

COMMENTS & LETTERS

Protesters holding a demonstration against blasphemy and demanding to punish social media bloggers in Karachi, Pakistan. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK



Death for blasphemy?

LAIQ AHMED
ATIF



The contemporary time we live in is full of horrendous and heartrending news. Not a single day passes without such horrific news of killing and bloodshed in the name of God, and in the name of his prophets who were the messengers of peace, brotherhood and love for mankind.

Recently, a university journalism student Mashal Khan was murdered on baseless accusations of blasphemy in Pakistan.

After the investigation, the police confirmed that they did not find any proof of blasphemy against him.

This incident is not the first of its kind; there have been many other cases where people accused of blasphemy have been killed by an angry mob. Pakistan's blasphemy law prescribes a death penalty for those guilty of blasphemy.

This law has been used to persecute and unfairly target the minorities and those who do not toe the line with the majority Sunni Muslims. Many a times, it is used for personal grudges and vested interests. In brief, this law has been extensively misused.

The religious imams and clerics openly claim in public gatherings and on print and electronic media, that the moment blasphemy is committed, the person is liable to the death penalty.

Such views are not limited to Pakistan alone, but there are many Muslim clerics and imams who believe the same in many other countries. These clerics exploit the ignorance of the people and mould it for showing their strength and power, and to keep a hold on people.

Such are the leaders about whom the Holy Prophet Muhammad warned the Muslims more than 1,400 years ago to be watchful and be careful. He said:

"There will come a time upon the people when nothing will remain of Islam except its name and nothing will remain of the Quran except its words. Their mosques will be splendidly furnished but destitute of guidance. Their leaders and clerics will be the worst people under the Heaven; strife will issue from them and avert to them."

This saying speaks volumes about the academic dishonesty of such so-called clerics who openly claim but do not substantiate their claims with proofs from the Holy Quran and the life of the founder of Islam.

Keeping different sayings of the Prophet Muhammad in view, one can categorize Islamic scholars and imams into two categories; *Ulema-e-Haq* (truthful and good scholars) and *Ulema-e-Soo* (untrustworthy and dishonest scholars).

The true and honest scholars are those who always promote love, tolerance, harmony, brotherhood, peace, human welfare, unity and build bridges between people. Their every word and action is motivated by the extreme and merciful love for mankind. They enlighten people about spirituality and strive to instil the love of Creator and the creation in the hearts and minds of people.

The disloyal scholars and imams are those who misguide people, who commit academic dishonesty, who spread hatred and promote hate speech for their personal and vested interests, who discourage dialogue, who build walls and barriers, who exploit the ignorance of their people for violence, bloodshed, extremism and terrorism; and those who make their people narrow-minded through inflicting fear in their hearts and minds to broaden their thoughts and knowledge, and those who issue baseless fatwas (edicts) against others, etc.

The question is why Mashal Khan was killed cold-bloodedly? Does Islam permit anyone taking the law into his hands; and what is Islam's position on blasphemy?

There is no doubt that blasphemy is the most repugnant, detestable and loathsome act, which touches on the sensitivities of all decent-minded and believing people. No matter which faith one belongs to, any violation by words or deeds of the sanctity of God or his chosen

messengers, is considered deeply offensive. In fact, Islam condemns every form of blasphemy. The use of abusive and filthy language cannot be permitted against any human being, so how could it be acceptable against religion, divine messengers and God? However, there is no physical worldly punishment prescribed for blasphemy in Islam, whatsoever.

I personally, as a student of the Quran for many years, have read the Quran numerous times and failed to find a single verse, or a part of a verse, which declares blasphemy to be crime punishable by human beings.

The Islamic punishments are divided into two, the crimes committed against God and against man. The crimes committed against God are only punishable by God and man has no authority to go into that domain, and blasphemy is part of that. The Holy Quran elaborates this point and states:

"Verily those who annoy Allah and His Messenger – Allah has cursed them in this world and in the hereafter, and has prepared for them an abasing punishment (Ch.33:V.59)."

There is no worldly punishment prescribed in this verse.

According to the Holy Quran all the messengers were mocked and ridiculed by their opponents. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad, was also blasphemed throughout his life. Despite all the ill-treatment and disrespect shown to him and the Quran, God instructed him not to retaliate, God says: "We will, surely, suffice thee against those who mock (Ch.15:V.96)."

There is not a minor punishment prescribed in the Holy Quran for blasphemy, let alone the death penalty, not even a permanent social boycott is permitted against the blasphemers.

The Holy Quran gives clear guidance on how Muslims should behave when they are faced with those committing blasphemy. Instead of punishing the blasphemers, believers are advised to leave the company of such people until they change the topic of their conversation. God says:

"When you hear the Signs of Allah being denied and mocked at, sit not with them until they engage in a talk other than that; for in that case you would be like them (Ch.4:V.141)."

How beautifully God has summarised this entire subject; after this clear guidance how can anyone justify the punishment of death for blasphemy in Islam?

For me as a Muslim, the Holy Prophet Muhammad is dearer to me than my own life; and I am ready to sacrifice even if I have 1,000 lives for his sake. He is my romance of life.

However, rationality requires from me to deliberate, what the true love means? Does it mean to kill others or loose myself in fighting with others, to substantiate my love with him, or the true love demands to follow his noble teachings as taught by him (ignoring the misinterpretations of today's clerics) and become the well-wisher of humanity, and follow his footsteps and character and become blessing for humanity as he was titled by God as a "Blessing for the entire mankind"?

Laiq Ahmed Atif is president of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Malta.

AMJMALTA@GMAIL.COM



There is not a minor punishment prescribed in the Holy Quran for blasphemy, let alone the death penalty