Religious violence towards minorities: the case of Youhanabad Church attack in Pakistan

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Abstract: Violence in general but religion-based violence, in particular, has been an unsettling, however ubiquitous, feature of Pakistani society. While there are economic, social, ideological, and psychological causes for why individuals engage in various acts of violence, particularly those against minority and marginalized groups are usually systemic. That is to say that either the system actively perpetuates it or passively observes it as it happens without doing anything to stop it. In Pakistan, religious violence is a result of both active perpetuations through discriminatory laws like blasphemy and or the prejudiced school curriculum and passive observation. Furthermore, in a larger context, all of this can be attributed to myopic state policies which sought to unify the nation by using Islam as a political tool to break ethnic strongholds. As it turns out, this policy has been disastrous for minority and marginalized groups. This paper seeks to understand the dynamics of religious violence in Pakistan to explain the twin attacks on Youhanabad Church in 2015. Furthermore, it undertakes a qualitative study i.e., conducting interviews with the victims of the 2015 church attack, to get insight into their feelings and how they are dealing with different emotional and economic effects of the tragedy.

Keywords: religious violence, systemic violence, discriminatory laws, Pakistani Christian community, minority groups, marginalized groups, dynamics of Islamabad

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1. Introduction

The breakup of East Pakistan called into question Pakistan’s independence rationale on the basis of religion. This was troubling for the Pakistani state establishment for two reasons: (1) India; and (2) Balochistan. Balochistan had presented similar sentiments and aspirations as East Pakistan so the security establishment in Pakistan feared Balochistan would also go down the same path. To counter their anxieties vis-a-vis Balochistan, they pursued a policy of Islamization which in their view would break ethnic strongholds and subsume all ethnic identities under one Muslim identity which would not only deter any Indian threat but also tone down Balochistan. Pursuant to this policy, Pakistan’s state-funded religious schools rewrote public school curricula and utilized religious groups for political purposes — all of this unchecked and with impunity.

The policy served Pakistan well especially in Kashmir, however until 2001 when Pakistan was made to partake in the war on terror against Islamic extremism which resulted in some of the groups turning against the state while others launched attacks against themselves. However, one of the most serious repercussions of this policy has been on the minority and marginalized communities. The state’s support of some religious groups emboldened all religious groups. Combined with it, blasphemy law was instrumental in translating extremism into violent actions directed toward any and all individuals deemed to be disrespecting Islam. Further, combined with it, near-collective perception of weak state institutions and writ, led to individuals deciding on the state’s behalf, thence mob lynching and such acts of violence as twin attacks on Youhanabad Church.

There have been many changes in Pakistan since the beginning, yet administrative and economic institutions appear to be static to many outsiders. In other words, society and the state are no longer interdependent. Pakistan had faced a slew of issues. It was critical for the government to ensure that religion had a part in policymaking. As the world's tolerance for religious pluralism erodes, religious minorities suffer increasing levels of persecution. It was clear that policymakers were divided on the issue of religion's place in Pakistan legislation and rules. However, some called for a more secular state. Since the 1980s, when the former obtained substantial influence over the narrative of the state, this argument has only become more acrimonious. For the most part, Pakistan's religious minorities live in continual dread of blasphemy, conversion, and violent extremism from a number of sources including the state, primarily due to the Muslim conservative worldview. The problem disproportionately affects Pakistan's substantial Christian population. Since so little has been published about the plight of Pakistan's Christians (and other non-Muslims, except for Ahmadiyya) it serves as a warning sign. It is common for the existence of non-Muslim people to be overlooked by Muslim authors covering the country's social, political, and religious landscape.

Islamic extremists have assaulted Christian Churches on a number of occasions, claiming the lives of hundreds of innocent people using the weapon of suicide bombing. The male members of the Christian community were among those who died in the greatest numbers. Families of the dead have endured a considerable deal of psychological, emotional, and financial distress. The primary objective of this study is to explore the insights and outcomes of such kinds of violent acts against minorities in Pakistan. The significant factor of this research is based on interviews with widows of the men that were being killed in the attacks also the study also tends to explore how the survivors and victims of these attacks and their family were being treated by the community and how they face the after-affect trauma from the society. Along
with that there were also some other concerns which were being highlighted within the research that were:

- To analyse the effects of Islamization on the Christian community being frequently cited as a concern.
- To determine the role of the Christian community and other institutions in assisting the widows and other victims in their time of need.
- To examine the stance of the government security officials who were on duty at the time of the occurrence.
- To show the perspective of Government and political influence towards the minorities of the country.
- To find out how the families of victims were able to make ends meet.

One of the main concerns of Pakistani Christians is that their Muslim citizens and co-religionists in the West do not pay attention to their predicament. Others are blind to the discrimination and unfairness they endure (Ibrahim, 2014). As a result of the current political atmosphere, minorities are subjected to hatred, widespread use of blasphemy laws, infidelity, apostasy and extremely violent attacks on worship places like churches for religious communities. This oppressive climate makes it impossible for them to live peacefully and safety even in regions where they have commonly lived all their lives. Thus, they are frequently forced to relocate to safer places inside the country or abroad, where they may live in secrecy and avoid becoming the target of violence speech, blasphemy allegations, or even life-threatening threats by going by Muslim names.

2. Literature review

Gleditsch and Rudolfsen (2016), in their study “Are Muslim countries more prone to violence?” raised the worry that the Islamization of disputes in Muslim countries leads to the growing intensity and may complicate conflict termination and resolution. Their main concern was to find out why so many armed groups, particularly those based in the Muslim world, depend on violent interpretations of religious texts? Also, they argued that the missionary nature of Islam, they say that it leads to a more aggressive position. Some people believe Islam is more prone than other religions to extremism and bloodshed. Lastly, secularization and more excellent protection of human rights are not being implemented in Muslim nations, as has been the case elsewhere, which has led to a drop in violence in other parts of the world; some other factors such as economic and political backwardness of Muslim countries also contribute to violent activities against the minorities.

Pakistani Christians lives were under fear on a daily basis. Christianity and people who follow it continue to be persecuted, whether in the open or with specific terrorist strikes in mind. Pakistani Christians have been brutally persecuted in recent years, most notably on Easter Sunday in March. Terror attacks in Pakistan are to blame, but so is Pakistan's stringent religious climate, which has made it difficult for Pakistani Christians to practice or identify with their religion openly. Pakistan will not become a better and safer place for Christians just through retributive measures and military-driven anti-terror efforts. First and foremost, there must be cultural and societal shifts (Hyat, 2015).

As Pio and Syed (2016) in their article “Marked by the cross: The persecution of Christians in
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Pakistan” mentioned that Pakistani Christians are persecuted because they are caught between their religious conviction and Islamic radicalism. They argued that the Christian community in the region has a long history extending back to the eighteenth century, and now, the majority of its members live in abject poverty, both economically and politically. Islamic anti-Western prejudice is also directed against them. Those who practice Christianity in Pakistan are subjected to a variety of crimes, including murder, sexual assault, abduction, and forced conversion, by mob violence and the burning and murdering of individuals.

It is also uncommon for influential persons to keep mute on the problem of religious oppression and bloodshed because of religious extremism, minority rights violations, and state-sanctioned jihadist propaganda. They argue that even though the minorities in Pakistan wouldn’t have to pay the Jizya and are theoretically allowed to practice their religion in accordance with Sharia law, including but not restricted to blasphemy law, they face discrimination and persecution at the hands of Islamic law, including but not limited to blasphemy law (Pio & Syed, 2016)

The top-down – bottom-up jihad linkage in Pakistan has led to the persecution of religious minorities. As a result of the military’s sway over society, the combined civil and military governments have played a significant role in Islamization efforts. The judiciary has also served as an ally of conservative religious forces and the military when it comes to challenging the executive branch's use of the constitution. Islamic extremists and religious clergy help minority persecution from the bottom up. Because of this connection, the Majority Muslim and religious minorities in Pakistan are legally separated.

The Pakistani Constitution grants residents the freedom to profess, practice, and promote their religion, as well as the right to maintain public order and morals. In contrast, the International Religious Freedom Report published by the United States Department of State emphasizes that several additional laws, as well as government policies, restrict religious freedom, particularly for religious minorities (U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2012). Freedom House notes that freedom of religion is subject to a large number of legal constraints in the United States. Intolerance is another term used to describe the religious environment in Pakistan, according to other sources. A growing religious extremism, according to the USCIRF, poses a threat to freedom of religion and expression, as well as other fundamental human rights (U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2012).

Malik (2002) in his report “Religious Minorities in Pakistan” argued that several violent attacks on minorities in the region have brought attention to the issue of minorities inside the country that is generally perceived to be a relatively homogenous Muslim nation, and that the demands for full independence by the major influential groups have over the years provoked severe government repression. Meanwhile, non-Muslim minorities have continued to suffer under exceptionally draconian religious regulations. There is a strong link between marginalization of Pakistan's minorities to the country's socio-cultural and political past.

By comparison, Christians are seen as inferior by the British Pakistani Christian Association (BPCA) and are typically weak and disadvantaged in society. According to an AFP report, the Minister for National Harmony said that Christians are among the country's poorest and most disadvantaged people and argued that discrimination towards Christians is fuelled not just by religion but also by caste. Anti-Christian attitude, according to some accounts, is fuelled by class discrimination (Lavallee, 2012). According to an article in the Georgia Straight, a
Vancouver-based weekly newspaper, the poorest and most hated part of the community turned to Christianity, and as a result, everyone knows that most Christians are actually untouchables (Dyer, 2012).

There are also other non-violent types of discrimination that Christians are subjected to, such as a lack of work prospects, limited education opportunities, and hurdles to social mobility, all of which increase the vulnerability of Christians even further. For example, the reason that sanitation positions, for example, are sometimes promoted as accessible just to non-Muslims featuring Christians as the primary target group reveals how certain companies feel about Christians.

The mistreatment of minorities, particularly Christians, is a stain on the reputation of Pakistani society as a whole. Although extremists is perhaps the most aggressive agitators, it is societal views that place minorities in the forefront of militants' lists of potential targets for attack. As Pakistan continues its struggle against extremism, it must recognize that military solutions alone will not suffice to defeat the extremists. Killing the militants may make the state a safer place in general, but it will have little effect on the everyday struggle of individuals who live their lives within the framework of degrading stereotypes, as has been demonstrated in the past. Until these fundamental issues are overcome, the country will remain a major role in the persecution of Christians on the international stage.

3. Theoretical framework

Three theories have been advanced that seek to explain the conditions under which religion becomes involved in activism and violence. These are: (1) social movement theory; (2) fundamentalism theory; and (3) apocalyptic warrior’s theory (Gregg, 2015). Social Movement Theory (SMT) posits the conditions under which grievances, which are plentiful, transform into mass movements aimed at social or political change. According to the scholars of SMT, there are three variables that act as necessary conditions for social movements to emerge: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes (McAdam et al, 1996). The term Fundamentalism denotes any individual or group that believes in the literal nature of scripture, clear-cut religious practices and beliefs, and the perception that there is an urgent need to get back to basics—the “fundamentals of the faith”—which are being corrupted or have been lost, and to reassert religion into society and, in some cases, political life (Gregg, 2015).

The concept of apocalypse is that of divine battles between the forces of Good and Evil and these battles are struggles to create “ultimate order” and conquer “ultimate disorder”. It is accompanied by signs that the end is near and that the faithful must rise up, stand firm in the face of trials and hardship, and defend the faith. Apocalyptic war thinking is triggered by acute personal and collective trauma brought about by catastrophic events or persistent trials. For example, war, occupation, corruption, lawlessness, and natural disasters may lead some to believe that these are signs of the end of times and the war between Good and Evil is occurring in the here and now. Under these conditions, earthly battles become spiritual battles in which the faithful must participate (Juergensmeyer, 1992).

4. Research methodology

The study is largely based on qualitative research methods, with the ultimate goal of developing
a broad explanation for Christian minority' responses to violent extremism widows' views, attitudes, and experiences through the use of questionnaires.

The widows of victimization of conservative and fundamentalist approach by Muslims were slain, as well as the leader of the Churches, were interviewed for this study. Additionally, the security personnel’s who were being deployed to the site were also interviewed. The study's central component is based on interviews with widows and other victims who were from Youhanabad a Christian slum areas in Lahore. The interviews were recorded and transcribed as part of the project. Pseudonyms were employed in order to maintain anonymity. The data from the interviews were compared to secondary data through secondary sources in order to identify parallels and differences. The survey questions were used to add fresh content to the existing corpus, which was organized around an abstract notion, an underlying theme, and a topic matter. After much deliberation, the co-related variance was eventually divided in half.

There were some restrictions faced while conducting the study. Christian groups in Pakistan tend to be isolated from one another, making it difficult and risky to contact them for this kind of project. As a second consideration, Pakistani Christians have a lower literacy percentage than the rest of the country, therefore interview questions should be simple. However, researchers in this study are fluent in their native tongues, which makes interviewing and transcribing interviews easier. The questions were carefully summarized in the native language and translated by the interviewees. Participants utilized either a literal translation or a metaphor strategy to convey their message. The interviews with the widows will be translated word-for-word. Another significant problem with the study's proposed research paradigm is that it solely studies the Christian population in Lahore and does not take into consideration a big number of Christians who live elsewhere in Pakistan. To address this issue, the study’s literature review and historical background provides an overview of the Christian population in Pakistan and their history, however it is vital to emphasize that major variations exist amongst Christians in different regions of the nation.

4.1. Research limitation

To enable the integration of objective research and identify research gaps, study permitted qualitative publications to be included. To limit the scope of the evaluation to an empirical study conducted, the editorials and another review of literature were added only. Study also didn’t include unpublished dissertations/theses to make sure the research was double-blind reviewed. There was no constraint for inclusion of empirical and subject inclusion criteria because they encompass a broad spectrum of research on victimization of Christians through fundamentalist elements. Study analysed the findings and inadequacies in empirical evidence linked to this topic both and limit itself due to less literature available.

The Christian population in Pakistan is primarily concentrated in segregated neighbourhoods, making it difficult to contact them about participating in such a venture. The literacy rate among Pakistani Christians is lower than the national average and this problem was addressed to some extent by the fact that the research participants of the study are proficient in the local languages, which makes it easier to conduct and transcribe interviews.

The literal translation approach, also known as the metaphase technique, was applied by the participants. This entails providing a literal translation of the widows' interviews word for word. The study's literature review and historic context attempt to tackle this problem by giving
a thorough overview of the Christian community disperse throughout Pakistan. The study depends solely on secondary materials written in the English language in order to give a general discussion on Pakistan's Christian population.

Licensing constraints restrict the use of Christian community literature written in regional languages such like Urdu or Punjabi. The utilization of Bilingual sources is warranted by the ease with which information can be verified and accessed while using them. On the other hand, literature written in indigenous languages reflect a more intimate and context-dependent approach. Comparing the previous literature in English and Pakistani dialects on minorities might be a fascinating option for researchers who are fascinated in Pakistani minorities.

4.2. Sampling method

Snowball sampling technique is being used to conduct this research under a non-probability sampling technique. This technique was used because the subjects with under-research characteristics were isolated and exceedingly difficult to locate in community. Chain-referral sampling was used because when interviewing the first widow, she refers other widows that were been the prime victim of suicide attacks.

Table-1: Statistical analysis of sampled widows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total women interviews</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>4.761</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in Christian community</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in Muslim community</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total children</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Employed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Unemployed</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>5.674</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated women</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uneducated women</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>4.761</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian women employed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>3.674</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian women un-employed</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>2.232</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Discussion and analysis

5.1. Challenges to Christian Community

Muslims and Christians have generally coexisted peacefully, with only occasional outbursts of hostility between them. In addition, claims of blasphemy and hate speech have frequently resulted in mob violence towards Christians, whereas Islamic Militants have also attacked the Christian community. Even while religious oppression is frequently conceived of in the classic sense of open violence, it may take place in a variety of other ways. However, although the threat of violence remains very real, more insidious types of persecution, including as job discrimination and the repression of Christian organizations, are progressively making their way into many governments, including the government of Pakistan (Sustainable Development Policy Report, 2014)

While Christian persecution undoubtedly has an impact on individuals on a personal basis, it also has an impact on the larger community on a larger scale in many cases. Sometimes certain attacks are utterly unnecessary, whereas other instances the activities of one member of the
group result in an assault on the whole community as a kind of vengeance against that one member.

Violence against Christians in Pakistan is perhaps one of the most atrocious, and regrettably, most common, forms of persecution in the country. The techniques used are quite diverse, ranging from gun rampages to physical attacks to suicide bombers and everything in between. Persecution of Christianity in Pakistan is aided and abetted by terrorism on a massive scale (Seiler, 2014).

In order to incite fear and convey political signals to traditionally Christian countries such as the United States, many of the most horrific assaults against churches including their families are carried out by extremist Islamic terror groups that operate in the name of Islam.

Figure 1: Sectarian violence in Pakistan (January 2000–December 2019)

Source: South Asian Terrorism Portal (2020)

5.2. The social problems and its impact on Christian Community

Islamist movements had already moved from the struggle for a super state Muslim community to something of an Islamic nationalism they would like to be fully recognized as legitimate players on the domestic political landscape and have largely abandoned the super state agenda that was a part of their ideology in the process. Alternatively, the conservative re-Islamization strategy pursued by many regimes, even liberal ones, in order to undermine Islamist opposition and reclaim some religious credibility has backfired, according to the World Bank. It has resulted in the emergence of a new form of Islamic fundamentalism that is theoretically conservative but occasionally politically extreme. This neo-fundamentalism is generally divorced from the policies and strategies of individual governments. According to appearances, it's much less politically driven than Islamist groups, and it appears to be more concerned with the execution of sharia than with establishing what a real Islamic State should look like Islamic law. Despite the fact that the movement is primarily a societal phenomenon, it has also spawned
an extreme manifestation that is expressed in informal peripheral networks of people who are motivated by these same reasons (Roy, 2001).

As a result, Islamic terrorism has changed from state-sponsored acts or actions against local targets to a de-territorialized, transnational, and mostly uprooted movement that has spread around the world. However, the strategic effect of these different trends is limited by the fact that they have such limited roots in the domestic politics of the states in which they operate, and that they are targeting the soft bellies of Pakistan's predominantly Christian community, which is already living a vulnerable life.

 Discriminatory persecution is the most ubiquitous and pervasive kind of religious intolerance, even if it isn't the most terrible. Extremists steadily force Christians to the outside of society by infiltrating government operations, manipulating popular sentiment through the news, and legally denying minority access to fundamental needs (Seiler, 2014).

5.3. Yuhanabad Church attacks

When it comes to religious minorities in Pakistan, religious fundamentalists utilize violent language and derogatory labels to display their bigotry in the workplace as well as the community. The notion of a war is linked to the widespread assumption that they are being attacked by an external influence within their own ranks. Muslims' anger over Western policies or circumstances that perceived anti-Islamic to Muslims escalated to retaliatory violence against Christian communities, such as the publication of a particular series of Danish caricatures. Because of this, some Pakistani Muslims see Christians as stooges of the West, and they are willing to pony up dearly for it. When a group feels particularly weak and vulnerable, some theorists believe the group may cooperate in spreading "extreme stereotypic contents" towards weaker factions in order to unleash its resentment toward the intruders who have oppressed the group.

While interviewing Amna Bibi whose husband died in a suicide attack on Church in Yuhanabad when Sunday mass prayers were on-going. She said:

“My first worry following the death of her husband who was deceased in a bomb attack was the well-being of her family. We were more than vulnerable than ever. I was afraid to let my children out of house and from the community. As a result of my husband's death, the level of anxiety for my children's safety raised. These worries put me in a terrible state of mental and emotional tension, which eventually manifested as bodily problems” (A. Bibi, 2021).

Beside the fact and pain of losing their family members, the Christian community in Yuhanabad was living under the threat of any persecution. They were afraid than ever. They didn’t know who to look for assistance. Due to huge influx of Muslim conservatism towards Christians, they were afraid of their own lives and the lives of their children rather than doing arrangements of already deceased. The targeted victimization of Christian community left the community into cosmos who is already vulnerable of many societal issues.

Besides the pain of losing a loved one, the victims also had to deal with a number of other issues, such as the loss of their sole source of income, which had an immediate impact on their financial situation. The sufferers had to deal with a lot of difficulties. The problem of violence
is widespread and has to be addressed. Fundamentalist religious movements have grown in prominence in recent years.

Following the death of her husband in the Christ Church tragedy, Maryam Bibi main worry was for her family members, who were subjected to mob violence in the aftermath of the suicide bombing. She said:

“After the riots began, I was concerned that my two boys would become victims of the violence. I was right. When word spread of an impending crowd, I gathered my two small kids and fled Youhanabad as quickly as I could without stopping. Thank goodness, my sister was able to give us with refuge for the following two weeks. Maryam Bibi went on to say, I will never forget the trauma that I and my sons had to go through. I can’t thank enough to those who helped me” (M. Bibi, 2021).

The family was living in constant worry and misery, fearing for their safety and the safety of their belongings in their surrounding and on their land. They had suffered from social, cultural, and monetary injustices. Legal concerns are linked to the government’s and law enforcement's hostile sentiments toward Christians and their social, religious events, as well as the Muslim community dominance.

Even the state's constitutional provisions can be read to suggest that just Muslims are given amnesty and all of the state's privileges. As a consequence, Pakistanis who classify as religious minorities face significant susceptibility as a result of their diminished citizenship. It is necessary to look at their stories in the context of state failure, the rise of authoritarianism, and the resurgence of nationalist and communalist ideologies, rather than simply looking for simplistic explanations that involve Islam's alleged inherent intolerance or the process of Islamisation.

The Christian community was confronted with multiple crises increase the severity of a single stressor. They were not only bereft of loved ones, but also faced the prospect of being rejected by their own community, which would result in multiple difficulties. The reason they believed they were regarded a strain on the people was that they couldn't afford to be in that position.

Following the death of her husband as a result of mob violence, Samina Bibi’s primary worry was the well-being and survival of her family. She said:

“I wasn't sure how I was going to mitigate the threat of survival. I was the only one who had to deal with this stress. I was in a bind of fear, but my family and community was in a bind there to support each other. We worked and contributed to our well-being to mitigate the threat of survival from Muslim conservative mindset. I can’t afford to undergo another psycho-emotional stress after death of my husband solely because we are Christians” (S. Bibi, 2021)

The victims have to deal with increasing levels of employment discrimination. No matter how good their credentials are, Christians frequently face discrimination in the workplace because of their religious affiliation and extreme fundamentalist violence against them. They rarely give even the most basic health care, making living in the Christian-dominated slums all the more
tough. Unfortunately, those rare individuals who succeed in rising through Pakistan's tight social tiers sometimes find themselves denigrated by the rest of the population because of their previous jobs. Discrimination and criticism are commonplace in the community as for people of colour and for people of faith (Christian Today, 2006).

The problem is the focus, which is only on persecution and exclusion, the image which is created is that all oppressed people are one big unidentified mass, and that we are all experiencing the same destiny. An endlessly repeated narrative has the effect of erasing a person's uniqueness, past, and capacity for self-determination. It also reduces her wide range of life experiences and her beliefs to a daily struggle against majoritarian intolerance and religious exclusion. It's more accurate to say that minority belief systems are multifaceted and diverse phenomena that vary widely by geography, socioeconomic strata, and denomination, encompassing their religious philosophy and practice, concerns of piety, religious community, and identity.

Based on an interview with Yousaf Zakria, DSP Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD), who spoke about the Muslim-Christian community relations following cases of defamation and attacks on a church in Youhanabad, Pakistan. He said:

“I was in the midst of my duties at Chohang when I received a call from the CCPO headquarters, instructing me to travel to Youhanabad. Being a member of the same Christian group, I made it possible for the police to access the church and take the initiative in gathering evidence, such as dead corpses, samples, and so on. At the time, emotions were strong, and the mob was violent, but I negotiated with them and pushed them back, allowing the police to do their jobs more effectively” (Zakria, 2021).

As in hundreds of other occasions, mobs have attacked Christian communities and, when attackers have been unable to murder a specific individual, they have burned down entire townships, leaving the rest of the community frightened to walk outside their walls. Extremists are regularly enraged by religious sermons delivered in mosques, which grant individuals the authority to murder. Beyond preventing Christian conversion, certain Islamic-dominated countries such as Pakistan are well-known for coercing people into abandoning their Christian faith altogether. It is most typically achieved by violence and intimidation by religious extremists, making the community feel more vulnerable as a result of their actions.

Based on the suicide bombing on the Youhanabad community in 2015, which targeted a Christian majority population while Sunday prayers were being held there. Shahzada Saleem was on duty at the Yuhanabad police station, carrying out his responsibilities as SHO. When discussing the response to acts of violent extremism directed at Christians, it is important to note that:

“I was the first person on the scene of the explosion to arrive. The most difficult part was keeping the mob in check while the Police took charge and searched for bodies. Protests by the victims' families erupted, and entry to the church was extremely difficult. We, on the other hand, worked out an agreement with the victims' families and the Church's leadership and reassured them by demonstrating our unwavering support for the victims. Personally, I visited the families on a regular basis and provided protection to aid in the aid-to-normalization process” (Saleem, 2021).
When asked about Christian families' use of negative coping mechanisms in response to blasphemy accusations, apostasy, and suicide attacks in Pakistan, Moderator Lahore Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, as well as Priest in Service Presbyterian Church, F. C. College, Lahore, Pakistan, Rev Reuben Qamar, said:

“As a priest in charge of ministering to grieving people, I attended the families of terrorist attack victims who had been injured or killed. Terrorist strikes have occurred repeatedly in Pakistan during the last two decades. Only a few of these events have allowed me to visit the victims, such as the 2009 fire that destroyed Christian colonies in Gojra, the 2013 fire that destroyed Joseph Colony, the 2013 suicide attack on a Peshawar church, the 2015 fire that destroyed Youhanabad, and the 2016 Easter evening fire that destroyed Gulshan Iqbal Park. In times of disappointment, I made regular trips from the Martyrs' funeral to their homes to encourage them in their faith in the Lord. I provided them with therapy and Bible teaching to help them cope with the stress of being persecuted in this way” (Qamar, 2021)

It's risky to be a Christian in Pakistan's Islamic Republic and fear is a way of life. Whether it's widespread hatred or narrowly targeted violence, Christians and those who follow their teachings are constantly in danger. As persecuted Christians become increasingly persecuted around the world, these horrors in Pakistan stand out. Christian exclusion from the mainstream is a social issue that goes beyond religion. Christian conversions from low-caste Hindu communities during British control were regarded social outcasts even before a strict interpretation of Islam became the essential cornerstone of the nation's identity.

Because of the blasphemy laws and violent activities in the country the resulting religious intolerance, religious minorities suffer a particularly severe penalty. Religious minorities are frequently the target of blasphemous accusations. Despite the fact that blasphemy laws are found all across the world, those in Pakistan have drawn particular attention due to the content and implementation of the legislation, as well as the resulting excessive violence. These rules have been criticized for a number of reasons, including a lack of clarity about what constitutes a violation, as well as punitive fines, a low threshold of proof, and a lack of means to hold people who make false claims accountable. Because there are no precise standards for what constitutes blasphemous activity, accusers have been free to employ their own religious interpretations when submitting a complaint.

Consequently, these laws have been used to satisfy personal scores, such land conflicts, forced marriages and sexual violence. It's easy to accuse someone of blasphemy because the burden of proof is so low, and it's difficult to prove or disprove these charges because the country's evidentiary norms continue to bias against religious minorities and women. In the face of these challenges, many people convicted of blasphemy remain behind bars seeking retrial or appeal. Christians have lost faith in law enforcement agencies because of the abuse of anti-Christian blasphemy and apostasy legislation to settle personal grudges.

During interviewing the DSP CTD Iqbal Shah (a JIT member involved in the Youhanabad incident), about the authority of police in Yuhanabad after Church Attack and community mechanism of coping. He said:

“When the Youhanabad incident occurred, Christians in the area were
violent. In Yohanaabad, there was no authority of Police. There was a terrible state of affairs at the time. CCPO personally came to check on things. Rehab was difficult at the time, but we made it and met the Padris of the Church, with whom we held negotiations. At first, Christian misbehaved with the Police and refused to let us in, but we were able to trick them by dressing in plain clothes to conceal our identities. We went to see the grieving family and offered them all of our support. We stayed till the families had finished their healing process. The enraged Christian and Muslim mob were under my control, and they were dispersed. As time went on, we convened meetings to try and resolve the problem with people from both sides of the community” (Shah, 2021).

Christian minority who live in areas where they are isolated and at fear of death are less likely to participate in day-to-day activities and socialize with others. People who aren’t part of their community don’t feel comfortable interacting with them.

6. Conclusion

There can be no national togetherness or peace without respecting the diverse religious underpinnings within a multi-religious society. For example, if the percentage of Muslims embraced other religious groups, such as Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists, this would strengthen inter-religious ties. In addition, the Pakistani community must recognize and embrace religious diversity as a crucial aspect.

Pakistan's government may play an important role in sustaining ecumenical harmony by putting out various initiatives and methods. In order to ensure that Pakistanis of all religious and ethnic origins may mingle with one another, the government launched a number of initiatives, legislation, and programs. It's far from a given that radical themes would take centre stage in Pakistan's national identity. The story of the country is rather shaky because of the historical circumstances surrounding its establishment and the policy choices made by future presidents. In terms of creating a stable self-image, however, its greatest weakness has been the absence of opportunity in order for its various ethnic groups to come to agreements and construct narratives about who they are and where they come from in their home country and the world's view of their country. Extremists have been able to take full advantage of Pakistan's vulnerabilities to great success.

To gain notoriety on the world stage while also strengthening their position within their own country. External Actors can mitigate this effect, but only if they commit to it over the long haul. This Even if it is free, participation requires a certain amount of ingenuity and flexibility. Trust among Pakistani audiences as well one of the most pressing issues in the fight to stop human rights abuses is religious persecution. International community should contribute more because of persistent discrimination and open mistreatment of minorities assist Pakistan's persecuted Christians with the resources available. Whatever the case may be, the media around the world portrays religious discrimination as a widespread problem that has an impact on many people essentially every culture. Only if the inequalities in Pakistan are brought to the attention of the international community is it possible for Christians to use both legal & religious means to make a difference? Pakistan's community has at long last achieved tranquilly. They have been victims of persecution for too long.
7. Recommendations

- Since most Christians are ignorant and poor, it's difficult for them to take advantage of the protections that occur in the community where bribery or anti-Christian prejudice are commonplace. As a result, many Christians feel betrayed. However, considering Islam's inherent egalitarian tendencies, it is obvious why the Christians were disappointed.
- It'll take some time to get there. Extremist narrative in Pakistan have a long history. It takes time to change the narratives that people have about the world. Pakistanis must be involved and in charge of the process. Non-Pakistanis are unable to develop Pakistani narratives. They must be rooted in Pakistani culture, beliefs, and aspirations. Non-Pakistanis will likewise be unable to act effectively without Pakistani support.
- There are some realistic ways to improve their situation based on this research on Islamization in Pakistan, though.
- Moving forward may require ensuring that existing laws and the constitution are properly enforced, and that the potential fifteenth amendment does not override them. If this is achieved, Christians will have access to court to amend many of the wrongs done to them, including false allegations under the blasphemy legislation. Other non-Muslim minorities would join Christians in pursuing this.
- Independent investigations into recent occurrences of mass killings of religious minorities should be launched by Pakistani authorities. There should be fair trials for those guilty for the killings, according to globally accepted standards.
- Anyone who commits a crime out of religious or ethnic hatred should be brought to justice as soon as possible by law enforcement and the courts. This includes targeting, harassment, murder, or other crimes of sexual violence.
- Clarity on the Section 295-C, which deals with blasphemy offences, demonstrates that the law is often used to target religious minorities. Pakistan's international legal obligations to protect and defend freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief; free speech; equal treatment under the law; non-discrimination; and fair trials are also violated.
- Religious institutions should also be exempted from discriminatory building and maintenance regulations. To help secure religious sites for all groups so that they can easily and safely practice their faith, work with government agencies.
- When a community is united, it has a higher chance of recovering from a catastrophe than when it is divided. The Christian community should investigate the root causes of detachment among its members, which might result in a lack of unity.
- Special assistance should be provided by the government (federal, provincial, and local) to the Christian community, particularly to those who have been victims of killing trauma, and they should be provided with appropriate rehabilitation. Rehabilitation centers should be developed inside their respective communities as well.
- Union Council structure should be reformatted to ensure elected representative effective functionality for the Christian community. Alternative dispute resolution forums for minorities' personal affairs should also be established. Quick response committees should be established to respond to fears such as violent conquest as well as gender rights even by local government, as well as other issues.
- Make certain that law enforcement officials do not ignore or participate in the persecution of minorities. In order to ensure that officers respond effectively to situations of discrimination, police monitoring and reform should be carried out.
Officers should also receive sensitivity training in the areas of minorities and gender issues.

- Collaboration with the appropriate stakeholders should be essential. Addressing narratives does not necessitate the identification of appropriate censors as much as it necessitates the engagement and facilitation of people who are already working with narratives.

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Interviews: