

Vol.10 Autumn 2018 (July-Dec) No.2

A PIPS Research Journal  
**CONFLICT  
& PEACE  
STUDIES**

**Freedom  
of Faith  
in Pakistan:**

Contextualizing  
Programmatic & Policy  
Orientation



Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)

**PIPS Research Journal**

# **Conflict and Peace Studies**

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**Vol. 10**

**Autumn 2018 (July – Dec)**

**Number 2**

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**PAK INSTITUTE FOR PEACE STUDIES (PIPS)**

*A PIPS Research Journal*

## **Conflict and Peace Studies**

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**ISSN 2072-0408**

Price: Rs 200.00

Date of publication: **July, 2018**  
The views expressed are the authors'  
own and do not necessarily reflect  
any positions held by the institute.

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## Editor's Note

This is 27th issue, second biannual of the year 2018, of the 10th volume of Conflict and Peace Studies – the first of the year came out in January with an exclusive focus on Pakistan's internal security in 2017. A flagship publication of Pak Institute for Peace Studies, the journal started to publish in the last quarter of 2008, first as quarterly and then as biannual from 2012 onward.

As many as 26 issues of the PIPS research journal have been published so far with their primary focus on conflict, counter-violent extremism (CVE), internal and regional security, militancy and militants' media, religious extremism, radicalization & de-radicalization, terrorism & counterterrorism, human rights and regional strategic issues. The journal has been well received by academic and research quarters. Besides adding to existing knowledge, it has been contributing to increase understanding among policymakers, and regional and multilateral institutions about situation-specific needs, early warnings, and effective options or strategies to prevent/de-escalate conflict and risk of violence in Pakistan and the region.

From the last two years, PIPS has been trying to release special issues of Conflict and Peace Studies structured around peculiar themes relevant to Pakistan's internal and regional policy discourse in terms of achieving peace and mitigating conflict. Two of these special issues were published in 2016 and 2017, respectively, on Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, and implementation on the country's National Action Plan; the most recent special issue however came out in January this year, as cited earlier, with a focus on Pakistan's internal security and related policy discourse. All these and other similar issues built upon extensive empirical and policy research work conducted by credible researchers, scholars and practitioners.

An extremely positive feedback on these special issues made the way for another such publication that is in your hands and which exclusively delves into the issue of freedom of faith in Pakistan. This special publication is also related to PIPS' overall thematic focus on social harmony, CVE, and concomitant phenomena. Building upon an extensive empirical insight gathered from the field, this special issue of Conflict and Peace Studies provides many policy-specific suggestions as well as practicable, innovative programmatic measures which can be taken up both by the state departments and civil society organizations.

The credit for this issue of the journal, on Freedom of Faith in Pakistan, goes to the entire PIPS team, especially to Safdar Sial and Muhammad Ismail Khan for compiling notes, to Nawaf Khan for engaging in field work, to Raisa Mansur for conducting desk research. This issue has been made possible with the generous support of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Pakistan.

**Muhammad Amir Rana**

## Executive Summary

Faith-based discrimination seems so pervasive that even attempts to seek solution are fraught with polarizing society further. Organizations advocating for rights have to scale down their activities, in part because of restrictive governmental policies. New ways can be explored too, mostly about providing tangible services to religious minorities, such as uplifting them economically; documenting their identity and marriages, as per their faiths; reforming criminal justice system; and engaging them in political parties. These will also help mainstream them in true sense, enabling them to freely practice their faiths.

Grievances of religious minorities in Pakistan have many common threads, ranging from societal discrimination to economic exclusion. There are a few specific variances too: Christians in particular point to the misuse of blasphemy laws against them, whereas Hindus in Sindh decry their girls are being forcefully converted into marriage.

At the societal level, while militant violence is condemned, the thinking behind it, especially against people of different faiths, is rarely taken upfront. This creates an impression as if faith-based discrimination seems a pervasive phenomenon, not restricted to any one class, ethnicity, educational background, or group. So much so that even the solutions to such issues are deemed as controversial in nature.

Non-government organizations working on “rights” or “peace” issues are rather viewed suspiciously. Government’s policies in the past few years forced them to scale down their activities. Coincidentally, their space has mostly shrunk in FATA, parts of KP, Balochistan, and in some cases, interior Sindh and southern Punjab – areas deemed sensitive in the eyes of the government, but areas that require priority socio-economic attention. Excluding them from any programmatic or policy work will only widen the differences.

Yet, it is in such environment that the need for reaching out to religious minorities is direly felt. A closer look of their issues shows that much of their vulnerability owes to their low socio-economic status. Working on those fronts can bring about some positive changes.

For one, investing in reforming criminal justice system will greatly contribute in producing amenable environment. Scholars who defend the controversial laws that minorities decry, say that the problem arises from the misuse of the law, that misuse should be stopped; they call for following the mechanism

## *Freedom of faith in Pakistan*

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already mentioned in the law. Very little research has been done on the justice system aspect.

Faith-based vulnerabilities also interplay with other identities. In the case of Hindus in Sindh, the newly-converts are mostly young girls even below 18. Conversion of boys has been unheard of. Programmatic interventions should consider into account this evident gender dynamics.

Similarly, poverty too is an aggravating factor. Economic mainstreaming is great antidote to their woes. While non-Muslims are mandated to have 5% quota in government jobs, that is rarely filled completely.

Above all, many religious minorities especially those who are poor, such as scheduled-caste Hindus in Sindh and poor Christian labourers in Punjab, at times even lack proper documents that establish their basic identity or marriage status.

Sufficient documentation will help in checking loopholes leading to their exploitation. While a Hindu-specific personal law was passed in 2016, its rules are yet to be charted.

In addition to NGOs, religious scholars can be engaged too, who are able to remove misperceptions about each other. The new government should not shy from delegating authorities at local level, where violations occur and can be stopped.

These are some of the broad findings of this report that aims to explore programmatic and policy responses of working on freedom of faith and belief in Pakistan. The report is based on interviews with religious scholars, NGO workers, academics, lawyers, religious minorities' representative in the four provincial capitals of Pakistan.



## KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ Faith-based violence/persecution originating from religious extremism in the country is a pervasive phenomenon, which is not restricted to any one class or group; hence, countering it requires a holistic approach, treating the concept as cutting across all activities.
- ❖ Pakistan is a diverse country with multitude of faiths and belief systems in the country. More than 95% of Pakistanis are Muslims. There is a strong sense of association of Pakistan and Islam, in public debates. There are however various denominations of Muslims.
- ❖ Those who aggrieve of persecution include Shias, especially from Hazara ethnic group, Christians, Hindus, and Ahmedis.

### *Exclusionary practices*

- ❖ Non-Muslims contend they are under-reported, which provides the basis of their socio-political exclusion.
- ❖ Religious-wises count of the 2017 census has not been publicized. Speculations are rife about inconsistencies or wrong data, because of wrong entries. These emanate as much from wrong assumptions or categories in the census forms, as from the insensitivity on part of census or NADRA's enumerators. Respondents are not comfortable sharing personal details.
- ❖ Non-Muslims are tagged with external elements. While Hindus are viewed as part of India, Christians are labeled as working for western countries. Instilling the concepts of equal citizenship is direly needed.
- ❖ Christians, who form 2.1 million, as per 1998 census, mostly reside in Punjab. Christians in particular point to the misuse of blasphemy laws against them. However, Hindus have also been charged under this law as well as Muslims by rival sects. Several Muslim scholars argue that because of some common belief system of Christians and Muslims, it is the differences which, when debated, can result into offending one or other, resulting into allegation.
- ❖ Given the polarizing debates surrounding the law, the procedural aspect of the law can be looked at. Several Muslim scholars argue that because the problem arises from the misuse of the law, that misuse should be stopped; they call for following the mechanism already mentioned in the law.

- ❖ Investing in reforming criminal justice system will greatly contribute in producing amenable environment. Very little research has been done on the justice system aspect.
- ❖ At the same time, inter-faith debates, involving scholars of different faiths, and held delicately, have proven to remove misperceptions about each other.
- ❖ Majority of Pakistan's 2.4 million Hindus reside in Sindh province. They decry their girls are being forcefully converted into marriage. So does Kailash community in KP's Chitral region. Those countering the charge say conversion is willful.
- ❖ The newly-converts are mostly young girls even below 18. Conversion of boys has been unheard of. Programmatic interventions should consider into account this evident gender dynamics.
- ❖ Many religious minorities especially those who are poor, such as scheduled-caste Hindus in Sindh and poor Christian labourers in Punjab, at times even lack proper documents that establish their basic identity or marriage status.
- ❖ Sufficient documentation will help in checking loopholes leading to their exploitation. Special attention should be paid to it, as this process is the least controversial of all. While a Hindu-specific personal law was passed in 2016, its rules are yet to be charted. That should be expedited.
- ❖ As a community, non-Muslims are economically on the lower rung of the society. Their economic participation too is at times limited to stereotypical jobs.
- ❖ Economic alienation may increase, as richer non-Muslims have been migrating abroad and younger ones unwilling to work the stereotypical jobs of janitors.
- ❖ Economic mainstreaming is great antidote to their woes. While non-Muslims are mandated to have 5% quota in government jobs, that is rarely filled completely. Civil society should get data on that, and train others on how to get that data, using the Right to Information Act.
- ❖ Minority communities, Muslims as well as non-Muslims, everywhere fear for their lives and complain their sites have been vandalized or converted into public places. But to chart a proper response, it is important to assess what which indicator or metric of security is under consideration? Some non-Muslims feel comfortable from the communities even in conflict-affected areas like KP. Government's response also matters too.

## *Key Findings*

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- ❖ Communities can also be engaged, especially in Sindh and Balochistan, where forced conversions are sourced to elite or outsiders, and not locals.
- ❖ Seats allocated to non-Muslims are not proportionate to their population or diversity within. The minority wings of political parties – if any – are dysfunctional. Non-Muslims should be made part of the mainstream decision-making of parties.

## *Players and policies*

- ❖ For all the differences about the extent to which constitution allows religious minorities to practice their faith freely, constitution is endorsed as the starting point of any debate or activity of working on freedom of belief in Pakistan. While Muslim scholars often refer to the constitution, non-Muslims refer to several international treaties Pakistan has signed. It reiterates the message of properly implementing the laws.
- ❖ Constitutional rights of minorities shall be disseminated to different educational establishments including madrassahs, and civil society organizations develop reading materials accordingly.
- ❖ NGOs are in the lead of work on freedom of faith, interfaith harmony, among others. Lately, however, their own space to undertake freedom of faith/belief activities have shrunk over, mostly on security grounds after the change in government in 2008, especially for those working in in FATA, parts of KP, Balochistan, and in some cases, interior Sindh and southern Punjab. All these areas are sensitive in the eyes of the government for security reasons; yet all these areas have worst socio-development indicators. Investing in one part as opposed to others will increase sense of alienation.
- ❖ Violation, one said, happens at the local level or lower level, calling for investment at those levels, not merely the top ones. Punjab province, for instance, has district peace committees, which include religious clerics to decide about issues of peace and conflict.
- ❖ Pakistan is signatory of several international conventions on human rights including freedom of faith and belief. Pakistan's obligation to these treaties should be made part of curriculum in public officers' academies, and trainings be imparted to journalists on these topics.
- ❖ Engagement of scholars have been successful where the results were more quantitatively defined, such as in the case of anti-polio or anti-dengue. Specifics can be sought in case of inter-faith harmony initiatives too.

- ❖ Attempts to reform curriculum fail partly because they do not take into consideration the opinion of non-Muslims and women in the first place. New boards should consult them directly.
- ❖ Behavioural changing exercises can be undertaken with different age groups. Different age groups have different requirements. Children should be taught about moral education; teenagers, on exploring their creative self; college and university students, on engaging with people other than them; adults, on grappling with knowledge about interfaith harmony; and families, on providing enabling environments.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The right to practice one's faith or live with one's belief system publically has been shrinking in Pakistan. For one, while the faith-based violence persists in the country, the fear of persecution also remains an unceasing concern among religious minorities. This poses very serious threat to peaceful co-existence, social harmony and tolerance of diversity of opinion in Pakistani society.

Meanwhile, faith-based violence and incitement of hatred are not confined to non-Muslims alone; minority Muslim sects, mainly Shias including Hazaras in Balochistan, have been the most frequent targets of violence on account of their beliefs.

While an increasing trend of use of violence and persecution undermines the constitutionally granted freedom of religion and belief, it also indicates a lack of mutual trust and interaction/dialogue among faith communities. The fact is manifested in sporadic incidents of communal violence, mainly in terms of mob attacks on members of minority communities, and their worship places and properties.

Several nongovernmental organizations, including national and international, as well as some state departments are engaged in diverse measures aimed at improving interfaith harmony and promoting freedom of faith and minority rights. However, there is little on-the-ground success that raises questions on the context, evidence base, efficacy and relevance of the programmatic interventions being implemented for that purpose. That substantiates a thorough inspection of the past and current state responses and civil society programs to see to what extent they are realistic, integrated and effective – in terms of improving religious freedom and harmony – and what kind of interference and impact their conceptual foundations and outcomes offer. That would certainly help improve effectiveness of local and international partners and strengthen the evidence-base for such programs.

In this backdrop, this research study was designed to serve the main task of improving understanding and capacity of stakeholders on programming on religious freedom and harmony and enhancing intra- and inter-faith dialogue. Summed up, the study assesses the existing programmatic work on freedom of faith and belief in Pakistan, so as to improve them, as well as identifies new ones for further work. It also provides, on the basis of empirical evidence collected from the field, policy recommendations for government and donors/stakeholders.

### ***Methodology***

The report is largely a narration and analysis of empirical, or firsthand, data collected from the field in form of semi structured comprehensive interviews and closed focus groups discussions (FGDs).

As many as 41 individual interviews were conducted in the 4 provincial capitals and federal capital Islamabad. (*Please see Annex-1*) Similarly, 5 focused group discussions (FGDs) or group interviews were also conducted; one each with around 6-8 stakeholders in 4 provincial capitals and Islamabad.

The resource persons who participated in individual and group interviews were mostly those who are involved in programming on freedom of religion and belief and interfaith harmony in Pakistan. They also included prominent religious leaders and scholars representing all faiths and Islamic sects, political and community leaders representing different religious communities in respective regions, civil society organizations mainly those working on interfaith and intra-faith harmony, minority rights, etc. Participants also included both male and female from different age groups.

## 2. THE CONCEPT

Many interviewees understood differently what it meant by freedom of faith/belief or faith-based harmony. On a large level, freedom of faith or belief is taken as the space that enables one to practice one's faith freely; given that Pakistan is a Muslim majority state, the term automatically leads many to think of the rights of non-Muslims to practice their faiths. Similarly, while intra- or inter-faith harmony are meant as bringing different faith groups together, in Pakistan's case, it is usually alluded to interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims for inter-faith harmony, and between adherents of Shia and Sunni sects of Islam in case of intra-faith harmony.

Many organizations and individuals have been working on these and related topics with most of them focusing on fostering peace and de-escalating conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims.

But not all approach the subjects directly. Some argue that directly approaching the subject, especially of freedom of faith and belief, can bring in public the details of one's faiths, and thus draw unwanted attention and at times harm.

Many therefore try to expand the concept, working on freedom of faith under the rubric of other terms like minority rights, religious tolerance, pluralistic co-existence, diversity and harmony, among others. Some programs on preventing or countering violent extremism also focused protecting the minorities from religious extremism and the violence and persecution it entails. One respondent even noted that freedom of faith should ideally include all those thematic initiatives.

Many interviewees even interchangeably used different terms, such as freedom of faith was used for inter- or intra-faith harmony – which was meant as developing interaction among people of different faiths or sects, to overcome demarcation. This demarcation is drawn against minorities mostly. That is why erasing that separation, by any type of inter-faith effort, ends up protecting the right of minority communities to practice their faiths freely.

Organizations often design programs around the terms cited earlier or other similar terms, to improve harmony and tolerance among different communities. It is quite a delicate task and if not done properly and carefully, organizations could end up exacerbating existing divides through their work. They are advised to be sensitive to the conflict, or be conflict sensitive in their programs, so that deeper tensions do not come in the open. Many international peace-building organizations have adopted this approach. To others, talking about rights of minorities should not be seen in separation to

any program. One organization said to them, the issue of freedom of faith/belief is a cross-cutting theme much like gender has been for many organizations working for women rights.

And there are strong reasons why these concepts are getting central attention in Pakistan: faith-based violence/persecution originating from religious extremism in the country is a pervasive phenomenon, which is not restricted to any one class or group; hence, countering it requires a holistic approach, something, which in programmatic design, is made possible by treating the concept as cutting across all areas and activities.

*Clearly, local organizations need to absorb these concepts and apply in their work, whether or not their work directly touches upon freedom of faith. They can be sensitized in this regard.*

Strangely, some interview respondents took freedom of faith as opposite to forced conversion. To them, it was about following one's own faith without being asked to change it. At the same time, it is not clear whether those who thought so were comfortable with different non-Muslim groups practicing their faiths publically. This distinction is important to note as far as limitations on such work are concerned. People might be comfortable with the private practice of certain faith groups, but not with their public ones. They will however object to forcibly changing anyone's faith.

### ***2.1 Religion and other vulnerabilities***

The vulnerability of a particular minority segment is often closely intertwined with other vulnerabilities.

One, some violations of rights are specific to women largely, such as in the shape of forced conversion of Hindu girls in Sindh. Two, economic status also comes into play; the girls converted are usually from scheduled caste. In Punjab, one said, the stereotyping of a Christian is because of his/her lowly caste. (These are discussed ahead.)

*Thus, designing programs on faith rights should also seek guidance from programming guidelines on gender and class.*



## 3. BASELINE OF FREEDOM OF FAITH PROGRAMMING

This section mainly discusses the anatomy of minority faith groups in Pakistan and their issues or themes around which the freedom-of-faith programs are or should be structured.

It has now almost become a cliché that Pakistan is a diverse country with multitude of faiths and belief systems. While followers of different faiths have largely lived peacefully with each other, not all of them are comfortable with the shrinking space for freely practicing their faith especially in public.

### 3.1 Snapshot of different faith groups

#### ❖ *Muslims*

There is a strong sense of association of Pakistan and Islam. More than 95% of Pakistanis are Muslims. The country itself came into existence on the idea of having a Muslim-majority country. Islam remains the state's religion, and there is more than one constitutional mechanism to ensure that laws passed are in conjunction with Islam – notwithstanding the debates on their precise application.

Successive governments have therefore brought laws aimed at Islamizing them further. Pointedly, these moves were often taken to dispel pressure by Islamic parties, rather than to evolve a particular model. As a byproduct, space for non-Muslims and even Muslim minorities was reduced. Adherents of enforcing their understanding of Islamic injunctions have no qualms in according secondary status to religious minorities.

But not all are comfortable with these moves. Even religious scholars have questioned the motive of such laws. Non-Muslim legislators have questioned the motives of legislating along what are deemed as Islamic lines. A broader debate is whether Pakistan was supposed to be populated by Muslims or led by Islamic injunctions.

One problem emanating from having uniform religious laws is that different Muslim denominations find their voice stifled. Majority of Pakistanis are Sunni, but there is sizeable presence of Shias, who even form majority in certain areas such as the northern Gilgit-Baltistan or erstwhile FATA's Kurram Agency; now a district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Within Sunnis, there are Barelvīs, who form an overall majority in the country. The other Sunni sub-sects are Deobandi and Ahle Hadith, who are sparsely populated in different parts of the country.

Surely enough, many Pakistanis did not self-identity their sects. Examples are given how Pakistan's first cabinet had a rich combination of individuals from all faiths who least cared of the faith of their co-religionists. Even the estimates of different faiths are made purely on conjecture – Sunnis are 85% of the total, and Shias 15%, for instance; and that Pakistan is Bareilvi-majority because most of those who adhere to this school of thought are in Sindh and Punjab, the country's most populous regions.

Lately, however, sectarian affiliations do get mention, at least for those who are unable to practice their faith freely or for those who do not want others to practice so. This is reflected in the rise of overtly-sectarian ideologies of mosques and madrassahs as well as political groups and militant outfits, and lately media outlets. All these institutions play central role in creating an environment where one can or cannot practice one's faith freely.

❖ *Hazara Shias*

One Muslim group that deserves special attention is of Hazara Shias, who were traditionally counted at 800,000. In Balochistan, one interview respondent claimed Hazara Shias to be 20% to 25% of Quetta's population, a figure that has for sure declined over the years.

To Hazaras, the injustices they face run parallel with the injustices meted out to them by the criminal justice system. It was because of the manipulation in this system that killings against Hazaras were easily orchestrated. A community worker recalled that the killings of Hazaras started as early as 1999 when "for the first time", five people were killed and five injured in an attack, and to add salt to injury, when they went to the police station to register FIR, they found that a counter FIR had already being registered against them.

So blatantly have Hazaras been killed in recent times, that they think a grand conspiracy has been hatched against them. They wonder how criminals get scot-free in densely populated areas, and even if they are apprehended, they get released from the jails. Attempts are also made at snatching their land. Such is their narrative. One said:

"Nowadays the whole Muslim Umma is protesting for the Muslims of Rohingya, what about us who have faced even more oppression? Other than atom bomb, every weapon and arms have been used against us."

## Baseline of Freedom of Faith Programming

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Lately, Hazaras have been attempting to escape; they are among the notable escapees from Pakistan. As per one estimate, around 50 percent Hazaras have left the country. "Today, 4 lakh have migrated, and other 4 lakh are mentally disabled," one Hazara respondent lamented. In recent times, many countries have shut their doors to those attempting to flee.

They wondered that while the courts have been taking suo motu cases on a range of issues, their complaints are ignored. *They called for establishing judicial commission to ascertain the causes of their plight.*

### ❖ *Hindus*

Hindus in Pakistan account for 2.4 million, as per 1998 census - a figure contested by a Hindu representative. According to Pakistan Hindu Council, the primary body for Hindus, the number of Hindus living in Pakistan is more than 8 million - or 4 percent of Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

Intriguingly, at the time of Independence, Hindus were around 25% of the population, and now they are the largest group in the total minority figure of over 4%, as per census figures. The decline in the figure of Hindus in Pakistan is often cited as an indicator of flight of minorities from Pakistan.

Much of this decline, however, occurred automatically with the separation of East Pakistan, where a sizeable number of Hindus lived. That incident had its impact on Hindus in Pakistan. Besides these, alleged abduction of young Hindu girls and later their forceful conversion as well as migration of Hindu families to India are also among the reasons of their decline.

As the numerical strength of Hindus went down, their activity level decreased too, even among the voices advocating minority rights. In the early years of Pakistan, Hindu legislators were quite vocal, with leading individuals occupying top positions and even putting check on the state of its abrupt embrace of religiosity.

Because Pakistan tended most blame on India, a Hindu-majority state, it sought to look at Hindus with equal suspicion. Hindus complain they are being unnecessarily equated with India, even though they are sons of the soil. This is witnessed in parts of Sindh, like Thar, where anti-India groups such as Jamaatud Dawa are trying to gain ground. One Hindu activist strongly called for providing them space in the country's armed forces. Majority of Hindus reside in Sindh province. One estimate puts their numbers at 95 percent of

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<sup>1</sup> Pakistan Hindu Council, "Hindu population [in Pakistan]," [http://pakistanhinducouncil.org.pk/?page\\_id=1592](http://pakistanhinducouncil.org.pk/?page_id=1592)

Hindus living in Pakistan. There are Hindus in big urban areas such as Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Peshawar, too.

Within Pakistani Hindus, one evident categorization is of upper caste and lower caste Hindus. In recent times, as cited earlier, many Hindus have also migrated to India.<sup>2</sup> In 2010, Sindh government also formed a fact-finding mission to this end.

Majority of those in Pakistan are of lower-caste Hindus. The lower-caste Hindus, often called as scheduled caste, are vulnerable by the upper ones too. As discussed above, the ambiguity surrounding their total count should be removed. Majority of the scheduled caste Hindus are settled in Tharparkar and Umerkot districts of Sindh, and some in Bahawalpur and Rahim Yar Khan in southern Punjab.

One issue they face is in the shape of forced conversion in interior Sindh. Interestingly, most of those converted are poor girls. According to Asia Human Rights Watch report, in every month 20-25 Hindu girls are abducted, wed to Muslims and made to adopt Islam in Sindh. Belonging to the poor and religious minority segment of the society, these people have never received proper legal remedies. In most of the cases, local *waderas* or landlords are involved in converting young girls.

One reason that plays in their vulnerability is the lack of their documentation. This comes in multiple forms:

One, many of those who do not have national identity cards are scheduled-caste Hindus especially women.<sup>3</sup> These women are unable to prove their identity; furthermore, they cannot furnish documentary evidence of their marriage certificates. Thus, legally, they do not have any religious identity, this way. This made them vulnerable to conversion too.

Secondly, in any case, for quite a long period of time, Hindus in Pakistan lacked personal marriage law; a Hindu couple is undocumented. They cannot prove in any court of law that they are married couple as per Hindu traditions. This too made Hindu women vulnerable to be abducted and married off. Although a law was passed to this end some years ago, its rules of business are yet to be charted out.

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<sup>2</sup> "Persecution forces 60 Hindu families to migrate to India," *Express Tribune*, August 9, 2012, <<https://tribune.com.pk/story/419691/persecution-forces-60-hindu-families-to-migrate-to-india>>

<sup>3</sup> Zahid Gishkori, "Legislation stressed for scheduled caste Hindus," *Express Tribune*, May 19, 2010, <<https://tribune.com.pk/story/14322/legislation-stressed-for-scheduled-caste-hindus>>

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### ❖ *Christians*

The total number of Christians in Pakistan, as per 1998 census, stood at 2.1 million. But as discussed above, the figures are contested by Christian leaders saying that the figure stood at 2.6 million.

Christians in Pakistan have been actively involved in nation-building projects, right from the day of Independence. Presently, many pro-minority movements in Pakistan are led by Christians. Because of these, compared to other faith representatives, Christian leaders are more open in taking pride to have contributed in the making of Pakistan. Christians for instance repeatedly say that it was because of the Christian vote in the run-up to the Partition that Punjab was made part of Pakistan. They call for making this contribution part of history books.

Yet they too cannot escape the tendency of being clubbed with other countries, in this case, with the West. Arguably, much of this may have happened in recent times, as the level of animosity towards Western countries was not at par with ill-will against India.

Majority Christians reside in Punjab province, especially in big towns like Lahore, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi. There are even Christian colonies in such towns.

Many are in the lower rung of society, undertaking menial jobs. Some even argue that the roots of hatred against Christians in Pakistan, especially Punjab, are more of a class- or caste-phenomenon than religious.

Christians have also been leaving Pakistan, reportedly those from upper classes. The ones who remain become further vulnerable as there is no one to speak on their behalf.

One issue they face is in the shape of being accused of blaspheming Islam. One argued it is because Christianity shares some tenets with Islam, and therefore some people from the two sides tend to resort into debates.

Most of those accused of blasphemy are from poor background. They are unable to defend themselves once they are charged of it.

As with Hindus, they too do not have proper personal law, thereby denying them any proper record of marriage, etc.

There are some reports even of aggression by Christians especially the younger generation who are fed up with the treatment meted to them. Young Christians also question why they should take menial jobs their elders used to do.

❖ *Others*

- As per some reports, the total number of Parsis or Zoroastrians is not more than 5,000. Interestingly, even this small-sized community has produced many notable names. Many have however been migrating.
- A Bahai complained there was no mention of his faith in the religious column, when he was applying for CNIC, or national identity card. The column was added after he informed, and NADRA officials verified it.
- The total number of Ahmedis in Pakistan is less than 1 million. As with other minorities, Ahmedis say they are under-reported because they are not documented properly in the first place. It is too dangerous for an Ahmedi to openly declare his faith.

They are clearly among the most persecuted community. Ever since Pakistan's creation, political agitations demanding ostracism of Ahmedis have cropped up. One of the first movements in early 1950s was directed against them; while government responded with heavy hand, it accepted the demand made again in 1970s. In 1974, the elected assembly of the country passed second amendment to the constitution that declared them non-Muslims.

However, persecution of Ahmedis continues; many have even been killed also. Some Muslim scholars now argue that given that parliament had decided about their status in 1974, there is no need of touching the issue – one way or another. Apparently, many organizations have kept it this way. Even rights organizations balk at inviting them to any faith-based events and prefer not to touch the past.

Several practitioners and activists contend that working with them is too risky in its own right. Even in many faith-based dialogues, Ahmedis are not invited. At the same time, they themselves avoid participating in such events.

While the entire issue of blasphemy was first raised against Ahmedis, in terms of numbers of people charged with it, they are on the third in order. One said it is because those who kill “think they do not need any excuse to kill Ahmedi. They can be killed without any excuse.”

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### 3.2 Issues: avenues of programmatic & policy intervention

#### ❖ *Identity and documentation*

To the non-Muslims, their total count is a sure indicator of their social and political inclusion. It is on the basis of their count that policies get shaped and finances are distributed. It is consequential of the spaces they may claim.

Non-Muslims of all faiths and denominations contend that their numerical strength is under-reported in official documents. While part of this may be exaggerated, a part of the claim is made out of documentary evidences. Inconsistent data, they say, is the very first point of their exclusion.

Pakistan conducted fresh census after a gap of two decades in 2017. While the total population of the country has been publicized, to date, the religion-wise count is not made public. Non-Muslim leaders are at loss about the reason. Speculations range from downward shift in their numbers since last census, to inconsistencies in the figures when compared with the records of non-Muslims.

As per 1998 census, 3.72 percent of Pakistan's population is of non-Muslim.<sup>4</sup> Some faith leaders even questioned this tally. Christians for instance argue that while they are the largest minority of Pakistan, they were accounted for the second largest. One Christian activist maintained that while they were counted as 2.1 million in that census, "church records of births, deaths, and marriages" show they are around 2.6 million. Hindus, as per 1998 census, were counted as 2.4 million. It was reported that census team do not go to brick kiln workers in many places; many of these workers are also Christians.

Hindus too are not content with their numbers. As per Pakistan Hindu Council, they are more than 8 million in Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> Hindu leaders argue they end up being underreported because the census form used in 1998 as well as 2017, has two choices of Hindu faith - one as "Hindu" and another "scheduled caste."<sup>6</sup> A scheduled caste Hindu is a Hindu, too, they argue. It is up to the person filling the form, mostly the enumerators, whether the schedule caste Hindu is marked under the category of "scheduled caste" or

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<sup>4</sup> For details, see religion-wise population of Pakistan, as per 1998 census:  
<<http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//tables/POPULATION%20BY%20RELIGION.pdf>>

<sup>5</sup> See the website of Pakistan Hindu Council:  
<[http://pakistanhinducouncil.org.pk/?page\\_id=1592](http://pakistanhinducouncil.org.pk/?page_id=1592)>

<sup>6</sup> For details, see Religion-wise population of Pakistan, as per 1998 census:  
<<http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//tables/POPULATION%20BY%20RELIGION.pdf>>

“Hindus.” The total count of Hindus is therefore divided into two categories; if, on the other hand, the count of scheduled caste is included in the Hindus, their numbers will soar.

Some Hindu leaders call for amalgamating the two, under Hindus. But scheduled caste leaders maintain that the separate count of “scheduled caste” is important too. They are among the most vulnerable to exploitation; having policies and plans for them requires their separate count too. They complain that many belonging to so-called scheduled castes are not counted because they are marked under Hindus, once they say their name to the enumerator. A feature in *Dawn* summarized this dilemma this way: “Getting clubbed together with upper-caste Hindus deprives the scheduled-caste Hindus of their political significance. ... [Nonetheless] when counted as members of scheduled castes alone and not as Hindus, they lose their religious identity.”

Sikh leaders have been calling for marking them under a separate category of their own, rather than under the rubric of “Others”. The “Others” include Parsis, Zikris, Kailash, Buddhists, Bahais – anyone who is not Christian, Hindu, or Ahmedi non-Muslim. Parsis and Buddhists were marked separately before 1998; not any longer.

Ahmedis maintain they may be underreported because it is too risky to openly declare as such. In fact, as per one report, when some Ahmedi tells his name, the enumerator at times automatically marks him as Muslim due to similar names they share with Muslims, with the person too fretful to correct.

A person who is non-Muslim but gets documented as Muslim runs the risk of grave insecurity, should his or her real faith come in the limelight. Many such non-Muslims, mainly Ahmedis, prefer not to publicize it. On 21st February 2018, Islamabad High Court asked Islamic scholars to assist as *amicus curiae* in identifying non-Muslims and suggest what should be done to them.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, some non-Muslims have even changed their names and appearances out of fear of being persecuted. However, should it be found that they are non-Muslim, they could face outright threats of trying to indulge in fraud in the name of religion. All these facts end up in under-reporting of non-Muslims in public documents.

A related issue is inconsistency in their *national identity markers*. Non-Muslims say they are underreported not only by census staff but also on the basis of their identity cards. The reasons are somewhat similar – NADRA staff themselves mark the faith of a person, once they hear the name like Muslims.

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<sup>7</sup> “IHC asks scholars to assist in identifying non-Muslims,” *Dawn*, February 22, 2018, <[https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=22\\_02\\_2018\\_151\\_002](https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=22_02_2018_151_002)>



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*Government staff especially census enumerators and NADRA's, are apparently not trained in assuring that the respondents share their details with trust to them. One Zikri complained that when he went to get his documents attested, the officer refused to do so on hearing about his faith.<sup>8</sup> It can be conjectured that many scheduled-caste Hindus or poor Christians, especially women, lack the CNIC, thereby exposing them to all sorts of vulnerabilities.*

More than that, non-Muslims, irrespective of their physical documentations, are tagged with external elements. While Hindus are viewed as part of India, Christians are labeled as working for western countries. Political situation in international arena takes toll on the non-Muslims in Pakistan. Many jihadi outfits have for instance threatened Christians for the policies of the western governments. Non-Muslims reiterate they are part and parcel of Pakistan; they are the sons of the soil. *Clearly, there is a need to instill value of equal citizenship at intellectual level in all segments of society.*

### ❖ *Misuse of blasphemy law*

Many non-Muslims and even Muslims complain about the ambiguity in the existing blasphemy laws, mainly on their procedural and implementation aspects, which make them – Muslims and non-Muslim equally – vulnerable to false allegations. There have been repeated demands of repealing or amending the law by removing loopholes. There is little dissent however on checking the misuse of the law.

Christians are reportedly the top victim of such law, especially in Punjab, but Hindus have also been charged in some cases. Intriguingly, many Muslims have been accused too, at times by rival sects.

For long, critics have argued that the law is a handy tool to defame their rival. In Punjab, several cases have been observed of settling personal scores by invoking this law. Organizations following blasphemy cases conclude that charges are largely engineered or concocted to settle personal vendetta or seek property. Many of these organizations are run by active members of Christian community.

It also emerged that a reason why Christians are mostly charged for blaspheming Islam is that some of their tenets and lexicon are similar to those of Islam. In arguing on certain issues that are discussed at length in the precepts of both such as the prophet-hood, a non-Muslim runs the risk of provoking a Muslim listener into charging the former with blaspheming Islam.

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<sup>8</sup> "Discrimination," *Dawn*, February 23, 2018, [https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=23\\_02\\_2018\\_009\\_008](https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=23_02_2018_009_008)

It is pertinent to mention about the blasphemy law that of the 3 sub-clauses of the blasphemy clause, inserted as 295 in Pakistan Penal Code, it is the third one that has often been invoked. This third clause, or 295-C, warns against passing any derogatory remark against the Prophet of Islam. Some say the clause is vague, which leaves it open to be used subjectively.

When one Islamic scholar was asked that non-Muslims often complain that Muslim scholars who pass controversial statements on different aspects of Islam are let free, he replied that we should “understand the differences between 295-A, B, and C”. Even non-Muslims fear of being booked under 295-C; one recommended that if someone is accused of blasphemy, police should register a case under 295 A, not 295-C.

The crux is any debate between Christians and Muslims should be held with delicate care, involving experts. As discussed later, *debates can help remove misperceptions* and some of the dialogues between scholars should aim at presenting each other articles of faith in front of each other so as to remove misperception.

Geographically stating, around 70% to 80% of such cases take place in Punjab. It is because of the presence of religious outfits, which are on the forefront to file blasphemy cases.

Many have been calling for *reviewing* blasphemy laws of Pakistan. Not all agree with completely scrapping it. Religious scholars rather argue that since the problem arises from the misuse of the law that should be stopped. They remind that the law already provides for proper mechanisms that should be adopted to come to a definite conclusion on blasphemy charges.

Some Christians especially the clergy said while there is no harm in the law, it should apply equally to all – that those who pass derogatory comments against their saints and prophets should be booked under this law. So far, however, hardly has anyone been booked for blaspheming Christianity.

Keeping these debates in mind and by understanding the risks involved in even talking about repealing the law altogether, many rights workers say that the law be amended, ridding of the more subjective and loose clauses. This, they say, can be achieved by engaging Muslim clerics too.

*One starting point suggested by many respondents is about reforming the procedural aspect of the law* – pertaining to the mechanism under which blasphemy allegation is invoked on someone. Attempts to bring scholars from various denominations can be tried, as has been tried with several other issues. In 2017, it was suggested that a law be passed under which a false accuser is also meted punishment. This, however, was done rather discretely without generating public debate and drawing their attention.

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At the same time, there is also a need to tighten the existing law especially by working on procedural aspects so that the law is not misused in the first place. It was suggested that a senior SP-level police officer should have authority for investigation. As of now, even an SHO (station head officer; usually an inspector or assistant sub-inspector) can do so. Also, there should be some check and balance.

*Another way is to broaden the debate towards reforming the criminal justice system especially prosecution.* There is very little research and work by NGOs on how to reform the justice system.

Strikingly, those accusing someone of blasphemy or resorting to arms in such matter also don't believe that government will ever pursue the case seriously. They think the government will let go the accused unpunished. This triggers mob violence. That is why focusing on criminal justice system is important.

With this system, for instance, the problem usually comes either from lower policing staff or judicial staff. Police is forced into filing a case – by the SHO, even. And lower judiciary is afraid. That is why there is often an acquittal at higher level. As one recalled:

“From 1992 till now we have looked into more than 200 cases of blasphemy and in most of the cases high court acquitted the victims. I can give you the compiled data. Lower courts for their own safety give punishment to the victim but higher courts don't do that.”

It was a question as to why without investigation, someone can be booked under 295-C, a high charge. Similarly, it was suggested that if someone has to file FIR, better that person do, rather than bringing an Islamic cleric with him. All in all, there should be proper mechanism.

### ❖ *Forced conversions*

Non-Muslim representatives deplore they are being forcefully converted to Islam. This complaint is mostly heard from Hindus in Sindh and from Kailash community in KP's Chitral area; Christians have also complained they are being converted. Some interviewees from Balochistan also spoke about conversion of Hindus in that province.

In Sindh, Hindus complain their girls are being converted by first forcing them into marriage with a Muslim. As she marries a person, she ends up having little choice than not to convert. One, it could be done forcefully;

reverting from Islam can invite charges of apostasy from the radicals that is usually tantamount to death. Two, any possible return of a girl is likely to face social stigma of being 'dishonoured.'

Same phenomenon has been observed with Kailash girls, who are even bought into marriage by potential suitors down from the plain areas of KP.

One activist shared the details of this entire process this way:

"A girl is kidnapped. When the parents come to know, they seek police's help and file an FIR. After some days, the girl is presented in front of the family, with a conversion certificate and a *nikah nama* (marriage certificate). The abductor claims the girl had converted after her own will and married him. When the girl is presented in the court, she is made to accept that she converted on her own. She is rarely left with any other choice. Afterwards, the abduction charges are removed and the abductor goes with the girl."

Those witnessing or solemnizing such marriages would argue that the girls changed their faith out of their free will. What is quite striking is that those converted are young girls even below 18. Not much has been reported about conversion of boys.

In 2016, Sindh government passed a law criminalizing conversion of young girls. Hue and cry was raised by religious parties, portraying the law as denying the right of conversion to Islam. The government had to step back on the last minute, succumbing to the pressure exerted by the more extremist elements. This withdrawal in itself sent negative message to the local minority communities, who felt that even the government could not dare to be on their side and that they are too vulnerable.

It is thus difficult to work directly on the issue. There can be other avenues to take up the issue:

One, what is obvious is the evident presence of gender dynamics. It is perhaps the only instance of restricting religion that has both conspicuous faith and gender aspects. What is required is coming up with programmatic interventions that aim to focus on gender aspect of freedom of faith/interfaith harmony too. If the issue cannot be tackled via religious side, the gender aspect can be explored to reduce women vulnerabilities.

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Two, as discussed in this section, many of those who are forcibly converted are from poor families who lack proper documentation, so much so some of them cannot prove their documentation or, in case of Hindus, a wedding record. While a Hindu-specific personal law was passed in 2016, its rules are yet to be charted.

Three, communities in many parts like Sindh or Balochistan say they have comfortably lived with each other for generations, and still do so. The problem, they say, comes from the feudal or outsiders who are the ones solemnizing these marriages. Communities can be engaged in these cases else attempts may be made to influence local elites.

Some noted that while the act of conversion in the beginning may be individual but later is owned by one or another organization. For instance, one interview respondent said:

“I have personally observed it that though an individual carries out this act but afterwards they approach an organization and tell them about their achievement for getting their support. So, I think that though the act is individual but after some time it is owned by an organization or larger community.”

### ❖ *Poverty and economic exclusion*

Much of the discrimination against non-Muslims is rooted in economics too. Those on the lower rung are forcefully married or accused of blasphemy; for one, the poor lack proper records, among other things. Even where non-Muslims live in relatively well-off districts like Lahore, they live in the most impoverished and mostly isolated areas.

Arguably, their sense of economic alienation may increase, which is diminishing their presence in policy matters. Many of the non-Muslims who migrated from Pakistan turned out to be upper-caste Hindus and well-off Christians – they are the ones who can afford to travel. Those left behind are automatically economically disadvantaged. In the past, some people could advocate on their behalf, but now, with influential voices in their own community going away, they are left on their own.

Secondly, traditionally, non-Muslims were generally given particular set of jobs, in what appears to be a stereotypical case. Christians are expected to do menial jobs such as janitorial services. But in recent times, young Christians are resistant to take these jobs. Similarly, many complain that Hindu youth have been left to gambling and drinking because they are allowed to purchase

and sell liquor in Pakistan. Hence, they are challenging the old job distribution now.

Thus, one of the antidotes to faith-based discrimination is not only economically empowering religious minorities or their areas, but also *bringing them in the economic mainstream*.

To be sure, non-Muslims are mandated to have 5% quota in government jobs. But, as several respondents said, most of them do not get those jobs. In reality, the seats meant for them are often either left vacant or filled by others. In Balochistan, for instance, of some 13,000 posts announced, not 500 are for non-Muslims. It is said that non-Muslims do not have requisite qualifications. Many non-Muslims do not even know about the seats. And at times, they are not hired for those jobs.

There are ways to remedy these, ensuring that the 5% quota is strictly enforced.

One, civil society should first get data from all departments about the sanctioned seats for non-Muslims and filled seats, to check any discrepancy. One organization, PEAD, recently filled Right to Information in KP in this regard; clearly, not many were filled by non-Muslims. Civil societies should be trained on the law and how to exercise it for their own benefit.

Two, it should be explored why there has been discrepancy between the filled and sanctioned seats, and remedies be suggested. One way could be to relax some criteria for non-Muslims. Another way could be to provide non-Muslims with training opportunities just before joining a particular job. Civil society institutions should invest in these areas.

### ❖ *Safety and security*

Minority communities, Muslims as well as non-Muslims, everywhere fear for their lives and complain their sites have been vandalized or converted into public places. Insecurity clearly is among their top concerns; many have even left for relatively safer places in the country.

But to chart a proper response, it is important to assess which indicator or metric of security is under consideration? Is it about security of a community or religious sites? Does that apply to all minority groups?

It can be argued that the dynamics of physical safety of different groups vary:

While Balochistan is in the throes of conflict of over a decade, many interviewees said that non-Muslims continue to enjoy their freedom more

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than in other parts of the country. The attack on Methodist church in Quetta, in December 2017, was counted as one of the rare ones.

Yet, it is the same city where Hazara Shias have been killed so frequently that they think a conspiracy of their complete elimination is being hatched by the influential players.

Similarly, communities in Sindh are proud of living with each other for centuries; yet forced conversion dominates concerns arising out from there. Protection is critical for those at risk of forced conversion.

By contrast, while Punjab is relatively peaceful than other provinces, non-Muslims feel insecurity inside at times from general people, at a time when mob resorts to violence.

This province-wise contrast can be gathered from a comment of an interviewee from Balochistan, who said:

“Long way back, in 1983, I visited Wagah border, Lahore with my friends. I asked for a cup of tea. A sort of conflict emerged after they got to know that we are Christian. I have not observed such behavior in Balochistan.”

Another metric is safety of the religious sites of non-Muslims. Allegations that religious sites of non-Muslims have been captured run high, especially in Balochistan and KP. In Balochistan, a few activists filed a petition against capturing of a Gurdwara. By contrast, very few interviewees from Punjab said so. Instead, one said that the Chief Justice rightly inquired about the waste disposal in Chakwal near a Hindu temple.

There can be many other metrics too. What it shows is that the sense of security varies from group to group, even among minorities, and may not necessarily match with the level of violence in a particular area. Too often, organizations invest in faith-based harmony initiatives in areas on the assumption of violence in that part. This should be revised.

Organizations engaging in such programming are advised to take these distinctions into account, such as by noticing the trend of violence against different groups, the perception of insecurity or restrictions within each group, and the response of communities towards different groups, among others, to draw a clearer understanding of what is required.

One related issue is of migration. Many non-Muslims, escaping persecution, have fled their hometowns; some even left the country. A Hindu activist, speaking of the massive migration of Hindus from Balochistan, said the main reason to this end was forced conversion too. Another Hindu interviewee said that from 2008 to 2013, around 90% of rich Hindu families from Balochistan emigrated. People from deep in Balochistan migrated to Quetta or Karachi. The rich ones left Pakistan for countries like India.

A sense of insecurity is thus a serious issue as a religious group or identity. It appears all religious groups feel threatened in one way or other.

#### ❖ *Personal family laws*

Another issue is the lack of proper personal family laws for some non-Muslim groups.

A Muslim marriage is solemnized under Muslim marriage act, but the same is missing for non-Muslims. Conducting marriages of non-Muslims under this law is clearly wrong. Problem is that different communities have different practices and restrictions regarding marriages. That justifies the need for separate law.

Without a law, many non-Muslim couples end up not being documented as wedded. This is a loophole which serves to the disadvantage of non-Muslims. A married Hindu woman can forcibly be married and converted on the basis of her inability to furnish documents in the first place.

Lately, some legislation has been done for non-Muslims. Hindu Marriage Act was passed. But its rules of business have yet to be formulated. It is thus in the preliminary stage of its implementation. That is why, as per one interviewee, the family law is “total eye wash” when it comes to implementation.

Civil society can advocate with legislators in further refining this Act and with relevant departments to chart its Rules of Business. Working on a law or its rule for non-Muslims will sail through easily compared to attempting to change faith laws that are resisted by Islamist parties.

There are reports that a new marriage law for Sikhs is being presented. According to this law, all marriages solemnized will be registered with union council.



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### *Terminology*

Many non-Muslims refuse the term “minority”, saying their identity not be reduced to their numerical strength. Some oppose the term “non-Muslims” saying they are defined in relation to Muslims. Apparently, calling them by their faiths such as Christians, Hindus does not invite any opposition. These terms can thus be used.

### ❖ *Electoral and political participation*

One complaint has been that seats allocated to non-Muslims are not proportionate to their population. They can also contest directly, but the chances of someone getting elected are extremely thin.

Political parties have minority wings but these are largely dysfunctional. It is suggested that non-Muslims be made part of the mainstream decision-making in the central bodies.

Some non-Muslims complain the leaders elected on their behalf are given seats not on democratic lines, but by being close to the top party leadership. A Christian said, non-Muslims are “selected, not elected.” That’s the problem.

One complained that when minorities are nominated on reserved seats, they are more focused for the party than for minority issues. One said it bluntly, “[If] I do not get our community vote, I do not own up to them.”

### ❖ *Constitutional and legal protection*

For all the differences about the extent to which constitution allows religious minorities to practice their faith freely, interviewees agreed that the constitution should be the starting point of any debate or activity.

The Constitution of Pakistan clearly states that every citizen has the right to “profess, practice and propagate his or her faith and to establish religious institutions.” Similarly, the Preamble of the Constitution, in the shape of Objectives Resolution, also says that “an adequate provision shall be made for the minorities to freely profess and practice their religion and develop their culture.” Yet, severe limitations were pointed out not only in terms of implementation of these clauses, but also other clauses that are understood as excluding non-Muslims. One of these pertains to the restriction of high offices like Prime Minister to Muslims only. One interviewee said that Pakistani laws discriminate with non-Muslims, laying way to the “foundation of unequal nationality”.

## *Freedom of faith in Pakistan*

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For all the limitations or contradictions in the Constitution, interviewees endorsed it, recommending that their activities of freedom of faith/belief be held within the domain of the Constitution. The “lack of implementation” aspect is too big to be ignored, they said. Thus, one organization that works on protecting rights of minorities in workplace do so by mentioning them their rights enshrined in the Constitution. This position is consistent with other observations made on legal issues – *procedural issues shall be taken care of at this stage of time.*

It was also suggested that the constitutional rights of minorities, as enlisted in the table, be disseminated to different educational establishments including madrassahs. Civil society organizations can develop Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) material and distribute it widely.

Below are some of the clauses in the Constitution that directly deal with minority issues:

Article	Description
<i>Article 4: Rights of individuals to be dealt with in accordance with law, etc.</i>	It is every citizen’s right to enjoy the protection of law and to be treated according to law. Further, no action pertaining to life, liberty, property can be taken except under the law, and a person cannot be stopped to do things which has been granted by the law and also cannot be forced to do things which is not been required under the law.
<i>Article 20: Freedom to profess religion and to manage religious institution</i>	Every citizen has right to profess, practice and propagate his faith and to establish his religious institutions.
<i>Article 21: Safeguard against taxation for purposes of any particular religion</i>	Nobody is bound to pay tax for the propagation of any particular religion of which he is not a follower.
<i>Article 22: Safeguards as to educational institutions in respect of religion, etc.</i>	No individual attending any educational institution should be forced to receive or attend any religious education or worship other than his own religion and admission to any institution should not be denied on the basis of caste, creed, faith or birth place.
<i>Article 25: Equality of citizen</i>	Law provides equal rights to every citizen without discrimination irrespective of sex and state is free

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Article	Description
	to make special provisions for women and children under this article.
<i>Article 26: No discrimination in respect of access to Public Places</i>	Entry to public places should not be based on caste, creed, religion, sex or place of birth.
<i>Article 27: Safeguard against discrimination in services</i>	Appointment to services in Pakistan shouldn't be discriminatory.
<i>Article 28: Preservation of language, script and culture.</i>	Any citizens having unique language or script and culture are permissible to preserve and promote it and can establish institution for the same purpose by law.
<i>Article 36: Protection of minorities</i>	The rights and interests of minorities should be protected, and state should ensure their respective seats in the national and provincial assemblies.
<i>Article 37: Promotion of social justice and eradication of social evils</i>	Educational and economic development of backward classes and areas is the responsibility of state. Moreover, state should provide basic free secondary education and should eradicate the social evils from society i.e. gambling, prostitution, drugs etc. Contribution of diversity of people should be ensured in different activities of state.
<i>Article 51: Right of vote costing, reserved seats in National Assembly</i>	10 seats should be reserved for the non-Muslims in the National Assembly.
<i>Article 106: Number of seats, specified for non-Muslims</i>	If no specific seat for any minority has been allocated in the provincial assembly merely for being less in number then combined seat allocated for all the non-Muslims in that area should include that specific minority too.

## 4. KEY PLAYERS: TYPOLOGY AND SCOPE OF PROGRAMS

### 4.1 Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

One set of institutions that are seen at the forefront of rights comprises the non-governmental organizations or NGOs. They were praised for doing exemplary work on subjects related to freedom of faith, interfaith harmony, among others. Many call them the only organizations that enable different communities, groups, or schools of thought to sit together.

Yet, some limitations were also pointed, mostly emanating from the working conditions in which they operate. These are categorized in NGOs' relation with different sets of players, enlisted below:

#### ❖ *Relation with each other*

Interviewees said *there is often replication of work, as different NGOs reach out to same people in different time.*

On the positive side, this results in keeping the motivation of certain change agents high, as these are the people who attend seminars or workshops rather routinely. Many NGOs who prefer to work on their own also keep alive the spirit of competition and rejuvenation of ideas.

Yet, many felt that working space is shrinking for NGOs, coupled with lack of assistance. A few complained that these realities have even made them veer away from the original motivation behind the organizations. Now, they are fighting for their survival or completing projects to meet expenditures.

While there is no harm in engaging same individuals again and again – particularly when there is dearth of a culture of volunteering – some sort of monitoring mechanism be shaped to ensure the involvement of new stakeholders. One way to do is by asking information from the “beneficiaries” about their past history with relation to the activity in which they have participated.

Similarly, as much as NGOs should carry out their own work, they should be *encouraged to become part of like-minded alliances.*

While many such alliances are on paper, they are not as active as the NGOs that are part of those alliances. Partly because alliances rarely find financial support while NGOs as individual entities do so. In reality, alliances are rather run by NGOs or their personnel on voluntarily basis. Thus even when

alliances are formed, members are unable to find time to even attend the alliance's meetings. They do not want to leave their primary tasks in their NGOs.

But alliances have great utility, as different actors converge to a single point. Many of the pro-women laws found their way after being presented from the platform of alliances. Financial partners of organizations should look at this aspect, encouraging support to alliances.

One recent attempt to push forward rights, including that of practicing freedom of faith and belief, is made by an alliance of 18 civil society organizations, in the shape of a charter of human rights. The group's representatives have met political parties, who endorsed the charter, which offers quite tangible recommendations such as establishing rights cells in parties. The finalized draft can even serve as a key document for civil society organizations and political parties of the country; it should be disseminated widely and different segments be sensitized on its point.

#### ❖ *Relation with media*

Interviewees said that media have not been tapped by NGOs as they should have been. There is a lot of discussion on *what media should do*.

Some organizations working on media work to the extent of monitoring them. Broadly stating, in relations to human rights, two sets of data are monitored.

One, the *data about rights violation is compiled* on a daily basis. Many human rights organizations compile data on gender-based violence. CLAAS in Lahore actively monitors reports of blasphemy charges from all over the country. Likewise, Digital Rights Foundation in Lahore reports such charges occurring in digital sphere.

Usually, the sources of such data are the newspapers, but some also are able to extract data from police stations. This data serves multiple purposes. Organizations are able to project trends in violation of rights, such as intensity, geographical scope, etc. Secondly, the data also alerts into providing legal assistance to the survivors of charges. While many of the organizations that monitor data do provide legal assistance, some do not do so; clearly, this resource can serve those in need of data.

There are other organizations that *track media on qualitative affairs* such as about reporting on certain issues. These include SAMAR, which monitors print media on rights issues; and *Uks*, which monitors media on gender issues. *Agahi* even confers awards on best reports on minority issues, based on qualitative assessment.

Findings of these organizations, and many others, have been used in designing program aimed at correct reporting on rights issues. Organizations then engage journalists on how to properly report on issues.

Many organizations like Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) have sensitized media on how to report on human rights issues including on freedom of faith. A few organizations were able to engage journalists for a longer period of time, such as providing mentoring for one year.

NGOs engaging media have also been by offering media services to broadcast or print content on issues promoting interfaith harmony. In some cases, production of programs or reportage about issues has been part of a project. This way, prime-time channels end up providing slots or space to issues the NGOs have been advocating.

A drawback is that some of these programs were unable to attract revenue for the program. TV channels telecasted the shows because they got paid for them already. There is thus a need for more investment in such aspect such as by sensitizing journalists to be able to report on their own, which will attract viewers too.

Nonetheless, this certainly has been quite helpful, but it has been tried on small scale. Many interviewees felt media is not engaged properly; one suggested that mass campaign on electronic media be launched. Some highlighted the lack of space and representation minority communities and their issues were getting on media including mainly entertainment and news TV channels.

In recent times though the trend is of engaging social media. *But again, the issue is more about reportage about what has been violated instead of what can be improved.*

One suggested that civil society should, in collaboration with government, develop a database for rapid response in case of any incidence of violence.

One interviewee said that social media play significant role in promotion of dialogue. Creative ways of engaging social media thus should be sought.

Local media is often ignored. Much of the commentary on religious freedom gets reported in English media.

#### ❖ *Relation with government*

Many interviewees said that for maximizing the outcome NGOs and government need to work together. Some said that government should provide conducive environment to NGOs.

The situation appears to be quite contrasting at the moment. In the words of one activist, “while the state does not facilitate civil society, extremist outfits are allowed to collect charity and operate freely. This explains the dilemma.”

Interviewees largely lamented that the space to undertake freedom of faith/belief activities has shrunk over the years, mostly on security grounds. Many organizations have to scale their work, downsize, or relocate their geographical focus. Local NGOs and their staff even complained of being monitored by state institutions.

Government officials are skeptical of the work civil society has been doing, especially the invocation of rights language. Rights are taken as infringement into security or questioning state officials or painting the country black. The themes of “peace” also come under this category; views of many vocal NGOs are seen as directly clashing the views of the state.

Besides security concerns, the utility of such rights-titled projects are also questioned by government. They think that funds meant for them are frittered away. Some NGO workers too made fun of such activities only, saying these are more of photo-taking opportunities and filling documents. Government officials ask NGOs to invest in projects with more tangible outcomes such as provision of water, education, etc.

Space is shrunk for those organizations that work tribal areas, parts of KP, Balochistan, and in some cases, interior Sindh and southern Punjab. All these areas have somewhat direct link to ongoing conflicts in the country; clearly, they are barred on security grounds. Government officials are wary of organizations which collect data for their surveys in these areas; it is suspected that some sort of geographical mapping is being undertaken.

Finally, an organization seeking foreign assistance is more likely to come under scrutiny for this purpose.

As per one estimate, around 1,100 NGOs were closed in Balochistan and a further 80 were banned in Quetta. Working in Quetta poses its own risk, not only from militants but also from security agents following NGO workers. Working outside Quetta is too risky. “We don’t conduct programs in peripheral areas. Nobody dares to go there to conduct program. It is a geographical challenge.”

Security situation also threatens civil society. An activist in Quetta suggested “do not try to protest publically if a church or temple is attacked.”

That said, there are *ways to mitigate the concerns*:

Focus should be paid on people, rather than area. Many people from conflict-affected areas such as erstwhile FATA and Balochistan have migrated to other parts of the country and may not necessarily be living in tents. Instead of going to conflict areas, organizations can arrange program with the displaced people.

Even if people are still based in areas from NGOs are barred, arrangements can be made in nearby districts where NGOs can operate. Many organizations working on countering violent extremism in southern Punjab invited “beneficiaries” to provincial capital, Lahore.

Some organizations are fusing different approaches together. For instance, one organization has a project by the name of “Water for Peace”, which provides for water pumps to members of different faiths. The idea is that different faith members go to a common point, where their chances of interaction increase. The organization has also formed water committees to adjudicate any dispute.

Clearly, every project has a goal comprising a soft component as well as some deliverables, which are tangible. NGO management can, in their communication with the government, focus more on deliverable. Thus for example, they can tell public officials that their program aims to increase enrolment of girls, rather than merely saying that it is about girls’ education rights – though both are same.

Many interviewees, while staying critical of government, said when interacting with the government, they clarify that their programs are meant to complement the work of government. National Action Plan, government’s counter-terror plan, is widely cited. Ever since the attack on the APS in December 2014, some civil society organizations have been holding annual vigil in memory of those attacked.

At least two points of NAP are of direct to freedom of faith and belief. One is about clamping down on hate speech; another is about stopping persecution of minorities. NGOs can draw tangible, verifiable indicators and suggestions on these two points and share findings with the government.

As much as NGOs face scrutiny over procedures, some have robust linkages with different departments and ministries. They can work with education ministry or religious affairs, on a range of initiatives such as ridding hate speeches off textbooks.

Many interviewees suggested there be *private-public partnership*, which entails engagement of both NGOs and government. One way to understand



this is by taking into account each other's strength. While government has resources, private bodies often have expertise such as data and skills.

Clearly, as discussed above, there are limitations not least mistrust from government. Yet, NGOs should continue to explore ways in which it can support government, which adds into earning trust.

There are times when the government is in dire need of data, even though it should have its own in the first place. In 2018, when the incidents of child sexual abuse were reported, questions were asked about the scale of occurrence of this abuse in Pakistan. The Ministry of Human Rights was supported by one specialized NGO Sahil on data to this end. Similar data was also shared about human rights violations, including around freedom of faith, and then presented in the parliament.

Similarly, while government officials might have been hesitant to support organizations at local level, fearing non-compliance orders from above, it is at the higher level, the central for instance, that the government can be engaged such as in policy seminars, conferences. In those events, the support from government can be verbally sought, documented, and while working in the field, presented.

Likewise, one advised that NGOs should pursue lobbying too, based on their own research findings. A Hindu activist said that it was because of active involvement of people like him that the Hindu Marriage Act was approved.

It was suggested that the concept of *volunteerism* be encouraged, especially as organizations are running dry on funds.

#### ❖ *Relations with donors*

Interviewees who felt proud about their work complained about lacking financial resources. They hinted as to how getting support requires specialized technical skills, which are made possible by engaging specialized people. Some complained that organizations or individuals having superficial understanding of the freedom of faith can get support, provided they furnish document in time and properly. They called for simple templates.

Some local organizations complain they are being left to execute and report back an idea which is already decided several tiers above them away from the field.

But credible funding bodies disagree, saying they leave to partners to identify programs that fit in the overall scheme things. One rather complained that some local implementing partners often indulge in vague and exaggerated

claims about what they can achieve. That, he said, is unlikely, and therefore they are advised to stay focused.

As government launches clampdown on NGOs, especially those working in the field of peace and harmony, the funds are shrinking. While donors do come in the field often with a macro picture of the country, situation on ground varies from region to region. Areas where funds are most needed are barred by government for NGOs to operate smoothly.

This shrinkage affects those working on peace and harmony. One activist said “how are we supposed to promote interfaith harmony when we do not have any funding?”

<i>Snapshot of “Who is working on what?”</i>	
Sheikh Zayed Islamic Center	<p>Peshawar University’s Sheikh Zayed Islamic Center offers MPhil and PhD degrees in religions and theology. Students can study around nine religions of the world, conduct research on, including on thematic issues of their holy books, as well as meet scholars of different faiths. The Centre has shaped its curriculum, as per its website, to seek solutions through interfaith dialogue.<sup>9</sup> The Centre also publishes a biannual research journal, Al-Idah, which has published articles on rights of minorities in a Muslim state, the need for dialogue, among others.<sup>10</sup> Their past research has identified causes of extremism, exploring any religious dimension, and suggests reforms. However, most of its students are Muslims, with very rarely any non-Muslim enrolling in it.</p> <p>When asked if the center has made any impact, the center’s director argued that for that, there needs to be harmony between what is taught and what is practiced on ground. “Even though the constitution talks about protecting minorities, they still complain about violation of their rights”, the director said. He called for bridging gap between policy makers and academics.</p>

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<sup>9</sup> Please see “Introduction” of the Centre at <[www.uop.edu.pk/departments/?q=Shaykh-Zayed-Islamic-Centre](http://www.uop.edu.pk/departments/?q=Shaykh-Zayed-Islamic-Centre)>

<sup>10</sup> More information can be seen here: <<https://www.szic.pk/journal.php>>

Snapshot of "Who is working on what?"	
Hindu-Sikh Social Welfare	This body was created in the 1970s, working in Peshawar. This organization tackles issues faced by community, so as to promote culture of harmony and peaceful co-existence. It is about community, dealing their social problems like wedding.
Faith and Friends	Based in Peshawar, Faith and Friends is a program of Pakistan's World Religions Council to encourage dialogue between the Muslims and the Christians in KP. It was for this program that the government of an Islamist alliance in KP renovated two churches, one at the Peshawar University and the other at Nathiagali. <sup>11</sup> One member of this alliance praised it saying he learnt a lot from people like Bish Manu, Bisham Humphrey, Qibla Ayaz, and Ruhullah Madni. It is even claimed to have become a central-level institution, with the passage of time, as more and more people got involved. Their methodology is of a growing tree. One member called Faith Friends as pioneer to this end. Another step was visiting those places where Christians were not sighted before. They went there time and again, leading to winning their hearts.
IRCRA	IRCRA, Nowshera, promotes culture of co-existence in society and raises awareness of social issues to masses. Since two and half years, the organization has been focusing on interfaith harmony, with particular focus on sectarianism.  The issue of dealing with intra-faith issues in society has been more challenging than inter-faith.  IRCRA created pilot-based team in Punjab, which includes representative from all schools of thought, calling them "peace advocates", and training them afterwards. They were brought via Whatsapp, a group was created by the name of "Masalik-e-Ulema". Its head office is in Lahore and is administered by a steering committee. It has been working against sectarian violence. For instance, church blast in Quetta, the group protested hard. At Christmas, its

<sup>11</sup> Please see: <<https://www.szic.pk/journal/jun2017/4.pdf>>

Snapshot of "Who is working on what?"	
	peace advocate along with police personnel, visited 9 churches in a day. It is first time in the country that a Muslim majority group has been protecting the minorities. During the month of Moharram in Gujranwala, police approached the group to protect Imam Bargah.
National Commission for Justice and Peace	National Commission for Justice and Peace, based in Lahore, aims to support the needy people in the form of legal and para legal aid as well as to conduct research, advocacy, and awareness into issues pertaining to religious minority especially women, children, and marginalized communities.
National Minority Rights	National Minority Rights Network comprises all the human rights organization and forty activists working on minorities from all the four provinces of Pakistan.

## 4.2 Government and public sector departments

As much government official criticize NGOs for talking about ethereal concepts, interviewees from NGOs said the government is just "focusing on building roads and not peace."

Pakistan is signatory of several international conventions on human rights including freedom of faith and belief. Yet they are either not ratified or made part of domestic legislation or not implemented properly. One way forward is to train different nodes of criminal justice system about Pakistan's obligation to several human rights treaties. These can be made part of curriculum.

Broadly stating, the general view is that religious parties are less comfortable to NGOs especially those working on freedom of faith/belief than others. Many of these parties question the motive of these NGOs. Some differentiated religious parties from religious scholars who can be engaged.

But not all agreed. On the contract, as one Hindu activist recalled, a religious alliance that ruled Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province from 2002 to 2007 was credited for proactively delving in interfaith issues. It was then that the first international conference on interfaith harmony was held, in Peshawar. These

parties were able to host such events because of having no strings attached to it. They realized the gravity of the issue from both religious and social aspects; other parties can discuss social component only, which too may or may not be endorsed by religious groups. In religious parties' case, any objection by any cleric is dismissed as irrelevant.

Government was also advised to encourage support to NGOs. At least government can encourage communities to be receptive to NGOs. One said very clearly, communities cannot collaborate unless government is willing to embrace them.

Interviewees also called for *investing at local level*, not merely at top. Violation, one said, happens at the local level or lower level. In Sindh, girls are forcefully converted with the connivance of the feudal (*waderas*) who have police on their side. Similarly, in Punjab, it is often from local establishments that hate speech proliferate, leading to mob violence.

To stop this, some suggested establishing *district minority boards* all over the country.

Surely enough, Punjab province has *district peace committees*, which include religious clerics to decide about issues of peace and conflict emanating from the practice of faith. These committees have in some places able to ward off incidents of violence especially sectarian clashes during religious days. The committee's members sit together along with police personnel.

However, the role of such committees is questionable for various reasons. Many of these committees include extremist-minded clerics too. Police justify their inclusion that this keeps them under police's watch, while giving sense of importance to them, who otherwise can be destructive to the district. On other end are committees whose members have little influence over the community; people suspect these clerics to be on the payroll of the government. In some districts, the committees do not meet often.

Clearly, these committees can be invested in for building peace in the province.

Local governments can also be engaged, such as through seminar. A local government official can arrange programs in schools.

Some problem comes from *individual government officials* than institutions per se. In 2017, it was reported that Hangu's assistant commissioner told a delegation of Sikh community that he will solve their problem, should they convert to Islam. Afterwards, KP Chief Secretary ordered inquiry, suspending the officer.

Seen in another way, engaging positive individuals in the government sector, after identifying them first, can be productive too.

There are *many public departments* that need to be engaged. Pivotal of these are education department and criminal justice system.

<i>Key initiatives/departments by government</i>
Ministry of Human Rights
Action Plan for Human Rights
National Task Force to monitor Action Plan
Provincial Task Forces
Toll Free Helpline "1099" for victims of Human Rights Violations
National Commission on the Status of Women
District Human Rights Committees

<i>Bodies relevant to HR</i>
Education department
Ministry of Interfaith Harmony
Criminal justice system: Police
Criminal justice system: Prosecution
Criminal justice system: Evidence

- ❖ Several called for *constituting diverse public work* spaces. As per rules, religious minorities are to constitute 5-7% of the seats in different public departments. But that is often under-achieved.
- ❖ The provincial Public Safety and Police Complaint Commission is one body that ascertains grievances filed with regards to police. It deals with all aspects of criminal justice system, that is, prosecution, jail and policing. However, one interviewee complained, that this commission

does not have members from religious minority community. This absence, he said, lead to violation of rights of minorities.

- ❖ Some interviewee said they are not encouraged in security forces. Hindu activists specially complained about this, saying it is because they are associated with India. One said, “Maha Bharat teaches me to die for my homeland. I can teach India a lesson if I am part of law-enforcement agencies ... But I am not included in these forces.”
- ❖ One platform, deemed strong by many, is Ulema-Mashaik Council. But this platform does not have any representation from minorities.
- ❖ Then, there are several days to celebrate human rights. Human Rights Day is marked on 10th December. One recalled that on one such day, the government arranged a program and invited people from all faiths and provided them opportunity to speak about their rights. This was appreciated.
- ❖ An empowered National Minorities Commission is needed to look at the issue of discrimination and marginalization of non-Muslims.
- ❖ Some called for including members from minorities and various ethnic groups in the census commission.
- ❖ National Commission for Human Rights should be actively engaged. It is one body which is seriously taking human rights issues. It has also come up with reports, but these are not uploaded. There seems to be some capacity issue. NGOs should collaborate with it. And attempts are made to raise stature of the commission in government hierarchy.

### **4.3 Communities and the people**

One platform through which issues of freedom of faith can be raised is the *community group*. Different organizations have been shaping community groups like peace groups, dialogue groups – at the basic administrative level, such as union council or village. These groups include residents of the locality, meet regularly, identify issues in their areas, and lobby with government departments to extract their demands.

One of the successful ways is by training these groups or their members on the financial plans of their union councils and the relevant laws through which information can be extracted. This way, the groups can know what amount is meant for temples or other sites of different faiths.

In yet another way, these groups provide a platform for community members from diverse faiths to sit together on diverse issues of common concern. In

Sindh, for instance, one organization has formed water committees comprising of Hindus and Muslims to resolve any issue of water in their localities. The idea in this case is interaction.

Organizations have also formed community-level peace groups that serve as early warning forums in cases of disputes.

Importantly, interviewees in some areas said that while there are faith conflicts in their areas, these do not necessarily come from the communities. There are *variations to the extent of which communities are responsible* in drawing divisions. They suggested the differences are not organic, but exported from outside or from above. This view mostly came from Sindh and KP.

Of Sindh, for instance, one said that forced conversion or other forms of faith-based persecution is led by some proselytizers from KP, banned outfits from Punjab, or feudal or religious elite of the district. Communities with mixed faiths, they said, have been living peacefully for centuries, and continue to do so.

Similarly, in KP, religious minority members said that they rarely face any discrimination by people of the area, though some said in areas where there are no non-Muslims, people are surprised to see them. The issue, they said, has come in the shape of violence from militants in adjacent tribal areas or ideologies from Punjab.

Religious minorities in Punjab fear violence not necessarily from militant groups but from unknown people in the neighbourhood. In what appears as stark contrast, whereas on the one hand, there are few terror attacks in Punjab, it is in this province where ordinary people have resorted to ransacking and attacks in what is known as faith-based mob violence. One observer shared, "there is no alternative liberal narrative in Punjab." In Balochistan too, one group that fears outright persecution are the Hazaras, who do not even go to outside localities after sunset.

These distinctions should be explored further to jot down the *nature of violence in different parts of the country, and the players responsible for it*. One way is to study the extent to which interactions are taking place already. In many cities of Punjab, for instance, Christians are now living in their own separate enclaves.

At the same time, openness towards NGO should be assessed too. In what appears to be a paradox, people are more open to civil society in Punjab than in KP; government's services are also relatively better in Punjab, which can help communities. Hence, collaboration with government can be opted in Punjab.



It warns against taking a generalized picture of all parts of the country. Instead, different forms of faith-based persecution have different manifestations and violence.

One, the utility of arranging community groups or projects in areas where there may not be community frictions, should be assessed. Communities can be engaged in these areas, as many NGOs have done, but they should be engaged in such a way that they are able to air their concerns about those producing problems in the community.

For example, when it comes to engaging communities in areas where communities may have imbibed differences, it is better to start with small steps like interactions or activities that remove those differences. Expecting dialogue on religious affairs or hardcore social issues may not work. In this case, it is far better to provide first opportunity for people to sit together, visit each other, chat and each with other – or, as one said, remove different platters for different faiths. Some sort of gradualism be adopted.

In areas where communities have some bonding, they can be engaged in advancing free spaces to different faiths or pinpointing individuals who are sowing seeds of division. In the areas, interfaith groups be established, which in turn should be linked to different government departments like law-enforcement agencies. One organization Karitas formed village communities and built their capacity afterwards.

What is obvious is that the response to same set of messages or activities in areas with different level of community's involvement in persecution will be different. That should be kept in mind.

Many people in Balochistan said that the communities by and large have been accommodative towards each other. They shared how different communities used to live side by side. Even now, many said, people from different faiths intermingle with each other and practice their own faith. But violence is injected from outside. One even said, "There was no concept of sectarianism in Balochistan."

"Earlier we proudly used to say that Balochistan is the only place where minorities are not targeted but after December 2017 church blast this history has changed," another noted.

#### **4.4 Change agents: individuals and groups**

##### **❖ Faith leaders**

Religious scholars or individuals were used in reference to a variety of individuals including faith leaders like priests and clerics, members of different faith communities taking leadership roles like Christian activists or Islamic scholars running organizations as well as religious parties.

Interviewees hinted that clubbing all religious people under one rubric be avoided. There are variations in terms of their thinking, openness, and influence. Yet, there are inter-linkages, which should be explored and put to use.

Some argued that engaging the “right” set of scholars have been the most challenging task. One used the term “religious conservatives” for such people, saying they are the biggest obstacle to any change on faith-based initiative. At times, they are not consulted. Should they be involved, engaging middle and lower level followers such as students and imams will be easier, one said.

One successful program in which the “right” set of scholars was engaged was the anti-polio campaign, one said. That campaign, one said, was successful because it got to hold of an edict from a leading cleric, which helped in developing consensus among *Ulema*, or Islamic scholars.

However, scholars have been engaged in many other programs too. Another reason to think of the success of the anti-polio campaign was the outcome of this campaign was clear in everyone’s mind – zero presence of polio virus in Pakistan. Hence monitoring the areas, identifying the people was quite straightforward.

Same has been the case with other health initiatives. “If government can work for creating awareness about dengue, then can’t they introduce programs for inter-faith harmony?” one asked.

Clearly, besides investing resources, attempts may be made to *identify specific issues of freedom of faith*.

Another model has been forming committees of faith leaders, who can support peace during time of crisis.

One committee along this line was formed in Lahore, comprising of Christian and Muslim leaders. In 2013, after a bomb exploded in Lahore at a church, the committee helped mitigate spread of violence. One interviewee recalled that

while initially Christian leadership administering the targeted church was very passive and angry, but with the involvement of this committee situation was brought under control. In rural Punjab, local clerics were criticized for provoking hate speech, which can then trigger violent agitation leading to some sort of action by the mob. These hate-speakers can be influenced by their elder religious scholars, even those one tier up.

❖ *Criminal Justice System - critical*

It was suggested that civil society should sensitize different organs of criminal justice system such as police, judiciary, and lower courts, among others.

When it comes to justice system, inclusion is the way to go. One said that in Pakistan, no one is going to hear your case, unless you know anyone in the courts. Non-Muslims are hardly in high government positions. That makes them difficult for the cases to be even heard in the first place.

In 2014, the Supreme Court also gave a detailed judgment about protection and promotion of religious minorities, under Chief Justice Tassaduq Jilani. That should be enforced and further propagated.

Judges in lower courts don't take decision bravely, they sometimes decide against victims because sometimes they are threatened. Islamabad's police has arbitration committees in jails, where one has to go before registering an FIR. Such committees can also be formed in other areas.

*Snapshot of critical agents - changing resistance to support*

	<i>Potential positive impact</i>	<i>Potential negative impact</i>	<i>Limitation</i>	<i>Suggestions</i>
<b>Teachers</b>	Can promote interfaith harmony by celebrating diversity in classroom, such as quoting diverse knowledge sources, diverse interpretations, treating minorities with equality, instill moral lesson	Can further the divisions by blatantly showing biasness, demeaning religious minorities by conduct, among others	❖ Bound to follow curriculum, given that teaching is source of job like other professions are ❖ Have personal biases	❖ Involve them in curriculum design; orient education system in a way that teachers think beyond the course ❖ Self-actualization and teaching courses

	<i>Potential positive impact</i>	<i>Potential negative impact</i>	<i>Limitation</i>	<i>Suggestions</i>
<b>Universities</b>	Laboratory of ideas, to provide students with opportunity to interact with diversity, engage in community and public interactions	Student guilds can turn violent; students can fall for radical people; less exposure to diverse ideas can reinforce stereotypes	❖ Bound by authorities about the limitations in universities, such as ban on student unions	❖ Student guilds in the form of magazines or other forums can be started, by way of authority ❖ Universities be bound to keep quota for a certain minority relevant to the area, in different departments ❖ Exchange programs with other universities and of members of different faiths
<b>Traders</b>	Can interact with people without considering biases	Have close relation with clergy in market, which can slip off	❖ More concerned about their economic output	
<b>Parents</b>	Serve as best counsel to children	Can force children into their thinking	❖ Cannot keep check all the time ❖ Personal biases	❖ Engage parents more frequently with teachers; parents be encouraged to visit at least once or twice a year
<b>Teenagers</b>	<b>Have revolutionary ideas that can be used for creativity</b>	Can go towards violence	❖ Behavioural changes such as impulsiveness, anger, hunger for new	❖ Engaging them in something creative;

Key Players: Typology and Scope of Programs

	<i>Potential positive impact</i>	<i>Potential negative impact</i>	<i>Limitation</i>	<i>Suggestions</i>
<b><i>Criminal justice system</i></b>	Can respond to any grievance justly	Can delay responding to any grievance	❖ Flaws at different entry points – prosecution, evidence-gathering, judiciary, policing	❖ Conduct research into fixing different entry points in different places; ❖ Build campaigns on recent judgments in favour of minorities; ❖ Engage former judges; ❖ Building programming activities around justice
<b><i>Immigrants to the town</i></b>	Bring new skills, ideas	Bring values with which the older residents may disagree	❖ New migrants from conflict zones may interact less, stay indoors, fall for radicalism	❖ Engage migrating communities in different parts of the country, by sensitizing them on their rights and helping them get decent jobs and intermingle with the community
<b><i>Madrasah</i></b>	Shape religious narratives followed by all	Give sectarian lens in their religious narrative	❖ Bound by authorities to fall for sectarian thinking ❖ Less interaction with each other	❖ Engage in exchange programs to different seminaries, such as inviting teachers and students to each other's establishments ❖ Encourage thinking outside

	Potential positive impact	Potential negative impact	Limitation	Suggestions
				sectarianism ❖ Teaching comparative religion ❖ Engaging them about rights of minorities, under Constitution and Islam
<b>Sectarian or banned groups</b>	None	Given sectarian lens	❖ Linked with political parties	❖ Ensure that government's own list of banned outfits is strictly enforced;
<b>Youth</b>	Can be untapped for economic productivity	Those frustrated can fall for radicalism	❖ Shortage of jobs ❖ Less engagement avenues	❖ Increase their involvement through technical education ❖ Introduce parks and grounds in major urban areas
<b>Digital technology</b>	Learning about new worlds, questioning one self	Risk for falling prey to the extreme voices within their own faith.	❖	❖ Sensitize parents and teachers on positive usage of social media ❖ Explore the positive usage of social media
<b>Religious scholars</b>			❖ May not intermingle	❖ Provide enabling environment to intermingle with each other

*Key Players: Typology and Scope of Programs*

	<i>Potential positive impact</i>	<i>Potential negative impact</i>	<i>Limitation</i>	<i>Suggestions</i>
<b>Media</b>			❖ Bound to relay news that catch attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Sensitize journalists</li> <li>❖ Discourage the news of fake news - expose that and train people and journalists against fake news</li> <li>❖ Draft a law against hate speech</li> </ul>
<b>Political parties</b>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Ask them to activate their minority wings, or allow for minorities in the central decision-making bodies</li> </ul>

## 5. THE INDIVIDUAL LENS OF ENGAGEMENT

Some called for focusing on bringing behavioural change in the individual, who at the end of the day is responsible for restricting or opening spaces that uphold freedom of faith and religion.

One member of Bahai community said, “every individual is part of a chain” and that is why individual has to be strong for the chain to be strong.

Below are key features of engagement at the level of bringing change in an individual:

- ❖ Interviewees called for undertaking behavioural changing exercises with **different age groups**. Clearly, different age groups have different requirements and different programs can be designed. Conducting same set of exercise with different age group, especially on issues of peace and harmony, can backfire.
  - One set of activities is supposed to be with *children*; key themes around which they can be sensitized are moral education and creativity.
  - Yet another group of people who need to be engaged are *teenagers*. Activities for them should aim at un-tapping their creative potential as well as managing their emotional growth.

One program suggested to this end was “Junior Youth Empowerment Program”. The program was designed with children from 12 to 15 years. It is this age group that a teenager gets “emotional” with “revolutionary feelings”. It is in this age that suicide bomber start suicide training, and a teenage tries smoking, and so on, one said. Attempts should be made at engaging young people of this age bracket. They can, for instance, be involved in activities aimed at bettering the society.

There is hardly any program in any school for this age group. Usually, children are watched carefully from their birth to age 10, as parents invest in the activities of their children. Similarly, when someone joins a university, usually above 18, again, there are courses and monitoring. There are no specific courses or attention given to children between 12 to 15 years.



One interviewee called for imparting training to children of this age. In this regards, families and parents should also be involved, as well as teachers and religious leaders.

- *College and university graduates* can be sensitized on how to engage with diversity. They should be given opportunity to interact with others who are of their age group but hold different religious, sectarian, or political views. This is based on the assumption that Pakistani youth is as diverse as the country is. Instead of merely engaging them on hard messages around faith, they should be given opportunity to sit down, chat, dine, play cricket, among other things.
  - *Adults*, on the other hand, can be given messages on interfaith harmony, emanating from different articles of faith. Excerpts from religions can be quoted, with the understanding that they are mature enough to absorb the issue.
  - *Families* were also identified as critical in enabling environment where children are tolerant to others. Parents want their children to grow intellectually and morally, so it is best to engage them. An interviewee said the desire that children should learn about moral education and socialization has greatly increased with the advent of social media and digital technology. Another endorsed and said while parents were hesitant in the past, now, they want their children to socially interact with each other so that they come out of the virtual spaces. It was suggested that children be given some sort of moral education.
- ❖ Different professions can also be engaged. These include teachers, health workers, and journalists, among others. They are usually given professional skills, but it is important that some lessons for behavior changes be introduced to them too.

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#### *Sensitizing on international conventions*

Pakistan is signatory to at least 7 international conventions on human rights.

Pakistan is obliged to report on the progress it has marked on those conventions. The main body that deals with UN mission is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. MOFA in turn is provided with the report by the Human Rights Ministry in the center, which in turn takes data from provinces. In 2017, when Pakistan was to file the report, the HR Ministry uploaded on its website a document that was not submitted by MOFA in the UN

meeting. Examples like this led some to speculate as if “multiple governments are working in the country.”

Such examples also raise concern that the documents submitted at the UN meetings might not be truthful in their depiction of the ground situation. To correct the record, many NGOs are asked to compile shadow reports too. Coincidentally, according to one NGO worker, some of those rights workers who have come under scrutiny are those involved in drafting those shadow reports.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the real data exists on ground; the real condition to change is there. It is beyond the center, in the province, and even beyond that in districts. Every district has Human Rights department which are supposed to collect data on rights violation, report to the province, which then have to send to the center, from where it is submitted to the UN.

These HR departments are not that strong. In some areas, especially Balochistan, the HR departments are even non-existent at district level.

The UN office in Pakistan has been assisting Pakistani HR staff in districts on collecting data. That is its focus. There should be more about the conventions in Pakistan. For one, Pakistani officers of all professions be trained and sensitized on the importance of the international conventions Pakistan has signed. Civil Service Academy can introduce courses on international conventions, their importance, and reflecting that in one’s work, inviting UN staff to this end.

Similarly, media should be sensitized too. Media tend to pick up the most controversial aspect of the recommendations, from a list of recommendations, and as per one worker, do not have understanding how this entire process undertakes and what it means for Pakistan.

- ❖ Some organizations that work on behavioral change have developed module. One successful way is by inculcating them with the *tool of self-actualization*. They are asked to identify themselves, what they like and do not, and then apply the same on the community in general. These lessons can be taught to adults on interfaith harmony as well as different professionals while training them on the tools of their professions.
- ❖ *Behavioural changes take time*. One said "you need to give time for human behavior. I remember once a bishop telling me clearly, 'I am a bishop, not your project.'"

## 6. DIALOGUE FOR DIVERSITY

Dialogue or other engagements like conferences and exchange visits among adherents of different faiths and schools of thought mainly to each other's worship places was also recommended. These include holding conferences, workshops, one-on-one interaction, meetings – anything that enables different schools of thought to sit and deliberate on issues, towards peace.

### *Issues under consideration:*

Some called for discussing *issues that unite* the different groups. In this case, it was suggested that even when people from different faiths are assembled, it is better to discuss issues of common concern like social and economic issues. One noted, "it can be any subject that does not put them into agitation; the purpose is interaction that is served anyway."

A standard recommendation of this school of thought was to *approach social issues*, rather than religious issues. Discussing religion can be risky, especially if there are no experts to engage or if dialogues are held in conservative setting.

This is not to say that discussing social issues will always be unifying. This line of reasoning is also relevant in areas where social divides get religious cover. Punjab is often cited. Much of the conflict that appears along faith line there is actually on social lines, some said. As one said, "we still call a Christian sweeper even when he gets off from his seat", one said.

Others argued that instead of circumventing faith issues that apparently divide them, it is better to bring those issues to the table.

Apparently, while attempts are made to discuss religious issues, keeping track of the purpose of dialogue is often lost, veering towards social issues. A researcher from Peshawar, in a critique of leading inter-faith civilizational dialogues in the twentieth century, said these conferences are meant to discuss issues *between* faiths, but end up discussing politics, economy, or other issues; and given that the west is ascendant, their policies are justified. Thus, he argued, when it comes to implementation, lofty promises made do not match action.

To this school of thought, it was important to discuss religion for the purpose of removing misperceptions. Such dialogues can be held by discussing each other's faith.

One way is to understand each other's faith. A study quoted a worker in Peshawar as saying, "we try to move from dialogue between faiths towards understanding of various faiths and co-existence."<sup>12</sup>

*Key features* of holding successful dialogues are below:

- ❖ All agree that the issue does not emanate from faith; it has more to do with how communities perceive each other, even if issue revolves around faith. One gentleman even contested the term "interfaith", saying no article of faith calls for striking down others. The seeds of discord are sown in communities, by people, suggesting that the term "inter-community" harmony is more apt.
- ❖ Likewise, whatever format of discussion be designed, it is important that members of different faiths sit together to not only discuss contentious issues, religious or social, but also to chat and dine. This way, they will know about similarities.
- ❖ Two, dialogues should be undertaken by experts who have solid expertise of the subject as well as strong communication skill, and possibly well-known among the audience. There is always a risk that interfaith dialogue, especially those touching upon faith issues directly, be branded as conversion attempts. Such an impression can be warded off by experts having command on religious matters.

Experts or faith leaders should talk about their subject or faith rather than speaking on behalf of someone else. To be sure, many experts are well-versed in multiple faiths, but as one said, it is better to talk about one's own faith rather than others. "That is how one appears authentic", he said.

Different communication strategies are adopted to convey one's message. When it comes to freedom of faith and belief, interviewees said that speaking is usually the toughest of all, because a speaker, unless well-informed, can be at loss in replying to any question asked immediately.

- ❖ Three, dialogues should be responsive and accommodative towards the people. Attempts of proving that one is right do not work out. One was emphatic, "You have to lose if you want to win others." Proving one community or individual as superior than other will

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<sup>12</sup> Dr Noor Hayat Khan and Dr Muhammad Riaz Khan, "Contemporary Inter-Faith Dialogues: A Critical Analysis from Historical Angle," *Al-Idah* (Urdu), Issue 26 (June 2013), <<https://www.szic.pk/journal/july2013/13.pdf>>

backfire. One has to approach the dialogue with open mind, be ready to face loss, should such a situation arise.

- ❖ Four, it must be understood that dialogues take their own time. If the audience is not responsive in the initial stages, one need not be disheartened. It should be understood as a process. A productive way, one suggested, was not to rush towards decision, but to wait, then hold another dialogue, and so on. One shared his experience that the success to dialogue lies in not getting disappointed at any stage.
- ❖ An essential feature to consider for dialogue is “follow-up”. Interviewees said that dialogues with follow-up bear more fruits than those without dialogues.
- ❖ Conference has to be part of larger initiative. In that context, it is better to have more than one conference. A series of events be conducted like a chain. Only then can there be impact. It depends on where they fit in the logical framework.

### *Key avenues*

- ❖ Several interviewees noted that there is *no standard literature* on inter-faith harmony, which experts can refer to. It was suggested that some sort of consensus-based literature such as guidelines be evolved.
- ❖ In terms of faith-based dialogues, interviewees stressed that *intra-faith dialogue* should be explored too. Many initiatives of dialogue are meant to engage different faiths, not sects; inter-sects dialogue increasingly demands attention.

Sect-based establishments such as madrassahs were counted as a limitation to holding intra-faith dialogues. According to one estimate, there are more than 300,000 students enrolled in these seminaries, which have clear sectarian orientation. Interestingly, while students of madrassahs can visit schools and colleges, they hardly interact with madrassah students of other faiths. Some suggestions to overcome this sectarian bias were: visit of student and teachers from one madrassah to another; interaction of seminary students in the form of sporting activity, among others.

A seminary student is faced with limited choices after graduation. He can either become an imam or teacher. That's it. Something must be done to stem the flow of sectarianism from these madrassahs. In this regards, one suggestion is to engage lower or middle level scholars.

Senior scholars are already connected. Dialogue should be on small scale, among madrassah students.

- ❖ There is also need to promote inter-faith harmony in schools and colleges too that can be done by arranging poster competitions on inter-faith harmony. Peace clubs can also be formed in schools.

There is also a need to arrange exposure visits to various worship places of various faiths like masjid, temples and churches etc. Similarly, a short session should be arranged in those places where the religious scholar should share the practices and customs of their respective religions so that the visitors will understand that religion.

- ❖ Where traditional avenue of interaction may not work, *social media* can. Interviewee said that social media, if strategically used, can significantly contribute in promoting dialogues.
- ❖ Some interviewees also emphasized *celebrating religious events* of each other jointly such as Diwali, Eid Milan Party, and Christmas. At the end of the day, peace building is about human interaction. With interaction, it has been seen that level of intensity (of separation) decreases.
- ❖ It was suggested that NGOs should conduct corner meetings in community to get a clear picture of the people in the area. Similarly, open forums should be arranged in universities and colleges.

## 7. FINDING THE RIGHT MESSAGE: THE POWER OF COMMUNICATION

As discussed elsewhere, several interviewees underscored the significance of communication skills when engaging on freedom of faith and belief. A good communicator is essential for holding dialogue or trainings. Having expertise in the relevant field is added advantage.

One of the issues that constantly propped up was pertaining to the right kind of messages that should be relayed during dialogues, workshops, and discussions, etc., on topics around inter-faith harmony. Some of the key ones are mentioned below:

- ❖ One message revolves around *globalization*. The need for harmony among different communities is the need of the time. Qibla Ayaz, currently chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology, has been stressing this message repeatedly, saying: “We need to realize that the majority in one country is minority in another country.”

Given the inter-linkages of one part of the world with another, promoting harmony at home essentially means securing one’s own dear ones abroad. One interviewee agreed, saying that “If we develop good relations with the non-Muslims inside Pakistan, Pakistanis who live abroad will be treated even more better by non-Muslims.”

- ❖ Another message used by some rights organizations was training on *self-actualization* moving all the way to holding harmony in the society. Others called for delivering the message of humanity, which too is linked to self-actualization.

An Islamabad-based organization, Rozan, has developed a manual for training gender rights experts. It recommends that trainers should start by teaching the recipients – or future change agent – with realizing their own “self”. Recipients understand what is good for them and what is bad for them. This singular message is then applied on a larger scale on the society in general. When some conflicting thoughts emerge among recipients on whether or not to grant rights to a particular group, they are asked to connect with the “self” and ask if they would want the same treatment be meted to them, to which the obvious response is in the negative. Trainers spoke quite optimistically about this work. This exercise can also be explored in the context of sensitizing people about the rights of people of different faiths.

- ❖ Many interviewees said a certain way to sensitize people is by asking them to *follow their religions in true spirit*. This came from several clerics, who argued that no faith furthers divide, and hence, there is no reason why faith leaders cannot be engaged. They reasoned that because of the preponderance of religion in people's lives, giving example from religion is seriously paid heed to. Secondly, they noted the wrong messages do not come from the tenets of any religion, but from a handful of wrong people from different faiths. The problem is with the people, not religion.

Thus, the emphasis in Islam on the "rights of people" or "rights and obligations" should be told about repeatedly. Similarly, some called for referring to examples from Sufi poetry's reference to the downtrodden. Some others called for presenting religious arguments logically, to be consistent with time.

However, some wondered if bringing in religion is of any utility. For one, the conflict, they said, is not among faiths, but among communities. Still, even if religion is being referred to, it is better that it be done by scholars of that religion rather than by someone from other religion.

Interviewees said that irrespective of whether religion is discussed, recipients of the message should be told that interfaith harmony is not about discussing beliefs for the sake of questioning them, but for promoting interfaith harmony. Recipients are often worried if the entire exercise is meant to question their beliefs; this, it was said, is not its goal. That is why some called for engaging religious scholars or specialists.

Secondly, the message should not leave an impression as if one religion or another is being proved right. This will automatically alienate the others. Any hint that one is superior than other can backfire; similarly, messaging to this end should not be taken as preaching. That is why religious discussions should be handled with care.

Some very clearly said it is better not to touch sensitive issues like blasphemy, especially at this point of time. Organizations are increasingly adopting conflict-sensitive approach in their work, by which they mean they ask themselves if they are damaging anything or not. National and local organizations should be trained on this concept too.

- ❖ Religious injunctions are often mentioned for *removing misperceptions* about different faith groups.

Interviewees said there are a lot of misperceptions on the very basic issues, especially in small towns and rural areas, such as whether or not



they can dine with non-Muslims or take pictures with them. Muslim scholars should enlighten that the discriminatory attitude towards non-Muslims has nothing to do with Islam. Many organizations and individuals are doing this, with quite positive result.

In yet another way, there is a need to remove misperceptions about what others are thinking about you, in this case, what non-Muslims think about Muslims. This sort of misperceptions is also present in urban areas, where opportunities of engaging with each other are often few and where even there is no confusion about basic issues. This sort of thinking can become dangerous, because to ward off alleged harm to oneself, one can end up harming another person. Thus, people will suspect what Christians or Hindus are up to in a particular locality. Removing such misperceptions is often made possible by the involvement of scholars of faiths that are stereotyped. Effectively, it means involving Christian priests to share Muslim audience about the tenants of Christianity and what they think of Muslims. In this case, interviewees said, lets non-Muslims say about their own faiths. Again, there have been positive results of this too.

One Christian, commenting on how to conduct dialogue, said: “I preferred taking inferences from Christianity because I learned from this experience that one should talk about their own faith which will be more authentic rather than talking of some other faiths.” It was recommended that organizations should engage scholars to produce literature on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in theological and historical context.

Some linked misperception to mistrust that too needs to be reduced through serious efforts. One said that mistrust can be eliminated through awareness and training. “Lack of trust is because of the lack of educations and training”, he said.

- ❖ In quite a lot of such discussions, it is common that the discussion veers toward *the role of state* and what it has been doing or not for that matter. This then questions the state and its narrative. Conducting programs with such discussions is not easy; it is for these reasons that the government has been suspicious of the activities conducted in the names of rights. Organizations tackle it in various ways, by engaging scholars who then share their own opinion and ask recipients to engage in interaction; others clearly tell from the onset that nothing is black and white, and ideologies keep on changing.
- ❖ Opinion is divided over the extent to which *commonalities be highlighted at the cost of overlooking differences*. Some said commonalities or shared past among different faiths should be flagged; this will also build a sense

of camaraderie. But others said that differences cannot be ignored. To them, merely talking about commonalities is the more traditional approach. This school of thought calls for sitting down and discussing the pestering issues; to learn living peacefully in a world of differences is the real art, they argue.

- ❖ There are issues that are considered *off limit* even by people working on the issues of freedom of faith. “You cannot discuss these – blasphemy, Ahmedis, and Jews”, one said.

## 8. KEY EDUCATION REFORMS

Participants repeatedly discussed the subject of “education reforms”. This came in different forms. While some blamed lack of education for intolerant behaviours, others blamed the existing system of education for furthering divides and differences.

One, participants hinted that intolerant attitudes are more likely to be found in people who are not “properly” educated. But what was meant by proper in this context was open to debate. Religious clerics, desirous of harmony, put that messages of experts are not listened to, and the opinion of amateur is relied upon. This, to them, meant lack of appropriate learning. They called for engaging specialists who cannot waver in face of tough questions about religion.

A few, however, disagreed, saying that educating someone should mean enabling the person to read and write, not making specialist out of him. Once such a person knows how to read or write, he or she can consult books on his own. Even these basic know-hows are missing.

Many interviewees, especially non-Muslims, repeatedly called for *re-writing Pakistan's official history* not only in textbooks but also in other learning tools.

For one, they asked about teaching about the contribution of non-Muslims in the creation of Pakistan. They were vested with key responsibility in the early years of Pakistan, indicating the trust they earned from Pakistan’s founder.

One Christian activist whose father was a decorated Air Force officer, complained:

“When I was in sixth grade, there was a chapter about Halwara incident [a battle in 1965 war] in Urdu book, with the title of “Ghazi aur Shaheed”. It was about Sarfraz Rafique Shaheed, Younis Shaheed as well as my father (Cecil Chaudhry, a Christian) who returned alive from the incident. After four years, when I was in college, I checked back the book and [to my surprise] found that the chapter was removed from the textbook. It was during the period of Islamization, during the policies of Zia-ul-Haq.”

Acknowledging their contribution helps in acknowledging them as citizens of the land and removing any inhibitions against them. Many non-Muslims

argued that they do mention the roles their elders play for Pakistan, which many Pakistanis find surprising.

Attempts to document positive role by any one community *should not, however, discard any other*. One Christian leader, while justifying Christians' sacrifices for Pakistan, drew a comparison with a partition-era Sikh leader who had denounced Pakistan. While this raises the importance of Christians, it can degrade those of Sikhs. Efforts of highlighting such contributions should be holistic, therefore.

Lately, some attempts at reforming curriculum have been made, yet there are gaps too. For all revisions in curriculum, the separation of East Pakistan is blamed on non-Muslim or Hindus of East Pakistan. Similarly, little is being taught about non-Muslims in the country.

One Hindu activist filed writ petition in Supreme Court and Islamabad High Court against hate literature and communal property protection. He provided 25 evidences from primary to higher education, about hate material.

One Hindu activist complained:

"[Mughal King] Aurangzeb had been projected as a Sunni king. How would it impact the Shia Muslims in Pakistan? Hindu is branded as enemy of Pakistan. State's armed forces do not have Hindu representation; how can nationalism be promoted then."

It is being suggested that any revision or review of curricula and textbook in any province should include *non-Muslims and women in the authorized bodies*. Given that education in Pakistan is provincial subject, any step towards reforming it even in the domain of curriculum has to be simultaneously undertaken in all four provinces. In 2018, Punjab became first province for including two members belonging to religious minority community in the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board.<sup>13</sup> Other provinces should follow suit too.

Some have been calling for *introducing quotas for religious minorities* in some departments of public university. Dr. Qibla Ayaz is credited to this end too. However, some disagree with the idea, saying stressing too much on quota is

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<sup>13</sup> Rana Yasif, "Equal opportunity: 5% quota for minorities proposed in varsities," *The Express Tribune*, February 22, 2018, <<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1641224/1-equal-opportunity-5-quota-minorities-proposed-varsities>>

tantamount to begging. They called for enabling community to match on their own.

A few even recommended *technical education for the vulnerable groups* like religious minorities. One gave example of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, who despite having any state identity, was able to form a niche owing to their technical skills like carpet weaving.

One reason why non-Muslims are unable to fill the 3-5% quota seats allocated for them is because they do not have the education level that is required to fill that post. According to some estimates, 7000 federal seats of non-Muslims are vacant, besides from the many at provincial level.

Some innovative solutions should be sought, such as by imparting the education required to fill those seats. In this case, a prior program can be arranged for non-Muslims eager to apply for government jobs on their quota.

One academic at Punjab University shared of supervising several rich theses with many examples of interfaith harmony. The good thing about these theses is that they deal with local context such as in Lahore and Faisalabad, and deal with local histories such as of Ranjeet Singh. Once these thesis are completed, they are left aside, and at best, gather dust in the university's archival section. One suggestion is to *convert the theses into digital format*.

Other than this the biased content in textbook should be removed and hate speech should be banned though a lot of laws are made but we haven't seen their implementation.

An organization is running "Campaign for Unbiased Education" for the last eight years. The campaign aims to check the textbooks annually - in the public schools from grade 1 to 10 - against any bias, violence, and misperception.

Some thematic areas are worth noting:

- ❖ Attempts to reform curriculum fail partly because they do not take into consideration the opinion of non-Muslims and women in the first place. New boards should consult them directly.
- ❖ Peace education to promote social harmony can be introduced for relevant degrees especially in madrassahs. One organization, Peace & Education Foundation, has produced a standard book on peace education in the country.

- ❖ While madrassahs share curriculum, they propagate sectarian thinking, with some blaming non-curriculum content being taught; these should be removed.
- ❖ Comparative religion can be taught at higher level especially for specialists as well as at primary and secondary levels.
- ❖ In the classroom, students should be taught from subjects on ethics.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

### A summary of the recommendations drawn

A summary of the recommendations drawn from different aspects of the discourse highlighted earlier under different sections is given below.

### To national and multilateral organizations including donor agencies

- ❖ Adopt conflict sensitivity and freedom of faith and belief as cross-cutting themes in your work.
- ❖ For programming in different regions, shun the macro-level findings of security of non-Muslims; rather take into account the different types of security demands for each group in different parts of the country.
- ❖ Explore the gender, class, and provincial dimension of the conflict at hand to suggest other workable avenues, such as:
  - With the support of women rights organizations, suggest measures against forced conversions of Hindus in Sindh; and
  - With the support of human rights bodies, suggest measures against mob violence against Christians in Punjab.
- ❖ Encourage women groups as well as parents in interfaith harmony programs parallel to those of teachers, community members, social workers, lawyers and youth, etc.
- ❖ In liaison with the government, sensitize public sector staff, especially of NADRA and ECP, in documenting non-Muslims in the country.
- ❖ Regularly sensitize teachers on social harmony, and equip them with tools that enable them to deal with diversity in the classroom, such as through critical enquiry and teaching of social sciences; additionally, they can also be trained to identify and respond to students on the path of radicalization including in terms of faith-based violence and persecution.
- ❖ Sensitize students, teachers, and administrators of educational institutions on the fundamental human rights including minority rights and freedom of faith as enriched in the Constitution.

- ❖ Undertake special programmatic measures for the economic mainstreaming of non-Muslims, such as by launching campaign about the job rights, helping non-Muslims in applying for jobs, among others.
- ❖ Train journalists, researchers, and faith activists on the Right to Information Act (RTI), so as to enable them to get due information about non-Muslims, such as whether the job quota has been duly applied; whether funds meant for them have been released; so on.
- ❖ Invite legislators of RTI Bill to different workshops and seminars so as to have discussions/interaction with the people from different walks of society.
- ❖ Undertake special programming measures for reforming criminal justice system, focusing on following the procedural aspects in spirit, strengthening the lower entry points of that system, among others.
- ❖ Explore avenues of removing loopholes in the procedural aspects of the blasphemy laws, such as by undertaking debates, shaping public opinion on the issue as well as criminal justice system.
- ❖ Draw a public campaign aimed at securing the legal rights of then non-Muslims by referring to the Constitution of Pakistan, their job quota, as well as the 2014 judgment by Justice Tassaduq Jilani.
- ❖ Assist government bodies in drawing Rules of Business for Hindu Marriage Act and Sikh Marriage Act.
- ❖ Train officials in different professional academies about Pakistan's obligations to various international treaties and their significance for Pakistan's own standing.
- ❖ Form alliances with other NGOs, ensuring that adhering to alliances are part of NGO's routine work.
- ❖ Provide with the government data on different rights violations, especially at end of year or when any such need arises, to help gain trust about work.
- ❖ Conduct dialogues like conferences, interactions with non-Muslims on a range of topics, depending on age groups and locations: children be given moral lessons; teachers' creativity be steered for constructive work; young students be engaged with diversity; only adults above a certain age be engaged in debate on faith-based issues.



## *Recommendations*

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- ❖ Any training program for any profession should also include a session on “self-actualization” or the need for improving oneself, so as to realize upon the value of the work in their personal lives.
- ❖ Train journalists on what is meant by international human rights convention Pakistan has signed as well as the procedures in drafting their reports.
- ❖ For areas barred from working, such as tribal areas, engage with their communities in areas where they might have migrated, or invite them to a comfortable place.
- ❖ Bring to front the tangible goals from any programming on human rights and peace, to be used for convincing government officials.
- ❖ Integrate programming goals in the broader goals of the government, such as National Action Plan (NAP).
- ❖ Invest more in volunteers, raising teams, where possible.
- ❖ Enhance engagement of youths from different faiths in joints sporting and cultural programs.
- ❖ Hold capacity building and myth-breaking sessions across different segments of society mainly including religious leaders, advocates, police, media and judiciary. A particularly focus of these programs should be on reforming participants’ behaviours and attitudes. For engaging civil servants such as from law enforcement, NADRA and judiciary, joint programs with different government departments can be developed.
- ❖ Assist the government in effective functioning of district peace committees or boards established by the government.
- ❖ Establish interfaith committees comprising followers of different faiths at district level and most importantly youth should be included in these groups.
- ❖ Actively engage National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), raising its capacity and encouraging it to advocate issues with the government.
- ❖ For any programming activity, ensure that the level of trust by community is taken into account; this trust may vary from place to place.
- ❖ Help remove misperceptions of different communities by visiting each other and lecturing about one’s faith. Especially,

- Undertake special misperception-removing exercises between Christians and Muslims, in light of the charges of blasphemy filed against Christians.
- Undertake visits of students and teachers of different seminaries to each other, to enable them think beyond their sectarian confines.
- ❖ Undertake dialogue, engaging an expert with strong communication skills, on common social issues or faith issues, depending on the need and audience:
  - Produce standard literature on interfaith and intra-faith harmony in Pakistan; and
  - Actively engage social media for bringing diverse audiences together.
- ❖ Support civil society organization's projects on interfaith harmony and freedom of faith or belief, for a period of at least 5 to 10 years, so as to sustain their impact.
- ❖ For organizations and donors working on freedom of faith programming, enhance multilateral organizational as well as public-private coordination to enhance synergy.
- ❖ For more sustainability of interfaith programs, promote joint collaboration with international stakeholders/players.
- ❖ Support civil society in designing project forms that have simple templates and prioritize those with experience or expertise in the relevant field.

### **On media and journalists**

- ❖ Sensitize media practitioners, including reporters, editors, scriptwriters, anchorpersons, etc., against faith-based violence and persecution, and for diversity, so that inclusion is reflected in their work.
- ❖ Use multimedia and street theatre to give and encourage the peace messages on faith-based harmony and co-existence.
- ❖ On electronic media, allocate at least 10% of the airtime to such promotions/ads or other dramas highlighting non-Muslims' problems.

## *Recommendations*

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- ❖ Ensure representation of minorities in all types of programs including on entertainment and discussions/dialogues.
- ❖ Promote the narrative of co-existence and harmony through FM radio and TV channels.
- ❖ Promote online blogs on social media platforms on freedom of faith and harmony.

### **To faith leaders and scholars**

- ❖ Improve and formalize mutual, joint celebrations of all religious festivals in the country, ensuring maximum participation from all faiths.
- ❖ Organize special joint events to promote those articles of Constitution that are linked to freedom of religion and minority rights as well as messages of peace and commonalities in the holy books of different faiths.
- ❖ Promote inter-faith and intra-faith dialogue at national as well as grass-root level.
- ❖ Develop and implement joint social action plans like plantations of trees at sacred places like mosques and churches etc., by different religious scholars/members.
- ❖ Annul the extremists' arguments and their sources that legitimize violence against non-Muslims.
- ❖ Discard religious interpretations contradicting with constitution or the sanctity it granted to citizens of people of different faiths.
- ❖ Manage visits of students and teachers from one madrassah to another; interaction of seminary students in the form of sporting activity, among others.
- ❖ Engage lower or middle level scholars, or senior madrassah students, in freedom of faith programs mainly in terms of dialogue and interaction among communities.

### **To the government, judiciary and Parliament**

- ❖ Implement the National Action Plan's (NAP) clause pertaining to the protection of minorities, and form a commission to that end.
- ❖ Take special measures to protect Hazara Shias in Balochistan.

- ❖ Ensure the implementation of 5% job quota implementation for the non-Muslims, during recruitments in government departments.
- ❖ Undertake fact-finding missions to learn about forced conversions in Sindh.
- ❖ *Via ministry of law*, elaborate the existing Islamic clauses in the Constitution for simpler understanding, in specific about (a) relations between Islam and state, (b) rights of the non-Muslims, and (c) relations with Muslim and non-Muslim countries.
- ❖ Boost religious tourism, reducing fears of people to visit shrines, temples.
- ❖ Review faith-based clauses of the Constitution that apparently accord second-class status to religious minorities.
- ❖ Hold dialogue with broad range of society including teachers, lawyers, faith leaders, media, and parliamentarians, on critical philosophical issues facing the country especially state-society and state-religion relation and their impact on peaceful co-existence and harmony.
- ❖ Consult religious scholars from different faiths in the country in any legislation pertaining to non-Muslims like the practice of consulting epic body of Council of Islamic Ideology.
- ❖ The Parliament, in particular, should set outline of fresh national narrative, extracted from the Constitution, upholding diversity and renouncing all sorts of extremism including faith-based.
- ❖ In conjunction with civil society organizations, sensitize public sector staff, especially of NADRA and ECP, in documenting non-Muslims in the country, without stereotyping them; Consider inducting non-Muslim staff, too, in NADRA offices across the country.
- ❖ Make special measures at registering scheduled-caste Hindus, poor Christians for their national identity cards.
- ❖ In consultation with scholars, remove loopholes in the procedural aspects of the blasphemy laws as well as evolve mechanism to check its misuse.
- ❖ Ensure that the 2014 judgment of Justice Tassadduq Jilani is enforced in spirit.
- ❖ In support from the NGOs, instill value of equal citizenship to different departments by relaying them with reading material like pamphlets, on constitutional rights of non-Muslims.

## *Recommendations*

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- ❖ Expedite drafting of the Rules of Business for Hindu Marriage Act and Sikh Marriage Act.
- ❖ Provide for substantive representation of non-Muslims in political parties, such as by activating the dysfunctional minority cells, or allocating seats to them in central decision-taking bodies.
- ❖ Include in different professional academies, Pakistan's obligations to various international treaties and their significance for Pakistan's own standing.
- ❖ In consultation with NGOs, revive the district peace committees.
- ❖ Ensure that workforce is diverse, that is inclusive of minorities. Specific bodies to look are Public Safety and Police Commission; census commission, curriculum boards; Ulema boards, among others.
- ❖ Introduce courses like ethics and comparative religion in curricula of different educational boards including of madrassahs.
- ❖ Remove hate material from the textbooks and curricula: to this end, required legislation should be done at earliest possible.
- ❖ Include content on equality, social harmony mainly in textbooks on Islamiyat and Pakistan studies.
- ❖ In the universities, build awareness about history of the West and evolution of its institutions, such as by establishing centers aimed at understanding relation between Muslim and the west, making functional the existing ones, add introducing courses to this end. This will help reform the worldview that creates hatred against non-Muslims.
- ❖ Non-Muslim heroes should be acknowledged in the curriculum.
- ❖ The government shall promote a citizenship framework, which accepts all Pakistanis as equal citizens, irrespective of their faiths and ethnicities. This framework will automatically help in embracing minorities, otherwise pushed to the sidelines. Gestures like acknowledging the contribution of non-Muslims in Pakistan shall be undertaken.

**Annex-1: Detail on individual interviews conducted for the study**

Sr No	Name	Designation/ Organization	Location
1.	Israr Madini	Chairman, International Research Council for Religious Affairs - IRCRA	Nowshera
2.	Fawad Akhtari	Religious Leader Bahai Community	Peshawar
3.	Dr. Rashid Ahmad	Associate Professor, Sheikh Zayed Islamic Research Center Peshawar	Peshawar
4.	Joseph John	Preist Incharge, St.John's Cathedral Church, Peshawar Cantt	Peshawar
5.	Rooh ullah Madni	Former Provincial Chief Khitab, KPK	Peshawar
6.	Haroon Sabariar	Chairman, All Pakistan Hindu Rights Movement / Founder member "Pakistan Council of World Religion Peshawar"	Peshawar
7.	Malalay Ahmedi	Trainer, Resource Person Bhai Community Peshawar	Peshawar
8.	Nisar Gul	Director, Dar Ul Sakoon	Quetta
9.	Kamal Rajpur	Member of HRCP Quetta/ Chairman Baluchistan Women Skills and Education Institute	Quetta
10.	Roshan Khursheed Barocha	Former Provincial Minister (2000-2002) Government of Balochistan in departments of Social Welfare, Informal education, Human Rights, Youth. Former Senator in Senate of Pakistan (2003-2006)	Quetta
11.	Seema Seher Batool	President Women Wing, Hazara Democratic Party	Quetta
12.	Liaquat Haravi	Former Councilor Hazara Community/ Trader	Quetta
13.	Shezan William	Executive Director, Caritas Balochistan	Quetta

Sr No	Name	Designation/ Organization	Location
14.	Asif Jehangir	Drama Writer PTV	Quetta
15.	Ali Baba Taj	Professor, Poet	Quetta
16.	Muhammad Arif	Assistant Professor Baluchistan University	Quetta
17.	Maulana Anwar Ul Haq Haqqanni	Baluchistan Provincial Chief Khitab, chairman Baluchistan Moon sighting committee	Quetta
18.	Dr. Iqbal Chawla	Dean Social Sciences, Punjab University	Lahore
19.	Muhammad Raghib Naeemi	Principal Jamia Naeemia/Member Council of Islamic Ideology Pakistan	Lahore
20.	Peter Jacob	Executive Director, Center for Social Justice	Lahore
21.	Cecil Shane Chaudhry	Executive Director, National Commission for Justice and Peace	Lahore
22.	Elaine Alam	Secretary General FACES Pakistan	Lahore
23.	I A Rehman	Ex-Director HRCP	Lahore
24.	Saroop Ejaz	Lawyer/ Member HRW Pakistan	Lahore
25.	Sajid Christopher	President, Human Friends Organization	Lahore
26.	Rubina Ghazal	In-charge Legal Department, CLAAS	Lahore
27.	Prakash V Channd	Hindu Social Worker	Karachi
28.	Dr. Khalid Ghaus	Former Director, Centre of Excellence for Women Studies Karachi University. Chairperson Social Policy and Development Centre	Karachi
29.	Dr. Sabir Michael	Professor Karachi University/ Consultant National Delegation for Minorities Rights	Karachi

Annex

Sr No	Name	Designation/ Organization	Location
30.	Ahmad Benori	Scholar Madrassa Benory Town Karachi	Karachi
31.	Aamir Hameed	Professor Department of IR Karachi University	Karachi
32.	Rafia Gullani	Chairperson, Social Democratic Women Organization	Karachi
33.	Sadiqa Salahuddin	Executive Director, Invest Resource Center	Karachi
34.	Zahid Farooq	Joint Director, Urban Resource Center	Karachi
35.	Nadja Wuensche	United Nations	Islamabad
36.	Rizwan	Norwegian Church Aid	Islamabad
37.	Dr Qibla Ayaz	Chairman, Islamic Ideology Council Pakistan	Islamabad
38.	Khursheed Nadeem	President, Organization for Research and Education	Islamabad
39.	Rashad Bukhary	Independent Consultant, Inter-faith Harmony	Islamabad
40.	Ms. Jennifer Jag Jivan	Director, Christian Study Center Rawalpindi	Rawalpindi
41.	Kumar Arora	Joint Director, Hindu-Sikh social Welfare council Rawalpindi	Rawalpindi



## GALLERY

First training conducted on engaging on interfaith harmony in Pakistan



## Second workshop on engaging on interfaith harmony held in Karachi



### Third workshop on Interfaith Harmony concludes in Lahore



**P**ak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) is an independent think-tank committed to provide an in-depth understanding and objective analyses of regional and global issues. PIPS provides international strategic thinkers a forum to play an active role in understanding and researching real and perceived threats to regional and global peace and security. The objective is to engage leading regional and international strategic thinkers, academicians and media persons in pursuance and production of knowledge of national, regional and global security issues and to promote awareness about the importance of peace and democracy. The goal will be achieved through independent policy analysis, and collection, processing, interpretation and dissemination of information and skills/training.

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ISSN 2072-0408  
Price: Rs 200/-