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GOOD BUREAUCRATS AND GOD: The Ethical Labor of the Public

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It is another Saturday morning and the five of us—myself, Azfar sahib, and three other Irrigation Department bureaucrats—are sitting too close to each other in a small Suzuki, being driven to Janjattey (a village in Punjab) as part of proceedings in an irrigation-water dispute. Azfar sahib sits at the apex of the Revenue Wing of the Lariyan Irrigation Division of the Irrigation Department in Punjab, Pakistan's agricultural heartland and most populous province.[1] Punjab is also where the country's canal-irrigation infrastructure—the world's largest contiguous such network—is concentrated. As deputy collector, Azfar sahib oversees the work of two subordinate bureaucratic tiers—the *zillehdar* and *patwari* (revenue officials); supervised by the Collector, these four tiers constitute the department's Revenue Wing.[2] The Revenue Wing is responsible for assessing irrigation-water charges, settling water disputes among agriculturalists,[3] and prosecuting water theft from state canals under the colonial-era 1873 Canal and Drainage Act, the primary legislation scaffolding irrigation management in Pakistan's Punjab.[4]

We are going to Janjattey because a man called Zaheer and some others have been throwing trash in a watercourse (*khaal*) in the village, blocking the flow of irrigation water to other cultivators who use that watercourse. Of those affected, some formed a group and visited Azfar sahib's office a few weeks ago, lodging a

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formal complaint against Zaheer. When the issue remained unresolved after three attempts by the *patwari*, Iqbal sahib, and the *zillehdar*, Hamdan sahib, Azfar sahib announced the day and time of his visit: "I'm coming then, and will look into it myself," he had said ominously to Iqbal sahib. Iqbal sahib's authority, as well as that of his *zillehdar* Hamdan sahib, had been dealt a blow by this decision, for it was their failure to reach an amicable resolution that had necessitated Azfar sahib's visit; his subordinates had been unsuccessful in resolving the matter, hence the escalation of the dispute to the upper tier involving him (as the deputy collector).

Attempts at dispute resolution by Irrigation Department bureaucrats are covered by the 1873 act. Specific sections of the act classify obstructing canal water flow and "corrupting or fouling" the water in a canal as offenses; prohibit the discharge of effluent into canal and drainage works; and vest officials with the power to remove a range of obstructions from a watercourse.

Figure 1. A *khaal* in rural Punjab.

On reaching Janjattey, we step out of the car, greet the village elders assembled to receive us, and are led to the watercourse. We walk along it noting the usual suspects—discarded juice boxes, plastic bottles, big and tiny plastic shopping bags, and rags of cloth mixed into balls of grayish green-brown slush—clinging to the mud bank.

Figure 2. Irrigation officials and agriculturalists "in the field" in a different case.

Azfar sahib: "The trash is clearly visible. Look, it is right here!"

He looks up at Zaheer, against whom the complaint is primarily directed: "Can't you see it?"

Zaheer, who had slowly and reluctantly walked up to us but continued to stand apart, says, "Yes, yes," but doesn't look Azfar sahib in the eye.

The June sun is shining shamelessly on our group of ten men, me, and some children skipping around, a little curious, a little bored. Azfar sahib's white shalwar kameez is shining back at the sun, his eyebrows are raised, and his lips drawn apart. Suddenly he stops peering into the watercourse, steps away from the embankment, flicks a fly from his ear, and says, looking at Iqbal sahib and Hamdan sahib, "They don't have to clean it if they don't want to. I'll simply press charges." Then, looking at Zaheer, "It's for you and your government [*apki hakoomat*] to sort out. And if water supply is cut off, I won't be able to help you."

Zaheer, now meeting Azfar sahib's gaze, says, "You are new, but this is an old problem. The deputy collector before you understood our problem. This waste is from the mosque. What are you suggesting? Should we stop doing ablution and praying in the mosque?"

After a few seconds of tense silence, some of the men around Zaheer say, "Yes, one has to pray!" and "One can't stop praying now!"

Azfar sahib lets out a short laugh, louder than usual. "We've brought God in the middle again, haven't we! Look, this is a water problem [*pani ka massla*]. There's no need to bring religion [*mazhab*] in. I am the new deputy collector, but I've been in this department for fifteen years. I know everything. I know what's going on." He jerks at his shirt as if, with the creases, questions about his expertise will also fall off.

PUBLIC OFFICE: State Transcriptions and Laboring Bureaucrats

State Transcriptions

Is it, should it be puzzling that a routine irrigation-water issue—a "Section 70 case" under the 1873 act that involves the offence of "corrupting or fouling the water"—generates discussion over "bringing in religion"? After all, Pakistan is officially an Islamic Republic; the preamble to its constitution begins by stating that "sovereignty over the entire Universe belongs to Almighty Allah alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Pakistan within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust"; the constitution proclaims Islam as the state religion; and a robust body of case law has conceptualized government office as a "sacred trust."[5] Given such authoritative state "transcriptions" (Khan 2012), why should the invocation of God or religion in everyday state activity prove contentious? The response to these questions must be routed through a conceptualization of law and everyday bureaucratic work as ethical labor—but first, let's take a deeper look at state transcriptions to better illustrate the stakes of what I am going to argue, and what my bureaucrat interlocutors are navigating.

Soon after Pakistan's creation, in 1949, the question of the public role of religion became a cause for high-level national dialogue as the country's first legislature (Constituent Assembly) debated passing the Objectives Resolution (OR). The OR addressed the relationship between the newly founded state, its citizens, and Islam, and was meant to articulate the main principles in light of which the new country would draft its first Constitution.

The Constituent Assembly was the site of vigorous debate—then Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan, moving the Resolution in March 1949, said: ". . .we, the people of Pakistan, have the courage to believe firmly that all authority should be exercised in accordance with the standards laid down by Islam so that it may not be misused. All authority is a sacred trust, entrusted to us by God for the purpose of being exercised in the service of man . . . . Islam is not just a matter of private

beliefs and conduct. It expects its followers to build up a society for the purpose of good life—as the Greeks would have called it, with this difference that Islamic 'good life' is essentially based upon spiritual values" (2009, 92, 95).

Specifically on the question of those running the state, Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Osmani noted: "It is evident that a State which is founded on some principles, be it theocratic or secular (like the USSR) can be run only by those who believe in those principles. People who do not subscribe to those ideas may have a place in the administrative machinery of the State but they cannot be entrusted with the responsibility of framing the general policy of the State . . . ." (2009, 113).

The OR served as a preamble to the 1956, 1962 and 1973 Constitutions, and in 1985, through a constitutional amendment, it became a substantive part of the Constitution. This incorporation took place during General Zia ul Haq's military rule (1977–1988), remembered (and reviled) for its "Islamization agenda." Also part of Islamization was the setting up of a Federal Shariat Court (FSC) to adjudicate in cases of legislation allegedly violating Islamic injunctions. Thus, conditions had been created for a case to be brought to the FSC in 1987, alleging that a clause of the Civil Servants Act of 1973 regarding the power of seniors to fire subordinate officers "at pleasure" was "repugnant to the injunctions of Islam." Since the OR's incorporation into the constitution as a "substantive" part, the allegation was triable in the FSC. The Supreme Court upheld the FSC judgment, an excerpt from which reads:

> A civil servant is required to act as a servant of the State . . . no opportunity can be provided in an Islamic State to any one to curb the urge and instinct of others to disobey his arbitrary, dishonest orders which are contrary to Sharia. Security of tenure of a civil servant can be an incentive to him for discharging his duties honestly, constitutionally and according to Sharia. On the other hand any apprehension in his mind against this security is liable to breed in him what is known as servility to the boss . . . servility is likely to endanger his independence of action and make his actions subservient to the wishes of the boss, howsoever, unlawful and unIslamic they may be.

Shortly after the judgment, Supreme Court Justice Nasim Hasan Shah (1987, 385), at a college event where he had been invited to speak, praised the judgment, emphasizing that "all government posts and ranks are Allah's trusts and the government officials and rulers are trustees."[6]

It is one thing for a member of the superior judiciary to announce that government posts are "Allah's trusts," and quite another to inhabit such a post and fulfill the role. State transcriptions contour the space for bureaucrats to labor with/in, but they do not predetermine bureaucratic behavior, nor do they settle the differences that inevitably arise as bureaucrats understand their mandates differently. As I will show in subsequent sections, on the reading of a few authoritative legal texts a conception of office as Allah's trust may appear straightforward—and yet examining everyday bureaucratic work shows how fine distinctions between what is and what isn't to be given a "religious color" (*mazhabi rung*) are made by bureaucrats in the course of their work. I argue, therefore, that it cannot suffice to locate determinations vis-à-vis the role of religion in law, high-level policy mandates, or case law, because they may very well be undermined in the course of everyday bureaucratic work.

This 'gap' between law and its application has featured prominently in anthropological writing on law and statecraft, and it has been filled with theorizations of discretion and power (Rudolph and Rudolph 1979), norms (Greenhouse 1982), corruption (Kaviraj 1984), irresolution (Holston 1991), political society (Chatterjee 2006), and of the divide between upper- and streel-level bureaucrats (Akhtar 2018). Anthropological engagements with this space have proved generative: Naveeda Khan (2012, 14) has suggested that "over time the legal transcripts of the state espouse a forcefulness" that may "surpass . . . the capacity of the law." Considering the proliferation of blasphemy allegations in Pakistan, Khan (2012, 17) suggests that texts come to "undergird everyday lives." This appears less settled in my research setting: while my bureaucrat interlocutors know what the Constitution says (some have read it, many others have not), they are not aware of nor conversant in the case law on public office. It became clear to me early in my fieldwork that legal texts—whether the 1873 Canal and Drainage Act undergirding the entire irrigation system in Punjab or court judgments conceptualizing public office—are only one among the many things bureaucrats labor with.

Laboring Bureaucrats

Instead of explaining the failures of law, I argue that ethical labor is key to understanding *how* bureaucratic work proceeds every day. Ethical labor is my conceptualization of the enrollment by my bureaucrat interlocutors of law, God, and vernaculars of work; and, as I will show through ethnographic evidence, the labor takes the form of distinction-making vis-à-vis the public and the private.

My conceptualization of ethical labor builds on two emic categories: ethics (*ikhlaq*) and labor (*diharri*). *Diharri*, a term my bureaucrat interlocutors use often, has a dual meaning: it can mean a daily wage as well as a day's work (see Hayat 2020 on this semantic space). My use of *labor* here is meant to emphasize intentionality and deliberation in bureaucratic work instead of exploitation, which is the more common register for examining labor. Attending to such vernaculars of work expands the scholarly lexicon of government, demanding that it make space for, for instance, "having to account to God," ethics, and a specific understanding of "merit" (that I elaborate in subsequent sections) as *ways to work*, as *ways of work*, not transgressions of bureaucratic objectivity and law.

My claim, that my bureaucrat interlocutors actively produce public-private distinctions in their everyday work as a modality of ethical labor, intervenes in three literatures: the anthropology of Islam, bureaucracy, and ethics. Recent literature in the anthropology of Islam has shown that the public-private distinction constitutes a modality of secular power (Agrama 2012; Ahmed 2010; Lemons 2018). Theorizing from the Egyptian case, in a compelling ethnography of personal status courts, Hussein Agrama (2012, 13) examines conceptions and practices of publicity and privacy to show that conflicts between religion and law are rooted in liberal secularism, and that Egypt's religious-political ambiguities are not a national failure or peculiarity, but expressions of deeper indeterminacies at the foundation of secular power (Agrama 2012, 74, 181). Indeed, a comparison between the Pakistani and Egyptian Constitutions, and the countries' political histories, reveals many similarities: a realm of personal family law governed by Sharia provisions; a contemporary legal framework rooted in colonial rule; Islam as state religion (Article 2 of the Pakistani Constitution); entrenched military power. Agrama does the important work of showing that states (of the Global South), such as Egypt and Pakistan, are not failing on a "scale of secularity." Thus, to the question of whether Egypt constitutes a secular or a religious state, Agrama (2010, 499, 501) responds that it is neither a false nor an answerable one, since the tensions such a question demands answers to are not peculiar to Egypt, but constitutive of modern secularism as a problem space. I am interested in the ethnographic demand *after* such a diagnosis: How do agents of the state navigate these indeterminacies with varying degrees of success and failure, hope and indifference, regret and disillusionment? Are they able to reconcile them at times, ignore them at others, or further them?

While such questions make the anthropology of bureaucracy an important conversational space for me to engage, my approach diverges from the overwhelming bent away from the bureaucrat in the literature. The anthropological literature

has shown bureaucracies to be sites of structural violence (Ferguson 1994; Graeber 2015; Gupta 2012; Hoag 2014). Akhil Gupta, in an examination of the Indian state's chronic failure to address poverty, has rooted the arbitrariness of outcomes in the structures and operations of bureaucracy, instead of in, for instance, officers' attitudes or incompetence. Gupta (2012, 23) writes that regardless of the sincerity and noble intentions of officers, "the very procedures of the bureaucracy" subvert the goal of helping the poor. He makes the important and fine distinction between the arbitrariness of bureaucratic outcomes and bureaucratic indifference. In their anthology, Aradhana Sharma and Gupta (2006) advocated examining "official procedures" as "authorless strategies through which power is exercised and inequalities instituted" to disentangle "intentionality" from the "operation of power." James Ferguson (1994, 283), too, in his influential text on development and bureaucracy in Lesotho, made a compelling case for "demot[ing] intentionality" and instead focusing on a "machine, an anonymous set of interrelations that only ends up having a retrospective coherence." Furthering this bent away from the bureaucrat, motivated this time by a Latourian turn away from the institutional, Matthew Hull's (2012, 18) more recent ethnography of a Pakistani bureaucracy focuses on "graphic artifacts" and the "associations" they are constituted by and constitutive of. While this scholarship has deepened the understanding of participatory politics (Anand 2017; Mathur 2015), and more richly populated bureaucratic spaces, the combined effect is reduced attention to bureaucrats themselves—their intentions, critiques, and ethical conundrums. This, as I show below, misses the difference made by bureaucrats' notions of accountability and their concepts of good and bad.

In taking seriously the reasoning articulated by my bureaucrat interlocutors, I find inspiration in the anthropology of ethics for its attention to subjecthood generally, and to emic idioms, categories, and reasoning in particular. The anthropology of ethics might appear a surprising interlocutor, given that bureaucracies typically feature in political and social theory, as well as in popular commentary, as foils to ethical enterprise (Kahn 2011; MacIntyre 1988; Mufti 2013; Taneja 2017). In particular, Saba Mahmood's (2004) ethnography of a piety movement among Cairene Muslim women has been a powerful stimulus for me to consider as ethical labor my bureaucrat interlocutors' quotidian work. Mahmood's ethnography is quite explicitly not about the bureaucratic as a modality of ethical inhabiting. But it bears mentioning that Mahmood's interlocutors were clerks in the state bureaucracy by day and participants in the piety movement by night. Reading Mahmood's analysis, built on her work with her female interlocutors after their office hours, I

was first led to wonder how the yield would differ if the ethnography considered their workdays.

My attention to vernaculars of work as a key element of ethical labor readily brings me into conversation with the ordinary ethics literature, given its organizing principle that the "wellsprings of ethical insight are deeply embedded in the categories and functions of language and ways of speaking" (Lambek 2010, 2). Critiques of this influential approach have noted that if ethics is considered intrinsic to speech and action, then the "communicative labor by which the ethical is made intersubjectively relevant, socially recognizable, and pragmatically consequential" risks being eclipsed (Lempert 2015, 134; Zigon 2014). In response, scholars have proposed alternatives to immanence, ranging from "entanglements" (Lempert 2015; 2013) and "assemblages" (Zigon 2011) to "affordances" (Keane 2014). Collectively, this marks an effort to *locate* the ethical—whether in the everyday, the ordinary, interaction order, actions, or situations.

While I share the attention to ordinary language use, my own approach diverges from ordinary ethics along two axes: (1) its invocation, in line with Aristotelian notions of practice and in opposition to Durkheimian and Kantian notions of obligation, of an overly simplified conception of rule-following as foil, culminating in a statement such as, "ethics is not a matter of smoothly following the rules" (Lambek 2010, 12); and (2) the status and role of the vernacular in conceptualizing the ethical. For an approach anchored in ways of speaking, ordinary ethics is remarkably dominated by English-language idioms and, hence, categories—consider, for example, lengthy deliberations over freedom and agency (Laidlaw 2014, 10), and practice and performance (Lambek 2010, 258). My interlocutors rarely used these words, or their Urdu or Punjabi equivalents, as I elaborate below.

Jarrett Zigon (2014), concerned about that which exceeds articulation, proposes a "critical hermeneutics" instead of an ordinary language approach. With critical hermeneutics as Zigon (2014, 755) views it, however, the anthropological endeavor is to go beyond our interlocutors' speech. This, in turn, is a function of his location of conscious reflection on appropriate ethical responses in moments of "breakdown" (Zigon 2009, 262).[7] My analysis diverges on both these fronts: first, in a bureaucracy that, in the words of one of my bureaucrat interlocutors, is devoted to "basically dealing with the public," "breakdown" is the stuff of the everyday: mediating between disputing parties, negotiating conflict, fielding complaints are all registers of the ordinary. Taking their terms seriously, I conceptualize ethical labor *with* my interlocutors' speech, not *despite* it.

The ethical has not formed a dominant modality for understanding bureaucratic work (cf. Ballestero 2015; Bear 2014; von Schnitzler 2013), and when it has, it has tended to emerge amid conversations on corruption (Jauregui 2014) or when newness enters bureaucracies in the form of neoliberal reform projects (Qureshi 2015; Tidey 2016). However, this has the effect of portraying bureaucracies as static (working smoothly) until a new (neoliberal) program knocks (Qureshi 2015, 37–38).

Next, I unfold my argument in a sequence of three ethnographic narrations that trace the intricate and often surprising ways in which public-private distinctions are made in quotidian bureaucratic work as a form of ethical labor. First, I complete the opening narration. Then I complicate the portrait of the same interlocutor, Azfar sahib, who in the opening narration says there is no need to bring in God yet routinely invokes accountability to God as integral to work. The third ethnographic narration introduces some of my other bureaucrat interlouctors and sheds light on a disagreement among them over what being a "good Muslim" entails in relation to *ikhlaq* and merit.

The ethnographic evidence in this article draws on a decade of research with the Punjab irrigation bureaucracy. During this decade, for many of my interlocutors I have graduated from being "that researcher working on her thesis who keeps coming back" to the "lecturer" who is now asked to deliver presentations on the colonial history of the department as part of trainings for irrigation officials. Then, as now, I consider myself a student of this world. Then, as now, the distinction between the anthropologist-me and the citizen-me continues to be an unsteady one. In the final section, for instance, you will encounter me more as angry citizen than as anthropologist. As it turns out, we were all busy in distinction-making labor—let me turn now to my interlocutors'.

"NO NEED TO BRING IN RELIGION"

Let us return to the ethnographic narration that opened this article. After the inspection we assemble in the village headman's quarters for tea as was usual practice. During this time Azfar sahib makes a bit of noise having the hosts find him a spot where he can offer *Asr* (afternoon prayers). Interspersed between his rounds outside the quarters for ablution and loud confirmations of the direction of prayer (*qibla*), are the following: "Please confirm the direction quickly, I don't want my prayer to go *qazah* [delayed prayer to make up for a missed prayer]," and "I never let my prayers become *qazah*." But I knew from nearly two years of fieldwork with Azfar sahib that he would routinely offer *qazah* prayers. On our way

back from Janjattey, Azfar sahib noted the excess (*ziadtti*) of Zaheer's instrumental use of religion. He also commented on the fuss he had made about praying, saying it was to reassure Zaheer and the others that he took concerns around prayer seriously. For how else, he suggested with a smile, would his attempt at bracketing the religious and managing the *pani ka massla* (water problem) prove effective?

Two related aspects of public-private distinction-making come into view: for this public matter, Azfar sahib wants to keep religion out, but for his attempt to be successful, he needs to be seen as a privately religious person. Had Azfar sahib been seen as someone inattentive to prayer, his attempt to keep religion out of the proceedings would have been less likely to succeed. For him to keep religion out of this case, he must be seen as someone who usually pays attention to the exigencies of prayer—as he noted, how else would his attempt at bracketing the religious succeed?

A few years after this incident, the Irrigation Department held a mandatory training for Revenue Wing officials and Azfar sahib was one of the lecturers. Bureaucrats' promotions require such trainings. During them, senior officials such as Azfar sahib are invited to lecture on topics of their expertise—in this training, Azfar sahib was in charge of the modules on irrigation legislation. During one such training session, which I was allowed to attend as a special favor given my years of working at the department, conversation between Azfar sahib and the participants (seventeen *zillehdar* and I) turned to how agriculturalists try to obstruct irrigation officials in "Section 68 cases."

Section 68 of the 1873 Canal and Drainage Act, titled "Restoration of Demolished or Altered Watercourses," gives the Department the authority to rebuild dismantled watercourses. Dismantling watercourses is a common form of disputation among agriculturalists. In such cases, the person who is no longer able to draw water because the watercourse has been dismantled approaches the department to lodge a complaint and request the watercourse's restoration. If the investigation finds that the watercourse was indeed wrongly dismantled, the department orders reconstruction.

Once officials reach the location to begin reconstruction, however, the situation can present further challenges: during the training, one *zillehdar* narrated his recent experience when agriculturalists had constructed a mosque over the path of a watercourse to stop its restoration. The construction of the mosque had taken place overnight when it had become known that the irrigation officials would begin work on laying the foundations of the watercourse the following day. Some of us smiled knowingly, others laughed, and nodding slowly, Azfar sahib said: "See.

See for yourself. This is a common tendency in our society . . . to give a religious color [*mazhabi rung*] to everything."

The discussion continued as officials shared their experiences—some successful, some frustrating—with Section 68 cases. As the session drew to a close, Azfar sahib said, "Look, it is never easy, doing the right thing is never easy." He used the terms *sahi kaam* (right act) and *durustt faisla* (correct decision) for "the right thing." He then narrated the incident which I recounted in the opening of this essay as a lesson to his juniors in how he had managed this tendency once by drawing boundaries around a "water problem."

The exercise here is not to determine how Azfar sahib typically works, or how a case such as this is typically resolved. It is to show that from the site of the bureaucratic everyday, distinguishing the religious from that which should not be given "a religious color" is underdetermined: state transcriptions, whether Section 70 of the 1873 act, or a Supreme Court judgment, or a constitutional provision, tell us only so much.

"I HAVE TO ANSWER TO GOD"

Azfar sahib took stock of his division every Saturday. At these meetings all the *patwari* and *zillehdar* of Lariyan Division would gather in his office and arrange themselves in two crescent-shaped rows of chairs, the *zillehdar* in front of the *patwari*, reflecting departmental hierarchy. Azfar sahib, seated behind his desk, his usual picture of calm, would command the room for about an hour. He would call on specific officers and ask to be updated on this or that court case, water dispute, or anti-corruption proceeding. At these meetings, he would routinely narrate his own experiences in government service, beginning and ending with, "The decision will be yours; my duty [*farz*] was to tell you."

His stories were usually about how he had withstood political pressure, pressure from his superiors, and the allure of bribes to do what was right: "Side with the law and the truth, then there's nothing to fear. Many people have put pressure on me, threatened me, blackmailed me. Did I ever budge?" Then one or another subordinate would say "No, never," and Azfar sahib would complete his story. These meetings would end with cups of tea and saucers clinking together; the twenty or so men and one woman standing up to take their leave, jerking at their shirts to let the biscuit crumbs fall; and Azfar sahib's parting words, always the same: "It is my duty to tell you, for I have to answer to God one day when He asks, 'So Azfar, I gave you this senior post, what did you do with it?'"

Here is a story he told once when Hina, a *zillehdar*, mentioned to him that the executive engineer ("XEN," her superior) was putting pressure on her to sanction a new watercourse at a politician's request (*sifarish*). These are known as "Section 20 cases," and require that the official secure consensus from the agriculturalists whose lands the watercourse will traverse before deciding whether to approve ("sanction") or disallow the watercourse. In this case, Azfar sahib had consulted with multiple agriculturalists and gathered that most opposed the proposed path of the new watercourse. But this did not decide the matter—in Azfar sahib's own words, "The law was clear, but practically there was so much going on" (*Qanoon ttu wazeh tha magar practically barra kuch horaha tha*). He went on to describe how he had been under "extreme pressure": he said "extreme pressure" thrice, then its Urdu version twice, "limitless [*be-inteha*] pressure."

"My seniors were putting pressure on me. The XEN wanted to favor one of the agriculturalists requesting the new watercourse, the chief engineer wanted to favor another who was opposed to the watercourse, and even the collector at the time wanted to favor someone else. I felt so stuck [*jakrra hua*]." He brought his tightly clenched hands up to his face to show how.

"I said to Allah, please help me. And then Allah created a situation that worked in my favor [*Allah ne aisee surat paidda kee*]. Somehow I got out of it, else I would have committed a wrong. Only because of His help did I do something right. I won, but only because He helped me. You can't make everyone happy. I've restricted myself to my self [*zaat*]. I have to answer to Him and I have to have a clear conscience. As for the others, that's their problem. Look, Makkah and Madinah were fixed only after the top was fixed. Once the top is OK then the rest becomes OK too."[8]

This story offers a rich analysis of government hierarchy, the self, and situations created by God. Indeed, on offer here is a theorization of government and self and of the life of law—"practically," in practice, so much more is always going on even if the law is clear (*wazeh*). But I want to pursue a particular thread: that ethical labor explains the very implementation of the law—it is what makes the law matter, and it is how the law matters. Azfar sahib's official duties, as scripted in the Manual of Rules, and the 1873 Canal and Drainage Act, include the supervision of his subordinates. But Azfar sahib invoked a duty (*farz*) owed to an entity other than the department. This was something he owed to God and would have to account for on the Day of Judgment (often referred to as *qayamat ke din* or *uss din*, "that day")—but insofar as one effect of this requirement was him serving as a diligent superior to subordinates, we could say that his ethical labor makes him

a good agent of the state. Azfar sahib discharges his official duty *because* he has to answer to God. He behaves like a good bureaucrat, then, *because* he is accountable to God.

Having to account to God also explained his decision not to bring his Suzuki to the office, and to take the bus instead. "A Suzuki needs fuel. If I start coming to the office in my car from my home all the way in Ichra [a neighborhood in Lahore], my fuel costs will spiral. My salary will remain the same. What will I do? Corruption. One has to answer to God! So to protect myself from corruption, I don't bring my car to work." Having to account to God made him a good bureaucrat insofar as it prevented him from refueling his car from the public exchequer.

Let me now expand my ethnographic evidence, and go beyond Azfar sahib's office. Consider another department-wide training. In one of the sessions dedicated to an explication of Section 39, as Azfar sahib was explaining the most common cases in which the section would apply, our conversation turned to the prevalence of disputation among water users. Part of Section 39 stipulates that for every application for the construction of a new watercourse, applicants will "identify owners or occupiers of lands and other irrigators who are likely to benefit from the proposed watercourse." The aim is to ensure that general support for the watercourse already exists before involving the department and formally beginning proceedings, since such infrastructure is usually not approved in the absence of consensus. In the training, Azfar sahib explained how officials should navigate this requirement, and actively support the creation of consensus, expending effort on mending soured relations among neighboring agriculturalists. He criticized current practice among department members which tended to reject applications for not evidencing consensus. Instead, he urged the officials to do the work of "creating consensus." Most of the hour-long session reinforced this point about promoting better social relations among people as a virtue—in terms of bureaucrats earning reward from God for a virtuous act (*sawab kamana*), following the Prophet's example (*sunnah*), and fulfilling their duties (*faraiz*) as Muslims.

Thus far I have shown how the routine conduct of bureaucratic tasks—supervising subordinates, getting to the office, following orders, refusing to follow orders, interpreting and implementing laws, delivering mandatory training—creates spaces for ethical laboring. Through an extended focus on Azfar sahib, I have aimed to draw a complex portrait of one bureaucrat—thus we have learnt from Azfar sahib not only as he is (challenged) in the field but also as he acts in his office leading weekly meetings and lecturing in department trainings.

In the final ethnographic narration I examine a different mode of everyday bureaucratic work—inspections as part of a drainage survey—and focus on a disagreement among multiple bureaucrats, paying particular attention to the categories, idioms, and metrics they employ for evaluating each other's actions, as well as their own. I aim to illustrate not just how bureaucrats navigate these situated tensions but also what favorable or menacing consequences for citizens this navigation produces. At stake in the next case is the reproduction of structural violence—specifically, the quotidian ways in which religious persecution against the severely oppressed Ahmadiyya minority occurs. I attend to the language of and reasons for which some of my interlocutors seek to challenge this injustice by invoking categories of merit, the official (*daftari*), and the legal (*qanooni*) to distinguish the private from the public.

TAX AND *IKHLAQ*

In September 2016, the Irrigation Department formed a committee to survey sewage drains in Lahore and reassess the revenue generated from them. Azfar sahib and engineer Azeem (an XEN) were chosen to head the committee. The survey meant to document the number and location of industrial units discharging waste into Lahore's drains, measure the volume of discharge into drains from each factory outlet, and calculate the charges each industrial unit should be paying. The committee had to report back with updated figures on how much revenue the drains ought to be generating. This entailed assessing the shortfall between the revenue that was due from each industrial unit and what was actually being collected every year, as well as identifying the location and extent of the shortfall. The committee started its work with a list of registered industrial units in Lahore, visiting each in turn to verify discharge volumes. I accompanied the team members on their inspections as part of the survey, which took about a month to complete.

The Third Day of Inspections

The inspection team comprises Azfar sahib, engineer Azeem, and me. We are joined by two officials from the Drains Section: Maheen, a newly inducted female engineer, and Saleem sahib (an XEN, and Maheen's superior). After a morning spent visiting paper, bleaching, and dyeing factories and measuring their outlet dimensions and velocity of effluent flow, we arrive at the gates of a textile factory. Azfar sahib's sweaty clothes hang limp from his frame, the belt on engineer Azeem's waist sits askew, my rolled-up sleeves cling with sweat to my elbows,

and we all smell the same—tired and somewhat anxious. Two uniformed security guards stick their heads out of the tiny shack flanking the locked gate and ask us why we are there. They tell us to wait at the gate while they confer with their superiors inside. Half an hour under the blistering sun later we are cleared for entry, but not before Azfar sahib threatens to add "refused to cooperate" on the form.

Figure 3. From the survey we conducted, inside the factory. Photo by Maira Hayat.

A security guard escorts us to the drain. A thick, dark purple, stinking liquid flows through the brick-lined outlet. Saleem sahib dips his calibrated stem into the drain at three different points to mark the level of the liquid and get a uniform reading. To calculate velocity, he drops a pebble into the drain at "point A" and asks me to stand and mark the point. Maheen takes my phone and turns on the stopwatch when the pebble is dropped into the drain. Azfar sahib positions himself at point B and shouts "stop" when the pebble passes him. We then note the time it takes for the pebble to cover the distance between points A and B. The distance is measured in feet by engineer Azeem and then by using a measuring tape. We repeat the process three times for three different points A and B. Azfar sahib measures the circumference of the outlet opening. Engineer Azeem then multiplies the area of the outlet opening with the velocity and asks Azfar sahib to insert our calculations into the "volume of discharge" box on the form. The volume is multiplied by the drainage charge to get the amount to be "recovered" from the factory.

Figure 4. From the survey we conducted, outside the factory. Photo by Maira Hayat.

As we are walking out of the factory gate, Saleem sahib suddenly says, "The object we used this time, that pebble, it was heavier than the twig we have been using all along. The pebble sank a little, remember? That has affected our measurements. Our calculations say the velocity is 4, but actually it will be closer to 6." A velocity of 6 would mean a higher volume of discharge and therefore a higher charge.

Azfar sahib quickly disagrees; he points out that we were careful to choose a pebble that weighed the same as the twig, which had been lost somewhere between inspections. One of the team had likely dropped it as we went from one factory to the next.

Engineer Azeem: "We can go back and measure again until everyone is satisfied."

Saleem sahib: "No that's unnecessary, but it's closer to 6; 4 is too low."

Figure 5. From the survey we conducted, outside the factory. Photo by Maira Hayat.

Maheen: "6 is too high."

Saleem sahib: "You are forgetting we changed to a pebble from the twig."

Maheen: "I remember very well. It can't be 6!"

Saleem sahib: "You heard the liquid making that loud *woosh woosh* sound, didn't you? It *was* flowing quite fast!"

Engineer Azeem: "Let's settle on 4.5?"

Maheen: "But we all just measured it and it was 4. Why is it suddenly a problem?"

Azfar sahib: "Yes I agree, we just measured . . . nothing needs to change."

Saleem sahib: "Believe me, this was faster than any of the drains we've seen all morning."

Engineer Azeem: "Let's stop arguing on the road in front of everyone. We have a long list of factories to go down; let's just enter 5 and leave."

Maheen: "4.5."

Saleem sahib: "5.5."

By the end, Azfar sahib seems quite spent from all his mediating, and every member of the team glowers. As we begin walking to the next factory, I fall into step with Maheen.

"What just happened to Saleem sahib?" I ask.

"You saw, right?" she says. "The pebble was an excuse. Sir knows that that factory owner is Ahmadiyya, so he was behaving like this."

BAD BUREAUCRAT, GOOD MUSLIM

I will work through something that struck me when I discussed the incident with other department officials: consistently, they discussed the incident with me not in terms of Saleem sahib being a biased, bad bureaucrat, but in terms of his misguided effort to be a "good Muslim." That someone would try to do this to an Ahmadiyya factory owner did not surprise me—by now I was familiar with the pervasiveness of anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment among many of my bureaucrat interlocutors. Today, anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment in Pakistan is widespread, and every so often incidents of violence against Ahmadiyya, and backlash against those who speak on their behalf, spiral to media attention.[9] Therefore, what surprised me was the challenge Saleem sahib's attempt met, and the reasoning behind the challenge.

Let me begin with Maheen. Maheen did not resist Saleem sahib's attempts to charge the factory owner a higher rate in the language of religious discrimination. As she said to me in her office a few days later, "Of course I couldn't call him out in those very terms." Maheen was junior to Saleem sahib—he could obstruct her transfers, promotions, and career advancement. But Maheen also could not openly support an Ahmadiyya factory owner because that "invites people to question your Islamic credentials." This can, literally, become a question of life and death. Lawyers in Pakistan often refuse to represent Ahmadiyya clients in false blasphemy cases (one form of harassment of religious minorities in the country) due to death threats, just as judges refuse to adjudicate in such cases.

Soon after the factory visit we made a short stop at a mosque to offer *Zuhr* (noon prayers). Maheen and I waited inside the car while the men went inside the mosque to pray. Maheen complained, "Trying to be a good Muslim, that's what he thinks he's doing!" She decried how Saleem sahib had tried charging the Ahmadiyya factory owner more than was merited, and then pointed to the contradiction (*ttazaad*) between that attempt to be a "good Muslim" and going inside the mosque to pray comfortably while leaving two women waiting, sweating in the car.

The "good Muslim" reference came up again some weeks later when I discussed the incident with Hina, a *zillehdar* in the department. Hina thought it was wrong of Saleem sahib to have tried charging the Ahmadiyya factory owner more because it went "against merit." Hina, ever proud of her mastery of Islamic historical dates, events, and names, said:

> Merit should have been his guide. In the Prophet Muhammad's time there were many non-Muslims living in the Islamic Republic of Madina. What did the Prophet teach them by example? That non-Muslims be treated just like Muslims. You can't be a Muslim if you cause hurt with your hands or your tongue. What kind of a Muslim does this officer think he is? He misunderstands Islam. Why do you think people converted to Islam? Not because the Prophet prayed or kept fasts. But because of his *ikhlaq*.

Hina's invocation of merit makes clear that *in this case* what should matter was the rate of effluent discharge, not the factory owner's identity. If Hina used the language of "merit," Azfar sahib used the language of legal (*qanooni*) and official (*daftri*) matters (*muamlaat*) to explain Saleem sahib's wrongdoing. The "mischief of Mirzaiyyat" (*fitna-e-mirzaiyyat*) had nothing to do with *qanooni muamlaat* such as this one, according to Azfar sahib; *Mirzaiyyat* (from Mirza; Mirza Ghulam Ahmed is the founder of Ahmadiyya belief) is a derogatory reference to Ahmadiyya. Azfar sahib explained that Ahmadiyya present the greatest danger to Muslims because, unlike other minorities that do not claim to be Muslims, Ahmadiyya do not only claim to be Muslim but are also "too similar" to Muslims: "Hindu and Christian places of worship look different and are easily spotted. But their [Ahmadiyya] mosques are just like ours, so you can't tell them apart! They can easily take our younger generations towards deviance [*gumrahi*] and we won't even know!" However, all this had nothing to do with the tax assessment for Azfar sahib—that is, anti-Ahmadiyya beliefs were private, and to be distinguished from what the public matter of this drainage charge demanded.

There is something to be said here about the particularity of the bureaucratic—"this case," "this particular drain's tax charge"—and what it enables and defers. It defers the Ahmadiyya question: we do not need to debate Hina and Azfar sahib regarding Ahmadiyya's constitutional status as non-Muslim in Pakistan. But in the deferral also lies an opening—we can ensure that fairer tax computation takes place *if* we bracket the Ahmadiyya question and break it up into "this case" that has to do with taxation. A long, onerous national history can be deferred,

as can its reckoning. The merits of this case demand that the Ahmadiyya factory owner should be charged the same as everyone else: that is, the factory owner's religion does not matter to calculations of his tax charge. Bureaucratic process here *interrupts* the violence that being Ahmadiyya in Pakistan involves.

Six months later, we were sitting in Hina's office when the Nekokara case came up. Some days earlier, an assistant commissioner (AC), Jannat Hussain Nekokara, had had to publicly apologize on national television for calling for "due rights" for non-Muslim minorities in Pakistan at a college event on International Human Rights Day. She had referred to Ahmadiyya as part of a list that had included other Muslim denominations such as Shia, Sunni, and Wahabi, calling for an end to such differences in the interests of a stronger and united Pakistan. As seen in video footage of her public apology that went viral, an extremely agitated student says, "When the Constitution is saying [they] are non-Muslim, then why are you [talking about] unity?" As Nekokara provides clarification, she is forced to state her own belief vis-à-vis Ahmadiyya and the finality of Muhammad's Prophethood (*khatam-e-nabuwwat*). Toward the end of the video she is asked to call Ahmadiyya *kafir* (non-Muslim), and their belief in the non-finality of Muhammad's Prophethood a "lie."

Iqbal sahib asked if we had seen that video of the angry student demanding an apology from the AC. I mentioned the factory incident to say that Ahmadiyya discrimination, as we had all seen with that survey, was pervasive. Yusuf sahib, a newly transferred *zillehdar*, was quick to dismiss Saleem sahib's attempt to charge a higher tax rate as misguided. "In official [*daftari*] matters it does not matter if the factory owner is Ahmadiyya or not." But after a brief pause he added, "You seem very upset for the Ahmadiyya factory owner." Thrown off by the inherent question and the pause preceding it, I said, "I think it is not right what has been happening to . . ." He interrupted me, "You should know that this story of them being persecuted is wrong . . . they are such big businessmen, senior officials. They are doing very well in this country. Ahmadiyya are basically a pressure group." My head pounding angrily, I—part-anthropologist, part-citizen—responded by saying that a few well-placed Ahmadiyya were not representative, and that even if they held high official positions today, it did not detract from the insecurity they must live in. Yusuf sahib added, lifting and smoothing the end of his shirt on his thighs in agitation or impatience, "They are everywhere and doing well. They are everywhere—that's the thing, you won't even know. For example, look at you. I don't know . . . . For all I know, you may be one of them too."

Iqbal sahib cleared his throat and began rustling papers, while Hina said, nervously, "Enough conversation for today! Let's study this map together and see how good you've been as a student. Tell me which watercourse provides water to this plot of land." It must have been about a minute later when Yusuf sahib quietly left the room.

CONCLUSION

It is not surprising that participants in piety movements, for example, grapple with ethical challenges. Indeed, work by anthropologists on such movements (Khan 2018; Mahmood 2004) has inspired me to take their inquiries to an ostensibly ill-suited ethnographic site. An irrigation bureaucracy notorious for inefficiency and corruption might appear a counterintuitive choice for asking questions about ethical labor. But I have shown in this article that bureaucracies are uniquely important sites in which to ask after the ethical: how bureaucrats work, the metrics they use to evaluate their work, and to whom they consider themselves accountable affects the many people to whom they are meant to provide public service, illustrating the distinctive and urgent stakes in expanding the anthropology of ethics and Islam beyond what we might consider intuitive sites. Examining everyday bureaucratic work as ethical labor provides insight into not only ethical work on the self but *also*, because these persons are public servants, on how their ethical labor—manifested in decisions such as blocking, reducing, or changing the direction of water flow—affects the public.

Pakistan's Punjab is home to one of the world's largest irrigation networks, managed by a vast bureaucracy; its agricultural economy depends on irrigation; and flows, blockages, and rates of water have direct consequences for who grows how much to subsist or sell. With a changing climate, as rainfall patterns become less predictable, systems of irrigation-water distribution come under greater strain, and pressures to administer an increasingly unreliable resource grow, the stakes in decision-making by bureaucrats will become increasingly urgent—not just in Pakistan, but everywhere that irrigation enables agriculture. As calls to privatize public goods become louder in the name of efficiency and climate preparedness (Hayat 2024), it is all the more important to better understand how public bureaucracies function, so that they can be supported to enhance the provision of the public good of water. Anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment and violence is widespread in Pakistan. And yet, distinctions of *daftari*, *qanooni*, *zaati*, considerations of *ikhlaq* and merit, and invocations of the Prophet as exemplar, have enabled some bureaucrats

to challenge one of their own, and to ensure fairer tax assessment for an Ahmadiyya factory owner.

Examining how my bureaucrat interlocutors enroll law, God, and vernaculars of work as an exercise in ethical labor, and how this labor manifests in distinguishing the public from the private, enables an appreciation of how specifics of national history and politics cathect the problem space of bureaucracy toward normative conceptions of duties, metrics, and exemplars (Scott 2004). While recent anthropological literature has examined the public-private distinction as one that secular power incessantly throws up, my contribution has sought to go beyond the implied automaticity of public-private distinction-making: what do bureaucrats *do* with such structural tensions and instabilities? Azfar sahib does not invoke God unthinkingly and inevitably as he goes about his work, even though the position he occupies has been recognized by the highest courts as a "sacred trust." His quotidian work entails distinguishing between when a "water problem" is just that, and when it is to be given a *mazhabi rung* (religious color). We miss this considered labor at our own peril and impoverish our understanding of public bureaucracies that do the crucial work of ensuring a public good is administered as such. Further, without subjecting public administration to greater scrutiny, what hope is there for demanding more from it?

The question of the public role of religion is an old one in Pakistan, but it is not a tired one—on the contrary, it has immense vitality. The recently ousted prime minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, came to power with an electoral manifesto that claimed to be based on the Prophet Muhammad's Madinah Charter. His aim, he has announced several times, is to build a *Madinah kii Riasat* (Republic of Madinah), which he has frequently described as "the first welfare state in the history of mankind."

As well, recent years have seen a worrying rise in cases of violence against Ahmadiyya. So will ethical labor among bureaucrats re-script, or further strengthen historical scripts such as the Second Amendment of 1974 that have created an atmosphere for the easy targeting of minorities in Pakistan through blasphemy allegations? While we can discern tendencies by tracing historical and political-legal trajectories, the answers are far from predetermined—how bureaucrats dialogue, reason, discriminate, and hold themselves accountable, and to whom, in each case, will tell. The stakes are not insignificant, and they go beyond the bureaucratic self: justice, case by case, or violence, case by case.

There is an all-too-human humility to this—in turn enabling going "beyond [the] human horizon" as Amira Mittermaier (2021, 26) puts it. I recognized this

when I was telling Hina some weeks ago about my frustrations concerning some group work at my workplace. I sent her a WhatsApp audio note, our usual mode of communication, describing feeling torn between securing my own position and not having done more to challenge the group since the ultimate decision made me unhappy. She responded: "We are powerless in front of systems, anywhere, U.S. or Pakistan. I have learnt this. Our work is to light our share of the lamp. You tried. Leave the rest to God. If you have faith in God. Today our problem is just this, we say we want to see the fruit of our labors."[10] A part of me finds this reasoning self-serving. But this is a partial interpretation, for Hina is someone I have worked with very closely for nearly a decade, someone who has been transferred from here to there and there to here for being "difficult." A more careful interpretation is: Hina is asking that we make the effort even though there are no guarantees. Indeed, she begins by stressing that we are powerless in front of systems. Labor, without demanding to see the fruit of that labor—leave it to God. *Allah pe chorr dain*.

ABSTRACT

Bureaucracies are typically studied for lessons in structural violence, anti-politics, failures of law, and as foils to the ethical. I, however, argue that they constitute uniquely important sites to theorize the ethical. Conceptualizing ethical labor as a modality of everyday bureaucratic work, I examine this labor as it enrolls law, God, and vernaculars of work, and takes the form of public-private distinction-making. The article expands the anthropology of bureaucracy, ethics, and Islam by going beyond showing that public-private distinctions are immanent to modern secular power, arguing instead that they are actively labored for in everyday bureaucratic work. As a result, who they favor or menace is a function of specific political-legal and historical lineages. [bureaucracy; Islam; water; ethics; law; Pakistan]

خلاصہ

بیوروکریسی کے مطالعے کے پس منظر میں عموماً یہ چند اسباب ہوتے ہیں : تشدد بذریہ ظوابط , قانون کا غیر اطلاق سیاست اور اخلاقیات کی نفی. تاہم اس مضمون کے مطابق سرکاری اداروں کے تجزیہ میں اخلاقیات کے نظریہ کی خاص اہمیت ہے. یہ تصور کرتے ہوئے کہ بیوروکریسی کی روزمرہ کارکردگی اخلاقیات کی ایک شکل ہےیہ مضمون بیوروکریسی، اخلاقیات اور اسلام کی بشریات کو ایک وسیع پیمانے پہ جانچتا ہے: بحث محض یہ نہیں کہ نجی سرکاری تفریق جدید سیکولر اقتدار کا ایک جُز ہے بلکہ یہ بھی کہ اس تفریق کو برقرار رکھنا بیوروکریٹک کام کا خاص مقصد بھی ہے. نتیجتاً کون اس سے فائدہ حاصل کرتا ہے اور کس کے لیے

یہ خطرہ ہیں , اس کا فیصلہ مخصوص سیاسی قانونی اور تاریخی مسب و نسب کے مطابق ہوتا ہے

[بیوروکریسی - پانی - اسلام - اخلاقیات - قانون - پاکستان]

NOTES

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1. All officer and division names, as well as locations, are pseudonyms.
2. The department comprises two wings: Revenue and Engineering. The Revenue hierarchy travels down from the collector, to the deputy collector, *zillehdar* and *patwari*. The Engineering hierarchy travels down from the chief engineer to the superintending engineer (commonly "SE"), the executive engineer (commonly "XEN"), the assistant executive engineer (or subdivisional officer, commonly "SDO"), and the sub engineer.
3. My use of *agriculturalist* is intended to include both land owners and tenants. Distinctions among agriculturalists—such as land ownership or other tenurial arrangements—are not my focus in this article. For literature on the complexities of categories such as *farmer* and *peasant*, see Gill 2024, Dove 1994, Hayat 2024, and Rizvi 2017.
4. In 2023, new legislation to replace the 1873 act was introduced. Rules under the new act have not yet been formulated. The material discussed in this article was governed at the time of my research by the 1873 act, and the section numbers refer to the law in place then.
5. For instance, Supreme Court cases, PLD 1987 Supreme Court 304, 2020 SCP 26, 2020 PSC 666, 2020 SCMR 568; a Sindh High Court case, 2006 PLC (C.S.) 564; a Peshawar High Court case, 2021 PHC 10.
6. Historian Rohit De (2018) has conceptualized the government job in India as a property resource. He attributes litigation among bureaucrats to the enactment of the constitution itself, and emphasizes the post-emergency period in Indian politics. This is an important comparative conversation to be developed, given shared and diverging trajectories of the politics of religion, employment and welfare in the two countries.
7. Unsurprisingly, this literature has occasioned the caution (Laidlaw 2014, 125; Lempert 2013; Zigon 2014) that the ordinary not be collapsed into the social. Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando (2015, 65) have articulated another interesting and important critique. They note that in many studies of ordinary ethics among Muslims, "the everyday acts . . . less as an empirical site of observation than a normative frame that enables the restoration of a conceptualization of agency primarily understood as creative resistance to (religious) norms." Noting the blurring of the ordinary into the everyday at play in much of this literature, they argue that the Muslim subjects of study end up being portrayed as basically like the secular humanist anthropologists studying them.

8. By "top" he meant leadership, in the sense of governmental superiors. This would sometimes be a loose reference to the secretary-level leadership of the entire department. At other times it could reference the elected political leadership. Azfar sahib was not the only one who invoked the "top" frequently, and of course not everyone was in perfect agreement. For example, Javed sahib, a *zillehdar*, would say in Azfar sahib's absence, "He should talk about his behavior too, as he's been at the top for a while."
9. In 1974, Ahmadiyya were declared non-Muslim. The declaration of their non-Muslim status has opened up space for persecution such that, for example, false blasphemy charges are brought against them. In 2018, when the government appointed the prominent Ahmadiyya economist at Princeton University, Atif Mian, to its Economic Advisory Committee, outcry from Islamist political parties led to the revocation of this appointment.
10. Here is what she said in Urdu:
میں نے تو یہ سیکھا ہے: ہمارا کام ہے اپنے حصے کا دیا جلانا۔ آپ نے کوشش کی. بس پھر اللہ پہ چھوڑ دیں۔ اگر اللہ پہ یقین نہیں ہے... یہ ہی تو اج کل مسئلہ ہے: ہم کہتے ہیں ہمیں ہماری جدوجہد کا پھل بھی ملے۔

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