

## **Pakistan: Fanaticism's coup d'état**

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It is not the murder of Salman Taseer that has shocked-and-scared urban majority in Pakistan into either an apparent silence or a plain indifference. It is not even the assassin's maliciously triumphant smile that has left many speechless. It is ceaselessly mediated threats and heartless puritan celebrations by a freemasonry of fiery anchorpersons, jingoist columnists and rejected bearded politicians that have created an atmosphere of fear-and-eerie-silence. For the first time, PPP's fearless workers, the idiomatic Jiyalas, have been scared into political-hibernation. Even if thousands attended Taseer's funeral and Jiyalas in Lahore initially took to streets in a defiant mood, chanting anti-mullah slogans, the PPP government capitulated, unsurprisingly. The PPP leadership has given up struggle since long. It keeps striking deals and wrap up shameless compromises. But leadership's expected capatulation has only offered the beards a field day. A filed day comes their way, by the way, every ten years. Beards ruled the roost for a while during the anti-Bhutto agitation, financed by Washington, in 1977. First Iraq War on the heels of Rushdie affair offered another chance to glow in limelight. The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 yet again saw streets taken over by confessional mobs. Now the Taseer tragedy has offered them a chance. On the contrary, masses get the chance to vote in a rather fair election every twenty years (1970, 1988, 2008). In every fair election, beards are simply punished by the voters.

It is, therefore, not a coincidence that one finds mullahs and dictators on the same side of the fence every time democracy is burgled. It is true that apparently-secular politicians have lavishly betrayed their constituency every time they were voted to power. Still, masses have never poised their trust in the MMA, or Mullah Military Alliance as it is called. They are not likely to do so either in the near future. The 'MMA' leadership understands it. Hence, the bullet that silenced Salman Taseer on January 4 was not merely fired to quieten the 'blasphemous' dissent. The bullet was a coup. Repeatedly rejected fanatic minority, assisted by mainstream media, has organised a coup. This minority is not defending the Blasphemy Laws enacted century-and-a-half ago by 'infidel' British administration. Stakes are much wider. A parliament independent enough to roll back blasphemy laws, might under mass pressure begin to debate defence budget and reclaim country's foreign policy. Majority will not rule even when democratically elected. This was the first message in the bullet that delivered Taseer's end.

There are roughly eighty thousand lawyers practicing law in the country. It was the struggle led by the advocates' fraternity that that humbled General Musharraf. Ever since the 1970s, pro-PPP or like-minded leadership sweeps the elections for various professional bodies of the lawyers. It is an annual ritual. The pattern holds true from district-level to national level. Only weeks ago Asma Jahangir, justifiably considered liberalism's conscience in the country, compellingly won a majority to claim Supreme Court Bar Association's presidency. During the campaign, she was subjected to a sinister smear campaign. Still she convincingly won. But the way two hundred or so lawyers from Rawalpindi, desperate to bail a killer out, have been presented as entire fraternity's conscience, in fact, mirrors the mediated power of televisual spin masters. Hence, the second message is that any reality can be manipulated in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Luckily, a coup in Pakistan has never gone unchallenged. Isolated but important dissident voices have emerged in mainstream media. Not everybody is ready to swim along the stream. Activists have recovered after an initial shock. A case has been registered against the mullah who issued fatwa

against Sherry Rehman. Despite threats, tiny but important demonstrations have taken place. More agitational actions are in the offing. The fear will subside in a matter of days. Or the 'deep state' will need staging of an even bloody act to perpetuate the atmosphere of fear. But fear cannot be sustained indefinitely. Dissent may be silenced; it cannot be killed off eternally. The minorities will never accept the Blasphemy Laws. Mumtaz Qadri is a self-confessed killer no matter media and mullahs have granted him the title of Ghazi or Mujahid. If a judge can not send him to gallows in line with Pakistani penal code, no judge will be able to set him free either. The majority in the country that takes inspiration from Sufis like Bulleh Shah and Lateef Bhittai will recover. It will not tolerate minoritarian attacks on their shrines, villages, neighbourhoods and way of life. The Taliban dictatorship, egged on by MMA (an extra M here stands for media), imposed in FATA has begun to find a fierce armed opposition in Tribal Lashkar (armies). Those singing swan songs for liberal dream in Pakistan have shown bit of hurry.

Let us not forget Salman Taseer is not the first person to lay his life in the struggle against Blasphemy Laws. Bishop John Joseph committed suicide in protest. Justice Arif Iqbal Bhatti was murdered for his daring act as Lahore High Court judge to acquit innocent Christians implicated in a fake-as-usual blasphemy case. As a matter of fact, not a single person has been hanged on the charge of blasphemy. The death sentence awarded by lower courts has every time been overturned by superior courts owing to a balance of forces at bar councils that tips in favour of liberals. Thirty-seven people, accused of blasphemy, who lost their lives were killed by zealots emulating Ghazi Ilam Din. But all will not be sorted out by itself. A sustained struggle, aimed at the transformation of the society, will rid the society of all the reactionary laws and norms. However, the dangerous precedent set by making an example out of Salman Taseer, a Frankenstein has been unleashed. After Salman Taseer's murder, a mullah, from D G Khan, and his son, have been convicted in a blasphemy case. The Deobandi mullah and his son were booked on the complaint of rival Brelvis. This is just a beginning. Ironically but understandably, in case of D G Khan's 'blasphemous mullah' and his son, for the first time a lower court has awarded life sentence instead of death sentence in a blasphemy case. There are at least 4000 blasphemy accused in the country. Either Media Mujahedeen or MMA will have to find 4000 more Ghazis or the some government will have to repeal the law.

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