

In Pakistan, Those Dangerous Ahmadis

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Ahmadis are a small sect – some 10-20 million people out of 1.6 billion Muslims – whom many Muslims do not consider to be Muslims at all, and persecute them or, as sometimes happens in Pakistan and Indonesia, even murder them. The Ahmadis believe that a 19th century Muslim, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, and not Muhammad, was the last prophet chosen by Allah. They consider themselves to be Muslims, but almost all other Muslims disagree, and talk of them as “heretical” Muslims, or still worse, as not being real Muslims at all. An amendment to the Pakistani Constitution in 1974 proclaims that the Ahmadis are “non-Muslims,” and they are required to identify themselves as such on all official documents, including passports. In 1984, a new law was passed, making it possible to jail Ahmadis for such capital crimes as “**posing as a Muslim**” or “**offending a Muslim’s feelings.**” Ahmadis are

forbidden by law in Pakistan from making the hajj to Mecca. Ahmadi bookstores have been shut down. Ahmadi mosques have been attacked; the last such major attack was in Lahore in 2010 on Muhammad's birthday, when 94 people died and 140 wounded. Apparently the 2000 Sunnis who attacked the mosque believed the Ahmadis were observing the birthday of the Prophet, something they – as “non-Muslims” – had no right to do. On a lesser scale, Ahmadis have also been killed in Indonesia, and Ahmadi mosques sealed.

Muslims in Pakistan have repeatedly described Ahmadis as even [“worse than Infidels.”](#) That is why mobs gather to see justice done against these dangerously camouflaged enemies who look like Muslims, read the same texts as Muslims, claim to be Muslims, and yet cannot possibly be Muslims because they believe that another prophet came after Muhammad.

Even achievements that could bring luster to Pakistan, or to Muslims, are ignored if it means recognizing Ahmadis. The single Pakistani Nobel winner, Dr. Abdus Salam, goes uncelebrated in his own country (save for a single posthumous tribute to him last year in *Dawn*), which he felt compelled to leave in part because of what he endured as an Ahmadi. When, in 2017, an Ahmadi Muslim actor, Mahershala Ali, won an Oscar, becoming the first Muslim to do so, Pakistan's top diplomat at the U.N. Maleeha Lodhi, sent a congratulatory tweet, but she was immediately and furiously attacked because Ali is an Ahmadi, and she had to delete her tweet to demonstrate that she was not in any way endorsing that dangerous thing, an “Ahmadi.” The level of hysteria in Pakistan over Ahmadis and “Qadianism” remains – it seems permanently – high.

Now the Islamabad High Court has instructed the government of Pakistan to supply certain information to the Court, aimed theoretically at all those who convert out of Islam to another faith, but the reports claim that this data is really meant to deal only with those Muslims who become Ahmadis. These are the main provisions of the High Court's request:

First, the government has to hand over to the Pakistani High Court a list of all those who have requested a change of religion from Islam to "Qadianism" (a pejorative term Muslims use for Ahmadiyya Islam, from "Qadian," the birthplace of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad). Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui, of the Islamabad High Court (IHC), has ordered Pakistan's Citizen Authority (NADRA), to compile, and forward to him, a list of such converts.

Second, along with a list of the names of an estimated 10,000 people believed to have requested a change of religion, the Islamabad High Court has also directed the citizen authority to provide their ages, their international travel history, and their parents' names.

This is an attempt to scare people away from converting, or if they have converted, to revert back to mainstream Islam. First, having their names (and addresses) makes it easier for the High Court to institute measures to track their doings, including what schools they attend, what jobs they hold, whether or not they have attempted to pass themselves off as mainstream Muslims (an Ahmadi might well not be hired, or might lose his job, if his new faith were discovered), and whether or not they engage in any form of proselytizing on behalf of "Qadianism."

Asking for their ages might suggest that the anti-Ahmadi government of Pakistan, as represented by the Islamabad High Court, could claim that some converts should be considered to have been too young to have understood the gravity of what they were doing, and the government might attempt, using that excuse, to make them rethink their conversion. Would a 15-year-old have reached a sufficient age to convert? Or a 20-year-old? The government could pass a law – it would hardly surprise if it's already in the works – establishing a minimum age for conversions out of Islam to be judged valid.

The same goes for elderly converts. Would someone who is 75 or

80 be considered in full possession of his faculties, or would the government again focus on the age of the convert, and suggest that such conversion out of Islam could be taken as a possible sign of dementia? After all, if you are a Muslim, you surely think that anyone who converts from Islam may not be in full possession of his faculties.

The information about foreign travel might be of value to elements of the Pakistani government in two ways. First, Ahmadis would be required to report if they went to Saudi Arabia. The converts wouldn't dare to lie about this, given that the Saudis have a record of who comes into their country, which they would no doubt willingly share with their Pakistani friends. So keeping tabs on the foreign travel of the Ahmadi converts is, first of all, a way to make sure they are not making the hajj, which has been forbidden to them. Second, the Pakistani government no doubt deems it useful to know where Ahmadi converts have travelled to, and if, for example, certain countries, or certain cities in those countries, might have an unusually large number of resident Ahmadis. Such information might help the Pakistani government figure out where Ahmadi proselytizers are most busily at work, and where these new Ahmadi converts, on visits, might themselves now be acting as proselytizers, among both non-Muslims and Muslims.

Finally, the Pakistani government (or its agent, the Islamabad High Court) has several reasons for wanting to know the name of the parents of those who have converted from Islam to become Ahmadis. If the government knows the names of those parents, it can hold the parents accountable, and either punish them for "allowing" their children to convert, or threaten to punish them if they cannot persuade their children to "revert" to Islam.

And knowing who the parents of these converts are, the government could punish them for the "sins" of their children – they could lose their jobs, if they work for the government, and would be subject to social ostracism no matter who was

their employer – thereby causing some would-be converts to reconsider.

It is astonishing how much animus and fear is directed at the Ahmadis in Pakistan:

“During the hearing [on measures being considered pertaining to the Ahmadis] before the Islamabad High Court, Hafiz Hassan Madni, a professor at the University of Punjab, Lahore, testified that a person who left Islam for any faith – and particularly for Ahmadism – was “dangerous” and needed to be punished, reports Rabwah [an Ahmadi newspaper]. Madni put it thus: **“Qadianis are more dangerous than infidels. They are neither Muslims nor Christians and in fact, they have covered themselves under Islam.”**

The Ahmadis are more dangerous than Christians and Jews because they outwardly appear to be “Muslims”; they read the same Qur’an and the same Hadith. They are thus seen as liable to confuse or fool or discombobulate many ordinary Muslims, and better able to inveigle him or her into their heretical version of Islam (one so heretical that most Pakistanis insist it should not even be described as a version of Islam) than can the obviously non-Muslim Christians and Jews.

The legal hearing [was prompted by] a petition challenging amendments in Pakistan’s electoral law which give more rights to minority Ahmadis. Earlier the same court barred the NADRA from changing the ‘religion’ column on national identity cards for Muslim citizens.

The petitioner, Maulana Allah Wasaya, has previously asked the government to set up a database of government employees belonging to the Ahmadi faith, according to Dawn.

The Ahmadis are between 0.2 and 2.2% of Pakistan’s population – a minuscule number. They have never attacked anyone, but have frequently been attacked by, even murdered by, mainstream

Muslims. So have their mosques. There were mass anti-Ahmadi riots, and the murders of hundreds of Ahmadis, in Lahore in 1953, 1974, and 1984. Not a week goes by without attacks on, and frequently murders of, Ahmadis somewhere in Pakistan. They have been similarly attacked, sometimes beaten to death, and their mosques sealed, in Indonesia, which in the West is wrongly considered to be a bastion of "moderate" Islam. Even in the U.K., an Ahmadi shopkeeper was killed by a Sunni Muslim who said that the shopkeeper had claimed that he himself was a prophet, and so of course deserved to be stabbed to death. Ahmadis live on the edge everywhere in Pakistan. Yet here is the government of Pakistan, full of fear and fanaticism, itself set on edge because 10,000 people – out of a population of 201 million – chose to become Ahmadis.

The reasons for these particular items of information, I have suggested above, but think it bears repeating, is to reduce the number of such converts. By asking for their names, the government is impliedly threatening, in some as yet not clearly defined way, these converts. The government wants to make sure that none of them tries to pass himself off as a real Muslim; this information helps it keep track, and if need be, to inform others – such as, for example, educational institutions and potential employers – because a good Muslim wouldn't want to inadvertently admit to a college, or to hire as an employee, an Ahmadi convert. Then, the government desires data on the ages of these converts. The government can then determine if among those converts are some who can be deemed to be too young to quite realize what they were doing in converting (including what harm they might be bringing to their family in Pakistan), or too old, and perhaps suffering from dementia. By asking for a list of their foreign travels, the government might be better able to discover where Ahmadi proselytizers living abroad are most active, and to monitor their activities, possibly even send agents to keep tabs on them, or threaten harm to their relatives in Pakistan if they don't desist. The government can also determine if these

Ahmadi converts are making the hajj, despite being forbidden to do so, if it turns out that their reported travel abroad includes Saudi Arabia. Particularly sinister is the collecting of the names of converts' parents, who might either be punished for their child's conversion, or threatened with punishment unless they can persuade that child to revert to Islam.

But what about that verse in the Qur'an where it says "there is no compulsion in religion" (2:256)? It's a favorite verse for Defenders of the Faith. But a moment's thought shows us how little 2:256 really means. For after being conquered by Muslims, the only options offered to subjugated Infidels are death, or conversion to Islam, or accepting the permanent status of dhimmi, subject to a host of onerous conditions, including payment of the Jizyah, a "tax" non-Muslims pay to prevent being attacked. How many tens of millions of Infidels over the past 1400 years have converted to Islam not out of belief, but out of a desire to avoid having to endure life as a dhimmi? Surely that is a form of "compulsion."

In any case, 2:256 dates from very early in Muhammad's Medina period, and has been "abrogated" by later verses, including Quran 2:106 and 16:101.

And Muhammad was very clear about what should happen to apostates: "The Prophet said, 'If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him.'" – Sahih al-Bukhari, 4:52:260.

In Pakistan today, the government is not killing those who have converted to Ahmadiyya Islam. For that, at least, one can be thankful. But that has not prevented Muslim vigilantes from carrying out rough justice (and they are seldom punished for doing so) by killing Ahmadis.

Islam is a brittle faith. It cannot stand to be challenged from within. It regards converts as being traitors, defectors from the Army of Islam. That is why converts out of Islam –

apostates – can be severely punished or killed. Most dangerous of all those apostates are those who become Ahmadis, for Ahmadiyya Islam can be confusing to mainstream Muslims. That is why, right now in Pakistan, the most important story is not about the state of the economy, or the general election coming up this July, or the gas pipeline that is being built to run from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan to Pakistan and then to India, or what global warming means for the country's stability. Nor is it about the Taliban's activities in challenging the state. No: the main story is about gathering data on 10,000 Ahmadi converts, scarcely visible, but seemingly an endless threat, in a country of 201 million.

First published in