

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Asia > India > Fundamentalism, communalism, extreme right, secularism (India) > **Jesus statue smashed in spate of attacks on India's Christian community**

Jesus statue smashed in spate of attacks on India's Christian community

Friday 31 December 2021, by [ELLIS-PETERSEN Hannah](#) (Date first published: 27 December 2021).

Amid growing intolerance to India's Christian minority, several Christmas events were targeted by Hindu right wing groups

Festive celebrations were disrupted, Jesus statues were smashed and effigies of Santa Claus were burned in a spate of attacks on India's Christian community over Christmas.

Amid growing intolerance and violence against India's Christian minority, who make up about 2% of India's population, several Christmas events were targeted by Hindu right wing groups, who alleged Christians were using festivities to force Hindus to convert.

In recent years, Christians have increasingly faced harassment around Christmas but this year saw a notable surge in attacks.

In Agra in Uttar Pradesh, members of right wing Hindu groups burned effigies of Santa Claus outside missionary-led schools and accused Christian missionaries of using Christmas celebrations to lure people in.

"As December comes, the Christian missionaries become active in the name of Christmas, Santa Claus and New Year. They lure children by making Santa Claus distribute gifts to them and attract them towards [Christianity](#)," said Ajju Chauhan regional general secretary of Bajrang Dal, one of the right wing Hindu outfits leading the protest.

In Assam, two protesters in saffron, the signature colour of Hindu nationalism, entered a Presbyterian church on Christmas night and disrupted proceedings, demanding that all Hindus leave the building.

"Let only Christian celebrate Christmas," said one of the men, in a video filmed during the disruption. "We are against Hindu boys and girls participating in Christmas function ... it hurts our sentiments. They dress up in church and everyone sings Merry Christmas. How will our religion survive?". The police have subsequently arrested both men involved.

In state of Haryana, on Christmas Eve, an evening celebration at a school in Pataudi was disrupted by members of a right wing Hindu vigilante group. Storming into the school shouting slogans such as "Jai Shri Ram", now a clarion call for Hindu nationalism, they claimed that the festive event, which included Christmas songs and dance and teachings of the bible, was being used for "religious conversion under the garb of celebrating Christmas" and alleged they were "brainwashing children through drama and speeches into accepting Christianity".

In the same state, the day after Christmas, a Jesus statue was torn down and the Holy Redeemer Church in Ambala was vandalised in the early hours.

A Christmas event that is held every year at Matridham Ashram in Uttar Pradesh was also targeted by a Hindu vigilante group who stood outside shouting slogans such as “stop conversions” and “missionary *murdabad*”, meaning “death to missionaries”.

Speaking to local media, Father Anand, a priest at the ashram, said the protests were indicative of the increased attacks that Christians in India have been facing in recent months, as allegations of forced conversion of Hindus to Christianity have become rampant and an anti-Christian hysteria has begun to grow across India.

“This is a symbol of what is happening because these people have impunity, and it creates tension,” said Anand. “Every Sunday is a day of terror and trauma for Christians, especially those belonging to those small churches.”

The Christmas attacks are only the latest examples of incidents of violence against Christians, part of a growing atmosphere of religious intolerance towards India’s non-Hindu minorities, namely Muslims and Christians, under the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government.

Since the BJP came to power in 2014, attacks on Christians have been on the rise. According to a report by organisation Persecution Relief, crimes against Christians increased by 60% from 2016 to 2019.

In recent weeks, Christian missionaries have had their bibles set alight and Christian schools have been disrupted by right wing groups who allege that Christians are forcing Hindus into converting by offering them money and gifts. In the state of Chhattisgarh, the BJP have taken up the issue of alleged forced conversions, holding dozens of rallies. In the same state several pastors have been violently attacked and many church services now have to be conducted in secret for safety.

This month, the government of Karnataka state became the latest to pass a controversial “anti-conversion” law. Though it does not explicitly mention Christians, its provision against “unlawful conversions” has been used in other states to target Christian pastors and the state has already seen a surge in attacks, with 39 Christian hate crimes just this year.

According to a report released in October, there were more than 300 documented attacks on Christians across India in the first nine months of 2021.

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P.S.

The Guardian

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/27/jesus-statue-smashed-in-spate-of-attacks-on-indias-christian-community?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other