

# Hearings on Religious Freedom in India and Pakistan: Mr. John Dayal Oral Testimony

September 18, 2000

MR. DAYAL: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

The problem with being the last speaker is I was sorely tempted to abandon my own piece and respond to Professor Sharma. I will resist, mostly because of this. This is one of 400 Bibles that were burnt in the city of Rajcort [ph] in the State of Gujarat in West India in 1998. This is how the New Testament looks like before lunatics, who have their own funny version of what religion should be and how conversion is evil ended up with it.

I have an 11-page statement which please place on record. I will make a very brief presentation on not only the environment of hate in which this becomes possible. It's a portable thing, so I could carry it. I cannot carry raped nuns; dead bodies of priests; uprooted graves; burnt down churches with me to Washington. I have a very brief precis of my paper. I'll read it out. There are serious reservations in India on the timing and nature of these hearings.

Some feel that these hearings will embarrass the Prime Minister of India, who was here until yesterday. I personally have been under pressure from some friends as well as genuine well-wishers in political, academic, media and religious circles not to participate in the hearings.

I have been forcefully and persuasively advised not to hurt India's national interests. Many believe that this is the jurisdiction of the United Nations and not of the United States. My work in religious freedom issues is my personal response and assertion of patriotism, not of nationalism. My work in human rights and religious liberty in India has brought me many personal threats. The Indian National Human Rights Commission has ordered the Government of India to provide me security in view of the threats to my life and my liberty. Currently, I have two plainclothes armed bodyguards who accompany me when I am in New Delhi and cities of India.

I have agreed to participate in these hearings in my personal capacity for many reasons, the most important of which is to use this opportunity to reach out to the powerful and vibrant Indian community in the U.S. for their support. And another reason is that some organizations of the Sangh Parivar, such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, are seeking recognition in the bodies of the United Nations. Such recognition will clothe these fountainheads of hate and malice in a cloak of respectability, and therefore, it is only right and proper that there is an international investigation and a deep look at the character of these organizations, all of whom have been mentioned by my distinguished predecessors on this podium.

The Christian community is a mere 2.3 percent, down from 2.9 percent from when India became independent in 1947, and despite Professor Embree's dates, we still maintain, out of a racial memory, that since 0052 A.D., when St. Thomas first brought the liberating good news of our Lord to the shores of my homeland, we have lived in peace and in a dialogue of life with the neighbors, most of them devout and god fearing Hindus. They remain our friends, our allies, our protectors.

I would like to dwell a few minutes to add to defining the Hindutva Parivar as already has been defined. Research now underway and research that is partially completed has categorically shown how these organizations owe inspiration not only to the ideology of Mussolini and Adolf Hitler but to physical contact with them. Almost all of the founding fathers of the Hindutva Parivar have brought on record, as their children do now, the admiration for the Sangh Parivar and their hatred for any person they deem to be alien. They, of course, reserve the right to define who will be an alien, which will be an alien religion, which will not be.

Bethlehem, gentlemen, as you know, is not in England; it's in Asia. I will focus on two aspects: how the law itself is sought to be criminalized; the administration padded up; and then come very briefly to the actual violence, because numbers don't matter? How does it matter in a country of billions of 35 people die a year, 40 people die? There are no rivers of Christian blood on the streets of India. That is very clear. But there is an atmosphere of fear, and that is what we need to address.

And there is a rabid atmosphere of hate, which we need to challenge and defeat. Hate kills, surely as a bullet; surely as a knife, and that is the whole argument that people like me argue about. Compared to Indonesia; compared to the Sudan, the number of Christian dead is minuscule, but, dear friends,

as Sister Dolores told the Prime Minister, for the first time in 50 years, we fear.

For many years, this hate has been going on, and the confusion is when nuns are raped in the forests of the state of Uttar Pradesh, it is a member of the Hindutva Parivar who says the nuns were asking for it; the nuns deserved to be raped.

For many years, the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act has been used to harass Christian NGOs; churches; institutions. These regulations are used in a discriminatory fashion. It is almost impossible for Western or non-Indian evangelists or a preacher to visit India honestly, unless he pretends to come there as a tourist. There is an effort to recreate, to enforce, anti-Christian, anti-conversion law by states.

Three states already have such law: the States of Uttar Pradesh, Orisa [ph] and Matra [ph] Pradesh. The special rapporteur of the UN has questioned India: what is the logic of this totally unheard-of law? The government has not been able to respond to it, despite that, fresh state governments--in fact, legislation is sought to be introduced even in Parliament through private means to curb the right to preach, propagate, profess, and also the right of the individual to change his religion, whether he wants to live and coexist in three religions at a time or one at a time. There is a law afoot to try to prevent even that multiple choice.

The worst, of course, is the legalized bigotry against Christians of Dalit origin, Christians who were converted from what were once the untouchable castes, and I would like to hear how Article 18 addresses untouchable castes; how untouchability itself is addressed in the miasma of human rights. The constitution has the first amendment of it almost taking away the right of the Dalit--of the Dalit generally to choose his religion. The law is being used to punish any Dalit who changes his religion from so-called Hinduism to Christianity or Islam. He instantly loses his job; any of the facilities which was given in the proactive laws that were enacted at the dawn of our republic.

There have been many other lapses in implementing constitutional guarantees. Current research, including research by the last National Commission for Minorities, has shown that basic articles of the Constitution, including Article 30, the right to freedom to run your own institutions; Article 25 have not been properly implemented. Only one of India's nearly 30 states have fully implemented this law, and this great state is Tuvinalad [ph].

Now, I'll come to violence. What can I speak of violence? We have been recording it. We are still averaging a violent act every 36 hours. Priests are being--they're hacked; they're murdered: not by a bullet to the temple; they're hacked to pieces. Nuns are punished not by a slap, not by a jostle. They're raped. Evangelists are tortured, burnt alive. Is this the punishment even if conversion were to be a crime?

Is burning alive of two young children and a father, the hacking to death of a priest day before yesterday, of several other priests in the past; the razing of dozens and dozens and dozens of churches, is that the punishment even if conversion were to be a crime? And, of course, I challenge the whole thesis of conversion. I am not going to go into details. We have produced what we call the unofficial white papers of violence on Christians. We call them unofficial because the Government does not want to publish the full data.

They admit in Parliament that violence against Christians has increased, but then, they say that each case is a separate incident. Of course, every crime is separate, and we say, well, why don't you look at the pattern? The pattern is science; the pattern is sociology. The pattern is how you can devise solutions. For me, the only solution is an assertion of political will by the Government of India, an assertion, a declaration, that hate will be punished.

It is hate which is the root of violence. You cannot control violence unless you first eradicate hate, sometimes officially-sponsored hate.

I thank you, ladies and gentlemen