

Hindu Mecca Ripe for Soul Harvest

Varanasi, India is the Mecca of Hinduism. Revered by other some other religions as well, Varanasi is the holiest of cities for Hindus.

The polluted Ganges River in Varanasi is considered to possess the power to cleanse sins and increase the chances of Hindu followers to have a good reincarnation—or to ultimately cease to exist—in the after life. Over a million people are in the city each day. Some know they have little time left and go to the river daily, praying for mercy to Hanuman, the monkey god, until they die.

Dave Stravers, president of Mission India, recently returned from the desperate city. “For most foreign, Christian visitors it’s a pretty ugly experience,” he says. “It really is Satan on display.”

Many in the region are surprisingly open to the gospel, though. Stravers says that the idea of Jesus—the God who loves them—is appealing to many Hindus seeking spiritual solace, and the Church is growing daily. With that ready acceptance, however, comes extreme antagonism.

“Once the Christian workers start seeing success—people are coming to the Lord, and churches are starting, this can cause a pretty violent reaction,” explains Stravers. “We’ve had a lot of reports of persecution.”

Fresh in Stravers’ mind before he left was the story of two church planters arrested in India under the auspices of forced conversion. The men are on bail, awaiting trial, and are threatened frequently by militants pressuring them to convert to Hinduism if they want to be safe. When Stravers reached India himself, he saw this type of persecution firsthand.

One church planter in Varanasi, who has planted three churches and baptized dozens of people, is consistently up against Hindu extremists. The missionary, Lakshman, says threats on his life have been getting worse and worse. One group recently threatened to shoot him if he did not leave the area.

Lakshman is far from backing down, however, Stravers says: "He said to us, 'I have 10 young men that I'm training—new converts from the three churches that I started. I'm training them as fast as I can to do the work that I'm doing so that if I die, the work will go on. Because this area needs Jesus.'"

Lakshman's attitude is visible across the region. Rather than fleeing danger, believers are desperate to preach the gospel.

"There are literally thousands of young Christians who want to witness, who want to do evangelism, who want to start new churches, who want to reach children and illiterate people. And they don't have resources; they don't have training."

But that's where Mission India comes in. "We provide them with the resources they need to do their work," says Stravers. "We are helping the local church leaders in Varanasi to reach their neighborhoods with the Gospel."

Stravers continues, "We're training a lot of people, but there are literally thousands of people who need training. We have a waiting list of people in Varanasi and other places in India."

The need is great in Varanasi, and believers are excited to respond to it. However, proper training is hard to come by. It does not cost much to prepare these Christian leaders for a lifetime of service to the King and their people.

In the meantime, Stravers asks you pray that church planters and pastors would have the courage to continue their work no matter what fears Satan tries to throw their way.