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“We are not equal citizens in any respect”: citizenship education and the routinization of violence in the everyday lives of religious minority youth in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This article foregrounds religious minority youths' subjective experiences of citizenship education in Pakistan to reflect on the relationship between educational curricula and religious exclusion. Drawing on narrative interviews with Hindu, Sikh, and Christian youth in the Punjab province, we demonstrate how sectarian constructions of national history and the paucity of positive representation in the curriculum inflict routinized forms of violence on minority youth and create an environment where anti-minority discriminations and prejudices can be justified. Youths' narratives also reveal how they mobilize available institutional mechanisms to challenge these routine forms of violence and reinforce their commitment to an inclusive Pakistani identity. Reforms in citizenship education curricula are therefore urgently needed to address these concerns and promote an inclusive Pakistani identity. We situate our findings both in the historical context of contemporary Pakistan and the wider region of South Asia which has witnessed a rapid growth in exclusionary religious nationalisms.

Introduction

This article contributes to our growing understanding of the relationship between educational curricula and religious exclusion, by drawing focus on religious minorities in Pakistan. In Pakistani schools, much like their counterparts elsewhere in the global south, school textbooks serve as the primary resource for teaching and learning. Among the various subjects taught at the secondary level, it is the mandatory subject of Pakistan Studies that forms the basis for citizenship education (Emerson, 2018). Citizenship education as a function of schooling facilitates the political socialization of youth by emphasizing their role within the society (Williams & Humphrys, 2003) and underpins the education system's ability to promote or thwart community cohesion (Malik, 2012). The vehicle of state directed citizenship education in Pakistani schools is the all-in-one social studies subject of Pakistan Studies, which owes its current form to the educational reforms set into motion by the martial law government of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1979 (Dean, 2005). These Pakistan Studies textbooks offer students, at the secondary and tertiary levels, an understanding of Pakistan's national ideology through condensed accounts of the country's origin as well as its contemporary political, geographical, and cultural landscape. Not only are these textbooks the foundation of citizenship education in Pakistan; they are often the primary source of historical knowledge for the millions of Pakistani youths whose education ends at the secondary level (Aziz, 1993). Through their instruction in schools, these textbooks transport the state's self-image and the place of minorities in it to the collective memory of its citizenry (Naseem & Ghosh, 2010). The mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion embodied by

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these textbooks therefore have direct ramifications for the way religious minorities are positioned within educational discourses and the treatment they receive in Pakistani society. Greater understanding of these issues can help create a more inclusive curricula in today's multi-religious Pakistan.

Existing studies of how school curriculum shapes majority–minority relations in Pakistani society are few and far between, with most researchers focusing on the content of textbooks and how they systematically otherise religious minorities (Aziz, 1993; Durrani & Dunne, 2010; Hussain et al., 2011; Khan Banerjee & Stöber, 2016; Mohammad-Arif, 2005; Naseem & Ghosh, 2010; Nayyar, 2005; Powell, 2006). Building on this body of research, in this article we enlist the conceptual lens of “routine violence” (Pandey, 2006) to interrogate the impact of these educational discourses on the lived geographies of Hindu, Sikh and Christian youth in the biggest province in Pakistan – the Punjab province. Although there are other religious minorities in Pakistan, such as the Ahmadis, in this article we focus on Hindus, Sikhs and Christians and their evolving position within Pakistan. By centering religious minority youths’ lived experiences of citizenship education, this study departs from previous scholarship which has concentrated largely on curriculum content rather than on religious minority pupils’ experiences of engaging with that content. Exploring these questions is particularly timely since successive reports on religious intolerance and minority rights in Pakistan published by international bodies and non-governmental agencies paint a grim picture. For instance, the Minority Rights Group International’s latest (Minority Rights Group International, 2021) “Peoples under Threat” ranking places Pakistan as the ninth worst country for minorities with religious minority communities identified to be particularly at risk. In its report, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2020, p. 32) too cites data about violent crimes against and persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan and recommends the US government to redesignate Pakistan as a “country of particular concern” insofar as the freedom of religious minorities are concerned. However, in this article, we go beyond these statistics, to capture the voices of minority youth and take their lived experiences of citizenship education as the basis for thinking about the future of inclusive education and plurality in Pakistan.

We begin by sketching the historical relationships between religion, politics and citizenship education in Pakistan and their impact on religious minorities. Then, we elaborate on the notion of “routine violence” (Pandey, 2006) that we will deploy to understand the lived experiences of minority youth. This is followed by a discussion of our methodology and the findings. We conclude with a reflection on the relationship between education curriculum and religious exclusion in Pakistan and offer suggestions for building inclusive curricular and pedagogical practices in the country. We further argue that these insights contain lessons for other South Asian countries as well, which have seen a rapid growth in religious nationalisms and concomitant persecution of religious minorities.

Muslim majoritarianism and citizenship education in modern Pakistan

Pakistan, a country of more than 207 million people, encompasses significant internal diversity in terms of languages, ethnic identities, and cultural formations. While 96.28% of the country are Muslims, the principal religious minority population of Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs are spread unevenly across the four provinces and two federal territories that make up the political geography of Pakistan (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2021). In order to fully understand the dynamics of majority–minority relations in contemporary Pakistan and trace their impact on educational curriculum, it is important to lay down the historical context in which Pakistan was created and its subsequent political history.

Pakistan as an independent country came into being in 1947 as a state for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. In colonial India, the movement for the creation of Pakistan was spearheaded by a political outfit called All-India Muslim League led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The basis for a separate statehood for India’s Muslims, Jinnah argued, lay in the distinctive cultural identity of India’s Muslims whose interests will not be served in a Hindu-majority independent India (Ahmed, 1991; Jalal, 1995). The subsequent partition of India and the creation of Pakistan did not fully resolve

this question of the Muslim identity, however. The partition itself led to the slaughter of millions of civilians as Hindus and Sikhs from the newly created Pakistan scrambled to cross over into India and Muslims on the Indian side of the new border made their way toward Pakistan. The birth of independent Pakistan thus reinvigorated the debate about the identity of the Pakistani state: whether it is a state for Indian Muslims (a Muslim-majority state) or an Islamic state where all laws are consistent with the Shari'at (Islamic law; Haq, 2010). The Muslim League had sought the creation of Pakistan in the name of Islam, but its leader Jinnah had consciously evaded committing himself to either of these ideological foundations in order to maximize support from the widest possible spectrum of Indian Muslims (Ahmed, 2010). His party largely held a secular outlook without explicitly using the word "secular" (Ahmed, 2010) and Jinnah – who would later be deemed as the Father of the Pakistani Nation – himself on multiple occasions pre-independence laid down the vision of Pakistan as a modern, pluralistic democracy where religion will have "nothing to do with the business of the State" and religious minorities will "enjoy all the rights [...] without any distinction" (as cited in Zahoor, 2020, p. 4). Post-independence, Jinnah went on to assert that "Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic State" and that all "non-Muslims" in Pakistan are "equal citizens with equal rights and privileges and every right to play their part in the affairs of Pakistan national state" (Merchant, 1990, p. 12). The first Prime Minister of independent Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, too held these liberal commitments to be wholly compatible with the idea of a Muslim-majority state (Zaman, 2018). These lofty ideas, however, were never fully realized, and Jinnah died in 1948.

Since the inaugural years of Pakistan's existence, two competing discourses about the political identity of the country were in circulation. On one hand, the "modernist" approach sought a synthesis between Islam and democracy and on the other the "Islamists" argued for an all-encompassing modeling of the country on the basis of Islamic laws (Ahmed, 2010). The turning point in this debate came in 1977 when General Zia-ul-Haq staged a military coup, became President of the country by declaring martial law, and thereby initiated a state-sponsored "Islamization" campaign which had far reaching consequences for majority–minority relations (Ahmed, 2010; Zahoor, 2020). Rooted in political Islam, and his orthodox interpretation of religion, Zia used state power as a tool to steer Pakistan toward Islamic purity by arguing that the two are inextricably linked; indeed, as far as he was concerned the Islamic ideology was the *raison d'être* of Pakistan (Jalal, 1991). He also added several new clauses to anti-blasphemy laws. Thus revamped, these laws reportedly contain – in the opinion of some legal scholars (Forte, 1994; Siddique & Hayat, 2008) – textual lacunae and in-built defects which arguably make these laws susceptible to abuse by some elements within Pakistani society as a weapon against religious minorities. However, characterizing religious minority lives solely in terms of their victimization through blasphemy laws is too simplistic and glosses over subjective experiences that cannot be defined in terms of legal persecution.

In summary, the rise of Muslim majoritarianism in Pakistan – since the state-led "Islamization" project – has created an environment where non-Muslims came to be seen as second-class citizens with their rights and privileges curtailed, their patriotism questioned, and their contribution to Pakistani society undervalued (Nayyar, 2005). Pakistan's lurch toward majoritarianism is not an exception in the sub-continent, however. Its neighbor India too has witnessed an escalation in Hindu majoritarianism and the resultant mistreatment of its religious minorities, especially Muslims. Therefore, interrogating this constitutive link between religious exclusion and citizenship education has important lessons to offer not only to the study of Pakistani society but to the wider South Asian region and beyond.

The politics of Pakistan studies textbooks

Integral to General Zia's wider project of making the Islamic ideology all pervasive, his government launched the National Education policy in 1979 which sought to promote national unity and patriotism by treating the curriculum as a means for the development of citizens as true Muslims (Dean, 2005). It also instituted Islamiat as a compulsory subject and revised Pakistan Studies curricula

to amplify the process of refashioning citizenship education in the model of political Islam (Dean, 2005). The school subject of Islamiyat teaches students about the core beliefs of Islam and is compulsory at all levels of education including undergraduate studies. Although his rule ended in with his death in 1988, some of these sweeping educational reforms including the incorporation of Pakistan Studies as a mandatory subject for secondary and tertiary pupils and the exclusionary mechanisms of citizenship education are still in operation (Emerson, 2018). These Muslim majoritarian ideas advanced by the curriculum, as some have argued, are incompatible with the ideal of Pakistan as a state committed to equal rights for *all* its citizens (Nayyar & Salim, 2005).

History textbooks are inherently about the stories that nation-states choose to tell about themselves and they therefore typically represent a core of cultural knowledge that school pupils must assimilate (Foster & Crawford, 2006). The Pakistani national history, taught through the compulsory lessons of Pakistan Studies, is “an explicitly state-directed, top-down project” (Ayes, 2009, p. 123). It represents the Pakistani state’s effort at creating a national identity, a unified sense of belonging and an underlying narrative of the past to buttress it. Doing so requires an investment in creative imaginings of the national identity, which can then be transported across the land through state-controlled educational curricula. General Zia’s policies outlined above provided the basis for the revised version of Pakistan Studies, and it equally served as the raw material for the official historiography of the Pakistani state it came to embody. Consequently, as Jalal (1995) has shown, Pakistan Studies textbooks involve the writing of history from an Islamic point of view and the state monopoly over curriculum guarantee a captive market. The lessons about Pakistani history thus taught in the classroom “serve as the alphabet and the grammar that makes psyches literate in the idioms of national ideology” (Jalal, 1995, pp. 77). After General Pervez Musharraf came to power in 1999, his administration championed the project of “enlightened moderation” – a version of liberal democracy – under which efforts were made to reform educational policy and push toward positive acknowledgment of religious diversity in school textbooks (Muhammad & Brett, 2019). However, these efforts at revising the curriculum did not succeed (Behuria & Shehzad, 2013). In more recent times, Prime Minister Imran Khan’s government, has introduced a Single National Curriculum (SNC) which will implement a single uniform curriculum for all children in Pakistan. Scholars have already drawn attention to the way the textbooks produced under this policy fail to acknowledge and celebrate religious diversity and instead entrench Muslim majoritarian views in ways that will alienate religious minority pupils (Dawn, 2022; Mehboob, 2021).

Scholars have repeatedly raised concerns about several aspects of the official historiography advanced by Pakistan Studies textbooks. Early commentators drew attention to historical inconsistencies, outdated research, and factual distortions contained in Social Studies and Pakistan Studies textbooks, which also promoted a model of rote learning in classroom as opposed to critical interpretive exercises (Aziz, 1993). Similarly, through their analyses of Pakistani school textbooks, Naseem and Ghosh (2010) point out that these learning materials construct Hindus and Indians as synonymous and posit them as the “other” of the Muslim/Pakistani “self.” The self-other opposition between Muslim/Pakistani and Hindu/Indian are further articulated through binaries such as brave/cowardly, clean/dirty, and honest/conniving, among others. Upon reviewing literature and social science textbooks taught in Classes 1 to 12 across Pakistan, Nayyar (2005) too concludes that rather than cultivating a sense of inclusive belonging and ever-handedness irrespective of faith, the curriculum sculpts a monolithic image of Pakistan as an Islamic state and Pakistanis as Muslims thus alienating non-Muslim pupils from the national imaginary. As others have pointed out, the growth of religious nationalisms in Pakistan and India has taken the form of sectarian history writing in school textbooks where the past becomes the site of ideological contestations over defining a national history in the present (Thapar, 2009).

These developments in political rhetoric and textbook curricula warrant greater scrutiny since a majoritarian view of society manufactured through school textbooks often enable a social setup where intolerance, bigotry and social injustices against minorities can be justified (Visweswaran et al., 2009). Indeed, when it comes to inter-community relations education has two faces; it can

either play a constructive role aimed at peacebuilding and harmony or a destructive one where the education system itself serves to destroy peace and buttress structures of violence (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). Educational researchers in Pakistan have repeatedly called on the Government to reform the school education system which, they argue, is making pupils “susceptible to a violent and exclusionary worldview open to ‘sectarianism and religious intolerance’” (Nayyar & Salim, 2005, p. 1). Schools themselves emerge here as “political sites for the production and reproduction of power and social inequality” (Dei et al., 2000, p. 15) wherein the very processes of teaching and learning inserts their participants into power relations – which are particularly pronounced in minoritized students’ experience of schooling. While the extant literature discussed above illuminates the mechanisms of religious exclusion embedded within textbooks’ content, they do not reveal how religious minority youth engage with these narratives. This article intervenes here by centering minority youth’s subjective experiences of and reflections on religious bias in Pakistan Studies textbooks and its impact on their daily lives. We enlist the conceptual lens of “routine violence” (Pandey, 2006) to unpack these narratives.

Understanding routine violence: a conceptual lens

In highlighting the condition of Pakistan’s religious minorities, reports by international observers and agencies often cite instances of anti-minority hostility such as the use of anti-blasphemy laws, forced conversion, abduction, demolition of property, and mob violence (Rehman et al., 2019; US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2020). While these are important issues to raise, they have the unintended consequence of reducing the lives of religious minorities to violent crimes and miscarriages of justice. Indeed, Fuchs and Fuchs (2020) argue that these acts of aggression faced by minorities need to be seen in the context of the wider Pakistani society where the ramifications of a failing legal system and rampant corruption are shared by many ordinary Pakistanis. Although these patterns of injustice are shared by many in today’s Pakistan, given their small numbers and precarious social-legal standing, these experiences are more pronounced for minoritized citizens. The latter are certainly more vulnerable than many others to the web of everyday violence and legal flaws, but their lives cannot be reduced to these statistics alone. At the same time, we cannot understand religious minority experiences through the lens of religious diversity alone because they fail to grasp the faith-based structural inequalities. As Woodhead (2016) argues, religious difference is negotiated on the ground within historically developed structural parameters wherein majority and minority communities do not meet on a level playing field. Thus, to fully understand minority youths’ experience of citizenship education at school we need to situate them within the historical dynamics of the majority–minority relations in Pakistan and the wider patterns of injustices that mark Pakistani society today. We therefore put to work the conceptual lens of “routine violence” (Pandey, 2006) to understand minority youths’ narratives. Pandey’s (2006) framework is compatible with more structural approaches to the study of violence, such as Galtung’s (1990) notion of “triangle of violence,” but the former is more appropriate for capturing the generalized and everyday nature of violence experienced by our participants than other available frameworks.

Anchored in the history of post-independence India, Pandey’s (2006, p. 5) conceptualization of “routine violence” demands a shift in our current understanding of violence as an interruption or a spectacle, to violence as “a much more general and continuous aspect of modern life” in the sub-continent. Routinized violence, which is often invisible, pervades the structures of modern social life and drives processes of inclusion and exclusion. It also lays the groundwork for more spectacular and visible forms of violence to emerge. In this sense, routine violence is built into everyday processes of “history writing, the construction of majorities and minorities, the education of marginalized and subordinated groups” (Pandey, 2006, p. 1). It is a useful lens to draw out the implications of religious

biases woven into citizenship education curricula in Pakistan. By centering the voices of minority youths, we show that the curriculum is part of this fabric of routine violence and it also enables visible forms of anti-minority violence to gather traction.

The study

This article draws on a qualitative study with Hindu, Christian and Sikh youths conducted in 2014 in the Pakistani province of Punjab. We selected Punjab as the focal point of the study because it is the most populated province with one of the largest school education boards in the country, and it also contains a sizable presence of Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The first author conducted one-to-one semi-structured narrative interviews with 10 Hindu, 10 Christian and 10 Sikh participants from different parts of the Punjab province. Aged between 18 and 25, the participants had successfully completed their higher secondary (known in Pakistan as “intermediate”) education and possessed Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) qualifications. Although there are differences among Pakistani Hindus, Sikhs and Christians in terms of everyday realities, in this paper we focus on their shared structural positioning as religious others and illuminate their experiences of navigating the educational curriculum. In doing so, we also pay attention to the specific conditions of each community in the ensuing analysis. The names used here are all pseudonyms.

The first author, a Pakistani Muslim man, conducted all the interviews. The study participants were recruited initially through community contacts that the first author had, and then through snowballing. Personal contacts and goodwill built over the years with these minority communities not only enabled the first author to access participants, but also helped mitigate the power imbalances in the field. The researcher’s genuine interest in listening to the participants’ lived experiences in their own terms coupled with the endorsement of gatekeepers from the community led the participants to freely share their lived realities of school education. As indicated previously, religious minorities are geographically dispersed. Consequently, participants from different minority religions were recruited from different parts of Punjab. However, being a male researcher in a gender-segregated social context meant that only male participants were accessed. Most of the interviews were conducted in Urdu and some involved a mix of Urdu and Punjabi, based on the preference of the participant. During interviews, participants were asked about their family background, their educational trajectories, and their experiences of school (including higher secondary) education. We asked specifically about their engagement with citizenship education at school, and their daily encounters with the majority community. The participants were also invited to reflect on Pakistan Studies textbooks and its impact on their daily lives. These interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and then translated and transcribed into English. The transcribed interviews were then coded and analyzed using a narrative framework (Riessman, 2008) which offers a window into the ways in which lived experiences are storied by people. We used three tools of narrative coding, namely “broadening” (looking at the wider context), “burrowing” (focusing on specificities of participants’ accounts), and “storying and restorying” (iterative distillation of core themes) developed by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) to produce the themes presented in this article. The resultant narrative analysis of the interview data helped us capture the impact of exclusionary curricula on minority youths’ daily lives and aspirations, as detailed below.

Misrepresentation as routine violence

The religious minority youths who took part in our study spoke at length about the way their communities of origin were misrepresented and systematically stigmatized in Pakistan Studies textbooks which forms the basis for formal citizenship education in Pakistani schools. Specifically, our participants drew our attention to instances of selective and sectarian telling of the past in these textbooks that either undervalue the contribution of minorities or portray them as adversaries of the

nation. In doing so our participants were voicing their dissatisfaction with the present curricula and at the same time reinforcing the legitimacy of their own Pakistani identity which they define in inclusive terms.

Eighteen-year-old Manpreet is a Sikh student who has recently graduated from secondary school and entered university. When he sat down for the interview, he was asked about his experiences of the school curricula and how he personally related to it. He recollected his history lessons at school and identified biases in historical narratives that pitted Sikhs against Muslims and did not offer a balanced account of the partition of India that led to the creation of independent Pakistan in 1947.

Well, I think that facts are misrepresented in Pakistan studies textbooks which only favour the majority while putting the minorities at risk. Lies such as Sikhs and Hindus migrated from Pakistan during partition and there were only Muslims left in the country - this makes me think about my existence in the country which is not been acknowledged in the textbooks. The fact that Sikh committed atrocities against Muslims during partition and killed millions in the process is also a negative representation which can only do harm to us, not any good. Such bias puts the minorities at a great risk.

The collapse of the British empire in India, the partition of the subcontinent and the birth of the two independent nation states of India and Pakistan were mutually entwined. However, the history of these events is written quite differently in the two countries (India and Pakistan) owing largely to their respective nationalist discourses. For Indian nationalists, partition was a tragedy, an aberration in the destined forward march of Indian history while the same event is viewed by Pakistani nationalists largely as the moment of independence – the struggles and sacrifices that were required in realizing the natural course of history, the coming into being of the homeland of South Asian Muslims (Pandey, 2006). In the summer of 1947, when the provinces of Bengal and Punjab were partitioned, Hindus and Sikhs from the newly assigned Pakistani half migrated toward the Indian side and many Muslims from the Indian side of these provinces made their way toward newly created Pakistan where their coreligionists would constitute the majority. There were also thousands of Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab and Bengal who decided to stay put and become Pakistani citizens just as a greater number of Muslims remained in India than those who migrated to Pakistan. The hastily drawn partition plans, which were imposed within a matter of weeks on millions of people living in these provinces, led to a carnage never seen in the region before with the killing of around a million men, women and children and the abduction and rape of thousands of women. Overall, as one historian puts it, during the partition of British India “Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus suffered equally as victims and [each community] can equally be blamed for carrying out the murders and assaults” (Khan, 2017, p. 6). In other words, no one community can be wholly blamed or seen as victims in a scenario of utter chaos and carnage, killings and retaliatory killings, lootings and arson which took the lives of millions of people from all three communities and changed forever the lives of those who survived. The writing of partition history in textbooks reflects some of the preoccupations with sectarian history writing pointed out earlier. Consequently, it is not just a matter of factual inaccuracy that Pakistani textbooks create an impression that all Hindus and Sikhs went away to India leaving Pakistan in the hands of Muslims. Similarly, these history lessons underscore the sufferings of Muslims in the hands of Sikhs and Hindus during partition without providing a balanced account of how all three faith communities suffered and can equally be blamed for partition violence.

Chapter 2 of *Pakistan Studies Class 12* textbook states that Muslims who migrated to Pakistan from non-Muslim majority areas faced “unimaginable” atrocities with “large number of Muslims . . . massacred” and their properties looted with no mention of atrocities faced by other communities (Punjab Textbook Board, 2014, pp. 26–27). What Manpreet is referring to is this larger discourse of religious nationalism that drives such history writing; histories that sidestep the fact that a significant minority of Hindus and Sikhs among others decided not to migrate to India, embraced their Pakistani identity and have continued to contribute to the Pakistani society. In a similar vein, he points out how highlighting the atrocities faced by Muslims in the hands of Hindus and Sikhs during the partition without putting them into perspective have ramifications for inter-community relations today as anti-

minority sentiments are emboldened when history lessons perpetuate the image of Sikhs as perpetrators of violence against Muslims. Put differently, the representational economy of secondary-level Pakistan Studies textbook posits Sikhs in a negative light which stigmatizes the self-image of contemporary Sikh youths and vitiates Muslim-Sikh relations. By advancing a negative representation of Sikhs, and denying Sikh youth an equal stake in the national community, the curriculum itself constitutes invisible violence. These routine forms of violence that the curricula mete out to minority youths push back against these youths' commitment of an inclusive Pakistani identity and their sense of belonging to a multi-religious national community.

Amol, a 21-year-old Hindu man, took his school-leaving examination three years ago. While reflecting on his experiences of history curriculum, he connected sectarian history writing in textbooks to questions of citizenship and legal structures in Pakistan.

We are not equal citizens in any aspect, we are not represented positively in the curriculum. Even the constitution and laws are discriminatory towards us, giving unfair advantages to the majority. Why can't I be president or prime minister of the country? A Muslim is awarded 20 marks if he is a Hafiz-e-Quran. Why not 20 marks for me if I learn the Bhagwat Geeta by heart? I do not feel integrated with this society.

Through their skewed representation of minorities, Pakistan Studies textbooks not only inflict invisible forms of violence on minority youth who are taught these lessons at school; these representational biases are interlocked with wider structures of violence and discrimination as Amol indicates. Pakistan formally became an "Islamic republic" in 1956, which conferred a special status to Islam, allowing only Muslims to hold the offices of President and Prime Minister. As recently as October 2019, Pakistan's National Assembly rejected a bill that would have allowed non-Muslims to become head of state (US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2020). Notwithstanding the fact that Pakistan Studies textbooks reiterate the ideal that in Pakistan all citizens are equal before law and indeed the constitution itself outlaws faith-based discrimination in education and employment; barring non-Muslims from the highest political offices solely on the ground of their religious identity creates a disjuncture and curtails the aspirations of minority youth. It is in this sense that Amol feels his rights and privileges as a citizen of Pakistan are inferior to that of a Muslim Pakistani. He also cites a practice in Pakistani education system where pupils who have committed the Quran to memory (Hafiz-e-Quran) and could recite it fluently are awarded 20 additional marks when they apply to university (Memon, 2012) thus giving them an unfair advantage in the admission process; while there are no such provisions for Hindu pupils to recite their holy book, the Bhagwat Geeta, from memory and be awarded marks for it. Thus, in contemporary Pakistan, religious minority youths do not get to engage with their majority counterpart on a level playing field. Curricular and pedagogic practices in Pakistani schools play a key part in establishing, nourishing, and sustaining these inequalities. Another Hindu respondent, Rahul, described the curriculum as "derogatory" and posed the rhetorical question that "if Hindus are represented [in textbooks] in such a negative light then how can a [Muslim] person be fair to me when they grow up?"

Russell too brought up the issue of representation. He is a twenty-four-year-old Christian man who has completed university education and is now a school teacher. Drawing on his experiences of being a student and his current role where he teaches the Government mandated curricula, Russell believes that the curriculum is "playing a key role in widening the gaps between majority and minorities" and advocates for changes in the curricula as a way of fueling positive social change.

You know, students are the backbone of a society so if you are teaching them such hate material in the curriculum how can you expect that they would be tolerant and sensitive about issues of minorities when they grow up? ... Equal representation of our heroes should be included, and the hate material should be excluded from the curriculum. For example, in 2009 in International Islamic University Islamabad there was a suicide bomb blast in which a Christian sweeper gave his life in order to stop the bomber from entering the main building which saved many precious lives. But that person is a part of history nobody speaks about. He is not only our hero but the hero of the nation. In contrast, this year [2014] a student named Aitzaz did the same thing, and he became a national symbol of bravery and was given some medal for his bravery as well.

Despite their small numbers, there have been many notable contributions made by people from minority communities to Pakistani society (Nayyar, 2005). Yet, they hardly feature in history books and are not extended the kind of hagiography accorded to those from the majority community. For Russell, this cultural politics of representation pervades curricula as well as media accounts, both of which pave the way for greater marginalization of minorities. Representation matters for many like Russell who question the sectarian basis on which the figure of the national hero is constructed in the public imaginary of Pakistan. To flesh out this perception, Russell provides the example of a suicide bomb attack at a university in the capital city of Islamabad wherein a cleaner named Pervaiz Masih (a Christian) intercepted the bomber in the doorway and prevented him from entering a packed cafeteria where hundreds of female students were present (Watson, 2009). The bomber self-detonated and killed Masih. Masih's heroic efforts were not amplified in the national media and he was never hailed a national hero for his selfless effort. In contrast, Russell cites an example from 2014 where a student named Aitzaz Hasan confronted a suicide bomber who was about to target his school in the Hangu area (BBC News, 2014). The bomber detonated himself, killing Aitzaz with him. Following this incident, Aitzaz was rightfully hailed as a hero, posthumously awarded the Star of Bravery (Sitara-e-Shujaat) by the Government, and his school has since been renamed after him. Russell is not undermining Aitzaz's bravery but using his example to highlight how similar acts by a Muslim and a Christian receives very different kind of recognition which he links to the wider pattern of biased representation of national heroes that pervade the curricula. Narratives of heroism that ignore the exemplary contribution of minorities is built on a premise of violence and exclusion; it is part of the fabric of invisible, insidious violence that youths like Russell face on a daily basis.

Curriculum as a catalyst for violence

Curriculum content not only inflicts invisible forms violence through its representational economy, but also acts as a catalyst for other forms of exclusion, discrimination, and aggression that minority youth face within schools and in the community. We have shown earlier how by transporting biased images of minorities to the collective memory, history textbook aid in the creation of an environment where minority youth feel excluded and undervalued. In what follows, we highlight minority youths' everyday experiences of micro-aggression that are connected to curricular and pedagogic practices.

One of the Sikhs youths we spoke to, Sukhbir, described the curriculum as "biased and hateful." When prompted to expand on why he reached that conclusion, he referred to his experience of being the only Sikh pupil in the classroom. He recounted a history lesson where the issue of partition violence came up.

One day . . . a topic came that when Pakistan was created Sikhs attacked and killed Muslims. My teacher made a derogatory remark and said that when Sikhs are offered a *lollipop* then they do such things. He knew very well that I was in the classroom, still he deliberately said such a thing. By *lollipop* he meant Sikhs are greedy; give them an inch and they'll take a mile.

Sukhbir felt hurt by the use of such derogatory language about his own community by a teacher in a classroom. A teacher holds a position of authority within a classroom and when such a figure uses terms that demean and vilify minorities, then it is received by minority youth present in the classroom as a verbal abuse directed at them. In this episode the teacher was aided by a curriculum that, as we have discussed earlier, offers a lopsided account of partition violence. The curriculum therefore not only distorts the image of the Sikh, but such misrepresentations fuel the maltreatment Sikh pupils receive. Thus, religious minority youth in the school education system navigate a cycle of routine violence that has at its core a biased curriculum, and microaggressions aided by it. This cycle of violence within schools is enabled by structural arrangements such as social disparities, lack of legal protection and the currents of religious nationalism that are firmly established in Pakistani society. Sukhbir was hurt by his teacher, but he did not just accept the lollipop remark without protest. After

the class concluded, Sukhbir told us, “I met my teacher in private and told him that ‘Sir you have hurt my feelings and such kind of talk has negative impact on people like us.’” He made his teacher see the verbal abuse in his terms and the teacher, Sukhbir told us later, apologized to him.

Others too pointed toward such cycles of violence within the education system. Rajdeep (18), recently finished his intermediate education. He is Hindu by faith and while discussing his experience of school life, he pointed to the maltreatment and verbal abuse he received from teachers.

Many of my teacher were biased against me and they favoured Muslims over us. Favoured in the sense that they gave them good grades. If we [Hindus] went to the teachers’ office, they won’t even talk to us in a decent manner while they were usually very polite with Muslim students. This is because the curriculum is promoting hatred and bias against us. It is presenting us in the most demeaning way which is creating negative feelings towards us.

Rajdeep draws a direct link between the routines violence engendered in misrepresentation and the forms of verbal abuse and maltreatment he received from his teachers. Much like Sukhbir, he believes that the former enables the latter.

Noah is Christian and, after completing his intermediate/higher secondary education, he is currently unemployed. Commenting on the shortcoming of the education system, he drew attention to the lack of infrastructure and the routinized culture of violence toward minorities as significant roadblocks for youths from his community to achieve educational success.

In some government schools there is not even a proper building and if a child goes to the school he runs away because of verbal and physical abuse by the school teachers. I have personally witnessed government school teachers using foul language (galian) while talking to their pupils. In [intermediate] college, once people were teasing me because of I am Christian, but I fought back and complained to the Principal. He asked my classmates and they supported me because I always displayed good behaviour. He then took action.

Noah’s account shows how minority youth face verbal and physical abuse from teachers and peers at all stage of the education system, from primary schools to inter-mediate colleges (secondary schools). At the same time, Noah – much like Sukhbir – did not accept such treatment as fate. He took recourse to institutional arrangements, complained to the Principal, and addressed the issue. Minority youths, time and again, came across as active agents in their lives. They reflect on the injustices they face; not accepting them as the way things are but seeing them as societal flaws that need to be corrected. And whenever possible, they drew on institutional protocols to make their voices heard and redress the violence they faced. Recognizing their agency does not mean that the violence they face are in any way justified but it sheds a fresh light on minority lives that takes us beyond the frame of “victim” alone. By articulating their complaints and dissatisfactions with the current state of affairs, these youths were equally engaged in fostering a different notion of Pakistani identity which is not moored in exclusionary religious nationalism but is inclusive, compassionate, and sensitive to religious diversity and difference.

Concluding thought: toward a more inclusive education

Education can either play a constructive role in making societies more inclusive or it can play a destructive role by sowing mistrust between communities and destroying harmony (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). In particular, the role of citizenship education in community cohesion cannot be overstated (Malik, 2012). Although scholars working on Pakistan have for long recognized the pivotal role of education in shaping majoring-minority relations, they have mostly focused on curriculum contents. In this article, we have taken this body of research to new directions by harnessing religious minority youths’ own voices. Through interview narratives, we have centered youths’ narratives and used their lived experiences of school education as the basis for thinking about the future of inclusive education and plurality in Pakistan. Viewing these narratives through the prism of “routine violence” (Pandey, 2006) enabled us to identify and unpack the everyday, invisible and generalized forms of violence that circumscribe minority youths’ experience of Pakistani history curricula at school. Of course, there are historical differences between various minority religions in Pakistan in terms of structural locations. However, given the paucity of

scholarship in this field, our aim in this article was to understand youths' shared structural positioning as minoritized religious subjects in Pakistan and how that impacts the way they interact with the education system, in particular the curricular and pedagogic practices around citizenship education. Although the data presented here was collected in 2014, the issues around religious exclusion and citizenship education are still extremely relevant today especially given the fact that the current Pakistani government is implementing a new Single National Curriculum (SNC) which has already raised concerns among scholars about the way skewed representation of minorities and majoritarian narratives of national identity and history are channeled in these new textbooks (see, Dawn, 2022; Mehboob, 2021).

Hindu, Sikh, and Christian youths who took part in our study related their experience of studying Pakistani history through Pakistan Studies textbooks. They pointed out the specific ways in which their communities of belonging were misrepresented within the curriculum. Such distorted images of their communities were perceived by these youth as routinized forms of violence. Lack of positive representation and recognition of the contribution made by people from their communities make it difficult for these youth to develop a positive self-image. By focusing solely on how these communities have wronged Muslims in the past, the curriculum stigmatizes minority youth of today. These biased narratives also create an environment where discrimination against minorities can be justified by referencing the past. This translates into more direct forms of physical and verbal abuse that these youth face from both teachers and peers. Understanding these routine forms of violence engendered in and enabled by Pakistan Studies curricula and pedagogy is important because our participants see these faith-based biases and mistreatments as principal impediments to the realization of their aspirations.

Contained within these stories are several narratives of hope. The youth in our study did not accept the misrepresentations, discriminations or maltreatments as a given. Whenever possible, they took recourse to institutional provisions to redress the problems they faced. Even when the problems were more endemic, they did not accept the status quo. They are reflective and active agents. They identify the issues they face and link them to wider structural enablers within Pakistan society. In doing so, they cultivate an alternative vision of the Pakistani identity which is not coterminous with Islamic religious nationalism. Instead, they champion a secular idea of Pakistan that is inclusive, compassionate, and sensitive to religious diversity and difference. These individual acts of resistance are small-scale and do not alter structural inequalities. The ideals of an inclusive Pakistani championed by the religious minority youth in our study can only be realized if curriculum is reformed and made more sensitive to the religious diversity of today's Pakistan and does not stigmatize its own minority citizens. Although we have only captured the experiences of Hindu, Sikh and Christian youth, future studies can build on our insights to unpack the experiences of other minority groups such as Ahmadis and Parsis. Moreover, our study focused on the Punjab province alone. Future scholars can look into the experiences of minority youth in other provinces of the country. Despite these limitations, we believe that our findings will be relevant to other researchers interested in questions of social cohesion, inclusive curriculum and citizenship education in a region which has witnessed a rapid growth in exclusionary religious nationalisms. We therefore join others in advocating for curriculum reforms that can help build bridges between communities, promote social cohesion, and drive social justice.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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