

Indian Christians Forced Into Hindu Worship

Hindu extremists forced 15 Christians to participate in Hindu worship rituals, then beat them up and roused them from their village.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India said that on June 19, 150 Hindus rounded up 12 Christians in Jawanga, a village in the tropical Dakshin Bastar district of Chhattisgarh state, in eastern India.

The Christians were taken to the Pendevi Temple, where they were forced to **worship** tribal and Hindu deities, and to participate in Hindu rituals, Akhilesh Edgar of the Evangelical Fellowship of India told *Open Doors News*. He said the abductors then assaulted the Christians, though Edgar did not provide detail about the extent of any injuries they may have suffered.

Rather than let the Christians return home, the Hindus chased them out of the village. The Christians sought the help of John Nag, a pastor in Geelam about 5 kilometers from Jawanga, and Sonsingh Jhali, known locally as an advocate for Christians.

The Evangelical Fellowship of India said Nag and Asaram Bech, in whose house the Jawanga Christians sometimes held prayer meetings, approached the elected head of the village, who refused to permit the Christians' return. The uprooted Jawanga villagers are staying with other Christians in Geelam, the organization said.

The evangelical group said the Christians did not file a complaint with the police, for fear of stirring **religious tensions**.

The June 19 episode is only the most recent example of harassment of Christians in Chhattisgarh. The Evangelical Fellowship of India reported in April that 300 residents of Belgal village disrupted the attempted burial of a man who had converted to Christianity. Ten people were injured, and the burial was completed after district authorities intervened.

At the national level, India is **religiously pluralistic**, encompassing the world's third-largest Muslim population and about 25 million Christians, or about one of every 50 people in the country. **Persecution** of religious minorities generally intensifies at the regional and local levels, according to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Chhattisgarh is one of five Indian states that has adopted a Freedom of Religion Act, which the commission says has had the opposite effect.

"While intended to reduce forced conversions and decrease communal violence, states with these laws have higher incidents of intimidation, harassment, and violence against religious minorities, particularly Christians," the commission concluded in its 2012 annual report.

India is listed at No. 32 on the Open Doors World Watch list of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. "Persecution is largely due to the amazing growth of Christianity among the low castes and Dalits, which threatens Hindu leaders," according to the World Watch List. "Violence against pastors and church gatherings continues on a monthly basis, usually in rural areas."