

# Religious Intolerance in Pakistan: Causes, Impacts and Wayforward

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Religious intolerance is a major concern for the whole world. Almost every country, if not any, is facing religious intolerance of varying intensity. Among all the countries in the world facing religious fanaticism, Pakistan is at the top of the list facing religious intolerance incessantly since its inception in 1947. It would ~~be~~ not be a surprising thing to say that religious intolerance is a legacy which Pakistani people are bringing with them along with other things. There are multiple causes behind this legacy; illiteracy and lack of true interpretation of religious teachings; the search for identity and the import of religion from other countries; stubborn approach and stickness to traditional views, and not conforming with the modern world; and many other as well. ~~to~~ To our grief, this ~~is~~ malady has devastating impacts on Pakistan, ranging from socio-economic to psychological. One of the grave impacts is on the economy of Pakistan which was already in shambles. It is worth mentioning that Pakistan has the potential

to root out this ailment. Certain measures, such as ensuring the writ of the state, taking control of seminaries (madarssahs), regulating media and social platforms, focusing on human capacity development etc. would mitigate the already infuriated religious intolerance.

To begin with, the current situation of religious intolerance in Pakistan is of a grave intensity. From north to south, almost every part of country is facing religious activism. Most recently, the mob, fraught with religious hatred, set the churches on fire in the city named "Jarran Wap" in the province of Punjab. Huge damage to the infrastructure was inflicted on the poor minority. Moreover, the hatred against the beliefs of 'Hazara' community in the northern part of Pakistan, the Gilgit Baltistan, is evident from the recent events. The people of 'Hazara' community were brutally killed by the infuriated mob. But the religious fanaticism does not stop here. The foreigners are also under the radar of these perpetrators. One of the

finest and most recent example is the publically setting on fire of the Srilankan worker. It was the act against the true interpretation of religion, and against the human rights. All the aforementioned incidents disclose the grim situation of religious intolerance. The reasons behind these inhuman incidents are multiple which have marred the country's progress.

Out of all, the first and the foremost cause of religious intolerance is the identity crisis of people of Pakistan. The people of Pakistan tend to associate them with different countries, civilizations and cultural. This has resulted in the loss of identity, and consequently people tend to adopt the culture and norms of their desired countries. In doing so, the countries export their ideologies to accomplish their political and economic gains. Association with one country would be the negation of the other. It results in crisis. The same concept has been mentioned in a comprehensive book about the future 'The Future of Pakistan' by Stephen

P. Cohen. He illustrated that Pakistan used to import religion from other countries, which in reality is the import of their ideology. This predicament suggests the level of illiteracy in Pakistan, which is another reason of religion intolerance.

Illiteracy is universally acknowledged as the first problem that gives rise to all other complications. Illiteracy, in Pakistan, has been a major contributor of intolerant thoughts in the masses. In an educational sense, the people of Pakistan are well and considerably literate. However, in the sense of religious literacy, a very small section of society is literate. All others have planned interpretation of religious texts infused in them. These interpretations are solely founded in hatred against other sects. A fact to be noted here is that a minor fraction of people exists in Pakistan who would have read and comprehended the religious texts according to their own conscience. The rest have planned interpretations infused in

them. Thus, this lack of true understanding leads to the intolerance of others religious beliefs, and it also consolidates people to stick to their beliefs.

In addition to illiteracy, the adherence to orthodox approach, and rejection to change or revisit the religious texts with the changing world, augment religious intolerance. The demands of people change with the passage of time. Thereby, changing, revisiting and revamping ideas and beliefs are imperative to survive. Unfortunately, most of the clerics in Pakistan are reluctant to revisit their interpretations of holy scripture. Likewise, the followers of those clerics are also reluctant to give space to the beliefs of other members of the community. The idea of revisiting the <sup>interpretation of</sup> holy scriptures according to the modern requirements was given by many scholars in the past such as Shah Waliullah Dehlavi and Dr. Allama Iqbal. Thus, a stubborn approach towards the interpretation of religious texts gives rise



to religious intolerance.

Along with the traditional causes, the modern digital media has also contributed to increase the religious activism. Media is considered eyes and ears of the society. It has outreach to every corner of the country. In Pakistan, unfortunately, media has been used in sensitizing the already sensitive nation. Unregulated media is a platform where thousands of people from every walk of life are discussing the controversial topics. These topics sensitize the young and old generation equally leading to hatred for their adversaries. These events are more common during religious events such as 'Aushura,' 'Rabi-ul-Awwal' etc. Thus, the unchecked digital media has proved to be a major cause of religious intolerance, and spreads it not only within the country, but also beyond the border.

Last but not the least is the agenda of power politics. The geography of Pakistan is such that it is surrounded by two hostile enemies; one on the eastern border, India; and the other on the western border,

Afghanistan. Through the volatile Afghan-Pakistan border, formerly known as 'Durand line', India has sent many spies and insurgents with a vision to destabilize Pakistan. Moreover, India has been continuously supporting the insurgents and separatist groups through the use of religion. Mastung incident on September, 29, 2023 killed almost sixty people and many other injured, was planned by Indian intelligence agency. The involvement of India has been confirmed by the caretaker interior minister of Pakistan. Thus, religious intolerance is also augmented by rival countries for their political gains. And this ailment has far-reaching and ~~unprecedented~~ unprecedented impacts.

One of the first impacts of religious intolerance is the shattering of law and order in the country. For any state to function properly, the first pre-requisite is the availability of law and order situation. To the bad luck of Pakistan, people of Pakistan have hardly seen situation of law and order. There

comes new inhuman incident with every new day. This spreads the feeling of insecurity in the country. Students in the educational institutes, workers in the public sphere and army personnels at the borders, all are insecure. This dismemberment of law and order gives rise to many other complications, which halt the development of a country.

As a result of shattered law and order situation in the country, the state machinery's focus on the economic growth diverts. Thereby, the state machinery operates in an effort to re-stabilize the law and order situation. In doing so, the economic development lags behind, which in return gives rise to number of complications. History has witnessed that whenever, religious insurgents are at peace, the economic growth boosted and vice versa. Currently, economic situation of the country is indescribable. It has reached to the point of becoming default. The reason behind it is the new surge of

of religious intolerance. Moreover, the economic indicator further attracts the local and foreign investment which have been marked by religious activism.

Undoubtedly, the religious hypersensitivity has deteriorated the feasible economic environment of Pakistan, which has hindered the local and foreign direct investment. For any country to thrive and survive, investments are very important. In case of Pakistan, investors are reluctant to invest ~~in~~ as the situation in the country is not suitable. In a country where people are burnt alive, and take law into their hands, no one would take interest in ~~the~~ investing. For that reason, FDI in the country's last year was hovering around USD 1.2 billion, extremely low relatively. Thus disruption in the ease of doing business is resulted from the intolerance of other's beliefs. It further stigmatize the global image of a country.

Resultantly, the tourism

sector of the country suffers from ~~myriad~~ myriad of problems arising from religious intolerance. Fortunately, nature has been very benevolent for Pakistan as it has provided it with all the features present in the world, such as mountains, plains, lakes, forests, valleys etc. Thereby, Pakistan has great potential to attract tourists and generate revenue. To our grief, foreigners are reluctant to visit Pakistan, even the governments of few countries have alarmed their citizens. Recently, the governments of UK and Australia have added on their visa and passport websites that tourists must be careful while choosing Pakistan as their tourist destination. Hence, ongoing religious related complications have negatively impacted tourism sector of Pakistan. However, it is worth mentioning that Pakistan has the potential to alleviate the growing religious intolerance if it follows the constructive measures elaborated in the preceding paragraphs.

Moving towards the wayforward, the first step the government should take

is to ensure the writ of the state against all the perpetrators. The current predicament of the state is indicating that the law enforcing institutes of the country must ensure writ of the state and penalize every enemy of the peace. It has become imperative for the state machinery to be vigilant and ensure the peace and harmony in the country. Many examples can be found regarding the steps taken by governments against religious fanatics. Saudi Arabia is a fine example. It has taken strict steps against insurgents, and consequently it diminished the risk of growing religious intolerance. Thus, government of Pakistan ought to ensure writ of the state in the country.

Apart from ensuring writ of the state, censoring the digital media and social platforms would be helpful in mitigating religious hypersensitivity. Having illustrated in one of the above paragraphs, digital platforms and media outlets are ears and eyes of the society. Thereby, they play

major role in shaping the thoughts of the citizens. Therefore, media and other digital platforms should be censored. Moreover, it should be motivated to play its potent role in spreading interfaith harmony. The respective state institutes must monitor the activities of media outlets and digital platforms, so that religious intolerance spreading through these platforms would mitigate.

Subsequently, the government ought to reduce the kinetic measures approach of resolving complications. The government should shift its policy from kinetic to human capacity development. Provision of basic necessities without discrimination and introducing new development projects would change the traditional mindset of people. It has been observed that those countries which are investing in human capacity development have significantly reduced religious militancy. On the other hand, a harsh and military solutions regarding any complication had resulted in the upsurge.

Thereby, the state must shift its kinetic approach of conflict resolving to human capacity development as in the long-run it would completely eliminate religious intolerance.

Furthermore, the government of Pakistan must take the control of all religious seminaries. Pakistan is one of the few countries where seminaries (Madrasahs) are not registered, and are working on their own principles. That has not been the case in most of the developed countries. In most of the European countries, all the institutes are under governments control. But in the case of Pakistan, a great number of seminaries are unregistered, and those which are registered are operating on their fabricated principles. According to local estimates, more than thirty five thousand seminaries are operating in the country, and some twenty thousand are registered. Thus, state must pay attention on this issue and register as well as monitor seminaries across the country.



Likewise, after taking seminaries control, the next monumental step in eliminating religious militancy would be the revamping of curricula. The old and outdated curricula of the state are in a dire need of upgradation. Curricula of a state represent the vision of that nation. Thereby, the respective public institutes should endeavor to devise new curriculum in the country and eliminate all the hating elements. The 'Single National Curriculum' (SNC) ought to be implemented in the whole country as this would eradicate all the vulnerabilities regarding the resurgence of religious intolerance. Thus, the state must take immediate steps to implement newly devised Comprehensive 'Single National Curriculum.'

Last, but not the least is the empowering of women to utilize their 'Soft Power' in reducing all kinds of intolerances. Women constitute almost half of the population of Pakistan, but their powers and roles have been overlooked.

It is astonishing to know that there has been no evidence of religious intolerance where women have been involved. The fact indicates that these peaceful members of society can play a long-lasting role in eliminating religious militancy. The famous women activist of Pakistan Musarat Qadeem has used the term 'Soft Power' in one of her writings. She manifested that women can address the prevailing issues in Pakistan by using their 'Soft Power'. As they are the sole caretakers of their children, they can rear a peaceful generation. Thus, empowering women would eliminate the religious intolerance among all others in the long run of the country.

In the light of the above discussion, it can be concluded that there are multiple causes of religious intolerance prevailed in Pakistan which have marked the country to progress; however, the country has the potential to root out the causes and bring

interfaith harmony. Myriad of reasons have compounded religious intolerance such as adherence to orthodox approach, lack of true knowledge of holy scriptures, misuse of digital and social world and meddling of enemy countries in the affairs of the country using religion as a tool. These entrenched causes had inflicted great suffering to the people of Pakistan and halted the growth and progress of the country as well. However, the country has the potency to root out the causes for that purpose, it is imperative for Pakistan to ensure writ of the state, monitor media and seminaries, provide development projects and get the expertise of women to eliminate religious hypersensitivity. All in all, the strong will-power would eradicate the religious militancy, and would pave the way for a bright Pakistan.