



Indian Authorities Shut Down Church for Singing Too Loudly

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The Washington-DC based human rights group, International Christian Concern (ICC) www.persecution.org has learned of 3 attacks earlier this month on Christians in Kerala, generally considered a safe-haven for Christians because of the large Christian minority there. These attacks, which all took place within a week, are especially alarming because they mark the first time a church has been shut down by the local government in Kerala. In addition, Hindu extremists vandalized a Christian prayer center and invaded a Pentecostal church, physically assaulting several of the attendees.

That this sort of violence would occur in the normally peaceful Kerala reveals the extent to which the xenophobic "Hindutva" ideology has infiltrated India, as well as a growing radicalization of India's Muslims. Rather than welcoming differences, those who follow "Hindutva" seek to make India a country with only one religion: Hinduism.

First Church Closed in Kerala

New Testament Pentecost Church was established 35 years ago. Eleven years ago, the church successfully registered with the government, and has grown to include 11 branches and various ministries, and does not operate using foreign assistance.

However, 12 years ago a Muslim family living nearby started making life difficult for the church. The father of this family tried many different ways to get rid of the church, first by attempting to buy it from the Pastor. When that did not work, he and his son would disturb their worship by shouting loudly over their singing. But the real trial came when four months ago the neighbor and other Muslims joined together and sued the church. The Pastor, Sam George, was summoned to the police station 4 times. Twice the police were favorable to him, but the last two times the police became hostile.

Recently, a notice came from the municipality showing that the church's worship was causing a disturbance to the neighborhood. Police stopped Sunday services 22 times, verbally abusing the church members and attempting to arrest Pastor George. The police gained a court order against the church, prohibiting their use of a sound system because the sound was more than 55 decibels, the volume of a normal conversation.

Four weeks ago the church received a notice from the municipality showing that the church hall would be sealed if they sang songs or did any preaching. The next day the building was sealed without an order from the high court. For the last four weeks they have been worshipping in another house.

More Resistance to Pentecostal Churches

In two separate instances, the perpetrators were Hindu. Unidentified Hindu extremists came on motorcycles and started throwing stones through the windows of Carmel Gospel Center on March 6 in Kooroppada village in Pampady area near Kottayam town.

"After a prayer meeting...we heard the sound of stoning coming from the room where our five-year-old son Barose and two-year-old daughter Basia were sleeping. We cried aloud and rushed to the room to protect them. When the attackers heard our voice, they stopped stoning and fled," Paul said.

The attackers had also drawn Hindu symbols, such as "Om" and the Nazi "Swastika" on the walls opposite the compound of the Center.

In the third incident, a radical Hindu mob vandalized a Pentecostal church on March 4 in Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala. Extremists interrupted the Sunday worship service and started physically assaulting the congregation. The attack prevented the church from conducting the worship service.

According to the government figures, Christians comprise 19 percent of the 31.8-million population of Kerala. At the national level, only 2.3 percent of India's population is Christian. The fact that attacks are now occurring in Kerala will only embolden anti-Christian extremists elsewhere to attack the even more vulnerable Christians in their states.

International Christian Concern

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ICC is a Washington-DC based human rights organization that exists to help persecuted Christians worldwide. ICC delivers humanitarian aid, trains and supports persecuted pastors, raises awareness in the US regarding the problem of persecution, and is an advocate for the persecuted on Capitol Hill and the State Department. For additional information or for an interview, contact ICC at 800-422-5441.

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