Socio-Cultural Issues of Religious Minorities in Southern Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

Minorities are basically defined as ascribed status such as gender, race, ethnic, and religious background. The objectives of the current study were to determine the socio-cultural issues of religious minorities in Southern Punjab; to know the minorities' social condition and to examine the satisfaction of the respondents regarding government role regarding the protection of minorities. The study was conducted in two districts Rahim Yar Khan and Multan of Southern Punjab, Pakistan. Data were collected from 200 minority residents of districts Rahim Yar Khan and Multan through structured interview schedule. Data were collected through purposive sampling technique. Collected data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 23.0 version. It was found that majority of the respondents were from the rural areas and illiterate and less than ten thousand rupees per month. Majority of the respondents did not own the property and face lot of socio-cultural discriminations in daily routine of life. The respondents faced a lot of issues due to their religious identity and it strongly hit their socio-cultural, economic and even personal life. It is suggested that government should have to implement the prescribed laws to protect the minority rights and give them confidence to spend their life with full zeal and zest.

Keywords

Issues, Religious Minorities, rights, laws, Property, South Punjab.

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Introduction:

Pakistan is a diverse country and divided into subgroups such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Balouchi, Pushtun, etc. other than geographic strata's. Pakistan is also divided on the basis of religions "Muslims, Christian, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, Kalasha, Sikhs" and religious sects such as Shia, Sunni, Deobandi, Baralwi etc. (Khan, 2009). The religious minorities are group of people whose practices, beliefs and code of life are quite different from the state religion. Minority people are considered least acceptable throughout the world. They are limited to perform their religious practices and are discriminated in social as well as economic spheres of life. Every state has dynamic population and stratifying in race, color, language, religion and culture (Rehman, 2010). The Pakistani society guaranteed the minorities rights in every spheres of life.

Quaid-e-Azam believed in the fundamental principles that all Pakistanis were equal citizens of the state. He further stated that Islam believed in democracy. He gave the teachings of the Justice, equality and fair play. The father of the nation Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was the messenger of freedom and equality. On the 11 August 1947, in his oft-quoted speech to the first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, Jinnah said: "You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in the State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the State". It is very infortune for the Pakistani nation that it is not following the Quaid's vision and different unhappy incidents are face by the religious minorities in every spheres of life.

It is highlighted by Malik (2002) that religious minorities faces many socio-cultural issues such as "socio-psychological, suicide, deprivation, unemployment, illiteracy etc." due to active and passive exclusion. The minorities also face different types of harassment at workplace as well as in daily routine of life. The minorities are compelled to work with low wages and also perform the lower category works such as sweeper, sanitary worker etc. The religious minorities faced different types of discrimination in daily routine of life. Such as hatred, persecution, etc. (Basri, 2016).

No person should be deprived of life and liberty. There is no discrimination on the bases of caste, religion, creed and sex or place of birth. All kinds of slavery and forcible labor are strictly banned. They have full freedom of speech, thought and cultural activities. Pakistan has a cultural diversity in which there are many subculture as well as countless ethnic minorities but the dominant element that distinguishes the minorities is religion. It is usually observed that the religious minorities face the discrimination and socio-economic injustice. The Pakistani minorities seem to be insecure and isolated due to their religious identity. They are educationally backward and economically poor. Usually they receive menial and low income works to perform in the society. In this way they have insecurities in their promotions and job safeties. Furthermore it has also been found that in these circumstances minority's leadership has been divided and fails to play their role accordingly (Murphy et al., 2009).

It is reported that minorities are deprived of basic health facilities, security and proper residence (Piazza, 2011). Approximately 4 million religious minorities are residing in Pakistan as the Christians the Hindus and the Sikhs. Whenever an unwanted incidence happens in India

against the Muslims, in response of the Hindus in Pakistan become a target. Likewise after America's attacked on Afghanistan, Christians in Pakistan have been facing problems. In the government jobs they are discriminated at the local, provincial, and federal levels. Hindu women are suffering from forcible conversions and kidnapping in some cases as well. They are generally depressed, under employment and education exclusion as well (Public Religion Research Institute, 2011).

Research Methodology

The present study was held with an aim to identify the issues of the minorities in South Punjab, Pakistan. The researcher used quantitative method to conduct this study. The population of the study was based on two districts of Southern Punjab namely district Rahim Yar Khan and Multan district. The data were collected from 200 respondents with the help of purposive sampling. Interview schedule was used as a tool for data collection from minorities. Interview schedule was discussed with two experts of Social Sciences. It was revised according to their advice. Pilot study was conducted to check the response of the respondents and 20 questionnaires were delivered. The data was collected during the period of 15-06-2016 to 17-03-2017. Consent form was taken before the data collection process from respondents. In this study the respondents participated voluntarily and there was no restriction on anyone of the respondents. The researcher visited the minorities' communities and conducted interview from the respondents. The data was analyzed with the help of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 20. The researcher used descriptive statistics which include frequency, percentage.

Table 1. Demographic information of the respondents(n=200)

Variables	Frequency (%)
Religions	
Christen	113(56.5)
Hindu	79(39.5)
Sikh	8(4.0)
Mother Tongues	
Punjabi	160(80.0)
Urdu	40(20.0)
Gender	
Male	63(31.5)
Female	137(68.5)

Residential Area

Rural	75(37.5)
Urban	125(62.5)

Education Levels of the Respondents

Illiterate	44(26.8%)
Primary	32 (19.5%)
Middle	10 (6.1%)
Matriculation	24(14.6%)
Intermediate	50(30.5%)
Graduation and above	4(2.4%)

Monthly Family Income

1000-10000	42(21.0)
10001-20000	27(13.5)
20001-30000	38(19.0)
30001-40000	53(26.5)
41000 and above	40(20.0)

Table number 1 depicted that there were total 200 respondents among them 113(56.5) of the respondents belonged to Christianity and 79(39.5) were the Hindus and 8(4.0) were Sikhs. Majority 160(80.0%) of the respondent belonged to Punjabi background and 40(20.0%) of the respondents' mother tongue was Urdu. Of the 200 respondents, greater part of the respondents 137 (68.5%) were females while 63 (31.5%) of the respondents were males. About 125 (62.5%) respondents were belonged to rural areas while 75 (37.5%) respondents were belonged to urban areas. The demographic information showed that 44 (26.8%) of the respondents were illiterate while 32 (19.5%) of the respondents had primary education, 10 (6.1%) of the respondents had middle level education, 24 (14.6%) of the respondents were educated till matriculation level while 50 (30.5%) of the respondent were intermediate and 4(2.4%) of the respondents were graduate or above. Of the 200 respondents, 42 (21.0%) of the respondents reported that they earned 1000-10000 thousand rupees per month; 27 (13.5%) of the respondents reported that they earned 10001-20000 thousand per month, 38(19.9%) of the respondents said that they earned 20001-30000 thousand rupees per month, 53 (26.5) of the

respondents said that they earned 30001-40001 thousand per month, 40 (20.0) of the respondents said their monthly income were 41000 and above.

Analysis and Results

The results and discussion of the data have a key importance in the scientific research. These steps are helpful in the generalization and prediction of the data. The results and discussion of this research are given in the following lines.

Table# 2. Issues of Religious Minorities

Sr. No	Statements	Yes	No
1.	Do you have any property in your residential district / Tehsil?	79 (39.5)	121 (60.5)
2.	Do you freely celebrate your religious ceremonies?	158 (79.0)	42 (21.0)
3.	Are you freely doing worship?	162 (81.0)	38 (19.0)
4.	Do community members participate in your joys and grief?	147 (73.5)	53 (26.5)
5.	Do you face any discrimination in job opportunities?	118 (59.0)	82 (41.0)
6.	Do you think that government is taking interest to solve your issue?	48 (24.0)	152 (76.0)
7.	Do you face any discrimination in medical care?	17 (8.5)	183 (91.5)
8.	Do you feel comfortable while traveling alone?	144 (72.0)	56 (28.0)

9.	Have you ever been harassed /faced discrimination at workplace?	80 (40.0)	120 (60.0)
10	Is religious identity an obstacle to get admission in the school/collage/university?	106(53.0)	94 (47.0)
11	Do you ever cast your vote?	118 (59.0)	82 (41.0)
12	Are you a member of any political party?	51 (25.5)	149 (74.5)

The researcher asked the different question to the respondents to know the socio-cultural issues of religious minorities in Southern Punjab; to know the minorities' social condition and to examine the satisfaction of the respondents regarding the government role regarding the protection of minorities. It was reported that of the 200 respondents, majority 121 (60.5%) of the respondents did not have any property in their residential district/ tehsil whereas 79 (39.5%) of the respondents had the property in their residential district/ tehsil. It showed the deprived condition of the minorities in the studied area. Data showed that majority 158(79.0) of the respondents had a freedom in celebrating the religious ceremonies whereas 42 (21.0%) of the respondents replied that they did not have the freedom to celebrate the religious economy. Of the 200 respondents, majority 162 (81.0%) of the respondents said that they had the freedom of worship whereas 38 (19.0) of the respondents responded that they did not have the freedom of worship. Majority 147 (73.5%) of the respondents were agreed that the community members participated in their joys and griefs whereas 53 (26.5%) of the respondents did not agree and said that the community members did not participate in their joys and grief. Majority 118 (59.0) of the respondents responded that they faced discrimination in job opportunities whereas 82 (41.0) of the respondents said that do not face any type of discrimination in job opportunities.

Majority 152 (76.0%) of the respondents stated that the government of Pakistan was not serious in resolving their issues whereas 48(24.0) of the respondents stated that the government of Pakistan was not serious in resolving their issues. Majority 183(91.5%) of the respondents stated that they did not face discrimination in medical care whereas 17(8.5%) of the respondents stated that they did not face discrimination in medical care. It was found that 144(72.0%) of the respondents answered that they feel comfortable in traveling freely whereas 56(28.0%) of the respondents answered that they felt were uncomfortable in traveling freely.

About 106 (53.0%) of the respondents reported that they faced obstacles at the time of getting admission in academic institutions while 94(47.0%) of the respondents said that they did not face any obstacle at the time of admissions. Majority 118 (59.0%) of the respondents said that they ever caste the vote and 82 (41.0%) of the respondents responded that they did not ever

cast the vote. Majority 149 (74.5%) of the respondents were not members of a political party, whereas 51 (25.5%) of the respondents were the members of a political party.

Discussion and Conclusion

There were different socio-cultural issues confronted by the religious minorities in Southern Punjab, Pakistan. The researcher asked the different questions to the respondents to know their issues if they faced in daily routine of life. It was found that majority 121 (60.5%) of the respondents did not have the property in their residential area what showed the low socio-economic status of the respondents.

The present study showed that majority 158 (79.0%) of the respondents had the freedom to celebrate the religious ceremonies. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan consisted of a multi-religious and multi-racial nation, with Muslims being in the majority. Its 1973 Constitution promises religious autonomy to all religious minorities, including the Hindus, the Christians and the Sikhs. This is mainly because Islam itself guarantees religious freedom to the whole of humanity.

It was found that Majority 162 (81.0%) of the respondents said that they did not perform their worship freely. It was stated that the South Asian countries were confronted with religion based violence, sectarianism, extremism, communalism and even regionalism". It was reported that non-Muslim population was facing many challenges in Pakistan such as societal and employment discrimination and much more (Manchanda, 2009).

Pakistan is an Islamic society and the religion of Islam dominates where sometimes minorities may face the religious discrimination from the masses and are afraid of performing their religious activities openly. But the results showed the bad situation and were against the national and international treaties such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which state that everyone holds the privilege of freedom of thought, religion, and conscience. This right consists of liberty to convert one's belief or religion, whether individually or in society along with others and in private or public, and to manifest one's religion or belief in preaching, worship, observance, and practice.

It was reported that majority 147 (73.5%) of the respondents were agreed that community members participated in their joys and grief's. It was highlighted that the minority group of people co- existed with the larger population in any given area that are viewed socially, culturally, racially and ethnically distinct from the dominant group (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012). Likewise, it was also highlighted that these minority groups were having a strong sense of solidarity that were also committed to preserve their religious beliefs, cultural values and norms (Bhatti, 2008). The next question was related with the structural role to protect the rights of religious minorities in Pakistan. It was found that majority 152 (76.0%) of the respondents said that government was not serious in resolving their issues. It was mentioned by Gregory and Valentine (2009) that the social marginalization of religious minorities was by and big attributed to the educational, social, and cultural factors in Pakistan. Furthermore, the organizational oppression, social marginalization and economic exclusion of religious minorities were largely grounded in the social-cultural beliefs, religious intolerance, and political reasons.

Majority 183 (91.5%) of the respondents were agreed that they did not face discrimination in medical care. It was already highlighted that religious minorities faced different types of discrimination at different situations. The other study also verified that the minorities faced different types of discriminations and even the medical field was also its victim (Hossain & Khan, 2020).

The next question was related with the comfortable travelling of the respondents. The results indicated that majority 183 (91.5) of the respondents felt comfortable during travelling. The researcher also asked the question about the workplace discrimination. It was found that majority 120 (60.0%) of the respondent did agree that they did not face workplace discrimination. The research conducted by Jan and Rehman (2020) also verified that minorities were enjoying contribution in the economic activities which results in solid social ties and contact in their daily lives with majority in the study area. However, it was also found that the minorities are still underprivileged in the area of economic and business activities in Pakistan. According to Bhattacharya (2018) and Pakistan Security Report (2018) the violence against minorities had deteriorated in the last 2 years. However, it could not be claimed that the current situation was satisfactory (CRSS Annual Security Report Special Edition 2013–2018, 2018).

It was also found that majority 118 (59.0%) of the respondents said that they faced discrimination in job opportunities. It was highlighted that religious minorities had faced unsafe as the influx of extremism in Pakistan (Malik, 2002, 9) gravely harmed their financial well-being. The Christian minority, 60%, complained that the issue was not only of joblessness but also of discrimination in the selection method (Dawn, 2013). Though the government offered quotas for the Christians for various jobs etc. (The Express Tribune, 2015) yet a better balance was needed to be created in inferior jobs.

The next question was related with the obstacle faced by the religious minorities in education. It was found that majority 106 (53.0) of the respondents said that they faced obstacle to get admission in the school/collage/university. It was highlighted that the religious minorities were victims of marginalization in many parts of the globe. They were subject to discrimination and marginalization which hampered their development (Arousell et al., 2019). The next question was related with the political empowerment and awareness of the respondents. It was found that majority 118 (59.0) of the respondents did cast the vote. The next question was related with their attachment with a political party. It was found that majority 149 (74.5%) of the respondents were not the members of a political party.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the religious minorities were victims a lot of socio-cultural and economic issues. It was found that majority of the respondents were from the rural areas and illiterate and earned less than ten thousand rupees per month. Majority of the respondents did not own their property and face lot of socio-cultural discriminations in daily routine of life. The respondents faced a lot of issues due to their religious identity and it strongly hit their socio-cultural, economic condition and even their personal lives. There present condition of minorities' required quick improvement however there was no strong evidence to quote of the effort made by the government. Minorities were facing anger for political and economic reasons, compounded by factors rooted in land grabbing and racism.

Recommendations

On the basis of present study the following recommendations are as under to solve the issues and problems of the minorities.

- I. Family or personal laws for minorities in Pakistan should be reviewed to check discrimination against the minority people.
- II. Family laws should be inactive for the minorities to provide with a marriage registration and other important steps and arrangements for fulfillments of human rights.
- III. The Police should be trained to handle the problem of religious minorities to keep harmony and peace and justice among them.
- IV. The Government and non-government organization should extend their program of education to promote literacy among minority people.
- V. The syllabus for schools, colleges and university need to be rechecked and discriminatory parts should be removed.
- VI. Strict action should be taken against those teachers and students who discourage the religious minorities.
- VII. Five percent quota in employment should be reserved for the minorities.
- VIII. To enhance the economic status of minorities, the government should create special opportunity and schemes for soft business.
- IX. The Government should protect the minority worship places so that they perform their religious obligations freely.
- X. Awareness program should be promoted in order to reduce and eliminate discrimination in all walks of life for workplaces.

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