

Persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan

News Report April 2014

Sentence of imprisonment under Ahmadi-specific law upheld by the Sessions Court

Vehari; April 5, 2014: Mr. Muhammad Yasin and Mr. Abdul Latif had filed appeals in the Sessions Court against the judgment of a magistrate, dated 28.1.2010, whereby they had been sentenced to 2 years' rigorous imprisonment and fine of Rs. 5000/- each under the anti-Ahmadiyya law PPC 298-C. The Sessions Court has now dismissed their appeals.

Briefly, in February 2005, Mr. Muhammad Arshad, an Ahmadi religious teacher, under transfer, was moving his household belongings in a trolley when a gang of anti-Ahmadi zealots intercepted him on the road, took possession of his belongings including his religious books, notes and records, handed these over to the police and demanded that a criminal case be registered against Mr. Arshad and four other Ahmadis. The FIR accused Ahmadis of preaching their faith to "poor innocent Muslims on Hospital Road...and they fled throwing away their pamphlets and literature, which were presented in evidence by the accusers."

The police, rather than arresting the activists who committed a sort of robbery, booked the Ahmadis.

Their trial dragged on for five years. Eventually three Ahmadis were sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment and fine.

Two of the convicts of this fabricated case, later released on bail, filed an appeal against the magistrate's decision. The judge upheld the previous verdict and directed the police to produce the two Ahmadis before jail authorities.

Another attack on Ahmadiyya press in Lahore

Millat Town, Lahore; April 16, 2014: Two Ahmadi brothers Mr. Adnan Nasir and Mr. Imran Nasir have an outlet of fast food at Millat Chowk. An unidentified man bought some burgers from their shop. Later he filed a police case against them that the brothers gave him Ahmadiyya literature including the monthly Ansarullah.

The allegation is entirely false. The applicant and the police jointly cooked up the case and provided the monthly themselves. The police booked the two Ahmadis mentioned above and four others including the editor of Ansarullah, Mr. Ahmad Tahir Mirza, its composer Mr. Farhan Ahmad, the printer Mr. Tahir Mahdi Imtiaz and the publisher Mr. Abdul Manan Kauser under PPC 295-A, 298-C with FIR no. 151 in Police Station Millat Park.

One of the applied clauses (295-A) is from the blasphemy section while the other is from the anti-Ahmadi law. These expose the accused to 10 years of imprisonment.

The status of anti-Ahmadi police cases in Lahore

A. The daily Alfazl case

A baseless case was registered against 6 Ahmadis, including the editor and the manager of the Ahmadiyya daily Alfazl on April 10, 2013 under PPC 295-B, 298-C and ATA 11-W. The maximum punishment to which the innocent accused are exposed is imprisonment for life (under PPC 295-B). Four of the accused were arrested.

Mr. Faisal Ahmad Tahir and Mr. Azhar Zarif, two of the detainees were released on bail after one month. The other two, Mr. Khalid Ishfaq and Mr. Tahir Ahmad had to wait behind bars for 11 months before they were bailed out on March 1, 2014.

This case which essentially pertains to distribution of the Ahmadiyya daily, which is extra careful in what it publishes, is being heard in an anti-terrorism court, although it is the state that is terrorizing the victims. It would be an interesting and useful exercise for an NGO that concerns itself with 'freedom of press' to examine and pursue this case in detail and assess the extent to which the authorities here violate Ahmadis' rights, their freedom of religion and freedom of press.

It is not surprising why, in the light of experience gained in implementation of the Anti-Terrorism Act, the civil society is expressing great apprehensions over the proposed Tahaffuz-e-Pakistan (Protection of Pakistan) Ordinance.

The next date of hearing in the ATA Court in Lahore, Punjab is May 3, 2014.

B. Gulshane Ravi case

On April 28, 2013 mullas raided the Ahmadiyya centre of worship in Gulshan-e-Ravi, Lahore. The police joined them promptly and searched the centre for an hour and a half. They also detained nine Ahmadis including the local president, the local prayer-leader, his wife and their twelve year old son, and took them to the police station. The prayer-leader and his family were released the next morning while 8 others were booked under PPC 295-B and ATA 11-W (an anti-terrorism clause).

Six weeks later, the detained accuseds were released on bail. The trial, however, continued in the Anti-Terrorism Court.

Later on, the dreadful PPC 295-C was added to the summons.

On April 26 all the accused were acquitted of the baseless charges.

Thanks to the trial judge for being just, but what about the administration and the police of Lahore, the capital of the Punjab, for their full support to extremist mullas! Can one quantify the stress and strain suffered by the nine detainees who were led to the police station? The lady and the twelve year old boy could have received permanent psychological damage on exposure to tyranny. The eight accused underwent the stress of criminal prosecution for almost a year. Imagine the impact on the accused when their summons included the dreadful clause PPC 295-C that calls for 'death' penalty. This clause was added at the demand of the prosecutor who was an appointee of the Punjab.

C. The Black Arrow Press case

The Black Arrow Press in Lahore was owned by an Ahmadi. The mullas, in league with the police, arranged a raid on it and had four Ahmadis arrested including the owner and an Ahmadi who was visiting to collect the printed stock, an Ahmadiyya children's monthly. The police registered a criminal case against the four accused under PPC 295-B, 298-C and 24-A. They were accused of a crime – one does not know what precisely.

Hasan Muawiya aka *Tooti* (brother of Chairman of the Ulama Council of Pakistan, Maulvi Tahir Ashrafi) was, of course, present as a witness for the prosecution.

The accused plea for bail was rejected and had to be taken to the Lahore High Court where the infamous incident happened whereby 'LHC judge was forced to withdraw order of granting bail.'

Eventually bail was granted to all except Mr. Esmatullah who was mentioned in another case also where a non-Ahmadi book-binder, Syed Altaf Hussain was booked by the police for binding Ahmadiyya books. Mr. Hussain died soon afterwards – due to stress, perhaps.

Eventually Mr. Esmatullah was also released on bail in July 2013, after spending 7 months in prison.

The press is no longer operative which was a source of livelihood not only for the owner but the entire staff, including many non-Ahmadis.

The prosecution goes on. The prosecutor is paid by the state and is provided 'witness' support by mullas.

"Pakistan has no option but to put an end to terrorism, extremism and sectarianism":
Nawaz Sharif (the Prime Minister) *The daily Mashriq; Lahore, November 24, 2013*

D. The monthly ‘Ansarulla’ case

A description of this case is available in the preceding story.

E. Dr Masood Ahmad case

It would be recalled that septuagenarian Homeopath Masood Ahmad, a British citizen was booked and arrested for reciting the Holy Quran. He was later released on bail (under international protest), however his case remains alive.

F. The weekly Lahore case

The oldest weekly in Paksitan ‘Lahore’ was eventually made to stop publication in July 2013 by joint effort of religious bigots and authorities in Lahore. Its editor was an Ahmadi, Mr. Yasir Zeervi. He and three others were booked by the police in FIR 282/13 at Police Station Mazang under the anti-Ahmadi clause PPC 298-C. The prosecution goes on.

G. Atif Ahmad case

Mr. Ahmad was booked under anti-Ahmadi clause PPC 298-B on January 16, 2013. The case remains open.

All these court cases and their prosecution involve costs for hiring ‘complainants’, raiding parties, protestors, court witnesses, support to the prosecutors and, of course, management costs. Where does the money come from? A hint was dropped by none else than the Interior Ministry which was quoted in a news item published by the daily Khabrain on April 29, 2014 as:

35 big madrassas receive Rs 260 million in foreign aid; Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain are among donors: Interior Ministry

Some people are of the considered opinion that the above disclosure is only tip of the iceberg.

Ahmadis denied use of Islamic terms

Sheikhupura; April 01, 2014: An anti-Ahmadiyya campaign is going on in the city in which police, in response to applications of anti-Ahmadiyya elements, is erasing Arabic phrases from Ahmadis’ shops. A banned religious outfit is its prime-mover. An Ahmadiyya delegation met the authorities and conveyed them the gravity of the issue and told them that Ahmadis respect the Arabic (Islamic) words and protest against erasing them. The Superintendent of Police seemed to agree and told Ahmadis that they would not allow this any more.

Two days later the police again erased the words “*MashAllah*” from the signboard of an Ahmadi Sheikh Bilal’s shop.

Ahmadi professor harassed immensely

Daska, District Sialkot; March/April 2014: Mr. Sohail Mehmood Babur, Assistant Professor in the local Government Degree College faced severe opposition from some colleagues and a few students in the college, and having been accused falsely of ‘blasphemy’ had to flee from Daska and shift elsewhere.

A few students, perhaps egged on by some teachers, put up a written complaint against Mr. Babur, accusing him falsely of misconduct, *inter alia*:

- Forcing students to accept that Quran has been changed
- Forcing students to accept that Bible has not been changed and it is present in its original form
- Giving statement that Quran is totally false
- Preferring chirping of birds to Hadith
- Committing blasphemy (showing disrespect to the Holy Prophet PBUH), etc.

Obviously these accusations are pure fabrication as they contradict Ahmadiyya beliefs and position on these issues.

The college principal formed a committee comprising five Associate/Assistant Professors and a lecturer to inquire into the allegations and render a report.

It is a sad comment on Pakistani academia of the second decade of 21st century that all the members of the Committee upheld the lies and fabrications of all the four students, and they all rejected whatever Mr. Babur had to say in his defense.

Driven by bigotry, prejudice and God knows what else, the Committee unanimously concluded and recommended that ‘The case may please be referred to concerned police station for the fulfillment of legal requirements of investigation and penalization of the culprits (*sic*).’ There was no dissenting opinion over delivering their ‘non-Muslim’ colleague to the vultures of the blasphemy laws.

Mr. Babur had reason to get very worried. Deputy Director Colleges recommended to the Director to transfer him to another city. Faced with a blasphemy accusation, Mr. Babur shifted his family to a far off town. He knows what happened to Ms Aasia, Ms Rimsha and Governor Taseer.

Even the right-wing daily Nawa-i-Waqt, Lahore of October 6, 2013 decided to publish an op-ed by Dr. Khwaja, (extract):

O God, save Islam from ‘Muslims’

*...(Here) who and when, anyone may kill anyone after designating him a Kafir,
The entire city claims to be Muslim!*

Enough is enough. The flood of tyranny and blood is now passing over our heads....

Update on Tando Allah Yar riot

Tando Allah Yar, Sindh; April 2014:

It was reported in the lead story of our March 2014 report that miscreants had arranged stoning of Ahmadiyya missionary’s residence here on March 31, 2014, by madrassa boys. When reprimanded their sponsor viz. mullas took to rioting and forced the police to register a fabricated case of defiling the Quran. The police apparently took Mr. Tahir Ahmad Khalid, the Ahmadi missionary in protective custody.

The mulla, however, bites hard and doesn’t let go easily. The extremist elements forced entry in the Ahmadiyya mosque and damaged the property. They also held a rally in which they took to slander against Ahmadi leaders. They issued threats to Ahmadi residents of the neighborhood.

An Ahmadi delegation met senior police officials to request support and protection. The SSP advised the Ahmadi residents to shift their residences to a safer location. Easier said than done. Ahmadi protested that they had been wronged, attacked and booked in a false case, and now they are asked to leave their home and hearth where they have lived for decades. The SSP seemed to understand and promised help.

The detention of Mr. Khalid, which was initially taken as ‘protective custody’ is also likely to stick. On April 19, the Sessions Judge found it convenient to reject his plea for bail. The accused now will have to knock at the door of High Court to justify his bail, although the accusation of defiling the Quran is false, fabricated and entirely malafide.

To be an Ahmadi in Pakistan is to be at risk – all the time.

Ordeal of Ahmadi school children and their parents

Chak Chatha, District Hafizabad; April 2014:

Mr. Habibur Rahman is a teacher in Government Primary School, Hameedabad. Most of the residents are Deobandis and are anti-Ahmadiyya activists.

A prize-distribution was scheduled in the school. Parents were also invited to the ceremony. A day before the function mulla Afzal of the local mosque conveyed to the school that if anybody from Mr. Habibur Rahman’s family participated in the ceremony, his people would boycott the function. Mr. Rahman was conveyed the gravity of the issue.

In these circumstances, Mr. Rahman decided that his children's mother would not attend the ceremony. As other children's mothers were all going to attend, his children got upset and started crying. Some villagers sympathised with Mr. Rahman but expressed their helplessness over the issue. They told him that a Pir along with a *mufti* and a few mullas met the local mulla and told him to have the Qadiani teacher (Mr. Rahman) expelled from the village at the earliest. The local mulla acted upon their advice. Hence the incident.

Update of the Okara arrests

Nama Jandakia, District Okara; April 3, 2014: Mian Muhammad Yar, the president of the local Ahmadiyya community and his son Anas Ahmad were implicated in a false police case last month. April 3 was the hearing date in the court for their release on bail. Approximately 30 mullas gathered inside the court room at the time of hearing. The judge expelled all the mullas from the court and postponed the hearing. After an hour approximately 30 lawyers appeared in the court in support of the opponent party to pressurize the judge. Mian Muhammad Yar requested for another date on account of his lawyer's illness.

April 5 was given as the fresh date for hearing. At this occasion the judge rejected the plea for bail, ordered the arrest of the two Ahmadi accused and sent them to prison.

Pakistani vernacular press – a sample

Lahore: Pakistan has been blamed for toleration of extremism and even terrorism. In this the local print media, especially vernacular newspapers bear the responsibility. Below we translate a news item comprising statements of "Ulama and Mashaikh" of Sunni sect who are generally believed to be less ferocious than their Salafi and Deobandi peers; Headlines:

The government should implement without delay the sentences of all those convicted of Blasphemy. Ban should be imposed on Qadianis' TV channel: Ulama & Mashaikh

Mashaikh should be given representation on Islamic Ideology Council (IIC) Recommendations of the Council should be presented in the Parliament and laws promulgated accordingly.

Mazarat (tombs) should be handed back to *Sajjada Nashins*. We shall spare no sacrifice in the way of guarding the honor of the Prophet. Mumtaz Qadiri should be released forthwith.

A brief explanation of pointers in the above headlines will be appropriate. The IIC recommendations are many, some of the type that 'An apostate should be killed'. The sentences of blasphemy that have been demanded implementation without delay are 'Death'; the offer to 'sacrifice' everything is a call for offering blood and shedding blood sans limit. Mumtaz Qadiri whose immediate release is demanded is none other than the self-confessed assassin of Governor Salman Taseer.

Noteworthy is the fact that the daily Ausaf provided three columns for these headlines. It further reported that this End of Prophethood Conference at Golra Sharif (on the outskirts of Islamabad) was attended and addressed by Pir Amin ul Hasnat, Federal Minister of State for Religious Affairs, Makhdoom Javed Hashmi, a PTI leader and numerous others. All issues mentioned in headlines above were presented as resolutions and passed unanimously.

There are very few in Pakistan who have not contributed their share to push this country to the brink.

USCIRF 2014 Annual Report – Pakistan

Washington D.C. USCIRF released its 2014 Annual Report in April, in which it reports 'Shrinking Religious Freedom in South Asia.' Its Chapter Summary on Pakistan is reproduced below:

USCIRF 2014 Annual Report:

<http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202014%20Annual%20Report%20PDF.pdf>

New Twist on USCIRF Annual Report on the World's Worst Religious Freedom Abusers:

<http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2014/04/30/annual-report-on-the-worlds-worst-religious-freedom-abusers-comes-with-a-new-twist/31896>

Chapter Summary: Pakistan represents the worst situation in the world for religious freedom for countries not currently designated by the U.S. government as “countries of particular concern.” In the past year, conditions hit an all-time low due to chronic sectarian violence targeting mostly Shi’a Muslims but also Christians, Ahmadis, and Hindus. The previous and current governments failed to provide adequate protection or to arrest perpetrators. Also, Pakistan’s repressive blasphemy laws and anti-Ahmadi laws are widely used to violate religious freedoms and foster a climate of impunity. USCIRF again recommends in 2014 that Pakistan be designated as a “country of particular concern” (CPC). Since 2002, USCIRF has recommended Pakistan be named a CPC.

In Luton Town (UK)

Lahore; April 2014: The Friday Times, Lahore of April 18-24, 2014 published a full page report with colour pictures, titled: **In Luton Town**. It is written by Zenia Marufi. ‘Why did an ad in a local British paper create such a furor?’ she looks into the reasons.

It is a readable, independent and interesting report on an incident when ‘Ahmadi Muslims carried out a campaign to tackle Islamophobia in London.’

This report is placed at Annex.

Ahmadis behind bars

1. Mr. Tahir Ahmad Khalid, an Ahmadiyya missionary was charged under PPC 295-B on March 31, 2014 in Tando Allah Yar, Sindh. Sessions court has rejected his plea for bail. He remains behind bars.
2. Mr. Muhammad Yar was charged under anti-Ahmadi clause PPC 298-C and his son Mr. Anas Ahmad was charged under 7-ATA and PPC 334 on March 14, 2014 in Nama Jandekia, District Okara. They remain behind bars. A sessions judge rejected their plea for bail.

From the media

Ahmadi man held for ‘desecrating’ Quran amid rampage

The daily Dawn; Lahore, April 01, 2014

Four Ahmadis asked to record statements. The accused say none of the charges against them have been proven.

The daily The Express Tribune; Lahore, April 23, 2014

Chenab Nagar: Increase in street crime and robbery. Residents in state of fear. A locked house is invariably targeted.

The daily Din; Lahore, April 29, 2014

The authorities should destroy the cancer of Qadianiat from the body of the Islamic Republic: Khatme Nabuwat Conference

The daily Insaaf; Lahore, April 14, 2014

Qadianis are enemies of Islam and Pakistan; they cannot be permitted to violate the Constitution: Syed Ghulam Yasin Shah (of Jamaat Ahle Sunnat, AJK)

The daily Ausaf; Lahore, April 28, 2014

**Blast terrorizes capital, 24 dead
Over 120 injured in bomb explosion**

The daily Dawn; Lahore, April 12, 2014

7 killed as militants ambush police van in Peshawar

The daily The Express Tribune; Lahore, April 21, 2014

Waziristan: 3 troops including one officer dies in nine explosions
The daily Dunya; Faisalabad, April 21, 2014

Khyber Agency: Taliban abduct 110; release 40: Official sources
The daily Dunya; Faisalabad, April 13, 2014

Seminaries to help Taliban attack Islamabad
The daily The News; Lahore, April 13, 2014

177 Madrassas are spreading terrorism: Sarwar Qadri (ST)
The daily Ausaf; Lahore, April 28, 2014

Banned orgs have 500 centers in Pakistan; 33 Taliban groups are active: Report
The daily Khabrain; Lahore, April 24, 2014

35 big madrassas receive Rs. 260 million in foreign aid. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain among donors: Interior Ministry
The daily Khabrain; Lahore, April 28, 2014

One and half billion dollars have arrived (from Saudi Arabia) for Shia-Sunni conflict. Iftikhar Chaudhry gave nothing but disappointment: Imran Khan
The daily Mashriq; Lahore, April 11, 2014

Accept Taliban demands: JI Chief
The daily The News; Lahore, April 18, 2014

No change in JI policies on vital issues: Siraj
The daily The News; Lahore, April 18, 2014

Senior cop (in Punjab) says killers' links with religious organizations make arrests difficult
The daily Dawn; Lahore, April 22, 2014

No one has right to declare member of any sect apostate: Ulama
The daily The News; Lahore, April 18, 2014

Jumping red-light is a grave sin (gunah kabirah): Edict of Saudi Mufti Azam
The daily Mashriq; Lahore, April 30, 2014

All minorities, including Sikhs, enjoy complete religious freedom in Paksitan: Sardar Yusuf (Fed Minister of Religious Affairs)
The daily Mashriq; Lahore, April 15, 2014

Shahbaz promises world's largest steel mills in Chiniot
The daily The News; Lahore, April 18, 2014

British NGO (Minority Rights Group International) rates Paksitan worst country for minorities. (rated 6th; followed by Burma, Ethiopia etc)
The daily Jinnah; Lahore, April 30, 2014

Situation worsening for religious minorities: HRCP
The daily Dawn; Lahore, April 25, 2014

We shall raise the issue of the Blasphemy law with Pakistan: British P.M.
The daily Khabrain; Lahore, April 16, 2014

UN expert sounds alarm over condition of Muslims in Myanmar
The daily Dawn; Lahore, April 8, 2014

Canada asks Pakistan to protect minorities
The daily The News; Lahore, April 18, 2014

German court upholds school ban on facial veil
The daily Dawn; Lahore, April 26, 2014

Egypt: 683 including Muhammad Badi, head of Ikhwan ul Muslemoon sentenced to death
The daily Dunya; Faisalabad, April 29, 2014

Britain: 500 churches demolished. One thousand sold. Many converted to pubs, commercial centers.
The daily Insaf; Lahore, April 3, 2014

- Jamaat Islami and Maulana Sami ul Haq are political wings of Taliban. Awami National Party***
The daily Mashriq; Lahore, April 9, 2014
- Sibi: Explosion in Jaffar Express. 16 passengers burnt alive, 45 injured.**
The daily Mashriq; Lahore, April 9, 2014
- 16 Taliban released in South Waziristan: Spokesman Taliban***
The daily Express; Faisalabad, April 3, 2014
- (General Musharraf) INDICTED**
The daily The News; Lahore, April 1, 2014
- Parliament could not legislate on 90,000 recommendations of IIC: Hafiz Zubair, member IIC***
The daily Express; Faisalabad, April 7, 2014
- (Christian) Couple sentenced to death for blasphemy (in TT Singh)**
The daily Dawn; Lahore, April 5, 2014
- Army to protect its institutional pride: COAS***
The daily The News; Lahore, April 8, 2014
- TV anchor Hamid Mir survives gun attack**
The daily The Nation; Lahore, April 20, 2014
- Pope seeks forgiveness for child abuse cases***
The daily Dawn; Lahore, April 12, 2014
- 42 die as coach rams into trailer**
The daily Dawn; Lahore, April 41, 2014
- Man held in Bhakkar (Punjab) for cannibalism***
The daily Dawn; Lahore, April 15, 2014
- Two more arrested for selling donkey meat in Sargodha**
The daily Jang; Lahore, April 22, 2014
- Taliban infighting leaves 20 dead***
The daily Dawn; Lahore, April 12, 2014

Op-ed: The King and O

A U.S. diplomatic cable leaked in (President) Obama's first term revealed that as far back as April 2008, (King) Abdullah (of Saudi Arabia) implored American officials to launch a strike on Iran's nuclear program.

The weekly TIME, April 7, 2014

Op-ed: No More Broken Promises

Saudi Arabia has told the U.N. it will do better on human rights. Just as it did five years ago.

The weekly TIME, April 7, 2014

Op-ed: Different forms of torment

Muhammad Izharul Haq wrote in his column commenting on the situation in Pakistan (*translation*):

It is a strange country in which citizens tolerate everything – very coolly. The whip of God's punishment rises in the air, shines and rustles and strikes the people. It pierces their skin, cuts their flesh, bares their bones and makes their blood gush forth. Dishonest rulers, greedy mullas, *Fatwa Farosh ulama* (who issue edicts for money), heartless bureaucrats and millionaire anchor-persons (in media) impose themselves on society and bawl the people to the intended destiny.

What diverse forms of torment!

The daily Dunya; Faisalabad, September 13, 2013

Annex: 'In Luton Town' by Zenia Marufi, published in The Friday Times, 18-25 April, 2014

A readable independent and interesting report on an incident when “Ahmadi Muslims carried out a campaign to tackle Islamophobia in London.”

In Luton Town

Zenia Marufi

Who are they?

It maintains an estimated 15,000 mosques and centers, 1000 schools, 50 hospitals and several philanthropic organizations in over 195 countries around the world. It enjoys extraordinary support from politicians, world leaders and international organizations such as Amnesty International, the United Nations and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Most recently President Obama spoke up in support of this community by granting it an official house caucus in Capitol Hill which will work towards safeguarding its rights within and outside the United States. This is the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

Where it happened

Let's shift our gaze to a small town near London which has been repeatedly identified as “an area of concern” in reports published by the British Government. One in every 4 people here is a Muslim. The majority of these Muslims belong to Azad Kashmir and Bangladesh. According to UK Crime Statistics there was no significant decrease in the number of crimes committed here between December 2010 to December 2013, instead a rise in violence against Caucasians and Asian women was witnessed. Honour crimes, forced marriages and domestic abuse saw a particular spike. This is Luton, a town that topped the list of worst places to live in Britain back in 2004 and where things have remain unchanged since.

Ahmadi Muslims carried out a campaign to tackle Islamophobia in London

What exactly happened?

What does Luton have to do with the Ahmadiyya? Not much, except that in March 2014 an advertisement appeared in 30 local newspapers including The Luton on Sunday, to celebrate 125 years of the community. Whilst thousands went about their daily lives glancing unaffectedly at the advert, a group of residents in Luton were outraged and decided to take the newspaper to task. One can only guess at the extremely convincing rhetoric of the ‘members’ of the ‘other’ muslim community in Luton that won the newspaper over, as the following Sunday a clarification appeared.

“Last week Luton on Sunday carried an advertisement from The Ahmadiyya.....we would also like to make it clear that we disassociate ourselves from the content of the advertisement....On Friday we met with the representatives from the Muslim community to discuss the advertisement which we had accepted in good faith but now understand has caused offense to members of the Muslim community in Luton....”

Why is it shocking?

This in a country which has prided itself on being home to an ever-growing ethnically diverse Muslim population from varying sects as well as Budhists, Bahais, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs,Wiccans amongst countless others. A nation which extends human rights to its own people as well as outsiders without discrimination: whether it is the 72 year old British-Ahmadi Muslim Dr Masood jailed under the blasphemy law in Pakistan in December 2013 or an Afghan atheist. Members of the Ugandan LGBT community and Syrian refugees have found asylum in the last year alone.

This happened in a country where people have the right to profess and practice their faith without fear of retribution, where Ahmadi Muslims carried out a campaign to tackle Islamophobia by printing adverts across London buses in 2011 with the message “Muslims for loyalty, freedom and peace”. The same rights had been afforded to atheists who spread their message through a similar campaign, “There’s probably no God, now stop worrying and enjoy your life”. This in a city where mayor Boris Johnson said “London is one of the most tolerant cities in the world and intolerant of intolerance” in 2012.

Why it matters?

But it would seem that the editor of Luton on Sunday has other views about his city and what it stands for. Or maybe he simply felt that the fair and just moral code espoused by the nation was worth compromising in the face of difference of opinion? Or maybe he did not realise the significance of dropping the word

“Muslim” for a community which is recognised in all nations of the world, as part of the fold of Islam, with the exception of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

This, in a city which is home to a greater number of Indian restaurants than Mumbai and Delhi and which has the highest population of Koreans in Europe, further proving the fact that it is an ever-evolving, inclusive multi-cultural metropolis. This in a country where the 30,000 strong Ahmadi Muslim community, living cohesively with members of all faiths and ethnicity, continually boasts of loyal and significant contributions towards the betterment of British society.

In 2013, Prime Minister David Cameron amongst other prominent politicians including Baroness Warsi, the first Muslim woman to serve in the British cabinet, applauded the community's efforts towards raising millions of pounds in donations for causes such as the Poppy Appeal, environmental causes, feeding the homeless, organizing blood donations and promotion of peace and harmony through inter-faith dialogue and community activities.

Today in history

This in a country which has always embraced and acknowledged the contributions of Ahmadi Muslims such as the world renowned Professor Abdus Salam, who was invited to take a chair at Imperial College in 1957 and went on to establish the world renowned prestigious Theoretical Physics department at the college. Not to mention Chaudhry Zafarullah Khan who was the first Indian to top his class at King's College London and is credited for his contribution towards drafting the United Nations Charter of Human Rights, being elected President of the UN General Assembly and for becoming the first Asian president of the International Courts of Justice as well as the first Foreign Minister of Pakistan. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation recently established at King's College London has inaugurated the Zafarullah Khan Essay Competition recognizing him as a stalwart and encouraging modern day thinkers and activists to continue with his extraordinary legacy.

What goes on in Luton?

Meanwhile, taking a leaf from Pakistan's manual where the word 'Muslim' has been erased from Dr Abdus Salam's gravestone and Zafrullah Khan's name has been ripped from history books, Luton on Sunday has caved in to religious bullying. This too at the hands of a community which is often embroiled in religious-spurred and racist violence propagated by gangs such as the Yellows of the Choudary, the Khans, Ghafours, etc engaging in violent crimes such as theft, drug trafficking and stabbings. A community which is rife with honour and hate crimes warranting the establishment of several centres for abused women and children escaping forced marriages and death threats. Most recently it found itself in the papers when four of its residents who were inspired by Al Qaeda were jailed for 44 years for plotting terrorist attacks on military buildings: the MI5, the US Air Force and local shopping centres.

According to Crime Statistics UK, a comparison between the towns of Luton and Earlsfield and Morden (the latter two with large concentrations of Ahmadi Muslim residents), indicates stark differences between the crime rates in these areas with Luton leading with a total of 1160 reported crimes in February 2014 as opposed to the 400 registered in Earlsfield and 250 in Morden, a testament to, if nothing else, the internal disarray and disharmony prevalent in the town, which points to a growing wave of extremism and radicalisation in the aptly nicknamed “Islamic Republic of Luton”.

Now if a free newspaper in a free country decides to retract and censor the word “Muslim” from a paid advertisement which was published on behalf of tax-paying, law-abiding, upstanding citizens, what hope does the rest of the world have? The prophetic answer lies in the words of Benjamin Franklin, “Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation, must begin by subduing the freeness of speech”.

The Friday Times; Lahore, April 18-24, 2014