

## **Asia Bibi case**

### **Why in news?**

Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who was acquitted from the death sentence under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, was released from the jail.

### **Who is Asia Bibi?**

- Asia Bibi is a peasant field worker and mother of four, in a small village outside Lahore, Pakistan.
- She is a Christian, which is a minority community in the country.
- In 2009 she was accused of blasphemy by her neighbors and jailed pending trial.
- She was sentenced to death in 2010 by a trial court.
- She always maintained her innocence.
- She has spent most of the past eight years in solitary confinement.
- She was the first woman to be sentenced to death under Pakistan's blasphemy laws.
- Her case is one of the most controversial in Pakistan.
- Blasphemy carries an automatic death penalty in Pakistan's legal system.
- Although the state has never executed anyone for the offence, vigilante mobs have killed at least 65 people since 1990, according to the centre for research and security studies.

### **What is the recent development?**

- The Supreme Court of Pakistan allowed Asia Bibi's appeal and declared her innocent of the charges.
- She has been released and expected to be granted asylum in Europe.
- Her lawyer has fled Pakistan and the judges now fear for their lives.
- Pakistan faced the threat of mob violence led by the radical Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan party.

### **Why the case lead to violence in the country?**

- In 2011, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer was assassinated by his bodyguard for appealing on Ms. Bibi's behalf after meeting her in prison.
- Mr. Taseer called for a review of what he called the country's "Black" anti-blasphemy laws.

- After his assassination, Pakistan's only Christian Minister Shahbaz Bhatti was gunned down for suggesting the same.
- Each time there has been talk of revising the laws or freeing Ms. Bibi, mobs led by both the mainstream and fringe Islamist parties have taken to the streets.
- They bring major cities to a standstill with their violence and loot and burn the property.
- After her release, there was a violent protest preventing her from leaving the country.

### **What does this case highlights?**

- Pakistan's strict blasphemy laws are often used maliciously.
- False accusations are made against Christians and Ahmadis, a tiny minority that reveres a modern-day prophet from India.
- In recent years, numerous minority neighborhoods and places of worship have been attacked by frenzied mobs, enraged by rumors that someone had torn or defaced a Koran.
- The case against Bibi highlighted two issues with blasphemy laws in Pakistan:
  1. how allegations can be used to settle personal scores
  2. Lower-court judges feel unable to acquit defendants for fear of their lives.

### **Is this issue bears any similarity to India's current scenario?**

- Pakistan is at a point where its institutions have had to defend themselves before doing justice to minorities due to years of majoritarianism.
- India is at a stage, where its majority is seeking to bring its institutions to comply passively with majoritarian instincts.
- For instance the Sabarimala case where there is violent protest against the implementation of the verdict.
- The question is whether the people and the institutions succumb to pressure or adhere to principle.
- Each individual, regardless of birth attributed identity, is a minority of one entitled to an individual guarantee of rights protected by the Constitution.
- It is in the adherence to individual rights that the greater public good rests.
- Those who sacrifice a little man or woman's liberty for the security of the many will find neither liberty, nor security.

**Source: The Hindu**

