

PERSECUTION

CRACKDOWN ON CHRISTIANITY

A SPECIAL REPORT ON INDIA

**2021: The most
violent year for
Christians in
India**

**Targeted
attacks destroy
Christian
communities**

**Christians
navigate
troubled waters
under Modi**

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

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TROUBLED HEARTS FOR THE KING

CHRISTIANS PERSEVERE DESPITE GROWING PERSECUTION IN INDIA

You may not be familiar with Graham Staines.

As I read report after report of recent attacks against Christians in India, Staines comes to mind. In January 1999, the Australian missionary and his two young sons were burned alive by Hindu extremists.

His death was the precursor to an increase in violence against Christians over the next two decades in the second most populous country.

In 2021, there were 486 reported attacks against Christians in India, a 300% rise over the past eight years. How many more attacks were unreported?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are largely to blame. They have fueled and supported a culture of Hindu nationalism and implemented policies that hamstring Christianity. Their policies discriminate against minority religions. And they, like their counterparts in Nigeria and North Korea, ignore the attacks and murders of Christians.

The reports are chilling. One pastor was dragged from his church and arrested during a Christmas Eve service. Other church leaders were arrested and charged with falsely “converting” Indians to Christianity.

ICC goes into the most dangerous places on the planet to bandage and build the church. That is where we find the juncture of good versus evil. This is exactly the scenario in India.

We will not back down against the forces trying to extinguish the gospel. In recent years, we have bought hundreds of bikes and Bibles for pastors to spread the faith to rural areas. And we are training 200 church planters in a new, yearlong effort. With courage, they will travel to all corners of the nation to share the love of Christ—against great challenges.

In this March magazine issue, you will find heart-wrenching stories of persecution. You will also find hope as International Christian Concern—thanks to your support and prayers—comes alongside our brothers and sisters in India.

With gratitude and hope,



JEFF KING

President: International Christian Concern

Author: *The Last Words of the Martyrs* and *Islam Uncensored*

“I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. NO ONE CAN COME TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME.”

JOHN 14:6



YOUR DOLLARS AT WORK

ICC'S ONGOING INITIATIVES

ONGOING INITIATIVES



AFGHANISTAN CRISIS

Last August, ICC called upon its supporters to help rescue Afghan Christians in danger following the rise of the Taliban. Among the Christian families that successfully escaped to neighboring countries, ICC provided jackets, hats, and blankets to help them stay warm this winter. The families were given clothing that was appropriate for their areas, so they would blend in and not draw attention of authorities and risk deportation.



A SMALL BUSINESS LIFELINE

Christians in Egypt receive educational support, vocational training, and small business assistance. For one family, ICC provided a loan to help a shoe salesman named Reda expand his business to earn a sustainable living and serve the community. Reda also bought a tricycle to navigate the village and sell to a wider market.



BIKES AND BIBLES

ICC trains church planters in India and provides them with bicycles to visit rural communities that would be unreachable by foot. "My ministry improved so much because I was able to reach faraway villages," one pastor told ICC. "It was impossible to even think of visiting those villages before and the people gladly received the Bibles and were open to having conversations. I am so motivated because of this encouragement."

To learn more about how you can support these initiatives, visit www.persecution.org or give us a call at 800-422-5441.



EMERGENCY RESCUE FOR CHRISTIAN CONVERTS

In 2019, a Hindu man in India named Rajit developed a debilitating illness. After several failed attempts at finding a cure, he was told about the healing power found in Christ. He attended a church service, received prayer, and was eventually cured of his disease. Following this miracle, he and his family immediately began their new lives as Christians.

After becoming Christians, Rajit and his family began to face many hardships and struggled to make ends meet. Eventually, to keep food on the table, Rajit began to farm and was able to cultivate a plentiful crop by the grace of God. However, because of Rajit's newfound faith, a group of local villagers sent their cattle onto Rajit's field to destroy his harvest. The villagers warned Rajit of further violence if he didn't return to Hinduism.

Following the incident, Rajit and his family continued to receive

threats of violence for days. Tensions boiled to the point where the villagers forcibly removed Rajit and his family from their home and banned them from the village. With the help of a local pastor, the family moved into a small rental home with no source of income, but they remained steadfast in their faith.

In response, ICC came alongside this family and provided them with three months of rent, food aid, clothing, and household items. This assistance will provide them with the support they need while they settle into a new village and find new work.

Rajit expressed, "I thank God for His grace and faithfulness in my life. Truly our living God wipes out His children's sorrows and burdens. It is written in the Bible, 'Cast your burden on Him and He will give you rest.' It is [absolutely] true... I hope and believe that this help will be a great blessing and helpful for me and my family."



ZANZIBAR: IN THE DEEP WATERS OF CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

Three pastors in Zanzibar share their encounters with persecution.

By Kate Piselli

On March 19, 2020, Pastor James* woke up as usual and left his home to conduct prayers at his church on the island of Zanzibar, located off Tanzania's eastern African coast. But when he arrived, to his horror, he found that his church had been utterly flattened. Before he could comprehend what occurred, a group of radical Muslims descended on him with machetes.

"I went to open and arrange the chairs in preparation for our morning prayers when I found the walls demolished and the roof lying flat on the debris," Pastor James told ICC. "Suddenly a group of [radical] Muslims appeared from the buildings next to our church and started beating me... They said that the church was not needed in the area."

What followed was a series of brutal attacks that led Pastor James to not only lose his church, but also his house and all of his belongings.

"They cut me several times in the head and the hands and left for my home. They ordered my wife and children to get out of the house and then set it on fire. We lost everything in the house, from personal belongings, clothes, and my children's school textbooks to Bibles and hymn books. The first believers arrived 15 minutes later and found me lying down beside our demolished church. They rushed me to the hospital."

Pastor James*
Zanzibar

Pastor James' church demolition is not the only case of persecution on the semi-autonomous island of Zanzibar, where the majority Muslim population continues to crack down on Christianity. In 2019, a Pentecostal church was closed for a year after a sheikh from a nearby mosque complained that worship services were too loud.

In another case, a church was court-ordered to stop construction after a wealthy Muslim businessman launched a land complaint.

In the case of Pastor James, he continues to wait for justice, though he knows that compensation from the government is unlikely.

"We reported the matter to the authorities and gave a statement. Until now, nothing has been done. Our prayer is that we shall not wake up one day and find our church plot fenced off with a contractor putting up a mosque."

In the meantime, his church has been forced to refrain from meeting every Sunday, for fear of being attacked.

Bishop Derick* has been a critical voice for the freedom of Christian worship on the island. Although he has observed some gains over the year, he told ICC that there is a lot more work that needs to be done.

"The biggest obstacle to achieving equal religious judicial treatment is the concentration of Muslim judicial officers who take no action against the sectarian violence meted on the [Christian] Church," he said.

Weighing in on the current state of persecution in Zanzibar, Pastor Adam* of the Evangelical Assemblies of God Church commented:

"Zanzibar is still in the deep waters of religious discrimination and exclusion that affects Christians, for they are a minority group. The church in Zanzibar has tried to implore the government to intervene and create a level ground where different faiths and places of worship are respected and protected by law. This is still a dream and our daily prayer, and we shall not give up asking the Zanzibar authorities to protect believers from attacks orchestrated by the Arabic fundamentalists." ✝

* Names changed for security reasons

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"Our prayer is that we shall not wake up one day and find our church plot fenced off with a contractor putting up a mosque."

- Pastor James



Photos of the aftermath of Pastor James' church after radical Muslims destroyed the building in early 2020.



HOPE HOUSE CHILD SPONSOR

RESTORING HOPE TO BE AN ENGINEER

Hope House offers the opportunity for children to make their dream job a possibility.

Just a few months ago, Keroles Samy joined International Christian Concern's child sponsorship program with Hope House in Egypt. While Keroles is beginning to adjust to Hope House—a program that will positively affect the trajectory of his life—his family life continues on as it did before.

Many of the men in Keroles' family work in trade jobs. His uncle runs a training school for tailoring and his father works as a carpenter. If the Hope House center is open, Keroles attends his classes. But if not, he typically goes to visit his uncle and continues to learn his trade. When asked what he wants to be when he grows up, Keroles said, "I want to be [a] tailor, but for the educational path, maybe I want to be an engineer."

This dual response to what his future might look like underscores the problem that many Christian boys in Egypt face.

Generational and systemic persecution discriminates against Christians, leaving them with few opportunities for development. Though schools do not typically disqualify Christians directly, their poor status often leaves them without the confidence and funding to pursue their education. They're pushed into whatever work they can find at a young age in order to provide for the family.

When asked about his wishes for his son,

Keroles' father said, "I wish he could be an engineer like he told you."

Keroles, though only 9 years old, already sees this disparity and is unsure if he will be in the small percentage that moves beyond day laborer positions and local trade jobs.

It is the goal of Hope House to combat this mindset and teach children how to recover from this abusive mentality that seeks to keep them oppressed. Because Christians are often not directly excluded by name, the government creates a veil of leaving opportunities for higher education open to Christians, but rarely engages in stopping the root causes of persecution like financial opportunities and access.

Keroles' father said, "I always hear the [Hope House] center teaches children better than the school. My son only entered the center two months ago."

In that short time, Keroles has expanded his educational and spiritual knowledge. He told ICC, "I learned a verse in church, which is, 'And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself: I learned the hymns and the stories, but I love the hymns that we hear every day through the loudspeakers. I want to learn to read and write because I went to the center a short time ago.'"



"I learned the hymns and the stories, but I love the hymns that we hear every day through the loudspeakers."

- Keroles Samy

ABC



Partner with ICC

Would you consider partnering with ICC to help fight generational persecution that Christians in Egypt face?

To learn more about ICC's Hope House or provide a financial gift, please visit www.persecution.org/initiatives/hope-house/. To inquire about sponsoring a child, contact ICC at icc@persecution.org.





INDIA: THE PERFECT STORM FOR CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

By Mike Anderson

As long as Modi is in power, it's only the beginning of a long, violent road for Christians in India.

Rajesh* often wakes in the middle of the night gripped with fear. As does his wife. Fear for his beloved country, India. And as a devoted follower of Christ, fear for his family.

He could once venture door to door freely, sharing the gospel and handing out Bibles. Now, it's almost impossible to tell people about Jesus without facing extreme persecution in Uttar Pradesh.

The ICC staffer's understandable fear is fueled by a 300% rise in attacks against Christians since 2014—from 147 reported incidents to 486 in 2021, according to the United Christian Forum (UCF). While Rajesh has suffered beatings for sharing his faith, and been kicked out of villages, those incidents were infrequent and isolated. Now, it's an everyday angst of being outed and targeted as a Christian family. And he must be more discreet when helping persecuted brothers and sisters.

It's a perfect storm of Christian hardship, from anti-conversion and blasphemy laws

**Name changed for security*



to radical Hindu nationalist groups targeting Christians. The caste system exacerbates the situation and puts Christians, considered second-class citizens, at a disadvantage. If they profess Christ, they often receive less government aid.

The increase in persecution is attributed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Inspired by the notion of establishing India as a Hindu nation, Modi and the BJP have passed laws and enforced policies targeting Christians and limiting their religious freedom.

“There are citizens who think Christians are good people, and do a lot of good for this

country,” said Rajesh. “But in the last eight years it has really been suppressed by Modi and the BJP. For the average Hindu, they are kind of neutral because the BJP policies against Christians don’t really affect them. They are silent and don’t worry about it. But some are vocal and speak against the extreme right.”

India made the ICC 2021 Persecutor of the Year Awards in every category—country, entity (Sangh Parivar), and individual (Modi).

ICC Stands in the Gap

To counter the persecution, ICC helps Christians on the front lines with food and

safe housing, living and medical expenses, and small business startups. ICC also trains pastors and Christian leaders from rural communities on how to avoid, mitigate, and manage instances of persecution. ICC will train another 200 church planters in the coming year.

Rajesh and many followers of Christ, like their persecuted brothers and sisters elsewhere, feel helpless. They cannot depend on the mechanisms of law, like the constitution, that are designed to protect them. Religious freedom is a fundamental right promised to all Indians, upheld for seven decades. It’s a moot charter if ignored and unenforced.



**IT'S TIME
FOR EVERY
CHRISTIAN TO DO
WHATEVER THEY
CAN TO DRAW
ATTENTION TO
WHAT'S TAKING
PLACE IN INDIA.**

- Rajesh, ICG Staffer

The government's anti-conversion and blasphemy laws hinder Christians from proselytizing, gathering, and worshiping. Radical Hindu nationalists repel any encroachments against their faith or way of life. The right-wing organization RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) ensures that Hinduism and the nation's culture are protected and violently safeguards their place in society.

A Christian Calamity

Radical Hindu groups like Sangh Parivar further the narrative of the BJP, and incite violent mob attacks against churches, Christian families, and individual

believers. Churches are forced to close, go deep underground, or hold early morning services to avoid detection.

Violence is also fueled by a propaganda machine that portrays Christians as a threat to Indian culture. And foreign agencies as trying to take over India.

Meanwhile, the incidents mount. Pastor Jansign was holding a Christmas Eve worship service when assailants burst in, and dragged him out and into a police Jeep. He's still in jail. His wife, also subject to abuse, pleads for his release.

In Chhattisgarh state, a recent spike in

persecution escalated after a series of hate speech-fueled public rallies by radical Hindu nationalists. One leader called for beheading Christian evangelists.

Pastor Ankush Bariayar was summoned to the Purani Basti Police Station and falsely accused of engaging in illegal religious conversions. When he and two other pastors arrived at the police station, a mob of 50 radical Hindu nationalists burst in and beat the pastor with fists and shoes.

Rajesh says it's not just the Christian community that's suffering under Modi and the BJP. Other democratic institutions, freedoms, and rights are being undermined, too.

Still, he has hope for his nation and cites what took place in South Africa decades ago. Archbishop Desmond Tutu led a worldwide campaign to draw attention and eventual sanctions against the government for its discrimination and persecution.

"It's time for every Christian to do whatever they can to draw attention to what's taking place in India," he said. "If you raise your voice and talk to the politicians and government, write your representative in Congress, it can happen. There is hope for India." 

THE STORIES THEY

Two different experiences ...

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

Eight Christians, six men and two women, were arrested at a train station in Madhya Pradesh in May 2018. They were accused of kidnapping and attempting to forcefully convert 60 children they had accompanied to a summer Bible camp. All the children came from Christian families, and their parents gave consent for their children to travel and attend the camp.

Despite the situation, the eight Christians were charged with attempted forced conversions under Madhya Pradesh's Freedom of Religion Act 1968.

For the next two and a half years, the eight Christians had to fight a prolonged legal battle to prove their innocence. On February 18, 2020, they were finally acquitted of all charges.

"It was a life-threatening situation for me and my family during this prolonged trial," Lallu Babor, one of the eight Christians, recently told ICC. "Apart from the struggles I went through in jail for three months, my wife and two kids had no hope of survival without me around."

"All I know is that we did survive," Babor continued. "The false charges were proven to be false. We thank God for that. The people who beat us and framed these false charges against us knew eventually the charges would be proven false."



**ALL I KNOW IS
THAT WE DID
SURVIVE...WE
THANK GOD
FOR THAT.**

- Lallu Babor

CARRY WITH THEM

threaded together by their unrelenting faith.

TENSION IN GAGARI VILLAGE

Jharkhand, a state located in India's northeast, enacted an anti-conversion law in 2017 soon after the state government was taken over by the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP). Within one year, ICC documented the arrest of at least 63 Christians on false, forced conversion charges in Jharkhand alone.

Unfortunately, reports of false accusations against Christians of forced conversions continue in Jharkhand. On Sept. 23, 2020, the Christian community of an entire village was arrested by police after radical Hindu nationalists falsely accused them of engaging in forced conversions.

"There is still tension in Gagari village," Pastor Majendra Nayak told ICC. "The anti-conversion law is the easiest weapon that Hindu radicals use against us. It is the most dangerous."

"Even when the Christians gather and pray as a group, it is portrayed as a conversion ceremony by radicals," Pastor Nayak said. "The police immediately accept the mere accusation as evidence and make arrests."

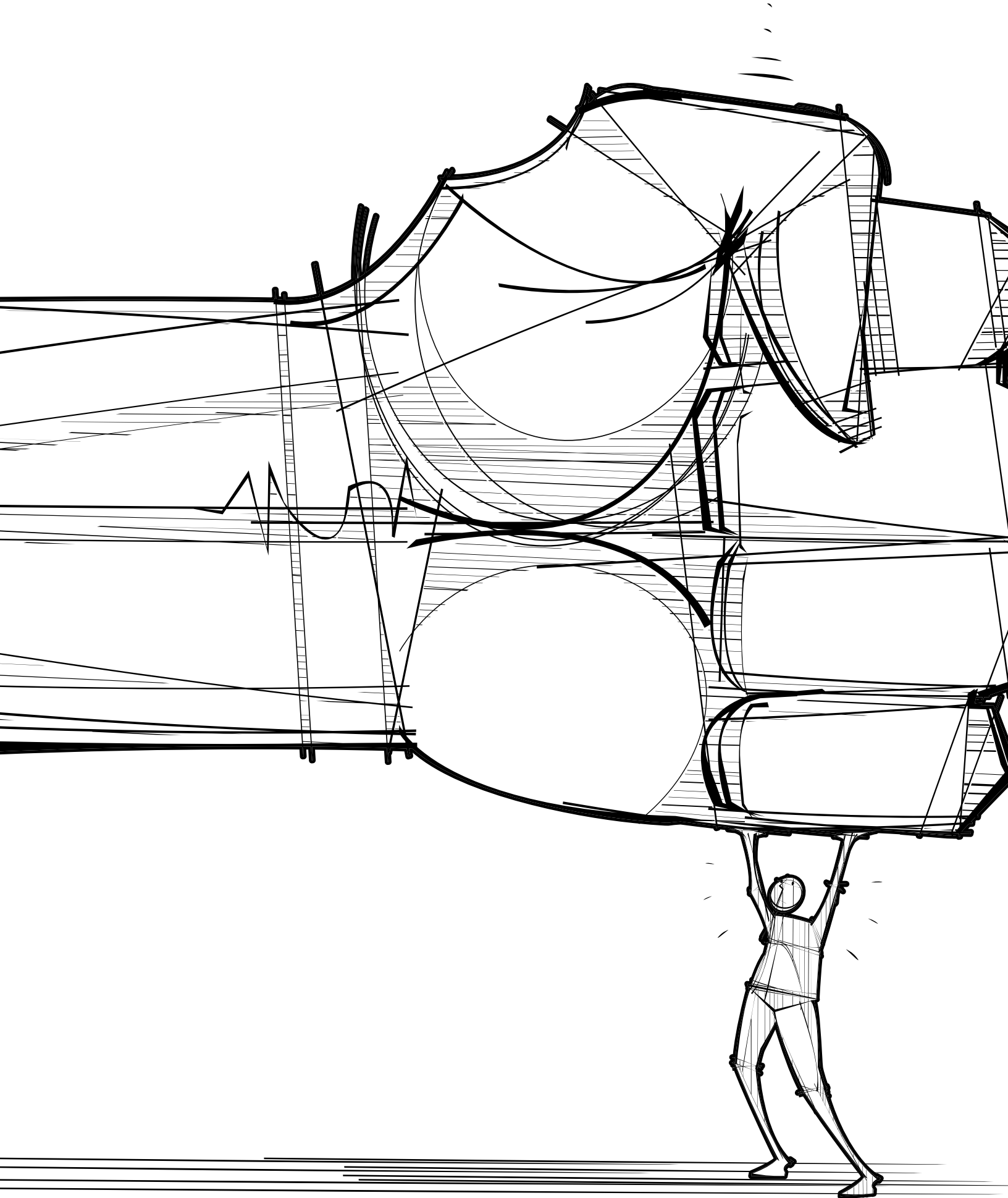
The Christians of Gagari village were eventually released after police could not gather adequate evidence to support the charges.



**THE POLICE
IMMEDIATELY
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AS EVIDENCE
AND MAKE
ARRESTS.**

- Pastor Nayak







Modi and the BJP hide behind the
guise of religious freedom for all while
oppressing India's most vulnerable
minorities.

DESIGNED TO OPPRESS

By William Stark

As Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi is complicit in the persecution of Christians. His administration has overseen a massive cultural shift in India from a pluralistic society (many acceptable religions) to one where Hindu nationalism (Hindutva) has dominated religious life.

Indian Christians can't fully realize their religious freedom rights under the Modi administration. Modi's administration consistently punishes all forms of dissent, like cracking down on human rights NGOs that seek to hold the government accountable. To add to that, India uses its government benefits to restrain the religious

freedom rights of hundreds of millions of people from low caste backgrounds. Not only that, but the Modi administration frequently looks away when its Hindutva allies violently target religious minorities.

Modi's message is clear: his administration will tolerate the persecution of Christians.

Blocking Outside Aid

The Modi administration targets Christian charities and human rights organizations that challenge its image of a Hindu-dominated India.

In 2017, the government shut down the international Christian ministry Compassion International under accusations of carrying out “religious conversions.” The New York Times estimates that roughly 500 ministries that partnered with Compassion International had to close.

Those that remained found it increasingly difficult to obtain financial support from outside India. The Modi administration instituted burdensome legal requirements

on Christian ministries, with the goal to deplete funding.

Blocking Government Benefits

Often called Dalits, individuals from India’s lowest caste have access to government benefits, called Scheduled Caste Benefits, designed to help them overcome generations of oppression. The program is supposed to move historically marginalized populations into the social mainstream.

However, according to a 1950 presidential order, “No person who professes a religion different than the Hindu, the Sikh, or the Buddhist religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste.” Low caste individuals from Christian and Muslim

communities are denied Scheduled Caste Benefits.

For many Dalits, the discriminatory policy forces them to choose between much-needed aid and the faith of their choice. For those who choose to convert to Christianity, this discrimination forces many to live double lives.

“I could easily lose my livelihood if I am open about my faith at the workplace,” Padma, whose name has been changed, told ICC. “It would have never been possible for me to get this job if I mentioned that I practiced Christianity on my official records.”

Padma is one of five children from Dalit parents in India’s Telangana state. Using the

BELOW: Prime Minister Modi gives a speech standing behind of a BJP-themed podium.



Scheduled Caste Benefits, Padma was able to study at university and become a nurse.

“I had to survive with two identities and with two names,” Padma continued. “One as a Christian at church and the other as a Hindu in the workplace. It has been hard living with this guilt. I feel I cannot freely exercise my faith.”

Padma hides his Christian identity in hopes of using the benefits to help his family socially and economically move up in the system.

“We don’t have the freedom to choose our religion,” he continued. “In most cases, we Dalits suppress our spiritual feelings. Many people choose to keep practicing the faith of their choice in secret so they can still receive the benefits.”

If all Indians genuinely realize their full religious freedom rights, Dalits should not be penalized by the government for practicing the religion of their choice. Until this issue is corrected, India’s promise of religious freedom in Article 25 of the constitution remains just words on paper for more than 200 million citizens.

Blocking Justice for Attack Victims

Perhaps the most egregious act of persecution by the Modi administration is its inaction.

There are virtually limitless reports on persecution against pastors, new or lifelong Christians, and whole churches. Hindu extremists who commit acts of vandalism, violence, and even murder frequently go unprosecuted if there is no public outcry to hold the government accountable.

This knowing inaction by the Modi administration may be the single most significant contributing factor to the dire state of religious freedom in India and a passive form of persecution that allows Hindu extremists to persecute India’s Christian minority with impunity.



TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2002

As Chief Minister of Gujarat, Modi’s actions and statements following a train accident significantly contributed to a riot where radical Hindus attacked the local Muslim minority; the estimated death toll of the riot was approximately 2,000, mostly Muslims.

2014

Modi, the BJP candidate, is elected Prime Minister of India.

2017

India’s Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) is used to shut down the Indian operations of major Christian charity Compassion International, one of an estimated 11,000 NGOs stripped of its license since Modi’s election.

2018

Human Rights Watch found the Modi administration failed to “prevent or credibly investigate” attacks on religious minority communities.

2019

India designated as the 10th most dangerous country to be a Christian, according to a report by Open Doors.

2020

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommends that Congress designate India as a Country of Particular Concern for severe religious freedoms violations.

2021

The Modi administration tightens restrictions on NGOs and Christian ministries that receive financial support outside India.

CHOOSING CHRIST UNDER DURESS

Christians in India experienced the most violent year on record.

Picture a country where religious freedom is a fundamental right promised to all by its founding fathers. A promise enshrined in the country's constitution and upheld for decades. Citizens have the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate the religion of their choice.

This is a democracy. These are the founding principles of India.

Article 25 gives Indians the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate the religion of their choice. Religious freedom has been the law of the land for seven decades.

However, a worrying trend of increasing religious intolerance and religiously motivated violence has many concerned

that India is tilting away from its founding promise.

Anti-Conversion Laws 101

Fueling much of the violence is an ideology of Hindu nationalism that stands in direct contrast to India's democratic and secular history.

India's Christians have seen their religious freedom rights diminished through the use and abuse of anti-conversion laws, officially called Freedom of Religion Acts.

According to these laws, the state regulates religious conversions. Individuals seeking to change their religion must have their conversion approved by the state government

after an investigation and waiting period. Fraudulent conversions, often labeled forced conversions, are criminalized.

Abuse of the Act

Hindu nationalists frequently use the specter of fraudulent mass conversions to Christianity to justify anti-conversion laws. According to these nationalists, Christians convert poor Hindus to Christianity en masse by fraudulent means.

Because of the growing religious intolerance and the normalization of religiously motivated violence, many radical Hindu nationalists view all religious conversions to non-Hindu faiths as wrong.

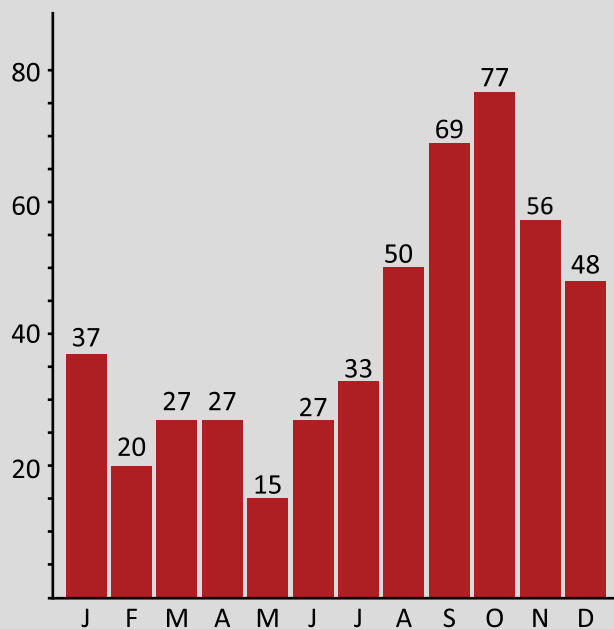
A YEAR MARKED BY VIOLENCE

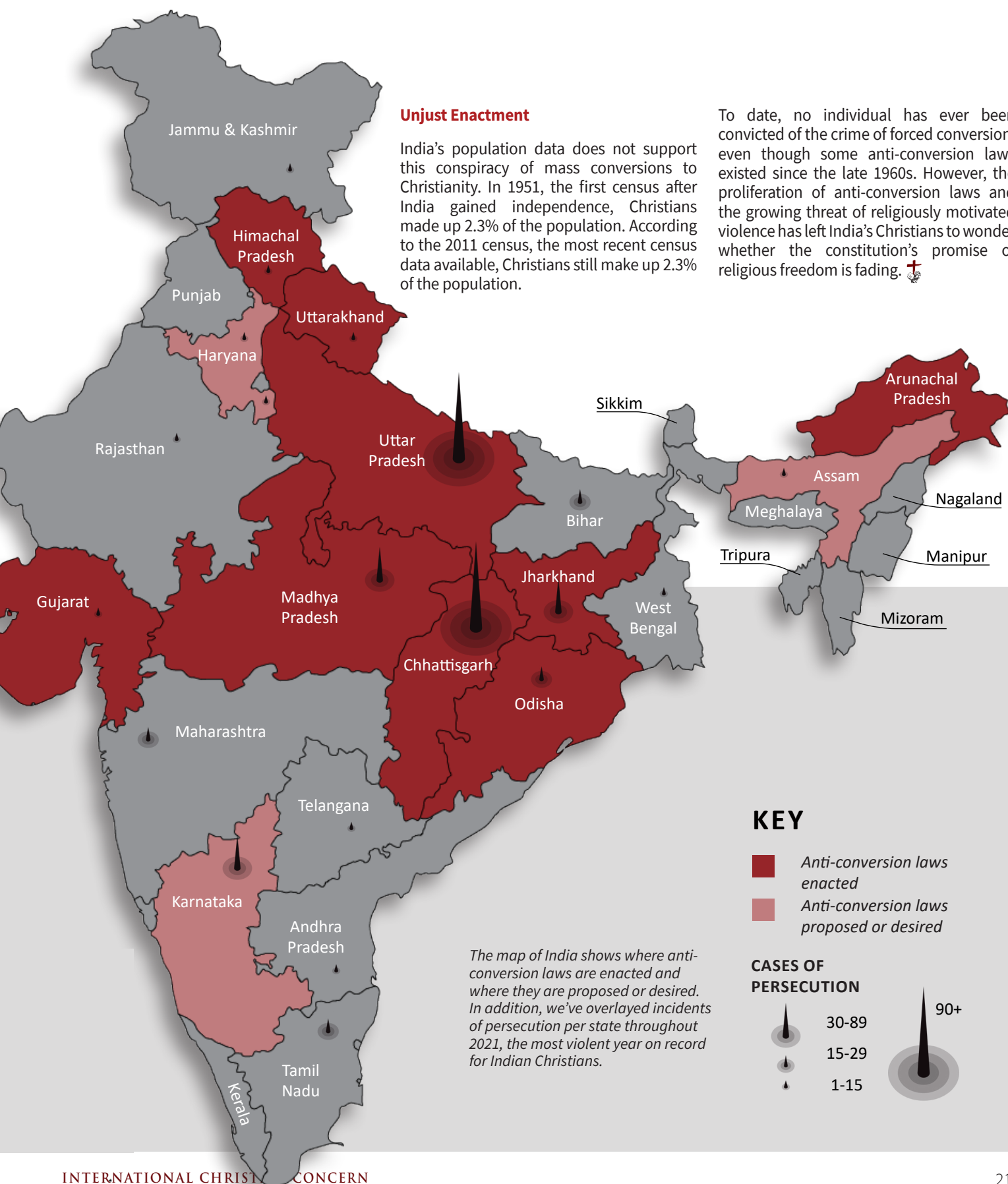
Last year was the most violent on record for India's Christian community, according to the United Christian Forum (UCF). UCF recorded 486 violent incidents of Christian persecution, topping the previous record in 2019 of 328 incidents.

Many experts blame the continued proliferation of radical Hindu nationalism in India for the steady increase in persecution.

In almost all the reported incidents, vigilante mobs composed of religious extremists were responsible for attacking Christians. In most cases, local authorities and police were passive observers or active participants in the violence.

2021 PERSECUTION INCIDENTS AGAINST CHRISTIANS





WHAT IS DRIVING THE PERSECUTION?

India's democracy faces threats of collapsing as Modi advances radical Hindu ideology.

The literal meaning of **Sangh Parivar** is “**Family of Organizations**,” a term used to refer to the web of Hindu nationalist organizations operating in India with a single agenda: to make India a Hindu nation.

The various groups under Sangh Parivar are adherents of a single ideology called Hindutva, meaning “Hinduness.” It seeks to establish a theocratic Hindu-majority state where religious minorities, including Christians and Muslims, are relegated to second-class status. It is a society where Hinduism is protected and promoted.

The establishment of this state would be a complete rejection of India's founding principle: religious freedom and equal protection for all religious groups.

While the Sangh Parivar has a single agenda, the establishment of India as a Hindu nation, each member of the Sangh Parivar has a unique and complementary role.

These various groups pursue different lines

of influence, mutually cooperating and supporting each other's activities. Over the years, ICC has documented how the most prominent Sangh Parivar groups have worked together to the detriment of India's religious minorities.

These two groups sum up the ideology and persecution methods of Sangh Parivar:

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS):

The RSS is an ideological founder of the Hindutva movement and was founded in 1925. The RSS, however, claims they are simply a cultural organization, working to protect Hindu culture from Western influence.

As a member of the Sangh Parivar, the RSS fuels a religiously intolerant narrative that portrays all non-Indic faiths, like Christianity and Islam, as foreign and threatening.

The RSS demonizes Christians and other religious minorities through these hateful narratives, instigating violence in the streets. The RSS also uses these narratives

to advocate for laws and policies that discriminate against religious minorities.

There are more than 6 million members of the RSS across India in over 50,000 locations. These members meet daily and dedicate part of their meetings to martial arts training. Many members eventually use this training against religious minorities.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP):

The BJP is the political wing of the Sangh Parivar. Using the hateful narratives established by the RSS and the millions of RSS members across India, the BJP uses political victories to establish India as a Hindu nation.

BJP politicians often use hate speeches against Christians for political gain. These speeches help spread the hateful narratives established by the RSS and instigate violence against Christians in the streets.

BJP politicians then use political support garnered by these narratives to pass laws that discriminate against Christians. ✝



TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2020

SEPTEMBER

BJP leaders in the Chhattisgarh state government removes reservation benefits for tribals who converted to Christianity. This policy, and the hate speeches used to justify its enactment, triggers a spike in attacks on Christians in the Bastar District of Chhattisgarh.

NOVEMBER

The BJP-led state government of Uttar Pradesh enacts a new anti-conversion law, blaming Christians for numerous forced religious conversions of Hindus to Christianity. In the months that followed, a surge of religiously motivated attacks on Christians was documented until the state was placed in lockdown due to COVID-19.

NOVEMBER

The chief minister of Karnataka state announces his government's intention to enact an anti-conversion law, citing illegal conversions to Christianity. A surge in attacks on Christians was documented following this announcement.

2021

JANUARY

Madhya Pradesh enacts an anti-conversion law. Following the enactment of the law, a vast number of independent house churches were closed. After six months, ICC documented at least 47 incidents of persecution against Christians in Madhya Pradesh.

JUNE

The arrest of two Muslim men in Uttar Pradesh on the charges of converting 1,000 Hindus to Islam triggered more than 20 incidents of Christian persecution in just two months.

AUGUST

The Bajrang Dal and VHP hold a rally in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, against conversions to Christianity. Increased attacks on Christians in Chhattisgarh were documented following this rally.

**LET US DRAG
PEOPLE FROM
THE CHURCH
AND STOP
CONVERSIONS
AT ANY COST.**

- Amit Sahu, President
of the Chhattisgarh BJP



RADICAL HINDU ATTACKS

Christian lives are completely shattered by targeted attacks.

The normalization of social hostility against religious minorities is a critical factor in India's decline of religious freedom.

Violent attacks on Indian Christians have more than doubled in recent years, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI). In 2014, the year the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rose to political power, EFI recorded 147 violent attacks on Indian Christians. In 2019, after five years of BJP rule, EFI recorded 366 violent attacks.





EFI's data is backed by a report released by Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) India. ADF reported at least 328 incidents of targeted violence against Christians in 2019. Similar to EFI, ADF's 2019 data represented an increase in violence when compared to recent years. And similarly, United Christian Forum reported 486 incidents of violence against Christians in 2021, a 300% increase since 2014.

However, the incidents reported by EFI and ADF likely only represent a portion of the violence India's Christian community experiences. Most incidents go unreported due to a fear of reprisal and lack of confidence in India's justice system.

The data collected by EFI and ADF shows a clear pattern of increasing social hostility facing Indian Christians. However, what the data doesn't show is how genuinely terrifying it is to endure these incidents of violence.

"They came prepared to burn us."

"They came prepared to burn us," Pastor Hanok Steven recently told ICC in an interview. "I saw someone from the group taking petrol out of the fuel tank of [a] motorbike and heard others shouting for the petrol to be used to burn us."

On Nov. 4, 2020, five Christians were brutally attacked by radical Hindu nationalists in the Meerpet neighborhood of Hyderabad, India. The attack resulted in the Christian victims sustaining multiple serious injuries.

According to Pastor Hanok, a Christian woman named Sadhya invited several church members to a prayer meeting. Before the meeting, Sadhya received permission from her Hindu landlord to hold the meeting in her home.

Around noon, only five minutes after the Christians gathered at Sadhya's home,

15 nationalists broke into the house and attacked the Christians with wooden clubs and sticks. The landlord joined the nationalists and helped drag Pastor Hanok out of the house, where he was further assaulted and threatened with being set on fire.

"I was panicked as all of this was going on," Pastor Hanok recalled. "For 30 minutes, the attack continued, but we eventually managed to run in different directions and reached the police station."

As a result of the attack, three Christians were seriously injured, and Pastor Hanok's car was damaged. A Christian man named Janaiah had his eardrum completely shattered, and a Christian woman named Annamma lost six teeth.

"We are completely cut off."

In another incident, this time in India's Jharkhand state, six Christian families had the electricity cut from their homes and were banned from accessing the village's well for more than five months. All of this happened after the Christians refused to publicly recant their faith at a village meeting.

On July 5, 2020, the village council of Petrudu, located in the Latehar district, demanded that the six Christian families recant their faith. When they refused, they were attacked and brutally beaten.

After the attack, the devastating social boycott was instigated against the Christian families.

"We walked for miles to fetch water for almost six months," Joginder, one of the victims, told ICC. "Most of the time, our phones don't work as we do not have electricity. We have to walk to neighboring villages to charge our phones."

"We are completely cut off," Joginder



ABOVE: People gather in support of the BJP, the current ruling party in India. Prime Minister Modi supports a radical Hindu ideology that fuels attacks on Christians throughout the country.

//

**WE ARE
COMPLETELY
CUT OFF...THIS
HAS BEEN
A PAINFUL
EXPERIENCE.**

- Joginder, victim of persecution

continued. “No one gives us daily wage working in the village, and we are not allowed to have any association with the other villagers. This has been a painful experience.”

Joginder and his fellow Christians have taken legal action against the people who attacked them on July 5. They are also fighting for the court to declare that they are legally allowed to practice the faith of their choosing in the village without social consequence.

Protecting Religious Freedom

Across India, similar reports of social hostility against Christians are being reported on almost a daily basis. Unchecked inflammatory rhetoric used by political leaders and widespread impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators are among the leading reasons why social hostility against Christians continues to rise across India.

If Indian Christians are to fully realize the religious freedom promised to them in the constitution, authorities must protect Christians and punish those responsible for attacks. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the direction India is currently heading. Instead, India’s leaders are allowing the constitution’s promise of religious freedom to slowly fade from reality for hundreds of millions of religious minorities. ✝

VIOLENT ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS UNDER THE BJP



BEFORE THE BJP

147

IN 2014

AFTER THE BJP

328

IN 2020*

486

IN 2021

* COVID-19 lockdowns affected the country for several months and likely suppressed the activities of religious extremists.



ADVOCACY *IN INDIA*

Taking action is the only option.

The United States and India share a special relationship, as the oldest democracy and the largest democracy in the world, respectively. On paper, both countries claim to stand for fundamental freedoms, like freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and, of course, freedom of religion.

India is clearly moving backwards, however, in these democratic ideals.

The United States' leadership under President Biden is fully aware of this decline and the increase of Christian persecution, but the U.S. government is willing to look the other way to stay in India's good graces to counter China's global rise.

Ever since Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took power in 2014, the cases of persecution in the South Asian country have skyrocketed. Yet, the U.S. continues to ignore many human rights violations to maintain a strong partnership with India. Though many hoped a new administration might bring change, nothing is different under President Biden.

While the church continues to feel the pressure of Hindu nationalists led by Prime Minister Modi, ICC's advocacy team has been raising the alarm in Washington, D.C. The advocacy team shines a light on what U.S. political leaders have turned a blind eye to for years. Indian leaders allow the atrocities of Hindu nationalists to continue as perpetrators enjoy near complete impunity.

RIGHT: U.S. President Joe Biden meets with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 24, 2021. (REUTERS/Evelyn Hockstein)

BELOW: Rashad Hussain, the newly appointed ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom. (U.S. State Department/US Mission Geneva/Creative Commons)



ICC's advocacy team has hosted several guests from leading Christian organizations in Washington D.C. who have shared their first hand witness accounts of the persecution endured by India's Christians. ICC hosted these victims during several briefings to color in the true picture of what life is like under the fanatical Hindu nationalists.

ICC also led a congressional letter with several members of Congress as signatories, challenging Prime Minister Modi on these ongoing atrocities and calling for the Indian leadership to answer for its unwillingness to stand up for the constitutional rights of Christians in India.

Things will not change in India until the truth becomes impossible to ignore. India is a democracy with religious freedom guaranteed for all under its constitution, but those democratic ideals are being chipped away day by day. The Western church must continue to pray for its persecuted brothers and sisters in India and stand up for them here in the United States.





PERSECUTION IN THE WEST?

West Watch seeks to share with you glimpses of issues involving Christianity in the Western world.

So often, ICC's content focuses on where we see persecution in its most extreme forms—murder, rape, torture, and imprisonment. Those who experience and endure these forms of persecution will always be at the forefront of our ministry mission.

However, ICC stands for religious freedom for everyone, everywhere. When we see religious freedom being violated, especially in the “free world,” we call it out.

West Watch highlights some of the issues ICC's advocacy team spots in Europe and North America—places where persecution of religious groups doesn't make headlines.

British Nurse Fired for Wearing Cross in Hospital Wins Discrimination Case

A U.K. employment court has found that Nigerian-born nurse Mary Onuha was wrongly dismissed from her position for her refusal to take off a small cross necklace.

In 2015, hospital managers at Croydon University Hospital told Onuha that she needed to remove a small golden cross that she wore around her neck as a sign of her Christian faith. When she refused to remove her cross, observing that none of the other staff was required to remove their jewelry, hospital management began a process of discriminatory and demeaning treatment, according to the recent ruling.

“Hindus [working at Croydon Hospital] wear red bracelets on their wrists and female Muslims wear hijabs in theatre (surgery rooms),” recounted Onuha in an interview.

“Yet my small cross around my neck was deemed so dangerous that I was no longer allowed to do my job.”

Onuha was demoted from her position as a nurse to a receptionist and told that if she did not comply by hiding or removing her cross, there would be an internal investigation. Despite feeling humiliated and losing the job she loved, she still refused to remove her cross. Given further pressure from hospital management and the internal investigation, she was forced to take stress leave in June 2020.

While there is no word yet on damages the hospital will have to pay as a result of the verdict, the U.K.'s National Health Service has since apologized to Onuha for its religious discrimination.





Ambassador Brownback Launches National Committee for Religious Freedom

Earlier this year, former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback launched the National Committee for Religious Freedom (NCRF), an organization aimed at protecting religious freedom in the United States. Together with the Religious Freedom Institute, NCRF seeks to defend this fundamental human right enshrined in the United States Constitution.

Although Brownback was highly praised for his efforts promoting religious freedom around the world, the former ambassador has decided to turn domestically to continue this vital work. During the group's launch, Brownback said religious freedom was increasingly under attack in the United States. He outlined NCRF's plans to educate the public on how citizens can freely practice their faith.

Swiss Supreme Court Calls Geneva Law Restricting Religious Activity Unconstitutional

The Federal Court of Switzerland recently called a law in the Canton of Geneva unconstitutional for being "contrary to religious freedom," according to Evangelical Focus Europe.

Passed in 2018, the law aimed to achieve equality of treatment between religious communities. However, many argued that it was an overreach of government authority, citing restrictions on civil servants expressing their religious affiliation and certain outdoor religious activities, such as

baptisms in natural bodies of water.

The Swiss Evangelical Alliance immediately condemned the law, commenting that it risked the "creation of a climate of suspicion and exclusion towards religious communities."

Many hope that other European countries will follow suit in condemning such laws that present undue restrictions on the free expression of one's religious beliefs.



New York Cardinal Condemns Increased Attacks Against Churches

In a statement made on Religious Freedom Day, Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York noted the "disturbing trend" over the past few years of churches being vandalized and religious sites being attacked, according to a report from National Catholic Register. The comment follows the defacement of a statue of Our Lady of Fatima in Washington, D.C., which hosted a prayer service in January.

"An attack on a house of worship is certainly an assault on the particular community that gathers there," said Cardinal Dolan. "It is also an attack on the founding principle of America as a place where all people can practice their faith freely."

The cardinal encouraged prayer for all religious communities to be able to worship freely without fear throughout the United States.



STAFF COLUMN

THE QUESTIONS WHICH HAUNT

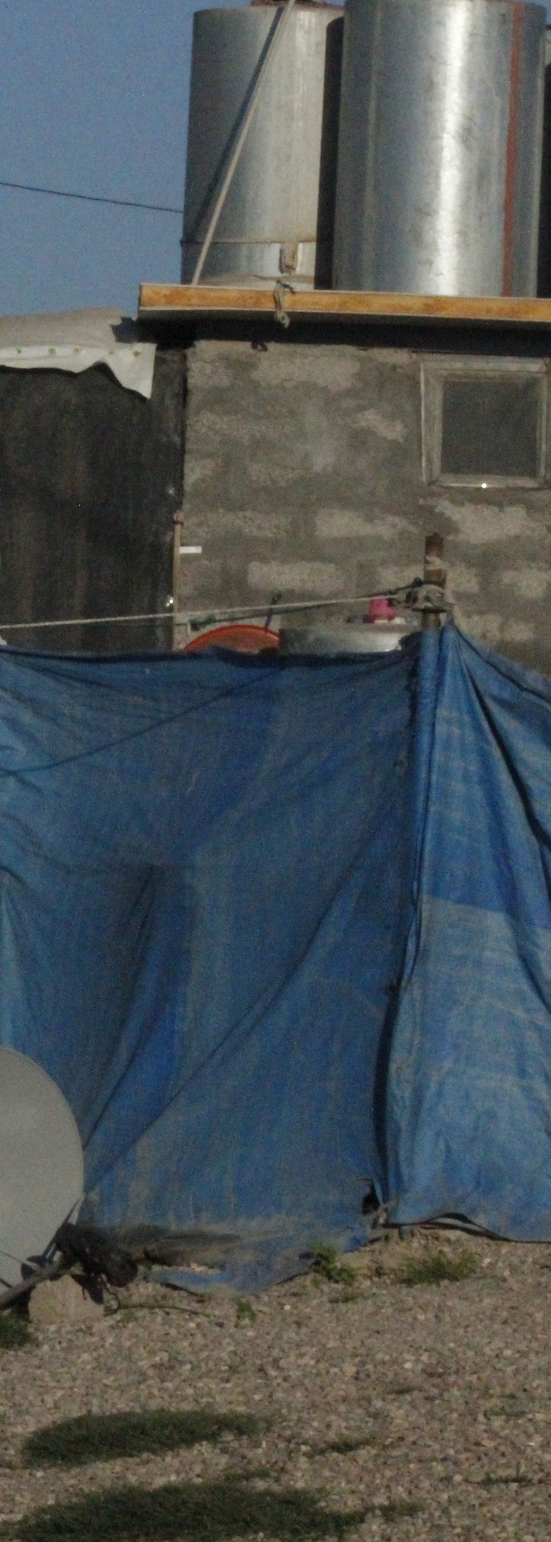
By Claire Evans



Surviving persecution often leaves unanswered questions, but serving the persecuted also allows opportunities for good.

She was wrapped in the elegance of an era gone by. A refugee of the Mexican War, her English was nonexistent but her stature spoke of kindness. Within her arms was an overflowing food basket, which she laid down before the door. My eyes caught her ghostly frame as she drifted away, the food at the door filling an otherwise completely empty home. How did she know? Who told her?

Years later, another food basket and refugee. This time the feet of a curly head child tiptoes around a wheelbarrow that her parents are filling with eggs, pasta, rice, and lentils. They begin arguing with another family, worried that there is not enough for everyone. The child's head turns towards me, her fingers deformed by violence make their way to her mouth as she shyly looks away again.



ABOVE TOP: A Christian family that suffered from a genocide receives a food package from ICC. **ABOVE:** The mass graves of Christian children from 75 years earlier remain neglected, foreshadowing the genocide of ISIS. **LEFT:** A genocide victim waits for news of a better future.

Our morning shopping excursion for the food packages was precipitated a few days earlier by a visit to a mass grave where 3,000 Christians, this little girl's ancestors, were killed because of their faith. During that visit, my feet were surrounded by adult femurs and jaw bones, as only the children were given the decency of a burial. For the Christians who received ICC's food packages, this mass grave created 75 years earlier was a warning

of the genocide that they themselves would experience. The inquiries of these Christians are slightly different. Where were you? Why did it take you so long to find us?

In my office at ICC, a small shadow box holds what is called a tear. I have had this perfectly round, black obsidian rock for nearly 15 years. According to my own community's legend, these rocks are the tears of the victims of yet another mass grave. Descendants give them

to each other as a reminder framed as an open question: When is enough, enough?

These questions remain unanswered. But every food basket, piece of clothing, medical procedure, livelihood development, or other items brought by ICC also brings good news: nothing is forgotten, hope is not absent, and love still exists. Life is crossed-shaped, but the tomb is now empty, and newness of life is coming. It may even already be here. ✝️



HOPE FOR THE PRESENT

In the Dark, We Find Light

By Jeff King, ICC President

Khandi, a brother in India, found Jesus five years ago.

After he came to Christ, he told his wife Bindi that he wanted to live the life of a church planter. Depending on where you are in India, this isn't the safest of professions. In fact, the job can be fatal.

But Bindi wasn't a Christian. She was wrestling through giving her life to Jesus and to man who wanted to be on the front lines of a spiritual war that she knew firsthand was very dangerous. Her mother had been raped because she was a Christian.

In the end, after weighing out the dangers carefully, she knew the gospel was true and her life must be given to Jesus. After that, the decision to follow Khandi to the front lines of the war was easier to swallow.

After making those huge life decisions, her burden for the lost of India exploded, so she and Kandi devoted their lives to spreading the gospel in a very dangerous area.

The job turned out to be just as dangerous as she had feared.

She said, "The villagers continually threatened us. They demanded we leave the village or give up our faith. But we refused... leaving the village would have felt like we were leaving our faith."

Working together with the same burden and under extreme stress bound them together. When I think of their love for each other working in such a dangerous area, I imagine them as a bubble floating among thorn bushes.

Unfortunately, their bubble did eventually land among thorns.

One night they were eating dinner when they heard the villagers outside their home, shouting and demanding that Khandi come out. Bindi froze in terror as Khandi held her. Finally, he took his face in her hands, looked into her eyes and said quietly, "I'm going outside to them. I may never come back but no matter what happens, you must keep spreading the faith. You must keep believing in Jesus."

Then he went out the door. She heard the crowd roar and then the





MARCH WEEKLY PRAYERS

Take one week this month to pray for the persecuted.

SUNDAY

Please pray for Christians in India, that despite persecution, their faith would grow.

MONDAY

Please pray for those who have lost their homes and entire villages at the hands of radical Hindus.

TUESDAY

Please pray for the U.S. government to take action and protect vulnerable Christian communities in India.

WEDNESDAY

Please pray for those who persecute Christians in India, that their hearts be softened.

THURSDAY

Please pray for the widows who have lost their husbands and the orphans who have lost their parents in India.

FRIDAY

Please pray for protection for Christians whose churches are attacked.

SATURDAY

Please pray for the success of the evangelists and pastors ICC equips.

To download our monthly prayer calendar, visit www.persecution.org/take-action/prayer-calendar

sound of them moved off into the night until all she could hear were the night insects.

Sadly, there's no plot twist or miraculous ending to this story. The next day, Kandi was found with his throat slit and that was the beginning of a very, very tough journey.

So, all of Bindi's fears and worst expectation came true. There are many stories I tell of the persecuted that highlight their superhuman courage and faith but that's not Bindi's story.

There's just a whole lot of sorrow and pain and even intense fear. For many months

afterward, she would feel terror and jump and feel terror every time the phone rang. Her own father pressured her to leave the faith and to stop doing gospel work.

In response, she told him, "I don't regret our decision to follow Jesus. Losing my husband has brought me so much pain but I will live for Jesus, and I will die for Jesus. But I will never turn back."

I think her story is much like our story would be if we were in her shoes.

I don't know what Bindi's future is, but I feel

confident in two things. One is that just as she said to her father-in-law, she will never turn back.

The other is that after her long journey through the night, I suspect that God is going to use her greatly. ✝

This was an excerpt from Jeff King's upcoming devotional book focused on spiritual lessons from the persecuted. For information about pre-orders, please contact moreinfo@persecution.org.

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