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Islamic Radicalism and Minorities in Pakistan

In the past, as well as in our times, religion in multi-religious and ethnic societies has polarized more than unified societies. Even within a single religious denomination one may find numerous strands that never tie up. Doctrinal differences, political contestation for power, material gains and territorial space can make the religion itself—and the question of authenticity—quite explosive. The political question of majority versus minority becomes salient and troublesome even in a society with one dominant religion. This question is a greater divisive force in states where religion is the source of political legitimacy or the basis of a state's identity. Religion turns out to be a dangerous political weapon when the majority religious communities attempt to shape culture, social institutions and the state itself according to a specific belief system. It was not without some learning from history of bitter religious feuds that the neutrality of the state became the central element of theorizing about the modern nation-state. The Western community of nations has accepted secular liberalism as the defining ideology of state, and this concept has found a considerable following even in the post-colonial states. But in some states, such as

Pakistan, the role of religion is not a settled issue, which greatly impacts the statecraft, the status and rights of minorities, and the larger question of internal peace and security.

Complex historical and social factors have shaped the interaction between religion and politics in Pakistan. Islam was at the heart of the political struggle for the creation of Pakistan and has remained at the center of post-Independence political discourse. Controversy about the role of Islam in politics continues to trouble the political landscape of the country. Even after half a century, the relationship between religion and state is still as unclear as the nature and direction of the democratic enterprise. The question of what type of polity Pakistan should be—liberal democratic or Islamic—evokes different responses from different social sectors and political interests. Military leaders, mainstream political parties, and Islamists have all attempted to define this relationship according to their vision of democratic development and the role of religion in society and state affairs.¹ Among the three main forces in the country, the quest for shaping the Pakistani state has added yet another dimension to religious and political polarization in Pakistan. As a consequence of this unending conflict of interests and expedient coalitions, the autonomy of the civil political sphere and the general question of civil liberties and minority rights have suffered a severe setback. The central argument of this paper is that the common political strands of identity politics, state formation processes, and Islamic radicalism have caused marginalization of religious minorities.

True representative democracy and constitutional politics are the best institutional tools to protect and advance the interests of religious minorities in any set of social conditions. For various reasons, Pakistan has never applied any of these tools during most of its history. The problem lies in the state formation process, in which the balance of power shifted toward the statist elites, the army and the civil bureaucracy.² Historical and geopolitical factors have determined this shift. At the moment, the army is once again restructuring the political system; the indications are that this will further institutionalize the

1. Anwar Syed, *Pakistan: Islam and National Solidarity* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1984), 74–100.

2. Hasan-Askari Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 1–16.

army's power. The disjointed nature of democratic practice and its structural problems, which is a result of the army-dominated state formation process, has not produced a social change capable of empowering minorities and other disadvantaged groups in society. Their marginalization is as much a result of the failure of democracy as it is due to deep-seated social and religious attitudes against them.

Another important aspect of the state formation process in Pakistan is the contested issue of its identity—whether the state would be neutral among different religious communities or be Islamic.³ Answers to this fundamental question continue to generate religious conflict and political confrontations in Pakistan. To explain this dilemma, it is necessary to touch upon the Pakistani theory of the state. The movement for the creation of Pakistan, among other things, was aided by the acceptance of the demand of the Muslims as a religious minority. Since Muslims were a substantial minority—about 25 percent of the population in undivided India—the objective was to have proportionate representation in the elected assemblies under the British rule. For this, they demanded and achieved a system of separate electorates under which Muslims electorates voted only for the Muslim candidates. Among other social and economic forces that influenced the growth of Muslim nationalism in British India, the separate electorates further distanced Muslims from integration with the majority community on the basis of secular Indian nationalism.

While separate electorates worked to the advantage of Muslims in undivided India—at least in getting larger numbers of their representatives in the elected assemblies—it was politically divisive and created a bigger wedge between Congress and the Muslim League. After the creation of Pakistan, the issue of separate electorates became enshrined in the character of the Pakistani state. Even though Muslims became a majority, the state had a formidable task of reassuring religious minorities and integrating them into mainstream national politics. In the 1956 Constitution, and later in the amended 1973 Constitution under the Zia ul-Haq regime, Pakistan practiced separate electorates against the will of minorities. The following sections explore minority discrimination and marginalization by examining the

3. Ayesha Jalal, "Ideology and the Struggle for Democratic Institutions," in Victoria Schofield, ed., *Old Roads New Highways: Fifty Years of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 121–38.

legal regimes that sustain discrimination, as well as informal social structures, values, and culture. The rise of Islamic radicalism during the past two decades has equally put religious minorities under tremendous social and political stress, in some cases provoking violence against their members.

Identity Politics and Marginalization of Minorities

UNTIL THE RECENT CHANGES in elections laws, Pakistan had a system of separate electorates that was introduced by the military government of Zia ul-Haq in 1979. But the political roots of separate electorates go back to the pre-Partition Muslim politics in the subcontinent and also to the early debates after the creation of the country about how to best protect minority rights. One of the most important planks of Muslim politics under British rule was to ensure that Muslims scattered around the length and width of India have representation in the elected councils proportionate to their numbers. For this, Muslims demanded separate electorates, meaning they would be allocated seats in the local, provincial, and central legislative bodies according to their percentage in the population, and that only Muslims would vote for Muslim candidates. The British in the Minto-Marley Reforms of 1909 for India, though vehemently opposed by the Indian National Congress, finally accepted this demand.⁴ Muslims were in fact accorded dual voting rights: to elect their own representatives and to cast their votes in the general constituencies. All elections after the introduction of these reforms were held according to this system. Some historians have rightly argued that the establishment of separate electorates further strengthened the Muslim separatism that led to the creation of Pakistan.⁵

After Independence, some leaders of the Pakistan movement continued to press for continuation of separate electorates; others pushed for ideological consistency, while still others aimed to ensure adequate representation of minorities in the elected bodies of the country. The question of separate electorates was one of the focal points of debate and controversy in the Constituent Assembly of

4. Khalid bin Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857–1948*, 2d ed., (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 28–33.

5. See, for instance, Iftiaq Husain Qureshi, *A Short History of Pakistan* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1988).

Pakistan when the first post-Independence constitution was under discussion. On the issue of separate electorates, the views of leaders of East Pakistan, where there was a sizeable Hindu minority, were different from those of the leaders of West Pakistan. While the West Pakistanis stressed the need for separate electorates, the East Pakistanis insisted on joint electorates. Members of the minority communities were also of the view that separate electorates would cast them off the mainstream national politics. They demanded equal political, civic and legal rights that could be guaranteed only under the joint electorate system.

It is important to probe the reasons for support of the separate electorates. Why did post-Independence Muslim leaders support separate electorates for minorities? Was the move to protect their democratic interests? A scant look at the arguments presented reveals that most Muslim leaders thought separate electorates would be consistent with the two-nation ideology of Pakistan.⁶ This theory was at the heart of political struggle that resulted in the creation of Pakistan. Conservative religious leaders—and even some members of the Muslim League (the dominant political party at that time)—did not favor the idea of granting equal rights and status to non-Muslims in the Islamic polity they wished to establish.⁷ Some of these leaders even questioned the loyalty of the Hindu minority to Pakistan and expressed their distrust of them openly. The religious parties and their supporters in the assembly refused to accept minorities as equal citizens with equal constitutional rights.

One wonders how separate electorates would have strengthened the foundation of Pakistan ideology, promoted national integration and made Pakistan a progressive, moderate and liberal Islamic nation that its founder, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammed Ali Jinnah wanted to make it. It is pertinent to mention here the famous and oft-quoted statement of the founder of Pakistan before the Constituent Assembly: "You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the state. We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are

6. See the views of the ulema (scholars of Islamic religion) in Sharif Al Mujahid, *Ideological Orientation of Pakistan* (Karachi: National Book Foundation, 1976).

7. Government of Punjab, *Report of the Court of Inquiry Constituted under Punjab Act II of 1954 to Inquire into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953* (Lahore: Superintendent of Government Publications, 1954).

starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state. You will find that in the course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state.”⁸

There cannot be a more lucid and forceful expression of the founder’s political ideology than this address to the Constituent Assembly. The occasion of entrusting the assembly with framing a constitution—and the forum itself—makes Jinnah’s intent very clear about the direction and nature of Pakistan’s polity. The liberals and minorities in Pakistan have taken this statement as the fundamental principle of the country’s political structure. Those who believe in liberal, secular and democratic values cite this historic address to support their vision of Pakistan.

Others have taken a long u-turn in reading the history of the Pakistan movement and have reached opposite conclusions about the political character of the post-Independence Pakistani nation and state. In the formative phase of the country, some members of Jinnah’s own party began to present a distorted, illiberal and retrogressive political map for the country. The argument that minorities could not be treated as equal citizens in the Islamic republic found a lot of support among the lawmakers from West Pakistan, many of whom hid their ideological bias in pleading that in a system of joint electorates minorities might not get representation in the national parliament and provincial assemblies. The members of the Constituent Assembly from East Pakistan vociferously contested this view.⁹ They were right in arguing that separate electorates would leave minorities in both wings of the country disenfranchised, and that the system would work against national integration.

The Constituent Assembly, in the very contentious atmosphere of framing the 1956 Constitution, failed to reach any agreement on whether to have separate or joint electorates. After ascertaining views of the provincial assemblies, the assembly left the matter for the future parliament to settle. The issue kicked up lot of public debate

8. *Quaid-i-Azam Muhammed Ali Jinnah: Speeches as Governor-General of Pakistan 1947–1948* (Karachi: Pakistan Publications, n.d.), 8–9.

9. The members of the Constituent Assembly from East Pakistan had vehemently argued in support of joint electorates, a political battle they later won.

and controversy, and lines were drawn between liberal politicians and regional parties on one side and religious parties on the other. The Jamaat-i-Islami (Islamic party) and its founder and prominent leader, Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, were at the forefront of opposition to the joint electorates.

Other religious political parties and, as mentioned above, some sections of the Muslim League, also supported separate electorates. Their reasons were as diverse as the leaders and groups themselves. They argued that some pro-India parties and groups would capture power with the support of the Hindu minority in a system of single-member electoral constituencies, mainly in East Pakistan. In their judgment, more Hindus would get elected to the provincial assembly in East Pakistan and to the national assembly than would be justified under joint electorates. They also argued that with the influence of Hindu lawmakers and their prominence in the political arena, Bengali nationalism would gain strength, undermine Pakistan's position on Kashmir and gradually erode the country's ideological foundations.¹⁰

These arguments were flimsy, unconvincing and evasive of the real issues. The central principle of democracy is equality among all citizens with equal rights and duties. But a true democracy based on such principles was the last thing on the minds of many of these politicians, who were more interested in how to prevent religious minorities from becoming equal citizens and how to exclude them from electoral politics.

Why the religious and political parties wanted to build a political system in Pakistan where minorities would be marginalized and alienated is a question that has bothered true democrats from the beginning of the controversy to its end in 2002. All the major political parties in then East Pakistan supported joint electorates, except for the Muslim League, which had lost its influence there since the 1954 provincial election. After the adoption of the 1956 Constitution, when the issue was referred to the two provincial assemblies (East and West), a different resolution was passed: East Pakistan for joint electorates and West Pakistan for separate electorates. The national assembly, feeling the political pulse and opposition from East

10. For details, see M. Rafique Afzal, *Political Parties in Pakistan, 1947–58*, vol. 1 (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1986), 185–89.

Pakistani parties, decided to approve two different methods: joint electorates for East Pakistan and separate electorates for West Pakistan.

When elections were about to be held under the 1956 Constitution, the military imposed martial law for the first time in the country, abrogated the constitution and set out to make a new one that would be “appropriate to the genius” of the people of Pakistan. The issue of separate or joint electorates lingered on in political debates. The commission that was set up to frame the 1962 Constitution recommended separate electorates for minorities. General Muhammed Ayub Khan, the military ruler, did not accept the recommendation and decided for joint electorates. Pakistan held all subsequent elections under joint electorates, and formal marginalization of minorities in elections ended.

After the breakup of Pakistan in 1971, Parliament framed a new constitution more or less along the same lines as the 1956 Constitution, putting an end to the presidential system that Ayub Khan had earlier introduced. Pakistan was back to the parliamentary system but this time around, even in the face of opposition from the religious parties, procedures for joint electorates were adopted. After the separation of East Pakistan, the population of religious minorities shrank to nearly 5 percent of the Muslim population. The new government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto introduced additional safeguards into the 1973 Constitution for representation of minorities in national and provincial assemblies. Six seats were reserved for minorities in the national assembly. For provincial assemblies, five seats were reserved in Punjab, two in Sindh, two in Baluchistan, and one in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). However, minority legislators were not elected directly, but by the electoral college of their provincial assemblies. To further prove to the world that minorities were well represented in the power structure of Pakistan, the Bhutto administration—and almost all subsequent governments—recruited from the minority community for at least one federal minister of some unimportant ministry. With this system, minorities had a better sense of participation but were far from being treated with equality as discrimination continued in many other forms.

A New Religious Minority

AHMADIS WHO CLAIM to be Muslims are a relatively new religious minority. Mainstream Muslims—both Shia and Sunni—do not accept Ahmadis within the fold of Islam. The controversy over the Ahmadi sect is about one hundred years old. At the turn of the twentieth century, Muslim cleric Mirza Ghulam Ahmad from Qadian in Punjab declared himself a new prophet of Islam. He made many other controversial assertions, such as the claim that he was Jesus Christ resent to reform the world. People generally regarded Ahmad as an insane person and ignored him. When the ranks of his followers began to swell in numbers, mainly after his death, the leaders of Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind (Association of the Islamic Religious Scholars of India) took serious notice of the new prophet from Punjab. Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, a noted religious scholar, wrote one of the first comprehensive theses against the Ahmadi sect in 1935. He declared Mirza Ghulam Ahmad a false prophet and an apostate and said any person who accepted him as a prophet, or even a religious a heretic, was liable to be stoned to death. After his decree a number of Ahmadis were stoned to death in the NWFP. The Deobandi ulema (religious forefathers of the Taliban) launched a nationwide movement against the Ahmadis by declaring them as non-Muslims and barring them from using Islamic symbols.

After the creation of Pakistan, the efforts of the Deobandi ulema gained considerable steam, particularly in Punjab, which had begun to emerge as the center of Ahmadi preaching. The Majlis-i-Ahrar (council for liberation) and the Majlis e Khatme Nabuwat (council for the finality of prophethood) were at the forefront of this movement. They put forward three demands to the government in 1951 when the constitution of the country was being debated: (1) that Ahmadis be declared as non-Muslims in Pakistan's constitution; (2) that Sir Zafarullah Khan, the first foreign minister of Pakistan, be removed from his position because he was an Ahmadi; and (3) that no Ahmadi be allowed to retain any key position in the country because Pakistan is an Islamic state. So strong was this movement that Mr. Daultana, a Muslim League leader and chief minister of Punjab, endorsed these demands. As the central government was unwilling to accede to these demands, the anti-Ahmadi groups began to agitate in the streets of

Lahore. The state of lawlessness and violence in 1953 provoked the city's first occurrence of martial law. Although the movement was suppressed, it continued to propagate against the Ahmadi sect in the following decades. A more violent form of the controversy revisited the country in the early 1970s.

Among the many controversies created by the Bhutto government, one of the most crippling was the move to declare the Ahmadi sect as non-Muslims via constitutional amendment. The events during the debate in the national assembly and later in the cities, towns, and remote villages would not make any Pakistani proud. While the national parliament was determining the religiosity of a community whose following was gaining in strength, the religious parties and groups pounced on the known Ahmadi families and prominent figures, burning down their houses and businesses. With the state taking the lead in branding a section of the population as non-Muslims, the religious groups became emboldened to the point of physically attacking, harassing and persecuting the suspected Ahmadis. Thousands lost their lives, and Pakistan created yet another marginalized community despite that community's following of millions and well-funded, well-organized religious and social networks. The Ahmadis' mosques were closed down and they were debarred from congregational prayers or showing any sign of being a Muslim in their places of worship. Ahmadis were added to the list of minorities—along with Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs—and were required by law to declare their status as Ahmadis in all official documentation.

Although the anti-Ahmadi movement is a perennial problem that has occasionally led to civil disturbances, the real persecution of this community started with the declaration that Ahmadis were non-Muslims. Since then, Ahmadis have been barred from naming their places of worship as mosques or even making them look like mosques. They are not allowed to make prayer calls or to display Islamic symbols or Islamic religious inscriptions in places of worship. These measures marked the beginning of official religious intolerance.

Persecution of religious minorities—particularly against Ahmadis—increased with late general Zia ul-Haq's Islamization project. A pervading sense of Islamic revival in the country fueled another anti-Ahmadi wave around 1984. To placate the religious right of the country and keep them on his side of the country's political divide, Zia further amended the Pakistan Penal Code by adding sections 298-B

and 298-C. These provisions made it a criminal offence for Ahmadis to pose as Muslims, to preach or propagate by words (either spoken or written) and to use Islamic terminology or Muslim practices of worship. Once again, the state took the lead in implementing the political agenda of the religious political parties. In doing so, Pakistan has ignored its commitments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and violated its social contract with the minorities that supported the Pakistan movement.¹¹

The wave of religious bigotry and extremism began with Zia courting the religious constituency for political support and legitimacy.¹² The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan and the Mujahideen resistance based in Pakistan were also factors that influenced the growth of religious militancy. The flow of arms and money from the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries to the Islamic madrassa (religious school) network further contributed to the power and influence of religious organizations.

Table 1. Population and minorities in Pakistan

	Number	Percent
Total population	132,352,279	100
Muslims	127,433,409	96.28
Christians	2,002,902	1.58
Hindus	2,111,271	1.60
Ahmadi	289,212	0.22
Scheduled castes	332,343	0.25
Others	96,142	0.07

Source: Government of Pakistan, Statistics Division, No. SD. PER.E (53)/99-449, Islamabad, 16 July 2001.

11. Tayyab Mahmud, "Protecting Religious Minorities: The Courts' Abdication," in Charles H. Kennedy and Rasul Bakhsh Rais, eds., *Pakistan: 1995* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 84.

12. Mumtaz Ahmad, "Revivalism, Islamization, Sectarianism and Violence in Pakistan," in Craig Baxter and Charles H. Kennedy, *Pakistan: 1997* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 118.

Separate Electorates

AFTER HANGING an elected prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Zia appeared desperate to cultivate a support base among the religious groups to end his political isolation. He took two drastic measures at that time to bring himself closer to the religious groups: separate electorates and blasphemy laws, two demands voiced by the religious groups for some time. Zia's actions are partly explained by his political need to have religious allies with street power on his side. Equally important is the fact that his vision of Pakistan was not much different from that of most religious political parties. Zia had plans to remain in power; his only bit besides the military was the religious establishment of the country. Zia gave the personal image of a pious, God-fearing, patriotic Pakistani. His Islamization agenda of the Pakistani state would have little credibility without acceding to the long-standing demands of the religious right for making provision for a separate system of elections for minorities. As an unchallenged military ruler, Zia began to give an altogether different orientation to Pakistan's political system, which was Islamic in the most conservative tradition. His ordinances, laws, actions, and acts of omission and commission were passed through the Eighth Amendment into the Constitution when the national assembly convened after the 1985 non-party elections. This way the separate electorates became part of the 1973 Constitution.

The Zia regime increased the number of seats for minorities in the national assembly from five to ten, but maintained the same numbers in the provincial assemblies. There was also a change in how seats in the legislatures would be filled. The entire country was divided into ten constituencies for minorities, which made it utterly impossible for them to effectively contest or cast their votes. Since religious minorities are dispersed throughout the length of the country, drawing long territorial constituencies reduced the exercise of separate electorates to a mockery. A few influential, wealthy and well-connected minority figures could win in such a rough and unleveled electoral field.

After the restoration of democracy in the country with the death of General Zia ul-Haq and fresh elections in 1988, leaders from the mainstream political parties did not bother to address the issue of marginalization of minorities in electoral politics. Even with the unanimous removal of some parts of the Eighth Amendment

through the Thirteenth Amendment in 1997, the issue of joint electorates was not touched. Most politicians have not been keyed in to the issue or have never felt the need to understand the plight of religious minorities. Another reason could be the hesitation to offend the clamorous religious groups or to kick up a fresh controversy over an issue that to them seemed politically insignificant.

Blasphemy Laws

NO OTHER LAW has had as grave of social and psychological implications for religious minorities as have the blasphemy laws. These laws have wide-blanket coverage of acts that may fall within the offences of blasphemy, the violation of which carries long prison sentences and death by hanging. Offences include injuring or defiling places of worship with the intent to insult the religion of any class; deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs; defiling a copy of the Holy Quran; use of derogatory remarks with respect to the Holy Prophet of Islam; uttering words with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings; use of derogatory remarks with respect to holy personages; misuse of epithets, description and titles reserved for certain holy personages and places; a person of the Qadiani group or Ahmadi calling himself a Muslim or preaching or propagating his faith. In almost all cases, the law does not require any solid written proof, just the offensive remarks and few witnesses to get a conviction. More draconian is the procedure to file a complaint against an accused person. In addition to the state functionaries, any private person can file a case in the police station against any person under these laws. For this reason, blasphemy laws have been repeatedly misused against religious minorities and Muslims. In almost all cases the complainants have been private individuals with a personal grudge or religious zeal.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) monitored the blasphemy cases registered from January to October 2000. The commission's newsletter listed fifteen cases against the Ahmadis, five against Christians and eighteen against Muslims.¹³ Common accusations against Ahmadis included posing as Muslims, preaching, possessing Ahmadi literature, and building minaret in the place of worship.

13. HRCP Newsletter 11, no. 4 (October 2000): 13–14.

Christians and Muslims were booked for making derogatory remarks about the Prophet of Islam, writing provocative slogans on the walls, desecrating Holy Quran or claiming to be prophets. The case of M. Yusuf Ali from Lahore is worth mentioning. Ali was sentenced to death in March 1997 for claiming to be a prophet. While his appeal to higher courts was still pending, a man convicted of sectarian terrorism and on death row himself shot Yusuf Ali dead in May 2002. This is not the first time a person accused of blasphemy has been murdered. The blasphemy laws have not only increased religious intolerance but have failed to provide any legal or institutional safety net for religious minorities.¹⁴

Religious Intolerance and Violence

THE RISE OF ISLAMIC RADICALISM in Pakistan has greatly contributed to the growth of religious intolerance even among various sects of the Islamic faith, and more so against non-Muslims, particularly Ahmadis and Christians. In recent years, religious extremists based in the country and outside Pakistan have also questioned the Islamic religious identity of the Isamelis or Agha Khanis. These extremists send out derogatory material insulting the community and its leader, Karim Agha Khan. It is interesting to note that only the Deobandi faction of the Sunni Islam in Pakistan has raised militant outfits such as Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, and Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). The Shia sect responded to the sectarian challenge of the SSP by organizing Sipah-i-Muhammed (SP). Both have been brutally murdering religious scholars, political activists and young professionals of the rival sect. Thousands of Pakistani have perished in the sectarian violence.

Both the SSP and SP have exclusivist religious imagination and conflicting interpretations of the history of Islam and its doctrines.¹⁵ Both question the religious authenticity of the other, each proclaiming the other is out of the pale of Islam. The majority of the members of the Shia and Sunni communities have watched the sectarian killings with awe and disgust. But the frequency and persistence of sectarian violence during the last fifteen years cannot be explained

14. See, for instance, I. A. Rehman, "A Critique of Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws," in Tarik Jan et al., *Pakistan Between Secularism and Islam: Ideology, Issues and Conflict* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1998), 196–204.

15. Qasim Zaman, "Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shia and Sunni Identities," *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 3: 689–716.

without sympathy and support of some influential members from each community. Sectarian violence that includes murdering fellow Muslims worshipping in the mosques or in religious congregations speaks volumes about religious hatred and intolerance. In a comparative sense, more Muslims have fallen victim to religious intolerance of the rival sects than have members of religious minorities; however, this comparison may not be fair due to the smaller numbers of minorities in the population.

More than numbers, the rise in Islamic radicalism confronts the religious community with a sense of exclusion, inferiority, discrimination and above all, insecurity and fear. Ahmadis, because of their breaking away from the mainstream Islam and their resourcefulness and organizational strength, have been the major target of intimidation and violence. Although Ahmadis have faced hatred and exclusion for a long time, never were they subjected to mass killings until their declaration as non-Muslims in the early seventies. Even after that brief but troublesome period, Ahmadis lived in harmony with their neighbors in villages and towns. It is only in recent years that the incidences of murders, mostly in places of worship, have increased against the Ahmadis.¹⁶

No other non-Muslim religious community has contributed more to the social sector development of Pakistan than the Christians have. Both missionaries and local members of the Christian community have built splendid educational institutions, hospitals and health facilities throughout the country. They have been peaceful even in the face of the worst provocation. Poor Christians have faced social exclusion and discrimination in both the urban and rural areas of the country. They have endured social inferiority and humiliation with grace and patience, hoping things would change with modernization and development. While Christians have yet to achieve social and economic mobility, they have increasingly become the victim of religious intolerance and terrorism; something this community had previously been spared.

Christians are the new target of terrorism in Pakistan. Lashkar-i-Jhangvi terrorists attacked Sunday Mass in the Dominican Church on 28 October 2001 in Bahawalpur and massacred twenty-nine worshipers, representing the worst case of terrorism against the

16. Amnesty International, *Pakistan: Use and Abuse of Blasphemy Laws* (New York: Amnesty International, 1994), 6–7.

Christians to date. In February 2002, terrorists attacked a church service mostly attended by foreigners in the diplomatic enclave in Islamabad. On 5 August 2002 terrorists attacked a Christian school in the Murree hills, killing six persons.

How can one explain the rise of violence against the minority Shia sect of Islam, the Ahmadis and the Christians? Is it due to declining capacity of the state?

The state's declining capacity is part of the problem; while religious bigots have been preaching hatred and violence against minorities, the state has remained silent. Participatory politics and civic culture with a focus on citizenship rights have suffered gravely due to the repeated failure of the democratic process in Pakistan. In this democratic vacuum, religious extremism—riding on the wave of jihad in Afghanistan and with transnational connections with similar groups—has taken strong roots in society. The war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, along with President Pervez Musharraf's policies to root out religious extremism, has produced a new wave of anti-Western feelings. This sentiment, however, is not new. Muslims thinkers such as Maulana Mauddudi and Sayyid Qutb of Egypt, the two powerful ideologues, shrouded Islamic revival in historical grievances of Muslims and Western barbarism.¹⁷ This ugly sentiment, cultivated among the Muslim youth, was manifested in the killings of thousands of innocent people in New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001. In Pakistan, anti-Westernism has been turned against foreigners and local Christians. Christians in Muslim societies are generally affiliated with foreigners and are regarded by many as an extension of Western religious influence.

Conclusion

NATION AND STATE BUILDING in any country, including Pakistan, is not about establishing a majority rule or simply holding elections (which in Pakistan have been few and mostly controversial), but laying a true foundation of democratic polity and society. For any student of democratic thought, nation and state building includes fundamental principles such as institutions and systems, citizenship,

17. Amir Taheri, "The Death of bin Ladenism," *New York Times*, 11 July 2002.

equality, inalienable fundamental rights, and empowerment of all individuals without any discrimination. In most post-colonial states, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities have found themselves at the receiving end of political distribution. Some saw their decline as a privileged group, while others found themselves reduced in number or branded as a new minority in the redrawing of boundaries. The example of Muslims in India and Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan fits this description. In Pakistan, the voice of minorities has never touched the heart or mind of politicians. The tormenting experience of communal violence, transmigration of religious populations and the young and strident Muslim nationalism further muted the voice of minorities. In the bouts of political struggle for power, even liberal politicians remained silent on the issue of separate electorates. What could be more discriminatory than the classification of the citizen along religious lines? Most of the political parties decided to push the issue, while the religious groups feared a reversal of separate electorates would create a backlash. But the vision of democracy for such politicians was confined to getting to the assemblies, obtaining ministerial positions and making fortunes, not laying the foundations for true democracy.

Formal and informal discrimination against minorities has gone hand in hand; one has encouraged and deepened the other. Separate electorates have been more than separate electoral constituencies for religious minorities; they have amounted to the disenfranchisement, further marginalization and deepening sense among minorities of being second-class Pakistanis. Mainstream political parties have no interest in courting minorities and embracing prominent members and leaders of these groups because they could not vote for them. Minorities were left to form their own parties, if they so wished. Only the Christians set up some loosely organized parties. Other minorities have notable figures but no political organizations.

In a traditional Islamic society such as Pakistan, non-Muslims hardly enjoy equality of social or religious status. Officially, placing non-Muslims in another category in the electoral politics further deepened their alienation. Minority groups never supported separate electorates and have, for decades, struggled with whatever meager political capital they had to restore the joint electorates. In a large number of urban constituencies where mainstream political parties have traditionally close contests, the balance held by minorities would make a major difference in joint electorates.

Minorities kept the issue alive via the press, seminars and publications. The explosion of civil society organizations in Pakistan and the presence of the foreign press and human rights organizations have maintained a gentle pressure by questioning the authenticity of Pakistan's electoral democracy. In the past few years, two issues in Pakistan have received a lot of foreign attention: the status of women and the plight of minorities. In examining both these issues, one cannot escape the conclusion that both of these groups have been widely discriminated against, have hardly any representation in the power structure of Pakistan, and that there is official as well as society-based discrimination against both groups. Self-image has become a big problem in the globalized world media, and Pakistan has found its image badly battered on many counts.

The contention of this paper is that the practice of separate electorates was the worst case of disenfranchising religious minorities in the name of having representation in the Parliament and in the provincial assemblies. The present government has reversed the practice of separate electorates.¹⁸ Accordingly, national elections in October 2002 were held on the basis of joint electorates. The constitutional amendments inserted by the chief executive have also provided for reserved seats for the religious minorities in the Parliament, as well as in the provincial assemblies. This is the first and most important step toward empowering minorities and bringing them back into mainstream national politics.

Another aspect of discrimination against minorities is informal, or social, which is subtler than the legal, formal process of barring minorities from the political arena. Pakistan has a long way to go toward integrating minorities into electoral politics. The next general elections scheduled for October 2002 will be the first in a quarter of a century where Muslims and non-Muslims will vote together for the same candidates. It is a sad commentary on Pakistan's democracy that in the 1970 and 1977 elections, which were held on the basis of joint electorates, not a single member from the minority communities won any seat. Given the social climate of the country, no political party in Pakistan in the October 2002 elections offered any ticket to any member of the minority community to contest elections on general seat.

18. See Chief Executive's Order No. 7 of 2002.

Social prejudice is so strong that no party would like to appear to be supporting a non-Muslim candidate against a Muslim candidate of a rival party.

The remedy lies in affirmative action and in maintaining reserved seats for minorities in the provincial and national assemblies. In addition to this formal political process, much more needs to be done at the social level. Pakistan has to stem the tide of Islamic extremism through reforming the madrassa network, cultivating civic culture, promoting democracy, and reorienting the political discourse on Islam, state, and national identity. This is a tall order, but these issues must be faced if Pakistan is to protect its society against indiscriminate violence, instability and chaos.