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Portraits of Believers: Ahmadi Women Performing Faith in the Diaspora

By Huma Ahmed-Ghosh[i]

Abstract

This paper is a look at how South Asian Ahmadi women in Southern California express their agency through their religious performance in the diaspora. This paper also tries to dispel the notion of a homogenized Muslim people and an Islamic faith in the USA. Western feminist work reflects diverse women's lives and experiences. A study of immigrant women who organize their lives along ethnic (South Asian) and religious (Islam/Ahmadiyyat) prescriptions will contribute to western feminism by expanding its scope, while at the same time challenging its perceived static hegemonic status. Ahmadi women, while cognizant of the gender hierarchy and the "holy patriarchy" of their faith, are willing to "compromise" their own need for autonomy in an endeavor to fulfill their spiritual needs and the security their prescribed roles bring about.

Key Words: Ahmadi women (sect of Islam), diaspora, autonomy and agency

Introduction

Temples, mosques and religious gatherings have mushroomed across the U.S. landscape. Since the 1980s, not only have religious organizations among South Asian communities in the USA emerged, but also there is a trend towards the redefinition of South Asian identity by conflating Indian culture and religion. This raises questions about gender dynamics in immigrant South Asian households. This paper is a look at how South Asian Ahmadi women in Southern California express their agency through their religious performance in the diaspora. Through this ethnographic research, my intention is to articulate how a religious framework is used to protect a beleaguered religious minority in the USA, and to show how women are the main proponents of this faith.

Another attempt here is also to dispel notions of a homogenized Muslim people or an Islamic faith in the USA. While a number of studies on Muslims in North America have been conducted, (Haddad 2002; Haddad and Smith 1993, 2002; Smith 1999; Haddad and Esposito 1998; Metcalf 1996, 1999; Aswad and Bilge 1996; Khan 2000, 2002; etc.) some minority Muslim communities have not received adequate attention; the Ahmadiyya community is one of these. I want to highlight the diversity that exists among Muslims generally, and specifically among Muslim immigrants from South Asia by describing how Ahmadi women negotiate their identity in a potentially alienating South Asian immigrant and North American culture.

Since 9/11, Muslims in the USA have become much more cognizant of their faith and location in American society. There has been a visible rise in attendance in mosques, head covering and reclaiming of identity based on Islam. For Ahmadi women strict adherence to their faith in the USA and worldwide precedes 9/11, but where 9/11 has made a difference is in the Ahmadiyya community's attempts at distancing themselves from mainstream Muslims to establish that their sect is non-violent, peace loving, and tolerant of other belief systems. An example of this was the immediate meeting of the national Ahmadi leader with the president of this country after the 9/11 incidents to clarify their stance on issues of terrorism.

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In this paper after giving a brief outline of the background of the Ahmadiyya community, and the methodology, I will engage in a discussion on feminism and religion and the issue of agency among Ahmadi women within the parameters of their religion. This will be followed by a dialogue with the women themselves for whom communality defines their individuality and simultaneously their safe and comprehensible location within the community and the larger society. Where as the need to conform to the Ahmadiyyat is driven by multiple factors, here I will focus primarily on how Ahmadi women negotiate and express agency through the performance of their faith. This research is conducted among women in Southern California, but resonates with Ahmadi women's sentiments in the rest of the country.

Who are the Ahmadis?

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, in his native town of Qadian, founded the Ahmadiyya movement in 1889. Qadian is a small town in the state of Punjab, in North India. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed proclaimed himself to be the *Mahdi*[ii] or the second coming of the Messiah by interpreting chapter 62, verse 4 of the Quran which claims that, "And among others from among them who have not yet joined them -- a second spiritual advent of the Holy Prophet will emerge," to apply to himself. (Khan, 1978) His claim of being the *Mahdi*-Messiah was viewed as blasphemous by followers of mainstream Islam, since the Prophet Mohammed was supposed to be the last Prophet sent by Allah. Such claims aroused bitter opposition and the mainstream Muslims denounced him.[iii] In January 1983, Muslim religious leaders in Pakistan passed a resolution, "declaring that any Muslim becoming an Ahmadi would face the death penalty." (Talbot 1998, 283) The then President of Pakistan, Zia-ul-Haq succumbed to such vitriolic sentiments by declaring the Ahmadis non-Muslim/Islamic, and subsequently this sentiment was expressed by the ordained powers of Mecca. As a unique socio-religious group, the Ahmadiyya community has thus been marginalized in the Muslim discourse. London, U.K. has become the headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Movement since 1984. (Talbot 1998, 283) Outside of Pakistan, London had a growing number of Ahmadiyyas who were able to establish an Ahmadi center there compared to other western cities.

The Ahmadis view themselves as the "true" Muslims (in relation to mainstream Shia and Sunni Muslims). For the purpose of this discussion I will refer to them as a sect of Islam. Ahmadis, though dotting the Muslim landscape of the USA, are not given the status they seek either among other Muslim communities or in research. The Ahmadiyya movement claims there are 90 million Ahmadis and 150 Ahmadiyya centers globally, of which 47 centers are in the USA.[iv]

For the Ahmadiyya community, the crisis of ostracism and persecution has also resulted in intensified commitment to their faith, especially amongst members of the diaspora. The need to preserve their identity, religion, culture, and, ultimately and most important, their history is the driving force behind the movement. As members of an immigrant community, their perpetual "homelessness" transcends boundaries, and it is only through their faith that they believe they can locate themselves globally as a community with history and continuity. Thus for many Ahmadis, there is a great sense of satisfaction that they are able of conform to their faith in a larger environment that is not even Muslim. Oppositional definition therefore intensifies their commitment.

At another level, the history of persecution and their insular or besieged reaction to their foreign setting also lends a purpose to their existence by emphasizing a proselytizing agenda. As Metcalf (1996, 6) elaborates about Muslims in general (and it certainly applies to Ahmadis), it is in the "portability" of their religion that the Muslims have been able to sustain their faith. They carry their rituals, relationships, and symbols with them. Therefore, it is the activity and community that defines the space, and not necessarily a physical mosque or clergy. In the absence of a religious priest, the elected leader of the group presides as the spiritual leader.

Methodology

I have been conducting research among Ahmadi women immigrants from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and a few African-American converts in Southern California for the past four years.[v] I have attended their monthly meetings, their mosque, and met their leader on a research trip to the U.K. in 1999. While I have met with numerous households, for this paper I have used detailed interviews with six women. The views expressed by these South Asian women on various topics broadly reflect the views of all the South Asian Ahmadi women I have met and interviewed over the course of the last four years. All six women interviewed have children. Three of the women interviewed work at wage employment as a daycare provider, an accountant and an educator, and three of the women are homemakers. All women in the sample are first generation women from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh who came to the USA around 12-16 years ago through marriage.[vi] They range in age from the mid-30s to the mid-40s. In general terms, they refer to themselves as middle-class. This paper mainly uses narratives to try to understand how Ahmadi women express agency through their acquiescence to a lifestyle prescribed by their religion. Detailed interviews were tabulated and according to the questions asked and themes and generalizations were deciphered from the data.

For this article, I have not interviewed African-American women because of the complexity of their situation in the movement. Neither have I interviewed other converts to the faith. Suffice, it to say that their experiences as Ahmadis are similar to the South Asian women in terms of their religiosity, but does differ in issues of cultural assimilation and practices of child-rearing. For example, to put it in very general terms, Caucasian and African-American women do not deal with issues of being immigrants but do, since 9/11, feel the gaze by others of being different.

Women, Religion and Identity

In this section I will engage with the complexities of why women choose to follow religious faiths to create an identity of their own and express agency that may seem contradictory to established feminist ideals of individualism, autonomy and resistance to organized religion. In feminist discourse no topic has created more controversy than women and religion. Feminism in its current form, while rightfully claiming a multi-cultural stance, still cannot provide an adequate or comprehensible framework for immigrant women to whom cultural detachment and religious persecution are a powerful dissonance. Qualitative methodology, narratives, biographies, life experiences and oral histories have been recognized as valid and legitimate forms of contemporary feminist discourse, as have Third World feminisms (Anzaldua 1990; Anzaldua and Keating 2002; Mohanty, et al. 1991; hooks 1984; Mohanty and Alexander

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1997; Wing 2000) In fact, western feminism comprises of multiple feminisms, constantly being made accountable for issues of racism, ethnicism, classism, ageism etc. Emerging consciousness on the part of feminists towards the needs, agendas, and politics of indigenous minorities and transnational feminisms is becoming more and more apparent. An example of such inclusionary work is Gloria Anzaldua's most recent co-edited book titled, *This Bridge We Call Home*, which justifies her inclusion of articles in the book by women of color, white women, and men by succinctly noting, "This inclusivity reflects the hybrid quality of our lives and identities ----- todas somos nosotras. Living in multicultural communities and the complexities of our age demand that we develop a perspective that takes into account the whole planet." (2003, 3) Thus, while western feminists can claim multiple feminisms, multiple life experiences of immigrant women should also be recognized as contributions to the field.

As Gross, puts it we, "need to study women as religious subjects in their own right, not merely as objects in the religious universes of men." (1996, 81) Hence, an understanding of diversity among Muslim women's lived experiences is particularly significant for feminist discourse. Feminism is neither static, ahistorical, nor apolitical. Ample feminist work in the West reflects the diversity of women's lives and experiences in the region. A study of immigrant women who organize their lives along ethnic (South Asian) and religious (Islam/Ahmadiyyat) prescriptions will further contribute to the wealth of western feminism by expanding its scope, while at the same time challenging its perceived static hegemonic status.

For feminists, patriarchy is the institution in society that is the root cause of power structures and women's oppression in all societies and, thus, needs to be challenged. Religion, too, is another institution in society that is patriarchal, and hence feminists' rightful concern with women opting to participate in religious movements or through individual worship. Rita Gross, who has written extensively on women and religion, discusses the role of patriarchy in her works and concludes that since hierarchy is inevitable, "the issue is of establishing a proper hierarchy." She continues, "It is not the same thing as what feminists mean by "domination" or "power over" in their critique of the patriarchal use of power." (1996: 25-26) While I am in total agreement with Gross over the "inevitability of patriarchy," I remain conflicted over her assumption that in most patriarchal religions, prescriptions for women are not rooted in dominance and control over their roles in society. It is towards the unraveling of this complexity that I am looking at Ahmadi women's lives to understand how they negotiate identity in their religious context.

"In the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminists pointed out how women often were completely excluded from the full practice of Judaism and Christianity." (Gross 1996, 40) Since the mid-1970s, Christianity and Judaism have seen an onslaught of critiques, adaptations and reclamations of religion by women to address their spiritual needs as well as to provide alternative interpretations of the texts aimed at gender equality. (Groenhout and Bower 2003; Haddad and Esposita 2003; Massey 2002; Nadel 2003; Plaskow and Romero 1974; Sharma and Young 1999) Feminist understanding of Islam is relatively new and still not explored by many. One of the more visible feminist theologians in Islam remains Riffat Hassan, a professor in religious studies and prolific writer on human rights and women's rights in the Quran. (1994, 199a, 199b) According to Hassan (1999b) the Quran provides enough verses if interpreted correctly to empower

women. She faults the interpretations of the Quran and over reliance on secondary Islamic texts (Hadith and Sharia) for Muslim women's oppressed conditions.

While one can argue that for women resorting to Islam and a Muslim heritage is done in an attempt to reject western cultural values including western patriarchy, the question still remains: is it possible to combine a sense of the spiritual with feminist sensibilities? For feminists, a second question that needs interrogation is why do women consciously choose one patriarchal ideology over another (1995:3). There is no doubt that by taking recourse to religious values, irrespective of which religion, women are succumbing to the gendered hierarchy prescribed in particular belief systems. But here the gendered hierarchy may provide the emotional, spiritual and material sustenance that these women are seeking in their attempt to cope with alienation in North America, even though they are operating within very limited choices. Of course, one has to keep in mind that for most women "choices" are limited in terms of patriarchal options, but given the inevitability of patriarchy, this paper spells out how Ahmadi women prefer their faith in contradistinction to their perception of western patriarchy (or non-Islamic patriarchy) that they feel politically and socially dominates their lives, and belittles their faith.

Agency: Ahmadi Women Defining Themselves

In discussions about women who are believers, a distinction needs to be made between women's personal spiritual needs to conform to a faith, and the position of women in the gender hierarchy as prescribed by her faith. Ahmadi women, while cognizant of the gender hierarchy in their faith, are willing to "compromise" their own needs for autonomy in an endeavor to fulfill their spiritual needs. They look upon their submission to the hierarchy as their duty to god with the conviction that this hierarchy has a significant purpose in the lives of all believers. I refer to this brand of patriarchy as "holy patriarchy." For Ahmadis, religious patriarchy is god-ordained and not one of dominance and control; whereas non-religious patriarchy especially in the USA is perceived to be one not only of hegemony, but one where "other" communities, cultures and women in general are debased and devalued.[vii]

A discussion on Muslim women's agency as informed by their faith is well laid out by Saba Mahmood (2001a, 2001b) in her work on the mosque movement in Egypt. Mahmood (2001a), through her critique of Butler's (1993) work, tries to reclaim Egyptian women's agency by disassociating it from issues of power and resistance by claiming, "I suggest we think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create." (2001a, 203) For the Ahmadi women studied for this research agency too is defined through an acceptance of subordination embedded in their faith and is definitely not derived from a resistance to power dynamics that the "holy patriarchy" may create for them. This agency is much more nuanced today given the revivalism of Islam in the Middle East and Asia in the last three decades. Issues of agency, power, and resistance have to be reread and redefined in the context of the changing world order. Islam has been revived in opposition to a hegemonic West, failed democracies, disillusionment with modernization projects, etc. For Muslim women specifically, western feminists' casting of all Muslim women into an "oppressive Islamic" mold, has complicated the discourse on ownership of agency, specifically for Ahmadi women today.

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My examination of the position of Ahmadi women indicates that this reality creates a "diasporic agency" that is expressed by the dislocation of Ahmadi women in their negotiation of their religious union with god, and their hierarchical relationality with their men. It is this "diasporic agency" that they utilize to transform themselves from being mere "victims of their faith" to women with an eminent status within the community and the larger alien society.

Metcalf asks, "Why do contemporary women participate in religious movements?"(1999:107) Interestingly, women themselves often take the initiative to participate in these movements. They may see religious movements as serving their own interests, interests which focus on maintaining the household and the community. The belief system of Ahmadi women is not just a matter of religion, but also of an institution that is perceived as privileging them and providing the stability they need to survive in the USA. Here I deliberately refrain from using the concept "empowering" because it is a word that can be misleading in its connotations. Being empowered entails political and economic power that is legitimized by the social order. For Ahmadi women interviewed in this project, such power was not evident, though a sense of entitlement and authority within certain parameters were observable.

As might be the case with any believer, Ahmadi women look to religion for guidance to resolve problems and provide solutions to their concerns. This framework of identity construction rooted in lived experience involves the "creation" of one's identity in terms of ethnicity (South Asian) and religion (Islam/Ahmadiyyat). Most importantly for Ahmadis, religion constructs identity for historical preservation that is unique in its content, message and politics. This construction defines the parameters, creates the space, and locates individuals in an environment that explains the universe in a language comprehensible to them. This language is powerful enough to create a discourse that makes it an attractive, desirable, and self-sustaining ideology. The Ahmadiyya movement has succeeded in creating adherents, who, with total loyalty, have pushed its agenda globally. The group has clear-cut rules along lines of age and gender for its followers. My specific interest in this discussion is not just to study the gender hierarchy among the Ahmadis but, more specifically, to understand how Ahmadi women relate to the precepts of their faith in an alien society and the importance of maintaining a "communal" identity over an individual identity.

According to Ahmadi women, their belief system differs from most mainstream religions in the openness and accessibility of the leadership. Followers are encouraged to maintain closeness with the leaders of the community. The leader is democratically elected for life, does not have to be an ordained priest (though has to be a scholar of Islam), and visits his congregation all over the world on a regular basis. The previous leader[viii] took particular interest in the welfare of families and women, and unlike leaders of mainstream Islam, had frequent meetings with women of his community.[ix] The global reach of modernization is utilized effectively in linking the Ahmadiyya faithful. Weekly, and for some daily, members watch their leader's speeches on television, accessed through a satellite dish. These discourses usually deal with current international issues and how peace and patience can help resolve them, and with maintaining harmonious relationships within the community and family. Such engagement of individuals with their leader and community is uncommon among mainstream Muslims.

Communality and Faith

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, Ahmadi women too conflate religion with South Asian ethnic customs. Given that the Ahmadiyya faith emerged in the region (India and Pakistan), which still claims the largest Ahmadi following, strong South Asian values inform the faith.[x] South Asian notions of sacrifice and a sense of duty to the family and community, and preservation of *izzat*[xi] (respectability) inform their interactions and value system. Belonging to the faith also implies keeping their ethnic values intact and passing them down to their children. The more dominant regional values that specifically impact women and form the backbone of the community are extended households and welfare of all kin, respect for and care of elders, selfless devotion to husband and children, a strong sense of community (caste, religion and region based), and finally, control over women's sexuality.[xii] For Ahmadi women, a reproduction of these value symbols and characteristics ensures that the younger generations do not lose sight of their duties and responsibilities to their families and community, and most important to their aging parents in a foreign country and culture. Culture, as Avtar Brah (1996,18) in her groundbreaking work on South Asian immigrants to the U.K. points out, "is the embodiment, the chronicle of a group's history." Thus, ethnic customs in conjunction with an Ahmadi value system underscores the need for preservation of their faith.

Other visible markers of their ethnicity are cuisine, clothing and language. Food served at home on a daily basis and during the meetings is basically South Asian, or what is popularly referred to as "Indian food" in the USA. Clothing worn at the meetings too is similar, mainly *shalwar kurtas* (pants and long shirts with scarves). Language spoken at the meetings is Urdu, even though one family is from Bangladesh and one is African American. Non-South Asians sometimes do wear the *shalwar kurtas*, and are also seen in western clothes worn modestly to cover the body and headscarves. What is fascinating is the simultaneous translation (from Urdu to English) that occurs in all conversations at the meetings to ensure that no one feels left out.

Since religion for most South Asians is tangible, structured and easily comprehensible, it becomes the perfect vehicle through which to transmit traditional ethnic values. Therefore, for Ahmadi women, practicing their faith is not perceived merely to enhance their own religiosity, but more important to preserve their culture and history. As a small, scattered, persecuted and ostracized community they feel invested in the "portability" of a faith powerful enough to survive in foreign lands.

For Ahmadi women in Southern California, *izzat*, shame, and honor continue to be values to which they attach themselves. Ahmadi women, as is the case with most women in Asia, are perceived to be the guardians of their family honor through their behavior, their preservation of culture and traditions, and through proper deportment of their sexuality (through prescribed clothing and interpersonal relationships with non-kin men). Ahmadi women and girls can compromise the *izzat* of the family and community through marriage with a non-Ahmadi, through "indecent" clothing, through dating, and through "disrespectful" (talking rudely, not serving guests, etc) behavior towards community members. These women claim to be part of the collective and feel that the collective defines them; therefore, the "honor of the collective" will bring them social recognition as individuals. Communality is emphasized and encouraged through frequent

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meetings, communal prayer, magazines, and television programs, all of which serve as constant reminders of their commitment to their faith. These institutions in turn add purpose and meaning to women's lives that helps in coping with life as immigrants.

Communality among Ahmadi women also helps them to conform to their religion more faithfully and maintain the family's spiritual sustenance. It provides a platform from which to preach their message, proselytize, and convert. It provides a shelter from the alien outside world, from ethnicism, racism, and in recent times from anti-Muslim attitudes. Communality for Ahmadis also provides the socio-cultural value system that is a comfort in a foreign culture, and also a framework for enculturation of their children. It is a location for economic sharing and political safety. Finally, a communal identity provides the courage for individuals to be "different" based on their utmost belief in the power and ultimate truth of their Almighty. Ahmadi women are convinced of god's authority and are compliant to his wishes and worship him through devotion, faith and trust.

Another major role played by communality in Ahmadi women's lives is the blurring of regional, class, and race differences in the structure and practice of their faith. The urgency to maintain harmonious solidarity in the group, especially as immigrants to the West, has resulted in a socio-political understanding of sisterhood where divisions along lines of being Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, rich or poor, or Black, White or Brown have receded in importance. For most other South Asian immigrants, these regional, class, and racial distinctions are very important distinguishing markers that are maintained through the formation of exclusive social groups.[xiii] Parvin,[xiv] a member of the Ahmadiyya group interviewed, feels that they are ostracized by other South Asians, including Muslims from the region because "they have a lot of misunderstandings about us. And because of that they probably do not like to socialize with us. It is very sad they have alienated us. We have not alienated ourselves from them." This alienation of Ahmadi women by other Muslims from South Asia resonated in most conversations I had with them. They felt they have a dual crisis to deal with, where the majority in this country erroneously perceives them as mainstream Muslims, while these Muslims in turn ostracize them socially. This perception of rejection and isolation then fosters a more intense attachment to their own community.

As pointed out by Ahmadi women, a basic tenet of Islam is its emphasis on egalitarianism, and the Ahmadiyya movement is not different in that respect. In fact, the Ahmadis are proud to point out that they were among the first in this country to address the issue of racism in the USA in the early 1920s (Haddad and Smith 1993). Ahmadis preached to African-Americans and recruited large numbers of them to their faith by pointing to the racist culture of the USA. In Southern California too, Ahmadi women have succeeded in drawing four African-American families into their fold. Its members see this overt declaration of being a just and egalitarian faith as the distinguishing virtue of the Ahmadiyya faith compared to other religions in the USA. Thus, for Ahmadis, at least during their meetings and times of worship, region, class, and race distinctions fade in the face of the commonality of the faith, the language and rituals of worship, and the promotion of oneness among their members.

The Ahmadiyya movement worldwide has a woman's wing, which is referred to as the *lajna* (in Arabic this literally translates to administrative group or a committee). The *Lajna Imaillah* (Assembly of Handmaidens of God) is an international Ahmadiyya

Muslim women's organization established by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II in 1922. (*The Ayesha*, 2000) According to *The Ayesha* (a magazine brought out bi-annually by Ahmadiyya women and currently published in Orange, California), "the *lajna* serves the spiritual and intellectual development of Muslim women and enables them to better rear their children in Islam and to serve humanity with beneficial programs." (*The Ayesha*, 2000,1) *Lajna* has a leadership parallel to that of men. Women elect their own leaders and create their own agendas within the context of the larger movement.

The local *lajna* meets monthly in the homes of its members. These occasions become the locale for expression of religiosity, a location to meet and interact with like-minded women in a non-hierarchical environment. It is an occasion for most of these women to network, to discuss their children, to entertain, and to relax and take a break from their daily routines. In this setting, they are also reaffirming their loyalty and commitment to their faith and community. For the host family, particularly women hosts, it is also a fulfillment of a religious obligation. The house and its members attain prominence through social recognition from the group and, it is assumed, rewards from god will follow.

A typical religious meeting lasts up to four hours. A meeting starts with the Ahmadiyya pledge and prayer to their founder, then a recitation from the Quran followed by its interpretation and a discussion of those verses in light of these women's realities and the present situation in the world. The spiritual part of the meeting ends with the recitation of the pledge again. Members of the group take turns in participating in the various activities of the meeting and an effort is made to involve young teens in the service.[xv] On completion of the religious requirements, refreshments are served and from there on it becomes an avenue for socializing. Most women dress in fancy clothes especially recent acquisitions from their home country, engage in joking banter about whether India, Pakistan or Bangladesh is setting the latest trends in *shalwar-kurtas*, and they basically relax and discuss the latest Indian movies (popular with all South Asians). Much of the post-religious discussion also centers on shopping, children, their education, and problems anyone may be facing in terms of their cultural adjustment to the USA or within their families. Ahmadi women repeatedly told me that getting together without their men and children gave them the space and time they needed to relax and not be conscious of their responsibilities. Saira, "When I am praying with other women from the group and spending the afternoon with them, it gives me the strength to lead my life. We share the same concerns and believe in the same religion so we are able to look for similar solutions to our problems."

Twice a year these women attend larger *jalsaas* (gatherings) in Los Angeles and/or San Jose, and once a year in Washington, DC (national headquarters) where they widen their social networks. Ahmadi women see these visits as pilgrimage plus vacations. They include meetings, tourism, and activities and competitions for children. Children are entertained with craft fairs, competitions in recitations and religious knowledge, sport, art etc. Women spend their time listening to religious speeches, religious poetry and socializing with women from different *lajnas*, and in Washington D.C. the highlight is the meeting with Huzoor (their religious leader).

In response to why Ahmadi women are motivated to organize themselves into groups and emphasize a sense of community among themselves, Parvin noted, "Yes, it is to create a religious identity. And at a wider level, it is about emotional and moral

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support. We go to our friends because we don't have relatives here. Religion for us is not just spiritual but also cultural. We follow the values handed down by our Books. For Ahmadis, Islam is our main identity."

Communality, then, defines and substitutes for Ahmadi women their extended family and support that displacement has rendered difficult to find. Dispossession of a homeland and cultural roots has not robbed the Ahmadiyya community of their cultural heritage and strong sense of community because of their maintenance of an uncontested faith in their belief. Through women and women's groups, the faith is kept alive and future generations enculturated into the religion and South Asian culture.

The journal *The Ayesha* also plays a very important role in keeping women focused on their mission and in equipping them with information about other religions to help them counter criticism about their faith. Strong role models are also projected by the faith. Examples are those of Ayesha and Khadija (wives of the Prophet Muhammad), and the wives and female family members of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed. The portrayals of these women display strength of character, bravery, tolerance, a high level of intelligence, and the ability to make independent decisions. These decisions not only pertain to their lives but also to their community, businesses, and, in the case of Ayesha, the ability to go to war. Thus, for Ahmadi women, being female is not associated with servility and oppression, but with a sense of entitlement and privilege endorsed by their social and religious community. *The Ayesha* repeatedly publishes articles on the above mentioned women to emphasize the sacrifices made by them to maintain honor and piety, to emphasize their selflessness and devotion to their faith and community, and the spiritual rewards they reaped in the eyes of god, and the adulation from the community.

The journal also reminds women of their roles as proselytizers by recognizing women who have brought in converts, and by constantly quoting statistics of the increasing numbers of converts worldwide who have been brought into the fold.[xvi] While men may go from door-to-door to proselytize, women do so in an unobtrusive manner. Ahmadi women interviewed stated that they go to their children's schools to give talks, participate in PTA meetings, organize talks in the community, volunteer for school and community events, become members of school boards, and set up stalls during school fairs. Some of them said that they "spread the word" in their children's sports fields where they interact with other parents, and at occasions of socializing with other South Asians.

A common method for proselytizing for all Ahmadis is the hosting of interfaith conferences/workshops comprising speakers from diverse faiths like Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and Jainism to engage them in a dialogue and to educate others about their religion. Ahmadi women interviewed conduct similar workshops but invite only women from diverse faiths to their workshops. It should be pointed out here that I noticed a visible absence of mainstream Muslim speakers at these inter-faith workshops. On questioning one of the members of the faith, I was informed that since the Ahmadiyya faith is the "true" Islam, it would be misleading to the other participants to be exposed to "misinformation in the name of Islam." The respondent did clarify though, that if one were a faithful believer of Islam, they too would be blessed by Allah in the afterlife. Attracting new members to the faith is the prime duty of Ahmadis, and it was claimed by one of them that Ahmadi women were bringing in more converts than men. As one

woman claimed, "It is our duty to educate as many people as possible about the Ahmadiyya faith since it is the pure form of Islam."

Thus, by emphasizing communality, strengthened by their group meetings and the journal, Ahmadi women are constantly reminded and inspired to be role models. They are assured of rewards from Allah (happiness in this life and a place in paradise in the next life), praise, recognition and high social status in the community, and ultimately as individuals feel endowed with a certain sense of piety. In the following sections I will describe pertinent values and prescriptions that are faith-based and aspired to by the Ahmadi women interviewed for this research.

Modesty: A Religious Prescription

Numerous scholars have noted the use of gender-specific symbols of control through the use of feminine representations. The most obvious symbol of Islam that has been identified and debated is the practice of veiling. A recent volume titled, *The Muslim Veil in North America*, edited by Sajida Alvi et. al (2003) consolidates and delineates the various issues and debates concerning veiling in North America. The volume presents varied interpretations of the Quranic injunctions on veiling, while also presenting ethnographic evidence of women in Canada who feel empowered and disempowered by veiling. Veiling has variously been interpreted to provide safety and protection to women and simultaneously been seen as an oppressive institution by some. Some interpreters of the veil also see it as controlling women's sexuality in attempts to maintain family *izzat*. While debates rage about what veiling really symbolizes, its implications for women's sexuality, and how much covering conforms to the prescribed form of veiling, the issue of concern should really be about who is veiling out of choice and who is being forced to do so.

For Ahmadi women the veil is essential to their very sense of religiosity and sense of self-righteousness. When moving out of their houses, Ahmadi women are very particular about their outward appearance, making sure they have a scarf around their heads and a light cotton coat over their clothes. Such modesty is interpreted not only in terms of religion but also in terms of maintaining a moral order different from the so-called western moral order. I discussed the issue of *purdah* (veiling and seclusion) with Saira to a get at the specifics of women covering their body. To my questions about whether Ahmadi women who cover their heads while wearing western clothes like jeans would conform to their standards, Saira replied, "Oh definitely as long as the jeans are not tight. That is perfectly all right. Look at Maryam (an African-American member) she wears long skirts and pants; many of our teenagers wear jeans---that is fine. Look, in the Quran men are told to lower their eyes first because they are "like that,"[xvii] and then women are asked to cover themselves." When I teasingly prodded her about what she meant by "like that," she half-jokingly replied, "It is part of their nature and a natural instinct to be 'like that'. Both the essence and form of women's modesty must be protected. In Islam, modesty is the main issue for men and women. Men should also keep their gaze lowered when talking to women."

Observing *purdah*, for Ahmadi women, is an expression of Islamic identity but also an issue of modesty that is closely tied to the issue of women's morality. While men are called upon to "lower their gaze" and not look at women "like that," it is women, according to Saira, "who have the prime duty and burden to maintain their honor and the family's reputation by following the Quranic stipulations more closely." For Saira and her friends, trying to center the discussion of veiling on issues of sexuality was awkward. It was not mere embarrassment on their part but

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also a lack of willingness to discuss sex and sexuality as issues that the Quran would be engaged with. All women interviewed on this topic felt that these were "western concerns" and sexuality as a subject was not important enough to discuss in public. Saira pointed out, "We do discuss issues of sex with our daughters, that is why we tell them it is important to observe modesty so not to attract sexual attention."

Teenage girls are also socialized into this code of modesty, and by their early teens wear clothing that cover their legs and arms completely. Perceived lack of resistance (as claimed by their mothers) by the teenagers is grounded in their belief that they are following the dictates of their faith that sets them apart from the wider "immoral" society. When I questioned one of my informants about whether her young daughters ever expressed an interest in wearing shorts and tank tops, she replied that she did buy them tank tops but they wore them under full-sleeved shirts. I would like to clarify though that I have not yet had the opportunity to interview the younger generation on their views on clothing and modesty. Living in Southern California, poses for these mothers added anxiety about their daughter's clothing. Ahmadi mothers were quick to point out that they felt that this part of the country as compared to the east coast was too liberal with clothing. They firmly objected to girls and women in skimpy clothes, shorts and sleeveless tops. Even on warm days they wore clothes that covered them fully. Curious about whether they visited the beach, Saira informed me that they do go to the beach and their children do go into the ocean in their pants "but do not swim in the ocean. They wet their feet." Saira did feel that her relatives and other community members in New York and New Jersey did not have such pressures as she faces here with "this culture."

Among Ahmadi women, a sense of confidence is visible in the adoption of modest clothing and head covering, especially in an environment where they stand out and which could be hostile to their faith. When questioned about whether veiling was imposed by Islamic patriarchy, their responses resonated more with their belief in their faith than any sense of oppression by a patriarchy. These women were quick to point out that, for Ahmadis, veiling was not as rigid in its covering as it was for mainstream Muslims. "We do not agree with people who say that women should wear the *burqa* (head-to-toe, tent- like garment) or cover their entire face. It is not mentioned in the Quran," explained Irum. I mentioned to her that on my visit to the Ahmadiyya mosque in London, U.K., I came across many women who had covered their heads and pulled the end of their scarves across their faces with just their eyes exposed. Irum responded that, "This kind of veiling is not required of them, but maybe they are being influenced by the Arabs in London. We believe in covering ourselves modestly, and that is why we wear a headscarf and coat. But if women want to cover more, that is their decision." Irum further clarified that when she went to work, she kept her headscarf on, but not her coat, even in the company of men. She did clarify that she wore long-sleeved shirts and long pants or *shalwar-kurtas* to work.

I observed an interesting situation at one of the interfaith workshops conducted by these Ahmadi women. Three men decided to accompany their wives, who were representing different faiths to this workshop. Suddenly there was a flurry of activity with many Ahmadi women crowding to the back of the room. A hushed discussion took place about what to do with these men. It was finally decided that since the heads of Ahmadi women were covered, it was appropriate enough *purdah*. For those Ahmadi women who

still felt uncomfortable in the presence of these men, it was suggested that the men sit in the front row so that these women would be behind them and therefore not looked at by the men. Through this compromise, Irum confirmed to me the liberal nature of their faith and, importantly, the power vested in them to make such decisions by the leaders of their faith. What was interesting to me was how the presentation of the self is dictated by their social and religious location. While these women go shopping, to work, and other public spaces where they mingle with men, a headscarf is perceived adequate, though I have observed instances where the scarf is around the neck and the head is not necessarily covered in all public spaces. But in religious meetings, a stricter form of *purdah* is conformed to. On pointing out this dichotomous situation to them, Irum was amused by my constant "quizzing" as she always puts it, and said, "well, you know how it is when you are in a meeting, we need to conform more rigidly, especially if the meeting is in a public hall." For Ahmadi women, while veiling was perceived as a symbol of Islam that added to their desired visibility, they uniformly felt that they were following the Quranic prescriptions of modesty.

Family: The Foundation For The Faith

Family plays a central role in determining the status and purpose in life for Ahmadi women interviewed. It is this location that defines a woman's identity but also rewards her with respectability, honor and pride. For Ahmadi women (like other Muslim women), "being a good wife and mother is ordained by Allah," according to all the women interviewed. Their roles at home involve a greater degree of responsibility than working in the public sphere. One of the informants went so far as to claim that since Allah gave women more "management skills to work at multiple jobs simultaneously, Allah made her responsible for the household!" Women also have the primary responsibility for preserving the faith within the household, making sure their husbands and children practice the religion faithfully. This responsibility gives them an elevated sense of self. For Ahmadi women, the family and the private domain thus, were not considered problematic sites of women's oppression, but for them an expression of their prominence in the family and community.[xviii]

All Ahmadi women interviewed came from South Asia to the USA through marriage. They consented readily to arranged marriages, even in instances where they had never seen their partners and marriages were solemnized over international telephone calls. Since marrying within the order is recognized as a virtue, these women conformed to such marriages with full faith and trust in the matchmakers. All the women interviewed claimed that women's primary responsibility was to take care of the family and raise children in an Islamic manner. Saira, in response to a question about working mothers felt that, "the family is first. We have seen where mothers work the whole day their children are neglected. Her role is to train and raise her children." When I questioned her about the source of her evidence proving children of working mothers were neglected, she was a bit vague about it and replied, "But with Muslims it has always been that way, it is even written in the Quran. Women are held responsible for the home, and men for outside." I persisted by referring to the Prophet's wives who had conducted business and even led a war as examples of working women, Saira replied that, "Well, if there is a necessity she does not have control, but where there is no necessity and you still want to work, then the burden is on your shoulders to prove that you can work and

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give excellent upbringing to children at the same time." She continued, "or you can have a compromise if you have an understanding husband. Prophet Muhammad does not say men should not help their wives. There are many instances noted in the Books where the Prophet helped his wives in household chores." When I told her that men's roles as helpers in housework is never emphasized by clerics, Saira replied, "See, Islam as preached by most Muslims is really a misrepresentation of true Islam. That is why the Ahmadis are trying to revive the original message of the Prophet. Even our Huzoor tells our men to help their wives at home and with the children. Look at Parvin, her husband does all the grocery shopping and helps the children with homework. That is how a family should be." All the women interviewed agreed with Saira that while running the house and taking care of children was primarily the women's responsibility, it was also the duty of their men to help out, "especially in the West where the women have no help from other family women or servants."

Marriage is seen as a required duty by the Ahmadis. Since women's identity is defined through marriage and procreation is seen as a virtue, the insistence on marriage for all women prepares them for the conformity that is prescribed by Islam. Interestingly, the previous Ahmadiyya leader Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad played a crucial role in matchmaking to ensure that most Ahmadis married within the fold. He used his office to keep track of eligible men and women, and according to the family's preferences tried to set up suitable matches when consulted.

The Ahmadiyya movement globally is very efficient in dealing with questions raised by its members, including issues pertaining to the status and treatment of women within the household. Domestic violence, abandonment, and any form of ill treatment of women by their husbands are dealt with severely by local chapter presidents, who are the community leaders of a particular city or town. According to Bajwa, a leader in the national *lajna*, "it is erroneous and illogical to locate violence and oppression against Muslim women in the teachings of Islam." (2000:6) She points out that when Christian women experience domestic violence and rape, it is unrelated to the religion. According to her, Muslim women's harassment is clearly not condoned in the Quran. Referring to Bajwa's article in *The Ayesha*, (2000) I asked my respondents what their opinion was to verse 34, chapter 4 (Dawood, 1974:370) in the Quran that allowed a husband to physically discipline his wife if she did not obey him. Some of the women interviewed claimed that they were unaware of that verse, while a couple of them clarified that the interpretation should be seen metaphorically. "The verse does not mean that a man should literally beat his wife, it means that he could discipline her through reprimand," explained Saira. Parvin added, "well, we should not forget that men are human and they can lose their temper sometimes. That is why it is written in the Quran that if a wife disobeys her husband, he should first scold her, then send her away to her room, and if she is still stubborn, then hit her lightly." Domestic violence among Ahmadis, though, is strongly condemned and this is apparent with their stance on divorce.

Divorce, though not encouraged, is permitted among the Ahmadis. In fact, according to the teachings of Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, if the man and woman at the outset of their marriage feel they are incompatible, divorce is prescribed. Divorce for Ahmadis is not unilateral as is in mainstream Islam, though the Quran does under exceptional circumstances allow women to initiate a divorce. Ahmadi women are allowed to file for divorce. This caveat of giving Ahmadi women rights to divorce is not

just seen as a "liberal" interpretation of their faith, but is projected as granting her rights to leave a failed marriage. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, women of the faith perceive their interpretation of Islam as specifically tailored to provide solutions for contemporary problems, and feel that they are vested with a certain amount of authority to transmit their religion and culture to the younger generation. There was a consensus among the women to the belief that was articulated by Irum, "I believe, and the Quran says the same thing, that a stable society is based in a stable household, and women are responsible for peace and harmony in the family."

Given the above situation, it becomes imperative to understand the power of a faith, which provides for these women an ideology and a spiritual strength, and fills a cultural void that the "foreign" society is not able to address. The emphasis on the family deflects individualism and promotes a sense of the community that is essential for the survival of the faith and its followers.

Interpreting and Understanding Ahmadi Women

At an Ahmadiyya meeting, I brought up the issue of certain verses in the Quran, which have been interpreted in a manner that hint at an unequal status for women in Islam, verses pertaining to unequal distribution of property, women as half a witness (two women's testimony equals one man's in court), women's role in the family etc. If there was a sense of discontentment with such interpretations or with Muslim states that imposed fundamentalist restrictions on women, the Ahmadi women interviewed saw these as misinterpretations of the faith, or as reflecting corrupted patriarchal politics. Women at the meeting claimed that these issues were raised in a deliberate attempt to discredit Islam by those opposed to the faith. At no point were disillusionments, disenchantment or negative life experiences resulting from (in my view) a patriarchal social order attributed to the religious texts or their religious leaders. Ahmadi women expressed their views on the prevalent gender hierarchy by accepting it as god-given but with a specific purpose, as one woman in the sample pointed out, "Yes women and men are different, but that is because their roles are different in the family and society. That does not mean they are unequal." Such arguments were also made when questioned about the possibility of ever having a woman leader head the Ahmadiyya movement. According to Ahmadis, women could never be leaders of the whole community because of veiling, and because "they were responsible for the most important job of maintaining the family."

Ahmadi women's location in the discourse on religious patriarchy is very similar to what women in Iran (Afshar 1998; Moghadam 2003, 1998, 1993, Bodman and Tohidi 1998) Afghanistan (Mehta 2002; Ahmed-Ghosh 2003) and Egypt are choosing. Mahmood in her articles (2001a, 2001b) on women in the mosque movement in Egypt observes that, "Notably even though this movement has empowered women to enter the field of Islamic pedagogy in the institutional setting of mosques, their participation is critically structured by, and seeks to uphold, the limits of a discursive tradition that holds subordination to a transcendent will (and thus, in many instances, to male authority) as its coveted goal." (2001, 2) For Ahmadi women "holy patriarchy," while underlining their gendered existence in the Ahmadiyya movement, is also the patriarchy that is protecting them, providing the answers they seek to their vulnerability in a foreign society, and empowering them to translate the text towards their spiritual sustenance. This "holy

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patriarchy" is preferred by Ahmadi women to western patriarchy, which they claim among other things, "destroys families," "has led to crimes against women," "discriminates against our men," and "looks upon us as backward people." Ahmadi women see "subordination to transcendent will" as duty to god and family, and in this submission a performance of their faith.

The sense of the collective is further strengthened by the notion in Islam that men and women "complement" each other. Ahmadi women emphasized the "complementary" role women played to men. Therefore, equality for them did not imply being like men but meant gaining the same respect as men by "conforming to the roles prescribed by the Quran." The notion of complementarity also emphasizes the differences between men and women as being god-given and not to be interpreted as inferior and superior statuses. Such complementarity, then, achieves the purpose of focusing on the family and community and minimizes the sense of individuality as being paramount. While such a concept of complementarity is problematic to feminists like myself, it creates the space for Ahmadi women to establish their position and identity within the larger community. For immigrant Ahmadi women, subscribing to such a dictate provides them with a clear-cut understanding of their position, not just in the family but also in society. As immigrants in a racially divided and religiously segregated society, Ahmadi women have few options in terms of coping strategies.

For Ahmadi women, besides their families, their religious affiliation is their only recourse and resort in times of need. Therefore, it is only through their adherence to it that they can have a sense of belonging to and participation in the larger society. Hence, rituals, meetings, and socializing along religious lines open up avenues to interact with the environment and engage with the majority culture. Here religion is providing for women, who are aware of the embedded patriarchy in their own lives, a space that they are able to negotiate, in the larger feminist sense, within western culture, a culture seen by them as impenetrable and hostile. "Religion," can as stated by Gross "validate women's ordinary domestic roles, sometimes powerfully comforting them even in highly patriarchal contexts." (1996:82) As Shahnaz Khan concludes from her work on Muslim women in Canada, "The women's narratives indicate that in their daily negotiations and translations of their discourses and structures that help determine their lives, expressions of ambivalence become a necessary part of their response to the structured contradictions of Muslim female identity." (2000, x) Continuing to borrow from Khan (2002), for Ahmadi women, their identities are consciously "constructed and performed;" a construction and performance that is deemed essential to perpetuate the faith by proper enculturation of their young ones.

Ahmadi women's responses to their faith and this research reflected a rationality that expressed not only their sense of conciliation but also a sense of determination to carve out an orderly and positive lifestyle. Loyalty and devotion to the Ahmadiyya community for these women meant not just fulfilling the dictates of the faith but also expecting the men to also conform, thus requiring them to play out their roles of provider and protector through good husbanding and fatherhood. Similar responses to patriarchy have been found in other parts of the world in varying cultures. Kandiyoti, in her oft quoted essay on, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," argues that, "Women strategize within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define the blueprint of what I will term the patriarchal bargain of any given society." (1988:275) Kandiyoti referring to women in

Asia continues, "The cyclical fluctuations of their power position, combined with status considerations, result in their active collusion in the reproduction of their own subordination." (1988:280) Here she is referring to how modernization changes labor relationships within traditional Indian and Chinese households to further devalue women. Under these changing circumstances Kandiyoti concludes that women prefer the traditional social order where even though subordinated, they could demand of men their traditional roles that provided for them. According to her, "Their passive resistance takes the form of claiming their half of this particular patriarchal bargain ---- protection in exchange for submissiveness and propriety." (1988:283). Kandiyoti's insights could very well hold for the Ahmadiyya community in the diaspora where given their foreign environment and the levels of modernization that Ahmadi women have to adjust to, confining themselves to their religion can permit similar patriarchal bargaining.

For Ahmadi women, their sect has provided a framework to deal with the strains of migration, a framework to preserve and create a culture in their own language and, most important, a framework for identity and recognition from within the group. For members of a displaced community, maintaining a sense of history and continuity and passing that on to the younger generation within the diaspora requires belief in an orderly, unchallenged and protective faith. For Ahmadi women, it is in their religion that they seek and find those institutions. Gender becomes for them, then, a role sanctioned by god, a god whom they are convinced knows best. Their faith becomes for them a sanctuary within prescribed roles.

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[ii] Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad tried to prove the misconception among the so-called orthodox sects of Islam that Jesus had been taken up bodily, thus establishing the humanness of Jesus and negating the 'son of God' premise.

[iii] After the death of Hazrat Ghulam Mirza Ahmed, the Ahmadiyya movement split into a Lahore Ahmadiyya group and a Qadian group over differences in leadership. The women in my study are the Ahmadis belonging to the Qadian group, that is the larger sect. Qadian is in India, but after the Partition of India into India and Pakistan in 1947, the Qadiani Ahmadis moved their headquarters to Rubwah in Pakistan. Temporarily the headquarters have been shifted to London, U.K.

[iv] The total strength of Ahmadis, according to various sources, range from 70 million to 200 million. Accurate statistics are not available on the demographics of the community, especially a country breakdown.

[v] Research methods include interviews, attending monthly meetings, visiting their mosque, and participant observation especially while socializing with them.

[vi] The last two years have seen some young Ahmadis move into the community but I have not included them in my research yet. Los Angeles and New Jersey have the largest concentration of Ahmadi immigrants.

[vii] Ahmadi women interviewed feel that women are not respected in the USA because they do not "dress properly," are used "cheaply" in advertisements, and basically "people in this country have lost all their moral values."

[viii] Mirza Tahir Ahmed died on April 19, 2003, ending his leadership of two decades.

[ix] Among the majority of the Muslims, the Shias and Sunnis, women are distanced from the Mullahs (priests). Only recently and still in rare instances are Muslim women allowed to pray in the mosque. Ahmadi women have equal access to the mosque as men though they pray in segregated spaces. Another distinction between the Ahmadis and mainstream Muslims is that the Ahmadis have just one leader for the

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whole community worldwide (similar to the Ismailis whose leader is Agha Khan), whereas for other Muslims leadership can range from national to regional and to the local.

[x] South Asian values, especially prescriptions for women to be homemakers, and good wives and mothers are not necessarily unique to the region. They exist in other cultures and movements too, including right-wing movements globally. But for Ahmadi women their conformity is to a process of socialization that is associated with South Asia.

[xi] Izzat is a term that denotes not just respectability of a person but is an issue of honor and prestige of a family for which the individual is responsible.

[xii] While such family values and decisions for women to stay at home are not confined only to Ahmadi women or women in Asia, what distinguishes many Asians, especially Ahmadi women from western women is the importance given to the collective over the individual.

[xiii] Amongst South Asians in the USA, most Indians socialize along lines of the state they originate from and their class status in the USA. For example, Indians in each US city will form regional organizations like the Gujarati Association, Bengali Association etc. Further, there is very little interaction among Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis due to the colonial and partition history of the subcontinent. Religious animosities between the Hindus, Muslims and Christians in the subcontinent further add to social segregation, as does South Asian distrust of African Americans.

[xiv] Parvin and other names of participants in this paper are pseudonyms. I have not elaborated on their age, marital and professional characteristics of the participants to maintain their anonymity, something these women were very insistent about.

[xv] There are separate groups for small boys and girls. *Nasrat* is for girls between 7-15 and then they belong to a *lajna*. Boys under 18 belong to *Itfal*; between 18-40 belong to *Khudam* and after 40 graduate to *Ansar*.

[xvi] According to the Ahmadiyya Gazette (2001, 2002), the sect has converted approximately a 100 million followers in the last two years. This information seems to be aimed at the Ahmadiyya community to strengthen their faith. These numbers seem grossly exaggerated, given that the total Ahmadi population is between 90-200 million according to their sources.

[xvii] "Like that," was used frequently by Ahmadi women to imply that men are naturally sexually attracted to women.

[xviii] Such patterns of women's assigned roles within the family have been observed in other settings too. Examples can be found in Hindu right-wing organizations (Mazumdar 1995, Sarkar and Butalia 1995), right-wing Christian organizations (Klatch 1999, Blee 2002, Buss and Herman 2003).

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