

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: IND34032
Country: India
Date: 30 January 2009

Title: India – Kerala – Mukkuva caste – Christians – Catholic Church

Questions

- 1. Please provide background information on the Mukkuva caste community.**
- 2. Please advise whether the RSS has targeted the Mukkuva caste community in Trivandrum?**
- 3. Please advise whether the RSS has targeted Christians in Trivandrum?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide background information on the Mukkuva caste community.**

Background information on Kerala's Christian Mukkuva caste (or jati) community was located within several anthropological and sociological studies. The Mukkuva are said to be principally Catholic, having been converted to the faith by St Francis Xavier in the 16th Century, and to be traditionally engaged in fishing. Two sources, a study produced by Kerala University's Loyola College of Social Sciences and a study produced by Robert Eric Frykenberg of the University of Wisconsin, relate that Kerala's Christian Mukkuva community have, historically, suffered economic and social marginalization as a consequence of their location within the polluted, or untouchable, strata of Kerala's caste relations. The website of the Kerala state government lists the Mukkuva communities on the "Other Eligible Community (O.E.C) List" as a community which is "Eligible for all Educational Assistance enjoyed by Scheduled Castes" (for an extensive anthropological overview of Kerala's Christian Mukkuva community, see: 'Mukkuvan, Christian' in: Singh, K.S. 1998, *India's Communities H-M*, People of India, National Series Vol.V, Anthropological Survey of India & Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp.2382-2385 – Attachment 1; for sources on the marginal position of Kerala's Christian Mukkuva community as a polluted or untouchable identity, see: Loyola College of Social Sciences, University of Kerala (undated), *Kerala Society Structure and Change*, Blogger website, (posted by heena 14 May 2008) <http://maloyola20socio.blogspot.com/> – Accessed 17 December 2008 – Attachment 2; and: Frykenberg, R.E. 2008, 'Avarna and Adivasi Christians and Missions: A Paradigm for Understanding Christian Movements in India', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol.32; no.1, 1 January – Attachment 5; 'The List of Castes included in Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes' (undated), Government of Kerala website http://www.kerala.gov.in/dept_sc/listofcastesinclud.htm – Accessed 17 December 2008 – Attachment 3; see also: Hapke, H.M. 2001, 'Petty Traders, Gender, and Development in a South Indian Fishery', *Economic Geography*, vol.77: no.3, July, pp. 230 – Attachment 12).

The Indian Ministry of Culture's Anthropological Survey of India provides an entry on Kerala's Mukkuvan Christian community in volume 5 of the 1998 *India's Communities* series. According to this source Kerala's Catholic Makkuvan's "speak the Mukkuva dialect of Malayalam language" and "converted to Christianity during the Portuguese period mainly due to the evangelization by St. Francis Xavier from the year AD 1544. The community has synonyms like Aryan and Latin Christian." Fishing is said to be "the traditional and present occupation of the Mukkuvan Christian". Kerala is also host to Mukkuvan Hindu and Mukkuvan Muslim communities. The entry for Kerala's Mukkuvan Christians follows below:

MUKKUVAN, CHRISTIAN They are a community in Kerala and Tamil Nadu who were converted to Christianity during the Portuguese period mainly due to the evangelization by St. Francis Xavier from the year AD 1544. The community has synonyms like Aryan and Latin Christian.

In Kerala, the Mukkuvan Christian are distributed in the Alleppey, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Quilon and Trivandrum districts. They speak the Mukkuva dialect of Malayalam language and use the Malayalam script. The womens' dress comprises of a jacket with long sleeves (rouka) and often a lungi (mundu) and a towel worn across the chest. They also tattoo their hands. The Mukkuvar Christian are non-vegetarian and rice is their staple cereal, supplemented with tapioca. Social divisions exist among them in the form of titles like Netto, De Souza and Decosta. These are also used as surnames, though nowadays, there is a trend to drop the surnames. Endogamy is practised at the community level, and cross-cousin marriages are permitted after obtaining permission from the church authorities. Junior sororate is also practised. A marriage pendant (thali) and ring (mothiram) are the marriage symbols for women. The system of dowry is prevalent among them. Divorce is prohibited, but remarriage of widows and widowers is permissible. Nowadays, there is a change in rule of residence, as some men choose matrilocal residences after marriage. They follow equigeniture as the rule of inheritance. The Kumbani Appan and Kumbani Amma (godfather and godmother) play an important role in the naming ceremony. On the twenty-eighth day of a birth, waistband-tying is observed. Puberty rites for girls (kuli kalyanam) are observed. The marriage is held at the bridegroom's parish church after the engagement (varthapadu) and tying of tall is an important ritual. The dead are buried and the death pollution is observed for seven days, at the end of which prayers are held.

Fishing is the traditional and present occupation of the Mukkuvan Christian. Some of them are landholders in the coastal villages, while others are employed in the industrial sector (Titanium factory) and shell-crafts. In the villages, the Mukkuvan women barter fish for tapioca and other agricultural products. Social control is exercised by the parish council. The heads of families are members of the council and they have an elected committee headed by the vicar of the church. The committee works for the general welfare of the community. They are Roman Catholics and their pilgrimage centres are the Catholic shrines at Goa, Velanganni and Edathwa. Pre-conversion practices like kuli kalyanam (puberty rites for girls) survive. Special food items are prepared and served to the invited kin. Sidha food is exchanged with all communities and they share water resources, cemetery and religious shrines with other Roman Catholics. They participate in traditional festivals like Onam with all communities. Basic amenities exist in almost all villages. Under the Malsia Fed and the Indo-Norwegian Project, the fishing industry in Kerala has made considerable progress in recent times, the beneficiaries of which include the Mukkuvan Christian ('Mukkuvan, Christian' in: Singh, K.S. 1998, *India's Communities H-M*, People of India, National Series Vol.V, Anthropological Survey of India & Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp.2382-2385 – Attachment 1).

A blog site posts extracts from a publication titled, *Kerala Society Structure and Change*, which provides extensive information on the caste system in Kerala and which mentions the Mukkuva caste in several passages (a precis to the entry relates that the book is the work of the Loyola College of Social Sciences at the University of Kerala). The article's entry on the Kerala's "Fishworker's Community" relates that the Mukkuva have, historically, been perceived as being "among the 'polluting castes'" and that they have been socially and economically marginalised. The relevant extract follows:

... V. FISHWORKER'S COMMUNITY

Kerala has a coastline of 590 kms, which constitutes approximately 10% of India's total coastline. Fishing in Kerala has been the traditional occupation of a group of communities consisting of Arayana, Velana, **Mukkuvas** and Marakkans. **These form the traditional Hindu fishing castes of the states. With the advent of Christianity and Islam, many of the traditional Hindu fish workers converted to new religious.** The Mukkuvas and Mappilas are the leading fish workers of the Malabar coast.

Fisher people were included among the 'polluting castes'. The geographical condition of Kerala is favorable for reaping the rich marine wealth. **The fishing community in Kerala is one of the most backward classes both socially and economically. As a community they have been isolated and unorganized.** Their isolation was of a communal nature. They are deeply religious and superstitious. Since majority of the members of the fishing community are illiterate their dependence on the religious leaders is very high. The social status of the community is low due to the very nature of their occupation. The fish folk are forced to depend on the money lenders and merchants for their day to day life. Thus indebtedness is a common feature in all fishing villages. **They have been subject to various types of exploitation, socially and economically** (Loyola College of Social Sciences, University of Kerala (undated), *Kerala Society Structure and Change*, Blogger website, (posted by heena 14 May 2008) <http://maloyola20socio.blogspot.com/> – Accessed 17 December 2008 – Attachment 2).

A January 2008 article, authored by Professor Robert Eric Frykenberg of the University of Wisconsin and published in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, provides background on the Mukkuva Christian identity in the context of a study of Christian missionary work in India. According to Frykenberg's study India's west coast Mukkuva Christian community has been marginalized within Kerala caste stratification as an Avarna untouchable community. The extracts provided below provide an extensive overview of Frykenberg's understanding of the Kerala caste strata and the historical location of Avarna and Adivasi Christian communities within Brahman dominated society.

What follows is a paradigm for understanding Christian movements in India. Some kinds of communities have been much more open to the Gospel and to conversion than others. Missionaries from abroad may have brought initial impetus and new technologies for transmitting new knowledge, both scriptural and scientific, but it was local agents who then took ownership of the Christian message, translating it into indigenously attractive idioms. Only then, and only after a period of incubation and after acculturation of the Gospel message, did explosions of spiritual and social energy turn communities to the new faith. Even so, such developments were uneven, and wholesale transformations occurred among only some Avarna and Adivasi peoples.

VarnHshramadharma and Social Structure

Avarna and Adivasi are Sanskritic categories of analysis and classification created by Brahmins in ancient times. As traditional and paradigmatic concepts they still define peoples

who, in terms of ritual pollution, lie outside the bounds of Sanskriti civilization. These are peoples who, in moral, social, and ritual terms, are “untouchable.” They are located outside the metaphoric spectrum of “proper colors” (savarna); they are beyond the pale and, in many senses, all but invisible.

“Color” (varna) metaphorically defines the caste system. The color code, or varndshramadharna, ranks all bioethnic communities. An abstract device handed down from antiquity for measuring inherent moral and ritual qualities, it excludes impure or polluted beings. The Sanskriti word for “born” or “birth” is jat. Each life form—bird, butterfly, fish, serpent, or mammal—is a jati and, as such, has its own biocosmic properties, its own genetic code or ritual DNA. Among peoples, each birth group, or caste (jati), possesses its own intrinsic qualities. Within each “color” of the four-color (chaturvarniya) system of humankind are hundreds of separate castes. Only castes ranking within the top three categories, or colors, are ritually pure (.savarna).

Within each category, only males who undergo the upandnayanaceremonyaie “twice-born” . . . receive sacred and secret knowledge (vedd) and skills unique to their birth or lineage. These skills, taken together, sum up the substance of each person’s proper duty, function, or religion (dharma). Peoples not included within categories of varnashramadharna are Avarna and Adivasi peoples. As such, they are polluted, or untouchable.

The highest category, or set of castes, is the white varna. People within such castes are known as Brahmins. The word “Brahman,” meaning “cosmic breath or sound,” signifies ultimate reality and sublime, supreme acuity, intellectuality, perspicacity, rationality, and spirituality. Brahmins have inherent power over words, numbers, and rituals. Just below the white varna is the red varna. Castes within this varna are known as Kshatriyas. Peoples in Kshatriya castes innately possess courage, prowess, valor, and rulership-power of the “sword.” The third varna is gold/yellow, and its peoples belong to Vaishiya (or Baniya or Vaniya) castes. These peoples are makers of wealth, with innate aptitudes in commerce and industry. Together, peoples in these top three categories are the “twice-born.” Their sacred and secret knowledge, passed down from generation to generation as their birthright, is for each people a unique religious duty (dharma/ karma). Each of the three categories of “twice-born” peoples constitutes roughly 5 percent of the population.

The fourth and lowest varna, over 40 percent of the population, is black. From a Brahmanical perspective, peoples in such castes are Shudras (Sudras). Neither ritually pure nor “twiceborn,” such peoples are thought to be descended from Dasya (lit. “servile”) peoples who had been conquered by Arya (lit. “noble”) peoples in ancient times. Meant to engage in manual labor, they till the soil, cultivate crops, and carry out other similar tasks. (In South India, where Aryan rule never penetrated as deeply and where Brahmanical influences arrived much later, social structures reflect a truncated varnashramadharna. High-born families of the south resisted being relegated to Shudra status. Thus, while some noble families of South India might claim Aryan or Kshatriya lineages, non-Brahman elites consider themselves equal, if not superior, to Brahmins.)

Below the four classical varna categories lies a fifth category. Known as the Panchamas (lit. “fifths”), such peoples now label themselves Dalits (lit. “crushed peoples”). Beyond the pale, they are avarna (lit. “colorless” and thus socially invisible). Too polluting to be permitted to mingle in respectable society, viewed as innately subhuman, these peoples are seen as dust, excrement, or filth—hence untouchable. Denied the right to dwell in a pukka or proper house, to drink from a common well or metal cup, to receive food service, or to enter a pukka or proper place of worship, they are lumped with dirt, disease, drugs, and debt. Nowhere else on earth are so many people, roughly 15 percent of the population, relegated to such perpetual, hereditary, and religiously sanctioned thralldom.

All peoples born outside of varnashramadharma are innately polluting. They fall into two subcategories: Avarna (domesticated, or subject, peoples) and Adivasi (undomesticated, or never-yet-subdued, aboriginal peoples). Avarnas, in other words, are domesticated Adivasis-”castes” that were once “tribes.” Avarna peoples, like cattle or goats or horses or elephants, know their lowly place. Taken together, the two categories of peoples, officially designated as “scheduled castes and tribes,” amount to more than 20 percent of India’s population.

Avarna Christian Movements

Since 1529, and especially since 1799, numbers of distinct Christian communities have proliferated. Each came into being under unique circumstances, and each developed its own character. What began in the south in Tirunelveli and Travancore was replicated in other parts of Tamil and Telugu country and, eventually, among lowest-caste peoples in the north.

Shoreline Avarna Christians: Paravar and **Mukkavar fisherfolk**. In the sixteenth century seafaring peoples of the south turned to Christianity. Paravar fishermen, pearl divers, pirates, smugglers, and traders on both sides of the Palk Strait faced perpetual oppression. Their work was hazardous, requiring courage and resourcefulness, for predatory armies and fleets constantly pillaged or enslaved them. In 1527, after forces of the Samudri Raja (Zamorin) of Calicut attacked them, they turned for help to the Portuguese. A Chettiar Christian merchant, John da Cruz, and fifteen Paravars offered an alliance. A year later, their jati thalavan (chief), Vikrama Aditha Pandya, gave the Portuguese access to the lucrative pearl trade. Families of some 20,000 pearl-fishers were baptized. In 1537 a furious sea battle ended threats from Hindu and Muslim forces, and the entire Paravar community declared themselves Christian.

Francis Xavier visited the “Fisher Coast” in 1542. He went from village to village with three Tamil-speaking Thomas Christian helpers, baptizing and teaching. Exploiting a deeply ingrained indigenous genius for memorization involving rhythmic recitations each morning and evening and reinforced by mnemonic exercises, they drilled bright-eyed boys in imperfectly translated essentials: the Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Creed, Ten Commandments, and other rudiments of Christian faith, as well as condemnations of blood sacrifice and other evils. On palm-leaf records, a designated scribe in each village church was enjoined to keep track of births, marriages, deaths, and family lineages and to foster communal solidarity. Other Avarna peoples-Karaiyars, Shanars, Kaikolars, Pallars, and Paraiyars-also came to Xavier for baptism. **In 1544, ten thousand Mukkuvas, fisherfolk on the west coast, were also baptized.**

...Finally, all forms of Christianity in India possess some form of dual, or multiple, identity. Few Christians-high-caste, low-caste, or tribal-have managed to rise above birth, or jat. Nowhere is this clearer than among Thomas Christians. These ancient, high-caste, Malayalam-speaking communities of Malabar, especially Malankara Nazranis, retain such consciousness of birth and lineage, such strict sensitivity to purity and pollution, that their claims to a place within varnashramadharma remain strong. But the same can be said for virtually all Christians in South Asia. Christians of South Asia are identified not so much by nationality as by caste. Birth, caste, and community matter as much as church, denomination, or theological outlook.

There is a sense in which Christianity has never existed solely in the abstract. If all Christians have some sense of ethnic identity, such consciousness is magnified in India. “Christian,” David Jeffrey reminds us, is an adjective, a property of something else, a concept that implies some sort of “diminishment” or positional subordination (Frykenberg, R.E. 2008, ‘Avarna and Adivasi Christians and Missions: A Paradigm for Understanding Christian Movements in India’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol.32; no.1, 1 January – Attachment 5).

Information on the caste situation of Kerala's fishing communities is also provided as background to a 2001 study of "the impact of economic transformation associated with technological change and commercialization on women fish traders in Trivandrum, Kerala". Authored by East Carolina University's Holly M. Hapke, the study notes the marginal situation of Kerala fishing castes.

Trivandrum is the southernmost district of Kerala, and Trivandrum City is the state capital. Fishing in Kerala, as in India as a whole, is a caste-based occupation—that is, one traditionally engaged in only by particular caste groups and fisherfolk occupy one of the lowest rungs on the caste hierarchy. Not only is their social status quite low, fisherfolk tend to exist on the fringe of mainstream Kerala society. The socioeconomic conditions in which they historically have lived are far below the average for Kerala State as a whole. In addition to abject poverty and low literacy rates, social inputs such as drinking water, health care, sanitation, housing, and so forth have been woefully missing from most fisherfolk villages in the state (Government of Kerala 1990).

... Though Kerala's fisherfolk generally belong to the same caste category, they are differentiated by religious identity and may be Muslim, Christian, or Hindu. In Trivandrum District, 73 percent of fisherfolk are Christian, while approximately 21 percent are Muslim (Government of Kerala 1982) (Hapke, H.M. 2001, 'Petty Traders, Gender, and Development in a South Indian Fishery', *Economic Geography*, vol.77: no.3, July, pp. 230 – Attachment 12).

The website of the *Kerala Swathanthra Malsya Thozhilali Federation* (Kerala Independent Fish Workers Federation) makes reference to the condition of the Latin Catholic Mukkuva community as a significant group within the Kerala fishing industry and the Fish Workers Movement in Kerala. A brief extract on the beginnings of the movement follows below:

Fish workers in Kerala have a tradition of having been unorganised and neglected by the mainstream politicians, political parties, and governments. The vested interest lobbies used to exploit fish workers on the basis of caste and religion. Political parties had been successful in maintaining the fish workers as a vote bank. This state of affairs had been detrimental to the interests of the fish workers.

The fishing community in Kerala belongs to the social categories of Mukkuva & Anjootty (Latin Catholic), Dheevera (Hindu) and Pooislan (Muslim).

It was in this context that a group of young and dedicated social workers, progressive members of the Christian clergy and members from a few voluntary organisations got together in 1969-70 and formed independent unions in several districts of Kerala, both coastal and inland. These unions were united under an umbrella body, Kerala Swathanthra Malsya Thozhilali Federation in 1980 ('History' (undated), Kerala Independent Fish Workers Federation website <http://keralafishworkers.org/history.htm> – Accessed 17 December 2008 – Attachment 4).

For extensive background on the role of caste in Indian society as well as the evolution of the scheduled caste lists and other backward castes lists, see the section 'Caste in Indian Politics' over pages 43 to 48 of the May 2007 UK House of Commons Library introduction to politics in India which is supplied as Attachment 56 (Harrison, T., *et al* 2007, *A political introduction to India*, UK Parliament website, International Affairs and Defence Section – House of Commons Library, 2 May <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2007/rp07-041.pdf> – Accessed 11 October 2007 – Attachment 56).

2. Please advise whether the RSS has targeted the Mukkuva caste community in Trivandrum?

No reports could be located of attacks on the Mukkuva caste community in Trivandrum (or Thiruvananthapuram). Neither could any recent reports be located of attacks on Catholic fishing communities in Kerala, or on Christian fishing communities generally. The only information that could be located of communal violence affecting a Kerala Christian fishing community relates to an event which occurred in Vizhinjam in May 1995. A recent report in *The Hindu*, covering subsequent court proceedings, provides details of this episode of violence. According to the August 2008 *Hindu* report: “a mob of around 500 fishermen belonging to the Christian community gutted nearly 400 huts and vandalised scores of fishing boats and tools belonging to the Muslim community allegedly as a response to an attack on a couple members of the Christian community earlier in the day”. The most significant episodes of violence to affect Kerala’s fishing communities occurred in Marad over 2002 and 2003 but did not involve Christians; the clashes involved Hindu and Muslim fishing communities (for information on the Vizhinjam incident, see: ‘Trial on Vizhinjam riots begins’ 2008, *The Hindu*, 8 August <http://www.hindu.com/2008/08/08/stories/2008080860370300.htm> – Accessed 18 December 2008 – Attachment 9; and: ‘Vizhinjam clashes: 83 acquitted’ 2008, *The Hindu*, 30 November <http://www.thehindu.com/2008/11/30/stories/2008113060370300.htm> – Accessed 18 December 2008 – Attachment 10; for information on the Hindu–Muslim communal violence which occurred in the Kerala fishing community of Marad, see RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response IND17161*, 7 January – Attachment 6; the following articles may be of particular interest: Iype, George 2004, ‘Riot-hit Marad goes off netas’ radar’, *rediff.com* website, 7 May <http://us.rediff.com/election/2004/may/07gi.htm> – Accessed 6 January 2004 – Attachment 7; for further information on the Marad incident see Krishnakumar, R. 2003, ‘Kerala’s communal challenge’, *Frontline*, 24 May <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2011/stories/20030606001904400.htm> – Accessed 14 April 2008 – Attachment 8).

3. Please advise whether the RSS has targeted Christians in Trivandrum?

In the time in which this research was undertaken very few reports could be located which referred to the targeting of Christians in the Kerala capital of Trivandrum (also known as Thiruvananthapuram) by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; National Volunteers’ Organisation). Four separate incidents have seen allegations of RSS involvement in attacks upon Christians or Christian churches in Trivandrum over the last decade and examples of the available reportage on these incidents follows below under the subheading: *Possible RSS attacks on Christians in Trivandrum*. None of the four incidents relate to attacks on persons or churches belonging to the Latin Catholic (Roman Catholic) Church; though Catholic leaders and Catholic news services have commented on the events in question. The most recent of these incidents, which occurred in 2007 and 2005, have involved attacks on the Salem Voice Ministries, an evangelical group, and have would appear to have been reported on by Christian sources only. Other incidents in which RSS activists allegedly had a role include the vandalism of an Orthodox church in 2004 and an attack upon a Pentecostal missionary from the United States (for a Christian news source claims of an October 2007 attack on six members of Salem Voice Ministries assaulted in Tiruvallam area of Thiruvananthapuram, see ‘India: News Briefs’ 2007, *Compass Direct News*, 2 October <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&id=5060&lang=en&length>

[h=short&backpage=archives&critere=kerala&countryname=&rowcur=0](#) – Accessed 9 December 2008 – Attachment 19; for reports on an April 2005 attack on a Salem Voice Ministries prayer hall, congregation and pastor in Thiruvananthapuram, see: ‘Pastor attacked, prayer hall burned’ 2005, All India Christian Council website, 1 April <http://indianchristians.in/news/content/view/156/45/> – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 31; and: Hendon, D.W.; Lynn, N.R. 2005, ‘Notes on Church-State Affairs’, *Journal of Church & State*, vol.47: no.3, 1 July – Attachment 32; for reports on an October 2004 attack on the premises of an Orthodox church in Thiruvananthapuram, see: (‘New attack against Christians in Kerala’ 2004, *Asia News*, 1 October <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?art=1592&l=en> – Accessed 28 January 2009 – Attachment 2; ‘Miscreants set fire to altar’ 2004, *The Hindu*, 30 September <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2004/09/30/stories/2004093012130700.htm> – Accessed 27 January 2009 – Attachment 24; ‘Man held in Pattoor church fire case’ 2005, *The Hindu*, 20 April <http://www.hindu.com/2005/04/20/stories/2005042025000300.htm> – Accessed 27 January 2009 – Attachment 25; and: ‘Church arsonist gets four-year term’ 2007, *The Hindu*, 19 December <http://www.hindu.com/2007/12/19/stories/2007121960100300.htm> – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 37; for the January 2003 attack on the protestant missionary from the United States, see: Krishnakumar, R. 2003, ‘An emerging threat’, *Frontline*, Vol. 20, Iss. 4, 15-28 February <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=20030228003704000.htm&date=fl2004/&prd=fline&> – Accessed 16 July 2007 – Attachment 28; ‘Attack on missionary was planned: CHRO’ 2003, *The Hindu*, 4 February <http://www.hindu.com/2003/02/04/stories/2003020409100300.htm> – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 29).

The only reports which could be located of alleged RSS attacks on Members of the Latin Catholic church refer to incidents which reportedly took place in areas outside Trivandrum. The most significant of these attacks took place in 2004 when RSS activists allegedly attacked members of Latin Catholic clergy in two separate incidents (one incident involved the killing of a Catholic priest and the other saw an assault on a group of Catholic nuns and brothers). A survey of the available reportage on the attacks and the subsequent police investigations, arrests and trials is presented under the subKeywords: *Possible RSS attacks on Christians elsewhere in Kerala* (for the attack on the Catholic priest, see: Menon, M.C. 2004, ‘Catholic Priest’s Murder: First Acid Test For Oommen Chandy’, *Asian Tribune*, 11 September http://www.asiantribune.com/oldsite/show_news.php?id=11161 – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 20; ‘Investigations to be expedited Fr Chittilappilly murder case’ 2007, *WebIndia123.com*, 3 October http://news.webindia123.com/news/ar_showdetails.asp?id=710031177&cat=&n_date=20071003 – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 21; for the assault on a group of Catholic nuns and brothers, see: ‘Trial in attack on nuns case begins’ 2008, *The Hindu*, 23 September <http://www.hindu.com/2008/09/23/stories/2008092354230300.htm> – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 23; Carvalho, N. 2004, ‘Hindu extremists injure 4 sisters of Mother Teresa’, *Asia News*, 27 September <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?art=1559&l=en> – Accessed 28 January 2009 – Attachment 18; and: ‘Violence will not stop Christian witness, Bishop Fernandez says’ 2004, *Asia News*, 27 September <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=1560> – Accessed 28 January 2009 – Attachment 17).

No media reports could be located which referred to a 1998 clash involving the RSS and the Kerala Latin Catholic Church's Social Service Society in Trivandrum. Nor could any reports be located of such a clash taking place in Trivandrum or elsewhere in Kerala at any other time. Searches were conducted, both online and within the Factiva subscription news database, in search of incidents involving the Trivandrum Social Service Society with the RSS, the BJP, police, violence and clashes of a more general nature.

An overview of the available source information follows below under the following subtitles: *Possible RSS attacks on Christians in Trivandrum; Possible RSS attacks on Christians elsewhere in Kerala ; Further information on claims of anti-Christian violence; and Information on the overall situation in Kerala for Latin Catholics.*

Possible RSS attacks on Christians in Trivandrum

October 2007:

Attack on six members of Salem Voice Ministries assaulted in Tiruvallam area of Thiruvananthapuram

On 2 October 2007 the Christian monitor *Compass Direct News* reported that "At least 15 extremists of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) attacked six Christians on September 4 near Parasuram temple in Tiruvallam area of Thiruvananthapuram, capital of Kerala state". According to this source: "police managed to arrest two RSS extremists identified only as Sreekumar and Lalu for the attack" and "A court remanded them to judicial custody on charges of attempted murder". Details follow below.

At least 15 extremists of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) attacked six Christians on September 4 near Parasuram temple in Tiruvallam area of Thiruvananthapuram, capital of Kerala state. With sharp weapons, the extremists assaulted Christians identified only as Jose, George, Santhosh, Bijoy, Jaykrish and Hari, who received serious injuries, said Paul Ciniraj of the Kerala-based Salem Voice Ministries. On September 6, police managed to arrest two RSS extremists identified only as Sreekumar and Lalu for the attack. Sreekumar is in charge of training the local RSS cadre, and Lalu is the leader of the Edayar area unit of the organization. A court remanded them to judicial custody on charges of attempted murder. Rights groups say Hindu extremists in the state have been trying to create religious tensions to help politically advance Hindu nationalistic parties ('India: News Briefs' 2007, *Compass Direct News*, 2 October <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&idelement=5060&lang=en&length=short&backpage=archives&critere=kerala&countryname=&rowcur=0> – Accessed 9 December 2008 – Attachment 19).

April 2005:

Attack on Salem Voice Ministries prayer hall, congregation and pastor in Thiruvananthapuram

On April 2005 the All India Christian Council reported that: "Hindu and Muslim villagers [had] burned down a prayer hall and physically attacked three church members following a baptism ceremony in Kerala on 1 April 2005"; it was also reported that: "Two days later, the villagers manhandled Pastor Paul Ciniraj Mohammed and his 54-year-old assistant". The report related that: "Some church members said the local unit of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu activist group, was behind the attack". The attack was also noted in the July 2005 edition of Baylor University's *Journal of Church & State*, though no mention was

made in the very brief bulletin on this event of any suspected RSS involvement ('Pastor attacked, prayer hall burned' 2005, All India Christian Council website, 1 April <http://indianchristians.in/news/content/view/156/45/> – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 31; Hendon, D.W.; Lynn, N.R. 2005, 'Notes on Church-State Affairs', *Journal of Church & State*, vol.47: no.3, 1 July – Attachment 32).

October 2004:

Attack on premises of Orthodox Church, St. Thomas Mar Thoma, in Thiruvananthapuram

On 1 October 2004 the Roman Catholic Church's *Asia News* network reported that "a group of unidentified people set fire to the Orthodox St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church in Thiruvananthapuram"; and that: "Police found the name of two Hindu groups written on a window near the altar. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and its armed wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)". The report relates that "Police suspect that the inscriptions were 'a deliberate attempt to divert the investigations'"; and also that: "Police in Kerala (southern India) are convinced that increasingly frequent attacks against Christians are aimed at igniting tensions in the area". The incident is framed a part of an outbreak of violence against Christians in Kerala, who had previously live in the state peacefully.

Police in Kerala (southern India) are convinced that increasingly frequent attacks against Christians are aimed at igniting tensions in the area. Last Wednesday night, a group of unidentified people set fire to the Orthodox St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church in Thiruvananthapuram (south of New Delhi). The altar, curtains and two chairs were burnt, but nothing was stolen nor were there damages to religious articles. Police found the name of two Hindu groups written on a window near the altar. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and its armed wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) were the fundamentalist groups named in the graffiti: both have been held responsible for acts of violence against Christians in northern India in recent years. Police suspect that the inscriptions were "a deliberate attempt to divert the investigations".

This is the third attack against Christians in Kerala in little more than a month. On August 28, Fr Job Chittilappilly was killed. Police arrested a RSS activist, saying that the youth had admitted to having killed the priest for "anti-Hindu activities". The following day, however, police stated that the young man's confession was not valid, as he had been under the influence of drugs. The Church called for a more thorough investigation and police say they have set up a special team to work on the case.

A second incident occurred last Monday when a group of Hindu activists attacked 4 Mother Teresa nuns, ripping from their necks the crosses they wore and injuring them with iron bars.

Kerala is the Indian state with the largest Christian presence, which accounts for 20% of the population of 31 million. Until recently, Kerala's various religious communities had lived together peacefully ('New attack against Christians in Kerala' 2004, *Asia News*, 1 October <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?art=1592&l=en> – Accessed 28 January 2009 – Attachment 2).

The Hindu also report on the vandalism of the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church at this time reporting that "Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church, Gee Varghese Mar Thodosius, who visited the spot told mediapersons that he did not view the incident as an attack on the minorities community. 'A place of worship has been attacked and that is unfortunate. It could be an attempt to provoke the people. I appeal to the public not to get carried away,' he said". In April 2005 *The Hindu* subsequently reported on the arrest of a man in connection with the incident. According to this report: "The Deputy Superintendent of Police Girijanathan Nair

said the accused had set fire to the curtain out of frustration as he could not find anything of value inside the church” and that “had scribbled the graffiti on the wall to throw the police off the track”. The police claimed to have tracked down the accused through enquiries into “criminals specialising in theft in churches”. According to the report: “The police had lifted a ‘faint’ fingerprint from the scene of crime”. In December 2007 it was reported that the arrested man had been successfully convicted and sentenced in a Kerala court (‘Miscreants set fire to altar’ 2004, *The Hindu*, 30 September <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2004/09/30/stories/2004093012130700.htm> – Accessed 27 January 2009 – Attachment 24; ‘Man held in Pattoor church fire case’ 2005, *The Hindu*, 20 April <http://www.hindu.com/2005/04/20/stories/2005042025000300.htm> – Accessed 27 January 2009 – Attachment 25; ‘Church arsonist gets four-year term’ 2007, *The Hindu*, 19 December <http://www.hindu.com/2007/12/19/stories/2007121960100300.htm> – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 37).

January 2003:

Attack on Joseph Cooper protestant missionary from the United States

In January 2003 a Pentecostal missionary from the United States, Joseph Cooper, was assaulted in Thiruvananthapuram along with “Benson Sam, a local pastor, his wife and children and two gospel singers”. A *Frontline* article of February 2003 provides an overview of the series of subsequent events which saw Kerala police arrest a number of RSS activists while also ordering Cooper to leave India for conducting religious activities in violation of his tourist visa. At the time Kerala was governed by a Congress led coalition while the BJP held power at the national level; the *Frontline* article suggests that some of the actions of the Kerala government may have been driven by the state’s need of financial assistance from the central government. The relevant extracts follow:

On January 16, by around 9.30 p.m., a mob wielding clubs and machetes attacked Cooper, Benson Sam, a local pastor, his wife and children and two gospel singers, while they were walking along a paddy field embankment after a service at the Friends Bible Church at Puliyaam near Kilimanoor in Thiruvananthapuram district. Cooper was seriously injured. Police arrested 10 persons, whom they described variously as “RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) sympathisers” and “regulars at RSS shakhas”. Chief Minister A.K. Antony refused to name them as “RSS cadres”.

Cooper spent a week in hospital in Thiruvananthapuram. As the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the RSS, and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) made shrill demands for his arrest for what they described as his “illegal missionary activities”, the State police ordered him to leave the country.

...The leadership of the RSS denied that the organisation had anything to do with the attack, claiming in the same breath that the incidents involving religious conversions and attempts made “to denigrate Hindu gods” had caused deep resentment in the Scheduled Caste colony and its neighbourhood where Cooper had sought to do missionary work. A report in *Janmabhoomi*, a newspaper run by the BJP, alleged that Benson Sam was involved in the molestation of a young S.C. woman and that there was deep resentment about this in the locality – suggesting perhaps that Cooper was not the real target of the attack.

In an interview to an American newspaper, Cooper denied the allegation, saying that “the story is false”. He said: “The girl, a member of the highest Brahmin caste, converted to Christianity and was disowned by her family. She subsequently reverted to Hinduism and was reconciled with her family. She then made charges of rape against Benson Sam, his father, P.K. Sam, and two other Christian leaders. But Benson Sam was in Canton, Ohio, when the

alleged rape was supposed to have occurred, so the police dismissed the complaint against him.”

PENTECOSTAL groups have been active in several parts of Kerala, especially in rural areas and the outskirts of cities and towns. And there is a sort of competition among Christian groups seeking to win over “human souls”. In fact when mediapersons met him at the hospital in Thiruvananthapuram Cooper said his work was among the “neglected Christians”. Another fact that did not go unnoticed was the absence of any immediate protest from the Christian community in Kerala in the immediate aftermath of the attack.

The rivalry among Christian groups has been more pronounced after the widely reported power struggles within certain prominent episcopal churches in Kerala. The struggles, often in the form of court battles and street fights between the followers of church leaders, have forced large sections of the general laity to look elsewhere for their spiritual needs. The proliferation of meditation centres, charismatic centres, small churches and Pentecostalist initiatives in the State in recent years is an obvious outcome of this process. It is in this context that the competition among Christian groups and the attempts of the Hindutva forces to gain a foothold in Kerala, in the name of guarding “faithfuls in the Hindu fold” from “the threat of missionary activity”, have intensified.

...The second “coincidence” was that the attack on Cooper occurred but two days before the arrival of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in Kochi to inaugurate the Antony government’s flagship event, the Global Investor Meet, organised to attract much-needed financial investment in productive ventures in the State, which is facing a serious financial and investment crisis (Frontline, February 14). The stakes were, therefore, high for the Congress(I)-led UDF government, which was then indeed seeking the pleasure of Vajpayee’s government and his party for more Central investment in the State telling investors from India and abroad that Kerala was indeed a safe destination for them and that the atmosphere in the State had at last turned peaceful and conducive for private investments. Given the circumstances, the Cooper incident was but something to be pushed under the carpet as quickly as possible. The Antony government promptly chose to ask Cooper to leave the country and delay the arrest of those involved in the crime. Significantly, it was at this juncture that the Sangh Parivar chose to launch its State-wide campaign demanding the enactment of a law to ban religious conversions in Kerala.

On January 31, even as the campaign began all over Kerala and as the Sangh Parivar pegged the demand conveniently on the attack by “concerned local people at Puliyaam” on the “erring” missionary, Antony, bowing to consistent pressure from BJP-RSS leaders, including Central Ministers, declared in the State Assembly that his government would take strict action against foreign missionaries who come to Kerala on tourist visa and thus illegally engaging in religious activities. Antony said that the law of the land did not permit it (Krishnakumar, R. 2003, ‘An emerging threat’, *Frontline*, Vol. 20, Iss. 4, 15-28 February <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=20030228003704000.htm&date=fl2004/&prd=fline&> – Accessed 16 July 2007 – Attachment 28).

On 4 February 2003 it was reported in *The Hindu* that the “Confederation of Human Rights Organisation (CHRO)” had “conducted a fact-finding mission into the attack on the U.S. missionary, Joseph Cooper,” and had “concluded that the crime was the result of a conspiracy hatched by the local unit of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)”. The CHRO is also reported to have claimed that “RSS functionaries were threatening some witnesses and cajoling others with promise of ‘Central Government’ aid for construction of latrines and free rations” (‘Attack on missionary was planned: CHRO’ 2003, *The Hindu*, 4 February <http://www.hindu.com/2003/02/04/stories/2003020409100300.htm> – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 29).

The US Department of States subsequent report on human rights in India reported as follows of the Joseph Cooper incident and subsequent lack of progress in the prosecution of those arrested in the case:

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 (US Department of State, 2003, International Religious Freedom Report 2003: India, 18 December <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/24470.htm> – Accessed 6 May 2004 – Attachment 30).

No further information could be located on whether those arrested for assaulting Joseph Cooper have subsequently been tried in court.

Other significant possible RSS attacks on Christians elsewhere in Kerala

August 2004:

The killing of Father Job Chittilapally, of St Varaprasadam Matha Church at Thruthiparambu, Thrissur district

The two other incidents noted in the above *Asia News* report of October 2004 (the killing of a Catholic priest in Kerala in August 2004 and the September 2004 attack on four Catholic nuns) though not occurring in the Kerala capital of Trivandrum may be of interest insofar as they constitute two of the most significant incidents of anti-Christian violence to have affected Kerala and were reported on in India's wider national English language press. A selection of other significant reports also follow.

The killing of a Catholic priest in Kerala in August 2004 received widespread coverage in India's national English language press and two examples are supplied to provide an overview of subsequent events. A September 2004 report published in *The Asian Tribune* details the manner in which the "murder of Father Job Chittilapally (71) within the precincts of St. Varaprasadam Matha (Mother of Grace) Church at Thruthiparambu near Chalakudy in Thrissur district on August 28...snowballed into a social crisis". Kerala police initially arrested a "former CPI-M activist who switched loyalties to BJP-RSS ten years" prior to the murder. Kerala Catholic Church leaders protested the handling of the case suspecting a wider conspiracy and a cover-up. The Kerala government subsequently transferred responsibility for the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the Indian national police service, and in October 2007 the investigations remained ongoing (more recent reports could not be located) (Menon, M.C. 2004, 'Catholic Priest's Murder: First Acid Test For Oommen Chandy', *Asian Tribune*, 11 September

http://www.asiantribune.com/oldsite/show_news.php?id=11161 – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 20; 'Investigations to be expedited Fr Chittilappilly murder case' 2007, WebIndia123.com, 3 October

http://news.webindia123.com/news/ar_showdetails.asp?id=710031177&cat=&n_date=20071003 – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 21).

September 2004:

Attacks on Latin Catholic nuns and brothers in Kozhikode district

The September 2004 attacks on the Mother Teresa nuns also received widespread coverage in India's national English language press as well as in Catholic media networks like *Asia News*. A report appearing in *The Hindu* on 2 October 2004 accused the "city special branch (police

intelligence wing) attached to the Office of the Kozhikode City Police Commissioner” of “bungling” its response to the violence in failing to rush adequate protection to the scene after reports of the assault were first received. The failure of the Kerala police in this regard is framed as a consequence of negligence rather than communal bias. “Cases were [subsequently] registered against 17 RSS and BJP activists under Section 307 (attempt to murder) and 153 A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence and language and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony) of the Indian Penal Code.” In September of 2008 it was reported that trial of the case had commenced in the “Kozhikode Fast Track Court I” (Govind, B. 2004, ‘Attack: Did police intelligence wing bungle?’, *The Hindu*, 2 October <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2004/10/02/stories/2004100204980400.htm> – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 22; ‘Trial in attack on nuns case begins’ 2008, *The Hindu*, 23 September <http://www.hindu.com/2008/09/23/stories/2008092354230300.htm> – Accessed 29 January 2009 – Attachment 23; for September 2004 *Asia News* reporting on the attack Kozhikode district on the Mother Teresa Sisters of Charity nuns, including allegations of RSS/BJP involvement and police arrests, see: Carvalho, N. 2004, ‘Hindu extremists injure 4 sisters of Mother Teresa’, *Asia News*, 27 September <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?art=1559&l=en> – Accessed 28 January 2009 – Attachment 18; ‘Violence will not stop Christian witness, Bishop Fernandez says’ 2004, *Asia News*, 27 September <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=1560> – Accessed 28 January 2009 – Attachment 17).

February 2005:

Six Asian Biblical Seminary students assaulted in Alappuzha district

Also of interest may be a February 2005 incident which, while not involving Latin Catholics directly, did receive comment and attention from the Latin Catholic Church. Reporting on this incident appeared on the website of the Roman Catholic Church’s *Asia News* network. According to the *Asia News* report: “activists beat up six Christian theology students from the Asian Biblical Seminary which is attached to the Thiruvalla-based Believers Church, near Mannar, Alappuzha district”. The report claims that: “Karnataka and Kerala are states where a violent anti-Christian propaganda campaign is underway” and relates that “Bishop Thottunkal said that although ‘[w]e have a Christian Chief Minister in Kerala, but sadly these attacks do take place’”. The report also related that the “the Alappuzha district superintendent of police” had said that “the culprits [had] been identified as members of the RSS and would soon be arrested”. No further reports on the incident, or on follow up by the police or the courts, could be located on the *Asia News* website. Details of the alleged assault, as reported by *Asia News*, follow below:

...The theology students had come to Mannar from Thiruvalla for Sunday to preach the gospel.

Witnesses said that the activists forced them to board an auto-rickshaw. They were then taken out of town and beaten. They are currently hospitalised in a private clinic in Thiruvalla.

Mgr Isaac Mar Cleemis Thottunkal, Catholic Bishop of Thiruvalla, told AsiaNews that he was going to “inquire into the attacks on the six students”.

“The interaction between the Church and the Believers is cordial,” Bishop Thottunkal added, but “we meet only for social engagements” (Carvalho, N. 2005, ‘Hindu fundamentalists beat up six Christian theology students in Kerala’, *Asia News*, 15 February

<http://www.asianews.it/index.php?art=2574&l=en> – Accessed 28 January 2009 – Attachment 15).

Further information on claims of anti-Christian violence

For an overview of the various reports of claims of anti-Christian violence in Kerala which have appeared in recent years see the response to Question 2 in *Research Response IND34133* of 23 December 2008 (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND34133*, 23 December – Attachment 35).

Information on the overall situation in Kerala for Latin Catholics

The Kerala Latin Catholics League provides the following information on Kerala's Christians, and Kerala Roman Catholics (or Latin Catholics), in particular.

In Kerala, there are 9 million Christians (22% of the population). Of the 5 million Catholics among them, 3 million are Syro-Malabar, 1.7 million are Latin, and 0.3 million are Malankara. Though the Latin Church is a minority in Kerala, it is the main Catholic Church in the Indian subcontinent and the world at large. They are known the world over as Roman Catholics. But in Kerala, the Syrian Catholics have appropriated that name for themselves.

...The Latin Catholics of Kerala are culturally and economically a mixed group. They live in a state whose population covers a variety of Muslim Christian and Hindu communities ("samudayangal"). A. Aiyappan, a sociologist who studied the stratification of Kerala society in 1941, divides it into 3 groups, A, B and C, based on the traditional caste perception. He places the Latin Christians of Kerala as A/C, meaning they include both the high status and the lowest. Aiyappan's 'A' group consists of higher castes, the "savarnas" recognized under the modern state as "forward castes". 'B' group includes Izhavas and consists mostly of "avarna" groups classified as "OBC or other backward communities". 'C' group comprises those of lowest status, recognized as "Scheduled Castes". But the Kerala Government, for reservation of quotas for government jobs, which were denied to the "avarnas" till 1919, brands Latins of Kerala as OBCs, along with the Izhavas and many other communities (Alexander, F. (undated), 'Roman Catholics in India: a Socio-Historical Perspective', Kerala Latin Catholics League website <http://www.keralacatholic.com/> – Accessed 31 January 2009 – Attachment 52).

In September 2006 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provided advice to the Tribunal, sourced from two Kerala based human rights organisations, on "the relative safety of Christians in Kerala State". These sources advised the New Delhi post that Kerala, though affected by "[s]poradic localised incidents of violence against Christian activists", remained a place where Christians are "relatively safer than in other states since they constitute a significant segment of the state's total population (19 per cent) and are economically well placed". The advice follows in detail (the Tribunal request which elicited this advice also asked for information on the particular situation of Catholics involved in proselytising and the attitude of police towards such practices and for this reason the advice refers to a number of conversion related issues).

1. Post spoke to Prof. S Varghese, Member, Kerala Human Rights Commission (an autonomous organisation set up by the state government) and Mr. Mathew Manakkat, an advocate and prominent human rights activist who heads the Kerala state unit of the Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties (an independent non-government organisation with presence all over India which works for human rights issues).

2. Prof. Varghese and Mr. Manakkat made the point that the Christian community in Kerala is relatively safer than in other states since they constitute a significant segment of the state's total population (19 per cent) and are economically well placed. Mr. Manakkat said most Christian groups focus on knowledge dissemination rather than conversion and these activities are quite peaceful.

3. Sporadic localised incidents of violence against Christian activists occur, but Mr. Manakkat opines that this is mainly with the Pentecostal sect (within the Christian community) whose public meetings are frequently marked by vehement criticism of Hindu gods, philosophies and practices.

4. Mr. Manakkat also opines that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other Hindu extremist groups have been weakened over the past few years and hence are no serious threat to the religious freedom of Christian and other non-Hindu communities. Legally, there is no ban or limiting provisions on religious conversion in Kerala as it exists in BJP ruled Indian states. Conversion activity can be undertaken by any Indian national without any legal hindrance.

5. An August 2006 judicial verdict by the Indian Supreme Court ruled that police forces in Indian states are free to register cases and arrest religious activists if there are any complaints against their proselytisation activities. Police are not required to take prior permission from government authorities before taking action in such complaints. However there are no reports of police having taken action or arrested any religious leaders (including Christians) in the recent past for proselytisation activities (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2006, *DFAT Report 538– RRT Information Request: IND30502*, 20 September – Attachment 26; for the Tribunal request which elicited this advice, see: RRT Country Research 2006, Email to DFAT: 'Country Information Request – IND30502', August – Attachment 27).

Research Response IND34133 of 23 December 2008 notes that there have recently been reports of anti-Christian attacks spreading to Kerala after an outbreak of violence in Orissa state saw flare ups in a number of locations across India. That the violence had spread to Kerala, a state usually known for communal harmony, was presented as an indication of the seriousness of the Hindu–Christian tensions that affected India at the time. A report in *The Hindu* noted that the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust had “issued a statement expressing distress over attacks on Christians, stating that: “the saffron brigade is concurrently orchestrating a mass campaign of bigotry and lawlessness that began in Orissa and has now spread to Karnataka and even threatens hitherto tolerant and peaceful Kerala”. A *Times of India* report of 17 September 2008 expresses the view that “the role of radical Hindu outfits was obvious”. Reporting on violence in Karnataka state a 22 September 2008 *Times of India* article observes that: “Neighbouring Kerala wasn't spared either with two churches being desecrated near the international airport in Nedumbassery, close to Kochi”. The report also notes that: “The assault was decried by Kerala Catholic Bishops Council, and the state home minister Kodayeri Balakrishnan warned the miscreants of serious consequences”. Sourcing the *Press Trust of India*, Australia's *The Age* reported that an arson attack on a “missionary-run school” in “Kerala's Kottayam district” had not resulted in any casualties. If reporting by *Compass Direct* is accurate at least one of the institutions attacked was a Latin Catholic school. According to this report the: “Jaya Mata Convent School, a Christian kindergarten that doubled as a church in Kottakkani area in Kasargode district” was part of the “Catholic diocese of Teleicherry” (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND34133*, 23 December – Attachment 35; ‘NCM team for Karnataka’ 2009, *The Hindu*, 17 September <http://www.hindu.com/2008/09/17/stories/2008091761051600.htm> – Accessed 31 January 2009 – Attachment 41; ‘3 churches attacked in Karnataka’ 2008, *Times of India*, 22 September

http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/3_churches_attacked_in_Karnataka/_rssarticleshow/

[3510970.cms](#) – Accessed 30 January 2009 – Attachment 33; ‘60 dead in Indian anti-Christian clashes’ 2008, *The Age*, 18 October <http://news.theage.com.au/world/60-dead-in-indian-antichristian-clashes-20081018-53e2.html> – Accessed 30 January 2009 – Attachment 34; for the *Compass Direct* report, see: Arora, V. & Bhatia, S. 2008, ‘Violence spreads to five more states in India’, *Compass Direct News*, 16 September – Attachment 39; this report may have followed details reported in: ‘Conversion fire spreads to Kerala’ 2008, *Times of India*, 17 September – Attachment 40).

Research Response IND34133 also notes reports that representatives of Kerala’s state government – a coalition group led by the Communist Party of India–Marxist (CPI-M) – have condemned the recent outbreaks of anti-Christian violence and have promised to have police track down the perpetrators of the Kerala church attacks. On 22 September 2008 it was reported that “CPI(M) Kerala Secretary Pinarayi Vijayan today said the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government...was committed to book the culprits behind the attacks on minority institutions” and that “‘Sangh Parivar’ groups, who target minority communities, should be dealt with sternly”. It has also been reported that: “The government of the Indian state of Kerala has offered to shelter 56 refugees from Orissa, most of whom had fled the state following threats and beatings by Hindu mobs avenging the murder of a Hindu leader” (see: ‘LDF govt. committed to peace in Kerala: CPI(M) Secretary’ 2008, *webindia123.com*, source: *United News of India*, 22 September <http://news.webindia123.com/news/articles/India/20080922/1059946.html> – Accessed 30 January 2009 – Attachment 38; and: Varghese, R. 2008, ‘Orissa Christians find shelter in Kerala state’, *Christian Today* website, 3 November <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/orissa.christians.find.shelter.in.kerala.state/21796.htm> – Accessed 10 December 2008 – Attachment 35).

It should be noted, however, that the Kerala CPI-M government’s relationship with the Latin Catholic Church is a complicated one. The Kerala Catholic Church has, historically, supported the Congress Party in Kerala (the CPI-M’s principal rival in Kerala electoral state politics) and the Kerala Catholic Church is currently embroiled in a struggle with the CPI-M government over control of Catholic education institutions. There have also been accusations issued by the Kerala Catholic Church that the CPI-M’s youth wing, the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), have attacked Catholic youth groups and educational facilities. Much of the available reportage on the strained relationship between the CPI-M government and the Latin Catholic Church suggests that the animosity is a consequence of the manner in which the CPI-M and the Latin Church leadership have both competed for the loyalties of the Latin Catholic voter; and that while the CPI-M movement has clashed with the leadership of the Catholic Church and with various organisation associated with the Catholic Church, the CPI-M has generally sought to woo the support of the Latin Catholic voter and has sought to encourage Latin Catholics to leave Church organisations for its own social networks (in January 2008 *The Indian Express* reported that: “The Catholic Youth Forum, a body of Communist Christians, has been founded for this cause”) (for information of the Catholic Church’s historical affinity for the Congress Party in Kerala, see: ‘Kerala Latin Catholics sever ties with Congress’ 2005, *The Hindu*, 20 June <http://www.hindu.com/2005/06/20/stories/2005062004680700.htm> – Accessed 31 January 2009 – Attachment 42; for information on the struggle over education facilities and youth wing clashes, see: ‘Bishop slams CPM after attack by its students’ wing on college’ 2008, *Gulf Times*, 31 March http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=210183&version=1&template_id=40&parent_id=22 – Accessed 19 December 2008 – Attachment 43; and: ‘Catholic forum deplors

“attacks”⁴ 2009, *The Hindu*, 14 January

<http://www.hindu.com/2009/01/14/stories/2009011453630300.htm> – Accessed 28 January 2009 – Attachment 44; for claims that an outspoken Catholic Bishop was threatened for his opposition to the CPI-M, see ‘Death threat promises dismemberment of Indian bishop’ 2007, Catholic News Agency, 12 December

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/new.php?n=11249> – Accessed 17 December 2008 – Attachment 45; for reports which note that the CPI-M competes with the Catholic Church leadership for the loyalties of the Catholic voter, see: Rajeev, P.I. 2008, ‘Holy war in God’s Own Country’, *Indian Express*, 8 January <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/holy-war-in-gods-own-country/259303/> – Accessed 6 January 2009 – Attachment 46).

A March 2008 *Compass Direct* report has noted that despite the differences which separate the CPI-M and the Catholic Church both have continued to assume a united front against communal violence and the alleged activates Hindu nationalist networks in provoking violence of this kind. The report also observes that: “Christians form close to 20 percent (6.05 million) of Kerala’s population of 31.8 million, with a segment within the state’s Christian community regularly voting for communist parties”. The relevant extracts follow.

Communists and Christians can be best of pals in defending against the onslaughts of Hindu nationalism, but their differences over Christian educational institutions surge to the fore where the leftists rule – as has just happened in Kerala state.

A government body in the southern state of Kerala has recommended banning of religious worship and use of religious inscriptions on the walls in private schools that receive assistance from the state, a move that is believed to be targeted at Christian institutions, according to a report in *The Telegraph* newspaper on February 11.

...Christians form close to 20 percent (6.05 million) of Kerala’s population of 31.8 million, with a segment within the state’s Christian community regularly voting for communist parties.

But since 2006, church leaders in Kerala have issued 10 pastoral letters against the Communists, which are read out in churches, in an apparent attempt to discourage church members from supporting them.

...Such conflicts come in contrast to the common ground that Christians and communists in India share: not only a united defense against the ideological enemy of Hindu nationalism (Hindutva), but concern for the poor.

While defending themselves against Hindutva forces brings Christians and communists together at the national level, said Dr. John Dayal, president of the All India Catholic Union, he noted that “both Christians and communists serve the poor and the marginalized” (Arora, V. 2008, ‘Communist Rulers Target Christian Schools in Kerala, India’, *Compass Direct*, 4 March – Attachment 47).

A 2007 report published by *The Hindu* has observed that the difficulties which have affected recent relations between the CPI-M and the Catholic Church could be read as an indication of the extent to which the threat of Hindu nationalism has receded from Kerala state politics:

The Church and the Left had moved closer to each other when missionaries were faced with threats from Sangh Parivar outfits in various parts of North India and some places in the State. However, with the threat of right-wing Hindu fundamentalism receding and questions of minority rights coming to the fore, the relationship appears to have soured (Nair, C.G. 2007,

'Church-Government row: a throwback to the 1950s', *The Hindu*, 30 July
<http://www.hindu.com/2007/07/30/stories/2007073052500400.htm> – Accessed 31 January 2009 – Attachment 48).

Reports generally relate that the Hindu nationalist movement has had very little influence in Kerala in electoral terms. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) attempted to position itself as a third force in the most recent state elections of May 2006 but failed to win any seats. A *Rediff.com* report of May 2006 report noted that: "The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance fielded candidates in all the constituencies; but they failed to make a mark". Nonetheless, it would also appear to be the case that regular reports appear of RSS and other Hindutva groups becoming involved in political and communal violence in Kerala state. Clashes between Hindutva supporters and supporters of Kerala state's ruling CPI-M have been particularly pronounced. An *India Today* article of March 2008 notes that: "Over the last few years, Thalasserry, in Kannur district, has been sporadically grabbing the headlines for its crass political violence. At least 200 persons have been killed and thousands maimed over the last 30 years in tit-for-tat violence between BJP-RSS and CPI(M), both of which have deep roots in these areas". For an overview of the extent to which Christians have been affected by the RSS, and Hindu nationalist militancy generally, see the response Question 2 in *Research Response IND33857* of 22 October 2008 (Lype, George 2006, 'Kerala: Where change is static', *Rediff.com*, 11 May <http://in.rediff.com/election/2006/may/11gi.htm> – Accessed 6 July 2007 – Attachment 49; Radhakrishnan, M.G. 2008, 'Old battle new ground', *India Today*, 13 March http://indiatoday.digitaltoday.in/index.php?issueid=&id=5770&option=com_content&task=view§ionid=21 – Accessed 21 October 2008 – Attachment 50; RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND33857*, 22 October – Attachment 50).

Finally it should be noted that a wide range of sources are available which report on Kerala as a haven of relative tolerance in India and as a place where Christian festivals are celebrated without incident by Kerala Christians and even by members of the wider Kerala population (for examples of such reportage, see: George, S. 2007, 'Chill, cakes and carols...Kerala peeps up for Christmas', *Hindustan Times*, 22 December <http://www.hindustantimes.com/storypage/Print.aspx?Id=f248dd19-7e01-462d-a74c-00ddb3727d6f> – Accessed 31 January 2009 – Attachment 53; 'Mourning for some, celebration for others' 2006, *IndiaBlitz.com*, 14 April <http://www.india blitz.com/63747/Mourning-for-some-celebration-for-others.htm> – Accessed 31 January 2009 – Attachment 54; 'Christmas brings back cheer to market' 2008, *The Hindu*, 27 December <http://www.hindu.com/2008/12/27/stories/2008122756321500.htm> – Accessed 31 January 2009 – Attachment 55; 'Catholic Church celebrates Alphonsa's canonisation' 2008, *The Hindu*, 13 October <http://www.hindu.com/2008/10/13/stories/2008101356541300.htm> – Accessed 27 January 2009 – Attachment 56; Reynolds, D. 2004, 'Little Cash, Lots of Riches', *Yes Magazine*, Summer <http://www.yesmagazine.org/article.asp?ID=871> – Accessed 31 January 2009 – Attachment 57).

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