



**BANGLADESH HINDU PERSECUTION  
MONTHLY REPORT  
March 2023**

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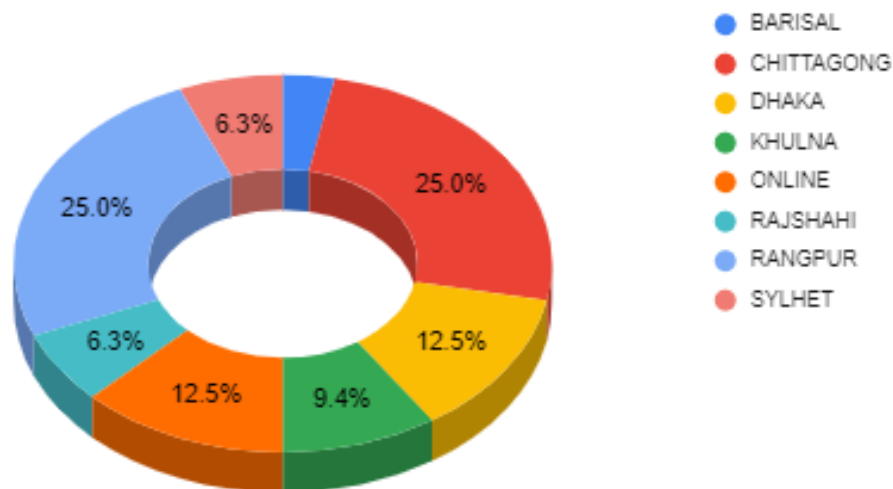
In 2023, the plight of minorities in Bangladesh continued to worsen, with Hindus and indigenous populations facing acts of aggression such as looting, destruction, kidnapping, rape, murder, eviction, and even forced conversion to Islam. This report provides an overview of the incidents compiled by Sriti o Chetona (SoC) from public information (including photos) available on social media and newspapers. All incidents are from the month of March 2023.

## Overview

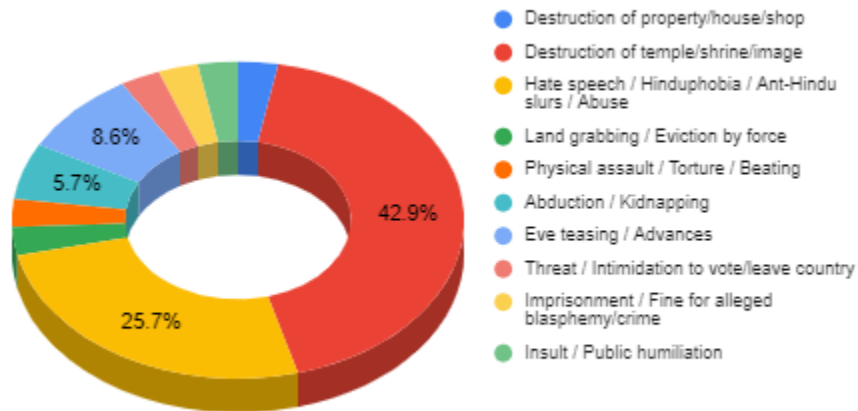
In the data collected by the Sriti o Chetona team, we found a spike in attacks on temples in March 2023, accounting for 43% of total incidents of persecution recorded.

Chittagong and Rangpur divisions each accounted for 25% of the total incidents, followed by Dhaka with 12.5%. Online incidents of abuse and hate speech also amounted to a substantial number, accounting for another 12.5% of total incidents compiled.

Persecution by Division

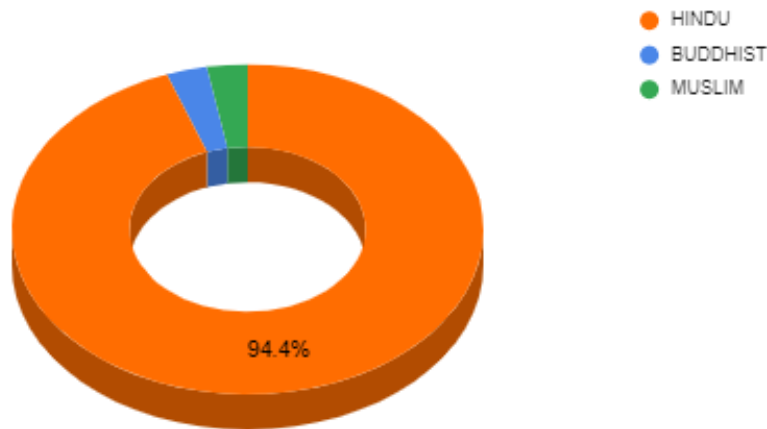


Persecution by Category



We analyzed the faith of the victims, and found 94.4% were Hindus. There were also incidents of land grabbing and attack on Buddhist temples; secular Muslims publicly humiliated for supporting Hindus or partaking in Hindu religious events, and attacks on Ahmadiyya sect Muslims.

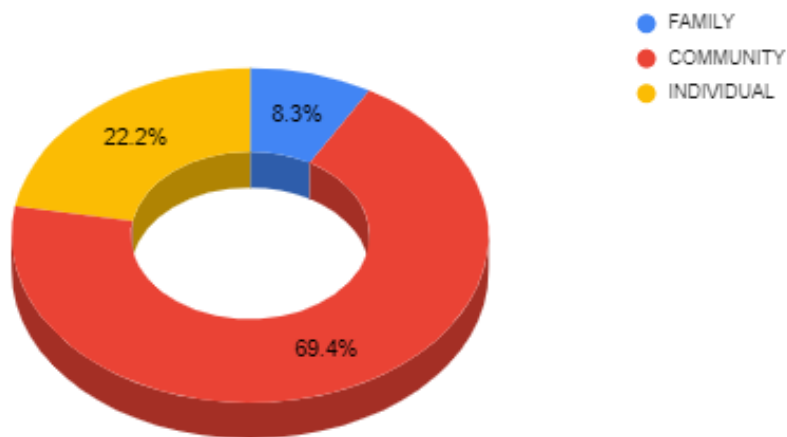
Persecution by Victim's Religion



The victims of attacks on temples and community properties are considered the whole community, which accounts for 70% of the victim group.



Persecution by Victim Group



Since there was an unusual increase in attacks on temples, we combined multiple incidents in this category for the detailed Featured Stories section below.

## Featured stories

At Sriti O Chetona we strive to cover as many stories as possible. However, due to lack of resources we are not able to cover each and every story. Only a handful of the stories get published. The section contains a selection of the news reports on the persecution of minorities included in the overview section for the March, 2023 report.

### Persecution Type: Destruction of temple/shrine/image

#### ***Thakurgaon: Deity in Ganga Devi Temple desecrated***

The incident happened from Ruhia Police Station under Thakurgaon district of Rangpur division. On 6th March 2023 morning, villagers found the temple door broken in and the deity was beheaded. There was discontent among the Hindu minority in the village and police were informed. As of the time of reporting, perpetrators have not been arrested.



#### ***Panchagarh: Deity in Kali Temple desecrated***

The incident is from Garinabari Union of Panchagarh under Rangpur division. The attack happened on the night of Shab-e-Barat. The villagers found the deity beheaded the next morning. Just like the incident in Thakurgaon a few days earlier, the identity of the perpetrators is unknown and no one has been arrested.



**Chittagong: Kali Temple forced to close down for Islamic prayer**

This incident is from Hazari Gali in Chittagong district under Chittagong division. A Kali temple was forced to close during Islamic prayer on the road in front of the temple. The temple bells were also taken down in fear of not aggravating the Muslims praying in front of the temple. This area is Hindu majority and a new mosque was built in the neighborhood recently and Muslims have started public prayer on the road.

**Chittagong: Minor madrasa student tricked to place Shiva Murty (Statue) in mosque**

This incident is from Cox Bazar in Chittagong division. A minor Muslim boy was asked by his relative to place a Shiva Murty in a mosque. It can be assumed that the ulterior motive was to start a riot similar to 2021 October Durga Puja riots. However, his mother advised him to give the statue to Hindus, which he did. This simple action by a pious Muslim woman might have saved a lot of lives and avoided property destruction and countrywide disturbances.



***Rajshahi: Hindu monastery built 350 years ago endangered***

The incident is from Sapura, Rajshahi City under Rajshahi division. A Hindu monastery built around 1745 with protected status by the Department of Antiquities is endangered by encroachers. In 2018, with funding from the Indian government, Rajshahi City Corporation did the renovation of the monasteries. Locals complained that engineer Nazimul Islam and his brother Yasin Ali did not allow the monastery to be properly renovated. At present Nazimul Islam is building a six-storey building around the monastery. Trustee of Hindu Welfare Trust Tapan Sen fears the monastery will be damaged due to excavation of the foundation around the dome and have reached out to authorities for remediation.

***Chandpur: Hindu cremation ground boundary broken***

The incident is from Kachua in Chandpur district under Chittagong division. The cremation ground land amounting to 14 percent was donated by late Dharmadas Pal 50 years ago. Locals Shahidullah, Nagis Begum and Arshad Ali caused hindrance to repairing and building a boundary wall around the cremation ground. The pillars constructed for the boundary wall were broken in the middle of the night. Hindus have demanded punishment for property damage. Local police have offered help in remediation and deescalation.





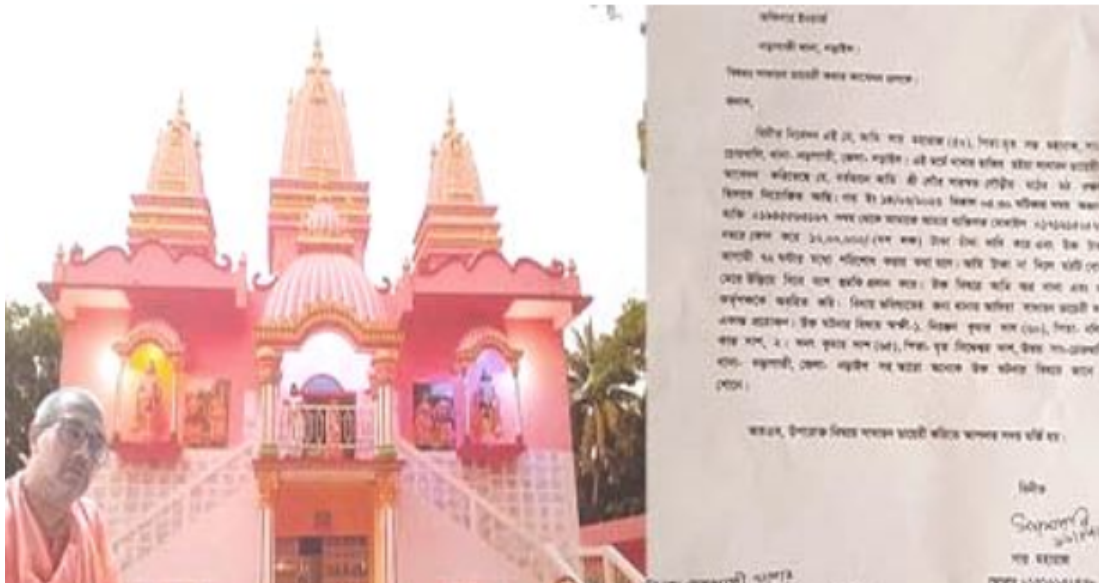
### ***Shariatpur: Sitala murty (statue) broken in the dark of the night***

The incident is from 27th March, 2023. The Shitala Temple located next to Palang Harishava Temple was broken in and the murty desecrated. Other objects used in puja (worship) were also destroyed.



### ***Narail: Gaudiya Math threatened to be bombed if a ransom of ten lakhs taka is not paid***

On 14 March 2023, Sar Maharaj, the caretaker of Gaudiya Math in Kalia, Narail district under Khulna division received a phone call demanding ten lakh taka ransom. The caller threatened to bomb the monastery if his demand was not met within 72 hours. Saj Maharaj has filed a police complaint on this threat. He said he was afraid about the safety of approximately 20 permanent residents in the math and also daily devotees who attend the worship every evening.



**Noakhali: Buddhists appeal to get back a road they have been using for past 200 years that from clutch of land grabbers**

Buddhists from Kankir Haat Barua Para, under Chittagong division appealed to PM Hasina for help in getting back their only accessible road, which was closed by Lokmaan Hussain. Mr Hussain’s goons attacked the native residents of Barua Para and held them hostage. Police have not been able to help the victims as order from higher authority is needed to re-open the road.



### ***Gaibandha: Ahsan, son of Abul Hussain arrested for vandalizing Kali temple***

Around midnight on 11 March 2023, local villagers from Gaibandha-Palashbari upazila in Rangpur division found two young men vandalizing the Kumargari Kali temple. Locals were able to catch one of the perpetrators, Ahsan, son of Abul Hussain and handed him over to police.



### ***Narayanganj: Hindu family threatened with expulsion from the country if they cant pay extortion money***

Manik Dutta, from Narayanganj-Rupganj upazila under Dhaka division was asked to pay extortion money of 50 lakhs in lieu of staying in his ancestral property and ability to perform puja (worship). Mr Dutta had recently started renovating a 124 year old family temple and cremation ground on his ancestral land. Few criminals threatened and assaulted him. They also forcibly stopped the repair work and other construction in the temple and cremation ground in his property. The perpetrators also destroyed the property and looted 1.25 lakh taka.

### ***Satkhira: Muslim neighbor broke family temple because they disapproved the renovation work***

This incident happened in Shyamnagar upazila, Satkhira under Khulna division on 10 March 2023. Satindranath Baidya's family temple was attacked and broken down by neighbors because they disapproved of repair and renovation of them in his ancestral land.



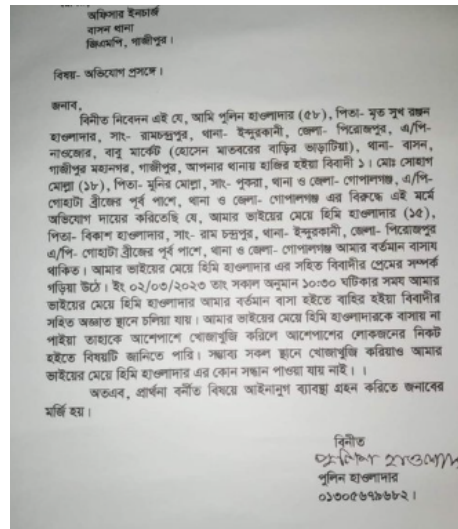


## Other Incidents of Persecution

Other incidents of persecution included hate speech, Hinduphobia, land grabbing, eviction, abduction and suicide. A brief summary of few incidents are provided below

### **Gazipur: Minor girl abducted**

A minor girl named Himi Howlader (15) was abducted by Sohag Mollah (18) and his associates from Babu Market in Gazipur Sadar upazila under Dhaka division. Her father Pulin Howlader has filed a complaint with the police.



### **Jessore: Minor girl commits suicide due to sexual harassment**

The incident happened on 27 March 2023. Ani Roy (13) was harassed by Shakib after she refused his romantic/sexual advances. Shakib and his friends forcibly locked Ani in a classroom and abused her. Upon returning home, the victim committed suicide by hanging. Locals organized a protest march demanding severe punishment for the perpetrators.





***Sylhet: Minor girl found dead, lover arrested***

A minor girl, Deepa Rani Singha (14) was found dead in an under-construction building. Her body had signs of injury on the head and her back was smashed. Her lover Iman has been arrested.

***Kurigram: Father of minor girl beaten up by men who harassed his daughter***

The incident is from Kurigram-Fulbari under Rangpur division. Akhil Chandra Sarkar (46) and his family members were beaten up by Roni Ahmed (20) and his gang. The victim had protested against the harassment of his minor daughter by Roni Ahmed.

***Indian flag removed from ambulance gifted by Indian government***

Hinduphobia and hatred for India go together in Bangladesh. Often Bangladeshi Hindus are abused and asked to leave for India. The exodus of Bangladeshi Hindus has resulted in a sharp drop of their population from the Bangladeshi census. The dislike for India is so extreme that the Indian flag is erased from the ambulance that was gifted by the Indian government.



## Sentencing of Iqbal Hossain, who incited 2021 Durga puja riots

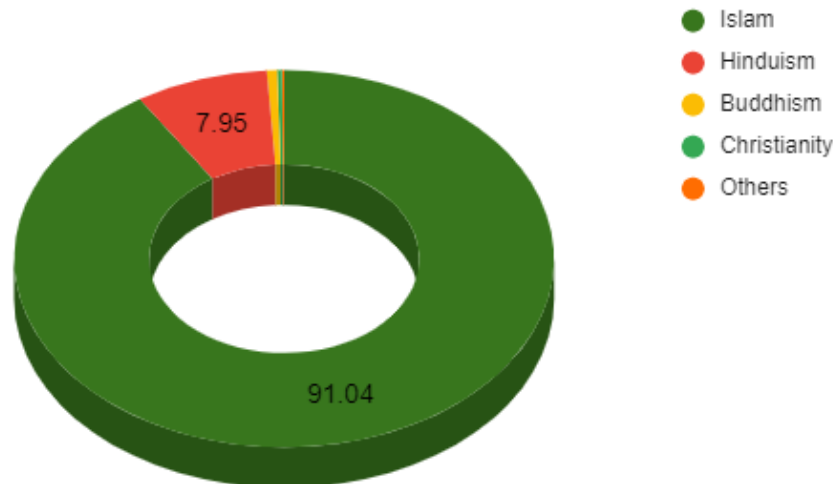
On March 2, 2023, Dhaka Cyber Tribunal Judge AM Zulfiker Hayet sentenced Mohammad Iqbal Hossain, the primary perpetrator for orchestrating the anti-Hindu violence during the 2021 Durga Puja to 16 months imprisonment. As Mohammad Iqbal Hossain had already served 16 months in jail, he was released immediately from jail.

His action had started a week-long anti-Hindu violence in which at least 8 people were killed, and 150+ injured. At least 80 temples and 200 puja mandaps were attacked and a large number of Hindu owned properties destroyed.

The leniency of Mohammad Iqbal Hossain's punishment is indeed extremely shocking. A month earlier, in February 2023, a Hindu Bangladeshi named Paritosh Sarkar was sentenced to 11 years imprisonment for hurting religious sentiments of Muslims. In January 2023, another Hindu man Rakesh Roy was sentenced for 7 years imprisonment for alleged blasphemy in a social media post. The discrepancy in punishment between a Muslim and a Hindu for similar accusations (blasphemy) is noteworthy.

## Recommendations

As per the latest 2022 census, the total population of Bangladesh is 165.16 million. Religious minorities constitute about 8.98% of Bangladeshi population, constituting 14.83 million. Hindus are the biggest religious minority group, with 88.5% of total minority population.



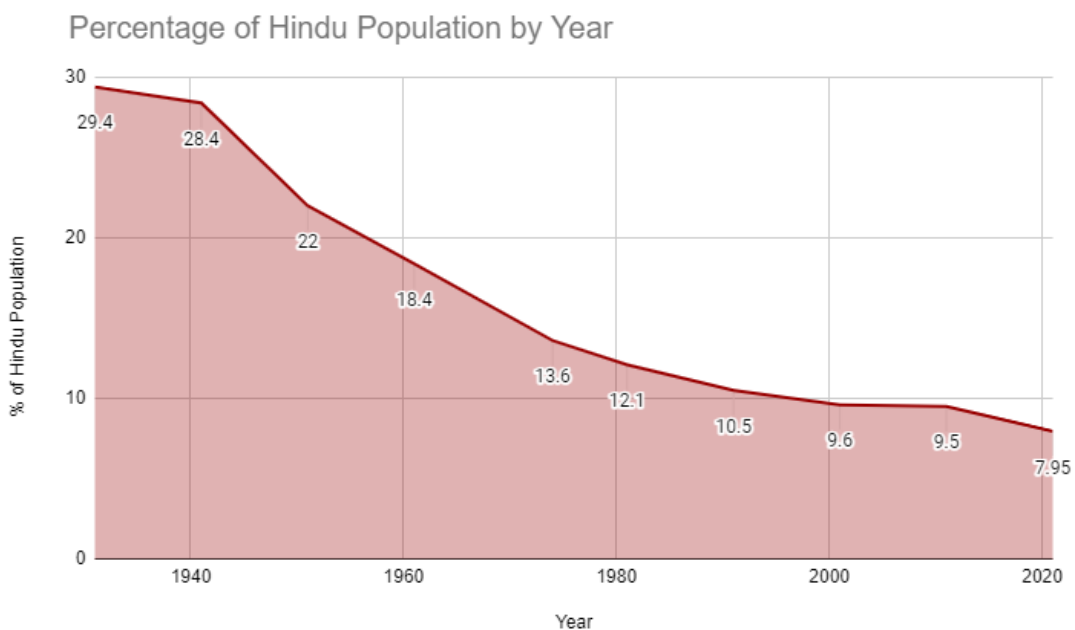
*Religions in Bangladesh (%) - 2022 Census Data*

Since the 1947 partition of India, Hindu population in East Pakistan/ Bangladesh is continuing to decline. The persecution of Bengali Hindus under the Pakistani regime is well recorded, especially during the Bangladesh war of independence. It is estimated that Hindus were about 20% of the population during that time, but the overwhelming majority (~80%) of the victims of Pakistani brutality. From 1947 to 1971, Hindu population fell from approximately quarter of the population to mere 13.5%.

1971 heralded a new hope among Bangladeshi Hindus under a secular constitution drafted by Sheikh Mujibar Rahaman's govt. However, the hope was short lived and Hindus faced hardship by Islamists under political aegis of various governments. It is also to be mentioned that General Ershad, who assumed power through a military coup, amended the constitution in 1988, to add Islam as the state religion. In the post-independence period, the first major anti-Hindu violence occurred in 1989-1990, following the Babri Mosque-Ram temple conflict in India. There was widespread destruction of temples, arson, looting and violence against Hindus. Another major anti-Hindu attack happened in 2001, following the election of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government led by Ms. Khaleda Zia. According to judicial enquiry by Bangladesh government in 2009, more than 18,000 rapes of Hindu women happened during the riots. In October 2021, a frenzied coordinated communal attack happened all over the

country following rumors of Quran desecration, which was later found to be done by a Muslim named Mohammad Iqbal Hossain. More than 50 temples were vandalized and at least eight people were killed. On March 2, 2023 the main culprit, Mohammad Iqbal Hossain was sentenced to 16 months imprisonment. The leniency of Mohammad Iqbal Hossain's punishment is indeed extremely shocking. A month earlier, in February 2023, a Hindu Bangladeshi named Paritosh Sarkar was sentenced to 11 years imprisonment for hurting religious sentiments of Muslims. In January 2023, another Hindu man Rakesh Roy was sentenced for 7 years imprisonment for alleged blasphemy in a social media post. The discrepancy in punishment between a Muslim and a Hindu for similar accusations (blasphemy) is noteworthy.

Since independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the Hindu population in Bangladesh fell from 13.5 to 7.95% in 50 years, a trend not very different from previous 25-year Pakistani rule of 1947-1971. The fall in minority population can be attributed to multiple causes - religious riots, election violence, exodus due to religious persecution, forced eviction, conversion under duress or enticement, economic hardship, less access to resources, political duress etc. The fall in Hindu population is often justified by Muslims stating lower Hindu birth rate compared to the majority population, which absolutely cannot justify the precipitous drop. From the last census of 2011, Hindu population has dropped by 1.55% in the 2022 census, a drop that cannot be justified by birth rate alone. Whatever the reason may be, Hindus and other religious minorities are vanishing at a very alarming rate from Bangladesh.



It is a matter of grave concern and surprise that this constant decline in Hindu population from Bangladesh has not been raised by neither the media, international human Rights and religious freedom organizations. This is a trend that is not endemic to Bangladesh only, but seen in other countries in South Asia.

In Pakistan, the Hindu population has fallen from 15% in 1947 to 2%. Every year, it is estimated that 1000+ Hindu and Christian minor girls are abducted and married to older Muslim men. In Malaysia, Hindus population has fallen to 6%. Hindus (mostly Tamils, constituting 9% of population) face constitutional discrimination, and children of parents converted to Islam are automatically converted, Hindu children in orphanages are converted to Islam by government authority.

In 2021, in the “Dismantling Global Hindutva” conference, the speakers openly called for dismantling Hinduism, not just Hindutva or political Hinduism. Hindu festivities like Holi have been politicized and “Holi Against Hindutva” events organized in multiple US campuses. Often protests against political parties are morphed into anti-Hindu rhetoric. In the United States, Hindu American Foundation (HAF) was attacked for using the term “Hinduphobia” and ridiculed for fear mongering stating nothing like “hinduphobia” exists. Hindu based human rights or political organizations or ordinary Hindus are frequently accused of fake victimization and bigotry.

Given the fact that media and power centers around the world are dominated by people educated on Abrahamic concepts, one wonders, is the indifference of the media and human rights organization to the plight of Hindus due to subconscious bias against “idol worshipping” or “pagan” people? Idol worship is forbidden in all Abrahamic faiths, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In Islam, idol worship is the most serious crime, worse than even murder or rape. Do average Abrahamic consider Hindu life of lesser value as people of monotheistic faith? There is a need for introspection and investigation about anti-idolatry bias. We urge the media and human rights organizations to actively remove any anti pagan or anti idol worship bias, if it exists. Media houses with a large Bengali audience or readership, like BBC Bangla can become a valuable tool to educate the world community about the plight of Hindus and suggest corrective measures for minorities to live in their motherland without any fear.

Media houses in India seem to have an unofficial censorship on news pertaining to minorities in Bangladesh. However, the events in India, which Bangladeshi Hindus have no control over, are often used to instigate anti-minority attacks. Media houses and social media influencers from India should report in a neutral manner, and not fan the already turbulent situation.

Hindus are considered a captive vote bank for Awami League, and often face wrath of political parties opposed to Awami League. The 2001 anti-Hindu violence after the Bangladesh

Nationalist Party came into power speaks volumes in this regard. However, recently there have been incidents of Awami League party workers abusing Hindus, forcibly evicting them and misusing the trust Hindus have in the party. Bangladeshi Hindus need to align with all political parties and not blindly vote for a specific party, but vote for political parties that enact policies and action taken to protect the minorities and create a secular humanist environment in the country.

The activism of native Bangladeshi Hindus is extremely commendable. They, along with secular Muslims and humanists of the country, continue to support the religious minorities in an increasingly hostile environment, where Islamist power is on the rise. People of Bangladeshi origin, irrespective of religious affiliation and country of residence can help by amplifying the voice of secularism and moderation in the country.

The US State government, in their human rights reports has from time to time reported the hardships minorities face in Bangladesh. However, the reports have not touched up the everyday hardship faced by minorities and investigation of the root cause behind attrition in the minority population. The reporting by foreign government and human rights organizations, like US human Rights Reports, Amnesty International, UN Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, EU Annual Reports on Human Rights and Democracy can help the cause of lessening the atrocities against minorities by regular reporting and suggestions for remedial actions by the government. Finally, if the attrition of religious minorities does not stop, we request that the United States and European nations provide refugee status to the violence affected minorities in Bangladesh.



Sriti O Chetona stands for 'memories and consciousness' - memories of the once vibrant Hindu life and culture in East Bengal and the consciousness about the present plight of Hindus in Bangladesh. Sriti O Chetona is a not for profit project that regularly monitors and reports the ongoing incidents of persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh.

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