

Pakistan's Societal Attitudes Towards Religious Minorities; Literature Gap and Future Direction

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the available research being done on the attitudes of many Muslims concerning religious minorities in Pakistan. A cumulative content analysis approach has been used, and themes were made for analysis. Restrictions were placed on the studies' publication years and reports dealing with attitudes towards minorities in Pakistan. Therefore, the data produced from 2011 onwards was investigated in this paper. The current literature discloses consensus among the researchers regarding undesirable attitudes towards religious minorities in Pakistan that profoundly influence their lives. Nevertheless, these analyses have not explored religion and culture-based prejudice among many Muslims. This paper highlights the gaps in the existing literature and proposes that the identified gaps may lead to new insights in the domain if filled.

Keywords: Societal Attitudes, Religious Minorities, Literature Gap, Future Direction, Blasphemy Law, News Media.

Introduction

Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country with a diverse range of cultures, languages, ethnic groups, religions, and sects. The most recent census was conducted in 2017, and the government approved the minorities' statistics in December 2020; however, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics website does not contain any current information on minorities. Religious minorities account for 3.72 per cent of the country's population, according to the 1998 Census. Christians comprise 1.59 per cent of the population, Hindus 1.6 per cent, Ahmadis 0.22 per cent, Scheduled Castes 0.25 per cent, and others 0.07 per cent (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 1998). Since the beginning, Pakistan has recognized the importance of its religious minorities. The white colour in the country's flag represents their existence and importance (Ambreen, 2014). The constitution of Pakistan also guarantees equal rights to them under Article 20. They have the freedom to acknowledge, practice, and promulgate the religion of their choice.

Similarly, every religious denomination can maintain, manage, and launch its institutions (Mehfooz, 2021). As a result of these provisions, religious minorities live and practice their religions freely in Pakistan. Some reports and studies, however, say that religious minorities in Pakistan are mistreated. Hostility and bigotry against them have risen in recent years. According to the Human Rights Commission Pakistan (2011), minorities had a lousy year in 2010, and the coming years will be even worse. In 2014, Pakistan was named one of the world's most hostile countries for religious minorities by the Pew Forum for 2011- 2012 (Pew Research Center (PRC), 2014). In Pakistan, religious seminaries and public schools have also been thoroughly investigated to see if education encourages prejudices and discriminatory attitudes against minorities. The attitude of the majority population towards minorities is a determinant of

social welfare and exclusion. Thus, considering the available literature, the current study examined the majority's attitudes toward minorities in Pakistan.

Methods and Material

Over the last two decades, a plethora of literature has been produced on Pakistan's religious minorities. The dissertations, articles, and reports on minorities in Pakistan chosen for this paper were all published in 2011 and after. Thus, open-access national and international peer-reviewed journals, JSTOR, Google Scholar, Research Gate, universities' websites, and organizations that advocate for the protection of religious minorities were combed through for relevant literature. Phrases such as 'attitudes towards religious minorities in Pakistan', 'discrimination of religious minorities in Pakistan', 'treatment of religious minorities in Pakistan' and similar were used to find literature. A summative content analysis approach was applied to collect all the relevant materials. Thus, the literature was thoroughly examined for keywords and common themes. Seven main categories were initially developed, but to limit the domain's scope, they were narrowed down to four broad themes: state policies, blasphemy laws, the education system, and media. These themes, wherever possible, were divided into sub-themes. The results of the chosen studies were then explored concerning relevant themes or sub-themes.

Religious Minorities and Attitudes

In Pakistan, minority groups experience poverty, lack of health facilities, injustice, and lack of education. Along with these problems, they are also facing insecurities and negative attitudes from Muslim citizens. The present study is devised to see the broad picture of the religious minority in Pakistan through different spectrums.

Minorities and State Policies

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, said religious minorities would be free to practice their faith and go to their worship places without hesitation (Jinnah, 2004). The constitution of Pakistan has also ensured that minorities shall live with equal rights (Mehfooz, 2021). Nonetheless, there seems to be a contradiction between Pakistan's state policy and its constitution, as Rahman (2012) contends that minority groups in Pakistan are subjected to severe abuses of fundamental human rights by both the state and society. According to him, the impact of state policies may be seen in numerous administrative systems and, more notably, in the judicial system and its discrimination against minorities. He concludes that Pakistan as a state and society has failed to provide proper protection towards minority groups with the legal and social rights they deserve." A survey conducted by Poza (2011) revealed that nearly 9 out of 10 Hindu women were illiterate, while the illiteracy rate for Pakistani women is 58 per cent. Poza concluded that Pakistani law protects fundamental rights; nonetheless, the government has failed to provide minorities with primary education, religious freedom, and protection. Due to a lack of education, most of the low-level jobs are done by people belonging to minority groups. Their condition becomes even more devastating when they face emotional and physical abuse at the workplace (Faruqi, 2011). Islamabad Policy Research Institute (2012) pointed out that job opportunities are not equally distributed among the minority groups in Pakistan. They are not allowed to work in high government and private ranks; only minimal blue-collar jobs are granted. In 2019, the government approved a 5 per cent job quota for minorities in federal government services; however, it has failed to implement it efficiently (Din, 2019). Pakistan has also been accused of promoting religious intolerance by enacting laws that encourage

citizens to discriminate against minorities. Some argue that laws governing Ahmadis' religious status, especially declaring them non-Muslims, have influenced public attitudes toward them, making them subject to extremist violence, persecution, and rejection by many mainstream Muslims (Chaudhary, 2020; Raja, 2020; Ispahani, 2017). According to a recent report "USCIRF" (2021), the enforced anti-Ahmadis laws have worsened religious freedom. Pakistan is re-designated, in the report, as a "Country of particular concern" that has failed to protect minorities from mistreatment.

Minorities and Blasphemy Law

The judiciary or judicial system is one of the most important organs of any state. It can help reduce discrimination towards minority groups (Finke et al., 2017). One of the most internationally criticized laws is the blasphemy law. The impact of this law has also caused a detrimental and prejudicial attitude towards religious minorities (Shaikh, 2011; Poza, 2011; Faruqi, 2011). The blasphemy law is said to have caused extrajudicial killings in the country. More than 60 people have been blamed for dozens of communal attacks against minorities that have taken place on the pretext of blasphemy (Smith, 2018). It has also been used as a means of revenge. According to some researchers, blasphemy accusations are frequently made and used to settle personal disputes with religious others (Smith, 2018; Curtis, 2016; Poza, 2011; Faruqi, 2011). Instances of misuse also exist against Muslim individuals (Dawn News, 2014); in fact, most individuals charged or sentenced under this law so far are Muslims (USCIRF, 2020; Din, 2019; USCIRF, 2016). However, to date, not a single individual has been executed by the court in the context of this law since its introduction (USCIRF, 2020). The legislation's goal of this law was to protect minorities rather than abuse and discriminate against them.

Minorities: Education System

Pakistan has two education systems: modern and madrasas systems. The contemporary education system is based on schools and universities. The schools are of two kinds: Urdu and English (Raheem, 2015). The madrasas are affiliated with five different primary religious schools of thought, each with its curriculum. Modern Education Several studies reveal the prejudicial attitude towards religious minorities within the contemporary education system. The curriculum fails to satisfy the needs and rights of minority groups in Pakistan (Rahman, 2012; Hussain et al., 2011). Some scholars say that the curriculum of public schools is unrepresentative of the religious and cultural values of minority groups (Mehmood et al., 2014). Others say that it is biased, particularly towards Christians and Hindus and portrays them as naturally evil, violent, and agents of West and India, respectively (Agenzia Fides, 2020; USCIRF, 2016).

According to Hussain et al. (2011), the teachers at public schools held discriminatory attitudes toward minorities, which has then been transferred to the students. Similarly, Mehmood et al. (2014) have concluded that the attitudes of public schools' teachers are biased towards minorities. Raheem (2015) found Urdu medium school students showed more prejudicial attitudes towards minority groups than English medium schools. Ajmal et al. (2011) studied perceptions of Muslim school-going students regarding Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews in Pakistan. The results indicated that Jews and Hindus were perceived more negatively than Sikhs and Christians. The authors conclude that the justified hostility towards Israel and India has contributed to their negative image. Others claim that problems faced by minority students in public schools are primarily driven by a prejudicial curriculum that relies on glorifying militancy and violence against non-Muslims. The discriminatory treatment in public schools can often lead to forcibly eating at separate tables, especially with Christian students (Mughal, 2018;

Mehmood et al., 2014). Conversely, Afzal (2015) found Muslim students and teachers reporting that they treat minorities perfectly well in Pakistan. They acknowledged that minorities are equal citizens of Pakistan.

Education and Madrasas

Scholars have also pointed out the causes of hostility and prejudice towards religious minorities to be the impact of madrasas' curriculum that has a role in shaping students' attitudes against non-Muslims. The textbooks taught in madrasas portray non-Muslims as either infidels or ones who have deviated from Islam. Consequently, it propagates negative views of minorities rather than describing them as citizens of Pakistan with equal rights and obligations (Hanif et al., 2020; Hussain et al., 2011). Raheem (2015), in his study, has found that the madrasa teachers have demonstrated some clarity about the legal status of minorities in Pakistan but were in various ways less tolerant toward them. He concludes that the students of madrasas held somewhat more aggressive and intolerant attitudes towards minorities than the students of English medium and Urdu medium schools.

Similarly, Hanif et al. (2020) found madrasas' students to be less tolerant towards minorities than the schools' students. On the other hand, Naz (2011) has concluded that the attitudes of the female madrasas' teachers towards minorities are not highly biased. However, prejudicial attitudes do exist, and they are not extreme.

Minorities and Pakistani Media

The widespread access to media makes it a powerful tool. It can rightly be used to contribute towards resolving the problems of religious minorities while giving proper coverage to their spiritual and social issues. In Pakistan, the representation of minorities in the mainstream media is said to be very low. Only a tiny coverage is given to the problems of Christians and Hindus, while other minority groups are almost ignored in the dominant media. Most of the coverage is not sympathetic towards them (International Media Support, 2019). However, today, the media is divided into print, electronic and social media; therefore, to know the broad picture of minorities' presentation in Pakistani media, we must look at the three streams separately.

Print News Media

The printed news media plays a tremendous role in influencing and shaping public opinion. It is a powerful tool and can rightly be used to resolve the problems of minorities while giving proper coverage to their religious and social issues. Ambreen (2014) examined the representation of minorities in prominent English newspapers, such as The Dawn, The Nation, and The News, from 2009 to 2011. Her study revealed that the representation of minorities in those newspapers was positive and encouraging. She has concluded that the overall coverage given to minority groups in print media was objective and focused on their issues. Khan (2016) has found that English newspapers give more coverage to minority issues than the Urdu newspapers. Batool (2018) conducted a comparative study on the representation of minorities in Pakistani and Indian print media from 1990 to 2010. She discovered that the Pakistani media was silent on Pakistani Hindus while the Indian press was presenting Indian Muslims negatively.

On the other hand, Khoso (2015) studied national and international newspapers on the incident where three Ahmadis were attacked in Pakistan. He concluded that the national newspapers reported the incident sensibly and did not cross the legal boundaries; in contrast, international newspapers misguided the

incident and represented the law of Pakistan against the Ahmadis. The print media is positive towards minorities and covers most of the News regarding them; that is why it has been called the most minorities conscious media in Pakistan (Alam et al., 2018).

Electronic Media

Public opinion is directly associated with the electronic media's agenda, which is what leading news channels set in presenting issues. The media must follow the ethics that benefit them and society's development. In their qualitative study, Joshua and Zia (2020) explored the policies of Pakistani electronic media and covered the issues. They found that matters were occasionally covered but often ignored specific crucial problems. The PEMRA strictly forbids all such News that creates hatred among the citizens. According to them, minorities' representation in entertainment media is almost nonexistent. In contrast, minority-related events are reported in the News but are not given the same amount of time and space as others. Shehzadi (2017) studied the performance of electronic media in terms of minority issues. Her study was designed to identify the news channel's presentation of the "Kot Radha Kisha" incident, where an angry mob had beaten a Christian couple over blasphemy and later set their bodies on fire. She found that the incident was covered with an ethnic side rather than a religious one. During her survey, almost half of the people agreed that news channels create conflict between Muslims and minorities. Bushra (2011) maintains that when the Ahmadis' mosques were targeted simultaneously in Lahore on May 28, 2010, all the TV channels reported them live and talked about the issues for hours. Mubeen and Qusien (2017) have concluded that private TV channels objectively cover minorities' issues and create awareness regarding their rights. However, Chaudhry (2019) reports a study that claims that almost all news coverage about minorities is conservative or event-related. In that study, the radio channels are said to have not aired a single story of minorities. A very similar conclusion was made by Alam et al. (2018) regarding radio channels.

Social Media

In today's world, social media has also become a powerful tool. It can help spread the News to every corner of the world. As the use of it grows, its negative impact also grows up. People do not hesitate to post hate speech on social media, which has also emerged as a significant topic of debate among media scholars (Costello & Hawdon, 2018). According to some researchers, social media is the primary source of religious hatred in Pakistan. It is allegedly used as a weapon against minorities, and the stories relating to religious intolerance are not censored. They propose regulating it to prevent incorrect information about minority groups from spreading (Anthony & Hussain, 2018; Tanveer, 2016). A poll of 559 Pakistani internet users found that 92 per cent have encountered hate speech on social media. Specifically, 61 per cent said it happened to Ahmadis, 43 per cent said it happened to Hindus, and 39 per cent said it happened to Christians (Haque, 2014). However, this is not always true; social media has also served as a valuable forum for journalists and advocates to encourage a greater understanding of minority issues. For instance, when a factory of a person belonging to the Ahmadi community was burnt over a blasphemy charge, the minority rights activists set up a campaign over social media with the hashtag "#IStandWithAhmadis." Many Pakistanis also showed grievances and supported Ahmadis on social media (Tamsut, 2015). Further, it has also been used to foster tolerance and raise awareness about minorities. Many activists and organizations use Twitter and Facebook to disseminate information about incidents that would otherwise go unreported in the mainstream media (Dilawar et al., 2014).

Religious Minorities and the Impact of Attitudes

It is an alarming situation for any country when individuals' religious identity becomes a risk factor for mental health in a society. The attributed factors for depression among adolescents are social stressors, as the youth of minorities tend to feel that they are not given the freedom to express their religious beliefs and practices. A study reveals that minority teenagers in Pakistan are more prone to lower self-esteem as compared to Muslim teenagers (Iqbal et al., 2013). Another study (Isik et al., 2018) concludes that compared to the students' background, students of elementary and higher education belonging to minorities score lower grades, obtain fewer credits, are more likely to fail examinations, and are twice as likely to experience study delays. It clearly shows that the academic motivation of the students belonging to minority groups is affected by injustice and inequality. Iqbal et al. (2012) investigated the level of depression in adolescents of

religious minorities in Pakistan. The minorities selected were Christians and Hindus, being compared with Muslims. The study results indicated that Hindus and Christians were more vulnerable to developing depression as compared to Muslims. Similarly, Naveed et al. (2014) conducted a study investigating the effects of discriminatory behaviour on minority groups. The people of minority groups were assessed regarding difficulties in gaining good jobs, practicing teachings, and performing religious obligations. They found that minorities are denied equal employment opportunities and are treated as second-class citizens, subjected to various types of discrimination, intimidation, and threats.

Literature Gap and Directions for Future

Previous research has focused on the effects of a discriminatory educational system, state policy, and the role of the media in instilling prejudice toward religious minorities. Nevertheless, the attitudes need to be explored at various levels. Even though the reviewed studies are systematic, they do not provide substantial insights into the impact of religiosity. Attitudes towards religious minorities can also be explored in the context of religious orientation, such as intrinsic and extrinsic (Allport & Ross, 1967), which has revealed positive attitudes towards outgroups (Höllinger, 2020) and plays a great deal in the reduction or promotion of negative attitudes towards outgroups (Brown & Baker, 2016). Another predictor that can impact individuals' attitudes towards minorities is the personality traits that are found to be associated with prejudice towards outgroups (Lin & Alvarez, 2020).

Moreover, personal experiences of individuals, such as researcher (Keehn, 2015), intergroup contact (Kende et al., 2021), and other predictors may reveal a clear picture of the phenomenon. Many studies regarding attitudes towards minorities have been conducted in Punjab, except for a few. Some studies have found a positive coexistence between minority and majority in KP province (Rahman & Akram, 2020). Therefore, ethnicity and other demographic variables should be considered, as some studies have found varying attitudes towards minority groups based on demographics (Anderson, 2019). Thus, the studies reviewed above regarding attitudes miss something important: By focusing on what kinds of attitudes are found towards religious minorities, such studies fail to perceive the effect of ethnic background on attitudes towards minorities. Thus, there is a need to fill in this gap by conducting quantitative studies.

Furthermore, another crucial aspect revealed is that most studies have focused on all minority groups. There is a need to study attitudes towards one specific minority group, such as Ahmadi, Hindus, etcetera, as some studies have found more negative attitudes towards one religious group as compared to the other (Raheem, 2015; Ajmal et al., 2011; Hussain et al., 2011). Future social scientists may study other factors, such as the impact of fundamentalism and conservatism with the mediation effect of personality traits on

attitudes towards minorities. Future scholars can also incorporate the Ashrāfs, the nobles, and Ajlāfs, the commoners (Rout, 2017) social dichotomy in their analytical studies. The discrimination and negative attitudes towards minorities may be because of their profession and lower social status, as lower-status Muslims meet similar discrimination by well-off and upper-status Muslims (Trivedi, 2016). This may reveal a clear picture of cultural-based discrimination of minorities.

Most importantly, almost all these studies are primarily conducted in the context of the secular state. At the same time, Pakistan is an Islamic state that shall enable Muslims to live following the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah (The Constitution of Pakistan, 1973-Article 2A). Thus, the country's ideological objectives must be taken into consideration when exploring the attitudes towards minorities, especially in the case of blasphemy laws. Though prejudice and discriminatory attitudes toward minority groups are not unique to Pakistan, they have long been a concern in many modern secular democracies. In the United States and Europe, people from minority groups experience abuse, exploitation, racism, and a variety of other forms of discrimination (Masci, 2019; Diamant & Starr, 2018). As a result, future academics may compare prejudice against minorities in these secular states to discrimination against minorities in Pakistan.

Conclusion

To conclude, it seems that the condition of minorities is pathetic in Pakistan. However, there is a dire need for more scholarly studies in this area. In the Pakistani context, school curricula and state policies are considered the fundamental reasons for negative attitudes towards minorities. However, many other factors may influence the attitude formation towards them. Thus, researchers of attitudes studies must examine religion-based and cultural-based discrimination separately to reveal and rightly address the issue.

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