all these guardians of morality and religious interests turn a convenient blind eye. While revealing the names of such in our area would be an infringement of their privacy, there are well known cases at the national level of many celebrities. There are quite a few Khans of Bollywood who have married Hindu women. There is Mansur Ali Khan also called the Nawab of Pataudi who has married a Hindu, Sharmila Tagore and probably converted her to Islam. Again, the popular BJP MP and film star Dharmendra is supposed to have converted to Islam to marry Hema Malini who is a BJP star campaigner. So, all the bravado of these guardians of morality is directed at the powerless ordinary people who have no money or muscle power.

The situation has gone to such a state that some Christian youth have ganged up with a Hindu organization to organize a sena attack on female members of their community who are seen with men of other communities! If one observes the members of these communal organizations it is mainly the lumpen elements and the unemployed young men. They are all out to vent their frustration on easily identifiable targets unable to defend themselves. Some sections of the media are hand in glove with such elements because we find that the media is very conveniently present to report on these events. The defenders of morality seem to thrive on this publicity.

How can this situation be tackled? The talibanis of all communities have to be made accountable for their actions. They cannot take the law into their hands. The police and the district authorities are to be vigilant of such and a few cases booked for those breaking the law will be enough to make them see sense. While one community is being blamed for bomb

"All that is needed for the dark forces of evil to take over this world is enough number of good men who want to do nothing" - Edmund Burke

blasts, which is understandable as the organizations claim to be belonging to that, it is not that others are angels. Like members of the banned Students Islamic Movement of India who have been preparing bombs, the Bajrang Dal has been also implicated in the same. It is for all citizens who uphold the democratic, secular values to make it clear to these misguided youth that they are being misled by vested interests out to exploit them. Once their usefulness is over, they are dropped like the proverbial hot potato and left to their fate!

As this goes to press there are have been attacks on places of worship under the guise of prevention of conversions and alleged insults to gods of a particular religion. One of the main reasons for this is the tolerance shown to the behavior of these hooligans by the decent, law abiding citizens of Mangalore who are "good" and want to remain so! I would like to add a quotation from a parliamentarian of repute, Edmund Burke "All that is needed for the dark forces of evil to take over this world is enough number of good men who want to do nothing". In the interest of the future of our children and coming generations who are not going to excuse us for non involvement when something could be have been done let us get out our cocoons and illusions of grandeur and start doing something about this sorry state of affairs. Let us remember how Hitler with his small band of Nazis brought Germany to the brink of annihilation by the techniques of systematic spread of lies and the co-operation of the large number of decent people, the silent majority who did not want to get "involved". Replace the word Jew by minorities and we have the same propaganda that is going on today.

BS



Divine morality is the absolute negation of human morality

- Michael Bakunin -

Twenty-eight churches have been targeted in Karnataka since August 2008

Karnataka Bureau

The Hindu, Bangalore (26 September 2008)

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Bangalore: Twenty-eight attacks of varying intensity on churches across eight districts of the State since mid-August. These range from stone pelting and damage to desecration, arson and attacks on nuns. The intensity of the attacks peaked on September 14 with 12 attacks in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts. It thereafter ebbed, following widespread protests and the intervention of the UPA Government in the form of an advisory to the State Government.

The following is the timeline of the attacks:

August 17

Protestors staged a dharna in front of the DHM church in Jayanagar in Davangere city. Christian literature was burnt. No arrests were made.

August 24

In Davangere, town vandals burnt Christian literature in front of the Nitya Jeeva Devalaya church. No complaint was registered.

August 27

A Christian prayer hall at Uchangidurga in Harpanahalli taluk was attacked and pastor Raju Gowda roughed up. Eight persons were arrested. Case was registered under Section 295 and 298 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

September 7

Around 9 a.m. at Bada village, Davangere district, the Yesu Kripalaya Church was attacked by a 300-strong mob that broke the asbestos ceiling, furniture, windows, set fire to a Bible and other literature. Ten arrests were made. Case registered under Sections 295 and 298 of the IPC.

September 14

Between 9 a.m. and 11.15 a.m., the following churches and prayer halls were attacked in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts:

In Bannur village, a group entered the Believers' Church and vandalised the place. Four persons were arrested. Case was booked under Sections 143, 147, 148, 427 and 149 of the IPC.

In Udupi city, the New Life Fellowship Hall was attacked injuring five persons and a child. Windows were smashed and furniture damaged.

In Shiroor village, Udupi district, a gang of 25 with sickles and sticks attacked the Life and Light Ministries prayer hall. The pastor was assaulted, a car torched, windowpanes broken, furniture damaged. Five arrests were made. Case registered under Sections 143, 147, 295, 448, 324, 506, 427 and 149 of the IPC.

In Koteshwar village of Udupi district at the Carmel Ashram church, idols of Mother Mary and Infant Jesus were damaged. Two persons were arrested.

In Mudur village, Udupi district, a group attacked the Mission One Million Life Centre and manhandled a person, damaged furniture, a television set and the telephone. Five arrests were made. Case registered under sections 506, 153(A), 149, 143, 147, 148, 448, 427, 323 of the IPC.

At Kodical, Mangalore city, a Tamil protestant church was attacked by 15 persons while prayers were on. Furniture was destroyed. Four persons were arrested. Case registered under Sections 143, 147,148, 333, 448, 153(a) 427, 149 of the IPC.

At the Adoration Monastery on Falnir road, Mangalore city,15 persons desecrated the place and attacked nuns who were in prayer. Seven arrests were made. Cases registered under 143, 144,

147, 148, 324, 326, 427, 448, 153 (a) and 149 of the IPC.

At Kavoor, Mangalore city, around 20 persons vandalised and desecrated the Assembly of Prayer Fellowship. Policemen on duty were attacked. Four arrests were made. Cases registered under 143, 144, 147, 148, 448, 323, 324, 427, 332, 153 (a), 380 and 149 of IPC.

At Shakti Nagar in Mangalore Rural taluk, around 60 persons vandalised and desecrated the Jesus Christ Church. No arrests were made. Case registered under Sections 143, 147, 148, 447, 427, and 149 IPC

At Bilinele village, at the Assembly of God Church, around 20 persons vandalised and desecrated the place. Nine persons were arrested. Case registered under Sections 143, 144, 147, 148, 447, 323, 324, 15(A), 295 (a), 506 and 149 of the IPC.

At Kalanja village, Dakshina Kannada district, around 15 persons assaulted devotees with sickles and desecrated the prayer hall of the Indian Pentecostal Prayer Hall. Nine arrests were made. Case registered under Sections 143, 147, 148, 324, 427 and 149 of the IPC. At Madanthyar village, Dakshina Kannada district, a gang of 30 assaulted the pastor of the Mahima Prayer Hall with iron rods and desecrated the place. Six arrests were made. Case registered under sections 143, 147, 148, 427, 324 and 34 of the IPC.

September 15

The following places of worship were attacked between 1.30 a.m. and 3.30 p.m.

At Ganjimath village, Mangalore Rural taluk, windowpanes of the Believers' Church were broken by motorcycle-borne vandals. No arrests. In Bantwal taluk, vandals tried to set the door of the Believers' Church on fire through a police team was guarding the church. No arrests were made.

On Jail Road, Mangalore city, motorcycle-borne vandals pelted stoned at the Capuchin Church and destroyed sacred idols. No arrests. Case registered under sections 427, 153 (a) of the IPC.

September 16

In Kolar town, vandals damaged a century-old statue of Mary at the St. Mary's church. No arrests were made.

At Adyar, Mangalore Rural taluk, over 20 vandals desecrated the Rima Worship Centre and destroyed property. No arrests were made. Case registered under sections 143, 144, 147, 148, 447, 427, and 149 of the IPC.

At Ernody village, vandals broke into the St. George church, desecrated the place and attempted to set it on fire. Two arrests were made. Case registered under sections 457, 295, and 448 of IPC.

September 18

On B.C. Road in Bantwal taluk vandals pelted stones at the Believers' church.

In Dharwad, attackers broke the glass encasing of the Mother Mary statue of the Presentation Girls School. No arrests. Case was registered under Section 295 of the IPC.

September 19

In Sagar town, a group hung a garland of footwear on the minar of the Idgah Minar. Three arrests were made. Case registered under section 153 and 153(A) of the IPC.

At Padu Kody village, Mangalore district, motorcycle-borne vandals pelted stones at the St. Xavier's church and destroyed the idols. Cases registered under sections 143, 144, 295, 427 and 149 of the IPC

September 21

There were four attacks on this date. A group broke windowpanes of a prayer hall called "Brethren Christa Aaradhanalaya" near Nellihudikeri town in Kodagu district At Yedapadavu village of Mangalore Rural taluk, a seminary belonging to the Believers' Church was attacked. Vandals threw stones and damaged the roof of the institution. No arrests were made.

In Bangalore at the St. James Church in Mariyannapalya, two gold plated crowns and cash from the offering box were stolen, and the sacred sacrament damaged. Seven persons were arrested.

At the Holy Church in the Name of Jesus at Rajarajeshwarinagar in Bangalore, the glass casing around Infant Jesus was stoned and the statue damaged. No arrests have been made. In both incidents, cases were registered under sections 144,149, 333 and 448 of the IPC.

Two churches vandalised in Kerala

K.P.M. Basheer

The Hindu, Bangalore (26 September 2008)

ANGAMALY (Kerala): Two churches, one of them among the oldest in India, were vandalised by unidentified people in the early hours of Sunday at Akapparambu in Nedumbassery panchayat, about 35 km from Kochi city.

A seven-foot statue of Christ in the cemetery of the 467-year-old Garvasis and Prothasis Church, belonging to the Syro-Malabar Church, was broken and knocked off its pedestal. Next door, at the Mar Sabore Afroth Syrian Cathedral Church, the glass windows of a chamber that houses the sandalwood cot used by St. Paulose Mar Athanasius were smashed. The cathedral, said to have been built in 825 A.D., is one of the ancient churches of the Jacobites.

Fr. Paulose Arackaparambil, vicar at the cathedral church, told The Hindu that the glass windows must have been smashed between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. As soon as a church employee informed him of the incident, he reported it to the police and they arrived soon. At the Catholic church, the destruction of the statue was noticed by early worshippers and church staff.

While the police and church authorities suspect a deliberate attempt to instigate communal ire, Nedumbassery and nearby panchayats, which are home to scores of churches of various denominations, remained calm.

Coming in the wake of the violence against Christians in Orissa and attacks on churches in Karnataka, the Akapparambu attacks immediately raised concern across Kerala, but no related incident was reported from anywhere. Church leaders played down the incident, saying it could be an isolated attack, while the authorities set up a special team to investigate the sacrilege.

In few hours after the incident, Home Minister Kodiyeri Balakrishnan and Fisheries Minister S. Sarma visited the two churches that stand on adjoining compounds and spoke to the church functionaries and lay people. Senior police officers, heads of government agencies, top functionaries of political parties and religious leaders also rushed in.

Book that triggered trouble in Karnataka

DH News Service, Bangalore

(*Deccan Herald*, 18 September 2008)

"Vishnu himself admits that he committed a blunder. I can't offer prayers to such a God. I don't like you people offering prayers to him" (Page 40)

"Rama, instead of advising his wife Sita, that she was eyeing a magical deer not a golden one, he went chasing the deer. Is he not a fool? How can he be a God?" (Page 42)

"Vashishta, progenitor of Brahmins, is Srirama's guru. He was born to Urvashi, a prostitute." (Page 48)

"Krishna, in the Vishnu Purana, admits that he does not deserve Shamantakamani. He said only he who does not have darkness in him deserves it. It is clear that Lord Krishna is not a symbol of light, but darkness. We should not forget that one who is filled with darkness cannot be a God" (page 50)

The above quotes are excerpts from Satya Darshini, the translation of a book published by Karunamaya Ministries, Carmel Church, Hyderabad. The 200-page book is in Kannada.

Disputed

While the Bajrang Dal alleges

that these books are being distributed through the New Life Trust of Christians, the Trust has claimed that it has got nothing to do with the book.

The author introduces himself as being born to a Vaidika Brahmin family. He served as the main priest at a Lakshminarayanaswamy Temple. When his sojourn to find true God began, he faced many hurdles. His own people tortured him. His people had left him in the temple without food for seven days. He was freed by Jesus Christ.

He realised that Hindu Gods were not worthy to be worshipped, since they had committed blunders like human beings.

Then he started worshipping Jesus, and began spreading the message of Jesus. Later, he started the Karunamayi Ministries and Carmel church.

Bajrang Dal State Convenor Mahendra Kumar said the book has been translated into Kannada by Ramareddy, who hails from Bangalore.

"The book denigrates Hindu gods - Rama, Krishna, Vashishta. As the book was circulated widely, Hindu youth were infuriated. They attacked churches as a measure to show their anger. The New Life Trust should be held responsible for the attacks," he added.

MP involved?

He said that the trust had been into conversion activities for years. Lok Sabha member H T Sangliana was the main trustee, and he had been monitoring the activities of the trust from Bangalore, he added.

"If he is arrested, the truth about the trust and its activities will come out. The state government should arrest him," Mahendra Kumar said.

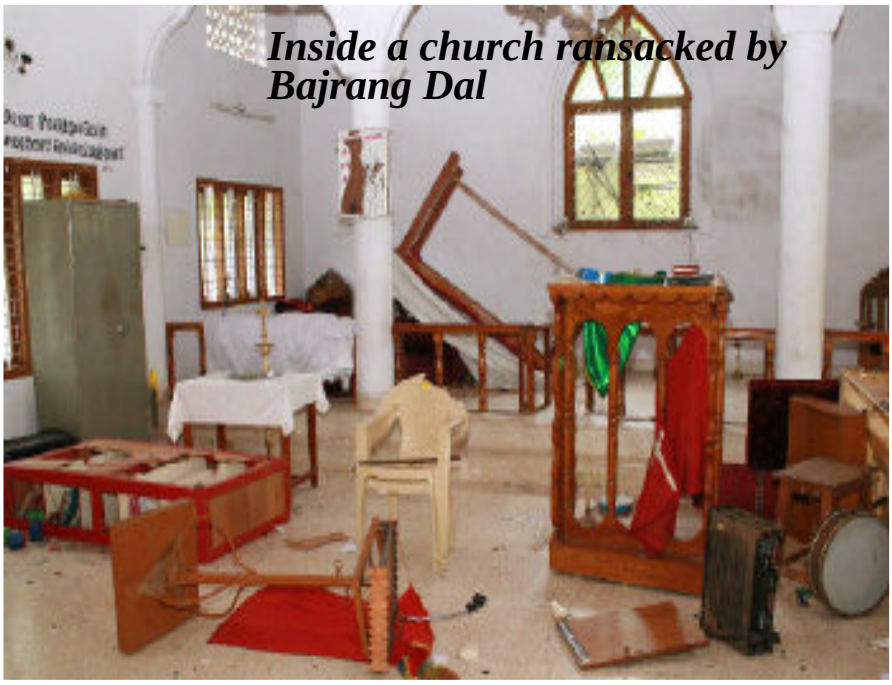
The printer has now shut shop

(*Deccan Herald*, 18 September 2008)

Gadag, DHNS: The printing press in Betageri, which is believed to have printed the controversial book Satya Darshini, had closed down about a decade ago.

Inquiries by Deccan Herald to find out whether the book was actually printed at the press met a dead end as the press did not exist now. Now, it is not clear as to who had distributed the translated book, which is believed to be the cause for trouble in many places. Even doubts were being expressed that a Hindu organization could have circulated photocopies of the extracts of the book to find a ruse for attacking churches.

The book gives the address of the publisher as Santhosh Printers, Subhash Road, Betageri. One of the owners, Narayana Hullur, who is now a weaver, said "We closed the printing press 10 years ago as we sustained loss owing to advent of offset machines." But he could not confirm whether the press had indeed printed the book. However, type phases indicate that it was done by hot metal composing press.



Inside a church ransacked by Bajrang Dal

Allegations, denials

(*Deccan Herald*, 18 September 2008)

Bangalore, DHNS: This is the first time in Karnataka such wide spread attacks against churches are taking place. There are allegations from the saffron brigade that these churches are responsible for large-scale conversion in the State. But Christians stoutly deny it, saying that there is no proof to back such allegations.

It is a fact that neither the Bajrang Dal nor the Srirama Sene are in a position to justify their allegations by producing statistics to show many Hindus have been converted to Christianity in recent years.

But the Bajrang Dal claims that the residents of at least 5,000 houses in Mangalore alone were converted to Christianity last year.

It is mainly SC/STs who are lured into converting to Christianity. While those belonging to scheduled tribes continue to get various benefits from the government despite converting to Christianity, it is not so in case of SCs. As per the rule, a person who undergoes caste conversion, has to declared the same before the deputy commissioner of the respective district. But on record, hardly any converstion takes place. This is because people would not like to lose benefits from the government while drawing benefits from churches, the Dal alleges.

How strong is Bajrang Dal?

Bajrang Dal is a Sangh Parivar outfit and was formed some seven years ago. It claims a membership of 5,000. About four years ago, following difference with RSS pramukhs, Pramod Mutalik, who was heading it, severed his links and joined the Shiva Sena. Later he established the Sri RAma Sene, which is active only in some districts. Mahendra Kumar replaced Mutalik. Dal members have been criticizing Christian religious leaders for allegedly taking up conversions.

No conversions here: New Life

(*Deccan Herald*, 18 September 2008)

Mangalore: The New Life Fellowship Trust (NLFT) has picked up public curiosity all of a sudden, with the Bajrang Dal's allegations of forced conversions and distribution of seditious literature during their meetings.

Interestingly, NLFT is not an organized church like the Roman Catholic Church or the Church of South India.
It is just a set of prayer groups, the members of which come from organized churches, as well as from other religions. The main difference is that while the Church is a building for organized groups in Christianity, it is a school of teaching for these unorganized groups. Also, they do not worship statues, said Pastor Alwyn Colaco of the Full Gospel Church.

Speaking to Deccan HErals, Pastor Colaco brushed away allegations of forced conversion. "Everything is okay if you are straight with God," he said., and added that their policy is to give whatever they have to those who embrace the faith, and encourage them not to leave it.

Secretary of the Karnataka Christian Council Rev Prof Dr HM Watson also dismissed the allegations of forced conversion by NLFT.

Speaking about the derogatory comments on Hindu Gods in a pamphlet named 'Satya Darshini' allegedly being circulated during NLFT meetings, he flayed any such action and said that nobody ahs the right to comment on another religion.

State in overdrive after New Delhi warns

Bangalore IANS
(*Deccan Herald*, 20 September 2008)

In a swift response to the central government's advisory following attacks on churches, Karnataka nabbed state Bajrang Dal convener and Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa on Saturday directed district authorities to prevent repeat of such incidents.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government also replied to the union government's Friday warning giving details of the steps it had taken to protect minorities.

It informed the central authorities of the decision to order a probe by a retired judge of the Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh high courts into Sunday's attacks on churches and prayer halls in the coastal districts of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi and the coffee-rich Chikmagalur district.

Yeddyurappa held a video conference in Bangalore with heads of civil and police administration in the 29 districts of the state on the situation in their areas and the measures to be implemented to maintain communal peace and harmony.

Nearly 300 people have been arrested in connection with the attacks and the subsequent violence in Mangalore during protest by Christians, the state said in the reply to the central government.

Bajrang Dal state unit convener Mahendra Kumar was arrested on late Friday night. He moved a court in Dakshina Kannada district headquarters Mangalore for bail.

Kumar was picked up in Mangalore late Friday night as he was driving down to the city from Chikmagalur, his home district, police said.

He has been held on charges of criminal conspiracy and acts disturbing communal harmony.

Kumar is said to have claimed that Bajrang Dal had attacked the places of worship in response to conversion activity by some Christian groups. However, he said on Thursday that he had only said his organisation was with the people who had carried out the attacks.

Yeddyurappa, who had earlier rejected the demand for a probe by a judge of the high court and entrusted the task to Corps of Detectives, announced the enquiry by B.K. Somashekara, a former judge of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh high courts, late Friday. The announcement was followed by arrest of Kumar.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government had warned the state governments of Karnataka, as also of Orissa, both ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies, that their administrations stand to be dismissed if they failed to act against perpetrators of violence against Christian minorities.

End aggressive faith-marketing

P N Benjamin
(*View Point*, *Deccan Herald*, 23 September 2008)

A senior RSS leader once told me: “The incidents of violence against Christians are a reaction to the aggressive propaganda and mindless evangelism, abusing Hindu Gods and indulging in similar activities. The incidents are blown out of proportion. We have decided not to tolerate intolerance of other faiths. Let the Church declare that there can be salvation outside the Church also. The whole atmosphere will undergo a radical change…”

The real source of danger to the Indian Christian community is not the handful of Hindu extremists. Most of the violent incidents have been due to aggressive evangelising. Other than this, there have been few attacks on Christians. Finally, the sensitive and sensible Christians must realise that acts of certain groups of Christian evangelists are the root-cause of tension between Christians and Hindus. Christian leaders should come out in the open to disown such acts of intolerance.

The best and perhaps the only way Christians can bear witness to their faith, is by extending their unconditional love to their neighbours and expecting nothing in return. As such, most of the Christians are against aggressive faith marketing by any religious group because such efforts discredit India's tradition of respecting all religious thought and also runs counter to the true spirit in which the Constitution grants people the right to profess, practice and propagate their faith.

Many of the Indian Christians were born into Christianity and some others freely chose to embrace it. They also believe that the Great Commission in the Gospel, according to Matthew, unequivocally calls us to witness Christ in a pluralistic setting without violating the right of others to preach, practice and profess his/her faith. Witnessing Jesus cannot in any case be done by questionable means, whether by questionable means, whether Jesus cannot in any case be done by questionable means, whether by exploiting people's socio-psychological vulnerabilities or by running down other religions.

The Christian injunction to make disciples of all nations in today's context is best honoured by the bearers of the Good News living exemplary Christian lives and showing respect for the nation's commitment to pluralism, for the larger public good in a civil society. Conversion of faith, given its life-changing nature, stems from a considered personal experience and is less likely in this day and age to be the stuff of dramatic immediacy.

India will continue to remain hospitable to all religions only if the Muslim fanatics and the Christian fundamentalists accept the pluralistic tradition of Hindus which is to consider all religions as equal. Pluralistic Christians and liberated Muslims of India have done that. The overwhelming majority of Hindus practice it.

Fundamentalist Christians assert that they alone are the holders of valid visas to heaven and paradise! Many preachers of the Gospel lay enticing traps for people whom they think must be 'saved' at all costs. It is worse still that their attitudes, though they (Christians) are a tiny minority in India, often create counter-reaction from among militant Hindus who sometimes incite violence against Christians. The Hindu fundamentalism is a reaction to the provocation of Christian proselytisers. The fanatics among the Christian faith will soon realise that theirs is a losing battle even if they derive their financial and other means of support from the wealthy nations overseas.
Will the Christians listen to the words of sanity of Dr Ken Gnanakan, well-known Christian scholar who told this writer the other day: "Preach Christ, but do not condemn others." Even Jesus said in John 3.17: "God did not send his Son to condemn the world..."

Karnataka govt defends move over Christian schools

Bangalore, PTI:
(*Deccan Herald*, 4 September 2008)

The Karnataka government on Thursday said that Christian educational institutions in the state have been served notices for their closure on August 29 to protest against attacks on their community at Kandhamal in Orissa, as they had violated rules.

Rejecting criticism from the Congress and JDS in this regard, Minister for Primary and Secondary Education Vishveswara Hegde Kageri told reporters that these institutions, which get grants from the government, have violated rules.

The Congress and JDS had criticised the government action, directing education department officials to slap notices on Christian run schools and colleges, seeking an explanation on why they remained closed on that day

Kandhamal: In the eye of communal storm

S T Beuria
(*Deccan Herald*, 7 September 2008)

While Orissa vies with Gujarat in the activities of communal forces, it has lagged far behind the western state in development. It continues to be the poorest state in the country.

Analysts strongly believe that this sad cocktail of poverty, ignorance and backwardness, made more potent by the continuing apathy of successive governments in Bhubaneswar, has helped the communal forces to spread their wings in the state.

"Acute poverty and backwardness have definitely helped the communal forces to expand their network and activities in the state, particularly in the tribal dominated districts," said a political science professor in a state university who did not want to be quoted.

The repeated conflicts between the majority Hindus and minority Christians have centred around the controversial issue of conversion and re-conversion. The seriousness of the issue could be assessed from the fact that it has already caused two high-profile and sensational killings in the state in the last one decade – the recent gruesome murder of Laxmanananda Saraswati inside his ashram in Kandhamal district and the brutal killing of Australian missionary Graham Staines at Manoharpur in another tribal dominated district of Keonjhar in 1999. Both the murders grabbed national and international attention and brought a bad name to the state. The conversion issue was also behind many big and small Hindu-Christian riots and armed conflicts across the state, including two in the last eight months in Kandhamal district which has emerged as the epicentre of communal activities in the state.

Hindu organisations in Orissa and their supporters have always charged the Christian missionaries, active in different districts, particularly in the tribal belt, for long, of illegally converting poor and illiterate tribals. According to them, the Christian missionaries engage in developmental activities like setting up of schools and health centres in tribal areas with the motive of converting innocent tribals.

"Large-scale conversions have been going on in the tribal districts like Kandhamal, Sundergarh, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj," insists Subash Chouhan, a senior leader of the VHP's Orissa unit and national co-convener of the Bajrang Dal.

However, the charge has always been outrightly rejected by Christian leaders who accuse the hardline Hindu groups of attacking and intimidating the minority Christian population and the missionaries who work for the development of both Christian and Hindu tribals.

"Conversion is not illegal. What is illegal and wrong is forced conversions or conversions through allurement. Christians do not believe in both (forced conversion or conversion through allurement). Therefore, the hardline Hindu organisations' allegation that Christians are involved in illegal conversion activities is baseless," said Rev P R Parichha, President of the Orissa chapter of the All India Christian Council.

According to Rev Parichha if Christian missionaries were involved in "large-scale" conversion activities as claimed by the Hindu groups then the Christian population in the state would not have remained what it is now. "If the Christian missionaries have been involved in large-scale conversion then how come the Christians constitute only two per cent of the state's total population," posed the Christian Council leader.

But the Hindu groups don't agree. "Illegal conversions are going on in a big way in districts like Kandhamal. This is proved from the fact that the Christian population in Kandhamal which was only 1928 in the year 1961 has gone up to 1,17,954 now as per the latest census," said the Gajapati Maharaja of Puri, Dibyasingha Dev.

The Maharaja had recently demanded a complete ban on organisations involved in unlawful conversions. The Hindu organisations in Orissa have not confined themselves to violent activities alone to counter the Christians, particularly the missionaries. They have also started developmental works like setting up of schools and health centres in the interior pockets of tribal districts like Sundergarh, Kandhamal and Keonjhar. These activities have helped them to gain confidence of the tribals, especially Christians among them, and to get them back into the Hindu fold through re-conversion camps, popularly known among Hindu activists as "homecoming ceremonies". Organisations like the VHP hold re-conversion camps in tribal dominated districts in regular intervals.

Unfortunately, the Orissa government had never made any serious effort to check illegal conversions and re-conversions and punish those involved in them. The state has an anti-conversion law – the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act (OFRA) – which came into effect in 1967. However, the law has been in cold storage and nobody had been punished under the Act in the the last two decades.

Nun was gang raped and priest brutally assaulted in Kandhamal

Parvathi Menon

The Hindu, Bangalore (30 September 2008)

Bhubaneswar: The Orissa government has failed to take any action, under the law of the land, against those who committed bestial crimes — the gang rape of a 28-year-old Catholic nun and the brutal attack on a Catholic priest who courageously resisted their attempts to force him to participate in the atrocity. These incidents took place on August 25 at K. Nuagaon, 12 km from the Baliguda subdivision in Kandhamal district. Both victims filed First Information Reports at the Baliguda police station. Sister Nirmala, Superior-General of the Missionaries of Charity, wrote to the Orissa Chief Minister and the Prime Minister specifying the atrocities.

The brutalisation of the nun and the priest by a mob raising anti-Christian, Hindutva slogans took place around 1 p.m. at the site of the Divya Jyothi Pastor Centre. The church was burnt the previous day in reprisal against the murder of an RSS activist, Lakshmanananda Saraswathi, and four of his associates on August 23. The gang rape of the young nun, whose "virginity [was] grossly violated in public" (and whose identity is being withheld by this newspaper to protect her privacy) took place in front of a police outpost with 12 policemen from the Orissa State Armed Police present and watching, according to Father Thomas Chellan, the priest who was dragged out and badly beaten.

"Around 1 p.m., a gang came and pulled me and the Sister out of the house where we had taken shelter and started assaulting us," Father Chellan told The Hindu in a telephonic interview from Kerala where he is recuperating.

"My appeals to the policemen who were standing nearby and watching only resulted in further beating. At one point the nun slipped away to plead with the police for help but she was dragged back by the mob and her blouse torn," he said. The nun was gang raped in a nearby building, and he was doused with kerosene by the mob, which threatened to set him on fire. They were saved by a group of youth who took them to the police outpost where "one among the attackers was present with the police between 3 p.m. and 9 p.m.," Father Chellan said.

News of the K. Nuagaon atrocity was conveyed through mobile phones to several priests and nuns hiding in the forests, fearing for their lives as the anti-Christian hunt was on. The victims were taken to the Baliguda police station around 9 p.m. where they lodged First Information Reports. "I believe the Sister wrote in her complaint that she was raped," Father Chellan said.

The atrocity, about which the State government has not gone

public, has outraged and terrified Christian organisations working in Kandhamal district. News of it was brought to the notice of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik by Raphael Cheenath, Archbishop of the Cuttack-Bhubaneswar diocese.

Sister Nirmala wrote letters to the Orissa Chief Minister and the Prime Minister on this and other brutal attacks on Christians in Orissa. In her letter, dated August 28, 2008, to Chief Minister Patnaik, she took up "a very sad incident, soon after the eruption of the violence" of "one young sister, consecrated to God, who was administrator of an institute, being hunted out of her hiding place and stripped naked by the mob and her virginity grossly violated in public, without any help from the police present there."

In her appeal for protection to Christians, Sister Nirmala urged the Chief Minister to "ask the Central Govt. for as many extra forces from the Centre as they are willing to give and you need."

When contacted, Praveen Kumar, Superintendent of Police, Kandhamal district, told The Hindu that investigations into the episode by a Deputy Superintendent of Police were on and "the law will take its course." He confirmed that no arrests have been made in connection with the incidents.

Victim of anti-Christian mob describes experiences

Parvathi Menon

The Hindu, Bangalore (30 September 2008)

BHUBANESWAR: "Let the law enforcement machinery, those who know the truth, speak the truth. They know who are the perpetrators of the crime, a matter of shame and insult to the law," Father Thomas Chellan told The Hindu. A Catholic priest belonging to the Archdiocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar, he was dragged out of his hiding place in K. Nuagaon, a small urban centre in strife-torn Kandhamal district, in the afternoon of August 25.

A mob armed with lathis, axes, spades, crowbars, iron rods and sickles, and shouting anti-Christian, Hindutva slogans, brutalised him, Meanwhile, his co-worker, a 28-year-old nun, was taken to a nearby building, and gang-raped in public view.

The district has been in the throes of anti-Christian violence ever since December 2007. Following the murder of RSS activist Lakshmanananda Saraswathi, on August 23, the violence has escalated sharply.

Since then, Christian institutions and Christians' homes have been burnt and looted, several Christian workers killed, priests and nuns hunted down, and Dalit Christian families driven into the forests and into relief camps.

Police were alerted

When he heard of the murder of the RSS activist, and amid rumours of threats to Christian workers and their institutions by his supporters, Father Chellan alerted the police outpost located outside his institution, the Divya Jyothi Pastor Centre. "I was overconfident in believing that nothing would happen to us," he said.

On August 24, the day the funeral procession of the RSS activist was being taken through the villages of the area, a "huge crowd appeared before the Pastor Centre at around 4.30 pm," Father Chellan said. Seeing the mood of the crowd, he along with a co-priest and the young sister jumped the wall of the Centre. "In half an hour, everything was in flames," he said.

They watched the funeral procession being taken in front of the centre, and believed the worst was over. On the advice of some of their supporters they hid in the forests that night.

The next morning they returned to the centre, and around 9 a.m. saw a crowd burn the Pentecostal Church in front of their centre. Sensing danger, a Hindu house owner hid Father Chellan and the nun in his

house, but they were pulled out by the crowd.

The rest is best described in a letter that was dictated by Father Chellan to a fellow priest soon after the incident from Bhubaneswar where he arrived, bruised and shaken, on August 26. He did this to put on record exactly what had happened to him on August 25:

"When I was brought out sister was already standing with the crowd as they caught her first. Immediately they began hitting me all over, forcefully removing my shirt and banian. They asked me: 'Why did you kill the swamiji? How much have you given to the killers? Why are you conducting lots of meetings there?'

"By pulling and pushing, the crowd took us to Gram Vikas building, the other side of the road. They were armed with lathis, axe, spade, crowbar, iron rods, sickles, etc. They continued beating us in the Jan Vikas building. They tore the blouse of sister, began assaulting her when I objected. I was beaten with iron rod on my right shoulder [and] they poured kerosene all over the body and was taking matches. Another suggested to take me to the road and burn [me] there. We were taken to the road and [they] made me kneel down on the road for more than 10 minutes.

"Meanwhile they brought sister out from Jan Vikas. Someone was searching for a rope and tied us together [to] burn [us] alive. Then they decided to parade us to Nuagaon, half a kilometre from there. We were paraded half naked. They told us to fold our hands and walk. They tried to strip remaining clothes. Somehow both of us managed to resist the same. As we were walking they went on showering blows on us. Some among the crowd began abusing [us with] words in Malayalam as they might have been working in Kerala."

When they reached Nuagaon it was 2.30 p.m. and there were 12 personnel of the Orissa State Armed Police standing by the side of the road, the letter says.

"I asked, sir, please help us. At that time one among the crowd beat me for asking the help. The police were just onlookers," Father Chellan's note says. In it he says that one of the crowd kicked him on the face. "At that



TERRIFYING VIOLENCE: A vandalised church in Tengedapathar village in Kandhamal district. A mob shouting anti-Christian and Hindutva slogans targeted this church three days after the gang rape of a nun and attack on a priest in K.Nuagaon.

time one among them I know well as a shopkeeper of Nuagaon was collecting thrown away tyres to burn us."

The crowd then took them to the K. Nuagaon block building and an officer there took them to the police outpost where they were given some first aid and taken to the Baliguda police station at 9 p.m. where they lodged three separate First Information Reports – on the attack on the Pastor Centre, the attack on Father Chellan and the attack on the sister.

In the Baliguda police station the Inspector-in-Charge asked him: "Are you interested in lodging an FIR?"

They spent that night in a camp of the Central Reserve Police Force. They were put on a bus to Bhubaneswar around 4 p.m. on August 26.

Father Chellan told The Hindu that they were not given a copy of the FIR as they were too badly injured to wait for one.

Fear, trauma

Although they know of the attack on Father Chellan, and the rape of the nun, Christian organisations, under enormous and continuing attack in the State, have been too stunned and cowed to make a public issue of it. They have also been concerned about what the publicity might do to the young nun who has been taken away by her order to an undisclosed place to recover from the traumatic episode.

The letter by Sister Nirmala, Superior-General of the Missionaries of Charity, conveys the deep anxiety and fear the community is beset by.

In her letter to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on August 28 she made a powerful appeal "in the name of God, as the Chief Minister of Orissa, to do all you can to put an end to this ongoing violence since 24 August 2008 causing untold terror, loss of property and even loss of life and human dignity, violating basic human rights of our brothers and sisters."

She asked the Chief Minister to ensure that those under attack in the interior parts of the district, those "without food, clothing, shelter and medicines" be given "immediate help"; that "the loss of property is compensated; that the facilities for the education of children be restored and that the people be rehabilitated." She ended the letter with a prayer that the Chief Minister "may not lack the necessary wisdom in searching for the good of all entrusted to your care which has as its basis respect for truth, justice and freedom."

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The bedrock of religion is blind belief. All religionists say that no one should suspect or question anything. This has given courage even to the idiot to say anything he pleases in the name of religion. Absurdities are having an eternal hold in the name of religion and god.

- Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy -





I was happy the August Issue was very good, and now I find the Sept. Issue 'excellent'. I suggest ,you add a permanant Short Invitation to all readers to become members of Bangalore Rationalist Association, and also encourage others to join, in large numbers, so that allactivities, specially 'Bangalore Skeptic' can get more readers, and hence more contributors also.

- Dr Keshava Rao, Bangalore

Many thanks for the kind mail and attached Bangalore Skeptic. It is a nicely managed e-magazine and bears allworth of Rationaland Skeptic nature. It would be a great pleasure if you subscribe to MANAVATAVADI-GROUP-subscribe@yahoogroups.com Rationalist Discussion Group and also send allyour articles you publish in the Bangalore Skeptic.we could circulate them through this list serve for discussion on the topics. You are also requested to ask allthe subscribers of your e-magazine to join this group and feelfree to open discussion on any rationaland skeptical subjects they want.

- Swami Manavatavadi, Kurukshetra

Thanks for such a wonderfulcollection of articles.

- Prabhakar Nanawaty , Pune

Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha

(Bangalore Rationalist Association)

Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha conducts monthly lectures and discussions on various topics. Some of the well-known personalities who spoke at the association's meetings are: Narendra Nayak (President, Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations), V.T.Rajashekar (Editor, *Dalit Voice*), and G.K.Govinda Rao (Author & Cine Actor)

Those who are interested in attending the programmes conducted by the association may contact:

Dr. M.N.Keshava Rao (Phone: 26690269. Email: keshava_rao@hotmail.com)

A.S.Nataraj (Phone: 26696553. Email: rajsri@bgl.vsnl.net.in)

Tools for Skeptical Thinking

Carl Sagan

Carl Sagan's famous essay, *The Fine Art of Baloney Detection*, more or less encapsulates the basic tenets of Skeptical Thinking, The present article is an extract from the essay. The full text can be found in one of Sagan's best-sellers *The Demonhaunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark.*

• Wherever possible there must be independent confirmation of the "facts."

• Encourage substantive debate on the evidence by knowledgeable proponents of all points of view.

• Arguments from authority carry little weight—"authorities" have made mistakes in the past. They will do so again in the future. Perhaps a better way to say it is that in science there are no authorities; at most, there are experts.

• Spin more than one hypothesis. If there's something to be explained, think of all the different ways in which it could be explained. Then think of tests by which you might systematically disprove each of the alternatives. What survives, the hypothesis that resists disproof in this Darwinian selection among "multiple working hypotheses," has a much better chance of being the right answer than if you had simply run with the first idea that caught your fancy.

• Try not to get overly attached to a hypothesis just because it's yours. It's only a way station in the pursuit of knowledge. Ask yourself why you like the idea. Compare it fairly with the alternatives. See if you can find reasons for rejecting it. If you don't, others will.

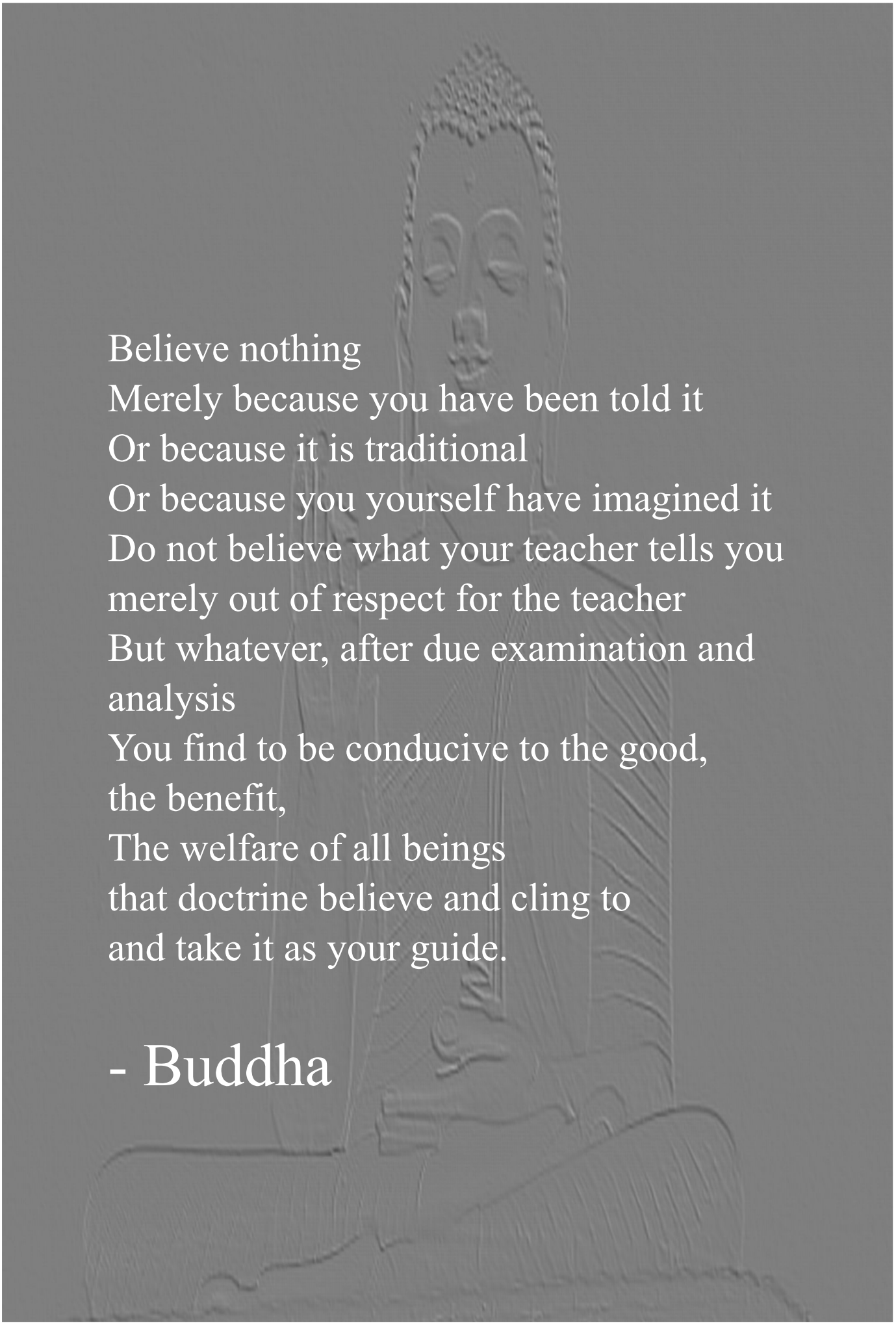


• Quantify. If whatever it is you're explaining has some measure, some numerical quantity attached to it, you'll be much better able to discriminate among competing hypotheses. What is vague and qualitative is open to many explanations. Of course there are truths to be sought in the many qualitative issues we are obliged to confront, but finding them is more challenging.

• If there's a chain of argument, every link in the chain must work (including the premise) —not just most of them.

• Occam's Razor. This convenient rule-ofthumb urges us when faced with two hypotheses that explain the data equally well to choose the simpler.

• Always ask whether the hypothesis can be, at least in principle, falsified. Propositions that are untestable, unfalsifiable are not worth much. You must be able to check assertions out. Inveterate skeptics must be given the chance to follow your reasoning, to duplicate your experiments and see if they get the same result.



Believe nothing
Merely because you have been told it
Or because it is traditional
Or because you yourself have imagined it
Do not believe what your teacher tells you
merely out of respect for the teacher
But whatever, after due examination and
analysis
You find to be conducive to the good,
the benefit,
The welfare of all beings
that doctrine believe and cling to
and take it as your guide.

- Buddha