

**Pakistan - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 6th May 2009**

**Information on Caste system in Pakistan- how it operates, if members of a lower caste would be discriminated against, if members of lower caste and upper caste would marry and any barriers they would face.**

Information on marriage between the upper and lower caste in Pakistan could not be found among sources consulted by the Refugee Documentation Centre. The following information may be of interest.

A report by the *US Department of State* under the heading '2008 Human Rights Report: Pakistan' subheading 'Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor' states:

"A Freedom House report from January noted that bonded laborers sometimes sell their organs, particularly their kidneys, to escape servitude. According to the UN's Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), the Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation conducted a survey in Punjab released in July 2007 noting that 93 percent of kidney vendors needed the money to repay debts and 69 percent of vendors were bonded laborers. There were continued reports of kidney sales after the introduction of the Human Organs and Tissues Transplant Ordinance, which banned the practice in September 2007.

A large proportion of bonded laborers were low caste Hindus, or Muslim and Christian descendants of low caste Hindus." (US Department of State (25<sup>th</sup> February 2009) *2008 Human Rights Report: Pakistan* subheading 'Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor')

A report by the *UK Border Agency* under the heading 'Country Of Origin Information Report Pakistan' subheading 'Dalits' states: (pg 89)

"The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), a network of national solidarity groups for Dalit rights, based in Denmark, reported on a workshop that took place on 3 June 2007 on "Caste-based discrimination in Pakistan". The report noted "It is estimated that about two million scheduled caste people are among the poorest of the poor and are discriminated against in day to day life. Scheduled caste communities include the Kolhi, Meghwar, Bheel, Balmiki, Oad, Jogi, Bagri and other communities." (UK Border Agency (16<sup>th</sup> April 2009) *Country Of Origin Information Report Pakistan* subheading *Dalits*)

It also states: (pg 89)

"Quoting from a BBC report on the workshop, the same source noted that:

"The survey revealed that the worst form of discrimination — from both upper caste Hindus and Muslims — came in the shape of untouchability, which means they were denied access to public places like restaurants, barber shops, etc. In some places they were served in separate crockery and in other areas they were even denied entry to certain restaurants and shops. They had segregated

housing, while the situation is worse in rural areas as 95 per cent of Dalits living in Rahimyar Khan reported untouchability as compared to 35 per cent living in Multan. Sixty-nine per cent of those surveyed said that their upper caste Hindu and Muslim neighbours either do not invite them to their social gatherings like weddings, or if invited they are served food separately. This attitude was relatively more prevalent in Rahimyar Khan (87 per cent) than in Tharparkar (60 per cent).”(ibid)

It also states: (pgs 89-90)

“The study claims that only one per cent of scheduled caste people were in government service, that also in the lowest tiers like primary school teachers. The illiteracy level in Dalits stood at 73 per cent against the national literacy level of around 50 per cent. The majority of these literates are educated up to the primary or secondary school levels, while only one per cent were graduates.

“Approximately 56 per cent of Dalit families live in single-room katcha houses, while 35 per cent reported the death of a child under 5 years in their families. The data showed that they were ignored by the political groups and government; hence they were unable to reap any benefits from the devolution plan. They also faced economic exploitation and the majority of bonded labourers in Sindh are from the scheduled castes.

“The research revealed that very little information was available on the status of issues being faced by marginalised groups like the scheduled castes. Also, there was no legal protection or affirmative action policy to combat caste-based discrimination in Pakistan, unlike in India.”(ibid)

A report by *Minority Rights Group International* under the heading ‘World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Pakistan : Hindus’ states:

“The Hindus of Pakistan – residing in the interior of Sindh or Baluchistan – belong principally to the so-called untouchable class, the Scheduled Caste Hindus. Many of them are landless bonded labourers, working on the lands of big Sindhi landlords (known as Jagirdars). Those who live in towns and cities also have a menial standing and are generally employed as sweepers or Jamadars”( *Minority Rights Group International (2008) World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Pakistan : Hindus*)

It also states under the heading ‘Current issues’

“A significant proportion of the Hindus within the province of Sindh are the so-called untouchables, the Scheduled Caste Hindus. As a result these Scheduled Caste Hindus make up part of the pool of landless bonded labour of the province of Sindh. Sindh's agricultural wealth, to a large extent, has depended on the intensive and strenuous work of bonded labour in producing hugely profitable cash crops such as sugar cane. While huge profits are made by the wealthy landlords, this landless bonded labour, consisting of substantial number of Scheduled Caste Hindus, continues to suffer from abject poverty. They remain tied to the land where they are forced to work literally as slaves. The landlords

ensure that these bonded labourers and their future generations remain illiterate and unable in any way to challenge the unfair system of exploitation. The National Assembly of Pakistan abolished bonded labour through the Bonded Labour Abolition Act 1992. However, the banned practices continue to thrive in many parts of Sindh; officials remain reluctant to interfere for fear of incurring the wrath of powerful ruling families.”(ibid)

A report by the *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre* under the heading ‘Pakistan: Displacement ongoing in a number of regions’ subheading ‘Displacement of Hindus’ states: (pg 27)

“Caste Hindus continue their domination only in southern part of Pakistan, especially former Mirpurkhas division, where more than one million Dalits dwell as landless peasants and labourers. The Caste Hindus, though small in numbers, dominate the minority politics through support of their convert relatives and government functionaries. The incidents of atrocities and caste-based discriminations on Dalits are increasing day by day in Tharparkar - a district where 35 per cent people belong to 27 different Dalit communities among a million people - because of growing awareness and assertiveness of the Dalits. Several hundred Dalit employees of Dalit communities were transferred to far-flung areas under different obnoxious pretexts. Cases were initiated against the Dalit political activists. Their rural folks were threatened and even disallowed to graze their livestock on government lands called Gauchar.

‘Dalits also suffer in many instances from de facto disenfranchisement. During elections 2002, those unpersuaded by typical electioneering were routinely threatened and beaten by a pro-government political party strongmen in order to compel them to vote for certain candidates. Already under the thumb of local landlords and police officials, Dalit villagers who do not comply had been victimized, beaten, and harassed. In Tharparkar, violence against Dalits is normally treated as a very minor and marginal issue, even by the law-enforcement machinery, whether be it police, the prosecution, or the medico-legal fraternity or often even the judiciary. Non-registration of crimes against Dalits is one of the main problem in Tharparkar. Political influence over the police, and caste, class, religion and gender biases are rampant. It is extremely difficult for helpless Dalits to file complaints, particularly against the powerful individuals and or perpetrators. The theft of livestock of Dalits in Tharparkar is rampant as police never registers any such case. These are very few examples as to how Dalits are dealt with if they display an act to show equality. Hundreds of the incidents of caste discrimination go unreported.”(Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (15<sup>th</sup> May 2008) *Pakistan: Displacement ongoing in a number of regions subheading Displacement of Hindu*)

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.

**References:**

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (15<sup>th</sup> May 2008) *Pakistan: Displacement ongoing in a number of regions subheading Displacement of Hindus*

[http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/\(httpInfoFiles\)/9A95EC2CCE8D8E76C125744A00538E73/\\$file/Pakistan+-+May+2008.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/(httpInfoFiles)/9A95EC2CCE8D8E76C125744A00538E73/$file/Pakistan+-+May+2008.pdf)

(Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> May 2009)

Minority Rights Group International (2008) *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Pakistan : Hindus*

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=49749cd23c>

(Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> May 2009)

UK Border Agency (16<sup>th</sup> April 2009) *Country Of Origin Information Report Pakistan subheading Dalits*

[http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country\\_reports.html#countries](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html#countries)

(Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> May 2009)

US Department of State (25<sup>th</sup> February 2009) 2008 Human Rights Report: Pakistan' subheading 'Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/sca/119139.htm>

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**Sources Consulted:**

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ECOI

EIN

Google

Human Rights Watch

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Refugee Documentation Centre Database

UNHCR UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR Refworld

US Department of State