

Untouchability Among Muslims? Findings of a Case Study in Pakistan



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ABSTRACT

The notion of untouchability, i.e., certain social groups are impure and polluting, is generally associated with the Hindu religious tradition. However, a few studies maintain that upper-class Muslims, too, observe it in some parts of South Asia. Against this background, the present paper investigates the validity of these claims as regards the practice of untouchability among Muslims towards Christians based on data collected during a field study on Christian-Muslim social interaction in Peshawar, Pakistan. The method combined a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. According to the study, 65.2% of Christians disagreed with the statement that Muslims consider them untouchables. Similarly, the majority (61.8%) of Christians insisted that they were never hated, while the majority (95.9%) of Muslims also rejected the claim that they hated Christians. The downside of these findings is that around one-third of Christians view that they are treated as untouchable by their Muslim compatriots. Results from the interviews also corroborated these quantifications. The paper concludes that although the Islamic teachings do not support the idea of untouchability towards human beings of any fold or affiliation, some Muslims in Pakistan still practice it towards a particular Christian ethnicity (*chuhras*), considering them sanitary workers. The stigma attached to this Christian community is primarily because of their occupation rather than confession. Associating any ethnic or religious group with unclean professions and then considering them untouchable is a social evil that needs to be eradicated.

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1. Introduction

Islam is known for its egalitarian teachings and unequivocal rejection of discrimination based on color, race, and ethnicity. However, as is the case with many other religious traditions, the disparity between the teachings of Islam and the practice of different Muslim communities cannot be ruled out. In South Asia, the starkest form of racial discrimination is the notion of untouchability, which means considering certain groups of people as impure and polluting if touched. Untouchability is generally attributed to the Hindu caste system, with its roots in ancient Brahmanism. However, some studies hint at parallel social stratification among Muslims in the region. Of particular relevance to the present undertaking are the claims that Pakistani Muslims treat the lower-class ethnic background Christians as impure and untouchables. This issue surfaced during our study of the social interaction between Christians and Muslims in Peshawar, as some items of the quantitative questionnaire related to untouchability and hate. The study also included interviews with selective Muslim and Christian leaders. The present paper uses the relevant data collected during the above-mentioned study to analyze the claims about Pakistani Muslims that they treat their Christian compatriots as untouchables.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Notion of Untouchability and Its Historical Background in South Asia

Hereditary social stratification is a common phenomenon in South Asia which inevitably puts certain groups and classes at a disadvantageous position in society. However, the most awkward form of racial discrimination and social exclusion is the practice of untouchability which is distinct from general discrimination or marginalization of other sorts.¹ It not only renders certain people personally impure and polluting, but it also renders those who physically come in contact with the supposed untouchables temporarily impure and unclean until they purify themselves ritually. Similarly, any food item or utensils used for cooking or

¹ Jodhka, Surinder S, and Ghanshyam Shah. 2010. "Comparative contexts of discrimination: Caste and untouchability in South Asia." *Economic and Political Weekly* 45 (48): 99-106.

dining are considered contaminated by the mere touch of untouchables. These stigmas and taboos explain the label ‘untouchable.’¹

One of the main contributing factors behind this social reality is the *varṇa* (caste) system, which has its roots in the Vedic literature. The creation myth narrated in the seventh verse of hymn number 90 in the 10th mandala of Rigveda divides human beings into four hereditary castes: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (kings and warriors), and Vaishyas (farmers and other skilled workers) and Shudras (servants).² Though some scholars argue that this myth is a later interpolation,³ the fourfold *varṇa* system took an institutional form in ancient Brahmanism and continued to flourish through the later phases of Hinduism to our times.⁴

The Mahabharata describes the *varṇa* system (Section 12.181) based on two models; the color and the behavior. Based on the color classification, the Brahmins are white, the Kshatriyas red, Vaishyas yellow, and the Shudras black. In comparison, the behavior model explains Brahmins as those dedicated to truth and pure conduct, the Kshatriyas to boldness and anger, Vaishyas to farming and cattle rearing, and the Shudras seen as fond of violence and impurity.⁵ Others have theorized that this system of social stratification was in practice in the pre-Brahminic ancient Indus Valley Civilization, where the poor sanitary workers were segregated

¹ Yamazaki, Gen'ichi . 1997. "Introduction: Social Discrimination in Ancient India and its Transition to the Medieval Period." In *Caste System, Untouchability, and the Depressed*, edited by H Kotani, 15-17. New Delhi: Manohar.

² Sharma, S P. 1996. *History of Ancient India*. New Delhi: Mohit Publications.p.99. Also see Basham, Arthur Llewellyn. 1989. *The Origin and Development of Classical Hinduism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 25.

³ Jamison, Stephanie W, and Joel P Brereton. 2014. *The Rigveda: The earliest religious poetry of India*. Vol. I. Oxford: Oxford University Press.pp. 57–58.

⁴ Smith, Brian K. 1994. *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varṇa System and the Origins of Caste*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See also, Aktor, Mikael . 2017. *Social Classes: Varṇa*. Vol. I, in *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Hindu Law: A New History of Dharmasāstra*, edited by Patrick Olivelle and R Davis Donald , 60-77. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198702603.003.0005>.

⁵ Hildebeitel, Alf. 2011. *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

and banned from the cities.¹ Though Shudras have been placed at the lowest rungs of this social hierarchy, they are still a part of the *varṇa* system. The people with no caste, *avarṇa*, are considered impure, polluting, and for that matter, untouchables.²

Jātī (race) is another intricate social system that divides the tribes and people based on hereditary professions. Since some occupations are considered inferior and polluting, like sweepers, tanners, and butchers, *jātīs* associated with these professions are sometimes stigmatized as untouchables. Thus, South Asia has diverse untouchable castes and races, which became identified collectively as Dalits during the British era.³

After independence, the Indian constitution banned untouchability, though such deep-seated prejudices and practices still exist.⁴ To give just one example, according to a news report, some years back, even the Chief Minister of Bihar, Jitan Ram Manjhi, was treated as untouchable because of his Dalit background.⁵

Historically, some untouchable Hindu castes and tribes attempted to take refuge in other religions, such as Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity, to get rid of the oppressive hereditary social system. However, the lack of systematic social change or professional uplifting meant that conversion did not relieve them of much of their miseries.⁶ Their lowest social status

¹ Jaiswal, S. 1978. Some Recent Theories of the Origin of Untouchability: A Historiographical Assessment. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 39, 39 (I): 218–229.

² Bayly, Susan. 2001. *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 9–11. Also see: Olivelle, Patrick . 1998. "Caste and purity: A study in the language of the Dharma literature." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32 (2): 189–216. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/006996679803200203>

³ Deshpande, Satish , and Geetika Bapna. 2008. *Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities: A Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge*. Status Report, Delhi: National Commission for Minorities Government of India. p.1. available at: http://kscminorities.org/pdf/Status%20Report%20on%20Dalits_in_Christian_and_Muslim_Communities.pdf

⁴ Ibid. pp. 54-56.

Thomson Reuters Foundation. 2014. "Indian temple 'purified' after low-caste chief minister visits." ⁵ REUTERS. September 30. Accessed January 20, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-foundation-india-caste-idUSKCN0HP1DE20140930>.

⁶ Walbridge, Linda . 2012. *The Christians of Pakistan: The Passion of Bishop John Joseph*. Oxford: Routledge. pp. 12-17.

and, in some cases, even the stigma of untouchability continued after their conversion to other religious traditions.

2.2. Social Stratification within Muslim Communities and the Claims of Untouchability

As mentioned above, though institutionalized social discrimination and untouchability were related initially to the Hindu social system, other religious traditions in South Asia were also influenced by it to some extent. Notably, the *jātī* system existed among different religious traditions, including Muslims.¹ A broader bipartite hierarchy among Muslim communities has been that of *ashrāfs*, the nobles, and *ajlāfs*, the commoners. The foreign-born Muslims were distinguished as *ashrāfs*, and those who were indigenous converted Indian Muslims were titled as *ajlāfs*.² The *ashrāfs* were composed of four social strata: Sayyids, the descendants of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him); Shaikhs, the descendants of the companions of the Holy Prophet; Mughals, the descendants of Turks; and Pathans, the descendants of Afghans.³ The *ajlāfs* were treated as a lower class because of their supposed low birth. Ziauddin Barani has noted that Shams ad-Dīn Iltutmish (1211-1236) had removed thirty-three men from their government posts on their belonging to *ajlāfs*.⁴ Ghiyās al-Dīn Balban (1266-1287) did the same and removed *ajlāfs* from critical positions due to their low social status. Similarly,

¹ Delage, Remy. 2014. "Muslim castes in India." Books & Ideas.net, September 29. Accessed December 24, 2022. https://booksandideas.net/IMG/pdf/20140929_castesmusulmans_delage.pdf.

² Ahmad, Imtiaz. 1967. "The Ashraf and Ajlaf Categories in Indo-Muslim Society." *Economic and Political Weekly* 2 (19): 887-891. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4357934>.

³ Buehler, Arthur F. 2012. "Trends of Ashrāfization in India." In *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies: The Living Links to the Prophet*, edited by Morimoto Kazuo, 231-246. Oxon: Routledge. See also, Buehler, Arthur, F. 2012. "Ahmad Sirhindī: Nationalist Hero, Good Sufi, or Bad Sufi?" In *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny*, edited by Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey, 141-162. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group. pp. 141-162.

⁴ Barani, Ziauddin. 1953. *Tarīkh-i Fīrōz Shāhī*. 2nd. Translated by Henry Miers Elliot. Vol. 14. Calcutta: Susil Gupta Ltd. p.178.

Muhammad Tughluq (1325-1351) preferred the *ashrāfs* in government administration over the *ajlāfs*.¹ However, this dichotomy is disappearing now in contemporary South Asia.²

Against such social differences and stratification, some studies have claimed that even untouchability exists in different Muslim communities of South Asia, both within the Muslim communities and concerning Muslim behavior toward followers of other religious traditions. For instance, Prashant Trivedi et al. write about Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, India: “relatively well-off sections among Dalit Muslims report higher incidences of untouchability, and perpetrators admit to it even more so. It leaves no room for any confusion that the practice of untouchability is not confined to Hindus alone.”³ Bharat Chandra Rout acknowledges that the study by Prashant Trivedi et al. substantiates the claim that untouchability towards Dalit Muslims by high-class Muslims exists in Uttar Pradesh but points out several methodological lacunas in the study.⁴

Speaking specifically about Pakistani Muslims, Surinder Jodhka and Ghanshyam Shah claim that “caste and untouchability also exist among the Muslims of Pakistan.”⁵ Another study admits the existence of social stratification based on the *jātī* and *qaum* system among Muslims parallel to the Hindu *varṇa* and *jātī* systems but contends that untouchability is practiced only by Hindus.⁶ Some of these studies seem to confuse the existence of a general social hierarchy with untouchability. The common everyday experience in Pakistan is that Muslims seldom treat their coreligionist of any caste or class as untouchables and polluting.

¹ Ahmad, Imtiaz. 1966. "The Ashraf-Ajlaf Dichotomy in Muslim Social Structure in India." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 3 (3): 268-278.

² Buehler. 2012. "Trends of Ashrafization in India." pp. 231-246.

³ Trivedi, K Prashant, Srinivas Goli, Fahimuddin, and Surinder Kumar. 2016. "Does Untouchability Exist Among Muslims? Evidence from Uttar Pradesh." *Economic and Political Weekly* 51 (5): 32-36.
<https://www.epw.in/journal/2016/15/insight/does-untouchability-exist-among-muslims.html>.

⁴ Rout, Bharat Chandra. 2017. "Social stratification among Muslims." *Economic and Political Weekly* 52 (5): 69-70.

⁵ Jodhka & Shah. "Comparative contexts of discrimination: Caste and untouchability in South Asia". pp. 99-106.

⁶ Usman, Ahmed. 2017. "A Comparison of Hindu and Muslim Caste System in Sub-continent." *South Asian Studies* 32 (1): 91-98.

2.3. The Christian Minority of Pakistan and the Question of Hate and Untouchability

There are several studies and reports that portray a bleak picture of the Christian minority in Pakistan. Such reports claim that Christians are socially abused, their rights are dishonored by the general public everywhere in Pakistan, and their marginalization exists in the whole social fabric.¹ Some scholars claim that Pakistani Muslims do not want Christians in their neighborhood and consider them evil and disease.² Another set of reports asserts that the general attitude of Pakistani Muslims towards Christians is negative and that they treat them as untouchables.³ For instance, Iwanek argues that many Pakistani Muslims treat Christians as untouchables who are expected not to share food with Muslims.⁴ For example, Aftab Alexander Mughal reports an incident in which a Christian student was killed by his schoolfellows. He was being called *chūhrā*, a derogatory word used for sanitary workers, and was stopped from drinking water in the glass of Muslim students.⁵

To understand such incidences of negative behavior, one must understand the social composition of the Christian community in Pakistan. Pakistani Christians can be divided into two main social classes, the elite Christians and those belonging to the lowest strata of the society, owing to the history of Christian missionary strategy in this region. During British rule, the Christian missionaries failed to achieve much success in converting the middle and

¹ National Commission for Justice and Peace. 2011. *A Report on Religious Minorities in Pakistan*. Lahore.

² Smith, S. 2015. "Muslim mob tries to lynch Christian family." *The Christian Post*. October 12. Accessed December 8, 2022. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/muslim-mob-lynch-christian-family-father-accused-blasphemy.html>.

³ *Situation of Christians in Pakistan, including social and government attitudes, treatment and rights (2010-2012)*. Retrieved from Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/510f8dbd2.html>; See also, Khalid, Iram, and Rashid, Muhammad. "A Socio Political Status of Minorities in Pakistan." *Journal of Political Studies* 26, no. 1 (2019); see also, Gregory, Shaun R, and Simon R Valentine. 2009. *Pakistan: The Situation of Religious Minorities*. Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1-41. <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4b01856e2.pdf>.

⁴ Iwanek, Krzysztof. 2018. "Aasia Bibi and the Plight of Pakistan's Untouchables." *The Diplomat*. November 05. Accessed February 20, 2023. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/aasia-bibi-and-the-plight-of-pakistans-untouchables/>.

⁵ Mughal, Aftab Alexander. 2018. "On the Catalogue of Injuries Faced by Religious Minorities in Pakistan." *Open Democracy*. January 25. Accessed September 12, 2022. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/on-catalogue-of-injuries-faced-by-religious-minorities-in-pakistan/>.

elite classes in northern India, which compelled them to focus on the conversion of the untouchable Hindus. In Punjab, the new strategy proved to be fruitful to some extent. The *chūhrā* caste, most of whom were untouchable sanitary workers, converted to Christianity in large numbers, making them more than 90 percent of the Christians in Punjab. However, this achievement of missionaries came at the cost of stigmatization of the image of the Christian community in Punjab, as the Christian identity became equated with the *chūhrā* class.¹ Unfortunately, their conversion to Christianity did not change much in their social status, and their hereditary profession and the stigma of untouchability continued.² Against this background, Rukhi Khalid and Amina Tarar maintain that the social status of Christians affects mutual perceptions of Christians and Muslims in Pakistan.³

However, some other studies conclude that the overwhelming majority of Pakistan is tolerant towards religious minorities and advocates for their equal rights.⁴ Thus, it seems pertinent to inquire into the quantitative and qualitative data obtained through fieldwork in specific localities to assess if untouchability exists in Pakistani society and, if yes, what its gravity is. For this purpose, the present paper relies on the data collected during a study of the social interaction between Christians and Muslims in Peshawar, the capital of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province of Pakistan.

¹ Pervaiz, Huma., and Mahmood, Tahir. 2018. "Mass Conversion To Christianity: A Case Study Of Chuhra Community In Sialkot District (1880- 1930)." *Journal of Pakistan Vision* 19 (1): 40-59; See also Ballard, Roger . 2012. *The Christians of Pakistan: A Historical Overview and an Assessment of their Current Position*. Manchester: Centre for Applied South Asian Studies, University of Manchester., pp.2-3.

² Mehmood. et al. 2014. "Discrimination and problems of Religious Minority Students in Public Schools of Pakistan." *Journal of Education Research and Behavioral Sciences* 3 (8): 237-239.

<http://www.apexjournal.org>. Also see: Mughal, Aftab Alexander. 2018. "On the Catalogue of Injuries Faced by Religious Minorities in Pakistan." *Open Democracy*. January 25. Accessed March 12, 2022.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/on-catalogue-of-injuries-faced-by-religious-minorities-in-pakistan/>

³ Khalid, Rukhi, and Tarar, Amina,. 2004. "Effects of Cross Categorization on Inter Group Perception of Muslims and Christians in Pakistan. , 2 (1),." *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 1 (2): 3-16.

⁴ Shamsi, A H. 2011. *Social Status and Political Participation of Christian Minority in Pakistan*. PhD Thesis, Lahore: University of the Punjab, Quaid e Azam Campus, Center for South Asian Studies. p. 157)

Some detail about the Christian community of KP stands in order. Christianity came to this region from Punjab during British rule and partially after independence. Hence, their social fabric resembles that of the Punjabi Christians. Presently, 165,000 Christians live in KP, of which approximately 70000 reside in Peshawar. Most of these Christians are ethnically Punjabis who speak Urdu and Punjabi dialects and are descendants of the people who converted from Hinduism.¹ Most Christians in Peshawar reside in Lal Kurti, Swati Patak, Naseer Abad, Academy Town, Kohati Gate, University Campus, and Yousaf Abad.

3. Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

3.1. Statement of the Problem

As the above survey of literature shows, several studies have pointed out the existence of untouchability among Pakistani Muslims towards the lower caste Christian community. However, it seems astonishing when considered against the commonly known teachings of Islam about human equality and inherent human dignity (*karāma*) conferred by God on all humanity. The Qur'an states that Allah "honored the children of Adam and ... favored them specially above many of those We have created" (Qur'an, 17:70) and that at the moment when humanity was created, God breathed into Adam something of the Divine spirit (Qur'an, 38:72); this relationship to the Divine and thereby human dignity is considered an innate attribute of humankind.

According to the Qur'an, the difference in color and language among human beings are signs of Allah for wise people (Qur'an, 30:22). The variance of gender and race is not a source of division but a means of identification. The Qur'an proclaims: "Human beings, We created you all from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-fearing of you" (Qur'an, 49:13). Similarly, the Qur'an states that religious diversity is a result of the divine plan (Qur'an, 10: 99-100), and therefore, no one should be forcefully compelled to change their faith (Qur'an, 2: 256).

Regarding Christians, the Holy Quran maintains that they are closer in affection to the Muslims than any other religious community (Qur'an, 5:82). The slaughtered meat of

¹ Rahman, Khaista, and Muhammad Akram. 2020. "Christian-Muslim Coexistence in Peshawar City." *Asian Social Science* 30-41. doi:10.5539/ass.v16n4p30.

Christians is *ḥalāl* for the Muslims as they are *Aḥl-e-kitāb* (People of the Book). Furthermore, *Sharī‘ah* allows a Muslim to marry a Christian lady without requiring her to change her faith.¹ So, on its face, untouchability among Muslims seems strange and needs to be counter-checked through empirical data.

3.2. Research Questions

The following questions guide this paper: Does untouchability exist among Muslims? Do Christians feel hated by the Muslim community in Peshawar?

4. Research Methodology

In this research, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. Hence, questionnaires, interviews, and group discussions were used as tools of data collection, as suggested by Jonker and Pennink.² The researcher distributed 200 questionnaires among the Muslim community and 200 among the Christian community by hand in every fifth house, as recommended by Singh.³ One hundred seventy complete questionnaires were received from the Muslim community, and 178 complete questionnaires from the Christian community. The total number of questionnaires received was 348.

Furthermore, the researcher purposively selected three religious scholars and two common people from the Christian community for semi-structured interviews. Similarly, three religious scholars and two ordinary individuals were chosen from the Muslim community. Apart from individual interviews, three group discussions were held with male Christians in three different areas: Academy Town, University Campus, and Yousaf Abad. Each group consisted of 5 voluntary Christian individuals.

The questionnaire was descriptively analyzed by using SPSS to get the frequency tables. The data from interviews and group discussions were thematically analyzed. Moreover, the

¹ Leeman, Alex B. 2009. "Interfaith Marriage in Islam: An Examination of the Legal Theory Behind the Traditional and Reformist Positions." *Indiana Law Journal* 84 (2): 744-771.

² Jonker, Jan and Pennink, Bartjan W. 2010. *The Essence of Methodology: A Concise Guide for Master and PhD Students in Management Science*. London: Springer. pp. 94-96

³ Singh, Kultar. 2007. *Quantitative Social Research Methods*. New Delhi : Sage Publications. pp. 86-87 .

fieldwork was carried out only in those areas where sufficient numbers of Christians reside, such as Lal Kurti, Swati Patak, Academy Town, Kohati Gate, University Campus, and Yousaf Abad.

5. Data Analysis

5.1. Quantitative Analysis

The first part of the questionnaire was based on the respondents' demographic information. The second part consisted of four general questions designed in light of the literature review.

5.1.1. Demographic Data

In the demographic part, questions regarding religion, age, gender, education, marital status, profession, income, and the duration of stay in the community were asked. The Muslim respondents were 48.9%, while Christians were 51.1%. 29% of respondents of the total sample were between 18 to 24, 23% were between 25 to 30, 24% were between 31 to 39, and 23.5% were 40 years old and above. Male respondents were 78%, while 22% were female respondents, which means that the male response is dominant in this study.

9.5% of respondents had post-graduate education, 25.7% were graduates, 25.7% had higher secondary education, 20.8% were matriculated, 13.6% were middle pass, 7.5% were primary pass, and 8.4% were illiterate. 56% of the respondents were married, 40% were single, and 2% were widowed. 23% of the participants were government workers, private servants 35.4%, and those who had their own businesses were 12.5%. Students who participated in this study were 19.6%, and 9.06% declared themselves jobless. The respondents who stayed in their neighborhood for 40 years and above were 40%, and those who lived for 31-40 years were 20.29%. Those whose duration of stay in their community was between 21-30 years were 16.2%, and those whose term of stay was between 11-20 years were 13%. The monthly income was categorized; as PKR 10000 and below (12%), PKR 11000 and 20000 (31.7%), PKR 21000 and 30000 (18.2%), PKR 31000 and 40000 (5.6%), 41000 and 50000 (3.81%) and PKR 51000 and above (1.5%).

5.1.2. Main Data

The respondents were asked to select a suitable option based on the Likert-type scale of one to three. The responses were then quantified in tables, which are explained below.

Table 1: Do you think that your Muslim neighbors hate you because of your faith?

Christians Response		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	All	3	1.7	1.7	1.7
	Some	64	36.0	36.2	37.9
	Not at all	110	61.8	62.1	100.0
	Total	177	99.4	100.0	
Missin g	System	1	.6		
Total		178	100.0		

According to table 1, based on Christian responses, 36% of Christians thought that some of their Muslim neighbors hate them due to their religion. Only 1.7% of Christians believed that all of their neighbors hated them. Whereas, above average, 61.8% of Christians did not agree that their Muslim neighbors hate them because of their different faith.

Table 2: Do you hate your Christian neighbors due to their faith?

Muslims response		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	All	3	1.8	1.8	1.8
	Some	4	2.4	2.4	4.1
	Not at all	163	95.9	95.9	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

On the other hand, table 2 shows that 95.9% of Muslims insisted that they did not hate Christian neighbors due to their different religions. A minimal number of Muslims (2.4%) claimed that they hated some of them, while 1.8% of Muslims claimed that they hated all Christians.

Table 3: Do you think that your Muslim neighbors consider you untouchable?

Christians response		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	All	6	3.4	3.4	3.4
	Some	54	30.3	30.7	34.1
	Not at all	116	65.2	65.9	100.0
	Total	176	98.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.1		
Total		178	100.0		

Table 3 reveals that 65.2% of Christians did not agree with the statement that their Muslim neighbors consider them untouchables. Whereas 30.3% reported that some of their Muslim neighbors consider them untouchable, and 3.4% claimed that all Muslim neighbors consider them untouchable.

Table 4: Do you consider your Christian neighbors untouchable?

Muslims response		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	All	7	4.1	4.1	4.1
	Some	15	8.8	8.9	13.0
	Not at all	147	86.5	87.0	100.0

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Total	169	99.4	100.0
Missing	1	.6	
Total	170	100.0	

However, on the other hand, according to table 4, 86.6% of Muslims reported that they did not consider Christian neighbors untouchable. In comparison, 8.8% of Muslims thought some Christians were untouchable, and 4.1% considered all of them untouchable.

Table 5: Do your Muslim/Christian neighbors avoid talking to you?

Christians response	Frequency	Valid Percent	Muslims response	Frequency	Valid Percent
All of them	15	8.5	All of them	3	1.4
Some of them	10	5.6	Some of them	18	10.2
Never	152	85.3	Never	147	87.2
Total	177	99.4	Total	168	98.8
Missing	1	.6	Missing	2	1.2
Total	178	100.0	Total	170	100.0

Table 5 indicates that 8.5% of Christians think that all of their Muslim neighbors avoid talking to them, while 5.6% believe that some Muslim neighbors avoid them. However, the majority that is 85.3% of Christians, insisted that their Muslim neighbors never avoided talking to them. On the other hand, 1.4% of Muslims think that all of their Christian neighbors refrain from talking to them. In comparison, 10.2% consider that some Christian neighbors avoid them, and the majority, 87.2%, Muslims insist that their Christian neighbors never avoided them.

5.2. Qualitative Analysis

The data obtained through interviews and group discussions are presented and analyzed under the following themes.

5.2.1. Hatred

When the researcher asked whether Muslims hate Christians, most Christian participants rejected this, while some said that only illiterate Muslim individuals hate them. Participants agreed that, as a whole, the Muslim community does not hate them. They were also asked about Friday sermons and if they had heard any hate speech against religious minorities. Some participants answered affirmatively; however, most answered a definite no. As a senior Priest of Saint Michael Catholic Church said, “I have never heard any speech or sermon from the neighboring mosque which provokes hatred or prejudice against Christians or other minorities.”¹

5.2.2. Labels of Untouchability

Participants were also asked about the meaning of *achūt* (an Urdu word for untouchable). Muslim participants did not know about the word *achūt* and its meaning. However, the majority of Christians knew it. Participants agreed that in the Pashtun Muslim community, some people use the word *chūhrā* for those who work as a sanitationer; however, this word is used infrequently. As a senior Muslim orator commented, “The word *achūt* is not so common in KP. People use the word *chūhrā* for those whose job is sanitary whether the person is non-Muslim or a Muslim.”² Likewise, the traditional word used for a barber is *nā'ī*. But, now, even the barbers mind the word *nā'ī*, which carries some derogatory meanings, and they insist that they should be called *hujām* or *ustād*.³

A Christian clerk participant said: “I was born in Punjab, and then my family migrated to Peshawar. I have lived here in Peshawar city for over thirty years but never heard the word *achūt* from any of my Muslim neighbors in Peshawar. He continued, saying, “I have heard this word many times in Punjab.”⁴ Apart from this, there was a consensus among participants that the word *chūhrā* implies a derogatory meaning used for sanitary workers. However, the

¹ Riaz, Younas, interview by Khaista Rahman. March 22, 2016.

² Maulana Hasan, Faiz-ul, interview by Khaista Rahman. March 20, 2016.

³ Researchers' personal experience.

⁴ Masih, Younas, interview by Khaista Rahman. March 19, 2016.

use of this word is infrequent in Peshawar. As the Bishop of KP said, “The word *chūhrā* is not so common but used rarely. Those Christians who think they should not be called *chūhrā* should struggle to upgrade their social status and educate their children.”¹

6. Discussion of Results

The result of table 1 clearly shows that most (61.8%) of the Christians agreed that their Muslim neighbors never hated them due to their different religions. However, 36% of Christians complained that some Muslim neighbors hated them because of their faith. A similar response we obtained from the interviews and group discussions with participants. On the other hand, 95.9% of Muslims disagreed and insisted that they never hated their neighbors due to their different religions, and the interviewees also claimed the same. Thus, most Muslims did not admit that they hated their Christian neighbors.

Again majority (65.2%) of Christians disagreed with the claim that the Muslims consider them *achūt*, while 30.3% of Christians agreed that some Muslims consider them *achūt*. Similarly, most Christians (85.3%) think their Muslim neighbors never avoided talking to them. The same majority (87.2%) of Muslims insisted that their Christian neighbors never avoided them.

The Christian and Muslim interviewees claimed that instead of the word *achūt*, the word *chūhrā* is rarely used in Peshawar. Conversely, the majority (86.6%) of Muslims rejected this claim. Muslim and Christian interviewees equally admitted that the word *chūhrā* is culturally used due to social status and profession, not because of religion. Besides, all the Christian interviewees also insisted that they had not received any threat, persecution, or such labels from Muslim society.

6.1. Limitation of the Study

Since the study was primarily focused on the broader Christian-Muslim social interaction, the issue of untouchability was dealt with as a byproduct. Further empirical studies are needed to be undertaken in which the instrument should be specifically designed and validated to study the issue of untouchability in the context of Pakistani Christians.

¹ Peter, Humphery S., The Bishop of KP, interview by Khaista Rahman. March 29, 2016.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1. Conclusion

The study found that most Muslims do not consider their Christian compatriots untouchable, and most Christians agree that Muslims do not treat them as such. However, a considerable number, around one-third of respondents, both Muslims and Christians, have indicated the existence of this attitude among Muslims. Thus, some reports about the status of religious minorities in Pakistan might be exaggerated; untouchability towards a particular Christian community does exist among Muslims to a certain degree. However, this behavior has more to do with the social status of the Christian community in point and their physical impurity rather than their religious confession, as the qualitative interviews revealed that well-to-do Christians are not treated as untouchables. The findings of this study also imply a gap between Islamic teachings and Muslim practices.

7.2. Recommendations

The political, religious, and social leaders must work to curb any remnants of the inhumane practice of untouchability towards any community or social group in the country. The Muslim clergy needs to propagate Islamic teachings that stress the equality of all human beings. The imams should educate the masses about these teachings of Islam, which betray the notion of untouchability.

The sanitary work should be mechanized so that the workers involved can perform their job without getting physically polluted and exposed to unhygienic practices. Furthermore, the government of Pakistan should institutionally disassociate the employment of sanitary workers from any particular religious or ethnic group.

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