

Examining Pakistan's Relationship with Religious Minorities: A Case Study of the Christian Community

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Abstract

The constitution of Pakistan asserts the principle of equal citizenship regardless of religious distinctions and commits to safeguarding minority groups. The subject of religious minorities in Pakistan is framed within the ambit of socio-political and historical trajectories that substantiate their marginalized status. Nevertheless, the dynamics of the relationship between religious minorities and the state, particularly concerning equal citizenship, have not been extensively examined. Based on 26 comprehensive interviews with members of the Lahore Christian community, this study aims to elucidate the meaning of citizenship understood by people situated at the margins of society. While drawing inferences from the theory of *intersectionality*, which underscores how various forms of oppression can intersect and exacerbate disadvantage and discrimination, the study suggests that Christian communities occupy a distinct place in the spectrum of citizenship. This positioning is attributed to their profound sense of distinctiveness, stemming from their unique religious identity.

Keywords

Religion, Minorities, Identity, Christians, Citizenship, Pakistan

Introduction

While there is no universally accepted definition of 'minority,' a practical definition considers a numerically smaller, non-dominant group distinguished by shared ethnic, racial, religious, or linguistic attributes (e.g., Hannum, 1990). The concept of a 'minority' varies in different contexts and is often subject to interpretation based on a country's specific socio-political, legal, and cultural settings. Francesco Capotorti, the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Sub-Commission on the 'Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities', defined a minority (in 1977) as a group that is numerically smaller than the rest of a state's population and in a non-dominant

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position. Members of this group, being nationals of the state, have ethnic, religious, or linguistic features distinct from the majority. They also, at least implicitly, exhibit a sense of solidarity aimed at preserving their culture, traditions, religion, or language (Barsh, 1989). The treatment of minorities by the state has been a prominent issue in international human rights discussions, particularly in the context of democratic governance. The protection of minorities is not only a matter of concern in domestic law but also in international law, as the key challenges involve exclusion, discrimination, and the denial of minorities' identities (Alam, 2015).

Balibar (1988) highlighted a dual tendency in interpreting the concept of citizenship. On one hand, there is a trend to emphasize a specific definition, such as equating citizenship with nationality. On the other hand, some view citizenship merely as a 'legal fiction,' a façade that conceals underlying power structures. This perspective reduces citizenship to nothing more than an instrument of domination. Balibar argued that both tendencies overlook the dynamic nature and essential fluidity of the concept of 'citizen' and its relationship to the state.

Weaving the discourse on citizenship and rights of marginalized groups, Lister (1997) maintained that the ability of certain groups to act as citizens and the extent to which they enjoy both formal and substantive rights are contingent upon where they stand on the continuum of inclusion and exclusion that represent two sides of the citizenship coin. The inadequacy of citizenship rights in meeting the needs of socially and economically marginalized groups has been a topic of discussion among radical leftists and feminist critics. Therefore, the relationship between minorities and the state should be examined from two perspectives: the ideological dimension, which focuses on an individual's identification with the state in terms of inclusivity, and the material dimension, which addresses the capacity of marginalized groups to access economic and political resources (Higgins, 1984).

Reflecting on the multiple marginalities of Christians in Pakistan, including poor class, low caste, subservient gender (in the case of women), and minority religion, several research studies have well-substantiated the socio-economic and politico-religious marginality of religious minorities in Pakistan (Beall, 2006; O'Brien, 2012; Gregory, 2012; Raina, 2014; Amjad-Ali, 2015; Butt, 2019). However, there has been limited focus on examining the dynamics between the working classes from these religious minorities and the state, particularly from the standpoint of citizenship. Addressing this gap, this study explores various vital questions, such as how members of religious minorities perceive their relationship with the state and what citizenship means to this marginalized group positioned at society's fringes. The study also seeks to understand their concept of nationalism, whether minorities feel integrated into or excluded from the larger community, the role of Christian political representatives in the parliament, and how the state responds to the grievances and concerns of religious minorities.

In Pakistan, where Muslims constitute 96.28% of the total population of approximately 207 million, the country is also home to religious minorities. These include Hindus, Christians, Ahmadis, and scheduled castes (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The Constitution of Pakistan, through *Article 260*, defines religious minorities as non-Muslims. Furthermore, *Article 36* mandates that the State is responsible for protecting the legitimate rights and interests of these minorities. This includes ensuring their appropriate representation in Federal and Provincial services.

Christians and Hindus in Pakistan, marked by their distinct ethnic identities, are primarily concentrated in the Punjab and Sindh Provinces, respectively. According

to the 2017 census of Pakistan, Christians account for 2.3% of Punjab's total population of 100 million, while Hindus constitute 6.51% of Sindh's 47 million inhabitants (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). A significant number of Christians reside in central districts of Punjab, predominantly in Lahore, Karachi, and Faisalabad, as well as in some rural areas of the province. Many Christians in these regions, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds, are employed in agriculture, brick kilns, and sanitation services.

A study by Gill and Aqeel (2023) highlights the prevalence of Christians in sanitation work in Punjab, especially in Lahore. Despite Christians comprising less than 5% of Lahore's population, they represent over 80% of its sanitation workforce. For example, the Water and Sanitation Authority employs 2,240 sanitation workers, of whom 1,609 are Christian. Similarly, the Lahore Waste Management Company employs 9,000 sweepers, all Christian. This data underscores the significant presence of Christians in these sectors and points to broader socio-economic dynamics within these communities.

A few empirical studies were carried out on caste-based discrimination in Pakistan informing the prevalence of social exclusion and humiliation experienced by low-caste Christians in Pakistan (Aqeel, 2015; Patras, 2020; Jodhka & Shah, 2010; Gazdar, 2007; Beall, 1997; O'Brien, 2012). Sara Singha (2022) argued that Caste in Pakistan is integrally connected to the Dalit conversions to Protestant Christianity in the mid-1930s, and due to these conversions, many people in Pakistan associated Christianity with Dalit; therefore, low caste associations in addition to poor economic factors resulted in many forms of persecution and exclusion for specific Christian communities in Pakistan.

Methodology

The current study is positioned in the qualitative domain, relying on an interpretative approach and epistemological stance for data collection and analysis of research findings. It highlights the importance of eliciting data from the margins within the social research paradigm. This study asserts that social meaning is closely tied to the experienced material conditions of a group. The argument maintains that social realities are shaped by the perceptions of the involved actors, who internalize the meaning of systems and operate within their perceived domain. Interpretivists excel in elucidating the systems that evolve, generate, and persist through fluid social interactions among group members within a specific social context (Mason, 2002). In examining women, this paper also employs gender as an analytical category. The feminist school of thought validates women's personal encounters as a valuable source of knowledge, asserting that both ordinary and extraordinary events warrant critical reflection, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the world (Campbell & Wasco, 2000).

Christians, constituting nearly 5 percent of Lahore's total population, were chosen as the focal point for this case study. The snowball sampling technique was employed to select interviewees from the working-class Christian community in Lahore. Leveraging the author's 14 years of professional experience in a church-based charity organization, rapport with the study participants was established. The familiarity stemming from the Christian identity proved advantageous in navigating sensitive questions about their experiences of discrimination, fostering an environment where participants felt comfortable sharing their perspectives with a co-religionist rather than an outsider. Repeatedly, participants expressed a sentiment about this study, stating, "[...] sister belongs to our community; therefore, we can openly talk with her."

Throughout the data collection process, a heightened awareness of critical self-scrutiny was maintained to minimize the introduction of self-biases and ensure the application of epistemological reflectivity.

In-depth interviews served as the primary research tool, and they were conducted with 15 women and 12 men from an impoverished Christian settlement in Lahore. The participants represented diverse occupations, with thirteen engaged in sweeping, two working as self-employed beauticians, three as office assistants, two as church leaders, two as members of Provincial Assemblies, three as community/social workers, one as a nurse, and one as a college student. These research participants reside in impoverished Christian slums in Lahore, raising questions about the self-imposed isolation within their community. Despite a substantial number of Christians providing sanitation services to the city, they grapple with discrimination and indignity associated with their cleaning work. Open-ended questions were posed, exploring topics such as why Christians opt to live among co-religionists, experiences of discrimination when interacting with the majority community, perceptions of citizenship and nationalism, feelings of being equal citizens of Pakistan, relationships with political representatives in reserved parliamentary seats, and benefits from state social welfare programs.

This study relied on theoretical insights drawn from the framework of intersectionality, rooted in the black feminist school of thought, and allowing for an understanding of identity politics at the intersections of race, gender, and other identity categories. Coined by Crenshaw (1997), the term *intersectionality* elucidates the exclusion of black women from white women's discourse, highlighting that social category are not interdependent and mutually constitutive, thereby explaining unequal outcomes. Methodological nuances were informed by the feminist standpoint and postmodern postulations, emphasizing the importance of listening to voices from the margins to discern the goals and aspirations of Third World women. This approach aids in constructing strategies for improving women's lives (Kirsch & Kirsch, 1999).

This study specifically addresses the discrimination faced by the Christian working classes engaged in sanitation. The investigation aims to analyze the situated knowledge of individuals in a context where class, caste, and sexism may intersect, leading to multiple sources of oppression that hinder social progress. Social inequalities, exclusion, and economic deprivation significantly influence the behaviors and attitudes of those who feel deprived. This study explores whether individuals experiencing deprivation or discrimination have internalized these phenomena, potentially giving up the struggle for social change, or if they aspire to challenge and overcome the shackles of deprivation for a better future, particularly for their children. Extracting responses from the subaltern community contributes to analyzing self-perceived and internalized discrimination, narrowing the possibilities for sustained efforts toward social change and reinforcing a sense of victimhood.

Eclipsed Citizenship

Since the inception of the newly formed state of Pakistan, religion has evolved as a fundamental component of the collective national identity. However, considering equal citizenship was overlooked during the formulation of this national identity, leading to implications for both minority groups and society (Hisam & Qureshi, 2013). The foundational principle of equal citizenship, enshrined in Article 25 of the constitution, which unequivocally asserts equality for all citizens irrespective of differences in religion, sex, class, and creed, becomes obscured by the provisions delineated in *Articles 41* and *92*. These constitutional articles disqualify non-Muslims from holding

the positions of President and Prime Minister. O'Brien (2012) argued that the 1949 'Objective Resolution', designating Pakistan as an Islamic state, laid the groundwork for the legal categorization of Pakistani citizenry into Muslims and non-Muslims.

Highlighting the institutionalization of Islam within the State apparatus, Saigol (2013) observed that numerous laws and policies ostensibly framed in the name of religion in Pakistan had a detrimental impact on the rights of women, as well as religious and ethnic minorities. In alignment with this perspective, Shaheed (2010) remarked that the politically motivated use of Islam reached its zenith during the regime of General Zia (1977-88), whose policies undermined equality for female and non-Muslim citizens.

Kamran and Purewal (2015) asserted that the dichotomy between Muslims and non-Muslims was officially institutionalized through the state's incorporation of religious categorization in the Constitution of Pakistan. This categorization has had a lasting impact on the discourse surrounding minorities in Pakistan, labeling them as 'others' or 'deviant.'

The identification of a religious minority in Pakistan with equal citizenship also does not align with the understanding of the marginalized Christian community, as reflected in the words of a woman sweeper: "[...] I do not know about equal citizenship and rights; what does it mean?" (N.Bibi, personal communication, May 15, 2019, Lahore). However, when asked whether she feels that Muslims and Christians are considered equal by the State, she responded negatively, stating that Christians are viewed as inferior. In response to the same questions, a female nurse offered her perspective.

Christians are not equal to Muslims in Pakistan due to the difference in religion. Pakistan is made for Muslims only; this is what we have studied in our Schools. We face discrimination due to our religious identity (S.Naureen, personal communication, 21 August, Lahore).

The internalized perception of being inferior has led minorities to maintain isolation from the majority community, deepening their alienation from both the state and society. The crystallization of religious identities in Pakistan through state narratives that privilege Islamic identity has further undermined the potential for inclusive citizenship. Such sentiments are expressed in the words of a woman lawyer (M.Gill, personal communication, February 10, 2019, Lahore):

We are Pakistanis, but some Muslims think that we are different because of our religious identity. Our national loyalty towards the state is also underestimated. Muslims believe that we are more loyal to the Christians in the West. Such labeling led Christians to believe that they were other, second class and less significant citizens.

Rais (2007) highlighted that integrating religious minorities into the mainstream poses a significant challenge due to prevailing social prejudices and the classification of citizens along religious lines. Partha Chatterjee argued that by the early twentieth century, although the same rights unrestricted by race, religion, ethnicity, and class were extended to women, it did not result in the abolition of actual distinctions between men (and women) in civil society (Chatterjee, 2004). Similarly, the acknowledgment of the rights of a particular community or group by the state does not

guarantee the elimination of socio-religious distinctions and discrimination. Instead, it necessitates concrete measures by the State to safeguard the rights of religious minorities practically.

As of 2020, the Pakistan government's federal cabinet established a national commission for minorities under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony. However, this commission appears to lack significant authority, as an act of Parliament did not constitute it and, therefore, lacks statutory powers. Additionally, this commission does not possess legal jurisdiction beyond the capital territory of Islamabad. Linking citizenship and identity, Kabeer (2000) emphasized that violation or denial of the rights of certain groups constrains their application of agency for seeking redressal or challenging exclusion. Situated outside the boundaries of a political society, these marginalized groups do not relate to the state in the same manner as other upper classes or ruling groups maintain their relationship with the State. Furthermore, they remain excluded, having fewer rights and limited political possibilities to seek state entitlements.

Access to Social Welfare Schemes

Kabeer and colleagues (2010) highlighted the inadequacy of state-run social protection schemes in Pakistan in addressing social inequalities based on class, religion, and ethnicity. For instance, the exclusion of religious minorities from benefiting from the State-supported social welfare Zakat fund, which is specifically allocated for Muslims. This policy implemented by the state contributes to divisions among citizens and raises concerns about equal citizenship. A 36-year-old woman narrated her ordeal and how she was stopped from obtaining free medicine on account of her Christian faith (S. Samuel, personal communication, November 11, 2020, Lahore).

I used to get good quality insulin free of cost from the government hospital, but one day, a lady sitting in the hospital saw my documents and said that I was Christian. Therefore, I cannot get free medicines under Zakat funds, which stopped me from taking free insulin.

Additionally, the government of Pakistan has offered another fund known as *Bait-ul-Mal* for rendering financial support to poor people and destitute women, irrespective of religious affiliation. Commenting on the challenges to acquiring funds from the *Bait-ul-Mal*, a male Christian social worker identified the following problem.

It is quite a lengthy and cumbersome process to gain funds from *Bait-ul-Mal*. Illiterate and poor people find it extremely difficult to fill out their application forms, which are available in the English language only. No timeframe for the acceptance of the application is provided to the applicant. Once, I helped a poor woman in my hometown [Khanewal] by filling out her application form. I learned that she has to travel to another city [Multan] to apply. She had no money for travel and failed to pursue her application (S. Francis, personal communication, December 3, 2021, Lahore).

Alongside this, the 2022 report on the Punjab Pre-Budget Consultation, conducted by Sub-National Governance (2022) in collaboration with the Government of Punjab and UK aid in Lahore, acknowledged the exclusion of minorities and widows from targeted social protection programs in the region. The report recommended the

establishment of quotas for women and minorities within initiatives such as *Ehsaas* and other protection schemes.

Special Quota for Religious Minorities

The Government of Pakistan initially introduced a 6% job quota for scheduled castes in government employment through the Scheduled Caste (Declaration) Ordinance of 1957. However, this affirmative action measure faced challenges in implementation and was subsequently withdrawn in the 1990s (Shah, 2007). After a lapse of more than four decades, in 2009, the Government of Pakistan granted a 5% job quota for religious minorities in adherence to the constitutional provision that mandates the state to adopt special measures to safeguard the legitimate interests of minorities, backward, and depressed classes. Reports from various newspapers indicated that minorities have faced challenges in benefiting from this quota, leading to numerous unfilled job positions (Butt, 2019). The Supreme Court has expressed serious concerns regarding over 30,000 vacant job positions designated for minorities in the government employment quota, highlighting that minorities are not recruited following the established quota (Correspondent, 2021). In response to inquiries about why Christians, in particular, have faced challenges in availing benefits from the job quota, A male Christian Member of the Punjab Assembly viewed (H.Gill, personal communication, June 18, 2021, Murree):

Lack of education in the Christian community is a reason for not being able to seek benefits from this state's affirmative action. Second, Government departments usually offer this quota for low-scale jobs in sanitation services, which is already filled by poor Christian sweepers and conveniently avoids uniform application of quota for all tiers of jobs.

Further expanding on this notion, a 28-year-old Christian man who applied for an Operation Theatre Assistant job in a government hospital told his rejection experience during the interview (Z. Masih, personal communication, July 5, 2021, Lahore):

I have cleared the test for the job and appeared for a final interview. The interviewer panel told me that this quota was only available for the sweeper job and offered me to join as a sweeper. I insisted that I had applied for another job and passed the test, but they refused to listen.

Since 2012, the National Lobbying Delegation (NLD) for religious minorities in Pakistan, comprising 24 social and political activists representing Hindu, Scheduled Caste, Christian, and Sikh communities, has been actively engaging with state officials, including parliamentarians, bureaucrats, and policymakers, to address the challenges faced by their respective communities. The delegation has consistently raised concerns related to the non-implementation of job quotas, reservation of seats in higher education institutes, and proposed amendments to the personal laws affecting religious minorities (Radio Pakistan, 2021). Notably, in 2020 and 2021, two Provincial Governments, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, they respectively, allocated a 2% quota for students belonging to religious minorities in higher education.

Possibility of Electoral Politics

In 1984, the military President, General Zia-ul Haq, introduced a separate electorate system for religious minorities. This system limited their ability to elect representatives solely to national or provincial tickets, effectively segregating them from participating in the general voting process or contesting in general elections (Sultana, 2014). Consequently, minorities lost the opportunity for political participation in their districts, and Muslim politicians often neglect religious minority concerns in their constituencies due to the latter's lack of political leverage to influence local politics. Elections in 1985, 1988, 1990, 1993, and 1997 were conducted on separate electorates, leading to the prolonged political exclusion of minorities from mainstream politics. Recognizing the adverse effects on political participation, Christian leaders and political activists advocated for the abolition of separate electorates and called for the restoration of joint electorates. This longstanding demand of the Christian community resonated with the then-military president, General Pervaiz Musharraf, in 2002. Introducing universal enfranchisement for minorities marked a progressive step, enabling their equal participation in political processes.

Article 51(2A) of the Constitution of Pakistan designates ten reserved seats for religious minorities allocated to political parties in proportion to the seats won by these parties in the National Assembly. The politics surrounding these reserved seats are further complicated by political anomalies arising from the absence of any provision or procedure for direct and indirect elections on reserved seats within the political party structure. Consequently, Christian politicians nominated for reserved seats need more political support from their community, and their tenure is subject to the party leadership's discretion. Asif Aqeel, a Christian researcher, contends that minority representatives appointed to these reserved seats are handpicked and function as rubber stamps, primarily oriented towards appeasing their party heads rather than effectively serving the interests of the minority communities (Aqeel, 2020). This perspective is further corroborated by Ajay Raina, who asserts that the institutionalized Christian presence in politics has often been sub-proportionate, lacking in authority and influence, and tends to be perfunctory (Raina, 2014).

Legal Protection for Minorities

The century-old personal laws governing religious minorities, exemplified by statutes like the *Christian Divorce Law of 1869* and the *Christian Marriage Law of 1872*, exhibit legal anomalies that necessitate amendments to align with evolving local contextual needs and principles of gender equality. For instance, the *Christian Divorce Law* permits divorce solely on the grounds of adultery, a condition that proves exceedingly challenging to substantiate in a court of law. A female lawyer elaborated on this issue:

Due to the problematic nature of the law, Christians prefer not to seek any judicial remedy in the event of the breakdown of marriages that becomes quite disadvantageous for weaker partners, especially women in difficult marriages.

The formulation of the *Hindu Marriage Act* and *Punjab Sikh and Marriages Act* in 2017 and 2018 marked commendable initiatives by Pakistan's government. However, the rules of procedures governing these laws have yet to be established, rendering these legislative measures non-implementable. The absence of procedural frameworks for these laws has left personal matters related to marriage, divorce,

maintenance, and child custody without legal protection. Consequently, the lives of minorities are currently governed by patriarchal cultural norms and illicit practices due to the lack of legal safeguards in these crucial aspects of personal law.

Exclusion through Education

Multiple studies, including those by Lall (2007), Raiz (2010), Winthrop and Graff (2010), Nayyar and Salim (2005), and Dean (2005), collectively demonstrate the presence of biased material targeting religious minorities in school textbooks. Such content is recognized as contributing to promoting negative attitudes toward different religious beliefs.

Saigol's (2013) analysis of school textbooks in Pakistan emphasizes that religion is portrayed as a defining characteristic of good citizenship in the country. Consequently, the discourse of citizenship, integral to modern state formation, is appropriated by religion, particularly Islam, effectively excluding non-Muslims. Saigol further argued that government-approved textbooks consistently reinforce the notion that being a Pakistani is synonymous with being a Muslim (Razzaq, 2022).

This portrayal contributes to a sense of alienation and isolation among students from minority communities who find themselves perceived as different or "others." Moreover, these textbooks notably lack mentions of prominent non-Muslim heroes or role models, thereby constraining the educational scope for promoting religious diversity.

Article 22 of the Constitution of Pakistan explicitly states that no person attending an educational institute shall be compelled to receive religious instruction other than their own. However, in practice, minority students often lack alternative options for receiving their religious education and consequently find themselves studying ethics instead of Islamiyat.

A noteworthy development occurred on August 31, 2023, when the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training approved the 'Religious Education Curriculum 2022'. This curriculum is designed to encompass the teachings of seven different religions and is intended for implementation across all public and private institutions. To ensure the effectiveness of this initiative, provincial governments must follow suit and endorse the adoption of the Religious Education Curriculum 2022 in their respective regions.

This step aligns with the constitutional mandate of providing religious freedom to all individuals. It signifies a move towards fostering inclusivity and acknowledging the diverse religious fabric within the country's educational landscape. Further monitoring and collaborative efforts between federal and provincial authorities are essential to ensure the successful integration of this curriculum and uphold the principles of religious freedom as outlined in the constitution.

Living in Ghettos

Cullen and Pretes (2000) argued that socially constructed determinants of marginality, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, occupation, or language, may often lead to the spatial marginalization of certain groups who prefer to live in enclaves and ghettos and experience exclusion from accessing the privileged social spaces. While describing various dimensions of poverty, such as deprivations and capability failures, Amartya Sen demonstrated that social exclusion from social relations has a conceptual link with poverty (Sen, 2000). Aqeel and Gill (2023) argued that societal and political segregation across religious lines has resulted in ghettoized neighbourhoods populated

by religious minorities from *Dalit* backgrounds, and in addition to having second-class citizenship, certain minorities experience social exclusion based on their downtrodden caste identities.

In Lahore, Christians often reside in closely-knit, impoverished slums, where they demonstrate a preference for living alongside their co-religionists rather than experiencing potential discomfort in mingling and integrating with the predominantly Muslim majority. This sentiment is articulated by individuals such as Rafique, a male sweeper who has worked for the last 25 years.

Rafique's perspective sheds light on Christians' comfort in living within a *baradari* (a community of shared religious faith). He emphasizes the ease with which they can celebrate their religious festivals, thanks to the support of their Christian brothers and sisters. Rafique suggests this sense of freedom might be compromised if they reside in Muslim neighbourhoods (R. Masih, personal communication, December 22, 2021).

This observation hints at the complex dynamics of community living, where shared religious identity often provides a sense of security and communal support. It also reflects the challenges or perceived discomfort that some Christians may associate with integration into Muslim-majority neighbourhoods. A female nurse highlighted her difficulties while searching for a rented apartment. She cited an incident during the interview where the Muslim owner initially agreed to rent his house but later withdrew the offer upon learning about her Christian faith. This discriminatory experience left her with no alternative but to seek housing in a Christian locality.

Similarly, a 20-year-old female student shared her distressing experience with the author while looking for a hostel in Lahore (J. Masih, personal communication, August 16, 2022) personal communication. Despite securing a private rented room in an apartment, the situation took a turn when the apartment manager informed her that the owner discovered her Christian identity through her ID card. Consequently, she was asked to vacate the premises despite signing a year-long contract. This unfortunate incident compelled her to relocate to a friend's home for shelter hastily.

These anecdotes shed light on the religious biases that some individuals face in securing housing, emphasizing the impact of discriminatory practices on Christians seeking accommodation in certain areas. Such instances underscore the need for broader awareness and efforts to address issues related to religious discrimination in housing.

Encountering discrimination in social interactions due to a marginalized religious identity not only generates stress within minority communities but also serves as a persistent reminder of their perceived lesser significance within the majority community. As Balibar (1998) noted, the formal acknowledgment of citizenship does not necessarily translate into genuine equality. He highlights the contradiction between the formal autonomy granted by citizenship and the practical, subordinated status experienced by certain groups.

In the case of Christians in Pakistan, despite holding formal citizenship status, they grapple with numerous challenges when attempting to access social, cultural, and political rights on par with their fellow citizens. This discrepancy underscores the disparity between the ideal of equal citizenship and the realities faced by minorities, emphasizing the need for broader societal recognition and rectification of systemic inequalities.

Gender-based Marginalization

The concept of intersectionality illuminates the diverse experiences of women within society and the state, acknowledging that their positions are unique and specific. For Christian women, apart from facing discrimination based on religion and class, they confront an additional layer of bias stemming from gender inequalities ingrained in the socio-cultural fabric.

Female Christian sweepers, for example, often find themselves working in public spaces where they encounter difficulties. According to accounts provided by some women in this profession, they frequently face derogatory remarks. Some of the Christian women also recount incidents of religious discrimination in professional settings. A Christian nurse serving as a Head Tutor faced ridicule and derogatory comments from subordinates upon her promotion. These narratives underscore the multifaceted challenges that Christian women in Pakistan navigate, shaped by the intricate intersections of religion, class, and gender biases within society.

Low Caste Group Identity

An overwhelming majority of Christians in Punjab trace their historical lineage to downtrodden outcaste groups, who underwent mass religious conversions to Christianity from the 1870s to the 1920s under the influence of Western missionaries in the Indian sub-continent (Amjad-Ali, 2015; O'Brien, 2012; Streefland, 1973). This large-scale conversion, documented in Christian missionary reports as 'The Chuhra Movement' (Pickett, 1933), involved individuals from the Chuhras, who, under the Brahmanic caste system, were assigned degrading and dehumanizing tasks such as handling dead animals, cleaning excreta in villages, executing criminals, and skinning deceased animals (Stock & Stock, 1975).

Jo Beall observed that janitorial workers and sweepers in Pakistan, a substantial portion of whom are Christians, are interchangeably referred to by their caste name, Chuhra (as well as Jamadars) (Beall, 1997). The term 'Chura' is a commonly used epithet and derogatory stereotype for Christians in Pakistan. Despite the official discourse of the state denying the existence of caste-based on the egalitarian ethos of Islam, caste-like relations persist in governing social, political, and cultural realities. Stories of religious and caste-based discrimination faced by Christian sweepers are not uncommon.

Many Christians in Pakistan also hold occupations such as doctors, teachers, nurses, and business entrepreneurs; however, the predominant hereditary cleaning occupation within the Christian community persists. As of November 2018, over 80 percent of sweepers in Lahore employed by entities such as the Water and Sanitation Authority, Public Health Department Punjab, School Education Department Punjab, and Lahore Waste Management Company are Christians (Patras, 2020). This dual experience of caste-based discrimination alongside a distinct religious identity places Christians in a state of double oppression. The devaluation and discrimination against their identity impede the marginalized group's rightful access to essential facilities for their everyday livelihood. O'Brien (2012) noted that the internalization of oppression often leads to a sense of shame becoming central to self-image, self-hatred, and self-derogation.

The global narrative surrounding religious minorities, particularly Christians in Pakistan, often emphasizes a victimhood perspective, highlighting their experiences of religious discrimination while paying limited attention to their low-caste identity. Local Christian NGOs tend to frame the challenges faced by Christians primarily

through the lens of religious discrimination, and the inflow of foreign aid is often contingent on this narrative. Institutional Churches in Pakistan, heirs to imperial infrastructures evident in grand edifices like Cathedrals and institutions established by Western missionaries, consistently underscore the religious identity of Christians while deliberately downplaying their low-caste ancestral roots. This deliberate denial and disconnect serve to overshadow the struggles of a significant majority of impoverished Christians engaged in their hereditary occupation of menial work.

The state's persistent otherization of religious minorities contributes to the creation of boundaries among citizens where the religious identity of the Christian minority aligns with their low-caste status, effectively concealing the multifaceted marginalities experienced by the poor-class Christian population in Pakistan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the amalgamation of various marginalized identities is solidified and perpetuated through daily encounters with discrimination and disadvantages. These experiences hinder the development of inclusive citizenship, eclipsing the relationship between the State and the marginalized communities. The study emphasizes the imperative use of an intersectional lens when analyzing the lived experiences of individuals shaped by social divisions arising from caste, class, gender, and religion.

The challenges faced by religious minorities in their daily lives necessitate the establishment of a robust redressal mechanism by the state. State-led initiatives aimed at uplifting religious minorities, such as the allocation of separate quotas in education and employment, must be effectively translated into tangible outcomes. In selecting minority candidates for reserved seats in the parliament, political parties should implement fair and transparent mechanisms to ensure democratic principles and equal opportunities for political activists within the Christian community. Additionally, the State should not solely rely on religious clergy, claiming to represent minorities, as the exclusive voice or mediators in determining their relationship with the broader minority population. The engagement of the Christian clergy with the state within the confines of a doctrinal religious framework narrows the potential for exercising inclusive political agency.

The unaddressed demands and grievances of religious minorities, encompassing issues such as eliminating religious discrimination from school textbooks, amending personal laws, safeguarding workplaces, and ensuring protection from vigilante mob violence targeting impoverished residents of religious minorities, position these communities within an exclusionary terrain of citizenship.

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