

# Hearings on Religious Freedom in India and Pakistan: Dr. Mumtaz Ali Khan Oral Testimony

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DR. KHAN: While we try to analyze the conditions of Muslims of India, we have to bear in mind the nature of Indian society. It is basically a society known for religious pluralism and cultural realism. Muslims are born and brought up in this country, and therefore, they are no longer aliens. We constitute 12 percent of the total population of India and perhaps the second-largest Muslim population in the world after Indonesia.

A succession of political parties have announced special programs for development, but their sense of insecurity and even dependence has ruined them. Once rulers of mighty India in the Muslim period, mogul period; today, they are not even secondary citizens. Their present social and psychological conditions are quite alarming, even though the Constitution of India has guaranteed them certain special rights and fundamental rights, there are powerful anti-Muslim groups that are well-supported by the administration that keep them constantly harassed.

The constitution gives them religious freedom. It is because of this freedom to profess, practice and then propagate their religion; normally, in religious matters, there has not been much interference from the Government until recently. It is true that the constitution guarantees equality before the law. It also enables them to establish and maintain educational institutions of their choice, but in practice, a lot of discrimination is noticed: permission to start minority institutions is denied or delayed by the administration in clear violation of the constitutional guarantees. Civil restrictions and disabilities are enforced on them.

The mother tongue of the Muslims of India is generally the Urdu language. This beautiful language is not much encouraged, because it is spoken by Muslims. Telecasts of Urdu news are sometimes curbed, and there are incidents of riots against the Urdu speaking and Muslim communities. In the administration, the Muslims feel they are discriminated. Though they constitute 12 percent of the population, they have very poor representation in government services, particularly the Home Department and

the Defense personnel; you do not find increasing representation geared to Muslims because Muslims are suspects.

The status of Muslims under the BJP administration poses a problem. The central government is governed by the National Democratic Alliance which has the Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP, as the largest single group. It includes the support of a few secular regional parties, and the Prime Minister, Mr. Vajpayee has a secularist background. He is respected by Muslims by and large as the only hope for them amidst tension, suspicion and discrimination.

There are some central ministers who have been accused of supporting the demolition of Babri Mosque in Maharashtra, India. There are cases pending before the designated court. There are people who are central ministers who raise clouds of doubts about the very outcomes of the court proceedings. Shiv Sena, not intending to a political outfit, is adopting a piousness attitude towards Muslims in particular. The chief of the party, Mr. Bal Tagree [ph] hates the very shadow of Muslim. To him, all Muslims in India are suspects. They are Pakistanis, and they should be dumped in the Arabian Sea. This is all his words. His party workers harass Muslims; loot their shops and control religious freedom in every possible way. His party is an ally of BJP, and BJP is forced to work against Muslims. The post-Babri Mosque demolition period, there were riots where thousands of Muslims were killed and made homeless. Bal Tagree is called by me, rather, the present Adolf Hitler of India.

What is happening in some of the BJP-ruled states amounts to a reign of terror. A few major instances are presented here to illustrate how the BJP administration is treating Muslims. Of course, the [in foreign language] is still worse. I'll not go into that aspect, because there are others to speak about it. The National Commission for Minorities in India has indicted the Gujrat Government done by BJP attacks on the freedom of religion of minorities, particularly Muslims. The state administration and police are biased and partisan. The state has propagated a sense of insecurity. State administrations supported the rioters, is supporting them. The Muslims are attacked; their shops are looted; houses are set on fire. The places of worship and the tomb of a saint were destroyed.

In Uttar Pradesh, a BJP-ruled state again, the government wanted to have a new law according to which prior permission from the district authorities was a condition to build any place of worship. This was obviously against Muslims and Christians. Textbooks which have the test and sentiments of the religion of Muslims were freely allowed to be used by the government, and the central government was then mute. The special police in a town in Gujarat is said to have unleashed a reign of terror on Muslims, dubbing them as Pakistanis. Their policemen

utterly supported the Hindu rioters. They allowed the rioters to loot Muslim shops and burn their houses. Muslim students were forced to sing [in foreign language], and when they refused, they were beaten up. [In foreign language] is, in my opinion, an song of the BJP and VHP. To force Muslims to sing this song, this is a very anti-Islamic song. But [in foreign language] is definitely anti-Islamic to sing, because Islam prohibits such songs in praise of Hindu gods and deities.

There are a few premier research institutions such as the Indian Council of Social Science Research and Indian Council of Historical Research that are always headed by top social scientists with a secular bent of mind. But now, the present government with the current central minister, who is from an RSS background, has appointed people to head these institutions, and they have strategy rewriting social themes and history to propagate hate against Muslims and Christians.

In India, Muslims are governed by their own laws in personal matters, and their sanctions are very strong. But the BJP has decided to introduce a common civil code. They want to build a temple on the very site where Babri Mosque stood once. This is politically motivated. BJP has just kept all of this in their hidden agenda. Right now, they cannot do anything, as the central government is a mixture of BJP, its allies and regional secular parties. What happens to the minorities if BJP and its allies, like-minded allies, have an absolute majority? It's anybody's guess and a matter of great concern for the minorities.

As long as Mr. Vajpayee is in power, the BJP cannot do much damage. Items to review the Indian Constitution is feared to be a device to make minorities subdued and be secondary citizens. The Sangh Parivar has tremendous influence on the BJP rulers today in day-to-day administration. It wants India to be designated as Bharat [ph], not India, and the state to be declared as a Hindu Rashtriya. Rashtriya is nation. It wants [in foreign language] in the middle of the national flag to be replaced by letters oyem [ph], a typical Hindutva symbol.

Citizenship is to be conferred only on those who are [in foreign language], meaning thereby only these people are [in foreign language], and minorities are no longer [in foreign language]. The national song has to be changed from the present one, [in foreign language], to [in foreign language]. If BJP has its own majority to rule the country, all the demands of the Sangh Parivar will be implemented. This will make the minorities restless.

BJP is against conversion but is forcing reconversion. Many Muslims, many Christians, particularly in tribal areas, are forcibly reconverted, but how the government allows reconversion when the government does not permit conversions? All Muslims are believed Hindus, basically, and they should be reconverted. But let me declare that a vast majority of the Hindus are secular and well-wishers of minorities. Similarly, a vast majority of the political parties and leaders are secular. It is for this reason that the minorities are safe today.

When the BJP Government under pressure from the Shiv Sena and the Sangh Parivar starts ruling the country, what will happen to minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, is something that causes tension and insecurity among all the minorities in this country.

Thank you very much.