



BANGLADESH HINDU PERSECUTION
MONTHLY REPORT
May 2023

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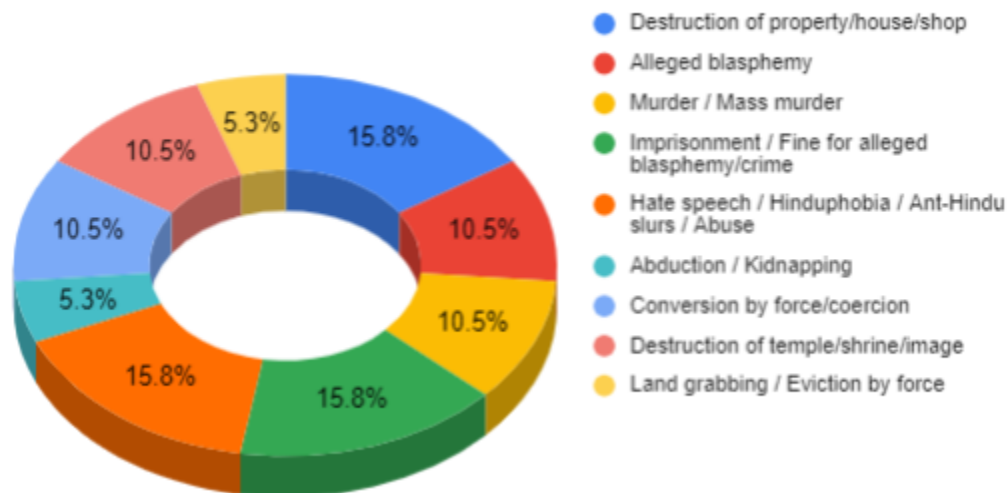
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In 2023, the plight of minorities in Bangladesh continued to worsen, with Hindus and indigenous tribal populations facing acts of aggression such as abuse, looting, destruction, kidnapping, rape, murder, eviction, and even forced conversion to Islam. 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 included either happened or reported in the month of May 2023.

Overview

In the data collected by the Sriti o Chetona team, “Hate Speech / Hinduphobia / Anti-Hindu slurs / Abuse” and “Imprisonment / Fine for alleged blasphemy” are the two highest categories of persecution in May 2023, accounting for 32% of total incidents of persecution recorded.

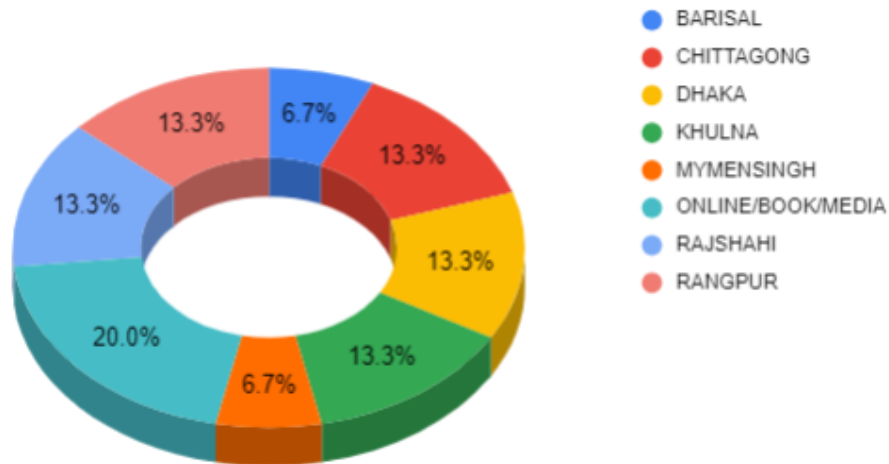
Persecution By Category



Online incidents of abuse and hate speech amounted to a substantial number, accounting for 20% of total incidents compiled. This is consistent with the one of the two highest persecution categories of “Hate Speech / Hinduphobia / Anti-Hindu slurs / Abuse”, as most of the abuse and hate speech can be found in social media and other internet sources. For “Imprisonment / Fine for alleged blasphemy”, there were multiple instances of courts giving prison terms for alleged blasphemy. Titu Roy, from Rangpur was sentenced to 10 years prison by Rangpur High Court. Religious persecution was not just limited to Hindus, non-conforming Muslims and atheists were also faced with mistreatment - an observant Muslim was arrested for defecating and burning the Quran in Cox Bazar under Chittagong division. In the second case, an atheist woman, Israt Jahan was sentenced to two years of prison for insulting Prophet Mohammed. While the court is strict in punishing blasphemy against majority faith (Islam), abuse of minority faiths (Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Animism/Tribal faiths) often go unaddressed and unpunished. In rare

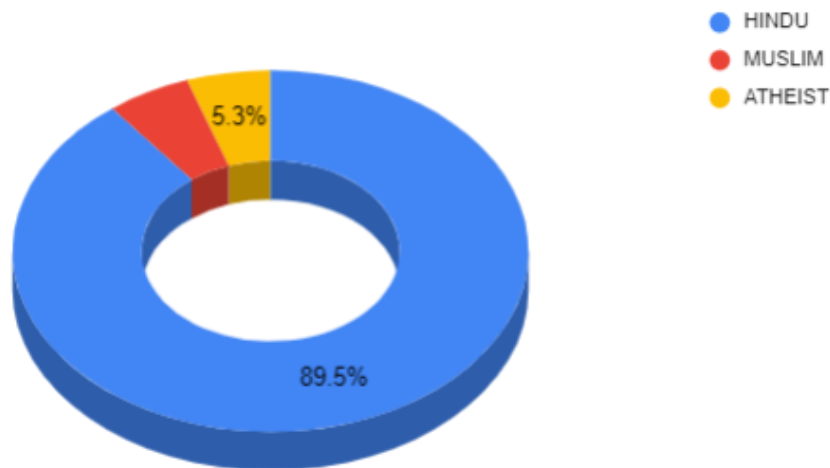
cases when the perpetrators for abuse of minority faiths are punished, the punishment is not equitable and light compared to similar crimes against majority faith.

Persecution By Geographical Division



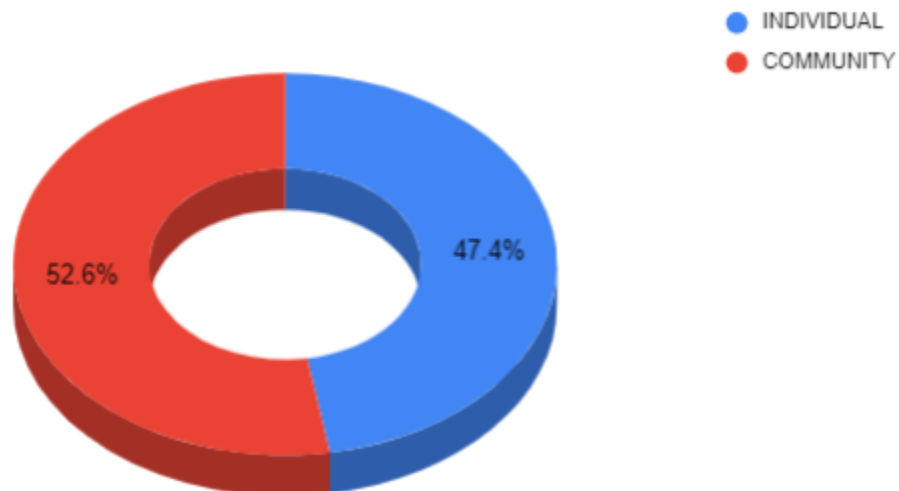
We analyzed the faith of the victims facing religious persecution, and found 88.9% were Hindus. There were few incidents of Muslim being arrested for desecrating the holy book of his own faith or an atheist imprisoned for insulting the Prophet of Islam by a Bangladeshi court.

Persecution By Victim's Belief



While analyzing the victim's group, the attacks on temples and other community properties or anti-hindu slurs, mass threat for conversion and abuse are considered affecting the whole community, which accounts for 53% of the victim group.

Persecution By Victim Group



Since “Hate Speech/ Hinduphobia / Anti-Hindu slurs / Abuse” and “Imprisonment / Fine for alleged blasphemy” categories rank highest, we will analyze those categories in detail, along with a few other selected incidents.

Featured Incidents

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

Rangpur: Titu Roy sentenced to ten years in prison for accusation of blasphemy in social media

A cyber tribunal in Rangpur district sentenced Titu Roy (from Thakurpara, Rangpur) to 10 years of prison and a fine of 50,000 taka (US\$466) for his post on Facebook. In his post he had written that Prophet Mohammed had married a 6-year-old girl. It is to be noted that this fact is substantiated by Islamic sources but nevertheless Mr Roy was punished. He is also accused of insulting Kaaba, Islamic holy site in Mecca. The investigation carried out under Information and Communication Technology Act (replaced by Digital Security Act 2018) has sweeping provisions against blasphemy and have been criticized by US International Religious Freedom Report published in May 2023.



Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council said, “Roy is an illiterate for whom it was neither possible to maintain a Facebook account or type a post”, which indicates the possibility of him getting framed.

After his post, 20,000 Muslims had attacked a village of Hindu farmers and set 30 Hindu homes on fire, including the house belonging to Roy. This was followed by looting and destruction of village temples - a crime for which none of the arsonists and rioters got punished.

Dhaka: Hindu couple detained for vandalism, with no evidence of vandalism presented

A Hindu couple was attacked and detained by the Bangladesh Nursing and Midwifery Council in Dhaka. Anand Kumar Das, the husband said the couple were detained separately and his wife was abused physically and mentally. Khan Md. Golam Morshed, President of Bangladesh Nurses Association said the couple was detained at the Nursing Council on charges of vandalism against Anand Kumar Das and Sujela Rani Roy, but they could not show evidence of vandalism.

Naogaon: Sarkarpara Kali temple destroyed by arson

This incident is from Mahadevpur in Naogaon District under Rajshahi division. On 17th May night, suspected Islamic religious extremists set fire to Sarkarpara Kali temple, destroying the temple and the murti inside. As of 18th May, no one has been arrested, but police have assured the locals of justice and arrest of miscreants.



Rangpur: Kali Temple Vandalized

On 12th May, a Kali temple in Shingimari village in Gangachara Upazila in Rangpur District of Rangpur Division was vandalized and deity broken down by miscreants. Miscreants have not been arrested as of the latest update available.



Barisal: Hindu shopkeeper Sagar Chandra Pal dies in arson

On May 8th, a Hindu shopkeeper Sagar Chandra Pal was killed in an arson that destroyed six shops in Champta New Market in Bakerganj under Barisal division. In addition to the death of Sagar, goods worth half million taka were destroyed. The victims claim the fire was set on deliberately as an act of revenge against the victims. Arifur Rahman, whose shop was also destroyed in the fire, accused that some people were jealous of the good business in Sagar's shop and deliberately locked the shop from outside and set it on fire. In recent days, Sagar's shop was vandalized and broken into multiple times, so he was sleeping inside his shop to prevent theft. He was burnt to death, as miscreants locked the store from outside so that he couldn't escape.



Bogra: Factory owner blocks access to Hindu crematorium

Belal Hossain, owner of agrofood factory, has built a drain for factory waste in Santahar, usurping land belonging to local hindu crematorium. The incident is from Bogra District under Rajshahi Division. The sewage from the drain polluted the Iramati Canal in front of the crematorium and deposited ash and pollutants in the water. Local Hindus can no longer use the crematorium because of lack of water. Santahar Municipal Crematorium Management Committee General Secretary Ratan Mukherjee lamented on the situation and hardships local Hindus face for the last rites of their deceased family members.



Netrakona: Hindu minor girl publicly hacked to death

This incident is from Barhatta, in Netrokona District of Mymensingh Division. A minor girl Mukta Rani Barman was publicly hacked to death. Mohammed Kauchar Miah killed the victim on her way back from school after writing exam. The killer used to tease Mukti and her sisters in the past and proposed the victim for a romantic relationship, which the victim declined. Victim's family and friends fear that the killer will not be punished and released soon for being a minor.



Gopalganj: Hindu widow raped and murdered in a paddy field

Mohammed Badal Sheikh is accused of raping and killing a Hindu widow named Smriti Bachar. Her dead body was retrieved from a paddy field in Muksudpur Upazila in Gopalganj District of Dhaka division. Locals accuse the perpetrator had tried to forcibly evict the victim from her land. He had also cut trees from her land before, for which he was arrested. After he was released on 21 May and returned to the village, the victim was found raped and murdered the same night.



Blasphemy law in Bangladesh, does it apply to all faiths equally?

More than 200 Hindus are jailed on charges of blasphemy. Negative remarks about Islam are not tolerated but, Muslims continue to abuse minority faiths with impunity.

In May 2023, Titu Roy, an illiterate person was sentenced 10 years of prison term. However, the mob of 20,000 Islamists that burned down his house and that of his Hindu neighbors in Thakurpara, Rangpur is yet to be punished.

The inherent bias against minority faith in the judicial system of Bangladesh is voiced by a Hindu twitter account (@VoiceOfHindu71).

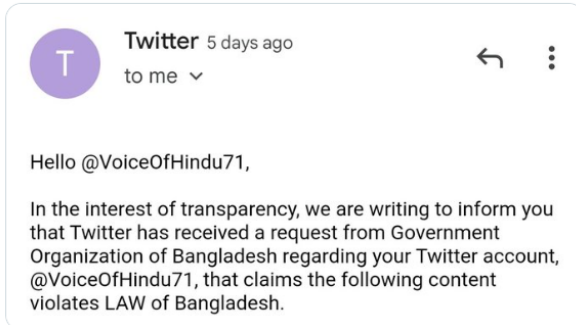


#SupremeCourtOfBangladesh

- ★in 2016, Islam was retained as the state religion.
- ★Asks ISKCON to apologize to Muslims for distributing food to them in 2019.
- ★In 2021, the investigation into the Durga Puja massacre was suspended.
- ★Now in 2023, want to repeal Hindu Family Law.



Reporting attacks on my community is a violation of Bangladeshi law. We are not against Bangladesh government. But has the government taken any action against attacks on Hindus, vandalism of temples, abduction of Hindu girls and encroachment of Hindu lands? #FreedomOfSpeech



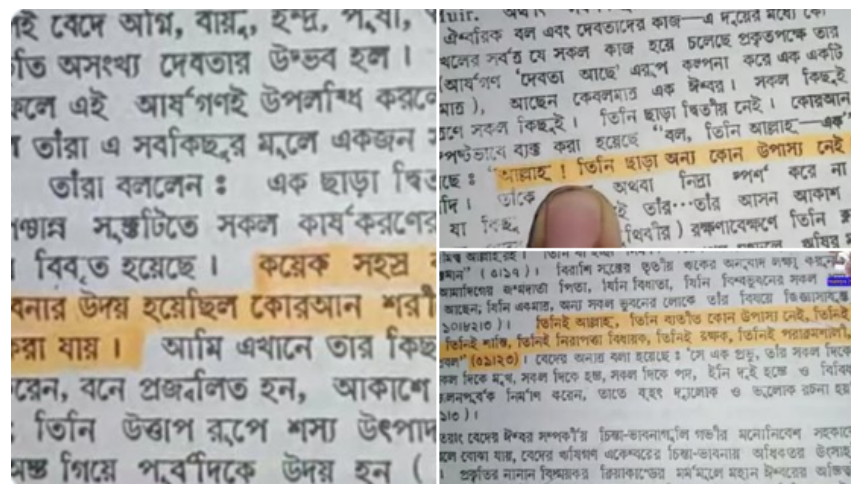
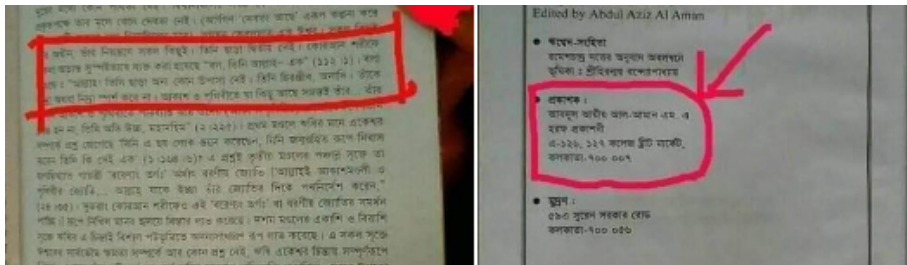
5:21 PM · Apr 11, 2023 · 11.2K Views

Last month, the government of Bangladesh had filed a complaint against the same account for violating the law of the land. The incessant pressure to silence the voice of religious minorities not only comes from majoritarian religious right-wing, but a relatively secular government headed by Awami League.

Educational System: Textbooks in Madrassas spew venom against other faiths, especially Hinduism. In our 2022 Annual Report, we highlighted some of the hateful content in the educational system.

- Students at Hathazari Madrasa in Chittagong are taught slogans against Hindus in school
- In 5th grade Islamic Studies textbook it is written that Non-Muslims are greedy, liars and inferior to animals

Malicious Re-interpretation of Hindu Scripture: Another modus operandi is misinterpretation of Hindu scriptures like the Veda and Upanishad to either demean Hindu faith or use them as a tool for conversion by injecting Islamic references where no such content exist in the original scripts. If any criticism of Islamic faith leads to arrest for blasphemy, why will this willful, malicious and false interpretation not be considered blasphemy and punished under the law of Bangladesh?



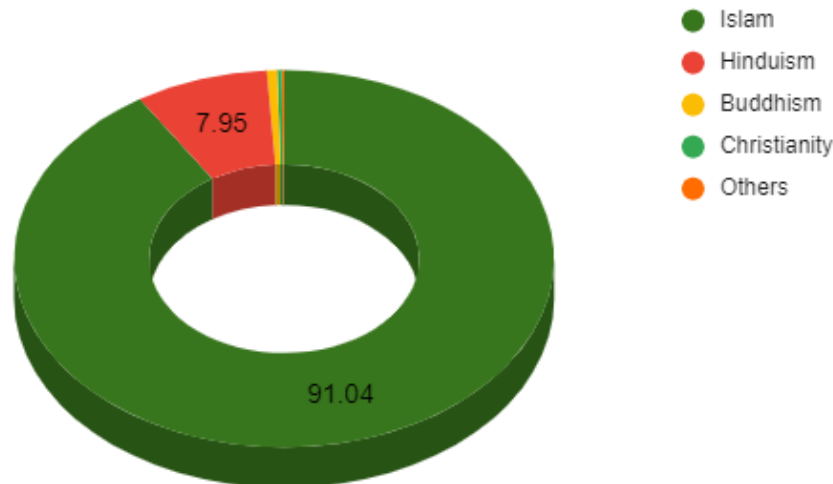
What is in a Name? Spree of Renaming Places in Bangladesh

Awami League MP Mashrafe changed the place called “Kalidas” to “Lalmiya” in Narail district under Khulna division. This is one of the many instances in recent months. Last month we provided information on almost 100 name changes from Bengali/Hindu names to Arabic names (e.g., Narendrapur in Kachua, Bagehat renamed to Nurjahanpur).



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.



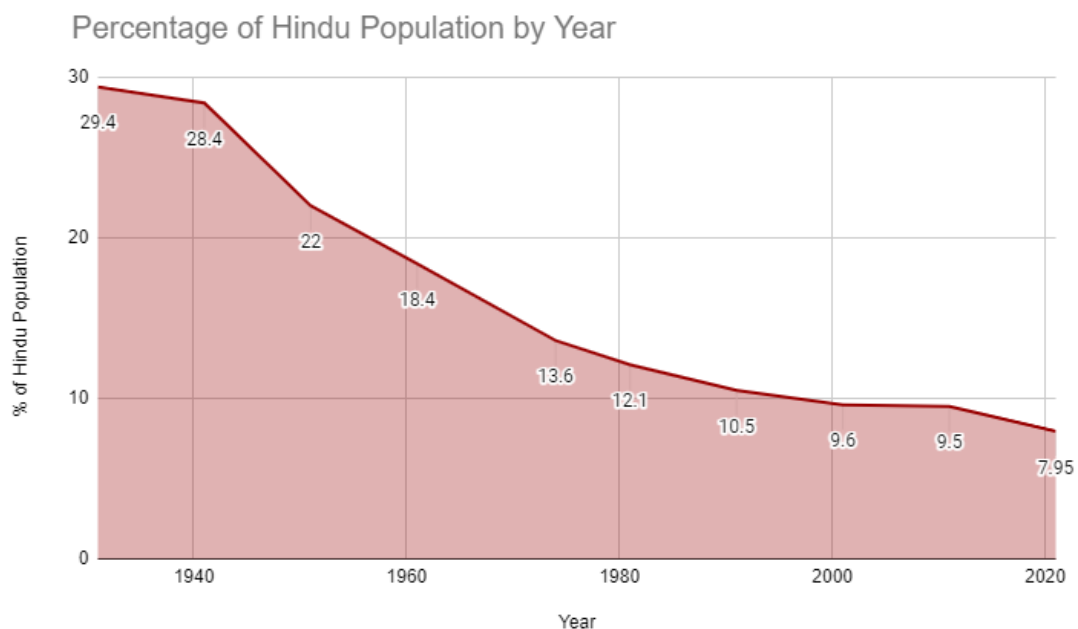
Religions in Bangladesh (%) - 2022 Census Data

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. In less than an year in during 1971 Bangladesh war of independence, approximately three million Bangladeshis were killed, a rate worse than Nazi genocide of WW2. 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 severity of 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 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 (many times headed by non-Hindu students). 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 and told 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 worshiping” or “pagan” people? India was colonized by Muslim Middle Easterners and Christian Europeans for more than 1000 years. Idol worship is forbidden both in Christianity and Islam, and remnants of colonizers' bias cannot be ruled out. In Islam, idol worship is the most serious crime, worse than even murder or rape. Do average Monotheists consider Hindu life of lesser value than people of monotheistic faith? There is a need for introspection and investigation about anti-idolatry and colonial bias. We urge the media and human rights organizations to actively remove any anti pagan, anti idol worship or colonial 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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