

Q&A: Maruc, an Indian church leader

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Maruc (not his real name) is a church leader in India and an Open Doors partner involved in teaching Indian Christians how to deal with persecution. We asked him how he experiences persecution, why an extremist Hindu would wake up in the middle of the night to make a threatening phone call and what the church in India most needs. This is his story, in Maruc's own words.

How would you explain [Hindutva](#)—which means “Hindu-ness” and has been a driving force for Hindu nationalism in India—to someone who doesn't know about it and who doesn't understand India?

India in the past has been known as a country of diversity. But today's leaders don't want diversity. They want uniformity and they want it by force.

It is like taking away your options, your rights, your privileges and they want to tell you, “this is what we are and this is who you should be.” They want to redefine the identity of every person.

In the past, the taboo word was “conversion.” If you tried to convert someone, it was a big problem.

But now they have now remodified the word conversion into [a new form of] nationalism. So anything you do that is not acceptable to one particular group of people, [nationalists] will brand you as an anti-Indian.

If you don't sing, if you don't stand up, if you don't salute, if you don't say a particular prayer, if you don't accept a particular book or a particular teaching—anything you do, any small thing, any big thing, all of this is being brought under one category: “You are anti-Indian.”

This is a new way of unifying India by broadening this particular word and then cutting off people's privileges and rights.

The dangerous part is, that this is happening in [every] rank of society.

It is a very uncertain future.

But you know, as followers of Jesus Christ, we should not be surprised. Because this was our history, and we had a pretty easy time in the middle [but now] it is getting back to our roots.

So maybe we should thank God for the easier times and also learn how to face these challenging, troubling times that we are going to face.

What kinds of persecution have you experienced or seen? How are people persecuted for being Christians?

I am a teacher and I have the privilege to teach Christians in different parts of our country who face difficulties because of their faith. I have never been beaten or otherwise assaulted because of my faith. This happens to many rural Christians who were born into Hindu families but later became followers of Jesus.

I have had my share of threats, though. Like someone [might walk] up to you in a fit of anger and threaten you, saying, 'OK, so these are your kids? I will kidnap them, or I will get somebody to shoot you dead, and if that won't work, I myself will come.'

There were some traumatic times, because life became very hard. Everything that you have taken for granted is now threatened.

[There was another] situation where somebody would call me exactly at two o'clock in the morning. And the phone would ring and ring and ring, every day between 2 and 4 a.m. That was a very traumatic experience. You feel unnerved, because you know it is two o'clock and you have to face it every day; your sleep is disturbed and you can't give your best during the day

One time a person came to me and said: 'On that particular day I will come to the church with three hundred people and disturb what you're doing.' I spent the whole night in prayer and cried out to God.

Then came Sunday, a very interesting one. The service started at 9 o'clock and I was at the door of the church, expecting something to go wrong. Five minutes before the service started, I saw a cop in his jeep. He brought a truckload of police personnel with him. I was wondering what they were going to do. They went to a shop opposite the church. They ordered tea and a newspaper, and they just sat there.

The service was about to start and I went inside. Throughout the service I was thinking about what was happening outside. I couldn't even focus on the worship or on the preaching. When the service was over and nothing weird had happened, I rushed to see what the situation was. The police were getting back in their vehicles and leaving.

There was nothing I could have done to protect us. I am convinced that God ordered a whole load of policemen to come and protect us on that morning. We've heard of many supernatural experiences like that.

When I was threatened and [people] said that they would assault me and that they would kill me and all that, I was standing outside as my children were coming back from school. I was afraid that something would go wrong.

So my wife walked in and asked me, 'Why are you standing here?' I said, 'Because I am waiting for the children.' 'You never used to do that earlier.' 'It's because I am very afraid.' She said, 'Are you worried?' I said, 'Well, I am a father, so obviously I have to be.'

She said, 'Who brought you here, to the city?' I said, 'God Himself.' 'If God brought you here, don't you think He will take care of you?'

I was very humbled, because my wife is a professor at the university, but she preached a sermon in just one sentence. [It was] much more powerful than the sermons I have preached for years, trying to change people's hearts and build their faith.

So I went back and I cried and I thanked God for the life partner that God gave me, but I continued to pray, because I wanted to see some divine hand of God helping us.

And I remember that after I had prayed, I knew specifically on that day, I was not praying to God to protect me from the threats, I was just praying for the other situations in our church.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, distinctly when I was in prayer for some other things, I heard footsteps in my room.

I have heard these footsteps many times in my life, in my ministry and I knew Jesus was walking into that room. I was trembling all over. I was afraid of God.

And then, in that still moment, I heard a voice. 'My son, the person who is threatening you, you will never see him again.' I heard that very stern voice.

I knew it was the Lord speaking to me, it was audible. So I was very excited, I got up from my prayer, I thanked God.

The next day I was sitting in my office and a friend of mine walked in and he said, 'What happened to the man who threatened you?' (because the other man witnessed me being threatened).

So I said, 'Don't worry, our problems are solved, we will never see him again.'

And as I was talking to him, that man actually walked into the back of the church office, so I was very terrified and I couldn't believe it, because God had told me that I would never see him again and I saw him.

So I said, did I hear wrong? Did I experience something wrong?

But then he came and for the last time he said, 'I will not come again, but this I tell you, you are finished, I will shoot you dead.' And then he walked off. So I just kept still, I kept praying.

But then, as God said, that was the last time I ever saw him. The phone calls stopped. The threats stopped. His visitation stopped. The people he sent stopped. Everything stopped, everything died down.

All I know is this, until and unless God permits it, no one has the power to touch us.

Someone has put it like this, 'We are immortal until God's purpose is accomplished in our life.'

But can you explain to me though, why would a Hindu [extremist] go so far as to wake up in the middle of the night to threaten you and come to your office and threaten to kill you?

You see, the extreme reaction of the Hindu [radical] is something out of the ordinary. Because Hinduism has a pantheon of gods. They have so many gods, so there is no problem in them incorporating another god if you give them one.

Just one more idol onto their shelf, just one more person to bow down to.

Because basically not all Hindus are convinced of their religious belief. They are not too sure.

My mum walked into a school run by fundamentalist Hindus, that it looked as if you were going into a temple, rather than into an educational institution. And one of the things her colleague in the school said was this: "You know, you Christians are lucky, because you only have one God, unlike us. When we are in trouble, we don't know who to call and we are not sure who will come.

"But you people call only one person and you are sure He will come and help you.

"Sometimes I wish in all my desperation that I maybe would be better off if I was a Christian."

This story shows us that not all Hindus are anti-Christian. Yet, we anger them. The same happened to Daniel in the Old Testament. The people weren't upset with him because he did something wrong to them. They couldn't stand him because he was good.

Another reason why Hindu [nationalists] may feel threatened by us, is because of their religious faith. They think, "Maybe I will lose my faith. Maybe I will lose the way I worship. Maybe I will lose my identity." That's why they show bouts of anger or react very harshly towards us.

So out of fear, they threaten people?

Out of fear because they think they are losing grip of their own [traditions]. They are so proud of their own traditions.

But the other thing is indoctrination. They are being fed the wrong information.

For example, some years ago [when] Christians went to help someone [including Hindus], they were very happy. And they always said, "I know that nobody likes you, but you Christians are very loving, you are kind and very hospitable, you are very social, you help people, you are very friendly" and all that.

Now, because of the indoctrination, when they see a Christian coming to help, however genuinely, they ask the first question, "Are you helping us, so that we will become Christians one day?"

So they question the motive of your generosity. Which is sad!

For example, we have recently had floods in the state of Kerala in south India. A Christian man took a boat and reached a remote house which was completely inundated. The [residents] were sitting on the roof and they needed someone to help them.

Can you imagine, they asked the boatman, “Are you a Christian?” And when he said yes, they refused to get in the boat.

Normally if you want to be helped, when you are desperate, you don’t ask anyone what they believe. It defies all logic. But that’s how things have gone. That is how things have turned, that’s what is happening in our country.

What are some of the strategies that extremist Hindus use to bring people back home?

They are talking about *Gar Whapsi* which means “coming home.”

For example, their argument is this: “All of you who have converted must come back home, because you are the prodigal; you are just wrong. You made a mistake, so we want you to recognize the mistake and come back. Come back—un-convert.”

So they want people to come back to the fold of the popular faith [Hinduism] that is going in India right now.

They are [also] accusing Christians of giving gifts and alluring people, enticing them with jobs and this and that, [or other] financial benefits, to become Christians. That is their accusation.

And in the name of getting Christians back into the fold of Hinduism, they are practicing almost the same thing. They are doing the allurements, they are doing the enticements. What they do does not seem wrong to them.

So they are guilty of the same crime that they are accusing somebody of. So that is an interesting thing that is going on.

Secondly, they are doing a thing that you can call follow-up. Which is: I give you certain things to get you back to Hinduism, but I am not sure if you will stay back, so I want somebody to watch over your back. And that is the follow-up.

What do you think is the biggest need of the church in India in these hostile times?

Paul writes that we should pray for the leaders and kings and those in authority, so that we will be able to live peaceful and godly lives (1 Timothy 2:1-2). We want to live a peaceful life, we want to live a godly life in the same country in which we were born. I think it is a good thing for us to pray on that basis.

And more importantly, I would pray for the salvation of people. At the end of the day, it does not matter what is going on in politics and religion. We want India to bow down to the name of Jesus. That is our desire – that is why we want to pray. We are interested in the salvation of the very people who are turning against the Christians.

So, a lot of things to pray for.

One thing we really need to pray for is this. For so many years in the past we have been blessed by believers across the country, across the world, who have a special place in their heart for India. So we have benefited from their generosity, we have benefited from their

passion, their prayers, their visits, their help, everything all over the past. And we wonder what will happen if all of that stops.

One thing that I believe will happen is that India has to raise local leaders who will stand up and be able to carry on the work.

Finally, as a follower of Christ, I believe God is faithful.

He said: "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." So, if He is the builder of the church here, He will take care of us.

He will give us two things. One, He will make a way of escape for us, out of any situation, any persecution.

Or [two], He will give us strength to face it and go through what we need to go through and play our part in the history of Christianity.

There are a lot of things to pray for, a lot of challenges to face.