

A Case Study on the Education of Christian Women in Pakistan

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Abstract

Education plays an important role in the development of individuals and societies. Education is not only confined to gain of knowledge but also inculcates the thrust to develop critical thinking and logical reasoning. This is the reason why governments all over the world, think tanks, researchers, academicians and international development organizations emphasize on educating people and it is declared as a basic human right, irrespective of gender, region, caste, ethnicity and religion. However, educational disparities exist all over the world. Cultural stereotypes, gender biases and lack of opportunities have forced the female segment of society away from education and literacy. Pakistan is a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religion country. The country has 5 percent of the population declared non-Muslims as per the 2017 census. It is being postulated every now and then, that these minorities face discrimination in all spheres of life including constitutional, practice to religion and access to better job opportunities. It is also being argued that they are at a disadvantage when it comes to the educational side. With this argument in the background, the instant study uses a qualitative approach to analyse the situation of Christian female education in the country. The analysis is being carried out on 2017 population census data. The study reveals that the Christian female are far behind in the educational field as compared to overall educational standards in the country. Furthermore, they face social discrimination, access to better educational institutes and lag behind in social inclusion. On the basis of study, it is recommended that the country in general needs to be socially more inclusive through legislation and policy making to encourage female from a minority.

Keywords: Christian, Census, Discrimination, Education, Minorities Social inclusion.

1. Introduction

Education plays an important part in the development of human society and is essential for obtaining socioeconomic prosperity for society and the nation. Education is unquestionably necessary for progress. According to practically all development policymakers and practitioners, the recent prosperity of rising economies such as East Asia is attributable to their good educational system.

In the modern world, education is unquestionably essential for forming both individuals and civilizations. It is the basis for societal progress, economic growth, and personal development. Education emphasizes critical thinking and practical skills that are vital for overcoming life's complex obstacles rather than just imparting knowledge. In addition, it fosters solidarity, tolerance, and social cohesiveness. People who have received an education are better equipped to positively impact both their local communities and the larger global environment. Education aims to empower people and spark constructive social change rather than just providing credentials.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted in 1984, originally outlined the commitment of the world community to universal education. Nonetheless, it is noted that women do not yet have access to the same opportunities as males in the majority of emerging nations. Compared to men, they have less options for how to spend their time, both at work and pleasure.

The gender disparity in our schools and universities today is largely a result of cultural prejudices that are imposed on men and women from the moment we are born (Ciarra, 2020). Conversely, minority groups' literacy rates diverge from those of dominant groups in many nations. Similarly, how one treats minorities inside a community or establishment is regarded as the actual manifestation of discrimination against them.

When we take into account the historical context of our country, it should be noted that the country appeared on the globe as an independent state in 1947 under the banner of a distinct entity for the subcontinent's Muslim minorities. Regarding the socioeconomic aspects of the nation, the 2015 report on Pakistan's state of education from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Human Development Index (HDI) was not particularly satisfying. According to the report, Pakistan ranks 135th out of 177 countries in the globe and has a low level of education. The study also showed that in Pakistan, women's educational attainment is lower than men's, at 35.2% versus 61.7%. It additionally revealed that gender discrimination is also high in Pakistan as Pakistan is on 107th among 177 nations.

In its 2015-16 annual report, the State Bank of Pakistan voiced severe worry about Pakistan's education ratio. The report concluded, "Unfortunately, Pakistan's reputation in basic and higher education has not been tolerable.

The report went on to say that Pakistan's education system is inadequate, with a low literacy and enrolment rate, a high dropout rate, poor quality higher and basic education, and significant gender imbalances. The 1973 constitution declares the country as an Islamic state with 95 percent of the population is Muslim (75 percent Sunni and 20 percent Shia). In Pakistan, 5 percent of the population practices other religions than Islam and are referred to as "Minorities" The Hindus account for 1.9% of Pakistan's population, Christians for 1.6%, Ahmadis for 0.1%, and Parsis, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Bahais for 0.012%.

Despite the fact that the country was founded on equality in 1947, concerns have been expressed about the situation of religious freedom, ethnic and religious discrimination, and access to fundamental human rights. Pakistan amended its proclamation on the rights of religious minorities, ensuring fundamental rights for all citizens in its constitution. However, the persistent injustices and oppression faced by religious minorities reflect systemic human rights violations within the country's politics, state institutions, and society at large.

Therefore, on the basis of the above issues, the present study attempts to examine the case of Christian female students from a double jeopardy point of view, that is discrimination on the basis of being marginalized on the basis of gender and on the basis of being female.t”.

2. Historical and Socio-cultural Context

The chapter presents data relevant to the research area, including data on Population, literacy and demographic characteristics of the country. The chapter uses the data issued by a government organization namely Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the largest in the country.

The time period of the data is based on population census of Pakistan conducted in 2017 and Pakistan Standard of Living Measurement (PSLM) survey, as the organization wasn't able to perform the survey after 2021. Hence in order to remove biases in the data and arrive at a reliable conclusion, a comparatively older data was used.

2.1. Historical Information

In 2017, Pakistan carried out its sixth census of population, according to which, the population of country remained at 207.6 million. Out of this, female's population was recorded at 101.3 million, which constitutes about 48 percent of the total population. The rural women were 49.1 percent of total rural population while urban women constituted 48.1 percent of the total urban population. The country's demographic statistics are tabulated below:

2.2. Demographics of Pakistan

Table 1: Population Distribution of Pakistan by Gender and Region with Female Percentage Share

Population		Male	Female	%Female/Population
Pakistan	207,684,626	106,018,220	10,344,632	48.0
Rural	132,013,789	66,867,099	64,836,918	49.1
Urban	75,670,835	39,151,1213	36,507,714	48.2

2.3. Religion-Wise Population Distribution

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics' Provisional Summary Results of the Government of Pakistan's 6th Population and Housing Census, 2017, state that the Christian community

forms the 3rd largest community of the country and the 2nd major minority of Pakistan. They form 1.27 percent of the total population. Christians comprise 1.1% of rural population and 2.59% of urban population of Pakistan (Source: PBS). The statistics are given in following table:

Table 2: Population Distribution by Religion with Corresponding Percentages

Population	Number	percentage
Total	207,684,626	100
Muslim	200,415,554	96.5
Hindus	3530638.6	1.7
Christian	26999900.1	1.3
Ahmadiyya	207684.63	0.1
Scheduled caste	830738.5	0.4

2.4. Gender Wise-Religious Bifurcation

Since, the published data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on population statistics do not bifurcate

the data of minorities between male and female, hence, the author distributed the total number of minorities population into male and female on the basis of proportion of both genders at national level. The gender-wise population data of minorities group is given in the table below:

Table 3: Total Population and Gender-wise Distribution Across Religious Communities

Population	Number	Male	Female
Total	207,684,626	106,018,220	101,344,632
Muslim	200187211	102,190,962	976,860,908
Hindus	35098703	17,917,079	17,127,243
Christians	32,398,802	16,538,842	15,809,763
Ahmadiyya	166147	84,814,6	8,107,571
Scheduled caste	768,433	392,267	374,975

2.5. Pakistan Literacy Rate

The population census of 2017 reveals an overall literacy rate of 58.92 percent. The literacy rate for male was higher when compared to female. The statistics are tabulated below:

Table 4: Overall, Gender-wise, and Regional Literacy Rates Demonstrating Educational Inequalities	
Overall Literacy Rate	58.92%
Male Literacy Rate	67.79%
Female Literacy Rate	49.69%
Rural Literacy Rate	50.05%
Urban Literacy Rate	73.23%

2.6. Christian Literacy Rate

The literacy data reveals a significant gender disparity, with male literacy at 56.79% compared to only 34.69% for female, highlighting the urgent need for equitable educational opportunities.

Table 5: Overall, Male, and Female Literacy Rates Highlighting Gender Disparity in Education

Overall Literacy Rate	48.29%
Male Literacy Rate	56.79%
Female Literacy Rate	34.69%

3. Record Review of published Reports

A report published recently by the Centre for Social Justice said that Christians have a higher literacy rate from among religious minorities. All of this was a result of focusing on the schools maintained by church missions and attributing them with much credit for offering quality educational services. The nationalization policy of 1972 and the subsequent Islamisation drive in later years, took a heavy toll on some of these schools. Whilst denationalization was initiated in the 80s, only circa half of the nationalized schools have been reclaimed. Most of them become pale shadows of themselves. The National Catholic Education Commission and the Catholic Board of Education raised a significant issue that Christian women are more likely than Hindu women to be literate. Our goal is to enrol more women who attend our schools. Nonetheless, there are very few schools in a sizable portion of Sindh province's regions with a majority Hindu.

A survey conducted in 2019 by The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and The Institute of Development Research & Corresponding Capabilities lead to a report titled, "Education and Inequality: Discerning the Foundation for Citizenry". According to the report 60 percent of non-Muslim students have "encountered or felt" discrimination and disrespect. The report also said 72% of the parents interviewed felt that their children suffered some form of bias in educational institutions based on religion. Minority teachers themselves are not safe, with 70 percent saying their religion was a cause for discrimination.

There is a need to remove existing inequalities in the education system of Pakistan. The curriculum should be reformed with removing religious bias. The curriculum should have things which emphasize how minorities contributed to making a nation. The government ought to observe the international conventions and treaties agreed by Pakistan for elimination of all forms of intolerance/discrimination grounded on religion or belief. There is a need to inculcate religious toleration in the society. There is also no need to teach the students of minority religious subjects that do not want it and the government. In nut-shell, comprehensive legal, policy and administrative measures are needed in order to prevent and address discrimination on the grounds of religion within the education system

According to a study by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute of Pakistan, national history is presented inaccurately in textbooks. These textbooks' ideologies glorify war, inspire violence, and promote prejudice and intolerance toward women and religious minorities.

In addition to financial difficulties, children from minority populations encounter particular obstacles in their pursuit of an education. These include prejudice in the classroom and textbook material viewed as a factor in issues including out-of-school youth, dropout rates, and subpar academic performance. Even targeted inclusionary interventions, such as a 2 percent quota for college admissions, fall short of the implementation test.

The ongoing disparity in literacy rates is indicative of the socio-economic marginalization and a deficiency of chances for the marginalized portions. The difficulty in achieving targeted levels of literacy stems from the fact that higher than average illiteracy among particular populations sometimes lasts for decades, posing a challenge to policy makers. It looks impossible to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goal 4 of "inclusive and quality education" by 2030.

Research was conducted by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) on 56 large and small villages with sizable Christians called their village "How Green Was My Village." The study raised concerns on the limited access to female-only schools in some villages. Some Christian girls dropped out of school after elementary or middle school, or they had to travel a great distance to complete their education in high school, despite the fact that the survey results indicate that more girls than boys are matriculating. One participant made an intriguing observation: if a Muslim girl wears jeans, she is not scrutinized; however, if a Christian girl wears jeans, people claim that Christian women have this appearance because they are liberal with morals and clothing, and as a result, people frequently question their character. According to a similar experience, a participant who identified as Christian noted that Christians are frequently perceived as having dark skin, wearing westernized clothes, wear a lot of cosmetics, chew gum a lot, and not cover their heads (observe purdah, which is deemed impolite in most parts of Pakistani society). All of this suggests that Christian girls have dubious morals and are a touch raucous.

4. Historical Overview of Christian Educational Institutions Before the Creation of Pakistan in 1947

Before the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the Indian subcontinent, which included present-day Pakistan, was home to a diverse array of religious communities, including a significant Christian population. Christian missionaries played a crucial role in the establishment of educational institutions, which were

pivotal not only for the Christian community but also for the broader society. This historical overview examines the development of Christian educational institutions in the region, focusing on their origins, growth, contributions, and impact on the educational landscape before independence.

4.1. Early Beginnings of Christian Education in the Indian Subcontinent

The history of Christian education in the Indian subcontinent can be traced back to the arrival of European missionaries in the 16th century. Notably, the Portuguese Jesuit missionaries established schools in Goa and other coastal areas to educate both Christian and non-Christian populations.

The 19th century marked a significant expansion of Christian missionary activities in India, particularly with the arrival of British and American missionaries. They were driven by a dual mission: to evangelize and to educate.

4.2. Formation of Educational Institutions

Missionaries established schools across India, providing education to boys and girls, which was particularly significant in a time when access to education was limited for many communities. Noteworthy institutions included:

- The Bishop's College, Calcutta (1820): Founded by the Church of England, this institution aimed to train clergy and provide a liberal education to students.
- St. Stephen's College, Delhi (1881): Founded by the Cambridge Mission, it became one of the first colleges for higher education in North India, promoting education for both Christian and non-Christian students.

4.3. Focus on Female Education

Many missionaries recognized the need for female education, which was largely neglected during this period. Institutions like the Convent of Jesus and Mary (founded in 1842 in Lahore) played a crucial role in promoting girls' education among Christian communities and beyond.

4.4. Impact on Society and Community

Social Reforms: Missionary education was intertwined with social reform movements. Missionaries often advocated for social justice, health care, and women's rights, leading to significant changes in societal attitudes towards education and gender roles.

4.5. Integration of Christian and Non-Christian Students

Many Christian schools were open to students of other faiths, promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding. This inclusivity helped bridge gaps between communities, laying the groundwork for future educational collaboration.

5. Challenges And Hurdles Faced by Female

This chapter gives the historical background and trend and statistical data of female education in the country. In addition, the chapter also covers aspects like problems and challenges being faced by the women/girls of Pakistan in acquiring education. This is essential because of the fact that Pakistan's society is predominantly a male influenced society and female have to break cultural barriers to get education. The chapter is based upon the citation of relevant literature conducted in the previously.

5.1. Historical Overview of Female Literacy in Pakistan

Historically, the female's literacy rate in the country has remained low when compared to their male counter-part. The situation is depicted in the following table:

Table 6: Literacy Rates by Gender, Region, and Province in Pakistan (2018–19 and 2020–21)

Province /Area	2018-19			2020-21		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Pakistan	73.0	51.5	62.4	73.4	51.9	62.8
Rural	67.1	40.4	53.7	67.2	40.8	54.0
Urban	82.2	69.7	76.1	83.5	70.8	77.3
Punjab	74.3	58.1	56.1	74.2	58.4	66.3
Rural	69.2	48.4	58.9	69.0	48.9	58.8
Urban	82.2	74.3	78.3	82.5	74.3	78.5
Sindh	72.5	49.5	61.6	72.9	49.7	61.8
Rural	60.0	26.5	44.4	58.8	26.8	43.3
Urban	82.2	67.7	75.6	85.2	69.9	77.9
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	70.1	35.5	52.4	72.8	37.4	55.1
Rural	68.1	31.8	49.4	70.1	33.5	51.7
Urban	79.4	53.2	66.2	85.8	57.8	72.3
Baluchistan	70.7	32.7	53.9	69.4	36.8	54.5
Rural	66.3	27.2	49.1	65.0	31.1	49.5
Urban	81.8	46.8	66.4	80.0	50.9	66.8

The above table clearly indicates that female literacy rate in general is far below than male throughout the country. However, the situation is worse when comparison is made between urban and rural areas. The phenomena is associated with many challenges explained here after.

5.2. Challenges of Female Education in Pakistan

The following challenges have been identified by the World Bank in context of Pakistan regarding female education:

5.2.1. Female out of school

Roughly 12 million females, approximately two million more than boys, are not enrolled in school in Pakistan; these females are the bulk of the out-of-school population in the nation. There are between 20.3 and 22.1 million unschooled children in Pakistan, according to estima.

5.2.2. Girls are expected more to not attend school

In 2018, there was a 7 percentage point difference in the number of girls who had never attended school compared to boys (19%). Since 2004, Pakistan has made progress, reducing the gap from 13 percentage points. However, despite these efforts, girls are still in a similar position compared to boys. The percentage of girls who had never attended school in 2018 matched the percentage of boys who were out of school in 2004. Girls from low-income families are disproportionately affected, as poverty is one of the major barriers to their education. Girls from these families are 22 percentage points less likely to attend school compared to boys. For families with higher incomes, this gender disparity diminishes, with no difference observed in the highest income quintile, where school attendance is nearly 87% for both genders.

5.2.3. Issue of Security

T Girls suffer harassment both at school and on the commute. Their security is compromised in public

areas, on transit, and close to educational institutions. In these settings, girls exhibit distress over all forms of harassment.

6. Barriers to Female Education in Pakistan

In Pakistan, a lot of obstacles keep women from pursuing higher education. Cultural norms, poverty, a lack of educational resources, financial limitations, and security concerns are some of these difficulties.

Mahboob's (2017) study identified eight key factors that contribute to the low rate of female education, which includes social and cultural issues; unaffordable higher education costs; early marriages; fewer scholarships; insufficient participation in local and international conferences; insufficient experience in academic work; co-education; and cultural issues.

The expense of schooling and prejudice against women are the other main obstacles to education for women. For instance, Lambert et al. (2012) claimed that parents in underdeveloped nations believed investing in their daughters' education would be a waste of time and money, and that female children are seen as inferior to male children.

According to (Ambreen, Mohyuddin, 2014), the veil has been the primary obstacle to female education in Pakistan. The findings of (Alam, 2017) research, social norms, unfavorable instructor attitudes, and guardians' unfavorable opinions on women's education all have a detrimental impact on women's education. In FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, (Afridi, 2010) conducted a survey and discovered that the majority of parents prevented their daughters from pursuing an education due to their own cultural constraints and illiteracy.

Other miscellaneous barriers that hinder women from pursuing higher education include issues related to transportation, safe access, and the quality of education. For instance, (Shahzad ,2017) found that poor transportation options, fatigue from long journeys, high transportation costs, and time lost during travel adversely affect girls' schooling.

Additionally, to (Juneja, 2001) identified that the distance to schools is a significant factor impacting girls' education and contributing to higher dropout rates.

Challenges associated with hostels, such as subpar food, expensive accommodation, and inadequate restroom facilities, also pose obstacles. Moreover, safety concerns, including fears of physical and sexual harassment, unsafe travel to educational institutions, and unwanted male attention while pursuing higher education, represent other major barriers to female education.

6.1. Socio-economic Barriers

A large proportion of Christian communities in Pakistan live in poverty, particularly those employed in sanitation or other low-paying jobs. Financial constraints often result in the prioritization of boys' education over girls', leaving Christian women with fewer opportunities to pursue schooling.

6.1.1. Discrimination and Marginalization

Christian women face religious discrimination in public schools, where they are sometimes ostracized or bullied due to their faith. This often results in higher dropout rates among Christian girls, limiting their educational and career prospects.

6.1.2. Cultural and Religious Pressures

Although a conclusion may review main points of the article, please avoid replicating the abstract in the conclusion.

6.1.3. Lack of Representation in Educational Polic

The education system in Pakistan often does not take into account the needs of minority communities. The curriculum tends to focus primarily on Islamic studies, leaving little room for the history, culture, and religious values of Christian students.

7. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, in a country like Pakistan, women encounter socio-cultural obstacles in their pursuit of education. This is a battle against these hidden barriers, and Pakistani women are fiercely striving to secure their rights. Although discrimination based on gender is pervasive in Pakistan, women and girls who belong to religious minorities or belief communities also experience several forms of discrimination that overlap with one another, on top of the discrimination experienced by the ordinary Pakistani woman. The study concludes that education stands as the fundamental right of every kid, and it ought to be granted without hindrance, prejudice, or discrimination as provided in the constitution of the country. However, implementation of this law requires addressing challenges like poverty, lack of facilities and other social concerns, shortage of trained teachers, and gender inequality. In Pakistan, girls face significant disadvantages, evidenced by much lower enrolment rates and greater rates of dropouts in contrast to males. Several factors contribute to this issue, including societal conventions that place a premium on boys' education, early marriage and childbearing, and the lack of safe and secure schools for girls. The distance to schools and safety concerns are the most common barriers hindering girls' access to education. The study reveals that female students of the Christian community lag behind in the educational sphere when compared to their Muslim counterparts. There have been various reasons attributed for this phenomenon, including the Christians in general are poor and they lack the financial resources for getting education. The recent forced conversion to Islam has contributed to drop out from schools and move towards early marriages of Christians girls. In addition to the above, inappropriate behaviour of teachers and fellow students, forcing of change of religion both by students and teachers, social exclusion, believing Christian's girls as indecent and modest were also held responsible for low female literacy rates.

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