

# Pakistan's Descent into Religious Intolerance

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**W**HEN PAKISTAN WAS CREATED IN 1947, ITS SECULAR FOUNDING fathers did not speak of an Islamic State. Muhammad Ali Jinnah declared that non-Muslims would be equal citizens in the new country. Reflecting his secular views, Jinnah—himself a Shia—tried to establish a multi-confessional state, and he nominated a Hindu, several Shias, and an Ahmadi to Pakistan's first cabinet. Today, however, Pakistan's religious minorities face discrimination and persecution. Throughout the country, Shia Muslims face smear campaigns from Sunnis that declare them "non-Muslims." Ahmadis—who were among Jinnah's most ardent supporters in his quest to create a Muslim homeland on the subcontinent—are now completely unrepresented, living as virtual outcasts in modern Pakistan. Moreover, the Pakistani government's policies and institutions have become deeply sectarianized, and non-Sunni Muslim representation at the cabinet-level is limited to mere symbolic appointments.<sup>1</sup>

Things have become worse in the past few decades due to a combination of factors. These include years of radicalization of Pakistani society, an educational curriculum that breeds hatred for minorities, and a judicial system that is unwilling to protect minorities and often even condones the behavior of aggressors.

Pakistan's national security establishment also continues to protect radical Islamist groups involved in these attacks because these groups are considered useful for foreign policy needs.

Pakistan may have been the first modern post-colonial state to embrace the idea of religious purification, but the phenomenon of the majority insisting that religious minorities practice their faith and culture within limits prescribed by the majority now occurs in several other countries around the world. In Pakistan's case, this quest for purity started soon after independence in 1947 and has continued ever since. The country's first Constituent Assembly heard arguments by theologians like Maulana Abul Ala Maududi and Shabbir Ahmed Usmani about how Muslims needed protection from the negative impact of non-Muslim culture on the Muslim way of life. The clerics' view put forth the idea that Islam had set up a wall between believers and unbelievers.

Over time this "protection" meant not only purifying Pakistan of non-Muslims—such as Hindus and Christians—but also purifying the ranks of Muslims by demanding separation of Ahmadis and Shias. The demands of clerics, backed by street protests, forced the state to make concessions as early as the 1950s and have continued ever since. In the early years these groups—including Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema Islam, Majlis-e-Tahaffuz-e-Khatm-e-Nabuwat, Majlis-e-Ahrar-e-Islam, and Jamiat Ulema Pakistan—demanded action by the state in fulfilling their goals.

Over the last two decades, religious-political groups have grown in power. Some have obtained weaponry and funding while advancing Pakistan's foreign policy objectives in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Islamist parties of the 1950s and 1960s have spawned militant offshoots that no longer limit themselves to contesting elections, or making demands for legislation from the state. They directly attack minorities physically, and threaten to eliminate through terrorism, anyone who disagrees with their point of view.

The perennial dissatisfaction of the Islamist extremists, whose worldview is in many ways anchored in the seventh century, has not diminished, even after several constitutional and legislative changes, and the killing or migration of their victims in large numbers.

To say that Pakistan's religious minorities are under attack is a self-evident truth. Pakistani laws, especially ones that deal with blasphemy, deny or interfere with practice of minority faiths. Religious minorities are targets of legal as well as social discrimination. Most significantly, in recent years, Pakistan has witnessed some of the worst organized violence against religious minorities since the 1947 Partition. Over an eighteen-month period covering 2012 and part of 2013, Shias

were subject to 67 attacks, including suicide terrorist bombings during Shia religious observances.

In addition, 54 lethal attacks were also perpetrated against Ahmadis, 37 against Christians, 16 against Hindus, and 3 against Sikhs during this period. Attackers of religious minorities are seldom prosecuted—and if they are, the courts almost invariably set them free. Even members of the majority Sunni community who dare to question State policies of religious exclusion are just as vulnerable to extremist violence.

Pakistan was created as a homeland for South Asia's Muslims, but soon after Independence some religious and political leaders declared the objective of Pakistan's creation to be the establishment of an Islamic State. Much of the prejudice against religious minorities can be traced to the effort by Islamist radicals to make Pakistan "purer" in what they conceive as Islamic terms. Partition-related violence and forced migration meant that very few Hindus and Sikhs were left in the western districts of Punjab that became part of Pakistan. The estimated percentage of Muslims in the areas constituting Pakistan rose from 77 percent in 1941 to 83 percent in 1949.<sup>2</sup>

THE DESCENT BEGAN AS EARLY AS 1949, WHEN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY declared the objective of Pakistan's constitution to be the creation of an Islamic State. It reached a nadir with the "Islamization" drive under General Zia ul-Haq during the 1980s. Today, the country contends with a spectrum of armed militias and terrorist groups—many of which were sponsored by the State—each intent on imposing its version of Islam by violent means.

Pakistan's first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan (1947-1951), led the way in creating a national narrative for Pakistan that perpetuated a sense of Islamic victimhood. In March 1949, Liaquat Ali Khan moved in the Constituent Assembly what came to be known as the "Objectives Resolution": a declaration of the goals of the new State that would form the basis of its future constitution and laws. The Objectives Resolution accepted the premise that "sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to God Almighty alone," and that the State of Pakistan would exercise authority "within the limit prescribed by Him."

The resolution declared that "Muslims shall be enabled to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres in accord with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and the Sunna," and "adequate provision shall be made to safeguard the legitimate interests of minorities and backward and depressed classes." The net effect of the Objectives Resolution was

to define the State in Islamic terms, opening the door for further legislation based on the interpretation of Islam by a parliamentary majority.<sup>3</sup>

Very early in its life as a new nation, Pakistan was plunged into a power struggle between regional politicians, and bureaucrats or generals, with each side invoking religion to enhance its standing and credibility. These power struggles had significant implications for the debate about the role of religion in the running of the State. Pakistan remained bogged down by ideological debates and political divisions that prevented the writing of a Constitution for almost nine years. The absence of a Constitution meant that religious minorities lived on the toleration of the majority, rather than protections guaranteed by the rule of law.

It was Hindus and Sikhs who suffered most at Partition and immediately afterwards. However, soon Muslim sects also became targets, starting with the Ahmadiyyas. In March 1953, anti-Ahmadi protests spread across Punjab, resulting in the deaths of as many as 2,000 Ahmadis by rioting mobs before order was restored. The anti-Ahmadiyya protests anticipated the more brutal treatment decades later of non-Muslims and heterodox sects within the fold of Islam who did not accept the beliefs and practices of the Sunni majority.

A judicial inquiry commission, headed by Supreme Court Justice Mohammed Munir and Punjab High Court Justice Muhammad Rustam Kayani, produced a 387-page report after exhaustive hearings, concluding in early 1954. The Commission interviewed almost all leading clerics and found that they often considered each other's beliefs incompatible with Islam. Although all Islamists wanted Pakistan to become an Islamic State, their visions of such a State differed significantly. They seemed to agree only on their contempt for, and opposition to, non-Muslims. Moreover, their definitions of "non-Muslim" often extended to members of other Islamic sects with whom they had doctrinal differences.

The Munir Commission's conclusion on the issue of the definition of Muslim was: "no two learned divines are agreed on this fundamental. If we attempt our own definition as each learned divine has done and that definition differs from that given by all others, we unanimously go out of the fold of Islam. And if we adopt the definition given by any one of the *ulema*, we remain Muslims according to the view of that *alim* [scholar], but *kafirs* according to the definition of everyone else."<sup>4</sup>

One of the most noteworthy findings of the Munir Commission related to the Islamist leaders' attitudes towards non-Muslims. "According to the leading *ulema*, the position of non-Muslims in the Islamic State of Pakistan will be that of *dhim-mis*, and they will not be full citizens of Pakistan because they will not have the same rights as Muslims. They will have no voice in the making of the law, no right to administer the law, and no right to hold public offices."<sup>5</sup>

Pakistan's first Constitution of 1956—abrogated within two years—described Pakistan as “the Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” and included the Objectives Resolution as the preamble to the Constitution.<sup>6</sup> Part 3 of the new Constitution laid down several “Directive Principles of State Policy,” which included Islamic provisions such as “Steps shall be taken to enable the Muslims of Pakistan individually and collectively to order their lives in accordance with the Holy Quran and Sunna,” and “to promote unity and the observance of Islamic moral standards.” The Pakistani State was now committed to securing “the proper organization of *zakat*, *wakfs* [religious endowments] and mosques,” to “prevent the consumption of alcoholic liquor,” and to “eliminate *riba* [usury or interest] as early as possible.” The 1956 Pakistan Constitution also barred non-Muslims from holding the office of head of State.

In October 1958, General Ayub Khan took power as Pakistan's first military dictator. Ruling over Pakistan for over ten years, Ayub saw Pakistan not as a conventional State defined by territory, but as a State defined by ideology. For Ayub, and indeed the Islamists of Pakistan, that ideology was exclusively Islamic. When Ayub arbitrarily framed a new Constitution for Pakistan in 1962, the new basic law also included several “Islamic provisions,” and restricted the office of president to Muslims. Further, a Council of Islamic Ideology was assigned the task of making recommendations to the government on bringing all laws “in conformity with [the] Quran and Sunna.” From the perspective of Pakistan's religious minorities, Ayub's self-styled benevolent authoritarianism offered little relief against the tide of intolerance that had engulfed the country since Partition. The minorities' treatment now depended on the dictator's view of each community.

To ensure that Pakistan's future citizens were all raised to become well indoctrinated in the national ideology, the Ayub regime, in all schools, made Social Studies compulsory from grades six to ten, and Islamic Studies from grades six to eight. An official report proudly proclaimed, “Students of Islamic history as now presented will develop confidence in themselves, and instead of looking for leadership to other Muslim countries, will try to lead others in the presentation of Islam.”<sup>7</sup> The syllabus emphasized Islam's martial traditions, spoke of a long-standing conflict between Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent, and drilled into students' minds the idea that Pakistan was created to be an Islamic State.

Social Studies, later known as Pakistan Studies, was made a compulsory subject of study from Grade 5 through 12 in schools, as well as undergraduate programs at colleges. Its curriculum crafted a version of history that emphasized Islam's martial traditions, spoke of a long-standing conflict between Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent, highlighted a pan-Islamic *ummah* and depicted

other religions as inferior to Islam. It also drilled into students' minds the idea that Pakistan was created to be an Islamic state, and to be the center of a global Islamic revival.

General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime (1977-1988) went one step further. It ordered a revision of the educational curricula for all subjects to ensure that "the ideology for which this nation had achieved Pakistan" may "permeate" the lives of people. This resulted in "Islamic" elements being added even in the study of languages and the sciences. The basic aim of this policy was to create a new generation wedded to Islam, and what the state described as "the ideology of Pakistan." The most far-reaching consequence of this decision was to quash the potential for critical thinking in the next generation, in addition to encouraging a false narrative of history. Students were introduced to religious bigotry at an early age, making it difficult for ordinary Pakistanis to empathize with religious minorities when they were under attack.

THIS PROMOTION OF RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE LEGITIMIZED THE VIEW THAT religious minorities lived in the country only at the sufferance of the Muslim majority. Instead of the modern conception of inalienable human rights, the minorities' survival and religious freedom were made dependent on various interpretations of traditional Islamic law. Islamization of Pakistan was incremental. The developments under the military dictatorships of Ayub and Yahya paved the way for Zia's much harsher interpretation of Islamic law, primarily to the detriment of religious pluralism and minority rights.

In 1969, when faced with protests against his rule, Ayub handed over power to his chief of army, General Yahya Khan. Yahya imposed martial law, but also promised to hold multi-party elections for a new constituent assembly. Although all political parties in the country were allowed to contest the election, the military seemed to favor conservative parties—described in the official media as "Islam-loving"—who were expected to keep in check the influence of secular and socialist factions.<sup>8</sup>

A Martial Law Regulation was passed which pronounced a maximum penalty of seven years' rigorous imprisonment for "any person who published, or was in possession of any book, pamphlet, etc., which was offensive to the religion of Islam."<sup>9</sup> This 1970 law foreshadowed the infamous blasphemy laws imposed under Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship a few years later.

The 1970 election, the ensuing civil war and the break-up of Pakistan were perhaps the most significant events in Pakistan's history since Partition. They were to greatly influence the nation's future policies relating to religion and religious

minorities. Indubitably, geography and ethnicity were compelling factors in the power struggle that precipitated East Pakistan's secession as Bangladesh. The glaring threat to West Pakistani hegemony posed by the Awami League's decisive victory could barely have been countenanced without incident, given the authoritarian tenor of the times. Less obvious though, was the fact that the east and west had sharply differing views on the role of religion in public life. It was a strong undercurrent drawing the two parts of Pakistan into direct confrontation.

Much has been written on the brutality of the Pakistan army in its attempt to suppress the 1971 uprising in East Pakistan. Estimates of those killed in the military operations range from a low of 300,000 (preferred by Pakistani officials) to a high of 3 million (cited by Bangladeshi officials). The Pakistani army's actions are widely described as attempted genocide, with even Pakistani generals later admitting that their orders were to secure control of territory even if it involved elimination of large numbers of citizens.<sup>10</sup> But the most significant element of this tragedy in the context of understanding Pakistan's policies towards religious minorities is the Pakistan army's treatment of Bengali Hindus, who were Pakistani citizens at the time.

The humiliating defeat of the Pakistan army in the 1971 war with India, and secession of East Pakistan to become Bangladesh made it impossible for the military to continue in power. Soon after the surrender at Dhaka, General Yahya Khan handed over power to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, leader of the PPP, which had won the largest number of seats in West Pakistan during the December 1970 election.

Pakistan now had a representative government, contiguous territory, and, with more than 96 percent Muslims comprising the citizenry, a more religiously homogenous population. The country could make a fresh start, leaving behind the stultifying baggage of ideology and conflict that had accumulated since 1947. However, the loss of East Pakistan did not end the drive for Islamization. On the contrary, Pakistan's leaders persisted in nation-building through religion, rather than embracing inclusive civic nationalism. Pakistan's religious minorities were now more beleaguered than ever.

Bhutto's own inclinations and previous public pronouncements indicated his preference for a modern, secular State. But the Pakistan that Bhutto governed, first as president, and then as prime minister, had been influenced, in the words of one foreign commentator, by "a distinctly obscurantist tendency," and "an unconstructive harping on Islam."<sup>11</sup> Although religious parties fared badly in the 1970 election, they still retained a strong presence in Pakistani society.

Further, the proportion of non-Muslims in Pakistan's population had shrunk significantly with the loss of East Pakistan. When a census was conducted in



1972, none of the non-Muslim communities counted even a million members.<sup>12</sup> In the past, the larger proportion of Hindus in United Pakistan had given some voice, however limited, to non-Muslims; that would no longer be the case. Having achieved a measure of purity in relation to non-Muslims within Pakistan, Islamists were now getting ready to purify the country of unorthodox groups hitherto identified as being Muslim.

The 1973 Constitution not only retained the Islamic provisions from earlier versions but also added new ones. Islam was declared the “State religion of Pakistan,” and a promise was made to ensure that “all existing laws” conform “with the Injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah.” The constitution declared that “no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such Injunctions.” The preamble of the basic law spoke of enabling the Muslims “to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres, in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam, as set out in the Holy Quran and Sunnah.” But it also promised that “adequate provision shall be made for the minorities freely to profess and practice their religions and develop their cultures.”<sup>13</sup>

Bhutto initially tried to balance these “Islamic” measures with efforts to emphasize pluralism and tolerance for religious minorities. The PPP had been strongly supported by Shias, Ahmadis, Christians, and Hindus at the polls. These communities expected the party in government to protect them, and the PPP government acquitted itself well on this score in its first two years. While negotiating with India over what became the Simla Accord in 1973, Bhutto insisted that the Hindus who had fled Sindh during the 1971 war should return to their homeland.

IN 1974, TWO DECADES AFTER THE 1953 ANTI-AHMADIYYA PROTESTS, PAKISTAN once again faced riots targeting the Ahmadiyya community. This time round, instead of setting up a commission, the issue was taken to Parliament to debate and vote on whether Ahmadis were Muslim. Religious parties managed to secure support from members of secular opposition parties for a unanimous resolution which “recommended and requested the federal government to declare the Mirzais, Amadis, or Qadianis as a minority because they do not believe in Khatme-Nabuwwat.”<sup>14</sup>

The Second Amendment of the Pakistani Constitution altered Article 106 Clause 3, which lists religious minority communities to include “persons of Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves ‘Ahmadis’).” The Ahmadis became the only religious minority listed in the Constitution, not by the name they use, but by pejoratives applied to them by their detractors.



Moreover, a new clause that attempted to define “Muslim” was added to Article 260 of the Constitution, transforming a purely religious question into a matter of law. “A person who does not believe in the absolute and unqualified finality of The Prophethood of Muhammad (Peace be upon him), the last of the Prophets,” it read, “or claims to be a Prophet, in any sense of the word or of any description whatsoever, after Muhammad (Peace be upon him), or recognizes such a claimant as a Prophet or religious reformer, is not a Muslim for the purposes of the Constitution or law.”<sup>15</sup>

It was a tragedy that instead of diminishing the difference between Muslim and non-Muslim over time, as Jinnah had envisioned, Pakistan had created a new non-Muslim minority through a constitutional amendment. It was a greater tragedy that this happened under an otherwise progressive and pluralist government. It is not unusual in the history of most faiths for religious leaders to classify members of other denominations as not belonging within the mainstream of their faith. But the purported heresy of a sect had not been made subject of legislation in any country in modern times before this.

ON JULY 5, 1977, PAKISTAN’S SECOND MILITARY COUP TOOK PLACE AND ITS THIRD military dictator, Chief of Army Staff General Zia-ul-Haq, took over the reins of power, deposing the elected Bhutto government. Zia legitimated his dictatorship by claiming the mantle of Islamization. He promised to be guided by “the spirit of the people’s struggle for Nizam-e-Mustafa,” from his first day in power. Zia changed laws by decree, imposed draconian punishments based on medieval interpretations of Islam, silenced secular critics, and changed school curricula to pass on his bigoted worldview to the next generation.

Hardline clerics with limited followings now preached on national television, and orthodox religious schools (*madrasas*) proliferated with State and foreign funding. Islamist militias, trained to fight the communist occupation in Afghanistan, also turned their guns on non-Muslims, Ahmadis, and Shias within Pakistan, often with a nod from Zia’s officials and political allies. If the 1947 partition virtually cleansed Pakistan of Hindus and Sikhs, Zia-ul-Haq’s decade-long dictatorship marked the beginning of a period of heightened sectarian violence in which all but the most obscurantist Muslim sects and groups were targeted.

At home, forceful advocacy of an Islamic State was Zia’s sole, albeit limited, source of legitimacy. Zia carefully nurtured his image as a man of Allah, with televised attendance at prayer congregations, and annual pilgrimages to Mecca. He also met regularly with clerics, many of whom were given State jobs and titles. Zia

thereby assembled a protective cohort of Islamist shock troops around himself, in addition to the uniformed military that he already commanded.

In February 1979, he ordered a revision of educational curricula to ensure that “the ideology for which this nation had achieved Pakistan” may “permeate” the lives of people. “Our text books and courses of study have drifted us away from our orbit,” he insisted. “Consequently, we had to devise a new educational policy to keep us within our intellectual orbit. The basic aim of this policy is to rear a new generation wedded to the ideology of Pakistan and Islam,” Zia said.<sup>16</sup>

Zia’s lack of tolerance for other faiths was particularly evident in his general disregard for the concerns of Pakistan’s minorities. While non-Muslims’ standing as citizens was reduced before the courts, the power of their franchise was also diluted by shrewd alterations to the electoral laws. Although Zia did not hold legislative elections until 1985, he changed the Representation of the People’s Act of 1976 to reintroduce separate communal electorates.

By 1980, the Islamization process expanded to include the implementation of *zakat*, a 2.5 percent annual wealth tax that is required by Islam to be used for the relief of the poor. The Zia government imposed *zakat* through a compulsory levy on bank deposits. In its first year, 485 million Pakistani Rupees were collected as *zakat* to be distributed through local committees, which would serve as a patronage network for Sunni Islamist parties. But Shias objected to the compulsory collection of *zakat* on the grounds that it was not in accordance with their religious law. Instead of *zakat*, the Shia paid *khums*—twice the amount the Sunnis paid. According to Khaled Ahmed, “it was traditionally aid to the Shia clergy, clearly a throwback to the history of Shias living as a suppressed majority, or a minority in Sunni states.”<sup>17</sup>

Zia and his fundamentalist advisers either did not anticipate a Shia backlash, or calculated that such a backlash would help consolidate Sunni opinion in favor of the regime. Led by a prominent Shia cleric Mufti Jafar Husain, on July 5, 1980, tens of thousands of Shias marched in Rawalpindi, near the capital, shutting down Islamabad. Violence ensued: one protestor was killed while fourteen were wounded. Zia amended the Zakat decree to allow anyone who considered compulsory deduction of *zakat* as being against his faith to seek exemption from the tax.<sup>18</sup>

Although the Shia had won the argument over *zakat*, Zia and his fellow generals were angered by the Shia’s ability to defy martial law. Moreover, they were fearful that Pakistani Shias would now rely on the new Islamic revolutionary regime in Iran for support. Zia’s regime responded by cultivating Sunni extremist groups that called for declaring Shias non-Muslim, with proscriptions similar to those that had earlier been issued against Ahmadis. Syed Vali Nasr cites reports

that “the martial law administrator of Punjab, General Ghulam Gilani, deliberately turned a blind eye to growing Sunni militancy and the rise of armed bands centered in *madrasas* after 1980, to address the problem of Shia resurgence.”<sup>19</sup>

Under Zia’s rule, Pakistan’s legal system was methodically transformed against religious minorities and their right to maintain or profess their beliefs openly.

In addition to unleashing violence against Shias, Zia also issued decrees that made it difficult for Ahmadis to publicly profess their faith. The hardline clerics who were calling for Shias to be declared non-Muslims were also not satisfied with the 1974 constitutional amendment that had declared Ahmadis non-Muslims for legal purposes. They wanted criminal penalties for Ahmadis who practiced their religion as if they were Muslims. Using his sweeping powers under Martial Law, Zia issued a Presidential ordinance in 1984 that barred Ahmadis from calling *Azan* (the call to prayer), and from describing their places of worship as “Mosque” or Masjid.

Zia’s ordinance went farther than the 1974 constitutional amendment in defining the terms “Muslim” and “non-Muslim.” The new definition described a “Muslim” as someone who believed “in the unity and oneness of Almighty Allah, in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Mohammad (PBUH: peace be upon him), and who does not believe in, or recognize as a prophet, or religious reformer to be a prophet, in any sense of the word, or of any description whatsoever, after Mohammad (PBUH).”<sup>20</sup> “Non-Muslim” was now defined by law to mean “a person who is not a Muslim, and includes a person belonging to the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, or Parsi community, a person of the *Qadiani* group or the Lahori group (who call themselves ‘Ahmadiyahs’ or by other name), or a *Bahai*, and a person belonging to any of the scheduled castes [of Hinduism.]”

The Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) were amended through Ordinances in 1980, 1982, and 1986, criminalizing anything causing dishonor to the Holy Prophet (SAW), Ahle Bait (family of the Prophet [SAW]), Sahaba (companions of the Prophet [SAW]), and Sha’ar-i-Islam (Islamic symbols). A simple complaint to the police over these “crimes” could result in arrest and trial leading to punishments of imprisonment, or fine, or both. Article 295A of PPC says that a deliberate and malicious act to outrage religious feeling of any class, by insulting its religion or religious beliefs, will be punished by up to 10 years imprisonment, or with fine, or with both; 295 B makes the defiling of Holy Quran punishable by imprisonment for life; 295 C mentions that the use of derogatory remarks in respect of the Holy Prophet be punished by death and fine; 298 A makes the use of insulting remarks in respect of holy personages as punishable by 3 years imprisonment, or with fine, or with both; 298 B mentions

the misuse of epithets description and titles reserved for certain holy personages, or place of Islam by Ahmadis, as punishable by 3 years imprisonment and fine; and 298 C makes an Ahmadi calling himself Muslim, or preaching, propagating his faith, outraging the religious feeling of Muslims, or posing himself a Muslim, a punishable crime for 3 years imprisonment and fine.<sup>21</sup>

These legal changes enabled bigoted Muslims to persecute and punish non-Muslims (Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus), and Ahmadis, by bringing false cases under the vaguely-worded Blasphemy Law. Apart from false cases of blasphemy or posing as Muslims, the Zia era also resulted in a plethora of cases concerning the abduction of Hindu women, and forcible conversions from the Sukkur, Larkana, and Mirpurkhas districts of Sindh. In one instance, the law was manipulated by powerful men who kidnapped a non-Muslim woman, claimed she had converted to Islam by producing false witnesses, and then threatened her with the dire consequences of apostasy if she denied her conversion to Islam.

The Pakistani government was accused internationally of abetting religious intolerance through legal formalities and requirements that encouraged private citizens to engage in intolerant or discriminatory acts in order to receive a government benefit. One example was the government requirement that Muslims sign an oath denouncing Ahmadis in order to get a passport or obtain government employment. The standard passport form issued by the Government, both in Pakistan and in other countries, contains a paragraph declaring that the signatory deems the founder of the Ahmadi sect an imposter.<sup>22</sup> Although the denunciation paragraph is described as a declaration that sets Muslims apart from Ahmadis, it amounts to making it obligatory for other Muslims to denounce Ahmadis if they are to obtain a passport.

In August 1988, Zia-ul-Haq died in a helicopter crash. Over the next decade, a succession of civilian governments led alternately by Benazir Bhutto (1988-90, 1993-96), and Nawaz Sharif (1990-93, 1997-99), attempted to rule, thwarted each time by the entrenched military-technocratic-intelligence establishment.

Benazir, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter, and head of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), was voted to power in 1988 with the expectation that she would turn Pakistan away from Zia's Islamization. However, the constant opposition she faced from the religious clerics, Islamist organizations, and the establishment, proved that the order created by Zia did not die, and secular political forces were eventually forced into pragmatic compromises over Islamization.

This meant that for the most part, Benazir Bhutto's ostensibly secular government was cast as a helpless observer while the Islamists thwarted its leader's vision of a society that did not discriminate on the basis of religion. Incidents of

persecution of religious minorities thus continued in a pattern that had become familiar under Zia's rule. In addition to targeted attacks on Shias, the Ahmadis continued to be persecuted under the draconian Ordinance XX. There were several new cases of sect members being imprisoned for using Islamic symbols. Local officials in several jurisdictions paid little attention to the prime minister's calls for greater religious tolerance.

Her successor Nawaz Sharif, head of Pakistan Muslim League (PML), came to power with the support of Islamist parties, and in May 1991 passed the sharia bill that declared the Quran and Sunnah as the law of the land, not just the guideline for legislation, as had been the case since the Objectives Resolution of 1949. The sharia bill opened the way for courts to base their judgments on Islamic law, citing sayings attributed to the Prophet, or to medieval Islamic jurists, instead of adjudicating cases on grounds of Pakistan's laws. Opponents of the bill, including minority and women's groups, saw it as a further step towards making Pakistan a theocracy.<sup>23</sup>

THE SITUATION DID NOT CHANGE WHEN BENAZIR BHUTTO RETURNED TO POWER as prime minister in October 1993, after the dismissal of the Sharif government a few months earlier. Bhutto spent her second term fighting fire, both domestic and foreign, the rise of the Taliban, and a faltering economy. In such an environment, there was little room for policy and legislative changes that were needed to end the widespread abuse and harassment of the various religious minorities.

In his second term, Nawaz appeared eager to burnish his credentials as a champion of Islam. By August, Sharif was ready to amend Pakistan's constitution "to create an Islamic order in Pakistan, and establish a legal system based on the Quran." This attempt at sweeping Islamization was similar to that undertaken by General Zia-ul-Haq, with one crucial difference: while Zia was a military dictator who lacked legitimacy, Sharif was an elected leader who was trying to move Pakistan farther along the path toward theocracy through an act of parliament. The inevitable consequence of the government nurturing the jihadi groups was unabated religious militancy and sectarian terrorism across the country.

In October 1999, Nawaz Sharif was overthrown in a coup d'état that brought the army back into power. General Pervez Musharraf styled himself as a reformer, and promised to push back religious extremism. Musharraf ended the separate electorates, though Ahmadis still could not vote because they refused to put their names in the non-Muslim register of voters.

Soon after the coup that brought him to power, Musharraf acknowledged

religious extremism as a problem that had to be dealt with by the government and the military. In his first address to the nation as Pakistan's ruler, Musharraf criticized the "exploitation of religion," spoke of Islam as a religion of tolerance, and reassured "our minorities that they enjoy full rights and protection as equal citizens in the letter and spirit of true Islam."<sup>24</sup>

However, with the passage of his dictatorship, Musharraf reverted to defining the role of Islam in Pakistan's life in ways similar to those adopted by earlier leaders after Jinnah. Upon being asked what role Islam should have in Pakistan, he stated that Pakistan was "an Islamic republic," that "Islam is a *deen*, a way of life" and he was "a believer in taking Islam in its real, progressive form—a much broader, futuristic view, rather than a dogmatic and retrogressive one."<sup>25</sup>

The new dictator was using language similar to that of earlier ones. He did not wear Islam on his sleeve like Zia-ul-Haq, but he also was not willing to embrace Jinnah's vision of religion having nothing to do with the business of State. Some of his rhetoric resembled that of Ayub Khan, Pakistan's first military dictator, who was not an Islamist, but inadvertently strengthened the Islamist cause while pursuing his external and domestic policies.

Under Musharraf, extremist madrasas continued to proliferate in an alarming manner even after the ouster of the Taliban from Afghanistan in 2001. The number of madrasas—ideological hothouses that almost invariably took a harsh view of unbelievers and apostates—had risen from 6,761 in 2000, to 11,221 in 2005, to 28,982 in 2011.<sup>26</sup> Thus, in the five years that also saw the terrorist attack of 9/11, the number of apostatizing seminaries had almost doubled in Pakistan. There were now 448 madrasas for women, too. The greatest number of madrasas was now in the city of Bahawalpur (where the October 2001 church attack on Christians had been perpetrated), followed by Lahore, Bahawalnagar, and Faisalabad.<sup>27</sup>

As the madrasas minted more and more extremist mullahs, religious vigilantism intensified against non-Muslims, as well as Muslim sects. Pakistani laws, especially ones that deal with blasphemy, deny or interfere with practice of minority faiths. Religious minorities are targets of legal as well as social discrimination. Most significantly, in recent years, Pakistan has witnessed some of the worst organized violence against religious minorities since Partition. As previously mentioned, over an eighteen-month period covering 2012 and part of 2013, at least 200 incidents of sectarian violence were reported; these incidents led to some 1,800 casualties, including more than 700 deaths.

Many of those targeted for violence during this period were Shia Muslim citizens, who are deemed part of Pakistan's Muslim majority under its constitution

and laws. During the same year-and-a-half period in 2012-2013, Shias were subject to seventy-seven attacks, including suicide terrorist bombings during Shia religious observances. Fifty-four lethal attacks were also perpetrated against Ahmadis, thirty-seven against Christians, sixteen against Hindus, and three against Sikhs.<sup>28</sup>

Attackers of religious minorities are seldom prosecuted; and if they are, the courts almost invariably set them free. Members of the majority community, the Sunnis, who dare to question State policies about religious exclusion are just as vulnerable to extremist violence.

Pakistan's religious minorities have often been the target of religiously-motivated attacks and persecution—these have risen in tandem with religious extremism in the country. Discrimination, harassment, and violence have been directed against all religious minorities, including Ahmadis, Christians, Shia Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Parsis, and Jains. Pakistan's small Christian community has particularly faced discrimination under the blasphemy law, with incidents on almost a weekly basis where Christians are attacked, lynched, and killed under false accusations of blasphemy. Anyone trying to seek a change in the blasphemy law or standing up for Pakistan's non-Muslim minorities, like former Governor of Punjab Salmaan Taseer, and former Federal Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, has been assassinated. Lawyers defending those accused of blasphemy have also been killed, like prominent human rights activist Rashed Rehman.

Pakistan's national discourse, aided by its school curriculum, generates religious prejudice against minorities. Although the country's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah envisioned a secular Pakistan, over the years, respect for the diversity of beliefs has eroded. Islamist groups have sought to purify Pakistan, which they deem to be the land of the pure. But history shows that these efforts at purification have only made Pakistan vulnerable to conflict, terrorism, and lawlessness.

The pursuit of religious purity is not an attainable goal. It has hindered Pakistan's progress and rendered it insecure. The country has drifted far from its founder's ideal, and has been engulfed in religious furies instead of cultivating humanistic passions. Violence against religious minorities has divided its people instead of uniting them, or even making them more pious. Instead of allowing bigotry to cloak itself in the garb of a state religion, Pakistan would advance better as a non-confessional State, as imagined by its secular founder. Although there is no sign of such fundamental change yet, Pakistanis must start working towards dismantling the constitutional, legal, and institutional mechanisms that have gradually excluded minorities from the mainstream of Pakistani life.

The proponents of pluralism and tolerance in Pakistan are small in number



and constantly feel besieged. They are under greater threat today than they were some decades ago, primarily because of the rise of vigilantes and terrorist groups who threaten to kill anyone who speaks out against the Islamist narrative. High profile assassinations of liberal and secularist individuals, coupled with violent attacks on even the smallest organization purporting to offer an enlightened view, of religion, have helped build an environment of fear. Still, some newspaper and magazine editors, talk show hosts for television programs, professors at universities, civil society activists, and human rights workers continue to raise their voice for a pluralist Pakistan. Quite often, these brave voices belong to individuals who, unlike the extremists, do not have well-funded organizations to support or protect them. The Pakistani government seldom defends the strongest voices for religious freedom in the country.

## NOTES

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