

# Market Drayton Churches Together: Prayer for Persecuted Christians - 20 Feb. 2019

## India

### 27 Jan. India Cracks Top 10-Why the Country Has 'No Room' for Christians - Open Doors USA

[opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/india-cracks-top-10-no-room-christians-persecution](http://opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/india-cracks-top-10-no-room-christians-persecution)

*What's happening to Christians in the world's second most populous country and why?*

On the afternoon of June 20, 2018, five Christian women (aged 20 to 35) were beaten and abducted from their Christian school while they performed a street play in the Eastern India state of Jharkhand. A day after they were released (the attackers threatened to kill them if they went to the police), the women reported the assault to authorities. It was soon confirmed that all five women had been gang-raped. The attack was also allegedly filmed on cell phones.

On January 20, 2018, the body of Pastor Gideon Periyaswamy in Adaiyalachery (Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu) was found hung from the thatched roof of his house, a week after he complained to police about opposition from radical Hindus.

These horrific attacks give us a glimpse into what the 65 million Christians in India are facing in this land of 1.3 billion people. The country now ranks as the 10th most dangerous country on the 2019 World Watch List—up from No. 11 in 2018 and No. 15 in 2017.

#### *12,000+ Christians Attacked in India*

Since 2015, the world's second-most populous country has risen 11 spots due to increasing pressure and violence against Christians. Research for Open Doors' World Watch List shows that in 2018, more than 12,000 Christians were attacked. But this number is only the tip of the iceberg, researchers say, as increasing numbers of persecution acts go unreported.

Nevertheless, India's World Watch List violence "score" for violence is extreme, rising from 14.4 in 2018 to 15.2 in 2019. More Christians were killed in India than last year, and the number of churches attacked increased substantially from 34 last year to 98 this year.

Looking at the statistics, it's evident - and undeniable - that Christians in India are and have been for quite some time the targets of Christian-based torture, persecution, and oppression at the hands of their fellow countrymen.

#### *Being a Christian in India in 2019*

What is life and society looks like for our Indian brothers and sisters as Hindu radicals continue to target and attack non-Hindus?

- The growth of the church in India presents many needs, especially related to discipleship and leadership development. The systematic targeting of the church by radical Hindus also brings to surface other needs like preparing the church to respond positively to the onslaught of persecution and a need for greater unity and cooperation between the various denominations.
- Hindus see Christians as a threat to the nation (because of their growth in numbers and their strong presence in the tribal regions). The number of violent incidents against Christians has gone up dramatically since May 2014, when the BJP political party took power and their candidate, Narendra Modi, became India's prime minister. Because the government refuses to take proper action, Hindu radicals feel they can attack Christians with seemingly little to no consequence.

- Discrimination is very common in India, finding its roots in the age-old caste system. The caste system affects Christians all over India because most converts to Christianity come from the lower castes or from the Dalits (the "untouchable" caste).
- Christian non-government organizations (NGOs) are targeted for detailed interrogation by various government departments (such as the income tax office and intelligence bureaus) in attempts to find faults and accuse them of being involved in anti-national activity (especially concerning conversions to Christianity).
- There is a significant increase in the number of local pro-Hindu political groups and youth wings, plus an increased number of open meetings and camps. Young people are educated in militant nationalism and are encouraged to display hatred towards other religions.
- Throughout India, there is an increasing emphasis on Hinduism in schools, and Hinduization of tribal people.

#### *The Denial Game*

And yet, India's high-ranking officials deny that persecution is happening. The country's national government has sometimes made overtures about protecting religious freedom but has often turned a blind eye to the reality of violence and pressure against the Christian community.

In 2014, when India Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office, he publically denied that any form of Christian persecution exists, asserting in an interview on the CNN-like TV news show "Aap Ki Adalat" that no church has been burnt anywhere in the country. He denied having knowledge of "any such incident."

India's Foreign Affairs Ministry of Government has also refuted all the charges included in a report from the U.S. Commission of Religious Freedom. The report focused on the persecution of religious minorities in India by Hindu fundamentalist forces.

Officials backed Modi, saying, "We have no cognizance of their report."

"Everyone already knows how the churches are being attacked and demolished on almost an everyday basis in India," says an Open Doors representative. "[Modi's denial] clearly shows how the head of the biggest democratic nation has been cleverly misleading the world."

#### *What's Driving Persecution in India? 8 Things to Know*

- The increase in persecution is a direct result of the ongoing Hindunization of India or Hindu nationalism - essentially, the belief that India must be a Hindu nation, and any other religion is not Indian. Christianity, as a result, has been a key target of this new nationalism. This radical nationalism has been spurred on by the political situation in India, which saw the election of a nationalist government in 2014. The reasons for increased persecution are many:
- The election of Prime Minister Modi in 2014 was seen by many observers as a tacit acceptance of Hindu nationalism. If anything, Mr. Modi's tolerance of religious extremism has only increased since his election victory.
- There have been recent calls for the Modi government to address Christian persecution, but those calls have gone unanswered. Of particular concern are allegations that Hindu nationalists are acting in collusion with some local governments and police forces.

**Dates of next meetings: Wednesdays 20 Mar, 17 Apr, 15 May & 19 June.**

- In early 2017, Yogi Adityanath was elected chief minister of India's most populous state (out of 29 states), Uttar Pradesh. Adityanath is widely known as a Hindu nationalist who has advocated for violence in the name of Hinduism and insists that India is distinctly Hindu. He's particularly known for stoking violence against Muslims.
- Leaders have vowed to rid the country of Christians and Muslims by 2021. The leader of Dharam Jagran Samiti - a group focusing on activism against religious conversion and working for the reconversion of Muslims and Christians to Hinduism - made international headlines in December 2014 in a public address in the Indian city of Agra (home to the Taj Mahal). The group's leader, Rajeshwar Singh, declared, "Our target is to make India a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation) by 2021. The Muslims and Christians don't have any right to stay here. So they would either be converted to Hinduism or forced to run away from here."
- To achieve their prime agenda, the government is systematically misusing the anti-conversion laws, religious laws, administration, and police to deprive freedom of religion to Christians. Brutal violence is often inflicted on Christian believers by Hindu Extremists, who eventually go unpunished because they have complete protection by the government. As a result, we continue to see a constant rise in Christian persecution.
- Christian converts from a Hindu background bear the brunt of the persecution in India. These believers face harassment on an almost daily basis and are constantly under pressure to return to Hinduism. They are often physically assaulted, hospitalized and sometimes even killed. They live mostly in the countryside, where they face societal pressure not only from family, friends, community members and local Hindu priests, but also from radical Hindus.
- Even Christian charities that are non-evangelistic in nature are having trouble surviving the current climate in India, where their ability to receive international funding is dependent on government approval. For instance, in 2017, Compassion International was forced to close its offices.
- Since the second half of 2014, Hindu radicals launched a homecoming campaign (also known as Ghar Wapsi), designed to lure Muslims and Christians back to the Hindu fold. Several campaigns have been held in which hundreds of people returned to Hinduism. The Ghar Wapsi campaign reached its peak in 2015 and early 2016.
- Recent political events suggest change isn't in the near future. In the summer of 2017, a new national president was elected. President Ram Nath Kovind has been described by one church planter in an interview with Christianity Today as having "no room for Christians." Additionally, online polling of Indian readers suggests that Prime Minister Modi's popularity is in no danger of waning.

### 15 Feb. Christians in India's Uttar Pradesh State Endure Rising Number of Persecution Incidents | ICC

[persecution.org/2019/02/15/christians-indias-uttar-pradesh-state-endure-rising-number-persecution-incidents](http://persecution.org/2019/02/15/christians-indias-uttar-pradesh-state-endure-rising-number-persecution-incidents)

Christians living in India's Uttar Pradesh state have reported an increased number of persecution incidents in the past two months. In 2018, International Christian Concern (ICC) verified 114 incidents of persecution against Christians in Uttar Pradesh, making it the most persecuted state in India. That trend seems to have continued into the new year.

On February 7, 50 Christians gathered for a prayer meeting were brutally attacked by religious extremists in Chattar village,

located in the Sultanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. As a result, six Christians were seriously injured and rushed to the Sultanpur hospital, nearly 20 miles from Chattar village.

According to Pastor Omprakash, a mob of 25 suspected Bajrang Dal activists forced themselves into the Christian home where the Christians had gathered for a special prayer meeting. "We were all frightened as they came in with wooden clubs and started beating everyone in the congregation," Pastor Omprakash told ICC. "I alerted the congregation as I sensed the trouble and told the congregation not to retaliate."

"Soon the blood started spilling over from the injuries sustained in the attack," Pastor Omprakash added. "There was no way that we could avoid this brutality. However, I was comforted by the scriptures as I contemplated about the suffering during end times."

On February 3, only days before the attack on the Christian community in Chattar, police disrupted a worship service in the Jaunpur district of Uttar Pradesh where over 400 Christians had gathered.

"We were halfway through the service, at around noon, when the police reached the church and told us that we cannot continue," Pastor Bharat Massih, head pastor of Pavitra Parmeshwar Yesu Dham, told ICC. "They asked if I had permission to run the church. They insisted that I go to the police station. However, I refused to go to the police station because a local BJP leader, Mr. Tiwary, has influence over the police."

"We continued the worship service with several interruptions by the police and had to conclude the service and meet the district level police," Pastor Massih continued. "I showed them all the papers I had."

"I have been serving the Lord as a pastor for 18 years in this place," Pastor Massih told ICC. In those 18 years, Pastor Massih reports his ministry had never been harassed by local police. "The first time I had to close my church due to the police harassment about permission was in January of this year. I now have a High Court interim order to run the church."

On February 14, also in the Jaunpur district, a local revenue department with police similarly harassed Pastor Nanhelal in Rakhva village on the same issue of requiring permission to run a church.

Uttar Pradesh continues to be a difficult place for Christians trying to practice their faith. In January alone, ICC has documented 18 incidents of persecution.

### 5 Feb. Hindu Extremists Pressure Convert to File False Charge against Pastor in India, Sources Say - Morningstar News

[morningstarnews.org/2019/02/hindu-extremists-pressure-convert-to-file-false-charge-against-pastor-in-india-sources-say](http://morningstarnews.org/2019/02/hindu-extremists-pressure-convert-to-file-false-charge-against-pastor-in-india-sources-say)

A pastor is facing criminal charges in northern India even though the complainant later denied allegations against the church leader of luring him to convert, sources said.

Police in Rupaidiha village, Uttar Pradesh state on Jan. 28 arrested 40-year-old pastor Dharmendra Singh on a charge of "alluring to convert" and two related charges – outraging religious feelings and promoting enmity. He was released on bail on Jan. 31.

Pastor Singh denied all charges against him, saying members of the Hindu extremist Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal fabricated a story and pressured a new Christian, Ramesh Gautam, to file a false complaint against him. Gautam said in court on Jan. 30 that the allegations were false, the pastor said.

“He witnessed that his faith is his own choice and nobody has forced him or his family to believe in Jesus,” Pastor Singh told Morning Star News. ““We have not converted by allurements but have become worshippers of Jesus,” said Ramesh in the courtroom.”

Pastor Singh leads a church in Nepalganj, Nepal, where he resides just across the India-Nepal border, but he regularly visits the Indian village of Rupaidiha, Bahraich District, to lead the new fellowship there where Gautam worships.

Gautam and other members of his family put their faith in Christ about six months ago after the pastor had prayed for his wife, who is from Nepal, and she was healed, he said.

“Ramesh, his wife and other members of his family believed and started to attend church regularly,” Pastor Singh said. “The entire village began to trouble the Gautam family and made things difficult for them.”

In spite of pressures, Gautam’s wife stood firm before villagers and defended their new-found faith, he said.

The pastor said he was grateful to God for the hardships he and his family have endured from his arrest.

“It is my privilege to suffer for Christ,” he said, adding that he was able to share the message of the saving grace of Christ with a group of 150 prisoners his first day of incarceration.

Later he shared the gospel with smaller groups of prisoners, as he did each day until his release, he said.

“The message of Christ was proclaimed with power amongst the prisoners, and I am delighted that the name of Christ was heard by all 1,300 prisoners,” Pastor Singh said. “I saw that their spirits were crushed, and they had deep loneliness in them.”

Some of the prisoners were convicted murderers and had killed as many as 22 people, and he prayed with and embraced many of them, feeling an anointing and the power of God, he said.

“I am delighted to have gone to the prison and been used by God,” he said. “Now that I have seen them and have been there, I can pray for them with much conviction and burden.”

A native of Delhi who converted to Christianity from Hinduism, the pastor moved to Nepal five years ago and lives there with this wife and three children. He runs a tailoring training center in Nepalganj with his wife and also has been ministering at the Prem Sewa Clinic, a hospital in Rupaidiha, for nearly two years.

Indian and Nepalese nationals may cross the border without restrictions, though there is a customs checkpoint for goods and for those from other countries.

India this year cracked the top 10 on Christian support organization Open Doors’ 2019 World Watch List of countries where Christians experience the most persecution, ranking 10th, up from 11th the previous year.

## **12 Feb. 'Situation for India's religious minorities is at tipping point' – report - World Watch Monitor**

[worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/02/situation-for-indias-religious-minorities-is-at-tipping-point-report](http://worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/02/situation-for-indias-religious-minorities-is-at-tipping-point-report)

A report by a religious freedom watchdog shows a dramatic increase in the number of attacks on Christians and Muslims in India in the last four years and “the situation ... is at a tipping point”.

The number of reported incidents in the first three months of 2018 was greater than the total number of attacks in the whole of the year 2014, according to the report “We’re Indians Too” by Open Doors.

This year India entered for the first time the top 10 of the same organisation’s World Watch List, an index of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian.

The report’s incident analysis shows that since Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014, the number of violent acts against Christians, Muslims and tribal Dalits (members of the India’s lowest caste) have increased.

Most incidents were reported in the Indian states of Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, followed by Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand.

The report identifies four “drivers” of persecution: “Hindutva ideology, Anti-conversion laws, the misuse of PESA law [The Panchayatiraj Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, 1996] and, for many, the caste system combine to create a toxic environment where violence and discrimination is an everyday reality for many of India’s religious minorities,” the report says, calling on decision makers to “act immediately to avoid catastrophe for India’s beleaguered religious minority communities”.

Also, according to the Open Doors report, although outside the scope of analyzed incidents, “it is deeply concerning that one reporting agency on the ground documented 775 incidents against Christians in 2018, including 14 murders. 775 incidents in 2018 represents the religious persecution of 50,819 unique people; 18,956 of whom were men; 18,858 of whom were women; and 12,790 of whom were children. These figures represent only one reporting agency’s findings. Given that no single organization captures the totality of religious freedom violations, these figures only demonstrate the need for proper documentation and monitoring of an escalating environment of religious-based violence.”

“India... struggles with growing incidents of local intolerance and violence against minorities. Security & justice for all must be guaranteed by state authorities,” Jan Figel, EU Envoy for freedom of religion or belief outside the EU, tweeted on 8 February.

One day earlier, on 7 February, six Indian Christians were injured when they were attacked by Hindu militants in one of their homes, CSW reports.

The group of about 40 people was meeting for prayer at the home of pastor Ranjit in Chapar village, Sultanpur District in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, when 25 Hindu militants attacked.

They raided the house, damaged Bibles and other property, and verbally and physically abused the Christians, seriously injuring six of them.

The police refused to open investigations until those injured had seen a doctor for a medical assessment.

Before the incident the attackers had threatened to kill the Christians if they continued holding their prayer meetings, a local source told CSW.

“Uttar Pradesh seems to have thrown away both democracy and the Indian constitution in the state sponsored or condoned violence against religious minorities,” John Dayal, a rights activist and writer in India told CSW.

“The state has seen one hundred or more cases of violence against Christians at prayer meetings or in churches and institutions. Portents and remonstrations with the chief minister over the past twelve months have failed to end the impunity. Police are either complicit or unconcerned. We fear a worsening of the situation in the next two months leading to the general elections.”

## Other Countries

### Pakistan:

**14 Feb. Where is Asia Bibi? A mystery surrounds about her whereabouts. Pakistan Christian News**

[pakistanchristianpost.com/editorial-details/137](http://pakistanchristianpost.com/editorial-details/137)

After Asia Bibi review petition in Supreme Court of Pakistan, media reported that she is in Canada with her daughters but then we witnessed news items in world press that she is in Karachi and kept in a locked room with her husband during day and only allowed to make phone calls to her daughters in Canada in evening. It seems mysterious that why she is still under locked room and who are preventing her to go abroad after her acquittal?

Cont/...

**9 Feb. Falsely accused Zafar Bhatti awaits appeal of life sentence for blasphemy**

[britishpakistanichristians.org/blog/falsely-accused-zafar-bhatti-awaits-appeal-of-life-sentence-for-blasphemy](http://britishpakistanichristians.org/blog/falsely-accused-zafar-bhatti-awaits-appeal-of-life-sentence-for-blasphemy)

The appeal of Zafar Bhatti's life sentence for blasphemy will go to the High Court on 12th of February, during which we hope his conviction will finally be overturned. An early court found there was no evidence to support the charges and reduced the previous death sentence, however they continued to incarcerate an innocent man. His wife has suffered isolation, and abuse in the community.

Cont/..

### Nigeria:

**As Nigerians go to the polls, will the election bring security for Christians? - Open Doors UK & Ireland**

[opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/nigeria-190215](http://opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/nigeria-190215)

**Nigeria election postponed hours before polls due to open after offices set on fire | The Independent**

[independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/nigeria-presidential-election-postponed-commission-muhammadu-buhari-atiku-abubakar-a8782176.html](http://independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/nigeria-presidential-election-postponed-commission-muhammadu-buhari-atiku-abubakar-a8782176.html)

**Boko Haram terrorists kill eight hours before Nigeria puts presidential election on hold | Daily Mail Online**

[dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6712187/Boko-Haram-terrorists-kill-eight-hours-Nigeria-puts-presidential-election-hold.html](http://dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6712187/Boko-Haram-terrorists-kill-eight-hours-Nigeria-puts-presidential-election-hold.html)

### Iran:

**31 Jan. Iran: arrests of five female Christian converts | Middle East Concern**

[meconcern.org/2019/01/31/iran-arrests-of-five-female-christian-converts](http://meconcern.org/2019/01/31/iran-arrests-of-five-female-christian-converts)

**1 Feb. Iran: further arrests of Christian converts | Middle East Concern**

[meconcern.org/2019/02/01/iran-further-arrests-of-christian-converts](http://meconcern.org/2019/02/01/iran-further-arrests-of-christian-converts)

**12 Feb. Iran: Pastor and two members of "Church of Iran" arrested in Rasht | Middle East Concern**

[meconcern.org/2019/02/12/iran-pastor-and-two-members-of-church-of-iran-arrested-in-rasht](http://meconcern.org/2019/02/12/iran-pastor-and-two-members-of-church-of-iran-arrested-in-rasht)

**13 Feb. Iran: Arrest and detention of two Christian converts in Tehran | Middle East Concern**

[meconcern.org/2019/02/13/iran-arrest-and-detention-of-two-christian-converts-in-tehran](http://meconcern.org/2019/02/13/iran-arrest-and-detention-of-two-christian-converts-in-tehran)

*The following report is from an unnamed country, but it could easily be about an Iranian woman*

**13 Feb. Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - Valentine's Day: A story of love amid persecution - Open Doors UK & Ireland**

[opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/uk-130219](http://opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/uk-130219)

### China:

**5 Feb. ChinaAid: Government denies imprisoned members of Sichuan church meetings with lawyers**

[chinaaid.org/2019/02/government-denies-imprisoned-members-of.html](http://chinaaid.org/2019/02/government-denies-imprisoned-members-of.html)

**13 Feb. ChinaAid: 'Think Stalin and Hitler, not Mao,'**

[chinaaid.org/2019/02/think-stalin-and-hitler-not-mao.html](http://chinaaid.org/2019/02/think-stalin-and-hitler-not-mao.html)

**15 Feb. ChinaAid: Spouses, child of arrested house church members taken into custody**

[chinaaid.org/2019/02/spouses-child-of-arrested-house-church.html](http://chinaaid.org/2019/02/spouses-child-of-arrested-house-church.html)

**16 Feb. Believer Dies While Running From CCP - Bitter Winter**

[bitterwinter.org/believer-dies-while-running-from-ccp](http://bitterwinter.org/believer-dies-while-running-from-ccp)

**16 Feb. New Innovative Way to Crack Down on Churches - Bitter Winter**

[bitterwinter.org/new-innovative-way-to-crack-down-on-churches](http://bitterwinter.org/new-innovative-way-to-crack-down-on-churches)

**16 Feb. "Cleaning up Gang Crime" Means Crackdown on Faith - Bitter Winter**

[bitterwinter.org/cleaning-up-gang-crime-means-crackdown-on-faith](http://bitterwinter.org/cleaning-up-gang-crime-means-crackdown-on-faith)

### Egypt:

**15 Feb. Book about beheaded Copts offers 'different view of martyrdom' - World Watch Monitor**

[worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/book-about-beheaded-copts-offers-different-view-of-martyrdom](http://worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/book-about-beheaded-copts-offers-different-view-of-martyrdom)

**12 Feb. Modern-Day Paul: 'I Planned to Kill Him; Now I'm Prepared to Die for Jesus' - Open Doors USA**

[opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/modern-day-paul-i-planned-to-kill-him-now-im-prepared-to-die-for-jesus](http://opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/modern-day-paul-i-planned-to-kill-him-now-im-prepared-to-die-for-jesus)

**31 Jan. Kidnapping, Torture in Egypt of Christian Woman from Sudan Highlights Convert Pressures - Morningstar News**

[morningstarnews.org/2019/01/kidnapping-torture-in-egypt-of-christian-woman-from-sudan-highlights-convert-pressures](http://morningstarnews.org/2019/01/kidnapping-torture-in-egypt-of-christian-woman-from-sudan-highlights-convert-pressures)

### Ethiopia:

**7 Feb. Ethnic Somali Christian police man forced to relocate after talking about his faith - World Watch Monitor**

[worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/02/ethiopia-ethnic-somali-christian-police-man-forced-to-relocate-after-talking-about-his-faith](http://worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/02/ethiopia-ethnic-somali-christian-police-man-forced-to-relocate-after-talking-about-his-faith)

Links to the full reports featured on this sheet, along with information about other relevant articles are available on the Market Drayton Churches Together website, linked from the P4PC section as "Recent Reports"

[churchestogether-marketdrayton.org.uk/p4pc](http://churchestogether-marketdrayton.org.uk/p4pc)