The Ahmadiyya question, the response of Muslim Scholars, and the (im)possibility of religious co-existence in Contemporary Islamic Thought

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I) Introduction

Liberty has become one of the most important determinants of the legitimacy and universality of ideas, practices, beliefs, ideologies, principles, and systems. It has emerged as the defining value with which the contemporary systems of thought ideally and principally like to define themselves. Far from being marked by individualism to which the contemporary systems of thought are committed, Islam as a religion is generally believed to be noncommittal to individual freedom. In the contemporary systems of thought, the demands for recognition of religious and social minorities are accepted with much alacrity. On the other hand, Islam as a religion is assumed to be inherently hostile to the religious minorities and their treatment as ‘second class’ citizens has in itself emerged as a paradigm through which many scathing attacks have been made on Islam and in reference considered anti-minority religion. Under these circumstances, it becomes essential to ask certain questions: Is there any possibility of religious freedom in Islamic societies? Is there a possibility of an Islamic society being compatible with the idea of individual liberty? Does the contemporary Islamic thought possess the interpretative frameworks for pluralism so that the dissenting, the heterodox, the marginal and the minorities enjoy proper rights, freedoms and protection? The scenario of the rights and freedoms in many (if not all) Muslim majority countries (like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran etc.) provides one ample reason to ask these questions.

In many Muslim majority countries the Ahmadiyya community faces discrimination on the basis of its religious beliefs and is amongst the most persecuted and discriminated religious communities in Indian Sub-continent. The community (including children) not only faces

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continuous othering, social boycott, indignities and humiliation in everyday social engagements but also persistent threats of violence. The normatively sanctioned othering and discrimination not only evokes intolerance but justifies violence as well.

In this backdrop, present paper is an attempt to use ‘Ahmadiyya question’ as a prism to study the problems raised above. In doing so, the paper does not narrate the history of the Ahmadiyya community or document the instances of their persecution. The purpose is neither to go into theological nitty-gritty’s of the Ahmadiyya beliefs nor to interrogate whether they can be regarded as Muslims or not. The purpose instead is to find out the possibility/impossibility of religious co-existence in contemporary Islamic world (focusing more on Muslim Majority countries like Pakistan) and Ahmadiyya question constitutes the lens through which we propose to survey the landscape of modern Islamic thought on religious diversity and coexistence. In order to do so the paper analyses and compares the opinions of scholars across different doctrinal orientations in Sunni Islam towards the Ahmadi’s.

Section II provides a brief historic profile of Ahmadi’s. Section III lays out the map of different doctrinal orientations that might be broadly referred to as “Traditionalist” and illustrates opinions of prominent scholars of these orientations towards Ahmadiyya. Section IV and V looks into the outlook of prominent Islamists and Islamic modernists/moderates towards the Ahmadiyya community respectively. Section VI provides the concluding remarks of the paper.

II) Ahmadiyyat: A brief profile

Ahmadiyat is one of the most controversial religious movements in contemporary Islam. This controversy stems from different spiritual claims of the movement’s founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (Hereafter MGA), who also rejected the notion of jihad for a more quietist but strongly proselytizing practice of Islam (Campo, 2009, p.23). However, the contestations within Ahmediyya’s over the claims of the founder resulted into the division of the sect into two. The larger amongst the two sects, pejoratively referred to by opponents as
Qadianis believe that MGA was a prophet. The other group Lahori’s views MGA only as a reformer not a prophet. Irrespective of this theological divergence between them, the Muslim mainstream contends that these beliefs present a challenge to Islam as they defy the finality of the prophet-hood of Muhammad and regard both the groups as almost equally unacceptable (Campo, 2009, p.23-24; Zaman, 2018, p. 166). They face vehement opposition and persecution in many Muslim majority countries of South Asia and Southeast Asia like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Indonesia etc. In Pakistan they came to be formally excluded from the Muslim community and were declared non-Muslims through an amendment to the constitution in 1974 and a decade later in 1984, Zia-ul-Haq issued a presidential ordinance that made it a criminal offense for the Ahmadis to perform the Muslim call to prayer (azan), to describe their places of worship as mosque (Masjids), to ‘pose’ as Muslims or to employ terms commonly used for the early caliphs and for the companions (Sahaba) of the prophet Muhammad to refer to MGA or his associates, on the basis that such acts/usage outraged the religious feelings of Muslims (Ispahani, 2017, p. 120; Zaman, 2018, p. 177).

III) Different orientations of contemporary Sunni Islamic thought and the Ahmadiyya question

We begin with the orientation that might be broadly referred to as ‘Traditionalist’, represented by the Ulama- the religious scholars who have long seen themselves as preservators and transmitters of religious knowledge and the associated guidance of people in its light. Though these orientations are united in their reverence for the Prophet and the foundational texts, but their interpretations differ markedly.

Deobandi School

One of the most prominent orientations’ of South Asian Sunni Islam came to be associated with a madrassa established in 1867 in the north Indian town of Deoband and has since been referred as Deobandi school. The founders of this school were guided by the conviction that the beliefs and practices of Muslims in South Asia had to be refined in light of the foundational Islamic texts and fundamentals. The Ulama at this seminary were trained to

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3 With reference to the birth place of MGA, Qadian
4The schema of the different doctrinal orientations has been adopted from Zaman (2012,2018)
provide guidance to the layman in all aspects of life, serve their spiritual needs and inculcate proper Islamic values among them, and at the same time work to continue long standing traditions of Islamic scholarship in general and Hanafi school of Sunni law in particular (Alam, 2011; Martin, 2004; Zaman, 2012). Deoband is amongst the major religious authorities of South Asia in its ability to shape the faith and practice of South Asian Muslims on perceptibly religious grounds. Metcalf (1982 c.f. Alam, 2008) argues that Deoband was central in the articulation of Indian Muslim identity.

The people associated with this school proudly claim that it has been at the forefront of rejecting the “heretical” beliefs of different sects like Ahmadiyya. The course for Aliyya (Bachelors) degree prescribed by Deoband includes five books refuting Ahmadi belief (Rahman, 2008). Deobandi’s not only consider Ahmadiyya’s beliefs as heretical but also legitimize social and economic boycott against them, ‘for they betray and deceive Muslims by acting and behaving as Muslims’.

Many scholars belonging to Deobandi school of thought have been vocal against Ahmadis. However, Anwar Shah Kashmiri (d. 1933) is regarded as the most indefatigable polemicist against them (Zaman, 2012, p. 27). He was of the opinion that “Qadiani problem” was one of the major fitnah ever faced by Muslim Ummah. He wrote two well acclaimed polemical treatises against Ahmadi’s, Hayate Ibn Maryam (Kashmiri, 2004a) and Khatimun Nabiyyeen (Kashmiri, 2004b) in Arabic language which were later translated into other languages as well. In 1932 Kashmiri testified in favor of a women plaintiff who wanted her marriage to be dissolved in the consequence of her husband’s conversion to Qadiani faith. The defendant stated in reply that Ahmadi’s are only a sect of Muslims and on the basis of their articles of faith, they cannot be declared infidels (kafir) or apostates (murtad), hence there aren’t any grounds for dissolution of the marriage. In contrast, Kashmiri argued that Ahmadi beliefs constituted apostasy from Islam and hence rendered the wedlock null and void.5

On the other hand, Ashraf Ali Thanwi (d. 1943), another prominent Deobandi jurist and Sufi argued that anyone who denies the essentials of religion cannot be considered as Muslim. To

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5 The court ruled in favor of the plaintiff and regarded the marriage null and void (Mawdudi, 1953/2017). For detailed arguments of different scholars to refute the defendants claims, refer to Bayanati Ulamayi Rabbani bar Irtidadi firqat Qadiani (Deoband: Maktabai Rashid, 1989)
him prophet hood was one of the fundamental and non-negotiable markers of faith. This applied as much to the Hindus, the modernists, the Shi’a, the Sufis and other Muslims as it did to Ahmadi’s. To him it was important to guard the boundaries of the Islam, and anything (like Ahmadiyya belief) that tried to dissolve these boundaries was to be dealt unsympathetically (Daryabadi, 1950, p. 234-236; Zaman, 2008, p. 97).

Similar views and attitudes have replicated and in fact hardened over time so much so that all the revered scholars of Deoband preach boycott of Ahmadi’s. The opinion of Muhammad Taqi Usmani is illustrative of this fact. Immense scholarly output, ability to bridge traditional and modern learning, degrees from Madrassa’s as well as Universities etc. has earned him global standing as an authority of Islamic law. Due to this cosmopolitan appearance it is argued that in contrast to the stereotypical images of Mulla’s, Usmani represents the forward-looking yet authentic face of Contemporary Islam (Zaman, 2018). Irrespective of all this; he holds a very stringent position against Ahmadi’s. When asked if Muslims should attend Ahmadi gatherings:

Islam does not prohibit you from meeting non Muslims…..As you live here (i.e. in west)….most people are not Muslims…you can meet them….but Qadiani’s are different from other non-Muslims. Despite being non-Muslims they claim to be Muslims….therefore policy adopted with them should be different from other non-Muslims. Therefore one should not have close relations with them as far as possible (Usmani, 2018)

**Barelvi School**

The second distinct orientation, which carries a significant following in South Asian Islam is Barelvi school, associated with its founder, Ahmad Riza Khan of Bareilly (a town in Northern India). They are commonly referred to as Barelvis and stand in marked contrast to Deobandis. This school of thought is more notably known for its Sufi tinge and other practices centered around the shrines of sacred men (Awliya). Though Deobandi School has a considerable focus on the Sufi devoutness, and some prominent Sufi figures have even been associated with it, there is a lot of difference in the strands of Sufism followed at Deoband, and the Barelvi School, as the Barelvi school is more entrenched in Sufism. Barelvis pride themselves on their love of prophet as they see him in superhuman terms and allege that other schools view

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6 For more details on the differences between these schools see (Alam, 2008, 2011; Rahman, 2008; Sanyal, 2008)
Him in complete human terms and hence disrespect his prophet hood. For Barelvis, Prophet is not merely a source of normative teachings, but an ever-living person and source of spiritual connect.

With this orientation, A.R Khan provided voluminous intellectual output that included exegesis of Qur’an, books refuting the beliefs of the rival orientations, works on Sufi Islam and countless Fatwas (many of whom declared other orientations as alien to true Islam and their followers as Kafirs). He held very harsh opinion about Ahmadis and issued a fatwa, not only asking Muslims to sever all relations with them but argued that even empathetic approach towards them will make one a kafir.

Mirzais are apostates and infidels. Contacts with Mirzais, be it participating in their happiness or sadness, business relationship, friendship of any type, all are strictly illicit. If any so-called Muslim considers any Qadiani’s to be oppressed because of the boycott, s/he is an infidel himself. {Ahkame Shariah c.f.(n.d., 2017)}

Contemporaneously, no one has been as famous and controversial among the Barelvi scholars as Muhammad Tahirul-Qadri. Born in 1951, Qadri acquired his master’s degree in Islamic studies, Bachelors in Law and later doctorate in Law. He was a close associate of government during the Zia-ul-Haq regime, which focused on Islamization and in fact his doctoral thesis sponsored Islamization at that time and even tried to put forward a spirited validation of Islamic criminal Law. He established an educational and religious movement the Minhaj al-Qur’an in early 1980’s and later adopted dual Pakistani and Canadian citizenship and migrated to Toronto, from where he is heading what now claims to be a global Minhaj al-Qur’an. Importantly, very few scholars enjoy the media presence and dominance as Qadri. Beyond Pakistan, Qadri is often presented as a moderate and progressive Sufi scholar who wrote a 600-page fatwa against terrorism that earned him a worldwide appreciation in which he categorically declared that suicide bombings and attacks against civilians were not only repugnant to Islam but also rendered the perpetrators totally out of the fold of Islam.

He has written and delivered a lot of lectures on the finality of Muhammad’s prophet-hood and on the repudiation of the beliefs of Ahmadiyyah (See for instance Qadri, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). He argues that anyone who believes in prophet-hood after Muhammad cannot be

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7https://www.minhaj.org/english(tid/8718/A-Profile-of-Shaykh-ul-Islam-Dr-Muhammad-Tahir-ul-Qadri.html#1
8https://www.minhaj.org/english(tid/8718/A-Profile-of-Shaykh-ul-Islam-Dr-Muhammad-Tahir-ul-Qadri.html#1
regarded as a Muslim. However as far as the controversial blasphemy laws of Pakistan are concerned, his arguments are contradictory as he makes two different claims on two different occasions. While on the first instance he claims that: “the blasphemy law in any form is not applicable on Jews, Christians, and other non-Muslim minorities. It is applicable on Muslims only” (Ali, 2013). On another occasion, he claims that it was because of his effort that the blasphemy law was enacted, as he claims, “I have always maintained, that whosoever commits blasphemy, whether a Muslim or a non-Muslim, man or a woman- whether S/he be a Muslim, Jew, Christian, Hindu, anyone- whosoever commits blasphemy their punishment is death” (Ali, 2013). In fact on a state television broadcast in January 1986, Qadri had recommended that those disrespectful of the prophet should be killed immediately (Ispahani, 2017, p.129). This change in attitude can be explained as the result of appreciation for the fatwa against terrorism, prompting him to change his opinion on blasphemy law as well.

**Ahl-i-Hadith**

Third important orientation in South Asian Sunni Islam is Ahl-i-Hadith (“People of Hadith” or “People of tradition”) that emerged in second half of the nineteenth century from the teachings of Syed Nazeer Husain (d. 1902) and Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832-1890). It rejected all the practices that lacked scriptural basis in texts i.e. Qur’an and Hadith (Metcalf, 2004). In marked contrast to Deobandi and Barelvi orientations, Ahl-i-Hadith (hereafter AH) reject authority of all schools (*Madh-habs, for example Hanafi*), oppose jurisprudential imitation (*taqlid*) in favor of the derivation of new legal rulings (*ijtihad*), reject Sufism in its entirety and strictly insist on the Qur’an and Hadith as the exclusive and directly accessible sources of guidance (Metcalf, 2004; Zaman, 2002, p.11). Riexinger(2008) and Zaman(2012, p. 40) observe that the South Asian Ahli-Hadith are highly conservative on social issues, and their attempt to challenge the authority of the schools of law by calling for *ijtihad* has rarely been accompanied by any significant rupture in the existing social customs and traditions. While the movement has been compared to Salafist movement in Arab nations and been branded as wahhabist by the opposing Barelwi orientation, it hasn’t shied away in drawing inspiration and financial support from these movements while maintaining its distinctiveness.

Since most of the prominent scholars of AH movement like Muhammad Husain Batalwi, Syed Nazeer Husain, Maulana Sanaullah Amritsari etc. were contemporaries of MGA, they
emerged as major antagonists of Mirza and Ahmadiyya. Batalwi was a close friend of MGA and in fact wrote an approving review of Mirza’s famous book *Baraheen-i-Ahmadiyya*. In a 200-page review, published serially in his magazine *Isha’at-us-sunnah* he argued that the book was a fine contribution to Islamic thought. However, later when Mirza made different claims, the two exchanged *fatwas* (religious verdicts) of apostasy and blasphemy against each other (Khan, 2015). Batalwi was amongst the first to organize a fatwa signed by hundreds of scholars of India declaring Mirza and his followers as disbelievers. Similarly Amritsari (1868-1948) wrote about a dozen books to refute the claims of MGA and Ahmadiyya movement.

The persistent conflict between the scholars of AH and the founder of the Ahmadiyya resulted into many debates and Mubahala’s (Spiritual/Prayer Duels) between them. Interestingly, the literature and followers of both camps declare their side as a victor (Khan, 2015; Memom, 1989; Zaheer, 1972, p. 28).

But the disdain for Ahmadiyya continues in the AH movement and in fact their scholars use the ‘Ahmadiyya question’ to oppose their belligerent ‘others’ (Barelvi’s and Deobandi’s) interpretation of Islam by tracing the roots of this “*fitnah*” in Sufism.9 In the AH scholarship of the recent past no one has been as distinguished as Ehsan Ilahi zaheer in carving a distinct and separate identity for AH through various polemical writings, and speeches against sectarian rivals. He was amongst the first generation AH leaders to be trained and educated in universities of Saudi Arabia, a protégé of Ibn Baz and had very strong links with Saudi religious scholars (Fuchs, 2017; Jaffrelot, 2017). He wrote books against rival orientations like Shia’s, Barelvi’s and Ahmadi’s etc. situating them outside the pale of “true Islam”. He not only characterized these sects with ‘otherness’ but also their followers as a different people, and therefore laid out the roots for sectarian/communal strife.10 In 1972, two years before the passing of the ordinance declaring Ahmadi’s as non-Muslim minority in Pakistan, he published a book “*Mirzaat aur Islam*” which was later translated in English as “*Qadiyaniat: An Analytical Survey*” in which he points out:

> I pray that (my) wail of anguish pierces the hearts of all those who love Islam especially the World Muslim organization (Mecca), the World Islamic Organization (Karachi), all

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9They argue that since these orientations believe in different spiritual claims of Sufism, they cannot criticize Ahmadi’s. It is the followers of AH who have the ultimate right to do so.

10Most of these books written in Urdu language were later translated into Arabic and English and their international distribution was facilitated by Saudi Arabia.
Islamic Institutions of Cairo etc. so that they act to liberate the Muslims from the clutches of these infidels and apostates... The effort directed towards the extinction of this movement is a common cause of the Muslims. The action against Qadiyanism to wipe out its threat to the Muslims is the sacred duty of every Muslim (Zaheer, 1972, p. 18-22).

Once the Ahmadi’s were officially declared as non-Muslim in 1974 Zaheer along with some other religious scholars started a campaign aimed at subjecting the Shias to similar prohibitions.

IV) Islamists and Ahmadi’s

In addition to the above mentioned orientations, Islamism has been an important part of religio-political landscape in South Asia. Any desire to give Islam (or any other religion) a prominent place in the State necessarily raises questions about religious minorities. Therefore any discussion on Ahmadiyya question will be incomplete without deliberating upon the perspective of Islamists. For the purpose, the paper looks into the opinion of two renowned Islamists of South Asia, Syed Abu’l Al’a Maududi and Dr. Israr Ahmad.

Maududi (d 1979) regarded as the most influential Islamist thinker worldwide, was an autodidact, Qur’an exegete, a journalist, political activist and ideologue in pre-independent India and Pakistan. He formed religio-political party, Jamat-i-Islami in 1941 to train and prepare a community of “righteous people” to bring about political change and establish an Islamic State. Maududi became an important critic of the politics of nations and nationalism and engaged in bitter polemics against the proponent’s of United Nationalism in undivided India (Muttahidah Qaumiyyat). However, Maududi didn’t ally with Muslim League either (the vanguard of the demand for Pakistan) on the pretext that its leadership was westernized and not Islamic enough, leading many observers to imbibe that he opposed the idea of Pakistan. However it needs to be taken note of that Maududi and Jamat did not object to the idea of Pakistan per se but to its creation under the aegis of Muslim League, a party that was

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11Islamism is a very contentious term, broadly referred to diverse Islamic movements, who are committed to political action to implement what they regard as an Islamic agenda (Piscatori, 2000). Different currents of Islamism have either aspired and advocated revolutionary strategies for seeking State power and harness it to the project of implementation of scripturally anchored vision of Islam, by making Sharia’h the law of the land and to have everyone submit altogether to the implications of Sovereignty of Allah; or alternatively a reformist strategy to Islamize society through grass-roots social and political activism; or a mix of both (Roy, 1994; Zaman, 2018). Zaman (2018, p. 10) argues that Islamism is often conflated by many observers with militancy, yet violence is not a defining feature of this phenomenon.

12The concept originally belongs to Husain Madani. For Madani’s conception of United Nationalism and its critique by Shabir Usmani, Maududi and others see Zaman, 2002 (chapter 2).
unlikely to make the new country an Islamic State (Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2015, p. 446; Nasr, 1994, p. 87). In spite of his opposition, he migrated to the new State and played a pivotal role in shaping the public discourse about the Islamic State. Maududi worked closely with the Ulama like Shabir Usmani (elected to constituent assembly on ML’s platform) in pressing for an Islamic Constitution. This led to the passing of what came to be referred as Qarardad-e-Magasid (Objectives Resolution), which formed the preamble of the future constitution, containing number of provisions and impressing the State’s Islamic Orientation.

Islamization of the state constituted his entire focus immediately after the new state was inaugurated, believing that the society will automatically fit in the new Islamic framework as the Islamization assumes ground and the constitutional framework becomes Islamic through the implementation of Objectives resolution and provide solution to host of problems including Ahmadi issue (Muhammad, 2000, p. 219-244; Nasr, 1994, p. 100-118). However by 1950’s Ahrar’s, who had a long history of anti-ahmadi sentiment started a movement demanding Ahmadis to be officially declared as non-Muslim, and for purging government offices of Ahmediyya’s. In 1952, Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi a very distinguished scholar and spiritual leader called a conference of Ulema to make similar demands on the state. In this backdrop, Maududi was attracted to act by the Ulema who excoriated his procrastination regarding the issue and also by Jamat cadres who believed that cashing on the issue will strengthen the base of party in Punjab (the hub of anti-Ahmadi mobilization). Maududi (1953) wrote a mordant Pamphlet Qadiani Masalah (The Qadiani Problem), defending the proposal put forward by the Ulema to declare Ahmadis a non-Muslim minority. By citing from Ahmadi literature he points out how the movement itself has been exclusionary and propagates severing of religious and social ties with the general Muslims. He argues that there is a difference between other sects (who also have cut off religious and social ties with general Muslim body) and Ahmadi’s in a way that they infiltrate into

the Muslim Society posing as Muslims; they propagate their views in the name of Islam; start controversies everywhere, carry on proselytizing propaganda in an aggressive manner……Thus become a permanent disintegrating force among the Muslims. How can

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13 Further Jamat didn’t have a distinct sectarian identity as Ulema with their ever concretizing doctrinal orientations have. Jamat’s membership transcended the old Sunni-Shia divide as well.

14 An Islamic group affiliated with the Indian Nationals Congress (pre-partition era) with socialist leanings yet without any stable ideology, best known for the impassioned style of its speakers. For more details refer to (Nasr, 1994, p. 106).
it be possible to show the same kind of toleration towards them as is shown towards other passive sects?" (Maududi, 1953).

In another book “Khatme Nabuwwat” (The Finality of Prophethood) Maududi (1962) argues that “of all the conspiracies hatched against Islam in modern times, the most dangerous is a false claim of Prophethood” and the cure to this problem lies in “educating people about true faith in the finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad”.15

In 1974, anti-ahmadi campaign resurfaced in Punjab, and under the persistent pressure from religious leadership, Z.A. Bhutto government decided that the parliament will debate and vote on whether Ahmadi’s were Muslim. When the issue was under discussion in the parliament Maududi wrote an article in his magazine Tarjuman-l-Qur’an (Sep 1974), in which he proposed a number of Constitutional amendments and administrative steps that could resolve the “Qadiani Problem”. One of the harshest amendments he proposed was that any person who irrespective of claiming to be a Muslim declares himself to be a prophet after Muhammad or regards the claimant of such Prophet hood to be his or her religious leader or invites others towards such prophetic claims or declares the rejecter of such claims as Infidel, He or She should also be considered as the perpetrator of High Treason (Maududi, 2012, p. 123-128).

In September 1974, both the houses of Pakistan’s parliament passed the second amendment to Pakistan’s constitution, declaring Ahmadis non-Muslims. Maududi welcomed the decision and argued that although the amendment resolved the issue constitutionally, government should also take necessary legal and administrative measures by which he meant exclusion of Ahmadis from senior positions in the civil services, Army etc. and putting a cap on their presence in public offices as per the proportion of their population. Maududi, however, was not in support of outright social and economic boycott though he wasn’t supportive of “friendship for the sake of friendship” either. In response to a question by IJT16 member, “whether we can have Qadianis as friends?” Maududi answers that you shouldn’t meet

15 of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad  
16 Student wing of jamat
Qadiani’s to be friends with them, but for preaching your religion\textsuperscript{17}(Maududi, 1987/1988, p. 275).

In the same vein, Dr. Israr (d. 2010) a famous commentator of Qur’an who had previously been a member of \textit{Jamat-i-Islami} and later founded many Islamic Organisations like \textit{Tanzeem-i-Islami} and \textit{Tehreek-i-khilafat} etc. which aimed at Islamic revivalism, held a very stringent position in reference to Ahmadiyya.\textsuperscript{18} For him the legal implication of the belief in the finality of prophet hood of Muhammad in Islamic state implies the execution of all those Muslims who make claims of prophet hood or accept such beliefs, for they are apostates in his opinion. He hails the 1974 amendment and 1984 ordinance, for declaring Ahmadis as non-Muslim and criminalizing their usage of Islamic marks and symbols (\textit{Sha’aair}), but considers them as incomplete, for they didn’t manifest into the implementation of death penalty on those Muslims who convert to Ahmadi beliefs, which for him is the only resolution of this “\textit{fitnah}”(Ahmad, 2016).

\textbf{V) Modernist and Moderate Scholars}

Irrespective of the hostility and intoleration from the orthodox scholarship, there have been scholars and voices that have differed with the consensus and argued for mutual co-existence with Ahmadis. Of these scholars, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (d 1898) one of the greatest Islamic modernists was a contemporary of MGA. Like most of the Islamic modernists, he was of the belief that Indian Muslims were in a state of ‘crisis of unity’ and the sectarian controversies only exacerbated the challenges created by colonialism. In spite of being a naturalist and averse to accepting mystical claims and miracles, he advised his friends/followers to pursue a policy of non-interference and tolerance with MGA.\textsuperscript{19} In response to letters by his admirers Sayyid Mir Hassan and his brother Sayyid Abdul Ghani\textsuperscript{20} who asked for his opinion regarding

\textsuperscript{17}This is quite ironic, because how is any dialogue with Ahmadis possible, if the Ahmadi faith in itself is a high treason in his opinion.

\textsuperscript{18} For details see (Ahmad, 1983, 1990; Nasr, 1994, p. 39-40)

\textsuperscript{19}MGA critiqued Sir Sayyids Naturalism in many of his writings (Khan, 2015 p28). Khan (2015 p 39-40) notes that Sayyid invited MGA for displaying his miracles in Aligarh, for which the latter didn’t turn up.

\textsuperscript{20} Both of whom knew MGA when he was in Sialkot.
MGA’s claims, he suggests both to be indifferent and not to be bothered about his claims, for they were neither beneficial nor harmful.21 In a letter to Hassan he observes

I don’t understand why people are after Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiyani. If he thinks that he receives divine revelations, let it be, they are of no use to us, neither useful in our religious affairs nor worldly…..I have heard that he is a nice person- prayerful and virtuous. That is enough to respect him. What is the need to argue and fight? I have seen his writings; they are as “good” as his revelations. Unless a person is not considered as a Law-Giver22, his revelations are of no purpose (Iqbal, 2014, p 629)

In a letter to Ghani he adds that there have been lot of good people who have had similar thoughts and to discuss on their truthfulness or otherwise is a useless exercise.

Similarly, Muhammad Iqbal, a very influential modernist philosopher and poet, has been very significant in shaping public opinion about Ahmadis. He is revered across different shades of religious, social and political orientations in South Asia. Many political and social organisations have attempted to affiliate themselves with him including; supporters of democracy, opponents of democracy, socialists, groups advocating territorial and racial nationalism, traditionalist Ulema, Islamists, modernists, virulent critics of the Ahmadis and the Ahmadis themselves (Sevea, 2012, p. 24-25). Although at the outset of the Ahmadiyya movement, Iqbal had expressed ‘hopes of good results from this movement’, however the shape it took over time and the consequent fear that its theology will split the Unity of Muslim Ummah, and reconcile it with disempowerment, made him write powerful polemical pieces against it towards the end of his life (Sevea, 2012, p. 121; Zaman, 2018, p. 167). 23

In 1934, Iqbal wrote an article “Qadianis and Orthodox Muslims” in which he argued that Ahmadis should be declared as a separate community from Indian Muslims. The survival and progress of Muslim community in a religiously diverse country like India, in Iqbal’s opinion, depends on its solidarity and camaraderie, and Ahmadiyya were a serious threat to it. He argued that any religious society historically arising from the bosom of Islam, which claims a new prophet hood’ for its basis, and declares all Muslims who do not recognise the truth of its alleged revelation as Kafirs (unbelievers)….be regarded by every Muslim as a serious danger to the solidarity of Islam…. since the integrity of Muslim society is secured by the Idea of the

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21As cited in Iqbal (2014 p 629-30).
22Sha’ri’, someone who gives new Shari’ah
23The question that why didn’t Iqbal oppose the Ahmadiyyah movement before 1934 is contentious, some opine that Iqbal admired the movement and it was only under the pressure of Ahrars that he changed his opinion while others deny it. For more details see last chapter of Iqbal (2014) and (Jalal, 1994, 2012)
Finality of Prophet hood alone (Iqbal, 2001, p. 26-27). Iqbal perceived the Ahmadiyya movement as a threat to the very structure of Islam, since the Magian concept of continual expectation of a prophet, on which the ahmadiyya movement was based, would only serve to increase religious adventurism, exacerbate disunity and splinter the Muslim collective. Of the two modern manifestations of Magianism viz Bahaism and Qadianism, for Iqbal, former was more honest for it openly departed from Islam and posed no threat to its internal structure, whereas later retained some of the more important externals of Islam with an inwardness wholly inimical to its spirit and aspirations. He further asserted that the British government should declare them as a separate community and the Indian Muslims will tolerate them just as they tolerate other religious communities(Iqbal, 2001, p. 31).

A year after the publication of this article, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote a series of pieces in the Modern Review of Calcutta questioning Iqbal’s presuppositions about religion.24 Iqbal responded with a rather elaborative article “Islam and Ahmadism” in which he provides a defense for the intense attitude of Muslims towards Ahmadis and why the declaration of Ahmadis as heretics was important. For him this issue was one of the greatest problems agitating the heart of Islam, for it had forces of disintegration, masquerading as reformation. The underlying motive of this purported reformation was to carve out from the Ummah of the Arabian prophet a new Ummah for the Indian prophet and to provide a theological and revelational basis for political and intellectual subjugation of Indian Muslims(Iqbal, 2001, p. 1-2) 25

Iqbal criticised all those who enunciated toleration in a matter like this and were extremely careless in their usage of the term “toleration”. He quotes Gibbon to elucidate that how the spirit of toleration may arise from very different attitudes of man. To him the true toleration or the toleration of the spiritually powerful man lay in the jealous guarding of the frontiers of his own faith, while appreciating all forms of faith other than his own(Iqbal, 2001, p. 4). Iqbal further argues that unlike other religions, the conceptual structure of Islam was not based on the race but on two simple propositions that God is one (tauhid) and Muhammad is the last of the prophets. The rejection of either one of these propositions would tear its fabric by

24 Leader of INC who became first PM of independent India
25 Generally referred to global Muslim community
affecting the frontiers of faith. In his opinion, the teachings of Qadianism qualified as heresy and thus the feeling of Indian Muslims has been very intense in the jealous guarding of the boundaries of their faith. However Iqbal did not call for persecution of Ahmadis, he called them to be recognised as a separate religious community beyond the pale of Islam as he felt that they would never voluntarily declare themselves to be a separate religious community (Sevea, 2012, p. 171). This for Iqbal was the only means of the peaceful coexistence between the Indian Muslims and Ahmadis.

Similarly, Abul Kalam Azad (d. 1958), an influential Muslim Intellectual, Qur’an exegete, firebrand Journalist also disagreed with the general consensus of Ulama in considering Ahmadiyya as heretics and outside the pale of Islam. In a 1923 fatwa published in the Lahore based newspaper Zamindar (c.f. Zaman, 2018, p. 167) Azad argued that they could not be considered as unbelievers, or excluded from the general Muslim community, or subjected to a social boycott despite characterizing the Ahmadi beliefs as highly aberrant.

In the same vein, Abdul Majid Daryabadi (d. 1977) disciple of, Ashraf Ali Thanvi, had a serious problem with scholars who held extreme views and were habitual of issuing verdicts of “apostasy”. Before writing a commentary of Qur’an in Urdu as well as English and authoring many books on Islam, Daryabadi, for many years in his youth had been an agnostic (Daryabadi, 1967, p. 233-239). His interest in Islam and Sufism had surprisingly been rejuvenated not by readings of foundational texts of Islam or that of Rumi or IbnArabi, but through diverse philosophical readings like that of Confucius, Bhagwad Gita etc (Daryabadi, 1967, p. 245-53). Due to ‘rediscovery’ of Islam for himself after being agnostic, he imbibed a broad and inclusive approach towards religious/sectarian differences. The insistence of different Ulema on strict, impervious and hostile sectarian boundaries for him amounted to nothing but Ulema’s bigotry (Zaman, 2008, p. 97).

In a series of correspondences with his spiritual guide Thanvi27, he asserted that if we continue to situate people outside the pale of Islam, not many people would be left behind who can be regarded as Muslims, “call them innovators (mubtadi’) deviant, heterodox,

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26He pointed out towards the classification of Sikhs as a separate religious community from Hindus in early 20th century as a precedent in this regard
27Which were later published in form of a book in (1950).
erroneous (fasiqul Aqidah), aberrant (gumrah) but the thought of considering them infidels and outside the fold of Islam shivers my heart” (Daryabadi, 1950, p. 232-233).

In fact, he was reluctant even to see Ahmadi’s as infidels and in a letter to Thanvi, writes that his heart is always in search of conjectures (taavil) to do so (Daryabadi, 1950, p. 233; Usmani, 2007, p. 79-81). Despite the fact that Thanvi disagrees with Daryabadi, regarded his position as an act of ‘supreme kindliness’, yet cautioned Daryabadi that this kind of kindliness carries a tendency that it will prove fatal in the long run for it will allow many people to imbibe heretical beliefs and thus fall into the ‘Ahmadiyya trap’, Daryabadi held onto this opinion till the end of his life. He thought that Ahmadi beliefs should be ascribed to their flawed interpretation, so that they too are seen as bad Muslims rather than outright infidels (Zaman, 2008, p. 97). He suggested that we should follow a policy of non-interference with all the deviant groups- neither approve their beliefs nor treat them as harshly as other proselytizing non-Muslim groups like Christians or Arya’s (Daryabadi, 1950, p. 234-235)28. In other words he opposed the position of most of the scholars of Deoband that groups like Ahmadis ought to be subjected to social or economic boycott.

This position has also been replicated by another important figure amongst the contemporary scholars- Javed Ahmad Ghamidi. Importantly, no one has approached the Ahmadiyya question as humanely and empathetically, and tried to sensitize the people of hostile approach towards Ahmadis as Javed Ghamidi, a commentator on the Qur’an, Islamic modernist, reformist scholar, popular television preacher, founder of Al-Mawrid Institute of Islamic Sciences, formerly a member of Jamat-i-Islami29, and the Council of Islamic Ideology, Pakistan.30 Irrespective of his strong presence on electronic media in Pakistan that has increased his prominence amongst the urban middle class; he lacks meaningful social base and authority in the country as that of the traditionalist scholars.31

Ghamidi argues that the prophecies of earlier prophets, verses of holy Qur’an and the sayings of Prophet (Hadith) make it clear that Muhammad was last prophet. He further argues that

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28 That is what Haji Imdadullah suggests Sir Syed Ahmad in a letter. Daryabadi liked the opinion so much that he published the whole letter in his magazine
29 Left the organization on account of disagreements with Maududi
30 Responsible for providing advice to government on legal matters
31 Through a series of television shows on major Pakistani channels
Prophet Muhammad himself made it clear that not only the rank and position of prophet hood has been terminated, but also its essence. Therefore, there is no possibility for any person to receive divine revelations or to converse and come in contact with God (Ghamidi, n.d. p.148). For him the whole institution of Sufism has undermined this essence through its core metaphysical ideas like Unity of being (*Wahdatul-Wujud*), Saint’s “non-legislative prophet hood” (*ghair tashre’ie nabi*), manifestations of the Spirit of Muhammad (*Noor-i-Muhammadi*) etc. reverberating in the writings of revered Sufi scholars like Ibn Arabi, Imam Ghazali, Abdul Karim Aljeeli etc (Ghamidi, 2013, p. 192-202; 2017). Ghamidi traces roots of the claims of MGA in these ideas and argues that the language and terminology of his books, and his correspondences with Hakeem Nooruddin32 make it clear that his claims need to be contextualized within the broader paradigm of Sufism. He argues that the claims of similar nature by different Sufi’s were not scandalized unlike MGA, because they never made these claims public, didn’t try to carve out a new community and didn’t issue the verdicts of disbelief on those who didn’t accept their claims.

He suggests that Muslims should highlight the errors in Ahmadiyya beliefs with humility, not pass on the verdicts of apostasy and persecute them. He further argues that the hostile attitudes and the persecution of Ahmadis has only served to evolve a distinct Ahmadiyya identity and destroyed the scope of any meaningful dialogue (Ghamidi, 2009). In this context and beyond, Ghamidi is highly critical of the practice of the issuance of verdicts of disbelief (*kufr*) and apostasy (*irtidad*), for it is God’s and his Messenger’s jurisdiction. He argues that a person can be regarded as a *Kafir* only if s/he knew the truthfulness of Islam (Haq) and then consciously rejected it. Thus in order to declare someone as Kafir, a conclusive communication of the truth (*Itmam-e-Hujjah*) is needed and no one can know that except Allah and only He can reveal the same through his Prophet(Saleem, 2015, p. 75-78). Similarly people who renounce Islam and adopt another religion or don’t follow any religion, in Ghamidi’s opinion, should be regarded as non-Muslims and not *Murtads* (apostates), for nothing can be said of what convinced them of conversion from Islam or complete disbelief and that there is a difference between being a Muslim by birth and a Muslim by conviction.

32Who became the first Khalifa of Jamat-i-Ahmadiyya after MGA’s death. For details of their correspondence see (Nadwi, 1974).
He is also equivocal against the infamous Blasphemy Laws of Pakistan, which prescribe Capital Punishment for the Blasphemer. Ghamidi completely rejects such laws on the basis that they don’t have any justification in Islam for they lack foundation in Qur’an or the Hadith (Saleem, 2015, p. 257-269; Walsh, 2011). He is of the view that Ulema take many verses of Qur’an and Hadith specific to prophet’s time, out of context and stipulate capital punishment for a blasphemer. In consideration of Islam and the greater interest of Muslims living in Muslim majority countries like Pakistan, Ghamidi suggests, laws can be enacted and punishment be prescribed as Ta’zir whereby some scope can be introduced for repentance and room for lighter sentences in view of extenuating circumstances and overall socio-psychological well being of offender. He opines that as far as dishonoring of Prophet or defilement of his name is concerned, Muslims are entitled to react. But they should also try to take note of the difference between critique and dishonor, and only protest rationally in case of later and counter former with arguments (Ghamidi, n.d.-b).

Very similar view to Ghamidi is held by Indian Muslim scholar, and peace activist, Wahiduddin Khan, who like Ghamidi had been a member of Jamat-i-Islami but bid adieu to it on account of ideological differences with Maududi. Later he became one the fiercest critics of Maududi and Islamists. He contends that the chain of Prophet-hood came to an end with Prophet Muhammad, which is repeatedly mentioned in Qur’an and Hadith. Khan (n.d. p. 189-201; 2017) posits that ‘self styled claimants of prophet hood’ like Bahaullah and MGA ‘produced new religions’ on the baseless pretext that the societal and cultural advancement of modern times demanded a new prophet for guidance of people. Khan finds this pretext unfounded on the basis that God’s word in the form of Qur’an is preserved in its original form and the task of re-interpretation is to be performed by religious scholars (Ulema) and mujtahids, which precludes the need for a new prophet. As far as the social relations of Muslims with groups like Ahmadis is concerned, Khan (1999, p. 318) argues that they should

33 For more details see (Ghamidi, n.d. p. 541-554) and (Saleem, 2015, p. 257-269)
34 That is punishment decided on the basis of reasoning or Ijtihad
35 Or defilement of God or holy books
36 That is by not taking law in own hands or by issuing public death warrants as was done in case Salman Rushdie, that made just another novelist into a global celebrity.
37 See Khan (1963/2009)
38 Someone qualified enough to practice ijtihad
seek guidance from the charter of Medina\textsuperscript{39} and adopt policy of mutual respect, tolerance and non-interference.

Khan (2008, 2010) has been highly critical about the view that apostasy and blasphemy are crimes punishable by death because for him these are the issues that fall within the domain of God and are not socially punishable crimes. He argues that capital punishment for apostasy contradicts many verses of Qur’an (For instance S 2: V 256) that explicitly espouse religious freedom and recommend that there should be no compulsion in religion. Contextualization of many Ahadith in Khan’s (2008) opinion makes it clear that where ever death penalty was issued for ‘Apostasy’, the term implied the change in political affiliations or treason or rebellion against the State and not the change in religion per se. He suggests that irrespective of the fact that most of scholars have suggested death penalty for apostasy, there is a need for Ijtihad so that apostasy is regarded as an issue of preaching and peaceful argumentation rather than issue of capital punishment.\textsuperscript{40} He further argues that blasphemy has no basis in Islamic scripture and is a clear innovation (Khan, 2010; Zakaria, 2015). He posits that

\textit{There are more than 200 verses in Qur’an, which reveal that the contemporaries of the prophets repeatedly perpetrated the same act, which is now called blasphemy or abuse of the prophet, but nowhere does the Qur’an prescribe the punishment of lashes, or death, or any other physical punishment.} (Zakaria, 2015)

For him blasphemy has been a subject of intellectual contestation in Islamic thought and was actually enacted during the Abbasid period as an expression of pride at the establishment of empire and political supremacy (Khan, 2010). Khan (1997, p. 8) blames the lack of ‘da’wah\textsuperscript{41} demeanor’ (Dawati Shu’oor) for the growing intolerance among Muslims and argues that it is necessary to react with patience, wisdom, and far-sightedness even in the face of extremely hurtful, provocative and blasphemous content like the Satanic Verses, to open up new avenues for Dawah. In fact the fatwa calling for death of Rushdie and the violence that unleashed, in his view is tantamount to murder of da’wah and laments that these reactionary steps strengthen the deep-rooted negative feelings amongst non-Muslims about Islam.

\textsuperscript{39}This charter expressly mentioned that the issues concerning the three religious communities domiciled in Medina would be decided on the basis of their own religious traditions and all would enjoy full freedom in religious and cultural matters.

\textsuperscript{40} That is there hasn’t been an Ijma i.e. a scholarly consensus.

\textsuperscript{41} Da’wah is an Arabic word which means a call or an invitation towards Islam and is amongst the obligations of Islamic faith.
Similarly, Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza, a tele-evangelist, who enjoys a significant following on social media in sub-continent generally and Pakistan in particular, invokes an argument of mutual co-existence with Ahmadiyya. Like Ghamdi he argues that Muslim mainstream should highlight the errors in Ahmadiyya beliefs argumentatively and emphatically. He argues that since they have already been declared non-Muslim by the government of Pakistan, the persecution of the community must be precluded (Mirza, 2018a). He stands against the social and economic boycott of the community because the boycott connotes that no meaningful dialogue can happen with them, which leads problematic situation whereby their deviant beliefs will remain as such and cannot be corrected. He further argues that Ahmadis are doctrinally closer to Islam than the Ahl-i-Kitab as they accept the oneness of Allah, Quran as a revealed text, and the prophet hood of Muhammad, neither of which is accepted by the later. Hence, they deserve a better social and economic interaction with the Muslim mainstream (Mirza, 2018b).

**VI) Conclusion**

This paper was an attempt to use Ahmadiyya question as a prism to explore the possibility of religious freedom in Islamic societies and whether contemporary Islamic thought possess the interpretative frameworks for pluralism. A careful look at the contemporary Islamic scholarship discerns numerous interpretative frameworks for a meaningful and enriching social interaction. Yet the hostility against Ahmadiyya has been no novelty in Islamic societies and Pakistan in particular where the successive waves of marginalisation and indignities have flowed since the inception of the community. What emerges as important to take note of is that no other religious minority has been subjected to similar indignities as Ahmadiyya, impressing the fact that Islam is not necessarily an anti-minority religion. However, in reference to Ahmadiyya’s there’s no scholarly consensus in the first place on whether they can be regarded as Muslims or not and as a result, what kind of social interaction can be pursued with them. Broadly, there are three categories of arguments regarding Ahmadiyya. First, Ahmadiyya are Muslims but they are deviants and hence there’s a scope for dialogue and communication so that their deviant beliefs can be corrected. Second,  

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42 Usually used to refer to Jews and Christians and Qur’an permits beneficial exchange, hospitality, and inter-marriage between Muslims and them.
they are non-Muslims but social interaction should and cannot be prohibited because the prohibition of social interaction also negates the scope of ex-communication with them, which also means that their heretic beliefs cannot be corrected. Third, they are non-Muslims but we need to scrupulously prohibit any kind of social interaction with them because they disguise as Muslims while in actuality, they aren’t Muslims. Conversely, if they declare themselves as non-Muslims, the social interaction with them can be assumed like any other religious community. Interestingly, it’s the third argument that has dominated the public discourse and consequently shaped the dominant public opinion about the Ahmadiyya, and evolving a significant social tension in the process. The primary responsibility for diffusing this social tension lies with traditionalist because they command a dominant space as well as the normative authority in defining the implicit permissible and the impermissible norms and grammar. This transition from impermissible to permissible however can only be achieved once the traditionalist-Ulema recognize that the interpretational differences should not merely be tolerated but respected as well. The traditionalist and orthodox Ulema need to gauge the contemporary social realities and act as religious preachers and transmit the religious knowledge rather than pass the verdicts of apostasy and heresy against the differing sects and groups.

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