**Islam was not born on 14 August 1947**

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When Pakistan was created in 1947, it was the largest Muslim majority state in the world and the fourth largest over all. Egypt’s King Farouk, who had ambitions of becoming the new Caliph of the Muslim World, was naturally alarmed. With caustic sarcasm he said “Don’t we know that Islam was born was born on 14 August 1947.” The founders of Pakistan had no real Pan-Islamic ambitions at the time. Jinnah had explicitly ruled it out in an interview with the New York Times in May 1947. On the other hand Bhutto in the 1970s was an out and out Pan-Islamist who propelled Pakistan to a leadership position in the Muslim world. In his short time in office, he managed to snatch the claims of the leadership from former United Arab Republic as well other claimants especially when he brought both Iran and the Arabs together. This was no mean achievement and may have brought about his eventual end.

Imran Khan is our neo Pan-Islamist. He seeks to lead the entire Muslim world. It is the same old rhetoric we have heard for the last 5 decades. The more despotic the leader, the more emphatic the Pan-Islamist claim i.e. Ziaul Haq, Pervez Musharraf, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and now Imran Khan. Khan’s address to the nation on the issue of TLP was a classic example of this. He promised that he would singlehandedly open a dialogue with the West on issue of Namoos-e-Rasalat on behalf of all Muslims in the world. This obviously is a very popular slogan and we all have been guilty of believing in these dreams and shadows, self included. When I was a 19 year College student in the US in 1999, I made a website called “Heroes of Pan-Islamism”. It listed Jinnah (who I hadn’t read about till then and had the regular Pakistan Studies view of} , Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (who, having grown up in PPP household, I absolutely adored) and Imran Khan (who I took as my leader at the time as a card carrying member of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf.). In that website I claimed that one day Imran Khan would become the Prime Minister and unite the entire Muslim world behind the leadership of Pakistan. The rest as you know is history.

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Of course Pakistan was not created on the basis of religion per se. It was an issue of a minority trying to escape majoritarianism. Jinnah himself said explaining his position on 7 February 1935 that “Religion should not be allowed to come into Politics. Religion is merely a matter between man and God”. In this speech he explained issue of minority rights was not a religious issue. Similarly Pakistan may have been envisaged as a Muslim majority state but not as a theocratic state.

So what went wrong? It is the tale of one secular politician after another appeasing the religious orthodox. Jinnah’s desperate attempt to convince the orthodox that a modern democratic state was compatible with Islam set the tone. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, desperately seeking political legitimacy after Jinnah was gone, folded to the demands of the orthodoxy by bringing the Objectives Resolution, which made religion the business of the state in sharp contrast to what Jinnah had promised on 11 August 1947 and most of his life before that.

When in 1953 the Mullahs started a movement against Zafrullah Khan and Ahmadis, mercifully the Muslim League government took a firm stance against the rioters. The then Prime Minister pointed out that the state had no business deciding the faith of an individual and that he would never remove Zafrullah Khan because the latter was in put in office by none other than the Quaid-e-Azam. Jinnah himself had admirably stood against those who wanted to declare Ahmadis Non-Muslim throughout the 1940s. In 1953 the militablishment had learnt an important lesson though: Khatme Nabuwat and Hurmat-e-Rasool were potent issues that could be used to bring down civilian governments. Institutional memory remained.

The issue resurfaced in 1974 and this time Ahmadis were not so lucky. Bhutto, being a wily politician, realised saw militablishment’s footprint all over it. He threw the question to the parliament and Ahmadis were declared Non-Muslim. It is just that this blood lust doesn’t work. In 1977 both religious and secular parties joined together and raised the slogan of Nizam-e-Mustafa against Bhutto’s alleged “secularism”. Ultimately Bhutto was booted by Ziaul Haq and even checked physically, after his hanging, to see whether he was circumcised or not i.e. was he a true Muslim. General Zia then unleashed 11 years of tyranny in which he brought one draconian and I daresay an un-Islamic law after another in the name of the pure and pristine faith of Islam. After Benazir Bhutto came to power, the opposition parties led by Nawaz Sharif often questioned her religious credentials and her fitness to lead as a woman.

Fast forward to 2017. PMLN government faced the wrath of that foul-mouthed cleric because PMLN had tried to extend franchise to that most hapless community, the Ahmadis, a requirement under International Law. I don’t need to say who was behind that because Qazi Faez Isa already did that. Now this in 2021 is comeuppance. Instead of refusing to entertain the ridiculous demand that the French Ambassador be expelled our PM has thrown the question to the National Assembly. Both the treasury and opposition benches have resorted to sloganeering competing with each other their Muslim credentials. Just imagine what will happen if the NA were to vote to expel the Ambassador. No other Muslim country is going to do it of course; even Erdogan’s increasingly Ottoman Turkey. We will though because we believe we are better Muslims. Our nation believes that Islam was born on 14 August 1947. It has caused a cognitive dissonance that has made most of us mental nutcases and deeply insecure lot. Ghauri Aya fir.

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