



Pakistan - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Wednesday 6 March 2019

Information on the Sunni~Shia relationship including inter-marriage and honour killings

A report released in May 2018 by the *United States Department of State* notes that:

“Members of religious minority communities continued to raise concerns regarding the government’s inconsistency in safeguarding minority rights, and official discrimination against religious minorities persisted” (United States Department of State (29 May 2018) *2017 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan*, p.1).

This document also states that:

“Armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government as extremist, as well as groups designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments, staged attacks targeting Christians, Ahmadi Muslims, Sufi Muslims, and Shia Muslims, including the predominantly Shia Hazara community” (ibid, p.1).

It is also pointed out in this document that:

“Sectarian violent extremist groups continued to target Shia houses of worship, religious gatherings, religious leaders, and other individuals in attacks...” (ibid, p.18).

In June 2018 *Minority Rights Group International* states that:

“Shi’a account for approximately 10–15 per cent of the Muslim population of Pakistan. They include a number of different ethnic groups and can be found throughout the country. Pakistani Shi’a are represented in all walks of life, but in many cases have succeeded in playing prominent roles in Pakistan’s cultural sphere and attaining influential, high-profile positions. Though as Muslims they are free from certain restrictions affecting other religious groups, Shi’a are still regarded as apostates by some extremist Sunni groups and individuals. As a result, many face regular hostility from extremists and public calls for members to be killed” (Minority Rights Group International (June 2018) *Pakistan, Shi’a and Hazaras*, p.1).

This document also states that:

“Though the escalation of violent attacks against Shi’a in the last decade has occurred alongside a general deterioration in the country’s security context, the specific attacks against Shi’a are distinct in character and intent to most political killings, armed conflict deaths and indiscriminate violence against civilians. There have been a number of attacks on Shi’a pilgrims travelling to and from Iran to attend holy sites and festivals: the 700-km highway connecting Pakistan to Iran runs through Baluchistan and is vulnerable to militant attacks. The Shi’a community is not only affected by the wave of killings and suicide bombings. Shi’a have also been subjected to various forms of hate speech, most commonly as campaigns in mosques, schools, public spaces and increasingly on social media. Shi’a are vilified

as a community for their religious beliefs and individuals are also picked out for criticism. The campaigns openly label them as apostates or heretics, and call on Sunnis to kill them” (ibid, pp.2-3).

In October 2018 the *European Asylum Support Office* notes in a report that:

“Sectarian violence across Pakistan is present. Shias, but also Sunnis, Ahmadis, Christians and Hindus are victims of religiously motivated violence, especially carried out by Sunni militant groups...” (European Asylum Support Office (October 2018) *Pakistan Security Situation*, p.17).

A report published by *Human Rights Watch* in November 2018 states that:

“Violence against women and girls—including rape, so-called “honor” killings and violence, acid attacks, domestic violence, forced marriage and child marriage—is a serious problem, and government responses are inadequate. Pakistani activists estimate that there are about 1,000 honor killings every year” (Human Rights Watch (12 November 2018) Human Rights Watch (12 November 2018) “*Shall I Feed My Daughter, or Educate Her?*”, *Barriers to Girls’ Education in Pakistan* p.5).

In November 2018 the *International Federation for Human Rights/Human Rights Commission of Pakistan* notes in a report that:

“Despite the adoption in 2016 of amendments to criminal law criminalizing rape...and honor killings...violence against women continues and effective access to justice for victims of rape and honor killings remains an unfulfilled objective” (International Federation for Human Rights/Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (13 November 2018) *Update for the 8th European Union (EU) – Pakistan Joint Commission’s Sub-Group on Governance and Human Rights*, p.7).

In November 2018 the *South Asia Terrorism Portal* notes in a report that:

“In Pakistan's sectarianism-riddled society, Shias are the primary targets, with the second largest population (estimated at 20 to 30 per cent of the total) in the Sunni dominated nation. The primary players in this sectarian violence have been TTP and LeJ, which aim to transform Pakistan into a Sunni state, primarily through violence” (South Asia Terrorism Portal (26 November 2018) *Pakistan: Sectarian Savagery*, p.2).

A compilation of COI sources issued in December 2018 by the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* includes a source which states:

“According to a Country Information Report on Pakistan by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia, “[t]here are no formal legal barriers to inter-sectarian marriage between Shi’a and Sunnis in Pakistan” and “such marriages do occur across the country (most commonly in large cities such as Lahore)”...However, the same report adds that according to “credible sources,” “Sunni-Shi’a marriages are becoming less common in the face of increasing religiosity across the country”...The report further states that “[w]hen inter-sectarian marriages do occur, one partner (typically the bride) usually undergoes religious conversion...” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (31 December 2018) *Pakistan: Treatment of persons in mixed Sunni-Shia marriages; ability to relocate to other parts of the country; state protection available (2017-December 2018)*, p.1).

Other sources utilised in this report state the following that:

“...views on Sunni-Shia marriages"vary considerably" throughout Pakistan...that "[m]ixed marriages between Sunni and Shia are perceived differently by the different factions of society"...that the treatment of those in mixed Sunni-Shia marriages in Pakistan "would very much depend upon where the parties come from in Pakistan. There are some places where the Sunni-Shia tensions run very high; other places simply get on with life without too much friction..." (ibid, p.1).

A report issued in December 2018 by the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* states that:

“Violence against women is frequent and multifaceted in Pakistan, with the United Nations condemning the prevalence of karo-kari (honour killings), acid attacks, and stove burning of women (CEDAW, 2013), despite the criminalisation of these acts. Legislation condemning honour killings was reinforced in 2016, to ensure that perpetrators of violence do not escape punishment and instead face mandatory life imprisonment” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (December 2018) *SIGI - Social Institutions & Gender Index 2019 – Pakistan*, p.4).

A report issued in 2019 by *Freedom House* reviewing events of 2018 states that:

“Constitutional guarantees of religious freedom have not provided effective safeguards against discriminatory legislation, social prejudice, and sectarian violence” (Freedom House (2019) *Freedom in the World 2019, Pakistan*, p.7).

This document also states that:

“...traditional practices in much of the country subject individuals to social control over personal behavior and especially choice of marriage partner. “Honor killing,” the murder of men or women accused of breaking social and especially sexual taboos, remains common. Most incidents go unreported. Successive attempts to abolish the practice, most recently in a 2016 law, have not been fully implemented” (pp.11-12).

A report issued in January 2019 by *Human Rights Watch* commenting on events of the preceding year notes that:

“Violence against women and girls—including rape, so-called honor killings, acid attacks, domestic violence, and forced marriage—remains a serious problem. Pakistani activists estimate that there are about 1,000 “honor” killings every year” (Human Rights Watch (17 January 2019) *World Report 2019: Pakistan*, p.3).

A report issued in February 2019 by the *Centre for Research & Security Studies* commenting on conflict in recent years states that:

“The Shia and Shia Hazara communities suffered nearly 54% (815+289) of the total fatalities during 2013-18, followed by Sunnis (367), Sufis (198), Christians (171), and others” (Centre for Research & Security Studies (28 February 2019) *CRSS Annual Security Report, A comprehensive look at Pakistan’s security situation from 2013 to 2018*, p.59).

A report issued in January 2019 by the *International Crisis Group* notes:

“...tensions provoked by intolerant and sectarian groups...” (International Crisis Group (28 January 2019) *Pakistan: Challenges of a Weak Democracy*, p.2).

This document also notes the:

“...fears of religious minorities that the state cannot protect them if those responsible for inciting and using violence against their communities operate with impunity” (ibid, p.3).

A report published by the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia* in February 2019 notes that:

“DFAT assesses, with the exception of the Ahmadi and Hazara communities...Pakistanis are generally able to practise their religion without official interference or discrimination. However, DFAT notes a trend of increased religious conservatism and intolerance towards religious minorities in Pakistan, which is likely to continue in 2019. Most religious minorities (with Ahmadi and Hazara exceptions noted above) face a moderate risk of societal discrimination and violence targeting religious ceremonies and places of worship” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia (20 February 2019) *DFAT Country Information Report Pakistan*, p.34).

This document also states that:

“Family members carry out honour killings against relatives perceived to have brought dishonour on the family by refusing an arranged marriage, forming a romantic attachment not approved by the family or, in the case of girls, for dress or behaviour deemed insufficiently modest. While young men can be targets of honour killing, most victims are female” (ibid, p.51).

Associated Press International in February 2019 states that:

“More than 1,000 women are slain every year by relatives in so-called "honor killings" in the conservative, Muslim-majority country” (Associated Press International (23 February 2019) *Young Pakistani man, woman slain in suspected honor killing*).

References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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