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‘People’s tribunal’ hears 15 testimonies of victims of attacks on Christians in Bengal, panel ‘shocked’ by allegations of assaults, police inaction

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Kolkata: A people’s tribunal organised jointly by Karwan-e-Mohabbat, Sabar Institute and Amra Ek Sachetan Prayas was convened on Monday to record the testimonies of Christians facing violence over the past few months. The tribunal panel comprising Harsh Mander, Jawhar Sircar, John Dayal, Wajahat Habibullah, Tanika Sarkar, Omair Khan and Vidya Dinkar heard 15 accounts from victims and experts highlighting mob attacks, police apathy and false charges.

A Keshpur woman alleged a group of 80 to 100 persons attacked her house church on Oct 2, assaulted her and her son, and forced her to plant a tulsi tree and chant ‘Jai Shree Ram’. “We were preparing for a 2pm prayer gathering with approximately 20 baptized attendees. Around 1.50pm, the mob attacked the home and started interrogating me. They asked if I belong to the ‘sanatan’ religion, to which I replied that I was and will remain in the ‘sanatan’ religion. When asked why I was practising Christianity, I clarified that I was not practising Christianity, but was rather worshipping my Lord Jesus because Jesus loves me and I love Him. Since my answers did not satisfy them, a group of 10 to 12 men

and women dragged me outside my home and pulled off my sari and tore my blouse," she said.

She went on to add, "I was made to wait from 6pm to 11pm for filing an FIR. The OC then called me to a room where six to seven BJP netas were present. The officer told me to pray privately at home. The FIR was lodged later, following intervention from Bangiya Christiya Pariseba (BCP)."

Mamata Joshua of West Bardhaman recounted two attacks on her home. On May 31, a group chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' vandalised their prayer hall over false conversion accusations, breaking the cross and attempting to beat her husband. "Police took no action against the attackers and ordered the congregation to stop gathering," she said.

Attackers allegedly returned on Aug 6, assaulting Joshua, her teenage daughter and an elderly believer. She has submitted FIRs by post to both Salanpur and Durgapur SD police stations.

Bally's Tumpa Mal said that on Sept 6, Bajrang Dal affiliates invaded their house church, chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' and declaring that Christians would not be allowed to pray in a Hindu society. A week later, a mob planted a religious flag on their property and threatened destruction. "We lodged a police complaint but a counter-complaint was filed against us," Mal said.

Pastor Anup Kumar Ghosh alleged that on July 3, some people affiliated with Hindu Jagaran Manch attacked his Midnapore home during a wedding celebration. "They accused us of forced conversions. It took the police two hours to arrive. The mob beat us up while looked on," he recounted. Police allegedly filed false attempted murder charges against the pastor, leading to a 41-day unjust imprisonment, Ghosh said. "I am forced to live away from

my home," he added.

BCP founder and general secretary Herod Mullick said, "The scale and the cruelty of persecution are gradually escalating. As of now, 68 incidents have occurred but only 46 have been reported. We have managed to file FIRs in 15 to 16 cases. We have sought appointments with the CM multiple times but he did not respond."

National Christian Council state general secretary Reverend Dr Arpan Rana said that they have handled 38 cases and in most cases, the police were inactive.

"Bengal had a society of pluralism and religious tolerance. Since BJP came to office, how quickly has hatred fostered! People have the freedom to follow their religion but suddenly that has become a matter of fear," Mander said.

"The testimonies have shocked me," said Tanika Sarkar.

Jawhar Sircar said, “Such attacks on the Christian community never used to take place here. We will make this a public issue.”