






# **SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDE FOR**

# ***GUMNAAM HASTIYAN***

## **(ANONYMOUS LIVES)**

**The Issue of Religious Intolerance  
Against Minorities in Pakistan**



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## **GROUP MEMBERS**

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# Project Overview

Religious minorities constitute around 3.53% of Pakistan's Muslim-majority population of 231 million, and are subject to varying forms of extremism and intolerance. Our aim in this project is to educate the youth and voice the concerns of the marginalized communities. We captured their on-ground realities in a documentary, which would serve as a compelling visual narrative for the youth-focused target audience.

We carried out research at different levels to get a holistic and unfiltered view of the realities of minorities. We reviewed academic journals and research articles, and conducted thorough field research in different cities of Pakistan to gather statistics and first-hand information on religious extremism, which would guide our project strategy and help us present the complete truth to our audience.

We aim to present the reality to the viewer in its true form, with a focus on educating them instead of pointing fingers towards any community. Our message is of peace, which we convey by providing the factual knowledge to the audience in a way which compels them to think and make a choice about what is right.

# The Blasphemy Laws

The blasphemy laws and the deep-rooted prejudices against minorities held by the common Muslims have resulted in some of the worst cases of religious violence. The Articles 295 and 298 of the Constitution state that any derogatory remarks about the Prophet or any sacred religious personality, spoken, written, or insinuated shall be punishable by imprisonment, fine, or death (Pakistan Penal Code).

Although the State has not executed anyone under this law, there have been several convictions against vulnerable individuals, where some got abducted or murdered even before their case was put to trial. At least 85 people have been killed in blasphemy allegations since 1990 - either burned alive, shot dead in courtrooms, hanged by mobs, or beaten severely (Al Jazeera).



# Incidents from the past

## Lahore Attacks

In 2010, two Ahmadi mosques in Lahore were targeted by religious militants with guns, grenades, and bombs, killing 94 people and injuring over a hundred (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

## Mashal Khan

In 2017, a university student was beaten to death by a mob of hundreds of his fellow students, on false allegations of blasphemy. They dragged him from his hostel room and beat him with sticks before shooting him. One of the attackers received death penalty, five got life imprisonment, while the rest of them were acquitted (BBC, 2018).

## Aasia Bibi

She is a Christian woman, accused of blasphemy in 2009 by some women while fruitpicking. She was convicted and jailed on death row, until she was acquitted 8 years later based on insufficient evidence. She left the country in 2019, but only amidst massive protests by extremists, demanding her to be hanged (BBC, 2019).

## Salman Taseer

He was the Governor of Punjab when he was shot dead by his bodyguard over "supporting blasphemy". He had openly supported Aasia Bibi during her death row and promised to acquire her a presidential pardon. His assassin was celebrated by some groups as a religious hero and later martyr amidst his imprisonment and death sentence. (The Guardian, 2011).





# Primary Research

Primary data was given the utmost significance by our team. Even though we started off with some secondary research as a warm-up activity, it was mainly to guide our trajectory for the primary research that we planned to conduct eventually.

We conducted ethnographic observations, interviews and qualitative surveys. After having learned from secondary research about the most vulnerable minorities, we contacted our social circle through word of mouth to get us connected with the relevant minority families – for security purposes, this call was not placed on the social media. Once the connections were made, we set out to conduct detailed conversations with the victimized families from the Christian, Hindu, Shia and Ahmadi communities. Extensive journeys were made by our team to far-off areas like Chenab Nagar (Rabwah), Karachi and Tando Adam to meet the victim families. Connections were also made at mid-way towns with people from Parachinar as entry is almost impossible in that area due to high surveillance and control over the actions of the minority population.

During our visit to Karachi, we tried to connect with the Parsi community, Shias, and Ahmadis through word of mouth. We arranged a common household to meet with each community at different intervals throughout our stay. These meetings were made as comfortable as possible for them, as refreshments were arranged by our team and the participants were provided with goody bags as a sign of our gratitude. All three minorities were observed to have their struggles; however, social integration and economic circumstance played a serious role in either slightly alleviating the struggle or further aggravating it.



# Primary research

In Tando Adam, we conducted one meet-and-greet event. People from the Hindu community were invited and were provided a one-time meal before the discussion on their lives, fears, incidents and the scope of justice served. We also met one-on-one with multiple families from other minority groups.

Even though it was not possible to incorporate all the stories in the documentary, we decided to afford as much insight as possible into the situation by speaking personally to all the families from different minorities and collecting rich qualitative information about their situations. The interview pattern was kept standardized for each conversation.

The details about each family were then combined with quantitative statistics pertaining to the persecution that each community faces. Accordingly, two families were selected for filming purposes on the basis of two main factors: severity of the damage incurred and the ubiquity of the issue at hand. These two families belong to the Ahmadi community, and we chose them due to the severity of the damage incurred by them, and the widespread nature of the issues that are faced by their community at large.

Once the families were selected, one of our team members engaged in careful ethnographic work in their hometown. For a week's time, we found opportunities to engage with the locals in various ways, while observing the practices, ingrained trauma cycles, and lifestyle at a non-intrusive proximity. Some information that would have been impossible for us to collect otherwise was acquired through this method.

For instance, the fact that there was not even a single person that didn't insist on their anonymity and confidentiality being maintained before sharing any details of their lives with us says a lot about the situation. Our ethnographic efforts allowed us to not view the victims' stories in vacuum when they were finally interviewed once again for the filming part.

# Documentary

We wanted to capture the ground realities of people from religious minorities so we could bring their experiences forward and give their voice a platform. Our documentary hopes to create awareness amongst the youth and incite a feeling of responsibility in them through a humanistic lens. For our documentary we approached two families from minority groups who were, and continue to be, affected by religious extremism. By requesting them to recount memories of their painful past, we allow the audience to draw parallels with them through humanity, which would hopefully bridge the dreadful gap between the religious communities of our country.

# About the families

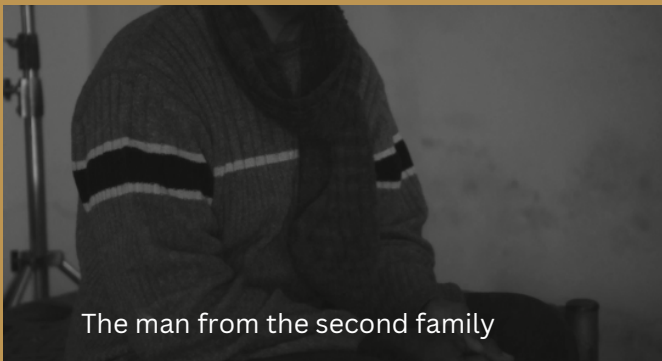
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Our interview data from minorities in different cities suggested that we should include the stories of the Ahmadi community in our documentary, because of the severity and prevalence of the incidents.

The first family belonged to the victim whose husband was massacred in the Lahore Attacks 2010 after which the entire family unit had to move to Canada to lead a safe life. Not just the wife but her children as well were scarred for life due to the traumatic incident they faced.



The woman from the first family



The man from the second family

The victim in the second family belonged to the same community and originally belonged to Mardan, KPK. He lived there in the 1980s – a period known for the rise in Islamic fundamentalist policies in the government of Zia

ul Haque, the military dictator with extreme right wing political views. The extremist community in Mardan learnt of the religious beliefs of the family and extreme discrimination and violence erupted for them at the societal level. Victim's father was a doctor and his clinic was destroyed and brought down by the masses, which shows that the hate brewing within the society for this community is not necessarily dependent upon the government's orders. The victim fled from Mardan to find a safe haven in Rabwah (a city where primarily the Ahmadi community resides). However, to this day we see that the family has not been able to find a fair footing emotionally, financially and socially.



# Call to Action



Prejudice against the minorities should be no news to the people of Pakistan; however, the most controversial topics become a taboo as people fear for their safety while engaging in related discourse. As a result, much room for the breeding of misinformation is inadvertently created.

Our Call to Action primarily is to initiate fact-based conversations regarding the lives of minorities within the country. Our documentary conveys subliminal messages to induce into the minds of the viewers the significance of discourse that is backed by empirical evidence. Opinions and surface-level beliefs have the potential to drive further ignorance and marginalizing propaganda against people that already exist on the periphery. Therefore, dialogue about the situation shall have some weight if it is backed by the lived experiences of the people. Therefore, the documentary subconsciously pushes for deeper conversations that are more connected with the minorities as real people.

A second layer of Call to Action tends to give momentum to a certain level of introspection at the individual level. The social treatment of minorities is not necessarily governed by the skewed legislation that penalizes people merely for belonging to a different religion or sect.



# Call to Action

The public has recorded instances for going even further to harm the minorities by taking the law in their own hands. When the laws set in stone the unjust treatment of the minorities, the public becomes involved in practically carrying out the atrocities rather than questioning the majoritarian legislation. There could be various examples of this, including the non-Ahmadis celebrating and enjoying festive sweets on the demise of our documentary participant's husband who was killed in the Lahore attacks, and people not willing to share their living areas or eating spaces with minorities. These actions were never dictated by the law, but the people continue to engage in them nevertheless - which is a thought-provoking phenomenon.

It has been empirically observed that the societal members deliberately go a step further to record their indoctrinated and ingrained aversion toward the minorities that comes from the consumption of misinformation and fear of the unknown. For this reason, introspection is called for in the documentary since deeper and more transparent conversations are bound to elicit aggressive reactions from the community, endangering the minorities further.