

# The worst ever Christian persecution in Orissa



**K**ondhmal in Orissa was all set to celebrate Christmas along with the Christian Community of the World. But who knew the 2007 Christmas would become the black Christmas for the Kondhmal Christians. It was on 24<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2007, the Christmas Eve, a small police station town, Bamunigaon was busy decorating a stage to conduct cultural programme on the occasion of the festival, which they have been doing for the past

5-6 years. Suddenly a group of people came to the erection ground of the stage and forbade the Christian youth not to proceed with the stage. They also stopped the weekly market and chased away the buyers and sellers. There was heated exchange of words and then the Hindu young people left the spot. But suddenly they rushed back with guns and started firing indiscriminately at the Christian young people, seriously injuring three of them. Taken awake the Christian young people were on their heels. Soon a bigger crowd joined with Hindu young people with guns, axe, knife, staves etc., and started attacking the church and Christian houses. The only church in the town and Christian houses were vandalised, looted and set on fire. The Christian community ran to nearby jungles for their lives.



Soon it spread to other parts of Kondhmal. The same evening three churches and a Catholic Computer Institute was attacked and set on fire in Baliguda a hilly Tahasil town. The Catholic fathers and nuns run for their lives and hid in jungles. The next day a small town Barakhama became the target where 415 Christian houses and 07 church buildings were attacked by an angry

mob. Each house was vandalised and looted of everything and set on fire. Seven churches destroyed and set on fire and in some cases with petrol and kerosene. Two people died during the attack. So far the official death toll is 04 but unofficially it is more than 10. Countless Christian houses in the villages came under attack and they were worst hit by the Hindu fundamentalists, as the police force had no access.

**So far the news reached us that about 70 churches in big and small and 1000 Christian houses have been destroyed in Kondhmal. I have been receiving news that in the remote villages people are facing more problems, as they continue to be threatened and attacked.**

**Forcible conversion to Hinduism:** Four people have been tonsured and forced to undergo Hindu rituals to become Hindu again. But in their heart since they were not reconverted, came back to the Christian fold. All the four took part in the Protest Rally organised on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2008 in Bhubaneswar the capital of Orissa by All India Christian Council.

**No Service on Christmas:** On 25<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2007 there was no Christmas service in Phulbani town, the district headquarters of Kondhmal. The district administration failed to provide security to minority Christian community and church in the city. In fact the officials said, not to conduct church service due to tension that prevailed in the city. In majority of the churches in Kondhmal there was no church service on Christmas. It was reported that one church was attacked while Christmas service was on and people were chased out and all food items trampled.



**Fact-finding team:** I led the fact-finding team of four and visited the affected areas. The places we covered were Phulbani, Phiringia, Baliguda, Barakhama, Raikia, Simonbadi, Daringbadi, Dasingbadi and of course the epicentre of the trouble Bamunigaon. We visited the relief camps set up by the Govt. at Baliguda, Barakhama and Bamunigaon. The conditions of the victims were miserable. There was no sufficient rooms, toilets and medical facilities. The chilled winter added to their misery. All that they had the only cloths they were wearing. One Pastor said his wife was missing. One couple were in tears as the daughter was missing. There could be many more such stories. We saw a few people in Barakhama and some were gradually returning from jungles. But in Bamunigaon we found a few women and men, mostly old. The entire town gave a deserted look. Not even a single police on the road, though there was a police camp. The only church was totally desecrated and destroyed. Houses were filled with heap of ashes and charcoals. Women folks were in tears while apprising their fate. The entire episode is a tragedy. The joy of Christmas turned to be a black Christmas!

**Road Blocks:** In order to prevent police force to reach the trouble areas the fundamentalists felled trees and stones on the hilly roads. They also stopped all transportations on 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2007.

**Administrative lapses:** There have been lapses on the part of the Government of Orissa in terms of deployment of police forces in time. The Government action was delayed; as a result the Hindu activists got enough time to do whatever they preferred to do. It was a mixture of both Hindu tribal activists and caste Hindu fundamentalists who attacked Christians, houses and churches in Kondhmal.



**Action taken by All India Christian Council:** It was on 24<sup>th</sup> Dec., in the afternoon as soon as the news of attack on Bamunigaon reached us, urgent fax message was sent to the Chief Minister. Due to in action of the Government things went bad to worse that resulted lose of lives and properties.

**On 27<sup>th</sup> Dec.2007, we were determined to meet the Chief Minister as the attacked continued.** About 25 Christian leaders met with the Chief Minister at 6:00pm at Orissa

Secretariat and briefed the situation. As a result more troops were sent to troubled areas and senior officers were instructed to camp in the district headquarters to monitor the situation. Things began to move and situation was brought under control.

Three Press Conferences were conducted. During second press conference, Mr. Mahesh Bhatt, Filmmaker from Bombay who is a Human Rights activist as well joined in the panel, condemning the attacks on Christians in Kondhmal. CBI enquiry also was demanded.

### **Memorandums presented to Chief Minister and Governor of Orissa**

A massive protest rally was organised on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2007 in the capital city Bhubaneswar with the objective to pressurise the Government where 10,000 people mostly from Dalit background participated.

The second fact finding team to study the situation for relief and rehabilitation has completed touring the affected areas.

Non-Government White Paper was released on 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2007 on the Communal Violence in the Kondhmal district in a press conference. This is a detailed report on Kondhmal violence.

**Damage control:** Damage control is being done by the Orissa Government through different means such as peace committees, short term relief and promises which normally not fulfilled.

**About 300 of our believers were in the Government relief camp and now have returned to their respective villages. But where to stay as they have lost their houses? They do not have any thing except the cloths on their bodies. They urgently need cloths, utensils and provision at least for a month for which each family needs Rs. 5000.00(US \$130.00). For reconstruction of houses Rs.20,000.00(US \$ 520.00) needed for each family.**

**Kontakt über In-Meiner-Strasse e.V. ; [www.inmeinerstrasse.de](http://www.inmeinerstrasse.de)**