To the Masters of Cold Countries
(extracts)

... My country is torrid.
Maybe that is why one neither knows
of clouds which bring rainfall
nor of floods that destroy.
And to wreck my harvests, sometimes moneylenders,
sometimes wild beasts, sometimes calamities,
and sometimes self-styled masters arrive.

Don’t teach me to hate my torrid country.
Let me dry my wet clothes in these courtyards
let me plant gold wheat in its fields
let me quench my thirst at its rivers
let me rest beneath the shade of its trees
let me wear its dust and wrap its distances around me.

... The sun and you
can not walk side by side.
The sun has chosen me for company.

Kishwar Naheed,
translated by Rukhsana Ahmad.
Located in the north-west of the South Asian sub-continent, Pakistan is a relatively new political entity. Comprising four provinces (North West Frontier Province, Sindh, Punjab and Baluchistan) and the tribal areas, northern areas, and the state of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan represents a great diversity of topography, bioclimates, peoples, and cultures. The rural-urban division is sharp, as are the disparities between the rich and the poor.

The land was the home of ancient civilisations and the meeting point of great cultures: Buddhist, Greek, Muslim, and Hindu. Consequently, Pakistan has a rich heritage of architecture, folklore, art, and music. Its people share the common traits of hospitality, warmth, and friendliness, and a strong sense of dignity.

Born in the ferment of change that accompanied the collapse of colonialism, Pakistan is still a society in transition. Older forms of economic, social, and political organisation are under challenge, while new ones have yet to evolve. Trying simultaneously to meet the compulsions of the international market economy and the demands of its burgeoning population, Pakistan is searching for an appropriate system of governance, and struggling to define its identity. In the process it has experienced a wide range of conflicts resulting from economic disparity, authoritarianism, ethnic assertion, sectarianism, gender discrimination, external aggression, and Cold War rivalries.

This book attempts to capture the many facets of Pakistan: its beauty and richness, its scars and shortcomings, its people and environment – in order to understand better a society poised between tradition and change.
Pakistan is bordered by Iran and Afghanistan on the west, China on the north, India on the east, and the Arabian sea on the south. It is separated from Tajikistan, one of the Central Asian Republics of the former Soviet Union, by a thin strip of Afghan territory in the north-west. The land is geographically diverse, including snow-capped mountains, plateaux, rivers, flood and arid plains, a variety of forests, deserts, lakes, swamps and a stretch of coastline.

Mountains cover more than half of the country's surface area, with three of the highest mountain ranges in the world: the Himalayas, Hindu Kush, and the
Karakoram, which rise above 8000 metres. These formidable mountain barriers are broken by passes which have acted as gateways to invaders, armies, refugees, fugitives, and nomads, from time immemorial to the present day.

Climatic conditions throughout the country are very varied. While some parts of the regions get as little as 250mm of rain, others, such as north-east Punjab, receive as much as 1000mm when the monsoon winds blow from July to September. Temperatures are similarly wide-ranging, from -25°C at the highest elevations in winter, to over 50°C in parts of Sindh and Baluchistan during the summer months.

The other prominent physical feature is the 3200km long Indus River, traversing the entire length of the country, rising in the northern Hindu Kush and Himalayan mountains, and fed by five major tributaries. The river supports the country’s complex irrigation system, the largest in the world, providing silt-enriched waters to the agricultural plains of Punjab and Sindh, before finally emptying out into the Arabian Sea.

### The Indus

The Indus, cradle of ancient civilisations, has shaped the lives of the people living on its banks. The Indus valley cultures (2500BC to 1700BC) represent the first organised urban settlements in the world. Culture, art, and architecture flowered. Sophisticated irrigation systems and the first forms of writing were part of these early civilisations.

The Indus delta, covering some 3000 square miles, used to be extremely fertile. Thick mangrove forests fringed the coastline, there was a vast variety of marine life, and fishing communities

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So the Indus delta died unwept, and with it a four-thousand-year history of trade and commerce... [as the water flow in the river declined] the sea moved into the lower reaches of the Indus distributaries for good, and the fertile mud flats became saline marshes unfit for cultivation. The rice mills ceased to function... large tracts of tamarisk forests died in the upper delta region. Drinking water was no longer available... it became impossible for animals or humans to survive... Those who could afford it, migrated along with their livestock.... Those who could not, moved away to work as landless labourers. The dhows unfolded their sails and sailed away from the Indus coastline...

*(Arif Hassan, Herald, August 1989)*
prospered. Much of the area has been affected by the construction of dams during the last 50 years designed to harness the waters of the Indus and its tributaries. Large tracts of desert lands became fertile, but at the same time the water flow to the sea was drastically reduced, changing the ecosystem and of the delta and destroying the livelihoods of the people that depended on it.

**Deserts and plateaux**

The Thar and Cholistan deserts in the Sindh and south of Punjab bordering India are marked by very low and erratic rainfall. But when the rains come, the deserts, particularly the Thar in Sindh, blossom into a veritable paradise.

There is a famous saying which is on every Thari’s lips: ‘Munjho muluk malir’ (‘My land is a paradise’). The phrase originated from a legend about Marvi, a beautiful woman from the Thar desert. She was kidnapped and carried off by Prince Omar, and during her long years of captivity and exile, he would taunt her about her continual longing to return to her desert land, and she would always reply ‘Munjho muluk malir’.

The Potwar Plateau in northern Punjab and the arid, sparsely populated Baluchistan Plateau to the south-west, also suffer from acute water shortages. Various indigenous methods were developed to store water. The most successful was a system of underground irrigation tunnels, *karez*, used in Baluchistan, which minimised water loss through evaporation. Tradition relates that some of the tunnels still in use were functioning when Alexander the Great arrived in this area. Many of the *karez* are now in a bad state of repair, but engineers are examining the system with a view to renewing it.
Pakistan now consists of four provinces: Punjab (63.9m people), Sindh (25.8m), Baluchistan (5.8m), and the North West Frontier Province (14.9m). In addition, there is the tribal belt (Federally Administered Tribal Areas, FATA), which for most purposes is treated as part of NWFP; and the disputed areas of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Agency (total 3.5m).

Punjab is traditionally the most prosperous and dominant province. It is the main recruiting ground for the army and home for most of the big financiers and industrialists. Punjab is also the agricultural heartland of the country and pioneer of the green revolution. Most of Punjab’s farms are owner operated, although there is a feudal belt in the south of the province where tenant farmers are in the majority.

The feudal structure in Sindh remains
much more intact than elsewhere in the country, with half of farms being run by tenants. The large landlords (vaderas) dominate their areas and can still command tributary labour. One consequence of feudalism is violence and insecurity, when vaderas give protection to robber bands (dacoits) that terrorise the area. Karachi, the largest conurbation in Pakistan, is in Sindh. It is now a city of about 9 million, and beset by all the problems of an overstretched urban infrastructure: pollution, overcrowding, poor services, ethnic violence, and crime.

Baluchistan is the largest yet most sparsely populated province, consisting predominantly of vast deserts and rough pastures. It is a largely tribal society, and the struggle between the Baloch and Pushtoon tribes for control periodically erupts into violence. The province is economically and socially underdeveloped. The arid conditions make sustainable agriculture difficult.

NWFP and FATA fall somewhere between Baluchistan and the rest of the country in terms of economic and social development, although their social structure is much closer to that of Baluchistan. The south of the province includes a canal-irrigated zone, dominated by small farmers, not unlike northern Punjab. The rest of the province is mainly mountainous, with rangelands and rain-fed agriculture, or small-scale irrigation. NWFP is also a tribal society, and 68 per cent of the farms are owner operated. There is a shortage of employment and resources for the expanding population. Deforestation is a serious environmental problem.
The people: an ethnic mix

The riverine plains are home to the majority of Pakistan's people, the Punjabis and the Sindhis; the Pathan tribes live in the north-western mountainous region; and the smaller but distinct nationalities (the Kalash and the people of Chitral, Gilgit, and Hunza) live in the extreme north. The Baluch and some Pathans live on the Baluchistan Plateau, and the Seraiki-speaking people in the south of Punjab. The Punjabis, including the Seraiki speakers, constitute roughly 55 per cent of the population, Sindhis 20 per cent, Pathans 10 per cent, **muhajirs** (those who migrated from India at the time of independence in 1947) 7 per cent, and the Baluch about 5 per cent.

There are also several sub-groups, such as the Brohis of Sindh and Baluchistan, the Seraiki speakers of Punjab, the Hindko speakers of the Frontier, and the Persian speaking Hazaras of Baluchistan, who consider themselves ethnically distinct. All these distinct peoples represent a wide variety of culture, language, dress, art, and literature.

Gypsies, in Sindh province. Many of them work as day labourers in the fields.

Family in a village in Punjab, making rush-mats for sale.
(left) Woman from a community of brick-kiln workers.

(above) The village midwife, in a village near Lahore, Punjab.

(left) Herdsmen in Quetta, Baluchistan.
A turbulent history

Pre-historic beginnings
Human history in Pakistan goes back to the stone age. Relics of the earliest stone-age man (500,000 to 100,000 years ago) have been found in northern Punjab. The Baluchistan Plateau culture, developing later (4000 BC to 2000 BC), extended to Iran. This was the precursor to the Indus valley civilisation (2,500 BC to 1700 BC), one of the earliest examples of organised urban settlement. This agrarian civilisation, the largest in the ancient world, stretched along the Indus river and its tributaries from the Himalayan foothills to the Arabian Sea. Excavations have revealed well-planned cities in Harappa (Punjab), Mohenjodaro (Sindh), and other sites in lower Sindh.

Since those first Dravidian settlers of the Indus Valley, successive waves of Aryan migrants from Central Asia came to this region. Alexander of Macedonia invaded with his armies in 327-326 BC, defeating local rulers on his journey from Gandhara, in the north of the region, to the south and west. Though Alexander stayed only for two years, the influence of Greek culture endured much longer. A Hindu dynasty, the Mauryans, succeeded Alexander (325 BC – 185 BC) and founded the first Hindu Empire. Ashoka, a later Mauryan king, adopted Buddhism, the new religion flowering in the Indian sub-continent, and Gandhara became the centre of Buddhism. Traces of a fusion of Greek, Central Asian, Indian, and indigenous cultures can still be seen in the ruins of Taxila city, in the Kalash valley, Gilgit, and Peshawar.

By the seventh century AD, Buddhism declined completely and Hinduism became the dominant religion. Around this time the Arabs, who had trade and commerce links going back for centuries, came for the first time as conquerors (712 AD). By 724 AD they had established direct rule in Sindh. Muslim rule, finally consolidated under the Mughals, continued over most of India until 1761. By this time, European trading companies, Portuguese, British, French, and Dutch, had become well-established in the sub-continent and were spreading their political influence.
Mohenjodaro 2500BC–1700BC

Mohenjodaro, situated on the bank of the Indus, is one of the world’s most spectacular ancient cities. Well laid-out, with wide streets and spacious houses, and a complete drainage system, the city remains a monument to an advanced and complex civilisation. Most houses were two-storeys high, with fair-sized rooms arranged around an internal courtyard and bathroom. The latter had a circular well and drain that emptied into a cess-pit from which water entered the main covered drain in the street. The artefacts, jewellery, figurines and seals found on the site reflect a highly-developed and sophisticated culture.

Colonial encounter

The land that is now Pakistan has always been a passage through which outsiders came and conquered the rest of India. The fertile plains of Punjab in particular were attractive to successive groups of invaders. In the period between 1798 and 1818, the British had managed not only to oust their fellow-European competitors, but to transform themselves from traders to an imperial power that had established indirect rule over most of the region. British power was challenged by many Indians – landlords, petty rulers, and nominal princes – in an organised resistance in 1857. This is known as the ‘War of Independence’ in Indian and Pakistani versions of history, and ‘The Indian Mutiny’ in the British version. The resistance was crushed, India was declared a colony of Britain, and direct rule imposed.

The impact of the British on the Indian sub-continent has been very deep. They brought with them a world-view based on their experience of the industrial revolution. They introduced changes in social and economic structures, and in systems of production, which served British interests and were not always in harmony with local needs: the shift to cash crops like cotton to provide for the British textile industry; the resettlement of large numbers of people from other areas; and the breakdown of subsistence agricultural systems. Railways were built, for moving agricultural raw material and other goods for the British markets, which made people more mobile than ever before.

Such modernisation brought tremendous social changes in a very short period of time. The British introduced new systems of revenue collection, legal procedures, forms of education, civil services, and politics, which in turn affected social relationships. The powers of traditionally dominant groups were reduced, and a new class of professionals (doctors, lawyers, and teachers) emerged that modelled itself on the British.

During the political struggles that took place under British rule, new ideas of democracy, freedom, and nationalism developed, which were to provide models for the systems and institutions of governance after Independence that continue to be followed to this day.
Pakistan’s cultural heritage

As an area with a turbulent history and the meeting place of many cultures, Pakistan’s traditions are rich and varied. The constant influx of settlers, traders, and invaders from Persia, India, China, Turkey, Greece and Afghanistan, have all left their mark on the art, crafts, architecture, dance, music, and literature of Pakistan.

Language
Linguistically Pakistan is a heterogeneous country, although all the languages now share variants of the Arabic-Persian script and alphabet. Urdu is the official language, developed during the Mughal times to serve as a common language for their eclectic army. Because it was primarily the language of the educated Muslims of northern India at the time of Independence, Urdu became strongly associated with Muslim nationalism. English is used along with Urdu for official business and in some parts of the education system. In most of Pakistan, it is the language of the elite and upwardly mobile.

Urdu has become politicised over the years. Mother tongue to the migrants from northern India (muhajirs), it has become their symbol of identity. Despite some resentment against it, Urdu has developed, and remains the language of literature and poetry. Some of the most sophisticated as well as popular poetry is written in Urdu, and the majority of newspapers, magazines, and books are published in that language.

While Punjabi, the mother tongue of the majority of the population, is not read by many people, due to difficulties with the script, Sindhi, written in a variant of Arabic, is the most developed among the regional languages of the country. It is rich in both language and literature, although Sindhi culture in Pakistan suffered considerably at Independence, when most of the educated, middle-class Sindhis, who were Hindus, migrated to India. Since a large number of Urdu-speaking migrants from India settled in the cities of Sindh, the movement for the promotion of Sindhi language and culture has been expressed in opposition to Urdu. This has led to conflict, in 1972 when language riots occurred after the government decision to grant special status to Sindhi language in the province.

Pashto, the dominant language of the NWFP, has a rich oral tradition. In the province of Baluchistan the prominent languages are Balochi and Brahui. One of the main dialects of Balochi is called Makrani, from the city of Makran near the border of Iran. Brahui is the only Pakistani language of Dravidian origin.

Most people in Pakistan, men, women, and children, wear a variation of the *shalwar kameez* – loose trousers and long shirt. While fashion dictates colours and designs for every-day, each district has its own traditional distinctive shapes, colours and techniques, and patterns of embroidery and decoration. *Saris, dhotis* (a sort of sarong), and *lehengas, chooridars* (tight trousers which roll up like bangles when worn) *ghararas* and other elaborate skirts are also worn. Styles in women’s *dupattas* – long scarves worn around the shoulders – vary too, with regional differences in size and thickness. Men’s hats are also distinctive – from the rolled-felt hats of Chitral, to the colourful, embroidered caps of Sindh.
A land of poetry

Every Pakistani is a poet. Man, woman or child, literate or illiterate, Brahui or Urdu speaking, nearly everyone has composed a few verses some time in their lives. A Pakistani poet may be an old Baluch out grazing her animals in the desolation of majestic mountains, a fisherman singing in the starry night in a boat far out at sea, a Pashtun with his gun slung over his shoulder, a brick-kiln worker at a union meeting, a young college girl serious and romantic, a clerk in a musty office, a rickshaw driver painting his verses on his vehicle, village women at a wedding party, a devotee at a saint’s shrine, a Sindhi farmer at a kutcheri (talking together in the evening), a villager at a tanzeem meeting, or a poet at a mushaira (a poetry reading session where a candle is passed from person to person as they read their verse).

Some people may be too shy to recite their own poetry to you, but everyone will launch into verses by the well-known poets in the course of ordinary conversation. Poetry is set to music in the form of the ghazal, where the music is subservient to the words. In a mushaira, or a ghazal concert, the audience will applaud the verses they like best, and the poet or performer will repeat them. Mushairas, formal or informal, impromptu sessions with friends, are a favourite activity for Pakistanis.

There is a national festival to celebrate the birthday of the late Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Pakistan’s greatest poet. After the death of a young woman poet, Parveen Shakir, in a car accident recently, a national day of mourning was declared.

Pakistani poets have been in the political forefront of the fight against oppression, and even those who do not agree with them politically will savour the flavour and quality of their poetry.

The tradition of the Sufi

Popular traditions continue, almost unaffected by political upheavals. Traditional poetry, literature, art, dance, music, crafts and architecture of Pakistan reflect the influence of Sufi thought. The Sufi’s quest to ‘know’, to ‘understand’ is through creative expression. Sufi thinkers have contributed much to the country’s poetic heritage, and their poetry, in particular, has developed its own symbolism over time. In Pakistan it represents resistance to authoritarianism and state oppression, and of freedom of the spirit and soul. This spirit of resistance continues in contemporary times in the work of poets like Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Habib Jalib. All the Sufi saints are remembered by their poetry.

‘Reciting the names of God on your rosary, and looking pious
Will never make you into a good Muslim
For within your heart lie hidden,
Deceit and Satan.’

Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, Sufi Sindhi poet
**Dedication (extracts)**
Let me write a song for this day!

This day and the anguish of this day
For this wilderness of yellowing leaves –
which is my homeland.
For this carnival of suffering – which is
my homeland.
Let me write of the little lives of office
workers
of the railmen
and the tonga-wallahs
and of the postmen.
Let me write of the poor innocents they
call: workers.

Lord of all the world
promised heir to all that is to come.
Let me write of the farmer
this Lord whose fief was a few animals –
stolen
who knows when;
this heir who once had a daughter –
carried off
who knows where;
this chief whose turban is a tattered rag
beneath the feet of the mighty.

... Let me write of the students
those seekers of the truth.
Who came seeking the truth at the
doorstep
of the great and the mighty.
These innocents who, with their dim
flickering lamps came seeking light
where they sell naught but the darkness
of long endless nights.

Let me write of the prisoner in whose
hearts all our yesterdays
dawned like sparkling gems.
And burning, burning through the dark
winds of prison nights
are now but distant stars.

Let me write of the Heralds of the
coming Dawn ...

*Faiz Ahmad Faiz*
*(Translation by Shooaib Hashmi)*

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**Working woman (extracts)**

They all say
I am too proud.
That I bloom and blossom with the
efforts of my own sweat and blood.
Every leaf is watered by the sweat of my
brow...
I am like a tall tree.
Yet within me there is an ancient creeper
which sometimes –
when the gales are strong –
wants to find a strong branch
round which to wrap itself.

*Parveen Shakir*
Music and dance: classical and folk traditions

Traditional dance and music takes two forms, classical and folk. While the classical expressions of both art forms developed under the patronage of the court or priesthood, the folk traditions are expressions of people’s joy or celebration at particular times in their lives: the birth of a child, a marriage, a religious devotion, or a spiritual experience. In Pakistan, classical music and dancing have suffered neglect and deliberate discouragement under some governments, particularly that of General Zia. But committed teachers continued to teach and students to learn, in an environment that was extremely hostile. They persevered, and it was a revelation after the end of Zia’s rule not only to rediscover the great teachers, but to see new young stars burst upon the horizon, performers of a quality that was second to none.

Ghazal, poetry sung to a musical accompaniment, is very popular, as is qawwali, a form of devotional group singing. Leading qawwals like the Sabri Brothers and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan are not only extremely popular in Pakistan but have also popularised qawwali in the West.

Folk music, closer to the people, has not faced any constraints, and has continued to flourish. Folk instruments include many versions of the flute, percussion instruments, including the matka, an earthen water vessel, and the chimta, a long poker. The most commonly played instrument in Pakistan is the dhol,
a double-sided drum, which takes several forms. The dholki is a small drum played flat on the ground, usually by women, at any and every festive occasion from weddings to Basant. It is accompanied by singing and folk dancing. Wedding celebrations last three days or more, one day being given over to the mehndi, when the bride’s hands and feet are dyed with an intricate clay pattern of dark red henna, and there is much singing and dancing. The dhol is a larger drum, hung round the neck and played with sticks, normally by a man. It is used outdoors, to dance to, or to accompany professional singers. The tabla, a twin drum set, is used mostly for classical accompaniment, and is one of the most complex musical instruments of the subcontinent, on which every note on a musical scale can be sounded.

**Basant: the kite-flying festival**

Basant: the sky is full of a thousand coloured kites, there are parties on the rooftops, blaring music and the hypnotic beat of the dhol, and gangs of little boys yelling ‘Bo-kata!’ and chasing something just beyond the horizon.

The kite-flying festival is celebrated with passion and abandon in the city of Lahore. It heralds the advent of spring after the cold winter and is a traditional festival of the Punjab, associated originally with farmers. During times when the state comes under religious influences, there are efforts to discourage what is, after all, not a religious festival. Lahoris have simply ignored such attempts with aplomb.

The colour of the day is yellow and everyone, especially the women, wears yellow. Yellow food is cooked, vegetables, specially cauliflower or potatoes with turmeric, yellow sweet rice (zarda, which means yellow), and Basant is a party day. People get together in open grounds or on roof tops to fly their kites. A great deal of care goes into preparing and stringing the kites before they actually fly.

The festival goes on all day, and when darkness falls, huge search-lights light up the sky, white kites are flown from the roof tops in all parts of the city, the rich homes of the elite as well as the congested homes of the walled city, once the heart of Lahore town, and the festival continues all night.

A feature of kite flying particular to Punjab is a competition to cut other people’s string, and young boys chase after the fallen kites as booty. Kite flying around the time of Basant becomes an obsession. Kites sell for as little as 20 pence and as much as £25. But the real cost is the dor, the string. Connoisseurs will get their string prepared the summer before, spending hours lacing it with ground glass to ensure its cutting edge! All over the pavements of Lahore, shocking pink and royal purple string is stretched out to dry, laced, and stretched out again by sellers of dor. String for the day of Basant can cost anything from £5 for a large party of children to £200 for three or four adults.

Women take part in all the activities of Basant, but to actually cut another person’s kite is considered somewhat tomboyish! The phrase used for one kite battling with another is pecha larana; and the same phrase is used for a flirtation.

**Selling kites for Basant.**
Young cricketers, Baluchistan.

Sport

Sports play a major part in the lives of Pakistanis. Cricket has become a national passion and children can be seen playing the game in the streets or any open spaces available. When the national cricket team is playing a match, life in the country comes to a standstill. Public holidays are declared when the team wins an international game (which it often does). Cricketers like Imran Khan, Wasim Akram, Javed Miandad are superstars in Pakistan.

Field hockey and squash are also popular, though they do not have the glamour of cricket. Pakistan has been the Olympic champion in hockey, and the country has produced top-level squash players like Jahangir Khan and Jansher Khan, the current world champion.

Other favourite sports include gulidanda, a street game which some consider to be the precursor of hockey, played with a stick and a four inch long elongated 'ball', kabadi, where two teams of players, with oiled bodies, try to slip across to each other’s territory, wrestling, and buz kushi, an early form of polo played in the northern mountains.

Architectural expressions

Architecture in Pakistan displays great regional diversity, based on available building materials, environmental factors, and social requirements. Succeeding historical periods have had their own distinctive styles, and have influenced that of successive periods. The Buddhist Gandhara architecture, for instance, strongly influenced subsequent Hindu architecture of the Salt Range (650-1026 AD). This, in turn, was assimilated in part by the architecture of the first Muslim Kings, and can still be traced in later tombs in the cities of the south Punjab. The Mughals who followed in the sixteenth century left a rich heritage of buildings with their lavish construction of imperial forts, palaces and gardens. The Fort, Badshahi mosque, Emperor Jehangir’s tomb, and the Shalimar Gardens in Lahore are fine examples.

The British colonists brought with them the building style of the contemporary West, still to be seen in buildings like the High Court and Chief’s College, in Lahore, and Freire Hall, the Hindu Gymkhana and the Sindh Club in Karachi.
Shalimar Gardens, Lahore.

Old mosque in Karachi.

Doorway, the Fort, Lahore.

Shrine at Multan, Punjab.
The birth of Pakistan

An Indian nationalist movement opposed to the British emerged with the formation of the All India National Congress in 1885. Muslims supported the Congress initially, but with the increasing use of Hindu symbols and rhetoric by Congress, which contradicted its claims to be an all-India party, the Muslims became more and more alienated.

In 1906, the Muslims formed their own political party, the All India Muslim League. Initially, the League saw its role as safe-guarding and representing the interests of the Muslims of the sub-continent. Its early preoccupation was to ensure Muslim representation in the parliamentary institutions that would be set up in post-independence India. It was the Muslim poet-philosopher, Muhammad Iqbal, who first put forward the idea of Hindus and Muslims having separate national identities. This idea crystallised in the 1940s into a movement demanding a separate homeland for Muslims.

In 1947, the British finally left. Pakistan was born as an independent state in two parts: West and East Pakistan, separated by almost 1000 miles of Indian territory. The controversial demarcation line between India and Pakistan was drawn hurriedly and almost arbitrarily. The process of Partition involved a massive upheaval of populations: some 14 million people crossed the new boundary: Pakistan lost six million people, mainly Hindus, and gained 8 million Muslim refugees from India. One million people died in the violence which accompanied Partition; thousands were displaced.

The influx of people from India added yet another element to an already complex racial-ethnic composition of the country. It sowed the seeds of conflict and discord for the years to come. Even now the migrants of 1947 are not fully integrated with the local population, particularly in Sindh.

Building a nation

West Pakistan, where the seat of government was located, had not existed as a political unit in undivided India. Sindh was part of the Bombay Presidency; Baluchistan and a substantial part of NWFP had resisted coming into the fold of the British administrative system and were largely governed by the

Jinnah’s address to the Assembly: 11 August 1947

‘...You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state. We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state...

Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as an ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state...’
tribal codes of rival chiefs; Punjab was the most organised and developed province. Its major city, Lahore, had been the provincial capital and a leading centre of education. But it was Karachi, the tiny port city of Sindh, that was selected as the new capital.

Pakistan did not inherit well-established administrative, political, economic, and military structures. Most of the assets and state machinery went to India. The country had almost no industry, or mineral resources. The number of professionals was tiny. The civil and military bureaucracies, though fragmented and weak, were the only ones that functioned.

The Constituent Assembly, consisting of Muslim members elected to the Federal Assembly and the Council of States in the Indian elections of 1946, was the primary political institution. The new country faced many challenges: rehabilitation of refugees; reconstruction; economic development; setting up of administrative institutions; and infrastructural development. The most important task was to formulate a constitution that would embody Jinnah’s vision of a non-theocratic, liberal, democratic Pakistan, where the freedom of speech and conscience of all citizens would be secure and tolerance, human dignity, and emancipation of women ensured.

The task of building a nation from scratch was indeed formidable but there was an equally vast opportunity to remodel and develop structures of governance and economic and social management according to the needs of the people. However, issues of ideology and politics, division of power, form of government, tensions with India, among others, kept consensus at bay, and meant that this opportunity was lost.

The disadvantages which the newly-born Pakistan inherited were compounded by a number of unforeseen occurrences: Jinnah’s untimely death hardly a year after Independence; the first war fought with India over Kashmir (1948), instilling a permanent feeling of insecurity and threat; the assassination of the first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan. External factors have had a strong impact on internal developments. For example, the tense relationship with India (marred by three separate wars) has been central to Pakistan’s foreign policy, and was one of the reasons for the military alliance with the US, and unfriendly posture towards the Eastern bloc countries. Events such as the Afghan war and the Iranian Revolution have had a profound effect on Pakistan’s internal stability and foreign relations.

**Power and politics**

Pakistan has been ruled by military dictatorships for almost half its existence (1958-1972; 1977-1985). The country has seen frequent dissolution of elected assemblies, the banning of political parties and trade unions, the curbing of student activities, and press censorship. As a result, the development of political and social institutions has suffered. The economic consequences of dictatorship have been sharper inequalities between different sections of society, and between different regions, and great concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. During Ayub Khan’s period, 66 per cent of the country’s industrial capital was owned by 22 families.

The country experimented with various forms of elections on its bumpy political path. There were direct elections; indirect ones; ‘basic democracy’ elections whereby a limited electoral college was first voted for on universal adult franchise, which in turn elected the President; and non-party elections. The first general elections on the basis of universal adult franchise were held in 1970, 23 years after independence, under the military government of General Yahya Khan, and were acknowledged to have been free and fair. Stability proved elusive to civilian governments as the political leadership failed again and again to share power and agree on systems of governance.
## Dates and Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>First Indian National Congress meets in Bombay.</td>
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<td>1906</td>
<td>Foundation of the Muslim League.</td>
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<td>1920 – 1922</td>
<td>Gandhi’s Non-Cooperation Campaign.</td>
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<td>1928</td>
<td>Indian women granted voting rights equivalent to men.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>All India Muslim League supports women’s demand for equal rights for all people regardless of religion, caste, creed or sex.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>‘Two Nation’ theory articulated by Jinnah.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1942 – 1943</td>
<td>Bengal famine.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Independence and Partition: 14 August – Pakistan; 15 August – India</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Jinnah died at Ziarat (11 September). War with India.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Family Laws Ordinance restricts polygamy, regulates divorce and raises the marriageable age for girls to a minimum of 16.</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>The new constitution of Pakistan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>War with India over Raan of Kach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Military action in East Pakistan. President Yahya Khan resigns and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto becomes the President and Chief Marshal Law Administrator. Pakistan Army surrenders in Dhaka; Bangladesh born.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>New Constitution approved unanimously by the National Assembly 10 April.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Ahmadis declared Non-Muslims.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Promulgation of Hadood Ordinance, introducing so-called Islamic punishments for crimes including slander, theft, rape, adultery, fornication (zina) and prostitution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Women’s demonstration against discriminatory laws, in Lahore. First street protest against Martial Law.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Islamic Law of Evidence passed. The Law states that in matters relating to ‘financial and future obligations’ the evidence of two men or one man and two women will be required.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>General Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq lifts Martial Law. Number of women’s seats raised to 20 in the National Assembly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Benazir Bhutto returns to lead the Pakistan People’s Party and demands elections.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Ishaq Khan dissolves the National Assembly. Benazir Bhutto’s government dismissed. Elections held. Nawaz Sharif takes over as the Prime Minister (October)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Assembly dissolved again. Benazir Bhutto becomes the Prime Minister again.</td>
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Secession of East Pakistan

Events leading to the formation of Bangladesh date back to 1948, when Urdu was declared the official language of Pakistan, even though 56 per cent of the population spoke Bengali, the language of East Pakistan. Resentment among the people of East Pakistan increased as they felt economically and politically marginalised. The devastating cyclone that hit East Pakistan in 1970 and the Central Government’s inability to respond adequately confirmed their perceptions. When the Central Government refused to accept the result of 1970 elections, it was the last straw: East Pakistan erupted with violent clashes between civilians and the army. A nine-month civil war followed, and the resulting exodus of refugees into India gave the Indian government a reason to intervene. The Indian Army entered East Pakistan in December 1971. After a brief resistance a UN-sponsored cease-fire was called on 17 December 1971 and the Pakistan Army surrendered. Pakistan was dismembered and the state of Bangladesh was born.

The Bhutto years (1971-77)

West Pakistan was governed by a Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) government under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. His slogan had been ‘Roti, kapra aur makaan’ (food, clothing, and shelter) and his politics populist. There were great expectations of his government, on the part of the landless, trade unions, and left-wing political parties, and his home province of Sindh. His main opponents ranged from the far right to the far left, and included the political power holders in the provinces of Baluchistan and the Frontier, as well as the mullahs. An opposition coalition, the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), led demonstrations and protest marches. Bhutto tried to placate them by passing token ‘Islamic’ legislation but at the same time declared martial law in certain areas. This paved the way for a complete military take-over, under General-Zia-ul-Haq, Bhutto’s own Commander in Chief, chosen for his loyalty.

The Zia years (1977-88)

When Zia imposed Martial Law in 1977 his stated intentions were to restore order in the country and to hold elections within 90 days. But very soon his mission changed: to convert Pakistan into a truly Muslim state. Once again, Pakistan saw the banning of political activities. Summary courts sent scores of people to prison and the gallows, with no right of defence.

The non-elected military dictator General Zia was regarded as an international pariah, because of the hanging of Bhutto on a murder charge; but with the outbreak of the Afghan war, he suddenly became the courageous defender of a strategic frontier against communism. Military aid for the Afghan mujahideen and the obliging Pakistan government flowed in freely from Western governments and right-wing groups. Private militias grew and civil society rapidly became militarised. Ethnic, clan, and religio-sectarian rivalries flourished. Sindh, in particular became the scene of violent ethnic conflict between the native Sindhis and immigrant muhajirs.

Return to democracy

General Zia’s death in August 1988 in a plane crash brought an end to a bleak phase of Pakistan’s political life. But the transition to democracy has not been an easy one. In the five years between 1988 and 1993 three general elections were held, twice because of dismissals of elected governments by the President.

Political activity revived during the general election of 1988. The PPP leader, Benazir Bhutto, daughter of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, was elected Prime Minister. She became the first woman leader in the Muslim world, in recent times. The return to a civilian dispensation did not entirely reduce the influence of the
military. The political deadlock between the three centres of power – the PM, the President, and the army – led to the dissolution of the assemblies by the President through extra constitutional powers, just 20 months after elections.

The 1990 elections, which were won by Nawaz Sharif and the Muslim League, were marred by the vehement allegations by the PPP that the elections had been rigged. The atmosphere in the new legislature remained tense. Once again, the assemblies were dissolved. October 1993 saw fresh elections, this time under the supervision of the army. The PPP and Benazir Bhutto were returned, but the electorate registered its protest by a low turnout. However, the marginal parties, particularly the religious, gained very few votes.

**Benazir Bhutto**

‘When Bibi [the young lady] wins, will she be able to sit on the gaddi [seat]? Will she give it to her husband? Will he allow her to sit?’ asked a peasant woman in disbelief in a village on the outskirts of Lahore during Benazir Bhutto’s election campaign in 1988. Benazir, an Oxford graduate, had been forced into a two-year self-exile by the military government after spending five long years in prison and under house arrest. She returned on 10 April 1986 to a tumultuous welcome. Hundreds of thousands of people lined the streets of Lahore when she arrived. There was singing and dancing in the streets, and a feeling of euphoria. Her public meetings attracted mammoth crowds, including large numbers of women.

Benazir Bhutto’s success in the elections and assumption of office as the Prime Minister vindicated people’s belief in themselves, particularly women activists who had relentlessly challenged discriminatory laws and regulations. That, in a country where women are underprivileged, a woman, and a young one at that, could reach the highest public office, was extremely reassuring. It was clear that for the electorate gender was not the determining criteria for leadership. That she has disappointed people by her inability to keep electoral promises is another story.
The unsolved problem of the disputed territory of Kashmir has persistently soured relations between India and Pakistan, preventing them from cooperating in ways that would contribute to both countries' development. So far, relatively few refugees have fled Kashmir, and many of those that have come have dispersed into small settlements, or are living with relatives.

The American influence on Pakistan was most evident under the government of Ayub Khan 1958-68 and Zia-ul-Haq, particularly in 1971, when India had a military pact with the Soviet Union. Pakistan has also had a very special relationship with China, and helped to negotiate the first surprise talks between China and the US, considered to be a great diplomatic feat. Since the end of the Cold War, Pakistan has lost its strategic importance to the US as a means of keeping Afghanistan as 'Russia's bleeding wound'.

Pakistan has close links with most of the countries of the Middle East, but it is something of a love-hate relationship. Pakistani workers in the Middle East are often at the receiving end of harsh employment practices and social discrimination, and yet most Pakistanis were fiercely opposed to the government’s participation in the war with Iraq, not wishing to be in what was clearly seen as the American camp against a major Muslim country; although Saudi Arabia, another powerful Muslim country, was also on the American side.

Links between Pakistan and Iran are strong, as neighbours and because of the Persian roots of the Urdu language. Large numbers of Iranians, students, refugees, and others, live in Pakistan, and there are also Persian-speaking Pakistani communities, mostly in Baluchistan. Many Pakistanis felt deeply involved with the Iranian struggle against the Shah. The Shi’a branch of Islam (see p.32)
in Pakistan has strong links with Iran.

Of late, Pakistan has been developing trade, tourism, and cultural links with many of the Central Asian republics of the ex-Soviet Union, although the war in Afghanistan has somewhat constrained this relationship.

**The Afghan War**

During the Afghan War, Pakistan played host to three to four million Afghan refugees. The poor of both countries became the innocent victims of the Cold War; Afghans had to flee their homes, and Pakistanis had to cope with four million unexpected guests. With no end in sight to the internal conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan continues to pay a heavy price for its hospitality.

The majority of the refugees remained in camps in North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan, but a substantial number spread across the country, many of them settling in Karachi. The infusion of Afghans into an already polarised Pakistani society, and their ability to obtain arms and drugs from the war-torn border region, has created serious problems.

**‘The Kalashnikov culture’**

Arms were channelled to the Afghan mujahideen by many Western countries, principally the US, to help them in their fight against Communism. Inevitably, many of these arms went astray and were sold, some to other governments, and many to the local Afghan and Pakistani population. Weapons of all descriptions, from small pistols to rocket launchers, SAMs, and landmines, are all readily available at bargain prices in the tribal areas of Pakistan, on the Afghan border. The inevitable result of this ‘Kalashnikov culture’ has been an increase in armed robberies, kidnappings for ransom, and gun-battles between rival groups.

The Pashtuns have always been a warrior people, and arms were manufactured in the town of Darra, but the most sophisticated weapon produced was a seven-shot rifle. Weapons such as this were used for celebratory firing at weddings when the groom was carrying off his bride. Now with the easy availability of Kalashnikovs (imitations are now being produced in Darra) a hail of Kalashnikov bullets are fired in the air at the departure of the bride and groom. What goes up must come down, and inevitably some of these bullets cause serious injury; a village organisation in Safiabad, Mardan, is campaigning to discourage people from this dangerous form of celebration.
**The drug culture**

Another consequence of the Afghan influx has been the easy availability of heroin. Pakistan is not only used as a staging post for heroin smuggling, but a high cost has been paid in terms of the increased incidence of heroin addiction among the Pakistani population. In 1977 there were only 50 notified heroin addicts in Pakistan; now there at least one million or more.

The young man, his head shaven, was in the blue cotton uniform of the Centre, ‘This is the second time I have come here’, he said. ‘I am the youngest in my family, I work in our photography shop in Quetta, with my brothers, and we are comfortably off. It was peer pressure made me try heroin: my friends taunted me for not using it. It makes you feel wonderful, but it destroys your life: you’re no good for anything or anyone, family or work. My wife is fed up, and threatening to leave me. That’s why I’m here again – it’s my only hope, my last chance.’

What sets the Milo Centre apart from the many other drug clinics that have sprung up all over the country is the strong community involvement in its running. The building, in a busy street in Quetta, is fortified to keep addicts in and drug pushers out. The atmosphere is quiet and friendly. Timings for meals, exercise, collective discussions, TV watching, are carefully worked out and followed. The 25 patients on a one-month detoxification course are cared for by a team of doctors, who give their services free. Other volunteers work a shift system to support the handful of paid staff. Expenses are covered by contributions from patients and community donations.

The centre was set up by Milo Shaheed, who had been a local tough, but who was transformed into a crusader against heroin when his brother became an addict. He fought the drug pushers with courage and energy until in 1990 one of them gunned him down at the gates of the clinic he had founded. But his commitment to rehabilitation of addicts and his fight against those who profit from heroin addiction has been an inspiration to those who continue his work today.

(above) Patients at the Milo Centre.

(below) This passer-by discovered a heap of opium poppies left to dry by the roadside. Opium is grown in many areas of Afghanistan, and in some remote areas of Pakistan, although the government destroys crops when they are discovered, it is a high value crop, attractive to poor farmers.
The school in the camp

For ten years, the Khairabad camp sprawled on the outskirts of Quetta: row upon row of small, mud-roofed huts, bleak and dusty, with no amenities. It was home to several thousand refugees. They were unregistered, and therefore had no official refugee status, and were not entitled to any material support. Many of them lived in home-made shelters of tattered cloth, even during the Quetta winter, with the snow piled high on the ground and temperatures below freezing.

The men either worked as day labourers in Quetta or were involved in the business of war. In 1991, the uneasy peace in Afghanistan offered a fragile hope to refugees, and the Khairabad camp quickly emptied. But less than a year later, most of them had been forced to return. The school building had been razed to the ground, but the camp leader, Agha Majeed and the teacher, Ghulam Rasool, were determined to restart a school.

A group of young volunteer teachers offered their help, many of them new refugees from Kabul. Latifa, for example, wanted her three young children to attend school, and offered to teach at the school herself. ‘At least my children are having an education, and I am right here with them. They are delighted they have other children to play with. And they come and go from school in safety. In the last days before we left Kabul, we lived in constant terror.’

With no permanent site, the school moves every few months. The present school building has only one room, the rest of the children study packed into the tiny courtyard. There is not even a single blade of grass: ‘There is not time to even plant a tree, before we are asked to move again by the landlord,’ says Ghulam Rasool.

The 364 children in the school, 120 of whom are girls, pay a small fee, out of which the rent is paid for the school building, and the teachers share the tiny sum left over. But Latifa and the other teachers feel they must go on: ‘Even if we could afford it, if we sent our children to Pakistani schools, they would have to study in a foreign language, and then how would they readjust to Afghan society? We are waiting for peace. Let peace come and we will be on our way home. I really need every penny I can earn, but this work is a labour of love, to ensure that our next generation does not grow up illiterate and uneducated. They are, after all, the future of Afghanistan.’

(facing page) Afghan refugee children at the school in the Khairabad camp.

(left) Two of the young teachers in the school.
Islam and Islamisation

Islam originated from the same part of the world as other great religions, the Middle East. Muslims believe that their Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) comes from the same line as Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus, all of whom are recognised as prophets bringing the same message from the same God, Allah. The Muslims own the religious texts of the Torah, the Bible, and the Quran, as part of their tradition, and consider Jews and Christians as ‘Ahl-e-Kitab’, or ‘people of the book’.

The basic affirmation of the Islamic faith is ‘There is no God but the One God, Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.’ (La Ilaha Illa Allah, Muhammad ur Rasul Allah.) Muslims believe that Muhammad is the last prophet. The Muslims, however, are not homogeneous. The majority of Muslims in Pakistan are from the Sunni sect, which is further divided into many schools of thought. A significant minority belong to the Shi’as branch of Islam, also subdivided into fiqah or religious schools.

The schism among Muslims occurred in AD 658 over the succession to Muhammad, as the Caliph. The Sunnis believed that the Caliph should be chosen from the broader Muslim community, while the Shi’as believed that he should be a descendant of the Prophet. Through succeeding centuries, the Sunnis have come to represent the establishment, with religion closely identified with the state, and discouraged reinterpretations of Koranic law by scholars. Shi’a Islam has tended to be associated with new thought, radical movements, and more liberal interpretations of the rights of women. Sunni Islam is more closely identified with the keepers of the Ka’aba, the most sacred shrine of the Muslims, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Shi’as have a strong concept of the clergy as spiritual leaders; while the Sunnis consider the clergy to be only religious scholars and administrators of the mosques.

People’s Islam

While most Pakistanis (96.7 per cent) are Muslims, at its inception the country did not see itself as a religious or theocratic state, but as a place where people could practice their religion and pursue their lives without fear of discrimination and persecution. The proportion of Christians (1.6 per cent) is small and that of Hindus even smaller (1.5 per cent). Also present in Pakistan is a small but influential and controversial sect, the Ahmadis or Qadianis. The Ahmadis were declared non-Muslims in 1974 for not accepting the basic Islamic tenet that Prophet Muhammad is the last in the line of Prophets. The community since then has faced considerable persecution, especially during General Zia-ul-Haq’s time, when stringent laws were passed against them.

People’s religion is part of their personal lives – they perform rituals, celebrate festivals, commemorate auspicious days, visit maazars for mental peace, and enjoy devotional music. But the business of day-to-day living is governed by the practicalities and demands of the material world. Even social relationships are defined more by customary practices and cultural norms than by religion alone.

For most Pakistanis, Islam gives a sense of community and identity, an important one among other identities. It implies a moral and ethical code. It
demands certain rituals: many Pakistani men (but by no means all) pray at the mosque on Fridays, and many more pray during the month of Ramazan. Most urban and many rural people fast during Ramazan. The two Eids are important celebrations. The festival of Eid ul Fitr is celebrated after the fast, and Eid ul Azha commemorates the sacrifice of Abraham, and is celebrated at the time thousands of pilgrims perform the pilgrimage in Mecca. Muslims who can afford it sacrifice an animal, and the meat is divided into three shares: one for the family, one for relatives and friends, and one for charity.

The vast majority of Pakistanis observe the prohibition of alcohol, although hashish and tobacco are more socially acceptable than in Western society. Marriage, death, and birth are surrounded by rituals, some religious, others social and cultural.

Outsiders to Islam often consider that women have a low status in Islam, but this view would not be shared by many Muslims. Views about women within Islam are as varied as views about women in any other context, ranging from the arch-conservative extreme to Feminist Islam, of which the Pakistani academic, Dr Riffat Hassan, is a prominent example. Pakistan boasts a woman Prime Minister, women pilots, women taxi-drivers, and women in every sphere of life; as well as women who are locked within the chadar (veil) and the chardivari (the four walls of the home); they are all Muslim women.

**State Islam**

Part of Pakistan’s particular brand of political development has been the transition from people’s Islam to state Islam. Over the years Islam has become central to the political life of the country, often used as a legitimising tool for unpopular governments, unpopular actions, and new social movements. Muslim identity, the primary unifying factor for the citizens of Pakistan, has been exploited by the religious right.
Initially, this was not taken seriously by the non-theocratic leadership, who believed that a liberal, democratic political system was well within the parameters of an Islamic state.

The political use of Islam increased mainly because of the lack of consensus among political elites, as a way of gaining support from religious groups. In the process, the latter began to play a more critical role in political affairs. Under Zia’s leadership, the politicisation of religion increased, because he had no electoral mandate for his continued rule.

When Zia came to power, Iran was engaged in a violent struggle with its Shah, who was propped up by the US; Afghanistan was on the brink of its holy war with the communists; Pakistan had been through its honeymoon with capitalism under Ayub Khan, and its populist socialist rhetoric and paralysing ‘nationalisation’ policy under Bhutto. The political context was ripe for a third way, specific to Pakistan.

Although few held fundamentalist views, most Pakistanis gave tacit support to whatever was cited in the name of Islam, not realising the lengths to which the religion would be exploited and the level of prescriptiveness that the government would introduce. Religion was seen as a family and personal matter, and Islam had been interpreted and practised in a thousand different ways. Only under a totalitarian government could certain options be declared unacceptable, and a single fundamental text proclaimed to which everyone must conform.

Zia’s rule marked the coming together of the obscurantists’ world view with that of the state. The religious parties, who before and since never fared well in elections, were for the first time part of the state machinery, in positions of power, and able to procure advantages for themselves. Land and money was now easily available for religious schools (madarasahs), religious groups were recruited in zakat committees, to allocate compulsory religious taxes, they entered the media, educational institutions, and trade unions.

Even after the restoration of democracy, and the repeated electoral rejection of religious parties by the people, the rhetoric of ‘Islamisation’ continues. The influence of politicised religion is so strong that every subsequent government feels bound to demonstrate its commitment.

However, it has been most interesting for Pakistanis to observe, in view of the West’s paranoia about Islamic fundamentalism, that, in many cases, fundamentalists have received the full backing of Western countries, when it suited their purposes. The mujahideen were allies in fighting Communism in Afghanistan; and General Zia-ul-Haq, standard-bearer of state Islam, received generous American aid; the Saudi government, with its own brand of Islamic fundamentalism, was an acceptable ally during the war with Iraq.

Among the legislation enacted in the name of Islam are the Ordinance against the Ahmadis and a Blasphemy Law. The former makes Ahmadis liable to punishment for referring to themselves as Muslims and to their places of prayers as ‘mosques’, or making public calls for prayers (azaan). The Blasphemy Law covers derogatory statements about Prophet Muhammad. The prescribed penalty is death. These two laws have led to extensive victimisation. Since the Blasphemy Law is very vague and ambiguous about the content of derogatory remarks it has been repeatedly invoked to settle personal or political scores. To try cases under Islamic Law, a parallel judiciary, the Federal Shariat Court, was created. The PPP government has expressed its intention to review the laws introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq, but currently none have been repealed.

Could Pakistan become another Iran or Algeria? The links of Pakistan’s religious militants with those abroad is a cause for concern. But despite the capacity of the religious parties to bring pressure on
government, to stop traffic or to shut markets, the over-riding fact is that these parties have not succeeded in increasing their popular vote nor their presence in parliament. For most people the feeling for Islam is very strong but equally strong is their rejection of those who would define Islam for them, or are seen to be using Islam to further their own vested political interests.
Women and Zia’s policies

There is no question that the ‘Islamisation’ package designed by Zia and his political allies was singularly damaging to women. But it must be stressed that Zia’s definition of Islamisation was extremely controversial, essentially a layman’s uneducated opinion, and has been widely criticised by the extreme right, by Islamic scholars, and by progressive schools of thought in Islam.

The first Islamisation legislation was the Hudood Ordinances (1979). These cover theft, drunkenness, adultery, rape, and bearing false witness, and prescribe maximum punishment for each. Under this law, women’s evidence is not permissible for maximum (hadd) punishment, though for lesser punishments (tazeeer) it may be admissible. The most serious aspect of the law is that it does not make a distinction in the level of proof required for the crimes of adultery (zina) and rape (zina-bil-jabir). To conclusively prove either, four male Muslim eyewitnesses of good repute are required. The equating of adultery with rape has had extremely negative implications for women. Innumerable women, particularly the uneducated and underprivileged, have been imprisoned on false charges, or flogged, under this law, while the perpetrators of the crime of rape have escaped punishment.

The Law of Evidence (1984) requiring ‘The evidence of two men, or one man and two women so that if one should forget, the other may remind her’ in financial transactions, unless the woman is appearing in an official capacity (Article 17), had similar negative implications, even if in reality the law is rarely invoked. It establishes a stereotype of women as mentally inferior, unreliable and inconsistent.

A number of directives were issued by Zia, regarding the dress code, gender segregation, campaigns against obscenity, covering of the head by female announcers on TV, banning of sports for women, a separate university for women, an end to foreign postings of women in the foreign service, and limiting women’s recruitment in banks and other public services. Not all these measures were implemented; the dress code, for example, has never been enforced.

Women from the conservative branch of Islam wear enveloping veils in public places.
Resisting Extremism

There are two mosques in the small village of Goth Janjano, one for Sunnis and one for Shi’as. Six Hindu families also live in the village. There is considerable potential for religious tensions, but local community leaders are dedicated to resolving any conflicts and keeping communication open between people of different sects and faiths. ‘In the last days of Muharram there’s a lot of grief and sorrow,’ says Muhammed Buksh, one of the village leaders. ‘This is when we relive the death of the grandson of the Prophet. During this time we have a session of mourning every evening. At this time even the Hindus join us, which helps to bind the community together.

‘I want to share a fear of mine with you: every Friday, outside speakers from the Shi’a and Sunni sects come to the village and talk at the mosques. I have encouraged a Sunni and a Shi’a to get elected on to our village committee, so that they have to work together and achieve positive things. I’ve organised other committees so that both sects have to work together, one on health, one on registering births and deaths, and so on. If we can’t stop it [i.e. the divisions being created by outsiders] getting out of hand, things will get in a real mess.

‘We’re working to stem the tide. We are having a series of lectures in the village at the moment about human development: when people started living in communities, building houses, and so on, to show that we are all the same.’

Every village in Pakistan, however small and remote, has its own mosque. The mosque is not only a place of worship but acts as the social centre of village life. This mosque is in a village in southern Punjab.