



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Last Rituals and Problems Faced by the Hindu Community in Punjab: A Case Study of Lahore

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Received:</b> August 30, 2021</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> December 29, 2021</p> <p><b>Online:</b> December 31, 2021</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Crematorium, Graveyard, Hindu community, Last Rituals</p> <p><b>*Corresponding Author:</b>  Sabirnaz1947@g mail.com</p>	<p>Lahore is the provincial capital of Punjab, where a sizeable population of the Hindus has been residing there since the inception of Pakistan. There had been many crematoriums in the city but with the passage of time, one after another, disappeared from the land after partition of the Sub-continent. Those places were replaced by commercial or residential sites. There is also a graveyard in the city which is in the use of Hindu Valmik Sect. However, it was encroached by some Muslims due to very small size of population and indolence of the Hindus. Later on, the encroachments were removed by the District Government Lahore in compliance of order of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Presently, there is a graveyard as well as a crematorium in the city. The community remained deprived of a place to dispose of a dead body according to their faith for a long period which is contravention with the guidelines of the Quaid-e-Azam, founder of the nation</p>

## Introduction

The Hindus have only one graveyard and one crematorium in present day Lahore. The graveyard is located at Budhu Awa, opposite the University of Engineering and Technology (UET) at G.T. Road, Lahore. The land has been transferred in the name of Hindu Valmik Graveyard as per record of the Revenue Department. Its registration is khata No. 47/68, Khasra number 189, Mauza Achint Gadh. The area of the graveyard, as per registered record of the office of the District Collector Revenue Department, Lahore Cantt, was mentioned as 03 Kanal, 04 Marlah & 30 square feet, but the front part of the graveyard (about 02 Marlahs) was taken for the construction of Metro Orange Line Train Station. On the back side of the graveyard, there is a floor mill named Modern Floor Mills. When the Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) ordered the restoration of the land of the graveyard from clutches of the illegal occupants, the Lahore District Government not only demolished the encroachments but also released a fund for the construction of a boundary wall and necessary rooms there. Later, the culprits tried to snatch the land time and again by using some unfair means, like blaming the Hindus for blasphemy etc. Some opportunist Christians also pleaded in the Civil Court with the plea that the land belonged to a Christian graveyard. However, the case was dismissed by the court because the SCP already had declared the same land allocated for the graveyard belonging to the Hindus. A meter for

electricity supply to the graveyard has been connected in the name of Mr. Amar Nath Randhawa.

The Hindus have also been provided with the facility of a crematorium (Shamshanghaat) in Lahore city by the government of Pakistan. It is located at Babu Sabu, Kachha Pind, where a land of 14 kanals has been specified by the government for it. Its foundation stone was laid on June 26, 2006 by Mr. Ijaz ul Haq, the then Federal Minister for Religious and Minorities Affairs. Presently, the crematorium is used by Hindus as well as Sikhs.

### **Historical Perception**

The graveyard was situated before Pakistan came into being. It was under the use of the Hindu Valmiki Sect to perform their last rituals. They have been burying the dead there since the early 1980s. Sadly, due to the slackness of the community as well as administrative executives, some land mafia grabbed the land for the graveyard in 1983. Furthermore, by humiliating the graves of Hindus without any lawful authority there, they built residential and commercial buildings through illegal occupation. Being marginalized, the Hindu community could not confront the culprits.

To vacate illegal occupation of the land of the graveyard, Mr. Tara Chund Randhawa, a local Hindu of Lahore, started to work. He consulted the Court of Collector, Lahore Cantonment. Resultantly, an inquiry was initiated against the encroachers in 1986 (Court of Collector Lahore Cantonment, 1986). As per the report of the Tehsildar Lahore Cantt, the land belongs to the Hindu (Valmiki) graveyard, having Khasra Number 189, Mauza Achint Gadh, an area of 03 Kanal, 04 Marlah & 30 square feet.



Fig. No.01. View of the graveyard when the government demolished illegal occupation

The report also shows that 05 persons were found to have encroached upon the graveyard land, i.e. Haji Ghulam Rasool (constructed Karkhana), Iqbal Hussain (shop and residential unit), Islam-ud-Din (residential unit), Mst. Rani (9 structures with a boundary wall), and Abdur Rashid Zulfi (motor workshop) (Court of Collector Lahore Cantonment, 1986). The Deputy Commissioner Lahore issued notices to all the encroachers under para 5 of Martial Law Order (MLO) No. 821. During the proceedings of the case, Martial Law was lifted and the case was forwarded to the Court of Collector Lahore Cantonment under the civil law. When the above mentioned encroachers were asked to place the record of their ownership of the land, they failed to do so. Consequently, the competent authority ordered the area magistrate and police station Mughalpura to remove the encroachments (Government of the Punjab, 1966). Notwithstanding, the order of the Collector, the encroachments were not removed. The case was in progress when Tara Chund Randhawa left this mundane world. He was buried in the same cemetery.

Mr. Heera Lal Randhawa, along with the community members, took up the matter left incomplete by his late father. He continued the struggle for this cause but could not get the job done. Later, in order to eradicate the encroachers, Heera Lal's son, Mr. Amar Nath Randhawa, started to contribute to the efforts. Eventually, to seek justice, Heera Lal and Amar Nath Randhawa knocked on the door of the SCP. The SCP issued an Order to handover charge of the graveyard to the Hindus (The Supreme Court of Pakistan, 2013). The District Government of Lahore, in compliance with the Order of the Court, removed all the encroachments from the graveyard (The Supreme Court of Pakistan, 2012) and facilitated the community with a development fund. The work was completed under the supervision of Mr. Amar Nath Randhawa.

The learned Additional Advocate General, Punjab appeared before Mr. Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani and Mr. Justice Asif Saeed Khan Khosa and submitted that, in deference to the direction of this Court, the Deputy Commissioner and other law enforcement agencies have removed all the encroachments from the Hindu Graveyard. He has also placed on record a letter dated October 22, 2012 from the Additional District Collector, Lahore, addressed to him, para 2 of which reads as follows: (The Supreme Court of Pakistan, 2012)

“It is submitted that orders of the Apex Court have been complied with, in letter and spirit. All the illegal encroachments have been removed from the Valmik Hindu Sect Graveyard measuring 03 Kanals, 04 Marlas and 30 sq. ft. of land bearing Khasra No. 189 situated in Mauza Achant Garh, Tehsil Shalimar, District Lahore. It is further submitted that the genuineness of the order dated 20.5.1986, passed by the former A.D.C.G (Cantt), Lahore could not be verified as the old record is not available due to the fire incident took place in the District Courts on 12.01.1998. However mutation No. 405 previously passed in favour of LDA, has also been cancelled by the undersigned being Additional District Collector, Lahore and fresh mutation No. 839 (Sehat Intiqal) has been entered in the revenue record.

Resultantly, the piece of land measuring 16 Marlas and 113 sq. ft. also stands in the name of Provincial Government for allocating/reserving the same for Valmik Hindu Sect Graveyard as ordered by the August Supreme Court of Pakistan. Detailed reports of the revenue field staff duly endorsed by the respective Assistant Commissioner are also enclosed for ready reference."

In view of the above, the SCP ordered in para 2 of this order in favour of the Hindu Community as "this petition has borne fruit and is being disposed of accordingly."



Fig. No.02. A view of Hindu graveyard after reconstruction. The figure was taken by the author on May 29, 2016.

When construction of the graveyard was about to be completed, the Hindu Sudhar Sabha (HSS), Pakistan Lahore, arranged an event on May 24, 2014 at the graveyard, with the cooperation of Mr. Kanji Ram, the then MPA (Punjab) on Minority seat. Mr. Tahir Khalil Sindhu, the then Minister for Minorities & Human Rights Affairs, Punjab, was invited as the Chief Guest. Some so-called Muslim religious leaders called for Amar Nath at mid-night, before dawn of the event, in order to prevent the event. They also threatened that they would not allow the Hindus to bury their dead in that graveyard. Basically, it was a conspiracy made by the encroachers. The next morning, they agitated on the road and Amar Nath was accused of desecration of the tombstone of Baba Haveli Sha, on which (they said) "Bismillah" was written. The matter was taken to the police. The Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Mughalpura found the facts baseless. Some Christians also claimed the graveyard belonged to them. The keys to the graveyard were given into the custody of the police. The Christians, on their request, were allowed to light oil-lamps on the graves.

### **Present Condition**

There was an iron-bar gate at the main entrance, which has now been replaced, after the construction of the Metro Orange Line Train Station, with a full-covered iron-sheet gate. Its colour is black. The old one was replaced because some areas of the front side of the graveyard had been broken and then the gate was reconstructed. Due to the construction of the station, the toilets in the graveyard erected at the main entry gate have been removed. In the premises of the graveyard, there is a small room (10 x 12 ft.) with an attached bath-room for the gravedigger or watchman, a kitchen, a veranda type open hall (18 x 40 ft.), etc. There are white marble tiles on floor of the veranda. The purpose of the hall is to facilitate the community when they come for performance of religious rituals for the deceased. There are some trees in the graveyard also.

### **Christians' Intervention and Hindus' Defensive Role**

Some opportunist Christians also intervened in the property of the Hindu graveyard. They filed a suit with the Court of Senior Civil Judge, Lahore on 27.01.2016 through Mr. Muhammad Anwar Bhatti, advocate of the High Court (The Civil Court Lahore, 2016) They claimed that the graveyard was a Christian graveyard, therefore, the Hindus might be evicted from the graveyard. The petition was submitted to the court of Senior Civil Judge Lahore. The then judge was Samia Hanif Chaudhary. In this court case, the petitioners were Mr. Rafiq Masih and Mr. Shaukat Masih, while the respondents were Mr. Amar Nath Randhawa, Mr. Heera Lal Randhawa, Haji Jamil Ahmed and Mr. Qasim Ghuman.

On behalf of the respondents, a written reply was submitted to the court on March 05, 2016 by Rizwana Yasmin, Saima Rasheed and Razia Mughal, Advocates at the High Court. It was prayed by the respondents to dismiss the petition with heavy costs as it was wrong and incorrect.

The case was first heard by the court on February 13, 2016. The Court was informed by the respondents that the SCP had already been associated with the graveyard with the Hindu community. It was also brought to the notice of the court that the graveyard was the only facility for them in the whole territory of district Lahore and they face trouble when someone dies in the community. Meanwhile, in the course of trial, the court heard the arguments, perused the record and announced its decision on 29.10.2016, which reads as follows:

“Perusal of file reveals that the plaintiffs neither mentioned any description of suit property nor produced any document in their favour which supports the version of the petitioners/plaintiffs. So there is no chance of irreparable loss to the plaintiffs and they have failed to establish prima-facie a good arguable case. Therefore in view of above discussion application under order



XXXIX rule 1&2 CPC is hereby dismissed and interim injunction dated 28.01.2016 is hereby vacated. Therefore it is tentative assessment and shall not affect the merits of the case.”

### **The Community’s Request to ETPB to Take Over the Graveyard**

For its protection, it was requested by Hindu Sudhar Sabha to place the graveyard under the custody of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB). The community also appealed to the Chairman, ETPB in this regard. On April 07, 2016, the community representatives met with Mr. Siddiq ul Farooq, the then Chairman of ETPB, at his office. The agenda of the meeting was an appeal to restore the graveyard. The delegation, comprising Amar Nath Randhawa, Aroon Kumar, Heera Lal, Sabir Naz and Ajmal Jee, was led by Hindu Sudhar Sabha.



Fig. No.03. A delegation of the Hindu community of Lahore met with Mr. Siddiq ul Farooq (Chairman ETPB, Government of Pakistan) at his office for restoration of the Hindu graveyard. The figure was taken by the author on April 07, 2016.

The matter was also taken to the District Government Lahore many times, but it had been ignored for a long time despite spending millions of rupees on its construction.

### **Requests from the Hindus to the Police Department**

On July 01, 2016, a delegation (Syeda Deep, Mr. Heera Lal, Mr. Amar Nath Randhawa, Mr. Arun Kumar and the researcher) met with Dr. Haider Ashraf, Deputy Inspector General of Police (Operations) and Mr. Muntazir Mehdi, Senior Superintendent of Police (Operations) at their offices to resolve the matter when the culprits were disturbing the community and the key to the graveyard was in custody of the concerned DSP. The community also requested to hand over the graveyard either to the community or to the government itself.

### **Urs Bava Haveli Sha**

There is a grave of Baba Haveli Sha. There is also a 'Sha' dynasty among Hindus. The researcher was informed by the Hindus that the said Bava was a Hindu saint. That is the reason he was buried in Hindus' graveyard, but the people who were trying to grasp the land claimed that Bava was a Muslim saint. Therefore, they forced the police to install a slate with Islamic scripts, i.e. Ya Allah, Ya Muhammad, Bismi'Allah, etc. The police did the same to bring the dispute to a halt. As some Christians also claim to associate themselves with the graveyard, they celebrate Urs of the Saint there on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday and Sunday of July every year. On the eve of both days, they distribute some Langar, dance to the beat of the Dhol (drum), and sometimes Qawalis are sung. On 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of July, 2018, the researcher also visited the Urs. 30 to 40 people were present there. Among them were some old men, young boys and a few children. A Langar of Naan and Daal was distributed there. Dhol and Dhamal were also played. Others were sitting on mats. In charge of the graveyard, Mr. Amar Nath Randhawa, also met the researcher there. He informed that the graveyard was opened for two days for the occasion, on special request of those who arranged the Urs there. He further said that the event was also brought to the notice of the concerned Deputy Superintendent of Police. The researcher asked about the history of the Bava, but no one among the organizers of the Urs was able to furnish the relevant information there. The researcher also sat there with them on the mat and took Langar too.

### **Crematorium (Shamshaan Ghaat)**

The city of Lahore had eleven crematoria for Hindus at the time of the partition; one of them was outside Taxali Gate, the second near Krishna Mandir and the third in Model Town (Tahir, 2010) but not even a single crematorium has been left for the Hindus, presently. All of them had been demolished. Owing that, after partition, the Hindus have been facing difficulty in cremating for a long period of time. They started to highlight their issues through print media in 2005 and also engaged with government offices as well as politicians. A correspondence was also carried on by the Pakistan Hindu Dalit Welfare Society, Lahore, with the minister (Pakistan Hindu Dalit Welfare Society, 2005). Meanwhile, a 70-year old lady, Radha, died in Lahore on May 30, 2006 at Mayo Hospital Lahore (Tahir, 2010). Her cremation was delayed due to the lack of a Shamshaan Ghaat in Lahore.

Therefore, she was buried at Miani Sahib Graveyard in Lahore. After this incident, the case was taken up by Mr. Amar Nath Randhawa, the President of Hindu Sudar Sabha.



Fig. No.04. A place in the Crematorium where the dead body is placed to pyre. The figure was taken by the researcher on September 24, 2018.

After a long struggle, a land of 14 kanals was fixed by the federal government near Babu Sabu, Kachha Pind, Lahore. Its foundation stone was laid on June 26, 2006 by the then Minister, Ijaz ul Haq. Lt. General (R) Zulfiqar Ahmed Khan, the then Chairman of the Evacuee Trust Property Board, appreciated the exertions of the Hindu Sudhar Sabha for achieving the crematorium in Lahore.

The Vice Chairman, Evacuee Trust Property Board informed the Ministry of Minorities (Minorities Affairs Division), Government of Pakistan as follows (Vice Chairman, 2006):

“Shamshaan Ghaat/ Graveyard was the most significant demand of the Hindu community of Lahore. Recently, ETP Board has allocated land near Babu Sabu, Lahore for the Hindu Shamshaan Ghaat. The Hon’able Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Minorities Affairs Mr. Ijaz-ul-Haq, laid the foundation stone for the Shamshaan Ghaat. The construction work is in progress and is likely to be completed within the next couple of months.”



The crematorium has now been established for both the Hindus and the Sikhs, as and when required. They may use the crematorium freely. The community is satisfied and thankful to the government of Pakistan. The crematorium is in the custody of ETPB but the encroachers try to occupy the land illegally, so they damage its constructed parts.

### **Conclusion**

The Hindus in Lahore have been confronted with a problem since the partition of performing the last rituals when someone of their beloved died. They remained deprived of a graveyard as well as a crematorium for a long time due to unlawful occupants one after another. After a struggle by the community for many years, the encroachments were removed by the District Government of Lahore on the direction of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. A crematorium has also been constructed on a vast area of land for the Hindus in Lahore. In both places, they are free now to perform last rituals according to their religious practice. Pakistan is the homeland of Muslims and religious minorities equally. It is mandatory for each and every segment of our society to go hand in hand for peace, progress, and prosperity of our communities, societies, and state. In the light of the Constitution (Supreme Law of the Land), it is the obligation of each and every stakeholder to provide equal opportunities to everyone living in this homeland without any discrimination on caste, creed, and religion.

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