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Radicalization and De-Radicalization in Singapore and Pakistan: A Comparison

Ishtiaq Ahmed

The upsurge of politicized religion and the concomitant salience of violence and terrorism have caused considerable anxiety all over the world. The common term being used to describe such phenomena is radicalization. The US-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies has a major project on terrorism and radicalization to study the emergence of “homegrown” terrorists among Muslims settled in the West.¹ The International Security Network at the Swiss Center for Security Studies also has a project on radicalization.² There are now several country-level institutes that network with international centers looking at extremism, violence and terrorism. Efforts to evolve de-radicalization strategies are also underway. Both Singapore, a tiny city-state in South East Asia, and Pakistan, the second most powerful nation in South Asia, have had to deal with radicalization though in vastly different contexts. Therefore, there is keen interest in both countries to understand radicalization and develop strategies and public policies that can bring about de-radicalization at the individual as well as collective levels.

Given the worldwide interest and concern over radicalization, it is important to elucidate the term radicalization and make explicit its connection to extremism and terrorism. The dictionary meaning of radical is simply “going back to the roots”. As such it is a neutral term, and divested of political and ideological baggage it simply means the application of a principle or procedure in a specific situation with a view to achieving its original or proper state. Radicalization is, therefore, a process through which the movement towards the pristine takes place.

One can think of radical education as a commitment to education that considers the existence of illiteracy a negation of its meaning. Therefore, removal of illiteracy through free and compulsory education for all, including special classes for elders, may be a form of radicalization that many people would welcome. Similarly, a radical approach on social justice through constitutional means and the rule of law could mean a movement to establish a welfare state. More examples can be given. It is possible that purely religious radicalization may mean nothing more than the believers of a religion beginning to observe their religious duties strictly in accordance with some core ideas. As long as such radicalization is peaceful and does not harm others, a case for accepting such religious radicalization can be made. However, if the radicalization of religion entails politicization of it, so that it becomes part of a power contest and evolves as an ideology that is intolerant of outsiders and of dissenters from within, then it forfeits its claims to being purely a spiritual transformation concerned with metaphysical concerns and objectives. It has instead become an ideology concerned with the distribution of scarce resources, power and status on earth and may even make tall claims to rewards in the hereafter. Such radicalization calls for a rational critique of its consequences and outcomes.

In political usage, the terms radical and radicalization have been associated with ideas and movements seeking to supplant a corrupt and defiled status quo situation with a pure form of it. The range of radical political undertakings can be limited to some specific change within a system that remains more or less

the same. Thus, for example, one can argue that the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 years is a radical reform meant to empower young people, but it is within the framework of a liberal, pluralist democracy. However, a radical political project can also be all-encompassing so that the aim is to effect fundamental and comprehensive transformation of existing conditions in a way that a veritable societal metamorphosis or revolution takes place.

Now, radicalism purported to effect fundamental change that transforms society and polity into some pristine form of these is proverbially fraught with dangers. It is more of a rule than an exception that radical ideologies and the revolutions they set in motion on both the left and right have ended up as utopian undertakings which in practice turn into their opposite—dystopias. The reason is that realizing some pure futuristic society (Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime) or an imagined original form of it in the past (Taliban regime in Afghanistan) invariably involves an oversimplification of the imagined pure form. Oversimplification is unavoidable both because ideologies by their very nature as guides to action reduce complex realities to a set of idealized depictions and, because, the information about the past is always limited and not entirely reliable. Futuristic projections very often tend to be mere speculation. Consequently zealots often use intimidation and force in order to extract compliance from the people. In the process brutalization of the people takes place; hence utopias turning into dystopias. Nevertheless, in some circumstances radical challenges to the status quo become inevitable because the status quo is grossly unjust or at least the people perceive it to be so.

Therefore, any de-radicalization project would entail preventing abuse of religious sentiments and beliefs by political entrepreneurs, lay or clerical, for advancing a political agenda that is a negation of the equal rights and status of citizens. The state has to act as protector of all citizens and a guarantor of the right of citizens to enjoy religious freedom individually and collectively.

One more aspect of political radicalism and radicalization needs to be noted with regard to its contemporaneous currency. Roughly during 1945-1979, when the Cold War was lashing worldwide radicalism was associated with socialist ideas and movements. It was a broad category that included anarchists, independent Marxists and orthodox Communists. Such radicals were considered foes of capitalism and bourgeois values and dangerous champions of mass power. In contrast the term reactionary was used to depict rightwing ideas and movements. Among reactionaries were included a broad assortment of ultra-conservatives and ultra-nationalists, racists and religious extremists. Reactionary ideas and movements were associated with elitism, hierarchy, a general contempt for the masses but not mob power and violence.

The term radicalism began to be used for rightwing ideas and movements after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 presented a peculiar model of revolution: a mass based movement against dictatorship but laced with a medieval ideology prescribing the supremacy of the clergy. In other words, it was a strange synthesis of popular upsurge that combined street power to establish a novel type of censorial quasi-democracy. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, leftwing radicalism greatly weakened as a world force and thereafter Islamism in its different sectarian garbs and regional manifestations became synonymous with radicalism.

It is important for not only ethical but also analytical reasons to distinguish between Islamism and Islam. Islam as a religious system and a civilizational, cultural force contains multiple traditions and

interpretations. Islamism simplifies Islam to a set of beliefs and practices which are patently anti-intellectual, anti-modern, anti-liberal, and anti-democratic. Thus, as a political ideology, Islamism—also known as Islamic fundamentalism, militant Islam, radical Islam and so on—generates a mindset that is invariably hostile to non-Muslims, deviant sects, women and liberal Muslims. Such a mindset translated into political actions tends to be violence-prone and can give impetus to terrorism. That is why an increasing resolve to defeat it is now growing all over the world, including Pakistan which has been the citadel of Islamism since at least the 1980s. It is in this ideational and political context that a comparison of radicalization and de-radicalization is attempted between the Singapore and post-Jinnah Pakistani approaches to such phenomena.

One can of course wonder if such a comparison is worthwhile in that the two countries are vastly different from each other. Singapore is a tiny city-state while Pakistan is a big state in terms of its territory and population. Moreover, while Muslims constitute a minority in Singapore in Pakistan they are in overwhelming majority. Other differences can also be pointed out. The similarities are of course that both emerged as independent states from British colonial subjugation after the Second World War. Therefore, both have been exposed to the same type of constitutional procedures and practices. It will also be argued that both states began their journey as independent sovereign states with nationalist ideals that were very similar. It is, therefore, intriguing to find out how Singapore and Pakistan dealt with the challenges of radicalization and what measures, if any, have been taken for de-radicalization.

1. The Singapore Approach to Radicalization and De-Radicalization

The religious composition of the 4.8 million-strong Singapore population is currently as follows: 42.5% Buddhist, 14.9% Muslim, 14.6% Christian, 8.5% Taoist and 4% Hindu. However, 14.1 percent do not subscribe to any religion at all. In 1963, Singapore achieved independence from Britain and merged with Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak to form the federation of Malaysia. However, the merger proved unsuccessful, and Singapore seceded from Malaysia and became an independent, sovereign republic on August 9, 1965. The separation had partly been expedited by the 'race riots' of July and September 1964. The rioting took place between the Chinese and Malay Muslims. In total, 36 people were killed and 556 were wounded. About 3,000 people were arrested. Such an experience greatly troubled the Singapore political elite. Consequently, when Singapore became independent, the government was determined not to let such conflict take place again. The fact that Singapore was surrounded by two large Muslim-majority neighbours, Indonesia and Malaysia, meant that racial and religious violence could threaten Singapore's security in the external domain as well.³

This fact was firmly grasped by the President of the Singapore People's Action Party and the main leader of the freedom movement, Lee Kuan Yew, who served as prime minister for a very long period—from 1965 to 1990. He realized that Singapore had to be consolidated as a multi-racial and multi-religious state. At the same time, it was imperative that pluralism should be strictly monitored and regulated by the state. This perspective was translated over the years into effective public policy. In his opening speech to the Singapore Parliament on December 14, 1965, Lee remarked:⁴

So it is that into the constitution of the Republic of Singapore will be built-in safeguards insofar as the human mind can devise whereby the conglomeration of numbers, of likeness—as a result of affinities of race or language or culture—shall never work to the detriment of those who, by the accident of history, find

themselves in minority groups in Singapore... the individuals shall not be penalized or discriminated against by reasons of race, language or culture, but also that their views should always be taken into consideration when formulating policies which affect their collective interests.

Consequently, the centrality of religion to the lives of Singaporeans was recognized by the state at the very outset and constitutional measures as well as public policy were generated to express Singapore's multi-religious and multi-ethnic character. In symbolic terms, this was reflected in the main religious festivals of the major communities in Singapore being declared public holidays. Such a pronouncement was consonant with the political tradition of South East and South Asia: that the state and government proclaim in an unambiguous manner the role of protector of all religious groups. To give it a modernist interpretation compatible with the political ethics of the 20th century, political governance was made manifestly secular, though the constitution did not as such mention secularism. One clear way of expressing this was that from the very beginning all the religious communities were represented in the Prime Minister's Cabinet. In religious and cultural matters, the state does not interfere with the beliefs of its citizens. What the state has done, instead, is to ensure that no religious community is involved in politics as a religious community.⁵

With regard to monitoring and regulating religious freedom, Singapore's policy was premised on a realist assumption that religious harmony cannot be taken for granted. It had to be maintained through a diverse range of government measures including pre-emptive measures to see to it that social cohesion and harmony are not jeopardized. In the 1980s, liberation theology that developed in Latin America and reached Singapore through some activists was considered problematic. In this regard, the government became especially concerned with the aggressive proselytizing activities of some Christian sects. Later, the growth of Islamist ideas and movements in South East Asia impelled the government to take concrete measures to prevent the radicalization of Singaporean politics and social interaction.⁶

1.1. Constitutional and Legal Provisions

More crucially, while the constitution provided for absolute religious freedom, including the right to convert to another religion, the government maintained an important distinction between belief and action. The position taken was that whereas beliefs pertaining to spiritual values and principles were to be enjoyed by all Singaporeans without interference by the state, the citizens were to be held accountable for their actions they may claim were inspired by their beliefs. Any action, including verbal action that undermined loyalty to the nation or sowed discord among the citizens could legitimately be prohibited. Therefore, the government asserted that it had a right to curtail and constrain religion-inspired actions that adversely affected the integrity and security of the state and subverted peace and harmony among the various religious communities. In this regard, the activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses church were proscribed because it opposed its followers doing military service. The belief-action distinction was elucidated in the Court of Appeal verdict which stated:⁷

It is therefore not illegal to profess the beliefs of Jehovah's Witness per se, nor is it an offence to be a Jehovah's Witness. A citizen's right to profess, practice or propagate his religious beliefs, even as Jehovah's Witness, has not been taken away. It is the manner of carrying out these activities that is circumscribed by the relevant orders.

In other words, the point established was that with regard to loyalty to the state and compliance with the duties the constitution demands of its citizens, religious belief could not be invoked to compromise that obligation. On the other hand, several measures were undertaken to ensure that religious freedom was not abused to preach hatred or incite violence against other religious and ethnic groups. Under the Sedition Act, it was clearly laid down that it was an offence 'to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between races or classes of the population of Singapore.' In 2005, three bloggers were convicted under the Sedition Act for posting anti-Muslim comments.⁸

The principle that communal harmony and peace was paramount and enjoyment of human rights can be qualified and restricted with a view to maintaining communal amity was extended even to free speech. In other words, free speech that subverted social peace and caused discord was an abuse of that right. Thus, *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie was banned because the book was considered scurrilous to Islam. The government also banned Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

Such proactive monitoring of freedom of religion and expression has earned Singapore the reputation of an authoritarian regime, but the government has always defended its policies by arguing that the overall advantages from such regulation of freedoms has been greater than the disadvantages of selectively restricting some freedoms.

1.2. Nation-Building and Social Integration

The government realized that given the disparate religious composition of Singaporean society, it was vital that nation-building should seek to integrate the various communities through enlightened education. Initially, students were given the option to study one of the six main religions through specific courses, namely Bible Knowledge, Buddhist Studies, Confucian Ethics, Hindu Studies, Islamic Religious Knowledge, and Sikh Studies. However, the evidence coming in from the schools soon suggested that the religious knowledge program was proving detrimental to ethnic relations. It was realized that such courses emphasized differences while inadvertently encouraging teachers and students to interact with members of their own faith or begin proselytizing others. On the whole, it tended to encourage a religious revival. Therefore, it was decided that government schools should not impart religious beliefs. The religious knowledge program was discontinued. The Civil and Moral Education program replaced it.⁹

1.3. Mixed Neighborhoods

Perhaps, the most progressive and enlightened innovation that the Singaporean state has devised is the policy that all government-built apartments should be ethnically and religiously mixed. Ninety-five percent of Singaporeans live in public housing built by the government, which are sold at subsidized rates to citizens and permanent residents. The distribution of these apartments in a particular constituency or precinct corresponds to the overall racial and religious ratio of the various communities in that particular constituency or precinct. The apartments can be sold by the owners, but the overall religious balance has to be maintained and so the sale can be restricted to a particular community. Considering that Singapore has very large number of immigrant workers and the various indigenous communities are so varied such policy has proved to be a most effective way of preventing ghettoization.

Since people of all communities and ethnic origins occupy the same space socially as well as share facilities that are on offer, they regularly interact and have to learn to accommodate differences and variations in culture. Such a milieu also helps to institutionalize regular interaction between the various groups through elected bodies that represent their common interests. Multiculturalism, thus, practically necessitates mutual acceptance and not just toleration of one another. Such pre-conditions for qualifying to live in government-built apartments have a benign effect on religious and ethnic identities and to a large extent cultural exclusiveness can be kept in check. What the government wants to avoid at all costs is the alienation and insulation of any religious group from the rest of society.

1.4. Other Integrative Measures

Besides mixed neighbourhoods, the government strongly recommends that all sport and cultural organizations have among their members, people from a mix of religions. The President of the Republic is advised by a body of lay and religious advisers on measures needed to enhance religious peace and harmony. Only very recently at the time of Baisakhi (an ancient harvest festival in the Punjab region), Singapore's President S. R. Nathan, was the chief guest of an all-day event organized by the Singapore Khalsa¹⁰ Association. This writer, who was also invited, was later informed that this is the standard practice. At such events, people from the other religious and cultures are also invited. The idea is that communities should interact regularly. The ties and networks thus established strengthen mutual respect for each other's festivals and religious sentiments.

1.5. Limited Application of Religious Law

Although public life in Singapore is regulated by secular laws, religious law applies to the personal affairs of members of the various communities. With regard to Muslims, marriage, divorce and inheritance are regulated by Sharia injunctions. However, neither polygamy nor child marriage is permitted. In adopting such policy, the government seeks advice from enlightened sections of the Muslim community, but the overall principle is that religious law should not adversely affect the status and rights of any section of a religious community.

With regard to the Malay Muslims, the government offers some extra benefits. They are entitled to state funding for building mosques, and pilgrims leaving for Hajj are also offered financial assistance. However, some cause for worry has been expressed by the increasingly isolationist tendencies among Malay Muslims. The religious revival all over the world means that communities turn inwards. This is seen as problematic by the government that constantly evolves cultural and educational inputs that seek to integrate the youths of different communities.

1.6. Specific Measures to Deal with Radicalization

On the whole, Singapore's approach to prevent radicalization of society is to actively engage with the religious communities, maintain close link with their organizations, and allow unrestricted religious freedom to them yet put limits to such freedom when national interest is adversely affected. In this connection, the government overruled the wearing of headscarves by minor Muslim girls in secular schools, asserting that all children must wear the same uniform and learn to mix with each other. However, at the university level, Muslim girls are free to wear the headscarf. The assumption is that as grownups they have consciously chosen to wear the headgear and, therefore, it is an expression of free

choice by a person who has already been groomed to appreciate and internalize the Singaporean approach to multiculturalism.

On the other hand, all religious communities can establish schools for religious instruction and education. In such places even very young Muslim girls can wear headscarves if their parents so wish.

1.7. Curbing Radicalization by Restricting External Interference

Singapore has been particularly vigilant with regard to monitoring the activities of foreign missionary organizations and states. The general policy has been to not allow any foreign power to use Singapore's territory to spread extremist and seditious ideas. However, Islamist activities in Indonesia and Malaysia had been going on since the 1980s when some individuals from these and some other South-East Asian countries were drawn into the Afghan jihad.¹¹ Such a development also affected Singapore.

Thus, in spite of Singapore's even-handed treatment of all religious communities the contagion of Islamic radicalism even infected Singapore. To the great surprise and shock of the people of Singapore and their government, in 2001 a terrorist plot by the *Jemaah Islamiah* to slam seven explosive-laden trucks into various locations around the city-state was uncovered. Mas Selamat, an Indonesian-born Singaporean, accused of planning the attack was arrested. He escaped from detention on February 27, 2008, but was eventually recaptured in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, on April 1, 2009 by Malaysian authorities after a tip-off from Singapore.

On the whole, the government watches very closely the activities of foreign missions whose reputation for promoting radical ideas is well known. The state maintains a sophisticated system of intelligence gathering to ensure that radicalization of society in general or of sections of society does not take place.

2. The Pakistani Approach to Radicalization and De-Radicalization

Pakistan emerged as a Muslim-majority state on the Indian subcontinent when the British Empire ceased to exist and power was transferred to the modernist elite organized in the All-India Muslim League. The 1998 population census put Pakistan's population at 132 million. The Muslim component (Sunnis and Shias) was given as 96.28 percent; Christians 1.59 percent; Hindus 1.60 percent; scheduled castes 0.25 percent; Qadianis or Ahmadis 0.22 percent; and others 0.07 percent. The Sunni and Shia proportions of the Muslim population are not given. This has been the consistent standard policy over the years. According to the Demographic Research Institute of Karachi University the Shia were 12-15 percent of the population.¹² The online CIA World Factbook gives the estimated current population of Pakistan as over 172 million. With regard to the Muslims, Sunnis are estimated to be 77 percent and Shia 20 percent.

The claim to a separate state was premised on the argument that Indian Muslims constituted a separate nation, and not simply a minority community. Such a basis of nationalism was not territorial but cultural or religious, and it is not surprising that among conservative Muslims it was understood that Pakistan will be a model Islamic state, though initially such a model emphasized social justice, equality and the rule of law. Later, it was hijacked by the Islamists whose interpretation of Islam was heavily impregnated with medieval standards of morality and punishments and rewards in the hereafter rather than a just and fair society on earth.

In any case, the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, propounded a vision of state and society which was identical to the one that inspired Lee Kuan Yew. It was eloquently portrayed on 11 August 1947 when Jinnah was elected as president of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly:¹³

You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of 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.... We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State... I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in due course 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.

A clearer and more categorical commitment to a religiously neutral state cannot be imagined. Jinnah was unequivocally calling for a strict separation between private religious belief and the rights of citizens. He assured all Pakistanis full religious freedom. Any sincere reading of his speech leaves no doubt that he wanted to supplant Muslim nationalism with Pakistani nationalism as the basis of nation-building. His Pakistan was going to be multi-religious and with equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their caste, creed, sect or gender. Indeed Jinnah never used the word secular in his speech to describe his vision of the Pakistani state but any familiarity with political theory should leave no doubt that he was prescribing a secular-democratic state. Jinnah died on 11 September 1948. One can only speculate how he would have fared in the actual politics of Pakistan. It is, however, clear that he would not have favoured the creation of a theocratic Islamic state.

His immediate successors did not remain steadfast to secularism though they were not seeking to establish a dogmatic ideological Islamic state. In any event, notwithstanding the fact that during 1948-1977 the governments in Pakistan were formed by modernist Muslims for various opportunistic reasons and in a bid to sharply distinguish Pakistan from India they set in motion a process that over time assigned Islam a definitive role in politics. Thus the Objectives Resolution moved in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly by Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan on 7 March 1949 proclaimed the novel idea that sovereignty over the entire universe belonged to God. Democracy was to be practised, but within 'Islamic limits'. The minorities were assured that their legitimate interests would be safeguarded and that provisions would be made for them in accordance with Islam freely to profess and practise their religions and cultures.¹⁴ Such proclamations sounded pompous and decorative and were not meant to create a theocracy, because the modernists were not practising Muslims in the strict sense and they had been educated to believe that Islam and democracy were compatible.

Thus the first constitution of Pakistan adopted in 1956 declared that Pakistan will be a constitutional democracy. Simultaneously a commitment to bring all laws into conformity with Islam was laid down. Pakistan was described as an Islamic republic. The constitution could not be put into operation because the government was overthrown in a military coup in October 1958. The second constitution given in 1962 by General Mohammad Ayub Khan prescribed the presidential system of government and introduced guided, tiered democracy. It too reiterated the commitment to bring all laws in conformity with Islam.

The third constitution adopted by the National Assembly of Pakistan in 1973 again revived the parliamentary form of government. It went some steps further towards Islamization. Unlike the first two constitutions that only required the President of the republic to be a Muslim, the third required the Prime Minister to be a Muslim too. It further obliged both of them to take an oath testifying their belief in the finality of Prophet Muhammad. And, more importantly bringing all laws into conformity with

Quran and Sunnah was again reiterated. In 1974, the elected members of the Pakistan National Assembly declared the controversial Ahmadiyya sect as non-Muslim. Such a ruling greatly accentuated the confessional nature of the Pakistani polity.

2.1. Radicalization from Above

Thus far, the constitutional process had made mainly token concessions to Islamism. However, things changed fundamentally when on July 5, 1977, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq captured power by overthrowing the elected but increasingly corrupt and authoritarian government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. No doubt General Zia inherited a long tradition of relying on Islam to define national identity and the rights of citizens, although the fundamental rights of Pakistani citizens had continued to be defined in general liberal terms, and mainly symbolic restrictions had been imposed on non-Muslims. The coming into power of General Zia meant a significant expansion in the role of dogmatic Islam in the polity. He visualised a social order in which all sectors of life including administration, judiciary, banking, trade, education, agriculture, industry and foreign affairs were regulated in accordance with Islamic precepts. Thus began a radicalization of Pakistan in religious terms which was referred to as 'Islamization'. In 1979 Zia announced the imposition of the Hudood Ordinance, i.e. punishments believed to be laid down in the Quran for the offences of adultery (death by stoning), fornication (100 lashes), false accusation of adultery (80 lashes), drinking alcohol (80 lashes), theft (cutting off the right hand), highway robbery (when the offence is only robbery, cutting off hands and feet; for robbery with murder, death either by the sword or crucifixion).¹⁵

In 1980 the Islamic welfare tax, Zakat, began to be collected from Muslim citizens. However, the Shias refused to pay Zakat to what they alleged was a Sunni government. The government initially dismissed the Shia protest. It resulted in widespread agitation. Finally, they were exempted.¹⁶ In 1984 a new law of evidence, the Qanoon-e-Shahadat Order was adopted which reduced the worth of the evidence given by a female witness in a court of law to half in value of a male witness. The same year many restrictions were imposed on the Ahmadiyya group. They were prohibited from using Islamic nomenclature in their religious and social activities.¹⁷ In 1985, separate electorates—abolished in 1956—were reintroduced, whereby non-Muslims were to constitute a separate body of voters and thus entitled only to elect non-Muslim legislators to the various assemblies. Their right to take part in ordinary law making was severely restricted. In 1982 an ordinance on blasphemy was enforced which made any derogatory remark about Prophet Muhammad a serious crime. In 1986, capital punishment was declared as the maximum punishment for blasphemy.

Besides such measures, the educational system was revised along radical Islamist lines. Instead of the pupils being imparted civic ethics the textbooks inculcated fanatical ideas. The Pakistan military was projected as the guardian of Pakistan and the general emphasis was on an uncritical adulation of Muslim conquerors and a demeaning of other religious communities, especially Hindus.

A campaign to impose an Islamic code of behaviour on women was also introduced. In 1980 a circular was issued to all government offices that prescribed proper Muslim dress for female employees. Wearing of a *chador* (loose cloth covering head) was made obligatory. Ulema, notorious for their opposition to female equality and emancipation, were brought onto national television to justify their misogynist opinions.¹⁸

2.2. Oppression of Women, Non-Muslims and Deviant Sects

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has been publishing in its annual reports many cases of gross miscarriage of justice since the Islamic laws derived from medieval sources are incontrovertibly inimical to equal rights and status of women. Moreover, the radicalization of law and the state as a whole was interpreted by fanatics as condoning violent crimes against women by religious fanatics.¹⁹ It has been virtually impossible to prove that a woman has been raped because the Islamic laws related to rape require that four pious Muslim males must testify that they saw the act of rape with their own eyes. Moreover, a marked proliferation of so-called honour killings of females suspected of unchaste conduct by relatives incensed by a narrow and rigid view of their womenfolk virtually being their chattels has taken place.²⁰

The blasphemy law introduced by General Zia has resulted in many non-Muslims being charged with that crime. Although nobody has been hanged for such an offence, the ordeal of going through a trial in which the lower courts hand down capital punishment but superior courts either acquit the accused or reduce the punishment to imprisonment has been extremely traumatic. Such individuals have often been forced to seek asylum in the West. In some extreme cases the court procedure did not even begin as fanatics simply took the law in their own hands and killed the accused. It is doubtful if such fanatics were punished severely. Moreover, the HRCP annual statements include many cases of forced conversion of Hindus and Christians, especially young women. There have also been cases of attacks on churches and temples.²¹

Although sectarian tension and clashes between Sunnis and Shias have been a regular feature of South Asian society, it was not until General Zia came to power and introduced his Islamization policies for which the Shias openly began to defy the government. This problem came to the fore when the state began to collect the alms tax, Zakat, from all Muslims. The Shias refused to pay Zakat claiming they would not pay it to a Sunni state. These difficulties were compounded further when in the late 1980s powerful external actors began to cultivate their lobbies in Pakistan. Thus Saudi Arabia and Iran were believed to be sending large sums of money, books, leaflets, audio and video cassettes and other means to propagate their views in Pakistan. Such propaganda offensives were backed by the inflow of firearms and other weapons. Sunni and Shia militias began to menace and terrorize society. Consequently, assassinations of several rival Sunni and Shia ulema and regular gun battles and bomb explosions have taken place in Pakistan in recent years.²²

2.3. Jihad

Radicalization of Pakistan received the strongest boost when the country joined the US-Saudi sponsored jihad against the Soviet Union when the latter marched into Afghanistan in 1979 to help bolster a Communist regime in that country. Muslim warriors were brought to bases in northern Pakistan where they were indoctrinated into a fiercely militant jihad ideology. The University of Nebraska prepared illustrated textbooks that made violence in the name of jihad appear entertaining and worthwhile for pious Muslims. After the Soviet Union withdrew in 1989 the Pakistani militants began to promote jihad in Indian-administered Kashmir, and in Afghanistan the Pakistan military sought close relations with the fanatical Taliban who had come to power in 1996. The Taliban were committed to holy war.²³

However, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 by Al Qaeda in the United States resulted in Pakistan being threatened with dire consequences by the Bush administration. The Pakistani president, General Pervez Musharraf, decided to join the “war on terror” rather than expose Pakistan to an American military assault. It meant providing intelligence about Al Qaeda operatives and curbing the Taliban in Pakistan. This greatly angered the Pakistani Islamists. The more extreme sections among them, including a group called the Pakistani Taliban who had links with the Afghan Taliban, embarked upon terrorism directed against Pakistan. It included bomb blasts, suicide bombings as well as assassination attempts on Musharraf and other senior generals.

Terrorism reached alarming proportions in 2007 when almost every week, sometimes several times in a week, suicide bombings wreaked havoc in Pakistan. The terrorists targeted mainly government, especially military personnel and installations but many civilians were also killed. In 2008 alone, 2,148 terrorist attacks took place. The deaths caused by such attacks were as high as 2,267 and 4,558 injured—a phenomenal increase of 746 percent from 2005. If the total deaths from various types of violent activities are counted the number goes up to 7,997 killed and 9,670 injured.²⁴ The very existence of Pakistan seemed to be in jeopardy. The election of a civilian government in February 2008 did not bring the terrorist attacks to an end. Pakistan has been facing scathing criticism from the United States, the European Union and indeed neighbouring states such as India and Afghanistan for allegedly not acting firmly enough to crush terrorism. There can be no denying that Islamist radicalism has had a most vitiating impact on Pakistan’s social and political systems.²⁵ The ultimate factor that finally compelled Pakistan to act against the Islamists was the expanding Taliban writ from Swat into other parts of Pakistan. Concerted and resolute military action began from early spring 2009 and the operation has now been extended to South Waziristan where the Taliban and Al Qaeda are believed to be ensconced.

The Pakistan de-radicalization policy is, therefore, now beginning to take shape. It is clear that crushing the militants would be necessary, but it would not be sufficient to realize comprehensive de-radicalization. De-radicalization must begin with the state being declared a protector of all Pakistani citizens and indeed all individuals living in or visiting Pakistan. As long as individuals respect Pakistan’s sovereignty there is no reason to impose any curbs on them. Medieval Islamic laws are the main ideological bases for radicalization. They have to be repealed. Also, a thorough review of school textbooks must be undertaken with a view to producing enlightened citizens rather than soldiers for holy war. All this is possible if constitutional, legal, educational and cultural reforms are undertaken in light of the August 11, 1947 address by Jinnah to members of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly.

Conclusion

Both Singapore and Pakistan embarked on a journey as independent and sovereign nations, after British colonial rule withdrew from South East and South Asia. The leaders of both the countries bequeathed visions of state and society which were strikingly similar, in fact, identical. Whereas Singapore remained consistent and constant in the realization of the vision of a state with equal rights for all citizens, in Pakistan the governments that followed deviated from Jinnah’s vision. Such deviations helped the Islamists gain influence and power in Pakistan. The radicalization of state and society that took place assumed violent forms as demonstrated above.

Pakistan has now begun to extricate itself from the extreme type of Islamism but de-radicalization would require much more than defeating the Taliban and other extremist outfits that abound in the country. It would mean resuscitation of constitutionalism, the rule of law and equal and inclusive citizenship. Of course military and other actions to crush terrorism should continue so that such a menace does not shatter the lives of ordinary people and threaten the existence of Pakistan as a modern, moderate nation. In this regard, Pakistan can learn from Singapore how to balance the freedom of religion with restraints on the misuse of religion to sow discord among different religious and cultural communities. Radicalization of religion in the form of an oppressive political ideology has no place in the 21st century. It represents a form of Third World cultural fascism and nothing more.



Notes

- ¹ http://www.defenddemocracy.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=515778&Itemid=343, accessed on 30 July 2009.
- ² <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=4888CAA0-B3DB-1461-98B9-E20E7B9C13D4&lng=en&id=90477>, accessed on 30 July 2009.
- ³ Azhar Ibrahim, "Discourses on Islam in Southeast Asia and Their Impact on the Singapore Muslim Public" in Lai Ah Eng (ed.), *Religious Diversity in Singapore*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), pp. 92-102.
- ⁴ *Speech made by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, when he moved the motion of Thanks to the Yang Di-Pertuan Negara, for his Policy Speech on the opening of Parliament on 14th December 1965*, http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/public/starsDetail.jsp?&chkDVD_id=20059&keyword=, pp. 41-2, accessed on 30 June 2009.
- ⁵ Seong Chee Tham, "Religious Influences and Impulses impacting Singapore" in Lai Ah Eng (ed.), *Religious Diversity in Singapore*, p. 17.
- ⁶ Eugene K. B Tan, "Keeping God in Place: The Management of Religion" in Lai Ah Eng (ed.), *Religious Diversity in Singapore*, p. 58.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-2.
- ¹⁰ Khalsa refers to the collective body of all baptized Sikhs.
- ¹¹ Azhar Ibrahim, "Discourses on Islam in Southeast Asia and Their Impact on the Singapore Muslim Public" in Lai Ah Eng (ed.), *Religious Diversity in Singapore*, pp. 83-102
- ¹² Ishtiaq Ahmed, *State, Nation and Ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia*, (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1998), p. 170.
- ¹³ *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah, Vol. II*, (Lahore, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1976), pp. 403-4.
- ¹⁴ Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Concept of an Islamic State: An Analysis of the Ideological Controversy in Pakistan*, (London: Frances Pinter, 1987). pp. 218-9.
- ¹⁵ Ishtiaq Ahmed, "South Asia" in David Westerlund and Ingvar Svanberg (eds.), *Islam Outside the Arab World*, (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), p. 231.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 235.
- ¹⁸ Mumtaz, K. and F. Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1987), pp. 77-96.
- ¹⁹ Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, *State of Human Rights in 1997 through 2008*, (Lahore: Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 1997 to 2009).
- ²⁰ Asma Jahangir and Hina Jilani, *The Hudood Ordinances: A Divine Sanction?* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003).
- ²¹ Ishtiaq Ahmed, 'Globalisation and Human Rights in Pakistan' in *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January-June, 2002), pp. 57-89; *State of Human Rights 1997-2007*.
- ²² Ishtiaq Ahmed, 'South Asia' in David Westerlund and Ingvar Svanberg (eds.), *Islam Outside the Arab World*, (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), pp. 232-33.
- ²³ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban, Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
- ²⁴ Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, *Pakistan Security Report 2008*, (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, 2009), p. 3.
- ²⁵ Ishtiaq Ahmed, 'The Spectre of Islamic Fundamentalism over Pakistan (1947-2007)' in Rajshree Jetly (ed.), *Pakistan in Regional and Global Politics*, (London, New York, New Delhi: Routledge, 2009), pp. 150-180.

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Pak Institute for Peace Studies

Post Box No. 2110, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Tel: +92 - 51 - 2291586

Fax: +92 - 51 - 2100651

www.san-pips.com

Email: pips@san-pips.com