

Parvathi Menon

Angana Chatterji's starting point for her study on the growth of Hindu majoritarianism in the specific context of Gujarat was a visit she made to Orissa in the summer of 2002, soon after the Gujarat riots. The Sangh Parivar in Orissa had given a call for mobilisation for a Hindu nation. She was deeply disturbed by what she saw, by the "impenetrable reticence amongst the majority community, and a plea for recognition of Hindutva's violence from minority and other subaltern groups, accompanied by denial and obfuscation on the part of state institutions, the media and the paucity of countervailing response, including scholarship in English and the vernacular." The book under review is the outcome of her six-year study of these issues.

There is a paucity of scholarly writing on the genesis, growth, and current state of the Hindutva movement in Orissa — which by 2007-08 had unleashed a war of terror against Christian groups — aside of activism-generated writing in the form of reports of fact-finding groups, and reports that have emanated from church groups.

The book meets this information gap to a significant extent.

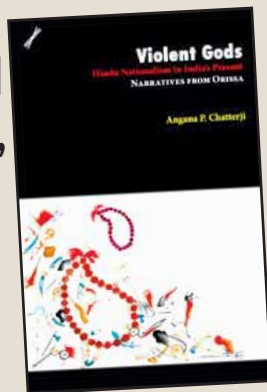
#### Valuable information

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the lengthy and sometimes distracting theoretical digressions that break the flow of the story, there is valuable and hitherto undocumented information in the chapters titled 'Dispositif' and 'Impunity', on the process by which the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and allied organisations under the Hindutva umbrella built the apparatus of Hindutva in the State.

These two chapters trace the story of how a Hindu right wing movement penetrated the spheres of culture, education, and politics as it mobilised, spread, and

# Hindutva movement in Orissa

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VIOLENT GODS: Hindu Nationalism in India's Present: Angana P Chatterji;

grew. The movement started with the setting up of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1940, grew through the periodic communal riots of the intervening decades, received an impetus when the RSS sent Lakshmanananda Saraswathi (the controversial Hindu proselytiser whose murder in 2008 sparked a prolonged spell of anti-Christian violence) to Phulbani/Kandhamal in 1960, to culminate in the 2007-2008 pogrom against Christians.

The historical background to conversions in Orissa, the reasons why poor tribal populations embraced Christianity, and the confrontation with militant Hinduism that led to re-conversions under duress, are provided in the last two chapters. There is a welter of detail here, drawn from interviews and case studies, on how Hindutva workers set the oppressed against the oppressed in deadly acts of vengeance and reprisal against so-called "forcible conversions."

The author was co-convenor of the Peoples Tribunal on Communalism in Orissa that commenced its inquiry into the communal violence and human rights abuses in June 2005. The depositions before the Tribunal were held under considerable tension: at one meeting in June "Hindutva activists wrought havoc", the author says, and the Tribunal was slandered and discredited by Hindutva leaders.

#### Submission

A part of the submission made in May 2008 by the author to the Commission of Inquiry under Justice Basudev Panigrahi on the violence in Kandhamal in December 2007 that has been reproduced is based on extensive trips to the towns and villages of the area and detailed interviews conducted by her. The last chapter offers a detailed chronological dissection of the violence against Christians that reached a crescendo after the murder of Lakshmanananda Saraswathi in early 2008, and the state's vacillating and collaborative response to it.

## India Must be Held Accountable for Manipur Fake Encounter: WSO

OTTAWA: The World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO) has condemned the continuing human rights violations and fake encounter killings being carried out by security forces in India. Reacting to publication of photographs of the broad daylight murder of 27 year old Chongkham Sanjit in a fake encounter by Indian security forces in the state of Manipur, the WSO's Ram Raghbir Singh Chahal said it was another confirmation of the long standing Indian practice of killing alleged suspects in staged encounters.

"We applaud the bravery of the photographer who captured these images, and hope that the international community will do its utmost to protect him. India's history of treatment of individuals who try to expose police atrocities, is rife with bloodshed. This was the case with human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khaira, who exposed thousands of police "disappearances" in Punjab, only to be disappeared himself by the Indian police in 1995," he said. Gian Singh Sandhu, Senior Policy Advisor of the WSO, said, "The international community must awaken to the police atrocities that have become a party of daily life in India."

The expose comes in the wake of the August 4, 2009, release of Human Rights Watch's report, "Broken System: Dysfunction, Abuse and Impunity in the Indian Police" which documents a range of human rights violations committed by Indian police, including arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and extrajudicial killings.

Despite India's claims of being the world's largest democracy on the fast-track to becoming an economic powerhouse, little has been done to improve its abysmal human rights record. WSO President, Gurpreet Singh Bal, stated, "India must be held accountable for the actions of its security forces including widespread torture, arbitrary detentions and disappearances. The murder of Chongkham Sanjit should be a wakeup call to the world community to take note of the human rights abuses occurring in India. Diplomatic pressure must be exerted on India to bring these practices to an end."

## Power-full Party, Powerless...

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hospitals, whereas the poor, underprivileged and power-less will have to make do with government-run euphemistically called civil hospitals, where doctors would either be absent or themselves be carriers of H1N1 virus.

The latest decision of the BBMB (Bakhra Beas Management Board) to reduce water outflows from the Bakhra dam by 3000 cusecs a day will drastically damage paddy in Punjab and Haryana. The only hope will be a downpour, should it happen. This will also reduce electric supply by nearly 200,000 units. The power-full party of Punjab has not made any statement towards resolving the crisis but is more worried about losing power in Haryana and therefore all energies are being thrust into saving the situation there by stalling the formation of the proposed Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

The tussle between the Power-full and the Power-less is likely to continue for quiet some time till it reaches to a head on collision. In a welfare state, where policies are designed invariably with an eye on elections, free water, free electricity has been playing havoc with the lives of people. Those who wanted them free are now reading between the lines. Free means No.

Only the Power-less can change the equilibrium. The power-less should unite to become power-full. Think beyond your own house. Think green. Think solar. Think unconventional. Think nearer to the nature. Think different. Think of the ways more in consonance with Sarbat Da Bhala dictum.

## Separate SGPC issue fast...

#### From page 1

What is wrong if Sikhs of Haryana want to create their own SGPC?" asked Gurdaspur MP Partap Singh Bajwa.

Hooda is taking a legal opinion on this issue right now. His problem is he had promised it in the election manifesto. He cannot backtrack on it just before the elections.

But ever since the issue played out at the national level with Parliament watching loud noises over the proposed Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in Haryana, and support

for the Badals' view point came from the Samajwadi Party and a few others, the issue has been witnessing fast paced developments.

The Sikh clergy is to meet and the general house of the SGPC is expected to strike a hard pose. The BJP is backing the Akalis and even in the Rajya Sabha, S.S. Ahluwalia of the BJP led the protest, making it tough to run the House.

On the Rakhar Puniya mela in Bakala, the issue was at center stage. The Congress leaders extended a peculiar argument. "If Parkash Singh Badal can demand

a separate Punjabi Suba, why not a separate gurdwara panel? It is a genuine demand raised by Sikhs whom Badal had left in a lurch after division of erstwhile Punjab State into Punjab, Himachal and Haryana," said Leader of Opposition Rajinder Kaur Bhattal.

MP and former chairperson of the Minorities Commission, Tarlochan Singh, is also opposing the separate SGPC.

But in all this din, there is little talk of the All India Gurdwara Bill which possibly could have helped in solving this and many other related issues.

WSN Network  
CHANDIGARH

The judges tried to look towards them, but it was difficult for them. "Why have you brought them all here?" one of the judges asked. He should have known. These people had brought their faces to the Punjab and Haryana High Court so that the judge can have a good look at what the Indian justice dispensing system was doing to whom.

Survivors of the December 1995 Dabwali fire tragedy last Monday filed into the court, one by one, quietly, and sat on the front row chairs. Each face was agony personified. Burnt and distorted faces looked askance at the judicial system, asking it if it knew what delay meant and how it was spelled. Their battle to get compensation seems to be never-ending.

Over 10 victims, including one on a wheelchair, thronged the courtroom of Chief Justice T.S. Thakur to witness the hearing of their plea for enhanced compensation and to "send a message across" about "our plight".

The presence of the victims visi-

## Why have you brought them here? Oh well, you should know



bly moved the Bench, including Justice Kanwaljit Singh Ahluwalia. "Why have you brought all of them here?" the Chief Justice wanted to know from the counsel of the victims. "It is very painful to see them here," he conceded.

Yes, it is painful. So what should they do? Stay at home so that you can be comfortable delaying cases? So

that an apathetic government can say that law is taking its own course? While the counsel was arguing, the emotions of the victims were overflowing.

It was on December 23, 1995, that 446 persons -- including several school students -- died in a fire during the annual day function of DAV school. The function was organised in Rajive Marriage Palace where the "pandal" was made of synthetic material that fed the fire. There was only one entry and exit door of the size of 10x12 feet.

The one-man Justice T.P. Garg Commission finally determined compensation this March ranging from Rs 44,000 to Rs 16 lakh to over 400 victims, including 172 children, their teachers and parents.

The Commission set up in January 2003 recommended compensation between Rs 2-16 lakh to 88 per-

sons who survived with serious burn injuries, resulting in amputation of the limbs. The victims are demanding enhancement in compensation. According to the survivors, what they wanted to "pray" before the court was to "look at us... we cannot take this legal battle any further".

Sixteen-year-old Bobby Girdhar said he wanted to tell the Judges that "jitna jaldi ho sake hame compensation mile". Sakshi, 19, a third-year student of Punjab Engineering College pursuing B.Tech in Electronics, wanted to know "when this case will come to an end?" Aware of the delay, the Chief Justice has been hearing this case every day to give the final verdict. In order to ward off the possibility of any party moving the Supreme Court, he later bounced various propositions to the victims and the school management.