



SINDHI FOUNDATION

SINDH'S STRENGTH IS THE WORLD'S STRENGTH

Statement on Sindhis

USCIRF Hearing on Citizenship Laws and Religious Freedoms

Sindhis are a global population that have for millenia called the delta and surrounding regions of the present-day Indus River home. There are estimates that place between 50 million people in the modern-day Sindh province of Pakistan, as well as 10 million Sindhis in India.¹

The hearing hosted by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom on March 4th, 2020, has focused largely on the the manipulation of citizenship laws and targeting of religious minorities with emphasis on Burma and India. There are a number of intersections between this theme and the reality faced by Sindhis, who themselves are targets of these legal maneuvers in present-day Pakistan although it is not broadcast on mainstream media or shared beyond localized social media channels.

The Human Rights Commission on Pakistan has asserted in an annual that there are an estimated 1,000 abductions and forced religious conversions of young, often underage, Sindhi girls each year. Sindhi girls of all minority religious backgrounds, whether Hindu, Christian, or Sikh, are being forced to marry Muslim men after their conversions, never to return to their families. The Commission has called for action by the central government of Pakistan, but has been ignored.²

Bharti Bai, a 24-year-old Hindu girl, is the most recent case of forced abduction and conversion in Sindh that has garnered considerable media attention in the region. Bai was abducted from her wedding ceremony in December 2019 by a Muslim man, Shahruk Gul, as well as a number of men in police uniforms. In a familiar pattern where these cases are concerned, Bai posted on social media weeks later that she had willingly converted to Islam and adopted a new name, Bushra, before taking her abductor, Gul, to wed.³

Sindh is also experiencing a sudden increase in the number of legal cases concerning blasphemy, where Sindhis are being accused of disrespecting Islam. Little-to-no evidence is required to charge an alleged perpetrator with death or a life-sentence, and this is thus being arbitrarily manipulated and employed as another tactic to suppress Sindhis.

¹ Kronstadt, K. Alan. "Pakistan's Sindh Province." *CRS Report No. x7-5415*, 29, Oct. 2015. Retrieved from Congressional Research Service website: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/sindh.pdf>.

² PTI. "Pakistan Human Rights Body Raises Concern over Forced Conversions of Hindu and Christian Girls." *The New Indian Express*, The New Indian Express, 15 Apr. 2019, www.newindianexpress.com/world/2019/apr/15/pakistan-human-rights-body-raises-concern-over-forced-conversions-of-hindu-and-christian-girls-1964694.html.

³ Bhandari, Shashwat. "Another Hindu Girl Abducted in Pakistan, Claims SAD Leader Manjinder Sirsa." *India TV News*, 17 Feb. 2020, www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/another-hindu-girl-abducted-in-pakistan-claims-sad-leader-manjinder-sirsa-589654.



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Notan Lal was accused of having engaged in blasphemous activity in September, 2019. This recent case was instigated by a 15-year old student, who accused Lal, the principal and founder of his school, after being criticized for not turning his homework in on time. Despite later recanting his accusations that Lal had said anything blasphemous and asking for forgiveness via social media, Lal remains imprisoned; no attorneys are willing to represent Lal for fear of armed retaliation, and after being held for six months his health is beginning to decline.⁴

Despite these forced religious conversions and arbitrary employment of laws related to blasphemy, there are few conversations being had about the human rights abuses being perpetrated against Sindhis. The situation in Sindh continues to escalate, however, and even force migration from the region— including to India. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed by India in December 2019 has proven an important vehicle for hundreds of thousands of Sindhi Hindu women and girls who have fled the Sindh province in the last decade with no place to go, seeking only a life safe from persecution.

The Sindhi Foundation focuses on raising awareness about the human rights violations targeting Sindhis, and we invite all those who resist the oppression of any people on the basis of creed to support us to that end.

⁴Hashim, Asad. "Pakistani Police Detain Hindu School Principal over 'Blasphemy.'" *Pakistan News / Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 16 Sept. 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/pakistani-police-detain-hindu-school-principal-blasphemy-190916083629192.html>.