

Freedom of religion and worship

2018

A 'convert' faces criminal charges for his faith

Basti Punjab, District Rajan Pur; October 2018: Mr. Arfat Qadir s/o Mr. Qadir Baksh, aged 20, recently embraced Ahmadiyyat. He is a government employee in a local office. After his switch over to Ahmadiyyat his opponents started victimizing him. They reported him to his boss. They also started a hate campaign against him on social media. Mr. Arfat remained steadfast. As last resort they complained to the DPO that Mr. Arfat was a Qadiani but acted like Muslims. The DPO inaptly told the DSP to attend to the issue. The DSP sent for Mr. Arfat and said, "You are a non-Muslim according to the constitution of Pakistan, and you can't use *Sha'air* Islam (Islamic practices)." The police thereafter registered a case against him under PPC 298-C, the anti-Ahmadiyya law and sent him to a lock up. The opponents accused him of "preaching Ahmadiyyat, denying the Khatme Nabuwat which amounts to blasphemy and posing as Muslim when applying for the job."

Poor Mr. Arfat was locked up only for his faith.

Police case against a local Ahmadi president for undertaking *Qurbani*

Guldasht Town Gujjarpura, District Lahore; August/September 2018: On August 22, 2018 on Eid ul Azha festival Mr. Muhammad Ahmad, president of the local Ahmadiyya community, undertook *Qurbani*. It was planned to sacrifice two goats and one cow, but while undertaking the *Qurbani* of the first goat, eight mullas accompanied by police arrived at the site. The police took Mr. Ahmad and the meat of the *Qurbani* to the police station, where 25 mullas waited for the raiding party. The police also had taken away with them the other two sacrificial cattle. At the police station the mullas tried their best to pressurize the police. After a two-hour discussion with opponents, the police let Mr. Ahmad go, on the assurance of a local person; however they kept in their custody the sacrificial cattle of Mr. Ahmad, and released them after three days.

On September 5, 2018 the police registered a case under PPC 298-C against Mr. Ahmad for undertaking *Qurbani*.

It should be pointed out that the law does not forbid Ahmadis to undertake *Qurbani*.

Another police case against an Ahmadi for undertaking *Qurbani*

Sadhokey, District Gujranwala; August/ September 2018: Mr. Shahid Hussain undertook *Qurbani* on Eid ul Azha on August 22, 2018. His neighbor reported to the police that Mr. Hussain had undertaken Islamic rituals. For this the police registered a case against the Ahmadi under PPC 298-C.

Mr. Hussain's pre-arrest bail had been obtained; however on September 11, 2018 the additional sessions judge cancelled his bail. Later, his denial of bail was appealed in the Lahore High Court, and the High Court accepted it on October 11, 2018.

Under PPC 298-C Mr. Hussain could be imprisoned for three years.

Police closes down Ahmadiyya prayer center, in contravention of constitutional rights

Ichra Colony, Lahore; September 10, 2018: Pakistan Constitution provides for freedom of religious practice in its Article 20. However for some time opponents have been agitating against the Ahmadiyya prayer center in Ichra Colony, Lahore. They prevented Ahmadis from undertaking *Qurbani* on Eid festival. After this, they were looking for mischief to spread more unrest in the area. So the mullas started getting signatures from the locals to close down the Ahmadiyya prayer center.

The police were informed by Ahmadis of the situation. The SHO sent for both the parties. Three Ahmadis went to the police station while 15 opponents turned up for the occasion. Opponents put great pressure to have the Ahmadiyya prayer center closed down, and falsely accused the Ahmadis of using it for preaching. They also objected to Ahmadis writing the word 'Muhammad' with their names. They demanded that Ahmadis be charged for this 'defiling'.

The police imposed an agreement on Ahmadis that they will wind up their prayer center. The police had no answer to providing them an alternative place for worship.

Obstacles in worship and freedom of faith

Sillanwali, District Sargodha: A year ago Ahmadis built a residence for their missionary in this small town. They use the place as a prayer centre as well.

Later, some people wrote an application to the DPO that Ahmadis were congregating there in secret to worship. This was a cause of concern to them and could lead to a religious dispute, they said. The DPO sent the application to the SHO for further action.

The SHO sent for Ahmadis and demanded that they give in writing that they would not assemble there for prayers. Ahmadis told him that the place was not a mosque but only a house where they get together for worship.

The SHO told Ahmadis that if they wanted to assemble anywhere for prayers they should first seek DC's permission and get the place registered.

Special verbal rules for Ahmadis – to deny them freedom to practice their religion.

Ahmadiyya prayer centre under scrutiny

Peelovains, District Khushab; February 2018: Ahmadis inaugurated their newly-built prayer centre and started worship in it. This was intolerable for local mullas. They complained to the police that Ahmadis had built a mosque. The police arrived to investigate and asked for a No Objection Certificate for the mosque. They were told that this was not a mosque, only a room where Ahmadis assemble for prayers. Moreover the government does not issue such NOCs to Ahmadis, nor was it needed under such circumstances. The police went back and reported the matter to the Deputy Commissioner.

Freedom of worship denied

District Khushab; April 22, 2018: Problems of worship were faced by Ahmadis in District Khushab where the police visited Ahmadiyya prayer centres. Previously they sealed the prayer centre in Peelovains. The police gave the reason that Ahmadis cannot pray at any place unless an NOC is obtained. The same excuse was reported from Quaidabad. Ahmadis pray in a house in Joharabad. The police arrived there too and told Ahmadis to close it down and get an NOC for praying there. The police also arrived at the main Ahmadiyya mosque in Khushab city and directed that it be closed down. They said that Ahmadis needed an NOC to pray somewhere. In reality no such NOC is issued to Ahmadis, nor were such NOCs demanded in the past. It was learnt that the DC Khushab was behind all this activism and agitation against Ahmadis.

Ahmadiyya prayer centre under threat of closing down – in the name of security

Wapda Town, Lahore; June 3, 2018: For some time the personnel of Special Branch had been visiting the Ahmadiyya Centre in Wapda Town, Lahore. On May 16, the police SHO sent for Mr. Nadeem Virk a member of the Ahmadi security committee. The SHO was newly posted. So two members of the Ahmadi security committee went to the police station and met the new SHO. The SHO told them that he had received a negative report regarding Ahmadis. According to the report Ahmadis do not have legal documents of this property, and the area is heavily populated with *Ahle Sunnat* and *Ahle Hadees* sects, so there was a risk that someone could agitate the people against Ahmadis. “So, for the sake of peace and to prevent any attack you should close your community centre; otherwise I would lock it myself”, the SHO said. At this the committee members told the SHO, “Our centre is in the police record. The previous SHO used to visit our centre; he also appointed personnel for its security. We have good relations with neighbors, and pose no threat to security or public peace.” The SHO appeared not to agree, and decided to postpone his action till a personal visit to the centre.

Later the SHO visited the centre. Members of the Ahmadiyya security team answered his questions and explained their position. He seemed to be satisfied.

Ahmadis face great hardships to practice their faith on Eid ul Azha

Various locations in the Punjab; August 2018: Mullas now create problems for Ahmadis at the festival of Eid ul Azha in their ritual of sacrificial cattle (*Qurbani*). They tell Ahmadis to refrain from this practice, and, in league with police, attempt to get criminal cases registered against Ahmadis under anti-Ahmadi laws. These incidents are on the rise with every passing year.

This year, mullas hung banners in different locations with inscription that Ahmadis are not allowed to indulge in cattle sacrifice under PPC 298-C; if they do they should be reported to the police. In fact, PPC 298-C makes no mention of sacrificial cattle (*Qurbani*) whatsoever.

A few days before the Eid, following was posted in social media: “All Muslims are hereby informed that in response to an application by Tahaffuz Khatme Nabuwat Forum I.G. Punjab has issued orders to all DPOs to take legal action against Qadianis indulging in Qurbani. It is thus your Islamic and national duty to inform the police as Qurbani and Eid Prayers are Islamic rituals (*shaair*), and Qadianis are forbidden to practice these. Safeguard your Islamic *shaair* by reporting violations to the police.” A fake notification was also posted to support the announcement.

On inquiry it came to light that the I.G.P. had not issued any such orders and the notification was fabricated. The police discovered that two clerks of the I.G. Office had produced this fake notification, added fake letter number and signatures and handed over the forged document to mulla Hasan Muaviya, a committed activist against Ahmadis. He is brother of the known mulla Tahir Ashrafi who is close to official circles in the national capital. Reportedly, a criminal case has been registered against Hasan Muaviya and the two clerks.

In view of the announcement on the social media and mullas’ activism, Ahmadis were very cautious and discreet in exercising their right to practice their religious rites at this occasion. Despite all this care a number of Ahmadis were harassed by the local mullas and the police.

Four such cases of police intervention were reported from Lahore, two from Sheikhpura, one each from Districts Gujrat, Gujranwala, Okara and Narowal. At these locations Ahmadis faced one or more of the following hardships:

- Police cases were registered against Ahmadis in Sadhokay District Gujranwala and in District Narowal.
- Ahmadis were made to report to police stations, a few were detained for a while.
- Ahmadis’ cattle were taken to the police station, kept there but released later on.
- Ahmadis were made to sign undertaking that henceforth they will not undertake Qurbani.
- A policeman took down the name plate of Mr Muhammad Hafiz, an Ahmadi and took it away, for ‘Muhammad’ was written on it.
- Mullas of TLP took out a procession in Guldasth Town against the Cartoon Competition in Holland, but they availed the occasion to promote agitation against Ahmadis on Qurbani issue.
- It should be mentioned that at places, the police acted fairly and dismissed the objectors or dispersed the unruly elements agitating against Ahmadis’ Qurbani, for instance in Samnabad.

It is disturbing to notice that the attitude and policy of the PML-N government, especially in the Punjab, during the past five years encouraged the mullas to become more demanding and they expanded their regime of bigotry, which encouraged sectarianism and extremism that has led to acts of terrorism inside the country and abroad.

Ahmadis denied freedom of faith

Baidapur Virkan, Sheikhpura; July/August, 2018: Ahmadi youths sat in their mosque with the missionary when a non-Ahmadi fellow came there and asked them to accompany him to meet someone. There approximately 25 men and a visiting mulla were present. They told the Ahmadiyya missionary that from now onward Ahmadis should stop saying *Azan* (call for prayers), their mosque should not have minarets; their graveyard should be separate and they would not undertake *Qurbani* (sacrificing cattle on Eid). The Ahmadiyya missionary replied that he would call the local Ahmadiyya president and they could talk to him. They said no to that and told him to simply convey the message.

On July 31 a Khatme Nabuwat conference was held at the same location. They decided to lay siege to the Ahmadiyya mosque the next Friday. Ahmadis informed the police of the plan. The police then heard both parties. The opponents presented three demands: 1) Erase the *Kalima* (Islamic creed), 2) Separate the graveyard, 3) Agree not to undertake *Qurbani*. On August 1 the DSP sent for both the parties to discuss these demands. He gave time to both the parties to solve the issues by mutual consultation; otherwise he would himself give the verdict.

Both parties met to solve the issue. Non-Ahmadis agreed to withdraw their demands. They had some questions over the writings of the founder of the Ahmadiyya community; Ahmadis gave answers which were to the satisfaction of the other party. This apparently solved the communal problem.

After some days mullas intervened and reignited their mischief, and threatened agitation. So, the DSP once again sent for both the parties on August 13; the opponents arrived with approximately 40 mullas. Ahmadis were put under great pressure with the help of police, and the following agreement was imposed upon them:

- Ahmadis will perform their worship inside their worship place and will never use loudspeakers.
- Ahmadis will not preach their belief to the villagers.
- Ahmadis will not undertake *Qurbani* and other rites in the days of Eid ul Azha.
- Ahmadis will arrange for a separate graveyard for them and will not bury any of their dead in others' graveyard. Within seven days they will inform the local police and administration about the land of new graveyard.
- If any of the party is in breach of the pact it will pay Rs. 10,00,000 as penalty to the other party and will also face the legal consequences.

Obstacles in worship

Qambar Ali Khan, District Larkana; September 2018: It was learnt by the local Ahmadi community that some people took photographs of Ahmadi worshippers who had congregated in their mosque for the Friday congregational prayers. Photographs were taken from a neighbor's house. On inquiry, the neighbor stated that a few Deobandi mullas had done the photography in his absence.

These mullas approached the police with these photos. The police found this 'complaint' a welcome source of unworthy interest. Ahmadis felt harassed wrongfully.

Ahmadis had to approach people whom the police pay attention.