



## **Sweeping Injustice: The Minority Rights Dilemma and the Tale of the Christians of Pakistan**

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## Introduction

In Pakistan, sanitation work has become a stigmatized profession predominantly assigned to members of the Christian minority. This systematic relegation of Christians to menial jobs, often as sewer cleaners, sweepers, or janitors, reflects deeply entrenched societal biases and institutional discrimination. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, the treatment of Christian sanitation workers highlights the stark disparity between the law and its implementation.

## Historical Context

The roots of Christian marginalization in Pakistan can be traced back to colonial-era labor practices. During British rule, many low-caste Dalit Hindus converted to Christianity. The British used to assign them menial jobs such as cleaning and sweeping because of their lower caste. Post-independence, these socio-economic hierarchies persisted, ensuring that Christians remained at the bottom of the social and economic strata.

## Systemic Discrimination in Employment

According to the report of the Minority Rights Group, employment discrimination remains one of the most visible forms of marginalization faced by Christians. Government job advertisements frequently list sanitation work as positions reserved for non-Muslims, which implicitly targets Christians.

According to an inquiry report by the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), nearly 80 percent of the sewer cleaners in Pakistan are Christians, despite their representation in the overall population being less than 2%. This disparity stems from a pervasive belief that Christians are "unclean" and suited only for menial labor. This stigmatization not only limits their job prospects but also reinforces societal exclusion.

Such systemic discrimination is not limited to the public sector. Private employers often avoid hiring Christians for professional roles due to entrenched biases, further narrowing their economic opportunities. This unequal treatment violates Article 27 of Pakistan's Constitution of 1973, which prohibits discrimination in public employment based on religion, sex, or caste.

### **Social and Psychological Impact**

The marginalization of Christian sanitation workers extends beyond employment discrimination; it has a profound social and psychological impact on the community. Christians working in sanitation roles are often stigmatized, both in their workplaces and communities, which aggravates their isolation. The stereotype of Christians being "unclean" is perpetuated in many social circles, further entrenching discrimination. This cycle of stigmatization impacts the mental health of workers, contributing to feelings of shame and social alienation. The constant exposure to social exclusion creates a barrier to upward mobility, reinforcing the notion that certain communities are bound to low-status occupations regardless of their qualifications or abilities.

## **Legal Framework and Gaps in Enforcement**

While the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equality under the law, this promise is often left unfulfilled, particularly when it comes to the treatment of marginalized groups. The 1973 Constitution provides clear protections against discrimination based on religion, yet the reality on the ground tells a different story. Similarly, Article 14 of the constitution provides for the inviolability of the dignity of a man as a fundamental right, but the stigmatization of the Christian community both in society and the workplace is a whole different tale. This discrimination against Christian sanitation workers is a glaring example of how laws meant to protect citizens are insufficiently enforced.

Though the constitution of Pakistan provides for equal protection and opportunity, and there are dozens of other federal and provincial labour laws, however, unlike India, Pakistan has not enacted any specific law to prohibit the employment of manual unclogging of sewers and for the protection and rights of sanitation workers.

Human rights organizations have highlighted this gap in enforcement, calling for stronger legal mechanisms to combat discrimination in the workplace. The government's failure to address these issues not only undermines its legal framework but also perpetuates the marginalization of an entire community. Although the country's labor laws theoretically guarantee equal rights for all citizens, the implementation of these laws remains uneven, especially when it involves religious minorities

## **Recommendations and Way Forward**

To address the marginalization of Christian sanitation workers in Pakistan, a multi-pronged approach is required, involving both government intervention and societal change. Some potential solutions and recommendations are:

**Revised Employment Policies:** The government should revise job advertisements to ensure that positions in sanitation work are open to all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. Affirmative action programs could be introduced to provide educational and employment opportunities for marginalized communities, enabling them to enter a wider range of professions.

**Strengthened Legal Protections:** The government must ensure that laws prohibiting discrimination in employment are fully enforced. This includes holding employers accountable for discriminatory hiring practices and ensuring that religious minorities have equal access to public-sector jobs.

**Public Awareness Campaigns:** National campaigns should be launched to challenge stereotypes and promote respect for religious diversity. Such campaigns can help reshape public attitudes, encouraging inclusivity and reducing discrimination against Christian workers.

**Educational Opportunities:** Providing Christians with access to quality education and vocational training can help them secure employment in a wider range of fields, moving beyond the confines of sanitation work. This could include scholarships, mentorship programs, and partnerships with private sector companies to create pathways to professional careers.

**Support from International Organizations:** International human rights organizations can continue to pressure the Pakistani government to address this issue by providing reports, research, and recommendations aimed at improving the situation for Christian workers.

These organizations can also support local advocacy groups working to protect the rights of religious minorities.

## Conclusion

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The marginalization of Christian sanitation workers in Pakistan is a complex issue rooted in historical, social, and economic factors. While legal protections against discrimination exist, the gap between law and practice continues to perpetuate inequality. By addressing systemic discrimination, promoting education, and encouraging social change, Pakistan can move towards a more inclusive and just society where all citizens, regardless of their religion or occupation, can enjoy equal rights and dignity. The fight for the rights of Christian sanitation workers is not just a struggle for equality but a fundamental call for justice and human dignity.