Annihilation of minorities
Syed Ishrat Husain

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On March 24, 2019, the then Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said:

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“The minorities in Pakistan make up the white of our flag and all of our flag’s colours are precious to us. Protection of our flag is our duty.”

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Addressing a function to celebrate Holi with Hindus in 2017, the then prime minister Nawaz Sharif insisted that it was not anyone’s job to decide who will go to hell or heaven, but to make Pakistan a heaven on earth. He said that forcible conversion and destruction of worship places of other religions is a crime in Islam and in Pakistan as he greeted the Hindu community on the occasion of Holi. In his inclusive message to minorities in Pakistan, he stated

“No one can force others to adopt a certain religion,”

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“Islam gives importance to every human being regardless of his caste, creed or religion and I say it clearly that forcing anyone to convert his religion is a crime and it is our duty to protect the worship places of the minorities in Pakistan.”

On March 24, 2019, Prime Minister Imran Khan had put a probe into reports of abduction, forced conversion and underage marriages of two teenage Hindu girls in Sindh province and to take immediate steps for their recovery. He also told the Sindh and Punjab governments to devise a joint action plan in light of the incident, and to take concrete steps to prevent such incidents from happening again.

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If the economic conditions are not improved and the minorities are passed on to the influential religious groups, I am afraid we will be left with religious groups only in the land of Sufis

In mid-September this year the Parliamentary Committee on Minorities headed by Senator Anwar ulHaqKakar had decided to travel to various areas of Sindh to meet the victims of forced conversion. The committee determined to visit all provinces and hold meetings with the provincial, district governments, civil administration and police officials so as to create an integrated system of detection, reporting, vigilance and response concerning forced conversions

On October 19, 2020 Senator AnwarulHaqKakar spoke to the press alongside committee member MNA Lal Chand Malhi and civil society activist from Tharparkar Krishan Sharma, following a recent visit by the committee to parts of Sindh where forced conversions of young Hindu girls have been described. . Senator Anwarul Haq Kakar, said the issue was sensitive, serious and complicated, the most complicated part of the situation is that what is considered as forced conversion by the aggrieved community is considered wilful conversion by religious groups, which includes Jamaat-i-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam, people like Mian Mithu of Sindh and even Tablighi Jamaat, but at the same time all conversions are not under duress and threats. The finding of the committee adds an interesting facet to the discourse around the forced conversion issue. Although conversion to seek a better lifestyle is also considered forced conversion, economic reasons can be considered exploitation and not force, as eventually it is after consent. Most instances have some degree of willingness. He added that there was a tenuous line between consent and exploitation, the conversion of Hindu girls in Sindh could not be considered forced. The committee did not see any trace of kidnapping and illegal confinement of Hindu girls who later came to give statements in court.

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During the visit, members of the committee held public meetings in Sukkur and Mirpur Mathelo in Ghotki district, as comfortably as a meeting with senior officials in the Sindh government in Karachi. Meetings were held with the households of victims of forced conversions, officials and accused groups. Approximately 200 members of the Hindu community participated in a public meeting in Sukkur while around 800 people attended the meeting in Mirpur Mathelo. The most vulnerable districts for forced conversions are Sanghar, Ghotki, Sukkur, Khairpur and Mirpurkhas. There have been negligible reported cases from Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while a few cases involving Christians have been reported in Punjab.

The committee have done a relatively thorough job of stretching out the layers of how and why forced conversions take place. Mr Malhi said that people such as Mian Mithu and Pir Sarhandi house girls and manage the system to prevent the girl away from her family. He stated there was no evidence that they were backed by an authority, political power or state organ. Mr Krishan Sharma said there are two kinds of forced conversions, the first involving kidnapping and illegal confinement. The second is rampant in Sindh and that has to be taken care of by the state, this is procedural forced conversions, [in which] the whole organization of the country, from the police, the courts, etc. are violating the laws and facilitating such conversions. Senator Kakar said that people who encourage young ladies from the Hindu community to move out and marry according to their own wishes are not as liberal about their own daughters.

The committee identified social and economic marginalisation as the reason why some girls willingly convert; to assign all incidents of forced conversions under this category is unfair and insensitive. Although the committee categorically said that the government had neglected in its responsibility to shield minority communities from forced conversion. They denounced all manner of religious conversion under social or economic duress. Identified it as exploitation, calling them, conversion as an effect of the social, administrative and economic marginalisation of the Hindu community in Sindh.

I am in entire disagreement with Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf lawmaker Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani who said: Times are changing and we should take advantage of this era, as all those who used to encourage kidnapping of minor girls, marry them and announce that they have converted to Islam are on the back foot now. Even today the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Karachi cancelled a seminar of noted economist Dr Atif Mian, who goes to the minority Ahmadiyya community, due to the threats the university administration was facing from extremists.

“Sorry to report that my zoom economics seminar at IBA Karachi has been cancelled due to threats that the university administration was facing from extremists,” tweeted Dr Atif Mian.

Prime minister Imran Khan mentions Riyasat Medina in his every speech; I would like to remind him that providing security to the minorities is the basic principle of such form of governance. If the economic conditions are not improved and the minorities are passed on to the influential religious groups, I am afraid we will be left with religious groups only in the land of Sufis. Federal and provincial governments must improve the economic conditions to stop conversions due to the economic pressure, or accept it that, the annihilation of the minorities is a planned practice.

Emancipate the minorities from economic and religious pressures.

The writer is a traveller and freelance writer based in UK. He has previously written for @the\_nation @Dawn\_com @DunyaNews @TheAsians He can be contacted on Twitter @SyedIHusain