

Anti-Ahmadism in India

Indians, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, must learn from the sectarian developments in Pakistan, and make every effort to stop any expression of sectarian prejudice in public contexts.

A few days back a small headline in the Urdu daily *Munsif* (Hyderabad) caught my eye: “The Worst Attempt at the State Level to Declare the Qadianis Muslim.” The text went on to report on what the dignitaries of an organization called Majlis-i-Khatm-i-Nabuwwat Trust, Andhra Pradesh had said in the way of denouncing the Mayawati government in Uttar Pradesh. However, only one sentence in the report running to 18 lines communicated any sense of what the alleged “attempt and conspiracy” was: “In the textbooks for high schools the Qadiani sect has been included in the account of the many sects among the Muslims.” Then I received a mailing that brought to my attention a long note by Sultan Shahin entitled “Muslim Juhala threaten Mayawati government over Ahmadiya issue.” (<http://www.newageislam.com/NewAgeIslamArticleDetail.aspx?ArticleID=3351>) It included the full text of an item published in *Hamara Samaj* (New Delhi; 25 August 2010) that provided the information I needed:

It is to be noted that on page 30 of *Samajik Vigyan* of Class X, in the chapter titled “Ahamdiyya Andolan”, the sect has been linked to Muslims terming it as a reformist sect. Not only that, on page 29, in the essay titled “Muslim Andolan” an attempt has been made to present Muslims as divided into various sects as Wahabi Andolan(Movement), Deobandi Andolan and Aligarh Andolan. It is to be noted that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was born in mouza Qadian in Gurdaspur district of Punjab (India) in 1839. He claimed to be a prophet in 1899 and died in 1908.

Clearly, the only questionable feature in the report is the use of “Andolan” for “sect.”

The report in *Hamara Samaj* included denunciations from the President of Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind, Qari Syed Md Usman Mansurpuri, the General Secretary of All India Muslim Personal Law Board, Maulana Nizamuddin, the General Secretary of the All India Majlis-e-Mashawarat , Maulana Umeduzzaman Kairanvi, the Naib Imam of the Shia Jama Masjid, Delhi, and the Principal of Jamiat-al-Shaheed, Maulana Muhsin Taqvi (sic), and a few other similar notables. Most denunciations were of the same nature as that coming from Maulana Abdul Khaliq Sambhali of Darul Ulum Deoband, who reportedly said, “The issue was an important religious one of the Muslims and no complacency would be tolerated over it.” The Maulana demanded that the UP government remove the reference in the book and “cleansed the book (committee) of Muslims who are enemies of Islam in the disguise of Muslims.” But the General Secretary of the Jama’at-i-Islami (Hind), Mujtaba Faruque, went many steps further in his reasoning. According the report in *Hamara Samaj*, he argued: “the

Qadiani sect is in fact a product of the Jews and the Christians. That the centre of the Ahmadiyyas is in Britain is clear testimony to this. He said that the UP government should realize that it was not wise to hurt the Muslims. He warned that they would be compelled to launch a movement if the essay was not expunged immediately.”

Apparently Mr. Mujtaba Faruque does not know or remember that Maulana Maududi sent his son to study and live in that most nefarious of the lands of the Christians and the Jews, namely the United States, and eventually came there himself for medical treatment that, sadly, did not suffice. I hope someone in the Minorities Commission would take notice of his inflammatory statement against all Jews and Christians.

Coming to the other notables “Our Lords”—that is what “Maulana” literally means—I would first like to request them to give up that title. I find it disturbing that they allow people to use for them the title that really should be used exclusively for the Prophet Muhammad. They themselves use the expression “Sayyadna wa Maulana Muhammadin” many times in the prayers every day to refer to him. Don’t they think it is disrespectful that they should also be called ‘Maulana’? After all the common expression till the late 19th century was “Maulavi” (“My Lord”), which was considered good enough for people far more learned and deserving.

Next I would like to draw their attention to two books. The first is the autobiography of Maulavi Abdul Majid Dariabadi, whose name I am sure they all know and revere. As is well known to his admirers, he went through a long period of ten years when he rejected all religions and was a votary of pure reason. Eventually he regained his faith in religion in general and Islam in particular, some might say with a vengeance. Be that as it may, he gives a vivid and honest account of those states of mind in the book *Apbiti*. According to him his faith in religion returned with his readings in Buddhist and Hindu texts, including the *Bhagawad Gita*, and his return to Islam was very much facilitated by his chance discovery of the English translation of the Qur’an by “Muhammad Ali Lahori Ahmadi (in common parlance Qadiani).” (That was, incidentally, the first English translation by any Muslim.) This is what he wrote:

I impatiently pulled it out from the cabinet and began to read, and, God be praised, the more I read the more my faith increased ... May Allah give that Muhammad Ali a place in Paradise [*karwaT karwaT jannat de*]. What he believed about the Mirza [Ghulam Ahmad] Sahib [the founder of the sect] is of no concern to me. Was he right or was he wrong, I don’t care. I can’t help but tell my personal experience, for it was he who hammered in the final nail into the coffin of my disbelief and rejection (*kufr wa irtidad*).” (*Apbiti*, Lucknow, 1978, p. 254.)

Surely, not one of the worthies mentioned above can claim to have served Islam similarly.

The other book is a classic, a one-of-its-kind intellectual history of Islam in South Asia. It is in three chronologically arranged volumes, the last of which, *Mauj-i-Kausar*, deals with the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. The author, Shaikh

Muhammad Ikram, was a scholar and Pakistani civil servant who also published very important books on Ghalib and Shibli Nu'mani. The first two volumes of the history were probably published in 1937; the final third was published either in 1947 or soon after. The three volumes went through two or three revisions and repeated printings in both India and Pakistan. The copy I have is the expanded and revised edition of 1962. It consists of six sections, one of which is titled "Modern Scholastic Theology" (*Jadid 'Ilm-al-Kalam*). It lists the following eight subsections: "Sir Syed; Maulavi Charagh Ali; Syed Amir Ali; Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and the Qadiani Jama'at; Ahmadiya Jama'at of Lahore; Muslim Missionaries; Nadwat-al-'Ulama; and Deoband." In other words, a highly recognized Muslim scholar of Pakistan, no less, felt no hesitation in according the Ahmadis of both kinds a place in the intellectual history of South Asian Muslims, despite his equally immediate critique of some of the "personal" claims made by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. The so-called "Maulanas" fail to understand that a school textbook is neither a missionary tract nor a site to declare someone *kafir*, that even a heretic Muslim remains a part of the history of Muslims—he does not become a part of some other religious history—and that it is not the state's job to take sides in sectarian matters. They claim that "all" Muslims are united in considering the Ahmadis beyond the pale of Islam, but then many of the same Muslims turn around and feel no hesitation in hurling accusations of heresy against each other, to the extent of any degree of violence. Just look at what has been happening for years in Pakistan.

It should be noted that extreme sectarianism and religious persecution of minorities in Pakistan began with the anti-Ahmadi movement led by Abul Ala Maududi and others during the regime of the army dictator, Gen. Ayub Khan, but gained enormous power only after the "socialist" Z. A. Bhutto, conceded the demand in a desperate attempt to save his political fortune. Gen. Zia-ul-Haq only worsened the situation with his draconian laws. He also fully exploited the sectarian passions of the mullahs and maulanas to keep the ordinary Pakistani beguiled while expanding the army's control in every sector of Pakistan's economy. What began as a campaign against the Ahmadis has now turned into a raging battle between most of the Muslims sects in Pakistan, who come together only when they wish to beat up on some hapless Hindu, Sikh, or Christian. Then they go back to bashing each other, not sparing even the sacred precincts of mosques and Sufi shrines. That the same scenario of sectarian violence has not played out in India is not due to any lack of attempt on the part of some of the so-called leaders. Read some of the writings of Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi and Manzur Nu'mani and the Urdu journals and pamphlets put out by various Muslims organizations, go to the cassette shops in Basti Nizamuddin and similar places, or flip through the pages of most Urdu dailies and you will easily find enough to make you worried about the future of Indian Islam at the hands of these self-appointed and mutually perpetuating "Muslim leaders." You will find at the very least a shameless coarseness of feeling and language that, in Pakistan, eventually led to a state where journalists covering the recent massacre of Ahmadis in a mosque in Lahore declined to drink the tea that was offered by the victims' relatives. The latest manifestation of that same erosion of basic human feelings in the cause of sectarianism was reported in the *Daily Times* (Lahore) of August 21:

LAHORE: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has expressed serious concern over the murder of two Ahmadi in the last three days and over reports of denial of shelter to the members of the Ahmadi community in southern Punjab.

In a statement issued on Friday, the HRCP said, "The unrelenting target killings of members of the Ahmadi community by extremists is a poor reflection on the state's obligation to protect the lives of all subjects. This week, the murder of an Ahmadi in Sanghar and another, a doctor, in Karachi only highlights the impunity the perpetrators of such heinous crimes enjoy. Only bringing the culprits to justice would bring an end to these senseless killings." The HRCP is also shocked by reports that government officials have refused to provide shelter to around 500 Ahmadi families from Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur districts.

That a religious majority might take to persecuting a religious minority is a possibility that everyone unhesitatingly understands. What is not so readily understood is that a minority itself often consists of one or two prominent collectives plus several smaller ones, and that the "majority" within a minority can persecute the smaller groups under the same psychological compulsions of authority and control that it accuses the national majority of displaying against it.¹ That is where state institutions must intervene, and play their critical role of both vigilance and diligence in providing physical, social, and economic security to all citizens of the country, regardless of the peculiarities or even idiosyncrasies of their beliefs. I hope Ms Mayawati's government stands firm in this matter. School textbooks are not meant to teach what religion or sect is "true." Their only purpose is to make the students a little bit knowledgeable about some subject in a fair and unbiased manner. People in India, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, must learn from the sectarian developments in Pakistan, and make every effort to nip in the bud any expression of sectarian prejudice in public contexts.

¹ See my essay, "The Second Tyranny of Religious Majorities," at <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00litlinks/naim/ambiguities/16secondtyranny.html>