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Thematic Focus: Development as Discourse

Issues of the Integration of the Baha'is and Hindus in Pakistan: A Case Study of the Twin Cities (Islamabad- Rawalpindi) - Rafia Jalil (2015-2017)

This research focuses on the topic of the minority groups (Baha'is and Hindus) living in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The twin cities may have majority of the Muslim population but it also accommodates the religious minorities. The study focuses on the Hindus and Baha'is who face discrimination mostly in social spheres of the cities and covers the political and economic marginalisation simultaneously which is comparatively lesser than the social marginalisation. It also investigates and analyses the circumstances which lead one minority being more discriminated to the other.

Key Findings

1. The two community members are living in peaceful manner within the twin cities. The larger share of the peace comes from their calmness and passiveness towards the intolerance that they have to deal in their daily lives.
2. The Hindus and Baha'is do feel strongly towards their religion. Their religion is an imminent part of their life exactly like the majority Muslim population. They distinguish themselves as member of other religions without hesitation and reluctance. Few Hindus may identify themselves as secular but they emote immense respect and belonging to their religion.
3. The Baha'i community is unrecognised and often seen as an off-shoot of Islam. They are not considered as members of distinct religion many times. They do not take part in politics but they are not politically marginalised. They are socially discriminated and often excluded by the majority population. They do not face any trouble securing prominent, relevant and career oriented jobs. They do face insulting and humiliating behaviour at the workplace.
4. The Hindu community is recognised, heard and given space in social, political and economic spheres. The Hindus feel discriminated by the intolerant forces but they are not unrecognised. They hold their distinct identity, without hesitation. The Hindus are discriminated socially, economically and politically but they are yet the part of the mainstream society in every way possible. The community is part of important decisions of the society and the country. They admit the preferential treatment towards them at many instances.
5. Both the communities keep their profiles low, separate themselves from arguments to avoid any unwanted circumstances i.e. criticism, mocking, threats, embarrassment. However, the Hindus use the verbal freedom more often to report any cases of discrimination against them. The Hindus maybe socially challenged but they do not feel excluded and unheard. Hindus are socially more integrated, known and recognised compared to the Baha'i members.
6. The employment opportunities are scarce for the labour force. The Hindus and Baha'is may face discrimination and prejudice at the work place due to their religion. They are often mistreated i.e. belittled, insisted to convert and their promotions often hindered.

Policy Implications

1. The current research calls for the attention of creating awareness of pluralism (defined along the axis of religious identity) to make society tolerant and democratic.
2. The current research also emphasises on the need for making creative spaces through institutionalising study groups/circles through which inter-faith harmony can be promoted.
3. The current research also proposes to increase socio-economic visibility of Hindus and Baha'is in Pakistan.