

## Pakistan elects a Hindu woman senator, second time in its history

Compare that with how many Muslim women have been elected in India since 1947. **Krishna Kumari Kohli's** election represents a major milestone for women and minority rights in Pakistan. Ms. Kumari's victory was a rare bit of good news for the country's Hindu minority.

Pakistan has a dismal record over the treatment of vulnerable religious minorities. Most live in fear of their lives and property amid an increase in religious intolerance in recent years, along with violence and deadly assaults. Hindus, who make up 4 percent of the country's population of approximately 200 million people, mostly live in southern Sindh Province. In recent years, they have increasingly complained of forced conversions to Islam carried out by hard-line Islamists. The local Hindu community has suffered persecution at the hands of radical Islamists, with many women forcibly converted to be married off to Muslims. The state's acquiescence to groups behind kidnappings, killings and desecration of Hindu temples, most notably in Sindh, has meant that Hindus have been fleeing Pakistan – often to find refuge in India.

According to Senator Ramesh Kumar, a member of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), “around 5,000 Hindus leave Pakistan every year” because of the persecution. Dev says the Kohli community is marginalized even among the Hindus. “This is why a Kohli woman joining the Senate is a positive development. For we have had parliamentarians from the Meghwar community, but never Kohlis,” he said.

Ms. Kumari said her aims as a senator would be to work toward improving the lives of religious minorities and the people of Tharparkar, which has been troubled by drought, unemployment and a lack of development.

Hindus have previously been elected to Parliament, both in the lower and upper houses. Two male Hindus from the Dalit caste have served in the Senate, both members of the Pakistan Peoples Party.

Kohli joined the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) as a social activist to campaign for the rights of marginalised communities in the Thar region. She also campaigns for women's rights, against bonded labour, and against sexual harassment in the workplace.<sup>[4]</sup> Kohli also actively participated and worked for the rights of downtrodden people of marginalised communities living in Thar and other areas.

She is from the family of the valiant freedom fighter Roplo Kolhi, who had waged a war against the invading British colonialist forces when they had attacked Sindh from Nagarparkar side in 1857. Subsequently, he was arrested and hanged by the Britishers on August 22, 1858.

Kohli was born on 1 February 1979<sup>[2]</sup> to a poor family hailing from a village in Nagarparkar.<sup>[3]</sup> When she was a child and a student of grade three, she and her family were held captive for three years as bonded labourers in a private jail allegedly owned by a landlord in Umerkot District.<sup>[4][3]</sup> They

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were only released after a police raid on their employer's land. She received her early education initially from Umerkot district and then from Mirpurkhas District.<sup>[2]</sup>

She got married at the age of 16 in 1994 while she was studying in grade nine.<sup>[2]</sup> She continued her education after her marriage and in 2013 earned a master's degree in Sociology from the University of Sindh.<sup>[3]</sup>

In 2007, she attended the third Mehergarh Human Rights Youth Leadership Training Camp in Islamabad in which she studied the government of Pakistan, international migration, strategic planning and learned about the tools that could be used to create social change.<sup>[2]</sup>

(Source:Wikipedia)

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