

Ahmadis in Pakistan's electoral paradigm

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“We should begin to work in that spirit and in course of time all these angularities of the majority and minority communities, the Hindu community and the Muslim community, because even as regards Muslims you have Pathans, Punjabis, Shias, Sunnis and so on, and among the Hindus you have Brahmins, Vaishnavas, Khattris, also Bengalis, Madrasis and so on, will vanish... nobody could have conquered you, and even if it had happened, nobody could have continued its hold on you or any length of time.”
(Mohammad Ali Jinnah, 11 August 1947)

The modern state system does not support any official religion in an independent state. Essentially, the religious beliefs and faith are the concern of citizens while the state is the custodian of their beliefs and devotions. Religion-dominated states are commonly bifurcated and less integrated. Historically, the religion-based ideology has increased the woes of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The issues of minorities, sectarian victimisation and the violation of basic human rights are massive.

A true democracy empowers citizens and creates the undeviating association among the ruled and ruler by representing the majority rule. But it also defies and binds the majority not to devastate the minority or tiny communities in a socio-political environment. Majority rule sometimes materialises as a gigantic deficiency of democracy and increases the agonies of minority groups.

Pakistan is suffering from the fanatic factions of ignorant *Mullahs*. The political elite and these religious freelancers are exploiting the nation in the name of so-called democracy and self-explained version of religion to fulfil their own agendas. Demonstrating street power provoking religious sentiments in religious assemblages, religion-based parties like Jamat-i-Islami (JI), Jamiat-i-Ulema Islam (JUI), Sunni Tehreek and Tahreek-i-Labbaik Ya Rasulullah (TLYR) etc. are fostering the political regimes to implement their radicalised agendas in the society to create supremacy and influence over the socio-political set up of the country.

Ahmadis are the most agonised community of Pakistan in this regard. State-led exploitation is swelling their hitches and torments. Ahmadiyya population in Pakistan is reduced to approximately three to five hundred thousand. In 1974, in Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's regime, the parliament declared them non-Muslims in the geographical boundaries of Pakistan. Later, Gen Zia ul Haq executed the Anti-Ahmadiyya Ordinance No XX of 1984. He implemented its strict clauses to contain and corner the Ahmadis in

Pakistan. Ironically, Ahmadis are non-Muslims only in the geographical boundaries of Pakistan while considered Muslims in rest of the World.

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Furthermore, in 1985, Gen Zia replaced the joint electorate system with the separate electorate, which further augmented the agonies of Ahmadis. Because of separate electorate system, Ahmadis have to contest the elections as a non-Muslim minority, which is not acceptable to Ahmadis. It seemed a tactic of Zia to kick the Ahmadis out of the electoral process. Therefore, Ahmadis are in a continuous boycott of elections of both national and provincial assemblies.

Since 1985, the voter lists are prepared separately, comprising different religious clutches. This punitive step is responsible for the bifurcation in the society, which is entirely against the Jinnah's slogan of 'unity, faith and discipline'.

General Pervez Musharraf initiated some changes but could not succeed to replace the system of the separate electorate with the joint electorate because of the massive pressure from the *Mullahs*. Even later, in reference of 2008 elections, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in a letter No F.1 (6) 2001-cord dated 17 January 2007, clarified that "the competent authority has been pleased to decide that separate supplementary lists of draft electoral rolls for Ahmadis/Qadianis for the electoral areas concerned, wherever they are registered, may be prepared and published...". Nevertheless, the compilation of these lists is entirely against the demands of Ahmadiyya Muslims.

Moreover, the provisions of 7B and 7C of the Conduct of General Elections, Chief Executive Order No. 7 of 2002 (as amended by C. E. Order No. 15) are now the part of Election Act of 2017. On the other hand, the PML-N's changes in the Election Act 2017 were also professed as an Ahmadiyya conspiracy by the radical stratum. This further instigated the general socio-political and communal environment, hatred and exploitation against the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan.

The number of Ahmadi voters in Pakistan in 2013 was about 115,966, but in 2018, this increased and reached approximately 167,505. Ahmadis have two reserved seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan but have no representation because of the boycott. The Lahori Ahmadis, a very small sub-group, has the false representation of Ahmadis in National Assembly without appropriate Ahmadiyya support.

In this critical and hateful environment, Ahmadis couldn't participate in the elections of 2008 and 2013. Even now in 2018 general elections, the circumstances have not changed. The separate electorate, Ahmadiyya non-Muslim status and separate voter lists for Ahmadis still exist. The state policy of basic human rights denial for Ahmadis is still in practice.

This manipulative situation of Ahmadis violates the Article 21 of the UN Human Rights Charter 1948. Article 21 provides the safeguard to the process of genuinely, free and fair environment to elect the representatives under "free voting procedures". Furthermore, this matter is in contradiction to the spirit of



justice and articles 3, 4, 36 and 37 of the Constitution of 1973.

Weak political status and critical social and communal conditions of Ahmadis amplify their miseries in Pakistan. They have always remained loyal and sincere with the state and the nation of Pakistan. State-supported discrimination of Ahmadis is ultimately the support of non-state factors. No Ahmadi has ever been implicated in any anti-state or terrorist activity. Their participation in the socio-political structure of Pakistan can make Pakistan progressive and prosperous for the reason that discrimination is not the solution to any communal issue.

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