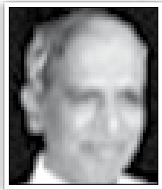


# Attack on Karnataka College Run by Jesuits

# SREIGN OF TERROR SANGH PARIVAR



BY DR. AMBROSE PINTO SJ

As far as citizens are concerned, Karnataka is not a secular State. Ever since the BJP came to power, a little more than three years ago, the State has seen the largest number of attacks on Christian institutions and its personnel. The Muslim community is defamed. Women have been asked to follow traditions. Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes have been angered by anti-cow slaughter Bill, introduction of Gita in schools and other communal programmes. The Christian community has suffered the most.

According to the All India Christian Council, Karnataka is the most unsafe place for Christians, more unsafe than Orissa where the Kandhamal riots took place. The latest incident, a day after the Republic Day, was an attack on the Principal and students of St. Joseph's Pre-University College, a Jesuit

institution, situated 30 km away from Bangalore, on the pretext of not hoisting the national flag. Established in 2010, with strength of 378 students of whom 220 are dalits, the institution caters to the marginalized communities.

### Flag hoisting on Republic Day

The Pre-University College had held a flag hoisting ceremony at its new premises on the morning of 26th January, according to the Principal. The attackers from various affiliates of the Sangh Parivar -- Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, Rashtra Sakthi Sene and Karnataka Rakshana Vedike -- forced their way into the Principal's office by noon accusing him of his lack of patriotism. When the Principal informed the crowd that the Pre-University College had their flag-hoisting in the premises of the Management, the group was insistent that the Principal had to be arrested for failing to perform the national obligation.

On the very next day, 27th January, a mob of about a 100 once again forced their way into the premises. They were shouting slogans, demanding the arrest of the Principal and closure of the college. The local police in spite of

being there refused to intervene. Students who came to protect the principal were beaten up. The mob paraded the principal for over a kilometre to the police station. The police went with the mob and did nothing to take action against the mob which was acting against the rule of law. In fact, they were following the orders of the anti-social goons. In the police station, the Principal was further abused and threatened. There were various allegations made against the Christians.

### Sangh is an ideology

The attack took the Jesuits by surprise. The MLA from the constituency is a Dalit and a Minister in the State government. Though belongs to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a party that is determined to transform India's secular state into a Hindu one, he has been a friend of the Superior of the community. The community was sure that nothing would happen to them as long as he continues to represent the constituency. Without his express will, the incident would not have taken place. What the Jesuit community is yet to realize is as far as the BJP is concerned it is not a person but an ideology that they are determined to spread. Christians are a means to power since they are categorized as the 'other' and helps them to consolidate their vote banks.

The Jesuits claim that the attacks were because they are educating a large section of students from the Dalit community. That argument, however, is not logical. The local MLA is a Dalit and yet he is a member of the BJP. There are other Dalits in the party and they are comfortable with the BJP. Most Dalits still consider themselves as Hindus in spite of being dubbed as low, impure, untouchables and inferior.

While the BJP needs some Dalits to co-opt the community for purposes of election, the Sangh Parivar really does not desire their empowerment. The conscious Dalits know it. In the last general elections more than 70% of the Dalits in Karnataka did not vote for the saffron party. A significant section of the Dalit community has been in the forefront of resistance to the saffron agenda in the state. And yet it would be incorrect to state that the institution was attacked due to its commitment to Dalit education though the saffron brigade may not feel happy that Dalits get educated by Christians.

### **Egalitarian Agenda of the church**

What angers the Sangh Parivar is the egalitarian agenda of Christian education that stands for rationality, modernity and equality. This agenda is in sharp opposition to the hierarchical agenda of the Sangh Parivar. While their agenda is one of exclusion, discrimination, irrationality and hate the Christian agenda is one of inclusion, compassion and concern. If one has to examine the kind of hate expressed through attacks on women, Muslims, Christians, the progressive citizens, churches, pastors and the poor in the state and the kind of moral policing that is done with imposition of moral codes, they are primitive and ancient.

The labelling of Christians as converters and the Muslims



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as terrorists has struck in a section of the public psyche. A section still thinks that the Sangh Parivar is the guardian of Indian culture and heritage in spite of continuously practicing hate, violence and hypocrisy. What is reprehensible is that the officials of the government have been colluding with the group and providing legitimacy to them.

How do we respond to these anti-secular and therefore anti-national forces? St. Joseph's Pre-University college is not the first institution to be attacked by these anti-constitutional forces. From the responses different groups that are attacked have made, one gets the impression that the church does not have a response. Most institutions have subordinated themselves to these groups. What would this subordination mean? It means that we do not have the courage to stand up to the constitutional values of secularism. Every attack of the forces of the Sangh on

the minorities or on any other groups is an attack on both the Constitution of India and liberalism which the Constitution holds dear.

In a democratic state there is a rule of law and no individual or group is allowed to take the law in their hands. The law permits young boys and girls to socialize. Women are permitted to go to pubs. It allows Christians to hold prayer meetings in their homes and churches. No citizen or group can attack individuals or their properties. Unfortunately, the victims have often not resisted them or challenged them and in the process helped these anti-nationals to expand their agenda. To allow them to go scot-free in spite of an open attack on the secular Constitution of India is a sin against the Constitution. As citizens, our national bible is our Constitution. It is the responsibility of all citizens to uphold that document against all anti-social groups.

Some have even appeased these groups without understanding the implications of such appeasement. When we give in to these saffron elements, we are allowing an attack on the nation. Their actions are anti-constitutional and anti-national. As a lunatic fringe, they have no business to attack churches, mosques, women, minorities or institutions. If people have erred, all have to submit to the rule of law. Submitting to their designs for temporary peace is to accept subordination and to encourage them to further their agenda.

**How do we become the "other"?**

We do not become the "other" when the affiliates of the Sangh Parivar define us so. But we may become the "other" when we fault against the Constitution of India that has defined the nation as a secular nation with freedom of thought and expression, freedom of religion and freedom of movement. Resistance to their agenda is to further the cause of secularism and the rule of law. How do we resist them? In Karnataka the police stations normally do not book cases against the family of the Sangh Parivar on the instructions of the state government. It is here the role of the civil society is the most important.

Every institution of ours has several stake-holders. The task of the institution should be to mobilise parents, social movements around the place, political groups that are averse to the sangh ideology and others. We are not the only ones that the Sangh Parivar has attacked. What hinders us to join all those who are attacked by these forces? The Church in spite of the adverse

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propaganda by the forces of the Sangh Parivar still enjoys a very good reputation in the state. Given the public space that the community enjoys, it should be possible to the Church to work with other groups to establish



a common resistance and thus establish a human community of all people of goodwill.

It is unfortunate that in spite of large number of attacks on the society and the Church, the latter has either not organized itself or organized within itself without looking outside of it. It is due to the limited understanding of what communalism is all about. The attacks of the Sangh Parivar must not be seen merely as attacks on Christians or Muslims. They need to be looked at as attacks on citizens and the nation. That is why it is important to speak out and become a part of all those who are resisting communalism in the state.

**Response of the Institutions**

The response the institution has to make is at two levels for nation-building. As law abiding citizens, the institution should

see that cases are booked on all those who forcibly entered the campus and those who beat up the students when they came to protect their principal. There are enough legal experts in the state who can easily assist. How can we allow lawlessness of the anti-socials in society? Students as well as the public should be made aware that democracies work on the rule of law. Since the students beaten up are from the Dalit community, the culprits should be booked under the atrocity Act. If the police station refuses to book cases pressure needs to be brought on the police by the larger civil society and cases booked on the police as well in the courts and with the Human Rights Commission and SC/ST Commission. If the rights of women students are violated, there is a need to approach the women's commission.

Secondly, the institution should not withdraw from the public realm. There are various Dalit organizations and other social movements in the place and around. They need to be mobilized for action and linked with the institution. And finally the institution has to move into the realm of culture and identity to educate the Dalits and to wean away the subaltern communities from the dominant caste structure which has made them experience discrimination and subordination for centuries. They need to be made aware of who they are and what their identity

is and what are the designs of the Sangh Parivar. And as long as the institution does not work on issues of identity and culture, our institutions are unlikely to empower them. Mere providing an education to pass is not a cultural education.

#### Why the Attacks on churches?

Why are these attacks on the Principal and the Institutions then? The very first reason of course is to humiliate a group of people who symbolize egalitarianism and modernity. The very Christian presence is a threat to the saffron psyche. A Christian institution by its very nature is a liberal institution that stands for the values of equality, liberty and community. These values are opposed by the communalists. They still hold on to caste, racism, dogmatism, inequality, discrimination and the doctrine of high and low. If students are freely allowed to discuss and debate dogmas, rituals and beliefs, it will be impossible to construct a Hindu state premised on hierarchy. And the fact is minorities and the subaltern communities are not included in the Hindu rastra. It is in fact, a rastra for a small minority. According to Dalit writers and scholars, they are not Hindus. The progressives among Dalits say that they are the original people of India and they are real citizens of the land. Those who claim as "pure" are outsiders and parasites who have not toiled in the fields and factories of India to be included as citizens of the land. They have lived on the exploitation of the laboring class.

Due to the system of education that was dominated by this class, the subaltern communities have been termed as impure, polluted and backward and the discriminated communities due to their lack of education and consciousness had internalized

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these myths. In fact, the architect of India's Constitution, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, had no hesitation in saying 'though born as a Hindu, I shall never die as one' and with lakhs of his followers converted to Buddhism in 1956. If the design of the Sangh Parivar is to transform India into a Hindu state, they can never do this without the co-option of the Dalits. It is here that Christian institutions have a major role to play by exposing these groups to their own recent cultural literature.

The attack on the institution places them on a higher pedestal of patriotism and the Christians on a lower pedestal since the institution has failed to hoist the national flag. But who are they to demand flag hoisting in any institution? Where do their powers to police Christian institutions come from? Is flag hoisting more important than the service of the needy and the poor? When does one become a patriot? And the truth is that for many years after independence, the RSS

hoisted the saffron flag and not the national flag on Republic Day as well as Independence Day. Those who have studied history surely would know that these elements were not a part of the freedom struggle at all. In fact, they had supported the British against the freedom fighters.

Christian institutions do not have to learn patriotism from these groups. Given the militancy of the group in Anekal, the group is likely to make more demands on the institution, asking them to celebrate Hindu feasts and festivals and be a part of their other Hindu activities in the locality. Instead of exposing their hypocrisy in a big way and working for a secular state, to subordinate to their designs is to provide encouragement to their hidden agenda and thus defeat the designs of the framers of the Constitution who have provided us an excellent document of governance.

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