

# Persecution and Discrimination of Hindus in Pakistan

Ranbir Singh, Chair of Hindu Human Rights Group (HHR)

I think it important to harken back to the very foundation of Pakistan, and in doing so recall the words of the nation's founder and first governor-general, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. On 11 August 1947 his speech to the Constituent Assembly of the soon to be independent state including the following:

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*"The people of England in course of time had to face the realities of the situation and had to discharge the responsibilities and burdens placed upon them by the government of their country and they went through that fire step by step. Today, you might say with justice that Roman Catholics and Protestants do not exist; what exists now is that every man is a citizen, an equal citizen of Great Britain and they are all members of the Nation.*

*Now I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State."*

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Citizens of the state and of the nation. That is how it was unambiguously stated by the Father of Pakistan himself. However the reality in Pakistan has become the diametric opposite. Hindus and Sikhs are anything but equal citizens of the nation. In the political sense they are hardly citizens at all. The politicisation of every social aspect of existence has meant that these minority communities, along with others, have been systematically marginalised, persecuted and discriminated against in a host of crushing measures. This has led to an increasing level of violence notably religiously motivated kidnapping, assault, sexual crimes and murder. Religious shrines are a particular favourite target. The 1951 census found that in the then West Pakistan 15% of the population was Hindu. I state this because we must remember that until 1971 the Hindu population as bolstered in real and proportionate terms by the inclusion of what is now Bangladesh. In both countries there has been a decline in percentage and real numbers. The 1998 census of Pakistan registered 1.6% of the population as Hindus. That means about 3 million Hindus. Today, Muslims constitute 14% of India's population, while in Pakistan, Hindus are said to be just over 2%.

It is important to remember those courageous individuals and organisations who continue to work under such horrific conditions in order to expose the persecution of Hindus and other minorities in Pakistan. Mention needs to be made of Sanjesh Dhanja, president of the Pakistan Hindu Seva in Karachi, and Ramesh Jaipal, director of the Hare Ram Foundation in Rahim Yar Khan in Punjab. The latter is also founder of Pakistan's Scheduled Caste Rights Movement.

According to the 2006 US Department of State International Religious Freedom Report, Hafiz Saeed, leader of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a designated foreign terrorist organization, consistently issued statements calling for holy war against Jews and Hindus. Some Sunni Muslim groups published literature calling for violence against Ahmadis, Shi'a Muslims, other Sunni sects, and Hindus. Some newspapers frequently published articles that contained derogatory references to religious minorities, especially Ahmadis, Hindus, and Jews. Sermons at mosques frequently railed against Ahmadis, other Muslim groups, and Hindus. This is exacerbated by the official state ideology and how it is inculcated in the masses. Already suffering mass illiteracy, Pakistan's schools do little to

promote tolerance towards minority groups. For the upholders of the Ideology of Pakistan, the existence of Pakistan is defined only in relation to Hindus, and hence the Hindus have to be painted as negatively as possible, especially in the glorification of jihad against India. Hence a 2005 report by the National Commission for Justice and Peace a non profit organization in Pakistan, found that Pakistan Studies textbooks in Pakistan have been used to articulate the hatred that Pakistani policy-makers have attempted to inculcate towards the Hindus. 'Vituperative animosities legitimise military and autocratic rule, nurturing a siege mentality. Pakistan Studies textbooks are an active site to represent India as a hostile neighbour' the report stated. 'The story of Pakistan's past is intentionally written to be distinct from, and often in direct contrast with, interpretations of history found in India. For example, the secession of Bangladesh in 1971 is blamed on various anti-Hindu theories. The class-eight Pakistan Studies textbook (English) simply states that, "Some leaders of former East Pakistan with the active help of India managed to break away from Pakistan and established Bangladesh." The class nine-10 (Urdu) book by far the most detailed devotes nearly three pages to explaining the disintegration. The listed subtitles include incompetent government of Yahya Khan, Hindu domination of trade, and nefarious role of Hindu teachers. From the government-issued textbooks, students are taught that Hindus are backward and superstitious. Ramesh Jaipal writes:

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*The state-run electronic media, which until recently dominated the opinion building in Pakistan as the only TV channel, PTV, and Pakistan Radio were completely under control of the state, which used to portray India (Hindu) as eternal enemies of Pakistan and Muslims of the entire world. Blaming India for every happening in Pakistan. The stories of atrocities against Kashmiri Muslims in Indian held Kashmir by the Hindu Army were part of regular and essential part of every news bulletin and other programmes of current affairs.*

*The print media, particularly mainstream Urdu newspapers, have also played their role in portraying Hindu as an enemy of Pakistan. This systematic image building has proved poisonous for Pakistani society, particularly it has made the lives of Hindus miserable. Hindus are suspected as agent of RAW and the poor and illiterate Hindus caste people are easy target to implicate in false cases to victims because of their weak socio economic status. Upper class rich Hindus may have been position to escape this attitude on the basis of their wealth, but there is no way out for poor.*

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Karachi has a well-established community of affluent Hindu businessmen, public servants and professionals numbering about 70,000 according to Anwar Syed, *professor emeritus of political science at the University of Massachusetts*, writing on 'The State of Minorities' in Pakistan's newspaper the Dawn, dated 18 June 2006. (<http://www.dawn.com/news/1069111/dawn-opinion-june-18-2006> ). In July 2010 about 60 Hindus were forced to abandon their homes and take refuge in a cattle pen, at Memon Goth in Karachi after influential tribesmen of the area objected to the boy drinking water from a cooler near a mosque.

However the majority of the Hindus in Sindh are often "Dalits", working as landless peasants, bonded labourers, or servants doing menial jobs (sweepers, scavengers, etc.) that other Pakistanis regard as degrading. Dalits comprise 85% of the total Hindus population and are the most vulnerable of the minority. About a million of them live in what used to be the Mirpurkhas "division," nearly 350,000 in the extremely arid district of Tharparkar. They are evicted from the land they occupy, relocated at distant places, and forced to work without due compensation. Bogus criminal cases are filed against the political activists among them. Their women are often molested, and the police ignore their complaints. Yet even the more affluent Hindus are not immune from attack. Majority community feels free to insult, humiliate, intimidate, and blackmail them. In the

past few years a number of prosperous Hindus (doctors, lawyers, businessmen) have been kidnapped for ransom. Many of them have had to pay money to extortionists. The community at large is suspected of being disloyal to the country. Hindu temples in Pakistan were destroyed in retaliation against the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992. If no other excuse is handy, individual Hindus can be accused under the wide ambit offered by the country's noxious Blasphemy Laws.

In 2006 the US Department of State issues an International Religious Freedom Report states that:

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*"On September 2, 2005, in Gandalf, Swabi, NWFP, police arrested a Hindu couple, Chaman Lal and his wife Krishna Wanti, on charges of defiling the Qur'an. Locals alleged that they had seen the couple throw a Qur'an into a field near their home. Lal had converted to Islam seven years previously but readopted Hinduism at his wife's insistence. The Peshawar High Court granted bail to Lal after he converted to Islam in the presence of the chief justice."*

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<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2006/71443.htm>

Females in particular are the target of forced marriage and thereby forced conversion to Islam, claiming it is their 'choice'. On 31 March 2010 the volunteer group REAL reported that Amarnath Motumal, an advocate and council member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, argues that between 20 and 25 Hindu girls were thus converted every month.

<http://www.realcourage.org/2010/03/pakistan-25-hindu-girls-abducted-every-month/>

The families of the victims are scared to register cases against the influential perpetrators as death threats are issued to them in case they raise their voice.

Now violence and atrocities against the minority population of Sindh has continued for many years but the Hindu minority are increasingly being treated worse than animals. Kidnapping of their girls and sexually assaulting their innocent children has crossed all bounds of humanity, made easier by the 'untouchable' status which these powerless Hindu minorities are forced to exist under. Pakistan receives substantial aid from British taxpayers, money which is being used to effectively ethnically cleanse the country of its indigenous minorities with total impunity. In February 2012 over 200 Hindus fled Pakistan after 19-year old Rinkle Kumari was abducted her village Mirpur Mathelo in Ghotki province of Pakistan, and subsequently forcibly converted and forcibly married. Her abductors had powerful political connections and after two months the country's Supreme Court ruled against her parents. Kidnappings, rapes, forcible conversions and constant harassment are therefore a daily routine for Hindus who dare to remain in their homeland of Pakistan and suffer the humiliation of being third class citizens and subhumans in the eyes of the majority and legal system. On 4 December 2012 six year old Vijanti Meghwar was brutally raped in Ghulam Nabi Shah village, district Taluka Pithoro Umerkot, in the Sindh province of Pakistan. Vijanti belongs to the Meghwar community of the country's minority Hindu population. She was found unconscious and lying in the street. Such a heinous crime was made easier by the fact that the Meghwars are Hindu and therefore powerless and helpless against mass intolerance and bigotry.

A survey conducted by Chander Kumar Kohli, vice-president of the Pakistan Hindu Seva in 2011-2012, Scheduled caste Hindus (Dalits) are reluctant to let their girls to study even to primary schools as they say there is insecurity for teaching girls i.e., whenever they go to schools they become a part of society and are abducted without any fault who are then converted to some other

religion. Some of the respondents in that survey also said that they don't let their girls study because they work to collect grass for their livestock.

Pakistan Muslim League (N) member parliament Dr Hareesh Chopra told the Times of India on 28 August 2012 that these incidents were increasing in frequency. He further said that there are organized gangs of mullahs and terrorists, who even abduct minor girls of minority communities and procure their age certificates with Muslim names from madrassas proving them adults.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Abduction-of-Hindus-Sikhs-have-become-a-business-in-Pak-PML-MP/articleshow/9763515.cms>

Unfortunately, rather than tackling the issue of minority cleansing in Pakistan this enforced migration is seen as an easy option rather than antagonising what after all is supposed to be an ally with western democracies in the war against terrorism.

## Hindu Refugees from Pakistan; What Next?

Ranbir Singh, Chair of Hindu Human Rights Group (HHR)

On 7 May 2013, Andrew Buncombe wrote in the UNHCR Refugees Daily, the aptly titled, "Pakistan is worse than hell for Hindus". <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refdaily?pass=52fc6fbd5&id=5189e8d55>

Haresh Chopra as MP from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2012, said:

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*"Being a soft target, many Hindus and Sikhs are abducted from the province for ransom, but cases of forced conversion are more in Sindh province. Those who can't bear their persecution anymore often think of migrating to India as they are not financially sound enough to shift to European countries."*

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Under the unrelenting persecution and hate it is no surprise that Pakistan's Hindu and Sikh minorities are fast disappearing with India being the favoured destination for the refugees with large refugee camps in places such as Jodhpur. Other have stayed on illegally in the Amritsar, Jalandhar and Rajpura districts of Punjab, too afraid to go back to Pakistan. There are approximately 1,000 Pakistani Hindus arriving annually in the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan, with an estimated 400 Pakistani Hindu settlements scattered throughout Jodhpur and other cities in the state, including Jaisalmer, Bikaner, Barmer, and Ganganagar. Many Pakistani refugees have settled in other parts of India. On 3 February 2013, during a press conference at the Lahore Press Club, the Adviser to Prime Minister on Minorities Affairs Dr Paul Bhatti, acknowledged reports that dozens of Hindu families have migrated to India, although he attempted to minimise the dire situation which had led to their exodus. Yet interviews with the asylum seekers suggest the Hindu minorities in Sindh have been living under the shadow of segregation and persecution on religious grounds. People said the harassment was manifested in Hindu children being discriminated against in government schools, Hindu residents not being allowed to buy property and bullied into leaving their establishments among others.

On 13 May 2013, Irfan Haider writing in Dawn, reported that Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani of Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League, revealed in the National Assembly on Monday that around 5,000 Hindus are migrating from Pakistan to India every year. On 5 September 2001 the Times of India reported that there were 17,000 Hindus from Pakistan who had yet to get Indian citizenship, out of whom 5,000 live in Jodhpur alone. Many of those who arrived in India as refugees in 1965 had also not received citizenship.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Hindus-fleeing-persecution-in-Pak/articleshow/614386142.cms>

On 29 October 2015 the Tribune of India reported that about 1,200 Pakistani Hindus have travelled from Pakistan to India in order to escape discrimination and religious persecution. Many of those who fled Pakistan, are housed in three camps in New Delhi. Sixteen-year old Mala Das was interviewed:

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*“Here Hindus pray without fear in temples and organise religious festivals outdoor. In Pakistan we prayed at home. If we went to temples, we avoided the gaze of our neighbours.”*

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<http://tribune.com.pk/story/981257/why-pakistani-muslims-fled-pakistan-for-india/>

Rajwanti, 13, and other children in the camp recall how Hindu boys and girls were made to read the Holy Quran in Pakistani schools and Muslim students allegedly laughed at their religious practices. The same report however also revealed the lack of interest from Hindu leaders in India. By contrast, under very pressing conditions in Pakistan, the Pakistan Hindu Seva Welfare Trust are currently working in seven districts of Sindh, including Hyderabad, Jamshoro, Badin and Mirpurkhas. IN March 2014 the The Hare Rama Foundation delivered care packages to over 650 families in the Rahim Yar Khan, Cholistan, and Bahawalpur districts of Punjab as well as the Ghotki and Khairpur districts of Sindh after floods in Pakistan. A remarkable exception in India is the work being done in Jodhpur by the Seemant Lok Sangthan (SLS) founded by Hindu Singh Sodha, which has sought refugee status for these refugees. On 15 June 2015 the Indian government announced that citizenship would be conferred on 4300 Hindu, Sikh refugees from Pak, Afghanistan in one year. Are these short-term measures, or plans to actually tackle the issue of persecution and unwanted stateless persons that have resulted from it? The majority of the refugees have gone to India, but there is lack of information for other destinations they may have gone to. Again why the lack of information? Does nobody take an interest in highlighting this human tragedy unfolding before us?

In 2013 Chirag Patel of NHSF (UK), National Hindu Students Forum, launched the Human Boundaries project to highlight the discrimination faced by Hindus in Pakistan, notably in the area of Hindu marriages not being recognised as valid within that country. Despite this laudable effort there was scant if any follow up. Indeed it remains lamentable that Hindu organisations in the UK, India and elsewhere have shown negligible interest in the plight of persecuted Hindus in Pakistan, especially when we compare it to the focus given to other refugees from conflict zones and oppressive regimes. The persecution of Hindus in Pakistan has spilled over into India itself. When we hear about Kashmiri refugees and Kashmiri self-determination this is never inclusive of Hindus and Sikhs. In a tragic rerun of partition, the Hindu minority of Kashmir, the indigenous Pandit community, was forced out a gunpoint in January 1990, and have remained in refugee camps ever since. If the NGOs, India and western democracies could turn a blind eye to this dramatic ethnic cleansing, is it any surprise that the persecution of Hindus van be treated as virtually non-existent? Where are the human rights organisations where this is concerned? Perhaps it has much to do with the scant interest shown by Hindu organisations themselves who busy themselves with ‘safe’ subjects, rather than inconvenient facts such as Hindu refugees being forced out of Pakistan and Kashmir, which means there is lack of political will to take up the issue. The few attempts that are made, such as the Human Boundaries project, have lacked any cogent follow up or plan of what to do next. We must ask ourselves is this because there is fear of speaking out too much on this issue? Why the silence when Christian, Ahmaddiyya, and Shia organisations are effective at highlighting the issues affecting their respective communities? It is high time this silence was broken.