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The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has an estimated population of 180 Million people. Out of this, 97% professes Islam as their religion of choice. Religious minorities which constitutes the remaining 3% include Christians, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhists. The politics of the country restrict religious freedom and the constitution endorses Islam as the state religion. There are provisions in the constitution that allow the minorities to perform their religious practices. I visited and lived in Pakistan for nine months and the experience I had was shocking. I witnessed religious persecution in various parts the country as extreme militant groups demonized anyone who had divergent religious beliefs other than Islam. The government and the fourth estate, by choice or by default, remained mum over the killings that were being executed by government security agencies. Churches represent the main target zones for the extreme militants. Brutality is the order of the day as the constitution, indirectly curtails the freedom of worship that the minority religions in the country are rightfully entitled to.

Upon violation of religious provisions enshrined in the constitution, a punishment not exceeding three years and a fine are applied. Religious parties in the country remain adamant to any amendments to the constitution that touches on the Muslims' clauses. At the expense of religious minorities in Pakistan, reasonable restrictions to freedom of worship are evident. As stipulated in the penal code of the laws of Pakistan, blasphemy attracts a capital punishment to the perpetrators. Speaking ill of Prophet Muhammad is even worse and can lead to a life imprisonment. Desecrating or damaging the Holy Qur'an leads to the same fate too. There is a 10 years sentence that awaits anyone who insults or compromises another's religious

feelings. Ironically, no such protection is accorded to religious minorities in the country. Rarely do we have the legal system institute a legal proceeding against anyone who insults other people's religious feelings. Justice is no doubt skewed in favor of the Muslim faithful.

A speech intended to incite religious animosity is punishable by up to 7 years in jail. This is provided for under the anti-terrorism Act (ATA). In an attempt to appease the international community and the donors, the government in February 2008, established the ministry for minorities. The docket was charged with the responsibility of overseeing a smooth worshiping process in the country. Barely four months later, was the newly formed ministry dissolved citing clash of interests. In August the same year, a powerful slot, dubbed the ministry of National Harmony, was created. Its main roles were to instill interfaith harmony and other commitments relating to religious communities. The judicial systems comprise of numerous independent court systems with no clear mandates and reflect differences in Islamic jurisprudence and civil jurisdictions.

All the judges and other legal brains who sit in the Shariat Court of the Supreme Court must be Muslims. The offenders who want to evade the court system are allowed to offer monetary restitution, commonly known as blood money, to the victims. The victims on the other hand are allowed to carry out physical retribution as an alternative for legal punishment. In addition, the government of Pakistan designates religious affiliation on passports, academic certificates and requests religious information in national identity card applications. For a country's national to vote, he or she must have a national identity card and those wishing to be listed as Muslims must swear

their belief that the Holy Prophet is the final and anyone else is an infidel or non-believer. Freedom for the management of religious entities is provided for in the constitution. Organized religious groups can voluntarily establish places of worship and train clergy members as they are protected by both the government and the constitution. Construction of mosques and other religious pilgrims are funded by the national government.

A cult can be defined as a group with charismatic leader who thinks that he or she has a direct access to some divine powers. On the other hand, a religion is a formal organized body who meets various criteria like; a set of principles to guide the livelihood of human beings and belief in the Almighty God. Believe in the importance of certain spiritual books like the Bible for the Christians, the Qur'an for the Muslims and the Torah for the Judaists is equally important.

The table below shows some of the differences between a cult and a religion.

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