

The *Mufti* Who Tried to Close Our School

JUST IN FRONT of the school on Khushal Street, where I was born, was the house of a tall handsome mullah and his family. His name was Ghulamullah and he called himself a *mufti*, which means he is an Islamic scholar and authority on Islamic law, though my father complains that anyone with a turban can call themselves a *maulana* or *mufti*. The school was doing well, and my father was building an impressive reception with an arched entrance in the boy's high school. For the first time my mother could buy nice clothes and even send out for food as she had dreamed of doing back in the village. But all this time the *mufti* was watching. He watched the girls going in and out of our school every day and became angry, particularly as some of the girls were teenagers. 'That *maulana* has a bad eye on us,' said my father one day. He was right.

Shortly afterwards the *mufti* went to the woman who owned the school premises and said, 'Ziauddin is running a *haram* school in your building and bringing shame on the *mohalla* [neighbourhood]. These girls should be in purdah.' He told her, 'Take this building back from him and I will rent it for my madrasa. If you do this you will get paid now and also receive a reward in the next world.'

She refused and her son came to my father in secret. 'This *maulana* is starting a campaign against you,' he warned. 'We won't give him the building but be careful.'

My father was angry. 'Just as we say, "*Nim hakim khatrai jan*" – "Half a doctor is a danger to one's life," so, "*Nim mullah khatrai iman*" – "A mullah who is not fully learned is a danger to faith",' he said.

I am proud that our country was created as the world's first Muslim homeland, but we still don't agree on what this means. The Quran teaches us *sabar* – patience – but often it feels that we have forgotten the word and think Islam means women sitting at home in purdah or wearing burqas while men do jihad. We have many strands of Islam in Pakistan. Our founder Jinnah wanted the rights of Muslims in India to be recognised, but the majority of people in India were Hindu. It was as if there was a feud between two brothers and they agreed to live in different houses. So British India was divided in August 1947, and an independent Muslim state was born. It could hardly have been a bloodier beginning. Millions of Muslims crossed from India, and Hindus travelled in the other direction. Almost two million of them were killed trying to cross the new border. Many were slaughtered on trains which arrived at Lahore and Delhi full of bloodied corpses. My own grandfather narrowly escaped death in the riots when his train was attacked by Hindus on his way home from Delhi, where he had been studying. Now we are a country of 180 million and more than 96 per cent are Muslim. We also have around two million Christians and more than two million Ahmadis, who say they are Muslims though our government says they are not. Sadly those minority communities are often attacked.

Jinnah had lived in London as a young man and trained as a barrister. He wanted a land of tolerance. Our people often quote the famous speech he made a few days before independence: 'You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with