

Asia

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Pakistan and Indonesia in terms of religious leadership represent – in some respects – opposite situations. In both societies we find a significant ‘legalistic’ vs. ‘Sufi’ divide, but the two forms of Islam are expressed and played out in different ways. Most importantly, they have different relationships with their governments that have produced drastically different results.

In January 1998, I attended a gathering of Fulbrighters in Lahore – both Pakistani and American. Just having returned from Indonesia, where I had been teaching at a government-run Islamic institute, I told the others that I had been struck by how much the government of Indonesia controlled religious matters. It set the curriculum for the institutes, appointed faculty, and hired the graduates to work in the bureaucracy as experts on Islamic matters. These graduates, of course, would be expected to be members of the ruling Golkar party. The government did not permit people who had gone through the centuries-old *pesantren* educational system to enter the government institutes unless they had gone to a government school as well. The traditional *pesantren* (a religious boarding school), which is a cross between a dervish conventicle and an Indian ashram – is a completely independent facility. It is run by a *kiyai*, a Sufi-like figure who holds his position through heredity as well as through the recognition he receives in society. These *kiyais* were being heavily pressured to conform to government policies and to be part of the Golkar party.

When I finished my presentation, a Pakistani man in the room said that he wished that the Pakistanis had someone trying to control their religious leaders. He, with others chiming in, said that Pakistan had just the opposite problem: that the government had no control over the *maulavis* and that they were making a mess of the country. They wished that the government could rein them in, as they seem to have done in Indonesia.

Not long after that meeting, violence erupted in Indonesia. In Pakistan, inter-communal violence continued to escalate. The press regularly reported attacks by Sunnis and Shi'a on one another's mosques in the Punjab. Indeed, I visited some of the mosques that had been attacked. In the office of one, the filing cabinet was stocked with guns and rifles, which were brought

out to protect the congregates gathered for prayers. The Christian community of Pakistan also feels besieged as a result of death sentences imposed on Christians accused of blasphemy. While tensions between Muslims and Christians have existed for decades, these accusations and the violence associated with them are a phenomenon of the late 1980s and 1990s.

Why the violence?

While religious tensions are hardly the only factor influencing riots and fighting in Indonesia, religion certainly is of importance when assessing violence on the islands of Java, Ambon, and Sumatra. In Java and Ambon, clashes between Muslims and Christians have taken many lives.

In Sumatra, the weakening of the regime has unleashed decades-old resentments over the issue of who defines and controls Islam.

In Karachi a Roman Catholic priest of Goan descent told me, '[The province of] Sindh is saturated with the culture of Sufism. Go beyond Karachi and you will find a lot of *pirs*. Sufis and *pirs* have the highest regard for the human being. They do not speak of the supremacy of any religion, but they speak of the unity of mankind.' In his eyes and in the eyes of so many other Pakistanis, including the people listening to my presentation on Indonesia in Lahore, it is not the *pirs* or the traditional religious leaders that are the problem in society. Rather, it is the *maulavis* who are causing the dissension, the clerics who deliver Friday sermons and speak for the narrowest of interpretations of Islam. Essentially, the *maulavis* are fighting a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran – a war that the Pakistani government does not discourage.

The situation in Pakistan

At an *imambarghah* in Lahore – a place devoted to the remembrance of the Imam Hussein – a man who had apprenticed him-

self to a dervish as a young boy, sat in the midst of some of his devotees. Others among his followers took me aside and told me how the recently rebuilt *imambarghah* had been destroyed by Sunnis a few years ago. 'It is the *maulavis*,' they said. They explained that they were not singling out only Sunni *maulavis*. They did not like any religious leaders who divided people and instigated hatred.

In the city of Gujrat, the leader of the Shi'a is not a man who studied at a *madrasa*. Rather, his father had been the Shi'ite headman of the area, and now the mantle of leadership had fallen on his shoulders. He too had little taste for *maulavis* and prided himself on the peaceful relations that he had helped to promote between Sunnis and Shi'as of this town – though the two communities lived in separate quarters.

In Pakistan, religious leaders of all varieties function independently of the government, though certainly the government is very keen on having the support of Islamic groups. Zia al-Haq, the military leader who took over Pakistan in a coup in the 1980s, tried to placate and thus control the leading Islamic groups (principally the Jamaat-i Islami) by inaugurating laws that could be portrayed as being in keeping with the Shariah; the *hudood* (criminal) laws and the blasphemy laws being the most controversial. But neither Zia nor the succeeding governments have been successful in completely winning over the Islamic groups. While Nawaz Sharif has made many overtures, the Jamaat regularly protest his policies. Obviously, the government does not have a great deal of say in the activities of the Islamist groups, yet it will step on the rights of minorities in order to try to placate even the most radical organizations.

The situation in Indonesia

Indonesia presents a very different picture. I visited some of the *pesantrens*, as I was interested in observing the lives of the students in these boarding schools. There was enormous variety among the *pesantrens*. Some did follow a government curriculum with a full spectrum of courses, while others maintained their traditional role – a place where one memorizes the Koran and the hadith and lives a life of prayer. These are the places where the Indonesian Sufi tradition is preserved. The independence of some of these boarding schools from government control became most obvious to me when I was visiting the northern part of the island of Madura off the coast of Java. On the birthday of the Prophet, thousands of people – men in their traditional sarongs and *pecces* (the so-called 'Sukarno hat') and women covered in their *jilbabs* – were making their way to the beach where a huge sound system had been assembled for speeches. In the villages nearby were *pesantrens* where serious young men wandered about clutching hand-written texts to their breasts. It was in places such as these that resistance to Dutch colonial rule had been organized and where further resistance to tyranny could also be fostered. Certainly I saw the potential for anti-government activity much like that found in the

madrasas in Qom a generation ago. Of course, the *pesantrens* can also be leaders in sectarian violence as their resentment towards the government can be aimed at anyone who seems favourable to it. Since it is part of government policy to recognize and protect the rights of five religious communities, the minorities tended to be subdued in their criticism of the government.

On the other hand, those who were considered 'the *ulama*' of Indonesia, the ones who had completed their studies in religious law, etc., have posed no threat to the government. In fact, in the face of the most obvious corruption, these men have tended to remain silent rather than be a voice of protest. I spoke to a member of the Council of Ulama, which is essentially a committee that issues fatwas. It was the council's job, he said, to convey to the people the wishes of the government rather than to advise the government about the Islamic position on an issue. One example is that of population control. After initial resistance, the *ulama* came around to the government's thinking and actively promoted birth control as a sound Islamic idea. At this time of crisis, most of these men may lack the prestige necessary for constructive leadership. While they might have received points for being somewhat open-minded and tolerant of peoples of other religions – at least those that are legally recognized – they also have not spoken out against the abuses of the Suharto regime.

The two extremes

When the governments of Pakistan and Indonesia have actively intervened in religious matters, they helped (whether inadvertently or not) to produce radicalism in different sectors of their religious communities. While the Sufis of Pakistan continue to have a more or less stabilizing effect on society, the situation for their Indonesian counterparts is more volatile. In both countries attempts have been made to co-opt Islam for political purposes. While the Indonesian government has successfully controlled religious leadership, the government of Pakistan, in failing to do so, has encouraged sectarianism. ◆

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