

Minorities in Pakistan

Newslines Special

By Massoud Ansari

Damned by Faith

For the Ahmadi community in Pakistan, life continues to be a state of purgatory.

On March 8, 1998, a few uneducated villagers in Fazil Rahu town of district Badin approached a local physician, Dr. Waheed, for assistance in filling out the census forms. The job done, they requested another doctor in the same vicinity, who unbeknownst to them had a professional rivalry with the former, to attest the forms as was required by law. Glancing at the documents, the doctor asked the men whether they were Qadianis. Bemused, they responded in the negative and asked what had made the doctor consider such a thing. He replied that the word Qadiani had been put down in the slot marked for religion in the census form, implying that the person who had filled them for the villagers had done so with mischievous intent.

The villagers who, because they could not read, had no way of gauging the veracity of the doctor's words, took them on face value and anxiously asked how they could set the record straight. The doctor told them to seek the advice of a maulvi.

The men rushed to the local religious leader and narrated the entire episode to him. The maulvi decreed, "Neither your Hajj nor your charity, nor indeed a namaz-e-janaza (funeral) prayer) offered for you will be accepted by God if you don't rectify this huge error." The villagers responded that they would do whatever was necessary to earn them their place in heaven.

The maulvi thus summoned his followers and along with the villagers, led by the clergymen, they took out a procession. Abusing the Ahmadi community, they marched to Dr. Waheed's house, who is Ahmadi. Breaking into his house the processionists destroyed all the home appliances within. Next, pulling the doctor out of the house they started to beat him as they dragged him to the local police station where they demanded that an FIR be lodged against him for blaspheming, discrediting Islam and hurting the sentiments of the Muslim villagers. Although the census forms they produced at the police station as evidence did not have the word "Qadiani" inscribed on them as charged, the police nonetheless took Dr. Waheed Ahmed, who is a heart patient, into custody and lodged an FIR against him under section 295(A) of the PPC for blaspheming against Islam and another under section 154 for the possession of illegal weapons. After being detained in the thana for a week, Dr. Waheed was sent to the Central Prison, Hyderabad where he remains todate. His case is pending.

That was just one part of the doctor's ordeal. While a possible death sentence or life term hangs over his head like the sword of Damocles, his plight has been compounded manifold by the persecution of his family by the villagers. Unable to withstand the pressure his father succumbed to a massive heart attack. In the absence of a male member, the women and children in Dr. Waheed's family became even more vulnerable to the intimidation and were eventually forced to flee their generations-old home and take refuge at an unknown location.

Dr. Waheed's case is but one of the many incidents of persecution meted out to the followers of Ahmadiyya sect in Pakistan, who have been branded "infidels." Says an Ahmadi. "Almost all the

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Ahmadis in Pakistan, who form barely 0.10 per cent of the country's 140 million population, have been persecuted for their faith one way or another."

Apart for a few isolated incidents the Ahmadis faced no real challenges during the British era or even in the early years of Pakistan's existence. However, in 1953, anti-Ahmadi violence erupted in Lahore when some religious parties ganged up against the community and demanded that they be declared "Kafirs" (infidels). A few Ahmadis were killed in the violence and their places of worship were set on fire. The government of the day was ultimately forced to impose martial law in Lahore to bring the situation under control.

Subsequently the government of the Punjab held a judicial inquiry into the riots under two High Court judges. Justice Munir Ahmed and Justice M.A. Kiyani, who drafted the report of the findings of the inquiry, submitted that political expediency was the main cause of the spread of the anti-Ahmadi violence. "The extremist religious leaders who had opposed the very idea of Pakistan in the beginning, exploited this situation to gain public recognition," the report concluded.

Eventually the dust settled and the Ahmadis were allowed to exist in relative peace until the early 70s when anti-Ahmadi violence erupted once again. Ultimately caving into the virulent demands of the clergy, in 1974 the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto passed a constitutional amendment declaring Ahmadis non-Muslims. The community was also prohibited from holding any conferences or gatherings. Thus, with official patronage, began the widespread persecution of the Ahmadis, and cases of violence against them multiplied across the country. Unable to endure the apartheid, those who had the wherewithal, fled to the west and sought political asylum.

Subsequently, an even greater reign of terror was unleashed against the Ahmadi community with the introduction of certain laws in the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). In 1982, section 295(b) was added in the PPC, which stipulated a sentence of life imprisonment for "whoever willfully defiles, damages, or desecrates a copy of the Holy Quran". In 1984, Section 298(C) was introduced, prohibiting Ahmadis "from calling themselves Muslims or posing as Muslims; from referring to their faith as Islam; from preaching or propagating their faith; from inviting others to their fold and from insulting the religious feelings of Muslims." In 1986 another amendment, Section 295(C), established the death penalty or life imprisonment for directly or indirectly defiling "the sacred name of the Holy Prophet". Thenceforth, anybody heard overly denying that Mohammad (PBUH) was the final Prophet could be prosecuted for indirectly defiling the prophet's name under section 295(C).

Gradually, several other changes insidiously crept into the fabric of Pakistani life -- many of them directly targeting the Ahmadis. One, for example, is the column added in the application forms for Pakistani passport and national identity cards whereby all citizens have to declare whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims. In order to qualify as the former they must affirm in the form that they accept the finality of the Prophethood of Mohammad (PBUH), declare that Ahmadis are non-Muslims, and denounce the founder of the Ahmadi movement.

Victims of the Law

The chargesheet against the Ahmadis

No.	Accused	Place	Charges	Year	Penalty
1.	Mirza Mubarak Ahmad	Mirpur Khas	295-B, C	1987	Released on bail after 3 months
2.	Khan Mohammad & Rafiq Naseem	Dera Ghazi Khan	295-A, B, C	1991	Not known
3.	Dr. Rana Irsal	Sargodha	295-C	1992	-do- Acquitted, after 5 years in jail durring trial
4.	Nasir Ahmad	Nankana	295-C/298-C	1992	Six years imprisonment
5.	Munawar Ahmed Qureshi	Rawalpindi	298-C	1993	Sentenced to 3 years and Rs.15,000 fine
6.	Rasheed Ahmed Sanawary	Dera Ismael Khan	298-C	1993	Not known
7.	Riaz Ahmed & others	Mianwali	295-C	1994	Case pending in Supreme Court
8.	Mohammad Aslam & Ijaz Ahmed	Kasur	295-B, C	1994	Released onn bail
9.	M. H. Ghazanfar	Rajanpur	295-C	1994	Not known
10.	Dr. M. Akhtar Majoka	Khushab	295-B, C	1994	Released on bail
11.	Nisar Ahmed	Lodhran	295-B, C	1994	Released on bail
12.	Mian Iqbal Ahmed	Rajanpur	295-C	1994	Not known
13.	Adnan Ahmad	Sargodha	295-C	1995	Murdered
14.	Bushra Taseer/ Seema Bukhari	Karachi	295-A, C	1996	Case not proved/ injured by knife
15.	Mukhtar Ahmed	Sanghar	295-C	1996	Not known
16.	Zahoor Ahmad Abro Noor Hussain Abro		295-C, 298-C	1996	Not known
17.	Dr. Saeed Ahmed	Faisalabad	295-C, 298-C	1997	Still in jail
18.	Anisur Rehman	Sanghar	295-B, C	1997	Absconding
19.	Malik Mohd. Iqbal	Narang Mandi	298-C		Not known
20.	A. Qadeer, Shehbaz, Ashfaq Ahmed	Sheikhupura	295-C	1997	Sentenced to 25 years, fined Rs.50,000 each
21.	Bashirul Haq/ Bashir Ahmad	Patoki/ Kasur	295-B	1997	Bail from Supreme Court
22.	Raza Hussain/ Tabassum Husain	Gujrat	295-C & 298-C	1998	Not known.
23.	Four Persons	Jhang	295-C	1998	Not known.
24.	Kunwar idrees	Karachi	Not known	1998	Not known
25.	Waheed Ahmad	Golarchi/ Sindh	285-A	1998	Not known
26.	Mushtaq Khan & others	Umarkot	Not known	1998	Not known
27.	Col. Ayyaz Mahmood & others	Rabwah	295	07-05-99	Not known
28.	Mushtaq Ahmed Sugho	Khanqah Dogran	298-C	22-07-99	Not known
30.	Zafar Kazmi	Tando Adam	295-A, B, C	00-11-99	Not known
31.	Shah Nawaz/ 3 others	Sangla Hill	295-B	02-09-99	Not known
32.	Dr. Abdul Ghani	Daska	295-A	17-09-99	Not known

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