

Socio-Political Role of Christians in Pakistan: A Case study of Socio-Political Development of Layyah District

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Abstract

Minorities are an essential part of the Pakistani society who are playing their role in the development of the country. Christians has also played their role in the formation and development of Pakistan. The main aim and objective of this research article is to trace out socio-political role of Christians in the formation of Layyah district. The research techniques used for this research study are multifaceted, as both the anthropological and historical research methods are utilized. The sources for this article are in the form of primary and secondary documents. The results of this research article shows that Christians living in Layyah district have been essential for the transformation of society and politics of the district. It is recommended that the further similar research to be conducted in another district to Pakistan to identify the socio-political role of Christians.

Key Words: Christians, Development, Layyah, Pakistan, Socio-Political

Introduction

Minorities who are not Muslims are able to enjoy their rights under Islam in every sphere of life. Minorities are granted total freedom under Islam. They are free to travel to any area of the nation, to educate their children, to pursue any career path they choose, and they are unrestricted in their freedom of all kinds. Non-Muslims were also assigned to positions of responsibility. Following the Muslim conquest of Europe and Africa, numerous non-Muslims were chosen to lead these regions' governments. It was acceptable for non-Muslims to live in accordance with their culture. They were allowed to carry out their customs. They might also freely grow in their linguistic abilities. Numerous instances from Islamic history can be seen that demonstrate the important participation of non-Muslim individuals in national politics and economic concerns. There are numerous non-Muslims holding prominent positions across Pakistan. They play a major role in the military and bureaucracy, courts and banking, the medical field, and nearly every other aspect of existence. For instance, in the 1960s, Alvin Robert Cornelius, a Christian judge, served as Chief Justice of Pakistan's Supreme Court, the country's highest court. In addition, he headed the Pakistan Cricket Board. He was an unquestionable and well-respected character in Pakistani judicial history (Cheema & Abbas, 2021).

Judge Rana Bhagwandas, a Hindu who served as both the chairman of the Federal Public Service Commission of Pakistan (FPSC) and the Chief Justice of the Pakistan Supreme Court, is another illustration of tolerance in Pakistan. In the 1970s, Justice Durab Patel, a Parsi, served as a senior judge on the Pakistani Supreme Court. For a long time, Jamshed Marker was Pakistan's UN representative. These are just a few instances of non-Muslims being appointed to the nation's most prestigious and high positions. In their private affairs, non-Muslim inhabitants of an Islamic state are not required to abide by Islamic law. They are allowed to make decisions about their cases in accordance with their respective legal systems. Their own religious laws govern the resolution of their civil disputes. In Islamic governments, non-Muslim laws have always been upheld. Other standard matters are handled according to Pakistan Penal Code (Curtis, 2016).

Islam forbids forced religious conversion because, according to the Holy Quran, "there is no coercion in Din (in the matter of religion)". Therefore, non-Muslims are free to profess and practice

their religion in Pakistan and other Islamic states. Muslims have the authority to convert non-Muslims to Islam through polite preaching. However, they are never permitted to force non-Muslims to adhere to Islamic beliefs. They are allowed to embrace their culture and engage in its rituals and customs without fear. They are able to construct their temples and other houses of worship. They are free to pray and carry out their other obligations in their houses of worship (Das & Samaddar, 2009).

According to Sharia law, the state is required to safeguard houses of worship against infringement. There are some unseen forces behind the terrorist attacks in Pakistan against non-Muslims, working to destroy the cordial and respectful relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. The institutions of Islam are thus vulnerable to these terrorist groups. All throughout the nation, their own houses of worship are experiencing violence. It has been attempting, through some unidentified elements, to put space between the various Muslim factions. In addition to the aforementioned advantages, non-Muslim minorities living in the Islamic state are also subject to some obligations, such as the need that they not interfere in the majority's internal affairs (Gilmartin, 1998).

The Government of India Act 1935, with the required modifications, was put into effect to manage the affairs of the newly formed state of Pakistan following its foundation in 1947. The Objectives Resolution was the first effort at creating a national constitution in 1949. There are three constitutions in Pakistan. The parliament passed the third and current constitution in 1973 with unanimous votes. In the 1973 constitution, religious minorities were granted complete rights. It allows people to live out their convictions freely. Their rights are safeguarded by the constitution. Article 20 of Pakistan's 1973 constitution addresses the liberties and privileges accorded to religious minorities. Article 22 mentions the freedom provided to govern religious institutions (1). The essays about minorities have been presented by S.K. Tressler. Individuals who identify as minorities are free to enjoy their rights, including those outlined in this proclamation, both on their own and in accordance with other members of their group without facing discrimination. Section 3 (1). It further reads, "No one shall be subject to coercion, which would impair his freedom to have religion or belief of his choice," which is found in the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (Kalia, 2012).

By changing the combined electorate, minorities are now afforded the ability to vote twice in addition to the other freedoms and rights guaranteed by the constitution. In addition to their own MPs, they are able to vote for the Muslim representatives. President Musharraf abolished the distinct electoral system for non-Muslim minorities, which General Zia had reinstated. In 2002, the joint electorate was updated to include non-Muslim minorities. Thus, it can be said that Pakistan's religious minorities lead balanced lives. The society is accepting and generously grants religious minority equal rights. Nearly every religious, ethnic, and linguistic minority that has established in Pakistan is peaceful and wants to see the nation become stable and peaceful (Munir, 2023).

Literature Review

A notable work on the subject is "Tarikh e Layyah," written by Thind, Noor Muhammad, and published in 1995 by Attar Publishers, Chok Azam. In it, the author goes into great detail about the development of each and every community in Layyah. He sheds light on the many historical eras of these various Layyah villages. The social features of the Layyah region are the main focus of discussion. Thind's excellent work offers a wealth of knowledge about the many Layyah communities. This is the most illustrious and superb description of the Layyah region and people, covering nearly every facet of daily life in the area. From Layyah's early past to its current state as a newly constructed city, the author describes the rise of every sect and caste in the area. This book has been broken into three sections by the author. The historical background of the city is thoroughly explained in the first section. It sheds light on the background of the many religions practiced in Layyah throughout history. Thind provides a thorough account of the various religions that have emerged in the region, as well as their current state of affairs. Additionally, he provides an examination of the socioreligious characteristics of Layyah's

population. Part two of Thind's presentation includes details on Layyah's several castes. Castes from all major religions have been included in this section (Perveen, Akhtar & Noor, 2021).

In the same part, Thind addresses the contributions made by several Layyah families and community leaders to the region's development. The institutions of Layyah and the shrines of its saints are discussed in detail in the next section. It is an excellent effort that may be regarded as a Layyah encyclopedia. The value of this book is increased by the comprehensive bibliography. The texts that needed to be studied included "Encyclopedia of Layyah" by "Khuda Bakhsh Nasir," which was released by Attar Printers Layyah in 2002; "The History of Origin of Christianity" by Ernest Renan; "India and Christian Opportunity" by Harlan Beach; and "India and Christian Mission" by Edward Storrow, among others. Additionally, information was gathered from the "District Population Office" and "District Council Records (Tahir & Tahira, 2016).

For this investigation, a respectable number of articles from various news publications were studied. Essays that were published in several journals served as the primary source of information about the study. The historical evolution of the social and cultural values held by the district's minorities is covered in this content. It is important to note that not a single book regarding the district's minorities has ever been published. There is no literature on the history of the minorities' religion or on their social and economic lives in the district. The brief assessment of the literature reveals a dearth of research on the social lives of the religious minority in the Layyah district. Thus, in order to gather enough information about the religious minorities in the Layyah district, a thorough investigation is required. Academic study and analysis on the subject are also required. In order to make the study valuable and instructive, every effort was made to obtain as much information as possible through surveys and interview (Whaites, 1998).

Material and Methods

Some significant primary and secondary sources are gathered through the use of qualitative research methodologies. The All-India Muslim League's archives and the Jinnah papers, which were influential in forming Pakistan's ideology, are the primary sources for this study. The two primary analytical tools of the qualitative research technique are used to analyze all of this data: theme and document approaches of analysis.

Results and Discussion

Minorities in Layyah District

The Layyah District is home to numerous ethnic groups, including Ahmedies, Christians, and Hindus. However, not enough research has been done on minorities' strengths and achievements in all spheres of life. Not even a single book has been written about the struggles minorities faced as Layyah District developed. Since 1947, they have made significant contributions to the domains of health and education, although their work has not received much attention. Two important departments where minorities have made considerable contributions are education and health. The study will highlight their contributions to various spheres of life and uncover the effects they have had on Layyah society. It will serve as a foundation for additional research on Minorities in Layyah. All of this demonstrates the significance of the worthwhile subject. There has never been a rational analysis of the social lives of these religious minorities or their place in Layyah district society. To fill this gap, in-depth research on the function of religious minorities in the Layyah district was also required. In actuality, it seeks to depict the social lives and social standing of Layyah's religious minority throughout the last 70 years. It should be made clear what part they play in Layyah District society. Their contributions to various spheres of life ought to be acknowledged. It is important to talk about the effects of their work as well. The primary academic fields that contribute to the research include history, sociology, and anthropology of religions (Mirani, 2000).

Social Role of Christians in Layyah

In Pakistan, Christians have long enjoyed total religious freedom. A few cases of them being the target have been documented. Nonetheless, Pakistan has demonstrated respect and tolerance for its Christian residents, in contrast to a number of other countries. In return, Christians have used their influence to improve the country in many areas. Some of the best schools have been run by Christians. They have also managed many top-notch dispensaries and hospitals. They have never deviated from the path of peace for the past 70 years, hence there has never been a This is the peaceful core of Islam that all Muslims and Muslim countries follow. Christians in Pakistan live in fearlessness and have never faced any danger. When the Christians arrived, a prayer space was built here. This mud-built chamber was inhabited by the Priest. Those who wanted to join in the prayers were forced to sit outside the chamber due to space restrictions. In 1960, an imposing church featuring Italian architectural style was built. This church quickly became quite important for the surrounding Christian villages. Because of its devotion to St. Cecilia, the church was named St. Cecilia Church. Waade Ki Sarzame Loreto claims that Church was given a large bell weighing sixty pounds by the US Navy and that Loreto received it. In front of St. Cecilia Church, this bell is suspended between two stone pillars. This bell works (Zaidi, 1988).

Loreto residents observe the Pilgrimage to the Holy Virgin Mary as a public holiday. The celebrations last for three days. In addition to designated prayer times, there are many festivities. In 1976, the first week of February was reserved for the requests of the Holy Virgin Mary. Father Ferror John and Remand Saeed started the Holy Week festivities. Fr. Yousaf Sardar turned Loreto into a sacred, revered place in 1986 by building a beautiful hill with Fr. Felix's help. In 1957, the Parish residence was built in Loreto. The sisters' first residence was this magnificent building. Minorities in the Layyah district is in a comparable predicament. Religious minorities and Muslims engage in all district development programs on an equal footing as other citizens. Affirmative action laws have given them the confidence to be proud of their ancestry and religion. The Christian, Hindu, and Ahmedi communities in the district have made contributions to many areas of society, especially the fields of education, trade, and health. Christian, Hindu, and other communities have coexisted peacefully since independence. These non-Muslim groups have not reported a single incident of persecution or prejudice in the district over the last 70 years. There hasn't been any indication of civil unrest or political repression. Similar circumstances affect the minority in the Layyah district. Religious minorities engage in all district development programs on an equal footing with their Muslim colleagues, as equal citizens. Thanks to affirmative action laws, they now have the self-assurance to be proud of their background and religion. The Ahmedi, Hindu, and Christian communities in the district have made contributions to many areas of society, especially the trade, health, and educational fields. The communities of Christians, Hindus, and others have lived in harmony with one another ever since freedom. In the entire district, these non-Muslim communities have not reported a single incident of persecution or discrimination for the previous 70 years. No signs of conflict or tyranny at the social or political levels have surfaced (Shah, 1995).

Following the establishment of Pakistan, Christians started to participate. Their performance has continuously exceeded that of the other minorities in the district for the last 70 years. Throughout the district, the Christians have established a large number of educational facilities. Throughout the district, the Christian community has established a large number of medical institutions and dispensaries. A sizable percentage of nurses are Christians who put forth incredible effort at great personal cost. As a result, the Layyah district's minority population is particularly skilled in the fields of education and health. Residents of the district will undoubtedly find that to be quite beneficial. There is a network centered around each community's own set of rights. The bulk of the network of Christians consists of churches. Christian missionaries-built schools and hospitals in the early 1950s. Back then, education and health care were unusual in this area. For this reason, the educational and medical facilities established by Christians were a great blessing to the community. Thousands of local youngsters have received an education from these Christian-founded schools, regardless of their faith or religious views. Most of them are busy doing various forms of service to their country. These mission

schools' previous students are now contributing to society as teachers, doctors, nurses, judges, attorneys, etc (Mandal, 2022).

As helpful as their schools are, the medical facilities that the Christians established have also been beneficial. The health clinics and dispensaries run by the sisters provide medical care to people of all faiths and creeds. In addition to receiving expert nursing care for hundreds of patients, these clinics also gave out free prescription drugs. Many people in the district receive medical care from these health centers. In this sense, the community has made a substantial contribution to society. Initiatives to better the nation are actively supported by the community. In almost every area, they are contributing to the betterment of society, regardless of caste, race, or religion. Christianity did not originate in this subcontinent; rather, it expanded here thanks to the persistent efforts of Christian missionaries. It's a converts' religion in Sub Continent. The subcontinent has been home to Christians for a very long time. The influence of Christian missionaries grew while they were ruled by the British. Christian missionaries built numerous educational facilities and schools for religious purposes throughout the Indian subcontinent, and many Indians were converted to Christianity. The first missionaries arrived from Portugal on the Indian subcontinent, made their home here, and worked hard to spread Christianity throughout India. The second wave of missionaries to India came from the United Kingdom and other western nations (Bodlah, et al, 2016).

It is found that a significant percentage of the Christian population in the district has opted to work as nurses and teachers. Throughout the district, the Christians have established a large number of educational facilities. Throughout the district, the Christian community has established a large number of medical institutions and dispensaries. A sizable percentage of nurses are Christians, and they do an incredible and crucial job. As a result, the Layyah district's minority population is particularly skilled in the fields of education and health. Christians make up a sizable portion of the sanitation workforce. They are simply poor, landless peasants living in the rural areas of the district, just like the Muslims.

The Christian community in Layyah, as in many other areas, is involved in social services, cultural contributions, and community engagement in a variety of ways. Christians in the Layyah region make a substantial social fabric contribution while being a minority. Christian organizations usually oversee schools and other educational institutions that cater to both non-Christian and Christian pupils. Apart from providing excellent education, these schools could serve as centers for the community's literacy and knowledge promotion. Healthcare Services: In addition to providing various healthcare services, Christian organizations and individuals may run clinics, hospitals, and medical camps. Fr. Felix Allah Ditta was one of Loreto's most valiant characters. He put a lot of effort into helping the Loreto people grow. He arrived in Loreto Parish in 1983. He made every effort to supply Loreto community with electricity. Thus, the Multan Diocese's Bishop Bertrand Boland turned on the lights in the village of Loreto in 1984. Fr. Felix was a major contributor to Loreto's conversion to a monastic community. He worked in the village of Loreto for a long time. Under the Green Belt Society, he initiated a tube well program. His magnificent contribution was the erection of the massive Ibne-Maryyam High School structure. He gave the dispensary his whole attention, which increased its functioning (Mehfooz, 2021).

Mr. Albert Gill recognized the value of games for kids' health. So, he got the Loreto kids ready for some games. Numerous writers also thrived in Loreto. Emanuel Perwana, Anwar Bhatti, Samuel Apna, and Sabir Gill are a few among them. The poet of the day, Mr. Maqbool Shehzad, is highly well-liked. The lyrics by Maqbool Shehzad are published weekly in "Catholic Times," monthly in "Sawan," and monthly in Jang Newspaper Multan. Mr. Emanuel Perwana was one of Loreto's literary figures. He was also a very skilled poet and dramatist. He was one of Loreto's most well-liked figures. The names "Perwana Road" and "Perwana Cricket Club" were chosen to honor his literary contributions. during the outset of Loreto's settlement. The Loreto people are deeply rooted in their social, political, and religious communities. A few well-known personalities have been quite helpful and energetic in assisting Loreto residents in organizing for political office. Nazir Among them are Sohan Khokhar, Yaqoob Anjum Bhatti, Pal Mehtab, George Sheikh, Javed Asif, Gulfam Rana, Ishfaq Faqeer, Mushtaq Yaqoob, Saleem Shehzad, Yaqoob Lehnga, Munawar Gill, Babul Saif-ul-Malook, Bashir Shahid,

Zakariya Gill, Bashir Foji, Ejaz Qadir, Mehboob Anthony, Saleem Shaw, Piara Maseeh, George Chaman, Pitras Rodsia, Yaqoob Delmia, Pervaiz Anjum, Seth Sultan, Choudary Riaz Anayat, Rehmat Mandian Wala, and Barkat Shingara are a few of them. The first politician in Loreto history is Hawldar Shingara. In 1967, he was selected to be a Layyah district councilor. There are also some great musicians in Loreto. Frank Mehtab and Chaman Lal are two of the most well-known musicians and singers in Loreto. Yet another well-known Loreto singer is Mr. Mushtaq Kanwal. Renowned vocalist Ghulam Ali Khan is his teacher. Aasi Bashir and Barkat Boota Thomas are the other famous people with beautiful voices (Malik, 1996).

Political role of Christians in Pakistan

Christians' political participation in Layyah district, or any district for that matter, would be heavily influenced by a number of variables, such as the size of the population, socioeconomic position, party affiliation, and the political climate at the time. Christians are a minority in Pakistan, yet they are nevertheless involved in many facets of society, including politics. Layyah district lies in the Punjab region.

Christians are able to hold posts in district, union, and city councils, among other local government organizations. They might have elected officials fighting for their interests and concerns locally, depending on their population size and political affiliation. To address issues impacting their community, such as discrimination, access to education, career prospects, and religious freedoms, Christians might get involved in political activity and advocacy. To raise their voices, this may entail planning demonstrations, contacting elected officials, or starting neighborhood associations. It is possible that some Pakistani Christians belong to major political parties. They could run for office, take part in party events, or use the party apparatus to sway judgments and policies. Christians in the Layyah area have additional ways to influence society than official political posts. These include holding leadership positions in social clubs, churches, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These leaders could have a big impact on influencing political beliefs and organizing their community. It's possible that some Pakistani Christians belong to major political parties. They could run for office, take part in party events, or use the party apparatus to sway judgments and policies. Christians in the Layyah area have additional ways to influence society than official political posts. These include holding leadership positions in social clubs, churches, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These leaders could have a big impact on influencing political beliefs and organizing their community (Taneti, 2023).

The village of Loreto had grown thanks to the efforts of many people. One of them is Fr. Ferror John. In 1974, he came to Loreto's Parish home after Fr. Jim. The financial status of the Loreto community was significantly impacted by him. He managed the scholarships for the Loreto children, sending them to various universities in Pakistan. Several young men from Loreto were sent to train as priests, including Fr. Yousaf Sohan. Two more well-known people who were awarded scholarships and became well-known in society are Dr. Elvin Murad and Mr. Mukhtiar Simon. Fr. Ferror John was compelled to go to America due to his health. He died in the United States. Social Welfare Programs: Christians may engage in various social welfare programs aimed at helping the disadvantaged and marginalized sections of society. This could include providing food assistance, shelter, and other forms of support to those in need. In Layyah Christians can take an active part in interfaith conversation programs that aim to foster harmony, tolerance, and understanding between individuals from many religious backgrounds. They might work together with different religious groups to promote respect for one another and solve shared social issues. Christian communities frequently use their music, artwork, and customs to add to Layyah's cultural richness. To encourage appreciation and interchange of cultures among community members, they could plan festivals, celebrations, and other cultural activities. Christians may take an active role in community development projects, cooperating with other locals to tackle problems like environmental preservation, sanitary conditions, and infrastructural development. Christians are able to support social justice, minority rights, and religious freedom among other human rights. They might strive for legislative changes to alleviate structural injustices and

increase public awareness of problems impacting marginalized communities. In general, Christians play a variety of social roles in Layyah, including work in the areas of community development, healthcare, education, social welfare, and cultural interchange. Christians, despite their minority status, have a favorable impact on the district's social cohesiveness and general well-being.

Recommendations

A thorough grasp of the background, difficulties, and opportunities that Christians encounter in Pakistan, especially in Layyah District, is necessary when examining their sociopolitical position. Here are some suggestions for improving the socio-political growth of Christians in Layyah District and carrying out a case study of this kind. A thorough grasp of the background, difficulties, and opportunities that Christians encounter in Pakistan, especially in Layyah District, is necessary when examining their sociopolitical position. Here are some suggestions for improving the socio-political growth of Christians in Layyah District and carrying out a case study of this kind. Examine how involved in politics Christians are in Layyah District, including how many of them are in political parties, local administration, and civil society organizations. Determine the obstacles that prevent people from participating in politics, such as prejudice, a lack of resources, or a lack of knowledge of their rights. Encourage the implementation of affirmative action plans, education and career training programs, and community development projects as well as other policies and actions that support the rights and socioeconomic empowerment of Christians in Layyah District. Encourage local Christian leaders and activists to speak out for the needs of their community and have conversations with policymakers, religious authorities, and other interested parties.

Conclusion

The intricate and diverse socio-political role of Christians in Pakistan's Layyah District is a reflection of the opportunities and difficulties encountered by the nation's religious minorities. Using our case study of Layyah District's Christians' sociopolitical growth. Christians in Layyah District show resiliency, autonomy, and a dedication to strengthening their sociopolitical standing in spite of these obstacles. They take part in a range of activism, advocacy, and community organizing activities to voice their complaints, stand up for their rights, and advance socioeconomic advancement in their local areas. There are still not many elected Christians in Layyah District who represent them in municipal, regional, or national politics. Their capacity to successfully advocate for their interests and have an impact on decision-making processes is compromised by their lack of representation. Layyah District's sociopolitical environment is significantly shaped by interfaith dynamics. While harmonious relationships and cooperation between Christians and Muslims can promote societal cohesion, tensions or confrontations might worsen the problems already encountered by religious minorities.

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