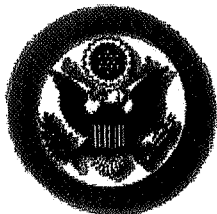


**UNHCR**
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U.S. Department of State



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**U.S. Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for
2003 – India - December 2003**

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The Constitution provides for secular government and the protection of religious freedom, and the central Government generally respected these provisions in practice; however, it sometimes did not act effectively to counter societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by state and local governments to limit religious freedom. This failure resulted in part from the legal constraints inherent in the country's federal structure, and in part from the law enforcement and justice systems, which at times were not effective. The ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities could be seen by some extremists as a signal that such violence may be committed with impunity.

The status of religious freedom improved in some ways and worsened in others during the period covered by this report. Although there was a decrease in the number of incidents of Hindu-Muslim and Hindu-Christian violence during the period covered by this report, two more state-level anticonversion laws were passed, and there was a gradual but continual institutionalization of "Hindutva," the politicized inculcation of Hindu religious and cultural norms to the exclusion of other religious norms. Hindutva, often synonymous with "cultural nationalism," excludes other religious beliefs and fosters religious intolerance. This institutionalization manifested itself through the spread of anticonversion laws in some states, the rewriting of textbooks to favor Hindu extremist interpretations of history, and illegal surveys of Christians by police in some areas of Gujarat to collect statistical information not sought from other religious groups. In addition, Hindus distributed tridents or "trishuls" (a small sharp object which can cause bodily injury) in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.

The central Government is led by a coalition called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which has pledged to respect the country's traditions of secular government and religious tolerance. However, the leading party in the coalition is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist party with links to Hindu extremist groups that have been implicated in violent acts against Christians and Muslims. The BJP also leads state governments in Goa and Gujarat; in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP rules in coalition with the Bahujan Samaj Party. Human rights groups and others have suggested that the authorities in Gujarat have not responded adequately to acts of violence against religious minorities by Hindu extremist groups, due at least in part to the links between these groups and the BJP. These groups have noted that the ineffective investigation and prosecution of such incidents may encourage violent actions by extremist groups.

Tensions between Muslims and Hindus, and to an increasing extent between Christians and Hindus, continued to pose a challenge to the secular foundation of the State. Attacks on religious minorities occurred in several states, which brought into question the

Government's ability to prevent sectarian and religious violence. In Gujarat the worst religious violence directed against Muslims by Hindus took place in February and March 2002, leaving an estimated 2000 dead and 100,000 displaced into refugee camps. It was alleged widely that the police and state government did little to stop the violence promptly, and at times even encouraged or assisted Hindus involved in the riots. Despite substantial evidentiary material, the judicial commission responsible for investigating the riots reported inconclusive findings. No Hindus have been charged for the violence. There were widespread reports of intimidation and harassment of witnesses. Violence and discrimination against Muslims and Christians continued in other parts of the country as well.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of approximately 1.3 million square miles and a population of slightly more than one billion. According to the latest government estimates, Hindus constitute 82 percent of the population, Muslims 12 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, Sikhs 2.0 percent, and others, including Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, and Baha'is, less than 2 percent. Hinduism has a large number of branches, including the Sanatan and Arya Samaj groups. Slightly more than 90 percent of Muslims are Sunni; the rest are Shi'a. Buddhists include followers of the Mahayana and Hinayana schools, and there are both Catholic and Protestant Christians. Tribal groups (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system), which in government statistics generally are included among Hindus, often practice traditional indigenous religions. Hindus and Muslims are spread throughout the country, although large Muslim populations are found in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, and Muslims are a majority in Jammu and Kashmir. Christian concentrations are found in the northeastern states, as well as in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three small northeastern states have large Christian majorities – Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya. Sikhs are a majority in the state of Punjab.

Over the years, many lower caste Hindus, Dalits (formerly called "untouchables," see Section II) and other non-Hindu tribal groups have converted to other faiths because they viewed conversion as a means to escape widespread discrimination and achieve higher social status. However, lower caste and Dalit converts continue to be viewed by both their coreligionists and by Hindus through the prism of caste. Converts are regarded widely as belonging to the caste of their ancestors, and caste identity, whether or not acknowledged by a person's own religion, has an impact on marriage prospects, social status, and economic opportunity. However, such converts often lose benefits conferred by the Government's affirmative action programs because these, according to the Constitution, are reserved only for those having scheduled caste status.

There are a number of immigrants, primarily from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, who practice various religions. Immigrants from Bangladesh usually reside near the border area.

According to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India, there are approximately 1,100 registered foreign missionaries in the country representing a variety of Christian denominations (see Section II).

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the central Government generally respected this right in practice; however, state and local governments only partially respected this freedom. There are no registration requirements for religious groups;

however, foreign Christian clergy often were required to register with the local police station during their visits to the country. Legally mandated benefits are assigned to certain groups, including some groups defined by their religion. The Government is empowered to ban a religious organization if it has provoked intercommunity friction, has been involved in terrorism or sedition, or has violated the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), which restricts funding from abroad. Christian organizations have complained that this prohibition prevents them from properly financing their humanitarian and educational activities in the country.

There are many religions and a large variety of denominations, groups, and subgroups in the country, but Hinduism is the dominant religion. Under the Constitution, the Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh faiths are considered different from the Hindu religion, but the Constitution often is interpreted as defining Hinduism to include those faiths. This interpretation has been a contentious issue, particularly for the Sikh community.

The country's political system is federal in character, under which state governments have exclusive jurisdiction over law enforcement and maintaining order, which has limited the central Government's capacity to deal with abuses of religious freedom. The country's national law enforcement agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), must receive a state government's permission before investigating a crime in that state. However, the federal Government's law enforcement authorities, in some instances, have stepped in to maintain order.

The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) have appointed members and are tasked respectively with protecting the rights of minorities and protecting human rights. These governmental bodies investigate allegations of discrimination and bias and can make recommendations to the relevant local or central government authorities. These recommendations generally are followed, although they do not have the force of law.

The legal system accommodates minority religions' personal status laws; there are different personal status laws for different religious communities. Religion-specific laws pertain in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. For example, Muslim personal status law governs many noncriminal matters involving Muslims, including family law, inheritance, and divorce. Hindu groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) advocate a uniform civil code that would treat members of all religions alike.

The Government permits private religious schools, which can offer religious instruction, but does not permit religious instruction in government schools. Some Hindus believe that this disadvantages them since Muslims have many private religious schools (madrassahs), but Hindus mostly attend government or Christian schools. Many Christian schools minimize overt religious instruction to avoid retaliation from Hindu extremists. During the period covered by this report, the Supreme Court ruled that the Government can prescribe qualifications for admission, based on merit, to colleges that receive public funding, but colleges that do not receive government assistance may admit students according to their own criteria. Some Muslims believe that Muslim madrassahs, some of which receive government aid, would be subject to stringent security clearance requirements under the Government's interpretation. Muslims have stated that this is a further attempt by BJP/Hindutva proponents to limit their freedom and ability to practice their religious beliefs.

Some government officials continue to advocate "saffronizing," or raising the profile of Hindu cultural norms and views in public education, which has prompted criticism from minority leaders, opposition politicians, academics, and advocates of secular values. The Government's National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) publishes textbooks that are uniformly used in government and private schools and are printed in various languages. In 2002 the Government announced its decision to rewrite existing NCERT history textbooks. The Government justified its decision by asserting that "history needs to be presented in a more refreshing and cogent manner." Secularists warned the re-written "history" spreads misinformation to support Hindu nationalist political aims,

including false claims that the origins of Hinduism are purely in India and that Indian Muslims and Christians are "foreigners." The Central Advisory Board of Education, a panel of experts responsible for reviewing the quality of textbook and academic instruction, has not been convened in 5 years. In January 2002, the National Human Rights Commission received a complaint asking the Commission to examine the printing of new history textbooks, which deleted references to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination by a member of the Hindu Mahasabha, a Hindutva organization that was banned following the assassination. In May 2002, the education ministers of 16 states walked out of a conference to protest the Hindutva bias of the new curriculum, while three leading scholars filed a petition with the Supreme Court challenging the publication of the new textbooks. The petition was turned down, however, and the new textbooks made their appearance in November 2002. The imposition of examination boards in line with the new textbooks forces schools to use the new syllabi. On January 31, the Ministry of Human Resources Development (HRD), headed by Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, passed strict academic guidelines to regulate academic partnerships between Indian and western universities and academics, in line with Hindutva philosophy. The new guidelines issued to all central universities require HRD permission for "all forms of foreign collaborations and other international academic exchange activities," including seminars, conferences, workshops, guest lectures, research, etc. The Government maintains a list of banned books that may not be imported or sold in the country, including books such as Salman Rushdie's "Satanic Verses," which contain material that governmental censors have deemed inflammatory. In March and April, the Indian Central Board of Film Certification denied a censor certificate to "Aakrosh," a film about the Gujarat riot victims.

Some major religious holidays celebrated by various groups are considered national holidays, including Christmas (Christian), Eid and the anniversary of the death of Mohammed (Muslim), Lord Buddha's birthday (Buddhist), Guru Nanak's Birthday (Sikh), Holi (Hindu), and the Birthday of Lord Mahavir (Jain).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act empowers the Government to ban a religious organization if it has provoked intercommunity friction, has been involved in terrorism or sedition, or has violated the 1976 FCRA, which restricts funding from abroad. Human Rights activists have criticized the Government for selectively applying the FCRA against religious minorities.

The Government officially banned the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act for "fomenting communal tension" and actions "prejudicial to India's security." The Government alleged that the SIMI had links with terrorist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and the Hizbul Mujahideen. The group is still banned and in January, police in three different states arrested eight of its members, including former president of the SIMI Bhopal district unit, Khalid Naeem. He was later released on bail.

On May 3, 2001, the Government officially banned the Muslim group Deendar Anjuman for "fomenting communal tension" and actions "prejudicial to India's security." State prosecutors alleged that some members of the tiny Muslim group called Deendar Channabasaveshwara Siddique (DCS) and its parent organization, Deendar Anjuman, were responsible for the Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh church bombings in 2000 (see Section III). This group is still banned. The fact that a Muslim group was responsible for the bombings of Christian churches was unusual; most attacks against Christians are perpetrated by Hindu extremist groups or by mobs. Some observers have compared the vigorous investigation and prosecution of Deendar members for attacks against Christians with the general lack of vigor in the investigation and prosecution of Hindus accused of carrying out attacks against Christians.

The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act makes it an offense to use any religious site for political purposes or to use temples for harboring persons accused or

convicted of crimes. While specifically designed to deal with Sikh places of worship in Punjab, the law applies to all religious sites. The state of Uttar Pradesh passed the "Religious Buildings and Places Bill," which requires a permit endorsed by the state government before construction of any religious building can begin in the state. The bill's supporters stated that its aim was to curb the use of Muslim institutions by Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups, but the measure remains a controversial political issue among religious groups in the northern part of the country. Most religious groups from all of the communities oppose the restriction on building religious structures and continue to view it as an infringement upon religious freedom. Legislation in West Bengal requires any person who plans to construct a place of worship to seek permission from the district magistrate; anyone intending to convert a personal place of worship into a public one also requires the district magistrate's permission. Muslim groups report that they have not received permission to build new mosques. In March the VHP announced it would launch a nationwide campaign to "reclaim" 30,000 Hindu temples that had been converted into mosques. Some Muslims fear that under this campaign, Hindus will try to claim the Gyan Vapi mosque in Varanasi, the Idgah mosque in Mathura, and the Ram temple grounds at the former Babri Mosque in Ayodhya.

The VHP continued its trident or "trishul" distribution program during the reporting period, despite the prohibition under the Penal Code against the distribution of sharp weapons to the public. Trishuls (three-pronged tridents) are Hindu religious symbols, but they have also been used as weapons, including in the 2002 Gujarat riots. In April the Rajasthan state government banned the distribution of trishuls in the state, but clarified that the order would not affect the use of trishuls in religious places and functions. On April 13, VHP General Secretary Togadia distributed the trishuls in defiance of the ban and was arrested. On April 21, he was released on bail.

The BJP, which has led two coalition national governments since 1998, is one of a number of offshoots of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, an organization that espouses a return to Hindu values and cultural norms. Most BJP leaders, including Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, also are RSS members. Members of the BJP, the RSS, and other affiliated organizations (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar) have been implicated in incidents of violence and discrimination against Christians and Muslims. The BJP and RSS express respect and tolerance for other religions; however, the RSS in particular opposes conversions from Hinduism and believes that all citizens should adhere to Hindu cultural values. The BJP officially states that the caste system should be eradicated, but many of its members are ambivalent about this. The BJP's traditional cultural agenda has included calls for construction of a new Hindu temple to replace an ancient Hindu temple that they claim once stood on the site of a mosque in Ayodhya that was destroyed by a Hindu mob in 1992; for the repeal of Article 370 of the Constitution, which grants special rights to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the country's only Muslim majority state; and for the enactment of a uniform civil code that would apply to members of all religions.

The BJP does not include the above RSS goals in the program of the coalition Government it leads; however, some minority religious groups have noted that the coming to power of the BJP coincided with an increase in complaints of discrimination against minority religious communities. These groups also claim that BJP officials at state and local levels increasingly have become unresponsive in investigating charges of religious discrimination and in prosecuting those persons responsible.

The degree to which the BJP's nationalist Hindu agenda has affected the country with respect to religious minorities varies depending on the region. State governments continue to attach a high priority to maintaining law and order and monitoring intercommunity relations at the district level. As a result, the central Government often is not the most important player in determining the character of relationships of various religious communities between each other and with the state.

During the period covered by this report, the states of Tamil Nadu and Gujarat passed

anticonversion laws. Under both laws, those "forcing" or "alluring" people to convert are subject to criminal action. Since that which constitutes forced conversions or allurement is not specified, human rights groups, Christian religious leaders, and Dalits have expressed concern that authorities will use these laws selectively in the future to shut down educational, medical, and other social services provided by Christian groups to Dalits and "tribals" (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system). Anticonversion laws have been in effect in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa since the 1960s, and laws against forcible conversions exist also in Andhra Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh.

The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion Act of October 2002 was declared by governor ordinance, which does not require approval by the state legislature. According to the act, those who attempt to convert individuals or groups from one religion to another using "false promises" and "allurements" are subject to prosecution, and all persons who "[take] part directly or indirectly in [a conversion] ceremony" must report the ceremony to the District Magistrate. Mandated punishments are greater for women, scheduled castes, and "tribals." As of the end of the period covered by this report, a petition questioning the constitutional validity of the act was under review by the state's high court.

In March the state assembly of Gujarat passed the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act. The act requires those involved with a conversion to seek the permission, both before and after the conversion ceremony, of the district collector, who is the sole arbiter of the validity of each conversion. This act also requires the police to investigate cases of forced or induced religious conversions. As with the Tamil Nadu anticonversion law, punishments are greater for women, scheduled castes, and "tribals." In April one Christian and one Buddhist organization filed a case in Ahmedabad High Court against the act; the court dismissed the petition as premature, since the rules and regulations for the act had not yet been gazetted. The rules had not been published by the end of the reporting period. A contingent of Dalits asked permission of the Vadodara Collector to convert to Buddhism under the new act; the collector had not given permission by the end of the reporting period.

In Punjab the Union Minister and General Secretary called for the state government to pass a law completely banning religious conversions. The move followed reports of large-scale conversions of Sikh Dalits.

In Chhattisgarh an anticonversion law has been in force since the 1970s (at which time Chhattisgarh was a part of Madhya Pradesh). On July 18, in the first conviction under the law, Sister Brishi Ekka was sentenced to 6 months in jail for not reporting the 1996 conversion of 95 families to Christianity. Sister Ekka appealed the decision in the Chhattisgarh High Court and later was released on bail.

In November 2000, the Orissa government notified churches that religious conversions could not occur without the permission of the local police and district magistrate; however, the rule does not appear to have been enforced. The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 contains a provision requiring a monthly report from the state on the number of conversions. After a conversion has been reported to the district magistrate, the report is forwarded to the state authorities, and a local police officer conducts an inquiry. The police officer can recommend in favor of or against the intended conversion, and often is the sole arbitrator. If the conversion is judged to have occurred without permission from the district magistrate or with coercion, the authorities may take penal action. There were no reports that the district magistrate denied permission for any conversions during this reporting period.

The eastern part of the country presented a varied picture with regard to religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Sporadic attacks continued but were not concentrated in one geographical area. In Orissa, which has been known for violence against religious minorities (particularly after the killings of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young children there in January 1999), the communal situation remained relatively unchanged during the period covered by this report, despite the installation of a BJP-Biju Janata Dal (BJD) government. According to an Orissa United

Christian Forum leader, there have been no major incidents of religious freedom violations in the state during the period covered by this report.

In the south, religious groups allege that since the BJP's rise to power in the national Government, some local officials have begun to enforce laws selectively to the detriment of religious minorities. The groups cite numerous examples of discrimination, such as biased interpretations of postal regulations, including removal of postal subsidies; refusals to allocate land for the building of churches; and heightened scrutiny of NGOs to ensure that foreign contributions are made according to the law. This revivalist campaign included the "Hinduization" of education, including the revision of history books to include hate propaganda against Islamic and Christian communities. On May 24, a Tamil Nadu Government unilateral order issued by the Registrar of the Dr. M.G.R. Medical University to the leading Christian missionary hospital in South Asia, Christian Medical College (CMC) of Vellore, directed the CMC to accept government-sponsored candidates into 40 percent of its school seats, in violation of the constitutional Special Minority Status guarantees given to unaided institutions. The CMC requested that the Supreme Court of India stay the government order and allow the CMC to follow its usual admission policy. The Tamil Nadu state government also has worked actively to strengthen Hindu institutions. For instance, in March 2002, the government initiated renovation of 200 Hindu temples throughout the state and sponsored spiritual classes in 63 shrines. Such state sponsorship is not available to other religious groups.

Other southern states, which have had a history of support for their religious minorities, now offer growing evidence of support for the Hindutva message. In addition to Tamil Nadu's anticonversion laws, inclusion of BJP membership in Andhra Pradesh's ruling coalition, Karnataka's complacency in investigating crimes of religious violence, "antiminority" remarks of Kerala's Chief Minister Antony, and five instances of communal violence in Kerala since January 2002 all signal a growing acquiescence to the Hindutva agenda. In Karnataka Christian leaders recorded 50 incidents, ranging from destruction of church properties to physical abuse of ministers and converts, reportedly perpetrated by members of the Sangh Parivar. Although reported to the police, none of the incidents were investigated. State authorities did not deny that violence had occurred, but claimed these incidents did not represent any organized effort to deter evangelists.

Religious minorities in the northern area of the country are concerned that attacks on religious minorities no longer appear to be confined to Gujarat and Orissa. However, only a few isolated incidents of communal violence were reported in the north during the period covered by this report (see Section III). The appeal of Hindu nationalism appeared to decrease in Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP-led state government was defeated in elections in early 2002.

In the west, Gujarat continued to experience incidents of intercommunity strife in which Hindu nationalist groups targeted Christians and Muslims. Beginning in February 2002, after an attack by Muslims on a train in Godhra that resulted in the deaths of 58 Hindus (see Section III), an estimated 2,000 Muslims were killed in rioting in Gujarat that continued throughout the period of this report. In addition, 100,000 Muslims were forcibly displaced from their homes, causing them to reside in makeshift camps throughout Gujarat. There were also numerous reports of the rape of Muslim women and girls. The Government closed the camps in mid-June, forcing the displaced to return to burnt houses and destroyed property, with the perpetrators still at large. The Gujarat state government and the police were criticized for failing to stop the violence, and in some cases participating in or encouraging it. NGOs report that police were implicated directly in nearly all the attacks against Muslims in Gujarat, and in some cases, NGOs contend, police officials encouraged the mob. The Government dispatched the NHRC to investigate the attacks against Muslims, but the NHRC's findings that the attacks against Muslims "was a comprehensive failure on the part of the state government to control the persistent violation of rights of life, liberty, equality, and dignity of the people of the state," led to widespread criticism in the Hindu community and allegations of government partiality.

Victims of the Gujarat riots claimed that Hindu nationalists sabotaged efforts to prosecute Hindus involved in the riots. Witnesses who initially came forward to file reports with the police and identify their attackers reportedly have since been harassed, threatened, or bribed into retracting their statements or not showing up at court. During the July trial of 21 Hindus accused of burning 12 Muslims and 2 Hindu workers alive in a bakery, 41 of the 73 witnesses recanted their stories. On July 1, the 21 defendants were acquitted. The key eyewitness, Zahira Sheikh, a 19-year-old woman, claimed that she testified falsely after BJP leaders repeatedly threatened her family. She also concluded that prosecutors, who made no effort to meet with her before the trial, were not serious about gaining convictions. Sheikh and family members remained in hiding at the end of the period covered by this report.

In January police began closing the files on the cases of Naroda Patia and the Gulberg Society, citing lack of evidence against BJP and VHP leaders named in the complaint. Most witnesses who had identified the perpetrators later retracted their statements, and as of the end of the reporting period, no defendants had been convicted. The police reportedly downgraded charges against Hindu defendants, filed false charges to cover up their own role in the violence, deleted the names of the accused, and failed to pursue rape cases. By the end of the period covered by this report, no arrests had been made or were likely to be made in connection with these attacks. Christian and Muslim communities remain suspicious of the state Government.

In March Gujarat BJP leader and former state Home Minister Haren Pandya were killed. Fifty Muslim youths were detained in a preliminary round-up; 18 were then arrested and later released. Over the course of several months, police detained 5 to 10 Muslim youths per day in undisclosed locations for up to 8 days. As of the end of the reporting period, five persons were being held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which allows the Government up to 6 months to formally file charges against the accused and allows all charges and court proceedings to be closed to the public.

Muslims continued to experience other intimidation tactics. Muslims reportedly could not work, reside, or send their children to schools in Hindu dominated areas. Signs were displayed stating "Hindus only" and "Muslim free area." Prohibitions on prayer reportedly have also occurred.

The Gujarat state government aggressively surveyed Christian families and Christian agencies during the reporting period, allegedly under the orders of Chief Minister Narendra Modi. The survey activities were carried out by police, often in the middle of the night. The survey was first implemented in February and continued through May, even after the Gujarat High Court ruled in March that the survey was illegal. The survey included questions about the number of converts in the household or parish, the circumstances of conversion, and the sources of funding received from abroad. The survey was widely seen as a prelude to the introduction of the Gujarat anticonversion bill in the legislature. In March the National Commission for Minorities requested an investigatory report. In April the NCM rejected the state government's resulting report as inadequate.

The Gujarat State Higher Secondary Board, to which nearly 98 percent of schools in Gujarat belong, requires the use of certain textbooks in which Nazism is condoned. In the Standard 10 social studies textbook, the "charismatic personality" of "Hitler the Supremo" and the "achievements of Nazism" are described at length. The textbook does not acknowledge Nazi extermination policies or concentration camps except for a passing reference to "a policy of opposition towards the Jewish people and [advocacy for] the supremacy of the German race." The Standard 9 social studies textbook implies that Muslims, Christians, Parsees, and Jews are "foreigners." In 2002 the Gujarat State Higher Secondary Board administered an exam, while the riots were ongoing, in which students of English were asked to form one sentence out of the following: "There are two solutions. One of them is the Nazi solution. If you don't like people, kill them, segregate them. Then strut up and down. Proclaim that you are the salt of the earth."

On October 21, the Gujarat Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Karsan Patel, instructed 400 Dang tribal children, who were boarders at a Christian school in Subir run by the Navjyot Social Service Society, "to decide whether they want to live as Hindus or die as Christians." Patel made this statement at the "Ram Kartha" convention in Subir, which was attended by over 15,000 devotees of Ram, a popular incarnation of a Hindu god. Hindus were asked, in pamphlets circulated by the VHP at the convention, to reclaim the territory for their god.

In Maharashtra Hindu-Muslim violence has increased in recent years (see Section III). The state government of Maharashtra filed charges against high-level police officials in 2001, 8 years after they allegedly fired into Suleman Bakery and killed nine Muslim employees in 1993. In April Deputy Police Commissioner Ramdeo Tyagi was exonerated by a Mumbai sessions court for charges against him in connection with the incident.

In Madhya Pradesh, intercommunity strife is relatively uncommon. There were no incidents of intercommunity strife in the new state of Chhattisgarh during the period covered by this report. Religious communities generally lived together harmoniously in Goa, despite one incident of intra-Christian strife during 2000.

There is no national law that bars a citizen or foreigner from professing or propagating his or her religious beliefs; however, speaking publicly against other beliefs is considered dangerous to public order and is prohibited by India's Foreigners Act. This act strictly prohibits visitors who are in the country on tourist visas from engaging in religious preaching without first obtaining permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Given this context, the Government discourages foreign missionaries from entering the country and has a policy of expelling foreigners who perform missionary work without the correct visa. Long-established foreign missionaries generally can renew their visas, but since the mid-1960's the Government has refused to admit new resident foreign missionaries. New missionaries currently enter as tourists on short-term visas. U.S. citizens accused of religious preaching while visiting India as tourists have faced difficulties obtaining permission to return to the country for up to a decade after the event.

Some foreign missionaries have been subjected to violent attacks. In September 2002, youth members of the Bajrang Dal Party attacked South Koreans suspected of performing missionary work in Orissa. In January a group of militant Hindus attacked American missionary Joseph Cooper in Kerala. The police arrested nine suspects in the case; however, as of the end of the period covered by this report, charges had not been filed. The state police ordered Joseph Cooper to leave the country because his tourist visa was incompatible with his work in the country. On June 30, Gujarat police detained for questioning nine foreigners (eight Saudis and one Sudanese) for misusing their visas by preaching Islam in Gujarat. All were released without charge.

Several Christian relief organizations also have been hampered by bureaucratic obstacles in getting visas renewed for foreign relief work. Missionaries and foreign religious organizations must comply with the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, which restricts the ability of certain NGOs, including religiously affiliated groups, to finance their activities with overseas assistance.

The personal status laws of the religious communities sometimes discriminate against women. Under Islamic law, a Muslim husband may divorce his wife spontaneously and unilaterally; there is no such provision for women. However, the Mumbai High Court ruled in May 2002 that divorces of Muslim couples must be proven in court. Previously, a Muslim male's assertion of a divorce was sufficient. Islamic law also allows a man to have up to four wives but prohibits polyandry. Under the Indian Divorce Act of 1869, a Christian woman could demand divorce only in the case of spousal abuse and certain categories of adultery; for a Christian man, a wife's adultery alone was sufficient. However, in 2001 this law was amended by Parliament to allow Christian women to file for divorce for the same reasons as men.

The Indian Divorce Act of 2001 places limitations on interfaith marriages and specifies penalties, such as 10 years' imprisonment, for clergymen who contravene its provisions. Under the Act, no marriage in which one party is a non-Christian may be celebrated in a church. However, the Indian Divorce Act does not bar interfaith marriages in other places of worship.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While the central Government has not been implicated in abuses of religious freedom, human rights activists have criticized the Government for indifference and inaction in the face of abuses committed by state and local authorities, as well as private citizens.

During the period covered by this report, the Delhi Minorities Commission issued an annual report that claimed that the Christian community had become the target of a sustained misinformation and intimidation campaign. The Commission also reported that adequate space for Christian worship and burial of the dead was not provided by the Government.

In some instances of Hindu aggression against Muslims, police and government officials abetted the violence, and at times security forces were responsible for abuses. Police sometimes assisted Hindu fundamentalists in committing violent acts. In February 2002, after Hindu-Muslim riots in Gujarat, Muslims and human rights activists alleged that the state reserve police sided with the attackers rather than with the victims (see Section III). Human rights activists reported that the Gujarat police received specific instructions not to take action to prevent a possible violent reaction to the February 27 attack by Muslims on a train in Godhra carrying Hindus (see Section III). The press and human rights activists have reported widely that police refused to come to the aid of Muslim victims, and in some cases even participated in attacks on Muslims and Muslim-owned businesses. The police reportedly told Muslim victims, "We don't have orders to help you." It was reported that assailants frequently chanted "the police are with us." In its June 2002 report on Gujarat, the NHRC held the Gujarat government responsible for the riots and accused it of "a complicity that was tacit if not explicit." It concluded that "there is no doubt, in the opinion of this Commission, that there was a comprehensive failure on the part of the state government to control the persistent violation of rights of life, liberty, equality, and dignity of the people of the state." The report recommended a Central Bureau of Investigation inquiry into the communal riots, which the state government refused to allow.

In July 2002, representatives of Amnesty International were denied visas to visit and investigate the aftermath of the Gujarat riots. In December 2002, the National Election Commission banned all religious processions in the state in connection with the December 12 election. The BJP party with its Hindutva brand of politics won the Gujarat election in a landslide with 126 of 181 assembly seats, sweeping those constituencies in the central part of the state that were most affected by the rioting. By mid-June the last of the displaced persons camps that had received the more than 100,000 Muslim victims of the violence was closed, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

During the period covered by this report, the Gujarat state Government appointed a retired Supreme Court Justice, G. T. Nanvati, to oversee a two-member judicial commission to investigate the February 2002 riots. The commission's investigation has been strongly criticized by media and human rights activists, who noted that in certain districts, hearings ended at 2:00 p.m. on appointed days instead of the advertised 5:00 p.m., and police of certain districts reportedly discouraged people from giving depositions before the commission. On May 18, in advance of a final report, Nanavati reportedly told the media that no evidence of police complicity had been found.

A Home Ministry report, released in April, stated that 23,777 persons, predominantly Hindus, were arrested and charged in 2,014 cases in connection with the Gujarat violence. None were charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. As of the end of the reporting period, there were no successful prosecutions of persons charged in connection with the Gujarat violence.

However, 124 of the 126 persons arrested for the Godhra train arson, predominantly Muslims, were charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which allows for detention without charge for 6 months, summary trials, and the use of testimony exacted under duress. Trials were beginning in these cases as of the end of the reporting period.

Though many of the incidents of violence during the riots were witnessed by scores of people, and some of them were televised, by the end of the reporting period, the state government had yet to secure a conviction of an accused Hindu. Human rights activists cited widespread intimidation of witnesses and judges, negligence by police, and shoddy prosecution by state authorities. Many Gujaratis reportedly were afraid of cooperating with the justice process.

Jammu and Kashmir, the country's only Muslim majority state, has been the focus of repeated armed conflict between India and Pakistan, and internally between security forces and Muslim militants who demand that the state be given independence or ceded to Pakistan. Particularly since an organized insurgency erupted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989, there have been numerous reports of human rights abuses by security forces and local officials against the Muslim population, including execution-style killings, beatings, rapes, and other forms of physical abuse. Government forces deny these allegations and assert that they target persons not on the basis of religion, but on suspicion of involvement in terrorist activity. For their part, terrorists killed and otherwise attacked hundreds of Hindu and Muslim civilians, including Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus, during the period covered by this report. In September 2002, unknown assailants killed 30 persons at a Hindu temple in Gandhingar. In November 2002, members of a terrorist organization stormed the Raghunath Temple in Jammu, killing 13 people and wounding 53. In March terrorists attacked a Hindu Pandit village at Nadimarg, killing 11 women and 2 children. Given that the terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir are typically Muslim and charges of religion-based harassment could be used to further their political objectives, it is impossible to substantiate either the claims of the security forces or those making the allegations against them. It is difficult to separate religion and politics in Kashmir; Kashmiri separatists predominantly are Muslim, and almost all the higher ranks as well as most of the lower ranks in the Indian forces stationed there are non-Muslims. On May 16, for the first time in 14 years, the Jammu and Kashmir government allowed a procession of separatist groups to mark the anniversary of the birthday of the prophet Mohammed.

The trial of Dara Singh, a member of the Hindu extremist group Bajrang Dal, for the killing of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young children was still ongoing as of the end of the period covered by this report. The trial was being prosecuted by the Central Bureau of Investigation, rather than by local prosecutors. Allegations that the CBI bribed defense witnesses prompted the state's high court to recall 22 of the 55 witnesses.

Weak enforcement of laws protecting religious freedom partly is due to an over-burdened and corrupt judiciary. The legal system as a whole has many years of backlog, and all but the most prominent cases move slowly. Official failure to deal adequately with intragroup and intergroup conflict and with local disturbances in some places as a practical matter has abridged the right to religious freedom. A federal political system in which state governments hold jurisdiction over law and order problems contributed to the Government's ineffectiveness in combating religiously based violence. The country's only national law enforcement agency, the CBI, is required to ask state government permission before investigating a crime in the affected state. States often delay or refuse to grant such permission.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

In April 2002, the Pondicherry state government ordered an inquiry into the alleged forced conversions of prisoners to Christianity by the superintendent of Pondicherry Central Prison. Six prisoners filed a complaint, claiming that they had been tortured after refusing to

convert. There were no developments in the case during the period covered by this report.

Hindu nationalist organizations frequently allege that Christian missionaries force Hindus, particularly those of lower castes, to convert to Christianity. Christians claim that the efforts of Hindu groups to "reconvert" Christians to Hinduism are coercive. On June 11, a mob reportedly ransacked a church in Chhattisgarh's Chaari village, broke the building's crucifix, and placed a Hindu idol in its place. On March 12, a Protestant church in Maharashtra was attacked by Hindu activists who had tried and failed to reconvert the church members to Hinduism. The Hindu mob smashed a wooden cross and placed a Hindu idol on the ground in front of the church. The local police chief, who ordered the Hindu villagers to remove their idol, was later criticized and forced to resign. Those responsible for the attack were arrested for 3 days and released on bail.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion 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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The NHRC and the NCM took unilateral action not prompted by a specific complaint or legal demand, directing the central Government and Gujarat state government to take corrective action in regard to the February and March 2002 violence. As a direct result of this warning, the central Government created a special compensation package for the victims of the violence in Gujarat. The NHRC issued directives against the Gujarat state government in April and June 2002 concerning the communal riots of February 2002. The directives recommended that certain Gujarat cases be entrusted to the Central Bureau of Investigation, encouraged support for the role of NGOs, and urged that police reform be undertaken. In April 2002, the NCM publicly criticized state Chief Minister Modi's inflammatory rhetoric and speech during an election rally.

The National Election Commission, the country's independent election authorities, decided to delay the elections until November 2002 to allow displaced persons time to return to their homes to vote. From November to year's end, the Commission banned all religious processions in Gujarat. The ruling came in response to a demonstration planned by the hardline Hindu group, VHP, in which the group planned to parade a replica of the burnt Godhra train car. The commission said that the VHP march should not be allowed to go ahead because there was a likelihood that "provocative and intemperate" speeches made during the procession could lead to more unrest. In response, the Gujarat VHP attempted to organize a procession from Ahmedabad to Godhra in contravention of the guidelines. The Gujarat police prevented the procession and arrested the leaders; however, they were released later that day.

On June 1, Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani was charged with criminal conspiracy for his role in the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, which sparked violent riots in 1992.

In April 2001, the standing committee of the Home Ministry expressed concern over the "alarming rise of the monster of communalism," and asked the Government to take steps to check the growing divide among communities.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Animosities within and between the country's religious communities have roots that are centuries old, and these tensions – at times exacerbated by poverty, class, and ethnic differences – have erupted into periodic violence throughout the country's 56-year history. The Government makes some effort, not always successfully, to prevent these incidents and to restore communal harmony when they do occur (see Section II); however, tensions between Muslims and Hindus, and between Hindus and Christians, continue to pose a

challenge to the concepts of secularism, tolerance, and diversity on which the Indian Union was founded.

Within the Indian context, the phrase "communal violence" generally is understood to mean Hindu-Muslim conflict and the possibility of retaliation and serious riots. During the period covered by this report, attacks on religious minorities decreased but did occur in several states. Some of these attacks were motivated by economic motives or arose in a context of existing nonreligious disputes; others were purely religious in motivation.

Hindus and Muslims continue to feud over the existence of mosques constructed several centuries ago on three sites where Hindus believe that temples stood previously. The potential for renewed Hindu-Muslim violence in connection with this controversy remains considerable. Extremist Hindu groups such as the VHP and Bajrang Dal maintain that they intend to build a Hindu temple in Ayodhya on the site of the 500-year-old Babri Mosque demolished by a Hindu mob in 1992, with or without the Government's approval. In March the Supreme Court decided against the central Government's application to vacate a ban on religious activity at the site. Thousands of police and paramilitary troops were deployed in and around Ayodhya, and most Hindu militants were stopped from entering the town for a March 15 religious ceremony. The Lucknow High Court ordered the federally run Archaeological Survey of India to excavate the site to determine if a Hindu temple ever existed below the destroyed mosque. Excavations were ongoing as of the end of the reporting period. In February a Hindu group began to demand greater access to a religious site in Madhya Pradesh, at which they had been restricted to one religious ceremony per year since 1996. Two people died in rioting after Hindu extremists stormed the ancient Bhojshala monument. Muslims claim it as the site of a 15th century mosque. In response to Hindu demands, the Archeological Survey of India permitted Hindus to worship on Tuesdays while Muslims continued to have access only every other Friday.

Some of the most severe communal violence in the country's history occurred in Gujarat in February 2002. Two train cars were set on fire, and 58 passengers were killed, including 15 children and 25 women, according to Gujarat state officials. Over the next 3 months, Hindu mobs in Gujarat and Maharashtra, allegedly angered by the attack on the train and incited and organized by members of the Sangh Parivar, destroyed Muslim businesses, raped Muslim women, and killed an estimated 2,000 Muslims. In addition, 100,000 Muslims were forcibly displaced into makeshift camps throughout Gujarat. The Government closed the camps in mid-June, forcing the displaced to return to burnt houses and destroyed property, with the perpetrators still at large. Initially the Government announced a probe only of the Muslim attack on the train; however, after criticism by opposition parties and the media, the government expanded the probe to include the violence after the attack on the train. Human Rights groups expressed concern that those responsible for the Gujarat violence may never be tried or convicted for their crimes. They charged that although the Government initially arrested thousands following the attacks, most of those arrested have since been acquitted, released on bail with no further action taken, or simply released. In addition, even when cases did reach trial, Muslim victims often faced biased prosecutors. Judges and lawyers representing Muslim victims also have faced harassment and threats.

In April 2002, a fact-finding team visited Gujarat to document the impact of communal riots on women. The team consisted of women from various women's organizations. The report stated that Muslim women had been subjected to "unimaginable, inhuman, barbaric" sexual violence during the violence. Women suffered rape, gang rape, and molestation.

In January Hindus destroyed Muslim-owned shops, restaurants, and vehicles in Madhya Pradesh over an alleged incident of cow-slaughter. On February 9, the Hindu extremist group Bajrang Dal clashed with Muslim youth over alleged instances of cow slaughter. In the altercation, 34 persons, including 26 police officers, were injured. On October 15, 2002, five Dalits were lynched by VHP activists in Haryana. A story of cow slaughter by the Dalits was told to justify the murders. In its investigation, the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights alleged police complicity in the attacks, and the NHRC called for the Haryana state government to initiate action against the policemen involved. The Haryana government

provided employment to the victims' next of kin and paid approx. \$10,000 (RS 500,000) to each family.

In July 2002, the VHP called upon the Muslim community to delete passages from the Koran that it claimed incited violence and hatred of non-Muslims.

On October 15, 2002, Shiv Sena leader Balasaheb Thackeray called upon his followers to form Hindu suicide squads to combat Muslim extremists. The Maharashtra government filed charges against Thackeray under the Penal Code for "causing a rift amongst two communities." The charges were still pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

On October 23, 2002, local Hindus reportedly attacked Muslims who tried to construct a mosque in Andhra Pradesh. Nine persons were injured. The local BJP president was arrested for complicity in the attack; however, the case was still pending as of the end of the period covered by this report.

Throughout the period covered by this report, Jammu and Kashmir continued to be a focus of violence. Pan-Islamic militants committed atrocities against Hindus and other Muslims, and security forces often used excessive force to suppress them. Civilians frequently are caught in the crossfire. Custodial killings of suspected militants, all of whom are Muslim, are common. Militants also carried out several execution-style mass killings of Hindu villagers and violently targeted Pandits (Hindu Kashmiris) in an attempt to force Hindus to emigrate. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, approximately 51,000 Pandit families fled their homes in Jammu and Kashmir due to the violence between 1990 and 1993. Of these, 4,674 families were still living in refugee camps in Jammu as of the end of the reporting period, 235 families were in camps in Delhi, and 18 families were in Chhandigarh. The rest still were displaced, but were living outside of the camps in Jammu and Delhi. The Pandit community criticized bleak physical, educational, and economic conditions in the camps and feared that a negotiated solution giving greater autonomy to the Muslim majority might threaten its own survival in Jammu and Kashmir as a culturally and historically distinctive group. Mass killings in Kashmir, targeted against the Sikh community, increased fears that the remainder of Kashmir's minorities may be forced to leave. There was an exodus of many from the Sikh community, particularly of the young, during 2001. In Kashmir the militant group Lashkar-e-Jabbar ordered Muslim women to dress in burqas, Hindu women to wear bindis, and Sikh women to wear identifying saffron headscarves. There were a number of violent incidents that are believed to have been carried out by Muslim militants. In December 2002, January, and March, approximately 30 Hindus died in explosions in the Hindu-dominated areas of Ghatkopar, Parle, and in a commuter train in Mumbai. Police blamed Muslim students for these killings. As of the end of the period covered by this report, there were no arrests. In February four Hindu family members were killed by suspected Islamist militants. On March 17, Islamic militants launched an attack on a police post, in which 13 people were killed. On March 24, militants gunned down 24 Hindus, including 11 women and 2 children. On May 22, Islamic extremists killed one Catholic nun and injured another in a grenade attack on Saint Lukas Convent School in Srinagar.

In August 2002, militants unlawfully entered a house in Jammu and killed four members of a Hindu family. On September 24, 2002, an attack on the Swaminarayan Hindu Temple in Gujarat left 40 persons dead before security forces stormed the temple. The Government responded swiftly by deploying approximately 3,000 army personnel to dispel a strike and protest march called by the VHP. Critics of the Government noted that had the Government acted as quickly following the Gujarat violence, many deaths could have been prevented. In November 2002, security forces ended a siege by suspected Muslim militants of two Hindu temples. Thirteen people were killed in the raid, including nine civilians, one soldier, one policeman, and two militants.

Early in 2001, eight Sikhs were killed, allegedly by an obscure militant group. On February 3, 2001, two gunmen killed six Sikhs and wounded at least four others in Srinagar. The

public interpreted this attack as punishment by militants for the killing earlier in the week of a Muslim civilian, allegedly by Sikh policemen belonging to Kashmir's Special Operations Group; however, such allegations were never proven. The Government sent a four-member team to Kashmir to investigate the killings; however, no one had been charged, and there was still no reported progress in the investigation of the killings as of the end of the period covered by this report. Sikhs protested the killings, which led to violent clashes with police. The February 2001 incident was the first attack against the Kashmir Valley's minority Sikh population since the March 2000 killing of 35 Sikh men in the village of Chatti Singhpora in south Kashmir.

Spokespersons for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and for the Vatican noted that the number of physical attacks against Christians has decreased since 2000. However, anti-Christian violence, including killings, continued. In addition, Hindu nationalists began an ideological campaign to limit access to Christian institutions and discourage or, in some cases, prohibit conversions to Christianity.

Between January and June, Christian leaders in Karnataka recorded 50 incidents, ranging from destruction of church properties to physical abuse of ministers and converts, reportedly perpetrated by members of the Sangh Parivar. None of the incidents were investigated. State authorities did not deny that violence had occurred, but claimed that the attacks did not represent an organized effort to deter evangelists.

On March 9, Hindu extremists reportedly started a fire that engulfed the roof of a church in Tamil Nadu. The District Collector, under pressure from the local RSS, denied permission to church leaders to use fire retardant roofing materials in the church reconstruction. The church presbyter feared this would invite another arson.

On April 10, 15 women Hindu activists attacked Sister Veronica Fernandes of Holy Cross Convent High School in Mumbai, smearing black paint on her face and body to humiliate her. Also on April 10, Hindu extremists in Gujarat vandalized a municipality-run health care dispensary that had been destroyed in the earthquake of 2001, rebuilt with the support of a Christian organization, and was scheduled to be dedicated by former state minister Kirtisinh Rana. A stone with the names of the donors was destroyed, and graffiti of Hindutva slogans was painted on the walls.

On June 26, eight Hindus beat a pastor and other members of a Grace Baptist Church. An investigation was initiated by the Government; however, by the end of the period covered by this report, no arrests had been made.

In November 2002, the Gujarat Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Karsan Patel, threatened Dang tribals "to decide whether they want to live as Hindus or die as Christians."

On December 25, 2002, armed men threw bombs into a Catholic church during midnight mass in West Bengal. A priest and 14 others were injured in the attack. Seven persons were arrested, but there were no convictions. Police alleged that the suspects were part of a local gang and were not members of a Hindu organization. The attackers were reportedly motivated by a perception that Christians were encouraging conversions of Hindus.

Christian missionaries have been operating schools and medical clinics for many years in tribal areas. Tribals (who have no caste status) and Dalits (who are at the lowest end of the caste system) occupy the very lowest position in the social hierarchy. However, they have made socioeconomic gains as a result of the missionary schools and other institutions, which, among other things, have increased literacy among low-caste and non-caste persons. Some higher-caste Hindus resent these gains. They blame missionaries for the resulting disturbance in the traditional Hindu social order as better educated Dalits, tribals, and members of the lower castes no longer accept their disadvantaged status as readily as they once did. Some Hindu groups fear that Christians may try to convert large numbers of

lower-caste Hindus, using economic or social welfare incentives. Upper-caste Hindus, the membership base of the BJP and RSS, are afraid that this may destroy the rigid caste hierarchy. Many acts of violence against Christians stem from these fears. This fear was highlighted by an August 15 statement by Prime Minister Vajpayee who stated, "There is a conversion motive behind the welfare activities being carried out by some Christian missionaries in the country's backward areas, and it is not proper, although conversion is permissible under the law." Citizens often refer to schools, hospitals, and other institutions as "missionary" even when they are owned and run entirely by indigenous Christian citizens. By using the adjective "missionary," the RSS taps into a longstanding fear of foreign religious domination. Several Christian-affiliated (in many cases, nonevangelical) international relief agencies stated that during the year, their work in delivering services to the poor became considerably more difficult due to threats, increased bureaucratic obstacles, and, in some cases, physical attacks on their field workers by Hindu extremists.

In March 2002, following the outbreak of communal riots in Gujarat, Christian organizations reported that Christian institutions and functionaries in the state also were attacked. These Christian organizations blame the RSS and the VHP for ransacking and burning Christian missions in Sanjeli and Dhudhia, although these charges have not otherwise been confirmed. In April 2002, a church in Managalore, Karnataka was attacked by approximately 60 persons protesting alleged attempts to convert local Hindus to Christianity. In August 2001 in Anakapalli, Andhra Pradesh, 43 Christian tombs in the local burial ground were destroyed.

In March 2001, K.S. Sudarshan, head of RSS, made a speech advocating the "Indianization" of Islam and Christianity. He stated that [Muslims and Christians] "should sever their links with the Mecca and the Pope and instead become swadeshi." He also had stated that Christians should "reinterpret their scriptures" in a manner more in keeping with Hindu cultural norms. Catholics took special exception to this; the Archbishop of Delhi pointed out that the Indian Christian church is 2,000 years old (traditionally dating from the Apostle Thomas), and that although the spiritual head was the Pope, the day-to-day administration of the church was entirely in Indian hands. The RSS published an article entitled "Foreign Missionaries, Quit India:RSS" in its weekly newspaper, "The Organiser," in which it attacked missionary-backed Christian institutions in the country. In March 2001, in Orissa, Christian Archbishop Cheenath gave a speech objecting to an amendment to the Orissa Religious Freedom Act that he believed would make conversion more difficult. He said that fears of forced conversion were not credible. He noted that, although Christian schools have for generations educated a far larger percentage of citizens than there are Christians in the general population, Christians make up slightly less of the population today than they did in the 1991 census.

In August 2002, a new cable television station, promoting Catholic values, was launched in Kerala, but several cable television station operators in Kerala and neighboring states reportedly initially refused to make the station's programming available to viewers. However, as of the end of the reporting period, the station was widely available.

In Christian majority areas, Christians sometimes were the oppressors. In Tripura there were several cases of harassment of non-Christians by Christian members of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), a militant tribal group with an evangelical bent. For example, NLFT tribal insurgents have prohibited Hindu and Muslim festivals in areas that they control, cautioned women not to wear traditional Hindu tribal attire, and prohibited indigenous forms of worship.

In Assam, where the population is increasing rapidly, the issue of Bangladeshi migrants (who generally are Muslim) has become very sensitive among the Assamese (predominantly Hindu) population, which considers itself to be increasingly outnumbered. In December 2002, tribal Hindu villagers pledged to fight alleged extortion demands and death threats for failure to pay by the NLFT.

The Indian Divorce Act of 2001 places limitations on interfaith marriages and specified

penalties, such as 10 years' imprisonment, for clergymen who contravene its provisions. Interfaith couples often experienced condemnation and violence from relatives and Sangh Parivar members, who object to the unions. On February 5 in Gujarat, a Catholic, Anthony Rebello, and a Hindu, Reema Sompura, were married in a legal Hindu marriage ceremony, but due to strong family and Bajrang Dal opposition, the couple was forced into hiding. Search warrants were issued against them when Sompura's mother entered a complaint against Rebello. On April 28, Sompura testified in court that she went with Rebello willingly. On April 29 outside of the court, the couple was attacked by VHP and Bajrang Dal members. Sompura, who was pregnant, was kicked in the stomach, and the baby was subsequently aborted. When at the police station, the couple was separated, Rebello was beaten further by VHP and Bajrang Dal members, and Sompura was handed over to her family.

The country's caste system historically has been an integral part of Hinduism. Hinduism delineates clear social strata, assigning highly structured religious, cultural, and social roles, privileges, and restrictions to each caste and subcaste. Members of each caste – and frequently each subcaste – are expected to fulfill a specific set of duties (known as dharma) in order to secure elevation to a higher caste through rebirth. Dalits are viewed by many Hindus as separate from or "below" the caste system; nonetheless, they too are expected to follow their dharma if they hope to achieve caste in a future life. Despite efforts by reform-minded modern leaders to eliminate the discriminatory aspects of caste, societal, political, and economic pressures continue to ensure its widespread practice. The country's caste system generates severe tensions due to disparities in social status, economic opportunity, and, occasionally, labor rights. These tensions frequently have led to or exacerbated violent confrontations and human rights abuses. Generally, intercaste violence does not have a significant religious component. However, in October 2002, five Dalit youths were killed by a mob, reportedly led by members of the VHP after reports of cow slaughtering in the state of Haryana. The local leader of the VHP stated that he had no regrets over the incident and that the life of a cow was worth more than that of five Dalits. A police investigation resulted in 30 arrests; however, there was no further action by the end of the reporting period.

The Constitution gives the President the authority to specify, in a schedule attached to the Constitution, historically disadvantaged castes, Dalits, and "tribals." These groups are entitled to affirmative action and hiring quotas in employment, benefits from special development funds, and special training programs. The impact of reservations and quotas on society and on the groups they are designed to benefit is a subject of active debate within the country. Some contend that they have achieved the desired effect and should be modified, while others strongly argue that they should be continued, as the system has not addressed adequately the long-term discriminatory impact of caste. According to the 1991 census, scheduled castes, including Dalits, made up 16 percent of the population, and scheduled tribes made up 8 percent of the population.

Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs historically have rejected the concept of caste, despite the fact that most of them descended from low caste Hindu families and continue to suffer the same social and economic limitations of low caste Hindus. Low caste Hindus who convert to Christianity lose their eligibility for affirmative action programs. Those who become Buddhists, Jains, or Sikhs do not, as the Constitution groups members of those faiths with Hindus and specifies that the Constitution shall not affect "the operation of any existing law or prevent the state from making any law providing for social welfare and reform" of these groups. In some states, there are government jobs reserved for Muslims of low caste descent.

Members of religious minorities and lower castes criticized the 2001 census as discriminating against them. They claim that they frequently were not allowed to register their correct caste status. Census results are used to apportion government jobs and higher education slots to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In February 2001, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India strongly criticized the census for "discriminating against weaker sections of society" by maintaining that Scheduled Castes may only be Hindu, Sikh,

continued to have contact during the period covered by this report. Consulate officers also met in Mumbai with a range of NGO, business, media, and other contacts, including Muslim leaders, to monitor the aftermath of the violence in Gujarat.

Officials from the U.S. Consulate in Chennai were active in assisting missionary Joseph Cooper following the attack on him by Hindu extremists. Finally, U.S. officials have continued to engage state officials on the implementation and reversal of anticonversion laws.