

Social Media Monitoring Report

April 2023

Forced Conversions

In April, several incidents of forced conversions of young girls and women of minority Hindus surfaced on the social media. As usual, majority of the cases were reported in Sindh. Journalist and minority rights activist Veengas highlighted some of the cases on Twitter. As compared to the previous month, a spike in forced conversions was observed during Ramzan. On 5th of April, a “Free Will” affidavit was filed on behalf of a young Hindu girl Bindia Meghwar (adopted name: Fatima Bibi). In the document, she supposedly claimed that she had embraced Islam and married her husband Rizwan Ali of her own free will and without any coercion. However, according to local media, the girl had been abducted from her home in Sanghar and forcibly converted and married off.



On April 11, Veengas shared a video of an underage Hindu girl also from Sanghar who had allegedly been converted on gun point, forcibly married, and raped for more than 10 months by her “husband” and his accomplices. The girl had reportedly escaped from captivity and returned to her family. It was also reported that she was getting threats from the perpetrators as well as local police.

Within a week from April 12 to April 15, three more cases were reported. A Hindu girl Suman Lohana was reportedly abducted and forcibly converted in Tharparkar. In an interview, Lohana claims that she had embraced Islam and married a Muslim man. However, in the same interview, she was unable to identify the caste or family name of her “husband.” On the other hand, the perpetrator, Sajjad Maher, gave an interview on April 15 in which he said that, “if you convert a Hindu girl to Islam, you will be rewarded.”

Veengas @VeengasJ · Apr 13
Suman Lohana got married off to a Muslim man named Sajjad Maher but she didn't know what was his family name.
Those who beat the drums of free will — Or call our work untrue. They should watch a video: How Hindu girls are threatened.
[#StopForcedConversion](#)



0:08 43.4K views

Veengas @VeengasJ · Apr 13
Suman Lohana who was kidnapped from Diplo and ended up at Bhurchundi, where she got converted to Islam and married off to a Muslim man.
Her brother said: the family was struggling to bring her back cos Suman didn't know about Islam and was coerced into converting her...

60 1,133 1,526 437.1K

Veengas @VeengasJ · Apr 15
Suman Lohana case: Sajjad Maher says: "If you convert a Hindu girl to Islam, you will be rewarded." He confessed that he abducted her. It means Suman was never got inspired by Islam, nor was her free will. Video: Social Media twitter.com/VeengasJ/status...



0:24 118.6K views

17 66 166 8,387

Shortly after Lohana's case, 11-year-old Leena Kohli from Naukot was converted and married to a Muslim man. Contrary to her family's account, Kohli is falsely documented as 19 years of age in the conversion certificate. After the child's abduction, the Kohli community protested the conversion. Activists reported that the community was being threatened by "influential persons" while the police were indifferent.

Veengas @VeengasJ · Apr 16
The state has utterly failed to protect Sindhi Hindus — if they protest against injustice, are being threatened.

The Rise News @Therisenews · Apr 16
Leena Kohli, aged 11 was converted to Islam after the abduction. The Kohli Community held a protest against threats. The local influential person was threatening and asking them to not protest about Leena's case, in addition, the police didn't cooperate with them.



0:15 5,131 views

14 235 357 12.1K

On April 14, the conversion certificate of another minor Hindu girl Sorath Meghwar from Islamkot was filed. After her conversion, Meghwar was married to a much older Muslim man as is apparent from a recently surfaced video of the two in which the child looks visibly upset.

The Hanging Sword of Blasphemy

In a Ramzan transmission on Bol Television Network, actor and television host Faysal Quraishi invited a panel of Muslim clerics for religious discussion. During the show, clerics spoke about the prevalence of “vulgarity” in universities and on social media. The talk session morphed into a passionate discussion on blasphemy. Barelvi cleric Mufti Naveed Abbasi claimed that as per an FIA cybercrime [report](#) an estimated 400,000 people in Pakistan were involved in “blasphemous” practices. The cleric went on to urge parents to keep an eye on their children’s social media activities. In response, the show host, Quraishi, said that the “pigs” responsible for blasphemy should be identified publicly so that people can get to see them and their families.

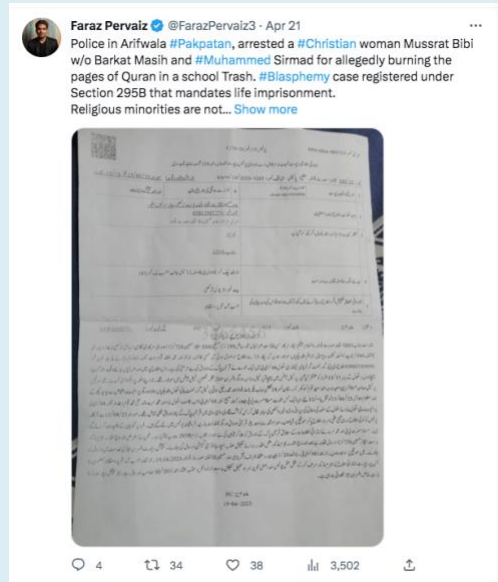
One of the speakers at the show was Mufti Hanif Qureshi - the cleric who is believed to have instigated Mumtaz Qadri to assassinate Punjab Governor Salman Taseer for his criticism of blasphemy laws and support for Christian woman Asia Bibi. Faysal Qureshi’s live Ramzan show ended with a group of singers [singing a song](#) about beheading anyone who insulted the Prophet (PBUH).

The show triggered a major controversy with people criticizing Quraishi for the program’s irresponsible and dangerous rhetoric and its potential disastrous consequences for vulnerable social groups who are often at the receiving end of blasphemy allegations. In response to the reactions, a cleric Hanif Qureshi said on another show that the social media accounts of the people who are bashing Faysal Quraishi should be “checked” and that “you’ll know that they are linked with the same blasphemers who are trying to destabilize Pakistan.”



In another blasphemy related episode on April 10, cleric and YouTuber Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza was booked for blasphemy under section 295C of the Pakistan Penal Code. A case lodged at Jhelum police station stated that Mirza passed derogatory remarks about Islam’s sacred personalities and Holy Quran. The complainant, Umair Ali Qadri, also alleged that the Mirza compared Ahmadis with Muslims and thus his action qualified a case under the section 295C.

Similarly, few days later, on April 14, the Faisalabad police arrested a Muslim woman on charges of blasphemy after she allegedly claimed prophethood. According to AP News, the woman was taken into custody from her home in Faisalabad shortly after a mob had gathered outside demanding that she be lynched. On April 15, the police registered an FIR against a man named Shahbaz Afzal in Gujrat for allegedly declaring himself a prophet of Islam.



In the same week, a Chinese worker on a dam project in northern Pakistan was arrested and imprisoned on accusation of blasphemy, in a rare case of a foreigner being swept up in Pakistan’s harsh and controversial blasphemy laws. According to the police report, the man was on a field visit along with a team of Pakistani workers over the weekend when he was accused of making blasphemous remarks and gestures against God and the Prophet Muhammad after afternoon prayers during Ramadan. News of the accusations spread quickly, leading to protests that were dispersed by security officials in the Kohistan region of KP. The man was transported to Abbottabad for his safety.

On April 19, an FIR was lodged against a Christian widow and cleaner named Mussarat Bibi along with her coworker after complaints emerged against them of allegedly burning pages of the Quran in the school where they worked. Students claimed that they found scraps of the pages in the wastebaskets. According to attorney Javed Sahotra, “Both workers were told to clean the storeroom that was filled with paper and other scrapped items. It has been alleged that they gathered the wastepaper and other scraps in a corner of the school and set them on fire. Some students later noticed that the burnt items also contained holy pages.”

However, the most disturbing incident relating to blasphemy occurred on April 21 in Hafizabad where TLP activists beat up a young student for denying the miracles of an ancient Sufi Saint Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani. In the same week, Sufi and Shia clerics in Layyah registered a blasphemy case against a Shia speaker for allegedly reciting a religious song that “implied” the deification of Imam Hussain. And in yet another

incident on April 24, the police registered a blasphemy case against a person for claiming prophethood. The complainant was a Bareilvi cleric.

Faith-based Persecution

Several incidents of faith-based persecution and violence occurred in April. On first April, a few days before Easter, a Christian man Kashif Maseeh was shot and killed in Peshawar by unidentified assailants. The murder of the Christian citizen was followed by another murder attempt in Punjab. An Ahmadi lawyer who advocates for the blasphemy accused in his community was attacked and injured with a cleaver in Chiniot. On the other hand, a 118-year old Ahmadi prayer center was vandalized by a mob. The minarets were demolished.

On April 16, a Christian girl was sexually harassed during a prayer session in a Church in Islamabad. On April 25, a Christian man was brutally beaten for his beliefs by Islamists in Sialkot.



Hate Speech

For faith-based hate speech on the internet, an analysis of the trends was undertaken. The trend analysis entails a review of top Twitter trends at a specific time (1:00 pm) (UTC) daily for April to pick ones relevant to religious beliefs especially those coinciding with religious personages, religious holidays and religiously themed news, representatives, or politics. In addition, the search was expanded to include derogatory terms and phrases that are commonly used in online hate speech against religious minorities. Each trend was individually reviewed to determine its relevance with the subject under consideration. Instead of just relying on the terms used in the trends, which are mostly very general, the top tweets made under each trend and the comments on these tweets were analyzed. Of the total 1500 trends reviewed during the period, we focused on 88 trends which were found to be strongly relevant (with more than 10k tweets).

The figure below indicates trends that were frequently repeated. However, it may be clarified that some of these trends were an attempt by Twitter users to highlight an incident or issue linked to the mentioned theme.

