

Words of HOPE

UPDATE

Good News. No Boundaries. 700 Ball Avenue NE • Grand Rapids, MI 49503 • 800-459-6181 • www.woh.org | December 2008



Persecution Worsens in India

For decades, India's religious minorities have experienced mounting tensions and increasingly violent harassment, often politically motivated. Christians, who officially comprise 3 percent of India's 1.1 billion people, have been persecuted for years—especially in regions where Hindu nationalists are strong. Anti-Christian violence soared in the state of Orissa following the August 23 assassination of a controversial Hindu swami. Although Maoist guerillas claimed responsibility for the killing, some Hindu activists claimed that Christians were to blame. A resulting wave of persecution led to the destruction of at least 4,500 homes and more than 150 Christian institutions.

Since August, attacks have spread to many states. Religious extremists have incited mobs to assault believers. Churches and other facilities have been vandalized in a series of attacks. Tens of thousands of believers have sought refuge in relief camps. Many more have hidden

in forests. Scores, perhaps hundreds, have been killed. Although Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh decried the Orissa incidents as a “national shame,” official appeals for calm and tolerance have not stemmed the assaults against believers. Christian leaders are dismayed that the widespread violence has attracted little media coverage or secular criticism, and that local police often do nothing to stop the attacks.

In October, demonstrators from many parts of India assembled in Ranchi, the capital city of Jharkhand state, to denounce the wording of Deuteronomy 12:2 in a recently published Kuduk translation of the “Nemha Bible.” A reference to trees was translated “sarna mann” in the context of God's command to the Israelites to destroy high places of pagan worship in ancient Canaan. Thousands of protesters brandishing bows and arrows accused Christians of conspiring to destroy the Oraon tribal religion because the word “sarna” is

associated with their places of worship as well as their tribal deity. The translation forced Words of Hope's India ministry partner to remove all Bibles from their bookstore shelves.

Indian observers note that the persecution began and has been most intense among tribal peoples and outcaste “Dalits” who have been committing their lives to Christ in recent years. Words of Hope broadcasts gospel programs to the Indian subcontinent in a number of languages. Ministry partners report faith commitments by many listeners. As they now face mounting persecution, the ongoing broadcasts help many believers to deepen their understanding and conviction to stand firm in their faith—even to witness to neighbors about Jesus' transformational impact on their lives.

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR:

• Building the Church in Iran

Building the Church in Iran

by David Bast



I'll call them "John" and "Mary." I met them last month at a conference we held for Christians from Iran. Twice a year Words of Hope arranges for believers who live in Iran to gather elsewhere for a week of worship, teaching and fellowship. They have very little opportunity for such things at home. Even if they live near an open church, as Muslim

converts these folks are barred from attending. Most of them have come to Christ within the past



Iranian ministry study center.

few years. Their stories are amazing testimonies to the power of God's grace and the attractiveness of Jesus.

These people love the Bible. We spend six or seven hours a day in serious Bible study, and they always want more. We sing together, me humming along and wishing, not for the first time, that I spoke Persian. Sometimes, when they choose a hymn brought to Iran by Presbyterian and Reformed missionaries, I can sing along with the English words. But I actually prefer the Persian songs, with their haunting Middle-eastern



"John and Mary" renewed their wedding vows in a ceremony conducted by David Bast.

melodies—praise in a minor key. We pray together (you can always recognize the name of Jesus). They smile and echo me when I exclaim *Khoda ra shokr!*—"praise

the Lord!" At this particular conference our focus was on church leadership. We set apart three men as elders for the underground church in Iran. We closed our time together by celebrating the Lord's Supper.

We also celebrated a marriage. John and Mary came to faith in Christ last December. Now they asked me if I would conduct a Christian wedding for

them. I explained that it wasn't really necessary, that because marriage was a creation ordinance they had always been married in the eyes of God. But

of course, if they wished, we would have a Christian ceremony to renew their wedding vows. And we did, in the presence of God and the company of a dozen of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Their lovely teenaged daughter "Annie" read the scripture lessons, and I declared them husband and wife, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And then we all feasted on roast duck and saffron rice.

As our time together came to an end, we went our separate ways, me back to my safe and comfortable home in America, and they to face who knows what challenges and dangers. But we will meet again, here—or there.

It is an unspeakable privilege to be involved in building the church in Iran. We do that through nightly radio broadcasts, these teaching/training conferences, by supporting Christian workers inside the country, and through literature production and Bible distribution. But whenever I spend time with Iranian Christians, I feel like I'm the one who is being blessed, and taught, and challenged.



Three men were set apart for church leadership within Iran.

If you would like to receive the Words of HOPE UPDATE regularly and are not already on our mailing list, please contact us at www.woh.org, or call 1(800)459-6181.

Words of HOPE
UPDATE