

Christian Indians Persecuted Over Baby's Name

What should be a time of extreme joy has turned into a bitter family conflict for a new Christian couple in Rajasthan, India.

The couple, a man named Sabal and his wife, Lajjawati, came to faith in Christ a little over a year ago as they sought a solution to what is considered a curse in traditional Indian society: being childless.

When repeated medical solutions failed, the couple turned to their traditional religion and faithfully followed the instructions of their priests and witch doctors—but nothing worked.

Then, a little over a year ago, they met Pastor Rafat Sanjiv. The Gospel for Asia-supported national missionary shared the Good News about God's love with them, and they responded. They wondered if Jesus could really answer their prayers.

As Sabal and Lajjawati began attending church and following Christ, God did answer the cry of their hearts and blessed them with a little baby girl. They were filled with joy—but then the trouble began.

Asserting his traditional position in the family, Sabal's older brother wanted to name the baby, and he wanted to give the little girl a name that reflected one of the gods the rest of the family still worshiped.

In Sabal and Lajjawati's former religion, the naming of a child is a rite of deep religious significance. That's why it is common practice to name the baby after a sage, saint or deity, believing that each time the name is said, it will remind the young person of the path he or she should take in

life.

The girl's name, Amritaya, for instance, means "the immortal Lord Vishnu," one of the gods the parents once worshiped. As Christians, of course, Sabal and Lajjawati didn't want their daughter to have such a name. They wanted a biblical name, like Ruth, and that infuriated Sabal's brother.

The brother personally threatened Pastor Sanjiv, warning him not to allow the couple to attend the Christian services. He says if his brother and sister-in-law did return to the church, he would file a complaint with the police, alleging that Pastor Sanjiv forced them to convert to Christianity. With the intense anti-Christian feelings pervading the state, such an accusation would cause tremendous problems for the pastor and his church—as well as for Sabal and Lajjawati.

GFA leaders in India are concerned about this situation and are asking for prayer that it can be resolved peacefully.

"This is a difficult time for this first-generation Christian couple as they stand firm in their new faith," notes GFA President K.P. Yohannan. "So I am asking believers around the world to join together to pray for them and for Pastor Sanjiv and his congregation. Pray also that Sabal's brother will come to know the love of God and that he will drop his opposition to the Gospel.

"It is so encouraging to know that a Christian family in this remote village can be lifted up through the prayers of God's people around the world." Dr. Yohannan adds.