"Read story on Page 18"
Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. Hebrews 5:8
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The headlines screamed about the terror attack in Pulwama on the CRPF Convoy on 14th February 2019, in Jammu and Kashmir, sending shock waves across India. 44 sons, fathers and brothers, lost their lives.

These young men served their country in the true sense of the word and honoured their motherland by protecting it with all their strength. All their adult life, they had been preparing for the eventuality of war with extensive training, both physical and psychological. For them, their duty for the country was always on the top of their priority list. No man who undertakes the cause of his country, entangles himself with the affairs of this life.

Their loved ones remember their loss, with both regret and great pride, that they died protecting India’s honour. The Country posthumously awards them the Param Vir Chakra.

We too remember the soldiers of the Army and acknowledge with gratitude their service to this land.

We are also at war:

Just as our men and women are fighting to secure the County and to protect us against terrorists, as a believer, for every Christian, facing a different kind of war in this lifetime, the battle lines are drawn. There is a battle being waged for the souls of men and women, who are bound by sin.

The Word of God is the only way for people to be set free.

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” - John 8:32

Unlike the armed forces, we are chosen by God. We cannot be drafted or volunteer to be in His service for we are chosen by God.

God has chosen to save all who come to Him by faith. The Scriptures do not talk about 2 separate groups – Christians and soldiers in God’s army. As believers, we ALL are to put on the whole armor of God and stand against the attacks of the enemy! So, the challenge before us is, are we good soldiers?

No soldier can give his best if he is not convinced the cause is right. If we are to make an impact on this world for the cause of Christ, we must be convinced that He is the Hope of this world! We must believe in the cause of Christ!
Jesus is the Commander of our Salvation. A soldier of Jesus Christ, leaves the affairs and business that he was formerly occupied in, and devotes himself to the duties that please His Divine Commander. Every man who wants to enlist, must be temperate, brave and virtuous, sober-minded, vigilant and temperate, fear God, ready for every call of duty and enterprise, to which he is called by his Commanding Officer. No man who undertakes the cause, entangles himself with the affairs of this life.

“No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who enlisted him as a soldier” - 2 Timothy 2:4

We cannot collaborate with the enemy. A good soldier cannot fight the enemy during the day, and then go to a party with them at night.

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down stronghold” 2 Cor. 10:4

The world hates the Christian.

“If the world hates you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you.”

Jesus laid down His life for us.

His twelve disciples were martyred.

Are we ready to enlist and serve as a good soldier?

Wherever the Lord places you - whether to tarry on your knees at home, at Sunday School, in Potiphar’s house, the Pharaoh’s Palace or the mission fields, always be ready to discharge your duties conscientiously, as under Christ your Divine Commander. And if you are to die in the “battle”, you die not only honorably, but most joyfully, for Jesus Christ, the glorious Commander of our Salvation, shall give us the crown of glory that shall never fade away;

Too many in the Lord’s army faint at the first hint of adversity. Millions have gone before us, paving the path and setting the trend, sacrificing their lives for the Gospel sake. Paul was stoned, shipwrecked, beaten, and placed in dungeons. He said,

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” – James 1: 2

Christians, are we serving as faithful and good soldiers in the army of the Lord?

We are challenged to go forward for the cause of Christ and be good soldiers for Him.

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.” - Deuteronomy 31:6

Therefore, be fully persuaded to put on the Christian armor, and to be ready “in season and out of season”.

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Tribal Christians ostracized and excommunicated, West Bengal

4 years ago, in the tribal-dominated village of Bhaskajuri, located in Barabani Tehsil of Barddhaman District of West Bengal, 2 families – one of Bro. Manoj Tudu and his mother Tulsi Tudu and the second family of Sis. Balika Marandi and her family members, embraced Christianity out of choice, accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior & Lord and committed to be followers of His teachings. They have been members of ‘Big Life Ministries’ Church, discipled by Pastor Tapan Ghosh.

Every Sunday, these tribal Christians gather to worship the Living God at Bhaskajuri village. However, over the last 3 months, they have become soft targets to religious fanatics, who have threatened the believers to stop following Jesus or to face death and to be ostracized from the village.

These families have been resolute in their faith in Jesus Christ, in spite of the village elders pronouncing harsh penalties, imposing social and economic sanctions – where the Christians have been cut off from all village activity, every government scheme and subsidy – totally isolating them from the rest of the village community.

However, the pain from ostracism has been severe and overwhelming, which has left the Christians threatened and insecure. Abandoning their personal property, land and their home, it has forced these terrified Christians families to move out of the village. They are currently living in the neighbouring village, at a Bro. Subbu’s residence, as the situation in the village is very tense.
It is alleged that the anti-Christian persecution is spearheaded by a local Coal businessman named Mahadev Marandi, in a collusion with local Tribal Leaders. It is reported that this hardline religious fanatic, has been responsible for igniting the communal tensions and behind the attacks against these Christian families; he is reportedly financially sponsoring the excommunication to ‘liberate’ the village of Christians.

Recently, Bro. Manoj Tudu was arrested by the Police, instigated by religious fanatics – a case where the victim is falsely accused as the aggressor.

Speaking to Persecution Relief, Pastor Tapan had informed that Police about the illegal ostracization, excommunication and harassment by Mahadev Marandi and the local villagers. However, in spite of filing a complaint, no action has been taken by the Police so far.

“Religion is a matter of faith and choice, not force”, said Pastor Tapan.

“The Church has been serving the lowest and weakest of the society. Nobody is being converted. Religious fanatics are just maligning the Church and Christians”.

Rev. Raja Dey, Head of “Big Life Ministries”, had formerly been in Jewellery business, where after some disastrous decisions, contemplated suicide. This is where he had an encounter with Jesus Christ, and his life turned around. He now serves this life-giving Lord and has more than 1000 believers, to whom he ministers.

“Local tribal leaders are making every effort to bring back the Christians to their original faith. They were beaten up last week also.”

“The fanatics work in the brick kilns. After work, they get drunk, pick up their lathis and indiscriminately and without provocation, beat up the Christians”, added Rev. Raja Dey.
98 Christian tribals reconverted to Hinduism ‘by force’

CHOWDHURY REPORTS THAT THE RECONVERTED PEOPLE ARE REALLY SORRY FOR THIS INCIDENT. A SENSE OF PSYCHOSIS PREVAILS AMONG THEM. MANY VILLAGERS BURST INTO TEARS IN FRONT OF ME.

The “back to basics” program was sponsored by the VHP, an ultra-nationalist Hindu group affiliated to the government. The Christian leader emphasizes that “the tribals are animists and have never been Hindu, so the attempt to bring them back to the fold is just a political ploy”.

The 98 Christian tribes of Tripura that a group of far-right Hindus claimed to have successfully brought back to their religion, ie Hinduism, actually “were forcibly reconverted”. This was stated to AsiaNews, Sajan K George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), sets forth the items discovered by a local politician who has traveled in the village tribal. According to Jiten Chowdhury, president of Upajati Ganamukti Parishad, tribal wing of the communist-Maoist party...
CPI (M), the Hindu group Jagaran Mancha, a member of the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad), would have ‘forced the reconversions’. Then he added that he had met former faithful Christians who told him that ‘they were happy first’.

The program of return to the original religion took place on January 23rd. The visit of the politician dates back to 25, while the official accusation by his party is yesterday. Chowdhury claims that “the VHP and the Hindu Jagaran Mancha have seized this opportunity. They threatened [the Christians] who would put them behind bars and force them to reconvert. “

According to Sajan K George, “the reconversions of tribal or indigenous groups known as Adivasis, are conducted in an habitual manner by extreme right-wing groups”. He then emphasizes that “tribals are animists and have never been Hindu, so the attempt to bring them back to the fold is just a political ploy to create social discord, mistrust and division among the tribals themselves”.

Chowdhury reports that “the reconverted people are really sorry for this incident. A sense of psychosis prevails among them. Many villagers burst into tears in front of me.

Speaking of reconversions, Interior Minister Rajnath Singh recently said he was “very concerned about mass conversions taking place in various countries, including India. We must stop them. On the contrary, for Sajan K George, ‘in view of the general elections, the reconversions are the strategic means to divert attention from the real problems that block the country and at the same time strike minorities with systematic denigration’.

By Nirmala Carvalho
BEAUTY WITHOUT THE CROSS IS NOTHING

FOUNDER-PERSECUTION RELIEF
Police in the Indian state of Kerala, detained a Christian Evangelist, accusing him of insulting religious sentiment and confiscated his motorbike.

Evg. Raju S Padmanabhan of the Indian Pentecostal Church (IPC), from Kolenchery town in Kochi District in Kerala state of India, was detained by Police.

A street evangelist for the past 15 years, Evg. Raju is popular and well recognized face in the area. A familiar sight, he takes his motorbike, seven days a week, every morning, fitted with Amplifier, Microphone, Speakers etc. and rides to different parts of Kerala, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

In spite of the embarrassment, shame and ridicule he encounters most times, Evg. has been working faithfully and independently fulfilling his ministry & calling, with no Church support, for the past 15 years.

On Wednesday, 06th February, around midday, Evg. Raju was sharing the gospel in Mahe, in Puducherry bordering Kerala. This is a tax-free haven, where alcohol is easily available at a fraction of the cost in the state. God had put a burden on his heart to minister in that area, so that he could share the gospel, for their lives to be transformed.

While standing beside his parked vehicle & sharing the gospel, a policeman approached him.
“Do you have the permission to preach”.
Evg. Raju was surprised at the question as he had been speaking in several places and no body had objected to it in the past.

When he told the Policeman that he was not aware that he needed to secure permission, the Policeman asked him to stop preaching.

Disappointed that he was asked not to preach, he decided to leave but after distributing the tracts that he had carried with him.

As he started distributing the tracts, the same policeman came back and confiscated the tracts from his Motor bike. He was abused and asked to report at the Mahe Police Station later in the evening.

Evg. Raju arrived at the Police station around 6 pm and was asked to leave his bike – fitted with all equipment’s like Amplifier, Battery, Mic, Speaker’s etc. in the parking area outside the Police Station.

He was detained for 3 ½ hours, until 9.30 pm, after which he was asked to leave. However, they refused to allow him to collect his motorbike.

Speaking to Persecution Relief, Evg. Raju was disappointed that a week since the incident, his built-in bike is yet to be released.

Evg. Raju recalled that he had a great reception at different locations on the same morning, where people were touched by the message and gladly received the tracts. However, at this location, he was certain that an anti-Christian would have called the Police and informed about his preaching.

Church pray for Evg. Raju, that he may continue to remain strong and steadfast in his faith, and continue with his street preaching.

Relief Provided

I was very happy to hear from Bro. Shibu Thomas, who I had never heard of before. He was very sympathetic, prayed and encouraged me. He guided me on how to proceed with retrieving my motorbike from the Police Station and also assisted me financially to meet my expenses.

- Evangelist Raju S Padmanabhan
“Deny Jesus or die!”

Religious fanatics turned the Sunday service, held in the remote village of Chote Markeli, Bijapur District of Chhattisgarh, into a scene of bloody horror and outrage as they entrapped the Christians and beat them up brutally.

On Sunday, 03rd February, Christians had gathered to celebrate Sunday worship service which was being held at Manglu’s residence as was customary. Around 10 am, religious fanatics along with local villages, surrounded the house as the meeting was in progress. Shouting slogans, they trespassed into the House Church, vandalizing the place, apprehended the terrified believers and rounded them into an open area.

“Deny Jesus or die” the mob yelled out at them.

The believers refused to recant and said that they will never deny Christ who they believe in the one true God of the Bible, no matter what happens.

Seeing their steely resolve in spite of the threat of beating and death, the incensed religious fanatics and local villagers, pounced on them, and brutally beat them up indiscriminately.

Amidst the screams and cries of the congregation, as they tried to take cover, women were not spared. The children watched the bloody sight in abject terror as their parents and other faithful believers were attacked because of their faith in Jesus.
Around 15 members were brutally beaten and a several collapsed under this severe assault. The Local Pastor Jai Ram, Lakmu Michha, Chetu Michha, Ashok, Pawan, Bhagli, Sunita, Anita, and an elderly Sis. Bundi, collapsed with a broken hand. She was later referred to a Hospital in Bijapur for surgery of her broken hand.

Several suffered serious head wounds while the more seriously injured were taken to a nearby hospital.

Narrating the incident to Persecution Relief, was Pastor Ramesh Jhadi, a member of a gramin fellowship, and Secretary of “Stephen Pastors Association”.

Local Christian Leaders contacted the Police Station and reported the shameful and cowardly incident.

A FIR has been registered and the Police have assured that they will take strict action against the Persecutors. They have also promised to provide security, to ensure peace in the area.

According to sources, the villages had planned the attack on Saturday night.

Ordinary Christians like Pastor Jai Ram and Sister Bundi, give a different meaning to the phrase, “live for Christ”, redefining the meaning of commitment to the Christian faith.

Stories like these are a dangerous indicator of how easy it is to attack a gathering of Christians, with impunity and liberty, in different parts of India, while the government remains mute, ignoring the gravity of these attacks. Scores continue to live to Christ, faithfully, even through all the fear and persecution.

Church, pray for the Christians who have been attacked in the village of Chote Markeli, as they return to pick up the pieces of their lives, for them to have the spirit of forgiveness, so that Jesus Christ may receive all the glory and honor He deserves through their lives.
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Church demolished by fanatics, Telangana

**AROUND 80 MEMBERS GATHER AND THEY ARE ALL TRIBALS, FIRST GENERATION BELIEVERS, WHO ARE GROWING IN THE LORD.**

Pastor Samudralea Babu Rao, has been serving the tribal community, reaching the un-reached with the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ, touching the hearts of people, helping them to reach their own and transform society.

Amidst stiff opposition, but drawing inspiration and guidance from the life and teaching of Lord Jesus Christ, many souls were added to the Church.

Saving from the little that he receives, God enabled his desire, to have a private place of worship, to become a reality in the year 2013, when he purchased a small piece of land, for Rs. 35,000/-, measuring around 12 cents (436 sq. ft), in Ambatipalli, a village, in Mahadevapura Mandal, Karimnagar District of Telangana State.

Toiling day and night, and serving as a beacon of hope and love to the deprived, disadvantaged, exploited, destitute tribals, Pastor Babu Rao purchased the land, solely to build a structure for gathering and worshipping Jesus Christ.

Securing all the necessary permission, he built a temporary shed made of metal sheets, to protect from the elements, were around 80 believers used to gather for fellowship every Sunday.

Speaking to Persecution Relief, Pastor Naveen who ministers in Karim Nagar, around 100 kms away from where Pastor Babu Rao ministers, rushed to enquire and comfort the Church.

Translating and narrating the entire happenings on behalf of Pastor Babu Rao who only speaks the local language Telugu, Pastor mentioned that all the member of the congregation, were tribals.

“Around 80 members gather and they are all tribals, first generation believers, who are growing in the Lord.”

“The Church and I have been harassed by religious fanatics and village leaders since December 2018. We were threatened and forbidden from conducting any prayer meetings or having Christmas celebrations during Christmas”.

www.persecutionrelief.org
On Friday, 01st March, around noontime, religious fanatics, angry at the number of people coming to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, plotted and destroyed the Church building. Hearing about the attack on the Church, Pastor who lives around ½ a km away, rushed to the site, to see the destruction of the Church in progress. As he begged and pleaded with the mob to stop, disregarding his pleas, the aggressive, merciless and hostile mob, attacked the Church.

Tension prevailed in the area following the demolition of the Church.

Church, continue to pray for Pastor Babu Rao and the congregation, to remain steadfast and courageous in their faith, in spite of the persecution.

Pray that God will frustrate and destroy the plans of those who intend evil and destruction of God’s people, that they may witness the power and glory of HIS righteousness.”
The gruesome murder of Bro. Anant Ram Gand for his faith in Jesus Christ, has shocked the state of Odisha. His beheaded body and mortal remains were found in Raigarh Tehsil, Nabarangapur District, Odisha, on a narrow road in full public view.

On Monday, 11th February, Sis. Sukbati, accompanied by her 4 daughters, had left to the neighbouring village. Bro. Anant Ram and his 6-year old son, Purno Gaud, stayed back. Son Purno recalls that he woke up to a knock on the door. His father opened the door and 3 men called out to him. They caught hold of his father and tied his hands to his back, to a pole, leading him away from the house.

Following his father, the killers pushed little Purno away, threatening to harm him if he followed them. Fearing their threats, scared Purno ran to this Uncle’s home (father’s brother) close by.

The perpetrators of this heinous crime, first shot Bro. Anant Ram in the head, crushed his head with a large stone, then decapitated him. His body was thrown on to the road.

Speaking to Persecution Relief Founder, local Pastor Chandan Jani, condemned the beastly act. He recalled that Anant Ram had committed to following Jesus Christ 9 months ago.

“He was baptized 2 months ago, and his passion and dedication were unbelievable. Most days, he fasted and prayed”.

“The entire family embraced their faith whole heartedly”.

From that moment on, the villagers were extremely hostile towards him and his family, depriving them of basic amenities. Water from the public well was denied them. They had to dig their own bore well to meet the family’s needs.

The villagers taunted Bro. Anant Ram and his wife about their new-found faith. In spite of the incredible pressure and intimidation of physical harm this lone Christian family faced at the hands of the villagers, it only fanned their faith to burn brighter for Jesus Christ.

He was harassed and beaten twice in 2018, and excommunicated from the village. He moved his family away from the contentious villagers and was living a kilometer away from the village.

“In the past, before he became a Christian, he was a Naxal and was caught by the Police. That was the turning point where he surrendered to
the Police and renounced his life as a Naxal”

“The Naxals thought that he might share their secrets with the Police. But Anant Ram did not want enmity with anyone and assured them that he was a follower of Jesus Christ”

“He made his livelihood working in the fields”.

However, religious fanatic villagers did not appreciate his change of faith. Tensions were brewing over traditional tribal customs that were not being respected and obeyed. Enraged by their cultural separation, it is alleged that the fanatics spread false stories to the Naxals about Bro. Anant Ram being a Police informer, in order to eliminate him.

“This quite spoken man, who lived peacefully in the village with his family, was murdered for his faith”.

Speaking to the Pastor in the native dialect, his wife, Sis. Sukbati said that she was fearful about their future and terrified what the religious fanatics might do to her and her 5 children.

“My master is dead. He has been killed for his faith in Jesus Christ. But I am sure I will not forsake Jesus Christ my Saviour and Lord. Please remember us in your prayers so that we stand strong in faith and all our daily needs are met. God bless.”

Bro. Anant Ram Gand (40) is survived by his wife Sis. Sukbati Gand (38 yrs) and 5 children – namely, Dhanomati Gand, 13 yrs (F), Purnima Gand, 11yrs (F), Purno Gand, 6 yrs (M), Hemobai Gand, 3 yrs (F), Kemiti Gand, 2 yrs (F).

In 2018, Odisha recorded 20 anti-Christians attacks, making it the 6th most hostile state in India. Notorious Odisha has once again become a battleground on account of religion.

20 years ago, 58-year old Graham Staines, an inspiring man of God, who worked among the socially outcast lepers, and his sons — Philip, 11, and Timothy, 7 — were burnt alive by religious fanatics, in their station wagon in Manoharpur, Keonjhar district, Odisha, India.

In January 2019, 45 incidents of persecution have been recorded so far.

The killing of another innocent man, in the name of religion, will remain an ugly blot on the conscience of India.
Adopt

THE FAMILY OF THE MARTYRED CHRISTIAN.

Contact: +91 99932 00020
PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS LIKELY TO RISE IN 2019, REPORT WARNS

The two most populous nations on Earth, India and China, are increasingly hostile toward Christians.

Iraqi Christians attend a mass on Christmas Eve at the Grand Immaculate Church in Qaraqosh (al-Hamdaniya), near Mosul. (photo credit: THAIER AL-SUDANI/REUTERS)

Christians are facing an alarming rise in persecution this year, according to a report from the Open Doors organization.

Iraqi Christians attend a mass on Christmas Eve at the Grand Immaculate Church in Qaraqosh (al-Hamdaniya), near Mosul. (photo credit: THAIER AL-SUDANI/REUTERS)

Christians are facing an alarming rise in persecution this year, according to a report from the Open Doors organization.

The report predicted a 14% increase in the number of persecuted Christians worldwide in 2019. Currently, the report states, “1 in 9 Christians experience high levels of persecution worldwide.” Eleven Christians are killed each day for faith-related reasons, and 4,136 were killed in total in 2018.

The most dangerous country to be a Christian is North Korea, where members of the faith are targeted because they are seen as dangerous to the Communist regime. All but two of the top 15 most dangerous countries for Christians are majority-Muslim. Pakistan, which ranks as the fifth-most dangerous, was in the spotlight last October when its Supreme Court overturned the death sentence of Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of four originally found guilty of blasphemy in 2010 and who sat on death row for eight years.

Both China and India also ranked as dangerous countries to be a practicing Christian, but for the first time India entered the top ten - making it to the tenth spot on the list of countries in which it is dangerous to practice Christianity.

This means that the nation is more hostile to Christians than Syria, which came in at number 11), or Iraq at 13. According to the report, “Since the current ruling party [BJP, a Hindu-nationalist party] took power in 2014, attacks have increased, and Hindu radicals believe they
can attack Christians with no consequences. The view of the nationalists is that to be Indian is to be Hindu, so any other faith- including Christianity- is viewed as non-Indian.” In China, Christians are “monitored via CCTV and spies,” and worship is difficult even in state-approved churches. The report also notes that it is a cause for concern that the world’s two most populous nations, each with over a billion people, are so hostile to Christianity.

The Palestinian Territories (the West Bank and Gaza) come in at 49 on the report’s list. Palestinian Christians face persecution from their Muslim counterparts, and the worst persecution is reserved for those who convert to Christianity from Islam.

### CHINA TEARS DOWN CHURCH’S CROSS, ARRESTS MEMBERS, RAISES CHINESE FLAG

MICHAEL FOUST | ChristianHeadlines.com Contributor

All four are members of Zhongxin Church in the province of Henan. The action was part of a widespread crackdown on Christianity across Henan that often has included the removal of crosses, sometimes with cranes, China Aid and International Christian Concern (ICC) reported.

In recent years, Chinese officials have removed crosses from an estimated 4,000 churches in Henan.

Pastor Li Juncai, along with church members Wu Raoyun, Bai Yun and Ma Yanfang were arrested and charged with “disrupting public service” after they stood against the forced removal of the church’s cross. Government officials installed a flagpole in place of the cross to fly the Chinese flag.
(Worthy News) - Two hundred Christian families were recently driven out of their homes in Karachi, Pakistan, after a Muslim couple instigated a mob against four women whom they claimed had desecrated a Koran.

International Christian Concern noted that the couple had previously been asked to leave their apartment by their Christian landlord after stirring up strife against believers in the community.

“Samina Riaz borrowed a copy of the Quran from Khalid Khan, a nearby shopkeeper,” and desecrated it herself, according to Aslam Masih, a local witness. Riaz subsequently used the tampered evidence to rile the mob against local Christians.

Pakistan’s famous “blasphemy law” received international attention recently with the acquittal of Asia Bibi, a Pakistani woman who was held in solitary confinement for almost a decade after allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad.
Last week, I returned from an emotional heartbreaking visit to jail. I paid a long overdue visit to Sister Concelia Baxla, a Mother Teresa Sister who along with an employee of the Nirmal Hriday Home, Ms. Anima Indwar was arrested two hundred and twenty-two days ago on charges of child trafficking. Nirmal Hriday (Immaculate Heart) is one of the 18 houses of mercy run by the Mother Teresa Sisters in the State of Jharkhand. The misuse of the police force, the manipulations of political authorities, the apathy of our justice system in the story of this poor, naive and innocent woman who has devoted all her life to the selfless service of the poor and marginalized is a story of many poor prisoners of our country. Many like her are languishing in jail as under trials waiting for the slow churning of the wheels of justice which often appear to be spun by money power, political clout, massive media propaganda and even blatant manipulation of evidence.

The poor sister suffers from diabetes and varicose veins. Uprooted from her daily routine, left to suffer alone, all of us, her co-sisters, Superiors, Bishops, priests and all who know her and are convinced of her innocence can only look up to heaven in helplessness and hope, as every attempt to even get bail for her has been brusquely rejected by our judiciary at various levels sometimes in a matter of minutes.

I stood there outside the gate of the Birsa Munda jail waiting to be registered along with two other companions and many others for whom this must be a weekly or bi-monthly ordeal waiting to see some beloved living there behind the barbed wires and fortified walls. Every prisoner is allowed a visit once every week or fifteen days as decreed. Tens of poor people, some dejected, some anxious, some desperate wait patiently in front of a shabby structure to meet their sons, daughters, brothers, sisters’ friends...
incarcerated and waiting to be freed. Who knows what is going through their mind? A family of 4 stands before me. A boy about 10 years old is carrying a plastic bag of fruits for someone dear in prison. With him is a girl perhaps two years younger. As the lady gives her Aadhaar card for registration, the police constable kindly but firmly tells her that the family cannot visit the prisoner because just the previous day he has received a visitor. They will have to come after 14 days. I can see the distress on the faces of the young family as they turn back to go home and I can only look down at the ground with their sadness and sorrow rubbing off on me.

As I get myself registered along with Mr. Vepul Kaisar a dear friend from Kolkata and Adv. Siju Thomas a great collaborator and lawyer friend from Delhi (only three persons are allowed once in seven days), I am anxious, nervous, uncertain as to what I will say to Sister Concelia when I meet her. After all, our best efforts to bring relief to her including the services of the best of lawyers who had come to our aid had so far come to naught. Throughout these two hundred and twenty-two days (222) contrasting emotions had welled up in me at every turn. Disbelief when news of her arrest reached me, disgust when false manipulated reports were circulated about the Mother Teresa Sisters, anger when obtaining the copy of the FIR was inordinately delayed due to non-availability of court fee, frustration when the District magistrate summarily dismissed the bail petition, impatience at not being able to get the order from the court even after fifteen days, shock when the sessions court rejected without arguments our appeal for bail, worry when the high court threw out our appeal, joy when a leading lawyer willingly took up our case pro bono in the Supreme Court and despair when the Supreme Court also would not allow our poor sister any relief.

What pains me most is that an elderly woman, suffering from ill health could not get bail because the charges had not yet been framed. At the back of my mind was the Supreme Court order by a two judge Bench headed by Justice Madan B. Lokur which had ruled in February 2018, “Another important facet of our criminal jurisprudence is that the grant of bail is the general rule and putting a person in jail or in a prison or in a correction home is an exception. Unfortunately, some of these basic principles appear to have been lost sight of with the result that more and more persons are being incarcerated and for longer periods. This does not do any good to our criminal jurisprudence or to our society”
persons are being incarcerated and for longer periods. This does not do any good to our criminal jurisprudence or to our society”. But this yardstick does not seem to be applied for Sr. Concelia. Neither the fact that she was a woman, nor her ill health, nor her age could move the judges to grant her the simple relief of being out on bail. What would I say to Sr. Concelia? How could I tell her that we had collectively failed her? How would I face her knowing within myself that she would be there for some more time till God granted her mercy through human beings who till now appear to be merciless?

I was engrossed in my thoughts of self-reproach and utter helplessness as she was brought before us with two other women behind a double barred and netted window. “How are you?” I asked her. I am ok she said. Then she looked at me long with moist eyes and broke down crying. I thought it was her despair, her feeling of being let down by us, her misery of suffering that was playing on her. How wrong I was! Her next words stunned me. “pardon me my Lord”, she said, “I have brought shame to the Church”, she burst out. “But I am innocent my Lord”, she sobbed. As she kept weeping, I tried to console her telling her that she has not hurt the Church but that rather on the contrary we feel helpless as we cannot bring her out despite knowing that she was completely innocent. It was genuine sorrow, not self-pity but agony for the suffering of the Church which suffers with her.

Deep within me I was full of admiration for this brave, selfless woman. Here she was in jail, suffering humiliation and shame because political powers wished to use her to punish the Church for working for the poor, the marginalized and the destitute. She was not worried about her own travail. She was concerned about the harm her arrest had done to the name of the Church. I did not know how to react. Even as I stood touched and emotional, she continued sobbing. “My Lord”, she said, “I prayed so much that I may be released but perhaps God did not want it”. How could I tell her that some political power somewhere has decided that she be the sacrificial goat to get at the Church. “I pray”, she continued “and say my Jesus, ‘you suffered and died for me, can I not bear this suffering for you though I am innocent’. I accept God’s will”, she said and burst out into a heart wrenching sob. As for me, I stood
there across the barred, netted cage from which she was speaking unable to control my emotions anymore as tears flowed from my eyes and my voice broke down trying to console her. I needed a pause to regain my composure. I move aside and ask my companion to continue speaking to her. After some time, he broke down too. I did not have the courage to ask him what had transpired. I took over and resumed my conversation with Sr. Concilia a few moments later. She told me that though she gets Mass every Sunday, she would like to have communion everyday. I could not assure her that consecrated hosts could be left with her because of the difficulty of securing their safety in the circumstances in which she was staying. When I told her this again her reaction was of resignation to the will of God.

Ever since my visit to that jail, my faith in God and his Church has been reinvigorated. This simple woman with her faith in God, her dedication and devotion to the church, her readiness to accept suffering as the will of God has taught me more than one lesson. But it also raises in my mind many questions about justice and perceptions about innocence and guilt.

Even as I write this reflection, I have come to know that the alleged case of “Human Trafficking” against Sr. Concilia is now being conveniently represented as a case of “Irregular Adoption”. The couple who is supposed to have “purchased” the child has been given anticipatory bail on the statement of the girl who gave birth to the child that she has handed over the child of her own free will. The maid at the hospital who helped in the transfer of the child to the “adoptive parents” has also been granted anticipatory bail. Meanwhile our poor sister continues to be in Jail, two hundred and twenty-two (222) days in jail. She belongs to a Religious Order where sisters not only are not allowed to possess any money or belongings, but on their transfer carry just a bucket and a saree besides the one they wear.

The nuns are allowed to visit their homes once in 10 years for three weeks, and can go home for a week if either of their parents die. But what they do possess is a rich community life which sustains them, the daily Eucharist which strengthens them and the comfort of serving the poor and the marginalized which motivates them. Sister Concilia is deprived of all three because of the repeated denial of bail. This is what pains me most. Meanwhile Sr. Concilia lives the words of Psalm 9:9: “The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.” Meanwhile, I pray that my faith in God and love and dedication to the Church maybe as great as hers.
The illustration is a scene from the book of Acts 28:1-6.

Here Paul is under imprisonment, survived a shipwreck and suddenly a viper near the bonfire, struck his hand. The people who were watching believed that he was cursed and would drop dead. But when Paul miraculously survives, they changed their mind and thought that he was God.

Do not be discouraged because you are going through persecution, many people may be dissuaded initially, but when you stand by the Lord during these testing times; He will change the mind of these people. Our Lord will bring you out of every dangerous situation.

Arvind Sathe
Gladys Staines

“And the King will answer and say to them, Assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to me.” – Matthew 25:40

If Jesus physically walked the earth today, he’d definitely carry a picture of Gladys Staines in his wallet. Why do I say that? Because he would hardly find a better representative of what He stood for and modelled in his life on earth than this incredible woman. For those who are unfamiliar with her story, here’s a quick recap.

Gladys Staines is the widow of Graham Stuart Staines (1941-1999), an Australian missionary who was working with the tribals in Baripada, Odisha, since 1965. For over 35 years, wearing casuals, sporting his trademark hat, and wheeling his rickety bicycle, ‘Saibo’, as he was called locally, was a fixture in this tribal area as he did “God’s work”, tending to leprosy patients at a specially run home on the town’s outskirts. Gladys, a nurse, met Graham at work in 1981. They got married in 1983 and were blessed with three children, Esther, Philip and Timothy. Together, the couple continued their work in Baripada with the tribals, lepers and Odisha’s marginalised.

On the night of 22nd January 1999, after attending an annual jungle camp for Christians in Odisha, Staines and his two young sons Philip (aged 10) and Timothy (aged 6), were sleeping in his old station wagon because of the intense cold outside. A mob of armed Bajrang Dal extremists who alleged that Staines was forcibly “converting” many Hindus into Christianity (Gladys denied these allegations), attacked the vehicle and set it on fire, burning Staines and his young boys alive. As the nation went numb with horror over the atrocity, President K.R. Narayanan spoke for everyone when he described the murder as “a monumental aberration of time-tested tolerance and harmony. The killings belong to the world’s inventory of black deeds”.

Even after the heinous crime, however, Gladys, now a widow, continued to live in Baripada, selflessly caring for leprosy patients and Odisha’s poverty stricken, until she returned to Australia in 2004. In 2005, the Government of India awarded her the Padma Shree, India’s fourth highest civilian award, for her work with leprosy patients in Odisha.

The kind of courage and dedication Gladys displayed in the face of the worst kind of tragedy to hit anyone leaves me awe-struck. What is even more amazing, and what can only be supernatural, is her ability to forgive the men who killed her husband and children. In the aftermath of that ghastly attack which shook her whole world, Gladys Staines said: “The Lord God is always with me to guide me and help me to try to accomplish the work of Graham, but I sometimes wonder

AS A WIFE AND MOTHER, I CANNOT EVEN FATHOM THE MAGNITUDE OF THE WOMAN’S CHRIST-LIKE BEHAVIOR. I CAN ONLY MARVEL AT HER FAITH.
why Graham was killed and also what made his assassins behave in such a brutal manner on the night of 22nd January 1999. It is far from my mind to punish the persons who were responsible for the death of my husband Graham and my two children. But it is my desire and hope that they would repent and would be reformed.”

As a wife and mother, I cannot even fathom the magnitude of the woman’s Christ-like behavior. I can only marvel at her faith.

Only a person who walks in close intimacy with Christ is capable of responding as she did. For most people, even those of us who are Christians, this level of forgiveness, faith and devotion is incomprehensible. In an interview a few years after the tragedy, Gladys Staines said, “I forgive the other because I first received forgiveness from Jesus Christ – I have encountered the presence of Jesus in my life and this is the spirit I share. When we forgive, there is no bitterness and we live our lives and continue the task entrusted to us – with His grace and peace. All Christians who have known the intervention of Jesus in their lives will have this gift to forgive and to be the witness of His peace and presence.”

What an incredible testimony for Christ!

Most of us Christians know that working with the poor and marginalised in society is a central tenet of the gospel. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus commands us to care for “the least of these.” (Matthew 25: 31-46). One’s eternity hinges on caring for “the least of these.” Matthew 25 gives us enough clues as to who “the least of these” are. They are the hungry, thirsty, homeless, naked, sick, and imprisoned.

In the face of all that Gladys Staines endured in India and the hatred she was a victim of, it is absolutely mind-boggling that she continued to stay and work in the country among the very people who had destroyed her life. Hatred is a terrible emotion that leads to destruction, but love can conquer hatred. Indeed, love must conquer hatred. In a world where hate is rising, we as Christians are called upon to model love as Christ embodied it. We could all look to Gladys Staines for inspiration. The woman sets a benchmark that few can aspire to. Her courage and fortitude in the midst of all that she went through, her ability to surrender her situation to the will of God and let Him direct her steps, and her willingness to continue to do the work that her husband had devoted over 35 years of his life to, all speak of a woman of exemplary character.

For everyone who has ever faced persecution for their faith in Christ, and especially for those women who have lost a husband or loved one due to persecution, may the words of Gladys Staines bring solace when she says: “It is Jesus who is the source of every consolation and support. God gives us the strength to be able to carry our cross and to live in His will. Our life and our work here on earth has to go on according to His holy will.”

Truly, Jesus would be proud of her!

Radha Menon
Pray for missionaries and their families in India.

www.persecutionrelief.org
People around the world are aware that India is a multilingual, multi-religious and multicultural nation. Every citizen has freedom of thought, faith, religion, worship and expression. One of the most important things is that in the cosmic system of India lies the “rule of law”. It is expected that every citizen should not violate the law and not do any illegal act.

If any person has committed a crime, then the right to punish him is law, not to the general public. No one has the right to take the law into his own hands and punish the culprit himself, it is legally wrong and morally unjust too. Such incidents harm the social integrity of the nation and provide the basis for divisive powers to spread the unrest in the country. Therefore, it is necessary for the government to take strict action to prevent such kind of incidents which is happening around the country.

The psychology of the crowd is a small part of social science; it can be called mob psychology. This is a weird and old way. The crowd considers themselves to be above all the law and narrate their violent behavior as practical and necessary. Crowd eliminates the way to resolve issues through the conscience, understanding and ability of negotiation.

In recent times, there have been incidents of mob lynching in many places of our country as well as to the extent that people have been caught and killed by the crowd. In these incidents, the so-called accused are of eating beef, rape convicted or slaughtering the cattle, or guilty of robbing someone else. In Kashmir, police officer recently killed by a mob without any reason.

Any civilized person will never hesitate to say that killing or violence by the mob is unfair and criminal acts, because the crowd never gives an opportunity to examine, understand or tell the accused their side. Crowds allure each other and all people do violence in illogical ways. Such acts are violation of natural justice, without proper process of law. Fake news surfacing in social media adds fuels to such incidents. So, people need to be aware and cautious about the fake news which entice the people and creates havoc. In one part of the country there was surfacing a news that child thief gang is active in the area. People got influenced by such viral news and killed many people in isolated incidents without confirming their innocence. Even if they were culprit, nobody has right to kill anyone.

It is often seen in our country that the crowd is taking the law into its own hands. If we look at the history of the world thousands of years ago, then it will be found that such incidents were at that time more often but whoever the
ruler at that time used to take strict measures to stop such incidents. Civil society never encourages such evil tradition. Behind this violence, anxiety and panic can be considered responsible. People in our country go from one state to another to get employment. Most of them are belongs to poor section. It is being seen that the people of the poor community are attacked by the crowd more easily. In the last few days, cases of mob lynching have surfaced in many states. Even the State Government and the Central Government has hard time to tackle the situation.

There have been many incidents of mob lynching in our country in past years. Behind these incidents, Gauraksha, communal or ethnic hatred, rumors of lifting a child etc. were included. These are only figures of 9 states. Most of the incidents of mob lynching have occurred in Assam, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bihar, Tripura, Jammu and Kashmir.

At present, if any person is caught while committing an offence, he punished by the crowd instead of handing over to the law authority, nor do they hesitate to take his life, which is utterly inappropriate. Many such incidents are happening in our country in different states, for the different reasons like killing of cow, rape, theft, child lifting etc. Some anti-social elements are taking law into their own hands, which is a blot on this civilized society which can never be erased. The biggest irony is that in most cases the crowd has taken the lives of innocent people only on the basis of suspicion. Just recently a bullet hit an inspector shot to death in Bulandshahar by the violent mob who went to handle the law and order for the situation. It presents a horrific picture of Indian society. Nowadays, such violence is seen in political protests in the country and is often causing huge damage to the property of the nation. Perhaps this crowd mechanism does not know that it is compensated by the tax we have given to the government. The Central Government has taken it seriously and has also announced to make strict rules, but no social- political team is coming forward to solve this serious problem. The common man of the country is feeling insecurity in his own country due to the increasing cases of mob lynching. In the past, the Supreme Court has taken cognizance of this problem. It is felt that educationist, all the political parties and religious leaders should unite by making their opinions and spreading awareness about the ill practice surfacing in our society in order to create a decent society and to prevail a peace-loving society.

Most Rev. Leo Cornelio SVD Archbishop of Bhopal

Source: cbci.in/Blog
PRA Y FOR PEACE AND UNITY IN ODISHA

SUMMARY:

- Odisha (formerly Orissa), an eastern Indian state on the Bay of Bengal, is known for its tribal cultures and its many ancient Hindu temples. The capital is Bhubaneswar.
- The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) is a state political party of the Indian state of Odisha led by Naveen Patnaik, the current Chief Minister of Odisha.
- Odisha was the first state to pass the law named as ‘Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967’ - the Law criminalizes an act of conversion through fraud, force or allurement with jail terms.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray for the family of the martyr Bro. Anant Ram Gand who laid down his life for Gospel sake in Raigarh Tehsil, Nabarangapur District, Odisha. He is survived by his wife Sis. Sukbati Gandhidam (38 yrs), and 5 very young children.
- Pray for Odisha state which continues to see extreme persecution against Christians since the Kandhamal riots of 2008. 7 Christians continue to languish in jail since then, in fabricated murder case. Persecution Relief provides monthly livelihood support to all 7 families of these innocent victims.

Persecution Relief have arranged to shift the widow Sis. Sukbati and her children from the hostile environment in the village. Her monthly livelihood expenses will be provided through Persecution Relief. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our supporters for their overwhelming response to support her and her family.
All About You, Jesus

Luke 9:23 (NIV) – Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

Peter has just made his famous declaration of the fact that Jesus is truly the Messiah. Immediately after, the Lord predicts His imminent rejection, suffering, death and resurrection. It is in the backdrop of His own impending suffering and death that the Lord defines who His disciple is.

A disciple is one who follows a teacher.

And so, to those who follow Him wanting to be His disciple, the Lord says, three specific things in this verse. He says set aside, take up and conform.

A disciple of Christ is one who sets aside or puts away his/her selfish interests or personal agendas. A disciple has only one agenda, and that is the agenda of Christ, the One he is following. And so, all that a disciple does and says is driven by what Christ wants, not what he/she wants.

A disciple is also one who takes up his cross and follows Jesus. Interestingly, the cross is not something that comes automatically nor is it thrust upon the disciple. A cross is not even a difficult person or situation that one finds uncomfortable, as we often like to believe.

The cross is a choice that every disciple makes and willingly takes up. A disciple who chooses the cross, expresses a willingness to endure whatever may come as a result of following his Master. He takes up his cross because he believes that the One, he has chosen to follow knows best and loves him.

A disciple is also one who is willing to conform to the example of Christ. The Amplified Bible describes that a disciple is one who conforms to the way Christ lived, even suffered and died. And that is no easy call, and yet that is the call and commitment of every one who chooses to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

To say ‘no’ to things I desire
And ‘yes’ to those that He requires
Is to be a disciple, plain and simple

To say no to the happiness of this world and life
As one lives each day through many a strife
Is to say yes Lord from a heart, trusting and humble

A disciple simply believes and follows
The voice of the Master as through each day one goes
Leaning continually only on Him and His Word, the Bible

A disciple knows that faithful is the One who has called
Who will not leave you alone, for He is your Shepherd
And will bring you beyond Jordan, safe and gentle.
To choose to follow Christ, to live and die for Him, comes from a heart overwhelmed by gratitude for all that He has done for us. Gratitude to an amazing, loving God who willingly came looking for us, and died in our place so that we who were condemned to eternal death because of our sin were given the free gift of salvation and life eternal with Him.

And so, we as disciples live each day asking the question, what we can do in return for all that He has done for us? And the resounding answer is that we take up our cross daily and follow Him. Follow Him, knowing that He who has called us is faithful and will never leave us alone, whatever we may go through. Follow Him because He is more than worth it!

- Preethi Alice Jacob
PERSECUTION RELIEF EVENTS: February 2019, attended by our founder to highlight persecution of Christians and encourage the Church in India to stand united and pray for the persecuted Church.
Thank you, Persecution Relief
PRAY FOR THE UPCOMING REFUGE CENTER FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH IN INDIA

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