




Impure in the
land of pure


STORY by Shamin (Pakistan)

Recent THTC training participant Shamin, a former training course participant, tells about frequent human rights violations against women in Southern Punjab, Pakistan, through the shocking story of a low class Hindu girl.





Many low class Hindu families are scattered in the remotest areas of Cholistan desert district Bahawalpur Southern Punjab Pakistan. Since they are considered untouchables by the Muslim majority community they are not allowed to reside in the main villages. ***Their settlements are away in the sand dunes and at unimportant places where there are no basic human needs available.*** They have no facility of electricity, no clean drinking water, no sanitation system, no roads, no schools, no health care, no housing facilities and no facilities for socialization. They live in the straw sheds or mud houses. Most of their men, women and children work on land lords' agricultural farms from dawn to dusk. Some of them also work as seasonal crop weavers, brick kiln workers, their children are involved in child labor and their women work in the land lords' homes for cleaning, collect animal dung and do all types of menial jobs.



As their children grow up the boys are sent to farms to help their fathers and the young girls and women work as crop weaver, crop harvesting, weeding, and as land lords' domestic workers from where some of them are picked up by the land lords or their men. **They are raped, converted and married by force by the abductors.** Recently, Umeed organisation reported a case of a young Hindu girl (13 years of age) in district Bahawalpur who became the prey of her own land lord man's sexual lust.

*“I belong to a Hindu Bheel (low caste) family living in a Hindu settlement in Cholistan desert district Bahawalpur for the last few generations. My family is a property of the land lord who governs, rules and dominates each moment of our family life. **We are as though his bought slaves.** Last year it was the month of June and a warm sunny morning when my parents, brothers and sisters went to work on the land lord's farm leaving me alone in the house. I was busy with my house chores and I saw the land lord's man stopping his vehicle and with another man walking towards my house. I thought he was coming to enquire about my father and when he was at a distance I said my father has gone to the farm to work but still they kept on heading towards me.*”

All of sudden the other man caught me and started dragging me towards their vehicle. I started screaming but no one came to help me. They stuffed my mouth with a cloth and threw me in their vehicle and took me to an unknown place.

The land lord's man kept abusing me sexually for a few days and one morning a man with a long beard looked like an Imam Musjid (Mosque head) came in and asked me to recite some prayers, which I refused but the abductor began to torture me. Ultimately I had to give in and I confessed and became a Muslim. After a few days again the same Imam came to me and said that he is going to perform my marriage with the abductor and he began reciting prayers and after some time he declared that I am the wife of the abductor.

On the day of my abduction when my parents came back home in the evening they did not find me in the house. My father tried to register my abduction case, but the police was not cooperative at all. He requested the MPA (Member of Provincial Assembly Punjab) and pleased with the MNA (Member of National Assembly) of the area to help him to get his daughter back but no one aided him.

After several unsuccessful attempts, my father was suggested to approach the Legal Advisor of an NGO called Umeed Partnership Pakistan (UPP) and reported my abduction. The court order was issued but the police did not take any action. Then the legal advisor framed an appeal on my father's behalf and sent it to the higher authorities of the Punjab.



*Due to pressure from above police lodged the FIR and without informing my parents and their council the abductor along with me were presented in the court where **the judge dismissed the case declaring that I have become Muslim and that I married to a Muslim man with my own free will.** After hearing about the dismissal of the case the Counsel of my parents filled a petition in the same court requesting that I should be sent to Shelter Home and allow me to meet my parents. The judge announced that he has taken my consent I have converted to Islam and I am married to a Muslim thus the case was dismissed. The Counsel requested the judge to get my medical test since I am a minor. It was accepted by the judge but the medical report had been never performed. In the mean time the abductor along with me took a shelter at MPA's (politician of the area) farm where no one dares to go.*

*In Southern Punjab Hindus remain aloof and away from the majority community since they are considered unclean, dirty and impure by the Muslims. There is no question of eating or mixing with them. **The irony is this that I as a Hindu girl was born in a Hindu family; I was considered unclean, dirty and impure whose shadow even was avoided by the Muslims. They never ate, mixed and had any interaction with me and my family but as soon as I was converted to Islam I became clean, acceptable and pure. If this is the criteria then I suggest that all the people who are considered unclean, dirty and impure in Pakistan should be abducted, raped and converted to Islam so that they all become pure and clean, after all Pakistan is a land of the pure and how can impure in the land of the pure continue to live?***

More cases

According to recent researches, about **300 Hindu and 700 Christian girls and women in Pakistan annually have been kidnapped and forced to conversion in Pakistan.** Most cases have been recorded especially in the Southern Punjab Pakistan. Umeed observed that 10 to 15 teenage girls every year from the Dalit communities (Hindu and Christian) are abducted in district Bahawalpur by powerful culprits who legalise their crime by attaching religious sentiments.

Empowerment and lobby

- For the last several years Umeed is providing free legal aid in 5 to 8 cases every year of abduction, forced conversion and forced marriages. **Through seminars, human rights trainings and lobby sessions women are prepared to voice for their rights.** They are given courage to approach the police, judiciary and the doctor to get their cases registered. Umeed **lobbies** also with the law enforcement agencies and the policy makers to promote and protect women human rights at their own area of work.