



India

A pastor and his family beaten; a prayer meeting broken up; Christians forced from their village by a mob; children threatened and abused; a church building attacked and a cemetery desecrated – just a few examples of the repeated incidents of harassment and intimidation suffered by Christians in India in 2012.



Indian Christians gather for teaching and worship

In many parts of the country the small minority of Christians live at peace with the Hindu majority. But in some states they are acutely vulnerable to a militant Hindu nationalist movement called Hindutva, which is striving to make India a religiously “pure” nation. Recent years have seen numerous incidents of small-scale aggression such as those listed above, and also major outbreaks of anti-Christian communal violence in Orissa and Karnataka.

It is difficult for Christians to obtain justice for offences committed against them. Local police can be slow to respond to attacks, and often no-one is prosecuted. Corruption is also rife in the courts, and Christians’ unwillingness to play the system dishonestly works against them. Five years on from the Orissa violence, few people have been convicted. Christian leaders and human rights activists continue to campaign for justice, however, and in December 2012 twelve people were handed prison sentences for their part in the 2008 attacks.

The political wing of the Hindutva movement now holds or shares power in ten states, and in several of these it has secured the introduction of laws that forbid conversions by “force”, “fraud” or “allurement”. In some places these laws are interpreted more rigorously to prohibit legitimate Christian evangelism. In 2012 it was reported that the names of some 20,000 Christians had been removed from the electoral roll in Madhya Pradesh; Hindu extremists were suspected of attempting to disenfranchise them.

According to tradition, the apostle Thomas brought the Gospel to India, and there has been an established Christian community since at least the 2nd century. Later there were a number of mass conversions, especially among the lowest levels of the Hindu caste system. Much of the Hindu extremist activist activity has been prompted by the remarkable growth of the Church in India in recent generations, especially amongst Dalits. Two-thirds of India’s 27 million Christians are Dalits, who are at the very bottom of Indian society. They suffer even worse discrimination than Hindu Dalits because they are denied the legal status needed to relieve their intense poverty.

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