

Mixed-caste elopement ends in burning

Contributed by Correspondent
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Jeewam Shri, a Dalit (“Untouchable”) woman in Uttar Pradesh was burned alive by her higher-caste neighbour. Her crime ? Her son eloped with his daughter. “They burned me. My neighbour Rajveer burned me,” Jeewam said just before she died at the hospital from burns covering 80 per cent of her body. This incident is one in a long line of atrocities against Dalits, even in Uttar Pradesh, where the majority of the State’s government officials are Dalits, or from other low-caste groups. Chief Minister Mayawati claims as many as 7,500 crime reports have been filed by Dalits in just four months. She has put much effort into making it easier to file the reports, but she admits that many cases still go unreported. In Jeewam Shri’s case, her relatives have fled the village rather than file the report, fearing further revenge from the higher-caste community. This tragedy is representative of what Dalits face across India. It is estimated that every hour, two Dalits are assaulted, three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered and two Dalit homes are burned, according to the Human Rights Education Movement of India. Yet only one per cent of those who commit crimes against Dalits are ever convicted. “This incident is unfortunately part of a widespread mindset toward low-caste people,” GFA President KP Yohannan said. “The only way Dalits can find peace is to find their value in Christ.” Gospel for Asia missionaries in Uttar Pradesh reach out to Dalits and other low-caste people, as well as those belonging to higher castes. Bible colleges are training more workers to join these missionaries, and radio programmes in several languages bring the Good News to many in the State. (Source : Journal Chretien dated 22 October 2007)