

Structural Violence and Christian Minority in Pakistan: The Monolithic Image to be Blamed

Muhammad Riaz* & M. Wakil Khan**

Abstract

Pakistan is the only country in the world carved painfully out of India on the basis of its population's Muslim identity. Despite its population's diverse ethnic and religious affiliation, the state formation in Pakistan was such that it always depended on the reactionary Islamist forces in the country that made the system exclusively for the majority whereas the minorities – particularly the Christian minority – of the country were institutionally marginalized and suppressed, resulting in the constraint of civil liberties and minority rights. The monolithic image of the country as an Islamic state and the identity of its populations as Muslims explain the structural violence against the Christian and other minorities and the present crisis of human rights violations in the country.

Keywords: Structural violence, Christian minority, Religious extremism, Shari'a laws

Introduction

Pakistan is a country which has been directly ruled for almost half of its history by its military elites, who throughout their rule made the use of religion for political interests and provided space to the reactionary forces in the country at the expense of the civil society of Pakistan. The security paradigm of Pakistan, despite the country's cultural and religious diversity, has always depended on the reactionary forces, which have strengthened their structure in the country with the passage of time. The ultra-Islamic political agenda of Pakistan's militant Islamic outfits have made life miserable for the minorities, who are subjected to physical assaults, stigmatization, institutional degradation and persecution. The democratic set up in Pakistan is such that the utter discriminatory electoral process renders the minorities unable to

* Muhammad Riaz, M.Phil Scholar Department of Peace & Conflict Studies, National Defense University, Islamabad. Email: riaz_dirl@yahoo.com.

** M. Wakil Khan, M.Phil Scholar, NIPS, Quai-e-Azam University, Islamabad.

secure their due share in legislature. As a corollary, they are marginalized and underrepresented in all walks of life. Their minimal share in power, resources and decision-making in the country has put them at a distinct disadvantage. Minorities, being identity groups, need constitutional safeguards for their security, right of being equal citizens of the country, and to preserve their religion and culture in the state that is majoritarian in character.

Currently the popular resentment against war on terror in Pakistan, the Islamist insurgency in the country, and the role and expansion of the Islamist outfits throughout the country are the factors that have made security difficult for the general populace and more specifically for the minorities. The Christian minorities of Pakistan, in particular, have, over the years, come under the violent Islamist attacks for the reason that they are viewed by militants as allies and agents of the Christian west in the country.

The Christian minorities – who, according to 1998 census, constitute, in various denominations of the Christian faith, 1.9 % of the total population of Pakistan – feel themselves as the second class citizens of the state where they have been socially secluded, marginalized, negatively portrayed in the text books, and frequently attacked. In rare cases members of the Christian community rise to the high offices in the government or run their businesses. The successive Pakistani governments and the existing legislation have so far failed to rise to the occasion and put an end to violence and discrimination against the minorities, rooted in the socio-political system of Pakistan.

Imam Khomeini's triumphant return to Iran in February 1979, followed by the events such as the birth of Islamic Republic of Iran in April and the Iran hostage crisis in November of the same year when a band of Iranian militants laid siege to the American embassy in Tehran and seized 52 hostages, is considered by the experts to be the starting point of the debate on political Islam.

Such developments on one hand have ever since raised the question of citizenship rights, and on the other hand they have also sparked off the debate on the separation of state and religion in the Muslim world. The hard-line Islamic fundamentalists strongly oppose such idea that seeks the separation of religion and state on the grounds that any such undertaking is un-Islamic. They consider that the notion that religion is different and separable from the state is absolutely Christian,¹ thus further undermining the claim of the minorities for equality and human rights in the social and political structure of Pakistan.

This study attempts to uncover and acknowledge the instances of structural violence in Pakistani society, to explain the ethnic and religious diversity of Pakistan and the challenges faced by the Christian community. Moreover, it also systematically analyzes the political history of Pakistan, the state construction and consolidation, institutionalization – both formal and informal – and the question of state identity and citizenship that became major issues after Pakistan came into existence. The study also tries to investigate if Pakistani society and institutions have enough strength to clean extremism and militancy out of the country and work on the establishment of a society based on respect for human rights, rational approach to the issues, and the separation of public and private spheres and secular and spiritual issues.

Research Methodology

The study in hand is based on a blend of primary and secondary data. Structured interviews were conducted and literature and key reports available on Christian minorities were reviewed with a view to analyze the various aspects of the problem and build the framework on the concept of structural violence and neo-institutionalism in relation with Christian minorities of Pakistan. The resulting discourse was analyzed in a way so as to deduct meaningful patterns upon which conclusions could be drawn. While analyzing the data this study was enriched by the seminars and group discussions in workshops being attended on minority rights and inter-faith harmony at Christian Study Center (CSC), Rawalpindi.

Theoretical Framework

There are several influential frameworks which seek to analyze the development of violence in a society. One such influential framework has been developed by prominent peace researcher John Galtung.² He draws attention to three forms of violence:

- Direct violence: this refers to the physical violence inflicted on an individual or a group in which emphasis is on organized political violence.
- Structural violence: this form of violence refers to the violence that prevails due to inequalities in social structures. The people's quality of life develops according to these gross imbalances in the societal structure, thereby putting some people, classes, or groups at a distinct disadvantage but not others. Consequently such imbalances in the societal structure may produce direct

violence. In this particular case the societal structure refers to an institution (the state) or to a system that bears down on every aspect of socio-political life as was the case in apartheid South Africa. Structural violence theorists propound violence as the avoidable disparity between the potential ability to fulfill basic needs and their actual fulfillment.³ They also expound that unequal distribution of resources by the fact of unequal share of power which causes structural violations of human rights could otherwise easily be avoided.

- Cultural violence: this refers to the use of religion, linguistic and racial symbols or myths that assert the superiority of one group over the other and justify its violence against the group it deems inferior in either its direct or structural form.
- Neo-institutionalism: in today's globalized world of complex politics, sovereignty of states has been challenged by diversified governance system which created the identity crisis. Thus religion is called in to resolve the identity crisis and provide the resource for collective identity, recognition and support. This introduction of religion to identity, however, does the great harm of furthering the existence of fundamentalism and reactionary forces, which enthusiastically propagate that the secular nature of society degenerates values and lowers the moral standards of the people.⁴

Analysis and Examining the Problem in Depth

Politics of Religion

The advent of the British rule in India marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Indian sub-continent. The British established a new system of governance by replacing the centuries old Muslim rule. Drawing upon the doctrine of sovereignty belonging only to Allah, the Islamic fundamentalists opposed the British rule and later the idea of Pakistan on the religious grounds. The Muslim feudal lords and the masses in most of the Muslim areas finally saw that their interests in future state lied with Muslim League; therefore, they responded to Muslim League with zeal despite that it lacked any proper political structure and comprehensive program, which was capable of absorbing a variety of interpretations.

The fundamentalist forces failed to obtain the popular mandate in 1946 elections in Muslim dominated areas of India. They kept aloof from the Pakistan movement on the grounds that Islam did not recognize any divisions in the Muslim community and geographically defined polities.⁵ The president of the Association of Indian Ulama, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, adduced the practical argument that Muslims were not only too scattered in India to form a separate state but also too divided across ethnic and sectarian lines to form an Islamic state.⁶ When the British rulers announced the partition plan in June 1947, killings rang over India in widespread communal riots just before the creation of Pakistan as a new country on the world map in the name of religion. The communal carnage ratcheted up the feeling of insecurity, resentment, identity crisis and dependence on the armed forces among the Muslim migrants who fled India in terror and settled in Pakistan's urban areas.⁷

Pakistan that Mr. Jinnah tried to create was, seemingly, not meant to be Islamic but a secular state in which the interests of the Muslim community of the Indian sub-continent could be safeguarded.⁸ In fact, in a news conference in New Delhi on July 14, 1947, to a question if Pakistan would be a secular or a theocratic state, Jinnah answered that he did not know what a theocratic state meant.⁹ In addition, in an address to the constituent assembly of Pakistan, he said:

*"In course of time, 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 the political sense as citizens of the state."*¹⁰

However, since Pakistan definitely was created in the name of religion, Islam remained the dominant discourse in the newly established Pakistan and was practiced in its most conservative shape of social life. The fundamentalist forces, which initially held back from the Pakistan movement, began to reorganize in the new country and exerted their full influence over the Objective Resolution adopted in 1949 as guideline for the construction of the future constitutions. By and large, this state of affairs developed a conflict of interests and the polity in the country was questioned, resulting in the constraint of civil liberties and minority rights. The fundamentalists, the military and civil bureaucracy and the political leaders began to define the nature of Pakistan and the role of Islam in it according to their own different and often contrasting visions of democracy and faith.¹¹

The constitution, which could guarantee the rights of citizens and religious minorities, was often scrapped by the military dictators in Pakistan, thus derailing democracy most of the time and, with the support of reactionary and religious parties, kept flourishing disharmony and undemocratic principles in the country. Within a few decades of its existence, Pakistan shifted from supporting equal rights for all citizens to defining citizenship on the grounds of majoritarian Islamic parameters. Article 260 of the 1973 constitution declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims and offered the exclusionary definition of who could be a Muslim and who a non-Muslim.¹² The society was further compartmentalized along religious lines when the minorities were ostracized from political mainstream due to separate electorate for the minorities in the future elections that were to be held. Thus the elections of 1985, 1988, 1990, 1993 and 1997 were held under separate electorate system. The elections for minorities couldn't mitigate the minorities' sense of insecurity mainly because the minorities' representatives had to unquestionably go along with the majority or the ruling party. The sorry state of affairs that developed was exploited to the full by the fundamentalist elements in the country and launched various attacks on the country's minorities to further the agenda of non-Muslims' isolationism in the country. The loss of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1971 further weakened and marginalized the minorities, as they whittled down to 2.7 % from 23 % before 1971.

Despite that thousands of Christians participated in the annual Muslim League meetings in the pre-partition days; their role in the struggle for independence has been altogether ignored in the Pakistani text books. Before partition, Muslim League was also representing the non-Muslim minorities of India, which was why the Christians not only joined the Muslim League in large numbers but also sided with it on the question of Indian partition. It is for this reason that Mr. Jinnah even participated in the thanksgiving event held at the Holy Trinity Church at Karachi when Pakistan came into existence. After Jinnah, these brotherly relations, however, were not reciprocated by the leadership of Muslim League.¹³

Zia's Islamization and the Constitutional Rights of Minorities

Zia's coming to power in 1977 and his experiments of combining the state power with orthodoxy to govern the country was the last straw for the Christians and other minorities of Pakistan. He brought significant changes in the country through his Islamization

process by introducing Shari'a laws which were to have far reaching impact on the political structure of Pakistan and on such important issues as gender relationships and minority rights. To promote orthodoxy he changed the school curricula in which war was glorified, Jihad and Shahadat (Martyrdom) encouraged and militancy praised. He presented the monolithic image of the country as an Islamic state and the citizens as Muslims, thereby ignoring all other identities and religious minorities.¹⁴ Such developments not only arrested the economic progress of the country but also marginalized women and minorities legally and institutionally. Zia also introduced the pernicious laws of blasphemy to Pakistan which have been frequently used since then by the extremist elements against the Christian minorities. Thirty people – all of whom belonged to minority groups – have been killed extra-judicially since 1986 on the charges of blasphemy.¹⁵ The recently incident of Kotradhakishan Punjab in which a couple were burnt alive by a charged mob and the assassination of Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab, in a broad daylight at a market in Pakistan's federal capital by his own security guard on the charges of blasphemy reflects the matter of the fact which is bigotry and violence created by extremist ideology, deeply rooted in the society and the institutional hierarchy of Pakistan.

Zia's loyalty to the religious elements and institutions – that had evolved in the manner that made the system exclusively for the majority whereas the minority sections were altogether ignored – was meant for extending his political agenda for which religion had to be used. Although Zia emphasized over and again that his process of Islamization drew inspiration from the struggle that resulted in the creation of Pakistan, most of the religio-political forces at the back of Zia had opposed the stance of Muslim League with regard to struggle for the creation of Pakistan.

Zia's alliance with the Islamist forces became the major reason for Islamic fundamentalism and militancy in Pakistan.¹⁶ He legitimized his stay in power because of Islamizing the country, since he believed he had "a mission given by God to bring Islamic order to Pakistan".¹⁷ For this purpose, he issued a series of ordinances in February 1979 to institute Islamic penalties such as the imputation of the right hand for theft, 100 lashes for adultery, and 80 lashes each for consuming alcohol and false accusation of adultery. He established Shari'a benches in provincial High Courts and an appellate Shari'a bench in Supreme Court and introduced a number of laws to the constitution. The laws related to evidence equalized two women or two non-Muslims with a single male

Muslim, thereby furthering the disempowerment of women and minorities in the country.¹⁸

During the same time, when Pakistan was fighting a proxy war in Afghanistan, the Islamic seminaries (Madrassas) mushroomed all over the country to provide indoctrination rather than education to a large number of impoverished and religiously charged youth, and so the sectarian violence ratcheted up in the country. The sectarianism which had engulfed 22 lives during 1987 – 89 took 166 lives during 1993 – 95.¹⁹ Zia left a legacy of jihadi organizations across the country that would later become not only an existential threat to Pakistan itself but also the cause of great instability in South and South West Asia and the world at large.²⁰

Zia's troubling amendments in constitution provided the premise upon which marginalization and suppression of minorities continued through a concerted policy of exclusion pursued through Pakistani media, civil and military bureaucracy and educational institutions. All the state institutions in Pakistan vehemently promoted the ideology of the state and have still not recognized to this day the idea of a vibrant and pluralistic society in Pakistan.

Conclusion

The division of the Indian sub-continent on communal lines had far reaching impact on the society of the sub-continent which had been home to myriad ethnic and religious groups who were living together in peace and friendly environment of inter-communal dependencies. The partition of the subcontinent made the different religious communities antagonistic towards each other with minorities paying the highest price. Distressingly, the minorities remained alien to the majority populations in the post partitioned world and could never be socio-politically absorbed as part of larger population. The identity politics in the Pakistan, state formation, statecraft, and fundamentalist tendencies have all played their role in the marginalization of the religious minorities in Pakistan. The constitutional crisis over the issues of nation building in the post partition era in Pakistan and the missing links of citizens and basic human rights are the issues, which have cost heavily to the internal security of the country and the visible populations of the minorities, still have to be resolved.

Results and Discussions

In order to uncover and acknowledge the instances of structural violence in Pakistani society and to know the Christian views, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather maximum

information from the respondents, selected at random from rural and urban areas of Peshawar and Mardan districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Rawalpindi district in Punjab. It should also be mentioned that recorded face to face interviews with respondents from the selected areas were also conducted so as to make this study more reliable. The interview schedule was prepared in English and most of the interviews were conducted in the same language as many of the respondents were well-educated and at best aware of the situation. However, Urdu was used as a medium of communication in some cases where the respondents could not speak or understand English.

The common observation in Pakistan has been that Christian minorities live in ghettos and mostly do the country's worst jobs of sweeping the streets and cleaning the toilets. During the interviews different views came from the members of Christian community in explaining the reason behind the ghettoized Christian life in Pakistan. Ms. Romana Bashir,²¹ who has plenty of experience while working with Christian minority in peace building and raising their living standards, said when Christian missionaries came to India, the lower Hindu castes got attracted to the Christian faith with a view that the new faith would give them an identity, respect and honor. However, their social and economic status didn't change much and they remained socially secluded as before in the Hindu caste system. They, therefore, were compelled to restrict themselves to some safer places where people of the same religion and identity dwelled and faced no hatred; hence the establishment of the Christians' ghettoized living. Moreover, the educational level of most of the Christians is such that it not only doesn't secure them any high level of jobs but also keeps them out of mainstream politics, which is also one of the major reasons why Christians have been restricted to their ghettos.

Dr. Amanuel Mal²², a medical doctor in Peshawar, in response to a question if the majority culture was influencing the minority culture, said that marriage traditions, music, some of the religious traditions, food, dances and dressing are common among the Christians, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims of Punjab. He said that in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the Christians, owing to the cultural effects of the majority Pashtun culture, also kept fast during the month of Ramadan, and that he wore traditional dress so that he didn't look too stranger. Moreover, if on the one hand the majority culture had influenced the minority culture, on the other hand the influence of minority culture on the majority culture was, also visible in traditions such as the tradition of 'mehndi'.

Mr. Rafi Bhatti²³, a resident of Peshawar said that it was the influence of the majority culture that Christian women were also observing the 'purdah' (veil). On the subject of social discriminatory behavior Mr. Bhatti said that Christians were not deemed clean. He explained it with an example that a Christian couldn't sell Gandheri (fragmented sugar cane), as no one would like to buy from him. On the question of religious freedom Mr. Bhatti said while Christians were free to worship at home and in churches, yet if Christians desired to celebrate their festivals publically, many of their Muslim neighbors would not like that.

Mr. Edwin²⁴, a professor of English at Edwards college Peshawar, said that they were free to worship and were respected and honored. S.P Asghar²⁵, DOP, Peshawar, said that although they were enjoying the security and religious freedom, yet if something happened in the West that was profane, violence might rise against the Christians as if the Pakistani Christians were not Pakistanis but Western. He also said that the ratio of violence against Christians is more in Punjab than in any other part of Pakistan.

Most of the respondents believed that little opportunities had been provided to the Christians in the Government sector. They were of the opinion that in army and other institutions where strict hierarchy was found, the Christians often hit the glass ceilings and failed to reach the higher levels of ranks. Rev S.P Asghar said that Cicil Chaudhry was otherwise Pakistan's national hero but he had been kept out of the national discourse. Mr. Anwar Ghulam²⁶, said that most of Pakistan's national leadership received their education from such missionary schools and colleges such as Covenant, St. Mary, St. Cathedral, Presentation Covenant, Kinnaird College, Forman Christian College, and Lawrence College, and yet there were constitutional constraints on the Christians that prevent them from reaching high level of national positions such as president, PM, Chairman Senate and Chief Justice.

Most of the respondents were of the opinion that there was perceived violence against the Christians in the social structure which compelled them to flee for their safety and better life if they get any opportunity. But as most of the Christians were poor and had no sufficient resources to migrate to some safer places, they continued to live with intimidation, fear and hatred.

Recommendations for Policy Making

Constitutional provisions and laws such as blasphemy and evidence that discriminate particularly against Christians should be amended and the cases under sections 295 – B and 295 – C should be speedily decided and those found guilty of false evidences for whatever reasons should be brought under the law so that discrimination and misuse of any provisions and laws could be avoided in future.

Measures should be taken to ensure the Christian participation in economic and public life of Pakistan. A wide range of mechanism must be ensured by the government for the participation of the minorities in the decision-making bodies such as reservation of seats for minorities in government and parliament and consultative bodies on national and local levels on matters that concern to minorities.

Government must provide opportunities to everyone for higher positions in the government irrespective of creed, caste, color, and gender. The position of premiership, presidency, chief justice, chairman of senate, and speaker of national assembly must be open to all citizens of the country including the minorities.

Government must discourage mob psychology and any act of violence against any religious community. The places of religious worship must be used for interfaith harmony brotherhood and tolerance in society, and all those madrassas wherein sectarianism is taught and encouraged should be banned all over the country. Moreover, school curricula must include lessons on tolerance and interfaith harmony as well as the August 11 speech of Mr. Jinnah on religious harmony in the country.

Notes & References

-
- ¹ Carle Robert, "Reveling and Concealing: Islamist Discourse on Human rights", *Human Rights Review* 6, no. 3 (2005).
- ² John Galtung, "Cultural Violence", *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no.3 (1990): 291-305
- ³ Kathleen Ho, "Structural Violence as a Human Rights Violation", *Essex Human Rights Review* 4, no. 2 (2007): 1-17.
- ⁴ Sven Steinmo, "The new institutionalism". In Barry Clark and Joe Foweraker, (eds.) *The Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* (London: Routledge, 2001)
- ⁵ Ahmed Salim, "Partition, Violence and Migration: The Case of Miana Gondal (W-85)", *Policy* 2013 (2014): 14
- ⁶ Barbara D. Metcalf (ed.), *Islam in South Asia in Practice* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 373
- ⁷ Ahmed Salim, "Partition, Violence and Migration, op.cit., 14
- ⁸ Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (London: Hurst, 2009), 5.
- ⁹ Iqbal Haider, "Was Pakistan meant to be a secular state"? *Dawn* (Karachi), July 5, 2005
- ¹⁰ Muhammad Ali Jinnah, *Jinnah: Speeches and statements, 1947-48*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25-29.
- ¹¹ Anwar Syed, *Pakistan: Islam and National Solidarity* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1984), 74
- ¹² Iftikhar H. Malik, *Religious Minorities in Pakistan* (London: Minority Rights Group International, 2002), 17.
- ¹³ Kamran Tahir, *Community of the marginalized : A state of Pakistani Christians*, Center for Public Policy and Governance, Forman Christian College, Lahore (2011), 14
- ¹⁴ Abdul Hameed Nayyar and Ahmed Salim, *The Subtle Subversion: The state of curricula and textbooks in Pakistan Urdu, English, Social Studies and Civics*, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, (2005), 9.
- ¹⁵ Usman Ahmad, "A question of religion", Available at: <http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/5869/a-question-of-religion/> (Retrieved on April 28, 2014).
- ¹⁶ Naseem Ahmed, "General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq Afghan Policy 1977-1988", *Current Affairs Digest*, (2010), 117
- ¹⁷ Omar Noman, *The Political Economy of Pakistan, 1947-85* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1988), 122
- ¹⁸ Iftikhar H. Malik, *Religious Minorities in Pakistan*, op.cit., 19
- ¹⁹ Zia ul Hassan Khan, *Rise of Sectarianism in Pakistan: Causes and Implications*, Pakistan Administrative Staff College, Lahore (1995).
- ²⁰ Naseem Ahmed, "General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq Afghan Policy 1977-1988", op.cit., 118
- ²¹ Author interview with Romana Bashir, Christian Study Center Rawalpindi on June 3, 2012.

²² Author interview with Dr. Amanual Mal, Mission Hospital Peshawar, on May 28, 2012.

²³ Author interview with Rafi Bhatti, Local Resident, on June 30, 2012.

²⁴ Author interview with Professor Edwin, Edwards College Peshawar, on June 30, 2012.

²⁵ Author interview with S.P Asghar, DOP, Peshawar, on July 5, 2012.

²⁶ Author interview with Mr. Anwar Ghulam, Principal, St. John's Cathedral School, Peshawar on July 5, 2012.