

Hindu Villagers Attack Mourners in India

Hindu extremists trying to stop the burial of a **convert to Christianity** last week in Chhattisgarh state beat a pastor and other Christians, including children and two 60-year-old women who fell unconscious, sources told Compass.

Jaikant Pawar, 31, of Balgal village, Kanker district, died on April 20 en route to a hospital; an asthma sufferer, he had complained of chest pains. When more than 40 Christians at the family's house were taking his body out for burial, Hindu villagers who had surrounded the house stopped them.

"About 300 extremists led by the village head, Satnatram Pawar, suddenly surrounded the house shouting **anti-Christian** slogans, mocked and verbally abused us," one Christian leader told Compass. "They slapped, kicked and beat us with their fists and slippers. The extremists threatened to kill us and challenged us to bring life back to the dead body of Pawar."

At least 10 Christians sustained injuries and received medical treatment, sources said, adding that the attack went on for more than six hours. The assailants accused the Christians of having poisoned Pawar.

"The extremists were mocking us and said that Jesus, who calmed the storm, sent rain and who also raised up the dead, must also raise up Jaikant Pawar, and they forced us to pray," the Christian leader said. "They threatened to pull off my skin if Jesus did not make Pawar alive again."

The villagers beat Ganga Bhai and Suki Bhai, both 60 years old, he said.

"The Christians fled and scattered and some hid in their homes," he said. "However, the extremists chased them and

forcefully dragged them out from their houses. Two Christian children who were about 10 years old were pushed and thrown like a volleyball. They fell unconscious after some time.”

The leader, who suffered internal injuries in the attack, said he was beaten nearly unconscious, with the extremists pouring water on him to revive him when he was about to pass out. He and others eventually lost consciousness but were revived when a girl poured water on them; but one Christian, Pyaru Bihari, remained unconscious for 24 hours, he said.

At about 2 a.m. that night, the Hindu extremists told the Christians to remove the body from the village or be killed, sources said. The Christians carried the body to the Bande police station about 10 kilometers (6 miles) away, but police were unwilling to register a First Information Report, they said.

After pressure from area Christian leaders and the Evangelical Fellowship of India, the district collector and police investigated, source said.

The officials summoned the attackers, who then falsely accused the Christians of beating them. Police warned the villagers not to disturb the Christians again and worked out an agreement in which the body was allowed to be buried in Balgal.

On April 25, however, area Christians began to receive threats, according to Christian support organization Open Doors.

“Withdraw your complaint or face dire consequences, to the point of losing your lives,” they were warned, according to an Open Doors press statement.

Pawar and his wife converted to Christianity three years ago, remaining firm in their faith in spite of being ostracized by their family and community, a Christian leader told Compass.

“Pawar firmly believed in Christ, and he once said, ‘Jesus gives me peace, so I cannot leave Him,’ when his relatives and the villagers warned him to leave Christ,” said another church leader.

Since they were the only Christians in their village, the couple gathered with Christians in nearby Bande and Pakhanjur, according to Open Doors. Pawar had suffered from a sickle-cell disease as well as asthma, the organization stated, forcing him to be hospitalized earlier this month.