



EXPLORING THE PATTERNS OF PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION AMONG HINDU AND CHRISTIANS MINORITIES, REGARDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Asma Yunus¹
Neha Riaz Khan²
Zaheer Ali³

ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to explore the patterns of perceived discrimination towards religious minorities, mainly in education and social sector. Objectives of the study was to access the difference between Hindus and Christians regarding educational opportunities, to explore the minority's perception about dealing with the difference in educational opportunities, to analyze the role of curriculum at primary school level regarding minority affairs and to analyze the role of government in hindering the discriminatory practices against religious minorities. In order to collect the data, Snowball sampling technique was used for the study. A sample size of total thirty families comprising of, fifteen Christian and fifteen Hindu were interviewed. Case study research method was used as research technique. It was found that minorities are discriminated and harassed both in education and social sector. They are living in a highly disintegrated state from the majority and are facing identity crises. They poses a lower socioeconomic and literacy status. School curriculum is highly biased and content poses a threat for minorities. Government failed to develop and implement a tolerant and unbiased curriculum and school environment.

Key Words: Discrimination, Religious minorities, Education sector, Situation of Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Discrimination is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex (Oxford dictionary). There are many types and forms of discrimination such as; sexism, racism, sexual orientation, religious and spiritual belief, age, class,

¹ Lecturer, Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab **E-mail:** asmavounus@gmail.com

² Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab **E-mail:** nehariaz@yahoo.com

³ Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab **E-mail:** zaheer.ali87@yahoo.com

size (fat-thin), ethnicity, social class, wealth etc... On the other hand, the intensity of discrimination varies group to group based on acceptability level for different groups in society.

Religious minority refers to the group of people belonging from religion which is different in terms of belief, practices and offers a different code of life from the state religion. Religious minority is the least acceptable group in any society and faced the most discrimination. In the history religious minorities have been remained under the suppression of majority and faced restriction in offering their rituals, discrimination in social behavior, economic marginalized and do not seem to be part of main stream of the society. Religious intolerance and oppression have been remained the oblivious factors in the discourse of human history (Rehman, 2010).

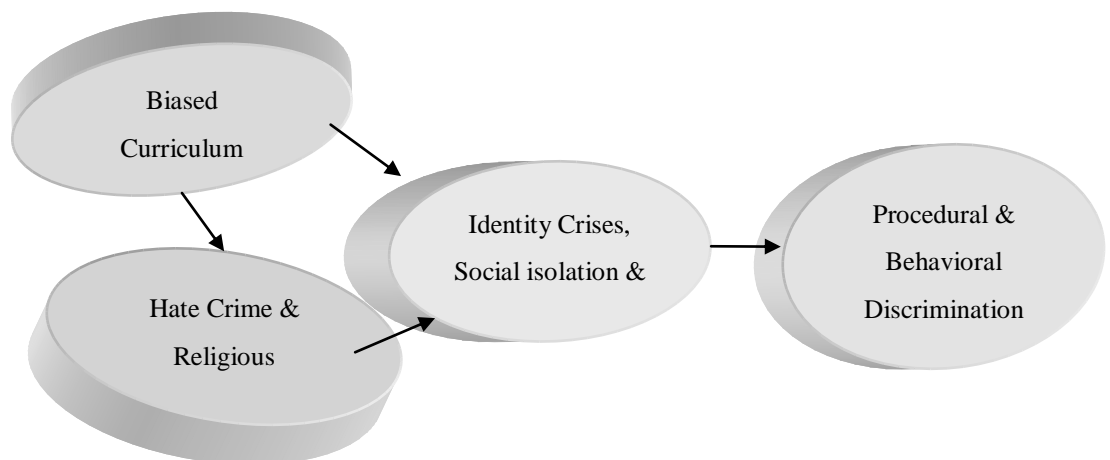
Every sector of everyday life possesses different types of discrimination to religious minorities. However education is the sector which injects discrimination in all other sectors of society so in a way it is the mother of all other sectors of society and all individuals passed through it to reach any other sector. Education sector faces discrimination in which the major concern is the increased dropout rate of children from a minority group. The text books also promote and inject negative feelings towards the minority groups. Existing curricula and textbooks are mainly more religiously oriented, ideologically motivated, and driven by hatred and prejudice against other religious minorities (Hussain, Saleem & Naveed, 2011).

Pakistan entered the new millennium with an unresolved question of discrimination with religious minorities. In 1947, the state of Pakistan was created on communal basis, but the question of religious freedom became very critical within short span of time after its inception. Pakistan has rectified the declaration on the rights of religious minorities and also has assured fundamental rights for all in its constitution. However, the kind of abuses and oppression religious minorities' face point to institutionalized human rights violations in the politics, state and society at larger. Examples can be incorporated of the exclusion of Ahmadis in the constitution of 1973, the anti-rights region of General Zia-ul-Haq, the blasphemy laws issue, the worsened situation and forced migration to India especially targeted towards Hindus; after the incident of Babri Mosque, and an important question/allegation raised by different minority groups are application of false blasphemy charges with the life of accused (Czarnecki, 2011). Asian Human Rights Commission (2011) explored the situation of human rights in Pakistan is one of the most serious in the Asian region and has the greatest impact on regional and international peace and security. Pakistan entered the new millennium with an unresolved question of discrimination with religious minorities. The absence of the rule of law and serious flaws in State institutions has made Pakistan into a hotbed of conflict and instability. A range of grave rights has been abused in Pakistan during 2010. These include discrimination and violence against women, forced religious conversion, the misuse of blasphemy laws against religious minorities, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and the endemic use of torture.

Hussain, Saleem & Naveed (2011) discusses the impact of curriculum in promoting hatred and discriminatory behavior towards different minority groups. This hatred in future turns out into extreme negative behavior patterns which may involve violating the fundamental rights of the minority groups. There's a lot of negativity and discrimination in the textbooks. And what the ultimate consumers, the students, are learning is that minorities are less valuable, are not full citizens, and are generally not viewed as a part of the social fabric of Pakistan. They concluded from this research there is omission from the textbooks, of contribution minorities made in Pakistan's formation, development, and defense. The attitude of school teachers is biased and the attitudes of students are misinformed or pejorative with minorities, which often imitate the textbook content or teacher opinions. Textbooks published after the curricular reforms of 2006 failed to follow the mandated guidelines.

Similarly; Hussain (2008) discussed that there are over 4 million religious minorities living in Pakistan with Hindus and Christians forming the largest group and if an unwanted incidence happens in India, Hindus in Pakistan become a target. Similarly, Christian community is facing more problems in hands of hard liners after Americas attack on Afghanistan. Religious minority is discriminated in government employment and there should be a reserved quota for them in government jobs at local, provincial or federal level. In schools and colleges, history books spread hatred and develop hostile attitude in Muslim students towards religious minorities. Contribution of minority population in independence movement and later in development of Pakistan never gets space in textbooks. Religious minorities have unfair business environment. They face hardships in recovery of credits and property. Hindu women suffer from kidnaps and forcible conversions, and the community is generally depressed, under-educated and under-employed. Christians as a community are better organized, with church-based and secular organizations emerging to focus on human rights.

Conceptual Framework



OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To access the difference between Hindus and Christians regarding educational opportunities
2. To explore the minority's perception about dealing with the difference in educational opportunities
3. To analyze the role of curriculum at primary school level regarding minority affairs
4. To analyze the role of government in hindering the discriminatory practices against religious minorities

METHODS

Population of the present study was Hindu and Christian community of the Lahore city. Target population was Hindus and Christians living in Lahore, whose children study in private and public schools of Lahore. Snowball sampling in combination with haphazard sampling technique was used to select from the overall population of Hindu and Christian living in Lahore a total 30 respondents, on average of 15 from both Hindus and Christians. Case-study research method with addition to content analysis was used as a technique of data collection because sample size was only 30. The tools used for data collection includes; in-depth interviews, informal meetings, interview of the key informants, content analysis, oral history and observation. Before the collection of actual data, the measurement tool was pre-tested from 4 respondents from the target population. Some questions were added, deleted and modified, according to the responses of the respondents. Rapport was developed to create friendly and reasonable atmosphere for conducting present study, researchers tried their best that none of the respondents hesitate and refuse to give information about any topic. Initially it was very difficult to the researchers to take respondents original views as it was a very sensitive issue and respondents were hesitated to give the response. Some respondents who were literate were supportive and provided all information to the researcher.

As it was a qualitative research project and in-depth interviews were done for data collection, analysis of data was not possible through statistical test because of small sample size and exploratory nature of study. Themes and sub-themes were developed after careful analysis of interviews and justification of themes are given in the original words of respondents. No intentional change was made in opinion of respondents, except fictitious names are given to respondents to ensure confidentiality, considering the ethics of research.

DISCUSSION

The major purpose of the study was to address the issues of religious minorities in Pakistan with special focus on education and social rights and the role of government in providing equal rights and opportunities to minorities. To achieve the objectives the researchers conduct in-depth interviews of two biggest minority groups of Pakistan, Christians and Hindus. In the light of related literature and the results of the in-depth interviews following debate was generated:

Religion has always been a key factor in creating a line between acceptable and unacceptable, sacred and profane, equal and unequal, pure and un-pure. Religion plays a key role in shaping an overall structure of a state worldwide. However; in Pakistan religion has taken over all other institutions of society to highest level which is creating chaos in the country and making life more difficult for the minorities.

Nature of Discrimination with Religious Minorities

Nature of discrimination with religious minorities can be divided as theoretical and practical. Whereas global factors are the theoretical nature of discrimination and religious extremism and socioeconomic and literacy status are practical nature of discrimination.

The situation of minorities in Pakistan is going to be worsened day by day. In Pakistan, discrimination is practiced in many forms while global factors such as Pakistan-India tension, Pakistan-America relations play a key role in promoting or hindering the patterns of discrimination. Hindus in the country are one of the biggest minority group and also one of the most hated and discriminated community. Pakistani Hindus suffer due to the Indo-Pakistani politics and their interstate rivalries; they are considered as the allies of an enemy state. Although, majority of them have been living here from before the inception of Pakistan but still they are treated as third grade citizens. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, the kidnap and rape of Hindu women; the devastation of Hindu temples during the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1947-8, 1965, 1971 are linked with the rise in Indo-Pakistani tension. In December 1992, the incidence of destruction of the Babri Mosque in India proved a milestone in promoting hatred and discrimination against Hindus of Pakistan specially Punjab. Temples were demolished in Punjab. Moreover, hundreds of families were forcibly moved from their homes and under constant fear and insecurity they were migrated to Sindh. While Christians may be disliked and discriminated against, but there have been no serious anti-Christian riots in Pakistan. The situation of Christians is a bit different due to the support of International Christian Community. Additionally, there are missionary institutes which are providing quality education to the Christians and also doing welfare work for them.

Religious extremism is also playing a major role in promoting hatred towards minorities in Pakistan. Religious extremists exclude minorities socially and also pose a direct threat to their security. Under the threat of religious extremists most of the Hindu and Christian families in Punjab are living with Muslim names. Religious extremism promotes religious intolerance in the society which not only risks the security of minorities but majorities as well and it also hinders the provision of basic human rights by the state to its citizens. Minorities are confined to menial, low-paid and low-status work, especially Christians and Hindus has seriously diminished their self-esteem. Most of the Christians (male and female) work as street sweepers and suffer from discrimination. The Hindus are mostly poor and lack organization, and are vulnerable to society oppression.

Pattern of Discrimination with Religious Minorities

There are three different patterns of discrimination; procedural, behavioral and linguistic. The role of government regarding minority rights has been highly criticized by human rights activists and different non-government organizations while discussing the procedural and behavioral pattern of discrimination. The infiltration of religious extremists in the parliament has been a key factor in flourishing the anti-minority policies since the creation of Pakistan. Although, Punjab Government has taken few positive steps which includes free education up till matriculation level but the level of education and facilities provided are totally inadequate. Government has reserved 5% quota of minorities in provision of government jobs but it is not implemented to date. The constitution of Pakistan itself is discriminatory and minorities are not given seats in parliament on practical basis. Role of government regarding minority affairs has always been vague i.e. firstly, there is no policy; secondly, if there is a policy, there is no implementation and lastly, if there is implementation then there is no check and balance. The results were consistent with previous findings in report by Rehman (2010). Government support programs such as Danish schools and Benazir income support program is not meant to support religious minorities.

Religious extremism has aggravate the situation for religious minorities; Hindus and Christians are called by derogatory words and threatened to forcefully convert to Islam, under these treats it is mandatory for religious minorities to live under Muslim names. There are insulting posters in the streets against minorities; for example, there are anti- Hindu statements i.e. “What is relationship with India? Hate and revenge”, on Rickshaws and on walls which are promoting hatred against Hindus.

Forms of Discrimination with Religious Minorities

Discrimination with religious minorities has been made a part of whole education system/procedure. There exist different types of direct and indirect discrimination; religious harassment and hate crime. Teaching in schools is heavily oriented towards Islamizing pupils indirectly. For example, 20 extra marks are given to any candidate for admission into schools and higher institutions for memorizing the Qur'an, ethics is offered from 8th class and Islamic studies from 3rd class and in school assembly religious minorities are compelled to learn and hear Quran.

However; Religious minorities are segregated on every ground even directly, as in schools they are not allowed to sit and eat with Muslims and mostly front seats are reserved for Muslims students. Religious minorities can't have house on rent easily, and they also can't declare their identity openly. Their children are threatened by teachers on being a Hindu. These findings are evidence to support report by Czarnecki (2011).

Discriminatory Course content and Religious Minorities

Based on the 1998 census, Pakistan's National Council for Justice and Peace (NCJP) - one of many well-respected human rights groups - has examined minorities' literacy rates. According to the NCJP's report for 2001, the average literacy rate among Christians in Punjab is 34 percent, compared to the national average of 46.56 percent. Among minority women, the rate is terribly low. The average literacy rate among the Jati (upper caste) Hindus and scheduled castes (Dalits) is 34 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively.

In Pakistan, School Curriculum served as a basic tool for promotion of hatred and negative feelings against the religious minorities. It is basic human nature that if you repeat some idea time by time human mind starts to accept it. Same is the tragedy with curriculum; curriculum taught biased and discriminated phrases to children who create a sense of extreme dislike and unacceptability for the religious minorities. Curriculum is biased especially the books of Pakistan Studies, Islamic studies, History and Urdu are portraying negative image of minorities and especially Hindus, which in future turn out into extreme negative behavior patterns which may involve violating the fundamental rights of the minority groups. These finding were in accordance with the findings of previous research of Hussain, Saleem & Naveed (2011).

Immediate steps should be taken by the government and non government agencies to design and promote a curriculum based on promotion of religious tolerance in education and also to nurture the values based on equality of all without making any discrimination on base of religion, caste, creed or race Hussain, Saleem & Naveed (2011). Government must include a representative from each minority group in Curriculum development committee; consequently that would reduce the barriers between the minority groups and majority and in addition would develop a curriculum which would satisfy the minority groups as well as would promote religious tolerance.

Influence of Discrimination on Religious Minorities

Discrimination with religious minorities effect them in a number of ways as their children start facing identity crises, feel insecure, get socially isolated and some extra sensitivities developed in them. Different types of religion exists in every society all over the world, which affects the living pattern of people in society and therefore effect their personality building. Children of religious minorities hear two contrasting point of views regarding religion in their schools and homes; which make them confused about their identity and they rise a lot of disturbing questions. These finding support the findings of previous research of Hussain, Saleem & Naveed (2011).

Hindu children are socially isolated and feel insecure while Christian children are also socially isolated but their ratio and level of isolation is less than Hindu students. These findings support the findings of previous research of Czarnecki (2011).

Phenomena of discrimination within discrimination also widely practiced; that is both Hindus and Christians are minorities but the behavior towards Christians is far better than that towards Hindus or we can say that Christians are more tolerated and socially acceptable than Hindus.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the findings of the research we concluded that there is a lack of progress in preventing religious discrimination in schools or throughout the social order. Schools play an important role in personality building of children but due to the subjective attitude of teachers and school administration regarding religious minorities; certain forms of religious discrimination is considered acceptable. Religion is a social institution which has its own values, the problem starts when we want to see every institution in the cover of religion. There should be the separation of Religion and School course content, but in Pakistan every institution education, health, mass media, and government revolve around religion; which discriminates the people who don't fall in our definition of state religion. The methods of limiting such discrimination are few and ineffective, and are incapable to prevent discrimination on a large scale.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are the recommendations made by researchers;

- Government should take necessary actions as;
 - Government should formulate laws for the proper implementation of existing policies for religious minorities.
 - Create a reporting mechanism for cases of discrimination against religious minorities.
 - Government must revise its policies and discriminatory laws and practices and should ensure basic human rights to minorities as equal citizens of Pakistan.
 - Government must take immediate action towards such elements of society which are openly promoting hate campaign towards minority groups.
 - Develop teacher-training programs to focus on the legal rights of religious minorities, critical thinking, and the importance of promoting tolerance for diversity in classroom.
- There is a need of development of unbiased, tolerant, and neutral curriculum for which government must include members from different minority groups in education commission of Pakistan.
- Future researchers must discuss the legal ways to overcome the problem of social exclusion and to preserve the identity of Religious minorities.

- The researcher has selected community of single city as the universe. A same research can be held on divisional level community setting as universe.

REFERENCES

- Asian Human Rights Commission. (2011)** The State of Human Rights In Eleven Asian States-2010. Hong Kong, China: Author
- Czarnecki, R. (2011)** Anti-minority education in Pakistan. Retrieved February02, 2012, from <http://www.neurope.eu/blog/anti-minority-education-pakistan>
- HRCF. (2010).** Status of Minorities in Pakistan in 2010 Annual Report SAHR. Retrieved from <http://www.hrcf-web.org/Publications/AR2010.pdf>
- Hussain, A., Saleem, A., & Naveed, A. (2011)** Connecting the Dots: Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan. United State Commission on International Religious Freedom. Islamabad, Pakistan
- Hussain, I. (2008)** Religious Minorities in Pakistan, Mapping in Sindh and Baluchistan. Center for Peace and Development. Quetta Baluchistan, Pakistan.
- Nayyar, H. A., Shah, A., & Khan, T. (2009)** Enhancing Religious Understanding and Promoting Tolerance in Education. Sustainable Development Policy Institute. Islamabad, Pakistan
- Population Census Office. (1998)** City District Lahore at a Glance. Retrieved May 20, 2012, from <http://www.census.gov.pk/PUNJAB/LAHORE.htm>
- Qaiser, J. (2010)** Situation of Minorities in Pakistan. Retrieved June 01, 2012, from <http://criticalppp.com/archives/4930>
- Rehman, A. (2010)** Major problems of the religious minorities of Lahore 1947-2010. Unpublished BS-4years thesis, Government College University, Lahore, Pakistan.
- Shaikh, H. (2009)** Status of Minorities in Pakistan in 2009. Islamabad, Pakistan: South Asians for Human Rights.