

Pastors, Other Christians Brutalized in Vicious Attacks

The father of one of 20 pastors ambushed in eastern India last month was soaked in blood from the attack as he told his son, "I don't think I will make it. I just want you to know that I will be with my Maker, and you should not worry for me."

He then collapsed, unconscious. The 52-year-old Sukra Madi was one of 10 Christians hospitalized and 30 injured in the attack as the pastors were returning from an event to bless farm crops in Kotamateru village, in Odisha state's Malkangiri District, on June 21.

Madi is still struggling to recover from the attack by 30 to 40 villagers who practice tribal religion, said his son, Pastor Manglu Madi, who had tried to rescue him from the assailants armed with spades, axes and wooden sticks.

"I was trying to escape but saw they had caught my father – how could I desert him?" Pastor Madi told Morning Star News. "I somehow pulled him into a nearby house. Blood was oozing from his head and his clothes were soaked."

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Local tradition calls for an annual chicken sacrifice to bless agricultural produce in what is known as a "seed blessing," but the 11 Christian families of Kotamateru had opted instead to hold a Christian form of the ceremony, inviting pastors from about 15 villages to bless their seed and partake in a meal.

They had obtained verbal permission from police, who promised they would handle any potential trouble, said Pastor Somru Muchaki.

"The Christians wanted to submit a written application, but the officer assured that all was under control," he added.

Pastors arrived for the event on motorbikes that morning, and after a worship service, Bible teaching and prayer, they blessed the seed and had a fellowship luncheon. They left for their respective villages at about 12:30 p.m.

"It's a remote area surrounded by jungle, so we decided to leave together," said Pastor Madi.

As they rode past a large neem tree near the church site, the local residents stopped them.

"They began questioning our presence and objected to pastors coming from other villages," Pastor Muchaki told Morning Star News. "We repeatedly explained it was for a seed blessing and lunch fellowship, but they wouldn't listen. They accused us of carrying out conversions, even after we explained the purpose of our visit. Then they began to assault us. The attackers were locals and had clearly come prepared for violence."

Several bystanders reportedly watched as the villagers used wooden sticks, spades, axes, knives and sickles to strike the pastors. Seven of the 10 Christians needing immediate hospitalization suffered critical head injuries requiring stitches.

"My brother-in-law sustained deep cuts on his head in two places when he tried to protect me from the assault," Pastor Muchaki said.

The remoteness of the village delayed news of the assault, but one victim managed to contact a pastor near Malkangiri who arranged transport to rush the wounded to the district hospital.

Before the violence began, Pastor Muchaki had called a local Christian who alerted police. The officer called one of the

assailants, who falsely claimed they were letting the pastors go, but after hanging up, the villagers grew violent.

After another call to police, an officer again ordered the mob to disperse, but the villagers ignored him and began attacking.

“They beat whoever they caught with sticks, knives, spades, axes, even kicking them while they lay on the ground,” said Pastor Madi. “They beat whoever they caught in a brutal manner. Ten people threw a Christian on the ground and would climb on him – hitting him with legs, wooden sticks, knives, spades, axes and whatever their hand could find.”

As blood began to pool, Pastor Muchaki called the officer directly and told him that his orders were not being followed and that the villagers would kill them all, he said. Again the officer scolded the villager, who lied that the Christians had already been released.

The assailants then demanded to know who had called the police, and after identifying Pastor Muchaki, they mercilessly beat him.

“They caught me by my collar and, taking out their sandals, shoes and slippers, they began to beat me with continuous blows,” he said.

During the assault, his phone fell and broke on the ground.



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When his brother-in-law rushed to his aid, his head was severely injured in two places from sharp weapons.

“We could have defended ourselves; we were greater in number than the assaulters, but the Bible does not teach us to indulge in violence. So we took the blows,” Pastor Muchaki

said.

Eventually he escaped to the jungle as he and others fled in various directions. Unable to escape the assailants, Sukra Madi was beaten until he fell unconscious.

In all, 30 Christians were assaulted, with 10 suffering bleeding injuries from sharp weapons, while others sustained internal injuries from blunt force, said Pastor Madi. The 10 hospitalized victims were treated for five days before being discharged, but four – Sukra Madi, Ganga Sodi, Podiya Kowasi and Erma Madi – developed complications and on July 7 had to be taken to MIMS Hospital in Bhadrachalam, in neighboring Andhra Pradesh state, for further treatment.

“Doctors advised three of them to take the new medication prescribed and go back for a follow-up,” said Pastor Madi. “But my father’s case is complex, and he needs immediate surgery” but lacks the \$1,600 to \$1,700 USD for it. “I don’t know how to raise that money. So, we are just praying and pleading before God to heal my father without any medical surgery.”

Laxman Kumar Beti, one of the victims and a resident of the village, filed a complaint on June 22 at the Malkangiri police station, naming 16 assailants in First Information Report (FIR) 315/2025. Charges included “wrongful confinement,” “voluntarily causing hurt,” “causing grievous hurt,” “using dangerous weapons,” “criminal intimidation” and “common intention” under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023.

“Despite video evidence, medical proofs of fatal injuries, and a formal complaint, no arrests were made,” Bishop Pallab Lima, state general secretary of Rastriya Christian Morcha, told Morning Star News.

At the same time, police pressured the Christians to settle with the attackers in a “compromise” agreement, avoiding legal proceedings, said Pastor Muchaki.

“This is the third time Christians have been attacked since 2014 in this village, and every time, police pushed for compromise,” said the pastor, who that year sustained severe injuries to his head, ears, eyes and nose, besides bruises all over his body. “I had almost died. It was only a miracle that saved me then, I pray that another miracle would save my father this time.”

Forced ‘Compromise’

The Christians on July 6 were summoned to the local police station and were “threatened and pressured” to agree on a compromise, said Pastor Muchaki.

“We had no intentions to compromise, and we were very clear on that,” he said. “There was a huge language barrier that worsened matters.”

The Christians and the villagers belong to the Gondi tribe, whereas the police spoke Odia language, he said. When police insisted on compromise, the Christians could not understand and agreed to put their signatures on the settlement, which they thought was a form requesting their consent to take action against the perpetrators.

If they had known they were signing a “compromise,” they would have insisted that the villagers give in writing that they would have no objection to their worship and would never again disturb them, he said.

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Though the officer in-charge told the Christians that if the villagers trouble them again, they should record video clips that police would certainly act on, the victims were very discouraged at their inaction.

"We had videos, pictures, medical report and blood oozing wounds speaking louder than words, enough to give adequate reasons to the police to take action, but they chose not to," Pastor Muchaki said.

The Christians submitted a petition to the District Collector's office, and although authorities said they would act after receiving medical reports, they never followed through.

"I suspect the authorities are trying to suppress our case and prevent legal action against the assailants," Pastor Muchaki said.

Protests

After 10 days of police inaction, the Odisha unit of Rashtriya Christian Morcha, Malkangiri District Christian Manch and Voice Against Hate organized a peaceful protest on July 2 demanding immediate arrests of the perpetrators.

More than 7,000 people attended the rally.

Tensions flared when, in symbolic protest, the president of Voice Against Hate and a political leader attempted to mockingly garland Inspector Rigan Kindo of the Malkangiri police station, sarcastically "honoring" him for allowing the Christians to be beaten. Viewing this as public humiliation, Sub-Inspector Prabhata Gouda filed an FIR against 30 Christian leaders accusing them of "wrongful restraint," "unlawful assembly," "obstruction in public ways," and "detering public servants from discharging their duty."

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Among those named in the FIR were Bishop Pallab Lima and Manas Kumar Choudhary (Bhubaneswar), Bijay Khara (Kalimela), the Rev. Debendra Singh (Jeypore), Rajesh Patra (Koraput) and the

Rev. Jitendra Khosla (Koraput).

Christian support organization Open Doors ranks India 11th on its 2025 World Watch List of countries where Christians face the most severe persecution. India stood at 31st place in 2013 but has steadily fallen in the rankings since Narendra Modi came to power as prime minister.

Religious rights advocates blame the increasingly hostile rhetoric of the National Democratic Alliance government, led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, which they say has emboldened Hindu extremists in India since Modi took power in May 2014.

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