

Market Drayton Churches Together: Prayer for Persecuted Christians - 21 Aug. 2019

India

13 Aug - Pray for Kashmir as the region loses special status - Open Doors UK

www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/india-190813

The sudden revoking of Kashmir's protected special status on 5 August has hit headlines around the world, and raises fears that persecution against minorities in the region will increase.

Amongst those vulnerable to escalating hostility are Kashmiri Christians, many of whom are from a Muslim background.

These Christians already face pressure within their local, Muslim-majority communities. But recent developments suggest this may become much worse, as a Hindu nationalistic agenda increases and power dynamics in the region shift.

The newly revoked Article 370 of the Indian Constitution had given special status to the region since 1947, allowing it to have a separate constitution, a state flag and autonomy over the internal administration of the state. This article put the citizens of Kashmir under a separate set of laws, including those relating to citizenship and ownership of property – citizens from other states couldn't buy land or property in Kashmir. The Indian Government say that the special status was always intended to be temporary, but its sudden revoking is likely to have widespread consequences. There are concerns that it will lead to conflict, violence, protests and clashes between opposing groups.

Without Kashmir's special status, religious minorities in India are also increasingly concerned that the government will introduce anti-conversion legislation in the region. Similar laws in seven other states have made it much more difficult to convert from Hinduism to other faiths, and it has become common to persecute Christians through baseless accusations under these laws. India is number 10 on the World Watch List, and persecution is getting worse in the country.

12 Aug - 'If you're not Hindu, you're not Indian' - The rising storm against Christians in India - Open Doors USA

www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/if-youre-not-hindu-youre-not-indian-the-rising-storm-against-christians-in-india

On the evening of March 21, 2018, a young Hindu man, who sculpted at a local temple in Southeast India, climbed the stairs to the rooftop of the home of an elderly woman in her mid-60s and attacked her while she prayed. Chadarajupalli Subbaravamma died that day reading her Bible. Her persecutor later admitted he wanted to kill her because she had left her gods and was now following a "foreign god."

Also last March in a remote village in Andhra Pradesh, India's third-largest state, villagers made boards with messages stating that "foreign religious preaching" was prohibited there.

On January 20, 2018 in Tamil Nadu state, which shares a border with Andhra Pradesh, the body of Pastor Gideon Periyaswamy was found hung from the thatched roof of his house, a week after he complained to police about opposition from radical Hindus.

In northern India on August 5, 2018, 9-year-old Anjali was playing with her friends in Gurdaspur district when three men lured her away with the promise of a guava. The men gang-raped her before strangling her to death with a telephone wire. A local pastor told media that Anjali's parents had recently become Christians, and that they had been repeatedly threatened. He said he believed her murder was used as a

warning to others who might consider changing their religion to Christianity. He also reported that an increasing number of people in that area had been converting to Christianity, stirring up increasing opposition and violent threats.

These attacks give us a glimpse into the threat 65 million Christians in India are facing today in this land of 1.3 billion people. The world's second-most populous country ranks as the 10th most dangerous country for Christians on the 2019 World Watch List—up from No. 11 in 2018 and No. 15 in 2017.

A deadly narrative for Christians in India

According to Open Doors' special report focusing on Christian persecution in India, titled "We're Indians Too," since 2014 persecution incidents against Christians have risen 400 percent. In only the first three months of 2018, more incidents (affecting 10,300 individuals)—including violence, property destruction, forced conversion to Hinduism and false accusations of forceful conversion—were reported than throughout 2014 or 2015. But this number is only the tip of the iceberg, researchers say, as increasing numbers of persecution acts go unreported for fear of the consequences other Christians have encountered.

The rapidly increasing numbers indicate that in 2019, the situation for Christians and other religious minorities in India is at a tipping point.

These escalating numbers stem from a nationalist agenda. Hindu extremist groups have created a deadly narrative: "If you're not Hindu, you're not Indian." "True Indians" are defined by their ability to call India both their father land and their holy land.

As a result, India's religious minorities, including Christians and Muslims, are considered a threat to India's unity because, the ideology purports, their love and allegiance lie outside India. The narrative implies that because a non-Hindu is not a fully-fledged member of Indian society—who enjoys the full rights afforded to them by the Constitution—their worth and dignity are in question.

That ideology has been espoused by those in India's halls of power. Some regional leaders have vowed to rid the country of Christians and Muslims by 2021.

One leader 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."

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12 Aug - 'We are always in danger' - the risks our field workers take to be God's hands and feet in India - Open Doors USA

www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/the-risks-our-field-workers-take-to-in-india

A family in a rural part of India has just lost their father—brutally murdered because of his faith in Jesus. It's your job to go and comfort the family. How will you reach them safely? When you get there, what do you say to them? What actions will you take to show them they're not alone? How will you be there for them?

For Abhishek*, an Open Doors local partner in India, this is the kind of hard situation and difficult questions he deals with every day. He is literally our hands and feet in India—your hands and

Dates of next meetings: Wednesdays 18 September & 16 October - IDOP 17 November

feet when you pray and give to support persecuted believers in India.

Binding up the broken-hearted

Talking with Abhishek, we get an up close look at the persecution Christians in India face today. He tells us more about the family's story above.

"The father was the bread winner of the house with three young children," he says, adding that he was also a strong believer who distributed Bibles and gospel tracts.

"This man was spreading the gospel," Abhishek says. "And one after another, people were coming to Christ in his village."

The father's commitment to spreading the gospel and seeing others meet Jesus were the very reasons why the Naxalites, a militant Maoist group in India, targeted him.

"People stopped obeying the Naxalites and instead obeyed what this father and Scripture said," Abhishek explains. "He told Christians to be humble, to live in a godly manner."

During Abhishek's initial visit with the family, they shared the details of their father's death. Early in the morning at 4 a.m., the Naxalites kidnapped their father and took him into the jungle where they mutilated his body.

"Then they just beat him senseless," Abhishek says tearfully. "They tied his legs, hung him from a tree and beat him with rods." Finally, they shot him.

"It was terrible to see. Such a heinous killing, so brutal. They killed this man of God." The Naxalites also threatened to kill them, the family said, if they reported anything to the police.

Ministering with both provision and presence, Abhishek provided the family with food and helped them relocate to a safer area. When the children are old enough for school, he will also help provide their school fees—because of your support and prayers. He is also present with them, walking with them through the nightmare.

"I went to that family and I cried with them, I encouraged them, I comforted them from the Word of God," Abhishek says. The widow shared her gratitude with Abhishek, saying that "nobody has come and comforted us like that."

A surrendered life

But Abhishek didn't grow up dreaming about serving others like this. He didn't even grow up Christian. He's from East India, raised in a Hindu family. He remembers the day he learned about Jesus from a preacher who asked him, "Since you are good in your studies, what are you going to do in your future?"

Abhishek's answer wasn't much different from that of many young people around the world: "I will study well, and I will become maybe an engineer or maybe a doctor," he told the pastor. "And I will earn money and have a good house."

In response, the pastor showed the young man Matthew 16:26 - a verse that has become a key scripture for his life: What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?

"That really touched my heart," he says. "So I received Jesus Christ."

His decision that day led him to Bible college and then teaching at a Bible college for almost 10 years. "I wanted to surrender my life completely to Jesus," he says.

In 2014, Abhishek became an Open Doors local ministry partner, sensing a call on his life to serve the persecuted church.

"The people who are poor, those who have been thrashed, those who have been really hated, who have been persecuted and

tortured for the sake of Christ Jesus—it is really wonderful to serve this group of people."

The videos we watched can be found on the following pages:

India World Watch List #10 - Open Doors USA

www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/india

Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - Healed.

Attacked. Healed again. Here's Kuldeep's story – and how you're helping - Open Doors UK

www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/india-190711

Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - Pastor Maruc: 'God will give us strength to play our part' - Open Doors UK

www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/india-190717

Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - Rohan: Could you forgive someone who burned down your church? - Open Doors UK

www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/india-190806

Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - When Mohan lost everything, your help gave him hope - Open Doors UK

www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/india-190815

The only Christians in their Indian village - Arjun & Neha stand strong in Christ - Open Doors USA

www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/the-only-christians-in-their-indian-village-arjun-neha-stand-strong-in-christ

Other recent reports from India:

8 Aug - Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - Three stories of miraculous healing in India - Open Doors UK

www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/india-190808

Three stories of miraculous healing in India

God is using miraculous healing to bring people to Christian faith in India, praise the Lord! We read many instances of Jesus healing in the Gospels, and He is still blessing people in the same way. Here are three stories from India of miraculous healings that led to faith in Christ.

It's amazing that Raman, Raj and Meeta* have become believers – but for them, and millions of Indian Christians like them, the story doesn't end there. India is number 10 on the Open Doors World Watch List in 2019, and anti-conversion laws are becoming more common – laws that are often used as an excuse to harass or attack Christians. These believers' new faith often makes them the target for persecution – and they need your support and prayers to help strengthen their faith.

Healed and healed again: Raman's story

When he was nine, Raman became ill. His sickness made him weak and he would frequently collapse – and it made him doubt that any of the Hindu gods his family believed in actually existed: "At that time, I was sure that there was no god. If there were, why did I have to suffer like this?"

At this point, he says, he began to hear evil voices. They whispered dark thoughts to him and urged him to carry out terrible acts, such as attacking others and even killing himself. He was a danger to himself and others, and so villagers advised his mother to chain him up for the safety of the community.

Raman was chained up for months. Nobody knew how to help him.

Finally, Raman's mother was advised to take him to church. She did, and Christians prayed for him. Within a month, praise the Lord, Raman was healed completely! His mother and sister converted from Hinduism to Christianity – but Raman wasn't interested in becoming a Christian.

Seven years later, Raman had a terrible accident. He was hit by a truck when motorcycling, and severely injured – even close to death. The pastor of his mother and sister’s church prayed for him, along with many members of the congregation.

After three weeks, Raman was awake and walking with crutches. While others praised God, Raman was dissatisfied: “I looked awful, I had scars on my face and I had to walk with crutches. I didn’t feel happy at all. I told my Mum, ‘If God has really healed me, then I want to walk without those crutches.’”

She prayed with him, and continued to pray for several days. “Within a week, all the strength came back into my legs. That was the moment I realised that Jesus had healed me.”

Raman started following Jesus, and later even became the pastor of a church. But the bigger his church grew, the more severely he was persecuted by Hindu extremists who accused him of following a ‘foreign’ God. He and his wife were knocked off their bike, and she lost their unborn baby. Extremists set fire to his church while he was inside, and Raman was injured.

Despite all this, Pastor Raman has continued to serve his congregation and is determined to plant churches in 100 villages near his town. Your prayers and support can help strengthen pastors like Raman today.

Cont/...

11 Aug - Pastor building community hall threatened twice then accused of blasphemy by Hindu zealots in India - BACA

www.britishpakistanichristians.org/blog/pastor-building-community-hall-beaten-and-threatened

An Indian Pastor who converted from Hinduism 5 years ago, seeking to build a community hall in Kaithal District, Haryana that would also serve to provide Sunday Church services, has received serious threats and blasphemy allegations from the local Hindu Community. Mobs in their thousands twice disrupted and delayed building work despite the Pastor having planning permission and local court approval.

In April 2019 Pastor Sunil (28 yrs) an affiliate of Ezra Academy Ministries bought a plot of land from his Hindu Neighbour in the village of Karsa by saving money from his small business of selling straw. After a few months after gaining planning permission he initiated the construction of a hall so that he can run local projects for Christians and hold Sunday worship services.

On 5th June 2019 building work for the community hall began, however a Hindu neighbour named Pawan (32 yrs) complained to a local Police station stating that Pastor Sunil was constructing a church and asserting this was causing offence to local Hindus. On 6th June Police stopped the construction work and met with Pastor Sunil.

During an interview with local Police Pastor Sunil produced verified planning documents and demanded that they allow him to proceed with the construction, which was his right. At this point police complied with his wishes and allowed the building work to resume.

However the next day Pawan who it is believed wants to buy the same land, gathered many villagers and surrounded the construction work stating that they would not let a church be built because it would desecrate local land. The Hindu man was declaring that it was Pastor Sunil’s intention to convert the whole of the village to Christianity in an attempt to foment hatred towards Pastor Sunil. The amassed villagers threatened

Pastor Sunil with death if he continued to build his hall. Police were called to stop the civil disobedience and on arrival question were raised by the mob over the exact planning permission and ownership of the land.

At the behest of the Mob local police informed Pastor Sunil that he was required to terminate construction work until he had shown full Title Deeds and planning details and drawings at the local police station.

On 15th June Pastor Sunil attended Butana Village Police Station and submitted all relevant land ownership and planning documents related to the construction of the hall. On receipt of the documents the local police allowed him to continue working on the land, to build the hall.

Local villagers, were again incensed by the decision in favour of the now beleaguered Pastor. Once again under the leadership of Pawan a large mob of in excess of 300 people gathered around the construction site and refused to let Pastor Sunil resume building work.

Police were called and this time Pawan filed a false case against Pastor Sunil stating that Pastor Sunil was offering to ensure Pawan who has five daughters that his next child would be a boy if he attended church. A bizarre allegation as Pastor Sunil has six daughters and one son. He also accused Pastor Sunil of distributing the bible and other Christian books and for offering a fiscal payment on his conversion.

Pastor Sunil was arrested on 22nd June and a First Incident Report (FIR) was registered at Butana Village Police station under the blasphemy laws of India section 295a and 298 of the Indian Penal code [This seems to be used by local police in absence of Anti-conversion laws which Haryana State has not adopted].

Cont/...

15 Aug - Pastor Dragged from Meeting and Beaten - Voice of the Martyrs Canada

vomcanada.com/in-2019-08-15.htm

A home prayer meeting was disrupted by Hindu nationalists in the Kanshiram Colony of Uttar Pradesh on July 28th. As some men and women were walking to the meeting, nationalists who recognized them as Christians began to physically and verbally assault them. When they arrived at the home where the prayer meeting was taking place, the harassment continued.

The attackers entered the house and dragged Pastor Raju Prasad outside where they commenced with their assault by beating him. When police arrived, Pastor Prasad was arrested and taken to the police station where the abuse resumed. After five hours of interrogation, the police determined that no conversions were taking place at the meeting and the pastor was released.

Despite the obvious physical abuse, even at the police station, no action was taken against those who beat him. While Pastor Prasad says that he expects opposition, he was surprised at this violent reaction when it was simply a prayer meeting for church members.

12 Aug - In the midst of beatings, Indian believer cries: ‘Jesus is real!’ - Open Doors USA

www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/in-the-midst-of-beatings-jesus-is-real

“Through the blows, they kept repeatedly asking why I called myself a Christian. With each blow they said, ‘Now tell us, will you still go to church?’

“Through the pain, I only repeated what I knew. I kept trying to say,

“Jesus is real. I have seen the goodness of the Lord. He is merciful and life giving.”

Rupesh says these words even as he describes the intense persecution he has endured at the hands of Hindu extremists. He says “I have seen the goodness of the Lord” in the same conversation as he recalls the way his home was destroyed, the feeling of hearing his wife be beaten, the pain of the blows to his stomach and back.

Even though his church has been destroyed, he and his family have no access to the village well and the local police decline to help, still Rupesh tells us repeatedly:

“I have seen the goodness of the Lord.”

Choosing Jesus

Rupesh is an “outcast among outcasts”—he belongs to a tribe of people in India who are considered to be even lower in status than even the lowest of the country’s notorious caste system. His tribe is a tribe of outcasts, struggling to make ends meet in the most underdeveloped parts of India, without certain access to education or employment.

And yet, he is even more of an outcast among this tribe of outcasts. Because he began following Jesus. Where Rupesh lives, this means he has essentially rejected the belief system of his people—his family and friends would view it as an ultimate betrayal.

He first began to follow Jesus at the age of 24. His youngest son was about a year old at the time, and suffering greatly from a disease that doctors could not cure. While his tribe are traditionally animist, Rupesh and his wife visited various temples and shrines in their desperate search for a miracle, hoping to appease any god who could heal their little boy. But all of their efforts came to nothing. Rupesh and his wife were discouraged and losing hope.

One of his relatives told Rupesh about Jesus, and prayed for his son. Miraculously, the boy started getting better. Rupesh could not stop giving thanks to the Lord for this gift of life. His family started attending a small house church near their village.

When people in his village started to notice Rupesh’s newfound faith, the response was quick and negative. He was taken aside once and told to stop going to church. He was told to stop speaking about Jesus. His neighbors began threatening him. But all that Rupesh knew was that Jesus was real, and that he wouldn’t leave Him.

12 Aug - ‘My son died in my arms’: Neelesh’s story of loss, pain and hope in India - Open Doors USA

www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/my-son-died-in-my-arms-pain-and-hope-in-india

2 Aug - Public Awareness, Pressure Help Persecuted Christians Win Justice in India - Morningstar News

morningstarnews.org/2019/08/public-awareness-pressure-help-persecuted-christians-win-justice-in-india

30 July - Reporting Persecution to Police a Vanishing Option for Christians in India - Morningstar News

morningstarnews.org/2019/07/reporting-persecution-to-police-a-vanishing-option-for-christians-in-india

25 July - Christians Forced to Reconvert - Voice of the Martyrs Canada

vomcanada.com/in-2019-07-25.htm

OTHER COUNTRIES

Bangladesh

13 Aug - Believers in hiding find support - Open Doors UK
www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/bangladesh-190813

Nigeria

16 Aug - Nigeria's Christians Under Fire - Prophecy Today
prophecytoday.uk/comment/church-issues/item/1547-nigeria-s-christians-under-fire.html

Aug 2 - Pray for Nigeria: 10 years of Boko Haram - Open Doors UK
www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/nigeria-190802

12 Aug - 8,000 children abducted by Boko Haram-pray for the children of Nigeria - Open Doors USA
www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/un-reports-8000-children-taken-boko-haram-suicide-vests

25 July - Nigeria: Violence continues but government in denial, church leaders say - World Watch Monitor
www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/07/nigeria-violence-continues-but-government-in-denial-church-leaders-say

22 July - Pregnant Mother among Five Christians Slain in North-Central Nigeria - Morningstar News
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12 Aug - 176 children lost one or both parents in Sri Lanka Easter bombings - World Watch Monitor - With video update
www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/08/176-children-lost-one-or-both-parents-in-sri-lanka-easter-bombings

16 Aug - Persecution Young Christian in Sri Lanka Assaulted by Radical Monks - ICC
www.persecution.org/2019/08/16/young-christian-sri-lanka-assaulted-radical-monks

China

16 Aug - China Intensifies Political Indoctrination of the Clergy - Bitter Winter
bitterwinter.org/political-courses-for-clergy-patriotic-songs-for-believers

17 Aug - Abusing People's Rights, CCP Collects DNA for Tighter Control - Bitter Winter
bitterwinter.org/ccp-collects-dna-for-tighter-control

13 Aug - China Employs Bread and Circuses Policy to Curb Religion - Bitter Winter
bitterwinter.org/china-employs-bread-and-circuses-policy-to-curb-religion

Mexico

15 Aug - Christian Family Takes Refuge in Mountains after Expulsion from their Home in Mexico - Morningstar News
morningstarnews.org/2019/08/christian-family-takes-refuge-in-mountains-after-expulsion-from-their-home-in-mexico

Algeria

7 Aug - As Church Worships, Police in Algeria Arrive to Seal Building - Morningstar News
morningstarnews.org/2019/08/as-church-worships-police-in-algeria-arrive-to-seal-building

Afghanistan

9 Aug - Afghanistan: Radical Islamist groups recruit at universities - World Watch Monitor
www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/08/afghanistan-radical-islamist-groups-recruit-at-universities