

South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > Pakistan: Fanatic Outrage and Shrine demolition:

Pakistan: Fanatic Outrage and Shrine demolition:

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Sat, 01/09/2021 - 05:39

Paper No 6730

Dated 9-Jan-2021

By K.M. Seethi

In less than a week after the destruction of a Hindu holy shrine in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), the Supreme Court of Pakistan has come down heavily against the perpetrators of the act as well as against the public authorities for having failed to protect the rights and privileges of the biggest religious minority in the country.

The Court on 5 January 2021 ordered the Evacuee Property Trust Board (EPTB) to begin the reconstruction of the shrine in the Karak district of KPK, besides directing the EPTB to present details of all functional and non-functional temples and Gurudwaras across Pakistan. The apex court orders and comments came at a time when another minority of Shiite Hazara community has been protesting—for the last eight days—against the ethnic carnage unleashed by Islamist militants on coal miners which resulted in the death of 11 persons. Both incidents have sent an ominous signal across the country and the Imran Government and the combined opposition parties have started crossing swords over the issues.

Reports said that hundreds of people stirred by some local Islamic clerics belonging to religious groups which reportedly included a faction of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) were involved in the demolition of the temple in Karak. They held protests before vandalising the shrine. Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed observed that the demotion of the shrine had brought "international embarrassment to Pakistan."

The temple, located in the Teri village of the Karak district of KPK, was built way back in 1919, following the samadhi of Shri Paramhans Ji Maharaj who is revered by the Hindu community. The holy shrine is the resting place of the saint. Born in Bihar in the mid-nineteenth century, Shri Paramhans Ji Maharaj is greatly venerated as a Hindu mystic and, according to various traditions, he was the first spiritual master of the Paramhans Advait Mutt. Upon his arrival in Teri, Shri Paramhans had built a temple. After his samadhi, a room was added to

the temple where he was buried.

Since partition in 1947, when many Hindus from the place began to flee to India, the future of the shrine was a major concern of the people who remained there. Yet, the Hindus continued to visit the temple without much trouble in spite of the mounting tensions and pressures built by the Islamist forces. The temple became a source of wrangle when the local Muslim mob destroyed it in 1997. However, after seven years, the intervention of the Supreme Court of Pakistan came as a great relief to the Hindu minority in KPK. The apex Court ordered its renovation in 2015.

Following the demolition of the shrine on 30 December 2020, even as video footage began to spread in international media, KPK Chief Minister Mahmood Khan ordered the police to take action against the people involved. Following the outrage, dozens of people were arrested immediately which included some leaders of JUI-F. There was also widespread condemnation of the incident from different sections of the Pakistani society.

A statement issued by the Supreme Court on 31 December noted that the lawmaker and the Patron in Chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council Ramesh Kumar called on Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed in Karachi to discuss the issue. The Press release of the court reads: "The Chief Justice of Pakistan showed grave concern over the tragic incident and informed the member of parliament that he has already taken cognisance of the issue and has fixed the matter before court on January 5, at Islamabad." Reports suggested that as per the Court direction One-man Commission on Minorities Rights, KPK Chief Secretary and Inspector General of Police already visited the site.

The Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari condemned the burning of the shrine and said that the government must ensure that the culprits were brought to justice. She wrote: "We as a government have a responsibility to ensure safety and security of all our citizens and their places of worship."

Following the Supreme Court orders on 31 December, the KPK IG submitted a report which stated that 109 people involved in the vandalism were under arrest while 92 police officials, including the superintendent of police (SP) and deputy superintendent of police (DSP) who were on duty at the time, were suspended. When the IG said that these police officials at the spot showed "cowardice and negligence," the Chief Justice remarked that "suspension was not enough." He also said: "You have to recover money from the people who did this, from this Maulvi (Sharif) and his followers." The IG report had noted that on the day of demolition JUI-F was leading a protest near the site which was sponsored by Maulana Faizullah. According to the IG, "Out of the six ulema at the protest, only Maulvi Mohammad Sharif incited the crowd," as reported by Dawn.

Before the IG report, the Shoaib Suddle commission also submitted its report before the Supreme Court, which noted that the disturbing action resorted to by miscreants, that too in the presence of police, not only hurt the sentiments of the Hindu community in particular and the minority communities in general but also brought shame to Pakistan by tarnishing the country's image at the international level. Suddle also

brought to light that the mob had also looted valuables from the temple after setting the site on fire but the station house officer and DSP concerned apparently did not take any action to control the situation.

The Suddle commission also recommended the opening of four Hindu temples for international tourism—Param Hans Ji Maharaj Samadhi/Mandir in Teri town of KP's district Karak; Hinglaj Mata Mandir in Hingol National Park of Balochistan's district Lasbela; Katas Raj complex in Punjab's district Chakwal and Parhlad Bhagat Mandir in Punjab's district Multan. The report said that they should be provided with sufficient security and appropriate lodging and boarding facilities similar to Sri Darbar Sahib Gurdwara in Kartarpur town of Punjab's district Narowal.

The fact that the religious and ethnic minorities in Pakistan have been facing several hardships since partition is testified by each episode of violence, hatred and attacks. Palpably, these minorities remained marginalised under all political dispensations—more evidently during the military rule which spanned over three and a half decades. The partition hazards are borne by the biggest minority of Hindus who currently constitute around 8 million (out of the 200 million population of Pakistan). The majority of them (more than 93 per cent) live in Sindh, and other provinces like KPK have a very small percentage of Hindus.

Attacks on temples and churches were reported from time to time in Pakistan. They became more frequent since the 1990s. Following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, many temples were attacked. With the emergence of Taliban forces in the mid-nineties, the neo-Wahhabi Islamist outfits began to target such shrines of minorities, and even Shia and Ahmadiyya communities fell prey to them. It was only in early November 2020 that a Hindu temple in Karachi was damaged with the reports of blasphemy allegations against a local boy. A few months before that, the Islamic outfits tried to block the construction of the first Hindu temple in Islamabad. In November 2014, a Hindu temple was vandalised in Sindh and another in March, both generating widespread reactions. Shortly before that, Islamists in Larkana burnt a dharamshala and destroyed idols of Hindu deities in a nearby temple. The frequent attacks on Hindu shrines and other incidents of religious bigotry and hate campaigns made the Hindu minority in Pakistan fearful

Years back, the Pakistan Hindu Council leaders also raised serious allegations that the land mafia has been actively engaged in illegally capturing the religious places of the minorities. The Hindu Council said that around 1,400 Hindu religious shrines across the provinces in Pakistan were in urgent need of protection by the authorities. The Council had also proposed the formation of an agency at the federal level to prevent atrocities against the minorities. Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yielded to this demand and resolved to institute a national commission on minorities to promote religious tolerance and harmony in the country. This, of course, came in the wake of a Supreme Court judgment on the rights of minority communities. However, the recent attacks belied all hopes that the attacks on Hindu shrines and other repeated incidents of hatred and violence against the Hindu minorities in Pakistan would come to an end with setting up of a commission.

In fact, the episodes of religious violence in KPK have four-decades old history. After the Soviet intervention in 1979 and the consequent prolonged war in Afghanistan, KPK became one of the most vulnerable hotspots of Islamic militancy and violence. Cross border movements

and attacks of terror outfits continued to affect normal life in the province for years, if not decades. In the background of Taliban activities in the 1990s, the minority communities became targets of attacks and intimidation. The situation began to worsen after 11 September attacks and the 'war on terror.' As the military regime of Musharraf began to support the US-led war in Afghanistan, the Islamist parties forged a joint front against the government and the US. The emergence of Muttahida Majlis Amal (MMA)—comprising of ultra-right Islamist parties like the Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP), the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-S), Jamiat-e-Ahle Hadith, Pakistan Islami Tehrik (ITP) and the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)—was a turning point in the strategic terrain of KPK and Baluchistan. MMA even secured mandate in the 2002 elections and began to form governments in both provinces.

The rise of MMA obviously strengthened radical Islam in both provinces, and terror attacks in these provinces alone took a heavy toll, over years. Reports of forced conversion and cases registered under blasphemy laws were also on the increase.

According to the National Human Right Commission of Pakistan (NHRCP), religious minorities found it difficult to enjoy the freedom of religion or belief guaranteed to them under the country's Constitution. For instance, in its Annual Report – State of Human Rights 2019, the NHRCP said that the Hindu and Christian communities in provinces like Sindh and Punjab reported cases of forced conversion. Similarly, in May 2020, NHRCP had to handle cases related to demolition of Hindu houses in the township of Yazman, district Bahawalpur, by the local authorities. An independent fact-finding mission of NHRCP confirmed that local authorities were complicit in the demolition.

Annual Report 2020 of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) says that “religious freedom conditions across Pakistan continued to trend negatively. The systematic enforcement of blasphemy and anti-Ahmadiyya laws, and authorities' failure to address forced conversions of religious minorities—including Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs—to Islam, severely restricted freedom of religion or belief.” The report noted that protestors in Sindh attacked and burned Hindu shops and houses of worship following two incidents involving a veterinarian and a principal. It also said that hundreds of young women, often underage, belonging to minority communities were kidnapped for forced conversion to Islam, and local police, particularly in Punjab and Sindh, were often accused of complicity in these cases.

Earlier the USCIRF said that the emergence of fundamentalist, extremist Islamic forces into the political arena, on the eve of July 2018 national elections, “threatened religious minorities' already precarious status in the country.” It had found, upon investigation, that Pakistan should be designated as a “country of particular concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). The State Department, however, put the country under “Special Watch List.”

Following the temple demolition, the Government of India lodged a protest with Pakistan, demanding the Imran government to take “strict action” against those responsible. New Delhi knows that the minority issues in both countries have strategic spill over effect, particularly in the background of LoC violations and the downturn in bilateral relations. The Imran government will also have compulsions to initiate action against the culprits as its credentials of combating terrorism and religious extremism were already under global terror scanner. Though the KPK government assured that it would rebuild the temple with all its sacred grandeur, the Islamist outfits will spare no time in mobilising the

local population invoking religious sentiments and hatred against minorities. That the local authorities—including law and order agencies—having taken a partisan role and remaining reluctant to step in to take stern action in such crucial moments points to the continuing dilemma of the beleaguered minorities in Pakistan.

The author is Director, Inter University Centre for Social Science Research and Extension (IUCSSRE), Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala. He also served as Dean of Social Sciences and Professor of International Relations and Politics, Mahatma Gandhi University. He can be reached by email in kmseethimgu@gmail.com [1]

Tags:

[Pakistan](#) [2]

[Hindu Minorities](#) [3]

Category:

[Papers](#) [4]

Countries:

[Pakistan](#) [5]

Topics:

[Minorities](#) [6]

[Human Rights](#) [7]

Copyright ©2012. All Rights are Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2730>

Links

[1] <mailto:kmseethimgu@gmail.com>

- [2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/71>
- [3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/2140>
- [4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>
- [5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/pakistan>
- [6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/minorities>
- [7] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/human-rights>