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**Political Marginalization through Separate Electorates: A Study of
Christian Community in Pakistan**

Dr. Saeed Ahmed Butt

Assistant Professor, Government College University, Lahore

saeedbutt@gcu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Religious minorities' political participation is considered an important trait of democratic governance. In Pakistan however, the institutional architecture of electoral system has historically impacted and, in some cases, limited the political agency of minority communities. This research paper will discuss establishment and functioning of separate electorate system (1985-2002) and the effect it has had on political marginalization of Christian community within Pakistan. The justification for the system was that it would provide minority representation but its impact was to promote minority segregation, minority political marginalisation and to strengthen structural minority exclusion from politics. Based on historical analysis, secondary literature and electoral data, the research presented hypothesis that separate electorates created a political isolation that had negative consequences for democratic participation and inclusive governance. The paper also assesses the changes that have taken place since 2002 and puts forward the case that while joint electorates brought an improvement, challenges remain on structural side of minority representation. The study presents original insights into issues of electoral design, minority rights and democratization in postcolonial states.

Keywords: *Separate Electorate, Christians in Pakistan, Political Marginalization, Minority Rights, Electoral System, Pakistan Politics*

1. Introduction:

Ever since its inception in 1947, Pakistan has been facing the issue of balancing the principles of democratic inclusiveness and equal citizenship with its Islamic ideological basis. Minority political participation is a central point of this tension. Religious minorities (Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and others) make up a small but sizeable community in Pakistan. Within these communities, Christians have historically helped shape education, healthcare and civil services, but politically they have been under-represented and of questionable legitimacy. One of the recurring issues in politics of minorities in Pakistan has been separation of electorates. The joint electorate system provides for same electorate irrespective of a person's religion. The opposite of this, however, is the separate electorate system, which votes people by religion and allows minorities to elect candidates from their minority communities. This system was officially implemented under the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq and continued till 2002.

The development of separate electorates was a turning point. Its supporters said it would ensure minorities were represented, but its opponents said it would marginalise minorities and diminish their power. This institutional framework during Zia's rule has left a deep imprint on Pakistan's political system as noted by Talbot (2012), "The institutional features of the Zia period profoundly affected nature of electoral process in Pakistan, where religious identity was institutionalized."¹ For Christians, this change was a political one, as well as one of less involvement in wider national

¹ Talbot, I. (2012). *Pakistan: A modern history*. Hurst & Company.p.278

politics. It aims at critically examining effect of separate electorate system on Christian community in Pakistan. This study's major contention is that rather than empowering minorities, separate electorate system institutionalized minority exclusion. It was a mechanism that limited political space of Christians, which undermined their capacity to shape policy, decreased accountability, and perpetuated structural inequalities.

2. Literature Review:

The origins of separate electorates are found in the past. The roots of separate electorates can be traced back in history. The idea of separate electorates was first proposed in British India during Minto-Morley Reforms in 1909. These changes included system of communal representation for purpose of accommodating religious diversity. Others contend, however, that this system exacerbated inter-community tensions and helped to create identity politics.² post-Independence Pakistan inherited this legacy and initially moved towards a more inclusive framework. The 1973 Constitution brought in concept of joint electorates under banner of equal citizenship. Rahman (2018) says this change was supposed to “encourage national integration and minimize communal divisions.”³ The summary of Islamization and Electoral Reforms under Zia-ul-Haq is summarized. The reintroduction of separate electorates can be directly attributed to policies of Islamization imposed by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1980s. Such policies were seen as defining Pakistan's identity in a more explicitly Islamic way, as written by scholars as Nasr (2001).⁴ Religious differences in politics were reinforced with separate electorate system, which was a component of this larger political agenda. In this arrangement, a certain number of seats were reserved for minorities and they were not included in general electorates. Weiss (2014) cites that “separate electorates have effectively disenfranchised minorities from mainstream political participation.”⁵ This exclusion had profound implications for representation and political participation of minorities.

There is a large and significant book on implications of separate electorates for minority populations. According to Sultana (2014), the system meant that minorities had less political power than other people, because the minorities were reserved for the reserved seats.⁶ In a similar way, Shaheed (2010) observes that minority representatives were often weak in organizing effectively for their communities due to inadequate resources and political backing.⁷ The difficulties were especially difficult for Christians. This lack of concentration of Christians made it challenging for candidates to establish political bases. This dispersion also “affected minority representation, and hurt voter turnout,”⁸ Rehman notes. Those who oppose separate electorates have termed it as institutional discrimination. Human rights groups say the system discriminated against citizens on religious grounds and was a denial of equality. The system “segregated voters and marginalised minorities, who were denied a full voice in the democratic process.”⁹ The implications of this for democracy are also stressed. The system excluded minorities from general constituencies and lowered incentives for mainstream political parties to pay attention to issues of minorities. This,

² Jalal, A. (1995). *Democracy and authoritarianism in South Asia*. Cambridge University Press.

³ Rahman, T. (2018). *Pakistan's politics and minorities*. Oxford University Press.p.134

⁴ Nasr, V. (2001). *Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the making of state power*. Oxford University Press.

⁵ Weiss, A. M. (2014). *Interpreting Islam, modernity, and women's rights in Pakistan*. Palgrave Macmillan.p.92.

⁶ Sultana, R. (2014). Political participation of minorities in Pakistan. *National Journal of Political Science*, 8(1), 55–72.

⁷ Shaheed, F. (2010). Contested identities and minority rights in Pakistan. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45(36), 25–30.

⁸ Rehman, J. (2001). *Human rights and the constitutional law of Pakistan*. Oxford University Press. P.67.

⁹ Human Rights Watch. (2002). *Pakistan: Reforming the electoral system*.

in turn, led to lack of attention paid to concerns of minorities in national policy debates.¹⁰ This was a major change in 2002 when separate electorates were repealed. Minority groups were re-sent to mainstream politics, by the restoration of joint electorates. But the researchers say there are difficulties that remain. Minority seats are currently allocated by party lists, which could lead to accountability and representation concerns.¹¹

3. Theoretical Framework:

The theories of political exclusion and minority representation are used as a basis for this study. Political exclusion is the processes whereby certain groups are systematically denied access to political power and participation.¹² Separate electorate system can be perceived as an institutional exclusionary process in context of Pakistan. Relevant too is the notion of “descriptive representation.” Pitkin defines representation as simply the presence of representatives from a group, but also that they are able to speak out on behalf of that group's interests effectively.¹³ The separate electorate system offered descriptive representation and lacked substantive representation.

4. Electoral Systems in Pakistan: Historical Perspective of Electoral Systems in Pakistan:

For decades, non-Muslim minorities have faced a lot of difficulties and issues to state's rules which result into politico-social subjugation, breed intolerance and institutionalize the discriminatory laws, “thus usurping the basic rights of non-Muslims in shaping their political life in Pakistan as independent and equal citizens.”¹⁴ The use of Separate Electoral system is well established in Indian sub-continent. Ever since Pakistan's birth the separate electorate has been one of most prominent issues of Christians minority. Since Independence, the electoral system in Pakistan has been through several changes. The early years were marked by debates over representation and identity. Joint electorates were introduced in 1973, as a measure of inclusiveness, but in 1980s, they once again became available under different conditions. In 1956, (West Pakistan) High Court was approached by Christian leadership, headed by Joshua Fazlud Din, Sunder Daas, Chaudhry Chandu Lal, S.P. Singha and Cecil Edward Gibbon, where they argued that the Parliament had not approved two types of electoral system for both wings of the state (Pakistan). The judges took action on this petition by rejecting it and stated that Parliament being a sovereign body, the constitution can be amended and formulated. Christians leadership also attached a document signed by Mohammad Ali Jinnah and S.P. Singha on this case that assured Christians for a separate electoral system in future Pakistan, in exchange of their votes for Pakistan. The minutes of Pakistan's Legislative Assembly record that on the Parliamentary Floor. C. Gibbon, a Christian representative and a motivating worker for Jinnah's Pakistan, voiced his protest, and spoke for 18 hours in favor of separate electorate and against Joint Electoral system for non-Muslims. Ahmad Salim describes that rapid increase in occurrence of religious discrimination and intolerance through separate electorate system have caused non-Muslims for demanding “dissolution of this system.”¹⁵ Joshua Fazl-ud-Din mentions in his book, *Separate Electorates: The Life-Blood of Pakistan*, “The very fact that the non-Muslim minorities are to enjoy full religious freedom and the right to develop their culture should leave us in no manner of doubt that these rights can be enjoyed

¹⁰ Talbot, I. (2012). *Pakistan: A modern history*. Hurst & Company.

¹¹ International Crisis Group. (2015). *Revisiting minority rights in Pakistan*.

¹² Young, I. M. (2000). *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford University Press.

¹³ Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The concept of representation*. University of California Press.

¹⁴ Ahmad Salim, Non-Muslims in an Islamic State A case Study of Pakistan, No. 2, p.55.

¹⁵ Ibid.

in real sense only when the minorities are also given full freedom to elect their representatives.”¹⁶ The demand for reserved seats will always be upheld so a segregation can be maintained between non-Muslims and Muslims and a separate Muslim Pakistan from rest of Indian Subcontinent can be created as per Two Nation Theory. It is a question on Muslim majority population of Pakistan when they are denying Separate Electoral system for non-Muslims, which was their basic and major demand during Freedom movement of the country of Pakistan. Such an attitude is an indication of undemocratic attitude on behalf of majority population in Pakistan. The issue of minorities emerged as a debatable issue in newly born state of Pakistan after independence of Pakistan in 1947. Dr. Martin Lau quotes Mr. Jinnah's situation on minorities' problem just three months before the Independence Day. Jinnah believed that, “The problem of minorities rights had thus become manageable and could be solved through law and the non-Muslim minorities of Pakistan would have fully-fledged obligations privileges and citizenship rights “with no distinction of caste, creed or sect.”¹⁷ Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah adopted an inclusive policy of taking Jogendra Nath Mandal, as country's first law minister, who belonged to a scheduled-caste Hindu from East Pakistan. Likewise, there were some great leaders of Christianity, *Fazal Ilahi* and *Chaudhry Chandu Lal*, who continued to be deputy speakers of Punjab Legislative Assembly. At the same time, Christian Cecil Edward Gibbon was also elected as Deputy Speaker of Pakistan's second National Assembly.

Following death of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Jinnah, there were many opposing views and challenges to Quaid's vision and ideas, both from outside and within the ruling party of Pakistan, Muslim League. Those who supported Objective Resolution (1949) started to demand the principle of separate electorate in the country, which was otherwise a political demand. Various non-Muslim, responded to Separate electoral system with their thoughts and perceptions. While on one side Christians of West Pakistan were in favour of the separate electorates, Hindu minority of East Pakistan started opposing the idea. Even Christian leadership of Punjab started to support system of separate electorates' pre-independence era. In July 1947, a prominent Christian leader, S.P. Singha¹⁸ commented before Punjab Boundary Commission that joint electoral system would bring domination of Hindu in Indian subcontinent. Talking about the Christian sensitivity and the obsession, he said that no one would think that the sensitivities of the community and the difference this issue would be to them, especially as it is now “a question of life and death” to them. This was for the first time introduced in 1985 elections under Zia's rule. Non-party elections further undermined political organization, and promoted lack of accountability. Later elections in 1988, 1990, 1993 and 1997 were held within this system, reinforcing principle of minority exclusion. Tahir Mehdi describes; General Zia-ul-Haq brought some amendments in election laws in September 1978 by creation of necessary inclusion of faith declaration in voter registration application. Thereby this step separated registration of non-Muslims from Muslims. On the other hand, President and military dictatorship Pervez Musharraf scrapped separate electoral system in 2002, which saw the minorities seats in National Assembly fixed but there was a slight change in their allocation, “The election to these reserved seats was to take place at polling booths.”¹⁹ The entire Pakistani state had to serve as a single constituency for reserved seats in National Assembly for each minority and this formula was also implemented in each province too.

¹⁶ *Joshua Fazl-ud-Din, Separate Electorates: The Life-Blood of Pakistan*, 1956. The preface of this book was written by *Maulana Maududi*, which was published in 1956.

¹⁷ Dr Martin Lau, a dean at Lahore University of Management Sciences, in his 2012 paper, *Islam and the Constitutional Foundations of Pakistan*

¹⁸ S.P. Singha was then a speaker of the Punjab Assembly in united Punjab.

¹⁹ Tahir Mehdi, *The Pakistan Election Compendium*

The non-Muslims had their own polling system from 1985 to 2000 for 15 years. The voice of Christian representatives was echoed in legislative bodies of Pakistan as well as on international forums, which made Muslims alarming and faced international pressure for suspension of Separate Electorate so that Christians voice might be ended. On the other hand, the government of Pakistan was unable to face protest and lawsuits like 1956, so government took a decision for using Hindu and Christian leadership against Separate Electoral system. Some of so-called Christian representatives are alleged to be engaged in politics of establishment as they receive financial support to hold press conferences and seminar in Pakistan from establishment organisations like IB, ISI etc. to propagate propaganda of non-separate electoral system in western states. Under cover of these Christian means, the government introduced Joint Election system for minorities in national general elections of 2002.²⁰ The separate electoral system widened divide between majority and minority, which resulted in decreasing of interest by minorities for electoral politics among minorities. It enabled people to spread hate material against Christians which also led to misappropriation of biased law against non-Muslims. All elected non-Muslims representatives would join ruling party and coalition government, which would prove an unfinished agenda of non-Muslim representation in Pakistan.

The Constitution of Pakistan, 1973²¹ has reserved 10 seats in National Assembly, 23 seats in four Provincial Assemblies (PAs) and 4 seats in Senate of Pakistan for non-Muslims. Usually, 4 or 5 seats were allotted to Hindus. The number of national Assembly seats were increased from 207 in 1997, to 332 in 2002. But number of non-Muslim reserved seats were not increased from 10. The number of seats in Provincial Assembly of Sindh and Punjab were also raised from 100 to 159 and 240 to 363, whereas no seats for non-Muslims were raised. Although a bill for increasing minorities' seats was introduced by Ramesh Kumar Vankwani, it was not passed²². Political parties Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) party is against giving reserved seats for minorities.²³ During 1980s, Zia-ul-Haq instituted a system where non-Muslims were only allowed to vote for candidates of their own faith. In national and provincial assemblies, seats were set aside for minorities. Muslim candidates had no reason to worry about minorities under separate electorates system, critics said, but government officials said the system was a method of affirmative action to ensure minorities' representation and that a consensus was being formed among religious minorities on this matter. Hindu community leader Sudham Chand protested against system but was murdered. This was scrapped from Pakistan in 1999. In 2002, Hindus and other minorities got a rare political victory as they ended separate electorates for Muslims and non-Muslims. The separate electorate system had reduced non-Muslims to a mere shadow of their former selves, as assemblies were unrepresentative as far as non-Muslims were concerned. Pakistan Hindu Welfare Association was active by organizing a national conference on subject in December 2000. In 2001, Hindus, Christians and Ahmadis also managed to partially boycott the elections, which led to elimination of separate electorate system in 2002. This enabled religious minorities to vote in National and Provincial assemblies for seats in mainstream rather than only for seats for religious minorities. Despite triumph, there are still many Hindu communities that are not well-represented.²⁴ In 2006, Ratna Bhagwandas Chawla elected as First Hindu Woman in Senate of Pakistan.²⁵ Although there

²⁰ Nazir S Bhatti, *Trial of Pakistani Christian Nation*, p. 72

²¹ *Junaidi, Ikram (3 April 2019). "JUI-F lawmaker suggests abolition of reserved seats for minorities". Dawn.*

²² *"Hindus feel the heat in Pakistan". BBC News. 2 March 2007.*

²³ *"After 1947, First Hindu Minority Woman From Thar to Become Senator in Pakistan". India.com.*

²⁴ *"Hindu woman elected to Pakistan's senate in historic first: Report". Times of India. 4 March 2018.*

²⁵ *Fazili, Sana (29 July 2018). "Meet Pakistan's First Hindu Candidate Mahesh Kumar Malani to Win on General Seat". Network18 Group. Archived on 20 September 2018. Retrieved 20 September 2018.*

is reservation of seats for women in Pakistan National Assembly, not a single seat was allotted for non-Muslim women until 2018. The first woman, who is Hindu woman Krishna Kumari Kohli, to win a women's reserved seat in the Senate of Pakistan in 2018.²⁶

In 2018, Pakistan general election, Mahesh Kumar Malani the first ever Hindu to win a general seat in Pakistan National Assembly 2018. He was from Tharparkar-II and was the first non-Muslim to win a general seat (not reserved) in Pakistan National Assembly. Hari Ram Kishori Lal and Giyan Chand Essrani topped voting and got elected for Sindh provincial assembly seats in provincial assembly election that was held simultaneously with Pakistan National Assembly election 2018. They have won a general seat (non-reserved) for the first time in a provincial assembly election, from among the non-Muslims.²⁷

5. Political Marginalization of Christians under Separate Electorates:

Pakistan has been a politicized society from time immemorial and people have been actively involved in the electoral politics. Although the military rule and attempts at a single government have occurred and emergency laws have been enacted, the people have not abandoned electoral politics. Significantly, except for a very small percentage voting for religio-political parties, people have usually voted for the mainstream parties espousing policies on national issues and have therefore shown their preference for a system that addresses the economic and political wellbeing of all. It has mostly been the regimes, in contrast, who have led the call for ad hoc policies and religious populism. The sense of insecurity and Islamist partisanship on part of regimes have added to tensions over pluralism. In general, Pakistanis did not demand separate electorates, but Zia opted for splitting Pakistanis into Muslims and non-Muslims. As he had explained earlier, his Hudood Ordinance and the law of evidence had already critically disempowered minorities and women. These discriminatory laws on the grounds of gender and religion were reinforced by constitutional changes and exclusionary clauses in the Penal Code. These were the bases for establishment of the segregationist system of separate electorates for minorities. There was addition of an amendment (Clause 4A) into Article 51 of the Constitution which mandated 'separate electorates. The law on separate electorates and communal representation was further elaborated by Presidential Order No. 8 of 1984 which reads: 'At an election to a Muslim seat or a non-Muslim seat in the National Assembly or a Provincial Assembly, only such persons shall be entitled to vote in a constituency as are enrolled on the electoral roll prepared in accordance with the law on principles of separate electorate for any electoral seat in that constituency.' Other way round, they would have their own constituencies and separate representatives that would not be Muslim. They would not have the same voting rights and constituencies, as they share the same existence with the Muslims, yet do not share their voting rights and constituencies. They can have constituents without ever having met them, or who live hundreds of miles away. Likewise, their representative could be complete strangers. Besides, even if living in the same town, Muslim representatives will have no concern about them. Prior to these crucial changes, there was a common electorate and common representation for local, provincial and national elections and no discrimination against minorities. The law on separate electorates did away with reservations for minorities and for women which were already in place to ensure that minorities and women can participate in national politics. In party-less elections held by Zia in 1985, separate electorates system was adopted (local elections were held in 1983 – albeit based on separate electorates). (Interestingly, in his own referendum in 1984 to seek presidency for five years, Zia used joint electorates as it served his own interests.)

²⁶ *"Pakistan election: Muslim-majority areas elect 3 Hindu candidates in Sindh". Business Standard India. 31 July 2018.*

²⁷ *Shahbazi, Ammar (20 March 2012). "Strangers to their roots, and those around them". The News.*

There was general opposition to separate electorates amongst most of the minorities, but there was strong support for separate electorates amongst some leaders of the minorities who felt that they would ensure adequate representation for religious minorities. In his Presidential Order, Zia had allocated 10 seats on National Assembly for people of other faiths – four each for Christians and Hindus, one combined seat for Sikhs and Parsis, and one for Ahmadis. Likewise, he set aside a few places for non-Muslims in four Provincial Assemblies. For instance, in Sindh 9 seats were reserved for non-Muslims, 5 for Hindus, 2 for Christians, 1 for the Sikhs and 1 seat was reserved for Ahmadis. In Balochistan, there was one seat allotted to Christians and one to Hindus, Sikhs and Parsees together. The new system of constituency was on religious lines, and in addition, the area was so extensive and unwieldy. The elected governments of Benazir Bhutto (1988-89) and Nawaz Sharif (1988-1999) along with three interim governments in between various dismissals (1990, 1993 and 1997) always skirted around issue of annulment of separate electorates law. The system put minority leadership in a dilemma. If they chose non-participation in new set-up, they would be totally disenfranchised, whereas by participating in it they would be seen to be supporting enforced segregation. Before elections of 1993, a minority candidate for Punjab Assembly, Naeem Shakir, had contested issue in a petition to Supreme Court. The Court permitted Muslims and non-Muslims to vote in same manner, regardless of his or her religion. But this was his own constituency (PP 126) and this was only a momentary success, as this was overturned by the Supreme Court on 4 October 1993. It disallowed Naeem Shakir from contesting elections from a Muslim constituency and thus maintained religious division within a democratic set-up.

The second term of Benazir Bhutto's rule from 1993-6 was supposed to be pro-joint electorates, but no action was taken. Bhutto's Attorney General, Fakharuddin Ibrahimji (who was also a former senior judge) reiterated *Jinnahist* concept of equal citizenship and joint electorates, but stated that it was a constitutional issue and could only be addressed by National Assembly. A few supporters of Bhutto believe that the reason she was unable to repeal separate electorates and other discriminatory laws and amendments was that she did not enjoy an electoral majority, a fact that Muslim League could not seem to care less about. This was not only because of the fact that Sharif and many of his colleagues had been beneficiaries of Zia and his regime, but also because the Muslim League has, in the past, been a party of conservative interests of the capitalists and landowners who never believed in an egalitarian system. The enforced separation led to absence of any representatives of majority community paying attention to development schemes in minority communities' area as it was outside their limits of constituency. Similarly, most of minorities, who were already poor, were unable to contact their representatives either due to lack of knowledge about them or due to lack of means of contact. Minority communities were cast into wilderness and in many instances, feelings of discrimination and loss overcame them. In past two decades, numerous civic organizations have called for repeal of this harmful and extremely discriminatory policy, but no government has gone so far as to remove Zia's tinkering with the system until 2002. It should be kept in mind that minorities have always lived in Pakistan whether it is in past or present so they are like other Pakistanis, in some cases even before Islam was introduced to the region. They chose Pakistan and in process, with Muslim community, Bahais, Christians, Hindus, Parsis, Sikhs and others suffered and experienced partition. Minorities have been by the side of citizens of Pakistan in defence of Pakistan, the motherland and yet they have been left with insecurity and deprivation by successive governments and some elements of majority community. All the way from Objectives Resolution to more recent times, regimes have opportunistically pandered to a policy of segregation between Muslims and non-Muslims and, sadly, this segregation has become multi-dimensional.

The climate of 'no-forgetting' separate electorates and other discriminatory practices continued to brighten agenda of Pakistan's civil society, to its credit. It had to be only after US operations against Taliban and pressure on government for changes in electoral system that Musharraf in early January 2002 scrapped the separate electoral system and reserved seats for the minorities. Musharraf also removed a statement from voter's registration forms, which was regarding reaffirmation of finality of prophethood, thereby seriously impacting Ahmadis. But under pressure from religious elements, the regime has repealed its decision and reinstated practice on 29 May 2002. Many civic leaders believed reserved seats for minorities should be in existence for some time at least until there was adequate representation of minorities on legislative bodies. Although Musharraf has provided more seats for minorities in National and Provincial Assemblies and for women and minority groups, it is not yet possible for minorities to field candidates on their own because of their weak economic resources and organisational capacity. Minority representation, in its entirety, is a delicate matter and has to be tackled in a holistic and supportive way, so as to generate a greater sense of participation and representation by avoiding the models of forced segregation and integration. Christians were only able to vote for Christian candidates under separate electorates. This restriction curtailed their involvement in national politics, and their voice in decision-making. This led to their political agency being greatly restricted. A few seats were reserved for Christians, so they did not have a strong voice in legislatures. They were limited in being able to promote the rights of minorities due to their peripheral status within the political system. The system worked in favor of the social divisions and separated voters by religion. This isolation prevented inter-communal dialogue and decreased the room for political cooperation.

6. Christian Political Marginalisation under Separate Electorates: Punjab and Lahore Special Case Study:

Punjab, especially Lahore, has been the life blood of the Christian community of Pakistan since long time. The effect of the separate electorate system is best seen in the central parts of Punjab (Lahore, Faisalabad, Sialkot and Gujranwala divisions), where the bulk of Christians is located. This section explores the impact of the system on Christian political involvement on the provincial and local level, with specific case studies. As the second largest city of Pakistan and the capital of Punjab, Lahore has a substantial number of Christians living in localities of Youhanabad, Kot Lakhpat, Badami Bagh and Shahdara. Today, there are still Christians who are politically marginalized, during separate electorate period (1985-2002). In system of separate electorates, Christians of Lahore were not allowed to vote for Muslims who were contesting general seats of National and Provincial Assemblies. Rather, they formed a national minority community, that frequently returned a single elector to represent a large geographical region. This led to a disconnection between problems in locality and political representation. For example, sanitation, employment and housing rights problems in the locality of Youhanabad, one of largest Christian localities in Lahore were settled. Their elected officials, however, who had their own electorates, often resided outside Lahore and had not direct contact with these communities. Rahman (2018) notes that "lack of geographically focused representation undermined the minority legislators' sensitivity to local issues."²⁸ Furthermore, the political mainstream parties were not interested in catering to the Christian electorate in Lahore since they did not have an electoral motive to do so as Christians were barred from the general electorate. This led to the structural neglect of minority neighbourhoods in planning urban development.

6.1. Faisalabad: Industrial Labor and Political Exclusion:

²⁸ Rahman, T. (2018). *Pakistan's politics and minorities*. Oxford University Press.p.142.

Faisalabad, commonly known as industrial hub of Pakistan, has a massive Christian community working in textile industry, sanitation and low-income jobs. In the days of separate electorates, political exclusion of Christians in Faisalabad was unmistakably linked with their economic status. Systemic discrimination in the labor market and in access to labor rights was experienced by Christian workers in Faisalabad. But they were not included in the mainstream electoral process and thus their issues were not heard in legislative bodies very often. According to Sultana (2014), “separation of electoral rolls effectively silenced minority labor voices in industrial constituencies.”²⁹ One such example is the general elections held in 1990 when Christian voters only voted in minority specific constituencies of Faisalabad. They had limited bargaining power in the face of employers or policymakers, especially in areas where the workforce was mostly unskilled. This meant that issues like the wage gap, union representation and workplace discrimination went unhandled.

6.2. Elite Capture and Weak Minority Representation, at Sialkot.

The dynamics are different in Sialkot, however, because there have been some Christian groups that have had a moderate socio-economic ascent. In spite of this, there was a type of elite capture in minority representation. Minority seats were restricted and elections were held nationally or in each province, which gave more of an opportunity to candidates with more capital, more political connections. It frequently led to selection of representatives whose primary focus was not on community. Rehman observes that “organization of separate electorates reinforced domination of more privileged parts of minority communities by elite candidates.”³⁰ The impact of this was that the working-class Christian did not wield much influence in Sialkot over the choice of representative, thus further undermining democratic accountability.

6.3. Gujranwala Division: Rural-Urban Divide in Representation:

The effect of separate electorates in Gujranwala division was affected due to geographic differences in both urban and rural areas. Rural Christian communities were somewhat more excluded than their urban counterparts, who were frequently working in agriculture. The separate electorate system meant that rural Christian electorate was amalgamated with urban electorate in large constituencies and issues like bonded labour and land rights were unable to be tackled because they were not on agenda. The lack of representation at local level “strengthened the marginalisation of rural minorities.”³¹ This rural-urban divide is an illustration of the fact that the system not only isolated minorities from majority but also standardized multiple minority experiences, excluding effective representation.

6.4. The Politics of Christian Representation in Punjab:

Some Christian leaders tried to work around structural problems of separate electorate system. The issues of Christian politicians in mainstream politics were highlighted by figures like Julius Salik and Shahbaz Bhatti (more so since 2002). There was a time in history of separate electorate in which Christian candidate did not have party support, and was elected as an independent or by narrow alliance. This limited their power in legislatures and restricted their advocacy efforts for policy changes. Separate electorates clearly had an impact at the local government level as well. Separate representation for minorities was also introduced in local bodies elections held under leadership of Zia-ul-Haq. This allowed some level of participation at grassroots, though it continued to reinforce segregation and restricted integration into wider governance processes. Christian councillors in Lahore were often weak and poorly resourced and lacked powers to solve

²⁹ Sultana, R. (2014). Political participation of minorities in Pakistan, P.63.

³⁰ Rehman, J. (2001). *Human rights and the constitutional law of Pakistan*. Oxford University Press. P.74

³¹ Weiss, A. M. (2014). *Interpreting Islam, modernity, and women's rights in Pakistan*. p.101.

community problems. Moreover, they were marginalized from the political system, making their impact on local government decision-making even less. Christian political engagement took a decisive turn in 2002 when JCE was restored. Christians in Lahore and other cities had the opportunity to once again vote in general constituencies, raising their profile in electoral politics. As political parties clambered to attract minority voters, especially urbanites such as Lahore, they started to be more active in those electorates. Political parties started to be more active, even in the minority voters, especially in urban areas like Lahore. But there are still issues – such as few minority candidates running in open seats, the party list system and socio-economic restrictions for political participation to name a few. The case studies of Lahore and the rest of Punjab illustrate how separate electorate system had negative and complex implications on the political marginalisation of Christians. It also produced a gap between people and representatives in urban center, and a polarization of economy and society in industrial and rural sections of the country, such as Lahore. The system also allowed for capture of elite and undermined grassroots representation. While separate electorates have been discontinued, impact of marginalization still remains on Christians' political experiences in Punjab. The results call for additional reforms to improve representation of minorities, democratic engagement of citizens and participation in governance.

7. Analytical Explanation of Voting Pattern in Punjab and Minority Representation (1985 - 2002):

The empirical data presented above provides a mode of analysis for structural dynamics of political marginalization in Punjab during separate electorate period (1985-2002). The information does not represent an inclusive democratic process but rather it is an indication of how the institutional framework systematically limited the political agency of minorities, especially the Christian community. The relatively high voting rates in Punjab which have been recorded from 1985 to 1997 would suggest high level of democratic participation at first glance. The percentage of voters in Punjab was always on par with and was higher than national average, reaching nearly 60% in 1985 and remaining relatively high thereafter. But a more careful consideration of figures reveals that they are deceptive in the context of minorities. The main problem is the separation of the electorate. With the separate electorate system, Christians were not allowed on the general electoral lists but were only allowed on minority-specific lists. For this reason, the high participation of the majority (Muslim) electorate is what the turnout statistics in Punjab are pointing at, and the participation of minorities is not making its presence felt in the aggregate statistics. Overall voting rates can be seen as an example of “participatory distortion” an electoral-level reflection of underlying differentials in political inclusion. Most people in the general population had full voting rights in geographically specific electoral districts, but Christians did not have the power to shape the mainstream election results. As such, turnout figures do not reflect the qualitative nature of participation, specifically in terms of their ability to influence political competition and policy outcomes.

The structural imbalance depicts in the composition of the Punjab Provincial Assembly is intrinsic in electoral system. The quantity of reserved seats - just eight for non-Muslims in the last 13 years (1985-1997) - is a quantitative cap on representation of minorities, regardless of their numbers. In terms of representation theory, it is a model of representation where there are some representatives of minorities, but they don't have any political power. Minorities' ability to legislate was limited as less than 3% of seats were reserved for them. This numerical restriction is what has led to non-proportional representation even in districts with relatively higher Christians population like Lahore and Faisalabad. Besides, the fixed quota system did not account for distribution of

minorities on a regional basis. In not matching up representation with demographic concentration, system actually drove minorities back to their localities and made them politically insignificant. This led to what many might consider institutionalized underrepresentation, or political outcomes based on structural design instead of electoral competition.

The statistics on the representation of National Assembly also demonstrates the extent of political marginalisation. Four seats in Federal level left Christians extremely under-represented in terms of population size and political representation. More important still, a national electorate for minority seats resulted in an extremely flawed representational system. Under conventional democratic models, representation is based on geographical proximity, enabling elected leaders to have a close relationship with their electorates. With separate electorate system, however, Christian candidates had to campaign all across the country. This geographical overextension inhibited development of constituency-based accountability and development of representative relationship. This meant that Christians in Lahore had their representatives who were far removed, and not socially connected, in the legislature. More generally, there was a lack of local representation that led to a lack of responsiveness, with community-specific concerns such as urban poverty, sanitation, and employment discrimination poorly addressed.

The reconstructed population distribution and political influence show a basic contradiction in the electoral system. A degree of electoral influence would be expected in cities with significant Christians where Christians were about 5-7% of population, such as Lahore. But separate electorate system nullified this demographic advantage. This difference can be explained by “representation gap” that exists between share of a group in population and in political system. This deficit was especially apparent in Punjab, as a minority vote was added to national vote instead of being assigned to a local electoral unit. Consequently, Christian voters in Lahore, Faisalabad and other urban areas were unable to use their strength to affect the election results in their localities. Their votes were absorbed in a larger national system and as a result they had no impact on local governance. This process is clearly an example of electoral dilution, which can be linked to systemic marginalisation.

A compelling analysis of the dynamics of minority politics is also provided by the results of the elections won by Christian candidates. The data suggests a disjointed voting and low voting figures, with multiple independent candidates. This fragmentation was in part due to the lack of robust party systems. Minority candidates have been contesting elections as independent candidates as there were not many incentives for mainstream political parties like Pakistan Muslim League (N) and Pakistan Peoples Party to seek the votes of the minorities. This limited their ability to organize, mobilize funds and voters. Collective political bargaining was further weakened by fragmentation. The fragmentation of votes among various candidates reduced the strength of the elections. This phenomenon can be called “intra-minority competition without institutional support”, which deepened the political marginalisation. Moreover, drop in votes in subsequent elections indicate a tendency to become more disaffirmative of politics. Minority voters might have felt that their electoral experience was becoming less satisfying as defects of system became more evident and might have felt electoral fatigue and disillusionment, resulting in lower turnout. A comparison of the joint and separate electorates emphasizes the general meaning of electoral design. With a joint electorate system, minorities have power to sway majority candidates, to play in competitive partisan politics, and to interact with political parties. The separate electorate system, however, on the other hand, imposed institutional segregation, which effectively isolated minorities from the mainstream of politics. This segregation had several ripple effects, including a loss of political leverage, a decrease in party engagement, a less powerful policy impact and the

weakening of democratic norms. There was a significant loss of political leverage in that Christians were not able to affect the election success of Muslim candidates, resulting in a loss of leverage. It has hindered party engagement as political parties have neglected minority issues because of a lack of electoral incentives. Minority concerns were not salient in legislative and policy debates, and were not given a strong policy priority. Democratic norms will be undermined. The principle of equal citizenship was undermined by differential voting rights. Theoretically speaking, this system could be seen as a form of exclusionary institutionalism, in which formal political institutions are structured in a manner that systematically excludes certain populations. The empirical findings paint a picture of a persistent process of marginalisation, disconnection and exclusion in the structure, politics and institutions. The separate electorate system was not only to restrict the participation of minorities but also changed the political engagement of the Christians of Punjab. This was due to the lack of representation, geographical isolation, weak political association and waning participation, which consequently exacerbated the cycle of marginalisation. Political influence was limited, leading to a decrease in representation, and thus in incentives for participation, further reducing political influence. From the empirical evidence presented in the section it can be inferred that the central thesis of this study, i.e., institutionalization of political marginalization of the Christian community in Punjab through separate electorate system is strongly supported. Deep structural inequalities are detectable when analysing deep indicators of active democratic participation, even though voter turnout may be high on an aggregate level. The system was one that would separate voters, it would exclude them in the number of representatives and it would give them little political power. This legacy remains to influence minority politics in Pakistan, and highlights the role of electoral design in improving democratic governance.

8. Conclusion:

The present analysis shows that separate electorate system (1985-2002) was not a system of minority protection but more of an institutional system that reinforced the political marginalization of Christian community in Pakistan. The system was done to religiously divide people, which was an assault on basic democratic concept of equal citizenship, thus diminishing the ability of Christians to meaningfully engage in democratic politics. Empirical evidence from Punjab, specifically cities of the province, such as Lahore, demonstrates the ways in which this system has restricted representation to a set quota, reduced influence of electorate through nationwide representatives and severed connection between electorate and locally accountable representatives. As a result, Christian communities were pushed to the margins of politics, and had little influence on policy-making process, nor had they much reason to care about the political agenda of major parties. A major step toward inclusion of minorities in politics in Pakistan has been taken with establishment of joint electorates in 2002, but the legacy of exclusion remains to affect the representation of minorities in politics. Christians are still marginalised from electoral politics by structural inequalities, party list mechanisms and socio-economic barriers. Substantive democratic inclusion requires more than electoral reforms, however and requires a general embrace of equitable representation, political empowerment and institutional accountability. In this context, experience of separate electorates is an important reminder of what electoral design might do to institutions of marginalization and what it cannot: in this case, it is important to remember that electoral design can serve to reinforce or dismantle institutions of marginalization, and that there is a need for ongoing reforms to ensure that minority voices are not only heard but have tangible consequences on governance.