



Situational Analysis: Persecution of Bangladesh's Hindus Intensifies

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Executive Summary

- **Post-Independence Bangladesh:** Since its emergence as an independent nation in 1971, Bangladesh has seen its Hindu minority community facing extensive persecution.
- **Decline in Hindu Population and Cultural Shift:** Over the past seven decades, there has been a noticeable decrease in the Hindu population. Concurrently, there's a shift away from traditional Bengali culture towards increasing Islamic radicalism.
- **Challenges Faced by Hindu Minority:** Hindus, who now comprise only 8% of Bangladesh's population, are subjected to growing discrimination and violence. This includes looting, sexual assaults, forced conversions, desecration of temples, property seizures, and displacement, amidst the backdrop of a Muslim-majority population.
- **Widespread Attacks and Government Inaction:** The Hindu community has faced over 3,679 documented attacks since 2013, with the government's inadequate response to this violence being a cause for concern. Immediate measures are necessary to safeguard religious minorities.
- **Temple Encroachments:** The attempted encroachments on Hindu temples, including the revered Chandranath Mandir, highlight a disturbing trend. Preserving the nation's religious diversity and heritage is of paramount importance.
- **Attacks on Hindus attributed to false pretexts of blasphemy:** The Durga Puja celebrations in 2021 were marred by extensive violence, triggered by misinformation. A strong stance against misinformation and commitment to fact-checking are essential to prevent further unrest.
- **Rising Social Media Misuse:**

The escalating misuse of social media, fake news in Bangladesh is alarming, as it fuels false narratives and incites violence against Hindus. A collective effort to counter misinformation is urgently needed.
- **Escalating Religious Attacks:**

With nearly 4,000 attacks (documented and reported) targeting Hindus since 2013, immediate action is crucial to halt these increasing assaults and ensure religious freedom and security for all.

- **Political Apathy:**

The continuous attacks on minorities reveal a concerning pattern of political apathy. Both current and previous governments need to prioritise the safety and inclusion of all citizens, fostering a tolerant society.

- **Forced Displacements and Human Rights Violations:**

The forced displacement of Hindus, coercive conversions, and property confiscations in Bangladesh constitute severe human rights violations.

- **BJHM and ASK Reports:**

Reports by BJHM and ASK document the atrocities and human rights abuses against Hindus. These findings highlight the urgent need for addressing these grave issues and ensuring justice for victims.

- **Specific Incidents of Abuse:**

Data from the Legal & Reconciliation Centre, along with documented reports, shed light on specific incidents of human rights violations, including vandalism, arson, rape, murder, and property grabbing targeting Hindus. Addressing these egregious acts is imperative to protect the rights and safety of the Hindu minority.

- **Need for International Intervention:**

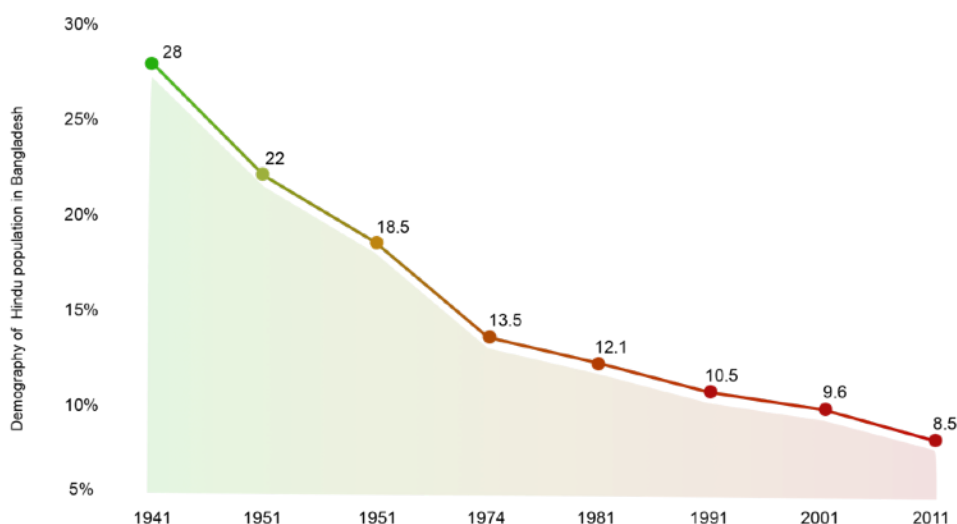
The dire human rights situation of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh demands immediate international attention and action to safeguard their rights and security.

- **A Crucial Decision for Bangladesh:**

Bangladesh stands at a crossroads: either to preserve its rich secular Bengali identity, which embraces diverse communities, or to veer towards becoming an radical Islamist state. This choice will significantly influence the nation's future identity.

Background and Context

In aftermath of India's freedom from British colonial occupation in 1947, the eastern segment of Bengal province was apportioned to form East Pakistan as per the Indian Independence act of 1947. Subsequently, the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, which notably ended in a pronounced military defeat for Pakistan against Indian forces, led to the establishment of Bangladesh as an independent, secular state.¹ Within this context, the situation of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh is increasingly concerning. As a relatively small group within a predominantly Muslim country, they are facing a spectrum of persecutions: instances of theft, physical assaults, sexual violence, forced conversions to Islam, desecration of their holy places, unlawful property seizures, and involuntary displacements. This report aims to highlight the challenges confronting the Hindu community in Bangladesh, a population that has seen a substantial decline over the past seventy years.



Ministry of Planning and the Bureau of Statistics Data: Demonstration of Bangladesh's changing demographic structure

Hindu minorities in Bangladesh have been at the receiving end in the last few decades as gradually Islamic radicalism has started to gain prominence over the syncretic Bengali culture. Hindu population has been on the decline and there are about 8 percent Hindus in the country of the total population. Bangladesh's Hindus are now a beleaguered minority, increasingly facing discrimination and violence in day-to-day life. Islamic radicalism and fundamentalist elements have been attempting to ride over the Bengali traditions and tolerant way of life.

¹ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/29/bangladesh-communal-violence-hindu-muslim-identity-crisis/>

Situational Analysis

Hindus, who make up about 8 percent of Bangladesh's Muslim-majority population, have repeatedly come under attack. A Bangladeshi human rights group, Ain o Salish Kendra, has reported at least 3,679 attacks on the Hindu community since January 2013, including vandalism, arson, and targeted violence.² The authorities have repeatedly failed to investigate and prosecute such violence³. Bangladesh has been witnessing a surge in religious extremism in recent years. Forces propagating radical Islam are trying to communalise the society.

Islamic fundamentalists have been targeting Hindu temples in Bangladesh over the last one decade. The recent attempt to seize the revered Shakti Peeth, Chandranath Mandir, signifies a grave violation of religious freedoms and human rights, exacerbating the plight of Hindus⁴. In a heinous recent attempt to disrupt communal harmony, Muslim-owned eateries along the way to the Holy temple have come up catering to Muslim visitors, serving beef, since late 2022, much against the religious belief of Hindu minorities.

This recent attempt to take over the temple has once again reminded the Hindu minority in Bangladesh of the fierce communal riots that took place across the country at several places during Durga Puja, the holiest Bengali Hindu festival of the year, in 2021⁵.

Bangladesh has been witnessing violence against the minority Hindus for several decades now. In 2021, at least six people were killed, and several were injured after violence erupted when Fake news was spread on social media that the Quran was allegedly desecrated at a Durga Puja pandal in Comilla town, Bangladesh. Communal violence had spread to several districts in the country after the incident and the situation had turned grim in Chandpur, Cox's Bazar, Bandarban, Sylhet, Chittagong and Gazipur after attacks against minority Hindus.

² <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2021/10/18/with-3679-attacks-in-9-years-bangladeshs-hindus-at-regular-threat-of-violence-ask>

³ <https://www.dw.com/en/bangladesh-hindus-targeted-by-violence-demand-better-legal-protection/a-59548821>

⁴ <https://swarajyamag.com/amp/story/world/bangladeshs-hindus-plead-for-help-as-islamists-plot-to-take-over-famous-shakti-peeth-but-with-little-hope>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/16/four-die-after-violence-erupts-at-hindu-festival-in-bangladesh>

What was shocking during the communal violence in 2021 & 2022 was that the attacks in which at least six people died were triggered after fake news reports shared over social media, indicating a conspiracy to instigate the violence, according to the Bangladesh Government. The mob violence began in Comilla, in Chittagong district, where an image allegedly showing disrespect to the Koran was circulated and led to a number of major mob attacks killing several Hindus, their homes ransacked & also 17 temples were targeted.

As the influence of radical groups is growing in Bangladesh, Hindu community is facing the brunt of Islamic extremism. Bangladesh has seen nearly 4,000 attacks against minority Hindu communities since 2013, according to a human rights organization. In October 2016, a Muslim mob attacked 15 Hindu temples and the homes of more than 100 Hindu families in Nasirnagar, near Dhaka⁶. Again, what triggered the violence was a Facebook post regarding a “rumoured” religious offence.

The past government in Bangladesh, the center-right Bangladesh Nationalist Party, which ruled in an alliance with the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami party from 2001 to 2006 was also not supportive of the ethnic minorities. The present Awami League government though has secular credentials, but it has not been able to protect the religious minorities in the country. The minorities, which do not hold any sway electorally except in a few constituencies, are not given any weightage by the political parties. Their small numbers do not help them in any way to gain political leverage.⁷

A report titled “Atrocities on Religious Minorities in Bangladesh from January 1 to December 31 of 2017” was released by the Bangladesh Jatiya Hindu Mohajote (BJHM), which is a grand alliance of national Hindu organizations. According to the report, at least 107 people of the Hindu community were killed and 31 fell victim to enforced disappearance in 2017, while 782 Hindus were either forced to leave the country or threatened to leave. Besides, 23 were forced to convert into other religions.⁸

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/03/world/asia/hindu-muslim-bangladesh.html>

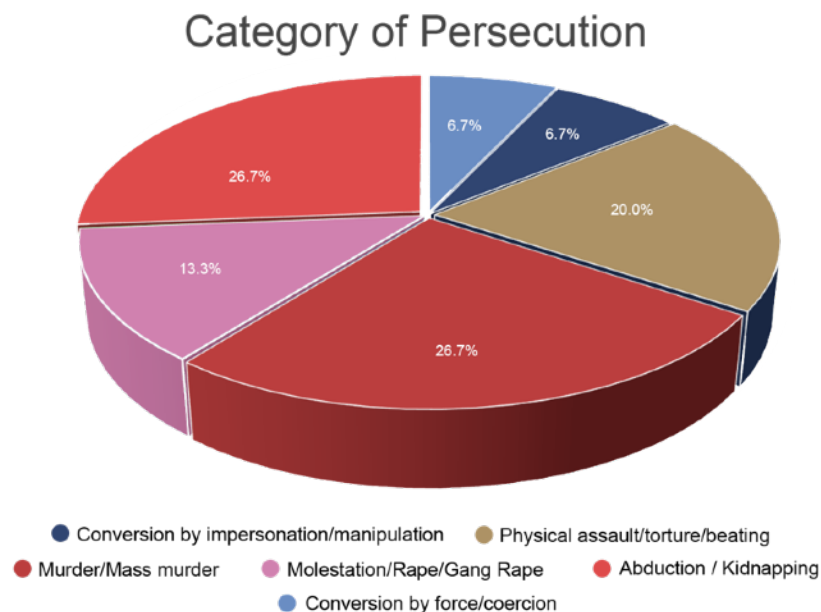
⁷ <https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/religion-and-bangladeshs-political-parties/>

⁸ <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/134750/bjhm-107-hindus-killed-31-forcibly-disappeared>

The Ain o Salish Kendra⁹, or ASK, a prominent rights group in Bangladesh, prepares annual reports on human rights violations, which includes a chapter on attacks on the Hindu community and other minority groups. As many as 3,679 attacks on the Hindu community took place between January 2013 and September 2021, according to the report by ASK.

The report carried by bdnews24.com says, the attacks included vandalism of and setting fire to 559 houses and 442 shops and businesses of the Hindu community. Around the same time period, there were also documented incidents of vandalism and arson attacks on Hindu temples, idols, and places of worship totalling at least 1,678.

In addition to the 862 injuries, 11 Hindu community members died in these kinds of incidents. Year 2014 saw the rape of two Hindu women and the sexual abuse of four more. In 2016, 2017, and 2020, at least ten Hindu households had their houses and lands taken away from them.



According to the Statistics compiled by Legal & Reconciliation Centre, a human rights outfit, a total of 3,679 Hindus were attacked during the last nine years. Of these, 1,559 Hindu homes were destroyed, 442 Hindu businesses vandalised and 1,678 idols in Hindu temples desecrated.¹⁰

⁹ <https://www.askbd.org/ask/category/publications-and-resources/annual-report/>

¹⁰ <https://organiser.org/2022/10/22/97082/bharat/islamists-at-it-again-in-bangladesh/>

There is no end to persecution of Hindu minority community in Bangladesh. However, the level of inhuman treatment and crimes has crossed all limits of tolerance. Murder, attacks on Hindu places of worships, forceful conversion, land grabbing, vandalisation of temples and desecration of Hindu Gods & deities is on the rise and has become a common incident in Bangladesh. Hate speeches, Hinduphobic statements and anti-Hindu insults in public as well as print & digital media dominated the headlines.

The UN and the international community at large would have to raise the issue of safety of minorities with the Bangladesh government to ensure the ethnic, religious groups are able to live peacefully in the country otherwise the exodus would continue. Bangladesh has to make a choice whether to preserve their distinct secular Bengali identity or to shift to becoming an Islamic state.

Concluding Observations

The escalating persecution of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh paints a distressing picture of religious intolerance and violence. The stark increase in attacks, ranging from physical violence to destruction of property and temples, underscores a worrying trend towards religious extremism. This not only threatens the safety and rights of Hindus but also challenges the foundational secular ethos of the nation. The ineffectiveness of government responses and the international community's limited intervention reveal a troubling lack of accountability and protection for these vulnerable groups. It's imperative for both the Bangladeshi government and the global community to acknowledge and address these issues promptly to prevent further erosion of religious harmony and to uphold the principles of human rights and dignity. The future of Bangladesh's cultural and religious pluralism hangs in the balance, necessitating immediate and concerted efforts to safeguard the Hindu minority and preserve the nation's diverse identity.

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