

7 Pastors arrested in India for 'Forced Conversion'

By Wilson Chowdhry

British Pakistani Christians (06.12.2017) – Seven Pastors were arrested Monday 4th December and detained for allegedly carrying out a 'Forcible Conversion Campaign' in Mathura a district of Uttar Pradesh in Northern India. On Tuesday they were produced at court and were remanded in Judicial custody and today (Wednesday 6th December) all seven pastors have been refused bail.

Police were called by local villagers who were concerned about the activities of the seven pastors in an area in the district called Irauli Gurjar for the past month. The pastors have been accused of sharing blasphemous words towards the Hindu faith and of sharing 'evil bibles.' One of the accusers has also stated that when local Hindus refused to accept the content of speeches and 'religious book', that the pastors reverted to violence to forcibly convert people from Scheduled Castes (lowers castes or untouchables) to Christianity. Around 700 of these Scheduled caste individuals are said to reside in the area of Irauli Gurjar.

After police received a call for one of the local villagers, who himself was not from the scheduled castes, they immediately arrived at the village and booked the seven unsuspecting pastors. All seven of the pastors have been charged under section 295A of the Indian Penal Code, which deals with 'deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings' said Superintendent of Police (SP) Adiya Shukla.

Family members of Pastor Stanley Jacob (one of those

arrested), tell a very different story. They state that a woman named Mamta who recently moved to the village after marrying a local man named Pradeep Singh both of whom recently converted to Christianity, invited the missionaries to her house for prayers on the Monday. Mamta's sister had also recently converted to Christianity but all these conversions had caused upset within Mamta's family. The pastors visited the house to hold a house meeting and share the gospel, pray and distribute bibles with local people who had been responding to invites to the meeting.

However while the house church service was underway some locals crashed the meeting and started to hurl abuse towards the seven Pastors. Responding to a call by Pradeep's uncle Lal Singh, police also arrived at the house and arrested the pastors. Lal Singh has filed a formal complaint despite no even being present at the meetings or hearing any of the blasphemous content directly. In his complaint he has said that he has been told that the blasphemy and forced conversions were being imposed on scheduled caste Hindus, by those who were in attendance.

The Pastors arrested include:

Stanley Jacob from Kerala who was part of a Ministry in Delhi named 'Masih Ghar' (Messiah House)

David from New Dehli

Vijay Kumar from Odisha

Amit from Mathura

Sumit Varghese and Anita from Hathras

Dinesh from Rajasthan

Despite the flimsy allegations all seven pastors have failed to obtain bail from the Police jail and will be applying for bail at the Sessions Court in Mathura tomorrow. All seven Pastors have asked for prayers that bail is granted. BPCA

would like to help the families of the pastors with the costs for a solicitor and other costs they have incurred.

Pastor Naresh, British Asian Christian Association, lead officer in India, said:

“I can't express the frustration I feel for these pastors, words simply cannot convey the anger I feel when I think of their unwarranted arrest, based on the lies of local people fearful of the Gospel message of Christ.

“Men trying to save the lives and the souls of other are arrested on the whim of extremists, but they never lose their calling or faith.

“Being a Pastor in India is becoming a nightmare role, persecution here is reaching the levels that were present at the time of Paul.

“We will do what we can for these Pastors, already I have counselled a few of the families and I am going to visit them and see what other support we can offer including support for legal fees. However, there are wives and children who await news daily fearful of what will happen to the patriarch of their family. Its is simply a devastating situation.”

Wilson Chowdhry, Chairman of the British Asian Christian Association, said:

“These arrests so close to Christmas are going to hurt the affected families badly. A time of joy for so many, Christmas this year for the Pastors arrested and their families will be a time of anxiety and fear.

“India continues it's trajectory towards despair, the caste system is gaining renewed impetus destroying the lives of disenfranchised citizens simply for the families they were born into. Worse still every minority living in the midst of the Hindu majority are living through a time of increased

suspicion and animosity.

“Whilst Narendra Modi remains in power the country will only become even more polarized, his regime simply desires the eradication of non-Hindus and as time progresses, the influence of the hatemongers becomes palpably stronger.

“If the seven Pastors are refused bail tomorrow, the Mathura courts will be illustrating that Indian law now deems Christians as pariah’s within the state.”

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