



Rights and Challenges: An Overview of Christian Minority in Lahore

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ABSTRACT

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The demography of Lahore presents a colorful picture of the anthology of multi-ethnic and multi-religious character with the overwhelming majority of Muslims and some other religious minorities in smaller number. This research paper is to analyze the Christian minority of Lahore with special reference to their social status, rights and challenges. Even in Pakistan movement, the Christian community played a significant role by supporting the just cause of a separate sovereign state for the Indian Muslims. No doubt, all the religious minorities including the Christians are fully free to live in accordance with their respective religious beliefs and rituals legally and constitutionally yet in practice; they have to face some serious issues and challenges in their daily life. This research paper will examine the true nature of the issues and challenges of the Christians of Lahore and the mechanism of possible solution of their genuine problems. The government must provide them maximum opportunities to involve them in main social stream so that they may contribute generally towards the nation building.



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1. Introduction

Minority is a group characterized by a sense of separate identity and awareness of status apart from a usually larger group of which it forms or apart (Pandey, 1997). Minorities are an essential part of a society to make substantial progress coping with the hardest challenges of modern times. Without collaboration and the mutual co-operation entire sectors of society and nation cannot work accordingly to acquire set goals and targets in the comity of nations. Doubtlessly, the minorities in most of the nation in developing countries are rendering meritorious services in all the fields of life (Sen, 1940).

In Lahore, the Muslims communities and the Christians communities are residing side by side since long in full peace and become the leading aspect harmony and tranquility for various fields of life. Muslim and Christian communities enjoy friendly interpersonal and communal relations along with mutual regard for each other. However, some members of the Christian community have grave concerns and reservations regarding the fundamental rights and liberties given to them under Pakistan Constitution of 1973 (SHAKIR, 1981). They have deep concern regarding their identity crisis and are looking for their ideology according to Christian beliefs, values and thoughts among others. They are having serious objections about the exact Pakistani population data that calculated information through census and other data regarding minority communities was prepared roughly in offices rather than reporting from the field sources. The

consequence of this, the statistical data collected by private agencies and government entities vary drastically. According to official statistics, Christians account for less than 2% of the entire population, although Christian organizations claim that the Christian population is closer to 5%. They consider and feel themselves as sub-national or second class citizens which always deprived from their socio-political and economic rights and liberties (Gravaas, Sauer, Engelsviken, Kamil, & Jorgensen, 2015).

They also face major security issues as a result of being persecuted and killed solely because they are Christians. They are worried about their basic human right such as right of life, security, property, dignity, honor and sense of belongings. Health and basic education are the basic human rights globally, yet the Christians communities in Pakistan are far behind from this equitable access. In recent past most of the Christian businessman, educationist and entrepreneurs were aspirations were dashed in the results of Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto nationalized policies. In the result of Bhutto policies all Christian Missionaries along with educational institutes, hospitals and business were taken over. Christian admission quota primary / secondary education and universities were converted. The Christian community considers it the Islamization, rather than nationalization that caused the problem. The inclusion of a religion column in the form of CNIC was also criticized and considered discrimination being a Pakistani national. Although Pakistan has positive progress in all spheres of life but still the religious intolerance is at peak because Muslims are so concerned about their religious belief and always willing to lay down or take the lives in this regard. Religious minorities are frequently mistreated and denied access to basic human rights (Gregory & Valentine, 2009). The majority of persons who are members of minority groups face unequal working conditions and low social status (Saman, 2015).

There is prevalence of social discrimination and religious intolerance towards minorities in Pakistan. The most of the manpower belongs from minority communities associated with low paid labor or poor economic conditions. These workers face severe harassment, discrimination and economic exploitation. The religious minorities in Pakistan reduced upto only 4% of the after separation of Bangladesh (Jacob & Varghese, 2012).

1.1. Study Questions

This study in hand has some basic questions as following:

1. What kind of Social and Economic deprivation faced by Christian Community of Lahore?
2. Who is primarily responsible for the deprivation of these rights?
3. What are the challenges, the Christians of Lahore facing in day today life?

2. Review of Literature

Khalid (2023) presented a masterwork entitled *A White Trail* which highlighted basic aspects, issues and predicament of minority communities of Pakistan. In this book author revealed a comprehensive picture and its association with social, economic, political and religious aspects. The empirical information from the said book provided a profound material by outlining the fundamental beliefs of all major religions, particularly Christianity, throughout the course of these festivals (Mahmoud & Khalid, 2013).

Zafar (2007) writes "A short History of Pakistani Christians" and revealed the remarkable contribution of Christian community of Lahore in regional and national development. This work highlights the progress in the field of health, education, defense, art and development of infrastructure among many other fields. Zafar claimed regarding Christian community of Lahore that they feel that their services and generous contribution towards the societal development. This book undoubtedly played a significant role in the proposed research because the author discussed thoroughly various social, political, cultural, and economic problems faced by Christians of Lahore (Zafar, 2007).

Ahmed (2011) worked on Religious Minorities in Pakistan and his extensive research covered presented in the book by Centre for Peace and Development (CPD) in Baluchistan. This study is one among the most pertinent to the proposed study. Akhunzada (2014) revealed in his work on Constitution of Pakistan and Minorities that the minorities rights protected by the

constitution of Pakistan. All inhabitants of Pakistan are guaranteed equal treatment under the law and are entitled to the same level of legal protection, according to article 25(1) of the country's constitution.

Religious Minorities in Pakistan presented by Malik (2002) and published by Minority Rights Group International (MRG). This outstanding work explained that economic, social and political involvement of minorities in Pakistan was unprecedented. The similar nature to the study in hand researcher revealed that similarities among issue of all minorities have significant importance and requires suitable solutions accordingly.

One among the most important work on, the trial of Pakistani Christian Nation done by Bhatti (2007) which presents coherent discussion on the issues of Christian's minorities of Pakistan. This work based on realistic challenges and circumstances faced by the minorities especially Christian community in Pakistan. Due to its nature and comprehensive approach this book is quite helpful in the investigation of issue.

In his brilliant work "Lahore Past and Present," Muhammad Baqir makes the observation that it is pretty obvious that Lahore was known by other names in the past. This book was quite useful for learning about Lahore's history. Consequently, it is vital for the suggested research (al-Bāqir, 1985).

2.1. Social Issues and Challenges

There are more than 5 million people from different religious minorities living in the country in which Christian's community and Hindus community are form the largest group. Christian leadership considers that the state has failed to give them their due status in accordance with the apparition of Quaid-i-Azam and the provisions of Constitution. This research paper will highlight and is focus and concerns of the Christian minority living in Lahore and their viable and practicable solution.

The Christians, living in Lahore are marginalized and victimized in the society in acquiring work different sectors and they have to live in grimy and grubby conditions. They think that are being deprived of provision of education and health care facilities on equal basis. Insecurity and maltreatment towards the religious minorities has been experienced by many of the members of Christian minority at different places of Lahore.

2.2. Social Discrimination

The Christian minority of Lahore has been suffering from social exclusion and discrimination in their day today life. They consider themselves as lower creature of Pakistan as they are aliens migrated from another land. They have to face severe marginalization in the selection of Combined Competitive Examinations at Federal and Provincial level to enjoy social prestige and recognition (Malik, 2002). There are provocative and confrontational banners and posters displayed that always humiliating the religious minorities. The religious minorities especially the common and illiterate persons have to face issues especially who living in local communities as they even cannot touch the vegetables, fruits or other eatables lying in the markets (Sheikh, 2009).

2.3. Culture of Intolerance and Violence

After the tragic incident of 9/11 violence and religious extremism increased on a large scale throughout the world and Pakistan is no exception. Majority of the Muslims, sometimes, becomes so violent and intolerant on certain occasions especially related to blasphemy. Religiously motivated people may lay down their lives or kill someone in such incidents. Many churches have been attacked by a small number of religious extremists and the Christian have to bear the loss of life and property (Gravaas et al., 2015). A terrible attack reported in March 2002 on church in the capital city of Pakistan (Islamabad) and more than five people were killed and many more injured (Taylor, 2002).

Different international platform such as Minority Rights Group International showed their concern on uncertainty regarding basic human rights of minority communities. They declare that Pakistan is one among the most failed states with regard to protection of minority's fundamental

rights (Malik, 2002). Many staunch leaders and political activists among Christians have been either threatened for their voice rising in fighting for the safeguards of their basic human rights.

2.4. State of Fear for Minorities Communities

Most of the Christians are of the view that they ever have been living in gloomy and grimy environment. The Muslims generally hesitate to build cordial relations with the suspicion that might be involved with other hostile countries in making conspiracy against the security of the state (Ali, 2014). The Christian community is not safe and sound in many areas of Pakistan and they demand refugee status from United Nations Organization (Bhatti, 2007).

2.5. Issues Related to Education

Basic education and awareness regarding any aspect of life can have significant impacts on lives and livelihood of individuals, groups and communities. Education enables people for better understanding, logical thinking, decision making and critical approaches accordingly. The provision of equal opportunities in acquiring education from Primary to Higher and Professional level is the constitutional right to all the citizens of Pakistan without any discrimination. In this way, people get awareness about their socio-economic and political rights to make their lives comfortable. The Article 28 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights revealed that the education is the primary human right for each individual without discrimination. Similarly, the article 22 of Pakistani constitution provides freedom of education for all without any restriction (Singh, 2007). The Christian leadership has some certain apprehensions about the content of curriculum in text books published Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board, Lahore (Aziz, 1993).

2.6. Employment Issues

Minorities especially Christians feel as second class citizen in Pakistan and are not enjoying equal job opportunities to meet the necessities of life. Most of the time they feel that discrimination occur during the process of employment on the basis of religion in both public and private sector. The fact is that many among the minorities have achieved prestigious positions in different departments of public sector. The quota for minorities in public sector has been increased upto 5% on the population stratification and minorities achieved better job opportunities (Anjum, Muhammad, & Rauf, 2021). Justice A.R. Cornelius and Justice Rana Bhagwan Das are the remarkable personalities and golden examples among minorities who served in Superior judiciary of Pakistan. Both rendered their services with honesty and integrity and reached at the highest rank in Pakistan judiciary such as the position of Chief Justice. Sometimes, religious minorities have serious objections on their recruitments on low paid positions. They have to face unfavorable and unconducive environment at their workplace that sometimes leads to psychological and health problems (Malik, 2002).

2.7. Research Gap

Even this age of globalization and advancement in education and facilities a large number of Christians have maintained their position and status due to their efforts in various field of life such as education, health, security among others. They feel even this remarkable contribution and untried efforts they did not get recognition as a patriot and true national. This study is an effort to understand the basic rights and challenges of Christian community and provide an empirical overview of Christian Minority residing in Lahore.

3. Research Methodology

This study has been conducted in Lahore, the capital city of Punjab province. Population for the current study was the Christian minority. The study was based on a qualitative approach, as the researcher intended a profound investigation of socio-economic issues and challenges being faced by Christian minorities. The primary as well as secondary option were utilized in this research study. Qualitative method was used in this research paper through collecting data by taking interviews of renowned personalities working in public and private sectors.

3.1. Demographic Characteristics of Lahore

Due to geographical and demographic nature Lahore has always significance importance in the province. The capital city of Punjab province is the center of political, economic cultural and educational among other activities since long. It is essential to view Lahore through historical lenses. The historical importance and combination of various civilizations remark that Lahore is where regional politics starts and ends (ul Anjum & Tariq, 2012). The population of Lahore is less politically active but more of philosophical nature. The minorities residing in Lahore especially Christian community always a productive and influence part of its development and have symbolic legacy. The Christian communities entered the Punjab for preaching round 1834 where majority of the residents were educated and urban (Webster, 1978).

3.2. Data Analysis

The study was qualitative in nature. The important Christian figures in district Lahore were interrogated in-depth, who were carrying out their responsibilities in the fields of economics, politics, and social circles. Audio recordings were intently listened to before being transcribed. According to a review of the transcription, following themes were created.

4. Study Results and Findings

4.1. Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Religious Minorities in Society

Data interpreted that the perceptions and attitudes towards religious minorities in Pakistan are often negative, stemming from a lack of understanding and mistrust. It was elucidated that Muslim fellows and colleagues perceive their acts negatively. Different rumors against Christians prevail in the society which hinder their worth and social participation.

4.2. Experiences of Societal Discrimination and Marginalization

It was found through the data that religious minorities in Pakistan, such as Christians and Hindus, face a wide range of experiences of discrimination and marginalization in their daily lives. The majority of the respondents reported that they faced many kinds of discrimination, such as verbal and physical abuse, social exclusion, and even violence. Some other claimed that they are often the targets of hate speech and derogatory language, making it difficult for Christians to integrate into society and fostering mistrust between Christians and Muslims. One of the respondents said, *"Historical legacies of discrimination continue to shape the current experiences of religious minorities in Pakistan that include discriminatory laws, attitudes, and practices passed down through generations"*.

4.3. Economic Discrimination

It was indicated by most of the respondents that the Christians are often denied job opportunities and promotions, and are often paid less than their Muslim counterparts. This can make it difficult for Christians to make a living, and can also lead to a lack of economic mobility. This discrimination can also make it difficult for Christians to access healthcare, education, and other basic services.

4.4. Limited Political Power and Representation

Data presented that the Christians are underrepresented in government and political positions, which further exacerbates their issues, as they lack representation and voice to bring their issues forward. One of the respondents said, *"Population of Christians in underestimated that cause their less political participation."*

4.5. Violence and Persecution

Majority of the respondents expressed that they were at high risk of mob violence, forced conversions, and even murder. In some cases, Christians have been falsely accused of blasphemy, a crime that carries a death penalty in Pakistan. This has led to a climate of fear and insecurity among the Christian community, and has also led to the displacement of many Christians from their homes.

4.6. Lack of Protection from Government

Additionally, it became apparent that the government failed to do enough to safeguard the rights and safety of Pakistan's Christian minority, including failing to look into and prosecute crimes against them and failing to offer protection from mob violence and forced conversions.

4.7. Strategies and Coping Mechanisms to Navigate Discrimination

Many of the respondents expressed their opinion that variety of strategies and coping mechanisms must be adopted to navigate discrimination, such as forming community and social support networks, or using education and media to raise awareness about their experiences. Community and social support networks play a crucial role in the lives of religious minorities through provision of support and protection, and also serve as a platform for them to advocate for their rights. More importantly it was also identified that Religious institutions and leaders play their role in promoting tolerance and inclusion in Pakistan. Religious leaders should provide education and guidance on the importance of respecting diversity.

4.8. Revision in Government Policies

Respondents were of the view that Government policies had a significant impact on the well-being of religious minorities in Pakistan. Government should make reforms to reduce discrimination in employment, lack of access to credit and financial services, and limited access to government-funded programs and resources. More over some measures should be taken to eliminate lack of representation and land ownership issues.

5. Discussion

No doubt, Pakistan is making serious and sincere efforts to provide peaceful and conducive environment to all the religious minorities in all aspects of life. The churches are in safe custody secured by law enforcing agencies through fool proof arrangements. The institutions are working efficiently to uplift and boost the economic conditions and social empowerment. On the contrary, the leadership of Christians is totally dissatisfied with the efforts and endeavors made by the government for their prosperity and development.

During a comprehensive discourse, Professor Dr. Peter John, from Chemistry department of GCU Lahore remarked that he has closely observed and experienced the inter community relations and he draws conclusion that both communities i.e. Muslims communities and Christians communities living in harmonious and conducive environment since long. He quoted many examples from his personal life about interactions with Muslim colleagues at different places which was quite satisfactory in all respects. He also said that only a small number of people among the Muslims had feelings of hatred towards the Christians and they were sick minded people. He never witnessed any type of discrimination of race, cast, color or religion anywhere throughout his life. All the people have been enjoying equal fundamental rights in socio-economic fields.

Professor Dr. Farzand Masih, working in history department as chairperson in Forman Christian College and point out during interview that both Christian and Muslim are enjoying amicable and cordial relations in almost every field of life. The Christians are true patriot and well-wishers of the state who has always rendered valuable services for the development and growth of the country in true letter and spirit. Although the Punjab Government has performed well for the uplift of all the religious minorities and in enhancing their living standards yet more is needed to be done in this respect to resolve their day today issues. They have some serious apprehensions about the implementations of Blasphemy laws and the process of investigation. Especially the amended article of 95/C should be applied after analyzing thorough and protection of innocent citizen without any discrimination.

Mary James Gill a renowned researcher and politician point out that the Christians were the sons of soil and not the immigrants, therefore safety and security of each Christian member must be ensured. The Christians are frequently maltreated and persecuted in public and private life by a small segment of Muslim extremists. They are recruited for low wages posts like sweeping and related to sanitation work which is humiliating for them. Job quota for all the religious

minorities should be increased up to 8% in all posts including Competitive examinations at Federal and Provincial level for social prestige. Reserved seats for all the minorities especially the Christians and the Hindus must be increased according to the proportion of their respective population in the public representative and local bodies administration for their true representation.

6. Conclusion

Religious and spiritual thoughts from all religion schools always promote, love, peace and harmony for mankind and their respective nations. They are equipped to meet today's challenges: resolving war-like situations, caring for the needy and promoting peaceful co-existence in the whole world.

Christian Faith: "In everything, do to others as you would have them do you; for this is the law and the prophets." (Robertson, 1911)

Muslim Faith: "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." (Hadith) (Roche, 2003).

If we look at history, it will be clear that minorities have been deprived of their due rights and were given a back seat in Constitution to some extent. The minorities deserve full security of their fundamental rights with dignity in order to improve their living standards that will surely bring a fair name of Pakistan in world community. Almost every state in the world has different types of minorities and they demand equality of rights in the society (Sen, 1940).

No doubt, the Christian minority is facing some serious challenges and issues in different walks of life by a limited number of extremists, but on the other side majority of the Muslims extend cordial and cooperative relations towards all the minorities. The government and the society must perform their respective duties and responsibilities to ensure the provision of equal fundamental rights to all the religious minorities without any discrimination of gender, race, religion or color. Only then, Pakistan can be a progressive state and can bring a good name in the comity of nations (Channan, 2012).

Authors Contribution:

Muhammad Rashid: The major contribution in this study such as formulization of basic idea, review the relevant literature and prepared research methodology, discuss results, findings and conclusion

Navaira Fatima: Provide assistance in all stages and review the collected information, improve writings and improved conceptual understanding of the issue.

Muhammad Shahid Iqbal: Provide assistance throughout the entire article writing process, proofreading's, formulation and presentation of this research article.

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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