

Faith-Based Discrimination in Southern Punjab: Lived Experiences



Field investigation report



Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

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Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

Aiwan-e-Jamhooir

107 Tipu Block, New Garden Town

Lahore 54600

T: +92 42 3583 8341, 3586 4994, 3586 9969

F: +92 42 3588 3582

E: hrcp@hrcp-web.org

www.hrcp-web.org

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Abbreviations

BVH	Bahawal Victoria Hospital
BHU	basic health unit
HRCP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
MNA	member of the National Assembly
MPA	member of the provincial assembly
PSC	Punjab Seed Corporation
R&M	repair and maintenance (department)
THQ	tehsil headquarter

Introduction

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) organised a fact-finding mission on 23–26 August 2019 in the districts of Khanewal, Bahawalpur and Rahimyar Khan to assess the nature and forms of discrimination against religious minority communities in southern Punjab. These districts were selected because they include areas with small, but significant Hindu and Christian communities.¹ The mission was led by Amjad Nazeer (HRCP member). Other team members included Faisal Tangwani and Fatima Faisal Khan (HRCP staff members), and Khawaja Asad (HRCP volunteer) who joined the group in Bahawalpur and Liaquatpur, Rahimyar Khan. The team visited several localities with a concentration of Christian and Hindu residents and interacted with a number of citizens and community representatives.

The mission observed a marginal improvement in the conditions of minority communities. However, the general intolerance against non-Muslim communities in society, as well as the incidences of faith-based discrimination and unfair treatment, continued to prevail. The report addresses the wide spectrum of individual and collective discrimination and exclusion faced by the members of minority communities. In particular, it highlights the issues and concerns that Christian and Hindu communities face with respect to unequal treatment and ‘otherisation’; limited, or lack of, provision of fundamental infrastructure and education facilities; attempts to persuade or influence conversion to Islam and, in the case of young girls, incidences of forced marriages and forced conversions. Despite their efforts to change their circumstances, widespread unemployment and limited job and business opportunities mean that members of the minority communities are trapped in poverty. Dilapidated and non-functional health, sewerage, sanitation and water facilities exacerbate their predicament.

While HRCP was unable to verify every claim recorded in this report, the team documented as many testimonies as possible to ascertain if any trends in discrimination against religious minorities emerged.

¹ Bahawalpur and Rahimyar Khan have Hindu populations of over 67,000 and 220,000, respectively (source: <http://pakistanhinducouncil.org.pk/hinduism/hindu-population-pk/>). Khanewal has a sizable Christian community, although no reliable figures are available.

'The pressure to convert': Prejudice in schools and colleges

Mushtaq Masih, a primary school teacher in Yazman, Bahawalpur, told the team that although the schools were not segregated, Muslim students far outnumbered the Christians—one Christian for every 100 Muslim students. Thus marginalised, Christian students hesitate to openly participate in the class or freely mix with other students or interact confidently with the Muslim teachers. According to him, there were currently only three or four Christian teachers in the entire tehsil. Mushtaq believed that Christian teachers should be appointed in Christian-majority areas to encourage Christian students to interact and mingle with teachers and students and be heard. He was also of the opinion that the syllabus needed to be reformed and improved to make it more inclusive and pluralistic.

Another recurring issue raised at all the mission's meetings was that of Muslim teachers and students urging non-Muslim students and even teachers to convert to Islam. In one case, a sixth-grade student in Yazman colony was forced by his teacher to read Arabic in class although the latter knew that he was Christian. When he was unable to read it, the teacher would punish him physically. Eventually, the boy left the school prematurely.

The Christian community of Chak 81/82, district Khanewal, did not believe that they were discriminated against in the health and education services. By and large, the environment was amicable. However, one member of the community recounted an incident from a local school where Master Shareef, who was allegedly sympathetic to the Taliban's orthodox Islam and taught at the Government High School in the same village, used to ask Christian students to drink water from separate glasses. He also asked Muslim students to separate their desks from the Christian students. In response to the community's complaints, he was transferred to another school in 2012/13.

At the Khurrampura Government High School in district Khanewal, Rozina, a member of the local Christian community and a human rights worker, recalled that two Christian students were forcibly given a school-leaving certificate by the teacher who happened to be an orthodox Muslim. The teacher first asked the Christians students to sit separately and then circulated an anti-Christian note in the school and separate water glasses

were offered to them. The headmaster failed 15–16 Christian girl students in their respective exams. Not a single Christian mother was a member of the School Management Committee, according to Rozina.

While interviewing members of the Shanti Nagar Church, the mission learned that a number of students were put under undue pressure by the Muslim students or teachers to convert to Islam. Safia Williams recalled a similar experience when she was doing her intermediate degree in commerce at a college in Khanewal in 2012. She said her friends and class fellows would preach to her to convert to Islam and “come to the path of righteousness and piety”. She was told she would go to paradise if she embraced Islam. She would reply that she believed she was pious and righteous as she was a true Christian, and that “our priests also promised paradise in the afterlife if we were truthful and fair Christians”. They would then argue that she “should still convert to Islam as it is a wonderful faith”. Such is the overall academic environment for a non-Muslim student.



The Christian community in Shanti Nagar, Khanewal, feels that students and teachers are unduly pressurised to convert to Islam

Pastor Salatiel Victor stated that the curriculum and educational content was prejudiced and exclusionary and did not acknowledge the existence of

non-Muslim communities. He was also aggrieved by the primary school teachers' appointment process in 2017. Muslim teachers were appointed within the union councils they lived in, while the Christian teachers appointed on the minority quota were posted around 50–70 km away from their hometowns or the union councils they came from. He recommended to the mission that there should be a policy emphasising that “there was a need to build an accurate and objective narrative of the social and political issues in the country, history should be taught objectively and impartially, and the role of the Christian community and leaders in the Indo-Pakistan independence struggle must be highlighted”. He quoted the example of S P Singha who was Speaker of the Punjab Assembly at the time of Partition and an eminent leader in those days.

The mission also discussed the problem of discrimination with Hindu students and teachers in the education sector with the representatives of Jinnah Abadi, Chak 101 DB, Yazman, district Bahawalpur. In this colony around 200 households belonged to the Hindu faith, up to 1,200–1,500 individuals in all. There was no school within their community, although they believed there was a need for one, and the existing schools were far away. The children had to cross two main roads to get to the nearest school. Only a couple of schools were accessible to their children and there too, they faced overt discrimination.

The representatives said the Muslim and non-Muslim divide was obvious there and there were only four Hindu teachers from Yazman. Hindu students from their community were repeatedly forced to learn Islamic studies. A Hindu teacher had been appointed in a local school in January–February 2019 and the local people had expressed serious reservations about his appointment just because he was a Hindu. It was common for Muslims in the vicinity and religious clerics in particular to raise objections whenever a Hindu teacher was appointed.

An example was given of a qualified Hindu teacher with a Master's degree in his subject who was appointed to teach in a local school. Muslim clerics from the area made formal complaints against him and, as a result, the teacher was prohibited from teaching Islamic studies. In another case, two other Hindu teachers out of a total of fourteen employees had to keep their drinking glasses in school separate from the others.

The Hindu community in Liaquatpur, district Rahimyar Khan, were initially reticent about sharing their views and experiences. Their concerns were to some degree allayed when the purpose of the mission and HRCP's vision was explained. The area had lacked a school in their community. A local charity, the Ghazali Trust, had opened a school within the community a couple of years earlier. Outside the community, their children went to the Government Model Public School. It was estimated that there was only one Hindu student for every 30 Muslims in a class.

Almost all the students without exception faced discrimination. All of them had to use separate water glasses. Most of the Muslim students brought their own water bottles. The local tea stalls and other food vendors kept separate utensils for Hindu customers. Even a *dahi bharey wala* (local snack) had separate plates for Hindu students. Such discrimination in schools is pervasive at all levels of education and a source of constant distress for non-Muslim students.

The Islamic studies classes usually involved more preaching than actual learning, with the teachers displaying typical discriminatory attitudes. The community members firmly believed it was essential to open a Hindi-medium school that would teach children in the Hindi language. Students at the Government Model High School in Liaquatpur had to study Islamiyat at the matric level but were advised later to opt for the subject of *akhlaqiyat* (ethics). Ironically, no teacher was assigned for the task and books on ethics were unavailable in the market, despite repeated requests to the authorities. According to a local councillor for minorities, Tariq Mahmood Shah, they had also contacted the largest bookseller in the district, Saeed Book Centre, but the proprietor was unable to help since the books were not available at all. The community argued that the issue needed to be taken up with the Punjab Textbook Board. If ethics was prescribed to the non-Muslim students, then the books had to be made available either in the market or provided by the district executive district officer for education.

Forced conversions and forced marriages

In Yazman, district Bahawalpur, there were at least a dozen cases of forced marriages alongside forced conversions. A member of the local community told the mission that in Chak 104-D in December 2018, Emanuel Masih's 13-year-old daughter was forced to marry into a Muslim family and was converted to Islam. The incident was brought to the notice of the Federal

Minister for Human Rights Dr Shireen Mazari but even then, justice was not dispensed. From another household, once again in Chak 104-D, four sisters were married to Muslim boys and efforts to prove this were unsuccessful.

There had even been a case of a Muslim girl marrying a Christian boy and the boy had to convert. Unfortunately, the boy was later killed. The local people had said the court would deliver justice to the victim's family but nothing had been done. The community said that such cases were indicative of entrenched institutionalised injustice in society. Local authorities and law enforcement agencies rarely held the culprits and perpetrators of major and minor offences to account in the province. Prevailing attitudes of prejudice and favouritism further discouraged minority Christians and Hindus to speak out, protest, dissent or proactively seek justice.



The Hindu community in Yazman, Bahawalpur, reported concerns regarding the forced conversion of young girls

The Hindu community of Yazman also faced attitudes of oppression and discrimination. In 2018, a married woman from the tiny Hindu community was abducted and forcibly converted to Islam. One of the community members interviewed stated that had the situation been reversed, i.e. if a

Muslim married woman had been abducted and forcibly converted to Hinduism, then the whole Muslim community of the area would have come out in support. The woman's relatives would have been up in arms and perhaps would have killed the Hindu man but no such thing happened in this case. In the Hindu faith, a woman once married was married forever and to be forced into marriage again with a man from an alien faith was a violation of the sanctity of their *dharmā* (principles of faith).

Given the kind of fear thus generated, girls in this community usually only studied up to the ninth grade. After that parents discouraged them from continuing their studies, fearing that their girls might be kidnapped and converted to the dominant faith. Another example given was of Kashmala Devi who was allegedly abducted by a Muslim and forced to convert to Islam. She had not yet returned to Yazman.

The Hindu community also faced the problem of registration of their marriages. Their marriage ritual i.e. 'circling around the sacred fire and tying the knot' is not officially documented and the rites of marriage as such remain verbal instead. Proving the marriage of a man or woman becomes difficult in legal terms. According to one member, Christians are considered *able-kitaab* (sister faith emanating from the Abrahamic tradition), and therefore the Muslim community's treatment of them was relatively favourable. Hindus were considered *kaffir* (lit. infidel, used in a pejorative sense), believing in a very different set of gods and goddesses, and as a result the Muslims' attitude towards them was typically exclusionary and alienating. Partition and Indo-Pak tensions had only exacerbated the situation.

The Hindu community of Liaquatpur, district Rahimyar Khan, regularly faced the issue of forced marriages and forced conversions of underage girls in their community. The community representative said that about five to six cases had already occurred in the year. The mission was informed of the case of Naina Bai from the district, who was forcibly married to a Muslim boy at the age of 12 or 13. Her age was changed to 16 in her identification documents. She was then kept away from her family for two months, and was then allowed to meet only once and that too for just 15 minutes in the presence of the police. In court, the girl was made to state that she converted to Islam and got married through her own choice. The judge who heard her case said that he could not do anything further after the girl's own statement of will.

The mission also learned about three or four other cases of forced marriage and involuntary conversions in Katchi Mandi, district Rahimyar Khan, including the cases of Gori (who was 13 years old at the time of marriage) and Radha, who was just 14 at the time of marriage. According to a community member, ‘the girls were abducted and kept hidden away for 2 to 3 months and the people who abducted them stated that the girls had gladly embraced Islam.’

The Hindu community in Gulshan Farid colony, district Pakpattan Sharif, faced similar circumstances. Strangely, about nine families altogether converted to Islam in 2016. The constant fear of forced conversions and marriages prompted Hindu families to keep their daughters at home instead of sending them to school to be educated. Those girls who did go to school reported sexism and discrimination, such as being forbidden to touch the same pots as their Muslim peers, as well as pressure to convert to Islam.

In Shanti Nagar, district Khanewal, the issue of Christian marriages and divorce came under discussion. The corresponding Acts of Christian Marriage (1872) and Divorce (1869) were observed to be unhelpful, being religiously orthodox, obsolete and, in particular, not allowing them the right to divorce unless one of the spouses, particularly the man, suspects or accuses one’s partner (even without grounds) of adultery or illicit relations outside marriage. The community stressed that there was a need for one localised law ensuring them the civil right to marriage and divorce. The community was also aware of the proposed Christian Marriage and Divorce Act 2019. Although they were unfamiliar with the details, they hoped the law was going to be progressive and would confer the rights to marriage and divorce as applied to other citizens of the country.

Traditionally and as per the above-mentioned pre-Partition British law, women do not have the right to divorce. As a result, the Christian community was worried because the British civil law was outdated and the Zia-ul-Haq regime’s abolition of the already flawed section 7 caused further difficulties. Under the present laws conversion to Islam or accusing one’s partner of adultery without any basis was a means of seeking a divorce. Therefore, the proposed law needed to be adopted by parliament in the wider public interest.

Biases in employment

The mission also visited the New Islami Colony Church on the outskirts of district Bahawalpur on 25 August 2019. Nadeem Patras, one of the members of the local church in the area, gathered a number of men in the church to talk to the mission. Most of them happened to be employees of the Bahawal Victoria Hospital (BVH) in the Repair and Maintenance (R&M) Department. They said that due to a recent downsizing move in the R&M Department at BVH, 183 sanitary workers, all belonging to the Christian faith, were fired without prior notice. Those affected suspected an element of faith-based discrimination, because the Muslims employed within the same and other departments were maintained.



Sanitary workers from the Christian community in New Islami Colony, Bahawalpur, discuss their concerns with the team

All the employees were paid on a daily wage basis. The basic salary at BVH for sanitary workers was Rs14,500 and even this amount was not paid and the salary was reduced each month without reasonable justification. For instance, one of the workers claimed that in the month preceding their unfair termination, they were paid only Rs11,000. Attendees of the meeting said that the reason given to them for termination was that the R&M

Department at the hospital was being closed in its entirety. However, the jobs of Muslim workers in R&M were not been abolished and only those 183 workers belonging to the minority Christian community out of the total 563 workers in the same department were dismissed. The workers had formally protested a couple of times but to no avail. Most of them were married and had children. The sudden termination of their jobs had caused them serious financial difficulties. Around 30 of these 183 workers lived in rented accommodation. Without their salaries, they were unable to pay the rent or send their children to school.

The workers spoke of having complained about this discrimination to the Hospital Administration but they also refused to cooperate. Subsequently, they met with local members of the provincial assembly (MPAs) and the ruling party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf district president Tehseen Nazir. Mr Nazir had promised to negotiate with the hospital administration and allay their concerns at a Board meeting scheduled for 3 September.

Unemployment and poverty are the biggest problems faced by the Hindu community of Jinnah Abadi, district Bahawalpur. Given the entrenched discrimination, the residual traces of caste-based bigotry, it is a daunting task for a Hindu man or woman to find a job. According to the local representatives, they cannot even open a *karyana* (grocery) shop or food stall. When asked the reason for this, they said that Muslim customers, believing them to be untouchable, avoided buying food from them, even fruit or vegetables. Thus, their only options were manual labour or serfdom with the local landlords.

Landlords and Muslim citizens in general avoided eating and sharing food with them or gave them food and water in separate pots and utensils. On the whole, the Hindu community (as well as the aforementioned Christian community) were severely poverty-stricken and discriminated against. Their Muslim counterparts were privileged in their opportunities and access to land, businesses, and other public and private jobs as well as educational opportunities.

In Chak 81/82 of district Khanewal, where most workers are employed at Punjab Seed Corporation (PSC), it was revealed that PSC gave notice to evacuate houses that were allotted to Christian workers. However, they believed that certain Muslim families who were also living on the land allotted by the PSC were not displaced. The workers believed that they were

no longer offered jobs by the PSC because they were held responsible for the unlawful stay in the premises of the PSC.

A couple of representatives narrated stories of discrimination. One said, “I happened to eat at the Jalandhar Hotel. When the owner of the hotel somehow discovered that I believed in Hindu *dharmā*, he broke the plate and compelled me to pay for it. He said I should have disclosed to him earlier [that I was Hindu] and he would have served me in separate dishes. If his customers found out, they would avoid visiting his hotel.” Another member of the community said, “We were visiting Dera Nawab for a relative’s marriage. It was winter, and very cold. Next morning, several of us took a bath and got ready for the ceremony on our host’s premises. Two of us went to the market in Dera Nawab and took a bath in a public *hamaam* (bathhouse). Discovering that we were Hindus, the owner forced us to clean the washrooms as they had been ‘polluted’ by us taking a bath there. Then he made us pay an extra fine. As we were poor and vulnerable, we had to obey.”

According to the Hindu group participating in the discussion, “the law enforcement authorities were deeply prejudiced against them”. At Bangla Manthar in district Rahimyar Khan, for example, a Muslim girl was harassed by a Hindu boy. He was taken to task the very next day. However, when a Hindu girl faced similar misbehaviour, no action was taken against the harasser for months. The community members stated that the class difference also mattered. Hindu people with better incomes or those who were relatively prosperous, many of them living in Sindh, did not feel as discriminated against as they did. Besides, their numbers were greater in Sindh and their votes counted. Therefore, they were not as intensely discriminated against.

The Christian community of Liaquatpur, district Rahimyar Khan also raised the issue of overtime duties for minorities. Shahzad Masih complained to the mission that when they worked over Eid holidays, they were never paid overtime—although it is worth noting that Muslim workers were not paid overtime either. However, workers have a genuine right to compensation for working overtime. Sadiq Masih, a sanitary worker from that area, said he had been working 28 years without any promotion, whereas one of his junior Muslim colleagues, M. Shahzad, had been made supervisor over him and others. No Christian was given the position of sanitary inspector. Almost invariably, the inspectors were Muslim. Pastor Saeed Akhtar added

that the whole area had only one council seat in the entire tehsil. There were both Hindus and the Christians in the community but none of them had the courage to stand for office. They knew that Muslim voters would never vote for them.

The Hindu community members were of the view that their representative on a reserved seat was almost always a Christian. But, they asserted, even their own representatives did not listen to them, saying “You never chose us. It is our party that offered us the seat.” Therefore, they were more faithful to their own or their party’s interests than that of their community. The so-called 5% quota was rarely respected.

In tehsil headquarter (THQ) Yazman Hospital, a Christian worker Kashif Masood told the mission how difficult his duties were because of the discrimination he faced from the management. He complained that every now and then they were also pressurised to convert to Islam. He alleged that Muslim ward boys were promoted to clerks, whereas he was still a ward boy, even though he had more experience than the ones who were promoted. Muslims were given preferential treatment in hiring and promotions.

Discrimination in access to infrastructure

The mission visited a school run by the Hindu community and funded by the Ghazali Trust in Liaquatpur, district Rahimyar Khan. Approximately 6,000 houses belong to the Hindu community in Liaquatpur, of which around 70 are situated in Hakeemabad (Chak 18/A), the area in which the school is situated. Of the various problems faced by the community in this area, a pressing concern was that of water. According to the local Hindu representatives, the water tank that supplied water to their community has been taken over by the neighbouring Muslim community. The tank was situated within the Hindu vicinity but supplied the Muslim community. The water supply to the Hindu community was cut off.

They had made numerous complaints to the additional commissioner and the deputy commissioner and more than once they had been promised that the water tank would be returned to the Hindus but the situation continued. In their view, the local *patwari* (land record officer) seemed complicit, perhaps seeking a bribe or simply prejudiced against the Hindus and

favouring the Muslims who had taken over their water supply. A copy of the petition is given in the annex to this report.

In addition to the range of problems indicated, the lack of infrastructure and provision of resources for local development is a massive problem in the Hindu community of Liaquatpur. Their right to worship is restricted—there are two or three *mandirs* (temples) in the area but almost all of them are in a state of dilapidation. They have been unable to secure funds for construction and rebuilding of the four walls of the temples that had fallen down years earlier, despite several promises from the local MPA which have never materialised. They have been requesting funds for this purpose for the past 10 years. The graveyard walls and gates have also been damaged but no funds have been given to them for repair.



The Hindu community in Liaquatpur, Rahimyar Khan, explains why their access to infrastructure is limited

The local police had ordered them to construct the four walls of their *dharmashala* (religious rest-house) for their own security. When they failed to do so, the police registered an FIR against them saying it was their responsibility to secure their worship places. They were given four days to construct the walls, but adequate funds were not forthcoming from the

municipal committee and the community itself was too poor to raise sufficient funds for the construction and improvement of their security.

The Christian community of Liaquatpur had also suffered from lack of access to a gas supply despite 10 surveys having been conducted. However, in 2008, Liaquatpur finally received gas with the help of the Pakistan People's Party. The first metal road in Liaquatpur was also constructed in the recent past.

In Khurrampura in district Khanewal, the Christian community requested Nishat Ahmed Khan Daha (sitting MPA) to install a filtration plant. According to the local representatives, he refused outright, saying there was a lack of funds. The funds had instead been used for the development of a filtration plant in the neighbouring Muslim majority area. Similarly, in terms of infrastructure, the people of Khurrampura were promised that a metal road would be laid before Christmas but the community learned that this plan too was abandoned without any notice.

Access to healthcare

In Liaquatpur, district Rahimyar Khan, there is no basic health unit (BHU) for the local communities—both Hindu and Muslim—which poses a serious healthcare issue. On the other hand, the local communities that met the mission in Yazman claimed that there were no healthcare issues there. Both the THQ hospital and BHU were easily accessible. In Shanti Nagar, district Khanewal, which has a population of around 35,000, no BHU existed while the hospital was quite far away. However, they did not experience any discrimination at the THQ and district headquarter Khanewal that served both the Christian and Muslim communities.

Faith-based discrimination by state authorities

In district Khanewal, it was brought to the mission's notice that, according to the old constituencies, there were 12,500 registered voters and all Christian areas had the same constituency. However, the new delimitation initiative had separated Shanti Nagar from the rest, and the move had affected the overall voting influence of the Christian voters. Shanti Nagar is one of the most populous Christian areas in the region and the division has thinned their voting constituencies.

The Hindu community of Yazman, district Bahawalpur, were aggrieved at not receiving an official holiday on Holi. Members of the Hindu community who met the mission were of the view that discrimination against the Hindu community was far more common in the country than against the Christians. One member of the community mentioned how he was discriminated against by a private hotel management when he was visiting a hotel in Murree. Luckily, he said, the staff protected him before the situation escalated in terms of how he was being treated by the management at the counter. Similarly, he told the mission that when he visited Cholistan in 2009 he was scared into leaving the festival halfway through after an incident of firing took place. He had no idea whether he was the target of the firing or someone else but as a Hindu he was too frightened to stay.

The main issue faced by the Christian community in Liaquatpur, district Rahimyar Khan (who met the mission at the Philadelphia Pentecostal Church of Pakistan) is that they cannot freely practise their religion and cannot openly observe their festivals and ceremonies. According to Pastor Akhtar, security in Rahimyar Khan district had been a problem for the past two-and-a-half to three years and therefore all the Christian and Hindu communities had been prohibited from openly observing their festivals and ceremonies, unless they arranged security measures on their own. They were not even allowed to open the doors of their respective churches except on Sundays, and that too only with the permission of the local police. They were only provided with police security on their major occasions but not otherwise. They said that security personnel tended to become impatient if the sermon exceeded the allocated time by even five minutes.

Religious activities had also shrunk to the bare minimum given the security concerns. Pastor Akhtar said that they were not able to hold a congregation for Psalm Sunday and were even denied permission to arrange a programme at the Press Club.

Hindu members of Liaquatpur also described how they were only allowed two hours of celebration for their annual Ramapeer Mela festival. If they failed to respect security protocols, they faced possible arrest. Previously, i.e. before 2006/07, the festival used to continue for the entire night.

According to Kaaloram, a member of the Hindu community in Headraj near Khanewal, arguments and domestic disputes were dangerous to get into as they might end up in accusations of committing blasphemy against Islam. He also stated that there were no representatives and no nominations of Hindu members in the respective government committees even though Hindus accounted for 70,000 votes in the area. No candidate from the Hindu community ever contested elections on a general seat because of a lack of confidence in receiving votes as Muslims would not vote for them.

In Yazman, the Christian interviewees said that they also did not trust the quota system as it rarely worked. Even the Hindu candidates for the provincial assembly and National Assembly reserved seats manipulated the system. They were not allowed a double vote, which they wanted. In a constituency where Christians and Hindus were concentrated, they could be awarded the right of dual voting, one for the general member of the National Assembly (MNA) and MPA, and one for their own constituency. The councillors were also 'selected' by the MPAs/MNAs themselves and were always brought from the areas of upper Punjab. The cause of contention with these appointments seemed binary—both regional (whether they are from North and South Punjab) as well as religious (whether they are Hindu or Muslim) for a fair representation.

Pastor Salatiel Victor of the Shanti Nagar Church told the mission that a local leader Faisal Khan Niazi of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) played a better role in addressing Christian issues and many lawyers and organisations sided with them. However, not even the National Action Plan made much of a difference because of the strong presence of Muslim conservative groups.

Another local person, Idriaz Rafaqat, pointed out to the mission that their day-to-day dealings with the Muslim community were amicable and that he personally never felt any faith-based discrimination. He claimed it mostly occurred with the lower classes. Regarding the attitudes towards the Christians, he said the local MPAs/MNAs demonstrated concern for everyone only in the election season to obtain votes. Otherwise they were primarily concerned with resolving the problems of the Muslim voters.

The locals who met the mission in Khurrampura said they believed the recent murder of a Christian community representative, Chaudhry Asghar

Afzal, was because of a long-standing feud between the Muslim and Christian communities.



The Christian community in Khurrapura, Khanawal, raises concerns about inter-faith feuds

The respondents also shared an example of gross discrimination by the local police. A few years earlier, when a Muslim person was murdered as a result of existing hostility between two parties, the killer happened to be a Christian. The police conducted a raid the very same night and arrested almost 50 Christian suspects. The murder suspect, a Christian, and possibly one other person, were killed in retaliation but the police response was lukewarm. The repeated pleas of the murdered Christian's relatives went unheard.

With reference to the 1997 incident of the burning and ransacking of Shanti Nagar over an alleged denigration of Islam, Joshua Afzal told the mission that the Justice Tanveer Commission was never formed to uncover the truth. The event weakened the social bonds between the Muslims and the Christians and many of the people were still traumatised and lived in a state of fear.

Recommendations

Based on its investigation, HRCP recommends the following steps be taken:

- The number of teachers from religious minority communities in districts such as Bahawalpur needs to be increased. Qualified teachers from minority communities should be provided with greater opportunities in the education sector.
- The syllabus being taught in schools needs to be revisited and improved keeping in mind the concerns of religious minority communities.
- Access to education for religious minority communities needs to be improved. The relevant government authorities need to assess the current state of opportunities for children from minority communities and ensure access to education for everyone.
- The provincial government of Punjab needs to take notice of the issue of forced conversion on a priority basis. Suitable legislation prohibiting forced conversions is needed on an urgent basis.
- The 5% job quota for religious minority communities needs to be implemented as per the directions of the 2014 judgement of the Supreme Court reaffirming the rights of religious minority communities in the country.
- Exploitation of minority communities based on their faith by various industries in Punjab is alarming and needs to be discouraged. The government needs ensure that minority communities engaged in various sectors are receiving at least the minimum wage.
- Access to health services for religious minority communities needs to be improved.
- The religious festivals of minority communities need to be respected and the government and local administration in various districts of Punjab need to ensure that these communities can perform their religious rituals as per their faith.
- The places of religious worship and significance need to be protected as per the directions of the 2014 judgement of the Supreme Court. State funds should be made available to build or repair places of worship,

especially in cases where these sites cater to poor, marginalised communities.

- The provincial government needs to take urgent notice of the issues of access to clean drinking water for religious minority communities in various districts in southern Punjab. It is the duty of the state to ensure the welfare and well-being of all its citizens regardless of their faith.
- All forms of discrimination against religious minority communities need to be discouraged. The provincial government needs to do more to sensitize its various departments to the needs of minority communities and to ensure that no bias is expressed when dealing with these communities.
- The government should make a concerted effort to revisit the Hindu Marriage Act 2017 and the Christian Marriage and Divorce Act 2019 bill and revise these in consultation with the communities concerned.

Annex 1: Petition of the Hindu community to retrieve access to water supply

بخدمت جناب میاں محمد شہباز شریف صاحب وزیر اعلیٰ پنجاب

درخواست برائے عکم فرمائے جانے کاروائی ضابطہ برخلاف (1) مختیار احمد ولد احمد وین قوم انہیں
سکنہ چک نمبر 18/A لیاقت پور (۲) تاج گجر پٹواری حلقہ چک نمبر 18/A لیاقت پور

جناب عالی! ساکنان حسب ذیل عارض ہیں۔

1. یہ کہ ساکنان چک نمبر 18/A لیاقت پور کے مستقل سکونتی ہیں اور اقلیتی برادری سے تعلق رکھتے ہیں ہمارے چک نمبر میں پانی کی ڈگی پختہ احاطہ نمبر 41 مورخہ 23.11.1989 سے چالو شدہ ہے اور باقاعدگی سے چل رہی ہے بلزم نمبر 1 نے بلزم نمبر 2 سے ساز باز کر کے اور بھاری رشوت دیکر مذکورہ ڈگی اپنے نام کرائی اور مورخہ 29.09.2016 سے بند پڑی ہوئی ہے۔ جنابوالد مذکورہ پانی کی ڈگی سے انسان اور جانور پانی پیتے تھے اور گھر بیوضوریات پوری کرتے تھے۔ جنابوالد مذکورہ چک میں مسلمانوں کی پانی کی ڈگی چل رہی ہے جبکہ ہمارا پانی بند کر دیا گیا جسکی وجہ سے ہم انسانوں اور جانوروں کیلئے پینے کا پانی میسر نہ ہے بوڑھے، بچے بیٹاس کی وجہ سے تڑپ رہے ہیں مسلمان برادری زنتو ہمیں پانی پینے اور لے جانے دیتی ہے اور نہ ہی ہمارے جانوروں کو ہم بہت پریشان حال ہیں ہمارے حال پر ہم فرماتے ہوئے مذکورہ ڈگی کوئی العور چالو کر دیا جاوے ورنہ ہماری موت کی ذمہ دار حکومت ہوگی بلزم نمبر 1 مختیار احمد کے پہلے بھی چک نمبر میں کئی پلاس ہیں 45 مرلہ کے پلاس میں رہائش رکھی ہوئی ہے اور 32k--0m اراضی کا زمیندار ہے مذکورہ الاٹمنٹ خلاف قانون ہے اور ہمارے ساتھ سرسبز یادتی کی گئی ہے۔ لہذا استدعا ہے کہ ملزمان بالا کے خلاف کاروائی ضابطہ کا حکم صادر فرما کر ہماری ڈگی چالو فرمائی جاوے اور انصاف کے تقاضے پورے کیے جاویں۔

تحریر 15.04.2017

ساکنان۔ مالورام ولد سونارام	بگورام ولد سیدہ رام	شمسی رام ولد رام چندر
مالورام	میکو رام	شمس رام
بیریل رام ولد پرکھارام	مانک رام ولد پرکھارام	مانا رام ولد بیرارام
	مانک رام	
چوٹارام ولد گنگورام اتوارام بنگوال ساکنان چک نمبر 18/A تحصیل لیاقت پور		
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