

Exploring Ahmadi Women's Voices

Pakistan

February 2015



WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK

AFGHANISTAN • PAKISTAN • INDIA

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The Women's Regional Network

The Women's Regional Network (WRN) is a network of women working within and beyond borders to enshrine and protect human rights and sustainable development and enable women's full participation in equitable growth to ensure a more peaceful and just world. The membership is a dynamic network of women peacemakers from Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, including activists, researchers, academics, students, educators, entrepreneurs and development practitioners, as well as supporters outside the network. The Network works to ensure that women from a wide cross section of ethnic, religious and geographical areas are represented.

The Community Conversations

How do you take discussions about security, conflict, militarisation and governance outside elite security policy circles? How do you bring more women's voices into this discussion? How do we integrate their experiences and concerns into the security discourse? Brainstorming around these questions generated the idea of Women's Regional Network 'Community Conversations' (CCs).

The WRN documents women's voices on issues of security, militarization and corruption to understand their experiences, fears and insecurities, acknowledging their contribution to justice, peace and social reintegration processes and highlighting the creativity and agency women have shown in adapting their lives to conflict conditions. Women's experiences, their fears, their courage, their priorities and solutions are the focus of the CCs.

The process thus far has generated rich and detailed accounts of the gendered social impact of politicised violence, militarisation and corruption on the lives of women. The process amplifies the voices of women and provides countless examples of women as agents of change rather than victims.

For this report, WRN conducted Community Conversations with 36 women from the Ahmadiyya community both in Pakistan and abroad with members of the diaspora who have fled persecution in Pakistan. These women were from all cross sections of society including civil society leaders, teachers, student and housewives, from Islamabad, Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, Peshawar and Quetta, from urban to semi urban areas. While the information related in this report is authentic, most names and other details have been changed for security reasons.

The objective of this paper is to understand Ahmadiyya women's experiences and fears, to affirm their courage, and to find policy and program support areas for the international community and government of Pakistan, in order to address the human rights concerns of the Ahmadiyya community.

Due to the reasons explained further on in this report, the very issue of the Ahmadiyya belief is a sensitive and emotional one in Pakistan. Perhaps because of this, there is very little documentation on the voices of Ahmadi women. This is why WRN also employed the technique of community conversations besides using secondary resources. We asked the participating Ahmadi women open-ended questions in person as well as through questionnaires about their experiences as Ahmadi women, about incidents of discrimination and violence, their fears and apprehensions, and their hopes from the national and the international community.

This paper appears at a time when Pakistan is fighting against militants and extremism on its soil. Pakistani is also fighting the extremists' narrative that feeds upon the Ahmadi issue as this paper tries to explain. The timing is crucial because the narrative and the will of the country shall determine its future course. The issue is also critical to the country's relationship with the global community that is supporting Pakistan to uproot the menace of terrorism and extremism. In this sense, the subject of Ahmadiyya persecution sets the tone regarding how the state of Pakistan views the questions of social cohesion, inclusion, human rights and peace in coming years. This paper is expected to generate examples of policy and program interventions that may be useful for Ahmadiyya community in the region too.

Introduction

Who are the Ahmadis?

The Ahmadiyya community officially refers to itself as the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat. It emerged in the village of Qadian in Punjab, India, in the late 1880s when a spiritual leader named Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1835-1908) declared himself to be the Mujaddid (divine reformer) and the Promised Messiah in line with prophecies in different religions, including Islam. Followers of the Ahmadiyya belief system are called Ahmadis. The Jamaat preaches and provides spiritual guidance to its followers through Caliphates, and has a presence in 204 countries around the world, including UK, Europe, Africa, USA and parts of Asia. The world's Ahmadiyya population is estimated to be between 10 and 20 million. The Jamaat claims that its adherents number tens of millions.

A cornerstone of the Ahmadiyya community's faith is their belief in non-violence. The community also believes in proselytizing, and is behind many of the conversions to Islam in other countries. The legendary boxer Cassius Clay who became Muhammad Ali after converting to Islam owed his new faith to Ahmadi missionaries. The Ahmadi belief in non-violence was one of the factors behind Ali's becoming a conscientious objector and refusing to participate in the Vietnam War.

Pakistan, with a population of over 180 million people, has the world's largest Ahmadi population, estimated at between two and five million. After the partition of India and the formation of Pakistan in 1947, the Jamaat moved its headquarters from Qadian to Rabwah in Punjab on the Pakistani side. Rabwah¹ has an Ahmadi-majority population numbering about 60,000. The headquarters were moved to London after 1984 when the persecution of Ahmadis began in earnest in Pakistan, following the then military dictatorship's imposition of laws targeting the community and making it a criminal offense for them to practice their faith as Muslims.

The finality of Prophethood: An emotive issue

Ahmadis believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of their sect, took birth in the likeness of Jesus, to bring about peace and eliminate religiously motivated wars and bloodshed. However, his claim to be messiah is a big controversy in the Muslim world. Many orthodox Muslims consider Ahmadis to be heretics and some countries ban or prevent them from practicing their faith as Muslims. Differences are centred around the meaning of *Kahatam An-nabiyyin* (The Final Prophet). All Muslims believe in the finality of Prophet-hood of the Prophet Muhammad (on Him be peace). Many consider as heresy Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's claim that he is the promised Messiah.

One of the arguments advanced at the time of the Second Amendment was that officially declaring the Ahmadis to be non-Muslim would prevent violence against them, as people would no longer be "compelled" to take the law into their own hands. However, the persecution has only intensified. Like the proverbial camel that was allowed to put a foot into his master's tent but then took over the whole tent, the "religious" right in Pakistan has taken the opening that was provided by such appeasement and has continued to appropriate more space.

¹ Officially re-named Chenab Nagar in 1999, but still primarily known as Rabwah.

One way that that militant extremists gather support and churn up emotions is by alleging disrespect to the Prophet of Islam (on Him be peace). The Khatm-e-Nabuwwat (Finality of Prophethood) is one of several such organisations that has taken it upon itself to protect the honour of the Prophet as the last prophet. They regularly take out rallies and hold conferences against the Ahmadiyya community, terming them as heretics and distributing pamphlets against them. They also justify the murder of Ahmadis as a religiously sanctioned act that will win the killer a place in heaven. The Khatm-e-Nabuwwat lobby and its allied groups are also behind most of the 'blasphemy' cases in Pakistan.

Fearing a backlash from religious forces in Pakistan who command formidable street power, the government appears unwilling or unable to act against those who indulge in hate-speech or incitements to violence, including the placing of banners in public places.

Persecution in the name of religion

The persecution of Ahmadis began as early as 1953, when hundreds of Ahmadis were killed in Lahore in politically orchestrated riots engineered by "religious" parties, groups and individuals who took out rallies, made speeches inciting violence and published provocative articles. Some 200 Ahmadis were killed before the government imposed a limited martial law in Lahore for three months.

Anti-Ahmadi riots in 1974 led to the killing of dozens more Ahmadis. Enraged mobs desecrated Ahmadi mosques and graves. The riots culminated in the Second Constitutional Amendment² that officially declared Ahmadis to be non-Muslims on the grounds that they do not regard Prophet Muhammad (on Him be peace) as the final Prophet. The Second Constitutional Amendment set the foundation for the subsequent persecution of Ahmadis and discrimination against them.

Ten years after the Second Amendment, then military dictator General Zia ul Haq promulgated Ordinance XX, 1984, that amended the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) to restrict the freedom of religion and expression of Ahmadis. The new laws, sections 298-B and 298-C criminalize Ahmadis' "posing" as Muslims, calling their faith Islam, preaching or propagating their faith. These laws make it a criminal offense for Ahmadis to greet other Muslims in the customary Islamic manner, to declare their faith publicly, build places of worship or call them mosques, make the call to prayer (*Azaan*), recite their holy book (the Quran) aloud, or even offer funeral prayers in the Muslim way. An Ahmadi "who directly or indirectly, poses himself as a Muslim, or calls, or refers to, his faith as Islam, or preaches or propagates his faith, or invites others to accept his faith, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, or in any manner whatsoever outrages the religious feelings of Muslims" can be awarded a three year prison sentence.

It is now irrelevant that these developments ran contrary to the views of Pakistan's founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who had refused to accept the demand of extremist groups to declare the Ahmadis as non-Muslims.

The persecution of the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan is not only severe, but also very systematic. Extremist forces deliberately use this issue, capitalising on the emotional appeal of defending the honour of the Prophet (peace be upon Him) by scapegoating the Ahmadis. Because it is a criminal

²The Second Amendment (September 7, 1974) was pushed through under Saudi pressure, as Dr. Mubashir Hassan, a close aide of the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto acknowledged years later.

offense for them to practice and profess their faith, the discrimination starts at birth when they can face legal proceedings for following Muslim rituals. Even in death there is no respite as their graves are defaced for bearing Islamic inscriptions.³ Ahmadis are forced to officially identify themselves as non-Muslims, contrary to their own beliefs. This is the only community in Pakistan that abstains from exercising its right to vote in protest at not being allowed to vote as Muslims. This too is a leftover law from the Zia regime that imposed 'separate electorates' on Pakistan – there separate electoral lists for Muslims and non-Muslims including Ahmadis. They refuse to vote as non-Muslims because they consider themselves to be Muslims.

While signing for official documents like admission forms for examinations, passports, identity cards and affidavits, Pakistani Muslims have to sign a declaration stating their belief in the absolute finality of Prophethood of Mohammad (peace be upon him) and attesting that Mirza Ghulam Ahmed was an "imposter *nabi*" (prophet) and that his followers are non-Muslims. This symbolic detestation towards a particular community feeds the extremist narrative and legitimizes the systemic marginalization, hate-crimes and aggressive attacks on lives and property of Ahmadiyya community.

The extremist lobby is also behind the distribution of hate-material like notices placed on shop windows announcing that Ahmadis are not welcome. Stickers distributed to schoolchildren to write their names in and place on their notebooks contain a line to the effect that "I will not be taught by a Qadiani (derogatory term for Ahmadi) teacher."

While the law prohibits hate-speech and discrimination, there are few avenues for the Ahmadis to turn to for redress. The security agencies themselves are often involved in "harassment and in framing false charges against Ahmadis, or have stood by in the face of anti-Ahmadi violence", as a Human Rights Watch report notes.⁴

In a survey of students and teachers at private schools, who are privileged and considered to be moderate, many were of the considered opinion that Ahmadis do not deserve equal opportunities and rights.⁵ This perception translates into bigotry, violence, and marginalization even in times of crisis such as floods and earthquakes. In the 2010 floods, for example, some 500 Ahmadi families were denied humanitarian aid because of their religious identity.⁶

Prominent Ahmadis including doctors are frequently targeted and killed.⁷ One of the worst attacks on the Ahmadi community took place in Lahore in May 2010, when the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) simultaneously attacked two of their worship places (that they cannot refer to as mosques), killing 90 people on the spot and injuring 108 children, youth and adults. Three days later, militants attacked the

³Asad Hashim, "Pakistan's Ahmadiyya: An 'absence of justice,'" *Al Jazeera*, 7 Aug. 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/08/pakistan-ahmadiyya-an-absence-justice-20148616414279536.html> [Accessed 1 Feb. 2015]

⁴Human Rights Watch. 27 May 2012. "Pakistan: Prosecute Ahmadi Massacre Suspects." <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/27/pakistan-prosecute-ahmadi-massacre-suspects>. Accessed 20 Feb. 2015.

⁵Tariq Rahman, "Passports to Privilege: The English-Medium Schools in Pakistan," *Peace and Democracy in South Asia* 1, No. 1, (2005).

⁶Atif M. Malik, "Denial of Flood Aid to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan," *Health and Human Rights Journal* 13, no.1, (2011). <http://www.hhrjournal.org/2013/08/20/denial-of-flood-aid-to-the-ahmadiyya-muslim-community-in-pakistan/> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2015]

⁷Beena Sarwar. "Poison in the body politic and the Ahmadi issue." *The News on Sunday*, 26 October 2014, <http://tns.thenews.com.pk/poison-in-body-politic-and-the-ahmadi-issue/> [Accessed Feb. 20 2015]

hospital where the injured were being treated. Twelve police officials and hospital staff were killed because they were treating and protecting injured Ahmadis.⁸

The anti-Ahmadi narrative that has developed in Pakistan even leads to national heroes being sidelined regardless of their distinctions in any field, art, science, medicine, defense, literature or diplomacy. The eminent physicist Dr. Abdus Salam is the most prominent example of this 'otherness'. Because of Dr Salam's faith as an Ahmadi, Pakistan downplayed his achievement as the country's first (and only, until Malala Yousufzai in 2014) Nobel Laureate, with Nobel Prize for Physics in 1979. Dr Salam received the Nobel award dressed in traditional Pakistani Punjabi attire and quoted the verses of the Quran in his acceptance speech. Yet on his return to Pakistan in December 1979, there was no public reception for him. Threats of violence by the Islami Jamiat-i-Tulaba, student wing of the right-wing Jamat-e-Islami, prevented him from delivering a lecture at Quaid e Azam University Islamabad. Other institutions found it difficult to invite him for the same reason. Dr Salam lived in exile after the Second Amendment declared his community to be non-Muslim. He died in Oxford, UK, in 1996 but was buried in Rabwah, Pakistan. Later, under court orders the word 'Muslim' was removed from the epitaph on his tombstone, because Pakistan's laws do not allow members of the Ahmadiyya community to call themselves Muslims. Thus the epitaph on Dr Salam's tombstone now reads: "First _____ Nobel Laureate" as no one thought to at least replace "Muslim" with "Pakistani."

'Blasphemy'

In addition to Ordinance 20, the Gen. Zia-ul-Haq regime made other amendments to the Pakistan Penal Code (inherited from the 1860 British colonial law) that particularly impacted non-mainstream religious minorities. The new laws added to the old British law relating to religious offenses. Additions made to section 295 that dealt with injuring or defiling any place of worship or insulting anyone's religion focused on insult and injury to Muslims and Islam. Sections 295-A, B, and C now made it a criminal offense to defile the Quran, to insult the wives, family, or companions of the Prophet of Islam, or to commit any act of apostasy or disrespect to the Prophet Muhammad (on Him be Peace). These laws have come to be known as the 'blasphemy law' of Pakistan. Convictions under the last one, 295-C, carry a mandatory death sentence since the option of life imprisonment lapsed in 1992.

The unscrupulous have found a convenient handle in these laws to further the rhetoric of religion as well as to settle scores, as the independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has been documenting since 1992. In this overall context, the Ahmadiyya community that orthodox Muslims consider as heretical is particularly vulnerable and open to vicious persecution that has increased over the years.

The first 'blasphemy murder', that of a Christian teacher who was falsely accused of insulting the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon Him), took place in 1992, soon after the option of life imprisonment as a punishment lapsed. HRCP has observed that the severity of the punishments under these laws makes them more liable to be misused. Independent investigations into many such cases indicate that economic interests and rivalries are often involved when it comes to the motives behind such allegations.

⁸"Pakistan: Massacre of Minority Ahmadis," *Human Rights Watch*, 1 June, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/06/01/pakistan-massacre-minority-ahmadis> [Accessed 1 Feb. 2015]

While about half the ‘blasphemy’ cases filed in Pakistan are against mainstream Muslims, the other half is disproportionately against non-Muslims especially Ahmadis who were in 1974 constitutionally declared to be non-Muslim. Judges at the district court level are often intimidated by mobs – many of them members of banned militant outfits. This makes judges wary of acquitting those accused of ‘blasphemy’, especially in high-profile cases.

Some of those accused of ‘blasphemy’ remain on death row for years as the Supreme Court leaves appeals against the capital punishment pending in such cases. Sometimes the accused fall victim to mob violence or are killed in prison by a fellow inmate or a guard. The fortunate may be released after acquittal but not before they have languished in prison for years. And even then, they may have to flee the country for their lives as fanatics feel justified in targeting them despite the acquittal, considering the very allegation of blasphemy to be enough to kill them.

Ahmadi Women

Insecurity

There is general insecurity in Pakistan given the ongoing deterioration of law and order and the attempts of the ‘religious’ right (linked to the global ‘terror’ network) using religion as a pretext to remain in the limelight and appropriate political power. In this context, most people feel unsafe, with members of different communities being particularly at risk if they belong to communities that the extremists consider to be heretical or non-Muslim. This includes Pakistan’s Shias, Hindus, Christians and of course, Ahmadis. Within each community, women are particularly vulnerable. And as members of the most persecuted community, Ahmadiyya women feel doubly insecure.

In July 2014, a mother and two of her children died in a fire when a charged mob reacting to an allegation of ‘blasphemy’ looted and torched the Ahmadiyya community’s houses in Gujranwala district, not far from the provincial capital Lahore. A seven-month pregnant woman had a miscarriage and lost her baby due to the attack.⁹ The mob refused to let the fire-trucks through as the police stood helplessly by. Months later, as of January 2015, twenty-three Ahmadi families, consisting of about 125 individuals, were still unable to return to their homes.¹⁰

This gruesome act and the state’s feeble response are particularly alarming in a country that has nuclear weapons and is fighting a war on terror. The barbaric attack on a school at Peshawar in December 2014 where Taliban killed nearly 150 school children and teachers underlines the desperation of the militants and the helplessness of the state. Women are particularly affected by these phenomenon a conservative, patriarchal culture now marked by horror and uncertainty. They battle against emotional, psychological, social, economic and political insecurities on daily basis.

The Women’s Regional Network (WRN) talked to 36 Ahmadi women from around Pakistan. Most are from Punjab province, but some are from south of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkwa and Balochistan. Some of the women talked to WRN from countries like USA, UK and elsewhere, where they had fled because of

⁹ [Three Ahmadis, including two minors, killed in Gujranwala](http://tribune.com.pk/story/741943/three-including-two-minors-dead-in-gujranwala-clash/), Express Tribune, 14 July, 2014

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/741943/three-including-two-minors-dead-in-gujranwala-clash/> [Accessed 15 Feb, 2105]

¹⁰ [Beleaguered denomination: Ahmadis running from pillar to post to return to their homes](http://tribune.com.pk/story/818461/beleaguered-denomination-ahmadis-running-from-pillar-to-post-to-return-to-their-homes/), Express Tribune, 8 Jan. 2015.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/818461/beleaguered-denomination-ahmadis-running-from-pillar-to-post-to-return-to-their-homes/> [Accessed 20 Feb. 2015]

persecution. Some of those who had moved abroad had husbands who had been killed or were themselves facing serious threats to their lives. Emotional insecurity is a common thread they share due to having been forced to leave their homes, relatives, and even children and parents. In addition, as women they are fearful of being targeted for sexual violence.

Discrimination

Discrimination, for Ahmadi women, is a multi-layered phenomenon, in every field, from education to employment, promotion, matrimony, travel, and social interaction. The women who talked to WRN revealed that the academic credentials that carry the word “Rabwah”(the Ahmadi-majority town in Punjab) raise eyebrows.

Ahmadi women tend to wear a particular style of headscarf. In response to the persistent discrimination, some in fact wear it as a symbol of political defiance, despite the dangers. One housewife told WRN interviewers that while she was out in the market, a shopkeeper asked if she was Ahmadi. Thinking that he was some one she knew, she answered in the affirmative. She was shocked when the man asked her to leave the shop because he did not do business with Ahmadis. She thinks she was recognized as Ahmadi because of the style of her headscarf.

A young girl shared her experience of being discriminated against by her own classmates who paid a condolence visit to her house after her grandfather passed away. “They saw a picture of our caliph, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, hung on a wall in our drawing room. A few days later, when I returned to school, I was shocked that none of them even greeted me. They just walked away. I never knew I could become a devil for them.”

An Ahmadi Montessori teacher from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province told WRN researchers that she was engaged to a recently converted Ahmadi. Her fiancé’s family boycotted him after his conversion and he fears they may try to kill him. “I pushed him out to Lahore where he may be safer as people don’t know him there. We, as Ahmadis, keep our identity hidden because it is not safe for us to be open about it. Once, a tutor of my younger brother came to the house and happened to see the book of the sayings of our Caliph lying on a table. The tutor bombarded us with questions as if it was a crime to be an Ahmadi. We had to make up a story that the book belonged to of one of our guests, who had forgotten it here, and only then the situation subsided.”

She said that the threat to her family is doubled because her father is an Ahmadiyya missionary, as Ahmadis are not allowed to preach their religion. “We have lived in five or six cities,” she says. “At the moment we are based in Abbottabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. It’s a lovely city but the people have little tolerance about different religions and ethnicity. We have not told any of our neighbours that we are Ahmadis. People come to our house for meetings and prayers but we keep all Ahmadi documents and printed material hidden away in lockers. We hold our Friday prayers in different locations, with all the Ahmadi families volunteering to hold meetings and Friday prayers in their homes in rotation.”

Another Ahmadi woman said that her community is afraid to distribute their religious material due to the fear of persecution, as the law prohibits Ahmadis from preaching their religion as Muslims.

Kausar Mushtaq, an Ahmadi housewife from Lahore, said she wanted her children to attend a nearby school. "My children have studied in a Montessori branch of the same school. However, recently, I learnt that the school administration no longer accepts Christian and Ahmadi students. The admission form explicitly asks parents to identify who they are through accreditation by the local imam of the mosque. By this act of the school administration, Ahmadi and Christian children are brushed aside like children of a lesser God. This is the worst form of discrimination. This is violation of the Constitutional right of the children and no one is bothered."

The fear of being identified and exposed and then persecuted is so strong that the Ahmadi community, particularly women, feel insecure even within their own homes. "We have to pack up and lock certain things that might expose our identity before the maids arrive at our homes to clean the house and do the washing. Sometimes we feel it is not even our home because of the fear we continuously face."

A young Ahmadi girl, who now is in the UK for higher studies told the WRN interviewers that her uncle was killed in 2010 at his own home, in front of the family. Some fanatics barged into the house, instigated by a local imam who had given a spiteful sermon during Friday prayers. "My mother locks herself up in the bathroom whenever she is alone at home. She can't bear to be alone at home. She says she looks at her children as if they are tiny sparrows, who grow in my nest but will have to leave it never to return." The mother walks a tightrope of hope and threat whenever her children visit her from abroad. She herself refuses to leave Pakistan for the love of this country.

One woman, who worked in a human rights organization and now lives in USA, shared her experience of harassment by some members of the support staff who were involved in swearing and jeering at her after they learnt she was Ahmadi. She chose not to complain to the higher management for fear of backlash as well as reluctance to see the workers lose their jobs if they were fired. Instead, she quit the job and left the country along with her husband.

Cross-community relationships

The discrimination the Ahmadi community faces due to constitutional and legal framework has infiltrated personal relationships. Several women had experienced social boycott after their religious identity was exposed in places they had moved to. One woman narrated her experience of being on good terms with the neighbours and how that all changed one day when the neighbours learnt that the woman and her family belonged to the Ahmadiyya Jamaat.

"I was unmarried and living with my parents in Karachi. We used to share food and visit each other's houses before that but that all changed after one of our close neighbours found out that we are Ahmadi. It was very humiliating as they stopped greeting us back – it was not a nice feeling to say 'Salam' (the Muslim greeting) to someone and not get any reply. They stopped eating with us or sharing food with us. The mother used to visit my mother and have tea together but now she avoided coming to our house. Whenever she did come, she wouldn't eat anything. We were treated like we were untouchables."

The woman, whose husband is a mainstream Muslim, explained how complicated and fearsome the experience of being Ahmadi was in the workplace. "I work as an accounts officer. At the office one day, someone who knew one of my cousins was Ahmadi confronted me about my religious beliefs. We became locked in a heated debate and I felt it was becoming dangerous. I had to convince him that I am

Muslim, and that some of our relatives are Ahmadis but I am not. The job market is so small that I cannot risk my job. I have children and a home to run. I can't take the risk of jeopardising my children's future."

Her husband's family who she lives with accepts her faith. They are "different from the majority in regards to the level of tolerance, but even then I have to keep my faith, or religious views, to myself," she says. "In the beginning, I tried to watch the Muslim Ahmadiyya television channel, in my own room, but my in-laws told me that I should not expose my daughter and son to any Ahmadi religious affairs. I understand that they say this out of fear and love, both. My parents-in-law are scared that if the kids go to school and say something about my faith, they will be discriminated against and might get bullied by teachers. This already happened to one of my daughter's schoolmates. It is dangerous for my kids to be Ahmadi. My in-laws don't want my kids to end up like me – someone whose friends left her after university because of her faith."

With increasing opportunities to interact at educational institutes and places of work, young people from the Ahmadi community and those from the mainstream Muslim community sometimes develop romantic relationships with each other. Some of the challenges that Ahmadi women face stem from such relationships. The situation remains calm as long as the Ahmadi's identity remains hidden. Sometimes, such relationships lead to unfavourable, even horrifying consequences.

One Ahmadi mother sent her son abroad because of serious concerns about his life. He had fallen in love with a girl from the mainstream Muslim community. They loved each other and wanted to marry, said his mother. "We had no problem. But when the girl's parents learnt we were Ahmadis, her mother barged into our home with a pistol in her hand. She brandished the pistol and I felt fear running down my spine. She demanded my son immediately cut off all links with her daughter or else he will be killed and no one will ever bother. And it was over for us. That was about two years ago, but honestly, any gunshot I hear makes my heartbeat go crazy as if that woman is shooting us. What a sad and disgusting world we live in."

Not everyone has the means to leave the country and go elsewhere, or they are tied down due to personal obligations. One middle-aged Ahmadi woman told WRN that she would like to go away but cannot leave her elderly mother who is almost blind. The woman herself is divorced, which further increases the insecurity of her position in society.

Even when the law takes its course against those engaged in violence, clerics continue to drum up support for the perpetrator and against the victim. One of the women talked about an Ahmadi food inspector who was shot dead in Lahore in 2009. "The murderer was sentenced to serve some time in jail. The local Imam would speak about his innocence on the loudspeaker in every Friday sermon. He also held collective prayers for the murderer's freedom. He told his followers that killing a non-believer is 'sawaab' (a reward by God)."

She talked about how awful she and her family felt when their neighbours and some hooligans of the street threw garbage at their house. They even celebrated the death of the Ahmadis' fourth Caliph. "They came as a group in front of our house and played loud music, drums and danced to mark the death. We were aghast. How can you celebrate death of someone, especially the one who is religiously dear to others? It is inhuman."

Forced to sell and move

The economic implications of the insecurity have immense bearings on the lives of the Ahmadi community as we understand after looking into their lives closely. They have to sell their property cheaply or have to leave it unattended, shattered or burnt. Saving their lives is the first priority in such circumstances.

One Ahmadi woman, Zakia Arshad, who now lives in the UK where she works for a local charity, told WRN that her family's houses in Lahore were burnt twice, during the riots of 1953 and 1974. Luckily, her family got wind of the attack to come and they were able to escape and go into hiding. She, along with her husband and a son, left Pakistan after twin attacks in 2010 in Lahore. Her husband barely escaped the massacre. He pulled dead bodies over him to save himself. He became psychologically unwell because of that carnage. Zakia sold her property very cheaply.

Two women, one from Islamabad and the other from Faisalabad, shared similar stories. Both had constructed new houses, investing everything they had. When the houses were built, they started receiving threats to their lives. They were forced to immediately sell the property at half the market value and move to Rabwah where there is safety in numbers with other members of the Ahmadiyya community.

Another woman from Multan not only lost her husband but also her home because of the persecution. In 2010, three armed men forced their way into her house, and held her and her children hostage. They shut the door, but deliberately left it unlocked. When her husband came home, he entered the courtyard and called out, admonishing the children for their carelessness in leaving the door unlocked. "As he came a little farther into the courtyard, they jumped out and shot him. He died there and then. Those goons killed my husband before my eyes. They killed him before the eyes of my children. We have been unable to sleep peacefully since then. We sold our poultry farm and shops at a throwaway price. We are not sure if success of my husband's business was the reason for this murder. We moved to Rabwah. Now we live here and are thankful to Jamaat for taking care of us so well. We cannot stay here all our life. There is no NGO or government support available to us in the times of crisis."

A retired school principal in Sialkot, told WRN about the physical and mental ordeal she underwent after her identity as an Ahmadi was exposed. Someone implicated her in a case of offending religious sentiments of the Muslims. She was a widow, a respected and promising headmistress of the government school in the area, but now no one was ready to stand by her. For fear of the police and consequent humiliation, she fled the city and went into hiding for the next two years. Meanwhile, the government suspended her for her absence from the job without any intimation. Finally, someone managed to get her out of the mess and she was reinstated but transferred to Hafizabad, a city in south Punjab. It took her four to five hours daily to commute between home and workplace. After years of this ordeal, she retired and spent her pension in the construction of her own house. After the house was completed, she started receiving life threats. "I had a grown up girl, my daughter, with me now. I could not just sit and watch her get killed or kidnapped or raped by vigilantes. I sold my house, cheaply, and moved to Rabwah," she said, bowing her head sadly.

A woman from Gilgit, the northern part of Pakistan, told WRN about how a mob killed her brother in Sialkot. The family managed to rescue his only child, a 14 year-old girl who is now married to the woman's son. The family now lives in Islamabad in a location where they feel relatively safe. They moved there after selling their house in another part of Islamabad where they felt insecure after a religious seminary started being constructed in the neighbourhood. She said that her husband, a teacher, was forced to retire early for his faith.

Taking a stand: an ongoing struggle

Only one woman out of all those who spoke to WRN had a positive story to share, in terms of her ongoing struggle in the face of persecution, that she has refused to accept. Qudsia Masaud is a teacher who returned from Libya where her husband was working, to her native town of Dunyapur, near Multan in southern Punjab, along with her three children. Her aim, supported by her husband, a former student activist, was to set up a school in Dunyapur. Although they are Ahmadi, the Masauds run the school strictly along secular lines, with the Islamic lessons taught by qualified Islamic teachers.

“Everyone knows we are Ahmadi. I love teaching and wanted to provide a quality education to my people – that is, the people of Dunyapur where my family has always lived and every second person knows me. When we put all our savings into the school and started to build it in 2011, we started getting threats and I was ready to pack up and go back abroad. But Masaud refused to give up. Without his support I wouldn't have been able to carry on.”

She has faced a full-fledged campaign against herself and her school from 'religious' elements. “They went around collecting funds to use against me, tore down my panaflex hoardings advertising the school, held meetings with women in the community to incite them against me, made announcements from the loudspeakers of mosques against me. They accused us of building the school with money from the Jamaat to spread the Ahmadi faith.”

She and her husband, who has the backing of the Gondal 'biradari' (the tribe to which he belongs) filed a report with the police against the instigators, and forced the government to take notice. The district administration called a town-hall meeting to resolve the matter and deal with the ongoing processions and agitations against the upcoming school.

“The media was there, the police, the hall was full of these clerics and their supporters, and there was me and my husband. The clerics made speeches against us and said they would not allow the school to function. They called us 'wajib-ul-qatal' (deserving of death) to our face.”

Asked if she was afraid, she said, “No. I felt no fear. This is my place, my home. My husband said, 'Building and running the school is our right. No one can stop us. We are professionals, we are building the school with our hard-earned money, and we want to give back to our country. We can take our money and go abroad, but we don't want to. We are Pakistani. Leave religion aside.' The government officials also took a stand and talked about how Islam calls for tolerance and living together amicably.”

The school is up and running with some 160 students today, including the children of some of those who initially participated in the campaign against it. One man was at a mosque where leaflets against the school were being distributed. He himself took 10,000 leaflets to distribute. “But then he came to see me and to see the school, and he realised that this was all false propaganda against me. Now his son has been in my school for the last couple of years, a very bright boy,” says Qudisia Masaud.

The harassment is still ongoing but she and her husband are determined not to give in. “They started a wall-chalking campaign against us. We sent photos to the government officials and demanded action. They had the walls white-washed. One man filed an application against me to get the school closed. I have filed a counter case of libel against him, and have taken it to the High Court. All this is difficult and causes tension. I want to focus on my teaching, and constantly fighting these people diverts my attention.”

How does she cope? Qudisia Masaud says firstly, it is the support of her husband and her in-laws that keeps her going. Secondly, she has built a strong network of people who stand with her – most of them non-Ahmadis. Third, she has used the laws that are available to proactively challenge those who are trying to undermine and threaten her.

The bottom line is that she knows the propaganda against her is not ‘religious’ so much as based in business rivalries, as the administration of another school in Dunyapur is clearly involved in the campaign against her school. This in fact is a pattern that is visible behind much of the persecution and propaganda against Ahmadis (and others who are being targeted) – economic or business rivalries, or the involvement of the land mafia when it comes to targeting buildings and graveyards.

“We have to go beyond religion and think about how we can sort out our issues,” says Qudisia Masaud determinedly.

Findings

Ahmadis in Pakistan face the dilemma of not being able to openly practice their faith as Muslims because of laws that make it illegal for them to do so. Those who live in communities where their families are well known have a degree of protection as people know them and accept them, like the schoolteacher in Dunyapur. However, due to economic reasons and in search of jobs or to set up businesses, many have moved to cities or towns where they are relative newcomers and lack a support network. In such situations they are forced to keep their identity as Ahmadis a secret.

Over the last few years we see enhanced danger from extremist groups that are using the Ahmadi issue for their own visibility and political power. These groups are increasingly mounting orchestrated campaigns to harass and persecute Ahmadis. Their campaigns feed the larger narrative of violent extremism in the name of religion in Pakistan that not only impacts the country but also has implications in the region and indeed the world.

We live in a global village where people and their lives are interconnected. The hate campaign against Ahmadis that began in pre-partition India now pervades in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia,

Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and other countries. This qualitative paper by the Women's Regional Network on women in conflict zones finds a plethora of security and socio-political and economic issues concerning Ahmadiyya women in Pakistan.

The global community's assistance, friendly pressure, and understanding of the issues involved in dealing with this crisis are critical for many reasons. For one thing, the issue impacts the lives of millions, not just Ahmadis but also others who are impacted by the narrative built up around the anti-Ahmadi issue. Secondly, as an ally in the America's "war on terror", Pakistan is an important geo-strategic partner that is fighting extremism and terror on its own soil. This war has claimed the lives of over 55,000 civilians and over 3,500 armed forces personnel in Pakistan. Additionally, as Pakistan begins the process of transitioning to a democratic system, the country needs to urgently strengthen the narrative of social inclusion. Finally, Pakistan is a nuclear-armed nation and its stability, pluralist and democratic society is important for global security.

Recommendations arising from WRN's community conversations and the secondary data on Ahmadi community generally and Ahmadi women particularly relate to:

- Educating Pakistani children, youth and religious clergy on social inclusion
- Religious freedom and repeal of the 'blasphemy laws'
- Safety and security of life and property
- Training of the law enforcement agencies
- Economic assistance programs and training to Ahmadi families
- Capacity building, empowerment and leadership training for women

Recommendations

- **Educate Pakistani children, youth and religious clergy on social inclusion**

Pakistan's Constitution and international commitments make it binding for the State to ensure the peace and security of its citizens. For this to happen, the country's leadership must effectively mobilize and educate its people especially children and youth – that forms nearly 63 % population of Pakistan -- and religious clergy, to engage them in constructive social activism, at schools and communities. Hate-literature, materials and speeches (banners, stickers, graffiti, speeches from mosque pulpits and at public gatherings) targeting different communities, particularly Ahmadis, feed the extremist narrative and must be tackled on a war-footing by Pakistan's political and military leadership. The recommendations of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in its Annual Report¹¹ are worth following up. They include encouraging Pakistan to re-establish the Federal Ministry for Interfaith Harmony, include discussions on religious tolerance in U.S.-Pakistan dialogues and summits, and encourage national textbook and curricula standards that actively promote tolerance towards all religions.

¹¹ 'Pakistan', US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2014
<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Pakistan%202014.pdf> [accessed Feb 27, 2015]

- **Curb the freedom to persecute and allow religious freedom**

Extremist groups are free to persecute different communities and individuals, not only curbing their religious freedoms but also subjecting them to violence. Pakistan's non-mainstream communities including Hindus, Christians, Shias and Ahmadis live in a state of fear. Pakistan's Constitution permits religious freedom but the amendments by a military dictator curbed these freedoms. Extremism on the one hand and the state of Pakistan's failure to protect and promote the provisions of religious freedoms on the other hand undermines the overall social environment, particularly for Ahmadis. Ahmadis often find it unsafe to reveal their identity in places where they don't have a support network. The international community can play a role in encouraging Pakistan to exercise its writ and reconsider repealing sanctions on religious freedoms and misuse of the "blasphemy" laws, the repeal of which human rights activists have long been calling for. In the meantime, at least the laws against false accusations of 'blasphemy' should be invoked in order to deter the misuse of these laws. Pakistan must also implement existing laws against hate-speech and take action against those who take out rallies to support murderers and instigate violence from the pulpit, or through media and street power. There is a need to follow up on the USCIRF recommendations¹² for Pakistan to rescind the laws that criminalize Ahmadis' practicing their faith and violates their right to freedom of religion guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

- **Safety and security of life and property of the Ahmadiyya community**

It is clear from numerous findings and reports that while there is general insecurity of life and property in Pakistan, the Ahmadiyya community is particularly vulnerable to the lawlessness, and further faces the desecration of its worship places and graveyards. Pakistan must prosecute those involved in criminal acts whether committed in the name of religion or honour or any pretext, and ensure that those found guilty are brought to justice. Those who aid and abet the perpetrators or allow them to carry out their criminal actions are complicit in the act. Making their identities public and prosecuting them under existing laws may help in this regard. There is hardly any evidence of compensation to the families of those killed by criminals acting in the name of religion. The Pakistani state needs to evolve a mechanism for immediate and adequate compensation of those who lose their family members and/or lose property to such violence.

- **Training of the law enforcement agencies**

In far too many cases police are helpless bystanders in the face of mob violence. There are many factors behind this inaction including lack of leadership, equipment, and/or training to defuse a volatile situation. Fear of the mob and lack of sensitivity towards the life and property of religious minorities may also play a role. Pakistan's law enforcement agencies need training to enable them to deal effectively and empathically with vulnerable communities, whether it is women or religious minorities. Training programs on human rights and minorities rights for the police and other law enforcement agencies need to be carried out on a large-scale basis, building on a few such efforts that have been attempted.

¹² USCIRF 2014; Ibid

- **Assistance and training for Ahmadi families forced to flee or sell their lands or businesses**

Many Ahmadis suffer from loss of livelihood or discrimination at the workplace due to their faith. There is an urgent need for Pakistan to take steps to address this issue so that no one is denied employment, promotion or other facilities due to their faith. Targeted and threatened, Ahmadis are often forced to abandon or sell their businesses or lands at below-market rates and flee to another city or country where they have to start afresh. The Pakistani government must follow such cases of such persecution paying particular attention to motives like land-grabbing or business rivalries and deal with the threats not on a religious basis but through existing laws. Some kind of economic assistance for Ahmadis who are forced to move or start new businesses elsewhere, as well as entrepreneurial training especially for Ahmadi women may go a long way.

- **In-depth Studies and National Database on Ahmadis' Issues**

There is a need for qualitative and quantitative studies on various aspects of Pakistani society, including gendered perspectives in order to make better and more comprehensive policies, analysis and program recommendations. Such a study on the Ahmadi community would also be useful, particularly including the views and situation of Ahmadi women.

- **Capacity building, empowerment and leadership training for women**

Build a support network for women – leadership training, empowerment, capacity building – training in dealing with local administration, filing police reports, working to enforce basic human rights laws in Pakistan.

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