

# Reducing Religious and Sectarian Violence in Pakistan

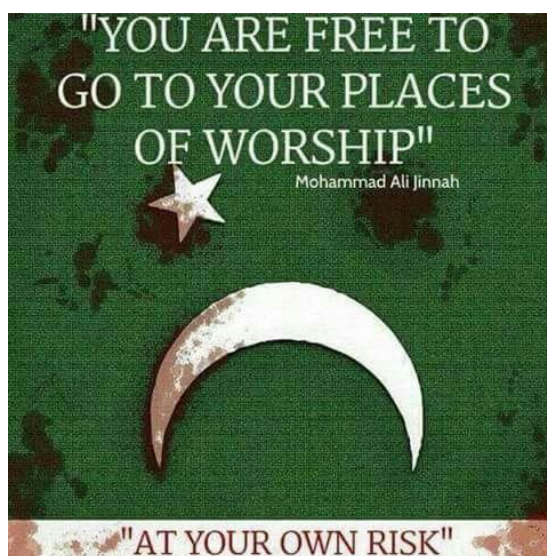
By Dur-e-Aden

Whether it's the shooting of 14 year old girls, killing of 146 school children, targeted killings of Shia doctors, bombings of places of worships of different Muslim sects, or mob violence against minorities, Pakistan is always in the news for the wrong reasons. The country whose name literally translates to "the land of the pure," has become synonymous with the idea of religious extremism.

On 11 August 1947, three days before Pakistan's official date of independence, Pakistan's founding father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah gave his first speech to the constituent assembly of Pakistan. His exact words were as follows:

*You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed -- that has nothing to do with the business of the State. As you know, history shows that in England conditions, some time ago, were much worse than those prevailing in India today. The Roman Catholics and the Protestants persecuted each other. Even now there are some States in existence where there are discriminations made and bars imposed against a particular class. Thank God, we are not starting in those days. We are starting in the days where there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle: that we are all citizens, and equal citizens, of one State...you will find that in 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. (Pakistan Movement Historical Documents)*

However, in today's Pakistan, Jinnah's promise of equal citizenship for all its citizens seems far and far away.



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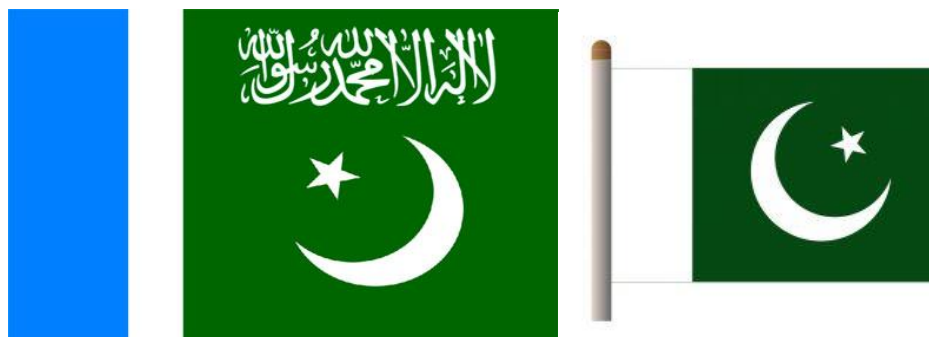
If Pakistan's founder had such a clear vision of what Pakistan was supposed to be like, how did it get to the position where it is today? There are as many theories as there are scholars as to what went wrong with Pakistan. Was it the partition itself, the trauma that accompanied it, the resulting rivalry with India, the continued alliance with the US, the war in Afghanistan, military regimes, or the corrupt civilian governments...the list goes on and on. However, the purpose of this report is less on what went wrong, and more on what can be done to make it right.

I begin this report by briefly discussing the origins of Pakistan's identity debate, which resulted in an evolving relationship of religion with the state and the society. I then discuss how the propagation of a certain kind of religion by the state led to an increase in polarization within the society, of which the current situation is an outcome. I conclude this report by giving certain recommendations, especially with regards to minority rights in Pakistan, and the role of the diaspora, who I believe can play a productive role in changing the drastic conditions within their homeland.

### **The Identity Debate:**

Pakistan was created in the name of Islam, therefore, it is supposed to be an Islamic country. If not, why did it separate from India in the first place? This is a common charge that is often heard from the political right, especially the religious parties (Devji 2013). On the other hand, the political left has Jinnah's 11 August speech (mentioned above), as well as his own secular credentials and lifestyle on their side (Hamdani 2013). So what kind of country was Pakistan supposed to be? Jinnah died just a year after the creation of Pakistan without drafting any constitution which would determine the country's future trajectory. However, as long as Jinnah was alive, his practical steps corroborated his inclusive vision of this new country. He appointed Sir Zafarullah Khan, who was an Ahmadi, as the first Foreign Minister of Pakistan. Moreover, the very first Law Minister of Pakistan was a Hindu named Jogendra Nath Mandal. The appointment of the law minister is particularly interesting since it gives rise to the question; if Jinnah wanted an Islamic state with Sharia law, why would he appoint a Hindu law minister? Shouldn't he have appointed an Islamic scholar? Nevertheless, after his death, a document known as *The Objectives Resolution* was passed on March 12, 1949, which steered the country's direction towards a path where religion would hold some sway over the matters of the state (Haqqani 2005).

The very first constitution of Pakistan was passed in 1956, which declared Pakistan as an "Islamic" Republic. This constitution was suspended in 1962 when Ayub Khan's military government took over. The new constitution drafted during his government took out the word "Islamic" and declared Pakistan just as a "Republic." Nevertheless, that constitution was also suspended by the subsequent governments and the current constitution, which was passed in 1973 during the reign of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, declares Pakistan as an "Islamic Republic."



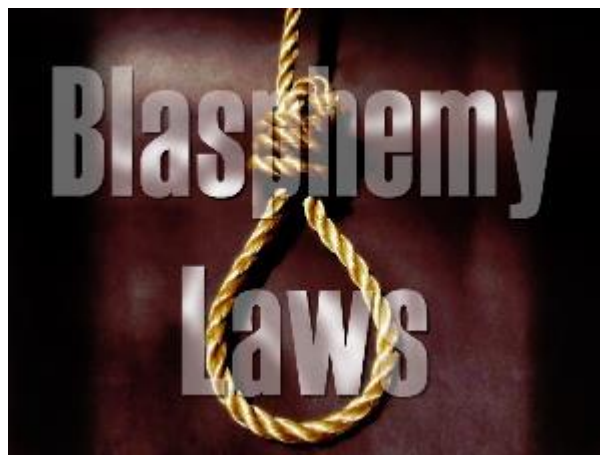
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### **Religion and the state:**

A renowned Pakistani scholar, Ayesha Siddiqi argues that after Jinnah, subsequent governments in Pakistan emphasized a singular identity of Islam in order to legitimize their rule, and to unite an ethnically and linguistically divided society. However, once religion comes into the political arena, it cannot be controlled in a way one would like, since others in that arena can also use it according to their own purposes (Siddiqi 2014). It is interesting to note that before partition, Jinnah himself thought along the same lines. He disagreed with Gandhi's use of religion, even when it was to emphasize non-violence and create intra-communal harmony. William Darlymple argues that according to Jinnah, "it was a crime to mix up politics and religion the way [Gandhi] had done," as "doing so emboldened religious chauvinists on all sides" (Darlymple 2015). Ironically, the same thing happened in the country that he created. Elites who were in charge of the state wanted to use religion because it bolstered their credibility, however, they were not knowledgeable in its subject matter. As a result, they ended up giving space to religious scholars, who then interpreted religion according to their own interests and/or understanding. This power made them a formidable pressure group and they were able to exert a considerable influence in the matters of the state despite being out of electoral power. This led to a change in both the laws of the state, as well as the curriculum in schools (Siddiqi 2014). Some of the most visible examples of these changes were the second amendment to the 1973 constitution, which officially declared Ahmadis to be non-Muslims, and the modifications in the pre-existing blasphemy laws during Zia ul Haq's era which specifically targeted minorities. Finally, religious minorities were excluded from holding high level offices, such as those of President or Prime Minister, in Pakistan (Yousaf 2015).

Now we have a society where religious parties control the ideological narrative or discourse, even if they are not in the electoral power. Not to mention that the increased interference of religion in the state led to an increase in the violence against minorities. Before 1986, there were only 16 Blasphemy related cases in the country. That number has gone up to 1300 over the last three decades (Yousaf 2015). It happened because discrimination on the basis of religion was made legal by the state. Furthermore, since in a religious state, sovereignty belongs to God and not the people, mere accusations of blasphemy have started to result in mob violence. Now, people don't even wait for a case to get to the court so that the accused can get a fair hearing. Their argument is that blasphemy is a violation against God's law, and if state cannot prevent it, we have a right to take the law in our own hands, since "the laws of God take precedence over the laws of man" (Lieven 2012).



Source for the image: <http://www.christiansinpakistan.com/the-notorious-blasphemy-law/>

### **Current Situation:**

According to the data available at South Asia Terrorism Portal, since 2003, approximately 20487 civilians have lost their lives in terrorist violence. Further, according to the Pew Research Centre's report (based on the data collected from 2007-2012), Pakistan topped the list of countries with most religious hostilities (Pew 2014). Pew's most recent report also includes Pakistan among the countries with highest restrictions on religion (Pew 2015). Since its inception in 1947, over 20,000 Shias have been killed in Pakistan (Shahid 2012).

While society is going through this increased polarization, state is not fulfilling its basic duties of protecting its citizens. Increasingly, hate speeches by religious clerics go unchecked, Madrassas imparting a restricted and narrow world view are not regulated, and as a result, create a generation of militants which is increasingly challenging the writ of the state itself. In other words, state is still facing violence from religious militants who think that despite incorporating religion in the constitution, Pakistani state is not "Islamic" enough. The most famous episode of this phenomenon was the incident of the Red Mosque in 2007, when military was in confrontation with the faculty and students of a madrasa, who wanted their form of Sharia law to be the official version of the state (CBC News 2007; Al Jazeera 2013)

The most surprising and depressing aspect of the current situation is that people are not ready to accept the severity of the problem. Part of it has to do with the global politics after 9/11 and the increased victimization of Muslims worldwide. As a result, Pakistanis have come to view the problems within their own state as a result of these global policies, and the debate over internal reform is not taking place with the same vigour as it should. In other words, the society is becoming latently radicalized. Ayesha Siddiqa defines latent radicalization "as the tendency to be exclusive instead of inclusive vis-à-vis other communities on the basis of religious belief. Such an attitude forces people to develop bias against an individual, a community, a sub-group or a nation on how faith is interpreted for them." Moreover, in this narrative, one's own group is seen as the righteous one and others are held responsible for all ills. A person doesn't necessarily have to be violent at this stage, but this kind of radicalism makes the mind vulnerable to accept the message from militant organizations (Siddiqa 2010).

Therefore, after every terrorist attack, while people condemn the violence, they often don't accept that its causes might have more to do with Pakistan's own policies, and the relationship between the religion and the state, as opposed to external factors (Almeida 2014). Christine Fair argues that Pakistani government can tie the country's internal threats with external threats, for example, by saying that Pakistani Taliban are agents of foreign agencies who want to destabilize the country. And the people who bolster this narrative, the "uncivil" society actors, hold a lot more sway in Pakistan today than the "civil" society actors who genuinely wanting to bring change (Fair 2014).

In such a polarized and volatile environment, it is the responsibility of the leaders to tell the truth. Benazir Bhutto did use to argue that even if foreign countries interfered in Pakistan before, they were acting in their own self-interest, Pakistan was not. Even a child brought up by abusive parents has to take responsibility for itself (Bhutto 1988; Bhutto 2008). That kind of courage is needed in today's Pakistan to transform the national narrative.



Source for the image: <http://www.christiansinpakistan.com/uscirf-presents-a-fact-sheet-on-sectarian-violence-in-pakistan/>

### **What can we do?**

Pakistani diaspora is a community of thoughtful and educated citizens who play an important part in their adopted countries. However, as minorities, they are in the best position to understand how important rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion are, as they prevent "tyranny of the majority." Just as you would like to have equal rights as citizens in your adopted countries, it is your responsibility to fight for the rights of minorities in your homeland, along with arguing for a separation of church and state, and universal human rights.

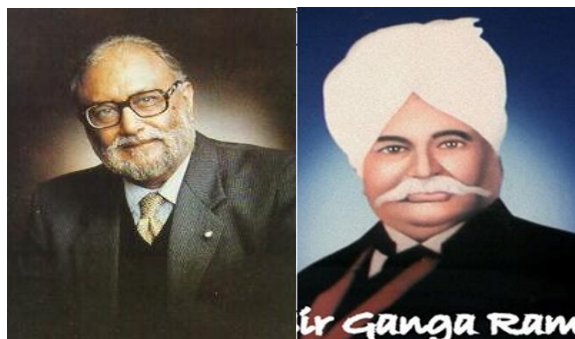
So what can be done? It depends on each individual's own status and interests.

- You can donate money to human rights organizations working on the ground in Pakistan
- You can talk to your MPs in your adopted countries, and pressure them to bring the issues regarding minority persecution while meeting with their Pakistani counterparts
- You can start online petitions, and write to the politicians within Pakistan to pay attention to this issue, or

- You can volunteer your time to a cause in Pakistan when you happen to be there.

Our organization, the Maria-Helena Foundation, firmly believes in taking practical steps in addressing these issues in Pakistan, and is already involved with different educational and vocational projects with our Pakistani counterparts. For the purposes of our current project, we argue that promoting respect of elders of minorities will increase their status as sons and daughters of their homeland, and will reduce hatred towards minority communities. Based on this thesis, our recommendations are as follows:

1. The Government should establish science scholarships in the name of our first Nobel Laureate, Dr. Abdus Salam, and the house where he was born be declared a protected property. His achievements brought prestige to Pakistan as a country, irrespective of any religious affiliation, and we need to promote his status as a learned Pakistani scientist and a role model for future students.
2. The Lahore Municipal Government should rename Mall Road as Shahra-e Sir Ganga Ram. Sir Ganga Ram was the grandfather of philanthropy in Lahore who help built many schools, hospitals and other buildings during the British rule. Sir Ganga Ram Hospital is just one of his many gifts to the citizens of Lahore.
3. Similar recommendations should be given to Parsi benefactors of Karachi.



Source for the image on the left: <https://hafsakhawaja.wordpress.com/2012/01/29/salam-abdus-salam/>

Source for the image on the right: <http://www.milligazette.com/news/12665-88th-death-anniversary-of-father-of-modern-lahore-sir-ganga-ram-observed>

### **Conclusion:**

Often times, when confronted with huge problems which carry tremendous historical baggage, people get discouraged because they feel that they cannot change these conditions. However, we should remember that every action, no matter how small, has the potential to play an important part in impacting the issue that it targets. Every big historical change, from abolition of slavery to women rights movements, did take a long time before they could challenge deeply entrenched societal and government structures. Not to mention that these struggles are still ongoing, albeit in a different manner. These examples only illustrate that the process of change is ongoing, and that it matters. Therefore, taking action against injustice is the responsibility of thoughtful citizens both in their native and adapted countries. As Margaret Mead put it beautifully, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

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