

THE ROCK OF FAITH

■ BY MANAN AHMED ASIF

What we often report is that it was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who passed a constitutional amendment on September 7, 1974 to declare Ahmadis non-Muslims. What we frequently state is that it was his nemesis Ziaul Haq who promulgated Ordinance XX which prohibits those already declared as non-Muslims from practising Islam. We trot out these constitutional and legal provisions sometimes to explain and at other times to justify – even condone – the unending physical and psychological violence inflicted upon the Ahmadi community in Pakistan. Such as when a mob burned down Ahmadi houses and historical sites in Sialkot on May 23, 2018. Such as when Atif R Mian, an economist at the Princeton University, had to resign on September 7, 2018 from the newly elected government's Economic Advisory Council.

Those who support the exclusion of Ahmadis from public life in Pakistan argue that this exclusion is well-deserved because the Ahmadi community violates the Constitution of the Islamic Republic by insisting on being Muslim. (They conveniently ignore the fact that all citizens do not have to agree with all the provisions of a constitution all the time. Otherwise, any demand for a constitutional amendment would be illegitimate.) Even those who support civic liberties for Ahmadis do so only after qualifying their statements with Ahmadi-specific legal and constitutional provisions.

That the problems we have with Ahmadis all stem from the law and the Constitution is a soft-bellied lie of our prejudiced present and fallacious history. The current status of Ahmadis does not have its origin in 1974.

We seldom pause to remember how anti-Ahmadi laws came about and how the movement against them originated. We assume that these things happened as a logical next step after the creation of Pakistan as a Muslim state, making it an imperative to define and determine who was a Muslim – and, thus, a legitimate citizen of the new state – and who was not.

We need to remind ourselves that the discrimination that Muslims display towards Ahmadis did not suddenly develop after the creation of Pakistan. In fact, Majlis-e-Ahrarul Islam – one of the earliest

instigators of an anti-Ahmadi movement – originated in British-ruled India. As early as 1935, it made a call for Ahmadis to be excommunicated from Islam and expelled from government offices. One key target of its ire was Chaudhry Zafarullah Khan, a leading Ahmadi jurist at the time.

We also need to remind ourselves that there have been many fierce champions of an anti-Ahmadi cause much before Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan's chief Khadim Hussain Rizvi came to promote it last year. One of the most prominent among them was one Agha Shorish Kashmiri, a poet, reporter, author and publisher. He did much, perhaps the most, to turn Pakistan's Urdu-reading middle class – mainly in Lahore and Karachi – against Ahmadis.

Chatan, in the meanwhile, was aggressively mobilising public opinion against Ahmadis, labelling the agitation against them as Tehreek-e-Raast Iqdaam (Righteous Step Movement).

Born in Amritsar in 1917, Kashmiri joined the Majlis-e-Ahrarul Islam in the mid-1930s and spent more than five years in jail under the Defence of India Act in the late 1930s and the early 1940s for his anti-Ahmadi activities. In 1944, Kashmiri moved to Lahore and began his career as a journalist. On January 1, 1949, he launched a colour weekly from the same city. It was called *Chatan* ('rock' in English).

Kashmiri imagined the magazine as one dedicated to the cause of Islam. It deployed Allama Muhammad Iqbal's poetry and Islamic history as twin poles to emphasise the finality of the Prophet of Islam (may peace be upon him) as the last messenger of God. It had a couplet from a poem by Iqbal as its motto (which was printed on the cover of its every issue): *Agarche buth hain jamaat ki aasteenon main/mujhe hai hukm-e-azaan la ilah-a-illallah (though idols are hidden in the sleeves of those standing for prayer/I am commanded to proclaim there is no God but Allah).*

Inspired by *Zamindar*, a Lahore-based Urdu newspaper that had played a major role in mobilising Punjabi Muslims along religious lines before 1947, *Chatan* was priced low so as to maximise its outreach. For the first few years, an issue cost a couple of annas (12 paise); by 1965, it cost 37 paise; by 1980, its price rose to three rupees.

Chatan argued that, instead of being a religious group, Ahmadis were a political community that had conspired

to create Pakistan out of India in order to have its own independent state which, it claimed, was going to be set up in Kashmir. This claim was the reason why Kashmiri raised his voice against Chaudhry Zafarullah Khan's appointment as Pakistan's foreign minister, arguing that, being an Ahmadi, he would misuse the post to help his own community achieve its political objectives.

Chatan also published reports that claimed Ahmadis were poisoning the Pakistani Army and the civil bureaucracy with their propaganda. Soon, the magazine started organising public meetings to demand Chaudhry Zafarullah Khan's ouster from the government. These meetings featured such religious figures as Maulana Abul A'la Maududi, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, and Maulana Abu'l Hasan Nadwi, an eminent scholar.

Thus originated the earliest political movement in Pakistan — with the objective to demonise, expel and even discard the Ahmadi community. It is a movement that has been with us since 1947 – since the Kashmir issue began – and Jinnah appointed Zafarullah Khan as Pakistan's foreign minister.

Maududi and Nadwi subsequently wrote two books, *Qadiani Masla* (The Qadiani Problem) and *Qadianiat: Islam aur Nabuwwat-e-Muhammadi kay khilaf aik baghawwat* (Qadiani Movement: A rebellion against Islam and Prophet Muhammad), respectively. The books were published in March 1953.

Chatan, in the meanwhile, was aggressively mobilising public opinion against Ahmadis, labelling the agitation against them as Tehreek-e-Raast Iqdaam (Righteous Step Movement). Yet the agitation was seen by many in the country merely as an "Ahrar-Ahmadi Controversy" — at least this is how Justice Muhammad Munir framed it in his inquiry report on the anti-Ahmadi pogroms of 1953.

Kashmiri made a fresh bid at fanning anti-Ahmadi hatred in the mid-1960s. He began to argue that the Ahmadis were, in fact, Zionists. By using terms such as Mirza'il (an amalgamation of Israel and Mirza, the title of the Ahmadi community's founding leader Mirza Ghulam Ahmad) and Ajami Israel (Eastern Israel), Kashmiri relied heavily on anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish notions to associate Ahmadis with a Zionist conspiracy to dominate the whole world. *Chatan*'s earlier insistence on Ahmadis being a political community was now smeared with an anti-Semitic internationalism.

The stories published in *Chatan* included lists of Ahmadi civil servants, bureaucrats and businessmen — 'secretive', 'conspiratorial' Ahmadis who were planning to bring about the demise of Pakistan. Ayub Khan's dictatorial regime, that was generally soft towards the magazine, started censoring its contents in 1967. Kashmiri published the censorship order on his magazine's cover on August 1, 1967. He was also jailed during this period for inciting violence.

After 1971, *Chatan* blamed the creation of Bangladesh on Ahmadi 'conspiracies'. It portrayed Mirza Muzaffar Ahmad, President Yahya Khan's economic advisor, as the source of grievances that East Pakistanis had developed against West Pakistan. On October 18, 1972, the magazine published a cover story that 'exposed' India's plans to divide Pakistan into many states. Along with Bangladesh, these included Sindhudesh, Khalistan and an Ahmadi state in Balochistan.

During these years, *Chatan* turned to lobbying Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who had taken over power from Yahya Khan and who had already received a glowing profile in the magazine's December 4, 1967 issue for publicly declaring that Ahmadi were non-Muslims. Though the government briefly jailed Kashmiri in August 1972 for provoking anti-Ahmadi violence, his agenda was clearly ascendant. By then the title of *Mujahid-e-Khatm-e Nabuwwat* (the soldier of the finality of prophethood) was conferred upon him by his supporters.

Kashmiri died in 1975 but *Chatan* did not stop its anti-Ahmadi campaign. It published cover story after cover story 'exposing' the presence of Ahmadi spies in the government as well as an Ahmadi 'conspiracy' to control the whole world in collaboration with Jews. Its July 12, 1982 issue carried a cover photo of Zia along with a self-explanatory caption: "Qadiani Activities and the Role of the President". Inside the magazine was the coverage of an International Khatm-e Nabuwwat Conference in London and an article 'exposing' an Ahmadi 'conspiracy' against Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. The article included a quote from Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, who is credited with being the founder of that programme, to substantiate its claims.

Chatan, however, is just one of the many streams that contribute to the river of hatred that separates Ahmadis from Muslims in today's Pakistan. The magazine's long run – that ended in 1989 when it ceased publication – helps us see the role of popular media in creating a public opinion in which Ahmadis have been reduced to nothing but conspirators, sub-citizens and even sub-humans.

These are the foundations of our hatred and communal discrimination that undergird our contemporary perceptions of the Ahmadi community — not any law or a constitutional amendment. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY SOONHAL KHAN