

Chad M. Bauman, *Pentecostals, Proselytization and Anti-Christian Violence in India*

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One frequently reads about religious violence in India. The assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 by her Sikh bodyguards brought on violent attacks against Sikhs across India. There are frequent reports of deadly violence between Hindus and Muslims dating back to the late 1940s and since the 1960s there have been increasing attacks carried out against India's Christians. Chad M. Bauman, Associate Professor of Religion at Butler University, has penned *Pentecostals, Proselytization and Anti-Christian Violence in India*, which focuses on this growing anti-Christian violence which in recent years has been directed more and more on evangelical Pentecostals. Bauman provides the reader with a detailed analysis of Indian Christian history and its involvement with contemporary Indian society, politics, and Hindu nationalism. The focus is on Pentecostals and Pentecostal Evangelical movements deep in Indian society and on how they have created tensions in India, which has led to growing violence against them.

India has hosted a small Christian population since the sixth century when Malayalam-speaking St. Thomas or "Syrian" Christians settled in India. This group got along well with people of other faiths. Overall, Bauman notes, Hindu-Christian relations in India have been relatively cordial. Indeed, "Historically speaking...more than a thousand years of mostly peaceful coexistence between India's Hindus and Christians preceded the first incidents of what we might call interreligious violence between them (42)." There were scattered incidents of violence over the past thousand years, mainly over "contestations over group status," but they were no more frequent than clashes between Hindus: "Not all Hindu-Christian conflict is violent, and since the latter half of the twentieth century a relatively standardized intellectual critique of Indian Christianity has emerged, focusing on its proselytization, its putatively use of wealth and 'foreign funding,' and its ostensibly denationalizing effects (44)."

Most traditionally Christian denominations have found a peaceful home in India. Christians account for two to three percent of the Indian population and many Catholic and Protestant churches have found a niche in Indian society. It is more evangelical groups like Pentecostals, recent additions to the Indian scene, that have caused problems.

Bauman's aim is to examine the question of why Pentecostals have been so disproportionately targeted in anti-Christian violence since the early 1990s. Bauman is not that interested in the occasional communal violence in which Christian communities are from time to time involved. Rather, he looks at the less covered "routinized" violence that has become a problem for many Christians where most of the victims are Pentecostals who experience harassment on a more frequent, sometimes daily basis mostly in rural areas. This "routine" violence takes on many guises including physical assault, severe beatings, seizure and destruction of religious tracts, and even rape and murder. There are also acts that can bring physical harm, such as rocks thrown through windows and arson. Bauman suggests that many of the instigators of this violence are with Indians associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization founded in 1925 that seeks to promote the concept of Hindutva ("Hinduness").

Bauman's opening chapters focus on the history and very nature of Pentecostalism in India, which today is the fastest growing sector of Christianity in India. The very public expression of Pentecostals envelopes many characteristics of followers of evangelical groups. Their very public "in your face" proselytization of their religious beliefs can be annoying and has turned Indians against them. But there are other factors as well.

Many Indian Pentecostals are from lower castes, and the refusal of Pentecostals to go along with the caste system is said to be a threat to the so-called ritual purity of Indian society. Bauman comments on the "disgust" that many high-caste Indians feel for their low-caste compatriots. "There is no doubt that the rise of anti-Christian violence in India is related at least in part to the rise of low-caste Christian communities to places of relatively higher social status and economic position...to a more equal, competitive, and threatening space...To the extent that low-caste, tribal, and other marginalized Indians are more active in Pentecostalism, and particularly in Pentecostal leadership, the targeting of Pentecostals for acts of violence makes more sense (176)."

Then there is the question of the foreign nature of the Pentecostals:

In many ways, then, Pentecostals embody the concerns that Hindu nationalists, and even more irenic Indians, have about Christianity. They are perceived to be more clearly de-nationalized than other Christians, and this is related to the rhetoric of rupture, and to the Pentecostals' frequently harsh critique of what many Indians would consider "traditional" Indian/Hindu beliefs and customs. India's Pentecostals and Pentecostalized Evangelicals are...often quite westernized and/or handsomely supported with funds from western missionary agencies (177).

The evangelical nature of the Pentecostals annoys many Indians. Pentecostals emphasize transformation of the self through absolute faith in Jesus. There is no accommodation to any other religion or faith. Evangelism strikes many Hindu observers as a sign of an unsophisticated faith, which when carried out in intrusive, adversarial, or antipathetic manner can be abhorrent to many traditional Hindus.

Bauman summarizes the central argument of this very compelling book by noting:

The disproportionate targeting of Pentecostals and Pentecostalized Evangelicals in India's anti-Christian violence cannot be explained with reference to internal Indian political and interreligious dynamics alone. Rather, a satisfactory explanation must pay attention to the imbrication of these dynamics with historical factors, transnational political and religious currents (e.g., colonization, globalization, and the global missionary movement), and intra-Christian tensions, politics, and structures of power. (178)

The high quality of this work stems directly from Bauman's expertise on Indian religions and his skill as a field ethnographer. He has interviewed many subjects and collected a vast amount of empirical data to support his theoretical analysis. It is the very depth of his field research and the vast amount of data based on his interviews and research into relevant documents that makes this book so successful. The topics covered here are complex, but he is able to develop the main issues in a clear and systematic way.

This book is a useful tool for scholars of South Asian religions, Christianity in Asia and global Pentecostalism. It will especially appeal to anybody with an interest in current trends in Indian society or the role of Christianity in traditionally non-Christian

societies. Departments of Religion and South Asian Studies could use this book as a useful case study in an advanced undergraduate or graduate seminar.

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