

Of the Helpless Pak Bangla Hindus

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It is tragic that though Sanatan Dharma, commonly known as Hinduism, proclaims universal brotherhood and oneness of humanity, and addresses the entire humanity as divine children (Shrunvantu vishve amrutsya putraha, Rig Veda: 10-13-1), most of the Hindus have either been killed or converted or driven out from Pakistan and Bangladesh which used to be Hindu lands. And those Hindus who are still left in Pakistan and Bangladesh are being treated with disdain and discrimination, and are being denied even the basic human rights.

Genocide and Persecution

Only a few centuries ago, Hindu religion and culture used to reverberate from Afghanistan to Indonesia. The Indian subcontinent including the present-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan and even Zabol in Iran was Hindu land, and had no Muslim presence till Muhammad bin Qasim's Arab army attacked Sindh in 711. After repeated invasions, Hindus lost the present day Afghanistan to Muslims in 987. And the areas now known as Pakistan and Bangladesh were lost to Muslims in 1947. Pakistan comprised two segments: East Pakistan and West Pakistan. In 1971, East Pakistan became Bangladesh, a separate country. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh have been declared as Islamic republics.

Hindus have always been threatened and discriminated against in Pakistan and Bangladesh on religious grounds. Though in 1947, Hindus accounted for 24 per cent of the present-day Pakistan's population, they now number less than two per cent.

Situation is equally grave in Bangladesh where Hindus, numbered 31 per cent in 1947, now number nine per cent. Most of the Hindus/Sikhs have either been driven out, or have been killed, or forcibly converted in Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, in India, the present percentage of Muslim population is much higher than that in 1947. Pakistan and Bangladesh have never explained what they have done to their Hindu population.

Hindus suffer constant threats to their lives, security and property in Pak-Bangla lands. Many Hindu temples have been desecrated and destroyed in Pakistan and Bangladesh. There are regular reports of illegal encroachments on Hindu temples and lands, looting of Hindu property, discrimination, persecution, molestation and abduction of Hindu girls both in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

During 1970 and 1971, Hindus in East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) underwent massive massacres by the Pakistani army and its collaborators. Over two million Hindus are reported to have been killed in East Pakistan during 1970 and 1971 leading to the Indo-Pakistan war in 1971. Besides, countless Hindu women were dishonoured and kidnapped during this period.

As per Dr Sabyasachi Ghosh-Dastidar's book Empire's Last Casualty: Indian Subcontinent's Vanishing Hindu and Other Minorities, over three million Hindus have been killed in the process of Islamization in the area now known as Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) since India was partitioned in 1947. This loss of three million lives remains suppressed from the world.

Even now, Hindus are facing genocide, terror, persecution, dishonour and atrocities in Bangladesh every day. And there is selective killing of Hindu judges, professionals, teachers, lawyers and civil servants in Bangladesh to smash Hindu resistance. Human rights organizations like Amnesty International are silent spectators of this blatant ethnic cleansing of millions of Hindus. They seem to be completely blind to the reality.

Forcible Conversions and Marriages

The alarming trend of Muslims kidnapping young Hindu girls and forcibly marrying them to Muslims is tormenting Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Though the Pak-Bangla media might have occasionally reported such atrocities, the mainstream media in India observes scrupulous silence in this regard. To illustrate the dismal situation, just one such example is given here. It was reported in Pakistan's premier English daily The Dawn (November 3, 2005) that 19 Hindu girls, mostly from Punjab Colony, Karachi, were missing from their homes. Relatives of these girls believed that they had been kidnapped and were being forced to change their religion, it added.

Columnist Irfan Husain's write-up entitled "Conversion Losses" published in The Dawn (December 3, 2005) relates the tragedy of the Hindu parents in Karachi whose three young daughters, Reena, Usha and Rima, of marriageable age, vanished in October, 2005. In a few days, the shocked parents received a courier package containing three identical affidavits from their daughters stating that they had converted to Islam and, therefore, could not live with their Hindu parents. And the father of the girls just wailed, "We just sit and stare at each other. For us, life is over."

And this hopeless situation can be the fate of any Hindu parent in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Kidnappings and Killings

Even during the last few months, thousands of Hindus have been forced to flee Pakistan and take shelter in India.

Increasing incidents of kidnappings, robberies and forcible conversion have rattled the Hindu community in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Those unable to pay the ransom are just killed. Hindu filmmaker Satish Anand's kidnapping in Karachi and recent release after payment of a huge ransom is just one of such countless examples. In April this year, Sikhs in Karzai in Pakistan were targeted to pay Rs 50 million as jazia,

the tax levied on non-Muslims. As the victims could not pay the said jazia, their houses were looted and destroyed.

Discrimination and Dispossession

Discrimination against Hindus is a fact of life as also a fact of law in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

As per the Constitution of Pakistan, only a Muslim can be the President or Prime Minister of Pakistan. As per the Bangladeshi Constitution too, only a Muslim can be the head of the state.

The Vested Property Act was passed in 1965 as “Enemy Property Act” in Pakistan. This law legitimized confiscation of Hindu property. After the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, this Act was renamed as the Vested Property Act in Bangladesh, and the state was made the owner of the Hindus’ property. This Act has legitimized the forfeiture of millions of acres of ancestral Hindu lands. And Hindu lands and properties are being taken over by the government (under the Vested Property Act) to be distributed among Muslims.

Way Out

In 1950, Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan signed an agreement called the Nehru-Liaquat Pact under which both the governments undertook to protect life, liberty, religion and safety of minorities in each other’s country.

But the government of India is doing nothing in the ongoing genocide and deprivation of Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

It is the Indian government’s legal and moral duty to ensure that as per the Nehru-Liaquat Pact of 1950, and as per the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Pakistan and Bangladesh treat their minorities in a human manner. India must also ask Bangladesh to repeal the Vested Properties Act, and restore the lands and properties of Hindus to Hindus.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights must also be approached to redeem the situation. Denial of human rights to Hindus violates the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

In Pakistan and Bangladesh, Hindus have only the right to suffer and the right to silence. Shockingly, the tragedy of Hindus of Pakistan and Bangladesh remains untold by the Indian mainstream media — obviously for so-called secular reasons.

India’s callous inaction regarding the pathetic plight of Pak-Bangla Hindus is disgusting. Killing of Hindus in Pakistan, in Bangladesh, or even in India is not taken seriously by the mainstream media, by the government, by various political parties, or by the human

rights industry in India. Is it because for some sections in India, only the terrorists, anti-nationals and Pak-Bangla infiltrators are entitled to fundamental and human rights? Will India ever act to save Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh?

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