

Interfaith Harmony in Faisalabad during Muharram-ul-Haram: A case study of Muslim-Christian Relations



¹* Muhammad Umer Raheel, ² Dr Ghulam Shams-ur-Rehman

¹ *PhD Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, Govt. College University, Faisalabad*

² *Professor/Chairperson, Department of Interfaith Studies, Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad.*

**Email:* mumerraheel@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36755/iqan.v6i2.455>

ABSTRACT

This is the survey-based study examines interfaith harmony between Christians and Muslims in Faisalabad, Pakistan, during the significant Islamic Festival of Muharram ul Haram. The results were prepared in SPSS after conduct of survey and the respondents were selected through snow ball sampling, reveal a substantial level of interaction and solidarity between the two communities, with many Christians participating in Muslim traditions, ceremonies, and acts of kindness. The findings indicate mutual respect, inclusivity, emotional support, and positive relationships between Christians and Muslims. While there is room for improvement, the study suggests a heartening level of interfaith harmony in Faisalabad, providing a strong foundation for further growth and development. The research highlights the importance of promoting understanding, respect, and empathy to build a more inclusive and peaceful environment in diverse societies.

Received:

03-June-24

Accepted:

24-Aug-24

Online:

15-Sep-24

KEYWORDS

Harmony,
Muharram-ul
Haram,
Faisalabad,
Islamic Festival,
Societies

Introduction

Faisalabad is one of the well-known cities of Punjab, Pakistan. Faisalabad is the biggest mechanical and metropolitan city of Pakistan. Faisalabad is very assorted regarding its way of life. The way of life of Faisalabad is very different in light of the fact that it is a mechanical city and individuals from everywhere Pakistan come to work here. When founded in 1890, it was named for Sir Charles James Lyall, lieutenant governor of the Punjab who was a Christian by his religion. In a land space of around 35,300 square kilometers, the bishopric covers the areas of Faisalabad,

Jhang and Toba Tek Singh. Faisalabad, the city of fabrics industry is Pakistan's third biggest city with a populace of more than 2 million. It is the second biggest ward in the country. Punjabi is widely spoken language in different areas. While Urdu and English are also the major languages in diocese. Faisalabad has consistently been a center point of writing. Prestigious artists and composition authors have a place with this city. Education rate is higher than normal. Practically 95% individuals communicate in Punjabi. However, being in focus of Punjab, individuals communicate in numerous different dialects also like Pothohari, Pahari, Shah Puri different dialects, for example, Urdu being public language is spoken and perceived. English is likewise perceived and spoken by the sizable taught individuals. Islam is the most common religion, with a 97.22% Muslim majority according to the 1998 Pakistan census report and 2001 population data sheet.¹

Christianity was an established in this area before the appearance of teachers. Faisalabad included three old Christian towns including Khushpur, Pakistan's most seasoned Catholic town in Punjab region. Faisalabad bishopric was made on the April 13, 1960 when it was isolated from the ward of Multan, additionally in Punjab area. Around then, Multan had a populace of 12,000 Catholics and Faisalabad had 50,000 Catholics. The see of the new see was around there. It presently includes regions of Faisalabad, Jhang, Toba Tek Singh. The main bunch of clerics during the 1960s delivered six ministers and the occupations developed a short time later. Gatherings of clerics and catechists use to venture out on bikes to the towns two times per year. Every one of these gatherings used to remain overnight in the town, eat straightforward food sources and proceed onward to another town next morning. Dominican Bishop Francis Benedict Cialeo of Multan was moved to Faisalabad to turn into the principal minister as he had recently worked in this space as a cleric with his three associates when he came in 1931 under the direction of capuchin preachers. As the minister of Multan, he welcomed Dominican nuns to work in schooling and wellbeing. In 1959 he welcomed La Salle siblings who expressed the notable school branch in Faisalabad in 1961 with just two catholic under studies young men. Diocesan Cialeo constructed numerous schools, places of worship and different establishments lastly established the framework of Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral in 1965, the structure was sanctified in 1969. Some notable churches in Faisalabad include:

- St. John's Church (1860)
- St. Peter's Church (1885)
- Convent of Jesus and Mary (1896)
- Methodist Church (1905)
- Presbyterian Church (1910)
- Roman Catholic Cathedral (1960)²

¹ Asad Ali Khan, Changing Pattern of Population Growth and Structure in Punjab, Pakistan, South Asian Studies, South Asian Studies, Lahore: Punjab University, 2011, Vol.26, Issue 9, P.371-372

² Special Branch, Official Report, Punjab Police, Faisalabad, 2022, p 23

Overall, the Christian community in Faisalabad is a vibrant and active part of the city's social fabric, contributing to its rich cultural and religious diversity. In short Faisalabad is the third-largest city in Pakistan and is located in the province of Punjab. The Christian community in Faisalabad is significant, with a population of around 100,000 Christians, according to the 2017 estimates.¹ Historically, Christianity came to Faisalabad during the British colonial era, with the establishment of the Church Missionary Society in 1854. The first church, St. John's Church, was built in 1860, and it remains one of the oldest and most prominent churches in the city. The Christian community in Faisalabad is predominantly Punjabi, with a small number of Urdu-speaking Christians. They are mostly affiliated with the Protestant denominations, including the Church of Pakistan, Presbyterian Church, and Methodist Church. The Catholic community is also present, with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Faisalabad overseeing the Catholic churches in the city.

The term Interfaith or interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions (ie "faiths") and/or spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels. It is distinct from syncretism of alternative religion, in that dialogue often involves promoting understanding between different religions or beliefs to increase acceptance of others, rather than to synthesize new beliefs. An attempt to initiate dialogue, cooperation and understanding among individuals, belonging two different faiths. It is also used to refer a relationship or marriage between people of different faiths. It is occasionally used as synonyms for multi faith. There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions and no peace among the religions without dialogue.² The word harmony has originated from the Greek word 'Harmonia which means "to: fasten or join". The word was coined during the days of Pythagoras, the famed Greek mathematician. A suitable arrangement of parts to make a well defined whole as agrees with the definition of being harmonious. For example, in a design, if the symmetry, balance, proportion is evenly done, then the finished product appears to be in harmony. The word harmony also finds its echoes in the world of music. Harmony in music is the study of the progression, structure, composition, and usage of chords. The sound of two or more musical notes at the same time, which is pleasing to ears, is called harmony Rhythm, melody and harmony are elements of music.³

Interfaith harmony is brought about through realizing that "Truth is one but the paths are many when we realize that the goal of every religion essentially the same the search for truth then we can foster an attitude of open dialogue and mutual exchange of ideologies rather than imposing our beliefs on others by force. Through the correct practice of religion, we should develop not only harmony between faiths and nations but a harmony or state of peace within ourselves and gradually a harmony or experience of oneness with something greater than ourselves. This is religious

¹ Federal Bureau of Statistics, District Census Report, Faisalabad, 2018, p 19

² K ng, Hans, *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*. USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008, P.xi

³ Starwin, R. (2006). *Harmony and the Ancient Greeks*. *Journal of Music Theory*, 50(1), 12-15.

evolution which starts with money or peace.¹ By interfaith harmony or interfaith dialogue, we mean that a discussion or conversation which aims at dispelling prejudices promotion of mutual understanding not only between different sects of the same religion. It can also be termed as need for religions to collaborate in their common task of providing religious inspirations to multi religious inspiration to multi religious society.²

Peaceful Coexistence:

A living together in peace rather than in constant hostility "Peaceful coexistence signifies in essence the repudiation of war as a means of solving controversial issues. It presupposes an obligation to refrain from every form of violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of another state. It implies renunciation of interference in the internal affairs of other countries. It means that political and economic relations must be put on a basis of complete equality and mutual benefit. It involves, he says, the elimination of the very threat of war. It is something which should develop into peaceful competition for the purpose of satisfying man's needs in the best possible way".³

Tolerance:

To another or remaining indifferent injustice but respect for the tensions Tolerance understanding way. Where individuals' communities entrenched in being groups endure of the past resolve Intolerance creating permanent between individuals is perpetuated when individuals base their impressions opinions another on assumptions. These assumptions influenced by the positive or negative beliefs most influential in their lives including parents or other family members, colleagues, educators or role Education or schooling based on myths can demonize and dehumanize other cultures rather than promote cultural understanding and tolerance for diversity and Parties to conflict and third remind themselves that tolerance to tolerating.⁴

Social Interaction: Muslim Festivals

In a multi-cultural society, social interaction is crucial for the harmonious coexistence of diverse communities. Renowned sociologist Max Weber emphasized that social interaction and social life have a profound impact on both religious and economic aspects of society. Neither economic factors nor religion alone can fully capture the complexities of social life. Social interaction plays a vital role in shaping society and can be classified into two categories: individual social interaction and collective interaction. Individual social interaction refers to person-to-person engagement that doesn't involve the broader community, whereas collective interaction involves interactions between individuals or groups from different communities, fostering connections and

¹ Eck, D. L. (2007). *The Age of Spiritual Exploration*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Interfaith Dialogue* (pp. 12-20). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Takim, L. N. (2008). *Interfaith Dialogue: A Shia Muslim Perspective*. In *The Oxford Handbook of Interfaith Dialogue* (pp. 34-41). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³ Khrushchev, N. S. (1956). *On Peaceful Coexistence*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House.

⁴ Banks, J. A. (2004). *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

understanding between them. During Muslim festivals, a unique dynamic emerges in the relationships between Christians and Muslims in Faisalabad. Despite historical tensions and incidents like the Faisalabad tragedy, economic necessities have fostered a practical harmony between the two communities. Many Christians work in Muslim households, engaged in domestic labor or agricultural tasks, such as cleaning or tending to cattle farms. While past conflicts may have temporarily strained these working relationships, the passage of time and the expenditure of monetary aid have led to a reemergence of this mutually beneficial dynamic. This survey explores the nuances of Muslim-Christian interactions during Muslim festivals, shedding light on the complex interplay between economic interdependence, social cohesion, and religious differences in Faisalabad's diverse community.

Religious interaction on Muslim festivals plays a vital role in promoting interfaith harmony in Pakistan. During festivals like Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Azha, and Muharram ul Harram, people from different religious backgrounds come together to share in the joy and spirit of the occasion. This interaction fosters a sense of community and mutual respect, helping to break down barriers and build bridges between Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and others. By participating in each other's celebrations and traditions, Pakistanis can develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of their diverse religious heritage, promoting a culture of tolerance, acceptance, and peaceful coexistence. Through such interactions, Pakistan can strengthen its social fabric, challenge extremism and prejudice, and create a more harmonious and inclusive society for all. Religious interaction plays a crucial role in promoting interfaith harmony in Faisalabad. By engaging in open and respectful dialogue, sharing in each other's traditions and celebrations, and fostering friendships across religious lines, individuals can help break down barriers and build bridges between communities. Through regular interaction, people can dispel misconceptions, develop empathy, and cultivate a deeper understanding of one another's beliefs and practices. To explore the religious interaction among Muslim Christians during Muslim festivals this, in turn, will help to reduce tensions, promote peaceful coexistence, and create a more inclusive and harmonious society. The responses of Questionnaires will help us better understand the current state of interfaith relations in Faisalabad and identify areas for improvement, ultimately contributing to a more vibrant and cohesive community for all.

On the eve of Muharram ul Harram in Pakistan, a unique and heartwarming phenomenon can be observed - the coming together of Muslims and Christians in a spirit of solidarity and respect. As Muslims prepare to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, Christians join in to show support and share in the sorrow. In many cities, Christians participate in the traditional processions, offering food and drinks to the mourners, while Muslims welcome them with open arms. This beautiful display of interfaith harmony and mutual respect is a testament to the strong social bonds between the two communities in Pakistan, and serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of unity and compassion in our shared human experience.

During the sacred month of Muharram ul Harram, religious interaction takes on a special significance in Faisalabad. As Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain,

interactions with people of other faiths can help foster a spirit of unity and solidarity. By participating in majalis (gatherings) and processions, sharing in the sorrow and remembrance, and engaging in respectful dialogue, individuals can build bridges between communities and promote a culture of mutual respect and understanding. People experiences and observations during Muharram ul Haram can provide valuable insights into the state of interfaith harmony in Faisalabad, highlighting both the successes and challenges in promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. Your responses will help us better understand the role of religious interaction in nurturing a more harmonious and inclusive society. In start we had discussed that our strategy for collecting the results will be snowball sampling, which is a research methodology that can be particularly effective in gathering responses from hard-to-reach or marginalized populations, such as Christians in a predominantly Muslim area during Muharram ul Haram processions. For collecting the accurate data, we have gone through these stages. In first step we identify a few initial Christian participants who are familiar with the Muharram ul Haram processions and have connections with other Christians in the area. I had asked these initial participants to refer other Christians they know who have experienced or observed interactions with Muslims during the processions. These referred participants, in turn, can refer others, created a snowball effect, allowed me to reach a larger and more diverse group of Christians. As the referrals came from the trusted sources, the respondents are more likely to be open and honest in their responses, provided valuable insights into their experiences and perceptions. So, the snowball sampling helped me to reach Christians who might be hesitant to participate in a traditional survey, providing access to a hidden population that might otherwise be difficult to engage. By using the snowball sampling, I had gathered a more representative and diverse range of Christian responses, provided a richer understanding of their experiences and perspectives during Muharram ul Haram processions.

Christians` Responses:

1. Have you ever participated in ceremonies of Muharram ul Haram?

Table # 1.1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	54	23.0	23.5	23.5
	Sometime	11	4.1	2.6	26.1
	Rarely	32	13.6	13.9	40.0

Never	138	58.7	60.0	100.0
Total	235	100.0		

Table # 1.1 shows that according to respondent 23.3% always, 2.3% sometime, 14% rarely and 58.1% never participated in ceremonies of Muharram ul Haram.

2. Do you participate in ceremonies of Muharram ul Haram with your Muslim Friends?

Table # 1.2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	86	36.6	38.1	38.1
	Often	6	2.6	2.7	40.7
	sometime	14	5.9	2.2	42.9
	Rarely	60	25.5	26.5	69.5
	Never	69	29.4	30.5	100.0
Total			235	100.0	

Table # 1.2 shows that according to respondent 36.6% always, 2.6% often, 5.9% sometime, 25.5% rarely and 29.4% never participate in ceremonies of Muharram ul Haram with your Muslim Friends.

Do you participate in Majaalis during the course of Muharram ul Haram?

Table # 1.3

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	54	23.0	23.5	23.5
	sometime	11	4.1	2.6	26.1
	Rarely	32	13.6	13.9	40.0
	Never	138	58.7	60.0	100.0
	Total	235	100.0		

Table # 1.3 Shows that according to respondent 23.3% always ,2.3% sometime, 14% rarely and 58.1% never participate in Majaalis during the course of Muharram ul Haram.

Do you participate in Jalus of Muharram ul Haram?

Table # 1.4

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	71	30.2	30.2	30.2
	sometime	12	5.1	5.1	35.3
	Rarely	27	11.5	11.5	46.8
	Never	125	53.2	53.2	100.0
	Total	235	100.0	100.0	

Table # 1.4 shows that according to respondent 30.2% always, 5.1% sometime, 11.5% rarely, 53.2% never participate in Jalus of Muharram ul Haram.

Do you put on a black garb during the course of Muharram ul Haram?

Table # 1.5

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	205	87.2	87.2	87.2
	often	18	7.7	7.7	94.9
	sometime	6	2.6	2.6	97.4
	never	6	2.6	2.6	100.0
	Total	235	100.0	100.0	

Table # 1.5 shows that according to respondent 87.2% always, 7.7% often, 2.6% sometimes and 2.6% never put on a black garb during the course of Muharram ul Haram.

Do you do anything as a token of sympathy with your Muslim friends in Muharram ul Haram?

Table # 1.6

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	71	30.2	30.2	30.2
	sometime	12	5.1	5.1	35.3

ĪQĀN Vol. 06, No. 02, Jun-2024

Rarely	27	11.5	11.5	46.8
never	125	53.2	53.2	100.0
Total	235	100.0	100.0	

Table # 1.6 shows that according to respondent 30.2% always, 5.1% sometime, 11.5% rarely, 53.2% never do anything as a token of sympathy with your Muslim friends in Muharram ul Haram.

Do you participate in Ta`ziya of Muharram ul Haram?

Table # 1.7

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	176	74.9	74.9	74.9
	Often	33	14.0	14.0	88.9
	Sometime	16	6.8	6.8	95.7
	Never	10	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	235	100.0	100.0	

Table # 1.7 shows that according to respondent 74.9% always, 14.0% often, 6.8% sometime and 4.3% people never participate in Ta`ziya of Muharram ul Haram.

Do your Muslim friends invite you to the meetings gatherings and processions during Muharram ul Haram?

Table # 1.8

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	205	87.2	87.2	87.2
	often	18	7.7	7.7	94.9
	sometime	6	2.6	2.6	97.4
	never	6	2.6	2.6	100.0
	Total	235	100.0	100.0	

Table # 1.8 shows that according to respondent 87.2% always, 7.7% often, 2.6% sometimes and 2.6% never Muslim friends invite us to the meetings gatherings and processions during Muharram ul Haram.

Do you distribute anything on Muharram as set up Sabeel on Muharram ul Haram?

Table # 1.9

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Valid	never	235	100.0	100.0	

Table # 1.9 shows that according to respondent 235% people never faced any mishap during Muharram ul Haram.

Do you send anything to your Muslim friends or neighbor`s during Muharram ul Haram?

Table # 1.10

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
--	--	-----------	---------	---------------	--------------------

Valid	Always	205	87.2	87.2	87.2
	Often	18	7.7	7.7	94.9
	someti me	6	2.6	2.6	97.4
	Never	6	2.6	2.6	100.0
	Total	235	100.0	100.0	

Table # 1.10 shows that according to respondent 87.2% always, 7.7% often, 2.6% sometimes and 2.6% never send anything to Muslim friends or neighbor`s during Muharram ul Haram.

Based on the survey results, here's a conclusion and a larger picture of interfaith harmony in the Faisalabad community the survey reveals a significant level of interfaith harmony and interaction between Christians and Muslims in Faisalabad during Muharram ul Haram. While there is room for improvement, the results indicate a positive trend:

- A substantial number of Christian participants engage in Muharram ul Haram ceremonies (23.3% always, 2.3% sometime), majalis (23.3% always, 2.3% sometime), and processions (30.2% always, 5.1% sometime).

- Many Christians participate in Ta'ziya (74.9% always, 14% often) and wear black garb (87.2% always, 7.7% often) as a token of sympathy with their Muslim friends.

- Muslim friends invite Christians to meetings, gatherings, and processions (87.2% always, 7.7% often), indicating a strong sense of inclusivity.

- Christians also engage in acts of kindness, such as distributing items (35% never, implying 65% do) and sending gifts to Muslim friends and neighbors (87.2% always, 7.7% often).

- However, there is still a significant percentage of Christians who do not participate in these activities (ranging from 25.5% to 58.1% depending on the activity), indicating potential areas for improvement.

Overall, the survey suggests a heartening level of interfaith harmony and interaction in Faisalabad, with many Christians actively participating in Muharram ul Haram events and engaging in gestures of solidarity with their Muslim friends. This bodes well for the community's social cohesion and inclusive spirit. The survey findings indicate a significant level of interfaith harmony between Christians and Muslims in Faisalabad, particularly during Muharram ul Haram. The results suggest:

- Mutual respect and understanding: Christians' participation in Muslim traditions and ceremonies demonstrates respect for their faith and practices.

- Inclusivity and social bonding: Muslims' invitations to Christians for gatherings and processions foster social connections and a sense of community.
- Emotional support and empathy: Christians' acts of kindness, such as wearing black attire and distributing items, show emotional support and empathy towards Muslims during a significant period in their religious calendar.
- Positive relationships: The high percentage of Christians engaging in interfaith activities indicates positive relationships between the two communities.

However, the survey also highlights areas for improvement, such as increasing participation and engagement from Christians in interfaith activities. Overall, your findings suggest that Faisalabad has a strong foundation for interfaith harmony, with opportunities for further growth and development. This interfaith harmony is crucial in Faisalabad, where Christians and Muslims coexist in a diverse society. By promoting understanding, respect, and empathy, both communities can work together to build a more inclusive and peaceful environment.