

The Consequences of Fundamentalism on Pakistani Media

by

Imran Munir

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APPROVAL

NAME: Imran Munir

DEGREE: MA

TITLE: THE CONSEQUENCES OF FUNDAMENTALISM ON
PAKISTANI MEDIA

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

CHAIR: Prof. Yuezhi Zhao

Prof. Martin Laba
Senior Supervisor, School of Communication, SFU

Prof. Pat Howard
Supervisor, School of Communication, SFU

Dr. Hari Sharma
Examiner,
Professor Emeritus, Sociology and Anthropology, SFU

Date: November 27, 2002

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THE CONSEQUENCES OF FUNDAMENTALISM ON PAKISTANI

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Author: _____

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Imran Munir

(name)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis maps the roots of fundamentalism and its impact on the Pakistani media. It examines how the religious groups and parties hijacked the national agenda of development and modernization and made inroads, directly and indirectly, in the media to promote their agenda of jingoism and beliefs.

The Pakistani media had a proud history of struggle for the freedom of expression and democracy. Journalists braved imprisonment, public floggings, torture and kidnappings but refused to bow before the autocratic and dictatorial regimes. But the meteoric rise of fundamentalism in the 80s dealt a crucial blow and divided the media along pro-Islam and anti-Islam lines--- the English press and the *Urdu* press. What socio-political factors contributed to this development is the key question this thesis will attempt to explore?

Democracy, citizenship, education, development, human rights, the environment and other urgent issues were sidelined as newspapers became the mouthpieces of the establishment to disseminate and legitimize state propaganda. This thesis explores the key moments that changed the media discourse in Pakistan and pushed it into the hands of the religious extremists.

DEDICATION

To our son, Momin, who inspired me to come thus far

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis seeks to identify the key moments in the emergence of fundamentalism in Pakistan in general and the news media in particular. The term 'fundamentalism' in this thesis will be used to mean religious obscurantism, militancy and extremism as well as the use of Islam and religion as tools to serve political ends. In the Pakistani context, Islamic fundamentalism is used as an ideology that diverts people from the path of natural development of consciousness and individuality; it undermines their personal rights. Fundamentalists believe in a particular way of life; they want to put everybody in their particular strait-jacket and dictate what individuals should eat and wear and how they should conduct their daily lives. Islamic fundamentalists reject equal status for minorities and women and want to convert Pakistan into a medieval theocratic state.

The thesis analyzes the conditions within which fundamentalism came to control and manipulate the social and political events that contributed to the current state of political communication in Pakistan. The thesis will detail and analyze the deleterious consequences of this capture and control of the media on the aspirations and projects of civil society in Pakistan. Indeed, the damage to civil society and its institutions will constitute a framework for description and analysis.

The thesis points out that fundamentalism was a phenomenon rooted in colonial politics, and later become a vehicle by which post colonial authoritarian regimes worked to subordinate democratic forces. The complexities of political communication in

Pakistan require a historical analysis of the communication media and in particular, an analysis of the struggle for freedom of the press and the eventual demise of that freedom under the fundamentalist influence and agenda.

Since gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan, by virtue of its geographic location, has been of tremendous interest to the international community and the Western world as an entry point to China, an obstruction block for the Soviet Union, and an influential force in the oil-rich Arab world. For over five decades, there has been no dearth of foreign scholars, journalists, writers and film makers with a keen interest to research various issues in Pakistan--- the political upheavals, the martial laws and military coups, wars with India, the severing of half the country to become Bangladesh in 1971, the much awaited and touted experiments with democracy, the population explosion, the enormous and widespread poverty, women's issues, human rights issues and abuses, environmental issues, drugs, government corruption, sham elections, militant insurrections in neighboring countries, fundamentalism, nuclear arms, the *Indus Valley* civilization--- and much more. However, one issue that has not been a focus of attention is the country's media. Due to the severe constraints on journalists and academics, there is a serious dearth of analyses on the subject, and the little that is available is lacking in both critical depth and substance. Critical articles that do appear in Pakistan's own media are, as a rule, confined to the English press, but these too are limited in content and analysis because of rigid constraints imposed on the media. When I chose this topic for analysis, I was well aware of the obstacles, but these very obstacles make this examination even more crucial and urgent. Having worked as a journalist myself in Pakistan for almost

fourteen years---the worst of them spent under the Zia regime, the most dreadful martial law the country has known---I felt particularly compelled to pursue this topic.

Jawaharlal Nehru's remarks in the early 60s that "Every country has an army while in Pakistan, the army has a country,"¹ draw our attention to the early praetorian patterns in Pakistan. A careful examination of the history of Pakistan reveal how the US-sponsored cold war served to forge an alliance between US imperialism and the Pakistan army in the 50s and how the subsequent process of militarization of the state was initiated in Pakistan on the pretext of national security. No civilian government was allowed to complete its tenure in Pakistan----one elected prime- minister was hanged and two were forced into exile by declaring them a threat to national security.

Today, under the fourth military dictator, all the heads of key government posts and autonomous and semi-autonomous departments are army generals, including: the Railway, the Postal Services, the National Highway Authority, Ports and Shipping, the Pakistan Steel Mills, the Export Processing Zone Authority, the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority, the National Telecommunications Authority, the Survey of Pakistan, the National Crisis Management Cell, the Federal Public Service Commission, the Civil Aviation and the vice chancellors of several universities. Even government appoints generals to run the sports, including squash, cricket, hockey, athletics and the Pakistan Sports Control Board. Unlike its predecessors, the present army regime has introduced a number of constitutional amendments to carve out a permanent and dominant role for the Armed Forces. Due to a lack of any effective opposition from

¹ Quoted in Faiz, Ali, 'October Coup" The Frontier Post, (Peshawar), (Oct. 26, 1999, P8.

civil society, it is assumed that Pakistan will remain a praetorian state, and this is the key context in which this thesis will examine the media in Pakistan.

In Chapter 2, various approaches are discussed to situate the Pakistani media in a broader theoretical perspective in order to explore how various regimes and the fundamentalists contributed to the demise of a free press in the country. This chapter discusses the various elite groups who represent a colonial legacy; they are identified as the forces of the status quo. These elite groups (the military, the bureaucracy, and the landlords and religious leaders) provide the dominant views of the society, while teachers, lawyers, and journalists articulate alternative subordinated views. Hence, in contemporary Pakistani society, the elite groups control a powerful array of resources, and most relevant for this thesis, the means of political communication. Hassan Gardezi describes the elite group in Pakistan as a “deadly combination of forces that sustains the praetorian role of the Pakistani state and retards the process of democratization in the country. Each of these forces thrives on the other.”² Under the praetorians, the media became the first casualty, and expression of free thought became virtually impossible. This chapter also gives a historical account of the socio-political events during the last fifty years that illustrate how the military consolidated its position of pre-eminent power in order to establish Pakistan as a praetorian state.

Chapter 3 discusses the media under the praetorians and the various piece of legislation aimed at reducing media to a subservient mouthpiece for the elite groups. Previous legislation ³under colonial rule was re-activated and in some cases made even

² Hassan Gardezi, A Re-examination of the socio-political history of Pakistan, (Ontario: Edwin Miller, 1991), p. 139.

³ Zamir, Niazi , Press in Chain, (Karachi: Royal Book Company) ,1987, p. 94.

harsher, while dozens of new laws were introduced by successive governments, both the "civilian" and military, to constrain the press. Media related legislation has been mapped in the historical context and briefly analyzed to explore its impact on the media.

Interviews with senior journalists were also conducted to better understand the consequences of media related legislation, and how journalists were prevented from performing their tasks freely. A senior journalist believes that after the imposition of the respective press laws and other harsh measures, 'conformism' has become the accepted norm, and journalists in Pakistan are no more the free agents and watchdogs of public interests; and the dictum "people's right to know" has been replaced by "people should only know what the establishment wants them to know."⁴ The electronic media, which has remained under government control since its inception, will also be discussed briefly.

Chapter 4 explores the key moments in Pakistan's history that provide opportunities for a prominent role for fundamentalists in Pakistan, their alliance with the military regimes and how this alliance took over the media and changed the contemporary cultural and political discourse in mainstream journalism. On the basis of interviews with working journalists, an attempt has been made to illustrate the ideological differences among the journalists on various social and political issues. This chapter analyzes the role played by the state to create a favorable atmosphere for itself, the sacking of independent journalists and the accommodation of right wing journalists, and the violence against the press by the state and the fundamentalists.

Chapter 5 takes up contemporary media reports, obtained from the English and vernacular Pakistani newspapers and their archives, to cite case studies to further argue

⁴ Interview ----Saqlain Imam, president Lahore Press Club, interviewed on March 1998.

the consequences of fundamentalism in Pakistani society. It will be argued that the worst victim of the right wing encroachment in the media is the civil society, which has been systematically deprived of any meaningful debate and dialogue about the national politics. And yet, both despite this and as a consequence, whenever the masses were given a chance at the ballot, they voted against dictatorship and the religious parties. The state of women and minorities will also be discussed to illustrate the horrific crimes against the weakest segments of the society. This chapter uses case studies to examine various Islamic laws introduced by the Zia regime, and their consequences for the media, women and minorities.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter seeks to place the Pakistani media in a broader theoretical framework in order to explore how successive authoritarian rulers and later fundamentalism played havoc with the media. There are, at present fifty-six statutes, rules & regulations, and other laws under various sections of the Pakistan Penal Code of 1860 to control the mass media, but there is no law to ensure access to official information in Pakistan.

Louis D. Hayes characterizing Pakistan as a failed state—this failure is evident in repeated political crises; a number of constitutional failures; four military coups; and the secession of the country's East wing, which is now Bangladesh.⁵ Successive governments, even the elected ones, did not accept the legitimacy of the political process; instead they remained keen to restrict communication and political activities to ensure their own survival.⁶

In many ways, Pakistan's history is one crisis and abuse of exploitation of labour forces, the lowest literacy rate in the region, discrimination against women and minorities, the highest infant mortality rate in Asia, and more than forty million people living below the poverty line without any housing and healthcare. The brutal state machinery deprives the people of their basic right to freedom of expression and provision of justice. To analyze the crises in Pakistan, we have to understand the concentration of wealth and resources into the hands of the elite, and their use of the state to render the masses powerless and vulnerable to exploitation.

⁵ Louis D. Hayes, Politics in Pakistan, (Colorado: Westview Press), 1984, p. 1

From its inception in 1947, Pakistan has remained mostly under the control of a military-bureaucratic oligarchy. The civil service inherited a passion for suppressing information from its colonial masters, while the military finds it below its dignity to share information with its subjects, whom they refer to as 'the bloody civilians'. General Ayub Khan, the first military dictator (1958-69) introduced the term 'bloody civilians' publicly for the first time. Later, it became the popular expression for the military officers to refer to politicians.

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to understand contemporary Pakistan without a historical analysis of the institutional power struggle soon after the independence. Several political analysts, including Ayesha Jalal, argue that the history of the first decade of Pakistan is very significant as the institutional imbalance established in that period had enduring effects in the years to come.⁷ The supremacy of non-elected institutions triggered an intra-elite power struggle, and the military emerged as the most powerful elite in the early 50s.⁸ During that decade, international and regional factors also contributed to the role and power of the military, especially when in neighboring Iran the Mussadaq government nationalized the oil industry in 1951. The Western powers' inability to intervene directly in Iran because they lacked a strategic base in the region instantly drew their attention to Pakistan. A military alliance was forged in 1952 between the USA and Pakistan to defend US oil interests in the Middle East and block the spread of communism.⁹ The US military advisors were attached to the Pakistani

⁶ Ibid., p.9.

⁷ Ayesha jalal, Democracy and Authoritarianism in south Asia (Cambridge;New York: Cambridge), 1995,p.54.

⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

⁹ Tariq Ali, Can pakistan Survive (London:Penguin,),1983,pp. 51-52.

armed forces to train them for their new role helping to service and police the Gulf States, a role which resulted not only in a flood of the Saudi petro-dollars but also the transfer of conservative Islamic ideology to Pakistan. A troika of "A"s, *Allah* (God), the Army and America, was thus established, with a profound impact on Pakistan's political and economic system. With no opposition from the domestic and international fronts, the military decided to wield direct state authority in 1958 by derailing and dismantling the political process and declaring martial law. And thus, the mould was cast to establish a praetorian rule in the years to come.

The military intervention in politics is generally described as praetorianism, and the term is taken from one of the earliest and most famous instances of military intervention. The *Praetorian Guards* of the *Roman Empire* were established as a special military unit to protect the emperor, but they ended up using their military powers to overthrow the emperor.

As one recounts Pakistan's checkered political history, it becomes obvious that the military has always projected itself as the only viable alternative to civilian leadership. Whenever political leaders failed, the Generals were emboldened to usurp political power and retain it for long periods under the pretext of restoration of "true" democracy. The fourth military takeover, that by Gen. Musharraf in 1999, also confirms this praetorian pattern.

Perlmutter notes that a collapse of executive power is a pre-condition to praetorianism, leaving the door open for the army to take over with or without the approval of the civilian government. He notes that in a praetorian set up, the political

leadership is recruited from the military and other groups supportive of the army's rule, while the military plays a dominant role in all political institutions.¹⁰

A number of Western scholars, Huntington, Janowitz, and Perlmutter, for example, have analyzed Pakistan's praetorian pattern and made certain errors by ignoring either its colonial history or by applying analytical frameworks developed to study Western societies. This oversight has meant that the meanings of basic terms such as "freedom," "democracy," "state," "civil society," and others have been applied in without adequate attention to the Pakistani context. The basic notion of "civil-military relations" has become problematic for depicting the true nature and context of the institutions and polity of Pakistan. In Europe and North America, the term "civil" refers to the political as well as the civil state apparatus or bureaucracy, while in Pakistan the civil bureaucracy is distinct not only from the political institutions, but also from the other civil institutions like police, communication, foreign services, etc.¹¹

Among the American scholars, Amos Perlmutter, who has written extensively on Pakistan, has divided praetorianism into three categories: autocracy, oligarchy and authoritarian praetorianism--- the first of these is simply military tyranny; the second one is dominated by the military at the executive level; and the third is the military-civil fusion.¹² Pakistan's dictators fall in the third category, as every military ruler in Pakistan introduced new political faces sympathetic to the military and declared the ousted politicians corrupt. Describing the 1958 martial law in Pakistan, Perlmutter says Ayub Khan's 'basic democracy' developed as an alternative to the regime it replaced. He argues

¹⁰ Amos ,Perlmutter, The Military and Politics in Modern Times (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) ,1977, p.95.

¹¹ Abdul Shakoor Khakwani, Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan, (Chicago: University of Illinois), 2001.

that in a praetorian state, as long as the interaction of the regime and the community is *stable*, the military remains subordinate to the political regime, and if this interaction becomes *unstable*, then the military intervenes to exploit the regime's vulnerability. He provides no explanation for why the military apparatus exploits a "regime's vulnerability" and also overlooks the fact that in Pakistan political regimes are appointed by the military through rigged and manipulated polls. Further, his analysis of the first martial law of Ayub Khan, and his introduction of basic democracy, lacks explanation of political and historical events in Pakistan. It needs to be mentioned here that firstly, it was the then US Defence Secretary McElory's four- day hectic visit to Pakistan that paved the way for General Ayub to become president.¹³ Secondly, the basic democracy plan of Ayub Khan was aimed at creating an electoral college of local body councilors who would elect him president without holding an election. Perlmutter also notes that modern praetorianism developed when the civilian governments lost electoral support, and the progressive and liberal politicians began to look at the military as a vehicle of hope and liberation. Again this analysis does not inform us about the praetorian pattern in Pakistan as all the ousted civilian governments in Pakistan never lost their electoral support, and progressive forces always denounced military takeovers.

Leading scholar, Samuel P. Huntington, whose work in the 50s set the agenda for the study of civil-military relations and the state, identifies two components, bellicosity and authoritarianism, as the trademark of soldiers. Huntington notes that by virtue of this

¹² Perlmutter, 1977, p. 95.

¹³ Hassan Gardezi and Jamil Rashid,eds., Pakistan , the Roots of dictatorship, (London: Zed Press) 1983,pp.84-85.

trademark the soldier is "also thought to be opposed to democracy and to desire the organization of society on the basis of the chain of command."¹⁴

Huntington's theory of 'professionalism-equals-civilian control' presents two broad models for 'civilian control' to avert military supremacy. Firstly, the 'subjective civilian control' models maximizing civilian power against the military, and secondly the 'objective civilian control' models for maximizing military professionalism.¹⁵

However, the military's professionalism thrives under praetorianism in Pakistan, and the military achieved maximum professional advancement during the martial law regimes. Similarly, it is the military that controls the power, and there is no force available in Pakistan that can increase civilian power.

Another military sociologist, Morris Janowitz discusses civilian control in the context of the Huntington model of 'professionalism-equals-civilian control', but views civilian control in terms of societal, rather than state or institutional control, as opposed to Huntington. However, there is no mention of the political economy of defense in Janowitz's analysis, which is a key factor in Pakistan as its spending on defense in relation to its GNP is the highest.

Another military anthropologist, Jack Woddis, provides a very useful analysis of a coup and the threat of a coup in Third World countries. He argues that the former colonies are more prone to coups as the armies have been trained and ideologically prepared for an 'anti-people' role. He believes that even after these countries gained independence, imperialist influences remained dominant in military matters because of

¹⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 1957, p.60.

¹⁵ Khakwani, 2001, p.13.

their dependency on Western instructors, equipment, and training in Western academies¹⁶. Woddis notes that

"officers who have received their training in Western academies, have in fact been specifically selected for such instruction by the former colonial power as being individuals of a sufficiently conservative outlook, or sufficiently opportunistic. They are ambitious and corrupt, as to provide a reasonable guarantee that they would use their position to act against any far-reaching progressive changes in their country. The same motivation lies behind the choice which the United States makes when it selects army personnel from the Third World to be trained in US military academies, particularly for counter-insurgency techniques."¹⁷

Woodis depicts the army coup in a general framework, but his analysis does not take account of the economic, ethnic and cultural factors that lead to praetorianism. Most of the Western scholars who studied praetorianism ignored the cultural setting and symbols associated with militarism, particularly in a Muslim society like Pakistan where historically all the heroes are warriors and generals who conquered the world and spread the word of Islam. The history textbooks in Pakistan start with an Arab general's invasion of the sub-continent in the 8th century, where "the great Muslim soldier *Mohammad Bin Qasim* conquered Pakistan early in the 8th century (712 AD) and extended the *Umayyad* Muslim rule to the *Indus Valley*".¹⁸ All the Muslim generals who have been invading the sub-continent for centuries are heroes in Pakistani textbooks, while noted historians, including Will Durant, have called them barbarians who torched cities rendering them to

¹⁶ Jack Woddis, Armies and Politics, London , Lawrence and Wishart Ltd,1977,p.128.

¹⁷ (Ibid. p. 128)

¹⁸ Yusuf Ali, Abdullah. The making of India (London: A & C Black),1925, p.27.

ashes, wiped out populations after looting valuables, and took away young women.¹⁹ Similarly, official propaganda presents these Muslim generals as outstanding role models for Pakistani society. All the Pakistani ballistic missiles, *Abdali*, *Ghaznavi*, *Ghauri*, and *Haider*, are named after these invading Muslim generals, and, interestingly, the two main battle tanks (MBT) manufactured in Pakistan are named *Al-Khalid* and *Al-Zarar*, both Arab generals.

Also, the perception among Western scholars that the post cold war era does not permit the traditional praetorian patterns and military regimes, and that there would not be any support in the international community, lacks credibility in Pakistan's case. The present praetorian ruler, General Musharraf, enjoys legitimacy and the backing and support of the international community. What the Western scholars fail to take into account is the 'client garrison' role of the Pakistani praetorians serving the imperialist power. Under the first dictator, Ayub Khan (1958-69), US spy planes used Pakistani bases to fly to the Soviet Union. The American U-2 spy plane that was shot down by the Soviets and pushed the two Superpowers to the brink of war in the 1960s, was flown from a Pakistani airbase. The second dictator, Yahya Khan (1969-72), facilitated secret diplomacy between China and the USA, and the famous secret visit of Henry Kissinger to China from Pakistan was arranged under him. The third dictator, Zia-ul Haq (1977-88) fought the American war in Afghanistan. The fourth dictator, Musharraf (1999-present) is facilitating the current US war against terrorism. Interestingly, Pakistan has always received massive Western aid and loans under praetorian rule, while the civilian rulers

¹⁹Durant Will. "Our Oriental Heritage" Story of Civilization, Vol. 1, trans. Rashid Tayyub (Lahore:

Takhliqat.), 1996, pp.84-91.

always struggled to obtain any assistance from the Western powers.

Therefore, it is important to follow an approach to military politics that seeks to locate it in the matrix of the power struggle in the state and society of Pakistan. Hassan Gardezi and Hamza Alavi, in separate works, analyze praetorianism in a colonial and post-colonial context and identify the role of elite groups in sustaining the praetorian state. This approach takes into account the influences that served and aided the military in its dominance of social and political order over the years. Their approach also assesses the social and class interests of the military, and their relations with the other dominant forces in Pakistan. Thus it is the most useful approach to inform my thesis.

The state policy to grant land to army officers fostered a vested property ownership interest among the officers. During the first martial law, several senior officers and generals who were assigned posts in various financial institutions and industries developed close links between them and the business community. Serving and retired army officers occupied most of the public and private executive jobs-- a trend that continues to present date. The convergence of army interests between the bureaucracy, landlord and business community facilitated an informal grand alliance of dominated forces. In coming pages, we will discuss the role of these dominated forces (elite groups) in detail. The fundamentalism in Pakistan is a parasitic product of the military in order to use Islam at the level of ideology and culture to sabotage and divert the struggle of the subordinate classes. The religious forces remained subservient during the first martial law but gained influence during the next one when they sent their cadre to East Pakistan (Bangladesh) to fight alongside the army to crush the nationalist uprising. During Zia's regime, they joined the ranks of the elite and soon became the most prominent force in

the country by occupying key ministries and other positions in the government. An analysis of the ruling classes or elite reveal us of the continuity of the colonial legacy and the meteoric rise of these elite groups in post-colonial Pakistan.

Gardezi and Alavi, have both traced the history of the elite groups pointing out that the creation of small elite group is a prerequisite for exploitation under colonialism. Alavi's analysis of the nature of the post-colonial state provides a good starting point to further discuss the issue. In his theory of the "overdeveloped state," Alavi describes three characteristics of the post-colonial state. Firstly, the post-colonial state inherits from the metropolitan elite a powerful bureaucratic military apparatus that was overdeveloped in relation to the colonized society because of the necessity to subordinate the latter to colonial interests. The second characteristic involves a new and relatively autonomous economic role by which the state appropriates a large part of the economic surplus and uses it in bureaucratically controlled activity in the name of development. Thirdly, Alavi asserts that the state plays a crucial role in creating territorial unity and its own legitimacy.

Acknowledging the basic framework of Alavi's theory, Gardezi developed his concept of "the creation of an elite group in a praetorian state" and identified different components of contemporary class structure and the transformation of these components into an elite group. I will discuss this framework in further detail as the role played by six elite groups is a key to identifying the factors behind the Pakistani media's subservience to the ruling class.

Prior to colonialism, the village system in Pakistan functioned as a *baradari* unit, a brotherhood of cultivators, and under this system land was not treated as a commodity.

The village 'elder,' selected by the community, was responsible for collecting the taxes, for the state and performing small judicial and administrative functions. The British Empire changed the indigenous rural system by introducing the *Settlement Act* in 1871 under which land titles were given to hand-picked loyalists to create a parasitic landlord class. Under the new landlord, the cultivators became mere serfs, with the sole function of producing a maximum yield for the Empire's needs.²⁰ The British introduced Punjab Land Alienation Act in 1900 to protect Muslim landlords in Northern India, now Pakistan. The Act allows free transfer of land within agriculture tribes but prohibit transfer of land to non-agriculturists. Pakistan inherited legally protected landlord elite.

The second group---the bureaucratic elite---was created to address the growing administrative needs of the empire. The highly educated native people, who graduated from the British education system, were allowed to join the 'exclusive' Civil Services. Gardezi points out that these new cadres of *Superior Civil Services* lived in specially constructed bungalows in segregated housing complexes known as *Civil Lines Colonies*, well away from any interaction with the ordinary people.²¹ This tradition of isolating this cadre from the masses is still practiced by the government of Pakistan. The principle architect of the British education system in the subcontinent, Lord Macaulay, characterized the local bureaucrat class in his famous phrase: 'they will be Indian in blood and color but will be English in tastes, morals, intellect and opinion.'²²

²⁰ Hassan, Gardezi and Rashid, Jamil. eds. *Pakistan, The Roots of Dictatorship* (London: Zed Publishers) 1983, p.29.

²¹ Gardezi, Hassan. *A Re-examination of the socio-Political History of Pakistan* Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991, p.26.

²² Ibid.,p.26.

The third group was comprised of urban traders and industrialists--this group was the business elite. The fourth group was the military elite. As a result of the two world wars and to protect the interests of the empire, the British inducted the natives into the military services with the main purpose of suppressing local uprisings and fighting overseas wars. The natives for the officer classes were recruited from the loyal landed gentry and were trained in British military facilities such as Sandhurst. The fifth group, which Alavi called the "salarariat", was the product of colonial educational institutions and performed as scribes and functionaries of the expanding empire with pen as an instrument of production. Alavi argued that the salariat was an auxiliary class, different from middle class and petit bourgeoisie.²³

The last group is the religious elite who emerged in the post colonial era and assumed the status of elite in the mid seventies after serving the dominant groups by providing them legitimacy through the interpretation of religion.

All these groups have a common interest in suppressing and derailing any democratic process in order to prolong and legitimize their own rule. In his analysis of the transfer of power to this elite group after independence, Gardezi argued that these elite groups were fairly safe candidates to maintain colonial policies in the post independence period.²⁴ The transfer of power from the white masters to these brown *sahibs* is a key concept to understand in order to analyze a society like Pakistan.

After the independence in 1947, the overwhelming majority of the new leadership was from the local landlord and immigrant Muslim gentry from India that had no

²³ For details see Hamza, Alavi, "State and Class in Pakistan" *Pakistan: The Roots of Dictatorship*, London: ZED Press , 1983, p.57.

²⁴ Gardezi, 1991, p.28.

connection with the masses, and thus soon found themselves unable to solve broad and complex social problems. To seek legitimacy, the isolated leadership then resorted to taking refuge in Pakistan's ideology, the core of which was that Islam is the basis for the creation of Pakistan. The isolation and incompetence of the political leadership further paved the way for the military and the bureaucracy to take control of the state. The official slogans of "Pakistani ideology" and "Islam in danger" could not get much attention in the mainstream media, which was more interested in projecting the failure of the government and its inability to address hunger and poverty. The mainstream media represented by activist journalists, who fought against colonial rule, viewed the official slogans as an attempt to divert the attention of citizens from the basic issues. However, this created an opportunity for the handful of right wing publications to seek influence within the new state.

The newly evolved political discourse of religion gave a new life to religious parties who had earlier opposed the creation of Pakistan and declared its leader Jinnah to be "an infidel and secular." Religious leaders and others who shared their purely religious perspective on politics took the initiative and claimed that Pakistan had been created for Islam, that the state system should be based on Islamic ideology to create an Islamic state. Later, successive governments also invoked Islam from time to time to overcome their internal political divisions. After the breakaway of East wing to become the independent nation of Bangladesh, the official reliance on Islam increased. The 1973 Constitution included more Islamic provisions and declared Islam to be Pakistan's state religion. After the 1977 military coup, Zia-ul Haq cultivated orthodox and conservative religious elements to counterbalance the opposition to his rule and introduced several

amendments in the constitutional . Zia told the BBC in an interview " I have a mission, given by God, to bring Islamic order in Pakistan."²⁵ The Pakistani state took upon itself the task of enforcing Islam along orthodox lines, and used the state apparatus and the state media to promote an orthodox Islamic ideological state.

This thesis will analyze the role of the forces of the status quo and the agents of change, and their constant battle in the contemporary political discourse in Pakistan. It will map the key moments that contributed to the meteoric rise, and subsequent dominance, of the fundamentalists, and the consequences for civil society. Besides secondary sources, I will use my interviews with numerous journalists belonging to various political and ideological groups. Some of these interviews go back to the period when I was a practicing journalist myself, and many were conducted later through electronic communication. In both cases, several of these interviews were conducted on the condition that identities would not be disclosed. The contents of the interviews are synthesized and paraphrased while precise quotes are taken from e-mails.

This chapter examined the different theoretical perspectives that enable us to place the social and cultural practices, indicating why Pakistan has become a praetorian state and could not evolve a democratic system, and allow its citizens to exercise freedom of expression and enjoy human rights. Under praetorian rule the media became the first casualty, and political communication took place under tight controls and manipulation. The suppression of dissenting views created entry points for the agents of elite groups to capture the media to manipulate it according to their needs.

²⁵ BBC, April 4,1978. Later this interview was widely publicized in local press.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the media under the praetorians and the legislation aimed to pressure, influence, and manipulate political communication by rendering the media to a subservient mouthpiece for the elite groups.

Chapter 3

History of legislation to tame the press

This chapter will discuss the state of the media in Pakistan both in contemporary and historical contexts. It will detail and analyze the suppression of freedom of the press through various pieces of legislation introduced by successive political and military regimes. Although the print media are the main focus, the state of the broadcast media will also be discussed briefly; in Pakistan, radio and TV have remained under rigid government control.

The very ideas of freedom of the press and democracy are anathema to the interests of the dominant groups in Pakistani society. In Pakistan, seventy per cent of the population live in rural areas under the landlord system where the land, the inhabitants and animals are all considered the property of the landlord. Modern education is labeled "the knowledge of the devil" by the landlords²⁶. The only education allowed under this system is religion, which supports the status quo. There are very few schools in the rural areas. Similarly, a free press is considered to be a direct threat to the interests of the landlords, and thus any such 'threat' should be either crushed or neutralized to maintain the status quo. Any anti-landlord discourse in the media is not allowed. In the urban areas as well, which are controlled by the praetorians with other elites, the media is perceived as a threat and allowed to function only under their tight control to highlight the

26 Priests in the rural areas are landless and live off the largesse from of the landlord. Orthodox Islam rejects all forms of knowledge, which are not derived from religion. The leading Muslim scholar of the 20th century, Maulana Maudoodi, declared physics, chemistry, biology and other science subjects as misleading because they were taught without the mention of God and his prophet Mohammed. For details see Mohammed Asghar Khan's, 1985, "Islam, Politics and the State", London, Zed Publishers, pp. 178-187.

achievements of the rulers. Any criticism of the armed forces is subject to charges of high treason and perceived as an act by 'enemy agents' to destabilize the national ideology and the country's security.

The mass media, which was introduced under colonialism in the late 18th century in the sub-continent, played a crucial role in the national liberation movement. As the struggle against colonialism gained momentum, the empire introduced various laws, mainly the 1910 *Public Safety Ordinance* and the 1930 *Press Ordinance* to curb the press.²⁷ More than 1000 newspapers and publications were suppressed through these legislation, resulting in the closure of over 70 per cent of publications.²⁸ Despite these repressive laws, the struggle for the freedom of expression continued, and the Muslim Press such as Zamindar, Nawaiwaqt and others, emerged as a strong force and played its role in mobilizing people for national liberation.²⁹

After the partition of India in 1947, the majority of Muslim political activists-cum-journalists, who had fought against colonialism, migrated to Pakistan to contribute to the new Muslim State based on secular democracy and rule of law. They also brought with them the notion that journalism is a mission to fight against oppression and to secure the rights of the people. They had always considered themselves as ones whose job it was to say what others did not dare to say. The press played its assigned role of awakening

²⁷ Zamir Niazi, *The press in Chain*, (Karachi :Royal Books),1987, p.20.

²⁸ Ibid.,p.23.

Note: ²⁹ The press was held responsible for the partial success of the Satyagraha campaign in 1930. Swift action was taken against the "erring" correspondents, besides the forfeiture of securities. Well over a thousand papers were victimized in Bombay, Bengal, Delhi, Madras, Punjab and the United Provinces (UP). Bombay led with 596 demands for security, while the Punjab came second with 237. Several leading editors of British origin were deported to England (Niazi, 1987, P 14-24).

political consciousness and mobilizing people to expedite the pace of the freedom movement to its successful end.³⁰

Pakistan inherited a highly politicized and activist media, particularly its English wing that was groomed under some of the best English editors. Influenced by the British practice of freedom of press, the country's English press started exposing the government's failure to address pressing issues of the masses. The ruling elite, which was dominated by the landlords, took this criticism as a threat to their rule and thus promulgated various legislative acts to mute the criticism. Within one year of the creation of the new state, the *Public Safety Ordinance* was implemented; civil liberties, including the freedom of speech and expression, were curtailed.³¹

The mass media were forced to either suppress truth or misrepresent it, and support dictatorships. A study of official records shows that during the first seven years (1947-1953), in the Punjab province alone, thirty-one newspapers were banned and fines were imposed on fifty-three publications.³²

In 1952, the *Security of Pakistan Act* was introduced, which allowed federal and provincial governments to close down any publication and arrest the publisher, editor or writer if they believed that the story was likely to endanger the defense, external affairs or security of Pakistan. The *Act* clearly states that, "any police officer may be authorized to carry out search and seizure." The Security of Pakistan Act 1952: Section 11 of the Security of Pakistan Act 1952 gives the federal government the power to require an

³⁰ Interview with Rafique Mir, a senior journalist who died in 2001.

³¹ Niazi, 1987, p.39

³² Ibid., p.73.

editor, publisher or printer to disclose the name of a confidential source and to prohibit the publication, sale or distribution of a document and to forfeit the same if it is of the opinion that the document contains matters likely to endanger the defense, external affairs or security of Pakistan. Three more sections were added in the Security Act of Pakistan in 1961 to seize any newspapers.

In the mid fifties, the military emerged as the dominant group within the elite. After ruling indirectly, they moved to outright praetorian rule in 1958 by declaring martial law and banning all political activities and freedom of expression. For the military, communication holds key significance; indeed, communication plays a central role in both peace and wartime operations of the military.

During conflict, armies focus on destroying the enemy's lines of communication and other communication-related facilities to gain a decisive edge in the war. In peacetime, major war games are held to test and deploy new communication tools. Therefore, when an army declares martial law, the first priority is the takeover of all communications facilities and replacement of civilian personnel with army personnel. As Robert Anderson notes in his study of martial law, "In fact every conceivable mode of communication is important to the military in peace and in conflict, regardless of the kind of society in which it operates."³³ Despite having a very limited experience with the mass media, it is essential for martial law regimes to control and operate "to create and sustain a grand illusion" of legitimacy for their rule.³⁴

³³ R.S., Anderson, "Introduction: Communication and Martial Law." Canadian Journal of Communication, 1988, p.3.

³⁴ Ibid.

Pakistan's military leaders needed civilian masks to legitimize their rule. The landlord and religious elite provided them with this mask, and in the process, they gained significant control over the political discourse. After laying down the foundation for a praetorian state in 1958, the army was able to devote more energy to suppress freedom of expression. Ayub Khan, the first martial law administrator, introduced the grand plan of placing the mass media under the government umbrella to strangle any independent voice against the praetorians. The first casualty of this grand design was the *Progressive Papers Limited* (PPL), which published the English daily *The Pakistan Times*, the *Urdu* daily *Imroze*, and the *Urdu* weekly *Lailo Nahar*. The owner and publisher were framed in several cases, ranging from high treason to receiving money from a foreign power, allegations, which were never proved. The papers were taken over by the government under the 1952 *Security Act*.

The takeover of PPL was a huge blow to the press and citizens, as they were deprived of the most authoritative and important voice of the people, while rendering dozens of leftist journalists' jobless. The forcible takeover of the *Progressive Papers Limited*, a corporately owned group of newspapers with an acknowledged reputation for quality, integrity and independence died a painful slow death. The sad part of this whole tragedy was the "welcome" which it received from the press barons: the editor of The Times of Karachi, wrote a signed editorial on the front page, stating, "The occasion demands that the rest of the National Press should hail the ideological re-birth of The Pakistan Times and its allied publications .The revolutionary regime has rendered a

signal service to the cause of a free press in Pakistan.”³⁵ The editor of Dawn also praised the “revolutionary regime”, as did the editors of Daily *Nawa-i-Waqt*, and *Jang*.³⁶ The military rule could not tolerate daily scrutiny by a watchdog. The next step was the setting up of the *National Press Trust*, (NPT) which brought 11 newspapers of English and Urdu with an aim that eventually all the major papers of the country would belong to government.³⁷

In 1960, the government introduced another draconian law, the *Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance*, which still remains in effect. This law, which was an extension of the 1910 colonial law, the *Public Safety Ordinance*, allowed the government to prohibit the publication of any material, impose pre-censorship, close down publications for unspecified time, prohibit the entry of a publication in any province, disclose sources, and make arrests.

In 1961, the government took the premier news agency, APP, *The Associated Press of Pakistan*, under government control in the "public interest". It then introduced the *Press and Publications Ordinance* in 1963, which was even more authoritarian than the press laws under the colonial rule. Hundreds of dailies and publishing houses were closed down and scores of journalists were jailed under the ordinance until its repeal in 1988 after the death of General Zia in a plane crash.³⁸ Ayub's regime also introduced

³⁵ Zamir Niazi, All is not lost, (Karachi : Dawn Publishers), 1999, p.17.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Aziz Siddiqui, No Hurrahs for Freedom, (Dawn Publishers), 1999, p.7.

³⁸ Mehdi Hassan, (1997), *Akhbar aur Pakistani Muashra* (Newspapers and the Pakistani Society), Lahore, A.H.Publishers.

another authoritarian practice, the “press advice,” which was a telephone call from the governments’ *Press Information Department* (PID) directly to newsrooms to suggest which news or photograph should be highlighted, played down or totally suppressed. This practice has continued throughout numerous civilian and military administrations to the present day.³⁹

In 1969, following a massive agitation launched by leftist students wings, trade unions and the media, Ayub Khan stepped down and handed over power to fellow general Yahya Khan who promised to hold the first general elections on the basis of adult franchise. The announcement saw a mushroom growth of newspapers and periodicals in the wake of political polarization. With the exception of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* publications and the *Pakistan Peoples Party’s* daily *Urdu* newspaper, the *Mussawat*, all these publications closed down after the 1970 election as their parties were completely wiped.

After the back to back martial law governments of Ayub Khan (1958-69) and Yahya Khan (1969-72), Z.A. Bhutto’s civilian rule started in Pakistan in 1972, when he assumed power as the first civilian martial law administrator. There was no respite for the media under civilian rule, and many newspapers were banned either for short periods or permanently. Editors, publishers and printers of three Lahore-based journals, the *Punjab Punch*, the *Zindagi* and the *Urdu Digest*, were not only put in prison and their papers closed down; they were also barred from editing or publishing any other newspaper or journal under any name or title whatsoever . Dailies, weeklies and monthlies were shut down in large numbers and many journalists were hounded. The ‘democratic’ government of Z.A Bhutto acquired full control over the press in 1972 when it issued directives to all

³⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

government, semi-government, and autonomous and semi-autonomous institutions to release their advertisements through the provincial *Press Information Department* (PID). Even to this date, the PID has sole authority to determine which newspaper will or will not get a quota of advertisements.⁴⁰

The *Dawn* tried to resist and challenged the government's harsh policies for one year, but soon after the arrest of its Chief Editor, it too started to toe the government line. Journalism under Ayub Khan and Z.A. Bhutto, as many professionals recall, was reduced to the level of 'prostitution' with newspapers competing with each other in the art of sycophancy.

The worst outcome of Z.A. Bhutto's era was the rise of the right-wing media. His information minister, *Maulana Kausar Niazi*, promoted the rightwing media to counter the "nationalist" political parties in the provinces of Balochistan and the NWFP, who were demanding autonomy and waging armed struggle against the center. This was also an attempt to keep a strong check on the leftists, who were controlling the academic institutions and trade unions. Kausar Niazi's strategy worked well, but at the same time it gave a new lease of life to rightist media groups, who later launched a vigorous movement against Bhutto during the 1977 agitation.⁴¹

After five years of civilian rule began the darkest and most brutal era for the freedom of the press in Pakistan. Under the army dictator Zia-ul Haq, in 1977 four journalists were flogged publicly. As many as four hundred newspaper employees were arrested in a single day to terrorize the entire press.

⁴⁰ Niazi, 1999, p.19.

⁴¹ Interview with journalist involved in the movement.

The Zia regime introduced the *Law of Libel* (Pakistan Penal Code Sections 499 and 500) through an amendment to the old colonial 1880 statute, thereby banning the publication of defamatory material against any person even if it is true and in the public interest. As Pakistani media historian, Zamir Niazi, notes

"This was an extraordinary piece of legislation, which had never been heard of in the last two centuries. It took the restrictions on the printed word to the limit. In plain words, this meant there was to be no exposure of official misdeeds and therefore no accountability"⁴²

Further, Zia introduced the blanket pre-censorship of each and every written word in the form of a newspaper, a magazine (literary periodicals included) or a book. The PID officials and young military officers, who had never seen a newspaper office before, assumed power as the sole arbiters of journalism⁴³

Besides pre-censorship, the Zia regime also outlawed any coverage of political parties or the movement for restoration of democracy. In 1983, his regime dismissed many senior journalists working in NPT papers and professors of several universities who had signed a memorandum urging an immediate halt to army atrocities against the people of Sindh province. The government declared all the signatories as 'anti-state' and seeking to disrupt the process of *Islamization*. They were only reinstated after the death of Zia in 1988.

Zia amended Penal Code provision Section 123-A, further curtailing the media. According to this provision, condemnation of state and its ideology would be punishable by ten years imprisonment and fine. The killing of hundreds of people in the Sindh

⁴² Niazi, 1999, p.13.

⁴³ Ibid., p.19.

province could not be published in newspapers as it was deemed against the 'ideology' of Pakistan. Each time senior journalist, the late Nisar Osmani, asked Zia when he would lift martial law, he had to spend a few nights in jail for inquiring.⁴⁴

Zia further amended the Penal Code, Sections 455 and 500, to make the publication of defamatory matter, even if it was true and in the national interest, an offense carrying five years of rigorous imprisonment, saying, "the ideological priorities of the country must be protected and anybody writing against it should be checked to safeguard Islam."⁴⁵

After the death of Zia in a plane crash in 1988, the international community exerted massive pressure on the army to restore democracy upon which they reluctantly allowed civilian rule. However, the army retained complete control by appointing retired army generals in key ministries, and appointing its men as the president with the power to dissolve the parliament and sack the Prime Minister. Four civilian governments were dismissed in ten years.

Under the so-called democratic governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif (1988-99), as many as thirty-six journalists lost their lives, while scores were assaulted. *The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)* recorded the atrocities against the press in its annual report of 1999. The HRCP report discusses in detail the threats to the media from the state agencies, religious groups and the drug Mafia. *Amnesty International* in 1998 stated that "journalists who have reported critically on different

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.16.

⁴⁵ The Jang, 17 December 1979.

armed opposition groups have been threatened with abduction and killing if they did not alter their reports".⁴⁶

The last civilian government of Nawaz Sharif (1996-99), which was ousted by General Musharraf in a bloodless coup in 1999, introduced several new measures to bring the relatively free press back under state control by charging newspapers with tax evasion, arresting an owner for drug trafficking, and 'kidnapping' another one for 'courting' Indian interests.⁴⁷ Nawaz, who had served during Zia- ul- Haq's martial law as chief minister of Punjab province, stayed true to his mentor and launched an attack on all institutions that questioned his autocratic rule. He asked the country's largest newsgroup, *The Jang Group of Publications*, to sack 12 journalists who were critical of his government. When the organization refused to oblige, the Nawaz government seized all their accounts and government agencies raided their offices in all the major cities of Pakistan. The supply of newsprint quota was also stopped and their press workers were harassed.

The praetorian pattern repeated itself again in 1999 when the army dismissed the civilian government and took control of the country. This was the first time in the history of Pakistan that a military takeover did not result in the declaration of martial law, suspension of civilian courts, establishment of military courts and other punitive measures. However, the media was kept under tight control through indirect methods including directives and orders from the government suggesting headlines and the

⁴⁶ Amnesty International's report on Pakistan, 1998.

⁴⁷ Rahmat Shah Afridi, the Editor-in-chief of the English daily The Frontier Post, who published several stories of massive corruption in the Nawaz government, was arrested on charges of drug smuggling and awarded a death sentence. The editor of the Friday Times, Najam Sethi, criticized the policies of the Nawaz government at a forum held in India. He was arrested on treason charges after his return home.

placement of stories. The *Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors* (CPNE) expressed concern over threats to press freedom, directives and orders received from the government with regard to the publication of news and photographs, especially press advice issued by the government.⁴⁸ As the US-based *Committee to Protect Journalists* summed up the state of the media in Pakistan today:

"The very nature of military rule threatens press freedom in Pakistan. Journalists no longer enjoy constitutional protection, and other democratic safeguards have been deeply compromised."⁴⁹

A senior journalist believes that after the imposition of the respective press laws and other harsh measures, 'conformism' has become the accepted norm, and journalists in Pakistan are no more the free agents and watchdogs of public interest; the dictum "people's right to know" has been replaced by "people should only know what the establishment wants them to know."⁵⁰

Broadcast media

Television was launched in Pakistan in 1964 and has remained under strict government control ever since. Today, *Pakistan Television* (PTV) has become the most important and largest tool of communication in Pakistan. Though PTV has made significant progress in terms of quality and countrywide transmissions, it lacks

⁴⁸ Dawn, May 21, 2001, CPNE press statement after its meeting at Bhurban.⁴⁸

⁴⁹ Dawn, May 4, 2001. This issue of Dawn included the entire text of CPJ Annual Report on Freedom of Press in Pakistan.)

⁵⁰ Interview .

credibility. The news bulletins always start with the statements of the prime minister or president. When Zia was killed in a plane crash, the duration of the news bulletin was cut short from thirty minutes to nine minutes as the *PTV* programmers had no clue as to what would be the policies of the new ruler. When Benazir Bhutto was removed from office in 1990, her title of *Mohtarma* (respected) was instantly removed. Similarly, when Musharraf came into power in 1999, the *PTV* halted its transmission for several hours, waiting for new policy directive.

In 1986, a *PTV* news editor was fired as he broadcast the name of the prime minister before that of General Zia, who was known for his passion for watching TV and who also sometimes issued directives during the newscast. According to a study conducted by the *Punjab University* in 1998, Pakistan had 5.1 million TV sets, with a ratio of seven people per set and a viewing time average of four hours a day. In a country like Pakistan, with an illiteracy rate of more than seventy percent, and massive unemployment, TV has assumed great significance for successive governments to promote Islamic ideology and victimize its opponents. The former chief justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Nasim Hassan Shah observed,

"In Pakistan radio and TV have always been under the rigid control of government and driven by narrow personal and party interests. As a result governance has also remained narrow and exclusivist, being confined to perpetuating the interests of the party in power. This state of affairs makes it all the more imperative to liberate the PTV and the radio from government's political control and to make them autonomous."⁵¹

⁵¹ Dawn, 15 February 1999.

The PTV is in fact a department of the *Ministry of Information*, and the government has the authority to appoint its chairman or managing director. The bureaucracy, headed by the Information Secretary, controls all functions of the PTV. In the nineties, with the advent of satellite and cable TV in Pakistan, the government effectively controlled the content by allowing only pre-edited broadcasts to air to ensure that no independent source of information was available to the people. To meet the new challenge posed by technology, the government created two semi-autonomous TV channels, *Shaheen Pay TV* and the *Shalimar Television Network*, but both without independent news bulletins. These channels could only broadcast PTV newscasts. *Shaheen Pay TV* (the largest cable TV provider) and its *Radio FM-100* are owned by the *Pakistan Air Force*.

With such absolute control over the broadcast media, the government does not permit any social or political debates, and there is no representation of minorities and the smaller provinces on the small screen. The only goal of the broadcast media is to promote Islamic ideology and to constantly remind people of the enemy threat on the borders (or even manufacture such a threat) to justify the huge military and defense spending.

The media in Pakistan can be best described through two different statements by two of its rulers. The founder and the first ruler of Pakistan, Jinnah, who was a strong believer in the freedom of the press, declared after the Independence: “I expect you (journalists) to be completely fearless. If I go wrong or for that matter, the Muslim League goes wrong in any direction of its policy or program, I want you to criticize it honestly as its friend, in fact, as one whose heart is beating with the Muslim nation”. ⁵²

⁵² Mohammad Ali Jinnah, *The Dawn*, 13 March 1947

During his one-year rule, no repressive legislation to curb the freedom of expression was enacted, but just a month after his death the *Public Safety Ordinance* was promulgated and civil liberties, including the freedom of speech and expression, were curtailed.⁵³

Jinnah's successors ruined all democratic institutions one by one, including the press. The mass media were forced to suppress truth, to ill-inform and misinform people, and support dictatorships and their cronies.⁵⁴ In absolute contrast to Jinnah, the military dictator, Zia-ul- Haq, (1977-88), declared "I could close down all the newspapers, say, for a period of five years, and nobody would be in a position to raise any voice against it. If they try to organize a meeting or procession, I will send them to jail."⁵⁵

This Chapter has detailed the various press laws to clarify the nature of the constraints on the Pakistani media under various regimes. The next chapter will discuss the rise of fundamentalism and its strong and growing influence over the Pakistani media.

⁵³ Niazi, 1987, p.39.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Zia-ul- Haq, Presidential speech to the nation, The Jang, 22 March 1982,

Chapter 4

Praetorian-Islamist nexus and rise of fundamentalism

This chapter will discuss the rise of fundamentalism in Pakistan, its alliance with the military regimes and how this alliance took over the media and changed the contemporary cultural and political discourse in mainstream journalism. There is a dearth of literature on fundamentalism's impact on the media and a lack of data and theoretical/methodological approaches to this issue. This research was designed on the basis of qualitative methods and the main information was drawn either through the author's long years of working in newspapers or collected through interviews conducted on electronic mail . The detailed interviews not only helped to incorporate the views of journalists, but also to test the hypothesis that under the praetorians and the overdeveloped forces of the status quo, fundamentalism was introduced in the media in the late seventies to promote the ruling elite's agenda of national security based on *Jihad*--to wage war for the enforcement of Islam.

The newspaper management (owners') represents the petit bourgeoisie and landlords, and their survival depends upon their acquiescence to the wishes and demands of the ruling elite, while the newspaper employees, who represent the middle classes, originally aligned themselves with the forces of change among the intellectuals, politicians and other civil society activists. However, due to financial restraints, the staggering power of the forces of status quo, and the ideological differences within their own ranks, most journalists associate themselves with the forces of the status quo in order

to survive and thrive. The premise that under the praetorians media become the first causality will be scrutinized with the information collected from journalists and media related actors through interviews and other interactions.

Interviewed journalists who were arrested, flogged, tortured, kidnapped, subjected to solitary confinement, forced into exile, and forced to change their profession, activists from journalist's trade unions, elected office holders of the press clubs and journalist's unions. Being a journalist and active member of the journalist's trade union myself from 1985 to 1999, I had countless opportunities to attend meetings of journalists and other activities that I will treat as participatory observation. Besides the interviews, a historical approach to the political discourse and events, which had a profound direct and indirect impact on the media in terms of national and regional politics will be used to identify the key moments in the fundamentalist encroachment in the media.

The religious parties realized fully in the 1970 elections that they could never win through the electoral process, and thus decided to join the most powerful elite, the army, to gain influence and establish their ideal—the Islamic State. "The Jamaat-I-Islami chief Mian Tufail Mohammad, closely associated himself with the military rule and expressed satisfaction over Zia's Islamic commitments and missionary zeal."⁵⁶

The army-Islamist wedlock taught the religious parties the importance of communication and control of tools of communication. Thus communication assumed a central role in the politics of the religious parties. All the religious parties and groups

have their own publications, essentially to reach out to the semi-literate priests, who run the countless mosques located in every locality of the country. A constant supply of the 'party line' to these priests is the key factor in the success of the religious parties' operations to generate funds and convert followers to their ideology.

Most of the political analysts blamed Bhutto for introducing fundamentalism in Pakistan, and bringing back the army to a position of strength. The two- year long army operation, which resulted in the killing of hundreds of Balochis and the arrest of over 50,000 people, destroyed the rural infrastructure and sources of earning in Balochistan.⁵⁷ The religious parties, particularly the *Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam*, (JUI), capitalized on this mess by opening religious schools to provide free education and food to children. Also, the religious parties gained significant presence in the media to shape political communication. The thousands of students at their disposal trained and brain washed in religious schools and willing to die for the cause of Islam provide a tremendous strength to the religious parties.

The religious parties acquired massive street power by mobilizing thousands of bigots through the media and the mosques to dictate their terms. With this newly assumed 'role' the rightists began demanding the implementation of an Islamic system in the country, and forced the government to impose a ban on liquor and to declare the *Qadiani* sect as non-Muslims in 1974.

When Zia overthrew Bhutto in 1977, the religious parties instantly extended their full support to the martial law regime on the condition that Zia would implement the Islamic system. As a result, Zia declared the Pakistan Army as the Islamic Army--- all

⁵⁶ Surendra Nath Kaushik, Politics of Islamization in Pakistan, (Delhi : South Asia Publisher),1993,p.35

bars were closed down in the army messes, and a new Islamic slogan was issued to the various units of the Pakistan Army--- “Unity, Peace and Faith” becomes “ Total War for *Allah*”.

Meanwhile, a countrywide newspaper workers’ movement was initiated against the Zia dictatorship, which was ruthlessly crushed by the public flogging of four journalists, while four hundred newspaper employees were arrested in a single day and put behind bars. Most of them were fired from their jobs, and the information ministry ensured that these ‘culprits’ would not get their jobs back. This was the first time in Pakistan that journalists were forced to go into exile, creating a situation that provided an opportunity for rightists to fill the vacant position in newspapers. May 13 1978, when Journalists were flogged, is regarded as a Black Day in Pakistani press circles.

The Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in 1979 triggered meteoric rise in the role of the intelligence agencies and religious parties in Pakistan. The military intelligence agency, the ISI, launched its operation ‘Bear Trap’ to engage the Russians in Afghanistan. Pakistan backed Afghan resistance groups were established and the armed struggle initiated. The Gulf countries started providing funding for the operation and the ISI strategy started producing results. The USA jumped into the situation by pumping massive money and arms to support the resistance and avenge their Vietnam humiliation.

As a result the ISI and the CIA became partners in carrying out one of the largest covert operations in history. The ISI also set up several political and domestic wings to control any possible internal strife or political unrest.

⁵⁷ Tariq,Ali, 1983,p.127.

Above all, the decade of the 80s was the high period for the rapidly expanding powers of the intelligence agencies, which had started manipulating the media for their larger game, the Afghan *Jihad*. The agencies wanted to construct public support for *jihad* in all newspapers and promoted the “pro-jihad” journalists. This was all pervasive in the *Urdu* language newspapers, whereas the English language newspapers were divided on the issue and showed some dissent. *The Muslim* and *The Frontier Post* were the two English dailies that disagreed with the state’s involvement in this *Jihad*; and argued in their editorials that a poor country like Pakistan could not afford the luxury of interfering in other countries. They raised the issue of the cultural and political threat to Pakistani civil society posed by four million Afghan refugees to, especially their role in spreading the drug and gun culture in Pakistan.

The military regime, however, launched a crackdown on Muslim and Frontier Post and started issuing declarations for newspapers to religious parties and groups to bring out publications to prepare the country's youth to take part in ‘*Jihad*’ in Afghanistan. All these new publications instantly received huge advertising quotas, prime real estate lands (commercial plots) and other perks to sustain and make their place in the market.⁵⁸ These publications also received advertisements and special supplements from Middle Eastern Islamic countries to sustain their businesses, and to promote fundamentalism to serve the Afghan cause in particular, and the Islamic world in general.

⁵⁸ Note: In Pakistan, the government controls all advertisements and issues a quota to each publication according to their circulation. However, this control allows governments to arm twist any publication that tries to play smart and does not toe the government line. Similarly, those publications that favor the government always receive a major quota of advertisements.

Thus, a new breed of journalists, blessed with their own trade union organizations and press clubs, emerged with full official backing in Pakistan. Several retired army and civil officers, who strongly believed in the pan-Islamization of Zia-ul- Haq, joined these publications. A number of retired defense officials became regular contributing writers to newspapers to promote the "fruits of *Jihad*" and the future of Pakistan as a strong Muslim country that would provide intellectual guidance to the Muslims of the world.

Meanwhile, the government forced newspaper owners to hire right wing journalists to important slots in their papers, with the mission to redefine Pakistan's ideology, its foreign policy and anti-India propaganda. This new breed of journalists also effectively performed the watchdog's role for the State by declaring progressive journalists and liberal elements as 'anti-State' and communists.

The division among the leftists, which also dominated the print media and reflected pro-Moscow versus pro-Peking loyalties, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, became a favorite topic for the rightists to bash in newspapers. Several stories of leftist journalists engaged in what the rightists call "moral corruption" like drinking alcohol and mixing with the opposite sex, were regular topics for the pro-government media.

Under Zia, the armed wings of various religious parties and other interest groups started attacking newspaper offices and assaulting journalists. The armed student wing of the Jamaat-I-Islami ransacked the offices of two Lahore- based dailies and assaulted the staff, because the newspapers were guilty of publishing a story about their leader, who has been arrested on charges of carrying a gun at the airport. The offices of two Urdu dailies, The Jang and Nawa-e-Waqt were attacked in 1980. Despite repeated protests, the

government did not take any action against the group responsible. A Karachi based daily was ransacked on charges of down playing the marriage of their leader despite the fact that the daily had published the story on the front page. The daily *Frontier Post*'s office in Peshawar was ransacked and torched in 1985 because it published an "un-Islamic photograph". Authorities registered a case against the workers of a religious party responsible for the attack but despite international and local protests no arrests were made.

Respected and fearless journalists were forced into exile, and newspaper managements were asked to sack professional editors and replace them with right wing journalists or former bureaucrats. The most respected of editors such as I.T Chaudhary, A. B. S Jafri, Aziz Siddique, Aziz Mazhar, I.A.Rehman and others were dismissed and replaced by government nominees.

Perhaps the most unfortunate development to occur in the media under Zia was the split among the journalist ranks along ideological lines. The splitting up of the *Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists* (PFUJ) into the leftist PFUJ (*Burna Group*) and the rightist PFUJ (*Dastoori Group*) in the late seventies divided the community into two extreme camps, and changed the entire debate regarding freedom of expression. The newly created PFUJ (*Dastoori*) attracted many fortune-seeking journalists into its fold as its members were granted free residential plots and other perks from the government. The culture of bribery and intimidation reached new heights in the media, and a class of "haves" and "have-nots" emerged among the journalists. The right-wing journalists gained new political clout as the press, TV, and radio regularly featured them in discussions to endorse Zia's foreign and Islamization policies.

Although the majority of working journalists at the time was not ‘fundamentalist’, the division among them undermined their collective strength to raise human rights issues and reverse the tide of fundamentalism. The PFUJ (*Dastoori Group*) created in the early period of Zia-ul-Haq’s rule, later turned out to be an ideal tool for the fundamentalist forces and the ISI. Moreover, the ISI also sometimes directly financed some right-wing journalists to promote their doctrine, which was fundamentalism.⁵⁹

Commenting on the massive corruption among the journalists, Niazi notes:

“When money becomes all mighty, ethics also suffer. With pain and sorrow I admit that most of our colleagues have been corrupted. Some press people take pride in being very close to the vested interests to the extent of even assuming the role of power-brokers”⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the armed student wings of religious parties captured the educational institutions in the late seventies, and instantly reacted to any news items criticizing their leadership or publication of photographs which they perceived as ‘un-Islamic’ by attacking newspaper offices. The fall of Karachi University and Punjab University to Jamaat-I-Islami student wing in early eighties , after bloody clashes in which several students lost their lives, was a major defeat for the liberal forces and the media in Pakistan. Both universities, producing graduates in mass-communication and journalism saw the forcible expulsion of liberal and leftist teachers. The collaboration between the teachers and journalists to initiate and hold debates on key social and political issues was replaced by debates on various ‘blessings’ of the Islamic system. Classes were

⁵⁹ Interview.

⁶⁰ Journalist Resource Center, JRC, Report, 'Jang-News Row', 1999, quoted newspaper historian Zamir Niazi.'s remarks.

immediately divided on gender basis, and female students were forced to cover their heads and to not participate in debates in class. This new atmosphere resulted in the gradual disappearance of women journalists from the profession.

The growing might of the religious right in the newspaper offices, and the infiltration of journalists paid by the government intelligence agencies, further complicated the pursuit of independent journalism, as the rightist-wing journalists not only challenged the publication of news that they believed to be against the ideology of religion and State, but also challenged the writer, terming him a "Western agent".

"It was strange as the rightists were the ones who were actually working for the West to implement the CIA agenda in Afghanistan but the blame was always shifted on us. Once a very senior rightist columnist told me that "we call you pro-West because you always talk about human rights, democracy and freedom of expression--the agenda of the West", recalled a senior journalist.⁶¹

Newspaper offices became the hub of ideological war and the conspiracies of secret agencies. Even before the publication of any story, the relevant agencies were fully aware of its content, and it was a common occurrence in the newsroom for a government 'request' to arrive to drop the news even before the story reached the editing stage.

A journalist recalled how within one hour of filing a story a 'visitor' was waiting for him at the reception desk of the newspaper office, from where he took him for a walk to eventually abduct him at gunpoint from a busy road:

"The kidnappers covered my head with a blanket and ordered me not to move. I was taken to an unknown place. They had tied my hands

⁶¹ Interview.

with a rope behind my back before they started grilling me. The first question was “Who gave you this information”? It was a shock for me as my story was still being edited in the newsroom. Certainly, someone had leaked it out. A few moments later, I came to know that they belonged to some intelligence agency. They started slapping and abusing me. After scuffling with them for about 15 minutes, I decided to disclose my source.”⁶²

Journalists who were on government agencies’ payrolls became the ideal choices for newspaper managements, firstly, because the government and the agencies broke major news through them and secondly because their influence was helpful to enhance the clout of the newspaper. Thus, these journalists also became role models for the new entrants in the profession. Senior Columnist of an English daily, Ardesir Cowesjee notes:

“What we all do know is the fact that there are many press people on the payroll of our governments (any and all governments) who will report as directed on any manifestly incorrect government stance. Some of the payroll lot has been given awards—medals and cash. Some have crawled out from the shadow of their mentors and been roughed up or incarcerated. Our governments are and will remain weak, under suspicion, and the game will continue till Kingdom Come”.⁶³

The right wing media and journalists fully served their praetorian masters. After Zia’s death in 1988, when four civilian governments came to office through elections but were sacked by the military elite in the middle of their tenures, the right wing-media launched a massive ‘media trial’ of the civilian rulers. Interestingly, the religious parties took advantage of these media trials and false accusations to mobilize the masses. They took to the streets to demand the enforcement of an Islamic system and the removal of corrupt politicians. The power of army intelligence in Pakistan can be judged from the

⁶² Interview.

fact that it created an alliance of religious parties and political groups within three weeks of Zia's death---the *Islamic National Alliance*--- to counter Benazir Bhutto, who was sure to win the elections with an overwhelming majority.

After Zia's death, the caretaker government repealed the *Public Press Ordinance*. Many political analysts believed that the establishment was sure that Benazir Bhutto would win the election, and a free press would be 'important' to keep her government in check and to destabilize it if the need arose. Commenting on the praetorian strategy to allow freedom of press, an editorial of an English weekly notes:

"When the press saw freedom in the post-Zia period, it was used against the politicians to paint them as corrupt, thus destroying the political institutions. There was much proof of such manipulation in the years to follow, with clever journalists becoming willing tools (information ministers, press secretaries and attaches) in various civilian dispensations."⁶⁴

In the post-Zia era the rightist influence was being felt in every sphere of civil society as they were in a position to dictate what they wanted, mainly because of their strong presence in the media. There was hardly a day when newspapers did not splash the press statements of religious leaders on their front pages. This prominent display in the media presented religious elite as more important and influential than they really were. Amidst the right-wing media propaganda against civilian rule, and for the establishment of an Islamic state under an "able religious leadership", the religious parties contested the 1993 elections from a united platform but managed to secure only 6.75 percent of the total votes. The *Jamaat-I-Islami* chief, Qazi Husain Ahmad contested seven seats but failed to secure even his home constituency.

⁶³ Ardesir Cowasjee, *The Dawn*, April, 1, 2001.

In the 1997 general elections, the *Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam* got 0.97% of the National Assembly seats, while the *Tehreek-e-Islam*, *Tehreek-e-Nifaz Fiqh-e-Ja'afria*, *Islamic Public Party*, *Mutahidda Deeni Mahaz*, *Islami Siasi Tehreek*, *Islami Inquilab Party*, *Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (Sami-ul-Haq Group)*, *Markazi Jamiat-e-Ahl-e-Hadis*, *Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Pakistan* and the *Muslim Ittehad* could not win a single seat even between the ten of them.

Despite a complete rejection of these Islamists by the people of Pakistan at the ballot box, they made hostages of all the post-Zia governments mainly because of their control over the media and street power. Democracy in 1988 also saw the gradual return of militants from Afghanistan, and now these battle-hardened and hardcore Islamists were all set to 'contribute' to Pakistan. The Army-fundamentalist nexus became stronger and found a point of convergence in the post-Zia era because of their mutual contempt for democracy and liberal society and consensus on establishing an ideological Islamic state.

In 1989, Benazir Bhutto's government tried to open a dialogue with India over the Kashmir dispute that had triggered three wars between the two countries. The liberal voices in the media welcomed the move, but the right wing writers and publications instantly launched a massive campaign against Bhutto, calling the initiative as a 'sell out' to India. The religious parties took to the street by declaring her as 'anti state' and a security risk to the national ideology ,while the army worked to sabotage her government.

Two senior officials from the ISI launched what came to be known as '*Operation Midnight Jackals*' against Benazir Bhutto by initiating a no-confidence motion against

⁶⁴ The Friday Times, November 2001.

her government through parliamentary machinations .The right wing media fully backed the army by publishing a number of fake scandals about Benazir and her government. The most outstanding example of this defamation campaign was the '*Unar*' case, when the entire mainstream media accused Benazir's husband of abducting a Britain based Pakistani businessman for ransom and splashed the scandal on the front pages. The month long campaign succeeded in portraying her husband as the most corrupt person in the country. However, after Benazir's government was removed, a judicial inquiry was held which concluded that nothing of the sort had happened; rather the *Unar* family had received commercial plots as bribe from her opponents to defame her husband.⁶⁵

During her second term in government, Benazir accused journalists of propaganda to destabilize her government. Her helplessness can be judged from the fact that while in office, her elder brother Murtaza Bhutto, a parliamentarian, along with his six party workers, was gunned down by the law enforcing agencies. His murder is still a mystery in Pakistan as who ordered the fire and independent journalists were discouraged from investigating the murder. The right wing media published several stories of his involvement in 'anti state' activities such as defaming the armed forces and plotting to assassinate military's top leadership to avenge the hanging of his father, former Prime Minister Z.A Bhutto.

In an interview with the English monthly *Herald*, Benazir said that the tragedy happened after an intelligence agency report stated that Mr. Bhutto and his associates were not to be trusted and were a threat to national security. "I was powerless to do

⁶⁵ Hasan,1997,p.71.

anything about this-- to even prevent the murder of my own brother despite being the prime minister because the intelligence agencies were beyond my authority.”⁶⁶

To further pressure her government, the right wing columnists and journalists initiated debate on whether a woman’s rule is Islamic or not. They wrote about selective incidents from history to prove that women had no capabilities to rule or lead. This anti-woman discourse in the media forced Benazir to go against her own beliefs and take refuge by donning a *chadur* (a big shawl to cover the head and upper half of the body), and to carry rosary beads in one hand. But even her ‘Islamic’ appearance proved futile and could not save her government.

After Benazir’s removal, a new force emerged on the political scene to pose a further threat to the civilian government of Nawaz Sharif. This new element appeared in the form of mercenaries, or *Jihadis* (Fighters for Allah), who began returning from Afghanistan after their decade long ‘holy engagement’ against the Soviets. The right-wing media projected them as heroes and followers of the true teachings of Islam, and the word *Jihad* entered the media as a prominent issue for discourse.

These militants, mainly sponsored by Saudi Arabia, emerged as the main partners of the military establishment, and with its full backing, groups like the *Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (Army of God), and the *Sipah-e-Sahaba* (Army of the Prophet’s Companions), were allowed to spread their networks into the urban and rural areas to recruit militants. These religious militant organizations also launched a number of publications to promote their one point agenda, namely *Jihad*, espousing militant causes throughout the world. According to a mapping analysis of these publications, some twenty publications with

⁶⁶ Benazir Bhutto’s interview, Herald, Monthly, Dawn group of Publications, Karachi, July 2001.

ABC certification (*Audit Bureau of Circulation*), including dailies, weeklies and monthly magazines, with a circulation of 240,000, have been produced by these organizations. If an average readership of five persons per publication were taken as a reasonable indicator for statistical analysis, the target readership would amount to around 1.2 million people. These organizations also maintain their presence on the worldwide web, declaring Islam as the salvation for humanity that can only be achieved through *Jihad*. These web sites are considered by these groups the most effective tool to generate massive funding from their sympathizers and supporters the world over.⁶⁷

Another key moment, which proved the strong bond between the praetorians and the Islamists regarding their complete control over media, was when Nawaz Sharif's government initially succumbed to international pressure to desist from conducting nuclear tests to match the Indian tests in 1998. The religious parties immediately took to the streets, while the right-wing media published a number of fake surveys and polls to show that the entire nation was in favor of conducting nuclear tests. Retired military officers also joined their cronies by writing pro-nuclear articles, demanding the government match the Indian tests or else the people of the Pakistan would overthrow the "cowardly and un-Islamic regime." Even the right-wing journalists launched an attack on the participants of an "anti-nuke" seminar, and physically assaulted noted scientists, professors and human rights activists who were urging the government not to conduct the tests. A vicious campaign was launched through the newspapers against all anti-nuke

⁶⁷ Workshop on "Mediaeval Mindset and Modern Media" organized by the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung Foundation, Nov. 29, 2001.

activists, including fellow journalists. All those who opposed the tests were marginalized; the press dubbed them as "anti-Islam and agents of the Jews".⁶⁸

The Nawaz government finally succumbed to this pressure for its own political survival, and soon after the tests the religious parties and right wing writers declared the atom bomb as an '*Islamic bomb*', and mock models of atomic bombs and missiles were erected at major intersections of all cities , and their photographs were splashed on the front pages of newspapers. Since then, a model of missiles and nuclear bombs has become a permanent feature in all religious parties' demonstrations. The right-wing web sites instantly featured interactive guides showing the nuclear blasts.

Imtiaz Alam, Editor of Current Affairs at the daily *The News*, who had organized the *Indo-Pak Parliamentarian Conference: "Toward Détente in the Sub-continent,"* in 1999, to defuse tensions between the two countries, received threats; and unidentified men broke into his house and torched his new car. His wife was asked to stop him from further "pro- India activities" or else their daughter would be kidnapped.⁶⁹ The right wing press lost no time in declaring him an "agent of the Americans and the Jews."

The international community, led by the USA, forced the Nawaz government to initiate dialogue with India to defuse tensions in South Asia. As a result, he invited the Indian Prime Minister to Pakistan and signed the historic *Lahore Declaration* to resolve all disputes with India. The religious parties took to the streets, while the army chiefs

⁶⁸ See the coverage from May to June 1999 in Pakistani newspapers, www.jang.com.pk, www.nation.com.pk. and www.dawn.com. Also Pakistan web directory, www.webs.com.pk.

⁶⁹ *The News*, Feb 17,1999.
Note: I was one of the organizers who arranged this event, which received global coverage. Our colleagues, mainly rightists, accused us of being agents of the Jews and RAW (Indian Secret Service).

refused to salute the visiting head of the state. The vernacular media fully justified the army's reaction and supported the Islamic parties who were demonstrating against the Indian guest. The religious leadership declared that it is un-Islamic for a Muslim general to salute an enemy and infidel head of the state. This nexus of the military and the Islamists was also at the core of an effort to engineer a war in Kargil in Indian controlled Kashmir to derail the peace process, eventually removing Nawaz from power and declaring him a "sell out and security risk."⁷⁰

The new praetorian ruler General Musharraf sent Nawaz Sharif and his family into exile for ten years, while barring all his family members from even issuing a political statement. The Islamists and the right-wing media have thrived under the new regime; their watchdog role and authorship of the ideology of Pakistan is still intact.⁷¹ They do not hesitate to criticize even their mentors, the army, if it tries to deviate from the 'Islamic' agenda. When President Musharraf initiated dialogue with India in 2001, the Islamists, led by the JI, asked the senior military establishment to replace him. They also launched a severe campaign against him when he said that the Turkish leader '*Kamal Ataturk*' was his ideal and that he believes in secular Islam. Several columns were produced in newspapers claiming that the people of Pakistan disown secularism and believe in *Jihad*.

The September 11, 2001 incident in the USA was perceived as a blessing in disguise by the liberals and many in the media in Pakistan, as most of the *Jihadi* organizations, which terrorized the entire civil society in Pakistan and made the nation

⁷⁰ For details, see coverage of Kargil on rediff.com (an Indian news agency), and millat.com. Also, several vernacular press web sites have complete coverage of the event.

⁷¹ Interview.

hostage to their rigid medieval agenda were banned due to severe US pressure. However, in reality it proved a blessing for the army rulers as they gained international legitimacy, and for the Islamists who, despite the ban, still enjoyed overwhelming support within the establishment and occupied center stage in the main political discourse. Needless to say, the right-wing media continues to operate without any checks.

Discussing the right wing media under Musharraf, a senior journalist said that the rightists enjoy complete immunity; while the condition of liberal journalists is unchanged ---in other words, the same old repressive measures;

“if you write against their policies one of their intelligence operators will summon you and say: You are spreading rumors against President Musharraf. Now more journalists are resorting to self-censorship than ever before.”⁷²

The saddest manifestation of government oppression is in the form of self-censorship, something widely practiced by journalists in Pakistan to secure their jobs, and in many cases, their very lives. Zamir Niazi, in his recent book *Ungliaan Figaar Apni (Our Fingers are Bleeding)*, maps the suppression of the media in recent times and points out the recent trend of self-censorship among journalists of the mass- circulation vernacular press.

The New York- based *Committee to Protect Journalists*, (CPJ), in its report published in March 2001 also mentioned the same trend of self-censorship in Pakistan.

⁷² Hamid Mir, The Independent Weekly, Lahore, Feb 14--21, 2002.

"While there was substantial debate on the administration's policies in the 'boutique English-language press', political coverage in the mass- circulation vernacular media tended to be far more tame. Self-censorship continued in all media", the report noted.⁷³ This report also notes that the rate of killings and arrests of journalists has been reduced from the previous year. According to the report, only 24 journalists were killed and 82 were behind bars in Pakistan in the year 2000. These figures alone speak volumes about the state of oppression in the country, although it is widely considered a better time in Pakistan's context.

Judging from the prevailing scenario, however, it seems plausible to conclude that the gradual induction over the years of right-wing journalists into the mainstream media, and the huge growth of right wing publications have further strengthened the already tight grip of the forces of status quo in the media; the maxim that the 'press and democracy rise and fall together' seems ironically accurate in Pakistan's case. The media, burdened with massive constraints on its freedom and its dependence on the government for advertisements to survive, has made it increasingly difficult for independent and liberal journalists to play their due role. Therefore, whenever a situation emerges for a publication to choose between survival and elimination, its management invariably finds itself forced into making a compromise with the establishment, with the sad result that the political discourse remains severely constricted in Pakistan. A senior columnist sums up the situation thus:

"During the nineties, there has been a marked increase in the number of threats and attacks by the state agencies and unidentified militants, often operating at the behest, or approval, of the state. There are also scores of

⁷³ Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Annual Report, New York, 2001.

self-righteous political charlatans and self-appointed men of God. Apart from bullying tactics, they have resorted to extortion, gang attacks on newspaper offices, beating reporters and photographers, snatching and damaging camera equipment, and other criminal activities against the press.

Despite so much violence against the press, many critical articles have been written and journalists and editors have fought valiantly to maintain their integrity. Those who were under pressure often fought back and faced the consequences. There are even some who paid with their live.⁷⁴

The journalists, pushed by their lower and lower middle class backgrounds, occasionally dare to challenge the forces of status quo, but in the absence of any institutionalized support, they have to mend their ways sooner or later. It is still to their credit that despite the overwhelming forces of suppression they dare to risk their lives for the freedom of expression---a naïve, romantic and chivalrous act rarely matched anywhere else. Interestingly, the right-wing journalists who come from similar backgrounds do not challenge the establishment, either because of their religious ideologies or their vested interests in financial gain that is tied to loyalty to the ruling elite. Criticizing the Armed Forces in Pakistan is subject to charges of high treason, a non-bailable offense that carries the death sentence.

⁷⁴ The Dawn, Karachi, Dec. 24, 1999.

Chapter 5

Fundamentalism and its fallout on civil society

In the previous chapter, the rise and progress of fundamentalism in the 1970s was detailed. As well the encroachment of fundamentalism into every institution in Pakistan, including the media, was examined in the context of the army dictatorship and its bid to consolidate its praetorian rule. This chapter will use contemporary media reports, obtained from the English and vernacular Pakistani newspapers and their archives, to cite case studies to further argue the consequences of fundamentalism on the Pakistani society.

We will argue that the worst victim of the rightist encroachment in the media is civil society which has been systematically deprived of any meaningful debate and dialogue in national politics despite the fact that whenever the masses were given a chance at the ballot, they voted against dictatorship and the religious parties. We will examine case studies to understand why pressing issues such as widespread poverty, the inhuman state of the minorities, 20,000 deaths of children per day,⁷⁵ women treated as second class citizens, dissolved parliaments, a chained judiciary, massive corruption and human rights violations do not find space in the media discourse, and why the national interest and its definition are the exclusive domain of the establishment and the rightists. We shall examine why those who differ are branded traitors and "anti-Islam." Development issues are 'soft news' that either do not find space in the newspapers or when they do, they are not given any prominence, especially in the vernacular press.

⁷⁵ UNDP report on Pakistan, 2000.

From December 2000 to January 2001, in the English press less than four per cent of editorials dealt with development issues and twenty per cent on women, minorities, human rights, democracy and education, while Kashmir, Islam and government statements occupied seventy per cent of the space on the editorial pages. The *Urdu* press gave ninety-three per cent coverage to government, Islam and Kashmir issues and only three per cent to other issues.⁷⁶

Pakistan is the tenth largest importer of arms in the world, but there is no debate on this issue; rather the religious parties want more spending on arms to liberate Kashmir. The Pakistan army owns the largest business-houses, ranging from chemicals, textiles, leasing, banks, heavy engineering and mechanical complex, airlines, communications, petroleum, Information technology, media, food, petroleum, real estate developments and other industries; all exempted from paying taxes. This huge business empire, including the largest fertilizer unit in Asia, cannot be subjected to any government audit or accountability despite being created from the tax payers money.⁷⁷ The lack of media discourse on key social issues, for example, hunger, is shaking the very foundation of civil society in Pakistan and undermining its ability to challenge the praetorian state.

⁷⁶ Editorial Analysis, internal research conducted by the Jang Group of the editorial content of three English and four Urdu dailies from Dec. 2000 to Jan. 2001. The information obtained through an interview.

⁷⁷ 'Agha, Ayesha Siddiq, Army Welfare Trust: Vested Khaki Interests and Double Standards of Business Accountability'; The Friday Times, p- 3;(Dec 14-20, 2001)

During the research, when journalists were asked to identify the most affected segment of the society under fundamentalism, the liberal and progressive journalists' unanimous response was the media, women and minorities, while the majority of the

right-wing journalists found very minor ill effects on the society. To test both responses, I will discuss the state of women and minorities in Pakistan from the late seventies onward, when various Islamic provisions were incorporated in the constitution. Also, briefly, I will discuss the impact of the Islamic laws on the society at large and the media in general.

Women:

The female population, that comprises 50.76 per cent in Pakistan, is forced to accept the status of second class citizens, while the official broadcast media and the *Urdu* press offer prescriptions for them to follow the strict dictates of Islam for their salvation. In TV plays, modern women always end up with a tragic ending, while Western women are projected as symbols of obscenity rather than as liberated citizens.

More than million women live in rural areas, and yet there is not a single female correspondent reporting from these areas. The late 80s saw the decline in number of women journalists, particularly as reporters, in newspaper offices. The newspaper managements encouraged women, if at all, to take office-based desk-jobs instead of becoming reporters, which is considered a male domain. Right-wing journalists disparaged female colleagues. This constant humiliation and character assassination

undermined the strength of women's presence in journalism. Even in Islamabad, the modern capital city, only four women are working as full-time reporters. This situation has resulted in a very insignificant coverage of women's issues in the media and lack of any debate on them in Parliament and other forums.

Just two decades back, it was a common sight to see women cycling down to their colleges and schools, groups of young women going to the theater in the evening without male escorts, taking a walk at night and laughing and enjoying themselves without fear.

Novelist and noted feminist, Tehmina Durrani notes,

"Under the same roof, men moved forward while women moved backwards .Two divided genders, one in darkness, one in light; one exposed, one concealed. Surrounded by guns, imprisoned in 'man's interpretation', with all their issues branded 'domestic', Muslim women became in many instances the most oppressed sector of humanity".⁷⁸

Zia's regime enforced various Islamic laws in 1979 and several of them, particularly the *Hudood Ordinance*, discriminated against women. In one of the provisions of the ordinance, when a woman reported a rape, she was to be immediately arrested, and then she had to prove the violator guilty or otherwise face the death sentence for committing 'adultery'. There are many cases where women divorcees, on their second marriages, were arrested on charges of adultery because their divorce papers were not found to be 'in order'. In any *Hudood* case guilt cannot be established as it requires four male eye witnesses, while a woman cannot be a witness in any proceedings under the Islamic law.

⁷⁸ Tehmina Durrani, Time for Renaissance, News International, Jan/Feb, 2002.

Another women-specific provision in the Islamic law, allows the perpetrator of an '*honor-killing*' to get away with a mild sentence instead of a life sentence or the death penalty; this has raised the murder-rate of women to alarming proportions, especially in the rural areas.⁷⁹ According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) report, more than 1,000 women were killed in 1999 alone in the name of 'honor', whereby an excuse as flimsy as a woman sitting next to a man, other than a relative, can justify a killing. The most frequent killers by far were brothers, followed by husbands. It is estimated that about fifteen per cent of the female victims were minor girls. From January to September 2000, as many as 240 killings of women, including thirty-one minors, were reported in the name of 'honor'. Only ten per cent of the accused were arrested, while the rest went scot-free, and those who faced trials were given lighter sentences, sometimes a few months' imprisonment.⁸⁰

Except for a few English publications, the main discourse on women remains under the domination of the religious viewpoint, which perceives women's rights as a Western agenda to promote obscenity. The killing of women is depicted as an act of 'bravery', especially in the regional press. The religious discourse does not denounce the killing of women; instead it justifies the act as 'necessary' to curb 'obscenity' and as a lesson to women to adhere strictly to Islamic teachings.

The *Urdu* media did not find these laws against women worth initiating a debate, or to advocating repeal on grounds of discrimination. The dominant religious discourse in

⁷⁹ The accused in honor killings cannot be tried under Section 302 PPC, the normal procedure for a murder conviction which carries a death sentence or life imprisonment. It may be mentioned that in Pakistan only 60 per cent of crimes are reported. In the rural areas, the reporting of crime is much less because of the landlord-administration alliance.

⁸⁰ HRCP report on honor killings, 2000.

the media prevents coverage of these injustices and paints women's rights discourse as an attempt by Western forces to undermine Islamic society. When womens' rights groups demanded equal representation in the "local bodies polls"⁸¹ on the basis of their sheer number, the Islamic alliance of religious parties lashed out at women activists, saying "this will create a culture dominated by women." Several newspaper columns and articles also supported the right wingers and suggested women should confine themselves to the upbringing of their children as "good Muslims." They also declared women-run NGOs as anti Islam in response to the demand to repeal the *Hudood Ordinance*.⁸²

Minorities: The Blasphemy Law

The religious minorities are the most vulnerable segment of civil society in Pakistan, alienated and deprived of equal access to justice. If a Muslim kills a non-Muslim, the accused can avoid prosecution by paying money to the victim's family under the *Qisas Act*, an Islamic provision on murder. A non-Muslim does not enjoy this loophole and, under similar circumstances, would have to face the death penalty. Under Zia's regime, the minorities were forbidden to take part in national politics. The late dictator Zia introduced the system of a separate electorate and it was included in the Constitution through the controversial 8th Amendment. Under the separate electorate system, minorities could only vote for candidates of their own faith, no matter how far

⁸¹ Note: Local bodies polls are held every three years in Pakistan on town level to form a union council to elect district *Nazim* or mayor.

away they were based. Thus, non-Muslim voters were denied access to local MPs and, through them, to government employment and all the other amenities controlled by the state. But even more importantly, they were deprived of all political power. No debate was initiated in the media about the declaration of minorities as second class citizens.

Perhaps the most destructive Islamic legislation that Zia introduced in Pakistan was the *Blasphemy Law*, according to which anybody who utters a word against the Prophet Mohammed could be punished by death. If a Muslim did not simply like a Christian or any other minority member, he could just accuse him of 'blasphemy' since all the court requires for a conviction is a single statement from a witness. Just a cursory look at the provisions of the *Blasphemy Law* is enough to send shock waves through the minorities. The law says:

"Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall be liable to fine."⁸³

Religious discourse prevents any meaningful dialogue in the press on Islamic laws, as a result of which as many as 3000 people have been booked under the *Blasphemy Law* in the last 15 years. This figure was as low as twenty-seven cases from 1947 to 1986. On average, 200 such cases are registered every year, about seventeen every month, or two to three per week.⁸⁴

⁸² Dawn, Karachi, Nov 15, 2000.

⁸³ Section 295 C of Pakistan Penal Code, PPC, Constitution of Pakistan.

⁸⁴ Dawn, Sep.16, 2001.

Case Studies:

A few case studies have been selected to illustrate the dangers of the Blasphemy law and its consequences for minorities, liberal Muslims and media. The case studies will also demonstrate how the scope of the minority-specific *Blasphemy Law* extends to other sections of civil society to unleash religious terrorism by the Islamists.

In 1996, Ayub Masih, was convicted of 'blasphemy' for making favorable comments about Salman Rushdie, the author of the controversial book *The Satanic Verses*. As a result, Ayub's family and thirteen other Christian families were forced from their village following the charges.⁸⁵ Activists of the militant Islamist party, Sipha-e-Sahaba (Soldier of friends of prophet) carried a warning to the administration against giving any kind of protection to Ayub Masih. As a result, no senior lawyer was willing to defend him. Ayub's principal defender, the Faisalabad Roman Catholic Bishop and human rights activist, John Joseph, committed suicide with a handgun outside the Sahiwal District Court where Ayub had been convicted, as a protest against the conviction.⁸⁶

The late Bishop was a well-known figure for his struggle to protect human rights and support minorities' struggle in Pakistan. The state media did not even mention the incident while most of the press, other than English media, treated the event as an

⁸⁵ Note: Later, independent investigations by the HRCP and others NGOs revealed that Ayub was framed in the 'blasphemy' case because a local landlord wanted to grab his piece of land.

⁸⁶ The News, May 6, 1998.

ordinary suicide case, completely ignoring the root causes of why a Cambridge University- educated PhD and a known pacifist resorted to such an extreme measure of protest. No follow-up stories were carried out in the press despite massive protests from minorities, NGO's and other civic groups.

The Bishop's death created a massive uproar among the Christians, particularly in his hometown Faisalabad, the third largest city of Pakistan, where they took to the streets to protest his death and the sentencing of Ayub. The local media in Faisalabad reported the protests with an anti-Christian slant and charged that the Christian protestors had desecrated a billboard containing Islamic verses. The religious parties, in turn, gave a call to suspend all business activities to protest against the alleged desecration of the hoarding. The shops and markets remained shut while in various parts of the country the religious parties' activists attacked Christian homes and businesses.⁸⁷

Armed with this law in the 90s, Islamic extremists started vandalising churches, looting and burning villages, and in many incidents women were also raped. In an ugly incident, eight Christian women, seven of them teenaged, were raped at gunpoint while they were returning home after working in a factory. The official media did not bother to mention the incident, while the press reported the incident mildly despite the massive protest from civil society organizations'.⁸⁸

The violators were never arrested, while the father of one girl was later booked on 'blasphemy' charges as he continued to pursue justice for his daughter. No independent, investigative report appeared in any vernacular paper. Instead, they mildly condemned

⁸⁷ Inter Press Service, May 7, 1998.

⁸⁸ The Dawn, May 16, 1998.

the incident but at the same time seemed to justify the action by declaring that those accused were under the "spell of alcohol."⁸⁹

In another horrifying incident, several thousand extremists attacked a Christian village, Shantinagar, in southern Punjab, burning houses and a church, injuring dozens of people and rendering thousands homeless. The residents of Shantinagar tried to lodge a complaint against the local police who desecrated the *Bible* while raiding the village to recover alleged quantities of liquor. The case took a new twist as the administration told local religious leaders that Christians had shown disrespect to the *Quran*. Within a short while the community of 25,000 people was attacked and the entire village was gutted and in flames. Five women gave birth to children in open fields, where the community was hiding to save their lives. This tragic incident raised alarm and protest in the international community, forcing the then Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, to announce a compensation package for those attacked and to hold an inquiry, but even then no arrests were made, and the issue was relegated to the cold storage. The international media covered the incident in detail and leading news channels sent their teams to Pakistan to report on the issue. But the local media largely ignored the event and did not conduct any follow-up stories to investigate the issue to create any informed dialogue on the growing intolerance and militancy.⁹⁰

"What these hunger strikers perhaps don't realise, is that their plight has ceased to be of any 'news value' to the media, and nor can the issue be cashed further by human rights activists or minority sympathisers.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ The News, Lahore, March 21,1998.

(I covered this story for *The News*, and conducted another follow-up after a year to give an update on the progress of government claims to rehabilitate the community, while also giving the community's complete version. For detail see Shantinagar victims' hunger strike gain little attention)

The Shantinagar affectees complain of visiting newspaper offices daily to call attention to their predicament , only to be bluntly told that, a year after the event, their story is now irrelevant. It has no 'news values' under the framework within which journalists work."⁹¹

Against professional Muslims

In the mid nineties, the extremists started using this law against secular Muslim professionals including doctors, teachers, journalists and others who challenged their fundamentalist version of Islam. The interior ministry figures for the year 2000 reveal that a total of 122 'blasphemy' cases were registered, ninety of which had been registered against Muslim residents, while 32 cases were registered or pending against the minorities, including *Qadianis* and Christians.⁹²

Even religious groups are alleged to have used this law for blackmail to get maximum donations. As reported in the press a well known industrialist in Karachi was asked for a huge donation. On his refusal a complaint was lodged in the local police station alleging that his factory, *Yunus Textile Mills*, was printing cloth with a design carrying the words '*Allah*' and '*Mohammad*'. The local administration sealed the mill and arrested the owner under the *Blasphemy Law* despite the fact that nothing objectionable was found in the factory. Even the journalists who visited the mill did not find any objectionable material, but the next day the vernacular media published fabricated facts fanning public sentiment against the mill and its owner.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Dawn, Jan 21,2001.

The textile mills print designs sent by their international buyers, but to extort money ,crooks may claim to perceive in any design the words '*Allah*' or '*Mohammad*'in such designs. They then terrorize the mill owners with threats of exposure, reports to the police, the *Mullahs*, the authorities, etc., unless substantial sums are paid . They also recruit and bribe the local press to print alarming reports intended to instigate and arouse the public.⁹³ One vernacular paper wrote in its editorial,

" We will stand by our commitment to use our pen as a sword, and its stunning strike on the enemies of Islam shall continue as such. A second paper went on to claim that angry mobs had blocked the national highway and tensions were running high in the locality while nothing of that sort happened".⁹⁴

Aftab Ahmad, a professor, poet and publisher, who published an anthology of poems written by the Indian Prime Minister, A. B Vajpayee, had to flee to India to seek asylum. No publisher was willing to publish Vajpayee's book in Pakistan but Ahmad managed to get the book published in Lahore as a goodwill gesture. He presented his book to Mr vajpayee and presented it to Mr vajpayee during his visit to Lahore.⁹⁵ The right wing media was quick to misconstrue his real intent and published several stories against Ahmad to brand him an 'Indian agent'.

Another scholar, Yousaf Ali was also sentenced on similar grounds and was gunned down in the Lahore District Jail by unidentified inmates. Instead of probing how

⁹³ Dawn, Nov 18, 2001.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ The Friday Times, Oct 2000.

Note: A writer in Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi, Aftab has translated a large number of poems and short stories from Hindi and other Indian languages into Urdu.

a gun reached the hands of prisoners in jail, the right wing media offered a justification, saying "the liar and infidel reached his proper end".⁹⁶

In 2001, a court sentenced a medical lecturer, Dr Younus Sheikh, to death for 'blasphemy' after the local *Mullah* had a case registered against him on a complaint by some students, charging that he made derogatory remarks about Prophet Mohammad by suggesting that he did not become a Muslim until he was forty years old and that his parents were not Muslims either. Any student of Islamic history knows that the lecturer had only stated facts. The vernacular press lashed out at the lecturer and carried a number of stories to condemn the accused, besides publishing statements from the religious parties. Several right-wing columnists targeted the role of civil society organization and the English press, which protested against the sentence, charging that they were playing into the hands of the West to promote an 'anti-Islam' agenda.

The dominant religious discourse in the media and the Islamists' street power has put extra pressure on the judiciary and the judges who hear the *Blasphemy* cases as they watch helplessly when courts are surrounded by scores of extremists, Pakistan's own peculiar brand of the 'guardians of Islam'. Justice Arif Iqbal Bhatti, one of the two High Court judges who released a number of Christians wrongly accused of blasphemy in 1995, was murdered in 1997; the other judge Chaudhry Khursheed lived under constant threat and was being protected by an armed guard. The judge in the Dr Younus Sheikh case shifted the hearings from an open court to the jail premises, fearing a violent

⁹⁶ The Dawn, June 12, 2002.

reaction from religious leaders and activists.⁹⁷ The judge also put a ban on the coverage of case proceedings.

US State department report also acknowledge pressure on the judges hearing the blasphemy cases:

"When blasphemy and other religious cases are brought to court, extremists often pack the courtroom and make public threats about the consequences of an acquittal. As a result, lower- level judges and magistrates, seeking to avoid a confrontation with, or violence from, the extremists, often continue trials indefinitely, and those accused of blasphemy often are burdened with further legal costs and repeated court appearances".⁹⁸

In 1997, blasphemy cases were transferred to anti- terrorist courts despite opposition from Human Rights advocates, who feared that if blasphemy cases were tried in the anti-terrorist courts alleged blasphemers were likely to be convicted, given the less stringent rules of evidence required under the Anti-Terrorist Act.⁹⁹

Later, the scope of the *Blasphemy Law* was extended to the press, and to include harassment of journalists in its net. The government of Pakistan banned the weekly *Newsweek* magazine issue carrying an article about Dr Younas. Condemning the ban, Ann Cooper, the director of the *Committee to Protect Journalists*' said:

"By censoring an article that spotlights threats to free speech in Pakistan, the authorities only bolster their country's reputation for

⁹⁷ Dawn, Oct 2, 1999.

⁹⁸ U.S. State Department Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: Pakistan. Released by the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Washington, DC, September 9, 1999.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

intolerance. Directly or indirectly, Pakistan's blasphemy laws are increasingly used to curb the press."¹⁰⁰

On January 29, 2001, in Peshawar, the city police raided the offices of an English daily, The Frontier Post, in Peshawar, arrested six employees, sealed the offices and closed down the newspaper on charges of publishing a blasphemous letter; they registered the case under the *Blasphemy Law*. The next day, a mob of religious parties' supporters attacked the office building and set it on fire, which resulted in the printing press and the office equipment being destroyed. The same day, the administration sealed the offices of the *Frontier Posts'* sister publication, the *Urdu* daily *Maidan*, and rounded up seven of its employees while wiping out the web sites of both newspapers.

The religious parties demanded public hangings of the culprits journalists and action against the administrations of both the newspapers. They jammed the city for four days with violent protests. These protests spread to other cities of the province where religious parties staged rallies and demonstrations. One report said the mob blocked the main highway leading from Peshawar to the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, and forced several schools to close. The military ruler, Gen. Musharraf, ordered a probe and action against the culprit journalists in a televised address to the nation.¹⁰¹

Religious discourse monopolizes the vernacular press, and therefore the mass-circulation media does not initiate any protest or debate on this growing violence against their own community in the name of religion. They only contribute by publishing a small

¹⁰⁰ CPJ Executive Director Ann Cooper, September 5, 2001, New York. Reported largely in Pakistani press. The article behind the bar was "Talking is Dangerous", Newsweek, September 3, 2001.

¹⁰¹ BBC, Jan 31, 2001.

statement from journalist leaders condemning the incidents, while the state-controlled broadcast media, both TV and radio, never participate in any debate relating to the media. Since the English media is not seen as a staunch supporter of this religious discourse, it is considered an 'agent' of the West, 'anti-Islam', and against the ideology of Pakistan. The HRCP's late Director, Aziz Siddique, has mapped the details of the misuse of this law. In his report on the *Blasphemy Law*, he notes:

'It could have shown how in all the years of its existence the law had been repeatedly abused: how innocent persons had been made to suffer months, even years, of incarceration, harassment and calumny on false imputation; how some were even extra-judicially killed and no questions asked; how, even judicially, lower courts were sometimes hustled and pressured by mob action into awarding conviction, which convictions had to be overturned on appeal because of their being cases of no evidence; how sometimes loyal members of these organizations themselves became victims of personal vendetta under the cover of blasphemy; and how once even a person of the stature of the late Akhtar Hameed Khan was humiliated and dragged in the courts on that charge near the close of his life and thus for months made to live in the shadow of the gallows'¹⁰²

¹⁰² Aziz Siddique, The Regimes' First Retreat, The Dawn, May 14, 2000.

Note: Akhtar Hameed Khan was globally recognized as a top social scientist and development guru. He is the pioneer of two of the world's largest development works, the rural-based Comilla Project in Bangladesh, and the urban-based Orangi Pilot Project in Karachi, Pakistan. In his last days, he was charged with 'blasphemy' and dragged through the courts and jail. He died in 1999 while still facing the trial.

Conclusion

No matter how much the West paints Pakistan's fourth military dictator, Musharraf, as a liberal, the realities in Pakistan have not changed. Like his predecessor, Musharraf also used the right wing-media to publish scandals of politicians to discredit them, and today two former prime ministers, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, are in exile while dozens of corruption charges have been initiated against them. The religious parties and the right wing media have gained increased influence under Musharraf's rule. In July 2000, authorities in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province decided to shut down cable television networks. The decision came as a result of criticism from Islamic scholars who alleged that cable networks were promoting obscenity on television. Armed with semi-automatic guns, religious groups attacked cable operators in Peshawar and other parts of the province. The military government bowed to the rightists' demands, and provincial Governor, General Mohammad Shafique, announced in a press conference "I order the closure of cable television networks in the province from today."¹⁰³

Contrary to the Western perception that the military dictator, Musharraf, is promoting liberalism by cracking down on fundamentalists, the ground realities, as most journalists in Pakistan argue, remain the same. No repressive legislation against women, minorities and the media has been repealed; instead, new curbs have been imposed. New sanctions have been imposed on political discourse through a record number of constitutional amendments by the army junta. The politicians and the media are barred from criticizing army rule in any form, and violation of this is treated as treason, carrying a maximum penalty of death or a life sentence. The *Human Rights Commission of*

¹⁰³ BBC, The News, Lahore, July 2000.

Pakistan's annual report made a critical point, noting that, since the coup, curbs on political activity have vacated space for religious parties. "The vacuum created by the military regime's strategy of discrediting and sidelining political parties and their leaders was ideally suited to the orthodox clergy, militant formations of which took little time to move into the space left behind."¹⁰⁴

It is assumed that under praetorian rule, civil society will remain a hostage to the fundamentalists, while the media, especially the vernacular press, will continue to play its subservient role to the establishment. For a poverty-ridden, largely illiterate and uninformed population, the chances to act and behave as autonomous subjects have been seriously impaired under praetorian rule. There was no resistance from the civil society to stop or protest the praetorian take over in 1999, a sad development that speaks volumes about how civil society has been forced to succumb to the onslaught of the 'military-fundamentalist nexus'. In Pakistan, the future of democracy, a free civil society and independent media discourse remain as bleak and elusive as ever.

¹⁰⁴ HRCP, Annual Report, 2000.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This thesis has highlighted the key moments in the emergence of fundamentalism in Pakistan and the consequences at this emergence in the media in particular and civil society in general. It argues that Pakistan is a praetorian state, and fundamentalism was nurtured in the lap of the military to retard the political process to further strengthen praetorianism.

An overview of the contemporary socio-political literature on Pakistan shows that many scholars have attempted to analyze Pakistani society through the Vice Regal Model (colonialism) and its continuity in terms of post-colonialism. Other scholars have subscribed to theories of feudalism and the Two-Nation Theory. The Vice Regal model simply exonerated the Pakistani leadership of all sins by shifting the blame on the colonial legacy, while the feudal approach again blamed colonialism for introducing feudalism in the sub-continent.

The Two-Nation Theory presented by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, made a distinction between Hindus and Muslims as separate nations whose religion and culture are different. However, after independence Jinnah rejected this theory by declaring that Pakistan would be a secular state. This theory received a further set back in 1971, when one part of the country, East Pakistan, became Bangladesh. However, right-wing scholars still subscribe to this theory to explain Pakistan's culture and politics. During the Cold War era, American scholar Samuel P. Huntington, who had a profound impact on US foreign policies, introduced the model of a 'controlled

democracy' which rationalized a need for dictatorships in third world countries to block communism. Later, several scholars examined Pakistan through the civil-military relation context, but after the end of the cold war this approach could not explain why Pakistan was still prone to military dictatorships. Another limitation of this model is that it cannot see beyond the institutional role of the military in Pakistan. This thesis has made an attempt to address the existing vacuum in analysis to look beyond the garrison role of the military, and study its overall impact on culture and Pakistan society. It has become even more crucial to study Pakistan utilizing the concept of praetorianism since General Musharaf has introduced 29 amendments into the constitution to formalize a permanent role for the army in the state. As a result of these amendments, any future parliament will not only be answerable to the army, but can also be dismissed by the army chief.

The institutional power struggle, which ensued soon after independence in 1947, was mapped through a historical analysis to illustrate the dominance of the non-elected over the elected institutions. The supremacy of the non-elected institutions triggered an intra-elite power struggle between the army, the civil bureaucracy, the business, landlord, and religious elite. As a result of an intra-elite power struggle and US military aid , military emerged as the most powerful elite in the early 50s, and thus the foundations for a future praetorian state were laid. Throughout the Cold war era, the military enjoyed the legitimacy sanctioned by the international community to consolidate its position by establishing a praetorian state. In the process, military officers emerged as the biggest landlords through land allotments, along with businessmen and industrialists, while the civil bureaucracy was effectively controlled by giving key posts to army officers in all the major government departments. This takeover was carried out on the basis of a

'perceived' danger of communism, and the Indian threat to national security. It is very difficult to understand the cultural ethos, values and civil institutions in Pakistan without understanding the unique praetorian patterns prevalent there. Therefore, this thesis has examined fundamentalism and the media in a praetorian framework as they are pertinent to the above- stated understanding.

The emergence of fundamentalism and its 'unholy' alliance with the army started in the early seventies, and later this bond was further cemented during the Zia-ul-Haq era, when the army facilitated a back door entry to religious parties to accommodate them on the main political stage. This thesis argues that fundamentalism is not a separate phenomenon in Pakistan, rather it is a praetorian extension that was unleashed to terrorize civil society. In the late seventies, the Zia regime paved the way for religious forces to enter the media and control political communications in order to promote the 'holy war' in Afghanistan and to export Islamic ideology and '*jihad*' to 'infidel neighborhoods'.

An attempt has been made to document and highlight the key moments of the entry of fundamentalist forces in the mainstream print media and how the once liberal institution became a hostage to the overt and covert agenda of the army-fundamentalist alliance, which eventually led to the demise of a free press in Pakistan.

It is important to understand why a free media cannot exist under praetorian rule. Young men, actually boys, are recruited into the military officer core just after they finish Grade ten. The rest of their training, physical and mental, becomes the sole right and domain of the army and its doctrine of absolute adherence to the status quo. There is no room for dissent and any contrary view is taken as a sign of enmity. Under army rule, the government becomes the law, and human rights violations and atrocities against civil

society are not considered illegal. All channels of communication must be under strict control to mute any and all voices of dissent. This one-dimensional method of control and absolute authority has penetrated even into the civil arena, and the so-called democratic governments have not been far behind in discouraging dissent (whether it took legislation or the severest possible punishments to do so).

As a general practice, students of journalism are taught to be the historians of everyday events in the world. The mass media in every country are expected to play this role of documenting culture, politics, changes in society, and the problems that face it. The media's function and credibility are particularly important as they reach out to citizens on a daily basis and through their reporting and commentary influence public opinion. The media in Pakistan, even that which is not officially under state control, is bound by serious constraints in the form of the religious, social and cultural requirements to sacrifice truth to report only what is 'acceptable'. This 'acceptable' is determined by the various power elites, be they government, clergy or army. The constraints are numerous; those who crusade in the name of free speech are not even a handful by comparison. Such is the dilemma facing the press in Pakistan that it has never been allowed to play its rightful role, not only in terms of disseminating news but most importantly in opening up public discussion and debate about issues crucial in determining the fate of a nation. The result, therefore, is obvious---the language, news placement and content must all comply in the end with the dictates of the state. The news and editorial policies must, even in the relatively progressive and daring publications, be subservient to the demands of the state and not threaten or challenge the status quo in any way.

The few critical pieces that do appear in the press are allowed publication only to serve yet another purpose of the state----to neutralize its iron image in the eyes of the national and international community and lend it a pseudo image of liberalism. In Pakistan it seems as if absolute rule has merely been handed down from one set of rulers, the British, to another more permanent dictatorial system the latter being all the more destructive and hard to bear as it comes from its very own guardian angels.

The alliance of military rule and Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan have not only undermined , distorted and manipulated the media. Their impact is apparent in almost every aspect of social and cultural life. Pakistan's Islamic laws such as the *Blasphemy Law* and the Hudood Ordinance reflect an extremist collective mind-set. The suffocation runs through the entire social fabric, only to be further strengthened by rigid religious thought. The media both shape and mirror what exists in the society at large, and have become partners in the construction and maintenance of an oppressive Islamic fortress . It cannot be stressed enough how utterly important communications are for both the army and the fundamentalist elements in Pakistan in particular control over what is reported and not reported. Both, with little popular base in the masses, use the media to highlight their 'efforts' at building an Islamic state where 'nobody will sleep hungry'.

Contrary to the popular perception in the West that the current military dictator, General Musharraf, has separated Pakistan from the religious extreme right, in the post September 11th era, it can be argued that fundamentalism is an extension of praetorianism and in the Pakistani context they cannot be separated. General Musharaf, after his takeover, launched a crackdown on popular political parties, either exiling or jailing their leadership, and thus created a massive opportunity for the religious parties to

fill that vacuum. Taking the cue from Musharraf, for the first time in the history of Pakistan, the religious parties have united on a single platform and contested the October 2002 elections. It is disappointing to arrive at this conclusion but as long as the praetorian institution is intact in Pakistan, regardless of the government, elected or otherwise, a controlled media is and will remain their prime vehicle for self-glorification, success and salvation, corrupt as they all are. The big question that remains is can Pakistan someday become a republic? And for that to happen, how much of the past and the present will have to be dismantled and unlearned?

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