

A man in a white shirt is walking away from the camera, carrying a brown suitcase. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a path. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting a bright day.

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE

MAY | JUNE 2024

THE EXTRAORDINARY
FAITH OF INDIA'S
PERSECUTED CHURCH

STRENGTHENING CHRISTIANS WHERE FAITH COSTS THE MOST

www.opendoorscanada.org

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*Cover image: God gave Laxman a vision as to where he should build his church. But this vibrant, thriving community was being watched. Your support means Pastor Laxman can keep meeting Indian believers in secret, to pray together and grow in faith. Read Laxman's story on page 4. *Representative image used.*

OPEN DOORS MAGAZINE is published 6 times a year to provide concerned Christians with information about events affecting persecuted Christians worldwide. ODC is a member of Canadian Centre for Christian Charities and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. The material contained in this publication cannot be reproduced in any form, including on the internet, without written permission. © 2024 Open Doors Canada.

GARY'S TAKE

Dear Friend,

After living through the isolating time of a pandemic, for us in Canada, attending worship at Church is pretty much back to normal. However, for Christians in India, there is no such thing as normal. Increasingly, there is the threat of Hindu extremist mobs attacking – causing injury, devastation, and fear.

In one such attack, persecutors outnumbered worshippers by more than double as they descended on a Sunday church service in Chhattisgarh State. They beat the men, assaulted the women, broke the altar, and placed Hindu idols in the church, worshipping them. When some women in the church asked why they were victims of this attack, they were told: "You were born in India – you have to remain Hindus and worship Hindu gods."

Across the country, false accusations of forced conversion are being used to harass and target Christians, and physical attacks are used to intimidate congregations and try to stop them from meeting – despite religious freedom being supposedly guaranteed in India.

Despite the attacks and the persecution, God is mightily at work in India and the church is resilient and growing. The story of pastor Laxman in the pages of this magazine is just one example. As you read on, remember to pray for our family members in India as they continue to shine the light of the Gospel.

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Gary Stagg
Executive Director



Canadian Centre for
Christian Charities
ACCREDITED MEMBER

BE PART OF AN EXTRAORDINARY STORY



Many Indians are coming to Christ because of the bold witness of pastors like Laxman. Now, amid growing Hindu extremism, these believers need your support. **Image is representative*

An amazing story is unfolding in India... a story of miracles and fiery faith. But as many come to Jesus, extremists attack. Persecuted Christians need your support.

Laxman's* wife was sick. Dying. In desperation, Laxman, a devout Hindu, took her to a church and asked someone to pray.

That was the start of an extraordinary story – and the moment Laxman's life changed forever.

"My wife received healing with just one prayer," said Laxman. "I understood the power of this God, and I became determined to spread his message."

Laxman studied theology and started a church, and incredible things began to happen. "People came to our fellowship and were delivered from their addictions to alcohol and tobacco," said Laxman. Others, including Laxman's own baby, were healed from illness.

The church grew from just three people to hundreds. But this vibrant, thriving community was being watched...

HINDU EXTREMISTS

India is the largest democracy in the world, and the most populated nation on the planet. But it's the 11th most dangerous place to be a

Christian, and there's a disturbing trend of worsening violence and persecution.

Across the country, Hindu extremists view Christianity as a threat. They believe Indians should be Hindu, and treat Christians and other minorities with intolerance, discrimination and violence. (The radical nationalist ideology of Hindu extremists is known as Hindutva).

In the state where Laxman lives, laws exist to stop forced conversion away from Hinduism. These anti-conversion laws are widely misused, so Christians who share their faith are often accused of criminality.

It wasn't long before Pastor Laxman became a target.

VIOLENCE AND ACCUSATIONS

"The extremists accused me of luring people to Christianity using money," said Laxman. "I was told that if I continued my ministry, I would be buried alive."

One member of Laxman's church was coerced into signing a blank sheet of paper. It was used to create a false statement, saying the believer had been lured to convert to Christianity. This 'evidence' was just what the extremists needed.

"I was conducting a prayer service and the police came," remembers Laxman, with tears in his eyes. "They beat me, took me by the collar and hit me with their batons. I thought the villagers would save me, but nobody came. The police put me in jail, tortured and mocked me. I asked the Lord, 'What will I do now?'"

After six days in prison, Laxman was released. His church building was in ruins, destroyed by the extremists. The believers were scattered, too scared to meet. With no church gatherings, Laxman lost his income. Now, he's under constant surveillance and police raid his home whenever they like.

It's a desperate situation – but Laxman persists. He meets secretly with a handful of other Christians, and he trusts the Lord. "God has promised He will be with me."

BE PART OF THE STORY

Right across India, the church is victorious and growing, but it's also vulnerable. You have a vital part to play in this extraordinary story of faith. Laxman and other Christians depend on you to provide food aid, persecution training, counselling and small business support.

Our vision is for Indian Christians to be resilient in the face of injustice, free to worship collectively and

peacefully, and strengthened to be salt and light in their communities. Your gifts and prayers fuel a thriving church.

Thanks to Open Doors' support, Pastor Laxman received emergency food and help to start a small farm, so the family can provide for themselves. It gives him hope and strength for the future.

"The church is closed but my ministry continues," said Pastor Laxman. "This is God's work. No one can close it or shut it down. It is for the Kingdom of the Lord."

**Name changed to protect his identity*

"I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH, AND ALL THE POWERS OF HELL WILL NOT CONQUER IT."

MATTHEW 16:18 (NLT)

WRITE A LETTER

Send a message of encouragement to Pastor Laxman or another persecuted believer in India. Write your message or prayer at www.opendoorscanada.org/write.

Your support means Pastor Laxman can keep meeting Indian believers in secret, to pray together and grow in faith. *Image is representative*

Be a vital part of India's extraordinary story...

PLEASE PRAY

- For Pastor Laxman, for God's strength and protection over him and his church.
- For our Indian brothers and sisters who've been attacked, falsely accused and imprisoned. Many are struggling with their faith. Pray they will stand strong.
- For freedom of religion in India, and a safe place for the church to gather and worship.

PLEASE GIVE

Every \$49 can provide emergency food to two Indian believers affected by extreme persecution.

Every \$68 can train 20 believers and equip them with a biblical response to persecution.

Every \$112 can help a persecuted community establish a livelihood, and give financial security.



WORSHIP IN WHISPERS

This courageous couple endured violence and persecution. But, thanks to you, they are not alone. Please keep praying.

Husband and wife team, Narendran and Kavita*, had just finished a prayer meeting in their small bamboo church in rural India when the attack happened...

“They punched my eyes, tore my shirt and beat me severely,” said Narendran. “They started hitting my wife and she fell unconscious.”

It was a terrifying assault which put the pair in hospital for a week. As they returned home, the couple discovered that Hindu extremists had wrecked their beloved church.

“For over a decade our church was thriving,” said Kavita. “We saw people being miraculously healed, and many began to believe in Jesus.

“But since the incident, half the believers stopped attending church. We cannot worship the Lord freely. We no longer use musical instruments, clap our hands or even sing loudly.”

And with fewer people attending church, the couple can no longer depend on offerings for their income. It puts them in a perilous financial position.

But your prayers and support keep Narendran and Kavita going.

Thanks to you, the couple received a sewing machine so they could open a tailor shop and earn

money. Now, they are continuing their ministry – even if it’s a little quieter than before. “We worship in whispers,” said Narendran. “I am still afraid when I go out to share the gospel, but we know we are not alone.”

He added: “God’s people stand with us in our troubles. You support us through prayer and encourage us to keep going. Without you, fear may have taken hold of us.”

*We are keeping their true identities secret for their protection

PLEASE PRAY

- For protection over Narendran and Kavita as they bravely continue their ministry.
- For the couple’s children, who’ve been left scarred by the attack on their parents.
- For Christians in the village who are frightened to return to church. Pray for peace.
- For freedom of religion in India, and for equality and safety for Christians.
- For God to change the hearts of Hindu extremists, so they will know the hope of Jesus.

'HE SENT YOU'



Hari, a pastor in India, lost his income and freedom when Hindu extremists attacked. But your support means his faith is as strong as ever.

It was Easter Sunday when everything changed...

Hari* has known difficulty ever since following Jesus. After all, faith in Christ meant turning his back on the traditional religion of his tribe, in rural India. He was kicked out of home and rejected by his family.

But nothing could prepare Hari, a church leader, for the persecution which burst through the doors as

his congregation celebrated the risen Jesus.

“Religious extremists barged into our Easter service, along with the police,” said Hari. “They threatened believers and drove them away from church. The police banned me from conducting church services and the extremists threatened to kill me.”

Hari added: “The Indian Constitution gives me the right to preach. I told

the police, I do not force people. They hear my preaching and, if they like it, they come to my church.”

But the police didn't listen. They closed Hari's church and sealed it shut.

CRUSHING LOSS

The unprompted attack was devastating not only spiritually, but financially. “As a pastor of a small church, offerings from believers are my only source of income,” said Hari. “When the church shut, I could not manage the expenses of my family.”

But thanks to you, Hari received vital support. Your generous gifts and prayers put Open Doors partners alongside the family with food, help to create a sustainable livelihood, and spiritual and prayer support.

Today, with you by his side, Hari's faith is as strong and defiant as ever.

'NOTHING CAN STOP US'

“I prayed to the Lord for help, and He sent you,” said Hari. “I now gather in secret with other believers, in small numbers in houses. Nothing can stop us from loving Christ and serving him.

“I want to continue to serve the

Lord even if they threaten to kill me for my faith. Christ has protected me, and there is much work yet to complete for God's Kingdom.”

A verse which inspires Hari is 1 Chronicles 28:20: “Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you.”

Your support helps Hari to know the truth of God's presence. He said, “It is so joyful to see God's family standing with me in the midst of persecution. Our God has indeed not forsaken or failed us.”

*We've changed his name to protect him and his family



WWL 11

PLEASE PRAY

- For Hari and his family, that their faith will remain strong, defiant and unshaken.
- For the Christians who meet in secret with Hari. Pray for permission to worship freely.
- For a change of heart among Hindu extremists in India, and an end to religious intolerance.

ENCOURAGED AND STEADFAST



A violent attack left Open Doors partner, Ajay, fearing for his life and the future of the church in India. Your support was vital.

Ajay* and his parents covered under a bed, trembling with fear, as Hindu extremists roamed the streets outside.

“We felt it would be our last day on earth,” said Ajay. “But even if we died, we knew we would be in heaven.”

It was May 2023, and violence was

erupting across Manipur State, in north-east India. The conflict was mainly between warring ethnic groups, but it had a religious element too.

India is becoming more and more dangerous for Christians, and what happened in Manipur was a frightening example of unchecked persecution and mob brutality. Hindu extremists, with a radical nationalist agenda, targeted Christians with extreme violence.

“I remember watching helplessly as

things that took years to build were burned to ashes within hours,” said Ajay. “After setting the church on fire, extremists attacked houses, throwing bricks and smashing the doors.”

Thousands of Christians fled the region, and many others lost their livelihoods and homes. Pastors were pressured to reject Jesus or face terrible consequences.

NO FOOD, NO SHELTER

The help that followed from government agencies was limited and inadequate. “Homes were destroyed and there was chaos all over,” said Ajay. “We had no food to eat, no shelter and we were uncertain about our survival.”

For Ajay, the need to protect his own family was strong – but, as an Open Doors partner, he also felt an overwhelming responsibility to care for God’s family.

Your support gave Ajay the strength, resources and defiant faith to stay in Manipur State and minister to persecuted believers.

“When Open Doors partners approached and provided food and safe housing, our hearts were filled with joy,” said Ajay. “To have people come, meet and pray with us showed that we are not alone in the battle of faith. The body of Christ is present with us in every

step, whether pain or joy.”

Your kind gifts provided Ajay’s family with emergency aid, and your steadfast prayers meant Ajay could continue his work with Open Doors. He’s helped other Christians find shelter, and he’s provided persecution training and practical support.

“I have the strength to encourage my fellow believers because I have been encouraged by you,” said Ajay. “God has been protecting us. Extremists might destroy our buildings, but they can never destroy God’s people.”

*We’ve changed his name to protect him and his family



PLEASE PRAY

- For Ajay. Give thanks for his bold, defiant faith and pray for his ministry in Manipur State.
- For Christians not able to return home since the attack. Ask God to comfort and provide for them.
- For the safety of Open Doors partners, and for an end to violence and religious intolerance in India.

BECAUSE OF YOU...

THANKS TO YOUR GENEROSITY, CHURCH LEADERS ARE BEING TRAINED IN SRI LANKA

Discipleship programs in Sri Lanka provide opportunities for church leaders to both grow in their own faith and pass that discipleship on to others.

In the face of rising persecution in Sri Lanka, Open Doors partners were able to begin a weekly discipleship program for pastors and other church leaders. There was some concern originally about whether the program would be well attended, but it turned out to be successful beyond expectations. "I thought I was serving the Lord as a disciple, but after the program, I realized that I had only been a believer," said one attendee. Not only is the program discipling these church leaders, it is also teaching them to disciple others – leading to a fuller, more vibrant Christian community in Sri Lanka.

YOUR SUPPORT PROVIDES EMERGENCY AID TO DISPLACED CHRISTIANS

Conflict in Ethiopia displaced nearly 100 Christians. Thanks to you, Open Doors partners were able to provide them with emergency relief.

Last September, a violent conflict erupted between Muslims and Christians in Qibet, central Ethiopia. During the conflict, there were several instances of Christian homes being burned, Christian-owned businesses being vandalized, and some Christians physically attacked. Nearly 100 local believers ended up fleeing to a nearby town for safety. Open Doors partners were able to provide them with aid, including food, hygiene materials, and trauma counselling. One woman who participated in the counselling said, "In all of this I sleep in peace... God wanted to strengthen my faith, because He knows from where He has rescued me."

NORTH KOREA NEVER ABANDONED TOUR

Join us for these in-person events to hear stories that will help you connect with your brothers and sisters who have sacrificed everything to follow Christ.

Saturday, May 4, at 5:00pm

Morning Star Ministries
3540 6th Ave, Regina, SK S4T 0N5

Sunday, May 5, at 10:30am

Yorkton Victory Church
38 Bradbrooke Dr, Yorkton, SK S3N 4J7

Sunday, May 5, at 7:00pm

First Baptist Church
1010 Main St N, Moose Jaw, SK S6H 3K8

Tuesday, May 7, at 7:00pm

Eastside Church of God
2105 Adams St, Swift Current, SK S9H 3X6

Saturday, May 25, at 7:30pm

****YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS ONLY**
Steinbach Evangelical Mennonite Church
422 Main St, Steinbach, MB R5G 1Z5

Sunday, May 26, at 10:30am

Calvary Church Kenora
1460 Valley Dr, Kenora, ON P9N 4K6

Sunday, May 26, at 7:00pm

Portage Evangelical Church
72 3 St NE, Portage la Prairie, MB R1N 1N6

Monday, May 27, at 7:00pm

Holiday Inn, Winnipeg South, Frontier II Room
1330 Pembina Highway, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2B4



SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY IS HAPPENING IN INDIA

When Pastor Laxman* started a church, it grew from a handful of people – to hundreds.

The sick were healed. Lives changed. And not only in Pastor Laxman's church...

An extraordinary story is unfolding in India. A story of miracles, defiant faith and an unstoppable church.

But Hindu extremists are targeting Christians for intense persecution. Leaders like Pastor Laxman are being violently assaulted, falsely accused and unlawfully arrested.

When believers come under attack, the church is scattered, and pastors like Laxman lose their income. India's Christians need your help to survive.

Be a vital part of an extraordinary story by sending a gift today.

Every \$49 can provide emergency food aid to two Indian believers affected by extreme persecution.



Your support is no ordinary thing. Visit www.opendoorscanada.org to give your gift today or phone (905) 636-0944.

Thank you

*We have changed his name and used a representative image to protect his identity

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