

## Gods in Exile

Written by Lalit Koul

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### *Perspective from IAKF President.*

First it was their leading lights - teachers, poets, civil servants, social activists. Then it was their common people. Now it is their Gods and Goddesses. Yes, I am talking about the original inhabitants of the valley - the Kashmiri Hindus.

After forcing the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus from the valley and illegally occupying their properties, now it is the temples and shrines of Kashmiri Hindus that being targeted. Now even Kashmiri Hindu Gods and Goddesses have to look for alternate accommodations because the coalition partners of the government of the day are too busy scheming to securing their "Kursi". In recent times, there has been a surge in the illegal real estate transactions whereby the properties belonging to Hindu temples and shrines are being bartered away without any respect for the sentiments of the Kashmiri Hindu minority population.

Numerous petitions have been submitted to various governments to allow the minority Hindu community to manage its temples and shrines within the state. A comprehensive bill is pending in the legislative assembly but the powers that be have successfully delayed the introduction of this bill on the floor of the assembly. One wonders why? If Dharmarth Trust can manage Hindu temples in the Jammu province, Auqaf can manage Muslim shrines, Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee can manage Gurudwaras, why can't Hindus from the valley manage their temples and shrines within the valley? WHY? Is it because minority Hindus from the valley are not aggressive enough to disrupt the government machinery and daily life in the state? Or is it because minority Hindus from the valley do not constitute a big enough voting block to affect the numbers in the assembly? Or is it because the religious sentiments of the minority Hindus from the valley are not worth showing any respect? Which one is it? These are not-so-politically-correct questions but the situation on the ground demands truthful and honest discussions and answers. Powers that be might want to remain in the make-believe world where they would want to wish away these issues but unfortunately for them these will not be wished away. Minority Hindus from the valley have every right to protect their religious temples and shrines and they are within their rights to demand protection of these holy places. After losing their homes and hearths, they are not going to allow the illegal sales of their temples and shrines. Gods and Goddesses cannot be displaced and planted somewhere else in the plains of India. These temples and shrines mean a lot to the ethnically cleansed community. These are the remaining signs of their cultural and ethnic heritage within the valley. Illegal sales of these cultural and religious signs tantamount to desecration and no government should allow any kind of desecration of sentiments belonging to any community, majority or minority.

It would be in the best interests of all, the government as well as the minority Hindu community, if the legislators from across the parties sincerely work on the passing of the comprehensive Protection of Kashmiri Hindu Temple and Shrine bill that has been pending in the assembly for

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a long time. It would address the genuine grievances of Hindu community from the valley and will establish a transparent, accountable and systematic mechanism to preserve, protect and build the cultural ruins of the community that has already suffered so much. Let us hope better sense prevails upon the powers that be and the holy temples and shrines are preserved and protected for all the times to come.