



THE **Voice** OF THE **Martyrs**

June 2022

**BEARING
THEIR CROSS
IN INDIA**

“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” Heb 13:3



The World's Most Intolerant and Least Inclusive Belief System

Hinduism is misunderstood in the United States. I am often asked how the same religion that is viewed as a source of positivity in our popular culture can produce such violent persecutors of Christians. The answer is that the seemingly peaceful and tolerant ideas that have been extracted from Hindu belief and popularized in the U.S. since the 1960s do not reflect the religion as practiced by approximately 1 billion people on the Indian subcontinent, the place of its origin and historic majority.

At Hinduism's core is the caste system, which is among the most oppressive and restrictive social constructs ever devised. In the West, many admire the concept of karma as the belief that if one does good, one will receive good. And reincarnation is viewed as an attractive idea of unending life. But those concepts are foreign to Hinduism as practiced in India, where the caste system traps each individual at birth within a specific tier of society. Hindus are born as simultaneously oppressors of those in castes below them and as

victims of those in castes above them — with no hope or means of changing their fate.

Many throughout the world have the misperception that Hinduism is inclusive, but its tenets include the teaching that those not born into it are permanently excluded. And worse yet, many in India are considered to be born beneath the castes. These are the "Dalits" (from a Hindi word meaning downtrodden), who number around 200 million and are treated so badly by others that they are untouchable. These people whom Hinduism defines as "untouchables" — but who Jesus Christ our Lord defines as my brothers and sisters — are eternally equal to you and me in every way.

I have found that South Africans, enamoured with Hindu ideas do not understand the most significant aspect of the religion as practiced in South Asia — the continual striving and sacrifice to appease wrathful gods and goddesses. Within this belief system, purifying a village, state or nation of

anything or anyone that is not Hindu is viewed as essential to eliminating suffering and ensuring prosperity. Those who have been governing India since 2014 fervently believe this and apply it to the rule of their nation. As a result, violence against Christians has increased year after year.

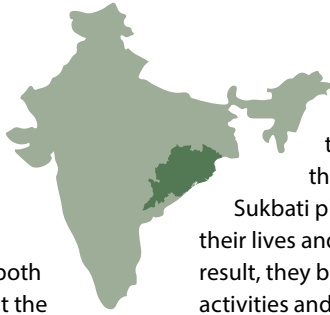
You would be accused of being a "culture wrecker" for proclaiming the Gospel in India, and more recently, the criticism of Hinduism has even been labelled as "hate speech." But we must obey God no matter what men may say, and it is an act of love to "wreck" false beliefs that hold people captive. I pray that we will love Hindus enough to join our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters in boldly and joyfully paying any price to bring them the Gospel.

Ashley



Choosing to Love The Murderers

Sukbati and Unga don't know one another, but they have several things in common: Both live in Odisha state, India; both have a strong faith in Jesus Christ; and both have suffered great loss at the hands of those opposed to their faith.



Maoist insurgents murdered Sukbati's husband, Ananthram, in 2019 during a period of increasing violence against Christians. "When I heard that my husband had been killed," Sukbati said, "I was afraid they would come and kill the whole family. We have been threatened two or three times since the day he died."

And Unga's story is painfully similar, though the source of his suffering was Hindu extremists rather than Maoist ideologues. Radical Hindus killed Unga's 16-year-old son, Samaru, in 2020 simply because he was a follower of Christ. "They had decided to kill us so that there wouldn't be any more Christians in the village," Unga said.

Faith over Ideology

Sukbati and her husband, Ananthram, came to faith in Christ and were baptized in 2018 after one of Ananthram's relatives shared the Gospel with them. Before coming to know Christ, Ananthram had supported a left-wing separatist group called the Naxalites, whose Maoist-communist ideals aspire to nothing less than an overthrow of the Indian government.

Like many in his village, Ananthram supported the Naxalites primarily to avoid becoming one of their targets. But after he and

Sukbati placed their faith in Christ, their lives and priorities changed. As a result, they became involved in church activities and stopped supporting the Naxalites. That's when the persecution began.

First, they were ostracized by their own neighbours. Villagers cut off the utilities to their home and beat Ananthram, warning him to stop his Christian activities. When Ananthram refused to abandon his faith in Christ, village leaders informed the Naxalites about his Christian faith and claimed that he was a police informant.

Members of the Naxalites soon confronted Ananthram about the accusation, but he assured them that he had never received money for helping the police. "I am a follower of Jesus," he told them, "not a police informant. I work in the fields to earn for my family."

Then, on a February evening in 2019, Ananthram answered a knock at the door and was faced with a Naxalite mob in front of his house. As men grabbed Ananthram, tied his hands behind his back and began dragging him away, his 7-year-old son tried to follow him. When the mob threatened to kill the boy, he ran to his uncle's house for help. The boy and his uncle searched for Ananthram that night but could not find him.

The next morning, they discovered Ananthram's body on the side of the



► Sukbati and her children pray for the men who killed Ananthram.



► Since the murder of Unga's son, Samar (above), 10 other families in his village have come to faith in Christ.



road a few miles from their house. The murderers had fractured Ananthram's skull with a large rock and left a note warning others against following Christ.

A Teenager's Sacrifice

A year later, also in Odisha state, a mob of Hindu extremists armed with sticks and daggers surrounded Unga's house one night at about 11pm. Unga was away from the village at the time, and his teenage son, Samar, was home alone. Knowing that his father couldn't be reached by phone, Samar called his uncle, who encouraged him to pray and be brave before rushing to provide help.

But Samar's uncle arrived just after the mob had broken into the house, and the extremists quickly subdued and abducted both him and Samar. While his uncle later managed to escape, Samar was dragged into the forest.

When Unga returned home and learned that his son had been abducted, he immediately reported the incident to local police. Unga's pastors, other Christian families from the village, and the police searched for Samar for weeks before finding his body deep in the jungle. Samar's face had been so badly damaged that he was unrecognizable. At

the sight of his son's mangled body, Unga fell to the ground and burst into tears.

"After the persecution, we were quite worried, filled with fear and sadness," Unga said. "But now we are strengthened in the Lord."

Samar's murder was not the first time Unga's family had experienced persecution. Unga and his nephew were brutally attacked by Hindus in their village in 2017. And villagers had also denied Christian families access to the village water well and prohibited them from purchasing items from village shops.

No Going Back

Following Christ has come at a great cost for Sukbati and Unga, but they each remain firm in their commitment to Jesus Christ.

When asked why she does not return to Hinduism, which would make life much easier for her and her five children, Sukbati testified of her unwavering devotion to Christ. "When Ananthram was alive," she said, "he told us one thing: 'Don't give up Jesus.' We came to know the truth, and we cannot stop. Though my husband lost his life for his faith in Christ and it is difficult to take care of our children and live without him, I will not

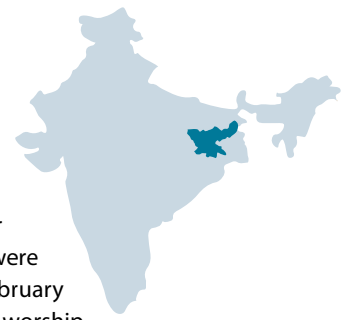
give up Jesus because He will be with me to care for me and my children." Although Sukbati and her children are the only Christians in their village, they boldly share the Gospel every chance they get.

And Unga expressed a similar determination to keep his eyes on Christ. "We have experienced the love of the Lord," he said. "There is no way to go back." Since his son's murder, 10 other families have come to faith in Christ in Unga's village.

Both Sukbati and Unga occasionally see the men who killed their loved ones. Sukbati said she holds no animosity toward those who killed her husband, and she prays that they will come to know Christ. Likewise, Unga said he is praying that those who killed his son will also come to faith in Christ.

"When I see them," Unga said, "I don't get angry. I smile at them, love them and pray for them because they also have to know Jesus. It is better to live and face trouble for the Lord and go to heaven to be in eternity with the Lord than to live in this world with sin and go to hell. Don't fear the people who destroy our body, but fear the Lord."

Standing Against the Mob in Jharkhand State



As four Christian families gathered for worship in eastern India's Jharkhand state in February 2018, about 150 Hindu nationalists did everything they could to stop them.

They destroyed the house-church's musical instruments, ripped its hymnbooks and stole money from its offering bag. The extremists then beat the Christians and dragged them to the centre of the village, ordering them to publicly renounce their faith in Jesus Christ.

"At that time," said a church member named Rakesh, "we were reminded of the Scripture where Jesus said that people will hand us over to the authorities; people will hate us due to our faith in Jesus Christ."

When the Believers refused to renounce their Christian faith, the attackers beat them again. And leaders of the group told the Christians that if

they didn't reconvert to Hinduism within 15 days, they would be barred from the village and forced to forfeit their land and property.

Ever since Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, Hindu nationalists have attacked churches with increasing regularity in their efforts to reshape India as a purely Hindu nation. Under Modi, a longtime member of the Hindu nationalist *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), numerous anti-conversion laws have been established at the state level. And Hindu nationalists often attempt to force new Christians to return to Hinduism through "reconversion" ceremonies known as *Ghar Wapsi* (meaning "coming home").

But as Hindu nationalists seek to "purify" India through violence against Christians, they only help the church

grow. The four families who were attacked in February 2018 resumed worship just weeks later, and their faithfulness to Christ attracted others to their church. Today, 12 families belong to the church, which now conducts Bible studies in three villages.

"For the first six months, we were still living in fear," Rakesh said. "But after that, our fear went away and we did not hate them anymore. As Jesus forgave those who put Him on the cross, we have also forgiven our persecutors."

"We continue to make ourselves available for helping our community with their agriculture-related needs," he continued. "This gives us more opportunities to share what we believe about Jesus, why we believe in Jesus and why we are willing to sacrifice for the

► This house-church was attacked in 2018, but church members persevered and welcomed eight more families to their group.

sake of Jesus Christ."

Church members admit that they occasionally fear further attacks, but when fear takes hold they sing worship songs and recite Psalms 23 and 91. The persecution, they said, has served to refine their faith and draw them closer to Christ.

"In the beginning of our faith life," Rakesh said, "we never knew that we would be persecuted. But after the incident of persecution, we realized that persecution comes for our advancement and growth; it strengthens our faith and commitment to Christ."

Jamshed, another church member, said becoming intimately aware of persecution and subsequently reading about it in Scripture has given members of the church more courage. "Since the persecution incident, we have more boldness," he said. "Many people in surrounding villages now know about



our Christian faith. Having seen our life and commitment to Christ, many want to know why we follow Jesus with so much commitment."

Despite ongoing tension and the likelihood of more persecution,

the Believers said they have never considered stopping their worship services. "We are so blessed because we were chosen to suffer for the name of Jesus," Jamshed said. "We have a greater reward."

Anticipating Violence in Karnataka State



Since beginning his ministry work in 2004, Pastor Ashok has been attacked three times.

◀ When Miriam pleaded with attackers to stop beating her father, they delivered a swift kick to her stomach.

The one attack in 2021 lasted 45 minutes.

On 31 January, 2021, Pastor Ashok and about 150 other Believers gathered as usual for Sunday worship at their church in Karnataka state, India. But as church members assembled for worship, a large group of Hindu nationalists barged into the church building shouting about Hindu gods. They then locked the building from the inside and beat Pastor Ashok and other Believers with whatever they could find, including Bibles and a tambourine. It was the third time the church had been attacked by Hindu radicals.

Ashok's 13-year-old daughter, Miriam, dropped to her knees in front of the attackers, pleading with them to stop beating her father. When she persisted in begging them to stop, one of the men kicked her in the stomach, leaving her

writhing in pain on the floor.

The pastor and his daughter were among 28 Believers, including women and children, who were beaten during the 45-minute attack. Miriam, whose injuries were more severe than most, suffered internal bleeding for more than two weeks and required extensive treatment for her stomach injury.

Pastor Ashok filed a case against the attackers with police. And in response, the attackers filed a case against him, falsely accusing him of forcibly converting Hindus to Christianity. As his congregation recovered from the attack, Pastor Ashok resumed church services, but he is still dealing with the legal case against him.

Since beginning his ministry work in 2004, Pastor Ashok has been attacked

three times. He has led more than 100 Hindus to Christ, making him an attractive target for the Hindu nationalists.

During the second attack, in 2010, his pregnant wife, Kala, was beaten so severely that she lost their baby and was left unconscious for three days. Following the attack, Ashok was forced to move his family to a different district because no one would rent them a home.

Pastor Ashok and his church members know they could face further attacks, but they continue to pray for their persecutors. Many of the Believers said they forgive their attackers and want them to know Jesus too.

Hunted at Home in Madhya Pradesh State



Not all attacks on Christians in India occur during worship services.

Sometimes radical Hindus target a single, influential member of a local church.

Vijay, an elder of a church in Madhya Pradesh state, left Hinduism to follow Christ after being healed of tuberculosis, from which he had suffered for two years. After trying Hindu rituals and numerous hospital visits, Vijay finally received healing from his illness after placing his faith in Christ.

◀ Vijay remains resolute in his desire to share Christ among Hindus in his village.

Having led his wife and 24 other relatives to the Lord, Vijay sought to share the Gospel with local villagers. He cultivated friendships with many in his village and eventually led more than 30 Hindu families to Christ.

In 2015, Vijay became an elder in his house-church. He assisted the pastor with his ministry, hosted a weekly prayer gathering at his house and continued sharing the Gospel with locals.

Then, one day he learned that some villagers were upset about his prayer gatherings and evangelism. They publicly chastised him for “spoiling” their Hindu religion by “forcing” Hindus to become Christians. And Vijay soon heard that some men were planning to chase him from the village and kill him.

One afternoon in April 2020, while his wife and children were away, Vijay lay

down to take a nap after a long morning of tending to his cattle. After dozing off for a short period of time, he awoke to find his home engulfed in flames. A mob of Hindu extremists had set his house on fire and left the scene.

The fire destroyed Vijay’s house and killed several buffalo, goats and cows that his family depended on for their livelihood, but he managed to escape. Police eventually arrested a few men for setting the fire, and some pastors, neighbours and friends helped Vijay repair his house. VOM purchased two buffalo and a goat for Vijay’s family.

Vijay said he has forgiven his persecutors and is praying for their salvation. He asks for prayer that he will be able to reach Hindus with the Gospel in surrounding villages. Reflecting on the incident, Vijay

quoted Job 1:21 — “*The LORD gave and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*”

Though Vijay’s face and hands were scarred by the flames, he remains joyful. He said even if his life is threatened again, it won’t affect his faith in Christ.

“If I am alive or dead,” he said, “it will be for Jesus only.”

▶ The fire set by Hindu nationalists at Vijay’s home killed several of the family’s buffalo and other livestock.





Day of the Christian Martyr

JUNE 29,
2022

JOHN CHAU

“You guys might think I’m crazy in all this, but I think it’s worth it to declare Jesus to these people.”

—John Chau, Nov. 16, 2018

As a teenager, John Chau felt called to take the Gospel to the people of North Sentinel Island. For nine years, he prepared himself to go to the island, live among the people, learn their language and share Christ with them.

John knew the risks. He knew the Sentinelese had been violent toward visitors before, but he also knew God had called him to go.

“I believe that the measure of success in the kingdom of God is obedience,” John said shortly before his death. “I want my life to reflect obedience to Christ and to live in obedience to Him. I think that Jesus is worth it. He’s worth everything.”

This month, join Christians around the world in honouring John’s sacrifice, and be inspired by his obedience. May we follow his example of obedience to Christ’s call to “Go into all the world” — at any cost.

Learn more about John, and get free resources for your church, small group and family.

persecutionsa.org/martyr

Prayer Diary

June/July 2022

JUNE

- S 19 JORDAN** **Pray that the Lord will raise new national leaders and pastors.**
M 20 CUBA Pray for Christians who are held for interrogation, harassed or fined.
T 21 NIGERIA Pray for an end to kidnappings of school children in the northeast.
W 22 SUDAN Pray for recent converts from Islam, who experience persecution from their families and communities.
T 23 OMAN Pray for Saleh and his family, who were forced to leave because of their faith.
F 24 KAZAKHSTAN Pray that Believers will find ways to spread the Gospel despite increasing religious restrictions.
S 25 COLOMBIA **Pray for widows and orphans in Colombia who are rebuilding their lives.**
S 26 SOMALIA **Pray that Somali Believers will be able to remain in the country and share the Gospel.**
M 27 BHUTAN Pray for successful Bible distributions in the country.
T 28 CHINA Pray that Christian children will have a firm foundation in the Lord.

W 29 DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR

Join Christians around the world in prayer and be inspired by the examples of faith of those who have come before us. (See previous page.)

- T 30 ETHIOPIA Pray for Abebech Demisse, Worke Eda'o, Meseret Teketal and other widows.

JULY

- F 1 ISRAEL Pray for Christian converts from Islam in Palestinian areas, especially those who have lost jobs.
S 2 MALAYSIA **Pray that new churches will be established and filled with Malay people.**
S 3 NEPAL **Pray for those reaching out to Tibetans in Nepal.**
M 4 MOROCCO Pray for King Mohammed VI and other government leaders.
T 5 NIGERIA Pray for Believers in southern Kaduna who have been forced from their homes by Fulani Islamic militants.
W 6 TURKEY Pray for university students and teachers who have asked for Bibles and information about Christ.
T 7 UGANDA Pray for Betty Musani whose children took away her property after she became a Believer.
F 8 JORDAN Pray that more Jordanian nationals will come to know Christ.
S 9 CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC **Pray that Bible translation efforts will continue despite instability in parts of the country.**
S 10 SYRIA **Pray for those ministering to oppressed Druze people in Soweida.**
M 11 SOMALIA Pray for unity among Somali Believers and those working with them.
T 12 BRUNEI Pray that Believers from neighbouring countries will find creative ways to engage with Bruneians.
W 13 MEXICO Pray for those losing land, housing, community and family for following the Lord.
T 14 IRAN Pray that Christians imprisoned for their faith will be witnesses in prison.
F 15 TURKMENISTAN Pray for all who risk their lives distributing Bibles and Christian literature.
S 16 SUDAN **Pray for unity and harmony among Sudanese churches and their leaders.**

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