

Empowering Voices: The Impact Of Minorities In Pakistani Politics (A Case Study Of Faisalabad)

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Abstract:

This article delves into the dynamic contributions of prominent minority figures across Pakistan, with a specific focus on the unique case of Faisalabad. Highlighting the prominent minority individuals popular in politics of Faisalabad for instance: Kamran Michel, Shunila Ruth, Asiya Nasir, Naveed Amir, Dr. Rubina Feroz Bhatti, Rana Bashir, Clement Shahbaz Bhatti, and Khalil Tahir Sandhu, it explores their roles as federal ministers, senators, members of National Assembly, members of Provincial Assembly, members of National commissions, and contributors to Punjab's commission on the status of women. The collective impact of these leaders transcends regional boundaries, emphasizing the nationwide significance of minority voices in shaping policies related to human rights, minority affairs, and child rights. Through the analysis of available sources this study article attempts to unknot the complex interplay between minority representation and political narratives in Faisalabad and beyond.

Key Words: Minorities, Politics, Empowerment, Religion, Faisalabad.

Introduction

In the diverse and dynamic realm of Pakistani politics, the voices of minorities resonate as vital threads woven into the fabric of governance. This article embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the impactful roles played by distinguished minority figures across the nation, with a special lens on Faisalabad. From federal ministers to members of national commissions, these individuals have not only transcended regional boundaries but have also left an indelible mark on the broader political landscape.

Among the luminaries under scrutiny are Kamran Michel, Shunila Ruth, Asiya Nasir, Naveed Amir, Dr. Rubina Feroz Bhatti, Rana Bashir, Clement Shahbaz Bhatti, and Khalil Tahir Sandhu. Their diverse roles, spanning from federal ministers and senators to contributors to

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national commissions and Punjab's commission on the status of women, collectively illustrate the multifaceted impact of minority representation in shaping policies related to human rights, minority affairs, and child rights.

As we delve into their journeys, we unravel not just individual narratives but a tapestry of empowerment, resilience, and advocacy. Faisalabad district in particular, emerges as a unique case study. As in this city we have Clement Shahbaz Bhatti and Khalil Tahir Sandhu a distinctive hue to the city's political canvas. As former was the first Federal Minister for "Minorities Affairs" and later was Secretary for "Human rights and minority Affairs" respectively.

This exploration seeks to underscore the profound influence of these minority leaders, transcending geographic boundaries to reflect a national narrative. Through their endeavors, we witness not only the empowerment of minority communities but also the shaping of a more inclusive and representative political landscape across Pakistan.

In 1947, following the independence of Pakistan, a significant demographic shift occurred, with approximately 14 million people migrating across borders. Pakistan received over eight million Muslims from distinct regions, came to West Pakistan, while East Pakistan welcomed 1.2 million Muslims. It is interesting to note that at the time of creation of Pakistan, minorities comprised to nearly twenty three of total population. However, this percentage has significantly dwindled to merely 3% in contemporary times (Dr Iftikhar H. Malik, 2002). One of the reason for this very clear decline was that East Pakistan got separated from the rest of Pakistan and today exist as Bangladesh. The non-Muslim ethnic minority has disproportionately borne the impact of reduced access to preventative medical services. This change in the religious demography of the country has impacted the social subdivisions of society. Regardless of their group size, these minorities face challenges. Likewise the legislations post 1971 when Eastern Wing of the country got separated that were supposed to provide equal rights for minorities are imperative. In the post-Partition era, minorities especially Christians in Punjab and Sindh had actively supported Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Muslim League, particularly after 1945. Even prior to the culmination of the movement, prominent Indian Christians, such as Pothan Joseph, had contributed significantly as journalists and advocates for the Muslim League. Jinnah, in his leadership, had consistently pledged complete equality of citizenship for all Pakistanis. Unfortunately, this promise remained unfulfilled by his successors (Dr Iftikhar H. Malik, 2002).

Pakistan follows a joint electorate system where all citizens, regardless of their religion, vote for candidates. Minorities, including Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and others, actively participate in politics. Some have held significant positions in political parties, and a few have served in governmental capacities.. The Constitution of Pakistan provides reserved seats for religious minorities in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies. This ensures some level of representation for minorities in the legislative bodies.

Another such politician from the minority was Mr. Khalil Tahir Sandhu. He was born in 1967 at Toba Tek Singh, is a distinguished individual with a multifaceted career. The son of Mr. Bashir Masih, he completed his LL.B. degree in 1994 from Punjab University, Lahore. Later he did diploma in International Law and United nation systems from Geneva. These certifications reflect his commitment to study and understand global legal frameworks. He secured a seat in the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab during the general elections of 2008

as MPA. He was elected on the reserved seat for minorities to safeguard the interest of the minorities during the upcoming legislations.

During his tenure in the 15th Assembly from 2008 to 2013, Mr. Sandhu held significant positions. He served as “Parliamentary Secretary for Human Rights & Minorities Affairs”. His involvement extended to membership in key committees such as the Special Committee and the Committee on Government Assurances, further emphasizing his active role in legislative and oversight matters. Khalil Tahir Sandhu's commitment to human rights is evident through his participation in meetings held in Geneva to show the status of minorities in Pakistan. In recognition of his dedication to interfaith dialogue and human rights, Mr. Sandhu holds a permanent executive membership with Interfaith International, an organization with Consultative Status with the United Nations. His international engagements include travels to the United Kingdom, Spain, and Switzerland, showcasing his commitment to understanding global perspectives.

As a representative of non-Muslim minorities, Khalil Tahir Sandhu continues to be a significant voice in the political landscape, contributing to the discourse on human rights, minority affairs, and legal matters in Pakistan. His journey reflects a harmonious blend of legal acumen, advocacy, and a steadfast commitment to fostering inclusivity and representation for minority communities.

A man of principles, Khalil Tahir Sandhu has navigated the political landscape with a focus on collaborative governance. His efforts have not only secured legislative wins but have also contributed to fostering a more inclusive and tolerant society in Faisalabad.

Clement Shahbaz Bhatti, born on 9 September 1968, was a famous Pakistani politician. He was the first Christian Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs. His political journey has been manifested by his deep commitment of advocating the rights of minorities. He challenged the blasphemy laws in Pakistan. He was born to the Christian parents from the Faisalabad District. His father's name was Jacob Bhatti. He had served as an officer in the British Army, afterward he remained a teacher and chairman of the board of churches in Khushpur. Shahbaz Bhatti's venture into activism started in an early age. His political step was the formation of Christian Liberation Front in 1985. He was at that time studying Public Administration at the University of the Punjab, Lahore. His passion for minority rights led to the establishment of another organization that was named as “All Pakistan Minorities Alliance” in 2002 (Bentham, Annabelle, 10 March 2011). He was later elected as Chairman. In 2002 he entered in to the day to day politics by joining Pakistan People Party (PPP). After a brief hiatus from politics, he became a federal minister in 2008. His remarkable journey reached its zenith when he was appointed as the “Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs” in 2008 (The Express Tribune, July 2010). Notably, under his ministerial reign the post of minorities representative was elevated to cabinet as well for the first time. This shows his lobbying success and to make others realize the increasing importance of minority affairs in Pakistani politics. Bhatti's acceptance of the ministerial position was an attempt to do some work for the oppressed and marginalized minorities of Pakistan. Through his works as minister it is clear that he spent his life for the betterment of religious minorities that were otherwise marginalized. In this ongoing struggle he raised his voice for reforming the country's blasphemy laws. This was seen as a hope by those from the minorities that had suffered already due to misuse of the Laws that were promulgated in this country during the Government of General Zia ul Haq. Although he remained unsuccessful in this regard, however still his effort remains a light of hope for many to follow. Among the other steps that were taken by Bhatti as religious minister were attempt

to launch a national campaign for interfaith harmony. Further he purposed to agree to such legislations that may help to ban the hate speech. In addition to that he called for introducing “Comparative religion” as a new subject in the University curriculum. He called for the implementation of the fixed quotas already present for the religious minorities in government departments. He further demanded the reserved Senate seats for minorities. However despite being so active for the minorities, on 2 March 2011, he was assassinated. At that time he was outside his mother's home. Apparently the executer was a terrorist of the Taliban (Perlez, Jane, 3 March 2011). He was murdered on the accusation that he uttered disrespectful words against blasphemy laws. There were no significant steps taken by the then government against the Taliban, that resulted in the murder of the Governor Punjab, Salman Taseer few months later. In the aftermath of his assassination, his brother, Paul Bhatti. He attempted to gain the leadership role, consequently he was appointed as Minister of National Harmony and Minority Affairs. Bhatti's legacy lives on as a symbol of courage, advocating for the rights of minorities and challenging oppressive laws in pursuit of a more inclusive Pakistan.

In unraveling the narratives of Khalil Tahir Sandhu, Shahbaz Bhatti, Kamran Michel, and Julius Salik, we find ourselves immersed in the profound impact of minority voices within the intricate tapestry of Faisalabad's political landscape. Their journeys, spanning from parliamentary roles to advocacy for human rights, reflect a commitment to empowerment that resonates far beyond regional boundaries. Faisalabad emerges as a compelling case study, where the likes of Khalil Tahir Sandhu have passionately advocated for the rights of minorities, transcending the confines of the local political sphere. As we delve into the lives of these influential figures, it becomes evident that Faisalabad's political mosaic is enriched by the diversity of voices championing the cause of the oppressed and marginalized. The tragic tale of Clement Shahbaz Bhatti, serves as a reminder of the challenges faced by those daring to challenge oppressive norms of the Pakistani society. Bhatti's unwavering commitment to justice and his tragic demise underscore the profound impact that minority leaders can have on national discourse, even in the face of grave adversity. The empowering voices of Kamran Michel, serving as a federal minister and senator, Shunila Ruth, Asiya Nasir, and Naveed Amir, along with the dedicated work of Dr. Rubina Feroz Bhatti and Rana Bashir, collectively contribute to the ongoing narrative of empowerment in Pakistani politics. These leaders have navigated challenges, initiated legislative reforms, and advocated for the rights of minorities, shaping a more inclusive and representative political landscape. As we conclude our exploration, Faisalabad stands not only as a geographic location but as a symbol of resilience and progress. The voices of these minority leaders echo through the halls of government, leaving an indelible mark on policies that promote inclusivity and justice. Empowering voices in Pakistani politics, especially within Faisalabad, embody the principles of unity in diversity. The collective efforts of these individuals, fueled by a commitment to human rights, social justice, and equality, exemplify the transformative power of minority representation. The journey continues, with Faisalabad serving as a testament to the enduring impact of empowering voices in shaping the future of Pakistani politics.

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