

Hindu Extremists in India Beat Pastor Unconscious

Hindu extremists beat a pastor and evangelist unconscious in front of his sons earlier this month in Madhya Pradesh state.

Ramesh Devda, 30, from Dhadhniya, Meghnagar district, said he was attacked on April 4 at about 11 a.m. after leading a prayer meeting in Chikkliya village. He said he was on his way to Bhajidongra, at the border of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat states, by motorcycle with his two sons, 10-year-old Elias, and 8-year-old Shimon, to lead another prayer meeting.

When he reached Raseda village, he said, suddenly three people on two motorcycles blocked his way and forced him to stop.

"Suddenly out of nowhere these three men appeared in two motorcycles—they blocked me and tilted my motorcycle," Pastor Devda told Compass. "We fell down. They were carrying big bamboo sticks and clubs. They started beating me, and then they called and three more men came and started to attack me."

He said he was thankful that his sons were spared from beating, though his older son sustained a leg injury in the course of the attack.

"They were angry at me and were threatening to kill me and were warning me not to come to their area again," he said. "My sons were screaming at the top of their voices, and they were afraid. One of the men hit me on my forehead with a big bamboo stick, cracking my skull. The others were also beating me on my body, especially my back with bamboo sticks."

A blow to the forehead temporarily blinded him, he said.

"My eyes were darkened, and I fell down, and they proceeded to beat me even more," he said. "The men were also abusive in the

foulest language that I had heard, and they were drunk.”

People passing by heard the two boys crying out and came to help, and the attackers fled, he said, leaving the unconscious pastor and his sons.

“I do not know who helped me, as I was unconscious,” Pastor Devda said. “But I came to know later that local Christians also came in and called the emergency helpline. As a result, an ambulance came, which then took me to the hospital.”

He was taken to Anita Surgical Hospital on Station Road in Dahod, Gujarat. There a physician identified only as Dr. Bharpoda told him that he had fractured his skull.

“I am being treated for my wounds now, but there is still a lot of pain,” Pastor Devda said.

A Christian for 15 years, Pastor Devda has been in Christian leadership for 11 years and now serves with the Christian Reformed Fellowship of India. He has two other children, Ashish and 4-year-old Sakina, and his wife Lalita, 28, is active with him in Christian service.

Pastor Devda leads congregations in Chikkliya, Bhajidongra and Dhadhniya villages.

“I have heard that I was attacked because the people of Chikkliya did not like me conducting the Sunday service there,” he said. “The people who beat me up do belong to a Hindu fundamentalist outfit, and some believers in Chikkliya know them. I can recognize them if I see them again.”

He said, however, that he does not want to file a First Information Report (FIR) with police.

“There is no one supporting me or standing with me in my village or my mission, and I am myself fearful, as I have to continue to minister to these very people,” Pastor Devda said. “I know my attack was pre-planned, but I do not want to report

it to the police.”

A Christian co-worker from Rajasthan was also attacked about a month ago in equally brutal fashion, he said, but also refrained from filing an FIR because of fear of repercussions.

Vijayesh Lal, secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India's Religious Liberty Commission, said the tribal belt that extends to the border areas of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan, has been a hot spot for anti-Christian activity since the late 1990s.

“Only recently a 65-year-old evangelist was beaten and stripped by Hindu extremists,” he said. “It is a worrisome trend, and one that should be dealt with not only by the government but by the secular media and civil society in general.”