

Political Participation of Christians in Pakistan

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Abstract

The Christians were very active in politics before the partition of the India. They supported the Muslims in the Pakistan movement and later on played a crucial role in the partition. After the independence, Quaid-i-Azam promised all the fundamental rights to the minorities living in Pakistan. Following the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights, the constitution of Pakistan, grants all the fundamental rights to the minorities. Political participation of all segments of society is necessary for any democratic system. So, seats have been reserved for the minorities in the National and provincial Assemblies to ensure political representation of minorities in the assemblies but the political participation of the Christians over the years has remained below average. This paper is aimed to find out the factors responsible for the level of political participation on the part of the Christians in Pakistan.

Keywords: Political representation, Minority, Human Rights, Christians.

Introduction

Political participation is generally referred to political engagement or involvement of the masses in the decision making process. At present, it is considered to be the most significant feature of a democratic system of government. More the people have freedom to take part in decision making more are chances of smooth running of a government (Dahl 1971, 1998; Pateman, 1970). The level of political participation is dependent on political rights of the citizens (Munroe, 2002). If the people are free to exercise their political rights the level of political participation will be high but if the situation is vice versa the level of political participation will be low. In the present day

world political participation is confined not only to participation in general elections as contender or as a voter but it is more than that. So many other things have been involved in this process such as supporting of a political party, running election campaign, contacting government officials, holding protest or demonstration against government policies, working with community members to solve the issues faced by community, working with organization of social welfare, collection of contributions for the political parties etc. (Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H., 1995). According to Bourne (2010) damaging public property during a protest, setting fire on the roads or shooting the masses or policemen during demonstrations are some of the worst form of political participation.

Political participation bears fruit if all the segments of society are granted equal rights of citizenship. If a particular segment of society or minority groups are discriminated on racial, religious or some other basis, the political participation will be of no use. Political participation on the part of a minority group in any political system does not mean that they want power or authority over the majority. International law does not approve any right of autonomy to the minorities but they can ensure their cultural security through political participation.

The concept of fundamental rights emerged in the west during 17th century. After the establishment of United Nations in 1945, the fundamental rights have been granted to all the citizens of the state and UN Declaration on minorities also grants political rights to all the citizens of the state irrespective of their gender, race, language or status (article 15 & 25).

Following the UN Declaration, at present, every state grants fundamental human rights to all its citizens equally without any type of discrimination. These rights have been included in the constitution of almost every state.

Models of Minority Political Participation

Political participation of minorities varies from state to state. Several models and theories have been presented by scholars to

explain the political behavior of masses and especially of minorities in different parts of the world. First model presented in this regard was socio-economic model. According to this model, the individuals with more socio-economic resources i.e. highly educated and wealthy people participate more actively in the political system (Verba and Nie, 1972). But the Psychological model suggests that qualification or income does not inspire much a person to take active part in the political system instead the level of participation decreases as the qualification and wealth of a person increases. Psychological orientations of an individual, his political efficacy, political interest and trust in the government play an important role in his political participation (Conway, 1991). A person having no trust in the government will not participate in the political process. He will take interest in the political participation if he believes that it will bring benefit for him.

Social connectedness is also a factor which influences the people towards political participation. Various studies in the USA have proved that lack of social connectedness leads to low level of political participation (Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999 A). Group consciousness or group identity model suggests that group consciousness also influences the people towards political participation (Hardy-Fanta, 1993). This model seems more relevant with regard to minority participation in the political system. Mostly, the minorities take part more actively in the political system under the influence of group consciousness e.g. in America the Blacks participate more actively in the political system than the Whites. Wilcox and Gomez (1990) are of the view that it is also because of group consciousness on the part of a minority.

Different groups live together in a society. These groups have relations or connections with one another (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Tension may be created among the people of different groups over political authority or division of resources or over religious differences (Sherif, 1961). If a particular group tries to occupy resources or get control over authority the other groups of the society become more active and it influences them towards political participation.

Minority groups take part in the political system under the influence of one or the other model. All these models have been followed in some or the other way in different parts of the world. In the sub-continent religion was basis of separate identity for the Muslims. They were living under the domination of Hindus who were not willing to give their due share to the minorities in the political system. So, they demanded a separate homeland where they would be able to live their lives according to the teachings of Islam. They had a bitter experience as minority in the sub-continent so after the establishment of Pakistan it was suggested that minorities living in Pakistan should be given due share in political system. This paper is aimed to study political participation of Christians in political system of Pakistan.

Political Participation of Christians in Pakistan

The Christians are largest minority of Lahore. They had been well organized and politically very active even before the partition. They played a vital role in partition. The fate of Punjab province was to be decided by the provincial assembly. The votes in favor and against partition of the province were equal. There were three Christian members whose votes got significance of casting vote. The fate of the province depended upon these three votes of Christians. Quaid-i-Azam held meeting with Christian leaders and asked for their support. The Christians showed complete confidence in the leadership of Quaid-i-Azam and assured him of their complete support and the Christian members of Punjab Assembly casted their votes in favor of partition of the Punjab. A Christian delegation even appeared before boundary commission t favor Pakistan. Quaid-i-Azam assured them of all the fundamental rights in Pakistan.

In the first constituent assembly of Pakistan there was no Christian member to represent the community. In 1955, the second constituent assembly was elected indirectly. Total number of seats was 72 and only one Christian C.E. Gibbon was elected to the assembly. First constitution of Pakistan was promulgated in 1956 but no elections were held under this constitution. In 1958 Martial Law was imposed in the country by Ayub Khan. Under his supervision new constitution was framed

and promulgated in 1962. Elections were held in the country and not a single Christian was elected to National Assembly. After the election, the Christians of Lahore felt that they should be politically organized so Christian political parties were established all over the country by different groups of the community. When Z.A. Bhutto started a movement against Ayub Khan, the Christian political parties completely supported Z.A. Bhutto and took active part in the protests held against Ayub Khan. After the ouster of Ayub Khan, constitution of 1962 was also abrogated and general elections were held in the country under Legal Framework Order issued by Military administrator Yahya Khan. Christian political parties took part in these elections but unfortunately they were defeated miserably. After elections, Z.A. Bhutto formed his government and a new constitution was promulgated in the country in 1973. In this constitution seats were reserved for minorities in the provincial assemblies but not in National Assembly. Later on, seats for minorities were also reserved in the National Assembly through an amendment in the constitution. As a result six Christians became members of the Assembly. According to this constitution, the minority representatives were not to be elected but the majority party in the assembly was given the right to nominate minority representative as members of assembly. In the general elections of 1977 Pakistan People's Party on the majority in National Assembly but opposition parties blamed the government of rigging in election so National Assembly as dissolved only after four months of elections. Zia-Ul-Haq imposed Martial Law once again in the country. He introduced his MAJLIS-E-SHOORA and six Christians were nominated in his SHOORA. System of joint electorate was replaced by separate electorate because some sections of Christian community had been demanding separate electoral system in the country. 10 seats were reserved for the minorities all to be filled by the elected members of minorities. General elections were held in 1985 on non party basis and 232 members were elected to National Assembly of which four were Christians. This assembly was dissolved in 1988 and elections were held in 1988. In these elections four Christians were elected as members of National Assembly. General elections in the country were held in 1990, 1993 and 1997 and the number of Christian

representatives in the National Assembly remained four each time. In 1999, the elected government of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif was toppled and General Pervaiz Musharraf took control of the country. He introduced electoral reforms in the country and electoral system was again shifted from separate electorate to joint electorate. The minorities had been given the right to contest elections on general seats and also given the right to cast vote but the seats reserved for minorities were to be filled by the representatives nominated by the political parties. General elections were held in the country in 2002, 2008, 2013 and 2018 and the number of Christian members in the National Assembly remained four, two, three and four respectively.

The Christian MNA's from 1947-2018

Sr. No.	Period	Total Strength	Christian Members
1	1947-1954	69	No
2	1955-1958	72	01
3	1962-1964	156	No
4	1965-1969	156	No
5	1972-1977	150	06
6	March 1977- July 1977	216	Data not available
7	1985-1988	237	04
8	1988-1990	239	04
9	1990-1993	217	03
10	1993-1996	217	04
11	1997-1999	217	04
12	2002-2007	342	05
13	2008-2013	342	03
14	2013-2018	342	03
15	2018-2023	342	04

Table: 1

At present, the minorities have no right to elect their representatives to the seats reserved for minorities in the assemblies instead their representatives are nominated by the Muslim leadership of the political parties having a particular percentage of members in the assembly. Political participation

of Christians in the political system is very low since the creation of Pakistan. Several factors are responsible for it. Some of the important factors are discussed below.

Constitutional Discrimination

Most of the Christians are of the view that they have been discriminated constitutionally in Pakistan. In 1949, "Objectives Resolution" was passed without the consent of minorities. Furthermore, in the constitutions of 1956, 1962 and 1973 the non-Muslims have been discriminated on religious basis. In the constitution of 1973 Islam has been declared as state religion (article 2) while article 4 declares that president and prime minister should be a Muslim i.e. the non-Muslims have no right to rise to these positions in Pakistan. They say, "if we do not have the right to hold a particular public office, how can we take interest in the political process and political participation becomes meaningless for us. Furthermore, all the public office holders from provincial assemblies to National Assembly, from Senate to president have to take oath that he/she will strive for preservation of Islamic ideology which is the basis of the creation of Pakistan. Even the non-Muslim members have to take this oath. In this way the minorities have been discriminated constitutionally. They are of the view that if the state continues to discriminate the minorities on the basis of religion the political system would remain un-supportive to them. There cannot be active and full political participation on the part of the minorities until they have been equal chances in the political system to rise to important public offices like other segments of society.

Social Discrimination

Though the Christians have been living with the Muslims long before the partition but still there are some serious issues which create hurdles for them. Most of the Christians have been converted from low caste Hindus. They had been offered menial jobs in society even before the partition. So, they are discriminated on the basis of their jobs e.g. most of Christians have been given jobs of sweepers or the works which are rejected by the Muslims. Nazir S Bhatti, the chief editor of the Daily Pakistan Christian Post, writes that Christians are discriminated

in the society which is a big hurdle for them to participate actively in the political system. The Christians doing menial jobs are not discriminated by the Muslims but by the well off Christian also. No one likes to intermix or dine with them.

The constitution grants all their fundamental rights but this social discrimination against them creates a sense of deprivation in Christian community. They are of the view that this treatment shows that as if they are second class citizens of the state. They have been deprived of their due status in society. They are discriminated everywhere in society. They are treated as if they are untouchables. A retired Christian Army officer, Mr. Chaudhry, recalls that once some Muslim labourers were brought for structural renovation of his house. When they were offered meal during their work, they refused to eat anything from a Christian's house (Khalid, 2013).

In his column published in the daily "The Dawn", Marylou Andrew, a Christian, recalls his past memories, "I was lucky one to be educated and given all the opportunities as citizen of Pakistan. I completed his education without any kind of discrimination or maltreatment in the educational institutions but still there were some issues which were cause of anxiousness in me i.e. my mother worked in a bank and the entire building was swept by the Muslim sweepers but they were not ready to clean the bathrooms. So, this dirty was left for the Christian workers (The Dawn).

This type of behavior creates sense of disappointment in them which can be seen in such statements as Iqbal Maseh, 76 years old Christian of Lahore made in an interview "In the past, I was a sweeper, at present my sons are sweepers, and in future my grandsons will be doing the same job. Nothing changes for us in this system. We will live and die" (newslines, 2011). In these circumstances it is not possible for the Christians to think about the active political participation where Christians are not allowed by the Muslims to stand in the queue with them to cast vote.

Religious Discrimination

The Christians are victim of religious discrimination not only in society but in the law of the country also. They have been granted all the fundamental rights as laid down in Islam. They are not appointed on the key posts. In Islam the non-Muslims have no role in defense. They have to pay “Jazia” (a special tax) for their protection in the Islamic state.

Dr. Farzand Masih, a renowned professor at Forman Christian College, University explains that at one place minorities have been granted all the fundamental rights of citizenship and on the other hand a specific group has been denied of its political rights by restricting them not to rise to the position of head of state. By doing this the state has set a bad example in the community of nations. On these bases, minorities consider themselves as second class citizens of the state. If they are not allowed to rise to high positions in the political system, it would not be possible for them to take interest in political participation.

The Blasphemy Laws

Pakistan was established on the name of Islam. Islam has been declared as official religion of the state in the constitution of Pakistan. The people are very sensitive about their religion and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Keeping in view the religious sentiments of the people an effort has been made that on one in country dare insult religion or religious personalities of the people living in Pakistan. In this regard blasphemy laws have been introduced in the country. The religious minorities are of the view that sometime these laws are wrongly used against them. These laws are a source of continuous fear for them. According to Gabriel (2007) false accusation of minorities is very common in society in these circumstances; the minorities cannot take active part in the nation building programs. In the same way, level of political participation also remains very low.

Census Problems

Census problem is another factor responsible for low political participation on the part of the Christians. They claim that in the national census the strength of their population is shown less than the actual one. According to Ucan news the Christians protested at National Press Club and launched a white paper “Confusing Demographics of Minorities” on June 07, 2022 because this act has direct affect on their political rights as well as on their socio-economic status. In the National Assembly of Pakistan 10 seats for minorities were reserved during Zia period. Almost forty years have been passed and no increase on the number of seats has been made. If actual strength of Christians is shown in the census then government will have to increase the number of seats reserved for them in the National Assembly. The Christian leadership of the view that it is deliberately done restrict the minority representation.

Poverty

Poverty is another big problem for the Christians. The socio-economic model of political participation suggests that people with more resources and qualification participate actively in the political system. The economic survey of Pakistan 2020-21 shows 22% of people have been living below the poverty line in Pakistan (The Express Tribune). The condition of minorities is more vulnerable. Most of the Christian families are forced to live miserable life poverty. According to Minister for National Harmony, the Christians are the poorest people of society (Agence France-Presse, 30 Aug., 2012). In these circumstances the community is facing great hardships in the daily routine life (www.christiansinpakistan.com).

Illiteracy

In a democratic system of government education of the masses is very essential because illiterate people cannot understand the complexities of the political system. Education is the base of political training. Unfortunately, the literacy rate of Pakistan is 60% (Economic Survey of Pakistan 2020-21). The literacy rate in minorities is far less than that because majority of them are

not well off economically and they do not have even basic necessities of life. The Christian colonies are less developed and lack educational facilities. No doubt, the Christians are very active in the field of education but after nationalization of their institutions the number of Christian students had decreased and when these institutions were given back to the Christians the educational expenditures were raised many fold. At present, the fee of most of the reputed Christian institutions is so high that it is not possible for poor Christian families to send their children to their own institutions. In these circumstances, they are forced to send their children to other government schools. As a result, so many children do not get the chance to get education and they are sent to some factories or other workplaces by their parents to earn livelihood to support their families financially. In this way, they remain illiterate. An illiterate person does not have awareness of his rights and duties in political system. He is unable to understand the complexities of system. Without proper political training and awareness he is unable to participate actively in the political system.

Culture of Intolerance

Difference of opinion is the beauty of democracy. The people belonging to different groups or parties may have different opinion but they should tolerate and respect each others' views and feelings. But, during the past few decades culture of intolerance has developed even in modern and developed democratic political systems. The people have become intolerant. Even in America President Trump had shown intolerance towards the Muslims. So many times, he had made statements against the Muslims (Human Rights Watch Report 2018).

In India BJP government has been blamed of atrocities against minorities especially the Muslims. Their houses have been demolished by the government (Human Rights Watch). The Muslim girls are not allowed to wear Hijab (veil) (The News) on the eve of Eid- Ul- Azha, the Muslims are not allowed to perform their religious duty of slaughtering a cow. Many Christian

families had been attacked by fundamentalist Hindu political workers of BJP (Aljazeera).

In Pakistan, the Christians have been living with the Muslims in harmony over a long period of history. A survey conducted on religious minorities by a London based NGO, "The British Pakistani Christian Association" (BPCA) reveals that the Christians in Pakistan have cordial relations with other religious minorities as well as with the liberal Muslim families (www.justice.gov). But like other countries of the world there are some groups who are intolerant towards minorities.

The Muslims in Pakistan are very sensitive about their religion. They do not even care to sacrifice their lives if religion demands so. In the same way some incidents have happened where non-Muslims have been killed over religious issue. There are reports of attacks on Christian Colonies by the Muslims e.g. Joseph Colony was attacked by the Muslim mob in 2013 (The Nation). The Christian leadership is of the view that this intolerance is a big hurdle in the way of Christians' political participation.

Electoral System

In the united India, the Muslims lived as minority under Hindu majority. The Hindu wanted to establish their government in the sub-continent on the basis of their majority. They did not want to give any share to the minorities in India. The Muslims were worried about their future in the sub-continent so they demanded separate electorate to safeguard their rights and for Muslim representation in the assemblies. They thought under the Hindu domination it was the only way to safeguard their rights.

After the partition of India, the same electoral process was suggested for the minorities living in Pakistan. But surprisingly, the minorities opposed this type of electoral system. They demanded joint electoral system so that they could participate actively in the political process of Pakistan. In this way they would get a chance to remain in the mainstream of political system. In the first constitution implemented in 1956, the electoral system was left to be decided by the provinces. In the constitution of 1962 and 1973, the system of joint electorate was

proposed for the country but during 1980's separate electoral system was introduced in the country through an amendment in the 1973 constitution of Pakistan.

Some minority groups were not satisfied with separate electoral system (Church World Service, 2012) and system was once again changed from separate to joint electorate in 2002 (The Dawn). At present there is joint electoral system in the country and seats have reserved for the non-Muslims in the National Assembly as well as in the provincial assemblies. The minorities have the right to contest elections on the general seats but they cannot contest elections on the reserved seats. Nominations are made by the political parties on these seats. So the minority representatives in the assemblies are not elected but selected by the Muslim leadership of political parties.

The minorities have reservations about this type of electoral system. They are of the view that they have no right to contest election for the seats reserved for them nor they can vote for the people who are going to represent their community in the assemblies. Their representatives in the assembly are nominated by winning political parties and most of the time the minorities do not even know the person who is nominated to represent their community in the assembly. The nominated members do not bother to go to their community and inquire about the issues faced by them instead most of the time they are busy to please the party leadership so that they may be nominated once again in the next assembly. In this process the community is completely ignored. This electoral system does not bear any fruit for the minorities. This situation is not acceptable to them where they do not have right to choose their representatives. So, they do not show any interest in the political process. This present electoral system is the biggest hurdle in the way of political participation of minorities.

Malpractices and Corruption

Malpractices of our political system are also a cause of low participation on the part of minorities. During elections the political and religious clergy of Christians take advantage of poverty and illiteracy of the Christian community. They are

offered money and other political bribes to support a particular candidate or political party in the election. Most of them are unaware of the significance of their votes and they fall prey to these political elements. The political leadership or religious clergy take political bribes and assure political support of their community. The community cast their votes as per directed by the leadership for little money. As a result, they purchase deprivations in the political system. The community is exploited by their own leadership sometimes and they lose their interest in the political process.

Conclusion

The Christian had been very active in politics before the partition of India but after the establishment of Pakistan their participation in the political process is very low. At the time of establishment of Pakistan they played a very vital role in the partition. They completely supported Quaid's stance and partition of Punjab was made as a result of their votes in favor of Partition. Had they not supported Quaid-i-Azam the map of Pakistan would have been different. In the constitution of 1973 they have been granted all the fundamental rights but they have no right to become president or prime minister of the country. The electoral system is also a basis reason of their lack of interest in the political participation. In the assemblies seats have reserved for the minorities but they have not right to contest elections on these seats. These seats are filled through nominated persons of majority parities. Such type of electoral system restricts their political participation. Poverty, illiteracy and social discrimination are some other factors responsible for their deprivations in the system.

Recommendations

- The constitution of Pakistan grants all the fundamental rights to the minorities the government should take step to safeguard their rights.
- Proper arrangements should be made in society so that the poor minorities may able to earn their livelihood in a reason manner.

- The society a whole should take steps to lessen the social discrimination against minorities. In this regard media and educational institutions can play a vital role.
- Such a mechanism should be developed that no one dare misuse the blasphemy laws.
- If Christians have apprehensions about census a joint committee can be set up by the government consisting of government official and Christian members to find solution of this issue.
- Such electoral system for minorities should be adopted which is acceptable to the minorities.
- The minorities should be given chance to elected their representative to the assemblies. The main stream political parties should have minority wings and these parties should give their party tickets to leading minority leaders to contest elections from their platform. If major parties support the minority leaders the people will definitely vote for them. In this way, their grievance can be reduced.
- The Christian leadership should take responsibility of political training of their community. The politically trained people having awareness of importance of their votes will not fall prey to mal practices of the vested interest political personalities.

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7. 13 Article 2(2), UN Declaration on Minorities (1992): "Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in ... public life"; Article 15, Framework Convention on National Minorities: "Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them". See, also, the CSCE Copenhagen Document which provides that "participating States will respect the right of persons belonging to national minorities to effective participation in public affairs, including participation in the affairs relating to the protection and promotion of the identity of such minorities" (1990) 29 ILM 1318, para. 35.
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