



Dossier: Religión y política en el mundo antiguo y contemporáneo

Blasphemy and Religious Violence in Pakistan

Menaal Safi Munshey
University of Cambridge, England
menaal@icloud.com

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ABSTRACT:

This study used a qualitative research design to analyse how religion and politics interacts in the case of blasphemy-related violence in Pakistan. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with a sample of Police Officers, and members of the Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities in Sukkur, Pakistan. This study finds that blasphemy-related violence occurs in a context where politics has been used to Islamize society, which is reflected in the state's struggle with identity, antagonistic and disconnected relationship between communities, and an atmosphere of fear, intolerance and discrimination felt by minority communities in Pakistan. Through the islamization process, the state essentially mandated vigilante religious violence. This has morphed into blasphemy-related violence today, which continues to be tolerated by the state.

KEY WORDS: Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan; violence; Sukkur; intolerance; discrimination

Blasfemia y violencia religiosa en Pakistan

Este estudio uso un diseño de investigación cualitativo para analizar como la religión y la política interactúan con los casos de violencia relacionada con blasfemia en Pakistan. Se llevaron a cabo entrevistas y grupos de control con muestras de policías y miembros de la comunidad Hindú, Musulmana y Cristiana en Sukkur, Pakistan. Este estudio encuentra que la violencia relacionada a la blasfemia ocurre en un contexto donde la política se ha usado para Islamizar a la sociedad, esto se ve reflejado en los problemas de identidad del estado, así como una relación antagonista y desconectada entre comunidades y una atmósfera de miedo, intolerancia y discriminación vivida por las comunidades minoritarias en Pakistan. A través del proceso de la islamización, el estado creó una violencia religiosa que se ha transformado



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en la violencia relacionada con la blasfemia y sigue siendo tolerada por el estado.

Palabras Clave: Leyes de blasfemia en Pakistan; violencia, Sukkur; intolerancia; discriminación

Blasphemy is the act of ‘speaking evil of sacred matters’ (Levy, 1993:3). The British promulgated blasphemy law in India (Indian Penal Code, 1860). Upon Pakistan’s creation in 1947, the law transferred into Pakistani law. The law is surrounded by an extra-legal system enforced largely through vigilantism and violence. The extra-legal enforcement of blasphemy threatens the government’s control, democratic power and the rule of law (Hoffman, 2014).

Section 295 of the Pakistan Penal Code (1860) relates to “injuring or defiling a place of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class”. Section 295-A relates to “deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs” (Pakistan Penal Code, 1860). These sections remain secular in nature.

The law was “islamised” in 1986 when General Zia-ul-Haq amended the Penal Code to include blasphemy laws that were purely Islamic in nature. These are:

Section 295-B: “Whoever willfully defiles damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Quran or of an extract there from or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable with imprisonment for life.”

Section 295-C: “Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to a fine.”

Section 298-A relates to the use of derogatory remarks in respect of holy personages, such as those related or associated with the Holy Prophet.



Sections 298-B and 298-C prevent the Ahmadi and/or Qadiani sect¹, from calling themselves a Muslim or propagating their faith. Ahmadi's have been legally and socially persecuted under the blasphemy laws since Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's rule (Ayaz, 2013). However, the effects of these anti-Ahmadi laws are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The blasphemy laws were amended as part of an islamization of law and society that occurred under General Zia-ul-Haq's regime. In 1977 General Zia-ul-Haq illegally toppled a democratic government to assume power. Zia's regime from 1977 to 1988 combined religion with human rights violations. He used Islam to legitimize his rule (Bahadur, 2006). Zia promulgated the Hudood Ordinances in 1979 specifically targeting women by obscuring the distinction between adultery and rape, with the punishment being stoning to death (Lau, 2007). The United States used General Zia to defeat the Soviet Union in Afghanistan using a fundamentalist Islamic campaign (Ali, 2003). Jihad turned into an instrument of state policy to fight the US war against the Soviets in Afghanistan (Jalal, 2014). An infrastructure of mosques, madrassahs², militant groups, and mindsets was created to propagate a hardline Sunni version of Islam (Toor, 2011). 2500 madrassahs were established, funded by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, to ideologically brainwash young men into becoming jihadis (Warikoo, 2011). An approximated 250,000 mosques exist presently in Pakistan, many of them built during Zia's regime (Ayaz, 2013). This sowed the seeds of the vigilante violence, intolerance, and religiosity seen in Pakistan today.

There has been an exponential increase in the impact of the blasphemy laws after their amendment in 1986. Blasphemy accusations have increased by 17,500%; after 1987 there have been 1335 accusations compared to 7 prior to the amendment (Engage Pakistan, 2015). The law has seen a significant rise in impact after 2010; with there being 90 reported blasphemy cases in 2014 (Engage Pakistan, 2015). In this recent wave of violence, Christians are

¹ For information on Ahmadis, please see BBC News, 2010.

² Madrassahs are Islamic religious schools (Singer, 2001).



most frequently targeted. The violence occurs in the backdrop of an increasingly violent and intolerant society with a high level of militarization and loss of state monopoly over violence. To make any attempt towards reform, it is vital to understand the societal mechanisms behind blasphemy-related violence.

Religious Violence

Cottee has emphasized the need for religious violence to be studied by criminologists (2014). The argument presented is that citizens commit vigilante violence against those accused of blasphemy because: they believe the crime of blasphemy deeply affects their morality, and the state is ineffective in dealing with blasphemers. The state's silence can be construed as tolerance of religious violence. Through the blasphemy laws, the state has restricted religious freedom, and contributed to an increase in violent religious conflict (Grim and Finke, 2011).

Moral Crimes

"Morals legislation" like blasphemy laws are enacted to control moral crimes by "restraining conduct by others that is regarded as offensive" (Schwartz, 1963:670). Lord Devlin argued that shared morality is necessary for a stable society, and that the morality the law enforces must be popular morality (Devlin, 1965). This common morality is a mixture of custom, feeling, experience and prejudice (Rostow, 1960). Schwartz instead asserts that law often implements the value preferences of elite, powerful groups (1978). These values may be far from the beliefs of the majority (Schwartz, 1978). Evidence has shown that over time behavioral changes occur, despite initial resistance (Schwartz, 1978).

The blasphemy laws in Pakistan are a piece of morals legislation. Although introduced by British colonial rulers in 1860, they were "islamized" in 1986 under Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship. This was done as part of a state-sponsored process of islamization to provide ideological cohesion and create individual moral reform (Talbot, 2009). Initially, the laws were not representative of



popular sentiment (Shah, 2012). However, the political process of islamization manipulated Islamic sentiments (Jalal, 2014) using “brute repression and ideological warfare” (Toor, 2011:149). A society that has been historically tolerant (Toor, 2011) has now become bigoted (Talbot, 2009). The blasphemy law although largely unused before 1986 has become increasingly significant, dangerous and representative of popular morality.

Theistic Violence

Theistic violence can be defined as “violence imbued with an overt or avowed religious meaning and purpose” (Cottee, 2014:981). Research shows that a factor involved in acts of violence is an effort to fulfil a religious vision (Juergensmeyer and Sheikh, 2013). Religion may be epiphenomenal as it is difficult to distinguish between religion and other societal phenomenon that leads to violence (Hall, 2013).

Grim and Finke (2011) show that restrictions on religious freedoms are associated with higher levels of violent persecution. Governments justify restrictions on religious activity based on maintaining order and reducing potential violence (Grim and Finke, 2011). Governments aim to achieve social control and in doing so, civil liberties of minorities are infringed upon (Grim and Finke, 2011). This form of social conflict is fuelled by governmental restrictions on religion (Grim and Finke, 2011), and has far-reaching consequences such as a lack of religious discourse, disconnect and discrimination between communities.

Religion and violence appear to be “intimately connected” in South Asia (Khan, 2007). Following independence in 1947, Islam became Pakistan’s “dominant social identity”. This set a historical backdrop for the islamization that occurred during Zia-ul-Haq’s rule (Grim and Finke, 2011). A “hyper-masculinized and militarized” interpretation of Islam was used as the ideology for the mujahideen in their battle against the Soviets in Afghanistan (Toor, 2011:157). The ideal citizen under Zia’s regime was a Muslim “ready to defend Islam – essentially, a religious warrior” (Toor, 2011:157). This ideology was disseminated through madrassahs and mainstream education channels



(Toor, 2011). This violent Islamic ideology has left minorities vulnerable to religious violence, especially under the guise of the blasphemy laws.

Vigilantism

Vigilantism is difficult to define (Brown, 1975; Johnston, 1996). Tankebe uses the definition of violent self-help (2009 and 2011). Sederberg argues that vigilanism is a desire to preserve social stability in the face of deviant behavior (1978). Spontaneous vigilanism arises from crime that gives rise to a strong sense of vulnerability in largely homogeneous communities (Shotland and Goodstein, 1984). The crimes are believed to threaten community standards (Silke, 2001). Vigilantism is critical of the state's performance and challenges the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force (Abrahams, 2007:423; Abrahams, 2002). Sen and Pratten argue that vigilanism is structured around moral imperatives, legitimate targets and appropriate punishments using "cultural templates" (2007:19). Paradoxically, vigilantes see themselves as breaking the law to respect it (Abrahams, 2007).

Blasphemy laws in Pakistan are accompanied by a pattern of vigilanism (Marshall and Shea, 2011). An extra-legal system of blasphemy law enforcement has emerged, grounded in "traditional notions of Islam and enforced in large part through vigilanism" (Hoffman, 2014:371). Punishment is "handed out in the street more often than in the courtroom" (Hoffman, 2014:386). Evidence shows that the law has unleashed a wave of religious terror and developed a life of its own (Forte, 1995). As Hoffman argues (2014), it is for this reason that legal reform is not the only answer to the phenomenon of blasphemy-related violence. For social change to occur, reform should be at a societal, institutional and political level.

Blasphemy-related violence in Pakistan is a vigilante act with mobs taking the law into their own hands spontaneously to control blasphemy-related crime. This speaks to two issues: first, the challenge of religious identity, intolerance and violence; second, the states ineffectiveness and unwillingness to provide protection to minorities (Bokhari, 2012). These have strong roots in Zia's islamization process. National identity was narrowed to propagate a Sunni,





Saudi, Wahhabi version of Islam that is orthodox and punitive (Bokhari, 2012). Persecution of Ahmadis under the blasphemy laws was encouraged by the state (Talbot, 2009). The state was ideologically islamized during Zia's regime and became unwilling to take action against attacks on minorities (Bokhari, 2012). The state sanctioned privatized violence in the name of religion during the Afghan War (Toor, 2011). In doing so, the state effectively authorized its own loss of a monopoly over legitimate violence. The effects of this can be seen in contemporary blasphemy-related vigilante violence. Minorities in Pakistan are heavily persecuted (Seiler, 2014). The government remains silent and afraid (Hoffman, 2014). This may be construed as tolerance of religious violence. The blasphemy laws thus continue to perpetuate an environment of intolerance, extremism and violence (Siddique and Hayat, 2008).

Analysis

In this study, all participants felt the blasphemy laws were morally correct and legitimate. Many participants rooted blasphemy-related violence by vigilantes in the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system, and strong religious beliefs. Participants from minority communities described an unequal society characterized by rampant discrimination and constant fear of the blasphemy laws. This was attributed to the islamization of law and society that occurred during General Zia's dictatorship. The effects of political changes based on religious beliefs live on today in Pakistan's education system, societal dynamics, struggle for identity and individual conceptions of religion.

Inequality and Discrimination in Society

Christians unanimously felt society was unequal and discriminatory towards them. Most striking in these conversations was the repeated motif of water. A Christian priest said:

"It's just a simple thing, in restaurants they keep a separate glass of water for non-Muslims and Muslims. You see this form of discrimination everywhere." (Christian Priest)



These experiences formed Christian participants very first memories of feeling like the “Other” in Pakistani society. As they grew older, they felt targeted at academic institutions as well. A Christian woman described her experiences of education in a changing society:

“I studied primary (education) in a Christian school, at that time there was a lot of peace, we faced no problems from the Muslims that studied with us or taught us. But as we have grown, society has changed. When we joined university, we faced problems. We are questioned about our religion, and that’s when we feel that we are different. The questions try to show us that we (Christians) are lower than them (Muslims) [...] The teachers force us to become a Muslim. They tell us that we should join Islam. This happens a lot. We have insecurity. That’s the main issue.” (Christian Woman)

As adults, they described facing a lack of opportunities:

“We can’t get government jobs, no matter how qualified you are, Christians can only get sweepers jobs. There are no opportunities for us.” (Christian Man)

Christians felt discriminated against in multiple settings within a society they viewed as inherently unequal. They felt disconnected from Hindu and Muslim communities and harbored antagonistic feelings towards them.

Christians felt Hindu’s are “prominent and financially strong. They run most of Sindh’s economy” (Christian Man). Despite the conception of Hindu’s having stronger status in society, many Hindu’s described similar discriminatory experiences. A Hindu said, “I have experienced when people don’t want to give their glass of water to me” (Hindu Man). They felt they had a lack of political power and voice: “they (politicians) are not our representatives. The politicians are not accountable to the minority electorate [...] They should help us irrespective of religion, but they don’t” (Hindu Man). This may be representative of the fundamentalist Islamic narrative in Pakistan that controls public political discourse (Milam, 2012). This narrative is fuelled by the Islamic





clergy and religious parties who influence politicians with sheer street power rather than electoral votes (Milam, 2012). This street power can deter politicians from espousing minority rights.

Despite the participants expressions of inequality and discrimination, members of minority communities felt that:

‘sindh is a highly tolerant place. Sindhis are not extremist in religion, but in Punjab they are. That’s the difference. In Sindh, Muslims support minorities, that’s why there are few cases (of blasphemy-related violence) in Sindh compared to Punjab.’ (Christian Priest)

Participants felt this difference stemmed from how Sindhis approached Islam: The humanist traditions of Sufis are an integral component of regional cultural identity (Talbot, 2009). ‘sindhis are followers of Sufism. Their teachings are of humanity and tolerance’ (Christian Priest). A Hindu man narrated stories of harmony in the Hindu temple where he worked. He said:

‘sixty percent of the visitors are from the Muslim community. They come without any hesitation [...] in front of the temple there is a masjid and madrassah. People ask me how I am surviving with a temple and mosque opposite each other, but we have never had any problems. The mauvi (muslim cleric) comes to my temple, and I go to his mosque. We eat together and help each other.’ (Hindu Man)

These views provide insight into the traditional view of Sindh being a tolerant and peaceful place. However, this tradition appears to be waning away due to the effects of Zia’s islamization, which was at odds with Sufi Islam (Talbot, 2009). Muslims felt that the harmonious nature of Sindhi society was changing because “practically clerics are creating differences between us” (Christian Man). This is resulting in “a lot of mistrust between us” (Hindu Man). These statements show that although Sindhi society is traditionally tolerant, the nature of society is changing, with communities becoming increasingly antagonistic and disconnected.

Fear of Blasphemy Laws



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The blasphemy laws are surrounded by an atmosphere of fear for minority communities (Siddique and Hayat, 2008). The Christian community described fear of blasphemy laws as affecting multiple aspects of their life and violating their human rights:

“Blasphemy laws are a continuous fear that threaten us.” (Christian Woman)

“This a threat from all angles in our life. We live in fear.” (Christian Man)

“The law has targeted the Christians and non-Sunni Muslim groups [...] nobody is spared. Without any witness or proof, it is a death penalty straight away.” (Christian Man)

“Even when people are acquitted from courts, they are shot outside. Most of the time it never even gets to court, the accused are killed beforehand.” (Christian Woman)

The blasphemy laws are largely enforced by vigilantes. The criminal justice system and government appear afraid. Those who have advocated against the blasphemy laws have been severely threatened or killed. After Salman Taseer’s murder, the official cleric refused to lead his funeral prayers, and senior government officials did not attend the funeral due to fears for their safety (Jalal, 2014). This is a prime “display of the state’s surrender to the street power of the clerics who have turned the blasphemy law into an instrument to legitimate murder” (Jalal, 2014:362). This environment of state ineffectiveness and unwillingness has broad effects on society.

This environment of fear is stifling debate about the blasphemy laws in public life: “if you talk about blasphemy laws, that too is blasphemy” (Hindu man). “The blasphemy laws have become like an untouchable law” (Muslim man). Fear of blasphemy accusations is stifling religious discourse between communities:



“We teach our children that they must stay away from any talk of religion [...] if in class a child is talking about a subject related to religion, you must not get involved in it.” (Christian Woman)

A teacher said, “we do not explain anything about Islam to non-Muslims” (Muslim Woman). As a result, inter-community religious dialogue does not occur on a personal level. Older participants felt:

“When we were young, between our friends we would talk openly about religion, we could openly express ourselves [...] we were not afraid. But since Zia’s law of blasphemy, that’s when we started to feel afraid.” (Hindu Man)

This theme of a changing community where members of different faiths were increasingly disconnected was repeated in these discussions.

Two participants narrated accusations of blasphemy they have personally faced in their professional career. These experiences have made them weary of the blasphemy laws:

“A teacher came to me and said the child had written something blasphemous [...] I innocently asked her what the child had written. The teacher was shocked; she said “I can’t repeat it, I will be doing blasphemy.” Even if I read it, I am committing the same blasphemy. I myself was blamed for this and people said I should be hanged publicly, just because I was supporting the child, that too was blasphemy. The clerics wanted to kill her and me. Then they said if the child accepts Islam then we both will be saved. So then the young girl was made to accept Islam, in front of 250 clerics.” (Christian Woman)

Her story highlighted the role of religious leaders in exacerbating blasphemy accusations. A publisher described an incident when she was accused of blasphemy: A religious group accused her of blasphemy for placing advertisements on billboards that depicted a child climbing a flight of steps in the shape of books. The advertisement symbolized attaining knowledge by reading books. To the clerics, it signified stepping on the Holy Book and



disrespecting the Quran. The participant described how members of religious parties called her and threatened they would kill her and burn her office if she did not remove the advertisements immediately. She had no choice but to cede to their threat for fear of vigilante violence. She continues to be cautious of the blasphemy laws in her professional career, which at times has led to self-censorship. Her story demonstrates the blasphemy laws potent and unrestrained power (Hoffman, 2014).

Contemporary Pakistani Society

The fear, discrimination and inequality described by minority communities in contemporary Pakistani society was attributed to the islamization of law and society that occurred during General Zia's dictatorship, Pakistan's education system that promotes intolerance, and an inherent struggle with Pakistan's religious identity.

Participants from minority communities unanimously felt that blasphemy-related violence is religious in nature and is linked to the political islamization of society that took place under General Zia-ul-Haq. Members of the Hindu community felt that:

“Zia came and gave Pakistan a separate culture. We observed this personally. Till today we are suffering from this culture he gave us. Religiously, the activities he did in Pakistan and in relation to the Afghan war, the effect was to destroy religious harmony.” (Hindu Man)

“Zia changed the mindset of people and the culture in Pakistan. The effect of that is the blasphemy related violence we see today. This mindset is dangerous.” (Hindu Man)

Human rights workers agreed with this view. They said: “Zia wanted to make this an Islamic state. He wanted to implement the Saudi model. He used religion as a tool to increase his power” (Muslim Man). He did this during the Afghan war where he ‘sent children to madrassahs and used them as raw material to fight against the USSR. He literally made us paid assassins for the



Americans” (Muslim Man). After General Zia-ul-Haq’s rule, Islam became a central feature of public life. Muslims felt that “we have given religion all our time, and everything else takes a secondary role” (Muslim Man). Hindus said the media had also become Islamic in nature, “media has programs and discussions which are anti minorities” (Hindu Man). This is true of Zia’s regime when “the state-controlled media waged a vigorous campaign to purify society” (Jalal, 2014:234). It was felt that “politicians promote Islam. They use religious rhetoric to influence people” (Christian Man). An exclusionary religious narrative has seeped into state institutions and into the mindset of a generation of Pakistanis, who have heard no alternative (Milam, 2012). This political Islamic narrative has created sympathy within politicians and the public for behavior that is seen as protecting Islam, even if it employs violent means.

Christians said Muslim clerics openly preach against them by saying “we (Christians) are non-believers because we are not Muslims; we are not pure” (Christian Priest); “we (Hindus) are minorities and we are criminals” (Hindu Man). One Muslim participant felt ‘saudi Arabia is the cause of this extremism. They are changing the mindset of normal people. They provide money to extremists” (Muslim Man). It’s the Saudi, ultraorthodox, Wahhabi version of Islam that was foisted on the country during Zia’s regime, and continues to dominate today (Jalal, 2014). The power of the fundamentalist narrative demonstrates a deep toxicity within society that has been internalized by its members (Milam, 2012).

Religious Vigilante Violence

Many participants viewed blasphemy-related vigilante violence as a reaction to the criminal justice system and its crisis of legitimacy. During Zia’s regime, the state had itself sanctioned privatized violence in the name of religion during the Afghan War (Toor, 2011). The effects of this can be seen in vigilante violence related to blasphemy today. Spontaneous ad-hoc vigilante groups meted out violence against suspects to correct crimes of blasphemy. Participants felt that blasphemy-related vigilante violence was a response to



the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system (Johnston, 1996), and an effect of its discriminatory nature towards minority communities. One Christian woman, who was a teacher said:

“When our students leave school they are good people [...] but who makes them terrorists? [...] We blame the law for this injustice.”
(Christian Woman)

All participants acknowledged that the blasphemy laws are misused. All participants condemned blasphemy-related violence, although some police officers expressed sympathy for vigilantes. Many Muslim participants offered religious justifications for blasphemy-related violence.

Muslims justified vigilante violence related to blasphemy in religious terms:

“If someone directly says something bad to to me about Islam, then of course I feel bad about it [...] You must first stop this (blasphemy) with your words, then your hands, and then you can go forward [...] in fact, you must go forward” (Muslim Man).

Muslims condemned vigilante violence, but felt it was necessary if the criminal justice system remained ineffective:

“When your religion is attacked in this way personally, then firstly if the government gives a punishment then that’s good, but if not then the public will rise up to punish these people, because this is a religious matter. It’s in our religion that if we have the strength to do something for your religion, you must do it.” (Muslim Man)

This is indicative of the theistic nature of this violence. The majority of the police expressed understanding for blasphemy-related violence based on their religious beliefs, reflecting their close cultural and class proximity to vigilantes (Jackson et al., 2014). They said:

“When Islam is involved, something comes alive inside of us [...] because we are Muslims. Mobs are created of 200-300 people. We



can't stop them. We can't stop the emotions people are feeling as Muslims." (Police Officer)

This shows the silence and ineffectiveness of state officials to take action against those committing blasphemy-related violence. The law has become a threat to attack minority rights in the name of Islam (Jalal, 2014).

"The threat of blasphemy is always there. If we don't get along, or if you are doing better than me, people just have to say that you have done blasphemy. They don't even have to say what you exactly said, because that would be blasphemy itself. The accuser doesn't have to say what the accused did [...] they don't tell the police or courts, it is never even mentioned in judgments. It goes unquestioned." (Christian Man)

This means that no evidence is offered in blasphemy cases, for fear of committing further blasphemy. Effectively the presumption of innocence is reversed in blasphemy cases.

"The laws are being misused by extremists. If I have to settle a score with someone [...] the last resort is to burn a page of the Quran. Who will see who did it? [...] Then the mob starts burning things and killing people in the name of religion." (Hindu Man)

Participants felt that vigilante violence was incited by religious leaders: "The cleric's influence is constantly felt. They tell people to convert us, even if it's by force, because then God will be happy with them" (Christian Man). Some members of the Muslim community agreed with this and said, "the cleric on Friday incites hatred and violence [...] they tell people that Islam is under threat and shout pro Taliban slogans" (Muslim Man). Although initially the majority of blasphemy accusations are made for personal motives, these accusations quickly escalate to mob violence motivated by religious sentiments with the encouragement of local clerics.



Conclusions

The states islamization of blasphemy laws in 1986 has contributed to an increase in vigilante violence of a theistic nature, as found in this study and supported by Grim and Finke (2011). The notion of a religious warrior using violence in the name of Islam was espoused by the state during Zia's regime and began the spiral of a loss of state control on violence (Toor, 2011). This is exacerbated by the street power of rightist religious forces in Pakistan, who can dominate popular political discourse (Milam, 2012). Individuals resort to vigilante violence based on extreme emotions to achieve "justice" in blasphemy cases. Often blasphemy accusations are false and based on personal motives. On this level, blasphemy accusations are not theistic in nature. However, the violence that follows these accusations is theistic in nature. Vigilantes find religious justifications for their acts. Society is thus plagued by inequality between Muslims and non-Muslims, hostility between communities, a lack of discourse regarding religion, and an atmosphere of fear and violence surrounding the blasphemy laws. The state itself is unwilling to intervene when Islam is invoked. In the case of blasphemy, the mixture of religion and politics appears to manifest itself within society through intolerance and vigilante violence.

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