

[Tearing the Vale of Kashmir](#)

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Hindus Under Seige in Famed Himalayan Valley

Just south of Kashmir's Chinese border, at a breath-robbing 18,000 feet, spent shells and blood stains littering the white ice of the Saichen Glacier evidence a little-known snow-trooper and aircraft war between Pakistan and India. The soldiers are Muslims and Hindus fighting over the Kashmir border, the "line of control" that separates the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir territory and Jammu & Kashmir state of India.

The crackle of gunfire on the glacier doesn't reach down into the Vale of Kashmir, but the worry and tension among minority Hindus living there crackles through the air. The saddle-valleyed Vale is home to the Kashmiri Pandits and has been for centuries. They have lived mostly unharrassed as a tiny community of Hindus among the Vale's 95% majority Muslims. But the past three years have turned the fabled Vale into a nightmare for the Pandits. And Hindus throughout Kashmir (25% total population of state) are feeling the pressures and injuries of religious discrimination.

The marks of unrest are both psychological and physical. Laws are being enacted that are designed to appropriate Hindu owned properties. And Hindu farmers are having a hard time even getting permission to till their land - once they leave it, it becomes eligible for a takeover. There is rampant discrimination against Hindus in advanced professional career colleges and in government jobs. Hindu students complain that they are not allowed to set up personal shrines in their dormitory rooms while public college halls are routinely converted into mosques. They further state they are being taught a Kashmir history sanitized of its Hinduness.

The Hindus in the Vale are personally enduring the whiplash. One swami has been murdered, young daughters have been abducted and Hindu businesses and homes are stoned, fire-gutted or destroyed by bombs.

Pilgrimage to Amarnath, the ice Sivalingam cave, used to be an uninterrupted journey into Siva as incredible landscape and omniscient Being. Now, the pilgrim is jarred on route by the sight of small Siva temples having been spoiled and taken over by Muslim authorities. Hindu temples have become favorite targets. Some have been looted, stoned, burned and bombed, others sealed off by Muslim activists during Hindu festivals to prevent the celebration. At least two have had their revenue-generating property disputed.

Over the past year, two forces have emerged to demonstrate and legally counter the anti-Hindu campaign. To effectively orchestrate their case, all the Hindu organizations in the Vale have amalgamated under the Hindu Ekta Manch flag. As a signal to the Kashmir government of their determination they undertook a short hunger strike and have been sedulously documenting their grievances. This past summer, the Hindu Yuvak Forum promoted a 2-day youth convention that focused on the discrimination crises. Attended by 140 delegates from all districts of Kashmir, the group resolved to unify Hindu youth and organization activity in Kashmir and appealed to the India central government for intervention.

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