

Christians Arrested for Operating Boys' Hostel in India

✖ Police accompanied by 10 Hindu extremists on Aug. 28 arrested a Christian operator of a boys' hostel in Karnataka, India, after the extremists accused him and another Christian of offering food, shelter, education and future job prospects as an "allurement" to convert to Christianity.

Hanuma Naik is also pastor of Indian Gypsy Works Fellowship (IGWF). After his release on bail the next day, he dismissed the allegations as fabricated, saying that parents of the 42 students voluntarily sent their children, ages 6 to 19, to the hostel. The parents had prior information and knowledge that Christian teachings are part of the program at the church-run hostel, popularly known as a "Christian Ashram," he said.

Sub-Inspector Chemaiah Hiremath of Kunigal police station told Compass that Pastor Naik and another arrested staff member of the hostel, Rama Naik, had disclosed in voluntary written statements that another pastor, Madesh Kumar, was supplying them with books and other tracts. Asked about the "voluntary statement" he was said to have signed, Pastor Naik replied that both he and Rama Naik were forced to sign blank sheets of paper at the police station.

Hiremath told Compass that Ramesh Kariyappa, a resident of Kunigal, filed a complaint on Aug. 28 against Pastor Naik and Rama Naik of "forcible conversion" and using food and shelter as an allurement to convert. The sub-inspector went to IGWF, where 42 students mainly of the Lambani tribes are housed. He claimed the students were forced to pray to the biblical God, and that Hindus "have gods like Hanuman and goddess Lakshmi."

Hiremath said the Christians had promised the parents of the

boys that they would take care of all the children's needs for food, clothing and education—a potentially criminal activity under draconian “anti-conversion” laws in force in some states, but not in Karnataka. Such laws seek to curb religious conversions made by “force, fraud or allurement,” but human rights groups say they obstruct conversion generally as Hindu nationalists invoke them to harass Christians with spurious arrests and incarcerations.

The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that Hiremath, Deputy Superintendent of Police Prabhakar Reddy and another official arrived at the IGWF church with 10 local Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) extremists led by Ramalingayya Gowda and two others identified only as Rangantha and Ramesh.

After falsely accusing the two Christians of fraudulently converting students to Christianity by luring them with food, shelter and education, the extremists slapped evangelist Rama Naik repeatedly and questioned many of the children about hostel activities, their studies and families, according to GCIC. Police put Pastor Naik and Rama Naik into a police jeep and confiscated Bibles and other Christian literature from the hostel.

With the Hindu extremists following behind them, the police then went to a nearby house church, Krupashraya Baptist Church (Grace of God Baptist Church) in search of Pastor Madesh Kumar, but he wasn't at home. His wife, Glory Kumar, told Compass that she was feeding her 18-month-old son when three policemen and six Hindu extremists arrived, entered the house and began questioning her about church activities.

They went around the house and picked up Bibles and some prayer books,” she said. Her son began crying, yet the police and extremists “in loud and threatening tones” sternly warned against future worship in the home and ordered her husband to report to the police station when he returned.

The GCIC reported that the police and extremists then went to the Indian Christian Revival Mission in search of Pastor Ranjanaswami Raju at . Agrahar, Kunigal Taluk limits, but he was away, and his house, where his church meets, was locked.

Police took Pastor Naik and Rama Naik to the Kunigal police station at 11 p.m. and charged them under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including “acts intended to outrage religious feelings by insulting its religion or religious beliefs” (Sections 295-A) and “promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion” (Section 153-A).

When Pastor Kumar showed up at the Kunigal police station along with attorney N.R. Rajashekar the next day, Aug. 29, at about 11 a.m., Hiremath asked him about his source of income and his house church. Pastor Kumar told Compass that he replied that he was an insurance agent and that only praise and worship services were held at his house. Hiremath warned him against “conversion activities”—mistakenly implying that conversion is illegal in India—and sent him home.

Rajashekar told Compass that the Christians were simple, innocent citizens who were being treated like criminals.