

## Focusing on Marginalized Groups in Pakistan: A Case Study of Christian Minority in Lahore

### ABSTRACT

*In today's world, there is hardly any state which is perfectly homogeneous and does not possess minorities of one type or other and Pakistan is also not an exceptional state in this regard. Pakistani society is a pluralistic one where citizenship is generally based on the principles of freedom of speech, thought and action. There are some incidents of religious intolerance by extremist elements in recent years that have attracted the attention of the writers to investigate the status of the religious minorities in Pakistan. Though Pakistan is an Islamic democratic state but its state and society provide religious freedom to minorities as well. Therefore, religious minorities always played an important role in its development, prosperity and solidarity without any religious prejudice. The Christian community of Lahore is now several generations old, although some have come from Muslims, Hindu or Sikh background. Minorities in Lahore also participated a lot in the development of the city and Christians being a largest minority of the city participated significantly in the society. Missionaries pioneered the provision of health treatment and education in a western style, not only during the Colonial period but after the partition their contribution enhanced in these fields, in a specific Muslim society instead being a minority of the city. It is imperative for decision makers in the country to revisit Jinnah's vision of democratic, plural and tolerant Pakistan, which is based on equal rights rooted in equal residency and similar rights of citizenship and free of biases based in gender, dogma and caste. This ideal formed the basis for the movement for Pakistan and still is adhered to an overwhelming majority of the country's populace. This study explores and analyzes the contributions and role of Christian community living in Lahore, in various fields*

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*including health, education, public work, civil and military bureaucracy etc. The prime object of the study is to highlight the efforts of Christian community in the promotion of socio-economic life of the people residing in Lahore after 1947, which may remove many prejudices of the ignorant persons, about the real contribution of the Christian community. Many historians, sociologists and anthropologists have worked a lot on the conversion movements and rights of Christian community in Pakistan, but no serious attempt has yet been made to investigate their role for the promotion of interfaith dialogue, imparting liberal education and health facilities after independence of Pakistan. Therefore, this study by throwing light on the contribution of Christian community in different walks of life in Lahore will fill a gap in the historical literature of Pakistani state and society. It would be a ready reference for the further study and research by other researchers. Therefore, it is of immense importance to understand the status of religious minorities more specifically of Christian community in Lahore with the subaltern historical framework.*

## **Introduction**

The pluralistic vision of the Quaid Jinnah was reflected in 11<sup>th</sup> August 1947 speech in modern Islamic state of Pakistan but unfortunately his speeches and statements have been thrown in the backburner by some governments in Pakistan to achieve their vested interests which caused intolerance and endangered the plural society of Pakistan. Therefore, even being a country with a heterogeneous society where the ethnic and religious minorities ought to have essential human rights, religious minorities are confronting numerous challenges including protection of their fundamental rights. According to some critics, the State has excluded the religious minorities from the state apparatus and they are fighting for their survival; therefore, rights of religious minorities have become a point of great debate in Pakistan. To enable its citizen to live decent and respectable life the modern states provide civil rights. (Quong, 2011, 120) It is generally believed that democracy as a form of government guarantees equality, ensure the good life of individuals and equal opportunities, therefore Pakistan also has granted in its constitution. (Constitution of Pakistan, 16) Therefore, Pakistan was destined to become a plural society where ethnic groups and the religious minorities were to have equal opportunity to grow in the modern Islamic democratic state. But, in the recent past, religious minorities have felt dangerous as the influx of radicalism in Pakistan (Malik, 2002, 9) gravely harmed their economic wellbeing and made their life awkward which have genuine ramifications for the eventual fate of plural society in Pakistan. This development has attracted the scholars, researchers and historians to probe into social status of the religious minorities in Pakistan. Therefore, this study intends to explore, investigate analyze the

status of Christians in Punjab that includes the socio-cultural, religious, economic and political status in Punjab from 2001 to date. (O'Brien,2006) *"The Construction of Pakistani Christian Identity"* (O'Brien,2006) is a description of Christian identity as a community in Pakistani society. (Khalid, 2013).

## The Quaid's vision of rights Minorities

Father of the nation, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was fully conscious of rights of minorities. He concentrated on the point that the religious minorities should not be considered as a separate entity rather they should be treated as equal citizens of Pakistan and its full citizens. (French, 1997) He assured the minorities that they were fully protected in Pakistan in terms of their faith, religion, property, life, culture, etc.

He further stressed that the religious minorities were equal citizens of Pakistan and therefore there will be no religious percipience on religious, creed or caste basis. In his February 1948broadcast to the people of America about Pakistan, Mr. Jinnah addressed:

"In any case Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic State to be ruled by priests with a divine mission. We have many non-Muslims -Hindus, Christians, and Parsis - but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan." (Daily Times, 2016)

The Quaid ensured freedom of worship to all religious communities in Pakistan. (Rafiq,1980, 420-423) He promised that they will be allowed to go to attend their worship places freely according to their respective religious beliefs. In his first speech in the First Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, the Quaid while issuing a policy statement on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1947, stated:

"You are free; you are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed –that has nothing to do with the business of the State". (John, 2009,93)

Rights of Minorities in Constitutions of Pakistan1956, 1962, 1973.

Since the birth of Pakistan, the religious minorities are given due rights in the constitutions of Pakistan. There have been number of provisions in the constitutions that guarantee the rights of religious minorities. (*Pakistan Tribune*, 2012) Pakistan is an Islamic and a plural

society with fluctuated ethnic and non-secular minorities. (Levesque, 2009) As Islam lays stress on protection of the religious minorities, therefore, the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, like the previous constitutions of Pakistan, 1956 and 1962, provides not only a citizen's fundamental rights to the non-Muslims in Pakistan but also ensures their rights as minorities. The more accurate population of registered religious minorities in Pakistani nation can be found in the recent census of Pakistan; however they are approximately 3 to 5 per cent of the total population of Pakistan.

These days, in local and general elections, minority individuals are not elected, rather they are selected. This practice causes deprivation of the religious minorities. Influential people are selected without consent of the general masses or citizens belonging to the religious minority in Pakistan. As they are selected as MPA, MNA or members in the Local Government bodies, they do not have coordination with the community for votes during the election campaign. Therefore, after selection, they have neither proper communication with the community nor bother to pay full attention to interests of their community. Though minority members have representation in National Assembly, Provincial Assemblies and Local Governments but the mode of their entrance into the government is not suitable. They must be elected through voting system and the religious minorities must have right of dual vote i.e. right to cast vote to the Muslim candidates as well. The right of dual vote provides them to be facilitated by the nearby elected Muslim members.

### **Role of Christian in Nation Building**

Prior to the British conquest and establishment of colonial government, Islam was deeply entrenched both in the religious belief and social orientation of the people in the country. Muslims had a uniform Quranic educational policy (Hashim, 2008,9) and in the remaining population other ethnic groups had their own traditional form of education based on their own culture and traditions, whose aims and objectives were similar. There were same position in the field of health and native population used indigenous experts for medication. The arrival of Christian mission's was basically for the purpose of the conversion and now days dozens of missionaries in Lahore are working to that end. They are active in most parts of the Punjab and do not care for the unfavorable living conditions. Lahore with all its religious, social, educational and factional characteristics could be a model to present the impacts of missionary efforts but during the colonial era, rulers in Lahore expressed a Commitment to education and health, in the belief that overcoming these formed a basis for national development as has been evident from their contributions in the field of education, welfare, health, economy, politics and communal harmony.

However after the partition many more mission schools were opened and attracted a lot of population due to their quality of education. Now a day, though not mandatory for mission schools, many of these follow the national curriculum in its core aspects with a little modification in order to accord with the teachings of Christianity. In the teaching of Humanities and History, a special emphasis is given to the Christianity.

But on the other side, history of Pakistan proves that the State of Pakistan adopted the policy of 'Inclusiveness' and therefore, religious minorities have been playing significant role in the nation building of Pakistan. (*Daily Dawn*, 2014)

There are particular renowned persons amongst the religious minorities who, on various fields, have contributed immensely. Jogendranath Mandal was main person who took part in the Pakistan movement and became minister of Labor and on religious affairs in the first cabinet of Pakistan. (*Dawn*, 2015) He also became the 'second minister of commonwealth and Kashmir affairs'. Alvin Robert Cornelius served as the "4th Chief Justice of Pakistan from 1960 to 1968". (*Christians in Pakistan*, 2013) Another important Christian leader is Julius Salik who is a human right activist and worked for the rights of minorities especially the Christians. (Pakistan Herald) In 1996, Mr Salik established "the World Minorities Alliance" to fight the case for the 'social status of minorities'. (*Dawn*, 2015) Clement Shahbaz Bhatti, sadly murdered in 2011 by some extremist, was a political figure, served Pakistan as a first minister of minorities affair and remained member of the National Assembly from 2008 till his death. (*The Guardian*, 2011) Cecil Chaudhry (Group Captain) got multiple talents and coined his name as "an academic, human rights activist, and veteran fighter pilot". (*The Express Tribune*, 2012) Ardeshir Cowasjee is a leading "philanthropist, businessman and columnist". (*Times of India*, 2012) 'Byram Dinshawji Avari is a prominent Pakistani businessman and twice Asian Games gold medalist'. (Daily Times, 2017) and Arthur Nayyar, known popularly as A Nayyar, is a one of the greatest 'Pakistani playback singer of all-time'. He won many medals in the show biz for his art of singing. (*The Nation*, 2016) The constructive services of persons like : "Joshua Fazluddin, Nasreen Anjum Bhatti, and Nazeer Qaisar from the Christian community" are extremely encouraging and inspiring for Pakistani State. (Khalid, 2014) similarly Bapsi Sidhwa from Parsi Community, Sobho Gian Chandani, Vali Ram Vallabh also rendered services for Pakistan. (Salem, 2006) On other hand the community also made their destiny and represented their strength in games especially in Cricket, "Antao D'Souza, played cricket 1959 to 1962 for Pakistan and also became the 'fourth Christian player who played test cricket for Pakistan' (*Christians in Pakistan*, 2015) including later Yousaf Yuhana (later accepted Islam no known as Mohammad Yousaf) a famous batsman represented his

community. The services of Christian minority especially of Lahore, in various field including army, Bureaucracy, Police and Local Government, education and health sector, are countless. Thus their role in making and building the nation of Pakistan is remarkable.

### **Current status of the Christian Community of Lahore**

The population of this study consisted of Christian minority residing in Lahore as it is one of the most populated cities of Christian minority. Lahore being the capital of Punjab and also recognized as the home to largest Christian Community of Pakistan, according to Christian demographic estimate of Pakistan 2013 reveals that, Lahore accounts for the highest percentage of Christian populations 368,089 which make 5.83% of total population living in Urban areas 268,775 and 99,314 in Rural areas, in contrast to any other district of Pakistan. Their Mainstream religious places (Churches) in the city are 'Sacred Heart Cathedral', 'St. Andrew's Church', 'St. Anthony's Church' and 'St. Joseph's Church'. The settlement of Christians in the city is in Yuhhanaabad, Joseph Colony in Badami Bagh and Mariyamabad etc.

Despite the fact they are contributing their best inspite of many difficulties, the role of Christian educational like Forman Christian College University, Saint Anthony's High School and medical institutions Hashmat Medical and Dental College, and United Christian Hospital Lahore is very commendable for imparting the education and health sector.

The research employed qualitative research method to gather experiences from 35 members of Christian minority belonging to different social classes and occupations. In this study the slum Christians were not interviewed and only those on high appointments were sampled to get the contextual information on identifying reasons in society affecting Christian minority. These were included employees of public and private organizations including management consultant, students, teachers, doctors, engineers, social workers, accountants, managers and representative of political bodies with age ranging from 18 to 80 years.

Findings of the study reveal that while each individual's experience was unique, patterns emerged for each query. The problems that Christian minority had been encountered varied greatly and categorized as religious intolerance, social discrimination, lack of educational and employment facilities. The inability to access to basic needs of life and financial instability were found common to the whole society and not specific to Christian community alone.

There were mixed responses from different people belonging to different social class among Christian minority. More than 65 % of respondents are of view that they have equal access to all needs; which

shows that they are also well aware of the problems faced by Pakistani society and its people. It is not only the Christian minority facing issues regarding basic needs of life, but almost 40% of the Pakistani including Muslims majority are also living below poverty line. (*Dawn*, 2013).

Though intolerance is not exclusive towards only Christian minority but is a menace to all communities residing in Pakistan including Shias (a Muslim minority sect), yet it is common complaint that Islam as a religious tool has been misused in Pakistan in spite of Pakistan being a Muslim-majority country. Although, Islam teaches tolerance and peace against other religions, but the current state is that intolerance is touching dangerous limits as conflicts amongst different sects like Sunnis and Shias is evident in the form of to the extent of bombings and blasts. (*The New York Times*, 2016) Responding to the religious freedom and tolerance, the Christian respondents (30%) responded that they were suffering from extremism in the form of suicide bombings and burnings of their settlements.

Responding to their legal rights they told that it was the most dissatisfactory feature of the legal system of Pakistan towards minority, as 75% showed their discontent to it. Unfortunately, Christian minority considers that Blasphemy law has become a tool to persecute them and many of the cases of violence resulted after acts of alleged blasphemy followed by dozens of Christian's sentenced punishments while many are under trial. (*The Express Tribune*, 2010).

When asked about role of education system, more than 50 % of respondents showed discontent for discrimination in educational institutes. However, the indicators are different in public and private schools, which also show radicalized culture of poorly coordinated public schools.

When respondents were asked about health services available to Christians, interestingly, 90% of respondents were satisfied from services of government hospitals. Unemployment and underemployment is a big issue in Pakistan and it is true with the religious minorities. (*Dawn*, 2013) Christian minority, 60%, complaints that the issue is not only of unemployment but it is also of discrimination in the selection method. (*Ibid*) Though government provides quotas for Christians for various jobs etc. (*The Express Tribune*, 2015) yet a better balance is needed to be created in inferior jobs.

Since the better off classes have a greater exposure to western style of life they indulge more in a liberal and modern life style. This class is more likely to indulge in imported forms of culture such as secular objects of art which would thus help raise their prestige among their peers.

In short, the Punjabi society exhibits a remarkable variety of life styles in which followers of a religious outfit can exist as neighbor to a family which indulges. Similarly, followers of popular music group in an upscale society might live next doors to a political radical. We also take

into account the collective society of Pakistan who irrespective of caste, creed, religion, language or political affiliation does not at all have equal access to basic needs of life. In that scenario, non-availability of needs to minorities makes routine, not exception.



## **Conclusion**

The study was conducted to assess the status of the Lahori Christian community and its services in the nation-building of Pakistan. Pakistan is a plural society and the religious minorities of Pakistan have been playing a significant role in the nation-building since 1947. However, since 1979 they have been facing numerous challenges including their religious freedom. Research has shown that socio-economically and politically disadvantaged Christians face lack of opportunities owing to variety of reasons. This study has tried to understand and assess the status of the Lahore Christians and data was collected by conducting interviews from different sections of the Christian community. Broadly speaking they have indicated that lack of proper education system and equal employment opportunity as two major problems they have encountered while discrimination in educational institutes is also affecting their educational and employment opportunities. In the recent past religious minorities, mainly Christians in Lahore, felt themselves unsafe due to the wave of extremism in Pakistan which badly damaged their social status and made their life highly, uncomfortable, something which has serious implications for the future of plural society in Pakistan. Despite facing many challenges and difficulties in the shape of laws and regulations set by the Pakistani society and state, the role of Christian educational and medical institutions is extremely commendable for imparting the education to the people of Pakistan on secular basis. In the light of the above there is a need to establish Ulema committees comprising of scholars from different religious backgrounds to generate healthy discussions and check social violence against any specific religious group.

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