



Local Context of Equal Status of Citizenship and Opportunities.



Pakistan has been struggling with defining its religious identity since its inception. As a result, religion has become a central theme of almost every discussion in the country. Religious considerations often shape the state's laws, stance on foreign policy, and human rights, leading to intense debates. Owing to its overwhelming majority following, Islam has played a significant role in constructing the culture and identity of the country. However, religious minorities, despite being relatively small in number, face several multifaceted problems, including concerns for their security and citizenship rights. Power imbalances between minority and majority groups occur in situations where constitutional and legislative systems could adversely affect equality and progress. Any critical discussion on this topic risks endangering minorities and their advocates. There is growing recognition that religious minorities in Pakistan are facing significant challenges, particularly in terms of their social acceptance as equal status of citizenship and economic opportunities for them.

Historically, minorities have faced significant challenges across legal, social, and cultural dimensions, resulting in discrimination and victimization. The increasing number of hate speeches and persecution of non-Muslims in various parts of Pakistan raises concerns about the country's constitutional guarantees of equal citizenship and opportunities for all. It also calls into question Pakistan's compliance with international agreements particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, and Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities.

The recent Jaranwala incident on August 16, 2023, has instilled fear among religious minorities in Pakistan, particularly the 1.27% Christian community. There have been several incidents in the past, each with varying degrees, posing a continuous threat to the community.

It is crucial to identify the root cause of the issue through effective contextual analysis that can inform policymakers to take measures to prevent similar incidents in the future. The contextual analysis helps us understand the factors and dynamics contributing to the vulnerability of the community in a Muslim-dominant state, which claims to protect minorities' rights in its constitution – specifically in Articles 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, and 36.

According to information obtained from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the 2017 census data for Faisalabad indicates a non-Muslim population of 276,432 out of 7,882,444, with Christians forming the majority at 264,677. Despite non-Muslims comprising 3.5% of Faisalabad's population (compared to the provincial ratio of 2.33%), the representation of Christian women remains negligible in the political process.

To grasp the complexities of the local context and on-the-ground dynamics, particularly in assessing the impact of statutes [influenced by religious preferences] on the social fabric, and the resultant state of ambiguity within grassroots communities regarding the understanding and

acceptance of diversity, the Association of Women for Awareness and Motivation (AWAM) executed a baseline survey in Faisalabad. The baseline survey specifically focused on assessing the participation of the Christian community [of different economic strata] in (a) job sectors, (b) education, and (c) politics. Simultaneously, the survey also assessed the level of information about the legal framework and reserved facilities for religious minorities and further inquired about the behaviour and attitude towards Christians of the people from the majority community.

Overview of the Study:

This analysis is rooted in the perspectives and indigenous knowledge of diverse segments of society residing in conflict-ridden areas like Jaranwala, Gojra, Warispura, Christian Town, Nasrat Colony, Daud Colony, and Dijkot, focusing on the challenges faced by religious minorities. Representatives from various religious institutions, including the Church of Pakistan, the Brethren Church, the Pakistan Bible Correspondence School (PBCS) Faisalabad, the Evangelical Bible Seminary (EBS), the Catholic Church, and the Presbyterian Church, and the Full Gospel Assemblies Church, actively participated in this study.

The team employed the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Method, an effective approach for in-depth exploration of socio-political and economic dynamics. Six Focused Group Discussions were conducted with young evangelists, pastors, and students of Christian seminaries. Three interactive sessions were held with youth from both Christian and Muslim backgrounds, and three seminars were conducted with research scholars, lecturers, and chairmen of the History, International Relations, and Pakistan Studies departments of the Government College University Faisalabad. In addition, the representatives of civil society organizations [for religious minorities] and human rights professionals [engaged with human rights issues] were also consulted.

✚ Desk Review

The FGD discussions were conducted by reviewing available information, accounts, preliminary interviews, and reports on the matter. This exercise helped us identify four major areas of concern: Socio-Cultural Context, Economic Opportunities, Political Engagement, and Role of Church and Religious Leaders. Additionally, the questionnaire was designed based on the survey of relevant literature, which includes legislative reforms, administrative notifications, and affirmative measures such as special allocations for minorities in jobs and higher education, exclusive commission, and political representation. All the literature used is cited and listed in the bibliography.

✚ Socio-Cultural Context (Equality Citizenship)

The state's responsibility to promote social unity while avoiding any element that can lead to division between communities is crucial. The introduction of religion into the formal matters of the state through the Objective Resolutions of 1949, while done with good intentions, has unfortunately led to discrimination against religious minorities. The realization of this discrimination over time has created a sense of insecurity among religious minorities in their homeland. Quaid-e-Azam's speech on August 11th, 1947, brought hope to many religious minorities by promising them equal citizenship status and protection from discrimination. This promise convinced a significant number of religious minorities to choose Pakistan as their home. However, despite the promise, religious minorities are still struggling to achieve equality in practical terms.

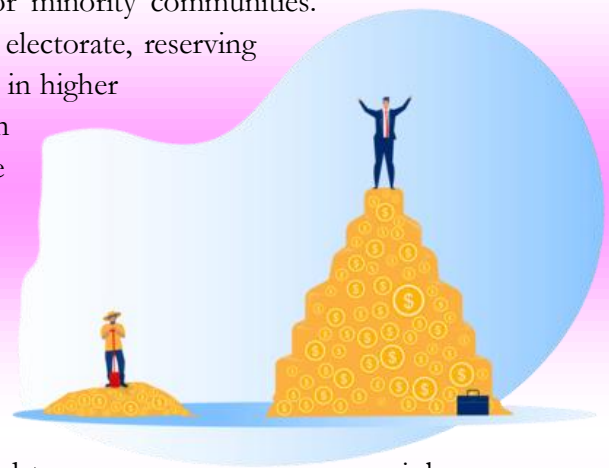
Socially, the community faces discrimination, hindering equal citizenship rights. Biases in the constitution [informed by the two-nation theory] inherently exclude non-Muslims, perpetuating otherness over inclusion. These deep-rooted indoctrinations push the community to the margins, affecting Christians to enjoy the equal status of citizens and access the opportunities equally. Particularly Christian women are disproportionately vulnerable to issues like sexual harassment, rape, forcible conversions, and forced marriages of Christian girls.

✚ Economic Situation

Throughout the years, successive governments in Pakistan have implemented various measures aimed at promoting equality and representation for minority communities.

These measures include the introduction of a joint electorate, reserving seats in assemblies, job allocation of 5%, a 2% quota in higher education, and establishing an exclusive commission for minorities. While these positive steps are commendable; however, more needs to be done to ensure that the fundamental freedoms of minorities are fully protected as enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973.

The government's 5% quota for minorities operates on a notification-to-notification basis, lacking effective empowerment. Historically confined to jobs as janitors and domestic labor, the community faces barriers to diversifying into other work spheres. Usually, treated by the majority of people as untouchable. In the same vein, the 2% quota in higher education, and exclusive commission [National Commission for Minorities] is also standing on a single notification.



✚ Political Scenario

It has been evident in several instances that socio-cultural and socio-political contexts play a significant role to protect and promote the concept of equal status of citizenship, and it is inevitable to engage all stakeholders to address the challenges faced by minority communities in Pakistan and promote greater inclusion and representation.

The desk review critically assessed the political representation of religious minorities. Our findings indicate that the representative model falls short in achieving socio-political transformation, lacking a focus on meaningful community participation. On the other hand, political parties claim to support minorities in their manifestos, but the lack of clarity suggests this may be more about meeting election commission criteria than a genuine political agenda.

Most of the mainstream political parties have established minority wings, similar to women's wings, labor wings, youth wings, etc. However, the members of these minority wings are usually not included in the central decision-making committees or boards. These arrangements within political parties are just to showcase that they have minority representation they are rarely allowed to participate in decision-making processes.

✚ Role of the Church

Seminaries have a primary focus on preaching and often neglect to provide community awareness about rights and issue resolution in a particular context. Churches and seminaries could play a vital role in civic education for the community's well-being and protection. To achieve this, these institutions need to shift from a charity-focused model to a welfare-oriented and rights-based approach to development model. It is essential to add material related to the local context into their syllabus as the graduates of the seminaries are ultimately supposed to preach or work in mixed communities. Therefore, young pastors and evangelists must have knowledge of the sensitivity of the local context.

FGD Structure and participants' demographics

Six FGDs were conducted to have an in-depth understanding of the issue. There were three groups designed in this regard that involved all stakeholders keeping in view the inclusion of all strata.

Discussion

In the collaborative discussions of the groups, a comprehensive view of the challenges faced by the Christian community in Faisalabad and Jaranwala emerged. In Faisalabad, the predominant occupation for the Christian community is sanitary work at the Waste Management Company, reflecting a societal stereotype that assigns lower-ranked jobs to the community. Very few people were associated to other occupations and had small businesses. The discrimination extends to daily life, with separate utensils and derogatory terms reinforcing a sense of othering. The incident in Jaranwala exacerbated the vulnerability of the community, resulting in terminations and increased discrimination, especially in the schools where the community members are blamed for committing blasphemy.

Some community members expressed serious concerns about their children studying in non-missionary schools. One woman mentioned that her child reported instances of Christian children being compelled to recite the Kalimah before entering school. Likewise, another mother reported that her child observed fellow students drawing a cross symbol on the wall to mock Christian children.

The participants highlighted the urgent need for education programs on minority rights to combat discrimination. Christian students spasmodically face pressure to convert in schools outside missionary institutions, and the stereotyping extends to perceptions about their appearance. People often associate dark skin color with the Christian community, leading to occasional racist comments. The youth shared that those with fair complexions often hear remarks such as, 'You don't look like a Christian; why don't you convert to Islam.'

Most of the participants in the group discussions were not aware of the rights of the community in law and constitution. Political affiliation among the Christian community members showed a diverse range, with some aligned with mainstream parties like PML-N, PTI and PPP. However, they mentioned that these parties' representatives didn't visit the conflict site during and after the incident happened. Nevertheless, they praised the efforts of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam representatives for supporting and delivering services to the community during the Jaranwala incident.

In Jaranwala, the Misaaq Centre plays a crucial role as a complaint helpline for minority-related issues. The post-incident discriminatory behaviors in schools, disrespect towards Christian symbols, and forced recitation of the Kalma underscored the need for inclusivity initiatives.

The participants expressed admiration for PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto for his numerous statements in support of minorities. Supporters of PML-N mentioned backing the party for implementing a 5% quota for minorities and others appreciating the efforts of specific representatives. However, a lack of political awareness about party manifestos was evident.

The participants emphasized the historical marginalization of the community, limited upward mobility, and the societal reluctance to support minority-led businesses. The educational scenario is marked by hopelessness, low awareness, and discriminatory remarks. The linkage of sanitary work with minorities perpetuates social stigma.

The participants across all groups called for the use of respectful terms like Masihi or Christian, the consistent fulfillment of job quotas, educational programs on minority rights, and initiatives for inclusivity and interfaith harmony. The comprehensive insights provided by the participants underscore the urgent need for societal, educational, and policy changes to address the systemic challenges faced by the Christian community in these regions.

Additional Findings:

To complement the methodology used for this analysis, we, additionally, conducted Interactive Sessions with Youth (on interfaith dialogues) and surveys on the issue for a comprehensive situational analysis.

📊 Surveys

The respondents of the survey said that navigating diverse socio-political environments in Pakistan as a Christian can be challenging. Some topics are not open for debate like forced conversions, misuse of blasphemy laws and desecration of Holy Books. They experience discrimination and intolerance during their college and university days, choosing to avoid responding to such acts.



The respondents criticized the role the National Commission for Minorities for lacking legal cover, autonomy, and independence, hindering significant progress in addressing minority rights violations. Though affirmative measures such as quotas for minorities in public sector jobs and educational institutions are positive steps, their effective implementation and impact assessment are still pending, along with an evaluation of their contribution to social cohesion.

To promote equal citizenship status and economic opportunities, suggested measures include amending discriminatory provisions in the constitution and existing laws, increasing funds for skill development institutes, ensuring funds for ministries to empower minorities, abolishing the Ministry of Interfaith Harmony, and assigning tasks related to job quotas to relevant ministries.

Assessing the performance of Christian political leaders, particularly in advocating for the Christian community in parliament, reveals challenges. Representatives on reserved seats may lack skills in drafting bills dedicated to safeguarding minority rights, often facing obstacles in having their legislative efforts considered by relevant committees.

✚ Interfaith Dialogues

The Interfaith Dialogues represent a pivotal stride in promoting interfaith harmony and social cohesion. As identified in the surveys, certain issues are not up for debate and most of the violence stems from these issues. It is important to have difficult conversations in a healthy manner to nip the evil of discrimination in the bud. The interactive sessions underscore the



significance of recognizing our shared composite heritage, fostering inclusivity, and involving youth in dispelling stereotypes and constructing bridges of understanding.

The participants and speakers emphasized that these dialogues are deemed essential for tackling the enduring challenges of discrimination and conflict in society. Through sustained engagement in open, respectful, and constructive conversations, a collaborative effort can be made to shape a more inclusive and peaceful society for all, grounded in the principles of unity and mutual respect.

However, some participants from the Christian community expressed discomfort with these activities, as they believed that non-Muslim women, in particular, could become targets for forced conversions in the aftermath of such events.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study sheds light on the challenges faced by the Christian community in Pakistan, particularly in the aftermath of Jaranwala. The incident has heightened fears among religious minorities, emphasizing the ongoing vulnerability they face. The analysis, rooted in diverse perspectives from conflict-ridden areas, highlights issues across political, religious, social, and economic dimensions. Systematic and structural discrimination, limited political representation, societal biases, and economic barriers emerge as significant concerns, perpetuating the historical marginalization of the community. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive changes, including political reforms, enhanced civic education by religious institutions, amendments to discriminatory laws, and targeted economic empowerment. The voices of Christian women, often neglected, demand attention, with a call for inclusive measures and educational programs to combat discrimination. The study also emphasizes the pivotal role of interfaith dialogues in promoting understanding and unity, recognizing shared heritage, and fostering inclusivity. Concerted efforts are required from policymakers, religious leaders, and society to create a more inclusive and peaceful environment for all, addressing systemic challenges faced by the Christian community in Pakistan.

Recommendations:

Immediate action should be taken to protect doubly marginalized Christian women against sexual harassment and forcible conversions.

- Amend discriminatory and contradictory provisions of the Constitution and existing laws in Pakistan.
- The government should address biases in the constitution, such as the Two Nation Theory, that form the foundation of state-imposed othering and exclusion.
- Seminaries should function as community welfare organizations and incorporate civic education into their curriculum, particularly about their rights in the constitution and safety and protection mechanisms.
- The church leadership further invests their energies and resources in Ecumenical Unity/Harmony and establishes fellowship programs for youth (particularly for girls and young women) to avoid incidents of religious conversions.
- A consensus should be built to amend the Christian Marriage Act, 1872, and Christian Divorce Act, 1869 and should invite suggestions and recommendations from the church leaders.
- Use "Masih" and "Christian" for the community, and sensitize people at all institutes and media instead of appropriating them as 'Eesai'.
- Educational institutions should play a role in eliminating discrimination as it affects the children and youth of the community adversely.
- Awareness of the laws should be promoted in school curricula based on Human Rights principles.
- Ban or discourage all derogatory and exclusionary materials that create a 'Holier than Thou' environment in society particularly those that encourage Muslim men to convert Christian women.
- Political parties should genuinely outline their plans for the inclusion of minorities, not only on a token basis but also for meaningful political engagement.
- Increase allocation of funds to skill development institutes to enable minority youth to receive technical education and access alternative opportunities for livelihood and income generation.
- Ensure funds are allocated to government ministries at federal and provincial levels to enhance the social and economic empowerment of minorities, addressing illiteracy and marginalization, including support for existing institutions offering formal and technical education run by minorities.
- The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) should be backed by the parliamentary laws defining its roles and responsibilities precisely in light of Paris Principles. In similar manner, the 5% job quota, and 2% quota in higher education should also be protected through legal framework rather than standing alone on administrative notification.
- Assign the Federal and Provincial Ministry of Human Rights or Ministry of Minorities' Affairs the task of addressing complaints regarding the enforcement of job quotas in the public sector, avoiding bureaucratic processes.