The Religious Situation in Indian Society –
Double Religious Identity as an Emerging Trend

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Introduction

First, we shall make a brief presentation of religious situation in India with a special reference to inter-religious violence in Kandhamal, Orissa. Second, the Indian religious experience. Third, we look at Christubhaktas (devotees of Christ) and their experience of ‘double religious identity’ and finally to draw few lessons that ‘double-religious identity’ is a need to heal inter-religious wounds.

The Religious Situation in India

Any community identifies itself mainly on religion, region, language, race, tribe or caste. These are very strong, deep and persisting roots of any community for its self-identity and self-preservation.¹ Among these, religious identity plays a significant role in shaping a community’s values, attitudes and patterns of behaviour. Religion, meant to unite people, becomes at the same time means of people’s fight, abuse and persecution of others.² In India today people are fighting and dying to affirm and defend their religious identity as the deepest element of their personhood. People also seem to feel that in order to assert their identity they have to oppose or degrade the identity of the other. There is an element of fundamentalism here.

The Ayodhya incident on 6th December 1992 brought this phenomenon into sharper focus. Hundreds of volunteers from different parts of the country stormed Babri Masjid, which dated back

² Ibid., 116.
to 1528. The Sangh Parivar with its four militant organizations: the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) had launched a massive campaign for the construction of a Ram Temple in the area, which to them was Ram Janmabhoomi (the birthplace of Lord Rama). BJP leader, L. K. Advani, further helped blur the lines between Hinduism and Hindutva through his journeys throughout India. His journeys in 1990, 1997, and 2004 helped gain the support of many unsuspecting Hindus for a militant, communal Hindu politics. The Hindu fundamentalism is based on a certain philosophy called Hindutva. Hindutva has a hidden agenda of “one nation, one culture, one religion, one language” similar to the Nazi slogan one people, one state, one leader (ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer). This movement based on the premise that Hindus alone constitute the Indian nation, as they are the original inhabitants who created Indian society and its culture. Vinayak Damodar Savakar, often called “Veer” (valiant) Savakar, a Hindu chauvinist leader of remarkable energy discussed the concept of Hindutva in his book Hindutva published in 1923. He propounded that struggle for supremacy of Hindu State would begin after the British left. He considered the Christians and Muslims as real enemies of Hindus who should be defeated only by “Hindutva”. His key sentence was “Hinduize all politics and militarize Hindudom.”

Arun Shourie, one of the most outspoken critics of Christianity, emerges from this brand of militant Hindutva. In spite of his Christian education at St. Stephen’s College in Delhi, Shourie published a book in 1994, “Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas,” in which he accused missionaries of stirring up agitators and fomenting secession. His book accused the Catholic Church of perpetuating the British domination of India and of being associated with imperialist powers. He returned to the battle in 2000 with another book, “Harvesting Our Souls”, which alleges that Christianity is based on mythology and inexact history.

To narrate a recent story of Sangh Parivar’s war against minorities, on the night of 23 August 2008, Lakshmanada Saraswati was killed in his Jaleshpeta ashram along with his four disciples. The police sources

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