



For some nearly 17 years, the Hindu American Foundation, an education and advocacy organization, has published an annual [human rights report](#) that is widely cited by policy influencers and policymakers. HAF has worked closely with persecuted religious minorities from [Afghanistan](#), [Bangladesh](#), and [Pakistan](#), and been on the forefront of documenting the horrific human rights conditions they have had to endure. HAF has made country visits, including a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh and Nepal to visit Bhutanese refugee camps.

The Hindu American Foundation also works with and sponsors medical clinics at refugee camps in the Indian city of Jodhpur which serve religious minorities who have fled persecution in Pakistan. The conditions in these camps are deplorable and bureaucratic delays in obtaining legal status for these refugees have left these stateless people bereft of basic needs, even while they have no recourse of return to their original homes and villages. Religious minorities who fled to India from Afghanistan and Bangladesh suffer similarly -- stuck in legal limbo, unable to resettle and restart their lives.

India's Citizenship Amendment Act seeks to remedy this long-standing insult to injury.

From rampant institutionalized and social discrimination, and widespread restrictions on religious freedom to bonded labor, kidnappings, forced conversions, rape, rampant violence, land grabs, and destruction of religious sites, religious minorities and ethnic minorities live as second class citizens in these neighboring countries with no improvement of conditions in sight. For those who were able to flee, India has been their only hope for freedom and survival.

To provide an understanding of the gravity of the situation, below are brief overviews of the legal, political, and social realities for religious minorities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. The horrors faced by them is jarring, and it is no wonder that those who could, fled to the only secular democracy in the region -- India.

That the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Indian American Muslim Council and all of their activist partners have failed to bring these concerns to your attention in their efforts to condemn India's Citizenship Amendment Act should be cause for serious concerns about these organizations' credibility, commitment to secularism as the only means to ensure religious freedom, and genuine concern for the human rights of all people.

Afghanistan: Afghanistan's constitution and legal system institutionalize discrimination against non-Muslims and firmly establish Islam as the state religion. These conditions continue to lead Hindus and Sikhs to leave the country, with only an estimated 200 families remaining (down from over 200,000 Hindus/Sikhs in the 1970s), according to Afghan Hindu sources. Afghan



Hindu and Sikh refugees similarly continue to face struggles in other countries where they have sought refuge, and in some instances, face deportation proceedings.

The plight of minorities and women is particularly concerning, as these vulnerable groups remain marginalized and subject to violence, social prejudice, and harassment. Hindus and Sikhs lack cremation rights and are often attacked and humiliated while trying to cremate their dead. Hindu and Sikh children, in particular, are harassed and bullied in school for their religious beliefs. Parents are hesitant to send their daughters out alone due to fear that they may be kidnapped and forcibly converted and married off to Muslim men. Hindus and Sikhs have also faced employment discrimination, and are both politically marginalized and excluded from most government jobs.

Most recently, on March 25, 2020 a terrorist attack on a Sikh gurdwara in Kabul, Afghanistan left 25 dead and injured at least 8 others. About 150 people were inside the gurdwara at the time of the attack, including women and children. The very next day, terrorists attacked the cremation ceremony of the 25 victims, illustrating the heightened threat that religious minorities, like Sikhs and Hindus, face in Afghanistan. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, however, some Afghan experts have pointed to a possible role of the Haqqani group and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), both of which are supported by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency.

In July 2020, the Indian government announced that it would grant long-term, 5-year visas to approximately 700 Hindu and Sikh citizens of Afghanistan.

Bangladesh: A bitter fact in today's Bangladesh is that the Hindu population is dying out. Since 1947, the Hindu population in Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) has drastically declined from 31% to 10% (less than 9% according to some estimates) today. In light of systematic human rights violations and discrimination that has incrementally worsened, the Hindu population has been irapidly leaving Bangladesh at an alarming rate and more than that of any other time.

Discrimination towards the Hindu community in Bangladesh is both visible and hidden. The state's bias in the Constitution and its reluctance to address human rights violations against minorities makes this discrimination evident. Moreover, there has been a long history of violence and repression against Hindus in Bangladesh including genocide of an estimated two million then East Pakistani citizens (mostly Hindu), the ethnic cleansing of 10 million ethnic Bengalis (mostly Hindus) who fled to India, and the rape of 200,000 women (also mostly Hindu) in camps set up for the sole purpose of raping and terrorizing. This infamous history consists of many barbaric episodes of violence over the years, including attacks on Bangladeshi Hindus in



retaliation for the tearing down of the Babri Mosque in India in the 1990s, the 2001 post election violence, and the vast appropriation of land under the Vested Property Act.

Although many Bangladeshi Hindu refugees have been living in India, they have done so without formal legal status. Prior to the Citizenship Amendment Act, the government had granted some refugees from Bangladesh living in India long term visas with the right to purchase land, but other hurdles remained.

Pakistan: The modern Pakistani state was created upon the request of Muslim leaders to partition the Indian subcontinent in 1947, following the British withdrawal, into the secular Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. At the time of Partition, the Hindu population in Pakistan (the area formerly comprising West Pakistan) was approximately 26%, but millions of Hindus and Sikhs fled violence and riots for the safety of India, and Muslims for East and West Pakistan. Today, Hindus are less than 2% (human rights groups have suggested that the government has intentionally lowered the figures to deprive minorities of services and political representation).

Pakistan is a federal republic with a significant role for Islamic law in the Constitution and legal system. The military establishment is the primary power-broker in the country and provides support and funding to Islamic militant groups operating throughout the region. Religious minorities face widespread persecution and a complex set of discriminatory laws and constitutional injunctions. The state, the military, and members of Pakistani civil society violate the human rights and religious freedom of its citizens, namely through blasphemy laws; abductions/forced conversions; sectarian attacks; and enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Moreover, with the constitutional preference for Islam, religious identification laws, and depiction of non-Muslims in school textbook institutionalized discrimination and the second-class status of minorities, ensuring generational bigotry towards Hindus, Christians, and Jews.

Religious minority women and girls are especially vulnerable. An estimated 1,000 Christian and Hindu women are abducted and forcibly converted to Islam every year. Often, after being abducted, these girls are forcibly married to complete strangers, often twice their age, raped, sold off, or forced into the sex trade. According to several human rights reports, 20 – 25 Hindu girls are kidnapped and forcibly converted to Islam every month in Sindh province alone, some as young as three or four years old. Often, after being abducted, these girls are raped, sold off, or forced into prostitution.

Similarly, Hindus and other minorities have been subjected to the bonded labor system, attacks on religious sites and the illegal occupation of temples, and other acts of intolerance at the

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hands of non-state actors with the complicit or implicit support of government officials (or failure to act).

As the largest democracy in the world and an emerging global leader, we believe India should continue to be a beacon for the religiously and ethnically persecuted in its region, and a torchbearer of secularism, pluralism, and religious freedom.

To learn more, visit <https://www.hinduamerican.org/projects/human-rights-report>