

Research Article

Inter-religious Harmony Between Hindu and Muslim Religious Communities of Miya Patan of Pokhara

Niranjan Ojha

Central Department of History

Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Email- ojhaniranjan@gmail.com

Article History

Received 27 May 2022

Revised 22 September 2022

Accepted 9 November 2022

ABSTRACT

Most Hindus see Muslims as the opposing faith to their own, although Hindus attend Muslim celebrations and Muslims attend Hindu festivals in Pokhara. Muslims in Pokhara dress in Nepali attire, which is not Islamic, and communicate in Nepali rather than Urdu or Hindi, which are peculiar to Muslim fundamentalism. Religious harmony is always vital for maintaining peace and harmony in a multi-religious country like Nepal. Despite the fact that Nepal is a secular country with a Hindu majority, Muslims are important and integral parts of Nepalese society. Unlike neighboring nations, there have been no severe religious riots or confrontations between Hindus and Muslims up to this point. When two cultures meet and interact, religious ideas will be transferred. The Muslims of Miya Patan have never contemplated a separate identity or attempted to break from society. They are quite proud of their national identity and identify more as Nepalese than Muslims. For ages, the Muslims of Pokhara have coexisted peacefully with their Hindu neighbors. This study attempts to explain the underlying causes influencing religious harmony in a multi-religious community of Miya Patan of Pokhara. In order to address the problem of study, discussion, in-depth interview and library research methods are applied. It is based on qualitative research method. It underlines the importance of components responsible for religious harmony in Pokhara. The findings may inspire other minority religious groups to maintain solid relationships in different parts of the country.

Keywords: *Brotherhood; conflict; harmony; Hindu-Muslim relations; religious riots*

INTRODUCTION

Nepal is home to many different religious groups. Many castes, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groupings have ancestral roots there. The Hindu community of Nepal makes up the great bulk of the country's population. There are many other religious people in Nepal. According to the 2011 census, there are 126 caste/ethnic groups and 123 mother tongue languages. Nepali is the first language of 44.6 percent of the population. There are ten religion categories, according to the 2011 census. Buddhism (9 percent; 2,396,099), Islam (4.4 percent; 1,162,370), Kirat (3.1 percent; 807,169), Christianity (1.4 percent; 375,699), Prakriti (0.5 percent; 121,982), Bon (13,006), Jainism (3,214), Bahai (1,283), and Sikhism (609) are the next most popular religions (<https://mofa.gov.np>).

According to the 2011 census, the total Muslim population is 1162370. Muslims make up 4.4 percent of the overall population, making them the third largest religious group of Nepal. The Terai's Muslim-majority districts include Banke, Kapilbastu, Parsa, and Rautahat, which have more than half of the Muslim population. The second Muslim majority districts include Bara, Mahottarai, Dhanusa, Siraha, and Sunsari, while the two districts Rupendehi and Sarlahi comprise a substantial third religious group (Census 2011). There is a tiny Muslim community in Miya Patan of Pokhara which is 4437 (Census, 2011). History of Muslim arrival wasn't clear but it is said they came to Kaski around 300 years before (Miya, 2022).

Muslims arrived in Nepal at different time for various reasons. They dwell in many geographical areas. It certainly caused cultural disparities among them due to geographical separation, despite the fact that they believe in the same faith and share the same culture. The Muslims, who reside in areas surrounded by Hindus, have a stronger effect on their society. In socio-cultural and religious activities, Nepalese Muslims residing in various locations took both liberal and conservative positions. When compared to Terai Muslims of the Deobandhi sect, who are conservative in nature, hill Muslims and members of the Barelvi sect are more liberal in socio-religious matters.

Muslim society is a close society in which Muslims live isolated from other religious groups and seldom contact with them. The Barelvis, who are Muslims of Miya Patan, have a liberal approach in both socio-cultural and religious matters; hence they are kind and open to non-Muslims. Because of this mentality, religious unity can be plainly witnessed at Pokhara's Miya Patan.

Before delving into the issue at hand, it is prudent to explore previously published material on various elements of religious concord. With the exception of Shrestha, Puri, Thapa, Banu,

Seddon, Khan and Taylor, no substantial study on religious syncretism has been published. So far, all of the works accessible are in the form of research articles, research report and Master's Thesis. Before beginning the research, all of these sources are critically evaluated. While identifying research concerns, academics and other scholars have not emphasized the subject of religious harmony between Hindu-Muslim religious groups of Miya Patan. Those studies aren't specific to the proposed research problem.

Shrestha (2005). "Religious Syncretism and Context of Buddhism in Medieval Nepal" gives broad information about religious syncretism between Hindu and Buddhist religious organizations. This essay is mostly on religious harmony in Medieval Nepal. It has nothing to do with Hindu-Muslim religious syncretism. Puri, Uddav. (2019) *Religious and Cultural Syncretism: A Study of Swoyambhu* examines the socio-cultural syncretism between Hindu and Buddhist religious communities. It focuses solely on the worshipping attitudes of two religious communities but not addressed Muslims. Charles, Taylor (2020), *A Revisitation of Religious Syncretism in Twentieth Century Yemen*" which focuses on religious syncretism in Yemen but does not address religious syncretism in Nepal between different religious groups.

Nepal Ra Nepali Musalman," Khan, Abdul Salam (2071 B.S.) presents general information on Nepali Muslims. His book focuses on the socioeconomic position of Nepali Muslims in Kapilbastu. "The Muslim Communities of Nepal" by David Seddon is based on a field research report. It focuses on the socio-cultural and political situations of Nepali Muslims in Terai. Thapa, Shanker (1986) has written extensively about Nepali Muslims. His contributions, "A study of population and family planning among Muslims in a Nepalese Town" and "Caste Hierarchy among Muslims" (1995), are outstanding works in the subject of Nepali Muslims. He has covered practically the whole Terai Muslims region, but the planned study problem has yet to be defined in his research.

In her Master's thesis "Introduction to Muslims in Nepal," Quraisha Banu (1980) presents an insightful and broad overview of Nepali Muslims. This study focuses on the historical features of the Muslim social order, religion, festivals and rituals, the status of women, and the family life of Kathmandu's Muslims, but it does not address religious peace.

These diverse issues give significant information on numerous aspects of Nepali Muslims, however prior research did not cover the inter-religious co-operation in Pokhara. As a result, the research gap created by prior studies has been adopted as the research problem in this study. The Muslims of Pokhara are not given adequate attention by the researchers and they have not yet been examined academically. Some native and international scholars

attempted to address religious concord among Nepal's religious groups, but they did not cover all elements and do not address the contemporary state of Muslims of Miya Patan, Pokhara. This article aims to identify some unidentified problems of religious co-operation between Hindu and Muslims groups of Miya Patan of Pokhara.

DATA AND METHODS

This article is based on qualitative research. This study included explanatory, descriptive, analytical, and informative methods. In-depth interview was held to get firsthand knowledge on the subject. In-depth interview was conducted to investigate the above-mentioned topic for more broad discussions. Three distinct in-depth conversations with Muslims Scholars, Senior Muslim leaders and ordinary citizens have been conducted. The discussion approach was mostly employed for the in-depth interview. With the concerned stakeholders, both official and informal discussions were held. For in-depth interview, resource persons were selected as respondent from Miya Patan Masjid (Hanif Miya), Abdul Rahim (Miya Patan), Jubeda Miya with unstructured questionnaire.

This study is based on current data, although historical references are included when applicable. The main sources of information for this study are both primary and secondary. The library research approach is mostly utilized for secondary information. Books, journal papers, internet websites, and relevant publications have been correctly cited. All of the material gathered has been categorized, summarized, and examined, and some consideration will be given to this research. This research is confined to a historical examination of Hindu-Muslim co-operation. This research does not address social, political, legal, economic, or other elements of the Hindu-Muslim relations. It will highlight events in Pokhara Ward No.13 Miya Patan, Chiledhunga-Mahadendra Pool region, and Prithivi Chowk. This study has made extensive use of historical data. Likewise, current context data and census data should not be neglected throughout study. Because the overall status of Muslims in the Gandaki province is nearly same, it will be easy to apply the research findings in other contexts.

Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx endeavored to investigate the link between religion and society around the turn of the twentieth century. They are among the pioneers of contemporary sociology. Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), a French sociologist, described religion as a “unified system of ideas and behaviors pertaining to sacred things” (1915). He is widely regarded as the first sociologist to examine religion in terms of its societal influence. Above all, he thought that religion is about community: it brings people together (social

cohesion and provides strength amid life's tragedies (meaning and purpose. Durkheim's theory of religion and morality is taken as the framework to investigate the research problem. He claimed that society's ideals must be preserved in order to sustain societal stability. Though his theory isn't fully supportive to proposed research but it helps to conceptualize the issue. Hence the theory of Durkheim is taken as the framework to investigate the research problem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nepal is a tiny Himalayan country with a diverse ethnic population. It is the ancestral home of many castes, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. Differences in lifestyle, beliefs, and so on represent societal and cultural variety. Their culture, festivals, food, customs, and language vary by location.

History

Historically, it is difficult to come to any conclusion of Muslim migration in Pokhara. Historical evidences support there was certain kind of commercial relation between Nepal and Arabia (Regmi, 2026). According to Gurung (2059), Muslims came to Nepal during 7th century. Some scholar argued that the presence of Muslims during Ancient times.in Nepal and were engaged in trade between Nepal-Tibet and China (Dastidar, 1997). In the year 1324 A.D., Muslims entered Nepal as an invader. Gayasuddhin Tuglak entered Simraungarh when he was returning from Delhi from Calcutta. In the year 1349 A.D., another Muslim ruler, Sultan of Bengal, Samasuddhin Ilyas invaded Kathmandu valley but return without success(Banu,1980). The first arriving Muslims in Nepal were the Kashmiri merchants who came in the reign of King Ratna Malla of Kathmandu. They came to Nepal via Ladhak and Tibet. This marked beginning of the history of Muslim population in Kathmandu. The main purpose of their arrival was to trade in Nepal (Subedi, 2040).

The second batch of Muslims came to Nepal during the reign of King Pratap Malla of Kathmandu in 17th century (Gaborieau, 1981). The third batch came to Nepal during the reign of Bhaskar Malla(1700-1722 A.D.) . The fourth batch entered at the time of Jaya Praksh Malla.

Prithivi Narayan Shah has also invited Muslim arm experts from India before and after the unification campaign (Sharma, 2032). Later, they were settled in different parts of Nepal including Pokhara. Likewise, petty hill state rulers invited Muslims people to settle in their states. Now, they live in Western hills and popularly known as the Churautey (Bangle Sellers). The rulers as well as local Nepali people accepted them as a part of society (Ojha, 2016).

Muslims were invited from India at various times by the rulers of petty kingdoms to settle in petty hill states as musicians to perform in the palace, beauticians to decorate Royal members, distillers of alcoholic beverages, Royal cook, horse keeper, rider and trainers, arm experts, utensil makers, and so on. Pokhara's Muslims are a nearly 300-year-old religious group (Miya, 2022).

Miya Patan constitutes 150 household of Muslims (Gurung, 2059). Miya patan is also known as Maula Patan because people of Kaskikot, Kahukot, Thulakot and Sarangkot offer sacrifice on Maula Patan during the ceremonies (Gurung, 2059). Abdul Rahim of Miya Patan said that the original name of the place is Kudhar instead of Miya Patan. Before many years Pokhara was the dense forest and no one is interested to settle in such area because of Malaria (Miya, 2022). Muslims who migrated to Pokhara were encouraged to settle after deforestation became the cause of naming of the Miya Patan commonly known as the village of Miya (Rahim, 2022).

There no historical evidence to support the arrival and settlement of Muslims of Pokhara. According to Miya (2022), Muslims were invited by the then petty ruler of Thulakot and Kaskikot to make arms, to train the army and to decorate the Royal ladies from India. According to Gurung (2059 B.S.), during the unification campaign, Muslims of Pokhara participated in the battle against Gorkha. 1812 Muslims took part in the battle from Kaski state. On that battle Subedar Major Salauddhin lost both his hands and legs and he was rewarded land of Kudhar for his bravery from the Kaski king, thus the Muslim permanently settled in Miya Patan (Miya, 2022). At that time total Muslim family were 22, are named as Baisghare (Miya, 2022). Some scholars argued that the Muslims of Pokhara are the descendent of the Muslims of Kathmandu. During the course of time they came to Pokhara for commercial purpose, saw the fertile land and permanently settled here (Gurung, 2059). Whatever the cause of migration, the Muslims of Pokhara are the migrants and settled here in Hindu environment with their unique culture being Nepali Muslims.

Muslim Population

According to census data Muslim population depicted 2.54% percent in 1954, 2.98% in 1961, 3.04% in 1971, 2.66% in 1981, and 3.55% in 1991. They have increased their numerical strength by 1.0% in 1991, 0.74% in 2001 and 0.11% in 2011 respectively (Gurung, 2059 B.S.). Statistical data shows that less than 1% percent of Muslims live in Pokhara. This figure raised in 2001 and 2011. But the mobile population is many times larger than the figures. In fact, their statistical strength is not insignificant in comparison to other minor ethnic and religion groups

living elsewhere in Pokhara. The total number of Muslim population according to census 2011 is 1162370. Muslims constitutes 4.4 % of the total population (Census 2011), the figure claimed by the Muslim organizations is much more than the census data.

Table 2

Religious Composition in Pokhara

Religion	Census 1991	Census 2001	Census 2011
Hindu			405141
Buddhist			66266
Muslim	1445	2642	4437
Christian			10538
Kirat			453
Others			1654

Source- Central Bureau of Statics, Government of Nepal, Pokhara, 1991, 2001 and 2011

Inter-religious Situation in Miya Patan- Pokhara

Nepal is a Hindu-majority secular state (constitution of Nepal, 2015). Nepal has religious minorities other than Hindus. According to the 2011 census, Hindus make up 83.14 percent of the population, 7.89 percent of Buddhists, 9.04 percent of Muslims, 1.41 percent of Christians, and 0.44 percent of others. (Census, 2011). Hindus and Muslims have different religious beliefs. Except for minor religious issues, there has been no substantial rioting among Hindus and Muslims in Nepal and in Pokhara. There is no such peace between Hindus and Muslims in India. They are always embroiled in religious warfare. A major conflict broke out between Hindus and Muslims in Ayodhya, Ram's birthplace, over the Babari Masjid dispute. As a result, they are always at odds with one another, terrifying cities and causing riots. Thousands of people have died. This religious issue occasionally has an impact on the country and politics. As a result, neighboring Nepal had some religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims in some areas (Gurung, 2059). Very recently there is a civil riot going on different Indian cities on the issue of Prophet Mohammad and Islam.

In Nepal, in 1977, the Hindu community protested against slaughter of cows in Rautahat district. The national animal cow is revered as God in Hindu culture. Cow slaughter and consumption is regarded a grave sin in Hindu tradition. Cow murderers are punished under Nepali law. In Nepal, this is known as the "cow debate." (Dastider, 1997) Fortunately, the massacre did not devolve into widespread violence. Within a week, the problem was resolved.

Another instance included the establishment of a madrasa near the Ram Janaki temple in Janakpur, which was opposed by the Hindu community but was eventually prohibited. Another

event occurred in Tulsipur, Dang district, in October 1992. On Tihar, the Hindu community sung Bhalio song in front of the mosque in Dang district's Tulsipur. For a few days, the region was tense. It was going to become serious. The region grew hostile as a result of looting by armed gangs. This fighting did not stop in Dang's Tulsipur, but expanded to the adjacent areas as well. The Banke district administration took the initiative to settle the dispute between the Hindu and Muslim communities and protested against the Tulsipur incident (Gurung, 2059).

The following two occurrences were extremely damaging to Nepalese social harmony. Some Hindus gave sweets on December 6, 1992, to commemorate the destruction of the Babari mosque. Similarly, on December 10, a Hindu organization distributed anti-Muslim flyers in Kathmandu (Gurung, 2059). According to the Nepal Muslim Jamaat, these two Hindu activities have harmed the sensibilities of Muslims (Gurung,2059).

Democracy was restored in 1990, Muslims submitted a 14-point proposal to the Prime Minister of the Interim Government, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, led by Iman of the Jam-e-Masjid in Kathmandu, demanding Muslim Personal Law Board, freedom of religious practice. Recognizing the existence of multilingual, multicultural, multi-ethnic groups in Nepal, the democratic government tried to maintain social unity by making arrangements for social rights, recognition of equality and social justice for all (Gurung, 2059). Besides these small incidents there is no serious problem between Hindus and Muslims in Nepal. In Pokhara, till date, no minor confrontation between Hindu and Muslims has been recorded (Rahim, 2022).

After the promulgation of new constitution -2015 all the religious groups have granted religious freedom. Christians grabbed this opportunity, geared their activities in Nepal but the Muslims they never tried to use such opportunity in their favor to harm century long co-existence.

In Nepal, Islam existed since its first arrival in the Nepali form. The Muslims are scattered everywhere. Almost every place, they live, is surrounded by the Hindus. The Muslims in Western hills especially in Pokhara, since their first arrival, they are living in Hindu environment (Ojha, 2011). Muslims, the third religious groups in Nepal were allowed to practice their faith under certain restrictions. They were debarred from propagation of Islam or to follow Islamic code Shariat. It is something amazing to see how this significant number of followers of Islam religiously compromised with anti -Islamic laws, un-Islamic Hindu environment and lived here peacefully for centuries.

Causes Behind Co-operation

Migration not the Invasion

Their arrival is the primary reason of religious co-operation in Pokhara. It should be recognized that Muslims arrived in Pokhara as guests, not as invaders. They had been encouraged to live here by the minor hill kings. Muslims were viewed as guest in Nepali society, as it shown in Pokhara. Society treated them with respect and never discriminated against them based on their religious beliefs, so they fit in the society.

Brotherhood Relation

During conversation senior Muslim fellow of Miya Patan Abdul Rahim said that the local Hindu friends encouraged them to establish a school in Miya Patan to educate Muslim children. Now almost all Muslim children are well educated. Some of them are Doctors, Engineers, and School teachers. Instead of Islamic school Muslim children are studying in non-Islamic school. This is all because of their Hindu counterparts. He said that all this credit goes to Hindus of Miya Patan (Rahim, 2022). This shows the brotherhood relation between Hindu and Muslims of Miya Patan of Pokhara to establish mutual co-operation.

Participation on Feast and Festivals

Muslims of Miya Patan participates in Hindu festivals such as Dashain, Tihar and so on. They celebrate Hindus festivals as their own festivals. Also, the Hindus of Miya Patan they participate in Eid, Bakra-Eid and other Muslim festival. Participation in funeral is common to both religious groups. Muslims participate in Malami whereas Hindus participate in Zanzaza (Miya, 2022). Such things are always vital in maintaining co-operation between the different religious groups which is the major attraction of Miya Patan.

Rights to Citizen

The Nepalese constitution grants Muslims equal rights without regard for their status as a minority. From the outset, Muslims have had equal rights to their Hindu counterparts in areas such as civil rights, political rights, freedom of expression, and property rights. Muslims have even occupied positions of power. The proportion is not disheartening. Many renowned Muslims are parliamentarians, ministers, higher-ranking public servants, academics, attorneys, scientists, medical practitioners, engineers, and so on. They have both contributed to the development of the country. Muslims are now the political party leaders in Miya Patan. Some are in positions of leadership, but the bulk of Hindus are party workers (Zubeda, 2022). The majority Hindus are working under minority Muslims in Miya Patan.

Muslims have never faced discrimination based on their religious beliefs. In religious matter, Muslims and Hindus are significantly distinct culturally, yet Nepali Muslims and

Hindus both engage in Hindu festivals and rituals. Following the adoption of the secular constitution, some Muslims are calling for the restoration of the Hindu state

Because of such environment, Muslims have been able to establish their roots in Nepalese society. They initially sense Nepal, then religious groupings. Every Pokhara Muslim harbors a Nepali nationalist sentiment. Respect for one another in society and camaraderie amongst religious groups made Pokhara an example to the rest of the globe of the message “Unity in diversity.

CONCLUSIONS

It is critical to recognize that living in a peaceful community free of conflict and stress is critical for national growth. Nobody in this world wants to live in a state of tension, conflict, or war. Thus, in order to establish a peaceful community, religious groups must develop their unity and solidarity. Inter-religious co-operation should be established on mutual trust and respect among diverse faith groups.

Muslims are religiously very different to majority Hindu population but they are assimilated in such a way now no one can separate them from the society. The Hindu tolerance to other religions is the factor that resulted to present demographic status of Muslims. The members of different communities of Nepal are characterized by their syncretic nature and good dealing with the Muslim immigrants which finally fostered the expansion of Islam in Nepal.

Nepali society is now experiencing socio-ethnic discord caused by caste, race, religion, and ethnicity. Terai Muslims, Nepal’s latecomers, are demanding socio-cultural freedom, a Muslim personal law board, and recognition as an autonomous religious community with specific prerogative rights. But the Muslims of Pokhara, particularly the Miya Patan, never consider separating and instead urge neighboring Muslim groups not to jeopardize centuries of peace, cooperation, and coexistence.

It’s amazing to see how Hindus promote Muslims in social and cultural matters while also teaching them, and how Muslims promote Nepali culture while dressed in Nepali attire. Ali Miya, a great poet and Muslim scholar, made significant contributions to Nepali literature. He was recognized by the Pokhara Literary Society, which was organized by Hindus. Pokhara has encountered no social, racial, ethnic, or religious prejudice. Hindus take part in Muslim holidays, while Muslims do the same. Pokhara’s charm is its religious concord and mutual co-operation between two distinct faith communities.

REFERENCES

- Banu, Q. (1980). *Introduction to Muslim in Nepal*. [Master's thesis, Department of History, Tribhuvan. University].
- CBS (1991). *Population census-1991*. Central Bureau of Statistics.
- CBS (1991). *Statistical year book of Nepal*. Central Bureau of Statistics.
- CBS (2001). *Statistical pocket book*. Central Bureau of Statistics.
- CBS (2011) *Statistical pocket book*. Central Bureau of Statistics.
- Dasitadar, M. (1997). Muslim mobilization and the Hindu state in Nepal, 1951-95, *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research (SOAS, London)*, 18, 20-35.
- Gaborieau, M. (1981). Peasants, urban traders and rural Artisans. *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*.
- Gurung, A. (2059 B.S.). *Miya Patan Pokhara ka Musلمانharuko aitihāsik chinari: Ek addhayan* [Master's Thesis, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara].
- Khan, Abdul Salam (2071B.S.) *Nepal ra Nepali Musalman* (Nepal and Nepali Muslims). Kathmandu.
- Ojha, N. (2016 B.S.). *A study on socio-cultural life of Muslims of Kathmandu*. Research report submitted to research division, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu.
- Ojha N. (2011). *Rites and rituals of Nepali Muslims*, Oxford Store.
- Puri, U. (2019). Religious and cultural syncretism: A study of Swoyambhu. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 24 (4), 18-27. e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845. www.iosrjournals.org
- Regmi, J.C. (2026 B.S.). *Lichhavis sanskriti*. Ratna Pustak Bhandar.
- Seddon, D. (2018). *The Muslim communities of Nepal*. Adroit Publishers.
- Shrestha, K.M. (2005). Religious syncretism and context of Buddhism in medieval Nepal. *Voice of History*, 20 (1), 51–60. <https://doi.org/10.3126/voh.v20i1.85>
- Shiwakoti, G. (2072 B.S.). *Nepal Ko Sambidhan (Constitution of Nepal)*. Pairavi Prakashan.
- Subedee, R.R. (2040B.S.). *Nepali Senama Musلمان haruko prabesh*.
- Taylor, C. (2020). A Revisitation of Religious Syncretism in Twentieth Century Yemen, *The Alexandrian* 9 (1), 22-29.
- Thapa, S. (1996). *Buddhist monasticism in Korea: Changes and development*. A seminar paper presented at the Academy of Korean Studies.
- Thapa, S. (1997). *Religious minorities and their identity*. A research report submitted to the Academy of Korean Studies.
- Thapa, S. (1986). Caste hierarchy: The inter-ethnic stratification in the Muslim society of Nepal. *Tribhuvan University Journal*, 13.