Portraits of Believers: Ahmadi Women Performing Faith in the Diaspora

Huma Ahmed-Ghosh

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.

Note on the Author
Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, Department of Women’s Studies San Diego, State University

Recommended Citation

Ahmadiyya was one of the groups that some Muslim respondents named when they were asked, “Are you Shia, Sunni or another tradition?” It is a small denomination with roots in India and Pakistan. Many Muslims consider Ahmadi beliefs heterodox, in large part because the movement teaches that its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who lived from 1835 to 1908, was a prophet, in contrast with the more mainstream Islamic belief that Muhammad (who died in 632) was the last prophet. Muslims who believe in the Messiah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, are known as Ahmadi Muslims. We adhere to the same Islamic declaration of faith, “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger. We likewise observe the same 5 Pillars of Islam and same 6 Articles of Faith. In an effort to arouse anger in the minds of unlearned Muslims, clerics make this fabrication often. In reality Ahmad considered himself insignificant compared to the grandeur and majesty of Prophet Muhammad. Ahmadi Muslims believe Prophet Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets, and therefore God’s greatest creation. Considerable number of Pakistanis believe that Ahmadis perform Haj by going to Rabwah (Chenab Nagar in Pakistan) or Qadiyan (India). No Ahmadi visits these places with the intention of performing Haj. Members of Ahmadiyyah Muslim community visit Rabwah Pakistan because it is the Headquarters of the Community in Pakistan since 1948, while many Pakistani Ahmadi visit Qadian for the annual convention or Jalsa Salana that was banned by the Pakistani Government in 1988. This religious hatred towards the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community that’s embedded in the Pakistani constitution leads to deprivation of their religious & political rights, the fact that they are Pakistani citizens makes no difference: this makes Ahmadis “Pakistan’s Palestinians”.