

Eight Christians Were Burned Alive By Muslims In Pakistan

Wednesday 5 August 2009, by [MUGHAL Aftab Alexander](#) (Date first published: 2 August 2009).

On Aug. 1, around three thousand violent Muslim demonstrators attacked a Christian colony in Gojra city in Punjab province and they burned 8 Christians - a 7 years old child, 4 women and 2 men - alive and injured 20 others. They put on fire the whole Christian locality in which 40 houses and 2 local churches were totally burnt.

The Muslim demonstrators were protesting against alleged desecration of Quran by some Christians in a nearby village Koriyan, about 4 kilometers from Gojra, 2 days ago. On July 31, Muslim already burnt more than 50 Christian houses and 2 churches in reaction of that incident, which was based on rumor. The tension between two communities - Christians and Muslims - was running high in district Toba Tek Singh after Koriyan incident. It was highly likely that some miscreants would use the situation to attack Christian localities in different parts of the district but no security measures were taken by the local authorities.

On the call of some religious organizations, Muslim community observed a complete strike in the city and started demonstration at 8.30 in the morning. They were demanding death sentence of Talib Masih who is charged of false blasphemy in village Koriyan. For several hours, they blocked the main roads and also the railway track.

Christian say that even after village Koriyan incident police did not provide them security despite their requests. The mob had not only torched their houses but also looted them. "Though police was present at the time of attack, miscreants were not stopped by them," Christians complained. After some time, when police tried to stop protesters, they also attacked police in which some police personals were injured.

It is a well know fact that this part of the country a banned militant organization has a very strong hold. Some independent reports have been suggesting for some time that after taking control in tribal and Swat area now Taliban inroad in Southern Punjab and some other parts of Punjab province. Ironically, Taliban's sympathizers in the media out rightly rejected these reports. Eyewitnesses said that when armed men of a banned militant organization from Jhang, an adjacent city, reached the spot the mob turned more violent and started burning and looting Christian houses.

Rana Sanaullah, Punjab's law minister, told the media that an initial investigation proves that no incident of desecration of Quran was happened in the area during the last week.

The only Christian minister in the federal cabinet Shahbaz Bhatti, federal minister for minorities affairs, blamed the local administration who did not provide security to Christians of Gojra.

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani asked Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif to bring the culprits to justice. He also appealed to the masses to remain calm and exercise restraint.

Deputy Superintendent Police Gojra Ghulam Abass was terminated by the Punjab Inspector General Police Tariq Saleem Dogar due to the negligence of his duty to control the situation. Meanwhile, a

company of Pakistan Rangers (Punjab) was dispatched to the troubled area on the orders of the federal government to control law and order situation.

Although the Punjab government of Mina Shahbaz Sharif has announced a judicial inquiry of the incident, it is highly unlikely that the report will come into light, some Christian leaders said. Sharif was the chief minister of Punjab at the time when a Muslim mob burnt the whole Christian village of Shantinagar in 1997. A judicial inquiry was initiated by the Punjab government after that but the report of that inquiry never made public, despite Christians' continues demand.

It is another blasphemy case in which 2 Christian localities were attacked on false allegation of insulting Quran by Christians. "The Blasphemy Law introduced by General Ziaul Haq (1977-88) has made it easier to persecute people on the basis of sometimes completely mala fide accusations. The law needs review and amendment. But we must also ask what local authorities were doing as people went on the rampage. It is hard to believe they could do nothing to prevent the mayhem. Their lack of action and sometimes connivance with those acting against minority groups have, in the past, made all kinds of outrages possible," The News, a major daily English language newspaper, said in its editorial.

This is the third incident in the last two months of this kind in Punjab province in which Christian localities were attacked due to alleged blasphemy allegations. Christians are just 1.5 percent of the total population of Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

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Minorities Concern of Pakistan
August 2, 2009

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