



## UNVEILING THE SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES: A CASE STUDY OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS LIVING IN LAHORE

**Fouzia Naveed**<sup>†</sup>

*Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab*

**Maryam Munir**

*Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab*

**Yasir Saeed**

*Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya Universty-Lahore Campus*

### ABSTRACT

*The research was conducted to explore the situation of religious minorities in acquiring job opportunities, difficulties face by them at worship places and in accessing health facilities. Objectives of the study are to analyze how Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis and Sikhs are marginalized in the society; to explore the issues face by religious minorities at worship places; and to document their perceptions about provision of health care facilities. For data collection, snowball sampling and purposive sampling technique were used. A sample size of thirty respondents comprising of, ten Christians, eight Ahmadis, six Hindus and six Sikhs were interviewed. In order to collect the data, in-depth interviews was used as research technique. Interview guide was used as a tool for data collection. Data was analyzed by using thematic analysis. It is found in the research that religious minorities in Lahore, Pakistan were in a grimy condition. They face negligence from state institutions; exploited by extremist groups and general public show hatred towards them. The research reveals that people of this society socially exclude the religious minorities from mainstream of society just because of their religion. They have no equal opportunity in jobs. People limit their interaction with religious minorities because people label them untouchable. The government has least priority to provide security to religious minorities. This research also found that they are also facing marginalization in provision of health care facilities.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Marginalize relegate to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group. This process is called marginalization (Adamshick, 2010). There are different types of minorities who are facing marginalization in various countries. Minorities are categorized into racial or ethnic minorities, gender or sexuality minorities, religious minorities, age minorities and people with disabilities. In international law, religious minorities include categories characterized by their desire to preserve their traditions, their language, their culture and their religion within a State. At the end of World War-II United Nation General Assembly adopted universal declaration of human rights on December 10, 1948. Universal declaration of human rights promotes the respect for these rights and freedom for human beings. Here is some overview of different countries related to situation faced by religious minorities.

### 1.1. Situation of Religious Minorities in Developed Countries

Religious minorities are facing problems not only in developing countries but also in developed countries like America. After 9/11 Muslims identity are under threat. Americans consider Muslims terrorists. American Muslims are marginalized in different aspects of life because of identity of Muslim after. 57% Americans respond to researchers that American Muslims are not important part of US religious community (Public Religion Research Institute, 2011).

### 1.2. Situation of Religious Minorities in Asia

When we take a glance in Asian region then we come to know that India is considered as largest secular state. There is no legitimately recognizable religion in India. Law and constitution failed to provide protection to the Religious minorities. Anti-conversion laws implemented in India promote discrimination in the religious minorities. Religious minorities forced to change their religion. In one incident twelve Christians were forced into a field where their heads were shaved because they refused to reject their Christian faith. Later all of them were told to eat raw rice mixed with goat blood in order to become Hindus. In Iran Baha'is are facing false imprisonment, arbitrary detention, deduction and destruction of property, lack of employment and government profit, and rejection of access to higher education. There is no single mosque of Sunni Muslims in Iran. After 1979 revolution in Iran religious minority were discriminated in such a way that worship places and graveyard of Baha'is community were removed by the government (Congressional Research Service, 2008).

Pakistan remained a volatile place where religious minorities faced insecurity and maltreatment. Freedom of belief and expression came under severe threat in Pakistan (Gregory and Valentine, 2009). Pakistan has a dual system of justice which includes Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and Pakistan's constitution. The 1973 constitution, broadly considered the most moderate, consisted of definite protections for religious minorities, where number of articles provided fully protection to the religious minorities:

**Table-1.** Protection of religious minorities in 1973 constitution of Pakistan

Article No	Description
Article 20	Freedom to profess religion and to manage religious institutions
Article 21	Safeguards against taxation of specific religions
Article 22	Safeguards around education with respect to religious freedom
Article 25	Equality of citizenship
Article 36	Protection of minorities

Source: (Gregory and Valentine, 2009)

### 1.3. Violence against Religious Minorities

Over the past three years violence against religious minorities has greater than before and targeted killings are on the rise. This is because *maulvis* (an expert in Islamic law and a person who regularly lead prayer in a mosque) are promoting such attacks and violence in their sermons and in the media. In a program aired on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the anchor of a popular religious program stated members of the Ahmadi sect *wajib-ul-qatl* (declared it compulsory for Muslims to kill members of the Ahmadi wing). Within forty-eight hours of the statement on television, 2 well-known Ahmadis were gunned down (Faruqi, 2011).

In Burma, Muslims are not allowed to build any new mosque and *Madrasah* (a religious teaching institution). If any new situation is marked, those responsible are punished to between six months to six years in jail plus a fine. No new mosques or *Madrasah* have been allowed to build in the last 20 years (IHH, 2012).

### 1.4. Threats due to Blasphemy Law

In the practices of political struggle for power, even liberal politicians remained silent on the issue about the fundamental rights of religious minorities. Blasphemy law proved to be a major contributor to the worst condition of religious minorities in Pakistan due to indecorous implementation. Parliament added section 295-C to the Pakistan Penal Code, which is known as the “blasphemy law” (Faruqi, 2011). In January, 2011 Salmaan Taseer, Governor of the Punjab was killed by one of his security guard supposedly for his verbal blame of Aasia Bibi sentence and the implementation of the blasphemy law. Shahbaz Bhatti, the federal minister for minorities, was gunned down outside his mother’s home in Islamabad due to blasphemous act.

### 1.5. Employment Issues

The government had reserved five percent of the jobs in government departments for educated and skilled members of the religious minorities. In Arakan, there is not a single Muslim civil servant. To start up a business in Arakan, it is necessary for a Muslim to establish partnership with Buddhist. In this partnership, the Buddhist partner owns half of the business without investing any asset (Insani Yardim Vakfi, 2012). Most of the Christians are sweepers or brick kiln workers. The working conditions are not safe and they are also physically and verbally abuse by their owners. They work all day long, but they do not get drinking water and toilet facilities at workplace. Religious minorities are exploited both by authorities and society (Faruqi, 2011).

### 1.6. Damages of Worship Places

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010, armed gunmen attacked two Ahmadi mosques in Garhi Shahu (a town in Lahore, Pakistan) and Model Town in Lahore, Pakistan where ninety six people were killed.

On November 15, 2010, a notorious land-grabber and armed men clothed in police uniforms attacked the King of Kings Church in Wasan Pura, (a town in Lahore, Pakistan). The attackers were armed with guns and used a crane and a bulldozer to destroy the church. The church was razed to the ground, and items such as crosses and Bibles were destroyed during the attack. First Information Report (FIR) was at the end registered. However local residents have received death threats, since attending the protest and lodging the FIR (Faruqi, 2011).

### 1.7. Access to Health Care Facilities

Health care is linked to the dignity of the person and his/her quality of life, irrespective of economic considerations. Muslims as religious minorities in Burma are deprived of all public services. They have very limited access to health care facilities in Burma. State does not take responsibility of Muslims community's need. When Muslims of Burma get sick they cannot go to state hospitals for treatment (Insani Yardim Vakfi, 2012).

### 1.8. Objective of the Research

The objectives of the current research are as mentioned below:

1. To explore the factors of stigmatization and marginalization among religious minorities.
2. To analyze how religious minorities are stigmatized/marginalized at workplace.
3. To explore what type of issues religious minorities are facing at worship places.
4. To analyze the religious minorities' perception about provision of health care facilities.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This empirical research explores feelings and emotions of religious minorities by using qualitative approach. The study is based on in-depth interviews with thirty members of religious minorities in Lahore. They were selected by using snowball sampling and purposive or judgmental sampling. Different religious minorities have been living in Lahore for a long time. The current research includes Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and Ahmadis as target population. Target population included literate or illiterate, employees or non-employees and religious workers living in Lahore, Pakistan. The most recognizable gatekeepers in present research were, the Pakistan Council for Social Welfare & Human Rights (NGO), Sialkot, sister of Jesus and Marry School Lahore and teachers of Institute of Social Cultural Studies, Punjab University Lahore. An effort was made to contact at least one religious leader from every religious minority but due to non-availability it could not be possible for each mentioned religious group. Researchers contacted with different members of religious minorities but few members refused to give interview. At the end, thirty interviews were completed comprising of, ten Christians, eight Ahmadis, six Hindus and six Sikhs during twelve week time period.

The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide to help the interviewer. The interviews were conducted in the local language that were Urdu, and Punjabi and lasted for one and- a-half

hour to two hours. With the consent of the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded then the transcripts were then translated into English.

### 3. RESPONDENTS' CHARACTERISTICS

**Table-2.** Demographic characteristics of respondents

Religious minorities	Number of respondents	Number of male/female	Employee/non-employee/Personal business
Christians	10	Male 5 Female 5	Employee 7 Non-employee 3
Ahmadis	8	Male 5 Female 3	Employee (in own community sector) 4 Non-employee 2 House wife 2
Hindus	6	Male 5 Female 1	Employee 3 Non-employee 2 House wife 1
Sikhs	6	Male 4 Female 2	Employee 1 Personal business 3 House wife 2

### 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Researchers analyzed the data by using thematic analysis. Researchers extracted the main themes from the data after multiple readings of the transcripts. Researchers extracted that religious minorities are facing different type of issues at worship places like restriction on ritual practices and threats at worship places etc. People label them for religious minorities at workplace and in community to show their hatred towards them. Medical staff shows biasness during treatment of religious minorities.

In Pakistan, government has set quota for religious minorities but most of the religious minorities do not have access to that quota. As [Church World Service \(2012\)](#) pointed out in research that non-Muslims faced structural obstacles, procedural impediments and socio-political barriers in job seeking.

One of the Christian respondent told:

“I applied for a job and passed exams but during interview I only rejected because I belong to religious minority”.

[Shaikh \(2009\)](#) stated that government had announced five per cent reserved seats in job sector for educated and skilled members of minorities. But sometimes they are exploited due to smaller number of seats. ([UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2012](#)) explored that the religious minorities are being exploited by giving them cheap labor. Religious minorities mostly employed in the agriculture and in the brick, glass, carpet, and fishing industries. [Minority Right Group International \(2012\)](#) pointed out that religious minorities are discriminated in such a way that they are assigned those tasks which are more at risk. Ineffective workplace's environment leads to health problems in the religious minorities.

Members of religious minorities do not get high post both in public and private sectors. As [Islamabad Policy Research Institute \(2012\)](#) focused that no minority member has ever been

appointed as grade 21 or 22 officer. There are very less amount of blue collar jobs for minorities. There are no minority appointees in the 'Atomic Energy commission. (Beall, 2002) explored that many people of religious minorities suffer social exclusion, on the basis of "who you are".

One of the Christian respondent said:

"I have experienced limited social networking since my childhood. During my student life in school I was forbid to drink water from water cooler. Reason behind this incidence was that majority of the students were Muslims and I did not have permission to drink water from that water cooler".

Pakistan Institute of Labour Education & Research (2009) pointed out that marginalization of religious minorities in central superior services and judiciary also exists in Pakistan. People think that religious minorities are untouchable so they limit their interaction with them. According to Beall (2002) stigmatized and marginalized residents, those who collect and dispose of waste, are religious minorities of the Faisalabad Municipal Corporation. Pakistani Christian sweepers are regarded as "polluted" on the basis of their work associated with waste collection. Municipal sweeper are faced more stigmatization and they are called *Chura* (a word used to call Christians in Pakistan that imply strong meaning like impure). Because they are routinely associated with "polluting" work. Minority Rights Group International (2002) explored in his research that there are provocative posters in the streets against religious minorities; for example, there are anti-Ahmadi statements outside mosques, and signs outside hair salons and water purification plants keeping out non-Muslims' entry. Human Rights Watch (2013) described religious minorities are facing harassment and intimidation at public sphere of their life. Condition of religious minorities deteriorated sharply.

Religious extremists use negative label and harsh words for religious minorities to show their hatred towards religious minorities both at workplace and in community.

One of the Sikh respondent answered:

"People mostly associate us with jokes and make fun of our personality. People think that our *bhabhi* (brother's wife) is wife of all brothers. Our first *bhabhi* equal to mother, second *bhabhi* equal to sister and third *bhabhi* is equal to the daughter in priority".

As Gregory and Valentine (2009) wrote report on the situation of religious minorities in Pakistan in which they described stereotypes of Islamic superiority and inferiority of non-Muslims. They described Pakistani Christians are the descendants of "untouchables".

Some families of religious minorities have good interaction with the Muslims families but their interaction influenced by the conflict among Muslims and non-Muslims at global level. Manchanda (2009) described that Muslims in India, Hindus in Pakistan become a target and vice versa. Hindus in Pakistan suffer due to the Indo-Pakistan conflict. Pakistan Institute of Labour Education & Research (2009) explored that in Pakistan religious minorities and scheduled castes are socially and physically excluded from the mainstream. They are forced to live in segregated settlements.

Government does not provide funding each of the religious minorities. Religious minorities own self look after poor people of the community. Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor

(2006) Report explored that state provide funds for the construction of mosque and Muslims religious places. Religious minority communities claimed that government does not spend sufficient funds for the protection and maintenance of their worship places.

One of the Christian respondent said:

“We received threats and our churches have been burnt by religious extremist in Pakistan whenever in abroad people used insulting remarks in respect of Holy Prophet (PBUH)”.

When members of religious minority go National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA) for their identity card they face problems. People look at them as they are alien. [Shaikh \(2009\)](#) explored in research that most of the religious minorities could not have access to B-form (form for under 18 age adults) and national identity card because they are unable to proof of their parent’s marriage. As [Church World Service \(2012\)](#) pointed out that at NADRA office religious minorities face spelling mistakes of their names by people and this thing create barrier in identity card procedure.

Most of the religious minorities have issue related to the less availability of their worship places. [Parliamentary Human Rights Group \(2010\)](#) found that the religious minorities are under threat; they have no freedom to practice their religion. Ahmadis are not allowed to demonstrate themselves Muslims. They have no right to say *azan* (is called out by a religious leader from the mosque five times a day), to give name of Mosque to their worship places. [United States Commission on International Religious Freedom \(2012\)](#) pointed out that Pakistan has signed the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights; it has located a clause which could potentially be misused to undermine Article 18's religious freedom protections.

Most of the religious minorities want proper implementation of blasphemy law. Because extremist used blasphemy law for their personal grudges.

Another Christian respondent answered:

“Blasphemy law should be equal for all religious groups. When there was incidence of Blasphemy in Badami Bhag in Lahore and Muslims destroyed the houses of Christians. Then there should be also punishment for Muslims because both Muslim people also use the insulting remarks for Christians’ Holy members”.

As ([United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2012](#)) explored that blasphemy cases against Ahmadis and Christians are mostly found. [Shaikh \(2009\)](#) stated that religious minorities faced more prejudice due to strong enforcement of blasphemy law. ([Faruqi, 2011](#)) analyzed Blasphemy law mostly used against non-Muslims and most of the religious minorities become victim of this law. [Minority Rights Group International \(2002\)](#) said that due to not proper implementation of blasphemy law religious minorities are exploited. [Minority Right Group International \(2012\)](#) pointed out that religious minority mostly assassinated by religious extremist by using blasphemy law. [Human Rights Watch \(2013\)](#) conducted that Blasphemy law should be equally implemented for all people.

Religious minorities face problem related to forcibly conversion to Islam. People usually underestimate their religious faith and beliefs of non-Muslims. Most of the religious minorities avoid from the cross religious marriages. As [Gregory and Valentine \(2009\)](#) wrote that women religious minority's women and children are being kidnapped, raped and forcibly converted to Islam. [UN High Commissioner for Refugees \(2012\)](#) conducted research that women of religious minorities are most exclude sections of society, particularly at threat of sexual and gender based violence, forced renovation to Islam and forced marriage by Muslim men. [Asian Human Rights Commission \(2010\)](#) conducted research that women of religious minorities faced sexual harassment. They are forced for marriages and religious conversion. [Manchanda \(2009\)](#) stated that religious minorities are forced under pressure to accept Islam. [Human Right Group \(2013\)](#) also focused in their research that religious minorities mostly condemn cross religious marriages.

One of the Hindu respondent pointed out:

“According to law no one can marry who are under 18. How Muslims could marry with our Hindu girls who are under 18? This is against the law. This law is equally applicable for those Muslims who marry with our Hindu girls who are under 18 after the conversion to Islam”.

Government does not provide proper security to worship places of religious minorities. [Minority Right Group International \(2012\)](#) explored in his research that religious minorities targeted by the Islamic extremist at their ritual places on the base of their religious identity. This is clear from the incident when 88 Ahmadis were killed when attackers attacked Ahmadis places of worship. ([Human Rights Watch, 2013](#)) pointed out that religious places of religious minorities are under threat at some area in Pakistan. Some religious extremist want to close the worship places of the religious minorities. Registration of marriages is also another big issue for religious minorities. Some religious minorities do not have proper system of marriage's registration.

One of the Hindu respondent answered:

“We have applied for the proper marriage registrations to court but government did not take any action for our marriage registration. We get certificate from *mandir* (worship place's Hindus) for our marriages”.

As [Church World Service \(2012\)](#) explored that there is no proper marriage registration of religious minorities. Poor members of religious minorities faced economic issues in access to medical treatment. People show favoritism towards religious minorities and sometimes doctors denied to provide medical services to religious minorities.

One of the Sikh respondent responded:

“We do not face so many problems due to references. But other members of our community and especially pregnant women faced problem in health services. Because few doctor denied to treatment of pregnant women”.

One of the Christian respondent said:

“Our community put into the awaiting list for their treatment on the ground of religious biasness”.



Lower class of the religious minorities do not has access to the free medicine. At the end researchers extract that Christians are more facilitated as compare to other religious minorities in all areas of life because they have strong relationship with the developed countries.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In the light of the current findings of the research, researchers concluded that there is a lack of progress in preventing religious marginalization throughout social order. Most members of religious minorities in Pakistan experienced life as second-class citizens subjected to violence, oppression, threats and are almost powerless to do anything about their circumstances. Religious minorities are also the part of this nation, but their rights are being neglected due to subjective attitude of government and biasness of policy makers. Religion is a personal choice for everyone but non-Muslims are not allowed to practice at their own will. There should be criteria for selection of any post base on capabilities not on religion. Government should take such steps which help out to minimize the exploitation of religious minorities.

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