

## **Ahmadis face discrimination, prejudice and impediments in education in Pakistan**

According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion & Public Life, Pakistan is the third least tolerant country in the world in terms of social acceptance of religious diversity.<sup>1</sup>

Ahmadiyya is one of the most educated communities in Pakistan. The mulla does not like that. As such the challenges which this community faces in both acquiring and spreading education are numerous. Ahmadis face severe religious discrimination in both public and private educational institutes.

According to a research report 'A Question of Faith' by Jinnah Institute Islamabad in 2011: *"It is common for Ahmadi students to be ostracized by students and teachers. When filling out admissions forms, Ahmadi students cannot write "Muslim" even though that is what they consider themselves. Since more and more Ahmadi students enrol each year, members of organizations such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, who have infiltrated universities and colleges, gather lists of all Ahmadi students enrolled to assist with targeting them for discrimination."*<sup>2</sup>

The textbooks taught in schools and colleges of the country contain a 'distorted presentation of national history, insensitivity to the existing religious diversity in Pakistan, views encouraging prejudice, bigotry and discrimination towards fellow citizens, women, religious minorities and other nations, and a glorification of war as well as an incitement to militancy and violence.'<sup>3</sup>

In September 2013 an influential cleric expressed that additional information about Ahmadis should be included in curricula, in an effort to further institutionalize their discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

The marginalisation is not confined to the religiously extremist elements but the government also does not take measures to protect the rights of this persecuted community in Pakistan. Thirteen Ahmadiyya schools and two colleges were taken over by the state in 1972 under policy of nationalization. However in 1996 the government decided to denationalize such institutes and hand them over to the original owners under some conditions. Ahmadiyya community met all those conditions, but it is 23 years that the authorities have not handed these institutes back to Ahmadis, thus violating government's own policy.

### **Challenges in acquiring education**

Ahmadi students are often looked at with contempt by their fellow students on account of intense hate propaganda. United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) conducted a study of the public schools and madrassas in Pakistan. The report,

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.pewforum.org/2011/08/09/rising-restrictions-on-religion2/>

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.jinnah-institute.org/images/stories/jinnah\\_minority\\_report.pdf](http://www.jinnah-institute.org/images/stories/jinnah_minority_report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>Rahman, Tariq. *Denizens of Alien Worlds: a Study of Education, Inequality and Polarization in Pakistan*. Oxford UP, 2004

<sup>4</sup>Tanveer, R., 'Second Amendment anniversary: speakers call for isolation, banishment of Ahmadis', Express Tribune, 8 September 2013

Connecting the Dots: Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan published in 2011 states that:

“Ahmadis were unanimously considered non-Muslims, and a majority of the students interviewed referred to them in terms of their views on the finality of the prophet. Students in general had very negative images of Ahmadis: *“Ahmadis try to convert members of other religions to their religion by casting magic. They don’t believe in prophethood and they deny the last prophet. We should behave badly with them.”*— Male Student (Punjab)”<sup>5</sup>

The study further reports that: “Students generally held very negative views about Ahmadis. In Punjab many students viewed Ahmadis as those who don’t believe in the last prophethood, while another student from Sindh said that Ahmadis spent money on converting people to their religion: *“Ahmadis are also kafir [infidels]. Our constitution has declared them non-Muslims. They are the ones who were Muslim but then turned kafir or non-Muslim by changing Islam. They are more or bigger kafir than the Christians, Jews, and Hindus. They have no rights in Islam and if there is an Islamic government it will give the death penalty to Ahmadis.”* — Madrassah Student (Sindh)”<sup>6</sup>

Ahmadi students face marginalisation on various counts. A female student in Lahore left her college when she discretely listened to the plan of her classmates to throw acid on her.

In June 2008, all the 23 Ahmadi students of Punjab Medical College were rusticated ‘due to the religious dispute, hate material distribution and on the recommendations of the college disciplinary committee’.<sup>7</sup>

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan issued a press release on July 02, 2008 which *inter alia* stated that:

*“The rustication of 23 Ahmedi students of the Punjab Medical College, Faisalabad, early last month on the ground of their belief was apparently a case of extraordinary discrimination. HRCP therefore requested a senior member of its governing body to probe the matter. This inquiry shows that while rusticating the unfortunate students the college administration did not follow the rules prescribed for this extreme action; that the committee of teachers set up to examine the victims after the event included teachers who were in the body that had taken the decision to rusticate them; and that the few students who appeared before the investigating committee were unduly harassed and intimidated. There were also indications that some members of the faculty colluded with the Ahmedi-baiting trouble-makers.”*<sup>8</sup>

A female student of another medical university told her story:

*“When I was in 2<sup>nd</sup> year my friends got my bio data out of the university database. They asked me if I was a ‘Qadiani’. When I told them that I was, they stopped talking to me. I was friendless in a class of 300 students. I was shattered. I felt suffocated.”*

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<sup>5</sup><http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Pakistan-ConnectingTheDots-Email%283%29.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Annex V of the Annual Report of Persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan During the Year 2008

<sup>8</sup><https://hrpcblogger.wordpress.com/2008/07/03/hrcp-plea-for-justice-for-unlawfully-expelled-students/>

Ms Atika Shahid, an Ahmadi young lady, an M.Phil. student at National Institute of Bio-technology and Genetic Engineering, Faisalabad was expelled by the administration from the course on September 26, 2018 without formally giving a reason. The Institute is linked with Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission. On Ms Shahid's insistence, she was told verbally by the staff that she had not been cleared by the security agencies, and they had not intimated the reason to the Institute. It was however mentioned that she had visited her relatives in Qadian (India) in 2014. She had gone there, in fact, to attend the traditional annual gathering of the Ahmadiyya Jamaat. Ms Shahid has done her M.Sc in Bio-technology and was awarded Gold Medal. Pakistani bigots seem to know how to deprive the country of its brilliant and gifted scholars.

An Ahmadi student, Ms Rabia Saleem in her final semester at COMSAT was falsely accused of blasphemy and was expelled immediately from the college. She would have graduated in 2012, but all she can show now for her efforts is a 3.27 GPA. *"I was the only Ahmadi in my class and people would keep saying things about Ahmadis being non-Muslims. I was tired of it. I only had one semester left. I asked my teachers whether I could take the exams from home, but they would not even let me do that,"* she said in an interview in Sri Lanka, where she fled to seek asylum.<sup>9</sup>

Two bright student brothers were targeted because of religious bias. At first, when the teachers came to know about their religious affiliation, they were not ready to accept it because of their academic excellence. Once confirmed, both were subjected to discrimination and prejudice. Sarmad, elder of the two, scored excellent marks in his 4<sup>th</sup> grade exam and stood first in class. The teachers were not ready to accept that an Ahmadi student could score so well. They tested him again and Sarmad got even more marks. The examiner was blamed for giving marks 'generously'. The brothers left the school and got admission elsewhere because of the biased attitude of the administration.

Ahmadis of Attock in northern Punjab were targeted in the recent past in many ways. Two Ahmadis were killed there for their faith. Two Ahmadi lecturers were fired from their jobs in a college. Another enormity was expulsion of two Ahmadi children from their school. One, Muhammad Ibtisam was in the Prep class while his brother Basal Ahmad was a student of class III in Sir Syed Public School. The principal issued the orders on October 15, 2016.

In September 2011, ten Ahmadi students and a teacher were expelled on religious grounds from two schools in District Hafizabad, after an anti-Ahmadiyya rally in the locality.

In August 2011, seven Ahmadi girls and boys were expelled from various schools in Pachnand, District Chakwal.

On another occasion, in March 2012 a student of ACCA in Acute Business College in Lahore was called over by the administration during his class timings. He was asked about his religious affiliation. When he replied that he was an Ahmadi, the college administration

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<sup>9</sup><http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/1/27/pakistani-ahmadis-seek-asylum-in-sri-lanka.html>

refunded him the paid fee of the on-going semester and asked him to leave the college premises to never return.

In June 2012, two Ahmadi students, Mr. Umair Ahmad and Mr. Saqib Ahmad of Haily College were harassed and beaten on June 7, 2012 by the members of Islami Jamiat Talabah – the student wing of Jamaat Islami – in The Punjab University. Both the students were kept in illegal detention for hours and were subjected to mental torture.

An FIR was registered against four school-going Ahmadi children, aged 14 – 18 years, on a false charge of blasphemy, under section PPC 295-C on January 28, 2009 in District Layyah. The police arrested them without establishing a credible *prima facie* case. The applied blasphemy clause carries death penalty. According to the accusation, graffiti defiling the name of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was found on toilet walls of a local mosque. ‘It must have been undertaken by the four Ahmadi boys’, speculated the accuser. No further investigation was undertaken by the police, so the real culprits remained unidentified. These students remained in prison for months. Eventually they were acquitted by a court, but they had to flee abroad in view of the nature and gravity of the alleged offense.

In the recent past, official Boards of Education in the Punjab introduced the system of ‘On-line’ registration of students for examination; this exposed Ahmadi students to harassment for their faith. Earlier, students had the freedom to state their own religion on their forms, but the new format restricts them to only two options: Muslim or Non-Muslim. This way, Ahmadi students are compelled to call themselves non-Muslim, which is against their belief.

### **Hate promoted on campuses**

There are also numerous cases of teachers’ hostility towards Ahmadi students and inciting other students against them. These teachers speak in classrooms of edicts about killing Ahmadis, and inculcate intolerance in young minds. A report by USCIRF states that: *“Public school teachers seemed equally divided between those who considered Islamic sectarian differences to be inconsequential and those who found them to be highly significant. Many described Ahmadis as non-Muslims and expressed a particular distaste for them. Teachers thought that Ahmadis deny the finality of prophet-hood and held them in general contempt.”*

*“Ahmadis are the result of a grim conspiracy of Christians and Jews, and they are just like them; they have turned away from their religion [Islam] and are liable to be killed.”* — Madrassah teacher (Balochistan)

*“From [an] Islamic point of view Muslims should invite ‘People of the Book’ to social events and celebrations. However, they should not invite those minorities who are not ‘People of the Book’ such as Hindus and Ahmadis.”* — Public School Teacher (Punjab)<sup>10</sup>

In 2016 Mr. Asad Qaisar (then Speaker of the KPK provincial assembly) of PTI made a special effort to have the precept of ‘end of prophethood’ (KN) included as part of school syllabus in Islamiyat. He knew very well that mullas use the KN as a theme and an excuse to

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<sup>10</sup><http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Pakistan-ConnectingTheDots-Email%283%29.pdf>

bad-mouth Ahmadis. However Mr. Qaisar, now Speaker of the National Assembly in 2019, called an official meeting in October 2016 of ulama and officials of the Education Department, and directed them to proceed with the task of inclusion of KN in school syllabus and also produce text for inclusion in the prescribed text books. This was done. Now the text book contains highly derogatory and insulting mention of the holy founder of Ahmadiyyat. This was done to promote political interest of the ruling party.

The administration of Nobel College, a privately-owned institute, in Shadman, Lahore on December 11, 2014 allowed two mullas of Dawat-e-Islami (green turbans) to hold a programme at the campus on Khatme Nabuwwat, to be attended by the college administration, teachers and students. During the lecture the mullas showed a picture of the founder of the Ahmadiyya Community and used very insulting language for him; they asked the students to say the same, and they did that. Selected extracts (without reference to the context) were read out from his writings and then insults were hurled against him by the mullas followed by the students. The mullas also incited the students against the Ahmadiyya community. The mullas reportedly had come on a three-day visit. They had a similar program for other colleges.

Sabih Ahmad, an Ahmadi student of class five was beaten by his classmates in Hafizabad. On inquiry, the students stated that they were urged by their teacher of Islamic Studies to beat their fellow student, as hurting ‘Qadianis’ was an act of divine merit.

In February 2011 a teacher of Farhan Academy in Shahdara Town, Lahore incited his students saying that Ahmadis are *Wajib-ul-Qatl* (must be killed). *“It is difficult to kill Ahmadi men as they can’t be identified. However, harass Ahmadi women and girls and kill them as they are Wajib-ul-Qatl,”* he elaborated further.

In October 2013 a teacher of Government Primary School in District Khushab brought Ahmadiyya founder’s photo in his classroom for 4<sup>th</sup> grade and asked the students to trample on it. An Ahmadi child in the class felt very hurt and started crying, at which he was expelled from the classroom with contempt.

An Ahmadi student of 8<sup>th</sup> class was regularly asked to leave the classroom during the period of Islamic Studies. During the class, the mulla teacher incited other students against Ahmadis. As a result, one day, a student brought a gun in school and pointed it towards the Ahmadi student. A tragedy was avoided on intervention of some senior boys.

The same year, World Tahaffuz Khatme Nabuwwat Council issued stickers in Jhang for school children and pasted these on text books and note-books on sale. These stickers contained the messages: *“It is strictly forbidden in Sharia (Haraam) to talk to or have any dealing with Qadianis”* and *“If your teacher is a Qadiani, refuse learning from him.”*

### **Harassment of Ahmadi educationists**

In both public and private educational institutes, Ahmadi teachers come across professional competition and animosity from their colleagues who avail of the anti-Ahmadi laws and sectarian prejudice in the society to suppress and severely harass them.

For example, there was a teacher in Lahore who had taught in a secondary school for 14 years. After the incident of 28 May 2010, in which 86 Ahmadi worshippers were killed in two mosques in Lahore, she faced severe harassment in the school as no one would talk to her. The principal of the school asked her to leave the job. She got a job in another school. A year later when that principal came to know of her belief, she was fired from there too.

In another case Mr Habib-ur-Rahman, Ahmadi was transferred in April 2014 to another school in District Hafizabad because of the pressure from teachers and a cleric. They reasoned that ‘they did not want a Qadiani teacher to teach their children and they had only hatred for him, socially and religiously’. Mr Rahman faced similar discrimination at the next school as well.

In May 2014, Mr Ejaz Ahmad, an Ahmadi teacher was forced to renounce his faith in District Nankana. In Hafizabad, a teacher in a primary school experienced social isolation in the staff room. He was disallowed to share the glass for drinking water with other teachers.

An Ahmadi female teacher in District Sargodha was insulted by miscreants of the area. On September 23, 2013, they stopped her on her way to school and shouted slogans against her and the Ahmadiyya community. They falsely accused her of proselytizing the children in the school. Consequently she was suspended from the public school.

Mr Azhar Chaudhary and his wife Ms Sarwat Mubashir, a couple dedicated to promotion of good education, opened a college in Dunyapur, District Lodhran. It was a great success as its students won top positions in the district. This aroused the jealousy of competitors, so in league with mullas of ‘end of prophethood’ faction they mounted a major campaign to close down the couple’s college. The mullas threatened the authorities with riots, and intimidated them to sign on the dotted line. The couple put up a bold defence for a while, but in the face of threatening mullas and their collaborating administration had to give up, and transferred the college to a third party who, availing the anti-Ahmadi agitation, failed to even pay up their dues for the buildings. This was a sad end to what would have eventually developed into an excellent large complex of education institutes for Dunyapur’s youth.

A number of Ahmadi educationists lost their lives in attacks on religious grounds. Rana Saleem Ahmad was the proprietor and manager of the ‘New Light Academy’ in Sanghar, Sindh. He was murdered for his faith on November 26, 2009 by unknown assailants. Mr Dilawar Hussain, an Ahmadi teacher in a local primary school was shot dead by pillion riders in Sheikhpura on October 01, 2011. One luminary in physics, Professor Nasim Babar of an Islamabad university was murdered at his home, for no other reason than his faith.

Two madrassah students carried out a murderous attack on Mr. Mubashir Ahmad Tahir, an Ahmadi college teacher in May 2009 in Chakwal. They tried to cut his throat and stabbed him in his chest and arm injuring him grievously. Mr. Tahir survived the attack.

## **Conclusion**

Incidents and cases mentioned in this brief are only typical examples of what has happened to Ahmadis in the field of education. The quantum of tyranny and persecution is vast and

beyond the scope of a few pages of this paper. For more information please visit the link; <https://www.persecutionofahmadis.org/persecution-activities/bar-to-education/>

In his book, *Denizens of Alien Worlds: A Study of Education, Inequality and Polarization in Pakistan*, Tariq Rahman presented the following results of a survey which clearly indicate the extent of marginalisation of Ahmadis in educational institutions:<sup>11</sup>

IN FAVOR OF EQUAL RIGHTS FOR...	MADRASSAS		URDU-MEDIUM		ENGLISH-MEDIUM	
	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student
Ahmadis	4%	13%	27%	47%	43%	65.5%
Hindus	15%	17%	37%	47%	61.5%	78.5%
Christians	18.5%	18%	52%	66%	81.5%	84%

There is little doubt that the prevailing extremism in the country is partly the result of flawed education system. Education material was not scrutinized and radical mullas were allowed to pollute the minds of many generations with seeds of bigotry and religious prejudice. This orientation spread and became part of the social fabric resulting in rise of intolerance against other communities in the society.

The report of Minority Rights Group International, *Searching for Security: The Rising Marginalization of Religious Communities in Pakistan* concludes that:

*“There is also an important role for educators and the wider community to foster greater cooperation between students of different faiths.”<sup>12</sup>*

Also: *“Authorities should engage in teacher training in order to increase faculty knowledge of the issues that religious minorities face, and develop educational materials and syllabuses to encourage learning about Pakistan’s diverse society.”<sup>13</sup>*

When asked about the future of their community in Pakistan, an Ahmadi student replied:

*“We don’t think discrimination against Ahmadis will end in our lifetime, unless the state drastically changes its discriminatory policies against us. We have no hope in the people. There are people who are sympathetic to us, and we are grateful to them. Even though we want equal opportunities we primarily want security; if anything that is the one thing the state should ensure us. This is a right available to all citizens. The future seems bleak right now, but we are hopeful. Hope is what drives us. We will always live by our slogan ‘Love for All. Hatred for None.’<sup>14</sup>*

## **October 1, 2019**

<sup>11</sup>Rahman, Tariq. *Denizens of Alien Worlds: a Study of Education, Inequality and Polarization in Pakistan*. Oxford UP, 2004

<sup>12</sup><http://www.minorityrights.org/13004/reports/mrg-searching-for-security-pakistan-report.pdf>

<sup>13</sup><http://www.minorityrights.org/13004/reports/mrg-searching-for-security-pakistan-report.pdf>

<sup>14</sup>[http://www.jinnah-institute.org/images/stories/jinnah\\_minority\\_report.pdf](http://www.jinnah-institute.org/images/stories/jinnah_minority_report.pdf)