

*Persecution of Hindus and Sikhs
in Afghanistan, Bangladesh
and Pakistan*



Goddess Durga Bust, 2nd century CE recovered from Ghazni, Afghanistan.

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Executive Summary

1. Hindus and Sikhs accounted for merely 200 souls of Afghanistan's population in 2021, down from 7,00,000 souls in 1970.
2. Many Hindus and Sikhs practise their religion in secret out of fear of punishment as a result of the long-standing and ongoing persecution of Hindus in Afghanistan. After the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in 2021, Hindus and Sikhs bore the brunt of their cruelty. The majority of Sikhs and Hindus were compelled to leave their homeland.
3. In Afghanistan, Hindus and Sikhs have experienced extreme harassment and have been forced to pay the jizya tax, which is a religious fee, or else their family members have been abducted. Huge ransoms are sought for their release, and if they are not paid in a timely manner, the kidnapped would be usually killed.
4. Taliban prohibited Hindus and Sikhs practice of cremation of the dead body in Afghanistan forcing the bodies of deceased to be transported to Pakistan for last rites.
5. There has been a consistent decline in population of Hindus over the last seventy years in Bangladesh, from 28 % in 1941 to 8.5 % in 2011 according to from Bangladesh's Ministry of Planning, and Bureau of Statistics
6. Hindus in Bangladesh regularly face theft, rape, violence against women, forced conversions to Islam, the destruction of temples and other religious sites, illegal property seizures, forced occupation, and the forced extradition of Hindus beyond the borders of Bangladesh.
7. According to the Pakistan Census, the Hindu population in Pakistan has decreased from 25% in 1947 to only 1% in 2014.
8. The Pakistani Army and its allies mercilessly tortured and raped nearly 200,000 women and girls until the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. According to estimates, the majority of those who were sexually assaulted were Hindus, and the ideology behind these heinous crimes was to create a pure Muslim race in Bangladesh.
9. Hindus in Pakistan experience a variety of forms of discrimination, including social, religious, institutional, systematic and legal bias.

10. Pakistan has a number of laws that discriminate against minorities, including the Anti-Blasphemy Law, the establishment of Shariat Courts, where the laws that are codified must adhere to Islamic tenets, and the Council of Islamic Ideology.

11. Since Pakistan's birth from Erstwhile India. In Pakistan, attacks on ancient Hindu temples, places of worship, and pilgrimage sites continue to be frequent. In addition, many Hindu temples have been demolished or forcibly turned into mosques.

Persecution of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan



Afghanistan has become a land of terror after the Taliban takeover, Hindu and Sikh minorities there were persecuted every day. Although most of them escaped from the country after the Taliban previously consolidated control of the government and ruled between 1996 and 2001, small populations of religious minorities, including Sikhs, Hindus remained.

They continued practising their religion secretly due to the fear of punishment as Talibani persecuted them for following their religion. In the recent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, things become most drastic people from other communities faced targeted violence, as a result, many fled as refugees to the neighbouring countries.

In the Taliban view of Islam, women were barred from participating in different activities such as working and going to school, their access to healthcare was restricted, they were forced to wear burqas and travel with a male relative in public.

The worst is happening with religious minorities like Sikhs and Hindus there, their properties, places of Worship even the cremation grounds were vandalized. They were forced to wear Yellow tags in order to be easily identified as Non-Muslims for persecution.

Hindus and Sikhs have been harassed and compelled to pay the jizya tax (religious tax) failing which their family members were kidnapped. Huge ransoms were demanded for their release which if not met timely led to the killing of the abducted. Taliban prohibited their practice of cremation of the dead body forcing the bodies of deceased Sikhs to be transported to Pakistan for last rites.

Number of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan over last 2 decades (numbers are approximate)¹ :

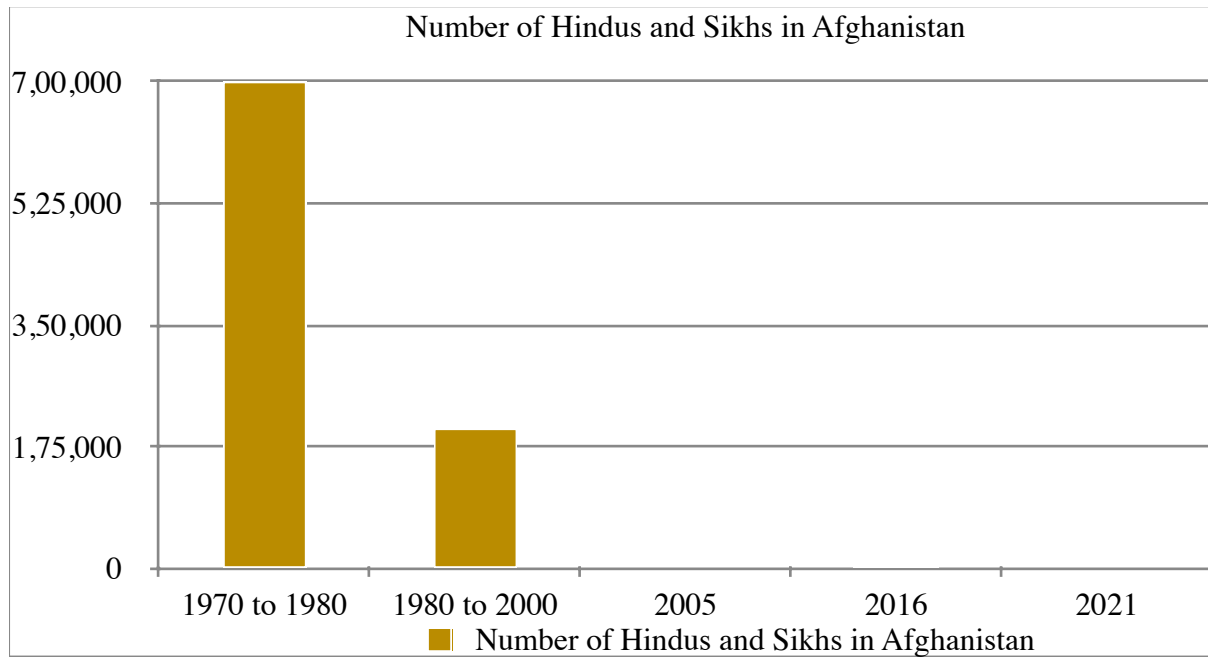
i.1970 to 1980: 7,00,000

ii.1980-2000: 2,00,000

iii.2005: 3,700

iv.2016:7,000

v.2021: 200²



¹ <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1311886/download>

² <https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/34205/transcript+of+weekly+media+briefing+by+the+official+spokesperson+august+27+2021>

Persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh

Religious minorities in Bangladesh have been facing existential threat ever since Indian independence in 1947. Minority communities in Bangladesh have seen a systematic ethnic cleansing that has led to a severe decline in their population over the last few decades.



The plight of Hindus in Bangladesh is appalling. Hindus in the Islam-majority country are faced with loot and plunder, killing, rape and violation of women, forced conversions to Islam, destruction of temples and religious sites, illegitimate confiscation of property and forced occupation, and forced extradition of Hindus beyond the borders of Bangladesh. In this context, we focus on the persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh.

1. There has been a consistent decline in population of Hindus over the last seventy years. Based on the information from Bangladesh's Ministry of Planning, and Bureau of Statistics, Fig. 1 shows the trends in the population demography of Bangladesh.
2. Rapes to violate the dignity of women has been a common sight in minority Hindu community of the country. After the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, nearly 200,000 women and girls were raped and brutally tortured by the Pakistani Army and its allied forces³. Estimates reveal that most of the raped victims were Hindu and the ideology behind these heinous crimes was to create a *pure* race of Muslims in Bangladesh.

³ Sajjad, Tazreena (2012) [First published 2009]. "The Post-Genocidal Period and its Impact on Women". In Samuel Totten (ed.). *Plight and Fate of Women During and Following Genocide*. Transaction Publishers. pp. 219–248. ISBN 978-1-4128-4759-9

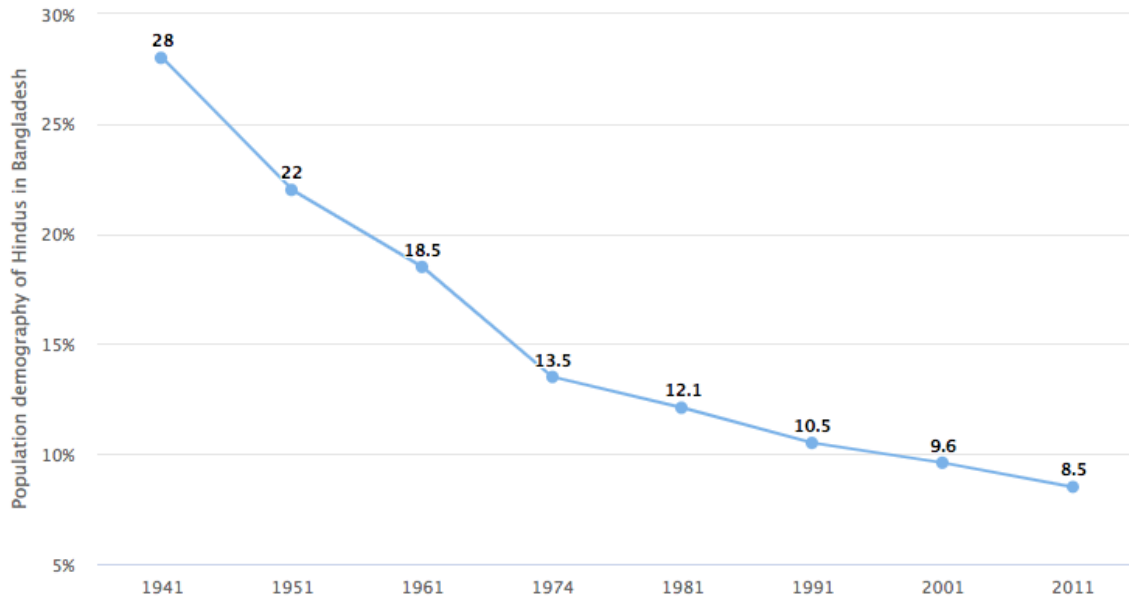


Fig.1. Decline in the population of Hindus in Bangladesh (1941-2011). Source: Census of India (1941)⁴, Census of East Pakistan (1951, 1961)⁵, Bangladesh Government Census (1974-2011)⁶.

As per findings of the Bangladesh Minority Council, gendered crimes in Bangladesh happen for three reasons:

- a. As per Islamic ideology, converting minorities and violating their women leads to attainment of *Behesta* (heaven, *Jannat*) for the doer and his next seven generations.
 - b. They raped women for occupying land which was owned by minorities in the country. In Bangladeshi culture, rape is a social stigma and families whose women and girls are raped are ostracized by the society, eventually forcing them to flee. To build Bangladesh into a pure race, rape acts as a convenient measure to chase away minorities.
 - c. Families abandon women and girls who are raped, hence, easing the process of converting the women of minority Hindu community.
3. Destruction of temples and religious idols has led to loss of Hindu heritage in the country. This attempts to dilute the presence of Hindu culture, to promote forced conversions, and to remove idolatry as it is offensive to Islamic culture. As per reports of the Bangladesh Minority Council, none of the offenders have till date been prosecuted for such acts of hatred towards Hindu culture, however, even the littlest aspersion towards Islam has been met with a strict response.

⁴ https://censusindia.gov.in/census_and_you/old_report/census_1941.aspx

⁵ <http://111.68.102.42:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/14510>

⁶ <http://catalog.ihsn.org/index.php/catalog/115>

4. Violence and quiet ethnic cleansing of the Hindus has been a long-drawn process since the 1970s. They are usually at the receiving end of violence in the country. Their shops and businesses are attacked and looted. As seen in Fig.1., the population of Hindus has drastically declined over the last few decades.
5. Chittagong Hills have been gradually converted to a breeding ground of Islamic terrorism. The provisions of the Peace Accord of Chittagong Hill Tracts (1997)⁷ have not been implemented. Thousands of indigenous people have been replaced, killed, tortured, and converted to Islam. As per the report of the Bangladesh Minority Council, the region had hundred percent indigenous population till 1947. After the partition of India, ancestral land was taken away and the local tribal customs and traditions were abolished to make way for Islam.
6. Radicalisation of Islam in Bangladesh has been a constant source of worry for minorities in the country. From the records of the Council, several Hindu families were falsely accused of insulting Islam, resulting in looting and plundering of their shops and households. Two recent incidents were in Brahmanbaria (2016) and Thakurpara (2017). The law and order agencies of the country failed to take requisite measures to bring peace and stability, indicating their appeasement of the majority Islamic community. To accentuate this appeasement policy, the government has allocated budget heads to facilitate construction of mosques and training of Islamic clergymen. The authorities have also started deleting texts written by non-Islamic scholars from text books so as to prevent students from developing multi-cultural and inclusive perspectives.

⁷https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/BD_971202_Chittagong%20Hill%20Tracts%20Peace%20Accord.pdf

Persecution of Hindus in Pakistan

In Pakistan, Hindus face many forms of discrimination i.e., social, religious, institutional, and legal. Islamists in Pakistan treat people based on what they do and believe. Hindus are the most significant religious minorities and primary victims of the discrimination and persecution.



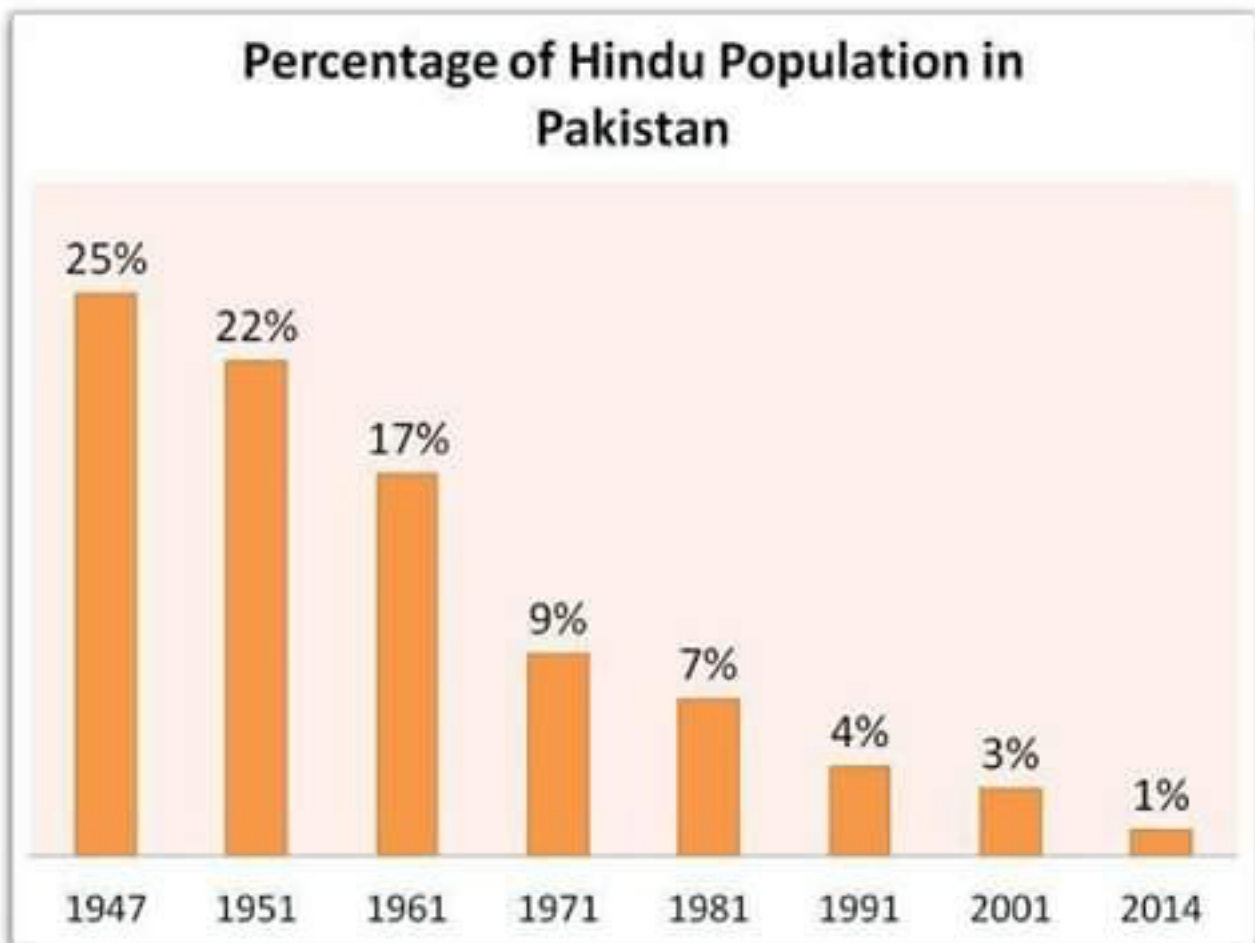
The tenure of the sixth president, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, is considered a darkest period, especially for discrimination against religious minorities and women. Active Islamisation began during the Zia introduced several discriminatory laws against minorities including but not limited to Anti-Blasphemy law, establishment of Shariat Courts and those codified laws must be according to Islamic injunctions and Establishment of Council of Islamic Ideology etc⁸. The persecution and discrimination against minorities reached to zenith in Zia's period. Repression of ethnic minorities' rights, social, educational, and institutional discrimination, Islamic extremism and sectarianism, abductions and forced conversions, blasphemy laws, discriminatory legal provisions, religious freedom, temples/religious places, etc. Pakistan has been hard at work of degrading and persecuting minorities since its separation from India. Pakistan is home to thousands of old Hindu temples and pilgrimage sites; these sites are constantly attacked. Thousands of temples have been demolished or converted to mosques in the years since independence of British Indian government authorities and law enforcement of Pakistan have failed to protect temples, and the helpless Hindu community is unable to repair temples or build new ones⁹. According to Pakistan's 2017 Universal Periodic Review, which was presented to the UN Office of the United Nations High

⁸ Satyani, P., 2022. *Persecution of Religious Minorities in Pakistan*. [online] Academia.edu. Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/35917269/Persecution_of_Religious_Minorities_in_Pakistan> [Accessed 10 September 2022].

⁹ Hindu American Foundation. 2022. *Pakistan Human Rights Report - Hindu American Foundation*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.hinduamerican.org/projects/human-rights-report/pakistan>> [Accessed 10 September 2022].

Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)¹⁰, on average, 20 Hindu girls are kidnapped in Pakistan each month. Similarly, as per Human Rights Commission of Pakistan's annual report, over 1,000 forceful conversions took place in the Sindh province of Pakistan in 2018.¹¹

With significant influence over government and policy programmes, over the year Islamists in Pakistan have become increasingly intolerant and repressive. Violent Islamic extremists have implemented Islamic rule in regions under their control, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the tribal areas. In exchange for security, terrorists in the tribal areas, particularly Khyber Agency, have forced Hindus and Sikhs to pay a punitive levy known as jizya (a tax initially imposed on non-Muslims living under Islamic control). Anti-minority or let us say, anti-Hindu sentiment is not new in Pakistan as the Janmashtami procession in Dhaka (then Pakistan capital) was attacked within a month of the partition of Pakistan. In 1948, Dhamrai Rath Yatra and Janmashtami processions were not allowed. In 1949, posters were put up all over Dhaka in protest against Durga Puja. As a result, there has been a drastic reduction in the number of community worships. In addition, hundreds of Hindu houses were set ablaze on Vijayadashami day, leaving around 750 Hindu families homeless¹².



June 2022]

¹¹ Smietana, B., 2022. Forced conversions, marriages spike in Pakistan. [online] Religion News Service. Available at: <https://religionnews.com/> [Accessed 25 June 2022].

¹² Web.archive.org, 2022. *The Legacy of the plight of Hindus in Bangladesh Part IV | Asian Tribune*. [online] Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200610222518/http://www.asiantribune.com/index.php?q=node%2F6606> [Accessed 10 September 2022].

Pakistan's Constitution on Religious Minorities

Pakistan was established on 14 August 1947, based on the ideology of Islam. In article 25 (1), the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees that “all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law.” Article 5 provides that “adequate provision shall be made for the minorities to profess and practice their religions and develop their cultures freely.” Article 33 declares that it is the state’s responsibility to discourage parochial, racial, tribal, sectarian, and provincial prejudices among citizens. However, these provisions have never been fully implemented in practice and are contradicted by other provisions of the Constitution. Firstly, Article 2 declares that “Islam shall be the State religion of Pakistan,” and article 31 states that the government must foster the Islamic way of life. Article 41(2) provides that “a person shall not be qualified for election as President unless he is a Muslim,” and article 227 (1) states that “all existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the Injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Qur’an and Sunnah, in this Part referred to as the Injunctions of Islam, and no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such Injunctions.” Article 20 of the Constitution, enshrines that every citizen’s “right to profess, practice and propagate his religion” and that “every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions”, is “subject to law, public order and morality,” and is thus contradicted in law and practice when it comes to the rights of religious minorities in Pakistan¹³.

¹³ Refworld.org. 2022. [online] Available at: <<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/57fb91e54.pdf>> [Accessed 10 September 2022].

