

Repression and endurance: anathematized Hindu and Sikh women of Afghanistan

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Hindus and Sikhs, longtime minority religious communities in Afghanistan, have played a major role in the social, cultural, and economic development of the country. Their history in Afghanistan has not been faithfully documented nor relayed beyond the country's borders by their resident educated strata or religious leaders, rendering them virtually invisible and voiceless within and outside of their country borders. The situation of Hindu and Sikh women in Afghanistan is significantly more marginalized socially and politically. Gender equality and women's rights were central to the teachings of Guru Nanak, but gradually became irrelevant to the daily lives of his followers in Afghanistan. Hindu and Sikh women have sustained their hope for change and seized any opportunity presented to play a role in the process. Active participants in the social, cultural, and religious life of their respective communities as well as in Afghanistan's government, their contributions to social changes and the political process have gone mostly unnoticed and undocumented as their rights, equality, and standing in the domestic and public arena in Afghanistan continue to erode in the face of continuous discrimination and harassment.

Keywords: androcentrism; religious minorities; sociopolitical repression; women's rights

Introduction

Women's status in any society can be determined by the position women occupy in the domestic and public arenas, and the role they assume in the decision-making process on issues that affect their lives. Women in the developing world are all too frequently discriminated against in all walks of life and a number of factors, including religion, are responsible for perpetuating this egregious state of affairs. The status of women in Afghanistan is no different from that of their counterparts in other developing countries – subordination to men. Afghanistan's culture and tradition extol male authority at the expense of women's social standing and development, and deprive women of their rights and equality, and control over their own lives. Women are treated as second-class citizens and expected to be subservient to their husbands and male family members.

Hindus and Sikhs are a longtime minority religious group who have lived in Afghanistan and played a major role in the social, cultural, and economic development of the country. They have endured years of political repression, marginalization, and mistreatment by dogmatic and conservative Muslims and were treated inhumanely during the ensuing

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civil war in the 1990s as *mujahidin* (Islamic warriors) descended on Kabul and provincial centers, fighting to establish their domination over the country's polity and in the process forcing people of both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds to abide by their stringent rulings. They took men and women of rival groups and communities hostage and raped captive women and girls. Taliban rule led to further persecution of minorities and degradation of women as they implemented their fundamentalist interpretation of the Prophet Muhammad's way of life as the correct prescription for Afghanistan. Their rule collapsed after their defeat at the hands of US–NATO forces, who installed Hamid Karzai as head of the Interim Government in late 2001. Karzai engaged warlords who also committed atrocities against the people.

The US–NATO involvement in Afghanistan resulted in the start of efforts to improve the status of women and to make gender equity and women's empowerment part of the nation-building policy. This also led to the appointment of a few women to junior and senior posts in the government, women competing for seats in the parliament and provincial councils, and working for civil society organizations. Despite these efforts, oppressive actions against women continued.

The status of women in Hindu and Sikh societies remained a neglected topic of study and research in academia and escaped national and international attention, because as a minority among minorities they remained invisible and on the margins of society. The educated strata of the community failed to produce literature on the community's history and the role of women in it. The focus of this article is to remedy this lack of literature on the topic, examining the plight of Hindu and Sikh citizens and the role and contribution of their women in the social and cultural development of Afghanistan. It also explores the social and political factors that contributed to men in Hindu and Sikh communities depriving women of basic rights and freedoms in both the domestic and public arena, instead of acting together in the face of the persecution and discrimination that drove many families out of the country.

Women in Hindu and Sikh theology

Men and women enjoyed equal privileges in the Vedic period around 1500 BCE. Women were equal, free, respected, and were allowed to seek an education. A Vedic saying aptly describes women's position in society: "Where women are worshiped, there the gods dwell." During this period, women

could move freely with their husbands, or lovers, and were employed in a number of professions. Some of the Vedic poets were women. The Rigveda, the oldest known scripture in the world, containing hymns (*suktas*), was composed by as many as 27, some of these hymns are frank expressions of their inner womanly desire for a loving husband, a happy and prosperous life from co-wives and so on. (Anand 2002, 20)

This idyllic situation for women is largely related to the nature of economic relations and activities during this period. People were mainly pastoral and led a nomadic life and as communities grew, the need to sustain the community necessitated women's inclusion and expanded involvement in production processes.

Division of society into classes such as the Brahmins (the priestly/intellectual class) followed by Kshatriyas (the warrior class defending the social order), Vaishyas (the trade/commerce class), and Shudras (the agricultural/labor class) paved the road for a patriarchal system where the oldest male member of the family or clan ruled supreme and subordinated others, including women. It was then that women lost their earlier status, and with the Manusmriti, the Veda of Brahmanical revival based on androcentrism, gender equality gradually

eroded. Rules and regulations were laid down that guided every aspect of women's lives, subordinating them to men to the extent that a woman was obligated to worship her husband as a deity even though

he is destitute of virtue or a womanizer. Women should be kept in dependency by her husband because by nature they are passionate and disloyal. The ideal women are those who do not strive to break these bonds of controls. The salvation and happiness of women revolve around their virtue and chastity as daughters, wives and widows. (Desai and Krishnaraj 1987, 28–29)

While Hinduism subordinated women to men and regarded them as inferior beings, Sikhism, which emerged in the fifteenth century in Panjab, India, was a liberating force for women in Indian society. In Sikhism, a synthesis of Islamic and Hindu belief systems, affirmation of gender equality was central to the teachings of Guru Nanak (born in 1469) who is regarded as the founder of the faith. There is no evidence to show that Nanak claimed that status. He regarded himself as a spiritual teacher and those who adhered to his teachings are called Sikhs, meaning learners. Sikhism treated women with respect, and supported an egalitarian social system that transcended the boundaries of caste and class society. Nanak believed that women have the same soul as men and proclaimed that women and men are on equal footing. Nanak visited Afghanistan in 1521 and during another visit in 1540 he stayed there for a short time, preached the faith, and converted a few Hindus to the new faith (Dass 2003, 5–6).

Sikh religious leaders that succeeded him

had little alternative but to introduce a wide range of organizational changes, many of which flew in the face of the founder's ideals of internalized simplicity. Pilgrimage centers emerged first in Goindwal and then Amritsar, revenue from devotees began to flow in on an ever increasing scale, and as the office of Guru was associated with an ever-increasing degree of wealth and power, so its holders adopted the ambiguous title of Sacha Padshah, which can equally well mean True Emperor as Emperor of Truth. (Ballard 1996, 2)

For this reason, Gurus continued to support women's active participation in all religious, cultural, and social activities outside the home. Women's equality with men articulated by Nanak no longer corresponds to the realities on the ground as social structure in Sikh society has been transformed by a code of conduct that governs every aspect of women's lives. Women no longer have much of a role in decision-making concerning issues that affect their lives.

Hindus and Sikhs of Afghanistan: historical background

Afghanistan is home to various ethnotribal and faith-based communities. Hindus and Sikhs are two of the longtime constituent communities that participated in the social, cultural, and economic development of the country. The Hindu Shahi dynasty that ruled the eastern and southern regions of Afghanistan resisted invasions by Arab Muslim armies for almost 200 years until they were defeated by the Ghaznawi ruler Sabuktigin (977–997) who seized Kabul (Kabulistan) and forced the Hindu Shahis to retreat to the eastern realm of the country. Sabuktigin's successor Mahmood (998–1030) was determined to expand his territory and attacked the Hindu Shahis and forced them to abandon their control of eastern regions in Afghanistan, transferring their headquarters to Lahore, Panjab of India. Mahmood launched several expeditions to India and his last well-known expedition was in the state of Gujarat where he massacred thousands of innocent people and brought enslaved Hindu warriors to Afghanistan. He destroyed the Hindu temple, the *Somnath* (the first of the 12 *jiyotirlinga* shrines of Lord Shiva) and looted its gold and silver contents.

Muslims regard Mahmood as an Islamic hero who expanded Islamic territory, while Hindus regard him and his army as thieves who not only looted their wealth but also slaughtered innocent men and women and brought enslaved Hindus to Afghanistan to serve his administration.

Ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali (1747–1773) launched several expeditions to subdue Hindus and Sikhs, seizing Lahore and then Amritsar, destroying their temples and slaughtering Sikhs. To maintain his influence he appointed Kabul Mal, a well-known Hindu resident of Qandahar as administrator of Lahore; however, by the time of his death he lost control of Panjab to Sikh leaders. Hindu residents of the country submitted to rules and regulations laid down by the rulers of Afghanistan and some submissively converted to Islam while some others embraced a new faith, Sikhism, in the beginning of the fifteenth century. Under the leadership of prominent Sikh leader Ranjit Singh (1780–1839), Sikhism began to establish its influence westward, with Singh seizing Peshawar on the border of Afghanistan in 1834. After his death, disputes over succession weakened their power and gave the British an opportunity to mobilize forces, defeat the Sikhs, and annex Panjab to British rule in 1849.

King Abd al-Rahman (1880–1901) appointed Hindu professionals to serve his government; Sada Nand, a graduate of a military school, was appointed head of the Royal Court's guard of honor and Ram Kapur became head of the accounting department in Herat province. However, later he restricted the rights of Hindus and Sikhs to practice their faith because he wanted to sustain his image as a defender of the Islamic faith. Afghanistan was a gateway for Hindu and Sikh businessmen from India to Central Asia. During the British rule of the Indian subcontinent and its indirect influence on Afghanistan, Hindu and Sikh merchants, mainly from Sind and those in the Frontier Areas, traveled to Central Asia via Afghanistan. They are mainly of two stocks – the Sindi Shikarpuris and Panjabi Khattris – and the former usually returned to their homes. A significant number of Hindus and Sikhs also settled in Afghanistan after the partition of the Indian subcontinent into Pakistan and India in 1947.¹ Rising Islamic orthodoxy and Pakistani nationalism were major factors that caused Hindus and Sikhs living in the border areas to settle in Afghanistan among their coreligionists.

Status of women and the family

Afghanistan's residents are overwhelmingly members of the Muslim faith, and women were said to constitute half of the population of about 30 million in 2010. Some 79% of the population are engaged in agriculture, 6% in industry, and 16% in the service sector. Family structure is primarily based on a patriarchal system that is steeped in male chauvinism. Because of this, the women are treated as *naqis-e-aql* (defective in wisdom) and men use this to give themselves the right to own and lead them – a cultural tradition that continues to shape many men's views of women to the present day.

Women are often mistreated and battered by their husbands if they commit or are even suspected of impropriety. Some scholars view women's oppression as a rural phenomenon. For example, Barfield (2007) argues that it is "the urban educated elite who see villagers as savages in need of reform." Barfield does not realize that the situation of women in urban areas does not differ from those in rural areas and that their status did not change even after the US–NATO efforts to build a democratic society. Women are molested, raped, and murdered by educated and illiterates alike in both urban and rural areas. Even well-educated Afghan expatriates living in the West, and apparently Westernized, murder their daughters and wives over the same cultural motivations they were steeped in while in their home

provinces. As repression against women continues, women who can no longer endure their situation sometimes resort to suicide as their only means to end their misery, while others run away to save their lives (Farooq 2007). Efforts by the ruling elite in the state apparatuses over the years to improve women's status have resulted in some success over years, but are often met with opposition and resistance by conservatives and Islamists as they view modern education for women and girls and their involvement in the public arena as state interference in family affairs.

Hindus and Sikhs are part of the country's mosaic of ethnotribal communities. There is no reliable data on Hindu and Sikh population numbers, but their population is said to have been reduced from an estimated 40,000–45,000 people in 1970 to about 3000 in 2010.

Sikhism does not stipulate that marriages should be arranged, but Sikhs generally prefer that their life partner is selected by their parents. People marry among themselves, not outsiders, in order to protect their faith. When arranging a marriage, parents take into consideration the family background of the prospective bride or groom, but not their individual merits. For example, if a prospective bride's parents enjoy a good reputation, or her sister earned her a place of respect among her in-laws, she will also be perceived as worthy. The tradition of arranged marriage has become difficult to practice due to the dwindling number of eligible brides and a repressive social and cultural environment in Afghanistan that forces many young Hindu and Sikh boys to leave the country. Polygamy, a tradition in both Muslim and Hindu society, is not a common practice; however, there is no social qualm against it and it may occur when a man does not have sons or any offspring from his first marriage.

The dowry system in Hindu and Sikh cultures places the burden of often substantial wedding expenses on the bride's family, in India and elsewhere. However, Afghanistan's tribal culture and tradition require the groom's family to bear all marriage-related expenses, and Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan follow suit so as to assimilate into the prevailing culture. Sikhism allows widowed women to marry again, but does not approve of widows marrying for a second time if they have non-adult children living with them. People look down upon sterile women, but women with more children, particularly sons, command greater regard. Women's sole responsibility is to rear children, but they do not have much say on the number of children a family should have.

Hindu and Sikh women rely on one another when they are left alone at home as male members of the family go to work and children are in school. They are often reluctant to trust their Muslim neighbors because many dogmatic Muslim women regard Hindu and Sikh women as unclean and uncouth and believe that any interaction with them would contaminate their faith.

Hindu and Sikh social structure

Hindus and Sikhs living in Afghanistan are primarily businessmen, traders, and merchants. When King Abd al-Rahman enslaved Shia Muslim Hazaras after bitter fights in 1892 and 1893, some Hindus in Qandahar were in the business of buying enslaved Hazara women and children from government soldiers and nomads and then selling them to clients in Quetta and Sind in present-day Pakistan and other regions of India. When trading slaves became a profitable business, local businessmen were interested in establishing their domination over the trade and kicking out the Hindus. They bribed a local judge who ordered Hindus to pay a fine of 3500 rupees each – a large sum that Hindus could not afford to pay – and this measure effectively put an end to their slave trading. When Abd al-Rahman was informed of this, he too ordered that Hindus be prohibited from buying and selling

Muslim children and imposed a fine of 14,000 rupees on those who violated his rulings (McChesney and Khorrami 2013, 1179–1180).

Renowned for their financial acumen, Hindus and Sikhs established businesses in Kabul and major provincial centers. They were financiers, moneylenders, and operated currency exchange centers. Some established factories, while others engaged in the import–export trade: exporting dried fruits and precious gems, importing fabrics and medicine, and operating textile, pharmaceutical, and grocery establishments. The expansion of modern education in Afghanistan contributed to the emergence of technocratic and professional strata such as medical doctors, accountants, and managers working in public and private enterprises. Given that the majority of other minorities tended toward agricultural work, this expansion of education provided a rare opportunity for a choice of profession for Hindu and Sikh families.

Upper class Hindu and Sikh families in Kabul hired poor men and women in their communities as domestic staff to help the women of the family with cleaning the house, cooking, washing, and running errands. They lived in exclusive neighborhoods in Kabul such as Shahr-e-Naw, Karta-e-Char, Karta-e-Parwan, and Taimani districts, while disadvantaged families lived in the old ghetto areas such as Shour-Bazaar and engaged in lower status jobs such as that of laundresses, brewers, and even as magicians, providing advice and talismans to their local customers. For example, a Hindu citizen known as Majnoon was a fortune teller who received customers in his courtyard, while his wife produced and sold home-brewed liquor to the customers who included both Muslims and members of the Hindu and Sikh communities (Rahmani [1382] 2004, 32–33).

Although some Hindus and Sikhs were better off than their Muslim neighbors, they still resided on the margins of society and were low on the sociopolitical ladder of the country because of their faith. Even poor Muslim men and women who worked as servants to Hindu and Sikh families considered themselves superior to their employers because of their Islamic faith. Over the years, Hindus and Sikhs of all social strata have been discriminated against for their faith to the extent that the word “Hindu” is now used as a slur to humiliate naughty children or to insult individuals. For example, Muslim tribal communities regard eating from the same plate as a virtue, and if a deliberately misbehaving son does not eat a dish from the same plate with his brothers, sisters, and others and intentionally uses a separate plate, he is ridiculed and called Hindu, in reference to the custom of eating from separate plates of affluent Hindus and Sikhs. Miscreant Muslim boys often harass Hindus and Sikhs when encountering them on the streets and alleys, shouting racial and religious slurs. Interaction between Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs is largely limited to the business realm; however, some liberal and progressive Muslims befriend their Hindu and Sikh counterparts, socialize with them, and participate in their cultural and religious events. Marriage between Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs seldom occurs and usually it is a Muslim man who marries a Hindu or Sikh girl and after marriage, the girl has to renounce her faith and embrace Islam. For instance when Mohammad Ishaq, a close family member of ex-King Mohammad Zahir (1933–1973) fell in love with a Hindu woman, Karshah, she embraced Islam in order that the marriage could be officiated in an Islamic court.²

A Hindu or Sikh can marry a Muslim woman if he converts to Islam; however, this decision is not without consequences to his family and community ties. A Hindu who lived in the Deh Muzaffar in Kapisa province converted to Islam so he could marry a Muslim woman. He socialized with his extended Muslim family and members of the community, but it discomfited his original family and community members. It is not feasible or safe for a Muslim woman to marry a Hindu or Sikh man in Afghanistan. Such a marriage rarely occurs even outside the country. A case in point is the marriage between Muska

Kakar, now known as Muska Kaur, daughter of an influential politician in the government of Karzai, and a Sikh man. Muska and her family fled Afghanistan when the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996 and settled in Victoria, Australia, where she met Jaidey Singh while at university, converted to Sikhism and married him despite her parents' opposition. Muska and Jaidey Singh went to Amritsar, India, where their marriage was solemnized at a Sikh Gurdwara. Muska's parents traveled to Amritsar and requested Sikh religious officials to return their daughter to them, arguing that Jaidey Singh had lured her into marriage, but Sikh leaders advised them not to interfere in the marriage as the couple were adults and married by their own decision without interference by others.³

A new era in the lives of Hindu and Sikh women

The conservative social milieu in Afghanistan necessitates that Muslim women remain secluded from public view and wear the *burqa* (a garment that covers their bodies from head to toe) when they leave home. Hindu and Sikh women would often wear their traditional clothing and a headscarf when leaving home out of a sense of decorum and deference to Muslim sensibilities. Despite their respectful attitudes toward their neighbors, Hindus and Sikhs experienced discrimination and were forced to adapt to a repressive social and cultural environment. They restrained from fighting even when Muslim hooligans provoked them by calling them names. Rising Islamic orthodoxy caused the opportunistic ruler King Habibullah (1901–1919) to further marginalize the community, instructing Hindus and Sikhs to wear special badges to distinguish them from the Muslims. Anti-Hindu sentiment led to the murder of a Hindu goldsmith in Logar, a town a few miles east of Kabul. The trial (in accordance with Islamic Sharia laws) of the Muslim man believed to be the perpetrator angered Hindus and they demanded that he be handed over to them. The murder of their coreligionist caused them to organize a *hartal* (protest demonstration) closing stores and business centers – a protest that lasted for weeks and spread to the city of Gardiz in Pakhtiya province. Hindus and Sikhs tolerated social and political repression and conducted business as usual. Their situations improved significantly after Habibullah's death and the succession of his son Amanullah to the throne.

The state promulgated a constitution in 1923 that recognized the equality of all people and assured minorities of their rights and of state support and protection. Hindus and Sikhs welcomed this development and expressed their support to the government and submitted a petition to Amanullah requesting that he put an end to harassment and intolerance by their Muslim neighbors. They cited as examples how when a Hindu woman converts to Islam or marries a Muslim man he and his family exert pressure on the new wife to convince her parents to convert to Islam. Muslims pressuring Hindu and Sikh men to convert to Islam when their wives convert to Islam and Muslims harassing Hindu and Sikh women when they visit the community's shrine or places that are sacred to their faith were other examples. Amanullah pledged to protect the rights and liberties of Hindu and Sikh citizens, and called upon Muslims not to force Hindus and Sikhs to convert to Islam with the threat that those who did so would be subject to fines and imprisonment. He told Hindus and Sikhs that they were free to wear any type of dress they wished and instructed the court to punish belligerents both Muslim or non-Muslim if they cursed each other's respective faith or engaged in a brawl over religious differences (“Huqoq-e Shahrwandi Hinduwan dar Dawran-e Amani” 2012).

Amanullah supported the rights of Hindus and Sikhs to practice their faith without intimidation and harassment and he even participated in Hindu and Sikh religious ceremonies. He also ordered the restoration of some of their dilapidated houses of worship, such as the

Sultanpur house of worship near Jalalabad in Nangarhar province that his father forcibly converted into a private residence. State officials and progressive elites also demonstrated their goodwill toward the community and participated in the annual Vaisakhi celebration of the Sikh community of Jalalabad. As the Vaisakhi festival assumed prominence, a number of anti-British clerics on the other side of the frontier used the occasion to deliver fiery speeches against the British, calling for a united front of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs against British colonialism, which had the tacit support of Kabul. Lalpur, a small town on the border area with a significant Sikh population, became a major clandestine hub for anti-British activities.

The state supported modern education and encouraged women to further their own. Educational policies did not discriminate against children of Hindu and Sikh families and they were admitted to public schools and colleges, including the army school. Hindu and Sikh students sat side by side with their Muslim counterparts and no one stigmatized them because of their faith; they were excused from class when it was time for Islam-specific study sessions, but not in a punitive sense. When Amanullah visited a school in Qandahar, he noticed that some students were playing on the school playground and asked the school principal why they were not in class and the principal's response was that they were Hindus and Sikhs and that during Islamic studies sessions they leave the classroom. Amanullah told the principal that he had instructed that when Muslim students study specifically Islamic subjects, Hindu and Sikh students should concurrently study their own religious subjects.⁴ The state encouraged women to take part in activities outside the home and facilitated their efforts to transform their situation. Elements of Amanullah's plan for state modernization included efforts to encourage women to discard the traditional veil, and to this end Amanullah's wife, Soraya, appeared in public without a veil. Although this policy affected Muslim women, it did not have much impact on Hindu and Sikh women as they are not compelled to completely cover their face when they leave home. Women who appeared without a veil drew public attention; liberals applauded their courage and admired their beauty, while conservatives condemned them for their immodesty and flagrant violation of Islamic tradition. A Hindu woman who was much admired for her charm, beauty, and appearance was Radha, known as Bibi Rado Jan, daughter of Niranjana Das. Das was born around 1853 in Kabul and held a prominent post in Habibullah's government and was awarded the title of colonel in 1906. Amanullah appointed Das chief of the finance department of the government and sent him as a member of the peace delegation to sign the Rawalpindi Peace Treaty with the British in 1919 that recognized Afghanistan's independence.

Das did not have a son and took Rado to formal and informal occasions where she often wore male clothing. Although many Muslim boys were attracted to her, they did not dare to approach her or to send their parents to see Rado's father to ask to marry her to their sons. Rado charmed everyone to the extent that young Muslims often sang songs praising her beauty and longing to have her. Muslim boys who remained her staunch fans knew that Hindus cremate dead bodies and they called upon the Hindus not to cremate Rado when she died. They wanted Rado to be buried in a Muslim tradition so that her fans would be able to visit her grave and pay their respects. A Persian song reads:

*Oh, Dukhtar-e Diwan, Bibi Rado Jan
Lala ra qasam dadam ke Rado ra nasuzan*

Oh, Rado Jan, the daughter of Diwan,
I swore in the Lala (her father) to not cremate
Rado.

Hindu and Sikh boys were also Rado's fans, but they too did not dare approach her because of Rado's family status – *Sardar-Khail* (Nobility). Class differences inhibited upper class

families from endorsing marriage of their daughters to men of a lower social status. Although they were attracted to Rado and wanted to be with her, they maintained a distance from her. Rado's fans resigned themselves to reminiscing about her when singing songs. Another Persian song reads as follows:

<i>Gul sar-e chawki neshasta mikunad darbar,</i>	The beautiful sat on a chair and having an audience
<i>Mara diwana kada dukhtar-e Sardar.</i>	Made me crazy, the daughter of Sardar.

Rado's social status effectively inhibited her from socializing with boys of the lower social class of Hindu and Sikh society and led some to believe that she never married, while others suggested that she married an Indian when she went to India.⁵

Participation of Hindu and Sikh women in public institutions

Hindu and Sikh society that had blossomed socially, culturally, and politically lost their status after the downfall of Amanullah in 1929. Hindu and Sikh residents of Lalpur, a town near the border area with present-day Pakistan, paid a heavy price during the civil war as people fighting Amanullah targeted them for their pro-Amanullah sentiments and loyalty. Resentful mobs looted their properties, and clerics who earlier supported Hindu–Sikh and Muslim unity against the British rule returned to Lalpur, killed some Hindus and Sikhs, and vandalized their houses of worship. After General Mohammad Nadir, formerly Afghanistan's ambassador to France, returned home via British India, he defeated and executed Habibullah Kalakani and put an end to his nine months of rule. During his tenure (1929–1933) Nadir ruled the country with an iron fist and suppressed civil liberties on the pretext of restoring stability. Hindu and Sikh citizens were put under state surveillance because of their previous support of Amanullah. Prime Minister Mohammad Hashim (Nadir's brother) specifically persecuted Hindus and Sikhs to the extent that his government seized Muti Singh's Inn, Saray-e-Muti, located in the Saraji area. Muti Singh had converted the inn into a school where Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh children attended classes; Hashim turned it into a prison where he incarcerated liberal and progressive individuals who protested or fought for societal justice.⁶

Harassment of Hindus and Sikhs continued unabated and dogmatic leaders worked to find excuses to further restrict their cultural practices. For example, in Kabul Hindus and Sikhs used to cremate their dead in an area adjacent to the Marinjan Hill; since 1933 they were prohibited from cremating dead bodies there because upon Mohammad Nadir's assassination his body was intentionally buried on the Marinjan Hilltop and the government built his mausoleum there. The community had no option but to quietly secure another site for cremation in the Shamsan Bony area of Kabul. Later they raised funds and purchased 2200 square meters of land in the Qalachah area for this purpose. Conservative elites in the state marginalized Hindus and Sikhs by spreading rumors that they were not loyal to the new government. Although successive governments did not devise policies to empower non-Muslim minority religious groups, Hindus and Sikhs did not give up nonviolent struggles for attaining their rights and equality.

The status of women improved somewhat in the late 1950s as the state began to involve women in the public arena. As a first step in that direction, it employed a few female singers for its radio station in 1957, airline cabin attendants, and telecommunication staff. Two years later during the country's independence anniversary, "the ladies of the royal family and wives of officials led a movement to end the use of the veil" (*The Kabul Times Annual*, 1967, 13). The situation of women further improved during the constitutional monarchy, 1964–1973. Although the 1964 constitution did not make any reference to women,

the word “Afghan” in article one that states “The Afghan nation is composed of all those individuals who possess the citizenship of the state of Afghanistan in accordance with the provisions of the law” was intended to apply equally to men and women. Even though a few women of the ruling elite were appointed to cabinet posts, their positions were primarily figurehead ones and without real power. The constitution protected the rights of minority religious groups and allowed for the formation of cultural, civic, and political organizations. Hindus and Sikhs welcomed this development and enthusiastically moved to participate in the country’s cultural, social, and political development. They submitted a petition to Prime Minister Mohammad Yousuf regarding the return of the community’s seized property, Saray-e-Muti, and Yousuf ordered the government to transfer inmates from Saray-e-Muti to another location and return the property to the Hindu and Sikh community.

With the formation of political parties in the mid-1960s, a number of Hindus and Sikhs became active participants in the struggle for societal justice. A few joined the pro-Soviet Hizb-e-Demokratik Khalq-e Afghanistan (the Peoples’ Democratic Party of Afghanistan, PDPA) and others became members of Sazman-e-Demokratik-e-Nawin-e-Afghanistan (the New Democratic Organization of Afghanistan), a revolutionary organization known as Shula-e-Jawid (Eternal Flame) that advocated Marxism–Leninism and Mao Tse-Tung thought. However, Hindu and Sikh women did not get involved in any political activity nor become members and sympathizers of the left or liberal democratic groups. Babrak Karmal, head of the Parcham (Banner) faction of the PDPA, managed to win the support of Mihir Chand Warma, a male member of the Sikh community, but the women’s department of the party headed by Anahita Ratebzdad failed to enlist the support of women in the Hindu and Sikh communities.

Hindu and Sikh women did not get involved in political activities because of their limited interaction overall with Muslim women associated with political groups. Women members of political parties also did not view them as viable recruits due to the marginality of their community. A small number of educated Hindu and Sikh women were, however, involved in public activities such as teaching in state institutions as well as schools operated by their own community, especially after the community had established its own cultural center in Kabul in 1961. The center had approximately 200 members and its charter emphasized expansion and development of the community’s languages, culture, tradition, way of life, and religious rites and ceremonies. Several women became involved with the daily affairs of the center, including the well-known teacher Murti Dewi who taught classes in the Khalsa School in Taimani as well as daughters of Pran Nath Chandihok, Rajni Pran, and Sabya Hakam Chand Kapoor. The center tried to organize a cultural show at one of the theaters in Kabul, Kabul Nandari, to promote the community’s culture and way of life, but the Ministry of Information and Culture refused to issue them a permit due to the show’s religious nature (Dass 2003, 105). Differences of opinion among Hindus and Sikhs led to a division within the community as each worked to have its own center. As the center’s activities expanded and the community was in need of educated staff, they submitted an application to the Ministry of Education requesting that it appoint and pay Hindu and Sikh teachers to teach Persian and Hindi languages as well as religious scriptures. These female teachers were Birbal Qandahari, Roy Kumar (currently residing in Germany), Poon Kumar Mehra (currently residing in the USA), and Janat Kumar, known as Raj Dewi.

Ranji Paran (born in 1951 in the Payan Chawk area in Kabul) was a prominent woman of the community and while attending religious classes at the Asmai School in Kabul, she continued her studies in the government school and graduated from the girls’ high school, Zarghuna, in 1970. When she and her family were in India she married a fellow Hindu,

Ashok Kumar Behsin. Soon after her marriage she returned home and worked as an anchor for Radio Afghanistan for 12 years. Whenever she returned home from a visit to India, she would bring cassette tapes of Indian music and songs in order to enrich the collection of Radio Afghanistan. In so doing she played a prominent role in the development of the music and song archives of Radio Afghanistan. When civil strife forced many people to leave the country, she and her family emigrated to the USA. Rashmu Kapoor Mehra was another well-known member of the community. She was born in 1953 in Kabul, completed her high school studies in Zarghuna in 1969, and attended the College of Education at Kabul University, obtaining her Bachelor's degree in 1974. After graduation from the university, she became an active member of the community. Like many families who suffered under the pro-Soviet repressive government and sought refuge elsewhere, she and her family also left the country and settled in the USA in 1980 (Dass 2003, 139–147).

Politics of repression and marginalization

Conservative and dogmatic Muslims look down upon Hindus and Sikhs and restrain Muslims from interaction with non-Muslims. In a similar vein, opportunistic political leaders marginalize the community in order to project their own image as religious iconoclasts promoting an Islamic way of life.

When the pro-Soviet PDPA seized power in a coup in April 1978 and declared Afghanistan a democratic republic, they worked to transform the country into a Soviet-style socialist society by issuing top-down decrees without soliciting the support or participation of citizens. One of the decrees specifically concerned women. Decree No. 7 issued on 17 October 1978 defined the marriage age (16 years for girls and 18 years for boys) and limited the amount of wedding-related expenses and *mahr* (the amount of money paid to the bride as assurance to safeguard her position in case her husband divorced her so she should not become dependent on her own family) and supported the right of women to seek a divorce. The regime also established literacy centers and forced men to send their women and daughters there to study. Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims alike opposed the policy regarding it as state interference in family affairs, but women of the community could not express their opinion on the issue and basically agreed with their men's views. The situation was further exacerbated due to incidents of some officials taking advantage of women and girls who were unaccompanied by men in these literacy centers, molesting them with impunity, as government officials summarily dismissed molestation accusations (*Democratic Republic of Afghanistan's Annual 1979*, 258). At the time, people were not in a position to launch an anti-regime rebellion with any chance of success, but oppressive decrees like these served to fuel simmering resentment and hostilities under the surface, throughout the country.

Party members holding key government positions in the capital Kabul and other provinces used force to implement the regime's policies of social, cultural, and economic development. Party members from the Hindu and Sikh community included figures such as Nawin Warma and Parkash, son of Hakam Chand, who worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The ruling party forced state employees and others to join the party and its affiliate organizations and many did so in order to avoid risking imprisonment. A number of Hindus and Sikhs either joined the party of their own volition, or like others, they too did so to avoid victimization by the PDPA. Hindus and Sikhs suffered from a repressive state policy of economic development as it worked to establish and consolidate state monopoly over the private sectors – a policy that effectively hampered the business activities of

Hindu and Sikh entrepreneurs. People throughout the country opposed the rigid policies of the client regime and fought for democracy and freedom. To consolidate its power base, the regime arrested anyone suspected of anti-state activities and summarily executed them. Among the thousands executed were two Sikh citizens, Bilal Singh and Jigandar Singh, students at institutions of higher education who were charged with affiliation to Shula-e-Jawid. Hindu and Sikh members of the ruling party that supported the regime did not and could not use their political connection to save the lives of the two Sikh citizens. Hindu and Sikh members of the PDPA also suffered at the hands of their own comrades-in-arms and were jailed (during the interparty struggle between the Khalq [masses] and Parcham factions of the PDPA; the former prevailed and demoted members of the latter and imprisoned some of their leaders). Mihir Chand Warma was arrested and remained in jail until the Soviet Union invaded the country in late December 1979 and installed Karmal in power.

After the Soviet client state collapsed in 1992 and Islamic warriors seized power, they fought each other for domination of the country's politics. They were determined to establish an Islamic state and in the process they tried to erase any symbol associated with a non-Islamic way of life. Islamic fundamentalist parties of Sunni and Shia backgrounds fought each other as the former tried to marginalize the role of the latter in the country's polity – the sectarian and ethnotribal conflict that ensued wreaked havoc on the lives of the people. Islamic warriors brutalized Hindus and Sikhs and forced them either to embrace Islam or leave Afghanistan. Mana, a Hindu woman of the Shour-Bazaar ghetto, publicly stated that when Islamic warriors of Shura-e-Nazar (Supervisory Council) of Ahmad Shah Masoud seized the area, commander Darab and his men destroyed the temple and tossed sacred items into the street and sarcastically told witnesses that the items belong in India and not in Afghanistan. In response, Uzbek militias under the command of Rasoul Pahlawan descended upon the area. They entered her house, looted its belongings, and shot dead her father and several family members while she hid in a closet. When the militias left she ran to the house of a Muslim family in the neighborhood where she stayed until she could flee with the remaining members of her family to Pakistan.⁷ Hindus and Sikhs were harassed to the extent that it was difficult for them to even venture outside their homes, go to markets, or visit friends and relatives. An Islamic warrior stopped Faqirchand Chandihok when he was on his way to visit bereaved family, beat him, and demanded he give him cash. He told Chandihok that if he continued to argue with him, he would burn him, India, and his Somnath (legendary temple that has been rebuilt).⁸ Persecution of Hindus and Sikhs continued unabated and in May 1992, militias loyal to Hizb-e-Wahdat-e-Islami-e-Afghanistan (Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan) under the leadership of Mohammad Karim Khalili murdered Mohan Lal, a cloth merchant, his wife, and his son, and seized his house in the Taimani area in Kabul. In Karta-e-Parwan armed militias entered Hindu and Sikh residences and after molesting their women and girls, they forcibly circumcised male members of the family (RAWA 2007, 227). This incident drove many Hindu and Sikh residents in Kabul to go to the Indian Embassy the next day to apply for visas to leave the country for India because they feared for their personal safety.

Islamic militias despised Hindus and Sikhs to the extent that Abdurrab Rasoul Sayyaf, head of Ittihad-e-Islami-e-Mujahidin-e-Afghanistan (Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujahidin) and a member of the National Assembly, expressed his views regarding Hindus and Sikhs stating that:

The Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan are considered part of the *dhimmi* in line with Sharia law. The government has an obligation to protect them but they are required to pay a poll tax. They can hold civilian occupations, such as doctors, but they cannot be in charge of a governmental

body or office. Upon meeting a Muslim, a Hindu is required to greet the Muslim first. If a Muslim is standing and there is a chair, the Hindu is not allowed to sit down on the chair. (Mohammadi 2009)

Islamic fundamentalists not only suppressed Hindus and Sikhs, but also called upon people to avoid buying items from stores operated by the “infidels;” they were also determined to compel Hindus and Sikhs to convert to Islam. The Taliban further suppressed them and used every means at their disposal to forcibly convert them to Islam. Taliban militias tried to force a young Sikh man to convert to Islam as they saw him speaking to a Muslim woman and told him if he would convert to Islam, they would help him marry that Muslim woman (Sharma 2013). The Taliban Ministry for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice ordered minority religious groups to wear yellow tags to separate them from the Muslims and ordered women to cover their face like the rest of the women in Afghanistan and declared that they must wear veils instead of headscarves. The Taliban segregated Hindus and Sikhs by ordering them to mark their houses so that they could be identified as Hindu residences. They justified their brutal and repressive policies on the pretext of identifying and protecting non-Muslims against routine checks by the religious police enforcing Islamic Sharia law. The Taliban ignored condemnation by the international community of their policies of suppression and segregation of Hindus and Sikhs and continued their efforts to erase any cultural symbols associated with non-Muslim civilization. This led to their horrifically brazen action in February 2001 of destroying two giant Buddha statues (dating back to the fifth century) that had been carved into the face of a mountain slope in Bamiyan.

Hindu and Sikh women in politics: the post-Taliban period

Politics was long regarded as men’s exclusive domain and women’s role was confined to performing domestic chores and rearing children. Hindu and Sikh women did not engage much in politics, although a number were employed in state-owned institutions as early as the 1960s. When the US–NATO military operations toppled the Taliban rogue state and installed Hamid Karzai with his close ties to the CIA (Rosenberg 2013) as head of the Interim Government, Hindus and Sikhs welcomed this development and some in exile returned home to participate in the rebuilding of the country and to reclaim their properties. For example, Balram Dhameja (who is the caretaker of the Asmai Temple in Kabul) left India and returned to Kabul after 14 years. However, he and other returnees largely failed in their efforts to reclaim their properties and continued to encounter troubles as all government agencies were riddled with corruption and officials and judges were unsympathetic to their cause.⁹

Although Hindus and Sikhs experienced continued discrimination and harassment, they retained hope for change and seized any opportunity presented to play a role in the rebuilding process. In June 2002 the government convened an emergency Loya Jirgah (a grand assembly of tribal leaders and intellectuals) to elect a head of the Transitional Government until the presidential elections scheduled for 2004. Karzai was under pressure by international donor nations to involve women in the country’s polity. Anarkali Kaur Honaryar, a student at the Kabul Dental School, was selected to represent the Hindu and Sikh community and she cast her vote in favor of Karzai as head of state; however, her struggle to defend the rights of Hindus and Sikhs did not yield any success as Islamists and conservatives inside and outside the state marginalized her and other women activists. In late 2003 the government drafted a new constitution and convened a Loya Jirgah to endorse it. The constitution declared Afghanistan an Islamic republic and Islam as the official religion of

the republic. Although the constitution provides followers of other religions the freedom to exercise their faith, it prohibits non-Muslim citizens from running as candidates in presidential elections. Article 62 states that presidential candidates “should be citizens of Afghanistan, Muslim and born of Afghan parents, and should not have citizenship of another country” (*The Constitution of Afghanistan 2004*, 12). Honaryar again was selected as the representative of her community to the Constitutional Jirgah held in Kabul from 13 December 2003 to 4 January 2004. During the Jirgah session, Malalai Joya, a radical representative from Farah province, argued that those who committed human rights abuses must be brought to justice; her words angered warlords and their men and they shouted obscenities at her. When Honaryar defended Joya, these same people mobbed her and Joya, resulting in a brawl between supporters of the two women and their opponents. Hindus and Sikhs registered to vote in the presidential elections held on 9 October 2004 and they enthusiastically cast their vote for Karzai believing that he was the right man to defend the community’s interests.

Honaryar wished to become a pilot after completing her high school studies, but her father did not approve of her decision, arguing that such a profession for a woman does not fit into the current regressive cultural environment. She attended dental school instead and soon after graduation she became deeply involved in the country’s politics and committed herself to promoting human rights and women’s rights. During the parliamentary election in 2005, Honaryar was elected from Kabul and Ganga Ram from Qandahar was appointed by Karzai to the Senate. Despite the state’s promise to support the rights of minority religious groups, the situation of Hindus and Sikhs continued to deteriorate as Islamic fundamentalists relentlessly harassed them, causing many to leave the country. The numbers of Hindu and Sikh citizens dwindle daily as families who can afford it try to leave for Western Europe, North America, and elsewhere, while disadvantaged families who cannot even afford a place of their own live in temples and Gurdwaras and subsist on food and aid donated by members of the Hindu and Sikh community and charity organizations.

As political leaders failed to take effective measures to ensure the security of the dwindling Hindu and Sikh community, members decided to try again to make their voice heard and nominate a candidate to contest the parliamentary elections in 2010 and use the parliamentary tribune to raise social awareness about the community and defend its interest. There were two candidates: Ganga Ram from Qandahar and Honaryar from Kabul; both candidates failed to receive the required votes to win the race. International pressure on the government to protect non-Muslim minority communities caused Karzai to appoint Honaryar to the Senate. Honaryar is an activist for human rights and as a member of Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission, she used her position to defend the interest of her community. Despite numerous hurdles that women encounter in a male-dominated society, Honaryar fights to promote gender equality and end violence against women and minorities. She was awarded the UNESCO-Madanjeet Singh Prize for Promotion of Tolerance and Non-violence in December 2011.

Islamic fundamentalists within and outside the state apparatuses continue to put pressure on Hindus and Sikhs to convert to Islam or else leave the country. If Hindus and Sikhs report any criminal act or harassment to their local police stations, corrupt authorities tend to dismiss their report. Hindu and Sikh children, especially girls, cannot attend schools due to harassment from miscreant Muslim boys. Ravinder Singh, a Sikh community leader in Kabul, described the ordeal of their children in government schools in these words: “The children of our Muslim brothers don’t know who we are. They hate our children. For instance, some of them cut off our children’s hair, while others make fun of them.

They regard them as strangers, not as Afghans.” An 11-year-old Sikh pupil Jagjeet Singh who experienced harassment in school said, “many of our children stop going to school after going for a few days, because the other students harass them, cut their hair and even beat them. They don’t respect us” (Ekhtiyar 2011). Harassment of Hindu and Sikh children in government schools compelled families supporting education for girls not to send their girls to school, and Hindu and Sikh women also do not see the value of education and marry off their girls at a young age, fearing for their security.

The National Assembly dominated by conservatives did not take measures to ensure the security and safety of Hindu and Sikh citizens but worked to further marginalize them. In 2013, representatives used their legislative power and rejected a presidential decree reserving a single seat for Hindu and Sikh society at the Assembly. This development outraged Hindus and Sikhs to the extent that when they arranged a meeting with Karzai, they told him if the government does not listen to their voice they are ready to abandon their citizenship and leave Afghanistan. Karzai promised that a seat will be reserved for members of the community in the next parliamentary election in 2015. Parliamentarians such as Shukria Barakzai, Fawzia Koofi, and Farkhunda Zahra Naderi who are associated with the power structure and warlords and yet claim to be the champions of women’s rights and frequently participate in round-table talk shows at private television networks debating sociopolitical issues did not bother to visit Hindu and Sikh families; nor did they organize public rallies in support of the community, speak about the rights of Hindu and Sikh citizens, and make the topic part of the national political debate to raise social awareness that Hindus and Sikhs are citizens of the country and have equal rights with other citizens.

Hindus and Sikhs continue their struggle for their basic rights and a voice in the country’s affairs. Dogmatic Muslims and fanatic religious leaders view them as infidels and believe that by coercing them to convert to Islam they would fulfill their Islamic duties. In 2013, Sushmita Banerjee, an Indian Bengali author living with her Pashtun husband in Paktika province, was killed by Islamic militants. Her husband Janbaz Khan and their children were not harmed and it is suggested that she was killed because she was active in promoting women’s rights (Gosh 2013). Hindus and Sikhs encounter numerous hurdles and growing discrimination that includes strong opposition by local Muslims to the custom of burning their dead. Muslims regard the tradition to be against their faith and try to stop it, periodically shouting insults or throwing stones at Sikh and Hindu funeral processions.

To ameliorate the grave social situation, Honaryar made the government allocate land in the eastern outskirts of Kabul for the purpose of building a settlement with schools, a crematorium, and other facilities. Members of the community do not view building such a settlement as a solution to their problem. They believe if people are not safe in the heart of Kabul city, they would not be any more secure living in the outskirts of the city. Protest demonstrations by members of the community to make their grievances heard and calls on the state to protect them and maintain their security did not yield any tangible results, causing more Hindus and Sikhs to leave the country. In late 2014, approximately 30 Hindus and Sikhs entered the United Kingdom illegally, requesting that the authorities grant them asylum; while many others left Afghanistan for India, where the Indian government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi granted citizenship to those who had settled in India prior to 31 December 2009.

Conclusion

Gender equality and women rights were central to the teachings of Guru Nanak, but this largely became irrelevant in the daily lives of his followers in Afghanistan. Nanak’s clarion call on women’s rights and equality are no longer the guiding principles in

governing relations between men and women. Hindus and Sikhs, in addition to suffering under their own patriarchal social system, live in a cultural and religious milieu that is influenced by the entrenched Abrahamic tradition – a tradition in which maleness is the natural order of things and God being male requires women to submit to men. This factor combined with patriarchal values of their own society has contributed to shaping men’s behavior and perception of women and delineated women’s responsibilities and position in the community – inferior and subordinate to men.

Hindu and Sikh women have been active participants in the social, cultural, and religious life of their own respective community as well as in Afghanistan, but their contribution has remained largely unnoticed. They endure a repressive social and cultural environment where Islamic fundamentalists and warlords rule supreme and lend deaf ears to women’s voice for equality, justice, and civil liberty.

Struggles for gender equality cannot yield results if they are not linked to the broader sociopolitical and cultural issues that negatively impact on women’s rights and equality. Afghanistan is a pluralistic society, but the ruling elite inside and outside the bureaucracy view pluralism and diversity as a threat to stability and their own vested interests and are reluctant to support policies that improve the situation. Lack of knowledge of each other’s faith, tradition, and history has also contributed to the perpetuation of the concept of “us versus them,” dividing citizenry into groups that derail their common struggle for common good – building a modern civil society where all communities enjoy equal rights. To do so requires that the topic of pluralism and diversity be included in textbooks in schools and colleges so that the younger generation will be brought up to view pluralism of faith and diversity of cultures and traditions as a source of strength and not as a weakness to building their future.

The government will not help; the men will not help enough. To transform their status quo, the educated women of Hindu and Sikh communities will need to redirect what resources they have and establish links with democratic and revolutionary organizations active in Afghanistan’s politics and engage in a united effort to further their struggle for societal justice. India’s nongovernmental organizations could consider establishing a dialogue with people of the Hindu and Sikh diaspora and encourage them to step in and provide needed support to members of their community still in Afghanistan who remain on the margins of society and cope with repression, unemployment, and poverty as they try to sustain their livelihood. Women of the Hindu and Sikh diaspora in Western Europe and North America are in a unique position to combine their experience in Afghanistan with knowledge gained from residing in the West and their political connections with international civil rights organizations to exert pressure on the government in Afghanistan to defend and protect the rights of minority communities. They could also appeal to the international community to provide financial assistance for rebuilding Afghanistan contingent upon the government ensuring that it works to create an enabling environment for minority religious groups, and particularly women of non-Muslim groups, to freely practice their faith and have equal rights with other citizens of Afghanistan.

Notes

1. For a detailed history of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan, see Emadi (2014).
2. From the online publication: Abdul Shukoor Hakam. “Kota Sukhani Piramon-e-Hinduha-e-Afghanistan ba Khusus Hinduha-e-Kabul [A Short Commentary on Afghanistan Hindus Particularly the Hindus of Kabul].” *Kabulnath*. http://kabulnath.de/Salae_Doum/Shoumare_36/Ustad_Hakam_HundjeKabul.html. Accessed April 27, 2012.

3. From the online publication: "Afghan Girl Weds Punjabi Guy." www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20011119/edit.htm; <http://www.topix.com/forum/religion/sikh/TQFTKIF44DFPT5MUO>. Accessed March 22, 2015.
4. From the online publication: Ishaar Dass. "O Dukhtar-e Diwan, Bibi Rado Jan." *Kabulnath*. http://kabulnath.de/Salae_Doum/Shoumar-e-45/Ischer%20Dass_BebiRadoJan.html. Accessed April, 27, 2010.
5. From the online publication: Ishaar Dass. "O Dukhtar-e Diwan, Bibi Rado Jan." *Kabulnath*. http://kabulnath.de/Salae_Doum/Shoumar-e-45/Ischer%20Dass_BebiRadoJan.html. Accessed April, 27, 2010.
6. From the online publication: Abdul Shukoor Hakam. "Kota Sukhani Piramon-e-Hinduha-e-Afghanistan ba Khusus Hinduha-e-Kabul." *Kabulnath*. http://kabulnath.de/Salae_Doum/Shoumar-e-36/Ustad_Hakam_HundjeKabul.html. Accessed April 27, 2012.
7. From the online publication: "Ba Zendagi Pour Mushaqqat wa Dardawar-e Hamwatanan-e Hindu wa Sikh Bayad Khoon Girist." [One Must Shed Bloody Tears on the Plight and Suffering of Our Hindu and Sikh Compatriots.] *Hizb-e-Hambastagi-e-Afghanistan* (Solidary Party of Afghanistan). <http://www.hambastagi.org/new/farsi-received-articles/482-one-should-cry-for-the-sorrowful-and-miserable-life-our-hindu-and-sikh-compatriots.html>. Accessed March 26, 2015.
8. From the online publication: Faqirchand Chandihok. *Kabulnath*. <http://www.kabulnath.de/Schankar%20Dara/Minare%20Chakari/Atlaja/028.html>. Accessed March 25, 2015.
9. Discussions with Balram Dhameja during a visit to the Asmai Temple in Kabul, Kabul, 3 June 2014.

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