

Enduring Persecution in India

Some Ways God is Working through Persecution

By the Leader of a Church Planting Movement in India

In this season of persecution, I feel like God has given Satan permission: “Do what you want to those believers in India.” I know that in history the church has grown, not just in spite of persecution but *because* of persecution. In 1950, when the Communists took over China, there were about one million churches. Horrible persecution ensued, and believers throughout the world feared that very little might remain of the Christian faith in China. But in 1990, when the Bamboo Curtain lifted and news reached the outside world, we learned that in the midst of persecution the church had multiplied incredibly, yielding over 70 million churches!

In the context of our movement, even with persecution, over 300,000 people celebrated Christmas 2018 in their house churches and small gatherings. Almost all of that number have become followers of Jesus during the past six years. They have always faced some persecution, but 2018 definitely brought a huge increase from previous years.

God is building maturity into the main stewards of this movement (leaders at various levels) as a result of and *through* the persecution they face. Here are a few of the ways:

1. Believers are rising to meet the challenges. They are afraid; they are sometimes afraid to answer a knock on the door. But they don't allow their fear to lead them. They don't live intimidated lives. The fear doesn't stop them. They are standing firm.

For example, the amazing gospel multiplication happening through Kamal and his connections can be seen in the 12-minute video “Ordinary People; Extraordinary Gospel.” This group lives very simply at

the bottom of society. Some people came from outside the area and told them that since they follow Jesus, they could no longer live here. Kamal and his people, the lowest of the low, stood up to them. They said, “No, this is where we live and this is our home.” So they were rounded up and taken to the police station. They had to pay extortion to be released and go home again. Up to the present, police show up almost daily and “arrest” the men of this community, so they have to pay again and again to be released. A (Hindu) lawyer has gone with them to the police station to try to address this injustice. They are under great pressure, but they continue standing up to the challenge.

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2. People in the movement are growing in patience. Area leaders wait patiently for the movement leaders to visit when they can, but they don't demand it. The movement has spread across four states (a large geographical area), and those involved have very little money. Visiting the various areas requires both time and money. The persecution keeps visits from happening as often, partly because finances are stretched even more thinly from responding to persecution. Also, if leaders from outside an area show up too often, it causes problems and more persecution. So we see illustrations of the biblical truth that “suffering produces perseverance” (Rom. 5:3).

3. The believers know who they are in Christ. They understand their identity in Him and they *own* it. They refuse to let traditional Christians dissuade them from who they are in Christ (as Paul instructed the Galatians when he asked, “Who has bewitched you?”) They refuse to be persuaded away from the identity He has given them, even when it results in persecution (whether from traditional Christians or from non-Christians).
 4. The movement leaders (52 area leaders plus further generations of leaders) are stepping up in their role as stewards of their “Timothys” and churches. This includes stewarding finances, discipleship and managing house churches. It also includes the process of growth in authority. This stewarding of decentralized leadership has become even more vital with the increase in persecution. The word “steward” is new for us. We no longer want to speak of movement leaders, but movement *stewards*. It is a biblical word, and explains well how the leaders feel— not only the top leaders, but all the main core group.
 5. Increased persecution has brought a response of increased generosity from the believers. They have only opened their pockets even more, rather than letting the persecution cause them to fear and become selfish in their fear. They are gaining a better understanding of how to make good decisions about the use of money based on what little they have available. Churches are generous with those in need. Funds come from the movement itself, from within the house churches. Generosity is flowing from church to church and up the chain to leaders and area leaders as people have need.
- These are a few of the ways God is maturing His church here in the midst of increased persecution in these days.

Persecution and Women in North India

By a Movement Leader in North India

Persecution takes many forms; too many to illustrate in one article. These vignettes of persecuted women in North India illustrate both the human suffering and the power of God.

In Haryana

In a nation regarded by many to be one of the most dangerous nations on earth for women, the Indian state of Haryana could be considered the epicenter of the misogyny and violence. About two and a half years ago, a believing woman in Haryana invited her neighbor, Reshma, to come over and participate in a Discovery Bible Study in her home. She knew that Reshma’s family had many problems. She wanted Reshma to hear a true story about the true God and to receive prayer. This friend felt sure that if the group could pray for Reshma, God would help her with her every need.

Reshma attended the Bible study and the story of creation amazed her. What wonderful news! There is a God above all gods. When He made the world, He made it beautiful and good. The world had not always been as it is now, full of violence, aggression, oppression of women, sadness and loss. This news watered the dry soil of Reshma’s heart. She attended three more Bible studies in her neighbor’s home.

Thrilled about the good news she was learning, she began to share the stories with relatives in the village. Her husband became furious when he heard about her activities. How dare she leave the house? How dare she promote Christian stories? He determined to put a stop to the nonsense and he took her to the roof of their home, held her over the edge and vowed he would throw her off if she didn’t stop telling people about this Jesus.

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The next time Reshma met with the other disciples, she informed them through tears of her husband’s threat. They told her to stop reaching out. She replied, “What I am learning [about Jesus and His commands] encourages me to share this. I cannot stop!”

Soon, Reshma’s husband heard that she was still sharing about Jesus with their relatives and neighbors. Thankfully,

he didn't follow through on his threat about the roof but he did imprison her in a room in their home. Before locking the door, he declared, "No one will meet together. You are separate from our family and will not see your children." Reshma prayed.

Six weeks passed. One day, her husband was badly injured in a fall from the tractor out in their field. With her husband confined to his bed, he allowed Reshma out of the room in order to serve him. She kept praying. She cared for her husband for 22 days, bringing meals to his bed and feeding him. Over time, he began to treat her politely. Finally, his arrogance melted into humility. After he became able to get up and walk around the house again, Reshma dared to ask, "Are you still angry with me? If not, can I do Jesus' work?" He didn't reply. Reshma took his silence as permission. Thrilled, she began again to share about Jesus with others.

The first person Reshma visited was a relative named Madhu. Madhu had noticed a change in Reshma's husband. She said, "Your husband seems changed. Are you doing something with him?" Reshma told Madhu about all that had happened. Madhu was very impressed by God's ability to soften and change the heart of Reshma's husband. So much so that she gave her allegiance to God and joined Reshma as a coworker in the kingdom.

Three months passed. One day, Madhu shared a true story with a neighbor named Maravan and his whole family. They liked what they heard, so Madhu began a Discovery Study in their home. Madhu's three children were afraid of Maravan. Like most men in Haryana, he was aggressive and rough. He owned a small shop near his house, but his shop wasn't doing well. He finally told Madhu, "If you will pray for me and God brings financial change to my shop, I will believe this God is true."

Madhu prayed, God blessed the shop, and Maravan and his whole family gave God their allegiance. Soon, Madhu's children began to see a change in Maravan. He was a new man. Maravan began sharing with others about what was happening to him and his family. One neighbour, Krish, and his household, soon gave their allegiance to Jesus because of all that Maravan shared.

Then Krish shared with another man and his family who also gave their allegiance to Jesus. So within nine months, five generations of disciples were birthed in this area of Haryana, the most violent state in India, one of the most violent nations on earth. So far, 42 people have been baptized from among these five generations. The words from Luke (1:78b-79) ring in our ears: "*the Dayspring from on high has visited us; To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace*" (NKJV).

In a different state of India

Six months ago, we visited a very poor family who lived in a hut. We encouraged the woman and a couple of her children to listen to God's Word and His stories—from Creation to Christ. We told them: "Listen over and over and over again. Then make sure you discuss the stories for the greatest benefit. We can't always visit you, and even the area leader cannot always visit you, but you always have God's Word."

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We returned six months later and met this family again. This time, the woman's husband and many extended family members also joined us. They seemed much happier this time than previously. I asked why they seemed happy. The wife and a few of the others immediately began crying. She said that every day during chai time she had listened to the stories. Her husband also listened, as did her son and his wife, who lived with them.

In the past, her husband drank too much and beat her. Her son also drank a lot and beat his wife. After hearing the story about Adam and Eve over and over again, the men came under conviction. They exclaimed: "This story says you were taken from my rib? That means we are same body! But I beat you and drink too much!" The husbands began to recognize the value of their wives and treated them differently.

In this village, the wives normally joined their husbands working in the fields. We learned that since we had first come and shared with them, the women were now sharing the stories with others as they worked. The daughter-in-law had also shared with her own mother in a different village. She was so happy to share the news, “My husband loves me!” She shared her testimony with her whole family.

Her brother and his wife lived with her parents. Her sister-in-law, who was also abused, heard her testimony and said, “I want those stories too!” That’s how it happened that on our second visit, the daughter-in-law brought her whole family to talk with us. As a result, two generations of families now follow Jesus and have been baptized.

I have been asked, “Why is the gospel advancing so rapidly in this region?” There are a few reasons, but one of the main ones is that the people here are *so* very poor (poorer even than the typical poor of India) that the women have to work as well as the men. Without the women working, they don’t have enough to eat. When women work out in the fields, they have freedom to share the Bible stories with other women. They are not trapped and isolated in their homes as are women in much of India. In this area, they are free to do what they naturally love to do: share the stories with their friends and pray for each other. The men don’t feel threatened because the women just share stories while they are out working. They not only pray for the sick and demonized, but they own the identity of living as a disciple and making other disciples. This leads to rapid spread of the gospel. 

