

AUTOCRATIZATION AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN PAKISTAN

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As opposed to the findings of Fukuyama and others almost 30 years back, elucidating that a liberal democracy could last forever since it had maintained due dominance, today's democracies paint a picture of gradual decline (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019). This view is furthered by ambiguity that subsists about the thrust and ferocity of the existing upsurge of autocratization in the world (ibid., 2019). To understand the framework of a liberal democracy, characteristics of the "illiberal democracy" (Zakaria, 2007) have to be explored further to understand various facets of its interaction with the rights of minorities in a modern-day democracy. According to Democracy Index 2020 by the Economist's Intelligence Unit, the average global score for democracy fell from 5.48 in 2018 to 5.37 in 2020 on a scale of 0–10 where 10 indicates full democracy and 0 means fully authoritarian states. In 2020, Pakistan secured 105th position in global ranking with 4.31 points. This score was a slight improvement over 2019, when it was 4.25 and Pakistan's global democracy ranking was 108th. However, Pakistan is still under the category of Hybrid Regime. The question is, are the liberal democratic rights that do exist distributed equally in society? An important undertaking is to see whether the situation of minorities did improve when Pakistan climbed on the democracy index. This chapter unpacks the history of minority rights in Pakistan parallel to government shifts between sporadic democratic moments to martial law. It is often assumed that minorities suffer more in times of autocratization. We argue that this is not always the case – at least not in Pakistan.

Minorities in Pakistan – the legal definition

The word "minority" is used twice in the Preamble of the Constitution of Pakistan while Article 36 of the Constitution is specifically about minorities to guarantee minorities' legitimate rights and interests including their due representation in the Federation and Provincial services. While in the Preamble, minorities and backward and depressed classes are discussed in the same breath. Besides these three references, there is no separate discussion of minorities in the Constitution. Articles 8 to 28 of the Constitution of Pakistan deal with fundamental human rights of citizens but they talk on a collective level, not mentioning minorities specifically.

There is no exact definition of “minority” given in the Constitution of Pakistan. However, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony talks about minorities as religious minorities in its official documents and states that they work for inter-religious and inter-sectarian harmony (Government of Pakistan: Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, 2020). While highlighting the Ministry’s role in improving the lives of minorities in Pakistan through special initiatives, the Ministry refers to religious minorities only. Since Shia Muslims are not considered a minority officially by the State of Pakistan, so they are not discussed as a religious minority, in this chapter. They formally enjoy the same rights as all Muslims in Pakistan. This, however, is no attempt to diminish the importance of atrocities and violence that Shias, especially Hazara Shias, are facing in Pakistan today.

A segment of Muslims known as Ahmadis was declared non-Muslim in 1974 through a Constitutional Amendment. In 1889, a then Muslim scholar Mirza Ghulam Ahmad from Qadian (a city in today’s India) claimed to be the “messiah”. Mainstream Islamic scholars of the time opposed his claim and declared him a heretic. However, he attracted a good following and they were called Ahmadis after his name Ahmad. They remained part of the Muslim community until 1974, when they were declared non-Muslim by the Parliament of Pakistan. According to the 1998 Census of Pakistan (Pbs.gov.pk, n.d.), Ahmadis constituted 0.2 percent of the total population. In numbers, this makes roughly 300,000 individuals. However, this figure is quite contested. Some sources estimate that there are more than half a million Ahmadis in Pakistan (UNHCR, 2017).

In the subcontinent, Christians started proselytization of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims during the sixteenth century. In the area that is now Pakistan, the majority of converts were low-income, landless workers who were mostly Hindu Punjabis (Church of Pakistan, 1998). According to the 1998 census, 1.6 percent of the population were Christians. The population census was next conducted in 2017, recording Pakistan’s total population as 220 million. However, the detailed results have not been published yet. A government body – the Council of Common Interest (CCI) – has to approve the results for publication. On December 22, 2020, the CCI approved for release the Census 2017 results but as of September 2021, the government had not published any details on the minority population. However, Ramesh Kumar – then a Member of the National Assembly – shared that there were 5 million Christians in Pakistan by 2019 (Tunio, 2019). Converting this number to a percentage share of Christians out of a total population as per Census 2017, it translates into 2.4 percent roughly.

At the time of independence of Pakistan, Hindus constituted about 15 percent of the population. During the initial years after independence, a large migration took place from Pakistan to India. Pakistan’s first census of 1951 recorded the Hindu population as 13 percent and most of them were living in East Pakistan. Then in 1971, East Pakistan became Bangladesh and the Hindu population share in today’s Pakistan declined substantially. According to the 1998 census, the share of Hindus was only about 1.6 percent excluding Scheduled Castes. The latter are Hindus but not considered part of four Varna groups of Hinduism. These were given the status of Scheduled Castes through a Presidential Order in 1957. Ramesh Kumar, who is a Member of the National Assembly on a minority seat and is Patron-in-Chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council, claims that the Hindu population is closer to 4 percent.

Evidently the religious minorities in Pakistan are so small in numbers that even if they acted together in politics as a united force, they would still represent less than 10 percent of the population. The small share of the population is most likely a reason that contributes to their exposed situation in the country.

Formative years and minority rights

The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, laid the ideological foundation of the country in his speech on 11 August 1947. He said, “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.”

Unfortunately, Jinnah did not live long enough to ensure equal citizenship of all citizens. He passed away on September 11, 1948 and the very next year the then Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan presented a bill to the Constituent Assembly that asked for the inclusion of the Objectives Resolution as Preamble to the Constitution of Pakistan (that was yet to be formed). The Objectives Resolution stated that Pakistan’s Constitution would be Islamic in nature and should be devised in the light of the sacred books of Muslims. The minority members of the Assembly expressed strong disagreement to the move. They feared that making Pakistan an Islamic State would affect the status of minorities of “equal citizens” and turn them into second-class citizens. However, the Objectives Resolution was passed on March 12, 1949. The 25-member Basic Principles Committee (BPC) subsequently sketched the layout of the Constitution, which then was formed under the chairmanship of Maulvi Tamizuddin Khan. The first report of the Committee was presented in 1950 but any fruitful deliberations could not be carried out due to the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951. Finally, the report was presented before the Assembly on December 22, 1952 by the then Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin. The foremost recommendation in the report was restricting eligibility for being the Head of the State to Muslims only. Naturally minority members opposed this recommendation as this would *de jure* and *de facto* make them second-class citizens. Another recommendation of the Basic Principles Committee was to set up Ulema Boards by the Governor General and the provincial governors. All the laws would be presented to these boards for a review in the light of the Quran and the Sunnah. This made it clear to the minorities that the proposed changes were not only about the head of the State. All laws were to be structured according to Islamic teachings. An influential Muslim scholar of the time, Maulana Maudodi, clearly mentioned the dichotomy of citizenship in an Islamic State. He believed that there should be a difference between Muslim citizens and the *dhimmies* (the protected subjects) – the non-Muslims living in a Muslim country (Nasr, 1996). His interpretation was popular at the time and it gave air to the fears that had been expressed by the minorities over Islamization of the newly formed State of Pakistan, unlike the vision of her founder.

During Pakistan’s formative years (1947–1956) the issue of separate and joint electorates remained under discussion. Preceding the provincial elections in East Bengal (part of Pakistan until 1971) in 1953, to cater to certain political needs of the province a suggestion was surfaced to amend the Government of India Act 1935. This Act was used as the Interim Constitution for Pakistan till the formation of the first own Constitution in 1956. The suggestion was to provide for separate electorates for Caste Hindus and Scheduled Castes. But this recommendation was opposed by Hindu minority members. They felt that representation of Hindus can be ensured within a system of joint electorate so there was not any need of a separate electorate for Hindu minorities. However, they were in favour of reservation of seats for Christians, Buddhists and the Scheduled Castes. In 1952, a conference was held in Comilla, East Pakistan, by minorities where they objected to the suggestion of having separate electorates. In 1953, when the draft Constitution was being debated in the legislative

assembly of Pakistan, the issue of a separate electorate was discussed again. The report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights that was formed in 1947 to safeguard rights of minorities, was presented. This report had dissenting notes by three non-Muslim members: B C Mandal, P H Burman and R K Chakravarty. They declared that a separate electorate would not be in the interest of minorities (Report of the Basic Principles Committee, 1954). However, the dissenting notes of the three minority leaders were not considered and a separate electorate was introduced. This was a major first blow to equal and effective representation of minorities in Pakistan's legislative assembly.

Muhammad Ayub Khan's Era – associating minorities with enemies

Pakistan saw its first military coup in 1958 – spearheaded by one of the generals of the Pakistan army, Ayub Khan, who overthrew the first President of Pakistan, Iskander Mirza. During Ayub Khan's reign, after recurring conflicts with India over the Kashmir region, the enemy in 1965 was branded as Hindu instead of Indian. This created hostilities towards Pakistan's Hindu communities too. Moreover, Christians were increasingly perceived and labelled as foreign agents Malik (2019). This naturally increased the insecurities of Christians in Pakistan. During severe tensions between Pakistan and India in 1965, there were also reports that many Christians were spies for India. The archives of the Special Police records in Lahore provide abundant evidence that cases of this nature were registered against Christians at that time.

Consequently, the situation for minorities was complicated from the start after Partition. However, the situation would soon become even worse.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's democracy – legalizing exclusion

Succeeding the dictator Ayub Khan, the civilian leader Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was received as a democratic leader. However, he proved worse for minorities than his predecessor. In 1974, under the leadership of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the Ahmadis were declared non-Muslims through a Constitutional Amendment. It was a big blow to Ahmadis who were already vulnerable to societal discrimination. The legal framework gave legitimacy to existing violence and prejudices against them, and at the time there already existed a long history of anti-Ahmadi sentiments and discrimination against the community by the larger Muslim population.

In 1953, riots targeting Ahmadis broke out in Lahore; their shops in Lahore were set on fire and there were cases of mob violence directed specifically against them ('1953 Lahore riots', 2015). Ultimately, the then government had to impose Governor's Rule to control the situation. But there were no attempts at government level to declare Ahmadis as non-Muslims. It was two decades later, when Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto brought the debate on the faith of the Ahmadis to the floor of the National Assembly, when they were finally declared non-Muslims. Since the emergence of Pakistan, the minorities were facing discrimination at societal level with no state patronage explicitly. But in 1974, the then government joined the bandwagon and capitulated to pressure of religious political actors. This paved the way for long-term entanglement of religious-based political parties in the power game. After getting Ahmadis declared non-Muslims, these religious groups started to push the government to include Shias, Zikris and Ismailis on the list of minorities (2008, 109).

Surprisingly, however, a year later, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto introduced a Constitutional Amendment in favour of minorities including the Ahmadis. It was to give them effective representation in the Parliament. Under the 4th Constitutional Amendment in 1975, minorities were given special seats in the National Assembly. The non-Muslims (including Ahmadis

according to the Constitution) got the right to vote for non-Muslim candidates as well as for Muslim candidates. Bigger minorities including Hindus and Christians were given four seats each, while Sikhs, Parsi and Ahmadis were given one seat each. One seat was reserved for representatives of other religious minorities (Election Commission of Pakistan, 1990). This political move was meant to ensure equal rights of minorities for their political participation. However, this leverage could not last long and soon Zia ul-Haq – the then army chief with anti-liberal ideology – toppled the government and imposed martial law. Hence began another dark chapter for the minorities and liberal elements of society.

Muhammad Zia ul-Haq's Islamization – patronizing violence

Zia ul-Haq overthrew the elected government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977. After a year (in 1979) of his coup, the USSR invaded Afghanistan. This changed the geopolitical situation of the region. The US used Pakistan as a proxy and entered into the Afghan war to counter the USSR. From a Pakistani perspective this war was termed as Afghan Jihad. The label of Jihad helped the US and Pakistan governments to recruit fighters from Islamic countries, especially from Pakistan. To create more *mujahideen* (the fighter who fights in name of Islam), Zia ul-Haq used the Islamic religion as a tool to motivate the youth to join the Afghan Jihad (Stern, 2000). Simultaneously, Zia ul-Haq went the extra mile to impose Islamic laws in Pakistan.

Minorities' security and identity were threatened badly during Zia ul-Haq's regime. Zia ul-Haq reverted the part of the 4th Constitutional Amendment that gave representation to minorities in the legislature. The nullification of a separate electorate for minorities was a big blow to all minorities especially the Ahmadis who were under constant societal persecution. Eliminating the separate electorate at that moment of history meant causing more damage to Ahmadis. They had recently been declared non-Muslims (in 1974) in response to public hatred against them. Under a joint electorate they had no chance of having their fair representation in the National Assembly.

For Zia ul-Haq, there were two main factors that motivated him to withdraw rights for minorities: First, Zia ul-Haq wanted to counter the popularity of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Islamic socialism and liberal views. Therefore, he introduced "real" Islamic values. In order to hinder alliances between Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's "Pakistan People's Party" (PPP) and the religious majority, Zia ul-Haq pursued non-secular policies (Yasmeen, 1999). Secondly, the geopolitical situation of the region in the 1980s created a need for *mujahideen* to fight against the USSR in Afghanistan. Islamization was used by Zia ul-Haq to attract young men for Jihad. In sum, slogans of Islamization served his purpose to refute Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's socialist ideology to one end and to garner emotional support and ideological grounds for war against socialism (USSR). Where counter-narratives were not available to subdue Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's actions, Zia ul-Haq showed extremity. He inflicted severe punishments on allies of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Many *jialas* (supporters of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) were arrested on fake charges and were imprisoned for years.

Zia ul-Haq did not stop at eliminating the separate electorate, his legislative proselytization continued. His legal initiatives of amending blasphemy laws put the minorities at further risk of isolation and discrimination. To gain popular support, he played havoc with the society by channelizing societal prejudices into legal courses of action against dissenting and unwanted voices. Sub-sections 295B and 295C were added to the Pakistan Penal Code. These sections criminalized the defiling of the Holy Quran with life imprisonment and defiling of the name of the Holy Prophet with the death sentence, respectively. Also, a new section of the Constitution, section 298A, was included in 1980 that criminalized defiling of any other personage revered

in Islam with three-year imprisonment. The changes legitimized anti-minority sentiments and gave a legal tool to persecute the minorities.

Zia ul-Haq's amendments to legal instruments regarding religious offences created more advantages in favour of the majority Muslims. Ahmadis, who had been declared non-Muslims only a decade earlier underwent another legal persecution in 1984 where they were barred from reciting Azan (the religious call to prayer) and calling their prayer houses Masjid (the word for Muslims' prayer house). These legal amendments put the Ahmadis at an even further margin of society. The legal discrimination coupled with cultural violence gave a social legitimacy to the incidents of direct violence against Ahmadis in particular. Since the promulgation of blasphemy laws in the 1980s, the misuse of these laws against minorities and fellow Muslims began. Fake cases had been registered for economic gain and personal vendettas. The number of cases registered under the blasphemy laws show that minorities fell prey to these laws disproportionately. At the time in Pakistan, less than 4 percent of the population belonged to minorities; however they faced 45 percent of the blasphemy accusations (Curtis, 2016).

Zia ul-Haq's patronage of religious segments catalyzed the opening of new religious seminaries across the country. The number of religious seminaries (*madaris*) increased exponentially during the 1980s. These *madaris* were receiving foreign funding as well as they were supported by the State from the Zakat Fund (Zakat is a religious tax that every Muslim has to pay annually at the rate of 2.5 percent of his/her total wealth). Zakat was considered a private matter but Zia ul-Haq institutionalized its collection. All the banks were ordered to deduct Zakat from all Muslim account holders on the first day of the Islamic month of Ramaddan. Zia ul-Haq used these funds to finance religious seminaries to create more *mujahideen* for the Afghan war. Up to thirty-six percent of the costs of the madaris, especially of the Deobandi sect (one of two main branches of Sunni Islam in Pakistan), were met by the government (Yasmeen, 1999). The increased number of students boosted the street power of religious-cum-political parties including Jamiat Ulema e Islam (a political party which is derived from the Deobandi sect's philosophy). Jamat e Islami (JI), another religious based political party that was founded by a religious scholar Maulana Maudodi who believed in a dichotomy of citizenship between Muslims and non-Muslims, also played a key role in Zia ul-Haq's government. The Jamat eIslami remained an ally of Zia ul-Haq and occupied key ministries in Zia ul-Haq's cabinet including the education ministry where a curriculum was introduced that promoted the Jihad element of Islam. Extremist religious actors that had established their legitimacy during the Afghan Jihad era acquired space in mainstream media. Graduates of religious seminaries were awarded certificates equal to a Master's degree, and they were eligible to apply for any mainstream job that required a Master's degree. Zia ul-Haq's patronage of religious extremists brought them to the mainstream and they became a regular party in power games at the national level. The process of religious politicization can be compared to the militarization of politics which had not ended since martial law was first introduced by Ayub Khan.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslims was followed by Zia ul-Haq's Islamization, and the backlash against democracy (especially in the 1980s) substantially ousted the non-Muslims from political life. In 1988, Zia ul-Haq was killed in an air-crash and democracy got a new chance. However, the democratic experiment lasted for just a decade.

The fragile democracy of the 1990s

When Pakistan saw a short spell of democracy after Zia ul-Haq's death, politicians in Pakistan then downplayed the opportunity to strengthen democracy by conspiring against elected governments. Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of former Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, was

elected as Prime Minister in 1988. Although she was more inclined towards liberal ideology but the democratic transition could not bring any significant change to minorities' rights. Her government was toppled on accusations of corruption. Then, Nawaz Sharif who remained Chief Minister of Punjab (the most populous province of Pakistan) under Zia ul-Haq's regime, became the Prime Minister. Sharif was more inclined towards right-wing Islamic ideology. And under his leadership, in 1998, the Parliament passed the 15th Constitutional Amendment that added Article 2-B to the Constitution. Under this law, the government got the authority to impose Sharia laws in the country. Additionally, it withdrew Parliament's power of laying down a Code of Ethics for official functionaries including judges and legislators. These powers were transferred to the government itself. This Amendment put minorities at further risk of State discrimination.

The tragedy of Shantinagar also took place during the tenure of an elected government in 1997. A village in the Khanewal district of Punjab was raided by a furious mob of Muslims who suspected that some of the residents of the village of Shantinagar had defiled the Holy Quran. In a series of incidents, Muslims destroyed 13 churches, 1,500 houses of Christians and numerous shops (Religious Extremism and its Impact on Non-Muslims, 2018). Ahmadis had long been facing mob violence but this was one of the first incidents where Christians also faced large-scale mob violence. Nevertheless, the situation would change, but for unexpected reasons.

Pervez Musharraf's enlightened moderation

By the end of the 1990s General Pervez Musharraf was the army chief. However, tension and distrust between Musharraf and Nawaz Sharif, the then Prime Minister, had started to build. In 1999, Nawaz Sharif tried to replace Pervez Musharraf with a new Chief of Army Staff. Instead, Pervez Musharraf toppled Nawaz Sharif's government through a coup and imprisoned leaders of the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, including Nawaz Sharif. A year after the coup, the 9/11 attacks in 2001 on the US changed the geopolitical situation again to something similar to the situation during Zia ul-Haq's initial years. The United States demanded Pakistan's support to fight terrorists in Afghanistan. General Pervez Musharraf agreed to support the US. However, unlike Zia-ul-Haq, domestically Musharraf promoted the idea of "Enlightened Moderation", which focused on promoting moderate Islam and discouraging the extremist interpretation of Islamic teachings. This turned extremist Muslims against Musharraf while minorities welcomed this idea. During his time in power, the government restored the reserved seats for religious minorities in 2002. The seat division was similar to that when there was a separate electorate, i.e. four seats each for Hindus and Christians, one each for Sikhs, Parsis and Ahmadis and one for Buddhists. However, in the following years, the number of reserved seats for the minorities remained the same despite a 32 percent increase in total seats for the National Assembly of Pakistan.

2008–2018: violence against minorities by non-State actors and the State's response

General Pervez Musharraf eventually allowed for a new transition attempt towards democracy. It started in the most terrible way when Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in December 2007 after just having returned from her exile. A democratic election was eventually held in February 2008, and then until 2018, the Pakistan People's Party (the left-inclined political party) and the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (the party inclined towards the Islamic right wing) once again had alternating terms in the government of five years each. Since Pakistan had become a US

ally in the War on Terror, and was carrying out operations in the country to fight terrorists, the terrorists who claimed to be religious fundamentalists increased attacks targeting security forces, civilian populations and minorities. Terrorists equated Christians with supporters of the US and thus carried out deadly attacks on churches in Pakistan. To mention some of the attacks, in September 2013, a church in Peshawar was bombed by terrorists where nearly 85 people died (Boone, 2013) and the attackers claimed that the bomb blast was the response to the killing of Muslims in tribal areas of Pakistan by the US drone strikes. Two years later, in 2015, two churches were attacked in Lahore claiming 20 lives with several injured.

For Ahmadis, the situation was always bad, but it got worse during this decade when “democratization” was supposedly taking place. To mention a few of the incidents, in 2010, the Ahmadi prayer area was targeted, and hundreds were killed (CNN Wire Staff, 2010). In 2018, a 100-year-old prayer facility of the Ahmadiya community was destroyed in Sialkot (Sayeed, 2018). Along with these brutal attacks they were consistently harassed by the majority Muslims. The State machinery could not protect well the community and its worship places. Even non-Ahmadis who stood for religious minorities and civil liberties were targeted. For instance, Sabeen Mahmud – a progressive human rights activist, was murdered for speaking up for human rights. Another human rights defender, the lawyer Rashid Rehman, was also murdered because he was defending Junaid Hafeez (a lecturer at Baha uddinn Zakariya University Multan), who was accused of blasphemy. However, the State did conclude some high-profile anti-minority criminal cases. Also, the murderers of Sabeen Mahmud were arrested and sentenced to death.

Furthermore, through a landmark judgment in 2016, Mumtaz Qadri who murdered the Governor of Punjab province, was sentenced to death despite massive public pressure. Mumtaz Qadri was a police official who was on duty to provide security to the then Governor (Salman Taseer, a public opponent of anti-minority blasphemy laws). Qadri’s action was celebrated by many lawyers who offered free legal support to him. He was declared a hero by many religious elements. Public rallies were organized in favour of his action. However, the government did not submit to the extremists’ demands for Mumtaz Qadri’s release. Eventually Qadri was hanged. Similarly, the culprits of 2010 attacks on the Ahmadi mosque were sentenced to death by the anti-terrorism courts. In another case, five individuals were booked under the charges of a mob attack that killed a Christian couple over blasphemy allegations in 2014 (Ghuffman and Gabol, 2016).

However, even if it is evident that the state has tried to counter terrorism in the country targeting minorities, there are many more ways that suppression of minorities continues to be exercised in the country. Forced conversions of Christians and Hindus to Islam is another challenge faced by the minorities. At times, the conversions are voluntary, but many times non-Muslims are forced to convert by extremists. Hindu and Christian girls are kidnapped and to cover up the crime they are converted to Islam forcefully. Due to fear of forced conversions many parents marry off their young girls (Saeed, 2016). The issue of forced conversion has been prevalent for decades, but it certainly got worse after 2008 due to a general increase in criminality and religious extremism.

For the last two decades the successive governments have taken few concrete steps to soften the environment of tension between the Muslim and non-Muslim segments. To end discrimination against minorities, the Supreme Court of Pakistan gave a judgment in June 2014 that led the Federal Government towards developing a dynamic task force for the protection of religious minorities. The then Parliament passed a law titled “National Commission for Minorities Act 2015”. This Act established a National Commission for Minorities with six official and eleven non-official members. Non-official members included representation from Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Bahai and Parsi communities. However, Ahmadis were not given any representation. The establishment of the National Commission for Minorities under the Ministry of Religious

Affairs was a concrete step forward for protecting minorities (Glendon and Swett, 2015). But the exclusion of Ahmadis showed the then government's poor stance on ensuring the rights of *all* minorities.

Recent developments relating to discrimination and the situation for minorities

In October 2018, Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (Pakistan Justice Party) came into power. This popular party has managed to engage youth and brought a more positive image of Pakistan to the outside world. With regards to improvements to lives of minorities, this government has also taken some initiatives. First, the National Commission for Minorities formed in 2016 was renotified in May 2020 with an addition of a member from the Kalash community. Ahmadis were given representation initially, but the government changed the decision shortly after due to public pressure. The renotification of the Minority Commission expressed the government's intentions to safeguard minorities. However, the move was not welcomed by minority representatives. The Chairman of People's Commission for Minority Rights, Peter Jacob, criticized the process of formation of the Commission. He stated that the Supreme Court ordered to establish the Commission through an act of Parliament, but the government had created the commission through cabinet approval. This does not give the Commission the legal sustainability and administrative and financial autonomy that is required for independent working (Pakistan Today, 2020). In the same year, the government established an economic advisory committee that included a US-based Pakistani economist Atif Mian who happened to be an Ahmadi too. His nomination had to be withdrawn due to anti-Ahmadiya sentiments that gave rise to massive public pressure.

The situation for other minorities has seen some improvements. In 2019, the government established the Kartarpur Corridor to allow the Sikh community from within Pakistan and from India to visit their holy site Darbar Sahib, located in Pakistan at a distance of 4.5 kilometres from the Pakistan–India border. A special access package for the Indian Sikh community has been introduced allowing them to visit the Gurdwara inside Pakistan without a visa. Although this step facilitated the Indian Sikh community, it gave a message to minorities of Pakistan that the State is considerate of their religious rights.

In 2020, another positive step to ensure minorities' right to practice their religion was taken by the federal government by allocating land for construction of a Mandir (temple) for the Hindu community in Islamabad. However, the construction process had to be stopped for a while due to massive public outrage. The government engaged Muslim religious scholars and asked them to harmonize public sentiments in favour of construction of the temple. This strategy worked and the construction of the temple was resumed. Similarly, in another incident, the government took firm action against criminals who were involved in the desecration of a Hindu temple in the Karak district of Pakistan (Siddiqui, 2020).

The impression of how the situation for minorities has changed over time is to say the least chequered.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, steps have been and are being taken by the State to ensure rights of minorities. The successive State patronage in the past has nonetheless developed strong anti-minority sentiments among Muslim masses that will take long, consistent and concerted efforts by the successive governments to undo. The damage caused to the minorities is extensive. In Pakistan

the evolution of minority rights did not remain linear; instead it evolved in a circular way with the change of governments and regimes, and not always following or being synchronized with autocratization and democratization movements. However, one constant component was the escalation of negative emotions among masses against minorities, although the hatred against each minority group is at a different level and because of different reasons. To reiterate the context, Hindus are hated because of animosity against India, while Christians are associated with the West and America. Ahmadis face the fiercest antipathy, caused by a religious interpretation that anyone who leaves Islam is punishable with death. Pakistan's history reflects that it does not simply struggle between military and civilian forces that put minorities at more risk. For instance, the decision of declaring a segment of community non-Muslim through a Constitutional Amendment was done by a democratically elected government (Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's). Moreover, the representation of minorities in the Senate was raised by a dictator (Musharraf). To empower minorities, it will take concerted efforts by successive governments with a multi-pronged strategy to deflate anti-non-Muslim sentiments, along with stricter implementation of the existing laws related to protection of minorities in a more genuine democratic setting.

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