



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 04 No. 02. Oct-Dec 2025. Page#.1460-1468

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17557837>**The Marginalized Voices: A Socio-Political Study of Minorities in Pakistan****Aadil Ali**

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aadilalibhutto621@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

Minorities are groups of individuals who live in a state but are less in number than the majority of people. They might be based on religion, language, or ethnicity. Since independence, the minority communities have lived peacefully in Pakistan and have played an active role in improving society, notably in the areas of health and education. Even if they are productive and responsible citizens living in a pleasant environment, minority groups have been treated unfairly, discriminated against, and victimized by both the government and society. These minorities have been pushed to the edges of practically every part of life, including work, school, and most importantly, their right to practice their religion freely. Minorities, especially Christians, have a lot of worries about their safety. They often say that they have been targeted, notably under the Blasphemy Law, which has been used to punish them in the name of religion. A lot of these blasphemy lawsuits have turned out to be the consequence of personal grudges and religious wars. For Pakistan to be a welcoming and moderate place for everyone, the government needs to quickly deal with these problems that affect minorities.

Keywords: Minorities, Pakistan, Blasphemy Law, Religious Freedom.

Introduction:

A minority is a group of people who are smaller in number than the majority of the population of the country who share the same race, religion, or language. These minority groups are found in practically every nation on earth, and they are typically marginalized. Their isolation from the political and socioeconomic mainstream is the cause of this marginalization. These groups also encounter many obstacles and problems when expressing their minority identity, such as the inability to publicly celebrate their cultural and religious holidays or practice their faith. Because of their disparate ethnic or religious affinities, they are frequently the focus of violence and conflict inside a state.

There are various reasons why people are subjected to discrimination in various nations in the modern world. In addition to their gender, sexual orientation, and impairments, minorities are typically divided into religious, linguistic, and ethnic groups. Religious minorities are entitled to the protection of their culture, customs, religion, and language while residing in a state under international law. At the end of World War II, General Assembly of United Nations established the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 for the preservation of the rights of all the people of the world without any discrimination.

Different academics and organizations have given varied definitions to the term "minority." According to a well-known author and thinker, a minority is a group of individuals who have a distinct identity and status from the larger group they are a part of. Panday (1997). Minorities continue to lag behind because they do not receive their fair share in the majority of states. As Montague stated, these groups fight for their rights and endure hardships in order to be

protected in a nation. It was described by Lord Curzon as "for artificial ropes and pulleys to haul them up." Krishna (1939). Furthermore, Sen defines a minority as "a group of persons differentiating themselves from the majority of the population in a certain country in terms of race, language, or religion." Sen (1940)

"Minorities are groups held together by ties of common descent, language, or religious faith and feeling themselves different in these respects from the majority of the inhabitants by a given political entity,"

According to Encyclopedia Britannica (1967).

"Minorities are singled out from others in the society in which they live for unequal treatment, and they regard themselves as the subjects of discrimination, persecution, and exploitation,"

According to Encyclopedia International (1982):

Minorities are groups that have a lesser social position, less authority, and fewer rights in a society, according to the researcher's perspective. They are viewed as second-class citizens and are frequently shut out of society.

Different Types of minorities:

The minorities have been categorized into three groups by the researchers. The first is a "racial minority," sometimes known as a "national minority." This is essentially a grouping of different races, and it is very difficult to identify or pinpoint their boundaries. The term "Religious Minority" refers to the fragmentation of a national minority into numerous religions that are practiced by the populace. The third and final one, "Linguistic Minority," is similarly unthinkable since it may not be classified as a national minority but rather a linguistic minority (Krishna, 1939).

The Concept of minorities in Islam:

Islam has placed a strong emphasis on the equality of rights for all people, including minorities, as a faith that is practiced by all. There is no distinction based on caste, color, race, or language in Islamic teachings. Discrimination between various social groups has been eradicated by religion on all fronts. It has brought all people together and granted them the total freedom to exercise and adhere to their own religion. The holy book, the Quran, is filled with verses that advocate for religious freedom and equality for all people worldwide.

The Quran Says:

***"There is no compulsion in religion."* (Quran, 2: 256).**

In addition, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) advocated for equality when he declared: "I shall be the opposing party to him in the litigation on Judgment if he abuses a non-Muslim subject or taxes him beyond his capacity." (Hamidullah 1987).

Ways to look at Religious Freedom

Due to the growing influence of religion on global socio-political challenges and conflicts, the rights and freedom of religious minorities have consistently been a topic of interest in the social sciences. Numerous scholars have attempted to use theoretical schools of thinking and methodologies to explain the genesis of religious freedom over the years. Modernization theory, rational choice theory, and the civilization approach are a few of these methods.

The Civilization approach:

The civilization approach bases its description of religious freedom on the various facets and traits of a civilization. Scholars like Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis, who are regarded as important figures in this school of thought, thoroughly examined the idea. The function of religion is more significant than structure and agency, according to thinkers of the civilization approach. It goes on to say that one of the fundamental tenets of Western civilization is religious freedom, which depends on the separation of church and state. According to the

academic Lewis, Islam does not embrace secularism, which is a fundamental component of Christian civilization.

Despite the fact that religion plays a significant role in both private and public life in Pakistan, a sizable portion of the populace advocates for the separation of church and state. Another issue, according to Mann (2009), is that this theory is still unable to recognize how religious freedom has changed throughout time in Western cultures, particularly in Christian societies. He cites England as an example, where, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, Catholics were persecuted, murdered, and imprisoned due to their faith, despite the fact that religious freedom is very strong for all religious groups now.

The Theory of Rational Choice:

Supporters of this idea contend that people typically make logical decisions based on cost-benefit analysis. Similarly, religious practice is factored into the cost-benefit analysis. This theory's other fundamental premise is that people frequently accumulate winnings while ignoring expenses, yet the awards are typically given out sparingly. Humans try to make logical decisions when presented with a choice, guided by their own interests and preferences, while keeping in mind their limited knowledge and information (Stark and Fink 2008). However, the religious market is likewise exclusive, and patrons are still unable to make a decision at the appointed time.

The Different between passive and assertive secularism:

Secularism, according to Talal Asad (2003), is the idea of separating state from religion and basically guarantees religious freedom for all groups in society, particularly minorities. However, in contrast, even though the idea of secularism—the separation of state and religion—is an essential step in defending religious freedom, including that of non-believers, governments in the United States permit students to openly display religious symbols in their educational institutions, whereas those in Turkey and France forbid this. Kuru has separated this ideological approach into "Passive Secularism" and "Assertive Secularism" based on religion. On the one hand, the secularism assertion aims to keep religion out of the public eye and views it as a personal matter for each individual; on the other hand, passive secularism has no opinion on religion and permits believers to practice their faith in public. Kuru states that the aforementioned forms of secularism serve as the foundation for religious freedom in this setting.

Furthermore, religious freedom is not just a political matter; it is also subject to social and cultural constraints. The main example is that, in a nation with a high rate of religious liberty and passive secularism, such as the United States, where symbols of any religion are allowed in schools, few Muslim women are unable to wear headscarves or abayas because of social pressure and the risk of harassment, even though they are free to do so if they so choose (Khalid 2013)

Minorities and South Asia

Minorities in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan and India, are dissatisfied with their circumstances, the policies of the government, and the perception of the general people. The Gandhi-Nehru philosophy of the "one nation" notion has been used to define the rights of minorities in India, acknowledging the existence of multiple linguistic, cultural, and minority groups inside the nation. All Indian people, regardless of race, creed, or caste, are guaranteed equal rights under the country's constitution. "The State shall not discriminate against any

citizen on the ground on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth or any of them," reads the Indian Constitution's chapter on fundamental rights.

The situation of minorities in India is unacceptable despite the Constitution's guarantees, as nearly all minority groups Muslims in particular faces discrimination in all spheres of life. In India, minorities do not have a "fair share" of higher administrative positions. International rights organizations and the rest of the world agree that minorities in India are being persecuted and denied access to basic rights and necessities. In terms of granting rights and enforcing its policies nationwide, the biggest democracy is completely failing (Shakir, 1980).

Minorities and Constitution of Pakistan:

When he named Sir Zafarullah Chaudhary, an Ahmedi, as Pakistan's first Foreign Secretary, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the country's founder, indicated his desire for a truly democratic and tolerant nation. Zaigham (2009). The question of separate electorates for Pakistan's minorities was considered in the country's first Constituent Assembly following independence. While the minorities from West Pakistan supported a separate electorate, the Hindu members of the East Pakistani assembly strongly supported a shared electorate system. In Pakistan, several religious groups were hesitant to acknowledge minorities as equal citizens.

However, Quaid-e-Azam had a very clear opinion about minorities and their equal rights without state discrimination. "You may belong to any religion, caste, or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state," he remarked in an address to the first Constituent Assembly.

"You are free; you are free to go to your temples," he said, emphasizing the religious freedom of all communities, including Pakistan's minorities. In this Pakistani state, you are free to visit your mosques or any other places of worship. (Speeches of Quaid-i-Azam.)

In the meantime, the first Constituent Assembly was unable to agree on whether the newly created state should have a separate or combined electoral system. While religious parties favored a separate electorate system, nearly all of East Pakistan's major political parties backed a joint electorate. Following the adoption of the 1956 Constitution, the Assembly passed a fairly peculiar motion calling for separate electorates in West Pakistan and joint electorates in East Pakistan.

Constitution of Pakistan 1973

The first full constitution of Pakistan, with 280 articles and six schedules, was passed on August 14, 1973. The constitution guarantees fundamental rights to all Pakistani citizens without exception under Articles 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20.

"The Constitution also proclaims the equality of all citizens before the law, irrespective of race, religion, caste, and sex," according to Articles 11, 25, 26, and 27. Moskalenko and Gankovsky (1978)

The 1973 Constitution's Article 260(3)(b) states that Sikhs, Buddhists, Ahmedis, Baha'is, and Hindus are Pakistan's recognized minorities. As of the 1998 Census, Hindus made up 4% of the country's overall population. The Ministry of Minorities was created by the Federal Government in 2004 and transferred to the provincial governments in 2011 as a result of the Constitution's 18th amendment (Children of Minorities, 2014).

Pakistani Minorities and Demographic Profile

According to the 1998 population survey, there were 137 million people living in Pakistan. About 96% of people were Muslims, and 4% were members of other religious groups. It is further separated into 1.69% Christians, although the percentage was disputed because the Catholic Church of Pakistan possesses birth records that are higher than those found in the census; the Church often quotes a Christian population of 2.5% to 3% in Pakistan. Religious

minorities made up about 10% of Pakistan's population during the first 24 years of independence, but after East Pakistan was divided, the percentage of non-Muslims in the nation fell to fewer than 4%. Jacob and Jivan (2012).

Issues Facing by minorities

Minorities in Pakistan continue to suffer significant challenges in all spheres of life, even though they are guaranteed full equality of rights. These minorities encounter social limitations, difficulties in educational institutions, and difficulties finding employment. The main problems minorities in Pakistan face are listed below.

Issue of unemployment

According to Pakistani law and the Constitution, every citizen, provided they are qualified, has the fundamental right to work in the public or private sector. Christians have the same rights to apply for any employment, but the minority group believes that their religious convictions are the reason they are not being considered. "I applied for a job meeting the requirements and passed the written test, but during the interview, I was rejected just because I belonged to a religious minority," one of the Christian respondents informed the researcher.

The Church World Survey (2012) states that non-Muslims in Pakistan encounter socio-political problems and systemic barriers when looking for work. Even though the Pakistani government has raised the non-Muslim quota for educated religious minorities in the workforce to 5%, they are frequently taken advantage of, mostly because there are fewer seats available (Sheikh, 2009). In Pakistan, the majority of religious minorities work in the carpet, fishing, glass, brick, and agricultural industries. Singh (2007).

Social Isolation

Due to "who you are," members of religious minorities Christians in particular face social and economic marginalization. Since most members of these communities are regarded as untouchables, they are frequently treated as second-class citizens. These minority are also excluded from better services in the nation (Pakistan Institute of Labor, Education & Research, 2009).

The majority of Christians work in the sanitary sector, which includes picking up trash and debris from residences and the surrounding communities. "Chura" means impure, and the Christian sweepers are viewed as "polluted," which is a significant stigmatization in and of itself (Beall, 2000). Additionally, there are offensive posters against religious minorities all around the nation in marketplaces, streets, and retail establishments. Malik (2002).

Discrimination based on religion

Minorities in Pakistan believe that their views on religion have led to significant discrimination and humiliation. As previously stated, they are viewed as lower class individuals and are referred to by the Muslim community as "Esai" and "Chura," which meaning unclean and impure. Nazir S. Bhatti writes in his book: "Muslim religious extremists frequently attack and even kill Christian leaders, politicians, and ordinary citizens." Bishop John Joseph's religious convictions led to his murder (Bhatti, 2007).

Individual and family law: Still In the Future

Although Pakistan's constitution and laws theoretically guarantee all residents equal rights regardless of their caste, gender, religion, or language, in practice, special personal and family laws for minorities remain a pipe dream. Pakistan's current family rules regarding Christian marriage and divorce are incompatible with the current situation. Creating a smooth and conducive atmosphere for all religious minority to adhere to and practice their cultural customs and religious ceremonies is the fundamental goal of creating personal laws.

The Catholic Commission of Justice and Peace (CCJP) has taken on the responsibility of drafting family laws for the Christian community and amending the existing laws for minorities in order to create new legislation for Christians in Pakistan. To identify the theme areas and complete the articles of the legislation, CCJP has conducted focus groups as part of the law-drafting process. Participants in these focus groups come from a variety of social backgrounds.

include community representatives, lawmakers, experts, judges, attorneys, social activists, and researchers. The participants have placed a strong emphasis on religion being viewed as secular law, forced marriages, minority child registration, the age of marriage, and a speedy legal system. A diverse group of religious experts should be assembled into a committee, and a solid foundation for gathering information on instances of breaches of minority rights should be upheld.

In addition, minority groups have once again shown interest in a distinct electorate. Javaid Shameem, the Minorities Alliance Pakistan spokesman, stated the following at the Karachi Press Club:

"We have long been politically marginalized. We call for a distinct electorate in order to have full representation in the legislature.

Perspective of the minority characteristics

Khalil Tahir Sandhu, a former provincial minister for human rights and minorities affairs, has said that minorities, particularly Christians, have been essential to the founding and the development of this nation. He went on to say that the administration must now strengthen the representation of minorities in the National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies.

Dr. Peter John, a chemistry professor at Government College University in Lahore, spoke with the researcher and stated:

"I frequently discuss my issues and service-related concerns with my Muslim colleagues at the organization, and I am entirely satisfied with their cordial attitude."

Kamran Michael, the Federal Minister for Statistics and a former senator, said:

The Christian minority in Pakistan, and specifically in Lahore, is at risk for security issues. There are security failures in Yohna Abad, a Christian neighborhood in Lahore with 172 churches and a population of about 0.2 million.

Famous author, columnist, and journalist Dr. Kanwal Feroze stated in an exclusive interview that despite being native to the region, Christians in rural regions continue to face discrimination and marginalization because the majority of Muslims regard them as foreigners. To live in peace and harmony in society, the word acceptability is more suited than tolerance, which is a nonsensical concept. Living with mostly Muslim neighbors presents an identity dilemma for Christians.

In an interview with the researcher, Mary James Gill, a well-known advocate and former member of the Punjab Provincial Assembly, claimed that Christians in Pakistan primarily work as laborers and, in essence, have no social standing or equal rights. Only because they are deemed foreigners are they given low-paying occupations like sweeping and sanitation-related tasks. Six thousand of the 8,000 workers of the Lahore Waste Management Company (LWMC) are Christians. Every department in Pakistan has institutionalized discrimination. Nearly 90% of the employees at the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) are Christians, and they work in appalling conditions. In search of safety and a higher level of living, some 2500 Christians have traveled to Thailand. By increasing the number of Christian seats in the Assemblies, the Pakistani government must take certain proactive measures to ensure that Christians participate as much as possible in the political process and decision-making.

Blasphemy Laws

The Pakistani Constitution's blasphemy rules have major implications for the nation's minorities because they are frequently applied to members of religious minority. The British colonial regime created the current blasphemy laws, which were initially put into effect by the British rulers in India in 1860. These British regulations had a lasting impact on Pakistan, particularly when General Zia, the military dictator, modified them in the 1980s as part of his Islamization campaign. Nearly 80 blasphemy cases were registered between 1977 and 1988, according to a research published by the Centre for Research and Security Studies.

The 1982 amendment, which included Section 295-B, which suggested life in prison for anyone who knowingly defiles, ruins, or desecrates a copy of the Holy Quran, was made during the Zia government. (Sethna, 2014). In 1986, Section 295-C was added, which stipulated that anybody who defiles the holy name of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through written or spoken words faces the death penalty or a life term. Khan (2012).

Usually motivated by personal dislike or religious grudges, these restrictions were applied against minorities, particularly Christians. The cases of Rimsha Masih, the Kot Radha Kishan incident in 2014, Sawan Masih, Aasia Bibi, Ayub Masih, Salamat Masih, Mazoor Masih, Rahmat Masih, and Ghulam Akba are among the noteworthy instances against minorities under Sections 295-B and 295-C.

Findings:

- The majority of Pakistan's minorities are accepting, peaceful, and supportive of minority groups' equal rights. These organizations are in favor of prohibiting hate speech and policies, as well as sectarian organizations. As the "Hudood Laws" have left minorities vulnerable, the Christian community wants to see them repealed.
- All of Pakistan's minority organizations are gravely concerned about the extremely low representation of minorities in the Parliament.
- Minorities have been complaining that their political representation and employment quotas are being adversely affected since the government's census does not accurately reflect their population size.
- The majority of respondents believed that they had to deal with a number of political and economic issues, including racism and land grabs.
- The majority of Christian authors, activists, and philosophers want the major political parties to provide party tickets to minorities in general elections. Religious minority can only have their legitimate representatives in parliament who will speak up and address their problems at the local level in this manner.
- In addition, the majority of them favor a separate electorate for Christians in the legislature. Both the Hindu and Christian communities have equal numbers of nominated candidates in the Parliament, which is a bad practice. However, Hindus now hold eight of the ten seats in the National Assembly, while Christians hold two. Three Hindus are nominated for Senate seats, whereas just one Christian is. In actuality, the population shares of the two religious communities are about equal.

Recommendation:

- To guarantee safety against prejudice and harassment, the government of Pakistan should immediately create an unbiased National Commission for Minorities.
- Any provincial legislation that undermines minorities' standing in the provinces shall be prohibited by the federal government.
- To enable minorities to carry out their duties effectively, a supportive atmosphere is required in every department.

- A free and fair court can guarantee justice for everyone, and the government must apply the law transparently to ensure that blasphemy cases under 295-B and 295-C are properly investigated and that no minority is unfairly prosecuted.
- The Pakistani government needs to take certain proactive steps to enable minorities, particularly Christians, to actively participate in decision-making processes. Minorities must also have equitable access to top positions in the military and civil government.
- Without discrimination based on caste, color, or religion, government institutions must create favorable conditions for minorities to participate in the political and economic spheres. They must have access to an environment that allows them to conduct business as usual.
- Attacks on Christian colonies, such as Joseph Colony and Yohna Abad, must be investigated transparently, and those responsible must be prosecuted in line with state law.
- To guarantee that educational institutions shield all students from discrimination on the basis of religion, the federal and provincial governments must ensure that complaint procedures are simple and efficient.
- To increase their sense of confidence that they are equal citizens of Pakistan, print and electronic media should cover Christian religious and cultural holidays like Easter and Christmas.
- In order to prevent discrimination and future abuse of any law or provision, laws pertaining to blasphemy and evidence that discriminates, especially against Christians, should be changed. Those found guilty of providing false information for any purpose should also face legal action.
- The government must forbid acts of violence against any religious community and mob psychology. In order to promote interfaith harmony and tolerance in society, places of worship must be utilized. To further promote lasting peace in society, tolerance and interfaith cooperation must be taught in school curricula.
- The Pakistani government must take proactive measures to guarantee that all laws, regulations, and procedures adhere to international agreements.
- In order for religious minorities to enjoy their fundamental rights, the federal and provincial governments are required under the constitution to provide them with reliable security measures at all levels.
- Due to the growing minority population, the public sector's reserved quota for minorities needs to be raised from 5% to 8%. They will be able to sustain their quality of living by making use of their potential and energies in this way. They will contribute to the nation's development and prosperity.
- Minorities, especially Christians, believe they are not treated with the respect they deserve in both society and the workplace. They must be treated with dignity and accorded equal rights. It is important to educate and train the general population to view all persons as equal citizens of the state.
- Hate speech against non-Muslim minorities must be prohibited, and religious leaders and ulemas must actively and successfully play their role in promoting religious unity.
- The Ministry of Human Rights and Minorities Affairs should receive larger funding in order to support and improve minority groups across Punjab Province.

Conclusion:

Since independence, Pakistan's minorities have lived together peacefully, harmoniously, and with tolerance. However, over the years, minority groups—Christians in particular—have been complaining about the nation's injustice, lack of political influence, insufficient educational resources, and mistreatment. Minorities have been subjected to prejudice and humiliation on all fronts by the public and the government. Since Sections 295-B and 295-C of the Blasphemy

Laws went into effect, the situation has gotten worse. In the context of political desires and personal rivalries, these laws have been utilized to target minorities nationwide. In order for Pakistan's minorities to feel safe and secure enough to contribute to the nation's growth and advancement, the government must take urgent action to address the problem.

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