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Religious Freedom in Pakistan: A Case Study of Religious Minorities

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Abstract: The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is a multi-racial and multi-religious nation, with Muslims being in the majority. Its 1973 Constitution guarantees religious freedom to all religious minorities, including Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs. This is mainly because Islam itself ensures religious freedom to the whole of humanity. Unfortunately, some Muslim clerics seem to be attempting to deny religious freedom to other faiths in Pakistan. Their opposition to the plurality of faith contradicts Islamic principles. This research paper identifies such Islamic principles and examines the undesirability of the mistreatment of religious minorities in Pakistan, focusing on the arguments for and against religious freedom in Pakistan on the one hand, and the religious rights and freedoms of non-Muslim minorities from an Islamic perspective on the other. The methodology applied in this discussion is critical analysis. The conclusion drawn is that both the Constitution of Pakistan and Islam guarantee religious freedom to the country's religious minorities. Finally, this study suggests some practical mechanisms to reconcile the different religious groups in Pakistan.

Keywords: Pakistan; Islam; religious freedom; religious minority; social harmony



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1. Introduction

The freedom to change and choose one's religion is protected by international law. Particularly, in any circumstances, people's core rights cannot be breached. Currently, international law acknowledges twelve non-derogable fundamental rights, including freedom of faith and the prohibition of discrimination based on religion. ([The Siracusa Principles 1985](#)). Therefore, everyone holds the privilege of freedom of thought, religion, and conscience. This right consists of liberty to convert one's belief or religion, whether individually or in society along with others and in private or public, and to manifest one's religion or belief in preaching, worship, observance, and practice ([Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948](#)).

Discrimination against minorities is as ancient as documented history ([Christen 1981](#)), and religious minorities are not excluded from this phenomenon ([Thornberry 1980](#)). During the early period of Islam, when the Persian Emperor Khusraw Parvēz conquered Byzantine, Byzantine Christians were treated mercilessly and exhibited extreme brutality to succumb Christianity, slaying over a hundred thousand Christians, annihilating monasteries and temples and constructing fire temples far and wide. Christians were compelled to worship fire instead of Christ. In such an environment, when the King of Rome, Harqal, tried for reconciliation with Khusraw Parvēz, the reply of Emperor of Persia revealed his intolerable tolerable thought: "No, I want Harqal the King of Rome, imprisoned in chains under my throne, I will not reconcile until he denied the Christianity and embraced the religion of Persian Empire" ([Shibli 1985](#)).

Notwithstanding pervasive education, constitutional guarantees, and enlightenment in most of the world's states, minorities are ignored; therefore, they must confront discrimination in every phase of life. In several countries, various kinds of minorities face marginalization ([Bécares and Priest 2015](#)). Minorities are classified as, among other things, sexual or gender minorities, ethnic or racial minorities, age minorities, religious minorities,

and individuals with disabilities (Mohanty 2010). According to international law, minorities of religions consist of classifications described by their willingness to conserve their languages, their traditions, their religion, and their culture within the State (Fouzia et al. 2014). In South Asia, the problems of common violence and religious freedom are complicated and deeply embedded in history (Curtis 2016).

South Asian communities were always religious. The major faiths in this region are Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity. Javid observes that “[t]he South Asian societies in the contemporary environment are confronted with religion-based violence, sectarianism, extremism, communalism and even regionalism” (2011). While taking a glance at some Asian territories, it appears that India is the biggest secular country (Corbridge and Harriss 2013). However, it must be highlighted that India has the world’s largest Muslim population, comprising approximately two hundred million Muslims (Osuri 2013), who live as a minority in a predominantly Hindu country where there are numerous incidents of religiously driven assassinations, riots, assaults, vandalism, discrimination, and actions limiting one’s right to speak and practice one’s religious beliefs (Fouzia et al. 2014). Under the statistics represented by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), 7484 communal violence instances occurred based upon religion between 2008 and 2017, in which more than 1100 people were killed (India: International Religious Freedom Report 2019).

In Burma, Muslims have not been allowed to build new mosques or Madrasahs (a religious teaching institution) for the last 20 years (Gravers 2015), and those who go against this law and try to build mosques or Madrasahs can be punished with six months to six years in jail, plus a fine. (IHH 2012). Hundreds of violent incidents against the Muslim community have taken place in recent times. Mosques have been attacked, Muslim shops ransacked, Muslim properties vandalized, and Muslim houses burned down (Smith 1996). Some Buddhist extremist groups have also ridiculed Islamic doctrines and Islamic teaching (Marzoli 2015).

In the Muslim majority country of Iran, Bahá’ís are facing false imprisonment, arbitrary detention, deduction and destruction of property, a lack of employment and government benefits, and are being denied access to higher education (Affolter 2007). After the 1979 revolution in Iran, the Bahá’ís’ community was discriminated against by having their places of worship and graveyard removed by the government (Congressional Research Service 2008).

Pakistan was established on 14 August 1947, based on the ideology of Islam. Most of the population in Pakistan was Muslim at this time, with almost 23% of Pakistan’s population comprising non-Muslim citizens at the time of partition in 1947 (Gregory 2012). Today, the proportion of non-Muslims has declined to approximately 3.7% of the population due to the fact that non-Muslims face many challenges, such as employment discrimination, societal discrimination, forcible conversion to Islam, intimidation, violence, and much else besides (Manchanda 2009). The distinctions among Muslim denominations have also become far more accentuated over the years. While conducting a survey about minorities’ rights in a Christian colony in Lahore, one of the Christian residents said: “We received threats and our churches have been burnt by a religious extremist in Pakistan whenever in abroad people used insulting remarks in respect of Holy Prophet (PBUH)” Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor (2006).

In the past few years, the necessity for religious freedom has intensified, owing to the religious fanaticism present amongst the adherents of various religions. Following 9/11, the world witnessed a surge in racism, prejudice, and bigotry. The September 11 incident split the world along religious lines, as an “Us” versus “Them” mentality began to grow. Consequently, foreign affairs continued to be influenced. Even today, it is not possible to determine when this divide may be peacefully resolved. How do we cross the bridge between “divided” and “united” (Minhas 2013)?

Therefore, this research intends to highlight the religious freedom provided to the minorities in Pakistan and how these religious minorities experience their aforementioned

fundamental rights, including religious freedom, which is the basic feature of an inclusive society. The study aims to answer to what extent Freedom of Religion, as per the Constitution of Pakistan, is applied to all religious minorities in Pakistan. How do the primary sources of Islam treat non-Muslim minorities under a Muslim polity? How can peace and social harmony be fostered among different religious groups in Pakistan?

Religious Minority Groups and Their Religious Freedom in Pakistan: An Overview

In 1947, at the time of the partition, non-Muslim citizens consisted of about 23% of Pakistan's total population. Presently, the non-Muslim population decreased to 3.7% approximately, due to facing many challenges such as societal and employment discrimination, intimidation, forced conversions, violence, and much else besides (Manchanda 2009). According to the 2017 Census, Muslim citizens comprise 96.28% of the total population of Pakistan. In total, 1.59% of the population comprises Christians, and they are mainly based in Punjab, Sindh, and Islamabad, the Federal Capital (Sookhdeo 2002). At the same time, Hindus make up 1.60% of the population and are mostly concentrated in rural Sindh (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2017). Presently, most Sikh communities reside in the Peshawar region. According to the latest information, the estimated population of Sikhs is about 0.03%, and they live mostly in Lahore and Nankana Sahib in Punjab (Walia 2003). The followers of the Bahá'í faith (founded by Baha'u'llah, 1817–1892) consist of over 0.04% living in Pakistan, particularly in Karachi and Lahore (Barrett et al. 2000). In Pakistan, there are approximately 20,000 followers of Buddhism (United States, Department of State 2004). Presently, the few remaining Buddhists live in the hilly areas of the Swat and Gandhara regions of NWFP and the Ladakh region of Kashmir (Perera 2008). The worldwide Zoroastrian population was projected to be between 124,000 and 190,000 in 2004, of which around 5000 live in Pakistan. Most of them reside in Karachi. However, in recent years, Zoroastrianism's popularity has increased due to Iranian refugees (Hinnells 2005). In 1974, the number of religious minorities, upon the inclusion of Ahmadis (or Ahmaddiyyas), increased. They were previously documented as being part of a religious sect within Islam. After the [Second Constitutional Amendment Act \(1974\)](#), Ahmadis were declared constitutionally non-Muslim. An estimated 0.22% of Ahmadis live across the country of Pakistan.

Manchanda (2009) expressed that religious minorities are often compelled to accept Islam under intense pressure. Religious minorities confront issues associated with forcibly embracing Islam. People generally undervalue the religious beliefs and faith of non-Muslims. Most religious minorities experience issues related to the decreased availability of their places of worship. A [Parliamentary Human Rights Group \(2010\)](#) found that religious minorities are under threat and that they have no freedom to practice their religion. According to [Gregory and Valentine \(2009\)](#), "Pakistan remains a volatile place where religious minorities face insecurity and maltreatment. Freedom of belief and expression has come under severe threat in Pakistan. Over the past few decades, violence against religious minorities is greater than before, and targeted killings are rising. This is because a specific group of religious scholars are promoting such attacks and violence in their sermons and the media". The anchor of a famous religious program, which aired on 30th September 2008, stated that Ahmadi sect members are wajib-ul-qatl, thus declaring it compulsory for Muslims to kill members of the Ahmadi wing. Two well-recognized Ahmadis were shot within forty-eight hours after the airing of this television statement (Faruqi 2011). In March 2013, during a mob attack on the Christin community in Punjab, dozens of homes were set on fire after a blasphemy allegation was made against a Christian man (Dawn.com 2013). The following year, a mob burned down a Hindu community center located in southern Pakistan following an allegation that a Hindu desecrated the Qur'an. Following this, four more Hindu temples were attacked (U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom 2015).

Two Ahmadi mosques in Model Town and Garhi Shahu (a town in Lahore, Pakistan) were attacked by gunmen on 28 May 2010, leading to ninety-six casualties. Subsequently,

on 15 November 2010, King of Kings Church, located in Wasan Pura, Lahore, Pakistan, was attacked by an infamous landgrabber and armed men in police uniforms bulldozed the church, demolishing it using a crane. During the attack, the church was entirely razed, and holy scriptures, such as Bibles, and crosses were destroyed (Faruqi 2011). Furthermore, a terrorist bomb blast in All Saints' Church in Peshawar in September 2013 claimed 86 Christian lives (Mohsin 2013). The Human Rights Watch country representative Ali Dayan Hasan stated that it was "the deadliest attack on a church and the Christian community in Pakistan's history" (Saiya and Manchanda 2020).

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF 2013), in its Annual Report, focused on Pakistan, mentioning the 200 attacks on religious groups in the country and the 1800 documented fatalities resulting from religion-related violence (among the highest in the world). Minority Rights Group International (2013), in its report, highlighted Pakistan, ranking the country top in its "People under Threat" global ranking. Likewise, a report by the Pew Research Centre during the same period underlined that "Pakistan had the highest level of social hostilities involving religion" (Pew Research 2014).

The rising trend of religious fanaticism and discrimination of religious minorities during the last few decades in Pakistan has threatened Pakistani society's very structure and damaged its democracy, simultaneously putting the lives of millions of religious minorities at risk. The reality is that the situation has become worse due to the fact that the "Pakistani state is engaged in or have tolerated severe violations of religious freedom" (USCIRF 2011). It has been observed that entire Christian families and villages embrace Islam to evade institutional ostracism and general Islamist extremist militancy (Misra 2015). Pakistani religious minorities are victims of institutional, social, and legal discrimination, as reported by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF 2019).

Fortunately, according to several sources (Bhattacharya 2018; Pakistan Security Report 2018), the violence against minorities has declined in the last two years (CRSS Annual Security Report Special Edition 2013–2018). However, we cannot claim that the current situation is satisfactory. Due to military operations throughout the country opposing terrorism, religion-based violence started to decrease, and only 228 fatalities were registered in 2019 compared to the 11,704 fatalities in previous years.

The bar chart in Figure 1 shows the data on fatalities due to terrorist violence in Pakistan from 2000 to 2019. The first bar of each year shows data for civilians' deaths. The second bar indicates data for fatalities among security forces. The third bar shows data for the fatalities among terrorists/insurgents. From this graph, we can conclude that, from 2000 to 2009, the fatalities due to terrorist violence increased and reached their peak in 2009.

It is instructive to mention here that every country has its problems, but how we handle these problems matters. In the Pakistani government administration, policymakers and numerous passionate individuals are doing everything they can to help religious minorities address these challenges. But the regrettable truth is that there is a lot more to be done.

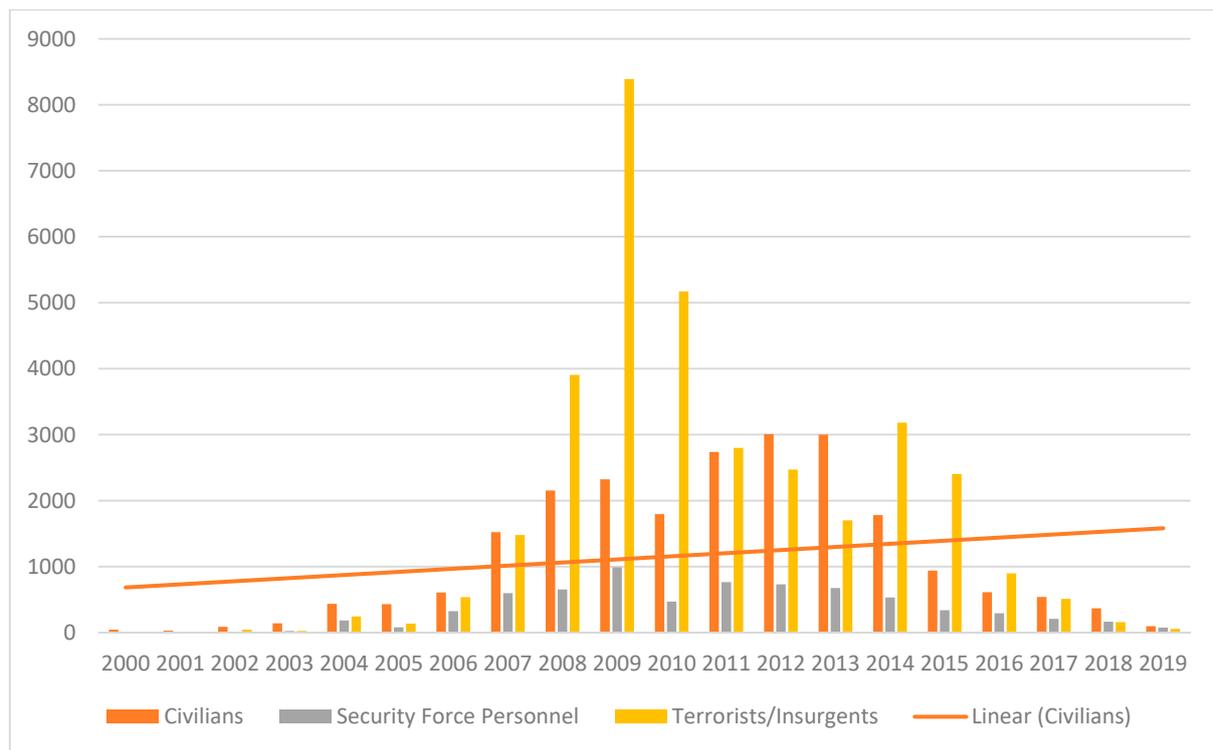


Figure 1. Sectarian violence in Pakistan (January 2000–December 2019). Source: [South Asian Terrorism Portal \(2020\)](#).

2. Constitution of Pakistan on Religious Minorities

Pakistan was established on 14 August 1947, based on the ideology of Islam. Most of the Pakistan population was Muslim, but non-Muslim minorities were also present in Pakistan in 1947. The founder of the Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, known as Quaid-i-Azam (a great leader), was completely aware of this reality ([Ispahani 2015](#)). Therefore, in his initial speech to the Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947, particular attention was paid to minorities in the following words:

“You are free; you are to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the State”. ([Jinnah 2013](#))

He continued,

“Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that 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”. (*Ibid.*)

This covenant is a consequence of unequivocal recurrent pledges to religious minorities that they will enjoy entire social and diplomatic rights equivalent to free state citizens. Moreover, religious views and State matters should be kept separate ([Swett and Glendon 2015](#)). These express assurances regarding freedom of religion/faith and its practice, due process, the rule of law, identical security, and an agenda of progressive legislation, presented by the leaders of the Pakistan Movement, comprise an implicit social agreement with Pakistani religious minorities ([Mahmud 1995](#)). This covenant embodies several guarantees for religious minorities that “freedom of religion and opinion will be guaranteed, and equal rights of citizenship will be enjoyed by all, irrespective of religious beliefs” (*Ibid.*).

When Jinnah addressed the people of the United States of America, he made the following statement: “The constitution of Pakistan has yet to be framed by the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. I do not know what the ultimate shape of this constitution is going to be, but I am sure that it will be a democratic type, embodying the essential principles of Islam. Today, they are as applicable in actual life as they were 1300 years ago. Islam and its idealism have taught us democracy. It has taught equality of men, justice and fair play” (Jinnah 2013). Following the constitution, every subsequent Pakistani constitution assured each citizen their right to propagate, practice, and profess their religious beliefs. Each religious denomination, and each sect therefrom, had the right to create, manage and sustain its religious traditions (Malik 2002).

The major constitutions of 1956,¹ 1962² and 1973³ sustain the essential rights of citizens and make numerous references to the term “minority”. In Article 25 (1), Pakistan’s Constitution guarantees that “all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law”. Article 5 provides that “adequate provision shall be made for the minorities to freely profess and practice their religions and develop their cultures” (Swett and Glendon 2015). The constitution of Pakistan guarantees religious freedom for all minority communities in Pakistan.

Presented in Table 1 is the clause from Pakistan’s constitution that provides minorities with their rights regarding freedom of religion and belief.

Table 1. Constitutional Provisions related to freedom of religion or belief and minority rights.

| | |
|------------|---|
| Article 36 | “The state shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the federal and provincial services.” |
| Article 20 | (1) “Every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion.” (2) “Every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions.” |
| Article 21 | “No person shall be compelled to pay any special tax the proceeds of which are to be spent on the propagation or maintenance of any religion other than his own.” |
| Article 22 | Safeguards as to educational institutions in respect of religion, etc. (1) “No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or take part in any religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own.” (2) “In respect of any religious institution, there shall be no discrimination against any community in the granting of exemption or concession concerning taxation.” (3) Subject to law: (a) “No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any educational institution maintained wholly by that community or denomination.” (b) “No citizen shall be denied admission to any educational institution receiving aid from public revenues on the ground only of race, religion, caste or place of birth.” (4) “Nothing in this Article shall prevent any public authority from making provision for the advancement of any socially or educationally backward class of citizens. |
| Article 25 | Equality of citizens.” (1) “All citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law.” (2) “There shall be no discrimination based on sex.” (3) “Nothing in this Article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the protection of women and children.” |

¹ Government of Pakistan, The Constitution of the Republic of Pakistan 1956, Government of Pakistan Printing Press, Karachi, 1956.

² Government of Pakistan, The Constitution of the Republic of Pakistan 1962, Government of Pakistan Printing Press, Karachi, 1962.

³ Government of Pakistan, The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973, Government of Pakistan <http://www.Pakistan.org/Pakistan/constitution> (as amended) (last accessed 1 July 2019).

Table 1. Cont.

| | |
|---|---|
| Article 26 | <p>Non-discrimination in respect of access to public places</p> <p>(1) "In respect of access to places of public entertainment or resort not intended for religious purposes only, there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the ground only of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth."</p> <p>(2) "Shall prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children."</p> |
| Article 27 (1) & 28: Subject to Article (25) | <p>Safeguard against discrimination in services</p> <p>(1) "No citizen otherwise qualified for appointment in the service of Pakistan shall be discriminated against in respect of any such appointment on the ground only of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth."</p> <p>(2) "Any section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture shall have the right to preserve and promote the same subject to law, establish institutions for that purpose."</p> |

3. Treatment of Non-Muslim Minorities by the Primary Sources of Islam under a Muslim Polity

The epistemological foundation of Islam is based on love, affection, kindness, and mercy. Therefore, Islam strongly promotes religious freedom. The Qur'an declares that "There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error" (The Holy Qur'an, 2: 256). It is clear from this verse that nobody can influence another person to embrace Islam forcibly. Whosoever does this has sinned. It is instructive to discuss the fact that this verse also instructs Muslims to guard others' fundamental rights, particularly their religious freedom. People are free to accept the religion of Islam or deny it. Islam also instructs people to accept Islam through their rational investigations and examination. The Qur'an repeatedly asks for humanity to ponder, think, contemplate, and observe (The Holy Qur'an, 2: 164; 5: 58; 13: 4). So, Islam demands that people accept faith with a firm conviction via empirical examination and observation. The Qur'an calls on people to believe in God, but it never compels them to believe in God. The Qur'an acknowledges that unifying all human beings around one religion is an impossible task, and that this is not what God intends. The Qur'an says, "If it has been your God's will, He verily would have made mankind one nation, yet they continue to differ except him whom your Lord has mercy and for that, He did create them" (The Holy Qur'an, 11: 118–119). Moreover, the holy Qur'an reiterates that "People will have different religion and ways Had Allah willed; He would have made you one community?" (The Holy Qur'an, 5: 48). Thus, people will differ from one another in religion and in dealing with other people from other religions. Islam emphasizes the importance of mutual understanding, tolerance, and compassion. Moreover, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)'s duty was not to force people into Islam; rather, it was his duty to teach people about the religion of Islam. It is God who judges people regarding their beliefs on the Day of Judgment.

The Qur'an never declares that wars should be fought in order to change people's religion. According to most modern scholars, all the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s battles were waged in self-defense or to pre-empt an imminent attack. The early Muslims were persecuted and tortured in Makkah for ten years. However, permission for fighting was not given in the early period, and they were asked to endure their treatment with patience. The Qur'an tells the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), "Pardon and forgive until God gives his command" (The Holy Qur'an, 2: 109). Only after they were forced out of their houses and their town and those left behind were subjected to abuse did God give His permission to fight in defense. Jihad became an obligation "for defending religious freedom and for self-defense" (The Holy Qur'an, 2: 190) and "defending those who are oppressed" (The Holy Qur'an, 4: 75).

The Holy Qur'an guides humanity to avoid any kind of conflict among people of diverse religious beliefs: "Unto you, your moral law, and unto me, mine!" (The Holy Qur'an, 109: 6). As the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated, "The whole humanity is created and supervised by Allah and most beloved among them is he, who is most beneficial for mankind" (Al-Tabrani n.d., Hadith No: 10033). In his last sermon, Hajja Tul-Wada (The

last pilgrimage), the Prophet (PBUH) said, “O, people! Lo your Lord is One, no Arab is superior to a non-Arab and no non-Arab is superior to an Arab. No black is better than red and no red is better than black. Then the only criterion for superiority and honour is piety” (Ahmad 1938).

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated, regarding the rights of the religious minorities: “Beware, if anyone wrongs a contracting man, or diminishes his right, or forces him to work beyond his capacity, or takes from him anything without his consent, I shall plead for him on the Day of Judgment” (Abu Daud, Hadith No: 3052).

Elsewhere, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) acknowledged the honor and dignity of the lives of minorities who do not follow Islam by these words: “Whoever killed a person having a treaty with the Muslims, shall not smell Paradise though its smell is perceived from a distance of forty years” (Al Bukhari, Hadith No: 3166).

During the early period of Islam, Christians and Jews who lived under Muslim rule were considered dhimmis (non-Muslim). “The word means a protected person”, and this status was subsequently expanded to other non-Muslims, such as Buddhists and Hindus. They were permitted to “practise their religion, subject to certain conditions, and to enjoy a measure of communal autonomy” (Lewis 1984). Their safety and the security of their property were guaranteed in return for paying tribute to and acknowledging Muslim rule (ibid.). Alluding to the commitment by the state under Shariah (Islamic Law) to safeguard an individual’s life, religious beliefs, and property, in return for allegiance to state and Jizya (poll tax) payment, this complemented the *zakat* (obligatory alms) paid by Muslim subjects (Glenn 2007). A thorough examination of Jizya (poll tax)’s initial history, especially since Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) imposed it, has been carried out. Subsequently, in the caliphate time, Jizya was utilized as a tax and, through its payment, non-Muslims were considered to express loyalty to Islamic political authority. There is no evidence that it was enforced only to degrade, dishonor, or socially humiliate them (Ahmed and Ahmad 1975).

According to the Shibli (1985), Jizya (poll tax) is the Arabicized form of another word, Kizyat, which stands for a levy that the Persian emperor used to impose when managing the affairs of war. It does not seem that individuals who embraced Islam were given honored status over those who kept their prior faith, nor did it create the impression that non-Muslims who were paying Jizya (poll tax) were saddled with humiliating provisions as a result of this (Ahmed and Ahmad 1975). The Holy Qur’an, likewise, “allowed Muslims are permitted to eat slaughtered animals by the People of Book, to eat from their dishes, and to marry their women” (The Holy Qur’an, 5: 5). This indicates the respectable status of People of the Book in Islam. Following Islamic law, both Muslims and non-Muslims are entitled to the same rights in the state and are considered equivalent in societal status. “So the fourth caliph of Islam said, their blood is just like us” (Sayyed n.d.).

By 637 AD, during the era of Umar bin al-Khattab, the second caliph⁴ of Islam, Muslim armies had conquered Jerusalem. Umar was given a tour of the city, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

“When the time for prayer came, Sophronius invited Umar to pray inside the Church, but Umar refused. He insisted that if he prayed there, later Muslims would use it as an excuse to convert it into a mosque—thereby depriving Christendom of one of its holiest sites. Instead, Umar prayed outside the Church, where a mosque (called Masjid Umar—the Mosque of Umar) was later built”.

Umar’s above action provides safety to places of worship of religious minorities living in an Islamic state (El-Wakil 2016). During the era of the second caliph of Islam, Umar bin al-Khattab, the General of the Christian army of Mery, wrote to Shamoon of Persia and confessed that: “Arabs have blessed a great dynasty by God do not attack Christianity, even they are our supporters, respect our God and do regard our saints, give donations to our churches and monasteries. No Muslim either he is ruler, officer or an ordinary Muslim citizen is allowed to capture the property of any non-Muslim illegally” (Sayyed n.d.).

⁴ “The chief Muslim civil and religious ruler, regarded as the successor of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)”.

During the whole period of the Caliphate⁵, the same religious freedom was given to religious minorities as that provided by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) during his lifetime. The first two caliphs of Islam renewed the same constitution for the Christians of Najran⁶ that was established by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with the Christians of Najran during his sacred era (Shibli 1985). Their rituals, like ringing bells and blowing a conch shell (at divine worship to summon the congregation) were not forbidden in any city of the Muslim empire during the whole caliphate. On their religious festivals, they were allowed to profess the Holy Trinity (Abu Yusuf 1999). Hamidullah (1987) says that “Islam has a very soft corner towards minorities living in an Islamic state. Islamic law guarantees and protects the rights to life, property, honour and liberty of conscience, and religion to all including Muslims and non-Muslims without any type of discrimination”. According to Islam’s teachings, a true global brotherhood could be established if Muslims stopped discriminating against non-Muslims (Musferah and Furqan 2018).

4. Reflection on Ways to Create Social Harmony among Different Religious Groups

In Pakistan, religious extremists use harsh words and negative labels for religious minorities in order to demonstrate their hatred, both in the community and the workplace. As Bar-Tal and Teichman (2005) argue, “the majoritarian belief that there is an enemy in their midst is related to the definition of a conflict”. For example, when the United States and the coalition forces began their war plan against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in December 2001, “Pakistani Christian leaders demanded security cover for themselves and their Churches” (BBC News 2001, “Analysis: Pakistan’s Christian Minority”). For instance, the United States of America, along with coalition forces, when making their war plans in December 2001 against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, noted that “Pakistani Christian leaders, demanded security cover for themselves and their Churches” (BBC News 2001, ‘Analysis: Pakistan’s Christian Minority’).

Later, a trend of retaliatory violence developed, where Christian communities endured the brunt of Muslims’ frustration with Western policies or events that seemed anti-Islamic occurring in the West, such as a certain Danish cartoon publication. Therefore, Christians in Pakistan exist as proxies of the West proxies in the eyes of some Pakistani Muslims, and a high price is paid for that perception (Gregory and Valentine 2009). Some theorists have proposed that, whenever a community feels especially vulnerable and low, that the specific community may participate in disseminating “extreme stereotypic contents” against the less potent factions in order to release its anger against the external opponent responsible for its oppression (Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005). The leader of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTE-P) claimed responsibility after the All Saints’ Church (located in Peshawar) terrorist bomb blast in September 2013, which caused 86 Christian fatalities, subsequently justifying these actions by advising “until and unless drone strikes are stopped, we will continue to strike wherever we will find an opportunity against non-Muslims” (Mohsin 2013).

Muslim extremist groups read Islamic texts and the statements of classical Islamic scholars out of context. This has been a common practice of some radical groups in their interpretation of some verses of the Qur’an concerning non-Muslims. Though most of the Qur’anic verses have global implications, some of the Qur’anic verses should be confined to the specific time in which they were written. A few examples of such Qur’anic verses

⁵ “Caliphate, the political-religious state comprising the Muslim community and the lands and peoples under its dominion in the centuries following the death (632 CE) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)” (Madelung 1997).

⁶ “The Najran Covenant, in common with all other covenants, stresses the theme of protection after which the main terms and conditions that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stipulated to the Christians of his time are listed” (El-Wakil 2016). These may be summarized as follows:

1. “The Muslims would protect the churches and monasteries of the Christians. They would not demolish any church property either to build mosques or to build houses for the Muslims;”
2. “All ecclesiastical property of the Christians would be exempt from every tax;”
3. “No ecclesiastical authority would ever be forced by the Muslims to abandon his post;”
4. “No Christian would ever be forced by the Muslims to become a convert to Islam;”
5. “If a Christian woman married a Muslim, she would have full freedom to follow her own religion” (El-Wakil 2016).

should clarify this point. Consider, for instance, the following text of the Holy Qur'an: "Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters, wherever you find them, and take them captive and besiege them and prepare for them each ambush" (The Holy Qur'an, 9: 5). This verse does not contain a general injunction for all times and all ages. Rather, it was a specific injunction⁷ directed at a particular group of people in the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Moreover, if the verse is read in conjunction with verses before and after it (The Holy Qur'an, 9: 5), it becomes clear that these verses addressed the pagan of Arabs, who persecuted early Muslims with constant hostilities and attempted to expel Muslims and revert them to paganism (At-Tabari 2001). Muslims were also ordered to treat Arab pagans in the same way that they themselves treated the Muslims. Yet, some academics have made an incorrect generalization based on this verse, arguing that Islam incites the murder of non-Muslims. They argue that this verse, "Slay the idolaters or Kill the polytheists", abrogates all other verses of the Qur'an that deal with non-Muslims (Haleem 2018). This incorrect generalization has led to a negative perception of Islam and Muslims across the world. Many verses of the Qur'an speak about inter-communal relationships. We should collectively read all of those verses when formulating any concepts about Islamic views on international relationships between nations. However, some radical Muslim groups do not read the Holy Qur'an's verses in context, and consequently reach the wrong conclusions. Muslim extremists always adhere to literalism in Islamic texts. They tend to only focus on the words used in Islamic texts and therefore fail to appreciate changing social conditions and the inner meanings and dimensions of these texts. For instance, when they read a verse such as "Do not take unbelievers as your friends" (The Holy Qur'an, 4: 144), they take its literal meaning without considering its inner meaning or implications. There are many kinds of unbelievers. Humanist unbelievers wish to get on well with Muslims, as do many innocent unbelievers who have not yet learnt about the teachings of Islam. Unless we differentiate between these people, it would be wrong to perceive that every unbeliever is the enemy of Muslims.

Furthermore, today, a crucial factor must be the development of mutual respect and the reinforcement and enhancement of the relationships between multi-religious believers (Abdullah et al. 2016). Moreover, Rahman and Khambali (2013) claim that individuals ought to respect religious doctrines and respect believers of their respective religions. Therefore, in this context, this mutual respect belies that every religious adherent, whether Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, or Hindu must respect one another, particularly in terms of faith, doctrines, festivals, and religious teachings (Talib et al. 2014a). The values of cooperation, mutual respect, understanding, goodwill, and tolerance are substantial elements that must be practiced in order to survive in a religious and multi-racial society.

When we threaten to burn the sacred scriptures of other religions, we are fueling conflict and hatred. When devoid of discussion and dialogue, there can be no cooperation or understanding. The deadlock of interreligious conversation is caused by the fact that every religion asserts that it possesses absolute truth, and that no truth exists beyond itself. However, victors are not required in every race. One ought to pardon others when it is conceivable, since one backward step creates a wider path in front of oneself. It is stated in the Bible that "if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek". The Earth's disagreements could be halved if we practiced tolerance to the fullest possible extent. Living together would be much easier if religions were less exclusive and more inclusive, and we should accept our social responsibilities collectively in order to encourage religious harmony in society. When every religion steps forward and accepts its responsibilities, then its effect will increase exponentially. A great scholar from ancient China, Xunzi, stated that "Harmony gives rise to unity; unity gives rise to strength. When combining strengths, we gain power, and with this power we conquer" (Wang 2013).

⁷ "Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters, wherever you find them, and take them captive and besiege them and prepare for them each ambush" (The Holy Qur'an, 9: 5).

Mutual trust and respect among the various religious groups could be created by the experience of working together and sharing responsibilities. To encourage religious harmony, we should resist using religion for cruel intentions. Historically speaking, there have always been people, factions, and groups who try to abuse faith for negative purposes. All religions ought to safeguard the purity of faith and restore religion's true face in order to eradicate any room for wrongdoing by individuals or groups. Likewise, we ought to oppose and censure the usage of religion as a banner in order to give sacred ground to differences. To encourage religious concordance, we must protect against religious fanaticism and extremism. Every religion pursues peace, advocates universal love, preaches goodness, and opposes violence. However, when individuals deviate from the correct path, they can become vulnerable to fanaticism and bigotry and ultimately drawn into fanaticism. The provocation of animosity and terrorist attacks being carried under the flags of religion are incredibly devastating and endanger the entire world. Moreover, all religions should utilize their teachings and carry forth compassion, love, restraint, and moderation.

5. The Initiatives Undertaken in Pakistan

Likewise, acknowledging the various religious foundations in a multi-religious society is vital for guaranteeing solidarity and harmony in a nation (Talib et al. 2014b). For instance, if the majority of the Muslim population welcomed various religious factions, like Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists, this would reinforce inter-religious relationships. Moreover, recognizing and welcoming religious diversity must be considered a necessary factor for the Pakistani community (Abdullah et al. 2016).

To preserve inter-religious harmony, Pakistan's government can play a significant role by implementing numerous endeavors and strategies. Thus, the government implemented various activities, policies, and programs to guarantee all of Pakistani society with various religious and ethnic backgrounds the opportunity to socialize with one another. Since the last decade, the protection of social harmony has become the state's national agenda. The Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered the Government of Pakistan to create a National Council for Minorities' Rights. It was recommended that a National Council for minorities' rights be established, under the Supreme Court of Pakistan's Judgement under Para (IV). The function of the National Council for minorities should be to *inter alia* monitor the practical implementations of constitutional rights and protections provided to minorities under the Constitution of Pakistan. The Council would also require the structuring of policy proposals in order to preserve and protect the rights of minorities by the Federal and Provincial Government (Supreme Court of Pakistan: Original Jurisdiction 2014).

Unfortunately, serious consideration has not been given to this significant initiative until 2018. However, the election campaign of the political Party "Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf" introduced, in their manifesto, a promise to establish a "legally empowered, well resourced, independent National Commission on Minorities, followed by provincial Commissions/Departments" (Akhtar 2020). Despite those pledges, however, no autonomous and independent minority commission has been established. In response to the lack of implementation of the Supreme Court's directive and order, on 8 January 2019, the Supreme Court of Pakistan appointed Dr. Shoaib Suddle to lead this commission. The committee aimed to "take all necessary steps to execute" the verdict passed by the Ex-Chief Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani on 19th June 2014, and provided the following seven directions to the Government:

- (a) "Develop appropriate curricula at school and college levels of education to promote religious harmony and social tolerance.
- (b) Constitute a task force at the federal level for developing a strategy for promoting religious tolerance
- (c) Curb hate speech in social media
- (d) Constitute a national council for minorities' rights
- (e) Establish a special police force with professional training to protect the places of worship of minorities

- (f) Ensure enforcement, at Federal and Provincial levels, of the relevant policy directives regarding quotas for minorities in all services
- (g) Prompt action, including registration of criminal cases, whenever constitutional rights of religious minorities are violated, or their places of worship are desecrated" (Rehman 2019).

It is necessary to note that, in maintaining interreligious ties, religious harmony is essential. The government attempts to maintain a harmonious community and, for this purpose, a National Narrative (Paigham e Pakistan) for Peaceful and Moderate Pakistani Society based on Islamic Principles was presented under the supervision of government authorities on 16 January 2018 in Islamabad. At the launching ceremony of this National Narrative, the Ex-President of Pakistan, Mamnoon Hussain, said:

"The national counter-terrorism narrative would help eradicate terrorism and prove instrumental in reforming the people who lost their path due to negative propaganda of aberrant elements".

Aayesha Rafiq (2019), referring to Paigham e Pakistan, stated that:

"It is a national narrative manifested into action at every level for shaping out the local events to counter the negative impacts of so-called terrorism or violent radicalization in the name of Islam".

Since 2018, Paigham-e-Pakistan has been fighting to end religious extremism by organizing workshops, seminars and conferences in academic institutions, colleges and universities in order to promote religious harmony and unity in diversity. The Paigham-e-Pakistan Centre for Peace and Reconciliation Studies issued a fatwa (verdict) from more than 1800 Pakistani religious scholars in January 2019, condemning suicide attacks, armed uprisings, and acts of terrorism in the name of Sharia.

"The Paigham-e-Pakistan narrative talks about national integration which is achieved through a process of national cohesion, stability, prosperity, strength and feeling of being united as a nation, an essential prerequisite for the survival of a country" (Ibid.).

We also cannot ignore the role of the Christian Study Centers Rawalpindi (CSC), Pakistan. The CSC was established in 1967 as an extension of the Henry Martyn Institute (HMI, Hyderabad, India) to promote interfaith dialogue, harmony, and good relationships among the followers of different faiths in Pakistan (Uzmā and 'Ashar 2008). The Christian Study Centre Rawalpindi provides great services and contributions to interfaith dialogue, social harmony, and peaceful coexistence in Pakistan (Saeed 2017). It would be instructive to mention here that, due to these efforts, the Pakistani government has started to provide armed forces for the protection of temples and churches in Pakistan from extremists. In Lahore, the Forman Christian College and University are run by Christians, and many Christians from all over Pakistan go there for education. These Christian institutions are run freely, without interference from government or any other segment of society (Khalid and Anwar 2018).

To promote tolerance, moderation, and minority rights, interfaith dialogue and sectarian harmony have been persistently called for by the government at a senior level (Pakistan International Religious Freedom Report 2019). Meetings were held where religious tolerance issues, interfaith dialogue, religious liberty were discussed, which were attended and hosted by embassy officers alongside government officials, leaders of all religions and faiths, and non-government organizations. Embassy officials also explored these groups for the development of programs and projects to promote religious tolerance (Ibid.).

In Pakistan, the administration, policymakers, and numerous passionate individuals are doing everything they can to help religious minorities address the challenges described in this paper. Religious segregation has been an effective way in which the religious and political elite in Pakistan can gain more power, and leaders of political and religious parties have used religion to this end, focusing on "divide and rule" and discouraging the viewpoint of "unity in diversity". The concept of religious segregation has become a part of Pakistan's culture and a great source of promoting violence against non-Muslims. Extremist groups have accomplished their brainwashing in an incredibly comprehensive

way, particularly of the students of *madrasahs* (the religious schools), leading them to believe that, other than Muslims, all are infidels and enemies of Islam and Muslims (Ahmar 2010). This promotes extremism by using jihadist ideology to motivate the followers of extremist groups to kill people of other religions in the name of God. As a result, it is imperative that any use of religion for ill purposes is opposed. Likewise, we also ought to oppose and censure the usage of religion as a banner to give sacred ground to conflicts. To encourage religious harmony, we must protect against religious fanaticism and extremism. The incitement of hatred or even terrorist activities under the banner of religion is destructive and is a threat to the world.

6. Conclusions

Pakistan is blessed with the presence of many major world religions. Pakistan's varied cultural and religious heritage beautifies its multicultural history, and should not lead to communal and religious conflicts. Unfortunately, tolerance for religious minorities is lacking in Pakistan today. Pakistan's situation stands in stark contrast with the plural vision of a tolerant Pakistan articulated by Muhammad Ali Jinnah at the state's founding. Minorities are facing exploitation by extremist groups, and some segments of society show hatred towards them, excluding religious minorities from mainstream society simply because of their religion. To do away with this situation, there is an urgent need to educate new generations in the country that both Islam and the national Constitution seek to treat religious minorities with justice and fairness. Each person who lives in any multi-religious society must accept and understand religious diversity. Understanding other religious groups' faith and teachings could encourage an individual to accept and respect other religious beliefs. The freedom of practicing religion is the fundamental right of humanity, regardless of whether a person is Muslim or non-Muslim, and must not be ignored in any society or country.

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