

State of Religious Minorities in Balochistan (A civil society perspective 2016-17)

**Dr. Abdul Rahim Changezi¹, Dr. Ayesha Gul²,
Mr. Mohammad Ayaz Mandokhail³, Shah Khalid⁴**

Abstract

State of human rights has never been satisfactory across provinces, particularly in politically unstable province of Balochistan. The situation severely worsens when it comes to religious minorities. A good number of Christians, Hindus, Parsis, Baha'is, Sikh and others have been residing in the province before existence of Pakistan. Their role and contribution on various fields of life has been tremendous, particularly in the field of health and education sectors. However, due to unabated discriminatory policies and indifferent behavior of the successive government combined with the on-going horrifying waves of extremism and terrorism, it is now far difficult for minorities to earn a respected life. Mass migration of minorities has now become a common phenomenon. This research study is a preliminary effort towards studying perception of people belonging to various strata of religious minorities. 120 respondents as sample were surveyed, the collected data was analyzed which followed by suggestions of doable actions to improve the present situation.

Key Word: Level-playing fields, International commitment, dividing forces, land of pure, minorities

Introduction

Sociologically speaking, humankind are all alike around the globe. They share, predominantly all resources and opportunities. Their basic social needs and process of nourishment are similar. Nevertheless, by-default, human-beings are classified into three broad categories of Caucasoid, Negroid and Mongoloid. This classification is based on the physical features each of them possesses. Negroid, for instance, has a strong physic, curly black or blackish hairs, big jaws and looped shaped head, while mongoloids are characterized

¹ Assistant professor, Social Work Department, University of Balochistan, Quetta

² Lecturer, Social Work Department, University of Balochistan, Quetta

³ Assistant Professor, Balochistan Study Center, UoB, Quetta.

⁴ Lecturer, Gender Studies Department, University of Balochistan, Quetta

with short heights, straight hairs and round shaped head. These peculiarities and diverse racial physical features are deep rooted and cannot be altered altogether (Tiwari, 2013). Any attempt to get these features changed produces a new form and shape.

The bleak side, however, is that all human, unfortunately, do not have equal access to opportunities to grow and contribute in accordance with their will and needs. There are certain socio-economic and political reasoning for it. There also exist institutionalized biased mindsets and social structures that support superiority of one upon the other with varying degrees, pace and intensity.

There is nothing more power force than interests that divide human beings into various groups, classes and society. The providers of goods and services, for instance, share the indistinguishable interests of “maximizing profit” while consumers interests move around availability, accessibility, quality and prices in today’s globalized marketplace (Mirza, 2000). Therefore, the interests of service providers and consumers are widely different, which divide them into various groups. Apart from economic perspective of worldview, there also exist social dimensions. Class-based social system and tribal set up is another powerful source of division through its powerful working mechanism. The social stratification system of Indian society is the exemplary case of class-based social set up. People belonging to upper social class such as “Brahman” is the most privileged for having access to and enjoining life as luxuriously compared to person of lower class such as “shuddar” who cannot even think of such luxuries. For being considered untouchables, they are kept confine to lower jobs associated to serving majority superior castes. Prevalence of biased social system excludes millions of people from lower social class to take part into certain affairs in so-called secular Hindu state (Singh, 1992)

Ideologies too, religions in particular have been the most powerful dividing factor in the history of humankind. Believers of one religion get isolated from the rest who do not share their belief system. All religions regrettably, do not engulf the gap between masses, instead builds walls to further widen and endorse it. Lines being drawn by religions are commanding to the extent that it can provoke people to get indulged into battles and war, displacement, become alien and earn title of minorities elsewhere far from native homeland. Religiously, humankind are bound to live into certain nation-states being established on the basis of belief systems and faith. At present there are various concepts of religious / ideological states – Islamic, Christian, Hindu and Jewish etc. Muslim states numbers into more than fifty in today’s world. They are almost 20% and second largest population of the world (Huntington, 1997)

Proportion of world population adhering to major religious traditions

Religions	Year 1900	Year 2000
Christians	34%	32%
Muslims	12%	20%
Non religious	0.2%	17%
Hindu	13%	14%
Buddhists	8%	6%
Chinese folk	24%	4%
Atheists etc	7%	7%

Most of the nation states of contemporary world have variety of citizens that follow different religious beliefs. Majority population enjoys life and is advantageous everywhere, while minorities either ethnic or linguistic have limited access to the resources to live a respectable life. The rights of majority population are safeguarded in most cases through constitutional and legal framework, while issues of minorities are still protected, by and large, with morality and undefined cultural values.

Pakistan as a developing Muslim country houses more than 13 million minorities consisting of 1.69% Christians, 2.02% Hindus and 0.35 percent others includes Qadyani or Ahmadies (Dr. Iftikhar, 2002). Parsi, Sikh and Buddhists are almost twenty thousand each in number. (Qaisar, 2007) According to official figures a total of 4 percent of Pakistan's population consist of non-Muslims, however, the religious minorities disagree to these figures and claim that it is 6%. (Qaisar, Aqliaton Ka Nauha, 2007). Christians, Hindus and Qadyani claim to have a population of 4 million each. The U.S. State Department estimated in its International Religious Freedom Report 2002 that there are at least 2.09 million Christians; 286,000 Qadyani, 2.8 million Hindus in Pakistan. (States, 2002) Further the 2007 report lists Parsis, Buddhists and Sikhs at 20,000 each; and Baha'is at 30,000. There is another category that includes tribes whose members practice indigenous religions and who usually do not declare them to be adherent of specific religion or those who even do not practice any religion and remain silent.

Balochistan geographically is the largest province of Pakistan. It is one of the richest parts of country not only in terms of its ecological diversity, but ethnic groups and communities. Prior to partition of the subcontinent, a huge population of Balochistan consisted of religious minorities. Many of the minorities migrated across border due to security reasons. However, currently there is a good number of minority population including Christians, Hindus, Qadyani, Parsi, Sikhs and Baha'is in Balochistan particularly in the provincial capital. According to Census Report 1998, almost 5% of the total population of Balochistan consists of religious minorities (Bureau of Statistics, 1998).

The minorities in Balochistan have shared significant socio-cultural and economic contribution to ensure peaceful co-existence in the province. Comparatively religious minorities have enjoyed adequate socio-cultural assimilation and political rights in Balochistan after Sindh Province. However, issues pertaining to biased treatment and discrimination cannot be ignored altogether. There are concerns and reservations among minority communities about prevailing practicing values and responses of state and government. This research paper is primarily aimed to unleash underlying causes of issues and bottlenecks that restricts religious minorities to contribute towards socio-economic development of the province. At the same time the research paper aims to highlight gaps and loopholes between international commitments of Pakistan as signatory to various conventions and the prevailing state of affair /situation. It also aims to suggest broader guidelines to be adhered to for improving the situation

Literature Review

While focusing today's worldview from a religious perspective, it is broadly divided into certain parts. Many countries of Asia are predominantly dwelled by Muslims, Hindus and Buddhist, while most of western countries houses Christians, Jews, and non-religious population. Despite all differences between inhabitants to poor south and rich north, and between developed and developing ones, it is still believed that protection of entire world is the responsibility of each and every human soul. Internationally, various efforts are in progress by civil society to develop some sort of a working mechanism to held everybody responsible for sustenance of life over mother planet, indeed with active participation of individuals belonging to civil society, public sector or private entities as part and parcel of exploring new avenues (Isreal, 2016)

Negotiating the significance of what efforts are in progress, human values such as coexistence and social harmony are considered to be the prerequisites for human survival and sustenance of life. Coexistence, principally is not limited to human only, it covers almost all aspects of life including protection and

conservation of natural resources including wildlife. Apart from physical exploitation of natural resources, the soft packages of culture such as peace, democracy, tolerance and justice are major components of the concept of sustainability to avoid bloody conflicts, wars and resource depletion. This idea had since long been examined by the collective conscience of world community. This consciousness has been materialized by holding nation states responsible to formulate policies and make pragmatic efforts.

In this regard, internationally, some conventions, declarations and commitments were devised while seeking consent of majority countries of the world to ensure harmony and reduce gaps between humankind and his/her physical socio-political environment. To align the focus of this research paper few of the international commitments being made to promote and protect rights of every human including minorities are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

a. Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The general assembly of United Nations has developed broader guidelines for promotion and protection of human rights. This commitment believes that all human-beings are the same despite of their biological, ideological, economical and social differences. “Human rights are those rights that belong to every individual – man or women, girl or boy, infant or elder – follower of any faith, lesser in number or part of majority population - simply because he or she is a human being. They embody the basic standards without which people cannot realize their inherent human dignity (Dimitra, 2005). According to the Universal Declaration, “equality and non discrimination follows from the first principle that human rights, by virtue of their very nature, are possessed by all in equal measure. Whatever our social, economic, cultural or political status, whatever the condition in which we live, we are, in principle at least, entitled to the same basic rights and freedom. The idea of equality and nondiscrimination is a fundamental, underlying principle of human rights. Article 2 (two) says, “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it is independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty” (Dimitra, State of human rights, 2005).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights UDHR does provide enough space for everyone to live peacefully, flourish to fullest of his/her competencies, explore all opportunities and be treated without discrimination.

b. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief

The General Assembly of United Nations on 25th December 1985 further declared that “Considering that one of the basic principles of the [Charter of the United Nations](#) is that of the dignity and equality inherent in all human beings, and that all Member States have pledged themselves to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the organization to promote and encourage universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, Considering that the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and the [International Covenants on Human Rights](#) proclaim the principles of non-discrimination and equality before the law and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief (Dimitra, state of human rights, 2005).

This declaration in its article three further focus the issue by stating that “Discrimination between human-beings on grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the principles of the [Charter](#). Declaration emphasizes over extra legal, administrative and social framework for protection of minorities.

c. Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic minorities

Another effort has been made on the platform of the General Assembly of United Nation on December 18th, 1992 in continuation of previous effort. “The General Assembly, proclaimed in its vision is to achieve international cooperation in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. Noting, the importance of the even more effective implementation of international human rights instruments with regard to the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. The declaration in its articles 3 and 4 states that “UN agencies and organizations and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to intensify their efforts with a view to disseminating information on the Declaration and to promoting understanding thereof. It also invites the relevant organs and bodies of the UN, including treaty bodies, as well as representatives of the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, and to give due regard to the Declaration within their mandates (General Assembly, 1992).

Now as signatory or rectifying country, it is the prime responsibility of state to devise strategy at national level in the light of declaration / convention being signed. It is also the moral duty of the rectifying country to either go for new legislation or bring about necessary changes in the existing laws in accordance to the essence of her commitment to international community. At the same time the signatory is ethically bound to make sure that the existing organizations and institutions are acting upon as per broader guidelines being developed by the state. Also imperative is to promote avenues that educate masses about role and responsibilities of state and citizens to avoid getting derailed from guidelines of commitments rectified/ signed. The ground realities however show that very little has so far been done by government at national and provincial level to ensure promotion and protection of the rights of religious minorities. Also vividly evident is that very least efforts have ever been made by civil society to remind it for her indifferences. Consequently, it is evident that when the rights of majority population does not seem satisfactory, how deteriorating would be the state of the rights of minorities.

Data and Methodology

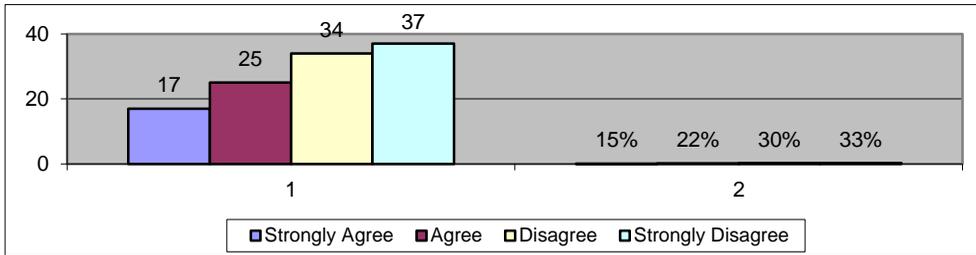
Assessing level of practicing values, knowledge and the attitude of masses about rights is not a simple task. It has certain dimensions, therefore different aspects was focused to make it comprehensive. In order to draw some prudent conclusion, the prevailing situation of religious minorities, issues that they are confronted with was analyzed. Keeping in view complexity of the issues the following step by step research methodology was carried out.

- *Step 1.* Relevant literatures including web pages were reviewed for attaining adequate grip over all dimensions of the state of religious minorities' rights and their socio-economic conditions.
- *Step 2.* Multiple sessions of focus group discussions both with diverse and homogeneous groups helped exploring the topic. Participants were included relevant stakeholders from both majority population and religious minorities and duty bearers.
- *Step 3.* Based on the findings of focus group discussion interview schedule as tool for collection of primary data was developed, pre-tested and implied.
- *Step 4.* Information and data collected from above steps were analyzed to draw conclusion. Based on the findings of above steps the final report was prepared.

Results

Figure 1. To be Religious Minority in itself is a weakness in Pakistani society.

The respondents from minority groups were inquired to respond on a statement that being religious minority in itself is a weakness in Pakistani society. 63 percent respondents disagreed and 37 percent agreed the notion.



A high number of respondents believed that although there are several factors that hinder minorities from coming forward yet self-interest, commitment, and potentials count to greater extent.

Figure 2. Prioritize the following elements that tantalize Religious Minorities' rights

The table below summarizes the key elements that tantalize the rights of religious minorities as per the responses in the survey.

(Data in percentage)	Rank	Total										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
International religious conflicts / incidents	8	9	7	7	12	10	13	7	8	11	7	100
Absence of constitutional / legal protection shield	6	5	6	5	7	11	13	15	11	11	9	100
Lack of awareness about rights and responsibilities	21	12	13	12	10	4	5	9	9	4	2	100
Defective law enforcement mechanism	10	5	15	13	11	9	10	8	9	6	3	100
Biased attitude of majority population	13	12	12	9	8	6	10	7	7	13	3	100
International Political Phenomenon	6	9	7	11	9	11	9	6	14	7	10	100

Lack of actual democratic government	11	10	9	13	12	10	8	8	7	7	5	100
Poor economic status	10	18	14	14	9	7	7	5	5	6	5	100
Tribal set up	5	5	5	9	8	10	7	11	8	7	25	100
The concept of two nations (religion) theory	4	5	8	2	7	14	6	10	15	15	15	100
Child grown up procedure that tags biasness.	6	8	4	6	6	8	11	12	7	13	18	100

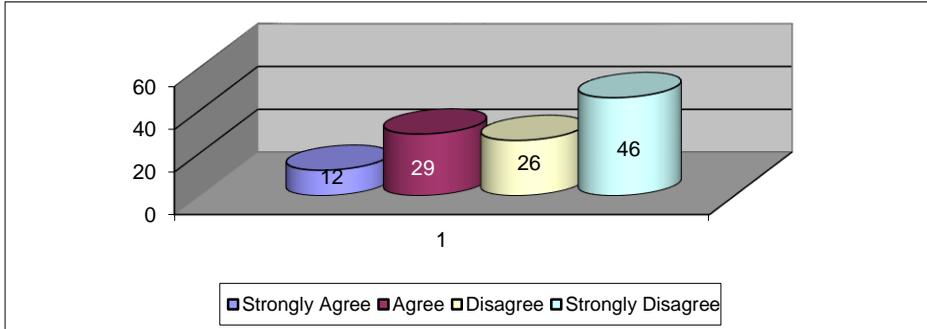
Table 3. Religious minorities are faced with the issues of conversion of their faith.

Conversion to other religion mostly to Islam is a major issue that most of the religious minorities are facing. However, the respondents from Baha’is faith disagreed to the phenomenon of conversion but acceptance of another religion, which is encouraged. Thus few Baha’is did not respond to this statement.

	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	%
	Fre q.	%	Fre q.	%	Fre q.	%	Fre q.	%		
By force	10	9	26	23	39	35	37	33	112	100
By preaching of majority population	8	7	22	19	43	38	38	34	111	98
As a result of inter marriages	13	12	37	33	39	35	22	19	111	98
To protect vested interest	25	22	23	20	35	31	28	25	111	98

It can be observed from the table above that there are several causes of conversion among minorities into majority religion. The notable point is that 72%, & 68 % respondents disagree conversion by preaching of majority population and by force respectively. However, 45 % and 42% expressed agreement to statements that conversion takes place as a result of inter marriage and to protect vested interest respectively.

Figure 4. *The feeling of insecurity hampers religious minorities to play their due role and responsibilities.*



Most of the respondents came up with a view that the feeling of insecurity is the overall issue of the masses; it is not confined to religious minorities.

The feeling of insecurity can limit ones due roles and responsibilities at all grounds. Unexpectedly a lower proportion of religious minorities only 37% agreed the statement that their due roles and responsibilities are hampered by the feeling of insecurity. Most of the respondents almost 63 % disagreed with the statement.

Discussion

Islam seeks to establish such a society where all citizens of the state enjoy equal rights and religion does not become the basis for any discrimination. Islamic law holds both Muslims and non-Muslims equal and no superiority or privilege is given to the Muslims on any ground (Qadri, 2009). Pakistan being an Islamic ideological country does follow Islam officially as state religion, which does not allow either any state institution or an individual to discriminate anybody on religious grounds in any field of life. The ground realities, however does not match with the state proclamation. Discrimination on religious, sectarian and ethnic grounds are in practice both at policy and practice levels. The controversial blasphemy law and incidents of its misuse by vested interest groups have tantalized the life and property of religious minorities in various areas of the country. The murder a former federal minister Mr. Zafar Bhatti in Adyala Jail and burning alive a Christian couple in Kasur district of Punjab are few cases of misuse of blasphemy law in Pakistan (Bakhsh, 2014). Murder of sitting Governor (Salman Taseer) by a rigid policeman, who was primarily deployed to guard him is the most recent incident of blasphemy law in the country (Chohdary, 2011). Cases of forceful conversion of belief system/ faith are another vivid feature of biased treatment towards religious minorities.

Democracy as a type of government is believed to be ensuring equity and equality among masses. However, in an ideological state such as of Pakistan, which is characterized with agrarian social set up and least ratio of literacy, it would be far difficult to opt for such an ideal democracy. Consequently, our brand of democracy would continue to have its own features, where the “have nots” are exploited by the “have ones” irrespective of their religious faith.

Also important is to consider that due to lack of social safety net and social security policies the life, education, health and shelter of everybody is at high risk irrespective of belongingness to either majority or minority populace. This feeling gets bigger and bigger based on vulnerability of masses on economic and accessibility grounds than faith and belief system.

Although protection of rights has constitutional and legal protective shields, enforcement and best practice is a matter of great concern. All actors of civil society, therefore, are faced with major challenges of advocating issues, lobbying around and building pressure for influencing decisions with regard to enforcement of laws in the light of constitution and international commitment according to its spirits.

It is also evident that biased attitude of majority population both at individual and institutional level forces religious minorities, particularly Christians and Hindu to be discriminated against because of the lack of initiative to address the issue. Sensitization of majority population in general and influential in particular both social and office bearers of various public sector organizations seems to be loopholes of administrative arrangement to promote social harmony.

Knowing one’s rights is a preliminary duty of an individual or community for its protection. Mass poverty, particularly among Christians and Hindus is prevalent to the extent that no one can spare some time to understand fundamental context of rights and responsibilities framework. Avenues of macro and micro level economic activities to reduce poverty and minimize unemployment have never knocked their doors as it has always been knocking the doors of majority populace on parameters being developed irrationally on religious grounds while compromising merits. This shows institutionalization of biasness towards minorities both at policy and program levels.

Conclusions / Recommendations

This research study finds a number of factors contributing to the plight of religious minorities and state of their rights. Some of those factors are external, upon which we have no or little control. External factors, by and large, are basically the outcome of international political phenomenon and incidences

that take place elsewhere, which has its negative repercussion in our country and indeed, province. While internal factors lie within our sphere of influence, which can be improved with pragmatic and persistent efforts. The internal factors are mostly linked with deviation from responsibilities combined with inefficiencies both at individual and institutional levels. Keeping in view the findings of both primary and secondary data, the following conclusion is drawn:-

- Sensitization of public representative at all three tiers of the government is of paramount importance i.e. federal, provincial and union council levels. Issues and concerns of religious minorities must be raised at such platforms. *The issue best expressed is half solved* is the ideal suggested solution. Performance of elected public representatives must be monitored on various human values grounds including this, which will force them to protect the interests of masses, instead of his/her personal ones.
- Controversial laws (Blasphemy and Hadud Ordinances) should widely be discussed at various form including national and provincial assemblies to modify and make it suitable and human friendly and not specific to protect majority populace. Enforcement of law should also be ensured to extract positive results. Lengthy procedure of judicial system is another major area of concern for all Pakistanis in general and for minorities in particular for seeking social justice in the court of law
- Lack of awareness among masses about rights and responsibilities, as civilized citizens, further aggravates the situation. In most cases neither the violators nor the victims are known due to the scope and limitations of their sphere of interventions for safeguarding rights. Mass media on regular basis must educate people about rights / responsibilities and avenues responsible to safeguard it.
- Our educational curricula and course contents must be revised from time to time to make it consistent with requirements of international standards for making it people centered. Topics such as framework of rights and responsibilities as human, women, child, religious minorities and consumers etc must be incorporated. Influential religious leaders of both majority population and minorities must be identified and used for soft packages of sensitization and mass education. Sensitization of such influential personalities would have its trickle down positive impact over the masses in general. Preaching of one religion at the cost of negative propaganda against other religions should be monitored and curbed vigilantly and the same should widely be publicized by both public and civic sectors organizations.

- Sense of exclusion among all religious minorities of provincial capital is vividly evident. One of the solid reasons for this is the feeling of insecurity and biased attitude of majority population. The current trend of religious fanaticism combined with horrifying waves of suicide attacks intensifies the feeling further more. Opting for Muslim names and tribal titles among minorities particularly Christians and Hindu is an attempt to hide their identities for avoiding discrimination superficially. This sense of insecurity is not only the hallmark of religious minorities, but has become epidemic and affecting everybody, which in turns hamper social interactions by keeping all lions in their own dens. Participating in religious procession of Shiite Muslim among Christians though is an act of integration; it also has some link with seeking better responses from majority population.
- The current political instability and chaos in the province might not be a conducive environment to receive positive and encouraging response from majority population. Project interventions to improve situation of religious minorities' rights would have to make extra time and efforts to make it the dire need of masses in Quetta.
- Promotion and protection of human and religious minorities' rights are not at the priority list of today's political parties. Help and support of civil society organizations would be useful in educating people about their rights and responsibilities as well as rights of religious minorities and their issues/ concern, which in turn would improve the situation.

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