

UNREST IN BANGLADESH: A LESSON TO LEARN FROM VIOLENCE ON THE HINDU COMMUNITY

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Abstract

This study looks at a shocking rise in violence that targeted Bangladesh's Hindu population following the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2024. Over time, Hindus have managed to struggle and claim the least of their religious as well as cultural identity only now constituting a less than 8% of the general population because of decades' migration, persecution, and general marginalization. This study examines the socio-political and historical contexts of such violence in its association with larger trends in political instability, election tension, and extremist ideologies resurgence. The research also critiques the socio-legal framework in Bangladesh and points to shortcomings in its ability to defend the rights of the minorities and victims. Through the lens of socioeconomic determinants, political agents, and demographic features, this research reveals systemic conditions responsible for the persistence of violence and injustice. This report will require speedy improvement and grassroots empowerment with long-term strategies for peacebuilding regarding the rights and dignity of religious minorities in Bangladesh and will mark the failure of legislative efforts by the internal and foreign lobbying.

Keywords: Hindu Community, Bangladesh, Religious Violence, Political Instability, Minority Vs Majority, Government's Participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the independence revolution of 1971, Bangladesh has been known for its rich cultural heritage and for the peaceful coexistence of various religious communities. However, a hidden

history of institutionalized violence against the Hindu minority forms this unity. Since the prime minister Sheikh Hasina has been overthrown in August 2024, political turmoil is affecting the country, and attacks against the Hindu community have increased.

Attacks on Hindu homes, businesses, and temples have risen sharply since the political turmoil started. Some 8% of Bangladeshis are Hindus, and this attack has infuriated them to a great extent. The violence has been characterized by looting, burning, and physical attacks. Many of the victims attribute the acts to political vengeance rather than religious enmity.

This essay aims to look into the sociological dynamics of the Hindu minority and their interaction with the majority Muslim population to understand the reasons for the upsurge in violence presently happening in Bangladesh. The historical background of persecution of Hindus, responses of the Indian government, and international support or lack thereof, are all covered. By analyzing these elements, this research intends to explain the structural problems Hindus in Bangladesh face and, more broadly, the broader implications for the religious minority in the region.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

- To examine how Bangladesh's Hindu minority is affected by political unrest and acts of religious violence.
- To assess how well the Hindu community is protected by the law.
- TO evaluate the impact of radical ideology and societal attitudes on the experiences of the Hindu minority.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Barua, L. (2023) aimed to outline the Buddhist peaceful methods of resolving religious conflicts in the context of anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh; to compile these methods for use in resolving conflicts between the Buddhist and Muslim communities in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh; and to examine the circumstances, causes, and consequences of the anti-Buddhist violence that occurred in Ramu in 2012. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and documentary analysis, were employed in this study. Eighteen months of research were devoted

to gathering primary and secondary data, conducting fourteen in-depth interviews with significant figures in the area, synthesizing data, and demonstrating the interreligious reconciliation pattern in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The Buddhist faith was one of the first to take root in Bangladesh's Bengal region. Many factors contributed to the rise of anti-Buddhist violence, including both internal and external pressures, as well as interest- and culture-based conflicts.

Kashem, M. A., & Islam, M. S. (2016) analysed Narendra Modi's policies towards Bangladesh and the state of relations between India and Bangladesh throughout his presidency. It challenges the conventional wisdom that states run by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Awami League (AL) are characterized by tense relations between India and Bangladesh. It contends that the water issue and the dynamics of internal politics are major roadblocks to the improvement of India-Bangladesh relations. Quite the opposite, it actively seeks for methods to enhance the relationship between the two nations. It concludes that there are certain untapped possibilities that need to be explored and made use of. Both Bangladesh and India stand to gain more from establishing diplomatic relations predicated on mutual regard, tolerance, and comprehension.

Haider, et al. (2019) utilized longitudinal data from the Matlab Health and Demographic Surveillance System spanning 1989–2016 to ascertain the level of contribution of fertility, death, and international migration to the growth rate discrepancy between Muslims and Hindus. The Hindu population of Bangladesh declined from 22% in 1951 to 9% in 2011. The Hindu population is growing at a slower rate than other religions in the country, which has led to a decline in the Hindu proportion of the total population. The Hindu population experiences lower fertility rates, higher mortality rates, and more out-migration rates compared to the Muslim population. According to these numbers, reduced fertility (41% of the decline), increased mortality (5% of the decline), and international out-migration (54%) may have been the main causes of the Hindu growth decline from 1989 to 2016. Migration has grown less of a factor over time, and the decline in Hindu population over the last two decades is mostly attributable to their lower fertility rate, which accounts for almost 70% of that decline.

Pattanaik, S. S. (2013) looked into the future of minority groups in Bangladesh as part of the larger debate about national identity. In its pursuit of nationhood with a unique history, this article takes a look at the problem confronting Bangladesh's Hindu minority through the lens of a majoritarian state, which stands for the social and cultural ideals of the majority. Despite their inherent equality as citizens, minorities are always suppressed in states that uphold the "nation state" narrative, which portrays them as unequal in its growth. While the study does a good job of analyzing Hindus' political involvement in Bangladesh and what was then East Pakistan, it also asks whether the minority's current strategy has provided them with economic, political, and physical protection and made them important players.

3. DECLINE OF THE HINDU POPULATION IN BANGLADESH

The Hindu minority population in Bangladesh has witnessed an acute decline over the past century. Their percentage has declined from 33% in 1901 to approximately 7.95% in 2022. Several connected factors are responsible for this decline:

- 1. Migration:** In the times of political turmoil, especially the 1947 Partition and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, a significant population of Hindus migrated to neighboring India. Especially during the 1971 conflict, millions of Hindus were forced to leave their homes in search of refuge from persecution and violence.
- 2. Religious Persecution:** Especially during times of political instability, Hindus have faced targeted violence and systematic discrimination in Bangladesh. The 1971 genocide saw an overwhelming number of Hindus suffering under the assault of the military, for instance, and one finds that they were actually the most victimized.
- 3. Socioeconomic factors:** The Hindu population is declining owing to social marginalization and economic inequality. The Hindu-owned land was confiscated following the Vested Property Act 1965, which involved financial migration and the loss of agrarian assets.
- 4. Declining Fertility Rates:** Bangladesh's Hindus have a fertility rate lower than that of the Muslim majority, which partly accounts for their share of the population declining.

5. **Political Tension:** There has been a pattern in violence against Hindus, often going high during political upsurges. For example, the political turmoil after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's overthrow in 2024 witnessed widespread reporting about attacks on Hindu residences, places of worship, and businesses, which was leaving the Hindu population thoroughly alarmed.

The Hindu population in Bangladesh had faced a number of challenges such as these, hence had been decreasing and it had become a minority community in the country.

4. SOCIOLOGICAL FABRIC: MAJORITY VS. MINORITY DYNAMICS

Sociological studies are significantly influenced by the interaction of majority and minority groups and how this influences cultural norms, social structures, and intergroup relationships. These issues must be understood for the sake of addressing such concerns as discrimination, inequality, and social cohesiveness.



Figure 1: Sociological Dynamic in Bangladesh

→ Historical Context and Evolution

Social stratification, migration and colonization have shaped the essence of majority-minority relations through history. For instance, colonization and the emergence of majority groups in different parts of the world led to extreme demographic and cultural changes wherein the cultural

norms and values of the colonization group were imposed on local communities. These dynamics have continually evolved over time, in which some minority groups won social and political recognition whereas others still face structural hindrances.

→ **Cultural Hegemony and Social Inequality**

Antonio Gramsci's term for "cultural hegemony" is a good example of how a majority or dominant cultural group can enforce their standards and norms on other non-dominant groups so that they feel alienated within their culture and begin losing their identities. It happens to be related to stratification in society. Class, race, ethnicity, and gender hierarchies produce relative inequalities in resource distributions involving healthcare, employment, or education. Since most minority communities are categorized into low-income backgrounds, they suffer from several systemically issues that restrict social movement and keep the cycle running from poverty to marginalization.

→ **Current Consequences**

Modern civilizations are less homogenous because of more migration and globalization, turning majority-minority on their head. The word "global majority" describes the ethnic minorities, Black, Asian, Brown, dual heritage, and global south's indigenous people. Over 80% of the inhabitants of the world are white or Eurocentric therefore this word is an inconvenience to them. Limitations of the phrase "Global Majority". The GRT communities are excluded, despite significant variations in the access to services, work, and health. Considering that minority status is situated and contextually imposed-often by sociopolitical forces-the "global majority" idea is ineffective.

5. SAFETY OF HINDUS IN A MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRY

Safety issues relating to Hindus among Muslim-majority nations for a long period remain an emotionally delicate matter that cannot be addressed merely by scrutiny of the available sociopolitical, legal, or cultural factors. Bangladesh can be considered to have lived with communal amity till date, but Hindus amounting to less than 8% there have experienced occasions of extreme violence and widespread discrimination whenever political instability would arise during the country's history. This study delves into the plight of Hindus in Bangladesh, focused on

targeted attacks, legal protections, and the sociopolitical context within which these problems emerge.



Figure 2: Religious protests in Bangladesh

Often violence erupts during times of religious and political uprising, for instance during polls and protest movements against some of these policies, affecting the rights of the Bengali minority in Bangladesh who follow the religion of Hinduism. Assaults have brought on marginalization, meaning Hindus withdraw entirely from the social sphere. Even though religious freedom is protected by the constitution, it lacks effective implementation and political instability that always leaves victims vulnerable during power struggles and blames Hindus. A variety of historical factors, among which were the partition in 1947 and then revisions in the constitution afterwards, left Hindus vulnerable. Discretion in possibilities in educational institutions and disputes over land are two other socioeconomic factors that have disenfranchised them even more. Even though they have attracted attention from all over the world, the solution is at home in Bangladesh. Even though the Hindu community is resilient in advocacy and support networks, many of them have taken refuge in India, where they risk losing their cultural identity.

6. INDIA'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING HINDUS IN BANGLADESH

6.1. Role of the Indian Government

Taking the above historical, cultural, and political relations into perspective between both countries, India has addressed issues Hindus face in Bangladesh on multiple fronts. These range from humanitarian assistance and policy actions to diplomatic efforts toward alleviating oppression among minority groups.



Figure 3: Role of the Indian Government in Supporting Hindus in Bangladesh

- **Diplomatic Engagement:** Diplomatic diplomacy is the preference of India for Bangladeshi Hindu minorities. The bilateral India-Bangladesh relation is close-knit in nature and neighborly and is characterized by India's following pursuit of religious freedom and communal amity in Bangladesh. Issues of minority violence, violation of Hindu temples, and a mass exodus of Hindus due to fear and harassment are constantly pursued. The secular base of Bangladesh is of vital concern to India to maintain social-political stability since Bangladesh's independence in 1971. India raises awareness about Hindus in Bangladesh, and Bangladesh is motivated to satisfy the grievances of minorities across international platforms.
- **Humanitarian Support:** Traditionally, India has accepted the persecution fleeing Bangladeshi Hindus. It is the cultural bond of Bangla Hindus and the onus of supporting the weak that makes it humanitarian help. Millions of Hindu Bangladeshis sought refuge

in India from the atrocities committed during the 1971 Liberation War. The pattern continues to this day, particularly when Bangladeshi religious riots occur. India has supported Bangladesh's Hindus through temporary accommodations, humanitarian assistance, and the legal integration process. India supports refugees with schooling, health care, and employment. These humanitarian steps have enhanced India's reputation on regional minority rights.

→ **Policy Initiatives:** India has made efforts to aid distressed minorities in neighboring nations. Among them, the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019 is more significant. This CAA helps those Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsis, who before December 31, 2014, had migrated from Pakistan, Afghanistan, or Bangladesh for fear of persecution and may become Indians quickly. Here, under this Act, minorities achieve legal rights as well as protection in seeking their rightful place and life in Indian society. While opponents say CAA prevents the entry of Muslim migrants, proponents believe it will be redressing historical persecution of minorities such as Hindus of Bangladesh. India issued visas and permanent residency to its estranged Hindus to allow them citizenship or reconstituting life in the country outside statute. The policies demonstrate commitment on India's part to refugee's protection.

6.2. Support from the International Community

Mixed notice worldwide has been received by Hindus in Bangladesh. Involvement is difficult, but the world is concerned.

➤ United Nations

UN officials have frequently criticized the violation of human rights in Bangladesh and persecution of minorities. UN reports and statements, more so by OHCHR, call for better protection for religious minorities. Political complexities and sovereignty restrict the level at which the UN can intervene. Bangladesh is against external involvement as it violates national sovereignty. The UN has brought more awareness but had minimal changes in ground-level reform.

➤ **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**



Figure 4: NGOs Initiatives Against Bangladesh's Violence

NGOs have played a fundamental role in the resolution of problems faced by Hindus of Bangladesh. Organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have exposed violence, discrimination, and institutionalized indifference towards the minorities around the world. Besides advocacy, NGOs also provided direct human support towards the affected communities. In this context, reconstruction work on houses and temples, legal support towards the victims, and working towards improving interfaith dialogues to improve communal amity fall under such forms of activities. However, for such programs to be effective for sustainable change, they require increased governmental and international cooperation.

6.3. Political Parties in India and Secularism

The secular and right-wing political parties in India show a contrast towards the Hindu minority of Bangladesh as it is also a manifestation of their various ideologies and policy objectives. Given that India has remained staunchly committed to constitutional secularism and non-discrimination, secular parties both call for diplomatic action as well as humanitarian action. Supporting their bilateral relations with Bangladesh, the temporary asylum granted to Hindus, and the involvement of these groups in international forums that are supposed to support the rights of minority

communities, their actions in trying to make a more hospitable society are well-established. For instance, as indicated in the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), right-wing groups, especially the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have been calling for the migration and naturalization of persecuted Hindus for civilizational reasons. Through domestic politics, these parties mobilize for the cause of Hindus in Bangladesh in terms of a broader context of safeguarding Hindus all over the world. While being different from each other, both political groups share an emphasis on the need to handle India's relation with Bangladesh and the concern of Hindus there.

6.4. Threats to National Interests

The Bangladesh situation directly impacts the security and diplomatic scenario of India. In this case, the country is vulnerable to cross-border tensions that are related to sectarian violence and persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh resulting in spillover of immigrants into India and resultant pressure on resources of West Bengal and Assam. Community problems like these can also add divisiveness to India's already sensitive interfaith relationship. So, India should balance humanitarian obligations with national security and social integration. At the diplomatic level, India needs to tread softly on its position for the religious minorities of Bangladesh without stretching the bilateral relations because Bangladesh is an important country for India, especially in terms of trade, connectivity, and combating terrorism. The Bangladesh minority issues could be a point of public criticism and might be seen as an interference. This would again create a threat to diplomatic relations. Therefore, India adopts diplomatic pressure and constructive.

7. CONCLUSION

In the light of continued prejudice, religious intolerance, and political instability, the study concludes with a discussion of the current challenges that Bangladesh's Hindu minority continues to face. The Hindu community remains marginalized, even with constitutional protection, particularly in times of political instability and election-related anxiety. Extreme belief and failure to execute the rights of minorities contribute to these problems. While the government has indeed made great strides in dealing with minority-related problems, tremendous progress is yet hindered by the nonexistence of a comprehensive socio-legal framework and incessant political disorder.

With respect to ensuring the safety and well-being of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh, the report identifies stronger legislative protections, social acceptability, and peacebuilding activities as priorities.

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