



Swaroopa (second left) and other girls displaced from Orissa by anti-Christian violence but now training to be nurses and midwives

Consoled in Suffering for Christ

At Christmas 2007 Hindu extremists launched a series of violent and premeditated attacks on Christians in Orissa State, India. Some 730 homes were destroyed, and 95 churches were razed to the ground. Eight months later the violence was renewed, leading to the deaths of at least 20 Christians. Thousands were injured, and tens of thousands were forced to flee their homes. The Christians were told, “Come back as Hindu or don’t come back at all!”

One of the families caught up in the second outbreak of violence was that of Swaroopa Naik, whose story is told below.

Escape in the jungle

Swaroopa was brought up in a Christian home with her brother and two sisters. Her father, Sunil, is a farmer. On Monday 25 August 2008 the family was busy with the housework as usual while Swaroopa was having a bath. Suddenly she heard terrible noises outside, and running out of the house she saw her family rushing into the forest. Swaroopa ran too and was chased by the attackers, but she was quick enough to escape them.

Swaroopa eventually found her parents in the jungle. Taking shelter under a tree, they heard the dreadful sound of homes being

destroyed and saw a plume of smoke rising into the sky. But Swaroopa says, “Both of my parents were consoled by the very thought that this tragic attack has been due to the fact that we believe in Jesus Christ and are Christians. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.” (Matthew 5:10)”

After a while the family heard the attackers coming along the path they themselves had taken, so they ran and hid themselves in the bush. The sunny weather changed to cloudy skies, and they prayed that the Lord would send rain. And then – a heavy downpour! The pursuers called off the chase and went back the way they came. Swaroopa and her parents praised God.

The Lord who provides

When the rain stopped the family went back to their village. There they found that their house had been reduced to a pile of ashes and debris. No-one in the village would take them in for the night, so they returned to the jungle to shelter under the trees. Early next day they set off to escape the pursuing assailants.

In the evening Swaroopa and her family reached Phulbani, a large township, where they felt safe enough to stay for two weeks. After this they moved on to Cuttack, the

largest city in Orissa, where they stayed with a family member.

After the anti-Christian violence had subsided, Swaroopa’s parents were able to return to their village to visit what was left of their house. They learned from their pastor about a ministry (supported by Barnabas Fund) that offers vocational training to young people displaced from Orissa by the violence. This is designed to equip them to return to the region later, not only to live there, but also to make a positive contribution to the community and to witness for Christ.

Swaroopa obtained a college place to study nursing and midwifery and is about to complete her first year of training. She writes, “We thanked and rejoiced in the Lord for having miraculously saved our lives and now for providing me with an opportunity to become a nurse. The Lord is really ‘Jehovah Jirah’ [the LORD who provides].”

This year Barnabas Fund has been supporting 27 girls on three different vocational courses. Swaroopa and the others training to be nurses and midwives will be continuing their studies for another three years, with continuing help from Barnabas.



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