



Perception of Malaysian Christians towards Social Status: A Case Study of Christ Church in Melaka

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Abstract

This research explore perceptions of Malaysian Christians regarding their social status and qualitative research design was used. Interview guide was ready and data was collected from the participants. The findings indicate that the Christian community in Melaka generally experiences religious freedom, social respect, peaceful relations, and cooperation with the Muslim majority in daily, professional, educational, and cultural life. The findings also show that Christians actively contribute to Malaysia's social and economic development through professions such as private employment, politics, teaching, and engineering, while benefiting from supportive attitudes from Muslim citizens, officials, institutions, and the media. Overall, the study concludes that the Christian community in Melaka maintains a strong sense of belonging to Malaysia and generally enjoys peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and cooperation with the Muslim community. It is suggested that the government and relevant social institutions should continue promoting equal opportunities, interfaith cooperation, religious freedom, and inclusive policies to strengthen peaceful coexistence and further support the contribution of Christian and other minority communities.

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Introduction

This research was designed to examine the perceptions of Malaysian Christians regarding their social status. Malaysia is a Muslim-majority country. Roughly two-thirds of all Malaysian Christians live in East Malaysia (on the island of Borneo), Sarawak. Christianity is the first major religious minority in Malaysia after Hinduism (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). According to the most recent (2020) census conducted by the Government of Malaysia, Christians are the largest minority in Malaysia, at 2.94 million; (Protestant and Roman Catholic) 1.97 million are Hindu people. The socio-economic conditions of Christians reflect that the majority of them live in poverty with less access to education, health, etc. The literacy rate of the Christian community in Malaysia (Alter, 2012). The nature of jobs shows that, out of the total employed, the majority of the population is involved in sanitation, reflecting a poor literacy rate among Christians. Economic conditions of the Christian community in Malaysia are also down. A range of classes exists in the Christian community, such as upper class, middle, lower, and below the poverty line. Despite having white-collar and educated people, a reasonable size of the Christian community works as house servants. This study will attempt to understand their perception and evaluate it in the face of socio-economic conditions of the Pakistani society.

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Problem Statement

This study aims to understand the perception of Christians in Malaysia about their social status. Social status in Malaysia is determined by different factors such as family background, wealth, occupation, caste, political power, and intellectual worth. A person can enjoy a better life because of his good social status. A diverse class structure exists in Malaysian society (Mat Karim et al., 2014). Similarly, Christians have the same class system in Malaysia's social setup. Christians with a political or financial background, education, and a lucrative profession or business enjoy good social status. Many are living below the poverty line. They work in sanitation and low-wage jobs. They are tasked with cleaning gutters and parks that show not only their poverty but also their social status in the setup of Malaysia. The Christian community of Malaysia has been engaged in almost every field. Still, the majority of them are downtrodden and working in those fields that are not seen with respect in society. The media of Malaysia portrays that the majority of Christian community in Malaysia is living below the poverty level and doesn't have access to the basic facilities of life and is living a lower-status life. The Christian community of Malaysia is unable to attain better facilities and economic prosperity. This research attempts to present how class influences the perception of people and also try to present that what the Christians of different classes think about social status and also highlight the perception of Christians of Malaysia about their living experiences with the majority community of Muslims.

Literature Review

There are numerous studies conducted on Christians of Malaysia by foreign and Malaysian writers. This literature includes books, research articles, newspapers, etc. A majority of the authors conclude that Christians in Malaysia are living under difficult situations and they are being discriminated against. At the same time, some authors claim that they are living in a relatively good environment. Before looking at the condition of the Christian population in Malaysia, the study examines the condition of minorities in some other parts of the world. Zain (2009) highlights the condition of Indian Muslims and claims that Muslims in India are facing many difficulties. They are not able to get government jobs and face discrimination in almost every field. Economically, they are weak and marginalized. The study also claims that there is no hope for their betterment.

International Crisis Group (2013) highlights that the humanitarian situation remained very difficult for the Rohingya. There were almost 140,000 People displaced in Rakhine State in 2012, and the majority belonged to the Muslim community that is living very poorly in temporary camps. In those temporary camps, basic life services are not available. Veen (2005) claims that the members of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Rakhine State are facing discrimination legally, economically, and socially. Muslims are not allowed to make new mosques and face problems in performing their religious obligations. The authorities most of the time don't allow Muslims to travel to other places.

Wicken (2013) highlights that in Iraq, Sunni Muslims are functionally excluded from the government because of the increasing authority of Shia Muslims. Lalani (2010) states that Kurds and other minorities in Iraq are suffering from violence, targeted killings, attacks on religious places, loss of property, and being discriminated against in getting public services like education, health, and employment. The violence and discrimination are due to the territorial conflict between Kurds and Arabs, but it has other factors also, like religious bias and political representation. Kwartan (2009) highlights that Shia Muslims are facing social, religious, and political discrimination in Saudi Arabia.

Many researchers highlight the condition of minorities in Malaysia. Zaman and Akhtar (1993) claim that minorities in Pakistan have been living in a tension-free environment. Naveed, Munir and Saeed (2014) highlight that most people of minorities in Pakistan are living as second-class citizens and are facing discrimination and violence. They are powerless to do anything. Minorities are also part of this nation, but their rights are violated due to

the non-serious attitude of the government. The researchers also claim that the condition of Christians is better than that of other minorities in all fields of life because they have good relationships with the developed countries.

The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2010-12) sheds light on the societal attitude towards Christians in Malaysia. It concludes that the majority community has a discouraging attitude towards Christians in Malaysia. It also states that Christians are being discriminated against in the fields of education, employment, religious expression, etc. The police and judiciary did not deal even handedly with the issues relating to the Christians. Malik expresses his opinion in his article that the Christians face anger for political and economic reasons coupled with the factors relating to 'land grabbing' or racism. Christians face discrimination and oppression regularly from government and society.

Jalalzai (2005) said that Christian minorities had played a very positive role even under difficult conditions. It was the responsibility of the majority to keep minority groups happy so they also felt themselves as part of society. Sparc (2014) highlights that Minorities are among the most marginalized communities. Their children are doubly marginalized. In jails, minority prisoners do not have the same facilities as Muslims get. Jinnah Institute (2011) concludes that Minorities face discrimination in different fields of life like education, health, and employment. The Minority Rights Group International (2014) highlights that the Christians minorities have been discriminated for many decades. But in recent years, the condition of minorities has worsened, which has led many people to migrate from the country. They are discriminated against at the societal level, at school, etc. They also claim that Christians are poor and working in lower jobs as cleaners, etc. They also said that there is a continuation of discrimination against the religious minorities. They are being discriminated against in almost every area of life. Despite too many attacks on minorities, there are limited signs of progress.

Gregory and Valentine (2009) describe that Christians are living under a great fear and with the pain of marginalization and discrimination. The state, society, and culture discriminate against them. The attitude of police, judiciary, and society is negative towards Christians. Christian women and children are being kidnapped, raped and forcibly converted to Islam. Khan and Rafi (2014) claim that Christians face numerous challenges in their day-to-day life. They are living as second-class citizens. The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (2014) highlights that most minority groups in Pakistan face too much hate, violence, and intolerance. They find that the main reasons for minority suffering are economic deprivation, Political divisions, Weak policy, and Poor government. Walbridge (2003) argued that the confidence of the Christian community was very much down when the educational institutions were nationalized.

Conceptual Framework

Theories such as Minority-majority question, social status, Marxist perspective and Max Webber's hierarchy was applied where required. Christians were seen under the concept of minority that was steer out the study in the right direction.

Research Questions

This research project plans to determine Christian perception about their social status in the city of Malaysia. This research was addressed the following questions:

1. What is the existing class structure within the Christian community?
2. What is the impact of class on individual perception?
3. What is the social status of the Christians of Malaysia?

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to understand the perceptions of Christians in Melaka towards social status. This study aims to understand the problems and issues at the local

and national levels that affect their social status. This research aims to explore different factors that shape their life experiences and perception. This study explores how socio-economic conditions and political involvement influence social status in positive and negative ways.

Method

The research method was qualitative and analytical, that facilitated the researcher in collecting information about facts relating to the past and present situations. The analytical method evaluated the data, which paved the way to conclude the study. The analytical method helped to find new directions or perceptions regarding the facts involved in the research. The perceptions of different classes of Christians were collected through interview guides and field visits, while libraries and archival places were consulted to collect material for the two research studies. For this, prepare questions to conduct interviews of all segments of the Christian community of Melaka, Malaysia. This method helped to understand the perceptions of Christians in Melaka Churches towards their social status.

Study Significance

Christians are a reasonable number in Melaka and can play a vital role in the country's development. This study presents the issues and problems faced by Christians. This study can be used for policymaking regarding minorities, especially Christians. A prosperous condition of minorities ensures integration and stability of the nation. The Muslim point of view on the subject should also be ascertained to examine their perception.

Findings and Discussions

Perception of Christians in Non-official Professions

Religious Leaders

Religious leaders are very important in the life of any community. Religion can be separated from politics but not from the people (Sandhu, 2011). Every religious leader is very important for their community. He tells them about religion and other ways of living. He also guides them on how to live and how to pass through hard and painful times. A priest is a guiding and religious leader of the Christian community in Melaka. The priest plays a vital role in the lives of people. The priest's major role in Melaka is to share the teachings and message of God with his people. He also guides the Christian community in Melaka on how to live in crucial times and how to settle their routine affairs and matters with the majority Muslim community.

Privileges

Christians of Melaka are proud of being Malaysian because they are sons of the soil. Christians and Muslims are united on national and international issues and events. He sheds light on the religious practices of Christians in Melaka and claims that Christians are free to practice their rituals. They never feel insecure at the hands of Muslims to celebrate their religious days. Christians have many Muslim friends, and they interact with each other in public places, cultural events, educational institutions, offices, and playgrounds, etc. He expressed his views on the behavior of Muslim officials and claims that, to a great extent, Muslim officials show their cooperative and friendly attitude towards their Christian brothers. Rich Christians in Melaka cooperate with poor Christians through donating to local churches. Inter-marriages between rich and poor Christians are possible. Christians don't get into the caste system and class system as it is preferred in the Muslims community (Christopher, 2015).

Christian community in Melaka receives much respect from Muslims. They are key members of society in the city of Lahore. They do not face trouble from the Majority

community. They keep a balance with the majority community and don't hurt them. The relationship between the two communities in Melaka is like a family unit. Both are living like brothers. They don't create problems for each other. He said that Muslims and Christians are living peacefully in the city of Malaysia. They maintain order in society and help each other in times of need. They raise their voices for one another and participate in each other's protests. Christians love to be born again in Malaysia because they are Malaysian first and then Christians. Malaysia is more important than anything for Christians, and they can sacrifice their lives for Malaysia. Christians and Muslims are united in each other's joys and sorrows. They do care for each other.

There are always chances of conflicts because of religious differences within a nation. This scenario in Malaysia is different. Christian community in Lahore is free to practice his religion. No one stops them or interferes in their religious matters. They are free to celebrate their religious events and rituals. They don't face any societal problems or trouble because of religious differences. Christians manage their daily routine with ease and comfort and don't feel that they are from a minority community. The majority of the Christian community in Melaka is in favor of military rule. The major reasons for this support are that they feel safer in terms of security under military rule as compared to democratic rule (Sohanlaal, 2015).

Private workers

Private workers are workers who do not work directly with the government. They are not a burden on the government. The biggest advantage to the government is that jobs are being created for its citizens, and the burden of salaries on the government is reduced. Their good output is necessary for the country.

Privileges

Christian community in Melaka is living a relieved life with a very peaceful atmosphere. They don't feel any hesitation by living in this city and don't have any trouble. They are living equally as Muslims in terms of food, opportunities, respect, and other things. They are very nationalistic and emotionally involved with Malaysia. Christians and Muslims support each other in times of hardship. Electronic, digital, and print media are playing a very encouraging role in the lives of Christians. When there is no one to support them, the media always supports them and plays a valuable role (Massiah, 2015).

Christian community lives a very simple life in the great city of Malaysia. There is no difference between Christians and Muslims in Melaka. They are the same and enjoy the same facilities. Christians don't have any societal pressure on them. They are part of the society. No one differentiates between them. Muslims and Christians don't forget each other in times of ease and difficulty. The attitude of the judiciary and other law-making institutions is very positive towards Christians. The events and celebrations of both the communities are shared. Christians never feel that they are from the minority side and less in number (Pervaiz, 2015).

The Christian community in the city of Melaka is very educated, and their literacy level is better than Muslims. Malaysia has always been home to the Christian community, and they are proud of it. Christians and Muslims dine together at the same place and in the same vessels. They make combined efforts in rallies and also offer combined peace prayers. The daily life routine is not challenging for Christians. They manage easily without getting into any trouble. Malaysia supports Christians much. They show very good feelings towards Christians and don't discriminate. Christians hope in the army (Ayub, 2015).

Christians in Lahore are living a respectable life because they work hard. They are not dependent on Muslims. Christians always support Malaysia and never think of going abroad because they earn their bread here. Christians and Muslims forget their issues to celebrate together. They also watch cricket matches together. Malaysia is mainly a Muslim-majority

area. Christians have Muslims friends. Malaysia is also a country of Christians. They work here and manage their routine smoothly without facing any issues. The attitude of Muslim colleagues, subordinates, and others is very good, and they treat them as their brothers (Salvan, 2015; Tan, 2020).

Politicians

A politician is a person who is in politics by profession. A politician is a very important individual in any society because they know the strengths and limitations of their community. The role of a politician in the community is to fight for their rights. In Malaysia, Christians politicians are not directly elected through the ballot. They are elected on a special quota according to party position in Elections.

Privileges

The Christian community in Melaka is living a friendly life with Muslims. The majority of the community belongs to the middle class. Both communities are first cousins. These two communities belong to two sons of Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S); the Christian Nation is from Hazrat Ishaq (A.S), and Muslims are from Hazrat Ismaeel (A.S). Christians are nothing if Malaysia does not exist. Christians and Muslims in Melaka are the two hands of one body; if one gets hurt, the other one also feels pain. They are very attached. Christians worked hard in the making of Malaysia. Their lives are linked with Malaysia. One of the most renowned men in the Christian community is Sp Singa. His vote was a decisive one at that time. This is the biggest example of the joint work of Christians and Muslims.

The government is working hard to provide prosperity to minorities. They are encouraging them in the sports field. Christians are totally involved in organizing the youth festival for the indigenous Bumiputera. The government of Sarawak encourages them and provides them with the opportunity to be involved in organizing this event. This government is very useful for Christians compared to the previous government of Malaysia. The Christian community in Melaka is getting more importance, especially in educational institutions. Christian community in Melaka is improving in every field. They are joining political parties because they think politics is the way to gain respect and development for their nation and people in society. Christian community is completely safe in Malaysia. They celebrate parties and visit parks without any threat. Muslim officials, politicians, and officers are always trying to secure Christians. They always try to ensure that Christians and other minorities do not face any problems. Malaysia is an Islamic state, and Islam provides its minorities equal rights and equal chances of development. It takes responsibility for its minorities (Mubarik, 2015).

Teachers

Teachers are one of the most influential people in society. They are preparing the future of the country. The knowledge they pass on to their students has a greater impact on the life of every individual in the later years of their life. The role of a teacher cannot be underestimated in the life of any society. He knows about the dynamics of his society.

Privileges

Christian community in Melaka is living an honorable life. Christians love Pakistan because Pakistan is the country of their ancestors; they were born here. It does not matter that Malaysia is a Muslim state; Christians love this land, and the country is like a mother for them, so they respect Malaysia very much. Muslims and Christians invite each other to their weddings. They eat, work, and play together without any dispute. Christians never think that they are separated from Muslims. The attitude of Muslims students is very encouraging towards their Christian teachers (Earnest, 2015).

Christian community in Melaka is very blessed by God in terms of everything. Muslims collaborate with Christians. Many of the clerics from the Muslim side talk very well about the Christian community in Lahore and advise everyone to treat Christians as their brothers. Christians have no issues in Malaysia. Christian community in Melaka is living a very sophisticated life. Christians find Malaysia one of the most suitable places to live. Muslims and Christians love each other. They live in the same area and share the same values. Muslims protect Christians from terrorism and other threats (Sohanlaal, 2015).

Engineer

Engineers play a prominent role in the advancement of Mankind. Christian community in Melaka also holds many engineers. They are providing many facilities to the public. They work in transportation, electricity, and other fields of life. They are contributing to the advancement of this country.

Privileges

Christians are one of the most important communities of Melaka. They are proud of being part of this historic city. Christians in Melaka live in almost every area, and they are playing their role well in the prosperity of the country. Muslims and Christians are the backbone of this country. The life of Christians is better than the life of other minorities like Hindus, Sikhs, etc. Christians are living in Malaysia by choice because they think that there is no other country that provides them this type of freedom which they have in Malaysia. They are free to exercise their religion. They are free to go anywhere at any time. Muslims treat Christians well and try not to remind them that they are from a minority community. They raise their voice for minorities and always condemn attacks on Christians. The attitude of Muslims officers, lawyers, doctors, and subordinates is very good towards Christians (Ayub, 2015; Choong, 2023).

Conclusion

This research focuses on knowing about the perception of Christians of Melaka regarding their social status. This research concludes that the Melaka Christians possess a deep sense of patriotism and loyalty to Malaysia. Their interaction with the majority community has extended over decades and has enabled them to get along with the people as friends and brothers. They are found in all fields of life, such as business, workplaces, political and cultural forums. Melaka Christians feel proud to be residents of Melaka, where they have contributed significantly to the growth and development of Malaysia.

The majority of the Christian community of Melaka lives in a peaceful atmosphere. They have more Muslim friends than Christians, despite religious diversity. They feel more comfortable in Muslim gatherings than in their own. They have been living an easy life as they can get food easily, and most of them are not threatened regarding the necessities of life. Food, shelter, education, and political rights are very important in determining social status, and the Melaka Christians enjoy all these rights.

Author Contributions:

The Conception and design: Hayatunnur Azwa Binti Arman. Collection and assembly of data, Qualitative Content Analysis and interpretation of the data: Kashif Ullah. Drafting and Critical revision of the article. Hayatunnur Azwa Binti Arman is Corresponding Author
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