



4.1.19

## INDIA | Christians beaten, Bibles burnt at prayer meeting

A prayer meeting in a home in India's Tamil Nadu state was disrupted March 19 by approximately 15 people from the Hindu Munani (Hindu Front) and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), which is the religious arm of the RSS, a Hindu nationalist movement.

The prayer meeting was being held in the home of a Christian student named Siddappa, who lives in Kurubatti in the city of Hosur. Neethiraj, of the India Evangelical Mission, visited the home of the student on March 19 to pray along with a friend named Chandrakant and his sick 16-year-old relative.

Soon after the prayer meeting began, the intruders went upstairs and questioned the men about their purpose for gathering. The Christians were manhandled and dragged down the stairs and taken to the middle of the street outside Siddappa's home.

Neethiraj's bag, which contained Christian tracts, was forcefully emptied on the street. The attackers also gathered all the Bibles and hymn books from Siddappa's home. Local sources say that Neethiraj was forced to set the items on fire with gasoline, which the perpetrators had extracted from a nearby vehicle, despite pleas from the Christians not to set the Bibles on fire.

Nehemiah Christie, Director of Legislation & Regulations of the Synod of Pentecostal Churches in Tamil Nadu, said, "Any Christian gatherings are now at risk of being interrupted by Hindutva forces. It is worrying to see that such groups freely intrude homes, question one's belief and seize articles of worship, including Bibles, and desecrate them. The Hindutva ideology of intolerance and impunity is spreading in this state, inciting people to harass and attack religious minorities, who just want to be able to practice their religion or belief peacefully. Such culture is not healthy for the future generation of Indians who are having to witness these awful acts. The Indian government cannot allow this divisive ideology to tarnish India's identity as a historically peace-loving nation. They must act now."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned that religious minorities who are simply exercising their right to practice their religions or beliefs are being harassed and targeted by non-state actors with impunity. We urge the

government of India to prosecute those involved in targeting religious minorities, and implement measures to encourage the co-existence of all religions in India.”