[**Islamic symbols removed from Ahmadiyya graveyard**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1569189/islamic-symbols-removed-from-ahmadiyya-graveyard)

[The Newspaper's Staff Reporter](https://www.dawn.com/authors/397/the-newspaper-s-staff-reporter)

 16 Jul, 2020

DAWN

**LAHORE: Police and locals allegedly removed Islamic symbols from the graves of the members of Ahmadiyya community in a graveyard in a village in Gujranwala on July 13.**

**A member of the Ahmadiyya Community told Dawn that the graveyard in Tirigri village was established in 1960 and it remained a shared graveyard of the Muslims and Ahmadis till 1967.**

**He said around 90 per cent of graves belonged to the Ahmadiyya community and after they were declared minority, the Muslims had separated their graveyard.**

**He said some locals lodged complaints with the Rahwali police to remove the Islamic symbols from graves on July 3. “The station in charge called the Ahmadiyya community to address the issue,” he said**

**ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER AD**

**He said they were pressured by the police to sign a permission to remove the symbols and they had to accept it under duress. A Rahwali police official denied pressuring the members of the Ahmadiyya community.**

**He said that they were not allowed to use the symbols under the constitution of Pakistan.**

**A spokesperson for the Ahmadiyya community said on one side while the state is trying to give the impression that Pakistan supports religious harmony and tolerance and on the other hand is following the desires of the extremists to carry out activities against a marginalized community.**

**He said the Ahmadis residing in Pakistan are not at peace even after their demise.**

**According to a complaint lodged by Muhammad Ikram with the Rahwali Cantonment police, the Ahmadiyya community was using Islamic symbols on gravestones which were creating unrest among the locals. On his application, the police took action.**

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1569189?ref=whatsapp>

**Behind the culture of impunity**

[**Waqar Gillani**](https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/writer/waqar-gillani)

[Dialogue](https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/category/dialogue)

July 12, 2020

THE NEWS ON SUNDAY

Amidst pressure from religious and political actors, the construction of Islamabad’s first Hindu temple is halted. But this is part of a systematic pattern of bigotry and oppression

Recently, Dr Arfana Mallah, an outstanding progressive voice from Sindh, a poet, and a senior teacher of Chemistry at the University of Jamshoro, facing violent backlash and threats of being charged with alleged blasphemy for her views on the blasphemy laws, had to abandon support for a fellow teacher of another varsity trapped in a blasphemy case. She had come to the support of Sajid Somro, a teacher of Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, booked under blasphemy charges in June allegedly in response to the pressure of rivals with radical religious ideologies. “We can differ with the teacher’s views or may not like them at all but cannot settle score with him this way by lodging a blasphemy case,” she had said.

Dr Mallah’s crime was to raise voice for Dr Somro, who has been freed on bail. Her opponents wanted to lodge a blasphemy case against her and went on a hate campaign warning her of a fate like Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab who was killed by his official bodyguard merely for criticizing blasphemy laws in 2011. She alleged that the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazl), a mainstream religio-political party, was behind the campaign, a claim denied by the party.

However, owing to the danger to her life, in a video message on social media, Dr Mallah tendered an apology a few weeks ago, thanking noted clerics of the province for giving her this opportunity to publicly apologise. After this apology, Dr Mallah has confined herself to her house.

This way of pressurizing and suppressing freedom of belief, particularly, of those who are religious minorities or independent-thinking groups has become a pattern with the state nowhere in the scene to protect the victims.

In May, the Bahawalpur city administration demolished a number of houses of Hindu community in the Yazman area after a complaint alleging the occupation of state land and the selling of liquor by the community in the area. In March 2019, Khateeb Hussain, a third-year student at Bahawalpur’s Government Sadiq Egerton College stabbed his teacher Associate Professor Khalid Hameed to death over what he vaguely described as the academic’s “anti-Islam” remarks and openly confessed his crime; and, case proceedings are very slow amid alleged pressure of religious groups. In December 2019, Jannat Hussain Nekokara, the assistant commissioner of Attock, was forced to apologise for her comments in support of equal rights for religious minorities and calling for unity regardless of religious divisions on an event arranged on International Human Rights Day. Soon after her speech, she was surrounded by young students along with other staff, she was forced to explain her faith in front of everyone.

Another Rawalpindi-based college teacher of English Literature, Anwar Ahmad, is facing blasphemy case for death penalty for interpreting Urdu poet Josh Malih Abadi’s verses on the concept of Heaven. A religiously motivated student made video of his lecture and uploaded on social media to trap him. Juanid Hafeez, a gold medalist lecturer in Multan, was awarded death sentence in a blasphemy case after right-wing students at the varsity accused him.

In the latest episode, a systematic campaign by religious extremist groups, publicly supported by Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam) – one of the key political allies of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) – compelled Capital Development Authority to halt the construction of first-ever Hindu temple in Islamabad. The previous political regime allotted the piece of land for the construction of a state-of-the-art temple-cum-community centre for the small Hindu population of the city in 2017 after a due process. CDA had transferred ownership of the plot to Islamabad Hindu Panchayat and a small groundbreaking ceremony for the temple construction took place at the end of June attended by the federal minister for religious affairs and minority Hindu community representatives. The government had also announced a substantial grant of Rs 10 million for help in the temple construction.

The situation forced the government to stop this construction and refer the matter to the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) seeking opinion as to whether a Muslim government can fund a temple construction.

“Almost every day, different people are coming to the construction site and demolishing the foundation walls of Krishna Temple and taking away other construction material,” says Lal Chand, a representative of Islamabad Hindu Panchayat. He adds that they had written to the authorities to provide security after the hate-campaigns but had not received support.

Video footage and posts circulating on social media support Chand’s statement. In one such message, people, more prominently, youth, are demolishing the foundation walls saying they would not allow construction of a Hindu temple in Islamabad, a city named after their religion (Islam). Another post as part of a social media campaign calls for building a mosque rather than temple on this site to avenge the demolition of the Babri Majid in Hindu-dominated India.

Some clerics of extremist factions issued decrees against the construction of this temple in Islamabad. A statement of PML-Q leader Ch Pervaiz Elahi, however, proved to be the most dangerous addition in this hate campaign. Elahi, in his video message, said the construction of temple is against the spirit of Islam. “Pakistan was created in the name of Islam. Construction of a new Hindu temple in its capital is not only against the spirit of Islam but also an insult to Riasat-e-Madina (Islamic welfare state),” he said. The situation forced the government to stop this construction and refer the matter to the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) seeking opinion as to whether a Muslim government can fund a temple construction.

Elahi’s message has been damaging notes Chand, adding, “We hope that we will get our right.”

The power of extremist elements lies in the sometimes open, and at others, tacit support of governments who do not take serious action out of the fear of losing political support, as these elements exploit religious sentiments of the public. In the case of Dr Mallah, Sindh’s ruling party, the Pakistan Peoples’ Party (PPP) failed to extend open support to her despite in power for despite claims of being progressive. According to insiders, the ruling PPP dared not to touch this matter during the All Parties Conference despite insistence by progressives.

**The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USIRF), in its 2020 Annual Report, highlights that the “systematic enforcement of blasphemy and anti-Ahmadiyya laws, and authorities’ failure to address forced conversions of religious minorities—including Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs—to Islam, severely restricted freedom of religion or belief”. The report adds that “these (controversial) blasphemy laws create a culture of impunity for violent attacks following accusations.”**

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/684795-behind-the-culture-of-impunity>