



# EXODUS

**IS THE HINDU  
COMMUNITY  
LEAVING SINDH?**

**A fact-finding study**

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Is the Hindu Community Leaving Sindh?



Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

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# Contents

Introduction	1
Hindus in Sindh: A snapshot	2
Has there been a Hindu exodus from Sindh?	3
Conditions promoting current migration	5
Understanding the emigration pattern	16
Conclusion and recommendations	21

# Introduction

The Hindu community's migration from Pakistan's Sindh province to India and other destinations has become a recurrent theme in media reports, in the discussions of civil society and minority rights groups, and even on the floor of the Parliament. However, a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon is necessary, taking into account not only faith-based discrimination and violence, but also security threats and economic hardship.

Commissioned by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), this study examines the multifaceted factors driving the out-migration of Hindus. It explores the deteriorating law and order situation, religiously motivated violence and the erosion of sociocultural norms in Sindh. It also underscores the unique vulnerabilities that Hindu women face, which are often overlooked in such discourse. By unpacking these complexities, the study sheds light on contemporary migration patterns among the Hindu community in Sindh, looking at factors influencing their decision to migrate and offering valuable insights for policymakers and human rights advocates.

This study employs a qualitative research approach to investigate the drivers of Hindu migration from Sindh. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with leaders from upper-caste and Scheduled Caste Hindu communities in Jacobabad, Ghotki, Sukkur, and Karachi. These interviews focused on first-hand accounts to explore motivations, challenges and community needs, capturing diverse perspectives. Key informants such as HRCP council members and staff members, minority rights activists, journalists, and political analysts were also interviewed. The identities of interviewees have been anonymized, and only their professions or positions have been disclosed to ensure confidentiality and to protect their privacy and safety. Additionally, extensive analysis of media reports, HRCP documentation and academic studies was conducted to provide historical context and broader social trends regarding Hindu migration from Sindh.

# Hindus in Sindh: A snapshot

As per the 2023 census, Pakistan's population is 240.5 million, of which 96.4 percent are Muslim.<sup>1</sup> Hindus are the largest religious minority in Pakistan, with a population of 5.2 million, followed by 3.3 million Christians. The Hindu community is officially classified into two categories: Hindu Jati, comprising 1.6 percent of the population, and Scheduled Castes, accounting for 0.6 percent. However, human rights activists contest the accuracy of these figures, particularly regarding the Scheduled Caste Hindu community.<sup>2</sup> They argue that the actual number is likely underreported, as the latter face discrimination from both the Muslim majority and caste Hindus.

Sindh has the highest concentration of Hindus in Pakistan at 8.8 percent of the province's population.<sup>3</sup> Despite this, they face significant socioeconomic and caste discrimination within the province. Caste Hindus engage primarily in trade and are concentrated in urban districts such as Jacobabad, Shikarpur, Ghotki, and Kashmore. They generally enjoy higher living standards and literacy rates than their Scheduled Caste counterparts.

Scheduled Caste Hindus live predominantly in the rural areas of Tharparkar, Umerkot and Mirpurkhas. They often work as *haris* [agricultural labourers] and are vulnerable to exploitation in the form of bonded labour despite its official prohibition since 1992. Human rights activists report exploitation by landlords, trapping these vulnerable Hindus in cycles of debt and harsh working conditions.

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1 Population by sex, religion and rural/urban, census 2023. [https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2023/tables/national/table\\_9.pdf](https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2023/tables/national/table_9.pdf)

2 The Government of Pakistan recognized 40 'castes of non-Muslims to be Scheduled Castes' through an ordinance promulgated in 1957. These include communities such as the Bheel, Kolhi, Meghwar, and Odh.

3 Population by sex, religion and rural/urban, census 2023. [https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2023/tables/national/table\\_9.pdf](https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2023/tables/national/table_9.pdf)

# Has there been a Hindu exodus from Sindh?

Reports of Hindu migration from Sindh—particularly northern Sindh—to various destinations, notably India, have become a persistent concern for human rights advocates and civil society groups. A Hindu parliamentarian disclosed on the floor of Pakistan’s parliament in 2014 that around 5,000 Hindus migrate to India annually due to security concerns.<sup>4</sup> These migrations are often driven by the deteriorating law and order situation in Sindh. According to a recent press report, more than 300 Hindus from Kashmore district have migrated to India due to lawlessness and fears of kidnapping by bandits.<sup>5</sup> Despite such alarming reports, government responses typically downplay the issue, framing it as a ‘conspiracy’ against Pakistan rather than addressing the underlying causes. This response reflects a broader sense of denial.

Field research and interviews with Hindu community elders and members for this study confirm that Hindus have been migrating from Pakistan, with many relocating to India. This trend is not new. However, determining the exact number or scale of this migration is challenging because of the sensitive nature of migration, which often leads to underreporting or the intentional concealment of information.

Hindu community leaders from various districts in Sindh recognize that migration to India is not a recent development. Several historical events have significantly influenced this ongoing movement. One of the pivotal moments cited by these leaders is the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India, on 6 December 1992. This incident provoked widespread anti-Hindu violence in Pakistan, with attacks on Hindu temples and places of worship by the Muslim population. This surge of violence in response to events in India became a catalyst, intensifying the

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4 I. Haider. (2014, May 13). 5,000 Hindus migrating to India every year, NA told. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1105830>

5 Badamni ain aghwa jo khauf: 300 kan vadik Hindu Bharat ludhi viya [More than 300 Hindus migrate to India: Fear of lawlessness and abduction]. (15 April 2024). *Pahenji Akhbar*. <https://thetimenews.tv/بڊاڻي-انگوا-جو-خوف-300-کان-واڊيڪ-هندو-ارت>

trend of Pakistani Hindus emigrating to India. A leader from a northern Sindh district elaborates: 'The Babri Masjid incident was a turning point. It led to a wave of attacks on our places of worship, making many in our community feel unsafe and prompting a surge in migration.'

However, the roots of migration extend further back. A significant, though less well-known, catalysing event occurred in 1986 when as many as 34 convicted prisoners, some of them infamous for kidnapping Hindu traders for ransom in northern Sindh, escaped from Sukkur Jail.<sup>6</sup> 'The jailbreak created a climate of fear among the Hindu traders. The incidents of kidnappings for ransom forced many to emigrate to India as their only safe option,' said a Hindu trader in Ghotki.

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6 Prison break: Sukkur jail worries about security threats from hotels and truck stand. (2012, April 19). *The Express Tribune*. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/366769/prison-break-sukkur-jail-worries-about-security-threats-from-hotels-and-truck-stand>



# Conditions promoting current migration

Field research findings reveal a multitude of reasons behind the migration of Hindus from Sindh. Safety concerns are a primary driver. Although large-scale incidents of violence have become less frequent, the persistent fear of kidnapping for ransom and targeted attacks continues to haunt the Hindu community. Community leaders highlighted that while their religious identity makes them vulnerable, their economic status also plays a significant role in attracting criminal elements.

## ***Persistent fear and insecurity***

Effective law enforcement remains severely compromised in Sindh, especially its northern regions. In 2023, an HRCP fact-finding report observed that northern Sindh was riddled with organized crime, militant violence, poor governance, and entrenched feudal power structures.<sup>7</sup> The report highlighted significant shortcomings in the police, judicial, and revenue systems, presenting formidable challenges to maintaining law and order. Tribal feuds further destabilize the region, paralysing socioeconomic development and creating a perilous environment for all residents, particularly for the Hindu minority.

## ***Kidnapping for ransom***

Kidnapping for ransom is rampant in northern Sindh, and extortion is commonplace. This dire law and order situation presents a grim reality for the Hindu community. 'Hindus feel frightened and insecure due to the rise in kidnappings for ransom by dacoits operating from the Katcha [riverine] areas' was a recurring concern in interviews with Hindu community leaders and rights activists in northern Sindh. Interviews reveal that the Hindu community is often targeted for its economic standing. In districts such as Ghotki, Jacobabad and Kashmore, the upper-caste Hindu community dominates trade, markets and transportation. They

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7 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. (2023). Northern Sindh: In search of solutions.

are also significant landowners, making them prime targets for criminal activities. Although religious violence is significant, it is not the sole motivator for the crimes they face. 'Hindus are not targeted solely because of their beliefs but because of their wealth and business interests,' explained a Hindu Panchayat leader.

Violence and crime against the Hindu community peaked in 2014. A subsequent law enforcement crackdown against dacoits in the Katcha area temporarily reduced kidnappings and general crime in the northern districts. However, in recent years, kidnappings for ransom by bandits have surged again, the community leader argued. A Hindu doctor from Jacobabad shared his experience: 'We avoid going outside the main cities after evening due to fears of kidnapping. The bandits have precise information about our wealth, businesses, and family members.'

One notable incident occurred in January this year when Retak Kumar, a Hindu trader from Mirpur Mathelo in Ghotki, was kidnapped by bandits.<sup>8</sup> While the Ghotki police claimed Kumar was rescued after 44 days, community leaders disclosed that his family had paid a substantial ransom for his release. In September 2023, dacoits from the Katcha area kidnapped three Hindu community members, including a nine-year-old, from Kashmore, and held them for several days for ransom.<sup>9</sup> 'In many cases, kidnappings for ransom are not reported in the media. Often, Hindu community leaders negotiate through local tribal chieftains to secure the release of their loved ones, typically paying ransoms ranging from PKR5 million to PKR10 million,' said a community elder.

### ***The role of tribal chieftains***

These kidnappings and ransom demands highlight the systemic issues faced by the Hindu community in northern Sindh. The failure of law enforcement to provide adequate protection leaves them vulnerable to exploitation by criminal gangs. Their relative wealth and the lack of government protection make them easy targets for bandits and tribal chieftains. The prevailing feudal system

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8 Hindu trader recovered in Ghotki. (2024, March 15). The News. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1168295-hindu-trader-recovered-in-ghotki>

9 M. H. Khan. (2023, September 4). Protest continues in Sindh's Kashmore over abduction of members of Hindu community. *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1774003>

exacerbates their plight, often leaving the Hindu community with little recourse. Tribal chieftains wield significant power, frequently influencing law enforcement and judicial processes. This entrenched power dynamic forces many Hindus to seek protection through alternative means.

To safeguard themselves and their families, many Hindus align with powerful tribal and influential leaders, involving them as business partners. However, these silent partners do not invest financially but receive a significant share—typically between 20 and 30 percent—of the profits. Their names are prominently displayed in mills, shops, transport companies, and other enterprises to deter bandit activity. A Hindu businessman elaborated: ‘We set aside a certain amount as the share for the tribal chieftains in our businesses and pay their share at the end of the year. We also display their names on our businesses to protect ourselves from the dacoits. This strategy has been successful in ensuring our safety.’

This desperate strategy underscores the deep-seated insecurity and lack of faith in official law enforcement channels. The fear and uncertainty extend beyond northern Sindh, spilling over into cities like Sukkur, Karachi, and Hyderabad.

### ***Fear from backlash related to India***

The Hindu community in Sindh faces increasing anxiety, particularly in response to events connected to India. In 2023, an incident involving Seema Haider, a Pakistani woman from Sindh who travelled to India to marry a Hindu man, triggered a wave of threats and violence that deeply unsettled the Hindu community in northern Sindh. Following her departure, bandits from northern Sindh threatened to attack Hindu temples in retaliation, causing widespread panic among the local Hindu population.

Media reports indicate that dacoits in Kashmore and Ghotki districts allegedly took several Hindu community members hostage, including women and children.<sup>10</sup> This alarming situation drew attention in the provincial assembly when members were

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10 More than 30 Hindus held hostage by bandits In Sindh. (2023, July 16). *The Friday Times*. <https://thefridaytimes.com/16-Jul-2023/more-than-30-hindus-held-hostage-by-bandits-in-sindh>

informed that a rocket had been fired at a temple in the Ghauspur area of Kashmore. Fortunately, the rocket did not explode, and no casualties were reported, but the incident intensified the community's fear and insecurity.<sup>11</sup>

These anxieties were heightened when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi consecrated a temple in Ayodhya in 2024 on a disputed site previously occupied by the Babri mosque. A Pakistani Hindu politician remarked, 'Incidents linked with India always cause panic among the Hindu community, even though they have nothing to do with India and are Pakistani citizens.'

### ***The wave of terrorism***

While not directly targeted, the Hindu minority in northern Sindh has felt a growing sense of insecurity during the wave of terrorism from 2013 to 2017. This period saw a surge in suicide attacks by a local militant group led by Hafeez Pandrani, linked to transnational groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and later the Islamic State. These incidents, including suicide bombings at Shia shrines as well as attacks on a Bareilvi spiritual leader and a Shia politician, spread fear among religious minorities.<sup>12</sup>

Illustrating the climate of fear, a Hindu Panchayat leader recounted, 'The wave of terrorism in those four years terrorized the Hindu community. Police constantly advised us to heighten security at our places of worship in Jacobabad, Shikarpur, and other areas due to the threat of suicide attacks by local Taliban groups.' The 2019 killing of Pandrani by law enforcement agencies brought a halt to the violence, offering a measure of relief. However, the scars remained. Facing continued unease, some Hindu families migrated to major Pakistani cities such as Karachi and Hyderabad, while others crossed the border to India.

### ***Religiously motivated violence***

HRCP and other rights bodies have regularly highlighted the precarious situation of religious minorities in northern Sindh,

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11 T. Siddiqui. (2023, July 18). Minister 'appeals' to dacoits to not attack temples in Sindh. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1765298>

12 Mastermind of several major terror attacks killed in encounter. (2019, March 1). Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1466771>

particularly the Hindu community. Despite public claims of social cohesion, these minorities face continuous threats due to institutionalized discrimination, arbitrary blasphemy accusations, and forced conversions. However, most respondents contend that there is no organized campaign targeting Hindus and other minorities in the region. Nonetheless, the environment of fear and suspicion remains a significant concern.

### ***Blasphemy accusations-linked violence***

Blasphemy accusations are a major source of distress for religious minorities in northern Sindh. Often unfounded and driven by personal vendettas, such allegations can swiftly escalate into mob violence.

Ghotki district has been a focal point for such tensions, with several high-profile cases emerging in recent years. One notable incident occurred in September 2019 when a Hindu teacher, Notan Lal, was accused of blasphemy. This accusation led to widespread unrest, with a mob vandalising a school owned by a Hindu resident and a nearby temple.<sup>13</sup> Police were notably absent in preventing the violence. Lal was detained and jailed, but in March 2024, the Sindh High Court released him, citing insufficient evidence to support the charges.<sup>14</sup>

This was not an isolated event. In 2016, the town of Mirpur Mathelo in Ghotki experienced a violent outbreak following alleged desecration of the Quran by a Hindu boy. The ensuing mob rampage resulted in the death of one Hindu man and severe injuries to another, with extensive damage to Hindu-owned businesses.<sup>15</sup>

The climate of fear is further illustrated by a Ghotki-based university student who recounted the October 2022 lynching of a

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13 H. Samoon. (2019, September 15). Riots break out in Ghotki over alleged blasphemy by school principal. *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1505352>

14 J. Khurshid. (2024, March 2). SHC sets aside conviction of school owner in blasphemy case. *The News*. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1163401-shc-sets-aside-conviction-of-school-owner-in-blasphemy-case>

15 Hindu youth killed as blasphemy allegation fuels tension in Ghotki. (2016, July 27). *The Nation*. <https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Jul-2016/hindu-youth-killed-as-communal-tensions-rock-ghotki-over-blasphemy-allegation>

mentally disabled Muslim boy over blasphemy allegations.<sup>16</sup> The student noted, 'Imagine the peril Hindus face in such a volatile environment. All it takes is a rumour.' This pervasive fear drives Hindu parents to isolate their children from Muslim peers and strangers, hoping to shield them from potential violence.

In the face of blasphemy accusations, some Hindus choose to leave Sindh altogether. A Hindu Panchayat leader in Ghotki revealed that two community members had fled to India after being accused of blasphemy. Initially believed to have relocated to Karachi, it was later discovered that they had settled in Indore, India. 'They left quietly because they knew they would never be safe here after the blasphemy allegations against them,' the leader explained.

### ***Fear and vulnerability for Hindu women***

Hindu women in Sindh face constant threats of harassment, kidnapping and forced conversion, significantly impacting their lives. This pervasive fear often forces families to withdraw daughters from school and relocate to safer areas.

To enhance security, many Hindu families live in close-knit communal compounds, which provide protection and solidarity but also highlight their isolation, driven by fear. The migration of Hindu families from rural areas such as Ghotki to larger cities or abroad reflects this anxiety. Scheduled Caste Hindu women are especially vulnerable, given their lower socioeconomic status and limited social mobility, exacerbating their plight. Some respondents said that harassment was forcing Hindu families to migrate to India. An activist from Panu Aqil recounted, 'At a wedding, a tribal chieftain's son inappropriately touched a Hindu bride, causing deep humiliation. Unable to retaliate, the family quietly moved to India within three months.'

### ***Forced conversions and coerced marriages***

Forced conversions and coerced marriages are a persistent issue in Sindh, with Ghotki emerging as an epicentre. Numerous

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16 R. Piracha. (2022, October 4). Disabled Ghotki youth killed over blasphemy accusation. *Voicepk*. <https://voicepk.net/2022/10/disabled-ghotki-youth-killed-over-blasphemy-accusation/>

high-profile cases, such as that of Rinkle Kumari in 2012, have emerged from this region over the years, highlighting the systemic nature of the problem.<sup>17</sup> A 2019 HRCF fact-finding report titled *Forced conversions in Ghotki?* documents the anxieties of the Hindu community in detail.<sup>18</sup>

Central to these allegations is Mian Abdul Haq, popularly known as 'Mian Mithu', a local politician and Muslim cleric. Mian Mithu stands accused of leveraging his influence to facilitate the forced conversions and marriages of underage Hindu girls. His seminary, Dargah Bharchundi Shareef in Daharki, Ghotki, is frequently cited as a key location where such abductions and conversions allegedly take place.

While Mian Mithu maintains that these conversions and marriages are voluntary, this claim is vehemently contested by Hindu community leaders. They argue that the girls, often minors, are too young to make such life-altering decisions and are pressured or manipulated into conversion. The complete absence of similar cases involving Hindu boys casts further doubt on the legitimacy of these conversions.

The Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013 sets the legal marriage age at 18, but enforcement remains weak. Perpetrators exploit loopholes by marrying girls off in Punjab, where the legal age is 16. The case of Reena and Raveena exemplifies this, where despite their families' pleas, the court ruled in favour of their Muslim husbands.<sup>19</sup>

Some respondents suggest that the families of converted girls refuse to take them back due to the associated stigma and potential repercussions. However, some Hindu leaders suggest a recent decline in conversion cases, attributing it to pressure from civil society and Hindu groups on Mian Mithu and his associates.

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17 Rinkle Kumari, a resident of Mirpur Mathelo in Sindh, was allegedly kidnapped and married off to a Muslim man with political connections after being forcibly converted in 2012. She was reportedly a minor at the time.

18 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. (2019). *Forced conversions in Ghotki?*

19 N. Sahoutara & A. Ousat. (2019, November 10). The strange case of the silent women. *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1515863>

## ***Conflicting views on conversions***

Some upper-caste Hindu leaders in Sindh argue that the media exaggerates the frequency of forced conversions, which are reported to be in the hundreds annually. A Hindu Panchayat leader from northern Sindh noted, 'It's not as if they come and kidnap our girls from homes or roads.' He claimed that many cases involve underage Hindu girls who fall in love with Muslim boys, making conversion to Islam a necessary step for marriage.

These young girls, often too immature to understand their faith, convert to a religion they scarcely comprehend. Another leader added that these girls usually realize the gravity of their actions too late, feeling trapped and unable to revert to Hinduism due to severe repercussions, including threats of death.

Alarmingly, some authorities, who should protect minors' rights, defend the consent of underage girls in these situations. A police officer from Ghotki admitted that many converts were minors but argued that they were 'genuinely attracted' to Islam or Muslim men. Additionally, those overseeing the conversion process often deny Hindu families any chance to meet with their daughters beforehand, preventing discussions about the significant implications of conversion and the opportunity to reconsider their decision.

Human rights activists and journalists note that conversions are more prevalent among Scheduled Caste Hindus than upper-caste Hindus. The latter have resources and representation, enabling them to voice concerns more effectively. Scheduled Caste conversions, in contrast, receive less attention due to their limited influence.

An activist from the Scheduled Caste community explained, 'Upper-caste Hindus have money, resources, representation in parliament, and strong organisations like the Pakistan Hindu Council. They raise the issue at every forum, even in higher courts, when girls from their community convert to Islam, forcibly or willingly.'

Conversely, the conversion of Scheduled Caste women garners less attention due to their lack of media, parliamentary and civil society clout.



## ***Consensual conversions***

While forced conversions dominate headlines, consensual conversions, particularly among Scheduled Caste Hindus embracing Islam, largely go unnoticed.<sup>20</sup> As Scheduled Caste Hindus face marginalisation from both Muslims and upper-caste Hindus, they are often denied basic social and religious rights.

Activists from the Scheduled Caste community in Karachi noted, 'Unaffordable cremation costs prevent them from following traditional Hindu burial practices, and Muslim communities often reject their dead in graveyards.' He cited a 2021 incident in Jacobabad's Thull town, where a Muslim community barred Scheduled Caste Hindus from burying their dead in a shared graveyard.<sup>21</sup>

Islamic organisations and individuals, recognising these vulnerabilities, offer conversion to Islam as a means to escape caste discrimination and improve socioeconomic conditions. 'Conversion to Islam is presented as an escape from the shackles of caste and a path to better life opportunities,' a Scheduled Caste community activist said. While exact numbers are elusive, community activities suggest hundreds of Scheduled Caste Hindus embrace Islam annually, seeking relief from their marginalized status.

Islamic groups are notably active in these efforts. However, smaller initiatives by Christian, Sikh and Ahmadi missionaries also aim to attract converts from these vulnerable communities, offering them alternative pathways out of difficult circumstances.

## ***Economic reasons***

Many respondents cited ongoing economic hardship in Pakistan as one of the major factors driving the recent migration of Hindus

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20 M. Abi-Habib & Z. Rehman. (2020, August 4). Poor and desperate, Pakistani Hindus accept Islam to get by. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/04/world/asia/pakistan-hindu-conversion.html>

21 S. Mandhro. (2021, October 22). Hindu woman's burial denied in Muslim graveyard. *The Express Tribune*. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2325805/hindu-womans-burial-denied-in-muslim-graveyard>

from Sindh. These challenges are not unique to Hindus but rather part of Pakistan's broader struggles marked by political instability, inflation, and stagnant growth. However, for Hindus, economic difficulties often combine with anxieties about their social and religious security, making migration about more than just seeking better opportunities.

A trader whose brother relocated to Nagpur, India, explained, 'When Hindu traders visit India, whether for business or religious purposes, they often explore opportunities to invest and relocate. In India, they perceive a sense of security and peace, unlike here where they fear kidnapping, violence, or even debt default from Muslim business partners.' This fear of targeted harassment and lack of trust in the legal system creates a precarious environment for Hindu businesses.

A community leader from Sukkur shared a poignant example. A garment businessman who extended substantial loans to expand his business, a common practice for small businesses, faced financial ruin when a powerful Muslim partner refused to repay a significant loan. This refusal escalated into threats against the businessman's family. Such situations, with limited legal recourse, leave Hindu traders vulnerable and force them to sell their businesses and flee to India for economic security.

In Jacobabad, where Hindu traders traditionally dominate the main bazaars, some shopkeepers allege discriminatory practices by the electricity body, which issues inflated bills despite their consistent payment history. They see this as a deliberate tactic to exploit their peaceful nature. 'They're reluctantly selling their businesses and leaving the country,' shared a local Hindu trader.

### ***Climate change***

While economic hardship and violence are the most immediate and visible concerns driving Pakistani Hindus to migrate, another less discussed but increasingly critical factor is climate change. For some, the worsening climate conditions in Sindh, particularly in the northern region, are becoming a compelling reason to seek refuge in more hospitable environments such as India.

Jacobabad, a northern Sindh city frequently cited as one of the world's hottest, exemplifies the problem. During the study's late

May period, temperatures soared to a scorching 51 degrees Celsius. These are not just uncomfortable conditions, they are life-threatening. Daily survival becomes a struggle, especially with frequent power outages lasting 12 to 18 hours.

A local businessman from Jacobabad shared his perspective: 'Visiting Indian cities like Indore, people find the weather comparatively pleasant. The stark contrast makes migration to cooler regions increasingly attractive. Here in northern Sindh, the brutal summers are almost unbearable.'

Climate change in Sindh goes beyond extreme heat. The region faces a cascading set of environmental challenges, including erratic rainfall patterns, frequent floods, and persistent droughts. These conditions severely disrupt agricultural productivity, a cornerstone of the local economy and a crucial source of livelihood for many, including the Hindu community.

# Understanding the emigration pattern

Interviews with Hindu communities in Sindh reveal distinct migration patterns. They often tend to settle where extended family members already reside in India. For instance, Hindus from Jacobabad move to Indore (Madhya Pradesh), whereas those from Ghotki and Kashmore prefer Nagpur (Maharashtra) and Raipur (Chhattisgarh), respectively. This suggests pre-existing family connections or social networks that act as a support system, easing the transition. Visa sponsorships by their relatives further facilitates migration.

Determining the exact number of migrants is challenging. A Hindu Panchayat leader in northern Sindh explained, 'Vacated properties are quickly filled by Hindu families migrating from rural areas to urban centres. We only become aware of their move to India after several months, as it happens silently.'

Community leaders overwhelmingly cite safety concerns as a primary motivator for migration. They fear for their businesses and, particularly, the safety of their daughters. 'With many families already established there and a religious affinity, India becomes the most viable option,' said a trader from Pano Aqil who was planning to migrate.

The historical context of the partition of 1947 also plays a role. This event separated many Hindu and Muslim families, creating a lasting divide exacerbated by hostile relations between India and Pakistan.

A Pano Aqil-based trader noted another reason for migration: 'Since our numbers are small, matchmaking is difficult. We often explore proposals from India to find suitable matches for our children.'

## ***India's Citizenship Amendment Act***

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), enacted by the Indian government in 2019 and implemented in March 2024, has become a significant driver of Hindu migration from Pakistan. This act

provides a fast-track path to citizenship for non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan who had entered India before December 2014.<sup>22</sup>

Recognising the concentration of Pakistani Hindus in specific regions, the Indian government authorized officials in 16 districts across Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi to grant citizenship under the CAA.<sup>23</sup> Despite the CAA's cut-off date, many migrants continue to arrive on long-term visas, allowing five years of residency and a potential pathway to citizenship after meeting certain criteria. This process involves local recommendations, central government vetting, and final certification by district collectors.<sup>24</sup>

The CAA has notably impacted Sindh's Hindu refugees. In Madhya Pradesh, a significant number of these refugees have been granted citizenship. NDTV reported in 2021 on a family from Jacobabad that had received citizenship certificates in Indore, reflecting a broader trend where approximately 2,000 Hindu refugees from Sindh obtained Indian citizenship over the past five years, with 1,200 more applications pending.<sup>25</sup>

In 2015, the BJP-led government in Madhya Pradesh announced plans to grant citizenship to over 20,000 Hindu migrants from Pakistan. This followed a public interest litigation filed by the Pujya Jacobabad Zila Sindhi Panchayat, highlighting delays in processing citizenship for these refugees.<sup>26</sup>

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22 O. F. Khan. (2024, March 16). Many Pakistan 'persecuted' minorities have not heard of India's CAA. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/many-pakistan-persecuted-minorities-have-not-heard-of-indias-caa/articleshow/108536253.cms>

23 Indian Citizenship Delegation Notice. [https://indiancitizenshiponline.nic.in/Documents/UserGuide/Delegation\\_Notice\\_16042019.pdf](https://indiancitizenshiponline.nic.in/Documents/UserGuide/Delegation_Notice_16042019.pdf)

24 R. Kidwai. (2015, February 12). Citizenship for Pak migrants. *The Telegraph*. <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/citizenship-for-pak-migrants/cid/1510310>

25 5 Refugees from Pakistan get Indian citizenship In Madhya Pradesh. (2021, July 10). *NDTV*. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/indore-5-refugees-from-pak-get-indian-citizenship-in-madhya-pradesh-2483283>

26 B. Jah. (2015, February 3). MPHIC directs govt to address citizenship issue of migrant Pakistani Hindus in 4 months. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/mphic-directs-govt-to-address-citizenship-issue-of-migrant-pakistani-hindus-in-4-months/articleshow/46110448.cms>

In a notable political development, P. L. Mandhwani Raja, a migrant from Jacobabad who moved to India in 1997 and gained citizenship in 2009, ran for election in Indore in 2021 on a Congress ticket, securing over 49,000 votes.<sup>27</sup>

By early 2020, Rajasthan's chief secretary, Rajeeva Swarup, reported that about 17,000 non-Muslims and over 300 Muslims from Pakistan were living in refugee settlements across the state on long-term visas, highlighting the ongoing challenges and complexities of migration and settlement for Pakistani Hindus in India.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Caste problem in India***

Caste dynamics critically affect the experiences of Pakistani Hindus migrating to India. Community leaders and media reports indicate that caste identity significantly influences the support and opportunities available to these migrants.

Upper-caste Pakistani Hindus generally receive better support due to family networks and backing from organisations that cater to their communities. These connections provide crucial assistance in finances, housing, and navigating bureaucratic processes in India.

In contrast, Scheduled Caste Hindus face severe challenges. Marginalized by both socioeconomic status and caste, they often live in dire conditions, particularly in Rajasthan, which hosts many such migrants.<sup>29</sup> A tragic incident in August 2020 highlighted their vulnerability when eleven members of a Scheduled Caste Hindu family from Sanghar, Pakistan, who migrated in 2012, were found

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27 T. Tiwari. (2023, October 16). MP Elections 2023: Pakistan migrant Is Congress candidate from Indore-IV seat. *The Free Press Journal*. <https://www.freepressjournal.in/indore/mp-elections-2023-pakistan-migrant-is-congress-candidate-from-indore-iv-seat>

28 D. Mukherjee. (2020, January 19). Pakistani Hindus living in Jodhpur camps believe Citizenship Act is their passport to future. *Indian Express*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/waiting-for-the-shadow-to-lift-cao-pakistani-hindu-refugee-camps-india-6223676/>

29 M. Abi-Habib. (2019, October 5). Hard times have Pakistani Hindus looking to India, where some find only disappointment. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/05/world/asia/pakistan-hindu-india-modi.html>

dead in suspicious circumstances near Jodhpur, Rajasthan.<sup>30</sup> The initial police suggestion was suicide by poisoning, but the incident raised serious concerns about the pressures and conditions faced by these migrants. Some respondents also said that many Hindu families, particularly those belonging to the Scheduled Castes, had returned to Pakistan after spending a few years in India due to the challenges they had encountered, including the enduring impacts of the caste system.

### ***Internal migration and migration to other countries***

Fleeing violence against their communities, many Hindu families migrate within Sindh, seeking refuge in major cities such as Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur. This internal migration reflects a desire to remain within Pakistan while prioritising safety. For those who remain within their districts, Hindus and other minorities often opt for secure gated communities, colonies and apartment towers in urban centres. This strength-in-numbers approach offers a sense of security and community. Well-off Hindus, particularly those already residing in Karachi with access to good education, often emigrate to wealthy countries such as those in the Middle East, Europe and North America. This suggests they prioritize economic opportunities and a potentially higher standard of living.

### ***Limited options***

Facing pervasive violence and intimidation, the Hindu community in northern Sindh finds its avenues for recourse severely restricted. With minimal political influence, they often resort to non-violent protests, shutter strikes, and hunger strikes to express their grievances. When threats arise or violence erupts, Hindus typically seek help from the government and police. However, community leaders frequently voice frustration with the criminal justice system, citing a reluctance on the part of law enforcement agencies to challenge influential local figures such as tribal chieftains and criminal networks. This perceived ineffectiveness deters many from filing complaints, believing it would be futile. In cases where state support fails, the Hindu community often negotiates directly

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30 Community calls for justice for 11 Pakistani Dalits killed in India. (2022, August 17). *The Express Tribune*. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2371585/community-calls-for-justice-for-11-pakistani-dalits-killed-in-india>

with kidnapers, incurring significant financial costs. The pervasive insecurity compels many to seek protection from local power brokers, sometimes paying hefty ransoms or protection fees.

### ***The role of civil society and political parties***

In light of state inaction, civil society, political parties, and the media have become vital in advocating for the rights and protection of the Hindu community in northern Sindh. Civil society groups document abuses, organize protests, and provide legal assistance despite having limited influence. Political parties often approach minority rights inconsistently; while some publicly support the Hindu community, their actions lack depth and fail to tackle systemic issues. Sometimes, these parties exploit the plight of minorities for political gain without providing sustainable solutions.

For instance, the Pakistan People's Party, the ruling party in Sindh, passed a bill against forced conversions in 2016. However, under pressure from Islamist groups, the governor did not give his assent. In 2019, an effort to reintroduce the bill with modifications failed when a majority voted against it.<sup>31</sup> Fractured Sindhi nationalist parties occasionally organize small protests in support of the Hindu community, but these efforts rarely impact the powerful tribal chieftains of northern Sindh.

Moreover, minimal Hindu representation within major political parties limits their influence on policy and decision-making. Until 1999, religious minorities, including Hindus, had dual voting rights in Pakistan's general elections, allowing them to vote for both general candidates and non-Muslim representatives. This system often elected Scheduled Caste Hindu leaders who genuinely represented their community. However, changes in electoral laws now lead parties to favour wealthier, upper-caste Hindus for reserved seats—a move opposed by many non-Muslim groups.<sup>32</sup>

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31 H. Tunio. (2019, October 9). PPP lawmakers turn down bill against forced conversions. *The Express Tribune*. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2075311/ppp-lawmakers-turn-bill-forced-conversions>

32 Z. Kunbhar. (2024, February 5). As Pakistan votes, 'untouchables' fight for representation. *Fair Planet*. <https://www.fairplanet.org/story/pakistan-election-dalit-representation-in-parliament/>



# Conclusion and recommendations

This study highlights the dire circumstances confronting Pakistani Hindus in Sindh, compelling many to migrate to India. Factors such as insecurity, economic struggles, threats to women’s safety, and worsening climate conditions contribute to this migration, reflecting deep-seated issues in Pakistan.

The migration of Hindus from Sindh signifies broader societal challenges, exposing the state’s failure to ensure security, justice and inclusivity for minorities. Dysfunctional legal systems, coupled with minimal political representation and perceived state indifference, continue to isolate and alienate the Hindu community. While offering hope, migration entails significant losses—familiar surroundings, social networks, and ancestral ties—all traded for an uncertain future. Such displacement underscores the urgent need for systemic change.

Addressing these root causes demands a holistic approach. The federal, provincial and district governments must prioritize the security and wellbeing of all citizens, regardless of religion. Collaboration among government, civil society, and political entities is crucial to ensure minority rights and opportunities. Meaningful change hinges on sustained commitments to justice, security, and equality. Only through such efforts can future generations of Sindh’s Hindus hope to find stability without seeking refuge elsewhere.

Accordingly, this study makes the following recommendations to the federal and Sindh governments to address both immediate threats and systemic issues:

- Collect credible data on the migration of Hindu individuals and families from Sindh to assess the scale of the problem.
- Strengthen law enforcement presence in areas with high violence against minorities, deploying specialized units.
- Create dedicated police units for the Katcha areas, equipped with modern resources and free from political interference.

- Prioritize the investigation and prosecution of crimes against minorities, ensuring swift and fair justice in northern Sindh.
- Provide protection to Hindu-owned businesses that feel compelled to align with powerful tribal and influential leaders and pay them as a means of ensuring their security.
- Establish independent oversight mechanisms for impartial law enforcement, with regular human rights training for police, particularly with respect to—and sensitivity for—the rights of religious minorities.
- Enact and enforce legislation against forced conversions and underage marriages, with stringent penalties and support for victims.
- Foster dialogue between the government, civil society, Hindu leaders, and religious authorities to address community needs.
- Develop economic plans for minority-populated areas in Sindh, focusing on infrastructure and skills development.
- Promote political representation for minorities at both local and national levels to ensure their voices are heard and concerns addressed within the political system.

