Q&A: Saree, a 12-year-old girl beaten for her new faith

Saree is a 12-year-old girl from a rural part of India. She’s tall for her age, slim, and has a beautiful smile. Though, because of the religious climate in India, she has had very little reason to show that smile. She’s carrying a heavy load. After she converted from her traditional, animist faith to Christianity, her parents forced her to choose between her new faith and them. She couldn’t make that choice. Her father made the choice for her and threw her out of his house.

Here, she describes how she was treated after her conversion.

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I know your childhood was difficult. Could you tell us a little bit about that?
I was bullied at school for being deaf. [Schoolmates] scolded me: ‘You are deaf!’ It made me so sad. I also couldn’t listen and study at school properly. My parents tried everything to heal me. We went to the hospital, to Hindu temples and even to people who practiced magic. Nothing helped.

You grew up in a small, animist community in India. How did you first become a Christian?
My [Christian] aunt took me to church. She told me, ‘we will pray for you in church, and the Lord will open your ears and you will be able to hear.’ [So,] I went to church with her. I was called to the front of the church and they prayed for my healing. At the same time, I started hearing a little bit and I [was being healed].

What happened when it was discovered you attended a Christian church?
When my parents found out I had gone to church, my father beat me. My parents told me not to stay in [their] house or eat [their] food. So, I went to my aunt’s house. My mother brought me back to my home, but when I reached home, my father beat me again. He threw my clothes out of the house.

So, I went to a different village where another aunt lives. Four days later, my older brother came by bike to my aunt’s house to get me. After taking me home, my parents again beat me up. My elder brother also beat me a lot. My parents told me, ‘stop going to church’ and then they threw my Bible into the mud. I picked up my Bible, dried it in the sun and went back to my aunt’s house with my Bible.

My parents said they would come to my aunt’s house and take me [home], but I did not want to go with them. My uncle hid me so they couldn’t take me. One day my elder sister came to meet me, to take me home but I said that I did not want to go.

My parents also beat my [other] sister who came to meet me; they pulled her hair and beat her.

One day, I went [back] to my parents’ house but my father and my elder brother ignored me. They were watching me very angrily. My mother talked to me but my father did not talk to me
Why don't you leave Christianity? It seems like then your problems would be over.
I do not want to leave the Lord; my mind is on the Lord. I [thought about leaving Christianity] but my attention goes towards the church. My elder brother also beat me and [tried to force] me to leave, but I did not.

I will never leave the Lord. Pray that I can understand the Bible and teach others. Pray for the salvation of my parents and relatives.