

Will Pak re-examine the way it persecutes Ahmadiyyas, others?

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Pakistan's fate hangs precariously on the edge of earning Donald Trump's executive ire, owing to the incontrovertible record of harbouring terror nurseries. The patent Pakistani ploy of designating such elements as, "non-state-actors", when cornered or exposed, is unsustainable as Donald Trump had shown his mind on the subject during his campaign trail, when he had alluded to Pakistani duplicity with the tweet, "When will Pakistan apologize to us for providing safe sanctuary to Osama Bin Laden for 6 years?! Some 'ally'."

As Pakistanis join the global chorus of calling the US immigration ban to be a "Muslim ban", and rightfully question the intolerance in the US executive action, they overlook the similar officially-sanctified intolerance in Jinnah's Pakistan. The retrogressions of Pakistani society go beyond the traditional strains of the sectarian Sunni-Shia divide and the more expected animus towards minorities like the Hindus, Christians, Parsis – it is deliberately formalised persecution of the ostensible, "Non-Muslim" Ahmadiyyas (approx. 4 to 5 million adherents), that is particularly pertinent.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto betrayed his supposedly "secular" moorings when he initiated the excommunication of the Ahmadiyyas in a bid to solidify himself amongst the reactionary forces with the passing of the parliamentary bill that declared them to be "Non-Muslims", in 1974. Later, these same retrograde forces consumed Bhutto himself and naturally aligned themselves with the openly puritanical instincts of Zia-ul-Haq. The revanchist Zia-ul-Haq further institutionalized the intolerance against the Ahmadiyyas, by criminalizing their usage in Islamic texts or titles that bridged their identity with the majority Sunni sect. The ordinance detailed severe penalties to any potential attempt at identifying Ahmadiyyas to mainstream Islam (hence, the place of worship could no longer be called a "mosque"), and their ostracisation was given the sovereign stamp.

This official intolerance is so steeped that Pakistan never really accepted the first Muslim Nobel laureate

in the field of science, Dr Abdus Salam, whose grave had to face the indignity of the Pakistan government removing the word “Muslim” from the epitaph that originally read, “First Muslim Nobel Laureate”. Similarly, Pakistani military folklore with the likes of Major General Akhtar Hussain Malik in the 1965 war and the inspirational leadership of the senior-most Pakistani officer to have died in Military Operations, Major General Iftikhar Khan Janjua, in the 1971 Indo-Pak war are relegated to the historians to muse, as the official narrative plays down the heroics of these Ahmadiyya-officers, as that could legitimize their first-class citizenship.

While the Shariaization drive of the Zia-ul-Haq era is rightly blamed for officially infusing the poison of intolerance, three decades later with multiple civilian and military rules, nothing has changed to undo the narrow-minded discrimination that Pakistan affords on the Ahmadiyyas. Even today, the pettiness of the official discrimination is exemplified by the process of getting the Pakistani Passport – herein, a mandatory, “Declaration in case of Muslim”, stipulates accepting amongst other things that, “I consider Mirza Ghulam Ahmed Quadiani to be an imposter nabi and also consider his followers whether belonging to the Lahori or Quadiani group, to be Non-Muslims”.

This perforce ensures that the Ahmadiyyas do not sign it and therefore are debarred from visiting Mecca to perform the Haj. So, the fact that the Ahmadiyyas do not assume themselves to be “Non-Muslims” and officially they are not as “Muslims”, their relatively large numbers remain irrelevant, as the official electorate is segregated into “Muslim” and “Non-Muslim” categories.

Essentially today, the charter of the Pakistani laws, are incompatible with the modern times or even to the Pakistan envisaged by the Qaid-i-Azam, Muhammad Ali Jinnah or Sir Muhammad Iqbal (who was an admirer of Ataturk’s republican secularism). Globally, societies are fractured with historical inter-faith distrust and discrimination, but the progressive evolution of statecraft has mandated, certain demonstrated “inclusivity”, that disallows persecution of a certain set of communities. In India, the law does not allow the other majority sects of Islam to declare the Ahmadiyyas as apostates, even though the mainstream clergy takes a dim view of the Ahmadiyyas.

There is no official identification, discrimination or persecution in their status, even though they are not permitted in the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, by the other leaders. Similar instincts in other Islamic countries like Indonesia, Bangladesh, have been spared the state-sponsored, “ban” or declaration as “kafirs” (infidels). Though, this hasn’t stopped their violent persecution from frequent hate-attacks, derogatory references and civic harassment. However, Pakistan has virtually legalized the persecution of the vulnerable minority with the frequent invocation of the convenient “blasphemy laws” that are routinely abused to bludgeon the Ahmadiyyas into social subservience.

As the polarised world increasingly suffers from growing bouts of Islamophobia, the multi-cultural and multi-religious countries like India, UK, Canada and others had essentially resisted the majoritarianism-led temptations of sanctifying discriminatory laws, till the very recent fillip to the same spirit and instinct with the arrival, and the accompanying executive actions of Donald Trump in the US. However, there is an inherent lesson in intolerance that countries like Pakistan need to introspect within, before beseeching the Americans with more sense in their official policies. The absolutist and simplistically linear logics of Donald Trump’s thinking will trip Pakistan on multiple fronts – from its sovereign sincerity (or otherwise) on fighting terror, in its sincerity in fighting discriminatory laws, etc.



The Ahmadiyyas are just an example, like the fate of other minorities in Pakistan. The essential difference in the Indian story versus the Pakistani narrative, is not that we do not have a similarly large number of ignorant revivalists in our society, across faiths – it is just that, our hallowed constitution mandates the oft-forgotten brilliance of inserting the inviolable tenet of “secularism” in our official bloodstream, which protects us from similar instincts that afflicts the polity across the border. It is this constitutional mandate that will hold us better than most other multi-religious countries, in the rocky times ahead.

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<http://www.asianage.com/world/asia/170217/will-pak-re-examine-the-way-it-persecutes-ahmadiyyas-others.html>