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Dialogue, Sacrifice and Reconciliation:
A Study of Kandhamal Violence, Odisha

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Abstract

It is very distressing to note that the dialogue imperatives are very strangely articulated or conveniently discarded by secular intellectuals even when they are worried about reconciliation. In the conflict resolution process, religious communities are made passive by the state while civil society pursues 'justice before reconciliation'. As the present study shows, both caste Hindu and Dalit Christian communities directly participated in a dialogue for reconciliation by dodging the legal path shown by the secular state, the Hindu right and Church. It is proposed that their reconciliation ushers new principles for secularisation which goes beyond constitutional secularism.

Key words: Justice, Dialogic Politics, Reconciliation, Political Secularism and Religious Xenophobia.

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1 Introduction

Dialogue studies are a rare genre in the debates on Indian secularism. Secular intellectuals cannot be blamed for what is missed by the secular state formation. However, it is very distressing to note that the dialogue imperatives are very strangely articulated or conveniently discarded by secular intellectuals even when they are worried about reconciliation. A few dialogue theorists like Akeel Bilgrami and Gyan Pandey talk about dialogue to reform religious faiths or resolve conflict situations (Bilgrami 1998: 410; Pandey 2007:175–77). But both are very hesitant to recognise that dialogue with contending organisations is necessary due to the fear of legitimising activities of contending parties. If democracy is afraid of contentions or contending parties, it ceases to be a practising democracy. As Ranabir Samaddar rightly argues democratic dialogue must in here and absorb conflictive positions (Samaddar 2011:790). Yet, a few secular intellectuals who insist on dialogue with contentious politics such as Maoism or the Kashmiri separatism do not plead for political dialogue to settle the major issues affecting India's secularism.¹ They do not feel disturbed that there could be paradoxes in their dialogic thinking. A democratic process following two separate standards for a select number of contentious issues is indeed the sign of contradictory democracy. Sikand (2001: 1716) argues that under certain contexts, 'dialogue' may be pursued by a religious group to carry out 'conversion' in a benign form. Now a question arises: what does happen to dialogue that respects rather than assimilates differences? Similarly, reconciliation may have happened without dialogue as argued by Meena Menon (2012: 231). After riots in Mumbai 1992, victims may have reconciled with their life situations with a sense of defeatism. So the relation between dialogue and reconciliation is very tenuous. Is it however possible to bring about genuine reconciliation without democratic dialogue?

There are a few studies on reconciliation after Gujarat violence (2002). But dialogue as a method of settlement of disputes is not even mentioned in these studies. Dialogue as a method is omitted in several narratives of reconciliation by T K Oommen, Dipankar Gupta, Harsh Mander, Rajeev Bhargava and many others, though all these writers are extremely concerned with justice before or after reconciliation. Both Gupta and Mander tend to argue that victims are interested in justice through law rather than reconciliation. Even Gupta argues (2011:113) that a model of reconciliation, put to a voice vote, would be vigorously rejected by victims interested to fight for legal justice. Mander's argument (2009: 171 & 179) however is subtle as he distinguishes two kinds of victims. There are victims who fight for legal justice through 'Nayagraha' as opposed to those victims who would like to compromise and move on. The latter remain critical of the former for creating difficulties for compromise (ibid: 169). The fight for justice through law, even if justice eludes them, is better than reconciliation as it enhances self-esteem, ensures dignity and security of victims by seeing culprits pulled by police to a court of law. Many of the working class victims themselves are Nayagrahi activists mobilising and assisting other subaltern members. Like Menon, Mander also argues correctly that for the path of reconciliation to open up, 'truth must be exchanged' (ibid: 179-180). However, the path of reconciliation is not opened up in Gujarat, as culprits are not prepared to confess truth in public and victims are divided in seeking justice.

¹ See positions of Romila Thapar, Amit Bhaduri, Arundhati Roy, Swami Agnivesh and Medha Patker. The National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM) has asked for dialogue with Maoists, Kashmiri separatists and others. See its dialogue appeal, NAPM for Political Dialogue with Maoists (2011). See also the appeal for a multilateral dialogue by the state with Maoists and tribes by Amit Bhaduri and Romila Thapar (n.d.). Swami Agnivesh calls for interfaith dialogue rather than political dialogue: see Agnivesh (2005).

Just as secular intellectuals miss dialogue as a method because the secular state never articulated democratic dialogue on a sustained basis, so also common victims notice the inaction of a state government in pursuing law and demand legal action for justice. In both cases, the stimulus supplied by the state is matched by communities/intellectuals accordingly. If intellectuals and civil society activists cannot transcend legal mindset of the secular state and cannot even imagine dialogue in search for settlement of major disputes to rebuild secularism, it would be futile to expect common victims/culprits to imagine that truth must be exchanged to bring about reconciliation. However, it must be admitted that common victims pursuing legal path for justice are still willing for reconciliation in public. But culprits are not sure if they should confess truth in public. The life stories of Walibhai and Abdul Bhai of Gujarat villages indicate preferences for reconciliation, failing which they pursued 'justice before reconciliation'(Mander 2009: 171&179). Similarly, the state government unwilling to follow a legal path or even dialogic path might induce victims to follow a binary path: fight for legal justice for dignity and self-respect or reconcile with 'fate' by a simple act of forgiving.

But, where the state follows 'ad hoc dialogues', forms dialogue committees driven by the district administration and also sets up 'fast track courts' seriously, communities – both culprits and victims - may respond differently at different times of their life situations. Depending on the nature of the state's stimuli and its timings, responses of communities may alter from 'justice before reconciliation' to 'justice through reconciliation', even though both secular intellectuals and civil society organisations still display a legal mindset as indicated by our case study.

Before we return to our case study, let us examine how a methodology of reconciliation is proposed by Oommen (2008) and Rajeev Bhargava (2010). Though dialogue as a method is missing in their studies, yet both explore steps of reconciliation which could be seen as elements of a dialogue process. Oommen (2008: 16-17) uses terms from financial transactions in reconciliation. First, communities must identify and endorse assets and liabilities in their cultural traditions. Second, they must 'reduce' liabilities and 'expand' assets. Third, they need to understand the realities of everyday life which may have triggered conflicts. These could be the styles of religious worship, varieties of food consumed or dress worn based on taboos or prescriptions. He argues correctly that unlike relief and rehabilitation, in the case of reconciliation both culprits and victims become 'carriers' or 'agents'(Oommen 2009: xi &17). Reconciliation may also need 'catalysts' that are not necessarily 'carriers'.

Bhargava on the other hand argues (2010:132-138) that the Gandhian model of peace building has a two-fold stage: 1. Barbarism followed by expression of grievances, acceptance of collective responsibility and forgiveness; 2. Reconciliation. Being a charismatic leader who forced culprits and victims for reconciliation through hunger strikes, Gandhi misses the 'machinery of arbitration' seeking reconciliation on the foundation of procedural justice. This notion of justice entails (i) recognition of 'untidy problems', (ii) sense of good life for 'self' and (iii) 'compromises' with good life of 'other'. Bhargava proposes a model of reconciliation enriching Gandhi's conception at three analytical stages: 1. Barbarism – sharing grievances, collective responsibility and restoration of justice by a machinery of arbitration; 2. Forgiveness and 3. Reconciliation. What Bhargava does not notice is that forgiveness follows sacrifice before reconciliation happens.² For, sacrifice is self-related act whereas forgiveness is other-related activity. One does not forgive one-self but expects others

² Implicit in his defense of India's constitutional secularism is a strategy of simple differential sacrifice derived from caste inequalities or what Bhargava calls 'intra-religious domination' in Hinduism(2010). We return to it in the last section of our paper.

to forgive one's misdeeds. Moreover, for forgiveness to materialise, one has to reduce 'own liabilities' as suggested by Oommen. As the story of Abdula Bhai and Walibhai reveal, expecting the other to forgive one's misdeeds is futile, if it is not preceded by one's sacrifice of 'ego' complexes or 'evil' practices in public mediation (Mander *op. cit.*). However, there are non-negotiable elements in each other's faith. People must realise what can or cannot be sacrificed in any religious dispute. A strategy of sacrifice must exhibit a deep sense of respect for values in each other's religion. Only when we recognise dialogue as a method of conflict resolution, it is possible to bring in a strategy of sacrifice which is at the root of forgiveness. Thus, Bhargava's model of reconciliation needs considerable enrichment. Theorising reconciliation without addressing a method of dialogue is like talking about effect or process without its causation. Given below is a story of 'justice through reconciliation' via a strategy of sacrifice brought about by dialogue or 'Tarka-Bitarka' (argument counter-argument) as local people told us in Kandhamal, Odisha.

2 The Bamunigaon violence

The events in Bamunigaon propelled a series of anti-Christian riots across Kandhamal district in Odisha in 2007. Swamy Lakshmananda Saraswati (henceforth Swamiji) of the VHP was widely perceived to have provoked communal riots in the district in 2007. Eight months later in August 2008, the Maoist squad took revenge on Swamiji for his alleged role in 2007 by killing him and four other associates at his Jalspeta ashram. The Maoists were widely seen by the Hindutva family to have acted on behalf of Christians in this attack. So his killing in turn led to a major series of attack on tribal and Dalit Christians across the district and elsewhere in the state. Though communal 'massacres' bypassed Bamunigaon in 2008, it affected people of the village. It made their life very tense. The Bamunigaon events, as we shall show below, are thus at the root of the spiraling conflicts in Kandhamal witnessed during 2007 and 2008. Given below are a sub-text of Kandhamal violence and a narrative of settlement of disputes as manifested in Bamunigaon. The main text of Kandhamal violence however has many more causative factors than what we see below in this village, even though the village was an epicenter of violence in the district during 2007.³

Bamunigaon is the official headquarters of the Bamunigaon Panchayat in the district of Kandhamal, Odisha. It has 7 villages and 4 hamlets. It has also a police station with an Inspector in Charge with the jurisdiction over eight Gram Panchayats. On its west, north and south side, thick forest hills surround the village and provided shelter to Dalit Christian and caste Hindu (henceforth 'Odia'⁴) communities respectively during the riots of 2007 (see village map). It has become a market hub due to a weekly Hata (market) since 1981.

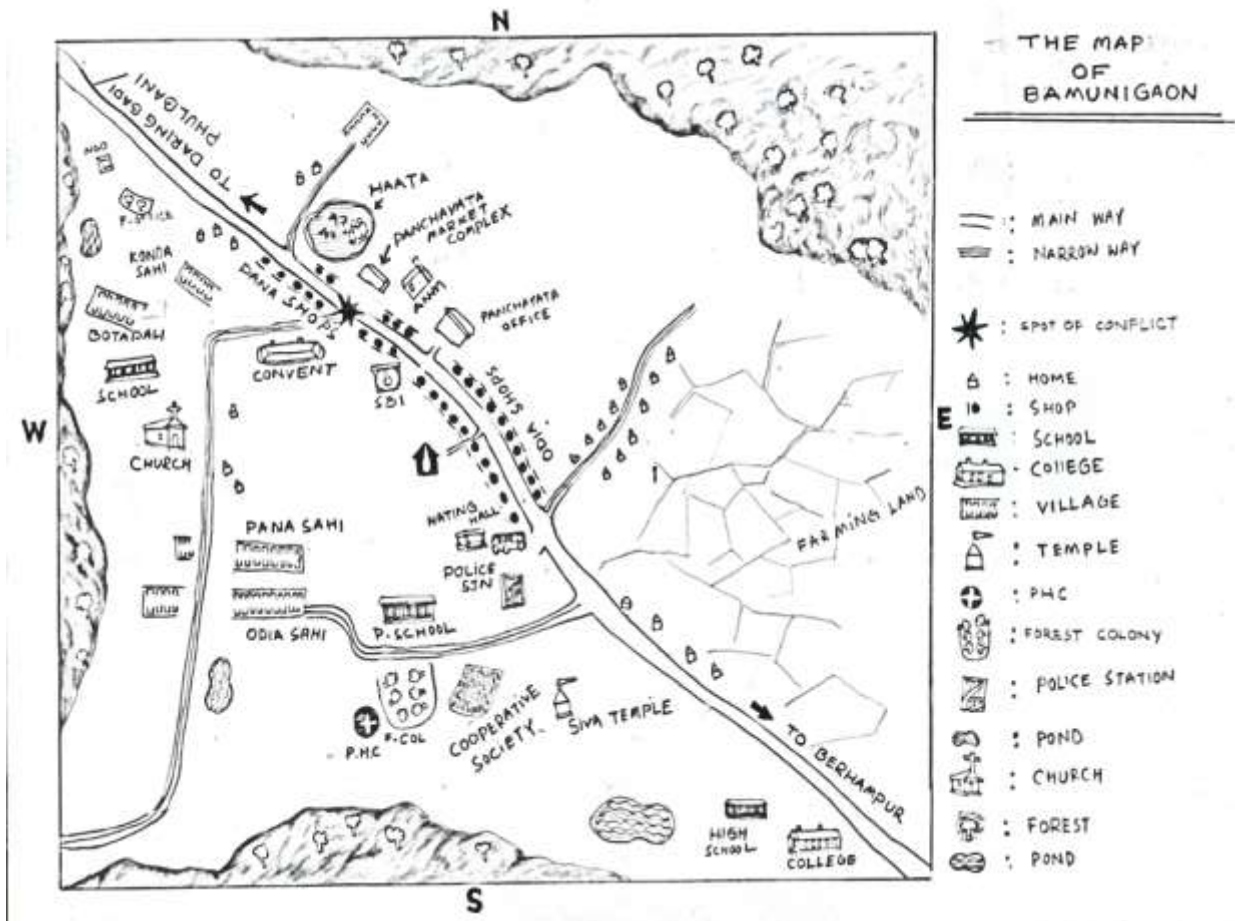
Villagers from nearly eight Gram Panchayats of Daringibadi Block and two Gram Panchayats from Gajapati and Ganjam districts solely depend upon for buying and selling of livestock, forest, agricultural products and other household items. The upper and middle caste businessmen basically sell household items, dress and other consumer goods but purchase forest and agricultural goods. The livestock business is done by the Christian Panas. Few of them sell dry fish and vegetables. For all social groups, the Hata not only provides

³ For the details of Kandhamal violence, see Angana Chatterji (2009), Pralaya Kanungo (2008, 2014), Bishnu Mohapatra and D Bhattacharya (1996), Arun K Patnaik and Rajesh Bag (2012), Reports of National Minorities Commission (2008). Also, for an account of pre-existing solidarity between Kandha and Pana and how Kandhamal violence broke this solidarity, see Felix Padel (2011: 1-34 & 325-333).

⁴ Though all caste people are Odias, caste Hindus are known as 'Odia' as they are all settled in the Odia Sahi (street) in Bamunigaon.

opportunity to buy and sell but it also gives space for social interaction with friends and relatives.

The social profile of the village is as follows. The village with its old and new streets has a population of around 3008 men and women with a total of 609 families.⁵ Basically the old Bamunigaon consists of three Sahis (streets). They are known as Odia Sahi, Pana Sahi and Kandha Sahi. In the Odia Sahi, it is found that most families are from the OBC background in a total of 151 families. The Paika (peasant warrior caste), Telli (oil-pressure caste) and Sundhi (toddy tapper) families are numerically dominant. A handful of families are from the upper caste. They are all from Hindu religion. The Pana (broom and rope weaving or drummer) Sahi is adjacent to the Odia Sahi and has about 53 families. They are all Dalit Christians. And the Kandha Sahi is located at 150 meters away from the two main Sahis and has 15 tribal families. The other 390 families from different castes and religions are settled along with the main road and in various new segments of the village (see map).



⁵Primary Census Abstract- Odisha, Census of India, 2011.

2.1 Secularisation of Social Imaginary: Social Discrimination from High to Moderate

If we look at the social relations between the Pana Christians and the Odia Sahi's Hindu middle castes, we may find them historically evolving from high to low discrimination after 1985. Their social imaginary has evolved over time for better or worse.⁶ After 1985, periodic solidarities between religious communities developed while pursuing festive activities and visible forms of social discrimination began to decline. Panas are mostly agricultural workers and the Odia Sahi people mostly small and medium farmers.

Before 1990s, Panas were looked down upon as low caste people. They would not come nearer Veranda (porch) of the Odia Sahi houses. They would collect dead cows from Odia Sahi families for food. The Pana women were ridiculed as 'Pana Brahminiani' (Pana Brahmin woman) near the village ponds. Even, Panas were disliked to ride on bi-cycles by the Paika youth. They used to encourage Kandhas more than Panas in social proximity. From the early 1990s, the visible forms of discrimination began to decline gradually due to several reasons. After the introduction of social Nataka (play) during festival times, the Pana and Odia Sahi youth began showing social solidarity. The Pana youth participated in social drama in the village festivals actively and contributed to their success. As a result, they became talking points of the village. Panas were not asked to wash their tea glasses in the tiffin centre. Their ridicule and public humiliation began to decline. When the self-help group schemes were introduced for women's empowerment in the village, it exposed both Odia Sahi and Pana women to the Banking sector. They used to go together to the government offices, banks and stood in the queues before the Bank counters. This enabled them to interact with each other more. Mocking references at the village pond by Paika women became less visible now. A Pana cycling his way was no more ridiculed. Panas began to get invitation to attend marriage feasts in Odia Sahi as per rules and norms. Though they used to eat at the end, waste food was no more thrown at them. Now they were welcome to sit on the Verandas of the Odia Sahi families for discussions.

2.2 Secularisation Halted: Clash of Intolerance

In 2003, the conflict between the Pana Sahi and the Odia Sahi came to the fore because a few Odia youths provoked by Swami's repeated hate speeches against 'cow slaughter' poured kerosene on beef meat while Panas were cleaning it for sale. Before doing this, the Sakha members took photos of people involved and later filed police cases against Pana Christians. Thereafter, the police harassment began. Panas blamed the VHP-sponsored Sakha for the spread of hatred against their food culture. Kanungo (2008:19) argues that the Orissa Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act 1960 and the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act 1967 have helped leaders of the Sangh Parivar to fan out its anti-Christian agenda. While it is broadly true, in the present case we however think that the opposition to beef-eating is simultaneously a show of intolerance against Christians, Dalits and their food culture.⁷

After the above conflict, Panas realised that they were dependent on the Odia business community for the purchase of food items and groceries. Immediately, Panas set up a tea stall and tiffin centre. Two years later in 2005, Panas decided to be set up their own business under the banner of Dr Ambedkar Vanik Sangh. Once a new rival emerged on the scene, the old business communities under the Vighnaraja Vanik Sangh could not make huge profits as

⁶ For the concept of social imaginary as a background understanding, see Charles Taylor (2007: 171-176). For an application of social imaginary via Gramsci's lenses, see Arun K Patnaik (2011).

⁷ Elsewhere, the VHP may not follow an oppositional stance. Faced with beef-eating tribals who are not Christians, the VHP has adopted 'assimilation' strategy by distributing sacred threads and by converting them into vegetarianism.

they did in the past. Though market competition became intense, their activities provided livelihood options for both groups. But anger and hatred were not healed.

Buoyed by their new financial strength, Panas wanted to celebrate the Bada Din (Christmas) on a grand scale in 2007. On 23th December, 2007 the Odia Sahi people instigated by the VHP opposed the grand arrangements made by Panas.⁸ They objected that the main road would be blocked if Panas went ahead with a series of arch lights spread across the main road (see village map for conflict site). Christians felt that they were only emulating the Hindu celebration of festivals and wondered why Hindus should object. Moreover, official permission was also obtained for the present arrangement. They felt that the objection by Odias was more due to caste jealousy instigated by the VHP and was meant to humiliate Christian Panas in celebration of their festival. Police tried to mediate between two groups and failed to prevail on Odias.

On 24th morning when the business community and villagers arrived in the market, rumours were spread that the weekly market was going to be closed. Dalit Christians believed that these rumours were floated by Swami's foot soldiers in order to spoil their festival shopping. This rumour led to mayhem. Outside business people fled in their trucks and trollies. During three hours from 8am to 11am, two gangs of Christian and Hindu youth confronted each other and later clashed in the bazar. Few Odia youths got injured severely and were hospitalised. Panas alleged that their podium, music system and arch lights were destroyed in the process. Around 6pm of the same day, a Christian youth burned an Odia shop and this led to a tense situation once again, alleged the Odia Sahi people.

In the evening of same day, a massive rumor was spread through the ETV Odia that Swamiji on his way to visit Bamunigaon was assaulted by the Christian youths in Dasingbadi and was admitted in the Daringibadi government hospital. This led to a series of retaliatory attacks on Christian communities across the district. On 25th morning, miscreants phoned local people in the village. In retaliation, an Odia mob in collusion with the followers of the VHP from nearby villages burnt down 30 Dalit households, vandalized 25 shops and burnt down the 43 years old Church in Bamunigaon. When the Dalits came to know the impending attack, they left for hiding in the nearby hilly forests. Few returned in the evening after the SP and the CRPF companies landed in the village. On 27th morning, about five thousand Dalit and tribal Christians allegedly in collusion with the Maoists surged ahead to retaliate the destruction of Church and property. They were armed with axes, spears and fire arms and burnt down nearly 118 houses of the Odia Sahi and were marching towards the market to burn down shops.⁹ When police tried to break their strength by shooting in the air, two Panas and one unidentified youth were shot dead. A young boy was injured in his leg. When more rounds were fired, the mob fled to the forests at the western side of their street. Dalit women said that they too fled to the jungle due to the ferocity of violent attack. Even, Odia communities also escaped to a different jungle at the South side of their street (see village map).

When police arranged relief camps, women returned first. Both men women had to hide in the jungles for three to four days without food and water. Three FIRs were filed by each community against a total of 80 people from all sides with regard to the destruction of houses, shops and the Church property. The story of conflict in Bamunigaon began on 24th December and ended on 27th December, 2007. Over these four days, fragile relations between Odias and Panas collapsed. And it could not be revived until the end of 2010.

⁸Kanungo (2008: 19) also states that the VHP's Brahminical Hinduism excludes festivals of Dalits and Christians.

⁹ Kanungo (2008: 18) states that Christians retaliated for the first time but the subsequent violence of 2008 sidelined everything. However, a few Odia Sahi people told us that Maoists helped Panas in retaliation.

3 Dialogue in passive mode

The disputes in Bamunigaon would have easily travelled into a lawyer's paradise, if the communities had not taken up 'direct action' to settle their own disputes under the Anchalik Shanti Committee (regional peace committee) in 2009. Before this happened, peace meetings were conducted by the Revenue Divisional Commissioner (RDC), a senior IAS officer, in the first week of January 2008. About five meetings were held under the district administration. The RDC chaired the first meeting and asked the two disputant parties to nominate 5 members each in the peace committee. These meetings happened near the porch of the police station (see the map). The RDC spoke how development and peace were affected by riots of 2007. He also spoke of 'Bhaichara' in the village. But his speech did not cut much ice in the meeting where disputant parties aggressively threw accusations against each other. It led to more acrimony. Communities did not confess mistakes committed by each which led to riots in 2007. It was like a continuation of war in dialogue rather than dialogue to resolve a war.

3.1 Dialogue and Direct Action

A new strategy was conceived by the two organic intellectuals of religious communities.¹⁰ As per their plan, on 29 December 2010 separate Sahi (ward) Sabhas were held and they chose 10 members each to represent in the Regional Peace Committee. In both the Sabhas, communities decided to follow decisions taken by their nominees. On 30th December 2010, villagers from neighbouring Panchayats met in the college ground (see the map). In this meeting, Karmapat Majhi was nominated as the President and Narendra Mohanty as the Secretary. Being neutral to this dispute, Karmapat Majhi, a tribal leader from the Saramuli Gram Panchayat, was chosen as their new moderator. Narendra Mohanty is the state convener of INSAF and the founder of the Vanavasi Suraksha Parishad, Kandhamal.

There was no help from the government and the NGOs for this dialogue to happen. Villagers themselves arranged funds for the meeting from their own contributions. However, the NGO 'Solidarity for Developing Communities' (SFDC) with its head office in Brahampur helped in providing transport for participants from neighbouring villages. Local NGOs also claimed to have given small contributions. But members were told to reveal their heart-felt feelings: 'Hrudaya Kholi Alochana Kariba' (Let us open up our hearts in discussion). Majhi asked few basic questions to ponder while narrating their Ashanti (unrest). Why did not caste discrimination lead to violent forms before? How did it promote violence now? The Hindus replied that they did not anticipate the magnitude of violence. They thought that they should keep Jati and Dharma on the top. It led to showing off their superiority complex and domination over Christians. Their Ego led them to be losers in life. Panas responded by saying that though they did not believe in discrimination, they resented 'Odia' domination and became revengeful which is why violence happened. Their mistake lies in taking revenge and retribution. Then Majhi asked them: what do you want now? Both Hindus and Christians stood up and collectively vouched for peace. 'Why peace now?', asked Majhi. Both representatives stood up and stated that due to misunderstanding between groups, they lost property, social prestige, gained more suffering and harassment in the court cases. So they wanted peace. Majhi moderated 'Tarka-Bitarka' between communities. Both groups decided to drop branding each other as pro-RSS or pro-Maoist. They painfully recalled a local saying:

¹⁰ Initially the need for dialogue was felt and articulated by Chitra Sen Patra from the Odia Sahi and R K Baliarsingh from the Pana Sahi. Both are civil contractors. Patra is also a farmer but Baliarsingh worked for a NGO.

‘Jiya ku Golia Pani Suahae’ (earthworm thrives in muddy water).¹¹ Both Maoists and the RSS are like ‘earthworms’ worth avoiding.

This meeting chaired by Majhi decided to set up two separate committees at the regional and local levels. Altogether 32 members from local and neighbouring Panchayats were selected to form the Regional Peace Committee. The regional committee would look into disputes and maintain peace in the ‘region’ under the Bamunigaon police station. Another ten members from the village were chosen from both Sahis in the local peace committee which would settle disputes locally. Chitra Sen Patra from the Odia Sahi and Kailash Nayak from the Pana Sahi were chosen respectively as the President and the Secretary of both committees. These two are organic intellectuals of the Sahi Sabhas.

In December 2010 the local peace committee decided that they would celebrate each festival within the premises of temple or Church or village streets. They would not hold these functions on the main road. The celebration of festivals on the main road was responsible for the riots in 2007. The Dalit Christians also decided that beef cutting and sale should not be displayed in an open space. They would transact cutting animal meat and sale from inside a house in the Pana Sahi only. The Odias recount a local saying, “Nija Ichha Re Khaiba, Para Ichcha Re Pindhiba” (Eat according to one’s wish, dress according to other’s wish).¹² This local saying was brought into fore while reconciling with food habits of each other. They regret that they were provoked by the external elements. Both communities compromised with their exhibitionist stances. It is interesting to note that Dalit Christians also regretted for being revengeful and gave up ‘open’ spaces for festival celebration, beef-cutting and sale.

Immediately thereafter, the local peace Committee met the lawyers from the RSS and Church to withdraw respective cases. To their surprise, lawyers told them that cases could not be settled out-of-court but advised them to do the following. During the subsequent witness depositions, they should say that they did not see how violence happened. On 19th January 2011, the committee met in the cooperative society’s ground and decided that each community would spend money separately or jointly on the transport, food and lodging while visiting Daringibadi JMFC or the District court in Phulbani.¹³ The NGO SFDC also provided some financial assistance for transportation during their court visits. A new kind of solidarity emerged due to the witness deposition process. They used to cook and eat food together during each visit and depose contrary evidences in the courts. Such intimate interactions were unheard before in the region. On 26th March 2012, all cases were closed due to the lack of evidences.

4 Anomaly between Secular State and Secularisation

As ‘the ant takes on the elephant’, so also a small story in Kandhamal confronts the big picture of Indian constitution. A social imaginary of the ordinary people may challenge high reason of intellectuals. There are anomalies between the constitutional secularism and the process of secularisation emerging from a case study of communities. Also, the legal path followed by the secular state and a dialogue path followed by communities are at variance with each other. It must be admitted that communities in this case study moved towards dialogue due to two kinds of pressure. A ‘reasonable’ enforcement of law, notwithstanding the slippery nature of legal outcomes, put pressure on the communities from above. So also the loss of market, livelihood and social life put pressure on the communities from below.

¹¹ In Odia there is a saying: Kankada-ku Golia Pani Suhae (crab thrives in muddy water).

¹² Personal interview with S.R. Sahu, Secretary of the Vignaraj Banika Sangha, businessman and 51 years old.

¹³ The Resolution of Anchalika Shanti Committteee Baithaka, dated 19.01.2011.

Gandhiji used to claim that adversity is the mother of progress. Faced with adversities, villagers of Bamunigaon look for ‘peace and development’.

4.1 Towards political society

Dialogue helps subaltern communities to form political society. If political society is the hope for subaltern communities, it comes into existence at the point of intersections with civil society. It works against civil society’s legal mind-set and yet works for ‘negotiation’ through dialogue with aids from civil society. Recently, Partha Chatterjee argues that political society is formed by communities trying to better their lives through a strategy of negotiation while civil society celebrates a legal mind-set (Chatterjee 2004: 27–78). Chatterjee’s argument is shared by Ashish Nandy and Gyan Pandey.¹⁴ Civil society organisations seek ‘state alone’ and demand a legal path to settle religious conflicts. Conversely, ‘anti-state’/ ‘anti-civil society’ theorists try to argue that ‘communities alone’ may settle disputes and bring about reconciliation. While the former action may bring some dignity/justice to victims, it has failed to bring about lasting peace. It has not prevented religious disputes growing in India. Similarly, the latter action may settle religious disputes and bring about lasting peace in a locality but it cannot even bring about reconciliation in a district. We thus need to explore a middle ground theory which may include a variety of agencies under a new political society or the state++ (=state+ civil society+ community) to settle growing religious disputes.

True, this dialogue is about ‘negotiation’ initiated by communities including subalterns for peace and development. The story of the successful dialogue in Bamunigaon is initiated by religious communities existing outside the pale of civil society which celebrates law as a measure of reconciliation. Almost all NGOs, Church and Hindutva organisations still pursue justice through law. However, communities in Bamunigaon decided to break free from this legal mindset and evolved a strategy of negotiation with each other for peace. Their initiative to form peace committees and look for a strategy of negotiation sans law could be seen as the making of political society *a la* Chatterjee. However, the aid from the SFDC, a foreign funded NGO, was no less significant in arrangement of funds and transport. Thus, civil society organisations may also act as ‘catalyst’ in reconciliation (Oommen 2008: 16-17). ‘Acting without state’ or ‘anti-civil society’ positions make significant sense but are not very accurate in the actual field of a successful dialogue.

4.2 The revival of good sense

In addition, *dialogue helps communities to reactivate their social imaginary from which they get alienated by following a legal strategy for justice induced by the secular state.* So communities give up the time-consuming process of remedial justice pursued by the state. In the remedial justice usually sought through a court of law, one seeks among others justice through the punishment of criminals. As communities are involved in committing crimes, the process of delivery of remedial justice is laborious, time-consuming and costly. As a result, both the groups seek restorative justice by using their respective social imaginary. In restorative justice, communities may seek justice through a restoration of pre-existing non-violent life.¹⁵ But when the restoration takes place, life is restored in a higher form. Their ‘good sense’ in the pre-existing social imaginary gets triggered up and helps in the restoration

¹⁴For a skeptical view of ‘anti-state stance’ of Nandy and Pandey, see S Kaviraj (2011:194).

¹⁵For a distinction between remedial/retributive and restorative justice, see Janine N Clark (2008: 331-350).

of life in a new form.¹⁶ There are at least four forms of good sense emerging from this dialogue.

First, they stopped their opposition to beef-eating by invoking elements in their social imaginary. As per a pre-existing belief, food must be eaten according to one's own wish. Second, dialogue can revive good senses of social imaginary that contributed to secularisation before. Caste Hindus recall that they gave up certain superiority complexes and welcomed Dalits to their marriage functions and allowed them to sit on the porches of their houses, before the VHP vitiated their 'Bhaichara'. Third, they jointly and painfully recall their shared social imaginary that Maoists and the RSS are like 'crabs who muddy their relations' and decide to dodge these organisations. Finally, faced with many adversities, their common 'search for peace and development' begins.

4.3 Dialogue as Yajna

Then again, *politics of self-purification is another feature of dialogue. Dialogue can induce communities to meditate on self-criticism. Without dialogue, they would be only critical of each other. That is how dialogue can contribute to a new friendship.* Any patronising attitude in friendship is harmful to its growth, whereas a self-critical attitude can take friendship to a newer height. Secularisation process may be seen as a self-critical perspective of friendship, whereas appeasements can ruin a friend/community's future progress. Communities may dialogue by scrutinising each other closely. They criticise themselves while accusing the Other. They subject themselves what B R Ambedkar would call 'Yajna' (not to be confused with Hindutva Yajna in Kandhamal).¹⁷ Ambedkar's self-purification actually means 'self-criticism'.

In the present story, the Odia communities criticised themselves for showing off caste superiority, religious superiority and cultural superiority in food and other things. They criticised their own exhibitionism. They could recall friendship and fellow-feeling with lower caste Panas from the days of social plays and self-help group that reduced caste-based untouchability. This helped them ease their Ashanti that inflicted them during 2003-2010. Political secularism must introspect much like our communities here. An introspective politics would do a world of wonders to secular polity. It must begin its journey in Ambedkar's Yajna.

4.4 The emergence of intersectionality of disputes

Besides, *when dialogue takes place at the intersection of both inter- and intra-religious disputes, it is capable of producing reconciliation. The secular society/state/political society must adopt a similar strategy.*¹⁸ Two or more paths of criticism of domination must intersect

¹⁶Following Gramsci, positive aspects of common sense could be called 'good sense' which has potential to become a new philosophy under certain historical conditions. Gramsci argues that good sense refers to a new philosophy. However, Gramsci also believes that a beginning of new politics/philosophy may be initiated by the popular through their 'good sense' (Coben, n.d.).

¹⁷In the course of his Presidential Address outlining the philosophy of the Mahad Satyagraha in a Conference held in Amravati (November, 1927), Ambedkar makes a distinction between 'Satyagraha' and 'Yajna'. While Satyagraha is like a war/Yuddha for human rights denied to Untouchables, 'Yajna' is meant to purify their 'own vices/complexes' which pin them down as Untouchables. By implication, Satyagraha alone is not enough (Yadav 2014: 89).

¹⁸This aspect is adopted from Rajeev Bhargava's theory of Indian secularism which essentially aims to curb inter- and intra-religious domination while respecting multiple faiths in India. The paper too believes in Bhargava's idea of 'respectful transformation of religions' by the state (2010:91& 2013).

for the progress of secularism. Today, Hindu fundamentalism tries to disconnect political secularism from social imaginary of the popular by simply highlighting inter-religious disputes such as Suddhi/conversion. Secular thinking tries reversing this argument by highlighting intra-religious domination within Hindus only. The current debate on ‘Ghar Wapsi’ in secular thinking seems to have fallen for a trap laid by Hindu fundamentalism. True, conversion-Suddhi debate may confuse and divert society’s attention from reforming caste and gender discrimination sanctioned by religion. But it is also necessary to recognise domination of one religion over another in the present debate. However, these intra- and inter-religious disputes intersect in real life. At the site of their ‘Sangam’ (confluence), dialogue may take place.

The present dialogue addresses intersection between caste and religion but leaves out intersection between caste, gender and religion. There is no woman member in the peace committee and therefore women practising discriminations in Bamunigaon are not part of this dialogue process. Despite its limitations, dialogue has helped in secularisation process in the village. However, under the state++ pursuing a dialogical strategy, all these limitations could possibly be tackled better.

4.5 From a simple to complex differential sacrifice

Furthermore, *agency-based dialogue must involve a strategy of complex differential sacrifice as it needs to negotiate intersections of inter- and intra-domination in India.* Following Charles Taylor, it could be said that the constitution of India follows a ‘reform master narrative’ to promote secularism (Taylor 2007: 773-776). The Constitution of India proposes to reform religious communities to build political secularism further.

At the time of adoption on 26th January 1950, only majority religion was expected to reform caste domination in public spaces (vide. Articles 15.4, 16.4, 17, 25, 25.2.B) and safeguard minority rights to culture (vide Art. 30. A). This reform narrative is based on a strategy of simple differential sacrifice.¹⁹ Only Hindu community was expected to sacrifice forms of domination over its own members and over ‘other’ communities.²⁰ This model is akin to a family norm where the parents are expected to make sacrifices for the sake of securing a better future for children and for their own well-being. Its flaws were soon realised and rectified in the Constitutional Order (CO) issued by the President in August 1950. Sikhism was included in its reform narrative. In 1990, it was further rectified by adding Buddhism. But the CO still excludes Muslims and Christians from its reforms. It assumes that so-called non-Indic religions are homogenous and egalitarians and are thus beyond its ‘reform master narrative’. If it were so, why should subaltern castes from Muslims and Christians still demand differential treatment by the secular state?²¹

¹⁹In a personal conversation, M S S Pandian drew our attention (Patnaik 2014a: 22-24) to a notion of differential sacrifice which means groups bear the differential costs of higher law-making so that its pay-offs in lower law-making track offsets the loss suffered under higher law-making track. See Bruce A Ackerman (1988:184-185). This paper is indebted to his terrific proposal but uses his strategy quite differently.

²⁰ Bhargava justifies the constitutional strategy of reforming Hinduism ‘much more’ than other religions on the grounds of ‘differential treatment of religions’ (Bhargava 2010: 89-90). He also argues that the state may ‘reform caste ridden Hinduism much more’ (2010: 89). Moreover, the Hindu right ironically defends existing constitutional positions in order to offer welfare facilities as ‘allurement’ for its Ghar Wapsi programme. Time has come to rethink.

²¹See especially the petition of Muslim Khatik community (scavenger) for ‘scrapping’ of the Constitutional Order 1950 and also the demand of Dalit Christians for ‘amendment’ of the same order in Bosco, Mohammed and others (2010: 18-25 and 113-118). This confused reaction is possibly an effect of alienation from political secularism enshrined in the Indian constitution.

More ever, as Gandhiji forewarns, the secular state should not patronise ‘missionary activities’ as during the colonial period so that ‘other’ religious communities would not feel alienated from secularism (Gandhi 1999, vol. 96: 238–239). Ivan Illich, a Catholic priest, too makes a similar argument against ‘corrupted Christianity’ that treat neighbouring religions as ‘enemies’ and hence try to ‘civilise’ them (Taylor 2007:742). As India is a multi-religious society, reformation of ‘corrupted religions’ (including corrupted Hinduism) is a very important task.²² But, this critical reform is absent in India’s constitutional law.

A genuine reconciliation brought about by agency-based dialogue may differ with a politically correct secular thinking such as above. *An agentic dialogue may thus negotiate intersectionality of power relations effectively and offer many varieties of reforms/sacrifices.* We suggest that a story of complex differential sacrifice is emerging in our case study. This new strategy assumes that all religious communities must mutually sacrifice for political secularism but Hindus being the majority may have to sacrifice more than Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and other minorities. *The present model of dialogue from Kandhamal rejects that Hindus alone will have to sacrifice for secularisation.* For political secularism to survive in India, it needs to anchor all religions in non-utilitarian roots. If it becomes a maximalist doctrine for all religions, then its project of secularisation of conservative social practices within and outside each religion is doomed (Patnaik, 2011).

In our story, all religious communities made some sacrifices. Dalit Christians made a few important sacrifices. So also Hindu Savarna castes that probably made more number of sacrifices. Reconciliation develops when all communities mutually sacrifice certain things they usually possess or are engaged with.²³ Only then it does *not* matter if the majority religion makes more sacrifices than minorities.

5 Conclusions

As Ambedkar forewarns, if democracy follows a policy of appeasement rather than a policy of settlement of the popular grievances, it would produce ‘Hitlers’ within the religious zelites.²⁴ Then, political secularism would face a major political crisis. *Dialogue must thus ask communities to offer mutual sacrifices and reform their relations within or outside in order to help secularism grow and agency based dialogue must curb the emergence of Hitlers.* The secularisation process in Kandhamal is thus envisaged on a model of sacrifice which goes beyond the underlying principles of constitutional secularism in India. Can political secularism renew a pledge to social imaginary of people and reform its ‘reform master narrative’? Can it learn lessons from Kandhamal’s secularisation and Ambedkar’s Yajna? Can the secular state pursue a twin strategy of dialogue/law to deliver justice so that what is witnessed in a locality can be universalised? Without the secular state’s pro-active role in a sustained dialogue, communities may still bring about reconciliation in a local

²² The periodic rise of ‘confessional religion’ in each religious community showing off supremacist tendencies has corrupted each religion. It is necessary that the secular state builds safeguards against the rise of ‘confessional religion’.

Today, the Pentecostal Churches and the VHP represent confessional religion as they, for example, assume that tribal religion is animistic, inferior and is to be ‘civilised’. Both must be restrained by political secularism. See Mrinal Miri’s reflection (2015) on tribal religion in the conversion debate.

²³The Allahabad High Court’s judgment on the Ayodhya dispute (2010) also articulates this moral vision of mutual sacrifice. See, Patnaik and Mudiam (2014).

²⁴Ambedkar was deeply worried about Congress party’s appeasement of Muslims and argued clearly that it would produce Hitlers among Muslim elites which, through a reflex impulse, would lead to the emergence of Hitlers among Hindu elites. This is a grave danger to secular democracy. B. R. Ambedkar (2014: 268-270), ‘Pakistan or The Partition of India’, in his Writings and Speeches, Vol. 8.

setting. But it would be unfair to expect ‘communities alone’ to settle their ‘Ashanti’ affecting about 600 villages across the district of Kandhamal during 2007-08. If the secular state courageously engages ‘contending communities’ in dialogue/law, the Indian nation may witness a new form of reconciliation and justice.

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