

“Is it okay if Hindus and Hinduism die in East Bengal?”

Address by Dr. Richard L. Benkin, USA

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First allow me a moment to pay homage to Tapas Choudhury, the brave law enforcement official murdered the other day. When we approached the family’s home last night, they were too grief-stricken to meet us, but if we did meet I would tell them that along with all of India, I honor the memory of Tapas Choudhury and wish his family the blessing of peace.

I also want to thank Hindu Samhati and my friend, Tapan Ghosh; and my friend Animitra Chakraborty who will translate into Bangla. As a student of history, I am 100 percent certain that there is really only one Bengal and its division into East and West did not change that. There is but one Bengal, one Bengali people; and I have focused for the past several years on those living in *East Bengal*, also known as Bangladesh.

While Hindus in West Bengal remain a majority—albeit a shrinking one—Hinduism in East Bengal is dying. This is not the ravings of an ideologue. It is not “political,” and it is not “communal.” People can call it anything they want, but it is simply a sad fact; and here is the evidence. At the time of India’s partition, Hindus made up a little less than a third of East Pakistan’s population. When East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971, Hindus were less than a fifth; thirty years later, less than one in ten; and reliable estimates put the Hindu population at

between seven and eight percent today. Professor Sachi Dastidar of the State University of New York estimates about five crore Hindus are missing from the Bangladeshi census. Still having trouble wondering where this is going? Take a look at Pakistan where Hindus are down to one percent or Kashmir where they are almost gone. Take a look at the future of Bangladesh's Hindus if we do not act.¹

Other minorities in Bangladesh are under duress, too: Ahmadiyya who are threatened with being defined out of Islam, Rohingya Muslims forced to flee from neighboring Myanmar, and 15 lakh Chakmas and other indigenous peoples who suffer many of the same atrocities as Hindus. Why has my heart gone out to Bangladesh's Hindus?

I could give you many reasons, but the fact is that everyone else has people to speak for them; but very few voices are heard for the 12 million Bangladeshi Hindus. Neither Hindu groups nor international bodies are effectively addressing this human rights travesty. The Amnesty International (AI)'s 2012 "Human Rights Report," in its section on Bangladesh, does not even mention the oppression of Hindus. The only acknowledgement that there even are Hindus is so AI can praise the current Awami League government's sham Vested Property Return Act and its

¹ Benkin, Richard L. *A Quiet Case of Ethnic Cleansing: the Murder of Bangladesh's Hindus*. (Akshaya Prakashan: New Delhi, 2012), page 30. Population statistics taken from the census of Pakistan (1951), and Bangladesh (1974 and 2001). Also see Dastidar, Sachi G.; *Empire's Last Casualty: Indian Subcontinent's Vanishing Hindu and other Minorities*. (Kolkata: Firma KLM Private Limited, 2008).

prosecution of 1971 war crimes. Yet, AI claims to have visited Bangladesh three times that year. And it saw no evidence of the ethnic cleansing of Hindus?²

The goal of Bangladesh's sustained attack is horrifying and nothing less than the complete elimination of Hindus from Bangladesh. From one third to one fifth to less than a tenth and now under eight percent; almost five crore people missing; and no one's ever tried to explain numbers as powerful as that? No one's ever made a stink about them? Not Amnesty International; Human Rights Watch; the UN; my own United States including its State Department, CIA, and Presidents whether Democrat or Republican, Obama or Bush; India; CNN, Reuters, the BBC, *New York Times*, *Times of India*, *Times of London*, the left-wing media, the right-wing media, and pretty much every other major "media" you want to cite? They do not even bother to deny that there is a problem; all we get from them is silence.³

Are we expected to believe that they are unaware of what is happening, that my ability to uncover the truth is that much greater than their combined power?

And let us lay aside forever the myth that the Awami League is any better in this respect than the *Jamaat-loving* BNP. It is not. Dhaka University's own Professor Abul Barkat has shown that the Awami League has looted as much Hindu property

² Amnesty International, "Annual Report 2012: The state of the world's human rights," <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/bangladesh/report-2012#ai-visits>.

³ Richard Benkin, "Bangladesh's Hindus are dying. Are we okay with letting it happen?," Address to Human Rights Center for Bangladesh, Dallas, Texas, January 19, 2013. <http://www.inte-rfaithstrength.com/Dallas.htm>

as the BNP.⁴ And until today, Sheikh Hasina still has not kept her 2009 vow to visiting French commander, Gerard Valin, to repeal all anti-minority laws.⁵

At least when the military was in charge, their leaders admitted that this was a problem. I have had numerous meetings with Awami League officials and every one simply denied it and asserted that there was nothing they had to do—which I believe just as I believe their goal is to eliminate Hindus from their nation.

And even with my own meager resources, I have been able to confirm the following with at least two independent witnesses:

- During the Awami League's first year in office, major anti-Hindu incidents occurred at the rate of almost one per week. They included murder, rape, child abduction, forced conversion to Islam, physical attacks, land grabs, religious desecration; and at least one three-day pogrom that occurred immediately behind a Dhaka police station.
- Things were no better the second year. The number and intensity of anti-Hindu atrocities did not drop, and one 26-day period saw seven major anti-Hindu actions or almost one every three days. The Hindu

⁴ Barkat et. al., *An Inquiry into Causes and Consequences of Deprivation of Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh through the Vested Property Act*.

⁵ "Govt to ensure minority rights, CHT peace treaty: PM," *Daily Star [Dhaka]*, April 30, 2009.

American Foundation, Bangladesh Minority Watch, and others document the same level of atrocities in the third year, 2011.⁶

- As we moved into 2012, I confirmed at least 15 similar incidents in the first quarter alone, and as we were moving out, almost one major incident a week during the fourth quarter. In at least two cases, Bangladeshi officials warned human rights activists that they better stop investigating the matter or face serious consequences.
- In between, there was a nine day period in May that saw an abduction, a murder in broad daylight, and two gang rapes, one of a child on her way to a Hindu festival: four horrific incidents taking place within a nine day period and no police actions against the *known* perpetrators. These were reported in local media, investigated and confirmed by Rabindra Ghosh and by my own associates as well.

The Awami League allowed all these anti-Hindu atrocities to occur by not prosecuting any of them.

Week after week, month after month, year after year; we know what is happening; and there is no use shaking our fists if we are not going to stop it.

⁶ Incidents through 2010 are documented in detail in *Op. cit.*, Benkin, *A Quiet Case of Ethnic Cleansing*, pages 311-331. Incidents after that time come primarily from Advocate Rabindra Ghosh and through him Bangladesh Minority Watch and Global Human Rights Defence; they all have been confirmed by his direct testimony and my own associates' investigations. Also see "GHRD Submission: Bangladesh, Universal Periodic Review, 16th Session to the UN Human Rights Council, 2013," *Global Human Rights Defence*, October 2012. <http://ghrd.org/FilesPage/4129/UPR-GHRD-2012-BD.pdf>.

And the Bangladeshis seem confident that no one will. When I confronted their US ambassador about it, he first denied anything was happening. Then after I kept pressing him with facts, do you know what he said? What kind of idiotic answer he gave me? He said that the reason why Hindus leave Bangladesh is because they cannot find matches for their children. So they go to India where there are more Hindus. He also said that if there were any problems, it was all because of “a few radicals.” Does he really expect us to believe that a few radicals can account for five crore missing people? That sort of nonsensical statement could be made only by someone who has no fear that his government will ever be called to justice for their crimes.

And that is what we must change.

I am working with lawmakers and others in the United States to take action that will force the Bangladeshis to stop these atrocities. I will not stop until they do, and I pray that everyone here will raise a cry so loud that they and officials everywhere understand that they will have no choice but to stop the atrocities and allow Hindus to live in peace. If not, I promise you that Hinduism in Bangladesh will soon be nothing but a memory to the eternal shame of all of us.

Dhanyavaad.

*Dr. Richard L. Benkin is the author of **A Quiet Case of Ethnic Cleansing: the Murder of Bangladesh's Hindus**, which is available at <http://www.InterfaithStrength.com/TEMP>. You can follow him on his blog and web site, <http://www.InterfaithStrength.com>, or via email at drbenkin@comcast.net.*