

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN PAKISTAN

Abstract

The Constitution describes Pakistan as an “Islamic State”. It is a predominately Muslim State but there are several non-Muslims groups living here as citizens. Pakistan’s Constitution stands for equality of all citizens irrespective of religion, caste, region, tribe language and gender. Islam the state religion of Pakistan stands for respect and toleration for all religions.

This paper examines the population and constitutional position of religious minorities in Pakistan. It also provides a general picture of major religious communities the Hindus, the Christians and the Sikhs. The paper also explains the Ahmadya community was declared a minority in September 1947. Despite the handicap of small population, Pakistan’s religious minorities have freedom to practice their religion and pursue their cultural heritage.

Key Words: All India Muslim League, PPP, 1973 constitution, Lahore resolution, Jamat-e-Islami, Makkah, Pakistan Hindus Welfare Association

Introduction

All resolutions of the All India Muslim League since 1940 made categorical commitments for granting religious and cultural freedom to all religious minorities. In Pakistan Minority community is able to assert that it is completely safe. For all those who are guided by reason and humankind’s becoming a modern, civilized and responsible state. The ethnic communities and diverse cultures included Punjabi, Baloch, Sindhi, Seraiki and similarly beside Islam, the believers of Hindu, Sikh, Christian and others religious were also living in Pakistan. The cultural diversity of the country is under threat and religious minorities and various ethnic communities are being denied rights and Identity.

Pakistan was established in August 1947 as a homeland for the Muslims of British India. It is a predominately Muslim Country but there are several religious groups within Pakistan, the Hindus and the Christian being the biggest religious minorities. The following table shows the division of population on the basis of religion.

“Religious Groups in Pakistan Census 1998

Administrative Unit	Muslim	Christian	Hindu	Qadiani (Ahmadi)	Scheduled Castes	Others
Pakistan	96.28	1.59	1.60	0.22	0.25	0.07
Rural	96.49	1.10	1.80	0.18	0.34	0.08
Urban	95.84	2.59	1.16	0.29	0.06	0.06

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N W F P	99.44	0.21	0.03	0.24	*	0.08
Rural	99.65	0.03	*	0.22	*	0.08
Urban	98.42	1.06	0.11	0.31	0.01	0.09
F A T A	99.6	0.07	0.03	0.21	0.03	0.07
Rural	99.63	0.04	0.03	0.21	0.03	0.06
Urban	98.16	1.17	0.32	0.10	.007	0.23
Punjab	97.21	2.31	0.13	0.25	0.03	0.07
Rural	97.66	1.87	0.15	0.19	0.05	0.08
Urban	96.25	3.27	0.06	0.37	0.02	0.03
Sindh	91.31	0.97	6.51	0.14	0.99	0.08
Rural	88.12	0.14	9.77	0.12	1.79	0.06
Urban	94.67	1.84	3.08	0.17	0.14	0.10
Balochistan	98.75	0.40	0.49	0.15	0.10	0.10
Rural	99.42	0.06	0.15	0.14	0.12	0.10
Urban	96.61	1.49	1.58	0.16	0.05	0.10
Islamabad	95.53	4.07	0.02	0.34	*	0.03
Rural	98.80	0.94	*	0.23	*	0.03
Urban	93.83	5.70	0.03	0.40	*	0.03

Source: <http://census.gov.pk/Religion.htm>”

The Lahore Resolution

When the All India Muslim League demanded the establishment of Pakistan in 1940, it was fully conscious that there will be the followers of other religions in Pakistan. It assured the non-Muslims that their freedom to practice religion will be protected and they will have secure life under laws of Pakistan. The Lahore Resolution, March 1940, that demanded the creation of a homeland for the Muslims, specially assured the religious minorities about the rights. The relevant paragraph of the Lahore Resolution reads:

“That adequate, effective and mandatory safeguard should be specifically provided in the constitution for minorities in these units and in regions for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in constitution with them and in other parts of India where the Musalman are in a minority adequate-effective and mandatory safeguard shall be specifically provided in the constitution for them and other minorities for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them” (Sarwar 2009).

All resolutions of the Muslim League and the statements of the Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah during 1940-47 repeated the promise of security of life and freedom of religion in Pakistan.

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah made a categorical promise of freedom of religion and equality of all

citizens before law in his first address to Pakistan's Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947. He said that in Pakistan "Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims not in the religious sense because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in political sense as citizen of state... you are free to go to your mosque or to any place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed... that has nothing to do with the business of the state" (Zafar, 2001), (Jinnah, n.d).

The Objectives Resolution, March 1949, passed by Pakistan's Constitution Assembly also recognized the rights of religious minorities. It says:

"All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such a race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (International covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966).

"In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language" (International covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966)

The PPP Co-Chairman and former president Asif Ali Zardari declared in his message on the eve of Minorities Day on August 11, 2014:

"On the eve of Minorities Day today there is a grim thought that crosses the mind: there is no minority community in the country that does not feel besieged and hardly any minority community is able to assert that it is completely safe" (<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/E-Paper/Lahore/2014-08-11/page-1/de...>).

The Constitutional of 1973 and the Rights of the Minorities

All constitution of Pakistan provide equal rights to religious minorities. They have freedom to worship and follow their culture. The 1973 Constitution provides fundamental rights to all citizens which provide important protections to religious minorities. The constitution of 1973 provided to minorities laid great emphasis of Fundamental Rights. The Fundamental Rights are given as under; All citizens are equal before law. No person should be deprived of life and liberty. There should be no discrimination on the ground of religion, caste, creed, sex or place of birth. All form of slavery and force labour are guaranteed. The freedom of speech, expression, association and cultural activities are guaranteed. The freedom of religious teaching of minorities within there institutions are granted. Safeguard against discrimination in government services and provided protection to the

maintenance and development of the religious institutions of all communities are provided.

The state shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the Federal and Provincial services. The state should give the following protections to the minorities:

1. “Freedom of trade, business or profession
2. Freedom of speech
3. Right to information
4. Freedom to profess religion and to manage religious institutions
5. Safeguard against taxation for purposes of any particular religion
6. Safeguard as to educational institutions in respect of religion
7. Provision as to property
8. Protection of property rights
9. Equality of citizens
10. Right to education
11. Non-discrimination in respect of access to public places
12. Safeguard against discrimination in services
13. Preservation of language, script and culture” (Ahmed, 2010).

The Former Federal Minister of Law (PPP), Dr. Babar Awan said in his article “Wakalat Nama” published in *Roznama Dunya*, according to the article 36, protection of minorities: “The State shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the Federal and Provincial services” (Awan, 2014).

Minority representation in the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies are:

National Assembly	10 reserved seats
Provincial Assemblies	
Punjab	8 seats
Sindh	9 seats
Khyber Pakhtun Khwa	3 seats
Balochistan	3 seats

The Christian Community

The Christian community which has traditionally enjoyed full freedom of worship and peace in Pakistan, has sometimes been targeted here. However, unlike India where the Christians, including nuns and priests, have been hounded and killed mercilessly by the bands of RSS and other militant Hindu factions. The

Christians in Pakistan have been generally treated with respect and tolerance which is the hallmark of Islamic teachings. Enjoying this freedom, the Christians have contributed their potential to different areas of national development. They have run some of the best educational institutions and have operated quality health care centres and hospitals. They have been peaceful even in the face of the worst provocation and violence.

Given this congeniality enjoyed by the Christians, the attack on a church comes as a shock that was difficult to absorb. President Pervez Musharraf who sent two of his ministers to Bahawalpur to express solidarity with the families of the victims, issued a strong statement vowing the government would do everything in its power to track down the culprits and bring them to justice. Those who expressed their horror and revulsion at the killings included all notable, political and religious leaders. Two delegations of Ulema's met Religious Affairs Ministers, Col. Retd. SK Tressler to convey him their sympathy and anguish at the killings. Condemning the incidents in strongest terms, the leaders of Jammata-e-Islami and JUI rightly emphasized the point that Islam teaches tolerance to its adherents and the attack on a gathering of worships could not be the done by the Muslim.

“The treatment meted out by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) to the enemies of Islam at the Conquest of Makkah is actually what Islam stands for. It is this spirit of peace and co-existence in Islam that Christians in Pakistan have led their life free of any fear or threat to their life and property” (Wattoo, November 2001).

When the Pakistan Government established the Minority Affairs Commission, an important Christian leader Dr. John Joseph, Bishop of Faisalabad Diocese, welcomed the establishment of the Commission for identifying the problems faced by the minorities. He said that it was a right step in the right direction which would help the neglected minority to join the mainstream of national development. He said that nomination for the Commission should be made amongst the qualified persons having adequate knowledge of religion so that commonly acceptable legislation be proposed to redress the basic problems of minorities.

He said that equal rights should be provided to them in getting administration and employments. He adds that personal laws for Christians also require immediate legislation rights. He says that we shall try to resolve these problems through the Commission. Dr. John Joseph says that although minorities in Pakistan are enjoying equal rights, yet the ideal system to establish this equality is joint electoral system. However, he conceded that separate electoral system should continue for the interim period to pave the way for joint electoral system by elevating the socio-economic conditions of minorities through special development schemes launched by minority representatives elected under the present system.

Commenting on Christian-Muslim relations, Bishop John Joseph says that Christian-Muslim Relations Commission headed by him has worked satisfactorily during the past years. He tells that it has brought the two communities closer to each other and many welfare institutions established by this Commission are helping Pakistanis irrespective of their religions. The

“Commission had also extended help for effecters of national calamities. He told that the third block on leper home has completed at a cost of Rs 20 lacs” (The Muslims, 1991).

The Christian community in Pakistan and all over the world is celebrating Christmas with religious enthusiasm to mark the birthday of Jesus Christ, lengthy preparations and shopping from the different places are being done. Bishop of Lahore, Dr. Alexander John Malik, Archbishop of Lahore, Lawrence J. Saldanha, Francis Nadeem and Bishop of Riwind Samuel Azriah asked the community to be more generous towards the less fortunate people so that Christmas joy could be shared with them and their suffering could be mitigated. Christmas is the festival of love, life and light. “God in the person of Jesus Christ loved the world and shared His very person with humanity. This is turn asks all and sundry to share their blessings with all, who are poor, needy and marginalized. Jesus Christ identified Himself with the poor, weak and suffering and said if anyone did anything good for them one would be doing it to him” (Malik, 2005).

The Hindu Community

The Hindus live in all provinces of Pakistan. Their main concentration is in Sindh followed by Khyber Pakhtoon Khwa. They are engaged in different professions: agriculture, business, government and non-government jobs, artisans and labour. Their “business activities range between small shopkeepers and wealthy owners of jewellery shops and larger stores. They control the whole trade in several towns in Sindh. Reports of their maltreatment in the Baloch areas are rare” (Syed, 2006).

Hindus of Pakistan have a very low profile but on the other hand they have some organizations (PHP) Pakistan Hindu Panchayat, (PHWA) Pakistan Hindus Welfare Association, and the (KHG) Karachi Hindu Gymkhana who work for the betterment of the Hindus community. They promote social development, organize and educate them to be a part of Pakistan success.

Few Hindus have achieved positions of great eminence, some are well known jurists and lawyers, one of them, being Bhagwan Das, who is the most senior judge in the Supreme Court of Pakistan next only to the Chief Justice.

Majority of Hindus of Sindh are placed in the lower caste called untouchables or Dalit. “They work as landless bonded labourers, or servants doing jobs (sweepers, scavengers, etc). About a million of them live in what used to be the Mirpurkhas division nearly 350,000 in the extremely arid district of Tharparkar” (Syed, 2006).

The Sikh Community

Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the Sikh community has been living with comfort and ease, Sikh had long played an important role in village life across the undivided Punjab playing an important role as businessmen and traders. Many towns of the Pakistan, such as the town of Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Sikhism’s founder Guru Nanak Dev. Each of Nankana Sahib’s nine gurdwaras are associated with different events in Guru Nanak Dev’s life. The major places

associated with the Sikh Guru are Nankana Sahib, Kartarpura or Manzoorpura in Narowal, Choo Harrkana or Frooqabad, maternal village of Dear Chahi, Punja Sahib in Hasanabdal, Rohats Fort, Aimanabad near Gujranwala; Pakpattan Chawali Mashaekh, Vehari; and Makhdoompur Pahurran in Multan district.

The picturesque town of Hasan Abdal comes alive non-stop cavalcade as Sikhs from all over Pakistan and indeed all over the world throwing the famous Gurdwara Panja Sahib to celebrate the Baisakhi festival pulsating with the proverbial fun, food and frolic. The Sikh festival celebrated every year on April 13 once in many years it occurs on April 14, lends a lively colorful and noisy ambience to the town.

The Sikh's have every kind of freedom of work in the territory of Pakistan. They are working as Parliamentarians, Police Man, Army Cadets, Lawyers, Shopkeepers, Traders and they also work in the different government organizations and they receive all the benefits which the other employees of the government get. The government gave them the pension and senior citizenship allowances when they passed the age of 60.

The Ahmadi's / Qadianis Community in Pakistan

The conservative Muslim groups demanded in the early 1950s that the Ahmadis / Qadianis should be declared as non-Muslims. This demand was not accepted. Then in the years of Bhutto rule, a similar movement started in 1947. The conservative and orthodox Muslim groups staged country wide agitations and strikes to press the government to declare Ahmadis as non-Muslims. Finally Bhutto took the issue to the National Assembly. This after a detailed consideration passed the second constitutional amendment on September 7, 1974, designating Ahmadya / Qadiani community as non-Muslims. Several restrictions were imposed on their religious activities by the military government of General Zia ul Haq in 1984. (for detail see Urdu articles 7th September: Yume Khatme Nabooat... Ashiqanay Rasool PBUH k lye Yume Fatah Mubeen by Maulana Abdul Naeem, Jung Lahore 5th September 2014, Zawiya Nazar by Mufti Muneb ur Rehman, Daily Dunya, Friday September 5th, 2014, Aqeeda Khatmay Nabooat, Daily Dunya, Sunday September 7th, 2014, 7th September Yume Thafuz Khatmay Nabooat PBUH by Maulana Mujeeb ur Rehman Inqlabi, Daily Dunya Sunday, 7th September, 2014.

Other Minorities

Several other religious groups exist in Pakistan but their number is extremely small. These include Parsis, Bhais of Iran, Jews (only in Karachi), Budhists who living and enjoying a very peaceful life in Pakistan.

Treatment with the Minorities in Pakistan

There have been two competing views about how to treat religious and cultural diversity in Pakistan. One is the liberal, democratic and progressive vision that the creator of the country, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and some of his close associates held. On the question of character of the new state, the Quaid had no ambiguity about it, resting on the idea of citizenship rights, irrespective of

the religious affiliations of groups and individuals. He understood the logic of the modern nation-state and its fundamental constitutional principle- that the state will be inclusive and will not discriminate against any religion or community of faith.

His historic speech before the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan testifies to this fact. He said: “You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the state...we are starting in the days when there is no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state...you will find that in course of time Hindu would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslim, not in the religious sense because that is the personal faith of each individual but in the political sense as citizens of the state” (Rais, 2006).

It is the sense of exclusion, favoritism and on top of all insecurity and fear that the rise of Islamic radicalism has brought to the religious minorities. Among all the minorities, the Christians have made a tremendous contribution to our national development. They have run some of the best educational care centres and hospitals as well as they all are working as a teacher and playing a vital role in the success and betterment of the society.

All laws are subject to the Constitution of Pakistan. Article 227 provides that all existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the injunctions of Islam; however, Article 227(3) declares: “Nothing in this part shall affect the Council of Islamic Personal laws of non-Muslim citizens or their status as citizens. Therefore, the provisions of the ordinances overriding of the Constitution, it may be recalled that in 1991 a federal statute was promulgated whereby Islamic Shariah became the supreme law of the land” (Chaudhary, 2006). Section 1(4) of the Enforcement of Shariah Act lays down: “Nothing contained in this Act shall affect the Personal Laws, religious freedom, traditions, customs and way of life of the non-Muslims” (Chaudhary, 2006).

Mr. Duncan Hooper, October 25, 1947, Research Society of Pakistan said: “I have repeatedly made it clear, especially in my opening speech to the Constituent Assembly, that the minorities in Pakistan would be treated as our citizens and will enjoy all rights and privileges that any other community gets. Pakistan shall pursue that policy and do all it can to create a sense of security and confidence in the non-Muslims Minorities in Pakistan” (Hooper, 1947).

Conclusion

Integrating religious Minorities into the national political and into our society as equal citizens will require social reforms and affirmative legislation to give them entitlement to land, living space in urban areas and jobs. We also need to stem forcefully the tide of religious extremism. The Christian, Hindu community, the largest of the Pakistan’s minorities, is quite proud of its history and religion. They have made their presence felt in education, trade and the arts. Since independence the Christian, Hindu and other communities has lived in relative peace in the country.

The government should ensure that the Christian, Hindu and other communities face no problems in observing their religious and cultural activities. They should enjoy freedom to practice their religion. Such measures are bound to bring goodwill for the local population and help to promote a democratic image of the country up road. The Christian community in the Urban areas they have traditionally been going into the teaching and nursing professions and also as cleaners and janitors. In the rural areas particularly in the Punjab province, they are mainly poor landless peasants, just as many Muslims there are also the current government to reassure the Minorities of its protection, whether it be their lives or their economic, social and political interest. That the rights and privileges of the Minorities, as enshrined in our constitution, will be fully protected.

Islam enjoins upon its followers to protect the life, property and honour of non-Muslims. The rights of all minorities and deprived people in the country for establishing a liberal and pluralistic society in Pakistan in which every citizen is allowed to participate freely in the social political and economic development of Pakistan irrespective of his cast, greed and color. All minorities are to be treated as equal citizen of state.

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