

Christians Under Constant Attack in India's Most Hostile State

Not a week goes by without a Christian being attacked somewhere in the south Indian state of Karnataka, where more than 40 incidents of violence on Christians have been reported this year.

Each attack deepens the sense of insecurity among Christians, who account for 1.9 percent of the 61 million people in Karnataka. But it is mostly Christians from small, independent groups who bear the brunt of hostilities.

The attacks on them are not just frequent, but also brutal. A recent incident, where Rightwing Hindus attempted to slit the throat of a pastor who was recovering in the hospital from a previous attack, serves as an example of what Christians go through in this state.

On Oct. 11, extremist Hindu nationalists—who equate a citizen's Indian-ness to his or her Hindu identity and reject religious conversions as disloyalty to the nation—beat pastor Samuel Kim, of Jerusalem Prayer House in Kannur village in eastern Kolar district, until he fell unconscious, according to Morning Star News.

Pastor Kim, who was accused of converting Hindus to Christianity, was admitted to a hospital in Kolar district headquarters with a broken rib, head and neck injuries, and bruises all over his body. Despite causing serious harm to the pastor, the attackers remained at large.

Early the following morning, the attackers returned to kill the pastor, who was in a private room in the hospital. "Five extremists came near my bed, started to strangle me, and

brought a razor to slit my throat," the pastor was quoted as saying. However, they ran away when they heard people approaching.

After the attack inside the hospital, authorities deployed police outside the pastor's room. However, that relief was short-lived. The attackers were still not arrested, and an official, identified as Circle Inspector Davendra Prasad, warned the pastor not to lead worship again or else face "dire consequences."

The attackers had been after Pastor Kim since they assaulted him about three months earlier—again with impunity, according to the Karnataka-based Global Council of Indian Christians.

With authorities shielding extremist Hindu nationalists, Christian workers have little they can do to protect themselves in this Hindu-majority state.

Within four years of its rule in Karnataka, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP or Indian People's Party) has turned this state, which is otherwise known as India's Silicon Valley, into the country's most violent place for the Christian minority.

According to the New Delhi-based Evangelical Fellowship of India, Karnataka has remained the worst state for Christians for the last four years. While Christian groups have recorded an average of one attack per week in this state in recent years, the actual number is perhaps much higher, for not all attacks come to the notice of Christian groups.

The World Evangelical Alliance recently warned in a report that the incidence of attacks in Karnataka might further increase with the BJP facing an organizational crisis in the state after a top leader splintered to form his own party. To retain power, the BJP is seeking to consolidate its Hindu vote-bank by raising the issue of conversions and launching attacks.

However, the suffering being meted out to Christians brings out heroes among the community. Karnataka's Christian workers have faithfully ministered to their congregations and others in the face of persecution in the past, and will continue to do so.

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