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India

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the National Government generally respected this right in practice. However, some state and local governments limited this freedom in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the National Government during the period covered by this report and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, problems remained in some areas. Some state governments enacted and amended "anti-conversion" laws and police and enforcement agencies often did not act swiftly enough to effectively counter societal attacks, including attacks against religious minorities. Despite Government efforts to foster communal harmony, some extremists continued to view ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities, particularly at the state and local level, as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity, although numerous cases were in the courts at the end of the reporting period. The National Government, led by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), continued to implement an inclusive and secular platform that included respect for the right to religious freedom.

Despite the National Government's rejection of "Hindutva," the ideology that espouses the inculcation of Hindu religious and cultural norms above other religious norms, it continued to influence some government policies and actions at the state and local levels. During the reporting period, the Government of Himachal Pradesh enacted a state-level "anti-conversion" law, which, similar to other laws of its kind, restricts and regulates religious proselytism. The law prohibits an individual from using "force, inducement, or fraudulent means" when contributing, in speech or conduct, to another individual's religious conversion. The Governments of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat amended their existing laws. The Governor of Rajasthan, later elevated to the Presidency, refused to sign her State's anti-conversion law, effectively nullifying it. Although these laws do not explicitly ban conversions, many Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) argue that in practice, "anti-conversion" laws, both by their design and implementation, infringe upon the individual's right to convert, favor Hinduism over minority religions, and represent a significant challenge to Indian secularism.

The vast majority of Indians of every religious group lived in peaceful coexistence; however, there were reports of organized societal attacks against minority religious groups, particularly in states ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Some NGOs report that societal violence against religious minorities is part of a larger Hindu nationalist agenda and corresponds with ongoing state electoral politics.

Terrorists attempted to provoke interreligious conflict by detonating bombs in Hyderabad in May 2007, in Nanded (Central Maharashtra) in February 2007, in the Muslim majority town of Malegaon (North Maharashtra) in September 2006, and in commuter trains in Mumbai in July 2006.

During the reporting period, societal violence also continued between Hindus and Muslims over disputed places of worship. The Bhojshala complex in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh is one such case where, since 2002, both Hindus and Muslims have disputed the right of the other group to offer prayers.

Hundreds of court cases remained in connection with the 2002 Gujarat violence.

The U.S. Embassy and its consulates promoted religious freedom in their discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials, and supported initiatives to encourage religious and communal harmony. During meetings with key leaders of all significant religious communities, U.S. senior officials discussed reports of harassment of minority groups, converts, and missionaries, as well as state-level legislation restricting conversion, the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat, and the plight of displaced Kashmiri Pandits.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1.3 million square miles and a population of 1.1 billion. According to the 2001 Government census, Hindus constitute 80.5 percent of the population, Muslims 13.4 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, Sikhs 1.8 percent, and others, including Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, and Baha'is, 1.1 percent. Slightly more than 90 percent of Muslims are Sunni; the rest are Shi'a. Tribal groups (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system), which are generally included among Hindus in government statistics, often practiced

traditional indigenous religions (animism).

Large Muslim populations are found in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala, and Muslims are the majority in Jammu and Kashmir. Christians are concentrated in the northeast, as well as in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three small northeastern states (Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya) have large Christian majorities. Sikhs are a majority in the state of Punjab.

There are Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh missionaries operating in the country.

Approximately 200 million persons or 17 percent of the population belong to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST, formerly called "untouchables"). Some converted from Hinduism to other religious groups, ostensibly to escape widespread discrimination.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the National Government generally respected this right in practice; however, some state and local governments limited this freedom by enacting or amending "anti-conversion" legislation, and by not efficiently or effectively prosecuting those who attacked religious minorities.

The country is a secular state with no official religion. The Constitution protects the right of individuals to choose or change their religion as well as practice the religion of one's choice. Many NGOs argue that state-level "anti-conversion" laws are unconstitutional and may reinforce the dominance of the Hindu majority. While the law generally provides remedy for violations of religious freedom, it was not enforced rigorously or effectively in many cases pertaining to religious-oriented violence. Legal protections existed to cover discrimination or persecution by private actors. The country's political system is federal and accords state governments the exclusive jurisdiction over law enforcement and the maintenance of order, which limits the national government's capacity to deal directly with state-level abuses, including abuses of religious freedom. The country's national law enforcement agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), cannot investigate a crime committed in a state without the State Government's permission. However, the National Government's law enforcement authorities, in some instances, have intervened to maintain order when state governments were reluctant or unwilling to do so.

The opposition BJP, the political wing of the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization, held power in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Uttarakhand and is part of the ruling coalition in Punjab, Karnataka, Bihar, and Orissa. Several NGOs alleged that during the reporting period, the BJP stoked communally sensitive matters as State elections grew near.

The Ministry for Minority Affairs, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) are governmental bodies created to investigate allegations of discrimination and make recommendations for redress to the relevant local or national government authorities. Although NHRC recommendations do not have the force of law, central and local authorities generally follow them. The NCM and NHRC intervened in several high profile cases, including the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat and other instances of communal tension, the enactment of anti-conversion legislation in several states, and incidents of harassment and violence against minorities.

Federal and state laws that regulate religion include the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976, several state-level "anti-conversion" laws, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act of 1967, the Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988, India's Foreigners Act of 1946, and the Indian Divorce Act of 1869.

The FCRA regulates foreign contributions to NGOs, including faith-based NGOs. Some organizations complained that the FCRA prevented them from properly financing humanitarian and educational activities.

There are active "anti-conversion" laws in 4 of the 28 States: Orissa, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh; however there were no reports of convictions under these laws during the reporting period. Gujarat and Arunachal Pradesh have inactive "anti-conversion" laws awaiting accompanying regulations needed for enforcement. In September 2006 the Gujarat State Assembly passed an amendment to make further clarifications on the provisions of the law, but the Governor did not take action by the end of the reporting period. The Rajasthan law passed the State Assembly during the previous reporting period, but was refused twice by the Governor and forwarded to the President on June 20, 2007, for legal review and guidance on its constitutional merit.

The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 states, "No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion." The law defines force as "a show of force or a threat for injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication", fraud as "misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance" and inducement as "the offer of any gift or gratification, either in cash or in kind and shall also

include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise." Individuals breaking the law are subject to penalties such as imprisonment, a fine, or both. These penalties are harsher if the offence involves minors, women, or a person belonging to SC/ST. The law also requires that District Magistrates maintain a list of religious organizations and individuals propagating religious beliefs, that individuals intending to convert provide a declaration before a Magistrate, that priests declare the intent to officiate in a conversion ceremony, and that police officers determine if there are objections to a given conversion. There were no reports of district magistrates denying permission for religious conversions or of convictions under the Act during the period covered by this report.

Under current provisions in the states of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, it is prohibited "to convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion." Such an offense is punishable with a maximum of two years' imprisonment, and a maximum fine of \$220 (8,800 INR), with harsher penalties in the case of children, women, or members of SC/ST. In July 2006, the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh enacted changes to their existing laws. These require that an individual planning on converting obtain prior permission from district authorities. Christians intending to "reconvert" to Hinduism do not have to fulfill this requirement. The amendments became void in January 2007; the respective Governors did not approve the bills before then.

The State Assembly passed the Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act 2006 in December 2006 and the Governor signed into law on February 19, 2007. The law is unique because the secular Congress party generated and passed it, while states ruled by the BJP enacted all of the other "anti-conversion" laws. The law states, "No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any other fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion". The law stipulates punishment of up to two years' imprisonment and/or a fine of \$625 (25,000 INR). If SC/ST members or minors are involved, five years' imprisonment and/or \$1,250 (50,000 INR) fine is the penalty. Any members of a religious group wishing to change his or her religious beliefs is required to give 30 days prior information to district authorities or otherwise face punishment of one month imprisonment and/or \$25 (1,000 INR) fine. However, returning back to a previous religious group is not considered violating this law.

The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) of 1967 empowers the Government to ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunity friction, have been involved in terrorism or sedition, or violated the 1976 FCRA.

There were no requirements for religious groups to be licensed in the country; however, the Government prohibits foreign missionaries of any religious group from entering the country without prior clearance, and usually expels those who perform missionary work without the correct visa. Long established foreign missionaries generally can renew their visas, but the Government has not admitted new resident foreign missionaries since the mid-1960s. There is no national law barring a citizen or foreigner from professing or propagating religious beliefs; however, the country's Foreigners Act prohibits speaking publicly against the religious beliefs of others, as it is deemed dangerous to public order. The Act prohibits visitors on tourist visas from preaching without prior permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and West Bengal have laws regulating the construction of public religious buildings and the use of public places for religious purposes.

On July 21, 2006, the Kerala High Court ruled that taking an official oath in the name of Allah is constitutionally valid. Observing that Allah is synonymous with God, the High Court dismissed a writ petition challenging the constitutional validity of the oath taken by 11 Muslim members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly who had used the name of Allah.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 lists offenses, including those pertaining to religious duties and practices, against disadvantaged persons and provides for stiff penalties for offenders.

Article 17 of the Constitution outlawed untouchability; however, members of lower castes remained in a disadvantageous position. The Government continued to implement a quota system which reserved government jobs and seats in higher education institutions for SC/ST members belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist religions, but not for Christians or Muslims.

Christian groups filed a court case demanding that SC/ST converts to Christianity and Islam enjoy the same access to "reservations" as other SC/STs and argued that Christian SC/STs suffer from the same caste-based socio, economic and political stigmas and discrimination. The usual counter argument is that there is no caste system in Christianity and, therefore, no need to extend reservations to SC/ST Christians. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court, which had not ruled by the end of the reporting period. Reservations existed in Andhra Pradesh for followers of Islam.

Under Article 25 of the Constitution, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists are considered sects of Hinduism; however, these groups continue to view themselves as unique religions and sought to introduce their own separate personal laws. Sikhs have sought a separately codified body of law to legally recognize their uniqueness and preclude ambiguity. The 1992 National Commission for Minorities (NCM) Act identified Buddhism as a separate religion. The Supreme Court rejected the inclusion of Jains under the NCM Act, stating that the practice of adding new religious groups as

minorities should be discouraged.

There are different personal status laws for the various religious communities, and the legal system accommodates religion-specific laws in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. The Government grants a significant amount of autonomy to personal status law boards in crafting these laws. There is a Hindu law, a Christian law, a Parsi law, and a Muslim law - all legally recognized and judicially enforceable. None of these are exempt from national and state level legislative powers and social reform obligations as laid down in the Constitution.

The Indian Divorce Act of 2001 limits inheritance, alimony payments, and property ownership of persons from interfaith marriages and prohibits their use of churches to celebrate marriage ceremonies in which one party is a non-Christian. Clergymen who contravene its provisions could face up to ten years' imprisonment. However, the act does not bar interfaith marriages in other places of worship.

The Government permits private religious schools, but does not permit religious instruction in government schools. The Government may prescribe merit-based admission for religious colleges that receive public funding, while those that do not may use their own criteria, including religious affiliation.

Many Hindu sects have established schools, although they did not receive aid from the state. Most Islamic madrassahs did not accept government aid, alleging that it would subject them to stringent security clearance requirements. Educational institutions given "minority status" by the Government are not eligible for government aid.

The West Bengal Government administers most undergraduate and post-graduate sections of madrassahs in the state and the state's Public Service Commission hires madrassah teachers and regulates their curriculum. Approximately 25 percent of the 400,000 students attending madrassahs in West Bengal and 15 percent of their 10,000 teachers are non-Muslims.

The Government's National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) publishes textbooks that are uniformly used in government and private schools and printed in various languages. In 2007 the Government released new NCERT textbooks which it asserted more accurately portrayed minority religious groups, among other changes, and restored the secular character of education; however, some schools have not yet received the textbooks.

In 2004 Parliament passed a bill creating the National Commission for Minority Education Institutions and in March 2006, it empowered the Commission to resolve disputes and investigate complaints regarding violations of minority rights, including the right to establish and administer educational institutions.

The major holy days of the country's predominant religious groups are also considered national holidays, including Good Friday and Christmas (Christian); the two Eids (Muslim); Lord Buddha's birthday (Buddhist); Guru Nanak's Birthday (Sikh); Dussehra, Diwali, and Holi (Hindu); and the Birthday of Lord Mahavir (Jain).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

No religious organizations were banned under UAPA during the reporting period. The Government renewed the ban on the Student Islamic Movement of India on February 15, 2007, for the fourth time, based on concerns about terrorism. In 2005 the Government extended the ban on the Muslim group Deendar Anjuman until 2007.

In contrast to previous years, the Gujarat Charity Commissioner did not request financial statements from faith-based charities.

During the reporting period, press reports documented the activities of foreign missionaries who entered on tourist visas and illegally proselytized. Foreigners with tourist visas who engage in missionary activity are subject to deportation and possible criminal prosecution. Foreigners are responsible for requesting the correct type of visa; generally, there are no provisions for changing a person's immigration category once admitted.

The Government maintained a list of banned books that may not be imported or sold in the country because they contain material that governmental censors deem inflammatory and could provoke communal or religious tensions. The Rajasthan Government continued to ban the books Hageeqat (The Truth) and Ve Sharm Se Hindu Kahate Hain Kyon? (Why Do They Say With Shame They Are Hindus?) for alleged blasphemy against Hindu gods.

In February 2007 cinema owners and distributors in Gujarat refused to screen the film "Parzania," depicting the sufferings of a Parsi family during the 2002 violence, out of fear of rekindling communal tensions and retaliation by the Hindu right, especially Bajrang Dal leader Babu Bajrangji of Ahmedabad. Hindutva groups in Gujarat, where the 2002 violence took place, had threatened to attack theaters that showed the film. The Indian Censor Board had already approved the film for countrywide distribution and the film was shown elsewhere in the country.

Buddhist monks questioned the non-Buddhist control of management of the 1,500 year old Mahabodhi temple in

Bihar's Bodh Gaya. The monks also accused non-Buddhists of chopping off a branch of the holy Mahabodhi tree. The monks requested that the Government hand over management of the temple to them by amending the Mahabodhi Temple Management Act.

Missionaries and foreign religious organizations must comply with the FCRA, which limits overseas assistance to certain NGOs, including ones with religious affiliations.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While there were no reports accusing the National Government of committing abuses of religious freedom, human rights activists criticized it for alleged indifference and inaction in the face of abuses committed by state and local authorities and private citizens.

The opposition party BJP, the RSS, and other affiliated organizations (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar) claimed to respect and tolerate other religious groups. However, the RSS opposed conversions from Hinduism and expressed the view that all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, should adhere to Hindu cultural values. During the reporting period, the BJP continued to advocate for contentious measures such as the passage of "anti-conversion" legislation in all states in the country, the construction of a Hindu temple in the Ayodhya site, and the enactment of a uniform civil code.

The BJP was associated with some instances of dissemination of information promoting religious intolerance. On April 11, 2007, the BJP released a widely criticized Compact Disk (CD) as part of its Uttar Pradesh election campaign material. The National Commission for Minorities called upon the National and State Governments to take serious note of offensive depictions of the Muslim community contained in the CD. The BJP claimed to have withdrawn the CD, however, its contents were published and broadcast by the media. The circulation of such material appeared in the wake of similarly provocative leaflets surfacing in different parts of the country. The Election Commission notified the BJP and filed cases against those involved in the matter under the Representation of People's Act.

In the state of Karnataka, Christian and human rights groups reported increased attacks and harassment following the formation of a coalition government that includes the BJP.

On February 20, 2007, a local BJP leader, Panat Ram, and his followers allegedly attacked three pastors of the Believers' Church while they were holding a prayer meeting in Raigarh district, Chhattisgarh. Elisha Baker, Balbir Kher, and Nan Sai were slightly injured. Panat Ram also tried to register a complaint against the pastors for engaging in conversion activities. Police investigated the complaint but found it unsubstantiated, and did not register a First Information Report (FIR) against the pastors.

On November 9, 2006, a local BJP politician and party workers allegedly attacked six Christians at a village meeting in Bastar, Chhattisgarh. According to the Christians, police refused to file an FIR against the attackers.

On October 10, 2006, the Chhattisgarh BJP government reportedly closed a government-financed, Christian-operated child nutrition services center in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh. The government fired 17 employees of the center on suspicion of engaging in conversion activities.

According to religious media outlets, on December 4, 2006, a sub-inspector of police in Kondapur, Andhra Pradesh, assaulted a group of Christians displaying a religious film. Reportedly, the officer disrupted the viewing despite the fact that the village head had granted permission to the Christian community.

On August 19, 2006, police officers allegedly pressured a Christian convert to re-convert back to Hinduism in Devangere, Karnataka.

In August 2006 in Radhanpur, Gujarat, police firing killed three people (two Muslims and one Hindu) during protests by Muslims of the local administration's action to breach the wall of a Muslim cemetery to let flooding waters subside.

According to reports, on July 16, 2006, the police in Sultanpur, Uttar Pradesh physically assaulted a Christian convert allegedly, at the behest of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) members.

In July 2006 in Bhiwandi, while dispersing a rioting mob of Muslim protestors, Maharashtra police killed two Muslims. Two Hindu policemen were subsequently lynched by rioters in a dispute between a Muslim organization and the police over the construction of a police station adjacent to a Muslim cemetery. The mob burned several buses of a local public transport company and 18 people were injured, including 12 policemen.

There were reports of arrests under state-level "anti-conversion" laws and other restrictive laws during the reporting period.

On April 5, 2007, authorities in Andhra Pradesh arrested three pastors and filed cases under IPC 295A and 298 for hurting religious sentiments. Local residents alleged that the pastors led 26 foreign tourists, including several Americans, into the Chikadpally slum in Hyderabad where they engaged in conversions, and made derogatory remarks against Hindu Gods.

On March 20, 2007, Bangalore police arrested two Christian missionaries, including one American citizen, for allegedly making slanderous statements ridiculing Hindu deities. Both missionaries were released on bail the next day.

According to reports, in December 2006 the Bajrang Dal allegedly assaulted a pastor and 20 other Christians in Chhattisgarh who were singing Christmas carols. Five individuals were seriously injured. The pastor and 10 others were subsequently arrested for forcibly converting others.

According to religious media, on September 21, 2006, a day after the Gujarat State Assembly passed an amendment to the 2003 "anti-conversion law," a group of extremists attacked eight Christians belonging to the Indian Missionary Society. The Christians filed a complaint against nine attackers and the police sub-inspector for physical abuse. Subsequently, authorities arrested the attacked on charges of engaging in forced conversions and carrying weapons.

There were 11 reported arrests under the Madhya Pradesh "anti-conversion" law. This compares with 20 arrested during the previous reporting period. However, there were no convictions and all those arrested were released on bail with their cases pending. Faith-based NGOs and the media indicated that authorities arrested 4 people in Andhra Pradesh, 14 in Chhattisgarh, 28 in Madhya Pradesh, 2 in Orissa, and 1 in Uttar Pradesh during the previous reporting period. Many of these cases involved societal attacks on Christians or their property, and in some cases, police brutality was reported. In one instance, the attacked were reportedly arrested instead.

The Government, in response to a Delhi high court ruling in connection with the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, paid \$3,075 (123,000 INR) to several persons injured during the riots. In March 2007 a Delhi high court convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment three persons - Harprasad Bhardwaj, RP Tiwari, and Jagdish Giri - for lynching a Sikh policeman, his son, and another relative during the anti-Sikh riots. Two other co-accuseds were acquitted due to insufficient evidence. The court also fined each convict \$125 (5,000 INR). In May 2005 a Delhi court also sentenced five individuals to life imprisonment for murder in connection with the riots.

The Government did not take any action during the reporting period to open cases against Minister Jagdish Tytler and Member of Parliament Sajjan Kumar, who were named in the Nanavati Commission's 2005 report on the 1984 massacre. According to the CBI, there is little evidence against Tytler and Kumar.

In May 2006 despite Muslim community protests, the Vadodara City Government demolished a 300-year-old shrine in Gujarat. While dispersing a mob of Muslim protestors, the Gujarat police killed two Muslims. The mob set four shops on fire in retaliation. Three Hindus were also stabbed to death in the mob violence and a group of Hindus set one Muslim man on fire. The Home Ministry deployed paramilitary forces and the army to assist local security personnel. The media reported that 6 persons were killed and 42 injured, 16 as a result of police fire. The NCM urged the State Government to ascertain if police firing was unavoidable and if the decision to destroy the shrine was justified. During the reporting period, the Gujarat Government did not take any steps to restore the shrine.

Press reported that in January 2006, 10 persons were injured after the demolition of the Christ Mission Ashram church in south Calcutta, West Bengal, in a clash between church members and Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority workers. The government later allotted alternate land to the mission to relocate the church and its facilities.

Police and state authorities took timely steps to end the violence and curb mob actions during outbreaks of politically-motivated religious tension in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat in early 2006.

In 2006 police launched a judicial inquiry into clashes between Hindu and Muslim residents in Uttar Pradesh. An NCM investigation determined that the Uttar Pradesh administration initially did not take appropriate steps to prevent the violence.

Between May and October 2005, communal riots in Uttar Pradesh resulted in the deaths of 7 persons and wounding of 36, including 8 police officers. In October 2005 the Uttar Pradesh Government convened a three-member committee to determine the cause of the riots and filed charges against BJP politicians Mukhtar Ansari and Ramji Singh for inciting communal discord. The committee also reported that BJP Member of Parliament Yogi Adityanath had a role in instigating the communal clashes, but did not file charges against him.

Allegations of forced conversion and "defamation of Hinduism" led to harassment of Emmanuel Ministries International (EMI), a large charitable organization in Rajasthan by members of the Sangh Parivar. In February 2006 the Rajasthan Government revoked the licenses of EMI-owned charities such as a bible institute, orphanage, school, hospital, and church. In March 2006 the Department of Social Welfare of Rajasthan froze the organization's bank accounts. In June 2006 the Jaipur High Court instructed the State Government to show cause regarding the closing of the EMI property and instructed the accounts to be unfrozen. See section on Societal Abuses.

Authorities held EMI President Samuel Thomas in judicial custody from March 17 to May 2, 2006, for hurting the religious sentiments of Hindus. Thomas was later charged with sedition in May 2006 for the use of a map on an EMI-affiliated website that did not include Jammu and Kashmir as part of the country. The Supreme Court granted Thomas bail, but restricted his travel. By the end of this reporting period, the sedition charges had not been dropped.

In June 2006, according to religious media, policemen verbally and physically abused four tribal Christians in Maharashtra who tried to follow up on a FIR. The four were then charged with breach of peace. A police inquiry into the case resulted in the removal of one police officer. No further action had been taken by the end of the reporting period.

In May 2006 in Punjab, after protests by Delhi All-India Christian Council (AICC) leaders, police arrested three Hindu extremists for a raid on an Easter Day event, in which they threatened worshippers and vandalized property. When the pastor attempted to register a FIR, the Senior Superintendent of Police at first told him that permission from the district magistrate was required, but later recanted and permitted the services.

There was continued concern about the failure of the Gujarat Government to arrest and convict those responsible for the widespread communal violence in 2002. Home Ministry figures released in May 2005 indicated that 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed, and 2,500 others injured. Some NGOs maintained the number of Muslims killed was higher, with figures ranging anywhere from 1,000 to 2,500. There were also reports of rape, gang rape, and molestation of Muslim women. According to an October 2005 survey by the NHRC monitoring committee, approximately 4,300 Muslim families (between 25,000 - 30,000 individuals) were still internally displaced and living in makeshift camps with inadequate infrastructure facilities. People told the committee that they feared retaliation by their Hindu neighbors if they returned to their native villages. They also feared that Hindu neighbors would pressure them to withdraw their complaints filed in connection with the 2002 violence.

In March 2006 the government-established commission headed by Justice Banerjee issued a report stating that the train fire was an accident and ruled out a Muslim conspiracy. The commission also accused the then-railway-Minister and the Railway Safety Commission of failing to adequately investigate the accident. The Gujarat High Court initially prevented the release of the report to Parliament; however, Indian Railways petitioned the Indian Supreme Court for its release, an appeal that was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the Nanavati-Shah commission, established in April 2002, continued its hearings into the Gujarat 2002 violence. It has received six month extensions on a regular basis and its current term is scheduled to end December 2007.

In its February 2006 response to the Supreme Court, the Gujarat police said that it would reexamine 1,600 of the 2,108 cases that were closed after the riots. However, during the reporting period, the Gujarat police had closed as many as 1,600 cases, citing the unavailability of witnesses.

During the previous reporting period, the Gujarat police registered 13 new riot-related cases and arrested 640 accused between August 2004 and February 2006. However, accused individuals were acquitted in several other cases because of lack of evidence or changes in testimony. During the reporting period, several fresh FIRs were registered on the basis of sworn affidavits of victims. On the basis of these affidavits, two prominent accused persons were arrested--Mahant Parshottamgiri Goswami, a high priest of a Hindu sub-sect in Vadodara, and Rajesh Katara, the son of Dahod BJP MP Babubhai Katara.

According to a report submitted by the Government to a UN agency in October 2006, 6 cases relating to 2002 violence resulted in convictions, whereas 182 cases resulted in acquittals. Human rights groups contend that, barring the few high-profile cases the Indian Supreme Court is directly supervising, the majority of the accused would not be convicted.

In October 2005 "fast track" courts in Gujarat sentenced 5 persons to life imprisonment for the murder of 12 Muslims during the riot period. The courts sentenced others to three years' imprisonment and ordered them to pay a fine of \$11 (500 INR) each, which they had not paid by the end of the reporting period. Local courts acquitted 107 of 113 persons arrested for killing 2 Muslims, and indicted 39 police officers for riot-related conduct.

The Bilkis Bano case continued its hearings in a Mumbai court during the reporting period. In February 2006 a special court in Mumbai convicted 9 persons of the murder of 14 Muslims in the Best Bakery case and sentenced them to life in prison. The court acquitted another eight. Many human rights groups continue to argue that, despite the Best Bakery verdict, those responsible for the 2002 Gujarat violence will go unpunished. Primary witness Zahira Shaikh was sentenced to one year imprisonment and fined an estimated \$1,200 (48,000 INR) for perjury. She served her prison sentence; the Supreme Court waived the fine.

In June 2005 the Central Prevention Of Terrorism Act (POTA) Review Committee recommended that POTA charges be dropped against many Muslims in connection with the Gujarat violence due to insufficient evidence; however, at the end of the reporting period the charges were still in effect. Approximately, 150 Muslim youth remain in detention under

POTA in Gujarat (the majority of them accused in the Godhra train burning case).

In March 2005 Gujarat police detained at least 400 persons to prevent Hindu-Muslim clashes during the Shi'a Muslim day of mourning (Muharram); the same month, Muslims called off a Muharram procession in Vadodara to prevent potential clashes with Hindus. Throughout the reporting period, Muharram processions took place peacefully in Gujarat.

Since an organized insurgency erupted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989, there have been numerous reports of human rights abuses by security forces, local officials, and separatists. It remained difficult to separate religion and politics in Kashmir; Kashmiri separatists were predominantly Muslim, and almost all the higher ranks as well as most of the lower ranks in the Indian military forces stationed there were non-Muslim. The vast majority of the 61,000 member Jammu and Kashmir police force was Muslim. Kashmiri Hindus remained vulnerable to violence. Most lived in refugee camps outside of the valley awaiting safe return. In May 2004 and 2005 and in April 2006 the Jammu and Kashmir Government allowed a procession of separatist groups to mark the anniversary of the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversions, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Authorities arrested numerous Christians under state-level "anti-conversions" laws during the reporting period for allegedly engaging in conversions by force, allurement, or fraud. (For more information, see Abuses section.) Hindu nationalist organizations frequently alleged that Christian missionaries lured low-caste Hindus with offers of free education and healthcare and equated such actions with forced conversions. Christians responded that low-caste Hindus convert of their own free will and that efforts by Hindu groups to "re-convert" these new Christians to Hinduism were themselves accompanied by offers of remuneration and thus, fraudulent.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

Terrorist groups perpetrated atrocities against civilians, including minority Hindu members of the Pandit (Hindu Brahmin) community, in the long-lasting insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, including car bombings, forced housing of terrorists, executions, and sexual assaults. Retaliatory killings by terrorists were also common. Security forces used targeted but at times excessive force to suppress them, with civilians frequently the main victims.

Terrorists attempted to provoke interreligious conflict by detonating bombs.

In May 2007 12 persons were killed and 40 injured when a bomb exploded during Friday prayers at the Mecca mosque in the Charminar area in Hyderabad. Investigations are ongoing and a few persons were arrested for questioning.

In February 2007 in Nanded (Central Maharashtra), two alleged bomb-makers died when their bombs exploded.

In September 2006 in the Muslim majority town of Malegaon (North Maharashtra) on the eve of an important Shi'a festival, 38 people died, and more than 100 were injured due to a series of bomb explosions in and around a mosque.

On August 16, 2006, during the celebrations of the birth of Lord Krishna, a powerful bomb explosion killed five persons and injured many others at the International Society for Krishna Consciousness temple in Imphal, Manipur. The shrine was crowded with devotees, including foreigners, when the blast took place. Manipur police are still investigating the case. Manipur has a number of insurgent underground groups that perpetrate violence on civilians.

On July 11, 2006, in Mumbai, a series of bombs exploded in commuter trains killing approximately 200 people and injuring over 700, as part of a terrorist campaign to incite widespread Hindu/Muslim rioting and destroy the India/Pakistan peace initiative.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Prime Minister's Office released the Sachar Report, a study on the socio-economic status of Muslims in the country, during the reporting period. It presented data documenting that Muslims lagged behind the general public in many social indicators. In January 2007 based on this report, the UPA government directed all banks to provide preferential loans to minorities. Furthermore, in April 2007 the Prime Minister said that efforts would be made to ensure women and minorities are "properly represented" at all levels in government.

In March 2007 the National Government announced it would pay approximately \$8,100 (324,000 INR) in additional compensation to the next of kin of persons killed in the 2002 Gujarat violence. The compensation supplements the

\$4,651 (186,040 INR) compensation already paid by the Government of Gujarat for each victim. However, there was no timetable for when these compensation amounts will be paid.

In May 2007 the National Government moved a Constitution Amendment Bill to grant Constitutional status to the National Minorities Commission.

The Gujarat State Government banned an anti-Christian rally announced by the VHP and the RSS, planned for Christmas Day of 2006 in the Dangs district of Gujarat. The rally was organized in response to the desecration of eight Hindu religious statues by unknown persons on December 14, 2006. Christian groups petitioned the government to ban the rally.

On December 29, 2006, Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh announced a 4 percent reservation policy for Muslims in government jobs. He reported that although the community comprised 7 percent of the state's population, it represented only 2.57 percent in government jobs.

The Assam State Government has drafted a \$148 million (595-crore INR) development package for the state's Muslims, comprising approximately 30 percent of its population. The state has a Muslim population of 8.2 million, the majority of whom are confined to the most economically-depressed areas. The package is designed to spur economic activity in minority-dominated areas and to develop community infrastructure. Congress President Sonia Gandhi and a number of central Muslim leaders attended an all-Assam minority convention on May 10, 2007.

In January 2007 on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Vasant Pachami, the local BJP administration avoided strife by allowing both Hindus and Muslims to offer prayers at a disputed religious site in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh, but at different times during the day.

The National Foundation for Communal Harmony continued to provide assistance for the physical and psychological rehabilitation of child victims of communal, caste, ethnic or terrorist, violence, with special reference to their care, education and training. The Foundation also promoted communal harmony, fraternity and national integration by providing \$3.96 million (15.97-crore INR) in financial assistance to rehabilitate 8,849 minority children through December 2006. It has also given grants to states to hold events that promote communal harmony.

During the previous reporting period, the UPA introduced legislation to give New Delhi the power to intervene in states in which the Government refuses to take strong measures to end communal outbreaks. The UPA also acted to increase the powers of the human rights commission to investigate abuse cases. After its introduction in Parliament, the legislation was moved to a standing committee, where it remained throughout the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the NCERT acted systematically to remove "tainted" textbooks with communal bias from schools and introduce secular, more objective school textbooks that seriously examine atrocities committed against minorities in the country.

Speeches by the Prime Minister and some state government officials emphasized the need to build communal harmony and to work towards peaceful co-existence. In May 2007 the country celebrated the 150th anniversary of its first rebellion against British colonial rule with a year of events aimed at promoting communal harmony, a theme on which Prime Minister Manmohan Singh focused his speech in Parliament.

The NHRC and NCM continued to promote freedom of religion during the reporting period. Through their annual reports and investigations, they focused attention on human rights problems and, where possible, encouraged judicial resolutions.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The country's population of 1.1 billion includes innumerable religious traditions; there were instances of societal discrimination and violence based in whole or in part on religion. Many such incidents were linked to politics, conversion, retaliation and/or revenge. Economic competition between different religious communities also played an important role in such conflicts. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs' 2006 Annual Report, there were 698 instances of communal violence or violence along religious lines in which 133 persons were killed and 2,170 injured.

Efforts at ecumenical understanding brought religious leaders together to defuse religious tensions. Prominent secularists of all religious groups made public efforts to show respect for other religious groups by celebrating their holidays and attending social events such as weddings. Muslim groups protested against the mistreatment of Christians by Hindu extremists. Christian clergy and spokespersons for Christian organizations issued public statements condemning anti-Muslim violence in places such as Gujarat.

Members of all religious communities also spoke up against terrorism. In March 2006 one of India's leading Islamic seminaries issued a fatwa against terrorists targeting places of worship and killing innocent people. The imam ruled

that "there was absolutely no room for terrorism in Islam and the murder of one innocent person amounted to the murder of the entire humanity."

Leaders of the Tibetan Buddhist community commented during the reporting period that relations with the Government and local residents were good, and that they did not believe the community to be persecuted.

In January 2007 in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh members of the Jain religion accused Muslims of destroying posters depicting a Jain saint. One person died of injuries sustained in skirmishes between the two communities.

According to media reports, on March 12, 2007, unidentified individuals allegedly chopped the hair and shaved the beard of a Sikh youth in Pune, Maharashtra, who was reported missing by his family several days earlier. The Sikh youth was found unconscious along the track near the Jagadhri railway station in Haryana. Although the police initiated an investigation, the case remains unresolved.

Approximately 4,778 Pandit families from Jammu and Kashmir still were living in 12 refugee camps in Jammu at the end of the reporting period, and 238 families were still in Delhi's 14 camps. The remainder of the more than 56,000 families who were driven from their homes by Muslim insurgents in 2002-2003 lived elsewhere.

There were instances of religiously motivated violence and sectarian rioting, including mob violence or vigilante action and Hindu-Muslim communal violence.

In March 2007 a Hindu color splashing procession (Rangteras') through a Muslim-dominated locality led to an incident of communal violence. Allegedly, the processionists raised inflammatory slogans and vandalized 26 shops belonging to Muslims. According to the Rajasthan Muslim Forum, the state police did not take any action to stop the violence and arrested all Muslims who attempted to file complaints against the rioters.

In February 2007 nine persons were injured in Hindu-Muslim clashes during the Moharrum procession in Indore, Madhya Pradesh.

On January 20-22, 2007, riots erupted in Bangalore after Muslim youth allegedly pulled down banners put up by Hindu activists. Clashes left a young boy dead, 31 individuals (mostly Muslims) injured, and at least 15 vehicles damaged. Media reports suggested that lack of clear orders prevented decisive police action against the rioters.

On September 29, 2006, during a procession in Nanded, Maharashtra, members of the Hindu student organization Chava damaged stalls selling Iftar food and stoned a mosque. Muslims alleged that the police remained passive while local police claimed they controlled the procession and arrested 30 Chava activists.

In September 2006 minor Hindu-Muslim skirmishes occurred in Rabodi (Thane city) and Osmanabad in Maharashtra during immersion processions of the Hindu deity Ganesh. Police acted promptly and brought the violence under control.

Although not decreed by fatwas, some Muslims attempted to impose their religious views concerning ethical and moral conduct on their fellow Muslims. On March 9, 2007, a 35-year-old woman was killed by local Muslim youth in Melapalayam, southern Tamil Nadu. The Media reported that the killing was due to her having an affair with a married man, which angered youth influenced by the Islamic fringe group "Al Umma." Tamil Nadu police arrested six individuals in connection with this killing.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reports of harassment of non-Christians in Christian majority areas or by Christian militant separatist movements.

The issue of conversion of Hindus or members of lower castes to Christianity remained highly sensitive and resulted in assaults and/or arrests of Christians. However, Christians often held large public prayer meetings without violence or protests. For example, hundreds of Christians participated in a program of nonstop devotional chants (akhand keertan) for two nights and days, from February 2-4, 2007, in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh.

According to faith-based organizations, including the AICC and the Christian Legal Association of India, there were at least 128 attacks against Christians in 2006.

Religious media reported that there were 20 reported acts of violence committed against Christians in Andhra Pradesh during the reporting period. According to these reports, the Bajrang Dal and other Hindu extremist organizations physically assaulted pastors and congregants, destroyed and vandalized churches, attacked schools and accused Christians of engaging in unethical conversion activities and proselytizing. There were seven incidents in the same state during the last reporting period.

On April 11, 2007, Hindu extremists attacked Evangelical Christians in Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh, physically assaulting some of the congregants, removing Christian literature and alleging that the Christians were engaged in unethical conversions. On February 20, 2007, Pastor Goda Israel, who was the overseer of 15 churches in Andhra Pradesh, died of stabbing wounds. According to reports, Pastor Goda received threats due to his proselytizing activities. On November 16, 2006, according to a Christian NGO, 30 extremists attacked a Christian school run by Roman Catholic nuns, damaging property and threatening the nuns with sexual humiliation. Allegedly, the incident stemmed from the nun's requirement that all students wear uniforms and not traditional Hindu clothing.

During the reporting period, faith-based media outlets reported at least 14 separate incidents of attacks on Christian prayer meetings or Christian individuals by Hindu extremists in Chhattisgarh. There were four incidents of attacks during the previous reporting period. Christians alleged that Hindu groups, such as Dharm Sena (Religion Army) or the Dharm Raksha Sena (Religion Protection Army) (DRS), disrupted prayer meetings, assaulted pastors and lay persons, and confiscated and destroyed religious material. Christians also claimed that authorities filed false charges of conversion by force and allurement, and that the police was biased in how it registered complaints, doing so promptly only when the accused was a Christians.

On April 30, 2007, eight extremists attacked a U.S. businessman, in Raipur, Chhattisgarh accusing him of engaging in forced conversion and missionary activities in the area. He suffered serious injuries. Police attempted to arrest the perpetrators.

On February 25, 2007, a group of Hindu villagers of Surgi village in Rajanandgaon district forcefully ousted India Mission Church Pastor T.N. Jose from the village, forcing him to sign a statement that he was converting people to Christianity. The villagers also briefly held captive his sister, who runs a medical clinic in the village.

On December 24, 2006, Dharm Sena activists publicly protested against celebrating Christmas in the state capital Raipur. Reportedly, many Christians were intimidated by the campaign and did not attend Christmas services.

On December 17, 2006, around 50 DRS activists assaulted Pastor Philip Jagdella as he was returning from teaching Sunday school. He was accused of conversion by allurement and of distributing candy to Sunday school attendees. The activists took him to a police station and pressured the police to register a complaint against him "for hurting Hindu religious sentiments." The Chhattisgarh Christian Forum (CCF) interceded, and made the police register counter-complaints against the DRS for the beatings. The police also ordered a medical examination for Jagdella because of CCF advocacy. CCF noted that police normally fail to follow this procedure when Hindus assault Christians.

Gujarat religious media outlets described several attacks on Christians by Hindu groups during the reporting period. In November 2006 the Gujarat High Court heard a case against the Bhavnagar district administration, which had unsuccessfully tried to close down a Christian-run school in October 2006 for administrative lapses. At the end of the reporting period, the school was open and the court case ongoing. In October 2006 the Hindu leader of the Hindoliya village of Surat, Gujarat asked a Christian villager to demolish a house used for worship, prayer, and Bible study, alleging that forced conversions were taking place there. The man refused and the case was in the court at the end of the reporting period. In September 2006 Hindu extremists accused eight Christian activists of the Indian Missionary Society of firing a gun at Hindus and attempting to forcefully convert one of them. The Christians claimed that they were the victims of an assault by Hindus. Police arrested the Christians and subsequently, with the help of the Gujarat High Court, the Christians filed counter-complaints.

According to religious press outlets, there were four reports of acts of violence against Christians following the passage of an anti-conversion law in Himachal Pradesh in late December 2006. There were no reports during the previous reporting period. On January 21, 2007, a large number of VHP members allegedly harassed Pastor Timuhias Behal in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, accusing him of engaging in unethical conversions and demanding that he close down an orphanage, cease prayer meetings, and leave the area.

According to religious media, there were at least 40 reported acts of violence against Christians in the state of Karnataka, a considerable increase from the 6 incidents reported during the previous reporting period. Religious press reported injuries to pastors and congregants (males and females), threats and intimidation and destruction of property and places of worship. Attackers disrupted prayer meetings and Church services. On June 8, 2007, media reported that a mob of Hindu extremists, allegedly led by the Bajrang Dal, the youth wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, disrupted a Christian service in a suburb of Bangalore. Local police arrived but the pastor said he did not want to press charges. On March 28, 2007, Catholics in Mangalore protested against a series of attacks on the community by activists belonging to the RSS. On January 7, 2007, Hindu activists attacked a pastor and two of his parishioners in a Bangalore suburb. This was followed by another attack by the same activists on a prayer meeting conducted by a different pastor. Both pastors complained that the local police have been lax in dealing with their case. On November 30, 2006, approximately 50 members of the Bajrang Dal and VHP attacked the Avila Convent Catholic Girls' High School in Misore, Karnataka, physically assaulting staff and vandalizing property. Extremists also accused the headmistress of engaging in unethical conversion during school hours. Allegedly, the police issued a warning to the headmistress.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Madhya Pradesh stated that between July 2006 and April 2007, it received reports of more than 55 attacks on Christians by various Hindu groups such as the Dharam Sena. Of these 55 incidents, 34 were in Jabalpur. The Conference members claimed that police often failed to file FIRs or to mention the names of Hindu perpetrators in the FIRs. Most attacks targeted private prayer meetings at houses of Christian worshippers. According to the 2001 census, 0.03 percent the state's population is Christian.

Religious media reported 20 acts of violence against Christians in Madhya Pradesh, 6 of which resulted in the arrest of Christians under the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act. This compares to 12 attacks reported by the same sources during the previous reporting period. Reports also stated that Bajrang Dal members and other extremists attacked prayer meetings, church services, and church property, resulting in arrests, threats, harassment, serious injuries to pastors and congregants, and destruction of property. The police were often ineffective in arresting perpetrators of attacks.

On April 1, 2007, 30 Hindus led by Yogesh Agarwal of the Dharam Sena attacked Palm Sunday prayers at St. Paul's Church in Gokulpur, Jabalpur. Seven Christians were treated in a hospital for injuries; two Dharam Sena activists were also injured. Attackers allegedly assaulted the 7-year-old son of pastor James Masih. Police filed a complaint against the Dharam Sena. On the same day, Hindu extremists attacked a Christian Palm Sunday procession in Damoh District. According to the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), two Christians received severe head injuries and were treated at a mission hospital. EFI has not published the names of the victims, citing security concerns.

On March 31, 2007, a Hindu leader Snehlata Kedia reportedly claimed in a public lecture in Bhopal that Christian priests have sex with young Hindu girls under the pretext of hearing confessions. On March 16, 2007, two independent pastors were arrested by police in Chenapur, Khargone district, after local residents complained that the pastors were hurting their religious feelings. The pastors were distributing religious literature. On March 6, 2007, Hindu extremists also attacked Pastor Binoy Kuriakose and 10 of his team while they were distributing religious materials near Ratlam town. Also in March 2007, Hindu extremists attacked a Christian prayer meeting and assaulted Independent Church Pastor Avinash Kanchan and some of his followers. According to reports, Police stated that no one filed a complaint.

During the reporting period, faith-based religious media outlets reported several instances of violence against Christian prayer meetings or church property in Maharashtra. In all cases, police arrested the attackers who were later released on bail.

On March 31, 2007, Hindu extremists allegedly assaulted a Christian pastor during a prayer service in Ulhasnagar. Christian activists claimed that he was being falsely accused of forcible conversions. He suffered a fracture and head injuries, but no attackers were arrested. On March 3, 2007, a group of Hindus assaulted two Christian youths distributing prayer tracts at a suburban railway station in Mumbai. The attackers stole the printed material, dragged the youths to the police station, and registered a complaint alleging denigration of other religious beliefs and forcible conversions. Police sent the youths to a hospital for medical examination and treatment. On February 19, 2007, a mob injured five Bible College students while distributing prayer tracts and literature. Christian activists claimed that the attackers had tacit support from the police. The youths were reportedly denied treatment at a government hospital.

According to religious media, there were nine reported acts of violence against Christians in Orissa. This compares with four incidents reported during the previous reporting period. Some of the affected pastors and congregants were seeking legal redress. On March 5, 2007, the AICC (Orissa Chapter) reported that Christians in Ranalai village, Gajapati, Orissa, were attacked by Hindus. The Council appealed to the administration to provide police protection to the Christian community and take appropriate action against the suspects. On February 28, 2007, approximately 400 people attacked a Gospel for Asia Bible school in Jharsuguda, Orissa, physically assaulting staff and students. On October 4, 2006, Hindu extremists abducted, tonsured, and tortured a convert to Christianity. Reportedly, he was forced to reconvert to Hinduism. This incident happened two days after the VHP reconverted 129 tribal Christians to Hinduism.

Religious media reported eight acts of violence against Christians in Rajasthan during the reporting period. The same sources reported numerous incidents of severe attacks against Christian property or persons during the previous period. In May 2007 media reported on a trend in Rajasthan in which Christians were threatened, followed by violence. For example, on April 29, 2007, a national television channel filmed the attack of independent pastor Walter Masih at his home in Nandipuri. The assailants were reportedly associated with the VHP and its youth wing Bajrang Dal. Police arrested seven people, including government employee and VHP officer Virendra Singh. According to religious press outlets, on May 12, 2007, approximately 15 individuals attacked the home of a Catholic priest, ordering him to leave the premises and accusing him of engaging in unethical conversions. On April 29, 2007, members of the VHP and Bajrang Dal allegedly attacked a church service held in the house of Pastor Walter Massey, physically assaulting him and vandalizing his property. Television channels and the national press reported the attack. Police arrested five individuals.

There were several instances of interreligious intolerance regarding marriage. In April 2007 after a Sindhi Hindu female minor eloped with a Muslim minor, the Sindhi Hindu community of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, tried unsuccessfully to ban young Sindhi girls from using two-wheelers and cell-phones. Following the elopement, the Bajrang Dal announced plans to form a Hindu Kanya Raksha Samiti (Hindu Daughters' Protection Committee) to prevent the recurrence of such incidents. Print media reported that for the last several years, Bhopal Police have kept

tabs on the number of interfaith marriages in the city (especially in cases when the groom is Muslim). Reportedly Hindu nationalist organizations cited police statistics, pointing to an increasing number of interfaith marriages as evidence of a purported Muslim conspiracy to "steal" Hindu girls.

In April 2007 after a Hindu female minor eloped with a Muslim man in Gujarat, the VHP announced that it would conduct a door-to-door survey of out-of-state migrant youths to "protect" Hindu girls. The Mumbai police subsequently arrested and charged the man with kidnapping and sent the girl to a home for minors. A Hindu Right group attacked the offices of a national TV channel, causing property damage, after the channel aired the couple's story.

In April 2007 DRS members damaged the Star News office in Mumbai, protesting the channel's report of an interfaith couple from Surat, Gujarat that fled to Mumbai to escape parental disapproval of their marriage. Also during the reporting period, several inter-faith couples from Ahmedabad, Gujarat (Hindu brides with either Christian or Muslim grooms) alleged in a series of media interviews that a Hindu nationalist group took action against them. The couples claimed that the group (often with the connivance of the girls' parents) abducted the girls and tried to marry them off to Hindu grooms. Reportedly, several interfaith couples fled from Gujarat to protect themselves and to marry according to their own wishes.

In January 2007 local Dharma Sena activists unsuccessfully tried to prevent a Christian man from marrying a tribal woman. Though the couple gave a notice under the Special Marriages Act in October 2006, the Jabalpur district administration held repeated hearings to hear objections by Dharma Sena activists, who alleged that the girl was being lured with money, and would be compelled to convert to Christianity.

In 2006 the Government of Madhya Pradesh (GOMP) education department relocated a girls' college from a Muslim to a Hindu neighborhood, purportedly to reduce chances of fraternization amongst Hindu girls and Muslim boys. The GOMP allegedly was responding to pressure from the VHP and Bajrang Dal. The GOMP cited administrative reasons for the move. Muslims claimed that that enrollment of Muslim girls in the college dropped as a result.

There were acts of vandalism against religious properties during the reporting period. On April 4, 2007, approximately 300 individuals from the Sangh Parivar and RSS reportedly demolished an Evangelical Lutheran Church and vandalized the pastor's property in Orissa. On February 28, 2007, a group of Hindus attacked the Believers' Church Bible College campus at Jharsuguda, Orissa. According to the AICC (Orissa Chapter), the attackers entered the premises, beat up students and staff, and ransacked property. An altercation between the students of the college and the inhabitants of a nearby village may have led to the attack. Armed police were deployed in the area following the incident, and a FIR was lodged with the Brajarajnagar police station. On February 22, 2007, a group of Hindus demolished a church building under construction in Bhubaneswar, Orissa. The police filed an FIR. In November 2006 alleged Hindu activists carried out an arson attack on a Catholic Church in Dharwad, Karnataka. Church authorities claimed police apathy in providing protection to the community. The church property suffered no damages.

No major attacks on churches, temples, or mosques were reported in Tamil Nadu between August 2006 and March 2007. However, incidents of tension around churches, particularly new ones, were not rare. The AICC reported that on December 5, 2006, a group of Hindus disrupted a worship service at a prayer hall in Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, because the church was located in close proximity to a temple. Reportedly, the local police advised the pastor to call off the worship service.

There were instances of discrimination against members of religious groups with respect to land transfers. In April 2007 the Chhattisgarh chapters of the RSS and BJP held a major rally in Raipur to protest the transfer or purchase of land by Christian tribal groups. Faith-based organizations alleged that the Chhattisgarh Government, at the behest of local Hindu leader BJP MP Dilipsinh Judeo, deliberately lodged false cases against Christian tribals who had bought land for Church activities. The same groups maintained that during the reporting period, Mr. Judeo organized several "Ghar-wapasi" (homecoming) programs to allegedly "reconvert" Christian tribals to Hinduism in Jashpur, Chhattisgarh. In most of these programs, tribals, regardless of whether or not they attended Christian prayer meetings, were "sanctified" by Judeo. Faith-based organizations claimed that tribals are animists and not Hindus, and that the rituals are tantamount to a "conversion" to Hinduism.

The Andra Pradesh Federation of Churches, an apex body of Catholic, Protestant, and other Christian denominations, demanded exemption from proposed legislation of the State Government to control church properties.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reported attacks against the media by ethnic and religious groups during the reporting period.

Discrimination based on caste is officially illegal but remains prevalent, especially in rural areas. With more job opportunities in the private sector and better chances of upward social mobility, the country has begun a quiet social transformation in this area. However, in rural areas, caste remains a major impediment to social advancement, and low-caste Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh Dalits continue to face class and race discrimination as a result. Some Dalits who seek to convert out of a desire to escape discrimination and violence have encountered hostility and backlash from upper castes. Ultimately, caste is a complex issue entrenched in society and the Government has taken steps to address it.

Despite government measures, the practice of dedicating Devadasis reportedly continued in several southern states, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Devadasis are young, generally prepubescent girls who are dedicated to a Hindu deity or temple as "servants of god." They may not marry, must live apart from their families, and are required to provide sexual services to priests and others. Reportedly, many Devadasis eventually are sold to urban brothels. The Devadasi tradition is linked, to some degree, to both trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Since Devadasis are by custom required to be sexually available to higher caste men, it reportedly is difficult for them to obtain justice from the legal system if they are raped. Estimates of Devadasis in the country varied; in Karnataka, media sources reported as few as 23,000 and as many as 100,000. The Department of Women and Child Welfare, Government of Karnataka, estimates 15-20,000 Devadasis in the state.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy and the three U.S. Consulates continued to promote religious freedom through discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. The embassy and consulates regularly met with religious leaders, and reported on events and trends that affect religious freedom.

The U.S. Government supported a wide range of initiatives to encourage religious and communal tolerance and freedom. Members of the embassy community celebrated Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jewish festivals throughout the reporting period with members of the various religious communities.

The Embassy repeatedly expressed concern over Himachal Pradesh's "anti-conversion" legislation with high ranking officials of the state and national governments.

Throughout the reporting period, mission officers investigated and reported on numerous cases of alleged religious persecution, the reported harassment of EMI by the Rajasthan Government, discrimination against Dalits, and religiously motivated attacks by militants and terrorists.

Mission officers also monitored the plight of internally displaced Kashmiri Hindus, known as Pandits, who fled their home areas in the valley of Kashmir starting in 1989 due to attacks on them by terrorists seeking to drive out non-Muslim minorities.

Embassy officers regularly met with the NHRC General Secretary and other Commission officers regarding actions by the State Government that have been injurious to the free exercise of belief by religious minorities.

During the reporting period, embassy and consulate officials met with leaders of all significant minority communities to discuss religious freedom concerns. In April 2006 the Calcutta Consulate organized a conference on "Perspectives on Islamic Education in the Twenty-First Century." Madrassah teachers attended the program and discussed topics including education, religion and public policy, new directions in Madrassah education in the country, and education and women in Islam.

The NGO and missionary communities in the country were extremely active on questions of religious freedom, and mission officers meet regularly with local NGOs.

The U.S. Government continued to express regret over the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002, and urged all parties in Gujarat to resolve their differences peacefully. Consulate and senior embassy officers also met in Mumbai with a range of NGO, business, media, and other contacts, including Muslim leaders, to monitor the aftermath of the Gujarat violence. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates reached out to madrassahs directly and through the special International Visitor Madrassah programs; religious freedom, tolerance, and respect for diversity were topics of discussion.

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