

**Ramification of Religious Polarisation in Pakistan
Challenge for National Integration
(Case Study: Mob Lynching of Priyantha Kumara incident)**



Submitted by

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BAHRIA UNIVERSITY ISLAMABAD

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DEDICATION

I offer this work to Allah and His beloved Prophet, as their guidance has been my eternal source of inspiration. To my teacher, Dr. Syed Muhammad Shahid Tirmizi, who has illuminated my path with knowledge and wisdom. To my Parents, whose tireless efforts and unwavering prayers have been the foundation of my life's journey. To my beloved Wife, whose steadfast support and boundless love have made this endeavour possible. To my cherished kids, whose presence fills it with hope and joy. And to my dear brothers and sisters for their constant care and heartfelt appreciation.

ABSTRACT

This case study delves into the ramifications of religious polarisation in Pakistan through the lens of the Priyantha Kumara incident. The study examines the complexities of religious commitment and approaches within Islam, highlighting optimistic and pessimistic effects. It further delves into the historical and contemporary global perspectives on religious commitment among Muslims, focusing on Pakistan. The study underscores the importance of tolerance and respect within Islam and explores how Islamic teachings promote social harmony and cohesion. It delves into historical contexts that emphasise religious tolerance and explores the challenges of blasphemy laws, including their misuse and misinterpretation. The study proposes comprehensive solutions for reforming blasphemy laws, strengthening the justice system, involving media responsibly, engaging religious scholars, and fostering family values to prevent the misuse of religious laws. It emphasises education, awareness, continuous learning, dialogue, and responsible speech as crucial tools for promoting understanding and coexistence within society. The study ultimately underscores the significance of collaborative efforts among government, media, religious scholars, families, and civil society to mitigate religious polarisation and promote a harmonious and tolerant society.

1. Keywords: Religious polarisation, Priyantha Kumara, tolerance, social harmony, Blasphemy laws.

Introduction:

Religion, often viewed as the ultimate bastion of prejudice, plays a significant role in shaping perceptions, often more than ethnicity or nationality. While most people are open-minded towards different races or nationalities, religious differences often mark boundaries. Discrimination based on religious beliefs remains a prominent human rights concern today. Many religious minorities, including Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs, frequently encounter prejudice, with some even facing violent repercussions.

Throughout history, minorities have endured discrimination and oppression. Religious minorities are no strangers to this trend. In contemporary times, the drive to safeguard religious minorities has been channelled through political negotiation, constitutional safeguards, and international guidelines. Politically, various religious groups often come together to form agreements centred on mutual respect, security, and collaboration. Constitutionally, numerous nations have instated laws ensuring freedom of religious beliefs and practices and have mechanisms to address infringements on these rights. On a global scale, international ordinances now mandate definitive codes of conduct, compelling nations to respect and protect the inherent human right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

Pakistan's inception was rooted in a vision articulated by its founder, Muhammed Ali Jinnah. While Pakistan emerged as a Muslim-majority nation, Jinnah envisioned Islam as a bonding force, emphasising that the country should stand firm on religious freedom and minority rights protection.¹

However, stark incidents like the assassination of Punjab's governor Salman Taseer in 2011 and rising blasphemy-related violence, as noted by the United Nations Human Rights Report in 2017,² reveal a growing intolerance. The tragic events surrounding individuals like Mashaal Khan and Priyantha Kumara underscore this disturbing trend. The unsubstantiated blasphemy allegations, except in Priyantha Kumara's case, further point to a rash culture of judgment.

Islam, in its essence, promotes the welfare and rights of religious minorities. Within its teachings, with an emphasis on their protection in an Islamic state.; it is mentioned in the hadith that “One who kills a man under covenant will not even smell the fragrance of Paradise³. The onus is on religious scholars to champion Islam's peace and acceptance of core values, emphasising unity in diversity. Encouraging open dialogues and cultural exchanges and fostering a spirit of understanding can be instrumental in breaking these barriers of prejudice.

Conflicting opinions are intrinsic to human societies. However, when disagreements escalate to violence, communities face the devastating consequences of lost lives, governance failures, and economic setbacks. While religion is sometimes cited as a catalyst for strife⁴, its purpose is to foster unity, peace, and reconciliation. Religious

¹ Ispahani, F. 2015. Purifying the Land of the Pure: Pakistan's Religious Minorities. Noida: HarperCollins Publishers India.

² HRC, 34th 31/01/2017 A/HRC/34/46 First session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law - Report of the Co-Chairs E F S A C R

³ Sahih al-Bukhari, 6914

⁴ Moberg, Marci, Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding (USAID, 2009), pp. 01

leaders, with their influential positions, can be instrumental in bridging divides and healing rifts, especially in conflict zones.⁵

Research Gap:

Specific dynamics intensify societal conflicts, as exemplified by incidents like the mob lynching of Priyantha Kumara. On December 3, 2021, Priyantha Kumara faced a tragic end in Sialkot due to widespread misconceptions and misunderstandings within the community.

Purpose of the Study:

This research addresses the gap in relevant literature by empirically investigating the underlying causes of incidents like these. The goal is to devise psychometrically robust metrics and strategies to eliminate religious intolerance, offering a consistent, trustworthy, and validated instrument for assessing religious intolerance among Pakistani Muslims. Additionally, this study seeks to pave the way for subsequent research on related themes by identifying potential factors associated with religious discrimination.

Research Questions

1. How do diverse approaches to religion impact individual behaviours and societal dynamics?
2. What insights does the Priyantha Kumara case provide into religious extremism in the context of blasphemy incidents?
3. How can comprehensive reforms prevent blasphemy incidents?

Objectives of Research

To comprehensively examine religious commitment, particularly in the context of Islam, assess the implications of blasphemy incidents through a detailed case study, and propose practical solutions, including legal reforms, media strategies, and involvement of religious scholars and families, to promote religious harmony, safeguard individual freedoms, and prevent the misuse of religious laws, with a focus on the situation in Pakistan.

literature review

Existing literature sheds light on methodologies and religious doctrines that foster peace and harmony in societies rooted in religion. Regrettably, comprehensive studies addressing religious and communal tensions, especially between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Pakistan, are scant. One notable contribution is the book “Non-Muslims in Muslim Majority Societies with Focus on the Middle East and Pakistan,” edited by Kajsa Ahlstrand and Goran Gunner, published in 2009 with the support of the Church of Sweden. It comprises four significant articles referencing Pakistan.

Sana Ashraf, in her book "Finding the Enemy Within Blasphemy Accusations and Subsequent Violence in Pakistan" Focuses on the past decade in Pakistan, 'Finding the Enemy Within' provides a groundbreaking ethnographic analysis of blasphemy

⁵ Moberg, Marci, Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding (USAID, 2009), pp. 05

accusations and ensuing violence. The first of its kind, this study explores diverse perspectives, including accusers, scholars, and lawyers, challenging prevailing analytical dichotomies. Through a case study on blasphemy, the book delves into broader issues of identity, boundaries, and violence in contemporary nation-states.⁶

Roswitha BADRY's "The Dilemma of "Blasphemy Laws" in Pakistan – Symptomatic of Unsolved Problems in the Post-Colonial Period?" reviewed Pakistan's "blasphemy laws," originating from General Zia ul-Haq's Islamization policies, remain unchanged despite controversies. This review explores the laws' emergence, sustained existence, and their role in escalating sectarian and religious violence. It questions the laws' reflection of longstanding issues in Pakistan, highlighting socio-political shifts, governmental responses, and external influences impacting the deep-rooted problems associated with the legislation.⁷

This anthology, "Religious Minorities under Islamic Law and the Limits of Cultural Relativism", holds increasing significance in the global discourse on the intersection of Islam and human rights, reflected in the expansion of related courses worldwide. Professor Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, a prominent scholar in the field for over three decades, is an essential authority, contributing significantly to the theory and practice of human rights. This volume compiles his extensive work, presenting his thoughts coherently to students, academics, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers engaged in this crucial subject.⁸

Mahmood Ahmad Ghazi, in "Islamic Shari'ah and the Question of Minorities", defines diverse criteria for minorities globally, with religion often a critical factor in Muslim societies. The historically nuanced treatment of minorities challenges contemporary international law, especially regarding majority rule. Muslim scholars traditionally categorised non-Muslims in Islamic societies, ensuring their rights, though this dynamic has evolved. Constitutional rights protect non-Muslims in Pakistan, yet Muslim minorities in non-Muslim communities face challenges in preserving their Islamic identity due to misconceptions about legal expectations.⁹

Jamal Malik's "The Prophet, Law, and Constitution in Pakistani Society" (book chapter) This chapter first discusses the pivotal role of Muhammad 'Alī Jināh in the creation of Pakistan. It considers his thoughts on constitutionalism, Islam, and Muslim opposition to the creation of Pakistan. It then examines the role of Islam in the drafting of Pakistan's three constitutions from 1947 to 1973.¹⁰

Ron E. Hassner's "Blasphemy and Violence" laid light on the 2005 Danish cartoon riots in nine Muslim states that were driven by radical Islamist movements perceiving a moral threat. The protests unfolded in states with political rights and civil liberties, where

⁶ S. Ashraf, *Blasphemy accusations: Power, purity and the enemy within*, Australia: Australain National University Press, 2021.

⁷ R. Badry, "The Dilemma of "Blasphemy Laws" in Pakistan – Symptomatic of Unsolved Problems in the Post-Colonial Period?," *Politeja*, p. 16

⁸ A. A. An-Na'im, "Religious Minorities under Islamic Law and the Limits of Cultural Relativism," *HUMAN RIGHTS QUARTERLY*, p. 18, 1987.

⁹ M. A. Ghazi, "Islamic Shari'ah and the Question of Minorities," *Policy Perspectives*, p. 15, 2009.

¹⁰ J. Malik, "The Prophet, Law, and Constitution in Pakistani Society (book chapter)," 29 11 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://brill.com/display/book/edcol>

regimes responded inconsistently, resulting in clashes with demonstrators. This pattern suggests that reactive religious violence occurs globally when fundamentalist movements face perceived transgressions in a politically permissive yet insufficiently protective environment for their spiritual principles.¹¹

Mehboob Sada's "Managing Muslim and Non-Muslim Relations in Pakistani Setting" delineates varied perspectives on the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. He begins with Jinnah's vision of a progressive Muslim state underpinned by equality. However, post-independence, radical interpretations of Islam have increasingly influenced societal and political dynamics, rendering interfaith relations more precarious. Sada offers a historical account of interactions between these communities, emphasising evolving perceptions.

Yasmin Haider's "Non-Muslim Women in Pakistan; Minority within Minority" highlights the position of non-Muslim women in Pakistan's multicultural and multi-faith societal fabric. Haider discusses the legal standing of non-Muslim women within Shariah, referencing the Pakistan Penal Code. She emphasises the legislative oversight concerning minority women's rights.

M. Aslam Khaki's "Islamization of Laws in Pakistan and its Effect on Minorities" thoroughly critiques Pakistani law, particularly articles rooted in Islamic principles. The establishment of the Federal Shariat Court led to discriminatory legislation, especially against minorities. Khaki's detailed analysis of the 1973 Constitution asserts that although its foundation promotes equality, several articles betray this principle.

In "Non-Muslims in an Islamic State. A Case Study of Pakistan," Ahmad Salim argues that every state should uphold its citizens' rights, regardless of majority or minority status. Islamic states historically protected non-Muslims, as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) treaty with the Jews of Madinah. However, Salim contends that Pakistan's approach towards religious minorities has been less than equitable, both in practice and constitutionally.

Tours article, "The Role of Religion in Peace and Conflict," maps out religion's potential in peacebuilding through dialogues and conferences¹². He portrays Christianity as historically contentious but doesn't delve into tangible or societal conflicts in religious communities. Literature from various conferences suggests that religion remains a potent force driving societal tensions, especially in culturally and religiously diverse settings.

Several works emphasise the importance of dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims to cultivate societal harmony, shedding light on their similarities and differences. Yet, specific literature contextualising this within Pakistan, emphasising conflict as a precursor to peace and harmony, remains limited¹³. This proposed research aims to bridge these gaps, introducing fresh perspectives on interfaith dialogue and reconciliation.

¹¹ R. E. Hassner, "Blasphemy and Violence," *International Studies Quarterly*, p. 23, 2011.

¹² It is actually, a research journal named *New Routes* by which that is published by "Life & Peace Institute. Tore Samuelsson and Kristina Lundqvist (Ed.), *The role of religion in peace and conflict* (Sweden: Life & Peace Institute, 2003)

¹³ "The role of Religion in Peace Making" presented by Amina Rasul CSID (Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy) 10th Annual Conference, May 2009

Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study adopts a case study approach, focusing on deductive analysis to explore the reasons behind events related to the subject matter. The study uses a descriptive method to comprehensively analyse the collected data. Primary data is obtained from early works related to the research topic, and a purposeful sampling technique is employed for in-depth analysis. The research delves into the study of the collected data to derive meaningful insights into the factors contributing to the events under investigation.

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Chapter 1: THE RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT: MEANING AND APPROACHES

1.1. THE RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT:

Religious commitment refers to deep dedication and devotion to one's beliefs and practices. It is an essential aspect of religious faith and plays a central role in shaping an individual's spiritual life. Religious commitment can manifest in various ways, such as attending religious services regularly, praying or meditating daily, following religious guidelines and rituals, and actively engaging in the religious community.

The verse of righteousness, "Aayat-e-Birr", emphasises the importance of individual and communal commitment in religious practice. It encourages individuals to maintain a solid personal connection with their faith by sincerely believing in Allah and adhering to spiritual principles. This includes performing acts of charity and kindness, fulfilling religious obligations, and cultivating a sense of trustworthiness and accountability.¹⁴

Furthermore, the verse highlights the significance of active participation in religious communities. Believers are encouraged to engage with their community members, attend religious gatherings, and contribute to the community's well-being. The verse also emphasises the importance of trustworthiness and fulfilling promises, promoting unity and integrity within the community.

In short, "Aayat-e-Birr" underscores the need for individual and communal religious commitment. Individuals are urged to strengthen their connection with their faith through acts of devotion while actively participating in their religious community's collective life. By embodying these qualities, believers contribute to developing a righteous society that upholds the principles and values of their faith.

1.2. Approaches To Religious Commitment

There are many different approaches to religious commitment, and individuals may have unique ways of practising and expressing their faith. In Islam, there are both private and public approaches to religious devotion.

I. Private Approaches:

Private approaches to Islam may involve personal prayer, fasting, and reading the Quran. This is often seen as a personal relationship with Allah and an essential aspect of individual spirituality. Private approaches focus on an individual's emotional and spiritual connection with religion. This includes their beliefs, values, attitudes towards their religion, and inner experience of spirituality¹⁵. Private approaches emphasise the importance of faith and devotion and individuals' relationship with their higher power or deity. Individuals may have their unique ways of practising and expressing their faith.¹⁶

¹⁴ (Quran 2:177) Verse Al-Birr آية البر

¹⁵ S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, Oxford: Routledge, 1991.

¹⁶ S. Schmidtke, *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

II. Public Approaches:

Public approaches to Islam may involve engaging with the wider Muslim community, such as attending Friday prayers at the mosque, participating in religious festivals, and giving to charity. This is often seen as a way of fulfilling the communal obligations of Islam and building a sense of unity within the community. Public approaches focus on the outward expression of religious commitment. This includes the visible signs of religious devotion, such as attending religious services, following religious guidelines and rituals, and participating in religious organisations. Public approaches emphasise the role of religion in shaping social and cultural norms and the importance of adhering to these norms as a way of demonstrating religious commitment.

Here are some common approaches to religious commitment:

The **ritualistic approach** emphasises the importance of religious rituals and ceremonies, such as prayer, fasting, or attending religious services. Those who follow this approach may find comfort and spiritual fulfilment in the repeated practice of these rituals¹⁷.

The **intellectual approach** emphasises the importance of studying religious texts, such as the Bible or the Quran, and engaging in theological discussions. Those who follow this approach may find meaning in understanding the more profound philosophical and ethical questions their religion poses¹⁸.

The **social approach** emphasises the importance of community and social engagement in practising one's religion. Those who follow this approach may find strength and support in sharing their faith with others, participating in religious organisations, and engaging in acts of service and charity¹⁹.

The **personal approach** emphasises the importance of individual autonomy and unique interpretation of religious teachings. Those who follow this approach may prioritise their inner convictions and values over external religious authorities or traditions²⁰.

The **mystical approach** emphasises the importance of personal experience and direct communion with the divine. Those who follow this approach may seek heightened awareness or transcendence through meditation, prayer, or other spiritual practices²¹.

In addition to these private and public approaches, there are different interpretations of Islamic teachings and practices. Some Muslims emphasise the importance of strict adherence to traditional interpretations of the Quran and Hadith, while others may adopt a more liberal or progressive approach to Islam.

¹⁷ J. M. Finney, "A Theory of Religious Commitment," JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3710160>, p. 17, 1978.

¹⁸ J. D. DAVIDSON, "A New Approach to Religious Commitment," JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20831037>, p. 23, 1977.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ J. Ralph W. Hood, "Forms of Religious Commitment and Intense Religious Experience," JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3510294>, p. 8, 1973.

Ultimately, an individual's approach to Islam is a personal choice, influenced by various factors such as culture, family background, and personal beliefs.

1.3. Conservative Or Orthodox Schools of Thought:

Strict adherence to traditional interpretations of the Quran and Hadith is a common approach among some Muslims, particularly those who identify with more conservative or orthodox schools of thought. This approach emphasises the importance of following the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his companions as closely as possible, based on understanding the Quran and Hadith as the primary sources of Islamic knowledge and guidance.

Adherents to this approach may emphasise the importance of literal interpretation of the Quran and Hadith. They may prioritise preserving traditional Islamic practices and values over more modern or progressive interpretations. They may also strongly emphasise following Islamic law and fulfilling religious obligations, such as the five daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and performing the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

However, it is essential to note that there are many different interpretations of Islamic teachings and practices and that even within more conservative or orthodox schools of thought, there can be differences of opinion on specific issues. Furthermore, there are also many Muslims who adopt a more liberal or progressive approach to Islam and who may prioritise personal interpretation and autonomy over strict adherence to traditional understandings of Islamic teachings²².

1.4. Liberal Or Progressive Schools of Thought: Top of Form

A liberal or progressive approach to Islam is an approach that emphasises personal interpretation, critical thinking, and flexibility in understanding Islamic teachings and practices. Muslims may adopt this approach to reinterpreting traditional Islamic beliefs and practices in light of contemporary social, cultural, and political contexts.

Adherents to this approach may prioritise social justice, human rights, and gender equality and may advocate for a more inclusive and diverse understanding of Islam. They may also challenge traditional interpretations of the Quran and Hadith and may emphasise the importance of context and historical circumstances in understanding Islamic teachings.

A liberal or progressive approach to Islam may involve questioning or challenging traditional practices or beliefs seen as discriminatory or unjust, such as gender segregation in mosques or prohibiting certain forms of dress or behaviour for women. It may also involve advocating for greater engagement with the broader society and promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

²² T. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

It is important to note that there is a wide range of views and practices within the Muslim community. Many Muslims adopt a hybrid approach to Islam, drawing on traditional and progressive interpretations of Islamic teachings and practices²³.

1.5. The Religious Commitment in Islamic Prospective:

Religious commitment plays a crucial role in the Islamic faith, involving a solid devotion and adherence to its principles and practices. This commitment includes a personal relationship with God and the public demonstration of faith through adherence to Islamic practices.

At the heart of Islamic religious commitment is the belief in the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ. Muslims are called to commit to the five pillars of Islam, including the declaration of faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. These practices remind Muslims of their faith and help them cultivate a closer relationship with God.

In Islam, faith is a personal matter between the individual and God. Muslims are encouraged to build a relationship with God based on love, trust, and obedience. This relationship is founded on the belief that God is merciful and forgiving, and through faith and good deeds, individuals can earn God's favour and blessings.²⁴

However, Islamic religious commitment is not limited to the private sphere. Muslims are also expected to publicly adhere to Islamic practices and guidelines daily. These practices serve as a visible demonstration of one's faith and can positively impact the wider community. For example, charity is seen as a way to benefit and purify one's wealth, strengthening the bonds of the community.

Islam emphasises social responsibility and community involvement. Muslims are encouraged to work towards social justice, support those in need, and be active members of their communities. In Islam, every person is responsible for their actions, and the individual and society must work together to create a just and equitable world.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is considered a role model for Muslims, and his life and teachings guide how to live a life of faith and devotion to God while serving others. Muslims are encouraged to follow his compassion, humility, and social responsibility example.²⁵

Religious commitment in Islam can have many positive effects on individuals and society. It can provide a sense of purpose, meaning, and direction. It can also offer guidance and support in times of difficulty and can help individuals cope with loss and

²³ A. Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

²⁴ S. M. N. Al-Attas, *Aims and objectives of Islamic education*, Jeddah: Hodder and Stoughton (for) King Abdulaziz University, 1979.

²⁵ S. M. H. S. H. Usman Riaz Mir, "Islamic Perspective of Corporate Social," *AL-ADWA* 46:31 , pp. 77-90, 2016.

grief. Religious commitment can foster community and social cohesion, bringing people together around shared values and beliefs²⁶.

In conclusion, religious commitment is a vital aspect of the Islamic faith. It involves a personal relationship with God and a commitment to Islamic practices and social responsibility. Islamic religious commitment can positively affect individuals and society, providing guidance, support, and a sense of purpose. Through their commitment to their faith, Muslims are encouraged to live a life of compassion, humility, and service to others²⁷.

1.6. Extremism In Islam:

Extremism in Islam refers to the adoption of an extreme, radical, or fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic teachings and practices, often intending to impose these views on others through force or coercion. This can include beliefs and actions that are contrary to the mainstream understanding of Islam and can be associated with violence and terrorism.

Extremist interpretations of Islam often involve a rejection of modernity, including secularism, democracy, and human rights. They may view non-Muslims and even other Muslims who do not share their beliefs as enemies to be defeated or converted.

Extremist interpretations of Islam are typically characterised by rejecting modern values and idealising a past era of Islamic dominance and supremacy. These views may involve a narrow and rigid interpretation of Islamic texts and rejecting alternative perspectives. They may also involve a belief in using violence or force to achieve religious or political goals and a willingness to disregard the rights and lives of others²⁸.

It is important to note, however, that most Muslims do not adhere to extremist views or engage in violence. Many Muslims actively reject extremist ideologies and promote a peaceful and tolerant understanding of Islam.

One of the most widely known extremist groups is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which emerged in 2013 and has committed numerous acts of violence, including bombings, beheadings, and executions, in the name of establishing a caliphate in the Middle East. Other extremist groups include TTP.

Efforts to combat extremism in Islam include promoting education and critical thinking, engaging in interfaith dialogue and cooperation, and challenging extremist narratives and interpretations of Islamic teachings. It is also essential to address social and political

²⁶ S. M. H. S. H. Usman Riaz Mir, "Islamic Perspective of Corporate Social," AL-ADWA 46:31, pp. 77-90, 2016.

²⁷ S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, London: Routledge, 1981

²⁸ S. A. M. Muhammad Adil Iqbal, "Challenge of Globalisation to the Muslim Ummah: Religious Extremism and the Need for Middle Path (Wasat)," <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48544311>, pp. 73-88, 2019.

factors contributing to the rise of extremism, such as poverty, political repression, and discrimination²⁹.

1.7. Modernity in Islam:

Moderate Islam is a term used to describe an approach to Islam that seeks to balance traditional Islamic teachings and practices with modern values and norms. Adherents to moderate Islam reject extremist or fundamentalist interpretations of Islam and instead strive to promote a more open, tolerant, and inclusive understanding of the religion.³⁰

This approach emphasises the importance of personal interpretation, critical thinking, and dialogue with other faiths and cultures. It rejects violence or coercion to spread Islam and promotes peaceful coexistence and cooperation with other communities.

The People influenced by this approach may also advocate for reforms within the Muslim community, such as greater gender equality, promoting education and scientific inquiry, and rejecting sectarianism and intolerance.

It is important to note that no fixed definition of moderate Islam exists, and different individuals and groups may interpret and practice it differently. However, the overall goal of moderate Islam is to promote a more sensible, balanced, and tolerant approach to the faith and to reject extremist or fundamentalist ideologies.³¹

Religious commitment can have both positive and negative effects on individuals and society.

1.8. Optimistic Effects of Religious Commitment in Islam:

Religious commitment in Islam can have a range of positive effects on individuals and communities. Here are some examples:

Islam encourages individuals to connect with their spirituality. This can provide comfort, guidance, and purpose in life. Religious commitment in Islam offers a framework for spiritual growth and self-improvement. Prayer, fasting, and other religious rituals can help individuals feel closer to God, develop a stronger connection to their faith, and achieve inner peace and tranquillity.

Islam strongly emphasises community and encourages individuals to support and care for one another. This can lead to a strong sense of social support and belonging. Religious commitment can provide a sense of purpose, meaning, and direction in life. It can offer guidance and support in times of difficulty and can help individuals cope with loss and grief. Religious commitment can foster community and social cohesion, bringing people together around shared values and beliefs.

²⁹ M. Palmer, *Islamic Extremism, Causes, Diversity, and Challenges*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

³⁰ T. Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

³¹ S. H. Nasr, *Islam in the Modern World*, New York: HarperOne, 2011.

Islam encourages individuals to follow ethical guidelines and values like honesty, compassion, and generosity. This can help individuals develop a strong sense of morality and make positive life choices.³²

Islamic practices, such as prayer and meditation, can have a positive impact on mental health, reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression. These practices can provide peace and calm and help individuals feel more connected to their spirituality.

Giving to those in need is a fundamental principle of Islam, and many Muslims view charity as an essential aspect of their religious commitment. Islam strongly emphasises charity and social justice, encouraging individuals to give to those in need and work towards a more just and equitable society. By practising charitable giving, individuals can make a positive impact on the lives of others and cultivate a sense of empathy and compassion.

Islam provides clear guidelines for ethical behaviour, emphasising honesty, compassion, and social responsibility. By following these guidelines, individuals can cultivate a solid moral character and positively contribute to their communities.

Islamic communities provide social support to their members, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity. This support can be significant during times of hardship or difficulty, helping individuals to cope with challenges and find strength in their faith.³³

Islam emphasises strong interpersonal relationships, including family ties, friendships, and community connections. By nurturing these relationships, individuals can develop a sense of love and respect for others, promoting harmony and unity within their communities.

Religious commitment in Islam encourages personal growth and development, emphasising the importance of lifelong learning, self-reflection, and self-improvement. By continually striving to improve themselves and their relationships with others, individuals can become more resilient, adaptable, and successful in all areas of their lives.

Islam provides a sense of identity and purpose for its followers, helping individuals to understand their place in the world and their relationship to God. This can lead to greater self-worth and confidence and help individuals navigate life's challenges more resiliently.

Religious commitment in Islam offers many practices, such as prayer and meditation, that can help to reduce stress and anxiety. These practices can positively impact mental health, promoting calm and inner peace.³⁴

³² M. A. U. R. O. R. A. K. a. R. M. Ghulam Murtaza, "Impact of Islamic Work Ethics on Organizational Citizenship Behaviors and Knowledge-Sharing Behaviors," *jstor*, p. 9, 2016.

³³ O. Kocak, "How Does Religious Commitment Affect Satisfaction with Life during the COVID-19 Pandemic? Examining Depression, Anxiety, and Stress as Mediators," *MDPI*, p. 22, 30 August 2021.

³⁴ R. Hassan, "Faith lines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society," *American Journal of Sociology*, p. 3, 2005.

Islam strongly emphasises education and lifelong learning, encouraging individuals to seek knowledge and deepen their understanding of the world. This can promote intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and a lifelong love of learning. Islam encourages followers to make healthy choices, such as avoiding alcohol and drugs, eating a balanced diet, and exercising regularly. By promoting these healthy habits, Islam can positively impact physical health and well-being.

Islam emphasises the importance of humility and gratitude, encouraging individuals to be grateful for their blessings and to treat others with kindness and respect. These values can help promote empathy and compassion and foster stronger relationships.

Islam strongly emphasises social responsibility and community service, encouraging individuals to use their resources and talents to help others. This can promote a sense of purpose and meaning and help individuals positively impact their communities.

Overall, the positive effects of religious commitment in Islam are numerous and varied, including strengthening personal identity, reducing stress, promoting lifelong learning, encouraging healthy lifestyle choices, promoting humility and gratitude, and encouraging social responsibility. By following the principles of Islam, individuals can lead more fulfilling, purposeful lives and contribute positively to their communities and the world around them.³⁵

1.9. Pessimistic Effects of Religious Commitment in Islam:

Like any religion, religious commitment in Islam can have potentially adverse effects on individuals and communities. Here are some examples:

Some individuals may take their religious commitment to an extreme level and engage in violent or harmful behaviour in the name of Islam. This can lead to terrorism and sectarian violence, particularly when individuals hold radical or fundamentalist beliefs. This can lead to intolerance, extremism, and conflict, as individuals may view those who do not share their beliefs as inferior or evil. Religious conflicts have been a significant source of violence and unrest throughout history, from the Crusades to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One of the most well-known adverse effects of religious commitment in Islam is the potential for extremism. Some individuals may radically interpret the teachings of Islam, leading to violence, intolerance, and discrimination towards those who do not share their beliefs. This can lead to conflict and division within communities and even globally.³⁶

Religious commitment can sometimes lead to a narrow-minded and intolerant view of the world, resulting in prejudice towards individuals or groups who do

³⁵ Z. D. B. M. S. M. G. S. H. Rezvan Homaei, "Relationship between Optimism, Religiosity and Self-Esteem with Marital Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction," *International Education Studies*, vol. 9, no. 6, p. 9, 2016.

³⁶ M. N. Peter Mandaville, "Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism," United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, 2017.

not adhere to the same religious beliefs. This can lead to discrimination and even violence towards those seen as different. In some interpretations of Islam, women may face restrictions on their rights and freedoms. At the same time, Islam promotes equality between men and women, and some interpretations of religious teachings have been used to justify the oppression of women. This can include restrictions on education, employment, and social interaction, as well as practices such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

Different interpretations of Islamic teachings can lead to conflicts and divisions within the Muslim community. These conflicts can be political, social, or theological in nature. While religious practices can positively affect mental health, excessive religious commitment can also lead to negative consequences, such as obsessive-compulsive behaviours, guilt, and anxiety. Religious commitment in Islam can sometimes lead to a suppression of individuality, as individuals may feel pressure to conform to strict religious practices and codes of behaviour. This can limit personal growth and creativity and lead to feelings of isolation or alienation.

Some interpretations of Islam can contradict scientific progress and knowledge, leading to a reluctance to embrace new ideas or technologies. This can hinder progress and limit opportunities for scientific advancement. Religious commitment in Islam can sometimes be used as a tool for political manipulation, with leaders using religious rhetoric to gain support or justify their actions. This can lead to corruption and abuse of power, undermining the principles of justice and fairness.

While religious commitment in Islam can have many positive effects, it is vital to recognise and address the potential adverse effects as well. By promoting a balanced and nuanced understanding of Islamic teachings and encouraging critical thinking and open-mindedness, individuals and communities can work towards a more positive and constructive approach to religious commitment.³⁷

1.10. Constructive Approach to Religious Commitment:

A constructive approach to religious commitment involves embracing the positive aspects of religion while being aware of and working to address potential adverse effects. Here are some strategies for taking a constructive approach to religious commitment:³⁸

Learning about the teachings and values of one's religion can help individuals understand the positive aspects of their faith and avoid potential negative interpretations or practices. Engaging with one's religious community can provide

³⁷ R. Hassan, *On Being Religious: Patterns of Religious Commitment in Muslim Societies*, Singapore : Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies , 2005.

³⁸ P. Goldberg, "Broadening Approaches to Religious Education Through Constructivist Pedagogy," *Journal of Religious Education*, vol. 55, no. 2, p. 5, 2007.

a sense of belonging, social support, and opportunities for positive actions, such as volunteering and social justice work.

Emphasising the compassionate and empathetic aspects of one's religious teachings can help individuals promote understanding and tolerance towards others, regardless of their beliefs. Striving for a balanced approach to religious commitment involves avoiding extremes, such as religious fundamentalism or neglecting one's faith. Instead, individuals can find a middle ground that allows them to live their faith positively and constructively while embracing life's complexities.

A constructive approach to religious commitment in Islam emphasises personal responsibility and accountability. This means encouraging individuals to take ownership of their beliefs and actions and use their religious teachings to guide them to live a virtuous and ethical life. A constructive approach to religious commitment in Islam involves encouraging critical thinking and questioning religious teachings. This means promoting a nuanced and balanced understanding of Islamic teachings and recognising that interpretations can vary among individuals and communities. Encouraging critical thinking and questioning within the context of religious teachings can help individuals avoid dogmatism and promote a more nuanced understanding of their faith.

A constructive approach to religious commitment in Islam involves promoting inclusivity and accepting diversity. This means recognising the value of different perspectives and experiences and working towards a more inclusive and tolerant society. A constructive approach to religious commitment in Islam involves fostering community engagement and social responsibility. This means encouraging individuals to use their resources and talents to help others and to contribute positively to their communities.

A constructive approach to religious commitment in Islam involves embracing modernity and adapting to changing times. This means recognising the potential benefits of new technologies and scientific discoveries and incorporating them into Islamic teachings. A constructive approach to religious commitment in Islam involves promoting peace and reconciliation and working towards conflict resolution and understanding among individuals and communities. This means recognising the potential for religious teachings to be used as a tool for division and conflict and actively working to promote peace and harmony.

By taking a constructive approach to religious commitment, individuals can reap the positive benefits of their faith while being aware of potential adverse effects and working to address them. Promoting a healthy and constructive approach to religious commitment is essential to encourage tolerance, understanding, and respect among people of different faiths. This requires recognising the diversity of religious beliefs and practices and respecting the rights and freedoms of individuals to practice their religion without fear of discrimination or persecution. By taking a balanced and nuanced approach to religious

teachings and recognising the potential for positive change and growth, individuals and communities can work towards a more constructive and positive approach to religious commitment.

1.11. The exploitation of religious leaders and institutions:

Religious polarisation in Pakistan is a complex issue, and the exploitation of religious leaders and institutions has contributed to its escalation. While it is crucial to acknowledge that not all religious leaders or institutions are involved in such practices, there have been instances where specific individuals and groups have taken advantage of religious sentiments for personal or political gains.³⁹ The following are some ways in which exploitation has occurred:

- Selective interpretation of religious texts: Some religious leaders exploit their authority to interpret religious texts selectively, highlighting certain verses while disregarding others. They manipulate these interpretations to promote their political agendas, often fostering a divisive narrative that reinforces a sense of religious superiority or victimhood.
- Exploitative religious leaders emphasise the differences between religious groups, portraying their followers as righteous and faithful believers while demonising those from other faiths or sects. This "us versus them" mentality further deepens religious polarisation by promoting hate, intolerance, and an unwillingness to engage in constructive dialogue.⁴⁰
- Certain religious leaders exploit their platforms to disseminate hate speech and provocative rhetoric, explicitly targeting individuals or communities from different religious sects or faiths. Their inflammatory language stirs up emotions, fuels anger, and incites violence, contributing to an atmosphere of fear and hostility.
- Exploitative leaders manipulate religious teachings to legitimise or justify acts of violence. They distort religious principles, misinterpreting texts to convince their followers that violence is a righteous response to perceived threats or religious differences. This incitement fosters a cycle of violence and deepens religious divisions.⁴¹
- Religious leaders and institutions hold significant influence over public opinion in Pakistan. Some leaders exploit this authority by spreading divisive ideologies and promoting a narrow interpretation of religious practices that align with their own biases or political interests. They use religious platforms to shape public discourse, often disregarding alternative perspectives or dissenting voices.
- Exploitative religious leaders utilise various media platforms to disseminate their polarising messages. They leverage television, radio,

³⁹ H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, London: Macmillan Publishers, 1986.

⁴⁰ M. A. Ali, *Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: A Case Study of Jhang*, Colombo: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 2000.

⁴¹ A. Abbas, "Tentacles of Hatred," *The Herald*, 2001.

social media, and other channels to reach a broad audience, further reinforcing religious polarisation by disseminating narratives that resonate with their followers while demonising opposing viewpoints.

- Political actors recognise the influence of religious leaders and institutions and exploit their support to gain legitimacy and mobilise their followers. They form alliances and seek endorsements from religious figures, often using religious rhetoric and symbolism to appeal to voters. This exploitation blurs the lines between religion and politics, contributing to the manipulation of religious sentiments for electoral or power-gaining purposes.
- Some political actors infiltrate and manipulate religious institutions, influencing their decision-making processes and leveraging their resources and networks for political ends. This interference compromises the independence and integrity of these institutions, contributing to the erosion of public trust and exacerbating religious polarisation.⁴²
- Certain religious institutions associated with extremist ideologies receive financial and logistical support from both domestic and international sources. This external funding allows them to propagate radical ideologies, expand their influence, and recruit followers who may be vulnerable to extremist narratives. The financial backing sustains their activities, further polarising society and threatening stability.
- Exploitative religious leaders may engage in illicit financial activities, including money laundering and the diversion of funds. These networks provide the necessary resources to sustain their activities, such as organising rallies, disseminating propaganda, and promoting polarising agendas. The financial support enables them to maintain a significant presence and influence within religious communities.
- Some religious leaders and institutions exploit the trust and devotion of their followers by misusing the funds they receive. Instead of utilising these funds for the betterment of the community, they divert them for personal enrichment or to support their political aspirations.
- Economic exploitation: In some cases, religious leaders take advantage of the economic vulnerabilities of their followers. They may impose excessive financial burdens through compulsory donations or exploitative practices, leading to financial strain on individuals and families who feel obligated to comply.
- Certain religious leaders exploit existing sectarian divisions and interfaith tensions to consolidate their power and influence. They promote exclusivist ideologies that foster hate and intolerance towards other religious groups or sects, widening the divide between communities.

⁴² M. A. Ali, *Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: A Case Study of Jhang*, Colombo: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 2000.

- Some religious leaders and institutions actively propagate extremist ideologies, advocating for radicalisation and violence in the name of religion. They exploit the vulnerabilities of individuals who may be disillusioned, marginalised, or seeking a sense of identity and purpose, thereby exacerbating religious polarisation.⁴³
- Political actors often seek to exploit religious institutions and leaders to gain electoral support and legitimacy. They utilise religious rhetoric and symbols to appeal to religious sentiments, blurring the lines between religion and politics and manipulating religious narratives to serve their political agendas.
- In certain instances, politicians sometimes influence religious leaders' appointment process within state-controlled institutions. They select individuals who align with their political ideologies, compromising the independence and integrity of these institutions. This politicisation undermines the credibility of religious leaders and erodes public trust.⁴⁴
- Some religious leaders and institutions marginalise or suppress moderate voices within religious communities. They exert control over the discourse, promoting an extremist and intolerant narrative while disregarding alternative interpretations or voices advocating for peace, harmony, and understanding.
- Exploitative practices include discrimination, persecution, and violence against minority religious groups. Such actions create a hostile environment, leading to the marginalisation and exclusion of these communities, thus deepening religious Polarisation.
- Certain religious institutions exploit educational platforms to indoctrinate students with polarising ideologies. They may selectively teach religious texts, omitting teachings that promote tolerance, respect, and acceptance of diversity. This one-sided approach nurtures a biased understanding of religion and contributes to the polarisation of society.
- The absence of a comprehensive curriculum that encourages critical thinking and exposes students to diverse religious perspectives further perpetuates polarisation. When education systems fail to promote dialogue, critical analysis, and an understanding of different faiths, it hampers the development of empathy, respect, and the ability to engage in constructive discussions.

Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that promotes transparency, accountability, and ethical standards within religious institutions. Interfaith dialogue initiatives should be encouraged to foster understanding, respect, and cooperation among different religious communities. Additionally, promoting an inclusive and diverse

⁴³ G. Ahmed, *The Menace of Extremism*, Karachi: Dawn, 2004.

⁴⁴ Ā. A. Khan, *Striking at the Root*, Glasgow: The Heralds, 1995.

education system that encourages critical thinking, religious tolerance, and respect for human rights is crucial in countering religious polarisation.⁴⁵

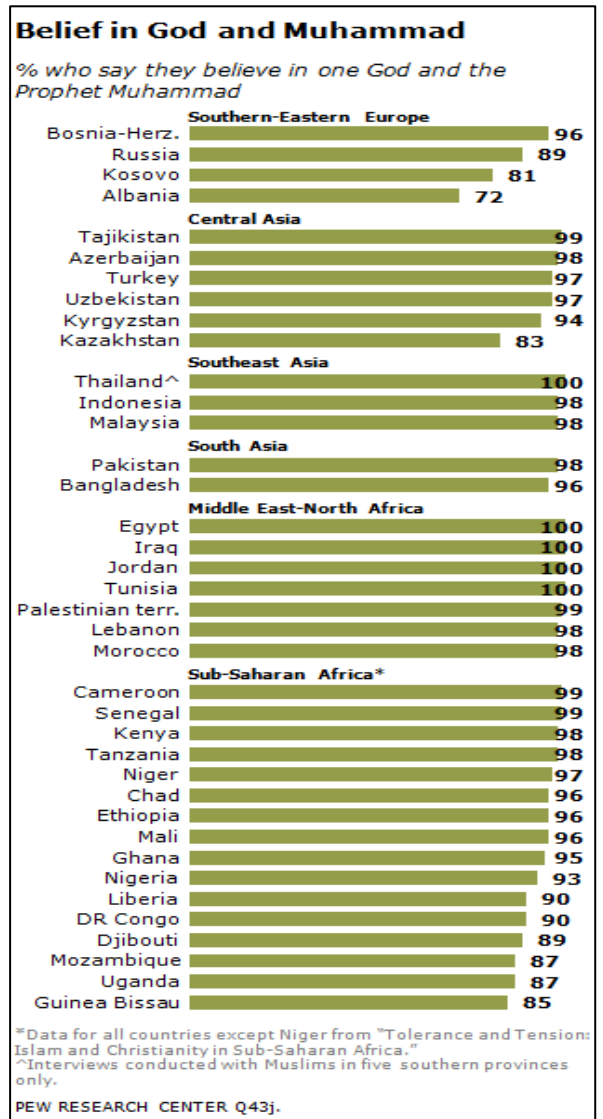
1.12. Variations in Religious Commitment among Muslims: A Global Perspective

The religious commitment of Muslims across different geographic regions is based on a survey. Here is a summary of the key points:⁴⁶

1.12.1. Global Muslim Belief in One God and His Prophet Muhammad ﷺ:

This study comprehensively surveys Muslims' belief in one God, Allah, and His Prophet Muhammad ﷺ worldwide. The survey found that in most countries surveyed, there was an overwhelming consensus among Muslims regarding this fundamental belief. In the Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, belief in the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ was almost universal. Similarly, Central Asia had high percentages, with only slight variations across countries. Many Muslims affirmed this core belief in Southern and Eastern Europe, with Bosnia-Herzegovina showing the highest agreement. The findings provide valuable insights into the variations in religious commitment among Muslims globally.⁴⁷

1.12.2. Importance of Religion by Region: Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia generally consider



⁴⁵ S. Parker, "Islam and education: the manipulation and misrepresentation of a religion," in *Journal of Beliefs & Values: Studies in Religion & Education*, UK, Taylor & Francis online, 2013, pp. 125-127.

⁴⁶ T. W. M. U. A. DIVERSITY, "Pew Research Center," Pew Research Center, 9 August 2012. [Online]. Available: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-2-religious-commitment/>.

⁴⁷ T. W. M. U. A. DIVERSITY, "Pew Research Center," Pew Research Center, 9 August 2012. [Online]. Available: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-2-religious-commitment/>.

religion very important. Morocco has the highest percentage in the Middle East and North Africa, while Lebanon has the lowest. Central Asia and Southern and Eastern Europe show relatively lower importance on religion.

1.12.3. Varied Perspectives on Religion Importance among Muslims Worldwide:

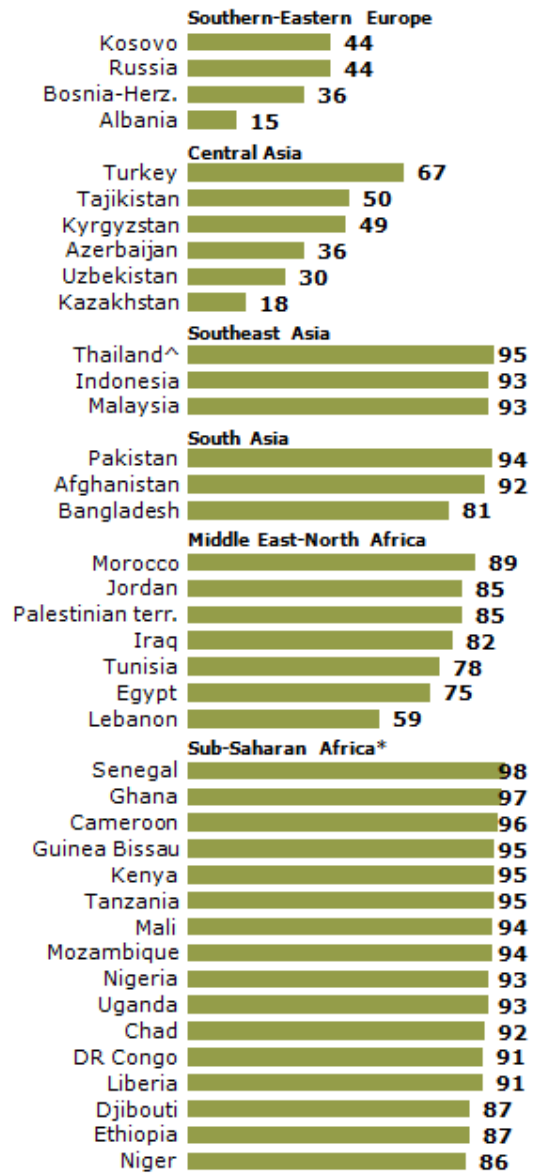
The significance of religion in the lives of Muslims varies across regions and demographic factors. While belief in one God and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is widespread, the importance placed on religion differs among Muslims. In sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, the majority of Muslims view religion as highly important. The Middle East and North Africa also show solid majorities, considering religion as significant, albeit at slightly lower levels. Central Asia and Southern and Eastern Europe exhibit relatively muted roles of religion. Regarding age, Lebanon stands out with a notable divergence, as younger Muslims emphasise religion less than older generations. Similar patterns are observed in other countries, including the Palestinian territories and Tunisia. In some cases, education levels also influence attitudes toward religion. Overall, these findings shed light on the diverse perspectives on the importance of faith within the global Muslim community.⁴⁸

1.12.4. Influence of Age and Education:

The importance of religion tends to vary by age in some countries. In Lebanon and other Middle Eastern and North African countries, younger Muslims place less importance on religion than older Muslims. Education also affects

How Much Religion Matters

% who say religion is very important in their lives



^{*}Data for all countries except Niger from "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa."
[^]Interviews conducted with Muslims in five southern provinces only.

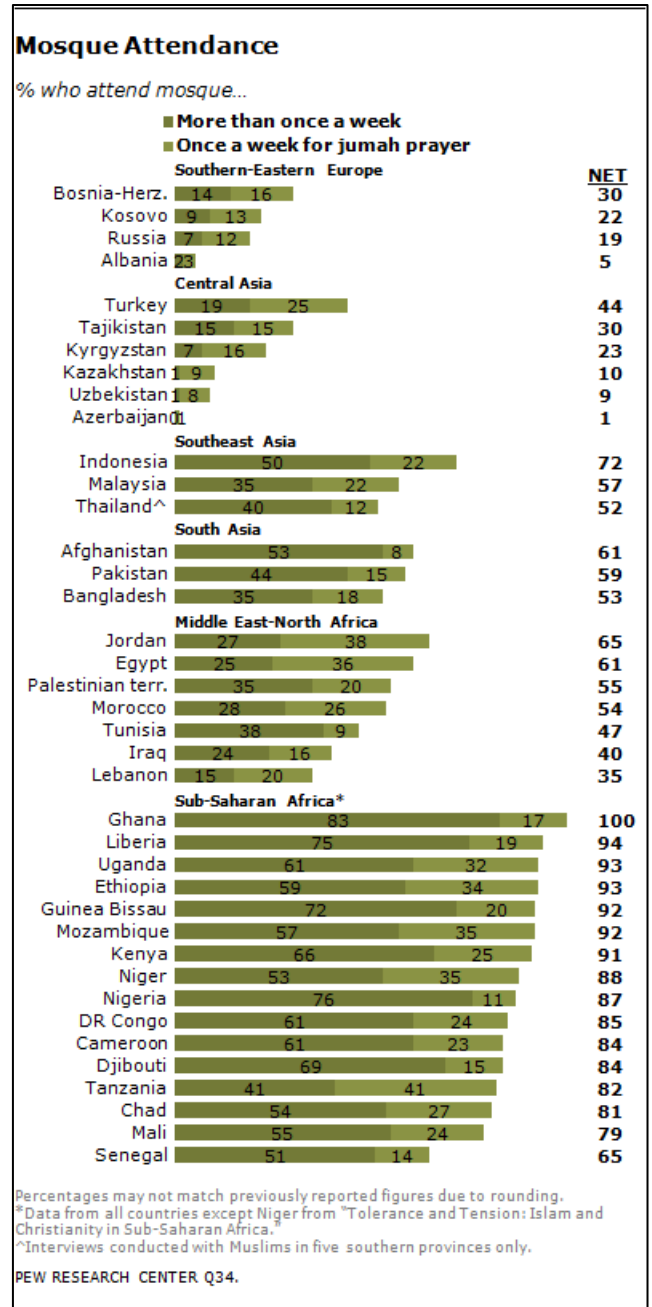
PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q36.

⁴⁸ M. Ruthven, "Islam in the World," in Islam in the World, third edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 89-90.

attitudes, with lower-educated individuals valuing religion more in some countries.⁴⁹

1.12.5. Mosque Attendance Patterns among Muslims Worldwide:

Mosque attendance plays a significant role in the Islamic tradition, serving as an individual and communal act of worship. The survey reveals varying rates of mosque attendance across different regions. Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates the highest percentage of Muslims attending mosques at least once a week, with countries like Ghana, Liberia, and Uganda reporting over 90% attendance. In South and Southeast Asia, mosque attendance rates are relatively high, although slightly lower than in sub-Saharan Africa. Central Asia and Southern and Eastern Europe show lower rates of mosque attendance, with a significant number of Muslims reporting never visiting their local mosque. Gender differences exist in mosque attendance, particularly in Central Asia and South Asia, where women are often constrained from attending due to customs or other considerations. Age can also impact mosque attendance, with older Muslims generally more likely to participate in the mosque at least once a week than younger individuals, particularly in the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia. These findings shed light on the diversity of mosque attendance patterns among Muslims worldwide.⁵⁰



1.12.6. Prayer Frequency and Patterns among Muslims Worldwide:

Daily prayer, known as salat, holds a significant place in the lives of Muslims across various regions. While worship is accessible to all Muslims regardless of

⁴⁹ M. Ruthven, "Islam in the World," in Islam in the World, third edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 89-90.

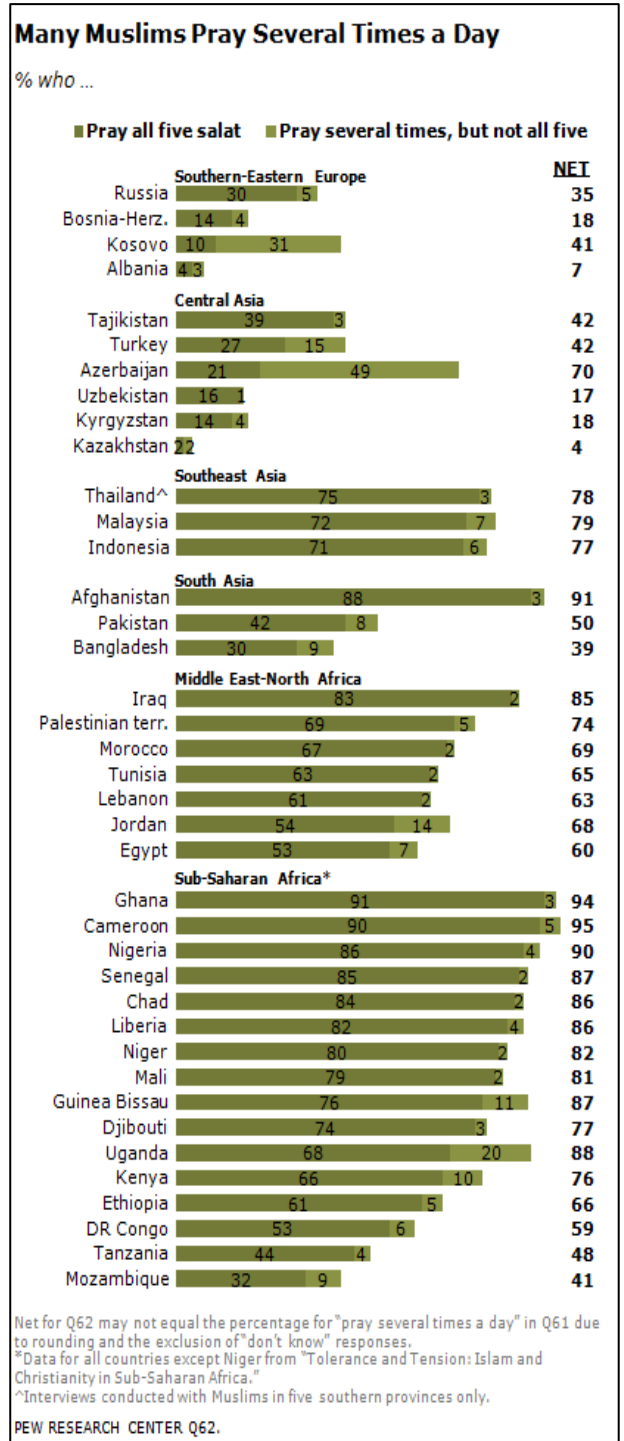
⁵⁰ S. A. & P. V. Aelst, "Religion works in different ways: an intersectional approach to Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation," Acta Politica, no. Springer Science and Business Media LLC in Acta Politica, p. 23, 2023.

factors like gender, health, income, or proximity to Islamic origins, other religious practices may not be universally feasible. The survey reveals that daily prayer is particularly prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. In these regions, most Muslims pray at least once daily, with many observing multiple prayers throughout the day. Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates the highest frequency of prayer, while Southeast Asia follows closely. In contrast, Muslims in Southern and Eastern Europe and Central Asia tend to pray less frequently. Significant variations in prayer frequency exist among different age groups, with older Muslims praying more frequently than younger ones in the Middle East and North Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. These findings shed light on the significance of daily prayer and its variations within the global Muslim community.⁵¹

1.13. Analysing the Discrepancy between Religious Identity and Commitment among Muslims in Pakistan

The data presented indicates a significant contrast between the self-identification of individuals in Pakistan as Muslims and their level of religious commitment. While a large majority (98%) claim to have faith in one God and the prophet Muhammad ﷺ, other indicators of religious devotion, such as mosque attendance, offering prayers five times a day, and daily recitation of the Quran, reveal lower percentages.

The fact that only 44% of Muslims in Pakistan attend the mosque suggests a relatively low level of active participation in communal worship. Mosque attendance, especially for Friday prayers (Jumah), is an essential aspect of religious practice and a significant



⁵¹ Photo Credit: © SZE FEI WONG / istockphoto

communal gathering for Muslims worldwide. The relatively low attendance rate indicates a potential disparity between religious identification and active engagement within the faith community.

Similarly, the data shows that only 42% of Muslims in Pakistan adhere to the practice of offering prayer five times a day, as prescribed in Islamic tradition. Daily prayer (salat) is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and is considered a fundamental marker of religious commitment. The relatively low percentage of individuals regularly performing this obligatory ritual raises questions about the extent to which religious teachings and practices are integrated into daily life.

Additionally, the data reveals that only 36% of Muslims in Pakistan recite the Quran daily. The Quran is the holy book containing divine revelations in Islam. Daily recitation is viewed as a means of spiritual connection and guidance. The relatively low percentage suggests a potential need for more emphasis on personal study and engagement with religious texts.

When considering these statistics collectively, it becomes apparent that there is a discrepancy between self-identification as Muslim and the level of religious devotion among individuals in Pakistan. While the majority may identify as Muslims, the data indicates that a significant portion of the population has lower levels of active participation in religious practices.

Several factors could contribute to this disparity. Sociocultural influences, limited access to religious education, insufficient understanding of religious teachings, societal pressures, and the impact of modernisation and secularisation may all play a role. It is essential to acknowledge that religious commitment is a profoundly personal and multifaceted aspect of an individual's life, and these statistics do not necessarily reflect individuals' overall spirituality or faith.

This data raises important questions and calls for discussions on the role of religion in society, the challenges faced in upholding religious practices, and the need for increased religious education and awareness to bridge the gap between religious identity and active commitment. It is essential to approach this topic with sensitivity, understanding, and a recognition of the complexities surrounding religious belief and practice.⁵²

1.14. Importance of Tolerance and Respect for Others in Islam:

Islam emphasises the importance of tolerance and respect for others, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or background. The Quran states, "We have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another"⁵³. Muslims are called to be peace ambassadors and promote understanding and mutual respect among people of different faiths. Tolerance and respect for others are essential to Islam and are emphasised in many

⁵² T. W. M. U. A. DIVERSITY, "Pew Research Center," Pew Research Center, 9 August 2012. [Online]. Available: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-2-religious-commitment/>.

⁵³ Surah Al-Hujurat 49:13, Quran

religious teachings and traditions. Here are some reasons why tolerance and respect for others are essential in Islam:

1.14.1. Quranic teachings:

The Quran promotes tolerance and respect for diversity, emphasising that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God.

1.14.1.1. Quran on diversity:

In Surah Al-Hujurat, Allah says, "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted."⁵⁴ This verse emphasises the importance of recognising and appreciating diversity among people and using it to gain knowledge and understanding.

1.14.1.2. Quran on peaceful coexistence:

In Surah Al-Ma'idah, Allah says, "And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty."⁵⁵ This verse emphasises the importance of working together towards common goals and promoting peace and justice while avoiding actions that cause harm or injustice to others.

1.14.1.3. Quran on Devotion to Allah:

In Surah Al-An'am, Allah says, "Say, "Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds. No partner has He. And this I have been commanded, and I am the first [among you] of the Muslims."⁵⁶ This verse emphasises the importance of focusing on our worship and devotion to Allah rather than engaging in conflict or harmful behaviour towards others.

1.14.1.4. Quran on justice:

In Surah An-Nisa, Allah says, "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So, follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted."⁵⁷ This verse emphasises the importance of standing up for justice and fairness, even if it means going against our interests or those of our loved ones.

1.14.1.5. Quran on forgiveness:

In Surah Ash-Shura, Allah says, "And those who avoid the major sins and immoralities, and when they are angry, they forgive."⁵⁸ This verse emphasises the importance of forgiveness and avoiding harmful behaviour, even when we may feel upset or angry.

⁵⁴ Surah Al-Hujurat 49:13, Quran

⁵⁵ Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:2, Quran

⁵⁶ Surah Al-An'am 6:162, Quran

⁵⁷ Surah An-Nisa 4:135, Quran

⁵⁸ Surah Ash-Shura 42:37, Quran

1.14.1.6. Quran on compassion:

In Surah Al-Baqarah, Allah says, "Hajj is [during] well-known months, so whoever has made Hajj obligatory upon himself therein [by entering the state of ihram], there is [to be for him] no sexual relations and no disobedience and no disputing during Hajj. And whatever good you do - Allah knows it. And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of Allah. So, fear Me, O you of understanding."⁵⁹ This verse emphasises the importance of avoiding conflicts and disputes during the pilgrimage to Mecca and focusing on worship and compassion towards fellow pilgrims instead.

1.14.2. Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ teachings:

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also emphasised the importance of tolerance and respect for others, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or social status. He said, "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."⁶⁰ This hadith emphasises the importance of treating others with the same kindness and compassion that we would want for ourselves.

1.14.2.1. Hadith on respecting people's feelings:

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."⁶¹ This Hadith highlights the importance of empathy and respecting people's feelings, regardless of their background or beliefs.

1.14.2.2. Hadith on treating others with kindness:

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or an oppressed one."⁶² This Hadith highlights the importance of avoiding harmful behaviour towards others, even if we disagree or have differences.

1.14.2.3. Hadith on respecting others' beliefs:

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbour, and whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should show hospitality to his guest, and whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or remain silent."⁶³ This Hadith highlights the importance of showing respect and kindness towards others, regardless of their beliefs or background.

1.14.2.4. Hadith on treating others with respect:

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "He who is not merciful to others will not be treated mercifully."⁶⁴ This Hadith highlights the importance of treating others with kindness and respect, as we would like to be treated.

⁵⁹ Surah Al-Baqarah 2:197, Quran

⁶⁰ Sahih Bukhari 13 كتاب الإيمان, Hadith

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Sahih al-Bukhari 2443 باب أعن أخاك ظالماً أو مظلوماً, Hadith

⁶³ Sahih al-Bukhari 6136 كتاب الأدب, Hadith

⁶⁴ Sahih al-Bukhari 6013 كتاب الأدب, Hadith

1.14.2.5. Hadith on respecting people's property:

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "Whoever wrongfully takes a hand span of land will be given a necklace of seven earths on the Day of Resurrection."⁶⁵ This Hadith highlights the importance of respecting people's property and belongings and avoiding any actions that may cause harm or injustice to others.

1.14.2.6. Hadith on helping others:

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "The most beloved of people to Allah is the one who brings the most benefit to people."⁶⁶ This Hadith highlights the importance of helping others and contributing to the well-being of our communities, regardless of their background or beliefs.

1.14.3. Promoting Tolerance and Respect:

This analysis explores the significance of tolerance and respect within the Islamic faith and its potential to promote social harmony and cohesion. It highlights the importance of religious freedom, the role of Muslims as role models, the appreciation of diversity, lessons from Islamic history, the value of dialogue, the respect for human dignity, and the practical application of these principles. By examining these aspects, we can understand how Muslims can bridge the gap between religious identity and commitment, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and harmonious society.

1.14.3.1. Social harmony and cohesion:

Tolerance and respect for others can promote social harmony and cohesion, encouraging individuals and communities to live together peacefully and with mutual understanding. This can help to reduce conflict and foster positive relationships among different groups.

1.14.3.2. Religious freedom:

Islam recognises individuals' right to practice religion and follow their beliefs without fear of persecution or discrimination. Tolerance and respect for others can help to protect this fundamental right and promote religious freedom.

1.14.3.3. Role modelling:

By practising tolerance and respect for others, Muslims can act as positive role models and demonstrate Islam's values and teachings. This can help promote a positive image of Islam and counter negative stereotypes and perceptions.

1.14.3.4. Diversity in creation:

Islam teaches that Allah has created human beings in diverse forms and colours. In Surah Ar-Rum, Allah says, "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colours. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge."(30:22)⁶⁷ Thus, Muslims are taught to value and appreciate diversity as a reflection of Allah's creation.

⁶⁵ Sahih al-Bukhari 2453 كتاب المظالم، Hadith

⁶⁶ S. b. A. b. Ayyub, Al Mujam-ul-kabir, Qahira: Maktaba ibn Taimiya, 1994.

⁶⁷ Surah Ar-Rum 30:22, Quran

1.14.3.5. Islamic history:

Muslims have demonstrated tolerance and respect for others throughout Islamic history, even during conflict and tension. For example, during the reign of the Abbasid Caliphate in the 8th and 9th centuries, non-Muslims were allowed to practice their religions and were given legal protections. This contributed to a thriving society where people of different faiths could live together peacefully and harmoniously.

1.14.3.6. Importance of dialogue:

In Islam, dialogue and communication are essential for promoting understanding and resolving conflict. In Surah Al-Ankabut, Allah says, "And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him."⁶⁸ This verse highlights the importance of engaging in respectful dialogue and finding common ground with people of other faiths.

1.14.3.7. Respect for human dignity:

Islam emphasises the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, regardless of their background or beliefs. In Surah Al-Isra, Allah says, "And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference."⁶⁹ This verse highlights the importance of treating all people with respect and dignity, regardless of their differences.

1.14.3.8. Practical application:

Practically, tolerance and respect for others in Islam can manifest in various ways, such as being kind and courteous to others, refraining from harmful speech and behaviour, and seeking to understand and appreciate different perspectives. This can contribute to a more harmonious and inclusive society where everyone is valued and respected.

Overall, tolerance and respect for others are important aspects of Islam and essential for creating a more peaceful and just society. By emphasising these values in our daily lives and interactions with others, we can help promote understanding, acceptance, and mutual respect among people of all backgrounds and beliefs.

1.15. Islamic Teachings and Religious Harmony:

Islamic teachings embody a profound commitment to religious harmony, fostering understanding and respect among people of diverse faiths. The Quran, the holy book of Islam, serves as a guiding light, encouraging Muslims to engage in meaningful and respectful dialogue with individuals of different religious beliefs. Quran, "To you, your

⁶⁸ Surah Al-Ankabut 29:46, Quran

⁶⁹ Surah Al-Isra 17:70, Quran

religion, and to me, mine,"⁷⁰ encapsulates this principle beautifully, reminding believers to honour the autonomy of others' religious convictions, affirming the coexistence of diverse paths to spirituality.

The Quran, the holy book of Islam, teaches Muslims to be tolerant of other religions and to engage in respectful dialogue with people of different faiths. Quran states, "There is no compulsion in religion. The Right Way stands clearly distinguished from the wrong. Hence, he who rejects the evil ones and believes in Allah has indeed taken hold of the firm, unbreakable handle. And Allah (Whom he has held for support) is All-Hearing, All-Knowing."⁷¹ This verse emphasises the importance of freedom of religion and that people should be allowed to choose their faith without compulsion.

Similarly, the Quran says, "Invite (all) to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and kind advice, and only debate with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord (alone) knows best who has strayed from His Way and who is (rightly) guided."⁷² This verse encourages Muslims to engage in respectful dialogue with people of other faiths and to use wisdom and beautiful preaching to share the message of Islam.

Furthermore, the exemplary conduct of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ serves as a beacon of inspiration for Muslims worldwide. He emphasised the importance of treating individuals from different faith backgrounds with kindness and fairness. His words resonate powerfully: "Beware, if anyone wrongs a contracting man, or diminishes his right, or forces him to work beyond his capacity, or takes from him anything without his consent, I shall plead for him on the Day of Judgment."⁷³ This resolute declaration unequivocally underscores the Prophet's ﷺ unwavering commitment to safeguarding the rights and dignity of non-Muslims residing within Islamic societies, further emphasising the significance of religious harmony in the Islamic ethos.

With the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as guiding principles, Muslims are encouraged to foster an environment of empathy, compassion, and mutual respect. By embracing the richness of diversity and engaging in constructive dialogue, Muslims can contribute to a society where individuals of all faiths coexist harmoniously, cherishing the tapestry of spiritual beliefs that adorn humanity.

However, it is essential to note that, like any religion, Islam has also been misinterpreted and misused by some to justify violence and intolerance towards people of different faiths. These extremist views are not representative of the vast majority of Muslims, who value religious harmony and peaceful coexistence. Understanding Islam's actual teachings and promoting interfaith harmony and understanding is crucial.

⁷⁰ Surah Al-Kafirun 109:6, Quran

⁷¹ Surat Al-Baqarah 2:256, Quran

⁷² Surah An-Nahl 16:125, Quran

⁷³ Sunan Abi Dawud 3052 ,Hadith

1.16. Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ Time: Freedom of Religion in Madina

During the era of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Madina, a significant emphasis was placed on ensuring freedom of religion for all individuals, regardless of their beliefs or religious affiliations. This commitment to religious liberty was particularly evident in the light of the Methaq-e Madina, also known as the Constitution of Madina. This historic document established a framework that protected the rights of diverse religious communities, including Jews, pagans, and Christians, allowing them to freely practice their beliefs and rituals without fear of persecution or discrimination.⁷⁴

- The Methaq-e Madina served as a social contract that solidified the peaceful coexistence of various religious groups in Madina. This document, formulated by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in 622 CE, laid the foundations for a pluralistic society, promoting cooperation and mutual respect among religious communities.⁷⁵
- One of the fundamental principles enshrined in the Methaq-e Madina was the recognition and acceptance of religious diversity. It acknowledged the rights of Jews, pagans, and Christians to maintain their own religious practices, institutions, and cultural traditions within the Madina community.
- Under the Methaq-e Madina, all religious communities were guaranteed the freedom to worship according to their beliefs. This encompassed the right to establish and maintain places of worship, engage in religious rituals, and preserve their distinctive customs without interference or persecution.⁷⁶
- The Methaq-e Madina emphasised equal rights and responsibilities among all citizens, regardless of their religious backgrounds. This principle of justice and fairness fostered an environment of harmony and cooperation among different religious groups.⁷⁷
- The Methaq-e Madina also provided a framework for resolving conflicts and disputes that may arise between different religious communities. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was a mediator, facilitating dialogue and promoting understanding, ensuring peaceful coexistence among diverse groups.
- The Methaq-e Madina encouraged collaboration and mutual support between Muslims and non-Muslims in matters of common interest, such as the city's defence against external threats. This spirit of cooperation helped to build trust and strengthen the social fabric of Madina.
- The Methaq-e Madina offers valuable lessons for contemporary societies, highlighting the importance of religious tolerance, inclusivity, and respect for diversity. It exemplifies the principles of freedom of religion and the protection of the rights of religious minorities within an Islamic context.

⁷⁴ M. Hamīdullah, *The Ruling System in the Prophet's Era*, Hyderabad, Sindh: Urdu Academy, 1981.

⁷⁵ M. T. N. A. H. A. R. Riaz Ahmad Saeed, "MINORITIES' RIGHTS FROM ISLAMIC SOCIO-POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE: EXPLORATION," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, vol. 15(2), no. <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol15no2.10>, pp. 133-145, 2020.

⁷⁶ M. H. Hackle, *Hayāt-e-Muhammad ﷺ*, Lahore: Al-faisal, 2006.

⁷⁷ M. Y. Al-Qaradawi, *Non-Muslims Rights and Duties in the Islamic Society*, Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2011.

- The Methaq-e Madina is a model for fostering peaceful coexistence and social harmony. Allowing religious communities to practice their beliefs freely created an environment where different faiths could flourish, contributing to Madina's cultural richness and diversity.⁷⁸

In conclusion, the Methaq-e Madina reflects Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ commitment to upholding freedom of religion and protecting the rights of religious minorities. This historic document established a framework for social harmony and cohesion in Madina, recognising and respecting the community's religious diversity. It continues to serve as a timeless reminder of the importance of tolerance, inclusivity, and mutual respect in creating a society where people of different faiths can peacefully coexist.

1.17. Historical Background of Promoting Religious Tolerance and Harmony:

Religious harmony and the protection of minority rights are fundamental principles in Islam. Throughout history, the actions and policies of the Rightly Guided Caliphs provide compelling evidence of the promotion of religious freedom, tolerance, and respect for diverse beliefs.

1.17.1. Emphasis on Justice and Fairness:

Islam strongly emphasises justice and fairness, regardless of religious affiliation. The Quran states, "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice"⁷⁹, emphasising the importance of upholding justice for all, regardless of their faith. Islamic teachings promote the idea that religious harmony can only be achieved when individuals are treated fairly and justly.

1.17.2. The Conquest of Jerusalem:

One prominent example of religious harmony can be seen in the Conquest of Jerusalem. The conquest of Jerusalem by Muslim forces stands as a remarkable example of promoting religious tolerance and the protection of minority rights. Muslims recognised the importance of upholding the rights of religious minorities, including Christians and Jews, and granted them the freedom to practice their faith without interference.

Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab entered Jerusalem as a conqueror but ensured the protection of the Christian inhabitants. He signed the Treaty of Umar, which guaranteed their safety, protection of their properties, and the freedom to practice their religion without coercion.

During the conquest, Muslims demonstrated a deep respect for the religious institutions of the conquered city. Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab carried out one significant act of religious sensitivity. He chose not to offer prayers in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, one of the holiest sites in Christianity. This decision was made out of respect for the Christians and their sacred space. By refraining from using the church for Muslim prayers, Umar ensured that the church would not be

⁷⁸ T. Al-Qadri, *Human Rights in Islam*, Lahore: Minhaj Publications, 2007.

⁷⁹ Surah An-Nisa 4:135, Quran

converted into a mosque in the future. This act preserved the sanctity of the church for Christians, allowing them to continue their religious practices without interruption.

Umar's decision exemplified the principles of religious tolerance and coexistence. It showcased a deep understanding of the importance of respecting the beliefs and rituals of others. By preserving the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as a Christian place of worship, Umar demonstrated a commitment to religious harmony and protecting minority rights.

This act in Jerusalem set a precedent for future interactions between Muslims and religious minorities. It established a standard of respect and tolerance guiding subsequent conquests and interactions throughout the Islamic world.⁸⁰

1.17.3. The Conquest of Damascus:

The conquest of Damascus provides another noteworthy example of promoting religious tolerance and coexistence. Damascus was one of the great cities of the time. During the conquest of Damascus, another significant event in Islamic history, the Church of St. John was in the city's heart. When the Muslim forces conquered the city, they faced the challenge of integrating their religious practices with the existing religious institutions. Rather than demolishing the church or converting it entirely into a mosque, a mutually beneficial solution was reached.

The church in Damascus was divided into two sections to accommodate Muslims and Christians. Half the church was designated as a mosque, where Muslims could perform their prayers and engage in religious activities. The other half remained a church, allowing Christians to continue worshipping without disruption. This decision demonstrated a commitment to religious harmony, allowing both communities to practice their faiths side by side.⁸¹

1.17.4. Salman bin Abdul Malik and Umar bin Abdul Aziz:

Caliph Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, known for his focus on justice and compassion, continued the tradition of safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. When Salman bin Abdul Malik converted a church into a mosque, Umar ibn Abdul Aziz restored it to its original status as a church, recognising the importance of preserving religious identities and allowing communities to practice their faith freely. His actions exemplified a commitment to religious harmony and respecting the sentiments of all religions.⁸²

1.17.5. Treatment of Non-Muslims in Andalusia:

During Andalusia's intellectual and cultural exchange period, which spanned from the 8th to the 15th centuries, the region became renowned as a melting pot of ideas

⁸⁰ A. a.-F. El-Awaisi, "Umar's assurance of aman to the people of Aelia (Bayt al-Maqdis Islamic Jerusalem): a critical analytical study of al-tabari's version," *Al-Tamaddun*, vol. 13(2), no. <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol13no2.6>, pp. 65-80, 2018.

⁸¹ As Salabi D. A. M., *Umar ibn katab his life and Time*, Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2010.

⁸² A.-S. D. A. Muhammad, *The Rightly-Guided Caliph and Great Reviver Umar ibn Abd Al-Aziz*, Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007.

and scholarship. Scholars and intellectuals from Islamic, Jewish, and Christian backgrounds flocked to Andalusia, attracted by the welcoming atmosphere and the opportunity to engage in cross-cultural dialogue. This vibrant exchange of knowledge led to remarkable achievements in various fields. Muslim rulers, such as the Umayyads and the Almoravids, actively promoted an environment of openness and tolerance, allowing for the flourishing of intellectual pursuits. Notable figures like Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Maimonides emerged from this rich intellectual landscape, making significant contributions to astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and medicine.

The collaborative efforts between scholars from different religious communities were a defining characteristic of intellectual life in Andalusia. Regardless of their religious background, these scholars often engaged in fruitful collaborations and shared their knowledge. They recognised the value of cross-cultural exchange and worked together on translation and commentary projects. This collaborative approach helped bridge the gaps between different religious and intellectual traditions and played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting ancient texts. Many ancient Greek, Roman, and Persian works were translated into Arabic by Andalusian scholars, ensuring their survival and eventual dissemination throughout Europe. This intellectual cross-pollination and the spirit of collaboration contributed significantly to the advancement of learning during the Andalusian Golden Age.⁸³

1.17.6. Treatment of Non-Believers in the Subcontinent:

In the subcontinent, Islamic rulers adopted a policy of religious tolerance towards non-believers. Non-Muslims were free to practice their religions, and their rights were protected. Hindu temples and other sacred sites were safeguarded, serving as a testament to the commitment to religious harmony and coexistence.⁸⁴

It is important to note that the destruction of the Somnath temple was an exception and driven primarily by its symbolic significance as a seat of power rather than reflecting a general Islamic policy. This event should be viewed in its historical context and not as a representation of Islamic principles regarding the treatment of religious minorities.⁸⁵

1.17.7. Prohibition of Forced Conversion:

Islamic teachings strictly prohibit the forced conversion of individuals to Islam. The Quran states, "There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion"⁸⁶, emphasising that true faith comes from the heart and cannot be imposed by force.

⁸³ F. A. Alamer, "The Umayyad Emirate in Al-Andalus /Spain and Their," The Service Center for Research and Languages Magazine/ مجلة مركز الخدمة للاستشارات البحثية واللغات, vol. 20 (57), no. <https://doi.org/10.21608/jocr.2018.128322>, p. 42, 2018.

⁸⁴ P. v. d. Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, California: University of California Press, 1994.

⁸⁵ M. Rasheed, *Sultan Mehmood Ghaznavi*, Lahore: IIm-o-Irfan Publisher, 2006.

⁸⁶ Surah Al-Baqarah 2:256, Quran

This principle upholds the rights of individuals to practice their chosen religion freely and promotes religious harmony.⁸⁷

The historical background of Islam, particularly during the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, provides significant examples of the importance placed on religious harmony, minority rights, freedom of religion, and the preservation of religious rituals. These instances embody the principles of tolerance, respect, and coexistence embedded within Islamic teachings. The actions of the Caliphs in Jerusalem, Damascus, and the subcontinent serve as enduring exemplars of promoting religious harmony and upholding the rights of religious minorities. By recognising and learning from these historical precedents, society can strive to foster a more inclusive and harmonious environment based on mutual respect and understanding.

1.18. Religious Tolerance:

Religious tolerance refers to the acceptance, respect, and peaceful coexistence of different religious beliefs, practices, and traditions within a society. It entails recognising and valuing the diversity of religious perspectives and allowing individuals to hold and express their religious beliefs freely, without fear of persecution or discrimination. Religious tolerance promotes understanding, dialogue, and mutual respect among individuals and communities of different faiths, fostering social harmony and the protection of individual freedoms.⁸⁸

It emphasises respecting and acknowledging the existence of diverse religious beliefs without necessarily requiring the freedom to practice or express one's own religious beliefs.

Examples:

- A society where people from different religions live peacefully and engage in interfaith dialogue.
- A workplace that accommodates various religious practices and allows employees to observe their religious obligations.
- A government that ensures equal treatment and protection for all citizens regardless of religious beliefs.⁸⁹

1.19. Religious Freedom:

Religious freedom, also known as freedom of religion or religious liberty, is a fundamental human right that encompasses the individual's ability to hold, practice, and express their religious beliefs without interference or coercion. It involves the freedom to choose, follow, and manifest one's religion or belief system without discrimination or persecution. Religious freedom includes the right to believe, worship, express, and associate with others based on religious

⁸⁷ M. H. Kamali, "Fundamental Rights of the Individual, An Analysis of Haqq in Islamic Law," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, vol. 10 (3), pp. 340-366, 1993.

⁸⁸ I. O. Benson, "Theory and praxis of religious tolerance," *OGIRISI*, vol. 12 (1.16), no.1.v12i, p. 26, 2016.

⁸⁹ M. P. Bojan Žalec1, "RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND INTOLERANCE," *European Journal of Science and Theology*, vol. 15, no.3, p. 10, 2019.

convictions while protected from religious discrimination or disadvantage. It upholds the autonomy and dignity of individuals in matters of religion and ensures that the state does not impose or favour any religious belief.⁹⁰

It focuses on protecting the rights of individuals to choose, follow, and manifest their religion or belief system freely, without undue restrictions from the government or other institutions.

Examples:

- An individual can worship according to their faith, privately or publicly.
- A religious organisation can establish its rituals, ceremonies, and practices without interference from the state.
- A person is free to openly express and share their religious beliefs through speech, writing, or other forms of communication without fear of persecution.

Religious tolerance emphasises coexistence and respect for diverse religious beliefs, while religious freedom protects individuals' rights to hold, practice, and express their religious beliefs freely. Religious tolerance sets the foundation for a harmonious society, while religious freedom safeguards individual autonomy and prevents government or institutional interference in matters of faith.⁹¹

1.20. Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ Teachings on Religious Tolerance and Freedom:

After the migration (Hijrah) to Madina, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ implemented teachings that promoted religious tolerance and religious freedom. His actions and teachings provided a framework for coexistence and respect among religious communities. Here's a detailed explanation of how the Prophet ﷺ taught his followers about religious tolerance and religious freedom and how his teachings can help us today:⁹²

1.20.1. Religious Diversity in Pre-Islamic Madina:

Before the migration of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to Madina, the city was inhabited by various religious communities. The predominant communities in Madina were the pagan Arab tribes, such as the Aws and Khazraj, who followed polytheistic beliefs and practised idol worship. Alongside these tribes, Jewish communities were also present in Madina, specifically the three main Jewish tribes: Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayza. These Jewish tribes had settled in Madina centuries before Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ arrival and established their own religious, social, and economic systems. The coexistence of these different

⁹⁰ A. & Y. N. & A. H. Aji, "Tolerance and Religious Freedom in Legal, Human Rights, and Islamic Perspectives.," Journal of Xidian University, vol. 14, no. 3, p. 9, 2020.

⁹¹ U. S. R. Digest, Freedom of Religion or Belief, New York: UNHR, 2023.

⁹² S. Abdullah Saeed, Islam and Religious Freedom, Georgetown: Baylor ISR, 2014.

religious communities in Madina laid the foundation for the diverse and pluralistic environment into which the Prophet ﷺ would later bring the message of Islam.

1.20.2. Covenant of Madina: Establishing a Framework for Coexistence

After migrating to Madina, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ established the Covenant of Madina, a charter that laid the foundation for religious tolerance and coexistence. This ground-breaking document recognised the rights and responsibilities of various religious communities, encompassing Muslims, Jews, and pagans. Under the covenant, each community was granted religious freedom and the autonomy to practice their faith without interference. This inclusive framework ensured religious minorities had protection and the ability to govern their affairs, fostering a diverse society where individuals could live in harmony while upholding their religious beliefs. The Covenant of Madina was a blueprint for promoting religious tolerance and freedom in a multicultural setting.⁹³

1.20.2.1. *The Clauses of the Charter of Madina:*

1. *Unified Community:*

The people of Madina, including Muslims and Jews, form a single political entity and stand united against the rest of humanity.

2. *Peaceful Haven:*

Madina is designated as a place of peace and security for all its residents, regardless of their religious affiliation.

3. *Divine Sovereignty and Prophetic ﷺ Leadership:*

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is recognised as the ultimate authority in resolving disputes and conflicts among the people of Madina. No declaration of war can be made without his permission.

4. *Mutual Defence:*

Muslims and Jews in Madina pledge to assist and support each other in the event of an attack. The costs and responsibilities of war will be shared equally between both communities. However, peace agreements require collective agreement, except in religious conflicts.

5. *Prohibition of Internal Strife:*

The people of Madina are bound to foster love, faithfulness, and loyalty among themselves, ensuring peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Jews.

6. *Duties of Non-Muslims:*

It is prohibited to offer refuge or support to the Quraish of Makkah, specifically regarding their lives or property, by anyone residing in Madina.

⁹³ S. Abdullah Saeed, *Islam and Religious Freedom*, Georgetown: Baylor ISR, 2014.

1.20.2.1.1. *Political Principles of the Charter of Madina:*

1. *Unified Identity:*

The political community of Madina consists of Muslims and Jews who form a single entity distinct from the rest of humanity.

2. *Sanctuary of Peace:*

Madina will serve as a peaceful haven for all its inhabitants, regardless of their religious affiliation, ensuring security and tranquillity.

3. *Divine Sovereignty and Prophetic ﷺ Leadership:*

The authority of Allah and His Prophet ﷺ, Muhammad ﷺ, will be the ultimate source of resolving conflicts, disputes, and disagreements among the people. The Prophet ﷺ will be consulted in misconduct cases, and no act of war can be initiated without his permission.

4. *Political Unity with the Jewish Community:*

Muslims and Jews have formed a united political alliance as one entity.

5. *Mutual Defence:*

In the face of external threats, both Jews and Muslims will stand united, offering support and assistance to each other in defending Madina. Should they fight together, the costs and burdens of war will be shared equally. Peace agreements must be made collectively unless they pertain to religious conflicts. During times of Jihad, unanimous consent from all Muslims will be required before making peace with the enemy, ensuring solidarity in war and peace.

6. *Prohibition of Internal Strife:*

Harmony, loyalty, and trust will be fostered between Madina's Muslim and Jewish communities, promoting a peaceful coexistence.

7. *Responsibilities of Non-Muslims:*

It is forbidden to provide refuge or support to the Quraish of Makkah, either in terms of their lives or property, by anyone residing in Madina.

1.20.2.1.2. *Civic Principles of the Charter of Madina:*

1. *Cooperative Compensation:*

The responsibility for the well-being of their respective dependents lies with both the Muhajirin and Ansar. The payment of blood

money will be a joint effort, while each group will independently negotiate the release of their prisoners.⁹⁴

2. *Debt and Obligations:*

Muslims are obligated to assist those burdened by heavy debts. It is prohibited for a Muslim to engage in direct agreements with individuals who have already entered into contracts with fellow believers.

3. *Opposition to Injustice:*

Muslims will unite in unanimous opposition against any form of tyranny, oppression, or wrongdoing.

4. *Duties of Believers:*

Muslims are forbidden from assassinating fellow Muslims on behalf of non-Muslims or assisting non-Muslims against their Muslim counterparts.

5. *Murder and its Consequences:*

The intentional killing of a Muslim will be met with retaliation unless the victim's relatives agree to accept blood money as compensation. Believers are prohibited from harbouring or encouraging murderers.

6. *Right to Retaliation and Self-Defence:*

Individuals who have suffered minor injuries retain the right to seek retribution.

7. *Collective Responsibility for Murder:*

Those who commit murder will be held accountable, both personally and on behalf of their tribe.

1.20.2.1.3. *Religious Principles of the Charter of Madina:*

1. *Fraternity and Mutual Support:*

Muslims share a bond of brotherhood, and they are obligated to protect and provide sanctuary for one another. A Jewish individual who converts to Islam is regarded as an equal member of the Muslim community and must be treated with respect and fairness.

2. *Freedom of Worship and the Value of Acceptance:*

Both Jews and Muslims are entitled to practice their respective religions without interference. Tolerance towards each other's religious beliefs is essential. Any violation of this principle will

⁹⁴ A. M. Ghazali, "The Concept of Conflict Management in the Medina Charter," *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, vol. 492, p. 6, 2019.

result in the individual responsible being held accountable, along with their family.⁹⁵

Example:

The Covenant of Madina, a remarkable document, extended its principles of religious tolerance beyond the Jewish tribes to encompass other faith communities. One notable instance of this inclusive approach was demonstrated when a Christian delegation from Najran visited Madina during the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Upon their arrival, the Prophet ﷺ (PBUH) graciously allowed them to stay within the precincts of the Mosque of the Prophet ﷺ (Masjid al-Nabawi), granting them both physical shelter and the freedom to worship according to their Christian beliefs. This act exemplified the all-encompassing nature of the Covenant of Madina, which embraced the presence of diverse religious groups and ensured their protection and rights within the community. The Christians from Najran, accustomed to praying towards the north, were permitted to continue their prayers in that direction while staying in the Mosque of the Prophet ﷺ (Masjid al-Nabawi) alongside the Muslims who prayed towards the south, facing Makkah. This harmonious coexistence of prayer orientations within the Mosque of the Prophet ﷺ reflected the Prophet's ﷺ understanding of and respect for the differences in prayer practices among various faith communities. It underscored his commitment to upholding religious freedom and accommodating the diverse needs of all people while fostering an atmosphere of inclusivity and mutual respect by the principles of the Covenant of Madina.

The Covenant of Madina further solidified its commitment to religious tolerance by granting freedom of religion to the pagan Arab tribes. They were permitted to practice their polytheistic beliefs without fear of interference or persecution. Additionally, the Jewish tribes in Madina, including the Banu Qurayza and Banu Nadir, were granted the autonomy to maintain their religious institutions, governance systems, and legal frameworks, allowing them to continue their religious practices and preserve their cultural traditions.⁹⁶

The Covenant of Madina also established a mutual defence and protection framework among the various religious communities. In the face of external threats or attacks, the different faith groups would unite and support one another, transcending their religious differences and demonstrating solidarity and collective security.

Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ forged treaties and agreements with neighbouring Christian tribes, such as the Treaty of Najran. These treaties recognised the rights of Christians to freely practice their faith, maintain their places of worship, and receive protection under Islamic rule.

⁹⁵ Y. Yildirim, "Peace and Conflict Resolution in the Medina Charter," *A Journal of Social Justice*, vol. 18, p. 9, 2006.

⁹⁶ Qamar-ul Huda, "Peacebuilding: A Collection of Stories and Anecdotes from the Prophet Muhammad's Life," *United States Institute of Peace Religion & Peacemaking Center*, vol. 1, p. 10, 2012.

Through these examples, the Covenant of Madina exemplifies the inclusive and accommodating nature of the society fostered under its provisions. It allowed for the coexistence of different faith communities, granting them the space and freedom to practice their respective beliefs, maintain their institutions, and participate in the community's affairs. The Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ commitment to a harmonious and pluralistic society in Madina laid the groundwork for a diverse and tolerant community where people of different faiths could find sanctuary and live peacefully.⁹⁷

1.20.3. Interfaith Dialogue and Engagement: Fostering Understanding and Respect

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ actively engaged in interfaith dialogue and interactions to foster understanding and cultivate mutual respect among individuals of different faiths. He recognised the importance of seeking to understand others' beliefs and perspectives. The Prophet ﷺ welcomed discussions, debates, and interactions, creating a platform for open exchange and learning. By encouraging interfaith dialogue, he aimed to bridge the gap between communities, reduce misconceptions, and establish an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance. This emphasis on dialogue and engagement was a powerful tool in promoting harmony and breaking down barriers of ignorance and prejudice. The Prophet's ﷺ approach inspires us today to actively engage in interfaith dialogue, forging connections and nurturing an environment of understanding and respect.

Example: The Prophet ﷺ invited delegations from different faith communities, such as the Christian monks of St. Catherine's Monastery in Egypt, to discuss matters of faith. This exemplified the importance of respectful dialogue in promoting religious harmony and fostering mutual understanding.⁹⁸

1.20.4. Treaties and Agreements: Ensuring Protection and Religious Freedom

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ actively worked towards establishing treaties and agreements with neighbouring tribes and communities, placing a strong emphasis on ensuring religious freedom and protection for non-Muslims. These treaties and agreements were designed to recognise and safeguard non-Muslims' freedom to practice their religion. By doing so, the Prophet ﷺ laid the groundwork for peaceful coexistence among diverse religious communities. He stressed the importance of upholding these agreements, highlighting the need to treat non-Muslims justly and with fairness. The Prophet's ﷺ commitment to religious freedom and the protection of minority rights serves as a timeless example for us today, urging us to promote and respect the religious rights of all individuals, regardless of their beliefs, as a foundation for harmonious coexistence.

⁹⁷ B. R. A. U. R. M. R. A. S. j. K. Saeed Akhtar, "The Quranic Concept of Religious Tolerance and its Manifestation in Islamic History," *Journal of Applied Environmental and Biological Sciences*, vol. 6 (3), p. 4, 2016.

⁹⁸ Ibid

Example: The Treaty of Hudaibiyyah is a notable agreement that guaranteed religious freedom and protection to non-Muslims. It allowed the Muslims to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca peacefully and ensured the rights of non-Muslims in the region. This treaty demonstrated the Prophet's ﷺ commitment to respecting the rights and beliefs of others.⁹⁹

1.20.5. Emphasis on Justice and Equality: Upholding Individual Rights

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ strongly emphasised justice, fairness, and equality for all individuals, irrespective of their religious beliefs. He taught that no one should be coerced or compelled to accept Islam, highlighting the significance of free will and individual choice in matters of faith. The Prophet ﷺ established a system in which justice was administered impartially, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their religious background, were treated equally before the law. His teachings emphasised the importance of upholding individual rights and ensuring everyone could live with dignity and respect. Today, the Prophet's ﷺ emphasis on justice and equality inspires us to strive for a society where everyone is valued and treated fairly, regardless of their religious affiliation, fostering a culture of inclusivity and social justice.

Example: The Constitution of Madina ensured equal rights and protection for all citizens, regardless of their faith. It guaranteed justice for everyone and upheld the principles of equality and non-discrimination.¹⁰⁰

The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ after the migration to Madina emphasised religious tolerance, interfaith dialogue, justice, and equal rights for all individuals. These teachings are relevant today as they inspire societies to embrace diversity, engage in respectful dialogue, protect human rights, and counter extremism. By following these teachings, we can create inclusive and harmonious communities that uphold religious freedom, foster interfaith harmony, and promote mutual respect and understanding among people of different faiths.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ R. Caco, "Islam concept about tolerance and religious freedom," *Al-Ulum*, vol. 14 (2), p. 16, 2014.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*

Chapter 2: CASE STUDY PRIYATA KUMARA

2.1. PRIYANTHA KUMARA:

Priyantha Kumara, also known as Diyawadanage Don Nandasiri Priyantha Kumara, was a resident of Ganemulla, Gampaha District in Sri Lanka. He had a background in production engineering, graduating from the University of Peradeniya in 2002.

Priyantha Kumara has been working in Pakistan since 2010. He was employed at the Rajco Sports Goods Manufacturing Company in Sialkot and has been with the company since 2012. Over the years, he progressed from an engineering role to the position of General Superintendent or General Manager at the Rajco Industries garment factory in Sialkot.¹⁰²

Regarding personal life, Priyantha Kumara was married to Nilushi Dissanayaka, and they had two sons, who were 14 and 9 years old as of 2021. His two brothers were also working in Pakistan and were employed at a textile factory in Faisalabad, Punjab.¹⁰³

2.2. The Tragic Blasphemy Incident:

On the fateful morning of December 3rd, 2021, the serene atmosphere at the Rajco Industries factory in Sialkot, Pakistan, was shattered by a tragic incident that would send shockwaves through the community. Priyantha Kumara, a 49-year-old export manager from Sri Lanka, found himself at the centre of a horrifying chain of events that would ultimately claim his life.

Having resided in Sialkot since 2010, Priyantha Kumara and his two brothers had migrated to Pakistan in pursuit of better economic opportunities. The brothers had built honest lives through their hard work and dedication, keeping their heads down in the face of the challenges that came with being foreign workers in an unfamiliar land.¹⁰⁴

Being the diligent and professional manager that he was, Kumara noticed a sticker on one of the machines in the factory and requested his workers to remove it. The factory was due to receive a delegation of visitors, and Kumara wanted to ensure everything was in order. However, his simple request would unwittingly set off a disastrous chain of events.

To Kumara's surprise, his workers refused to remove the sticker. In sheer frustration, he decided to take matters into his own hands and remove the sticker himself. Little did he know that some of his young employees would perceive this seemingly innocuous act as blasphemy. The sticker, it turned out, contained religious verses, and accusations of blasphemy were quick to fly, inciting a lethal fury among the workers.

¹⁰² News, "Sri Lanka buries Priyantha Kumara in native village with state honours," Dawn, 9 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1662808>. [Accessed 17 June 2023].

¹⁰³ T. T. o. India, "Family of Lankan national lynched in Pakistan awaits his remains to be flown in," The Times of India, 6 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/family-of-lankan-national-lynched-in-pakistan-awaits-his-remains-to-be-flown-in/articleshow/88118729.cms>. [Accessed 9 June 2023].

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

In Pakistan, the accusation of blasphemy carries grave consequences, often resulting in a death sentence. The absence of a requirement to clarify the exact nature of the blasphemy charge allows it to be weaponised for personal vendettas and settling disputes. In this case, a mob of 800 enraged workers chased Kumara, unleashing anger upon him. They tore at his clothes, viciously beat him, and showed no mercy. Malik Adnan,¹⁰⁵ a brave co-worker, attempted to shield Kumara from the mob, using his body as a shield. But his efforts were in vain against the wrath of the angry young men.¹⁰⁶

As the violence intensified, Kumara's bones were broken, and his battered body was dragged out onto the road. The mob then committed an unspeakable act, setting him ablaze and turning his life into a human bonfire. Fuelled by their hatred and enthusiasm, the perpetrators, young men and boys, proudly chanted slogans associated with the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and shamelessly took selfies, capturing their gruesome deeds for their social media feeds.¹⁰⁷

The sight of those selfies, with the black smoke of Kumara's burning body in the background, sent shockwaves throughout the nation. It was a chilling reminder of the depths to which human depravity could sink. The act of violence was not entirely new to the subcontinent, known for its occasional bouts of riotous unrest. However, the callousness and audacity displayed by the perpetrators, so brazenly documenting their actions for public consumption, painted a grim picture of the society where such acts could occur.

One of the individuals who posed for a selfie in front of Kumara's burning remains inadvertently revealed a telling glimpse into the mindset that fuelled the atrocity. As he held his smartphone aloft, with his face glaring into the screen, the words on the back of the device were visible: "Apna time ayega," a reference to the lyrics of a famous Bollywood rap song. The chilling inscription served as a stark reminder that some individuals believe their time for retribution will come, even as they perpetrate the most heinous acts imaginable.¹⁰⁸

The incident involving Priyantha Kumara stands as a horrifying testament to the destructive power of religious extremism and the dangers of unchecked fanaticism. It exposes the dark underbelly of a society where accusations of blasphemy can be used as a tool to settle personal scores and incite violence, bypassing the principles of justice and compassion.

¹⁰⁵ T. E. Tribune, "A hero stood between a bloodthirsty mob and an innocent man," Twitter, 5 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://twitter.com/etribune.....f>. [Accessed 16 June 2023].

¹⁰⁶ A. d. News, "Remains of Priyantha Kumara arrive in Sri Lanka from Pakistan," ADA derana, 6 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.adaderana.lk/news/78975/remains-of-priyantha-kumara-arrives-in-sri-lanka-from-pakistan>. [Accessed 13 June 2023].

¹⁰⁷ T. Siddiqi, "Pakistan: Brutal lynching of Priyantha Kumara," International Action Center, 17 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://iacenter.org/2021/12/18/pakistan-brutal-lynching-of-priyantha-kumara/>. [Accessed 9 June 2023].

¹⁰⁸ F. Bhutto, "The rage of men with no future led to the lynching of Priyantha Kumara," The Guardian, 10 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/10/rage-men-lynching-priyantha-kumara-pakistan>. [Accessed 9 June 2023].

The brutal murder of Priyantha Kumara sent shockwaves not only through Sialkot but also through the entire nation. It sparked widespread outrage and condemnation, prompting calls for justice and evaluating the laws and cultural norms allowing such heinous acts. The incident shed light on the urgent need for Pakistan to address the issue of religious intolerance and protect the lives and rights of its citizens, regardless of their faith or nationality.¹⁰⁹

In the incident's aftermath, authorities swiftly initiated an investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice. The senseless violence and the public display of the act through selfies were clear evidence of the disturbing mindset that led to Kumara's untimely demise. It was a stark reminder that religious extremism not only poses a threat to individual lives but also undermines the social fabric and harmony of a diverse nation.

As the nation mourned the loss of Priyantha Kumara, his family, friends, and colleagues grappled with the grief and pain of his senseless death. The tragedy forever altered their lives, and they became witnesses to the devastating consequences of religious extremism and bigotry.¹¹⁰

The incident of Priyantha Kumara stands as a chilling reminder of the urgent need for societies worldwide to promote tolerance, understanding, and respect for diverse beliefs. It is a call to challenge and dismantle the narratives of hatred and division that fuel acts of violence in the name of religion. Only through education, dialogue, and a commitment to fostering a pluralistic and inclusive society can we hope to prevent such senseless tragedies from occurring again.¹¹¹

2.3. Unmasking Religious Extremism:

Following the tragic incident involving Priyantha Kumara, the authorities swiftly launched an investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice. Police Assistant Commissioner Mohammed Murtaza revealed that the study considered multiple angles, including the possibility that some factory workers had manipulated religious sentiments to seek revenge against the manager. Tahir Ashrafi, a religious scholar and special prime minister's representative on religious harmony, confirmed the arrests and highlighted that some workers had described Kumara as a strict manager. However, he emphasised that the cause of the murder appeared to be personal and targeted rather than solely based on blasphemy allegations.

¹⁰⁹ P. I. Khan, "@ImranKhanPTI," Twitter, 3 december 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://twitter.com/ImranKhanPTI/status/1466770570637422592>. [Accessed 09 June 2023].

¹¹⁰ F. Bhutto, "The rage of men with no future led to the lynching of Priyantha Kumara," The Guardian, 10 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/10/rage-men-lynching-priyantha-kumara-pakistan>. [Accessed 9 June 2023].

¹¹¹ *Ibid*

Khurram Shahzad, a police spokesman, stated that footage from the scene was being examined, indicating that more arrests were likely. Amnesty International expressed deep concern over the lynching and killing, linking it to a blasphemy accusation.¹¹²

Pakistan's blasphemy laws, known for their severity, carry the death penalty and are often used against religious minorities. Accused individuals sometimes face mob violence even before their cases reach the courts. The fear surrounding blasphemy cases often leads to judges hesitating to find the accused anything other than guilty. One prominent point was that of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who was sentenced to death in 2010 on blasphemy charges but was acquitted almost a decade later after significant international pressure.¹¹³

Ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan condemned the violence in Sialkot, asserting that those responsible would face the full severity of the law. He pledged to oversee the investigations personally, highlighting that arrests were already underway. The spokesperson identified several arrested individuals, including Sikandar, Rashid, Ahmed Shehzad, Zohaib, Muhammad Irshad, Subhan, and Umair Ali, who were believed to have participated in the brutal murder of Priyantha Kumara. The arrests were facilitated by CCTV footage and mobile phone data, which aided in identifying those involved. Interrogations of the arrested suspects had commenced, and 26 individuals were identified as having played a significant role in the tragic murder.¹¹⁴

The law enforcement authorities had taken 131 individuals into custody, including 26 individuals identified as key suspects, according to official statements released by the Punjab Police. The police have invoked the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) against approximately 800 individuals who have been implicated in the act of lynching.¹¹⁵

As the investigation progressed, the authorities remained committed to ensuring justice for Priyantha Kumara and bringing all those responsible for his untimely death to account. The incident sparked a more comprehensive conversation about the need to address religious intolerance and protect the lives and rights of individuals in Pakistan, irrespective of their faith or nationality.

2.4. Understanding of Blasphemy:

Blasphemy, originating from the Greek word "blasphemein," refers to the act of speaking or expressing words that are disrespectful, profane, impious, or irreverent towards a divine being or anything considered sacred. The Oxford Dictionary defines blasphemy as behaviour or language that insults or exhibits a lack of respect for God or religion.

¹¹² Al-Jazeera News, "Pakistan: Dozens arrested after Sri Lankan lynched, set ablaze," Al-Jazeera, 4 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/4/dozens-arrested-in-pakistan-after-mob-kill-sri-lankan-manager>. [Accessed 09 June 2023].

¹¹³ S. M. Baloch, "Man tortured and killed in Pakistan over 'blasphemy'," The Guardian, 3 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/03/pakistan-sri-lankan-man-priyantha-diyawadana-tortured-killed-alleged-blasphemy-sialkot>. [Accessed 2023 June 2023].

¹¹⁴ Geo News, "Sialkot lynching: Murders occur when young people are emotionally charged, says Khattak," Geo, 6 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.geo.tv/latest/386083-sialkot-lynching-murders-occur-when-young-people-are-emotionally-charged-says-khattak>. [Accessed 09 June 2023].

¹¹⁵ A. Mehmood, "Remains of Priyantha Kumara reach Colombo," The Express Tribune, 6 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2332662/1>. [Accessed 13 June 2023]

Webster's Dictionary defines it as profane or contemptuous speech, writing, or action that mocks or shows contempt for God or anything held as divine.^{116 117}

2.5. Blasphemy in Islam:

Blasphemy, in the context of Islam, refers to the act of expressing disrespectful, offensive, derogatory or contemptuous speech, action, or writings that insult or show irreverence towards the Islamic faith, Allah, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Quran, or other revered figures and symbols within Islam or any aspect of Islam considered sacred.¹¹⁸ The Quran, as the primary scripture of Islam, emphasises the importance of reverence and respect towards Allah and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. While the Quran does not explicitly define blasphemy, it highlights the significance of maintaining the sanctity and dignity of the faith. Still, the concept of blasphemy is supported by scriptural references from the Quran and Hadith, which are essential sources of Islamic teachings. Blasphemy is viewed as a severe offence in Islam because it challenges the sanctity and dignity of the religion and its fundamental beliefs. Muslims hold the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the highest regard and consider the Quran divine revelation.¹¹⁹ Islamic teachings emphasise the importance of respecting the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and refraining from insulting or demeaning him in any way. Insulting the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is considered an act of blasphemy that deeply offends Muslims.¹²⁰

3.1.1. Quranic References:

The Quran mentions the importance of reverence towards Allah, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and the teachings of Islam. Muslims believe that disrespecting these entities or distorting their representations is blasphemous.¹²¹ The Quran contains verses that highlight the severity of blasphemy and its consequences. In Surah At-Tawbah, Allah emphasises the need to defend the faith and respond to aggression, “But if they break their oaths after pledging and attack your faith, then fight the champions of disbelief, who never honour their oaths so perhaps they will desist”.¹²²

In Surah Al-Hujurat, Allah emphasises the importance of maintaining a humble and respectful demeanour in his presence as it indicates their sincerity and righteousness by adhering to etiquette, “O believers! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak loudly to him as you do to one another, or your deeds will become void while you are unaware. Indeed, those who lower their voices in the presence of Allah’s Messenger are the ones whose hearts Allah has refined for righteousness. They

¹¹⁶ “blasphemy,” Merriam-Webster, [Online]. Available: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blasphemy>. [Accessed 22 June 2023].

¹¹⁷ “blasphemy,” Collins Dictionary, [Online]. Available: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/blasphemy>. [Accessed 22 June 2023].

¹¹⁸ S. M. Iffat Khalid, “Blasphemy law of Islam-Misconceptions and Fallacy,” *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 48-57, 2015.

¹¹⁹ 60 judges from world, “On Trial: The Implementation of Pakistan’s Blasphemy Laws,” International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, 2015.

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Surah Al-A'raf 7:201, Surah Al-Baqarah 2:54, Surah Al-Hashr 59:7, Surah Al-Ahzab 33:36. Quran

¹²² Surah At-Tawbah 9:12, Quran

will have forgiveness and a great reward”.¹²³ These verses serve as a reminder of the need to uphold the sanctity and dignity of the faith.

3.1.2. Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ Status:

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is revered as the last and final messenger of Allah, and any form of disrespect towards him is seen as an attack on the central figure of Islam. Muslims deeply love and honour him and consider him an exemplar of piety and virtue.¹²⁴

In addition to the Quran and Hadith, scholars have analysed various verses to derive legal and ethical rulings on blasphemy. Imam Qurtubi, Zamakshari, Alusi, and others have referred to Quranic verses to argue that individuals found guilty of blasphemy may face severe consequences, including the death penalty. This perspective is based on the belief that blasphemy constitutes a breach of the contract of Zimmah (an arrangement of surety guaranteed to non-Muslims by an Islamic state). However, the Hanafi school of thought, represented by Imam Abu Hanifa, holds the view that non-Muslim blasphemers should not be subjected to the death penalty but may face strict warnings and discretionary punishments (Tazir)¹²⁵.

The incident involving Hazrat Umar رضي الله عنه and the hypocrite Bishar, as mentioned in the Surah An-Nisa, “But no! By your Lord, they will never be (true) believers until they accept you (O Prophet) as the judge in their disputes and find no resistance within themselves against your decision and submit wholeheartedly”¹²⁶, is often cited to support the authority for the sentence of death for contempt towards the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This incident highlights the significance of accepting the decisions of the Messenger of Allah.¹²⁷

Considering the diversity of opinions among Islamic scholars, it is essential to approach the interpretation of these scriptural references and the concept of blasphemy in Islam with scholarly guidance. Understanding the broader principles of respect, reverence, and the sanctity of Islam provides a comprehensive understanding of blasphemy within the Islamic faith.

2.6. Historical Context:

Blasphemy has been a sensitive issue throughout history, often triggering conflicts, persecution, and social divisions. It has been used to assert religious orthodoxy, maintain social order, or protect the authority of religious institutions.¹²⁸

¹²³ Surah Al-Hujurat 49:2-3, Quran

¹²⁴ Surah Al-Ahzab 33:40, Surah Al-Fath 48:29. Quran

¹²⁵ A. B. Al-Jassas, *Ahkam-ul-Quran*, Vol. 2, Beirut: Dar Iyah-ut-Tauras, 1985.

¹²⁶ Surah An-Nisa 4:65, Quran

¹²⁷ S.-u.-D. M. Al-Ausi, *Roohul Maani* Vol. V, Tanzania:: Al-Itrah Foundation, Dar-us-Salaam, 2007.

¹²⁸ M. Nafees, “Blasphemy Casesin Pakistan: 1947 – 2021,” Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), Islamabad, 2022.

2.7. Instances of Actions in Defence of the Prophet ﷺ:

Hadith, comprising the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, further reinforce the Islamic understanding of blasphemy. Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim include narrations that showcase the Prophet's ﷺ response to instances of blasphemy and his call to protect the sanctity of Islam.

1. A Slave Woman Abusing the Prophet ﷺ According to the narration of Ibn Abbas, a blind person had a female slave who consistently abused the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ despite being warned not to do so. In response, the blind person, in frustration, killed her. When the incident was brought to the attention of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, he declared that the killing was not justified and regarded the bloodshed as vain.¹²⁹
2. In a confrontation with Kaab bin Ashraf, Jabir Ibn Abdullah narrated that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ sought help against Kaab bin Ashraf, who had insulted Allah and His Messenger. Muhammad Ibn Masalamah volunteered to kill Kaab, with the approval of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Accompanied by others, they executed Kaab bin Ashraf.¹³⁰
3. Ibn Khatal and Defamatory Poems Following the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ granted a general pardon to the people. However, he specifically ordered the execution of Ibn Khatal and his female slaves who composed defamatory poems against him.¹³¹
4. Killing of a Person Who Abused the Prophet ﷺ According to Qazi Ayaz in Shifa, a person insulted the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and Khalid Ibn Walid volunteered to kill him. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ accepted Khalid's offer to carry out the act.

These incidents highlight instances where individuals took action in defence of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ when faced with abuse, insults, or defamation. It is important to note that these actions were specific circumstances and should not be considered general guidelines or permission for vigilante justice. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ valued peace and forgiveness but also addressed severe cases of disrespect that threatened the community.

2.8. Blasphemy and its Consequences in Religious Traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism:

This writing explores the concept of blasphemy and its consequences in three major religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism. While each tradition approaches blasphemy differently, they all recognise the severity of disrespecting their

¹²⁹ Sunan Abi Dawud 4361

¹³⁰ Sahih al-Bukhari 3031

¹³¹ Sahih al-Bukhari 3044

respective faiths' divine and sacred aspects. This discussion will provide insights into understanding blasphemy, references from religious texts, and how contemporary societies interpret and apply blasphemy laws within religious tolerance and freedom of speech.

2.8.1. Blasphemy and its Punishment in Jewish Tradition

In Judaism, blasphemy is considered a serious offence, though there is no comprehensive list of blasphemy offences and punishments in Jewish law. The severity of blasphemy can be understood from instances in the Hebrew Bible, such as the death penalty for blaspheming the Name of God. Additionally, the prohibition against reviling God is mentioned in Exodus¹³². In Leviticus 24:10-16¹³³, a man with mixed heritage blasphemed the Name of God, resulting in a punishment determined by God - death by stoning. This case serves as an example of the seriousness with which blasphemy against the Name of God was regarded in ancient Jewish tradition¹³⁴. It is important to note that contemporary Jewish societies generally prioritise education, dialogue, and religious tolerance over implementing capital punishment for blasphemy.

2.8.2. Blasphemy and its Consequences in Christianity:

In Christianity, blasphemy is regarded as a severe offence, mainly when it involves blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Mark 3:28-29¹³⁵ states that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable, indicating its severity and eternal consequences. However, no specific list of blasphemy offences or their punishments is provided in the Bible¹³⁶.

It's important to note that contemporary Christian societies differ in their approach to blasphemy. Many prioritise principles of freedom of speech, religious tolerance, and forgiveness over strict legal punishments for blasphemy. Understanding and applying blasphemy laws vary among Christian denominations and legal systems.

2.8.3. Blasphemy and Penalizations in Hinduism:

¹³² Bible, "Exodus 22:28," Bible Hub, [Online]. Available: <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/22-28.htm>. [Accessed 22 June 2023].

¹³³ **Leviticus 24:10**-Now the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father went out among the Israelites, and a fight broke out in the camp between him and an Israelite. **11**-The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name with a curse; so they brought him to Moses. (His mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri the Danite.) **12**-They put him in custody until the will of the Lord should be made clear to them. **13**-Then the Lord said to Moses: **14**- "Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him. **15**-Say to the Israelites: 'Anyone who curses their God will be held responsible; **16**- anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord is to be put to death. The entire assembly must stone them. Whether foreigner or native-born, when they blaspheme the Name they are to be put to death.

¹³⁴ Bible, "Leviticus 24:10–16 A Blasphemer Put to Death," Biblia, [Online]. Available: <https://biblia.com/bible/niv/leviticus/24/10-16>. [Accessed 22 June 2023].

¹³⁵ **Mark 3:28**-Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, **29**-but whoever blasphemes against the **Holy Spirit** will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.

¹³⁶ Bible, "Mark 3:28-29," Salem web network, [Online]. Available: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/mark/passage/?q=mark+3:28-29>. [Accessed 22 June 2023].

In Manusmriti, one of the ancient legal codes and texts of Hinduism, some provisions address the importance of respecting deities, sacred texts, and religious practices. However, it is essential to note that Manusmriti is a complex and controversial text with varying interpretations.

According to Manusmriti (8.267-268)¹³⁷, those who disrespect the gods, sacred texts, and rituals are considered to have committed an offence. The text suggests that such individuals should undergo a process of expiation and purification through prescribed rituals and penances. The specific details of these expiatory measures can vary based on the severity of the offence and the caste or social status of the individual.

Similarly, the Brahma Vaivarta Purana (Krishna Janma Khanda 40.116-141)¹³⁸ describes the dire consequences for those who slander Brahma, goddesses such as Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Sita, Tulsi, and revered entities like the Vedas. This includes disrespecting sacred vows and rituals associated with spiritual guidance. According to the Purana, such individuals will be condemned to a hellish realm known as the 'Blind well' for a significant duration. In this realm, they will endure the excruciating torment of snake bites, accompanied by terrifying screams.

It is essential to approach these teachings with an understanding of their cultural and historical context, acknowledging that interpretations and practices within Hinduism can vary among different sects and individuals.

2.9. The Controversial Offense and Impact of Blasphemy on Society

Some countries have laws that criminalise blasphemy, making it an offence punishable by fines, imprisonment, or even death. However, the existence and enforcement of blasphemy laws can be controversial, as they may infringe upon freedom of expression and human rights.¹³⁹ Blasphemy can evoke strong emotions and provoke social and religious backlash. It can lead to protests, demonstrations, and calls for punishment or retribution by religious communities or individuals who feel their beliefs have been violated.

Blasphemy controversies can arise due to cultural clashes, religious pluralism, or the emergence of new forms of expression facilitated by technology. Such discussions often highlight the need for respectful dialogue, tolerance, and understanding among individuals with differing beliefs. Blasphemy laws and their enforcement vary worldwide, reflecting cultural, religious, and legal differences

¹³⁷ **Manusmriti 8:267-A** Kshatriya, having defamed a Brahmana, shall be fined one hundred (panas); a Vaisya one hundred and fifty or two hundred; a Sudra shall suffer corporal punishment. **268-A** Brahmana shall be fined fifty (panas) for defaming a Kshatriya; in (the case of) a Vaisya the fine shall be twenty-five (panas); in (the case of) a Sudra twelve.

¹³⁸ A sinner who slanders Brahma, the creator of the world, the goddess Durga who is the best of female deities, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Sita, Tulsi, Ganga, the Vedas, the mother of the Vedas, a vow, devotion, mystic formula pertaining to worship of the spiritual guide who gives formula will dwell in the hell called the 'Blind well' for half the period of the longevity allotted to Brahma, where bitten by snakes he will scream dreadfully.

¹³⁹ H. M. S. M. S. Fatima Zehra, "A Legal Perspective on Blasphemy within Muslim, Secular and Non-Muslim States," Global Digital & Print Media Review, vol. IV, no. 2, pp. 10-23, 2021.

among countries. Some regions have seen reform efforts to amend or repeal blasphemy laws, to promote human rights and freedom of expression.¹⁴⁰

The concept of blasphemy intersects with the principle of freedom of expression, raising essential debates about the limits and responsibilities of free speech in society. Balancing the protection of religious sentiments and the right to express diverse viewpoints is a complex challenge.¹⁴¹

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution sponsored by 60 member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which designated 15 March as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. This resolution recognizes the importance of addressing discrimination and prejudice against individuals based on their religion or belief.¹⁴²

2.10. Blasphemy Laws in Muslim-Majority Countries:

Blasphemy Laws in Muslim-Majority Countries: In several Muslim-majority countries, laws have been enacted to protect the honour and sanctity of Islam by criminalizing acts of blasphemy. These laws aim to safeguard religious sensitivities and preserve the dignity of the faith. The motivation behind such laws is rooted in the deep reverence and respect Muslims hold for the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Quran, and the fundamental beliefs of Islam.¹⁴³

2.11. The Historical Background of Blasphemy Laws in Subcontinent:

The origins of blasphemy laws in the Indian subcontinent can be traced back to the British colonial period. In 1860, the British government introduced four blasphemy laws, IPC 295¹⁴⁴, 296¹⁴⁵, 297¹⁴⁶, and 298¹⁴⁷, as part of the Indian Penal Code. These laws aimed to prohibit any act or expression deemed blasphemous or offensive towards religious sentiments.

¹⁴⁰ H. M. S. M. S. Fatima Zehra, "A Legal Perspective on Blasphemy within Muslim, Secular and Non-Muslim States," *Global Digital & Print Media Review*, vol. IV, no. 2, pp. 10-23, 2021.

¹⁴¹ G. J. A. I. F. T. World, "On Trial: the Implementation of Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws," *International Commission of Jurists*, Geneva, 2015.

¹⁴² U. M. Coverage, "Seventy Sixth Session, 61ST Meeting (AM)," 15 March 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://press.un.org/en/2022/ga12408.doc.htm>. [Accessed 10 July 2023].

¹⁴³ D. Gubo, *Blasphemy And Defamation of Religions In a Polarized World*, Washington, D.C: Lexington Books, 2014.

¹⁴⁴ "Whoever destroys, damages or defiles any place of worship, or any object held sacred by any class of persons with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of any class of persons or with the knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such destruction, damage or defilement as an insult to their religion, shall be punished with imprisonment ... for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both."

¹⁴⁵ Causing a disturbance to an assembly engaged in religious worship...

¹⁴⁶ Trespassing in place of worship or sepulcher, disturbing funeral with intention to wound the feelings or to insult the religion of any person, or offering indignity to a human corpse...

¹⁴⁷ "Whoever, with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person, utters any word or makes any sound in the hearing of that person, or makes any gesture in the sight of that person or places any object in the sight of that person, shall be punished with imprisonment ... for a term which may extend to one year or with fine, or with both."

However, the enactment of IPC 295A¹⁴⁸ occurred in 1927 following a highly controversial incident known as the case of IIm-ud-din. This incident involved the publication of a book called "Rangila Rasul," which was perceived as derogatory towards Muslims and the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. In response, IIm-ud-din, a Muslim carpenter, assassinated Rajpal, the publisher of the book.

The case gained significant attention and sparked widespread outrage and societal tensions. Despite the defence counsel, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, requesting a commutation of the death sentence to life imprisonment, IIm-ud-Din was eventually executed. His funeral saw an enormous turnout of approximately 600,000 mourners.

This incident marked a crucial turning point in the blasphemy-related matters in the subcontinent. It not only intensified existing religious divisions but also led to the introduction of IPC 295A, which criminalized deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class. The introduction of this law further exacerbated the political Polarisation along religious lines during a period of heightened political tension in the region.

Significantly, the incident involving IIm-ud-din and the subsequent introduction of IPC 295A played a role in shaping the discourse surrounding religious sentiments and freedom of expression. It also catalysed the independence movement in India and Pakistan, underscoring the complex intersection of religion, politics, and law in the subcontinent's history.¹⁴⁹

2.12. Blasphemy Law in Pakistan: Definition and Punishments:

In Pakistan, the legal framework defines blasphemy and outlines the punishments associated with it. TLaw295-A¹⁵⁰ states that any deliberate and malicious act to outrage the religious feelings of any class by insulting their religion or religious beliefs is considered blasphemy. This includes using spoken or written words or visible representations that insult or attempt to insult that class's religion or religious beliefs.

According to the law, individuals guilty of blasphemous acts may face imprisonment for up to ten years, a fine, or both. Additionally, the law specifically addresses the defilement of the sacred name of the Holy Messenger [SAW]. Any individual who defiles the sacred name, either through spoken or written words, visible representations, imputations,

¹⁴⁸ "Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of citizens ... , by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations insults the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both."

¹⁴⁹ M. Nafees, "Blasphemy Cases in Pakistan: 1947 – 2021," Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), Islamabad, 2022.

¹⁵⁰ Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs. Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of [the citizens of Pakistan], by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations insults or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to [ten years], or with fine, or with both.

innuendos, or insinuations, may face the penalty of death or imprisonment for life, along with a fine.

2.13. The Rise of Blasphemy Cases in Pakistan:

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, sectarian tensions emerged between different Muslim sects, particularly the Brelvi and Ahmadi communities. In 1948, Major Mahmud, an Ahmadi, was brutally attacked and killed in Quetta. This incident highlighted the growing hate and intolerance within society.

The Punjab Disturbances of 1953 further fuelled the tensions. Religious parties led protests demanding the declaration of Ahmadis as a non-Muslim minority and their removal from public offices. The military was eventually called to restore order after three months of unrest.

From 1954 to 1992, no extrajudicial killings of alleged blasphemers or Ahmadi followers were reported. However, cases of blasphemy were still documented during this period. The situation changed in 1988 when supplemental clauses were added to the blasphemy laws, namely PPC 295-B¹⁵¹, 295-C¹⁵², 298-A¹⁵³, 298-B¹⁵⁴, and 298-C¹⁵⁵, which

¹⁵¹ Defiling, etc., of Holy Qur'an: Whoever wilfully defiles, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Qur'an or of an extract therefrom or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable with imprisonment for life.

¹⁵² Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet: 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 Muhammad ﷺ shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.

¹⁵³ Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of holy personages: 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 any wife (Ummul Mumineen), or members of the family (Ahle-bait), of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, or any of the righteous Caliphs (Khulafa-e-Rashideen) or companions (Sahaaba) of the Holy Prophet ﷺ shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.

¹⁵⁴ Misuse of epithets, descriptions and titles, etc., reserved for certain holy personages or places:

1. Any person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation.
 - a. refers to or addresses, any person, other than a Caliph or companion of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, as "Ameer-ul-Mumineen", "Khalifatul- Mumineen", Khalifa-tul-Muslimeen", "Sahaabi" or "Razi Allah Anho".
 - b. refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, as "Ummul-Mumineen";
 - c. refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a member of the family "Ahle-bait" of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, as "Ahle-bait"; or
 - d. refers to, or names, or calls, his place of worship a "Masjid"; shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.
2. Any person of the Qadiani group or Lahori group (who call themselves "Ahmadis" or by any other name) who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation refers to the mode or form of call to prayers followed by his faith as "Azan", or recites Azan as used by the Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, and shall also be liable to fine.

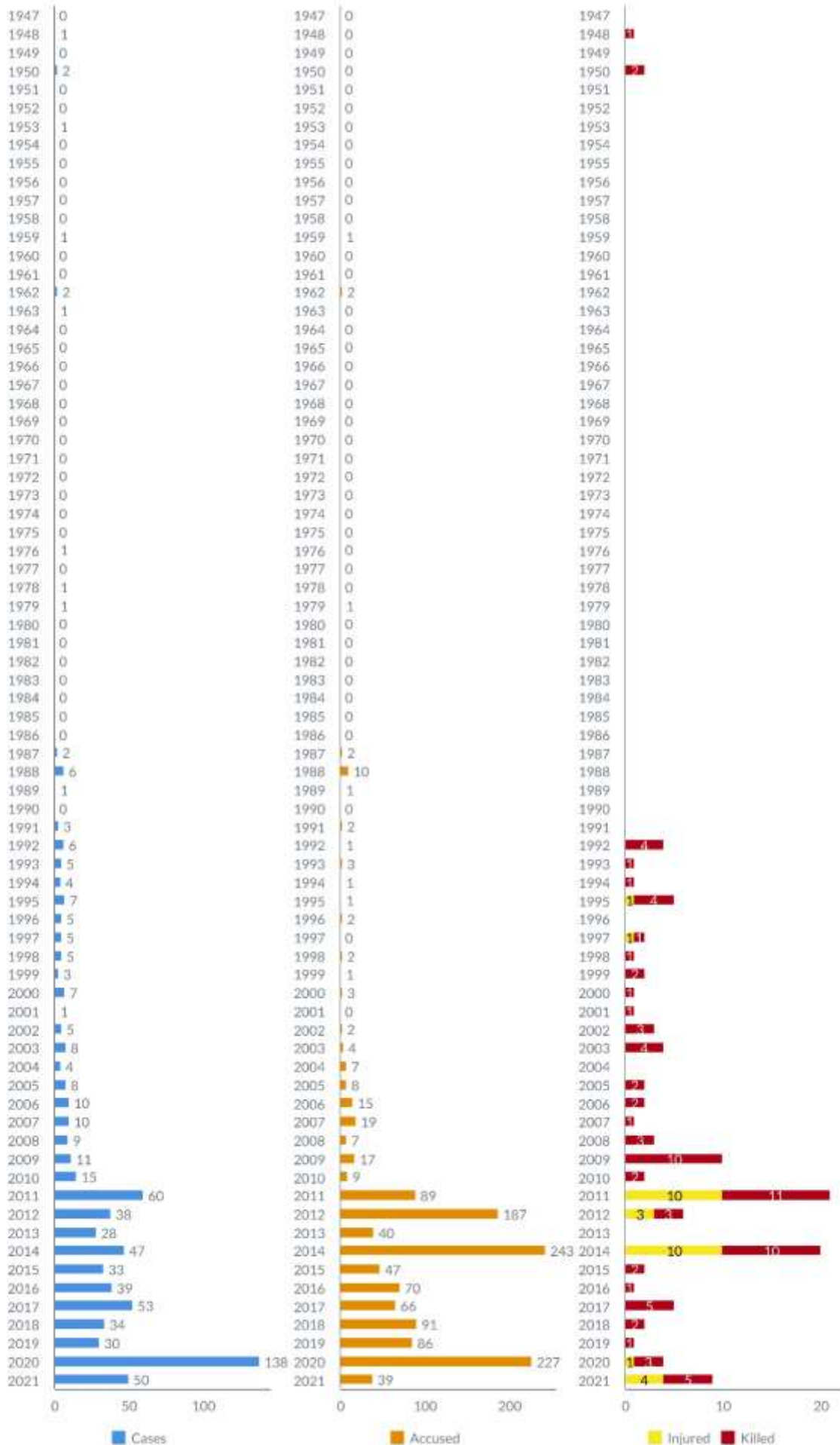
¹⁵⁵ Person of Qadiani group, etc., calling himself a Muslim or preaching or propagating his faith: Any person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name), who directly or indirectly, poses himself as a Muslim, or calls, or refers to, his faith as Islam, or preaches or propagates his faith, or invites others to accept his faith, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, or in any manner whatsoever outrages the religious feelings of Muslims shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.

intensified the impact of blasphemy accusations. The data presented in Table 01 reveals the relevant statistics.

Since then, the number of blasphemy cases and accusations has increased significantly. As of 2021, approximately 89 people have been extrajudicially killed out of around 1,500 accusations and cases. However, the actual number is believed to be higher, as many blasphemy cases go unreported in the press.

Table 01: Blasphemy Cases: 1947 – 2021				
Year	Cases	Accused	Injured	Killed
1947	0	0	0	0
1948	1	0	0	1
1949	0	0	0	0
1950	2	0	0	2
1951	0	0	0	0
1952	0	0	0	0
1953	1	0	0	0
1954	0	0	0	0
1955	0	0	0	0
1956	0	0	0	0
1957	0	0	0	0
1958	0	0	0	0
1959	1	1	0	0
1960	0	0	0	0
1961	0	0	0	0
1962	2	2	0	0
1963	1	0	0	0
1964	0	0	0	0
1965	0	0	0	0
1966	0	0	0	0
1967	0	0	0	0
1968	0	0	0	0
1969	0	0	0	0
1970	0	0	0	0
1971	0	0	0	0
1972	0	0	0	0
1973	0	0	0	0
1974	0	0	0	0
1975	0	0	0	0
1976	1	0	0	0
1977	0	0	0	0
1978	1	0	0	0
1979	1	1	0	0

1980	0	0	0	0
1981	0	0	0	0
1982	0	0	0	0
1983	0	0	0	0
1984	0	0	0	0
1985	0	0	0	0
1986	0	0	0	0
1987	2	2	0	0
1988	6	10	0	0
1989	1	1	0	0
1990	0	0	0	0
1991	3	2	0	0
1992	6	1	0	4
1993	5	3	0	1
1994	4	1	0	1
1995	7	1	1	4
1996	5	2	0	0
1997	5	0	1	1
1998	5	2	0	1
1999	3	1	0	2
2000	7	3	0	1
2001	1	0	0	1
2002	5	2	0	3
2003	8	4	0	4
2004	4	7	0	0
2005	8	8	0	2
2006	10	15	0	2
2007	10	19	0	1
2008	9	7	0	3
2009	11	17	0	10
2010	15	9	0	2
2011	60	89	10	11
2012	38	187	3	3
2013	28	40	0	0
2014	47	243	10	10
2015	33	47	0	2
2016	39	70	0	1
2017	53	66	0	5
2018	34	91	0	2
2019	30	86	0	1
2020	138	227	1	3
2021	50	39	4	5
Total	701	1306	30	89



Blasphemy Cases in Pakistan - Center for Research and Security Studies

The majority of the accused individuals, more than 70%, were reported in Punjab, followed by Sindh, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (KP), Balochistan, and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK). Surprisingly, the capital city had more reported cases than KP and AJK combined. The data also includes some cases from Bangladesh (when it was part of Pakistan) and Thailand involving Pakistani individuals. (Imtiaz, 2010)¹⁵⁶

Table 02: Blasphemy cases by province/region: 1947 – 2021		
Province	Accused	Killed
Punjab	1098	70
Sindh	173	9
Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT)	55	2
Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (KP)	33	6
Pakistan (including overseas)	25	1
Balochistan	12	1
Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK)	11	0
Gilgit Baltistan (GB)	7	0
East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)	1	0
Grand Total	1415	89

The alarming trend is the increasing number of cases and extrajudicial killings in recent years. From 1948 to 1978, only 11 blasphemy cases were recorded, with three resulting in extrajudicial killings. However, from 1987 to 2021, the cases increased by approximately 1,300%.

Notably, before the introduction of additional clauses to the blasphemy laws, no woman had been accused of blasphemy. It took nearly a decade after introducing these laws for the first female, Bushra Taseer from Sindh, to be charged under Section 295-C in 1996. Her case involved an allegation from a tailor claiming she provided cloth with a religious inscription.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ S. Imtiaz, "32 blasphemy cases in Sindh," The Express Tribune, 13 December 2010. [Online]. Available: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/89374/in-the-name-of-religion-32-blasphemy-cases-in-sindh/>. [Accessed 13 June 2023].

¹⁵⁷ S. Imtiaz, "32 blasphemy cases in Sindh," The Express Tribune, 13 December 2010. [Online]. Available:

It is concerning that the crime of blasphemy in Pakistan does not follow an established pattern, and many police websites remain silent on the occurrence of such cases. The complex dynamics of religious intolerance, societal tensions, and the misuse of blasphemy laws contribute to the sensitive nature of this issue in Pakistan.

Variations in Severity: Punishments for Blasphemy Across Muslim Majority Countries

Punishments for blasphemy vary in severity across the Muslim world, reflecting the diverse interpretations and legal systems within different countries. While blasphemy is considered a severe offence in Islam, the specific penalties and their enforcement differ significantly from one nation to another. It is essential to understand that there is no uniformity in applying these laws, and they can range from mild to severe, depending on the jurisdiction.

In some Muslim-majority countries, blasphemy is punishable by imprisonment or fines. These nations prioritize non-violent measures to address acts of blasphemy, focusing on legal repercussions rather than physical punishments. The goal is to uphold the sanctity of religious beliefs while respecting the rights and freedoms of individuals.

On the other hand, there are countries where blasphemy is treated as a capital offence, with potential penalties that include the death penalty. These jurisdictions take a stringent stance against blasphemy, viewing it as a grave violation that warrants the harshest form of punishment. However, it is worth noting that such severe penalties are not universally applied across all Muslim-majority countries.

The variation in punishments for blasphemy highlights the complexity and diversity within Islamic legal systems. It reflects the different cultural, historical, and political contexts in which these laws are implemented. It is essential to recognize that interpretations of blasphemy and its associated punishments can vary, and the severity of penalties should not be generalized across the entire Muslim world.

It is also important to acknowledge that public opinion and societal attitudes towards blasphemy play a role in enforcing these laws. In some cases, societal pressure and extremist ideologies may contribute to the harsh implementation of blasphemy laws, leading to severe punishments. However, there are also instances where legal reforms and advocacy efforts have sought to mitigate the severity of these penalties and promote a more balanced approach.¹⁵⁸

Below is a table illustrating the punishments for blasphemy in various Islamic countries:

Sr No	Country	Punishment
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<https://tribune.com.pk/story/89374/in-the-name-of-religion-32-blasphemy-cases-in-sindh/> [Accessed 13 June 2023].

¹⁵⁸ K. Robinson, "Understanding Sharia: The Intersection of Islam and the Law," Council on Foreign Relations, 17 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/understanding-sharia-intersection-islam-and-law>. [Accessed 15 July 2023].

1	Afghanistan	Capital punishment
2	Albania	No blasphemy laws
3	Algeria	Imprisonment or fine
4	Azerbaijan	No blasphemy laws
5	Bahrain	Imprisonment or fine
6	Bangladesh	Imprisonment or fine
7	Brunei	Capital punishment
8	Burkina Faso	No blasphemy laws
9	Chad	No blasphemy laws
10	Comoros	Imprisonment or fine
11	Djibouti	No blasphemy laws
12	Egypt	Imprisonment or fine
13	Gambia	Imprisonment or fine
14	Guinea	No blasphemy laws
15	Indonesia	Imprisonment or fine
16	Iran	Capital punishment
17	Iraq	Imprisonment or fine
18	Jordan	Imprisonment or fine
19	Kazakhstan	Imprisonment or fine
20	Kosovo	No blasphemy laws
21	Kuwait	Imprisonment or fine
22	Kyrgyzstan	Imprisonment or fine
23	Lebanon	Imprisonment or fine
24	Libya	Imprisonment or fine
25	Malaysia	Imprisonment or fine
26	Maldives	Imprisonment or fine
27	Mali	No blasphemy laws
28	Mauritania	Capital punishment
29	Morocco	Imprisonment or fine
30	Niger	No blasphemy laws
31	Nigeria	Imprisonment or fine
32	Oman	Imprisonment or fine
33	Pakistan	Capital punishment
34	Palestinian territories	Imprisonment or fine
35	Qatar	Imprisonment or fine
36	Saudi Arabia	Capital punishment
37	Senegal	No blasphemy laws
38	Sierra Leone	No blasphemy laws
39	Somalia	Imprisonment or fine
40	Sudan	Imprisonment or fine
41	Syria	Imprisonment or fine
42	Tajikistan	Fine
43	Tunisia	Imprisonment or fine
44	Turkey	Imprisonment or fine
45	Turkmenistan	Fine
46	United Arab Emirates	Imprisonment or fine

47	Uzbekistan	Imprisonment or fine
48	Yemen	Imprisonment or fine

159

It is also essential to recognize that societal attitudes, political considerations, and individual cases can influence applying blasphemy laws. Therefore, the table provides a snapshot of the range of punishments but does not capture the complete complexity of the issue.¹⁶⁰

Analysis of Blasphemy Laws and their Impact on International Religious Freedom:

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom report evaluates blasphemy laws across 71 countries. These laws are usually embedded in national penal codes and penalize the expression of opinions deemed "blasphemous" or against the prevailing religious beliefs.

71 COUNTRIES THAT HAVE BLASPHEMY LAWS ON THE BOOKS



The Human Rights Committee argues that prohibitions are incompatible with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, except under particular circumstances. They insist these laws should not discriminate in favour of or against specific religions or belief systems or prevent or punish criticism of religious leaders or doctrines.

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion has called for the repeal of criminal blasphemy laws. He argues they are counterproductive, potentially stifling dialogue, debate, and criticism between different religions or beliefs. It's also noted that these laws

¹⁵⁹ I have specifically listed countries with a Muslim population exceeding 50% among the approximately 55 Muslim-majority countries worldwide. [Muslim Countries 2023 - Wisevoter](#)

¹⁶⁰ K. Robinson, "Understanding Sharia: The Intersection of Islam and the Law," Council on Foreign Relations, 17 December 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/understanding-sharia-intersection-islam-and-law>. [Accessed 15 July 2023].

often provide different levels of protection to other religions and have often been applied in a discriminatory manner.

From a human rights perspective, blasphemy laws pose a risk of abuse as they place states in the position of arbiters of what is or is not offensive to the sacred, a highly subjective determination. These laws are intended to protect religions, not people, leading to enforcement issues that can result in human rights abuses and violence. In some cases, individuals expressing beliefs considered offensive to the sacred have faced severe sanctions, including state-sponsored violence.

Supporters argue that these laws are necessary to combat incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence and protect freedom of religion, per the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.¹⁶¹

2.14. Challenges of Misunderstanding and Misinterpretation in Islam:

There is a significant challenge of misunderstanding and incorrect interpretation of religious matters among some Muslims. This lack of familiarity with religious issues leads to ignorance within Islamic society and creates both internal and external effects. Extremism and radicalization stem from intellectual and cultural flaws, and it is necessary to change this by acquiring knowledge and developing critical thinking skills.

The misunderstanding of religion and the reduction in open dialogue with religious scholars contribute to the rise of extremism. Some individuals reject conversing with others and adhere to rigid beliefs, which can lead to distorted interpretations and extreme behaviours. It is essential to recognize that Islam is a moderate and balanced religion and to revisit the tools and methods of communication to address the intellectual crisis.¹⁶²

It is evident that an incorrect understanding of religious texts and the refusal to accept different opinions contribute to extremism. Extremists believe they are on the right path while considering others to be misguided.

2.15. Navigating the Hazards of Misunderstanding:

The profound consequences of misunderstanding Islamic law and its impact on the Muslim community. It emphasizes the need to faithfully adhere to the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ teachings and avoid distorting religious texts. Acknowledging the intricate nature of the foundations of faith, the importance of a comprehensive understanding rooted in Sharia principles is underscored. The significance of scholars in deciphering the Prophet's ﷺ intentions and contextualizing his teachings is highlighted, urging against misinterpretation or omission. This piece delves into the far-reaching effects of incorrect understanding, including the emergence of innovations and misguided practices. It urges individuals to engage in evidence-based research to grasp the true essence of Allah's message and the Prophet's ﷺ teachings. Ultimately, it urges the

¹⁶¹ J. G. K. Joelle Fiss, "Respecting rights? Measuring the world's blasphemy law," USCIRF (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom), Washington, D.C., 2017.

¹⁶² A. R. Al-Sheha, Human Rights in Islam and its Common Misconceptions, 2013.

Muslim community to present Islam as a religion of moderation, aligning with the desires of Allah and His Messenger, and to reclaim the beauty and truth of Islamic principles.¹⁶³

2.16. Challenges and Misunderstandings:

In Islam, there are two fundamental aspects: the command to promote goodness and the prohibition of evil. These principles guide Muslims' actions and interactions to foster a righteous and morally upright society. However, it is crucial to understand that implementing these principles is not solely the responsibility of individuals. Instead, it is a collective effort that involves different entities and authorities, each with their respective roles and capabilities.

The hadith on the authority of Abu Saeed al-Khudree رضي الله عنه highlights the varying levels of responsibility in addressing evil: "Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart, and that is the weakest of faith."¹⁶⁴ This hadith clarifies that the approach to stopping evil differs based on one's capacity and authority.

Stopping evil with the hand is the state's responsibility, as it possesses the power and authority to enforce laws and maintain law and order. It is the duty of the state to take appropriate actions and measures to prevent evil deeds and protect the well-being of society.

Stopping evil with the tongue involves using one's speech to advocate for goodness, condemn sin, and promote moral values. Media activists, religious scholars, teachers, and influential individuals are crucial in using their platforms and voices to speak out against evil and educate others on the importance of righteousness.

Feeling inadequate in the heart signifies the recognition of evil and a sense of moral unease, even if one does not possess the means or authority to intervene physically or verbally. It reflects the internal displeasure towards wrongdoing and the aspiration for a better society.

In conclusion, the command to promote goodness and prohibit evil in Islam involves a collective effort. The state is responsible for enforcing laws, individuals with influence should use their voices to advocate for righteousness, and every individual should cultivate a moral conscience. Muslims can work together to create a just and virtuous society by understanding and fulfilling these roles.¹⁶⁵

2.17. Navigating Misconceptions: Understanding Sharia Law in Islam:

Sharia law, an integral part of Islamic teachings, has unfortunately been subject to various misunderstandings and misinterpretations, leading to controversy and confusion both

¹⁶³ S. Ashour, "Misunderstanding of legal texts," IUGJIS, p. 25, 2015.

¹⁶⁴ Muslim: 49

¹⁶⁵ S. Younes, "Islamic Legal Hermeneutics: The Context and Adequacy of Interpretation in Modern Islamic Discourse," *Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad*, vol. 41, no. 4, p. 32, 2002.

within Muslim and non-Muslim communities. To address these misconceptions, it is essential to provide clarity and insight into key areas by referencing the Quran and Hadith.¹⁶⁶

One reason why Muslims may misinterpret blasphemy laws is due to a lack of understanding of Islamic principles. Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of justice and the rule of law, with the state being responsible for investigating and acting in cases of criminal offences.

However, some individuals may not fully grasp these principles and mistakenly believe that they have the right to enforce blasphemy laws personally. This can lead to instances of vigilantism, where people take the law into their own hands and engage in acts of violence or mob lynching.

It is important to emphasize that Islam does not condone or support mob violence or individuals acting as executioners. Islam upholds the principle that only the state can investigate and take legal action. Vigilante actions are against the teachings of Islam and go against the principles of justice and due process.¹⁶⁷

Another reason for the misinterpretation of blasphemy laws among Muslims is ignorance of due process. Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of a fair and just legal system, including following proper procedures for handling criminal offences.

However, due to a lack of knowledge or understanding, some individuals may not be aware of the importance of due process in implementing blasphemy laws. Instead of relying on the established legal system, they may take matters into their own hands and engage in acts of violence or retaliation.

Educating individuals about the significance of due process and the importance of following legal procedures in addressing blasphemy or any other criminal offence is crucial. This includes conducting thorough investigations, gathering evidence, and providing individuals accused of blasphemy with the opportunity to defend themselves in a fair trial.¹⁶⁸

Cultural influences can significantly impact how individuals interpret and perceive blasphemy laws. In some societies, a cultural norm of settling personal scores or seeking revenge may exist, which can influence individuals to take matters into their own hands rather than relying on the established legal system.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ H. Iqtidar, "Tolerance in Modern Islamic Thought," Pluto Journals, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 7, 2016.

¹⁶⁷ Dr. Burhanuddin S, "The Fundamental Principles of Tolerance Under Islamic Perspective," in *International Conference on Law Technology and Society*, Malang, 2018.

¹⁶⁸ G. J. A. I. F. T. World, "On Trial: The Implementation of Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws," International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, 2015.

¹⁶⁹ A. D. M. J., H. P. Tumin, "Discourses on Religious Pluralism: Islamic Practices of Tolerance in the Classical and Modern Times," *Atlantis Press*, vol. 518, p. 6, 2020.

In such cultural contexts, seeking personal justice or retribution may override the principles of justice, due process, and the rule of law. Individuals may feel compelled to retaliate against perceived blasphemy without considering the need for a fair trial or proper investigation.¹⁷⁰

Recognizing and addressing these cultural influences is essential to ensure a more accurate understanding and interpretation of blasphemy laws. By promoting a culture of respect for the rule of law, fostering a sense of collective responsibility, and educating individuals about justice and due process, societies can help mitigate the misinterpretation of blasphemy laws.

Misguided interpretations of religious texts can lead to a distorted understanding of blasphemy laws. In some cases, individuals may adopt extremist or radical interpretations that promote violent actions as a response to alleged blasphemy. These interpretations often overlook the core principles of compassion, mercy, and justice that underpin Islamic teachings.

It is essential to recognize that religious texts can be subject to diverse interpretations, and not all interpretations are accurate or representative of the broader teachings of Islam. Extreme or radical interpretations that advocate violence go against the fundamental values of Islam, which emphasize peace, compassion, and respect for human life.

Promoting a balanced understanding of religious texts and encouraging critical thinking and scholarly study are crucial to addressing this issue. By engaging with knowledgeable scholars and seeking guidance from reputable sources, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings and the proper interpretation of blasphemy laws.

Emotional reactions play a significant role in the misinterpretation of blasphemy laws. Blasphemy is viewed as a deeply offensive act that challenges the sanctity of religious beliefs and can evoke strong emotions among individuals, particularly those who hold a deep sense of devotion to their faith.

In the face of perceived blasphemy, individuals may experience anger, outrage, or a sense of deep offence. These emotions can cloud judgment and lead to impulsive reactions that bypass the proper legal channels for addressing such matters. Instead of allowing the legal system to handle the situation, individuals may resort to vigilantism or take matters into their own hands.

It is essential to acknowledge and understand the intensity of these emotional reactions. However, it is equally crucial to emphasize the importance of maintaining composure and channelling these emotions through appropriate

¹⁷⁰ N. M. , M. M. A. Tengku Nor Rizan Tengku Mohd Maasum, "Addressing student diversity via culturally responsive pedagogy," *Elsevier* , vol. 134, p. 8, 2014.

channels of justice. Islam encourages individuals to exercise patience, wisdom, and restraint, even in the face of offensive or sinful acts.¹⁷¹

In conclusion, the misinterpretation of blasphemy laws in Islam is a complex issue that arises from a variety of factors, including a lack of understanding of Islamic principles, ignorance of due process, cultural influences, misguided interpretations, and emotional reactions. These factors contribute to a distorted understanding and application of blasphemy laws, leading to vigilantism, personal vendettas, and a disregard for the principles of justice and fairness.

It is essential to recognize that Islam upholds the principles of justice, compassion, and the rule of law. Blasphemy laws, like any other laws in Islam, should be implemented through a proper legal framework, with the state having the authority to investigate and take appropriate action. It is crucial to promote a better understanding of Islamic teachings and emphasize the importance of adhering to due process, respecting the state's role, and avoiding actions that undermine the principles of justice and fairness.

By addressing these misconceptions and promoting a more accurate understanding of blasphemy laws in Islam, we can strive for a society that upholds the principles of justice, compassion, and respect for all individuals, regardless of their beliefs. Through education, dialogue, and engagement with knowledgeable religious scholars and authorities, we can work towards a more accurate understanding and application of blasphemy laws, fostering a society that respects the rights and dignity of all.

2.18. Religious factors responsible for intolerance

Religious factors can contribute to intolerance in various ways, often stemming from certain beliefs, interpretations, or practices within a particular religious framework. While it is important to note that not all individuals or groups within a religion are intolerant, certain religious factors can contribute to fostering an environment of intolerance. Here are some critical religious factors that can contribute to intolerance:^{172 173}

Muslims, as followers of Islam, firmly believe that Islam is the ultimate and comprehensive religion revealed by Allah through Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This belief is a cornerstone of their faith and shapes their religious identity. Muslims consider the teachings of Islam, as outlined in the Quran, to be all-encompassing and applicable to every aspect of life. The Quran affirms its divine origin and authenticity: "It is not possible for this Quran to have been produced by anyone other than Allah. It is a confirmation of what came before and an explanation of the Scripture. It is, undoubtedly, from the Lord of all worlds."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ A. Hashim, "Explained: Pakistan's emotive blasphemy laws," Al Jazeera, 21 September 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/21/explained-pakistans-emotive-blasphemy-laws>. [Accessed 19 July 2023].

¹⁷² D. Y. S. F. G. M. D. A. J. D. A. R. G. B. Dr. Muhammad Yaseen, "An Empirical Study on the Causes of Intolerance among the Youth of Karachi," *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, vol. 15, no. 8, p. 11, 2021.

¹⁷³ D. I. H. Malik, "Religious Minorities in Pakistan," Minority Rights Group International, London, 2002.

¹⁷⁴ Surah Yunus 10:37 - Quran

This conviction of Islam's superiority is deeply rooted in the understanding of the Quran, the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and the belief that Islam offers guidance for the salvation and well-being of humanity. The Quran further clarifies, "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam. And those given the Scripture did not differ except after knowledge had come to them - out of jealousy and hatred between themselves. And whoever disbelieves in the verses of Allah, then indeed, Allah is swift in (taking) account."¹⁷⁵ Muslims recognize Islam as the religion Allah chose and embrace it as the path to righteousness.

However, it is essential to emphasize that acknowledging the superiority of Islam does not equate to disregarding the rights and beliefs of others. The Quran explicitly states, "Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood. So, whoever renounces false gods and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the firmest, unshakable handhold. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing."¹⁷⁶ Islam teaches its adherents to engage with people of different faiths with kindness, respect, and tolerance. Muslims are encouraged to foster dialogue, understanding, and peaceful coexistence with diverse religious communities.

Acknowledging that diverse interpretations and understandings of this belief may exist within the Muslim community is crucial. While the belief in the superiority of Islam unites Muslims, individual perspectives on interfaith dialogue, religious pluralism, and coexistence in pluralistic societies may differ. The Quran advises, "Invite (all) to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and kind advice, and only debate with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord (alone) knows best who has strayed from His Way and who is (rightly) guided."¹⁷⁷ Thus, Muslims are urged to approach discussions on religious superiority with respect for varying viewpoints and to foster dialogue and understanding among people of different faiths.

In conclusion, Muslims firmly believe in the superiority of Islam as the accurate and complete religion. However, it is essential to approach religious discussions with respect for diverse perspectives, promoting dialogue and understanding among individuals of varying faiths. The Quran reminds believers, "Allah does not forbid you from dealing kindly and fairly with those who have neither fought nor driven you out of your homes. Surely Allah loves those who are fair."¹⁷⁸

Insufficient exposure or understanding of other religions, including their shared commonalities, can also foster religious intolerance. When individuals are unfamiliar with the diverse religious traditions and the principles they share, it becomes easier for misconceptions, stereotypes, and biases to persist, ultimately hindering the development of empathy and respect for other faiths. Recognizing the shared values of compassion,

¹⁷⁵ Surat 'Ali 'Imran 3:19 - Quran

¹⁷⁶ Surah Al-Baqarah 2:256 - Quran

¹⁷⁷ Surah An-Nahl 16:125 - Quran

¹⁷⁸ Surat Al-Mumtahanah 60:8 - Quran

peace, justice, and love for humanity across religions can help bridge the gap and promote interfaith dialogue and understanding, thus combating these challenges.¹⁷⁹

Limited opportunities for meaningful interactions and dialogue between individuals of different religious backgrounds can hinder understanding and empathy. When people have little or no exposure to diverse religious communities, overcoming preconceived notions and stereotypes becomes challenging. Meaningful interfaith engagement can provide a platform for open conversations, mutual understanding, and the dismantling of misconceptions. The Pluralism Project by Harvard University aims to promote interreligious understanding and cooperation.¹⁸⁰

The influence of social networks, peers, and family beliefs can shape an individual's understanding of other religions. If individuals are surrounded by like-minded individuals who hold limited knowledge or negative views about other faiths, it can reinforce pre-existing biases and intolerance. Overcoming social and peer influences requires exposure to diverse religious communities and alternative perspectives. The Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology investigates the role of social and peer influences on religious tolerance.¹⁸¹

The presence of extremist ideologies and misinterpretations within various religions can significantly contribute to religious intolerance. It is essential to acknowledge that religious extremism is not exclusive to any faith and is widely rejected by the majority of adherents. These extremist interpretations often arise when individuals or groups selectively interpret religious texts to serve their own extremist ideologies or political motives, distorting the true essence of their respective religions.

These distorted interpretations often involve taking religious passages out of context or disregarding the overarching principles of peace, compassion, and respect inherent in most religious traditions. By focusing solely on literal interpretations or cherry-picking verses, extremists manipulate religious texts to justify acts of discrimination, violence, and the marginalization of individuals or groups from different religious backgrounds.¹⁸²

Understanding that such extremist interpretations do not represent the comprehensive beliefs and values most followers hold within a specific religion is crucial. Instead, they result from selective interpretation and the manipulation of religious texts to align with particular agendas. By recognizing this distinction, we can avoid conflating the actions of extremists with the broader faith community and work towards promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among people of diverse religious backgrounds.

¹⁷⁹ A. C. B. W. Quinn Galbraith, "Religion as a Source of Tolerance and Intolerance: Exploring the Dichotomy," Brigham Young University Scholars Archive, p. 18, 2020.

¹⁸⁰ "Tolerance for Diversity of religion or Belief," in *Springhill Conference*, Minnesota, 1986.

¹⁸¹ M. Azam, "Religious Behaviors in Pakistan: Impact on Social Development," *Pak Institute of peace studies*, p. 17, 2010.

¹⁸² N. S. Michael Kalin, "Religious Authority and the Promotion of Sectarian Tolerance in Pakistan," United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, 2014.

In some cases, religious leaders or institutions may promote intolerance towards other religions or groups, either explicitly or implicitly. Their influence and authority can shape the beliefs and attitudes of their followers, leading to the perpetuation of discriminatory practices or even incitement to violence.

Historical conflicts between religious groups, fuelled by religious differences or territorial disputes, can leave deep-rooted animosity and contribute to ongoing religious intolerance. These conflicts often create a cycle of violence, mistrust, and prejudice, making it challenging to foster understanding and reconciliation.

It is important to note that religious factors alone do not solely contribute to intolerance. Socio-political, economic, and cultural factors also play significant roles. Nevertheless, addressing religious factors contributing to intolerance requires promoting interfaith dialogue, education, and a greater emphasis on the shared values of compassion, empathy, and respect within different religious traditions. Fostering a climate of understanding and acceptance, building bridges, and promoting peaceful coexistence among individuals and communities of diverse religious backgrounds is possible.¹⁸³

2.19. Social Factors Responsible for Xenophobia and Religious Bigotry.

Xenophobia and religious bigotry are interconnected issues influenced by various social factors. These factors contribute to negative attitudes, prejudices, and discriminatory behaviours towards individuals or groups based on nationality, ethnicity, or religious beliefs. Understanding these social factors is crucial for addressing xenophobia and religious intolerance and promoting a more inclusive and harmonious society. Here are some critical social factors that contribute to both xenophobia and religious bigotry.¹⁸⁴

Fear of the unfamiliar or unknown can lead to xenophobia and religious intolerance. When individuals are exposed to different cultures, ethnicities, or religious practices that they are unfamiliar with, it can trigger a sense of insecurity or threat. This fear is often fuelled by misconceptions, stereotypes, and negative portrayals in media or popular discourse, perpetuating negative attitudes towards those perceived as "foreign" or "different."

Economic factors can also contribute to xenophobia and religious bigotry. In times of economic uncertainty or inequality, individuals may perceive immigrants or individuals of different religions as competitors for resources or job opportunities. This perception can lead to scapegoating and the blaming of "outsiders" for socioeconomic challenges, creating divisions and fostering intolerance.

Social identity plays a significant role in shaping attitudes towards others. When individuals strongly identify with their own cultural or religious group, they may develop a sense of superiority or exceptionalism. This sense of identity can lead to the exclusion

¹⁸³ A. S. A. N. Azhar Hussain, "Connecting the Dots: Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan: A Study of Public Schools and Madrassas," United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Washington, DC, 2011.

¹⁸⁴ N. u. Din, "Challenges in Exercising Religious Freedom in Pakistan," Centre for Social Justice, Lahore, 2019.

or devaluation of those who do not belong to the same group, fostering xenophobia and religious intolerance.

Media plays a decisive role in shaping public opinion and perceptions of different groups. Negative portrayals or biased reporting can perpetuate stereotypes, reinforce prejudices, and contribute to xenophobia and religious intolerance. Media outlets are responsible for promoting accurate and unbiased representations of diverse communities to counteract these negative influences.¹⁸⁵

Political rhetoric and nationalist ideologies can fuel xenophobia and religious intolerance. When political leaders or groups use divisive language or promote exclusionary policies, it can create an "us versus them" mentality and contribute to the marginalization of certain groups based on nationality, ethnicity, or religious beliefs.

Addressing these social factors requires a multi-faceted approach that includes education, awareness campaigns, intercultural dialogue, and policies promoting diversity, inclusivity, and equal rights. By fostering understanding, empathy, and respect for different cultures and religions, societies can work towards building a more inclusive and tolerant environment where individuals are valued for their contributions rather than discriminated against based on their background.

2.20. Failure of Law-and-Order Organizations in Addressing Religious Bigotry:

The failure of law-and-order organizations against religious bigotry refers to the inadequacies and shortcomings of law enforcement agencies and institutions in effectively addressing and combatting acts of discrimination, prejudice, and hatred based on religious beliefs. This failure can manifest in various ways, including:

Challenges in Implementing Laws Against Religious Bigotry:

In addition to the challenges surrounding blasphemy cases, the implementation of laws against religious bigotry can often be ineffective. Despite the rules, law enforcement agencies may struggle to address incidents of religious discrimination effectively for various reasons. These can include limited resources, inadequate training for law enforcement personnel on handling cases related to religious intolerance, or a failure to prioritize the issue at hand. As a result, the mere existence of laws becomes insufficient in combating religious intolerance, as they fail to have a meaningful impact on the ground.

Instances have been reported in Pakistan where law enforcement agencies have faced accusations of inaction or negligence in responding to incidents of religious bigotry. The failure to promptly investigate and prosecute offenders can create a sense of impunity, allowing the culture of intolerance to persist. This not only undermines the rights of

¹⁸⁵ M. T. Islam, "The Impact of Social Media on Muslim Society: From Islamic Perspective," *International Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 3, p. 20, 2019.

individuals targeted by religious discrimination but also erodes trust in the justice system and fosters a cycle of violence.¹⁸⁶

Aasia Bibi Case and Ineffective Implementation:

The case of Aasia Bibi, a famous incident of blasphemy, further highlights the challenges surrounding religious intolerance and the ineffective implementation of laws against it. Aasia Bibi was initially sentenced by lower judiciary, including high courts, but was later released by the Supreme Court due to a lack of evidence and inconsistencies in witness testimonies.

This case raises critical questions about the flawed judicial process in religious discrimination cases. Suppose the evidence and witnesses were incorrect or the police did not properly investigate. Why did the lower and high courts reach a verdict against Aasia Bibi? Furthermore, if Aasia Bibi was falsely accused, why were no actions taken against those who provided false information to the court, leading to an unjust decision?

These issues highlight the urgent need for comprehensive and impartial investigations, fair judicial proceedings, and accountability within the legal system. It is essential to address the shortcomings in implementing laws against religious bigotry, ensuring that the principles of justice, fairness, and respect are upheld for all individuals, regardless of their religious beliefs.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ N. u. Din, "Challenges in Exercising Religious Freedom in Pakistan," Centre for Social Justice, Lahore, 2019.

¹⁸⁷ M. S. Kakar, "Dissecting the Asia Bibi Case: A Critical Analysis of Blasphemy Law in Pakistan," *Manchester Journal of Transnational Islamic Law & Practice*, vol. 18, no. 1, p. 22, 2022.

Chapter 3: PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

To address the prevalent concerns in Pakistan related to minority rights and blasphemy laws, solutions have been proposed by human rights advocates, legal experts, religious scholars, and international entities. Firstly, revising the blasphemy laws to clear ambiguities could deter their misuse, especially in personal disputes. Ensuring the security and independence of legal professionals can uphold the integrity of trials, safeguarding them from intimidation. Enhanced and rigorously enforced constitutional protections are required to combat the discrimination faced by religious minorities. Public education campaigns, possibly spearheaded by religious scholars, can be instrumental in raising awareness about the rights of minorities and the specifics of blasphemy laws, thus dispelling misconceptions. Comprehensive judicial reforms, focusing on prompt and impartial case resolutions are of utmost importance. By acknowledging and responding to international concerns, Pakistan can improve its global standing and foster a more inclusive and understanding domestic environment.

3.1. Reforming Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan:

One of the significant concerns with blasphemy laws in Pakistan is the low evidence threshold required to prove an accusation. To improve the justice system, the evidence requirements must be raised to ensure that allegations are supported by credible and substantial evidence. This would help prevent frivolous or baseless accusations and reduce the potential to misuse these laws. An example of this issue is the case from 2003, where Samuel Masih, a Christian, was accused of allegedly defiling a mosque by spitting on its wall. While in prison, Masih contracted tuberculosis and was transported to a hospital. While in police custody, Masih was killed by a police officer who used a hammer to end his life, claiming that it was his duty as a Muslim to kill Masih.¹⁸⁸

Specialised investigation units focusing on blasphemy cases could be set up to handle these sensitive cases with the utmost care and impartiality. These units should consist of well-trained investigators who understand the complexities of religious and cultural dynamics in the country.¹⁸⁹

Accused individuals facing blasphemy charges often face immediate threats to their safety from vigilante groups and mobs. Measures like witness protection programs and safe detention facilities should be established to protect their lives and ensure fair trials. The accused should have access to legal representation and be provided a golden opportunity to defend themselves.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Dawan, "High-profile blasphemy cases in the last 63 years," DAWN, 8 December 2010. [Online]. Available: <https://www.dawn.com/news/589587/high-profile-blasphemy-cases-in-the-last-63-years>. [Accessed 15 August 2023].

¹⁸⁹ 60. j. a. l. f. t. world, "On Trial: the Implementation of Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws," International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, 2015.

¹⁹⁰ S. Aziz, "Pakistan court seeks to amend blasphemy law," Al-Jazeera, 15 August 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/8/15/pakistan-court-seeks-to-amend-blasphemy-law>. [Accessed 21 July 2023].

Emphasising the presumption of innocence is crucial in blasphemy cases. The judiciary and law enforcement must treat the accused as innocent until proven guilty. This requires a significant shift in mindset, not only in the procedural aspects but also in the personal beliefs and attitudes of the judiciary towards the accused. Judges must avoid being judgmental based on personal biases and ensure impartiality throughout the legal process. This change is imperative, especially considering the social stigma and potential danger that accused individuals face even before the trial begins.

Training sessions and workshops for judges and lawyers can enhance their understanding of the complexities surrounding blasphemy laws and religious diversity. These programs can help them approach cases impartially, without bias based on religion or personal beliefs.¹⁹¹

Conducting periodic reviews of blasphemy cases can help identify potential instances of misuse or unfair trials. These reviews can be carried out by higher judicial authorities to ensure that lower courts are adhering to proper procedures and evidentiary standards.

Allowing international human rights organisations to monitor blasphemy cases and implementing these laws can enhance transparency and accountability. International involvement can check against potential human rights abuses and provide valuable insights for reform efforts.

To address the issue of misuse effectively, a mechanism for reporting cases of false accusations and misuse of blasphemy laws should be established. This could be done through a helpline or an online platform that allows people to report instances of abuse confidentially.¹⁹²

Promoting community-based conflict resolution mechanisms can help address grievances and misunderstandings before they escalate into blasphemy-related incidents. Mediation efforts by respected community leaders can be employed to resolve disputes peacefully. For instance, in KPK, out-of-court dispute settlements are encouraged under the supervision of a Judge according to ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) or EDR (External Dispute Resolution). The District & Sessions Judge is tasked with exploring ways and means for amicable settlement of disputes through the ADR system in his Court and Courts within his district. By invoking relevant law provisions for mediation, conciliation, and arbitration, the Judge ensures a systematic approach to conflict resolution. Furthermore, the Judge should also establish necessary forums for pretrial proceedings, always adhering strictly to the parameters of the law.¹⁹³

The government plays a crucial role in bringing about meaningful reforms in the justice system. Political leaders should demonstrate strong commitment and support for changes

¹⁹¹ 60. j. a. l. f. t. world, "On Trial: the Implementation of Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws," International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, 2015.

¹⁹² S. M. McMillion, "Crucial reform of Pakistan's blasphemy laws remains a distant dream," Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, Oslo, 2012.

¹⁹³ P. H. Court, "Chapter-IV (Administration)," in Judicial Estacode, Peshawar, Peshawar High Court, 2021, p. 839.

to ensure the fair implementation of blasphemy laws. Moreover, politicians must take a proactive approach by convincing the public of their constituencies about the importance and need for these reforms. By gaining public support, the momentum for change becomes more robust and has a greater likelihood of lasting impact.¹⁹⁴

3.2. Improvement of the Justice System of Pakistan

A robust and responsive justice system is imperative to ensure the rule of law, uphold human rights, and promote sustainable development in Pakistan. Strengthening the justice system is a multifaceted task, and the following offers a detailed outline of potential areas of focus:

3.2.1. Structural Reforms:

Decentralising judicial services can aid in making justice more accessible to the public. Reference: World Bank's "Decentralization in Client Countries" which underscores the significance of local judicial services for improved governance.¹⁹⁵

Upgrading court facilities with modern technologies can lead to swifter justice. This is highlighted in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) report on "Enhancing Judicial Reform in Asia". Increase the number of courts, especially at the district and tehsil levels, to ensure timely adjudication of cases.

Establish specialised courts for specific areas, such as commercial disputes, environmental issues, or gender-based violence. This would help in expediting cases and improving expertise in particular domains.¹⁹⁶ Digitize court records and proceedings, introduce e-filing systems and employ videoconferencing for hearings to speed up processes.¹⁹⁷

3.2.2. Capacity-building:

Regular training programs for judges and court staff can increase their competency and adaptability. The International Development Law Organization's (IDLO) works underline the importance of such continuous learning.¹⁹⁸ Improved forensic capabilities ensure better evidence gathering, which is pivotal for the justice system. This is supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) guidelines on forensic lab practices.

¹⁹⁴ T. O. o. T. C. N. C. f. H. R. G. o. Pakistan, "Proposed Procedural Amendments to Check the Misuse of Blasphemy Law in Pakistan," The Senate of Pakistan, Islamabad, 2016.

¹⁹⁵ W. B. I. E. Group, "Decentralization in Client Countries. An Evaluation of World Bank Support, 1990-2007," The World Bank, Washington, D.C, 2008.

¹⁹⁶ D. F. Hussain, The Judicial System of Pakistan, Islamabad: Federal Judicial Academy, 2015.

¹⁹⁷ T. O. o. T. C. N. C. f. H. R. G. o. Pakistan, "Proposed Procedural Amendments to Check the Misuse of Blasphemy Law in Pakistan," The Senate of Pakistan, Islamabad, 2016.

¹⁹⁸ M. J. M. N. Y. D. W. I. Dr Khurshid Iqbal, Trainer's Toolkit: Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Training Programs, Islamabad: Federal Judicial Academy, Islamabad, 2015.

3.2.3. Legal Overhauls:

Periodic reviews can ensure laws remain relevant to contemporary society. The World Justice Project's "Rule of Law Index" has consistently highlighted the importance of up-to-date regulations. Ensuring laws are in line with international human rights standards is essential. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent treaties serve as guiding principles for such incorporations.

3.2.4. Timely Judicial Processes:

Under the principle of "*Justice delayed is justice denied*," the justice system must operate swiftly and efficiently. Prolonged judicial proceedings undermine the public's trust in the justice system and hinder timely justice delivery to the aggrieved parties. This component focuses on measures to expedite legal processes, reduce case backlogs, and ensure that justice is served without unnecessary delay.

These reforms, while broad, serve as starting points. They underscore that a justice system's efficacy isn't just about punitive measures but also about ensuring that every individual's rights are safeguarded and that the design contributes to the broader goals of national growth and sustainable development.¹⁹⁹

3.2.5. Capacity-Building and Human Resources:

Regularly update training modules for judges, lawyers, and court staff, focusing on modern jurisprudence, technology, and soft skills. Address the chronic shortage of judges by streamlining the recruitment process and enhancing incentives to attract the best legal minds. Often, weak prosecution is a result of inadequate investigations. Train police forces in modern investigative techniques and forensics and ensure they work closely with public prosecutors.²⁰⁰

3.2.6. Legal Overhauls:

Review and update colonial-era laws that no longer serve contemporary needs. Encourage mediation and arbitration to resolve disputes outside the formal court system. This can help in reducing the caseload on courts. Establish and promote state-sponsored legal aid systems to ensure even the economically weaker sections have access to quality legal representation.

3.2.7. Transparency and Accountability:

Establish mechanisms to hold the judiciary accountable, ensuring they remain incorruptible and uphold the highest standards of justice. Make court proceedings more accessible to the public and media, ensuring transparency in the justice system's workings. Develop and implement

¹⁹⁹ A. R. N°160, "Reforming the Judiciary in Pakistan," International Crisis Group, Brussels, 2008.

²⁰⁰ A. R. N°160, "Reforming the Judiciary in Pakistan," International Crisis Group, Brussels, 2008.

performance metrics to evaluate the performance of judges, prosecutors, and other court officials. This can be used for promotions, incentives, and training needs assessment.²⁰¹

3.2.8. Public Awareness and Participation:

Conduct programs to educate the public about their rights, legal processes, and avenues for redress. Strengthen community policing initiatives to build trust between the police and communities, which can help in crime prevention and community harmony.

3.2.9. Protecting Vulnerable Populations:

Train law enforcement and the judiciary to handle cases involving women, children, and marginalised communities sensitively and without bias. Establish robust witness protection mechanisms to ensure witnesses can testify without fear of retaliation. For particularly sensitive cases, such as Blasphemy and those involving sexual assault or terrorism, establish fast-track courts to expedite the judicial process.²⁰²

3.2.10. Collaboration with Civil Society:

Engage with NGOs, academic institutions, and international organisations to gain insights, collaborate on training modules, and conduct third-party evaluations of reform initiatives.

3.2.11. Periodic Review:

Regularly review the judicial process, seeking feedback from all stakeholders, including lawyers, litigants, and the general public, to continually refine and improve the system.²⁰³

3.2.12. Legislative Revisions:

Ensure that the wording of the blasphemy laws is clear and specific. This would minimise their misuse based on ambiguous or vague interpretations. Introduce stringent penalties for individuals who make false or malicious accusations of blasphemy. This would act as a deterrent against using the law for personal vendettas.²⁰⁴

3.2.13. Strengthening the Investigation Process:

Provide specialised training to police officers in investigating blasphemy cases. This would ensure that they can differentiate between genuine and false claims. Institute a mandatory initial review by a senior police officer

²⁰¹ M. I. Ijaz, "Improving the Judicial System of Pakistan: A Probe," *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research*, vol. 9, no. 2, p. 9, 2018.

²⁰² M. U. Rafique, "Pakistan's Criminal Justice System: Challenges and Reforms," *Daily Times*, 18 May 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/1094319/pakistans-criminal-justice-system-challenges-and-reforms/>. [Accessed 20 July 2023].

²⁰³ Y. Afridi, *Judicial Reform Strategy 2018-22*, Peshawar: Peshawar High Court, 2018.

²⁰⁴ T. O. o. T. C. N. C. f. H. R. G. o. Pakistan, "Proposed Procedural Amendments to Check the Misuse of Blasphemy Law in Pakistan," *The Senate of Pakistan*, Islamabad, 2016.

or a magistrate before registering an FIR (First Information Report) for blasphemy. This would act as a filter for frivolous or malicious complaints. Ensure that the accused is protected from an accusation, given the high risk of mob violence in blasphemy cases.²⁰⁵

3.2.14. Public Awareness and Education about the Law:

Many Pakistanis are unaware of the specifics of blasphemy laws. An awareness campaign can clarify what constitutes blasphemy and the consequences of false accusations.²⁰⁶

3.2.15. Monitoring and Evaluation:

Create an independent commission to periodically review blasphemy cases, ensuring that justice is served and identifying areas of improvement in the system. Allow for a feedback mechanism where judges, lawyers, and even the accused can provide insights into their challenges during the trial process.²⁰⁷

3.3. The Role of Media in Improving Society's Response to Blasphemy Incidents

Media can foster interfaith dialogue and promote understanding among people of different religions or beliefs. By sharing stories that highlight the value of tolerance and respect for all beliefs, media can contribute to a more inclusive society.

Media can be a watchdog, holding governments accountable for the misuse or abuse of blasphemy laws. They can pressure governments to reform these laws by reporting on unjust application incidents.

Media can give a platform to those most affected by blasphemy laws, such as religious minorities or political dissidents. By sharing their stories, the media can humanise these individuals and groups, fostering empathy and understanding among the public.

Media can advocate for repealing or reforming blasphemy laws, highlighting the views of legal experts, human rights advocates, and other stakeholders. They can also explain the benefits of such reforms for freedom of expression, religious freedom, and societal harmony.

While advocating for freedom of speech, the media can also emphasise the importance of responsible speech that respects all religions and beliefs. They can encourage public figures and influencers to use their platforms responsibly to avoid inciting hatred or violence.

²⁰⁵ T. O. o. T. C. N. C. f. H. R. G. o. Pakistan, "Proposed Procedural Amendments to Check the Misuse of Blasphemy Law in Pakistan," The Senate of Pakistan, Islamabad, 2016.

²⁰⁶ B. A. Parveen Gul, "The Concept of a Fair Trial," *Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 47, no. 69, p. 16, 2016.

²⁰⁷ N. Saeed, "Blasphemy laws need reforming not toughening," *Daily Times*, 10 January 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/536167/blasphemy-laws-need-reforming-not-toughening/>. [Accessed 18 July 2023].

In an era of rampant misinformation, the media can play a crucial role in debunking false allegations of blasphemy, which often lead to violence and social unrest. By verifying information before publishing, the media can prevent the spread of false accusations and their potentially harmful effects.²⁰⁸

Journalists can be trained in conflict-sensitive journalism, which involves understanding the context of the conflict, promoting peaceful responses, and avoiding the propagation of hate speech, stereotypes, or bias.

Media organisations can develop and promote media literacy programs to help the public understand how to consume media critically, recognise bias, and distinguish between credible news and misinformation.

Given social media's extensive reach and influence, traditional media can collaborate with these platforms to spread accurate information and debunk misinformation about blasphemy incidents.

Media can consistently underscore the importance of human rights, including freedom of speech and religious freedom. Regular features on these topics can help embed these values in public consciousness.

Media can engage with policymakers, highlighting the societal implications of blasphemy laws and advocating for policy reforms. They can facilitate dialogues or debates on these topics involving experts and influencers.

Media can provide coverage to whistleblowers and activists who expose the misuse of blasphemy laws, giving them a more comprehensive platform and offering them protection through visibility.

Media outlets can collaborate internationally to share best practices, co-produce content, and support each other in promoting an accurate understanding of blasphemy laws and their impact.

3.4. Role of Religious Scholars in Preventing Blasphemy:

Elaboration on the role and obligation of religious scholars in preventing blasphemy and reacting to the destruction of the law of the land:

3.4.1. Providing Correct Interpretation of Religious Texts:

Religious scholars are responsible for providing accurate interpretations of religious texts, including those related to blasphemy. This entails:²⁰⁹

Scholars should base their interpretations on sound knowledge, scholarship, and expertise in the religious texts. They should strive for accuracy,

²⁰⁸ I. M. Support, "Between radicalisation and democratisation in an unfolding conflict: Media in Pakistan," International Media Support, Copenhagen, 2009.

²⁰⁹ S.-G. o. t. U. Nations, "The Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes," United Nations, Washington DC, 2017.

avoiding misinterpretations that could lead to misunderstandings or extremist reactions.

Given that religious texts are regarded as God's words and the holy Prophet's teachings, their timeless wisdom is pivotal. However, it's essential to recognise that these texts were conveyed in historical, cultural, and social settings. Hence, religious scholars are responsible for interpreting these scriptures in a manner that respects their original intent while making them relevant and understandable for today's society. By offering contextualised interpretations, scholars can guide the faithful in applying these teachings in specific modern situations, ensuring a harmonious fusion of tradition and contemporary life.

3.4.2. Promoting Tolerance and Patience:

Religious scholars are crucial in promoting tolerance and patience in dealing with blasphemy issues. This involves.²¹⁰

Religious scholars must consistently emphasise the profound teachings of compassion, mercy, and forgiveness in sacred texts. These foundational values should be at the forefront, whether during Khutba Juma, in conferences, or in classes for religious educators. By internalising these principles, individuals can approach perceived blasphemy with patience, empathy, and understanding.

Drawing inspiration from the first community of Madina, scholars should champion the essence of peaceful coexistence among followers of diverse religions. By revisiting the common values and shared teachings that linked the early inhabitants of Madina, scholars can illuminate the shared tenets that bridge various faiths. In doing so, they can cultivate an environment that encourages mutual respect, understanding, and a profound recognition of the commonality between religions.

3.4.3. Countering Extremist Narratives:

Religious scholars are at the forefront of countering extremist narratives associated with blasphemy. Their responsibilities include:²¹¹

The Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ offers a vast repository of teachings and actions that promote peace, understanding, and harmony. One such instruction from the Prophet ﷺ emphasises moderation. He said, “Beware! Avoid going to extremes in religious matters, for those who came before you were destroyed by going to extremes in religious

²¹⁰ D. O. Tadjibaeva, “Religious tolerance is a symbol of peace and enlightenment,” *Ilkogretim Online*, vol. 19, no. 4, p. 6, 2020.

²¹¹ *Ibid*

matters."²¹² In the face of rising radical viewpoints, religious scholars have a pivotal role to play in disseminating these teachings:

The Prophet's ﷺ life was marked by instances where he chose compassion over conflict. For example, during the conquest of Makkah, he forgave many who had previously persecuted him, choosing mercy over revenge. By delving deep into these episodes, scholars can present real-life examples of choosing peace and understanding over violence.

Scholars can hold sessions and discussions that dissect extremist interpretations and counter them with well-founded arguments from the Sunnah. The Prophet conversed with his critics and adversaries, emphasising understanding and clarity. Engaging the youth, often targeted by radical narratives, can be particularly impactful.

The Prophet emphasised the importance of community and unity. He once said, "The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever."²¹³ Scholars can foster strong communal ties using such teachings, which can act as a buffer against divisive ideologies.

Scholars should prioritise continuous learning sessions focused on the Prophet's teachings. The Prophet said, "Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim."²¹⁴ These sessions can act as platforms to address and rectify any misinterpretations of religious texts that might lead to extremist views.

Interfaith dialogues can be powerful tools to counteract extremism. The Prophet ﷺ had interactions with Christians, Jews, and members of other religious communities during his lifetime, often emphasising mutual respect and understanding. Scholars can build bridges of understanding and cooperation by collaborating with leaders from different religions and highlighting shared values and teachings.

By centring their teachings and efforts around the Sunnah of the Prophet, scholars can provide a robust and peaceful counter-narrative to radical ideologies, fostering a balanced and harmonious understanding of the faith.

Young individuals are particularly susceptible to radical ideologies. Scholars should actively engage with youth, providing a comprehensive

²¹² Sunan an-Nasa'i: 3057, Hadith

²¹³ Sahih al-Bukhari: 6011, Hadith

²¹⁴ Sunan Ibn Majah: 224, Hadith

understanding of religious teachings and countering extremist narratives that may lead to violent reactions.

3.4.4. Encouraging Lawful Behaviour:

Religious scholars must promote lawful behaviour among their followers. This entails:

Religious scholars should highlight the fundamental principle in Islam that discourages taking the law into one's own hands. By referencing Islamic teachings, they can stress the importance of not resorting to mob justice. They should further emphasise that Islam values the rule of law and that adhering to the laws of the land is in harmony with the teachings of the faith. Breaking these laws contradicts both the spirit of Islam and the essence of societal order and peace.²¹⁵

After collaborating with the commoner, who raises concerns about the functioning of the legal system where law enforcement agencies may not be fulfilling their duties and the judiciary might not be delivering effective judgments, scholars have a crucial role to play. Scholars can actively engage with relevant authorities to foster improvements in such instances. By offering insights and advocating for a just and efficient system, scholars can contribute to the ongoing efforts to ensure that justice is not only served but also perceived to be served by the people. This engagement aligns with the Prophet's emphasis on justice and accountability in society.

3.4.5. Open Dialogues and Discussions:

Religious scholars can facilitate open dialogues and discussions on blasphemy issues, enabling productive engagement and understanding:²¹⁶

Scholars should create an environment where followers feel comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification about sensitive topics, including blasphemy. This helps dispel misconceptions and foster a deeper understanding of religious teachings.

Engaging in interfaith dialogues with leaders of other religions can highlight the commonalities shared among diverse faiths. These conversations promote mutual understanding and challenge misconceptions about blasphemy or religious disrespect. Focusing on shared values such as compassion, justice, and the importance of human dignity, this dialogue encourages respect, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among all religious communities. By coming together to explore these universal principles, individuals from various

²¹⁵ D. A. A. Andrabi, "Interfaith dialogue: its need, importance and merits in the contemporary world," *International Journal of Advanced Academic Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 264-271, 2020.

²¹⁶ Ibid

faiths can build bridges of harmony and contribute to a more compassionate and united world.

3.4.6. Addressing Misuse and False Accusations:

Religious scholars have a role to play in addressing the misuse of blasphemy laws and false accusations:

Scholars should strongly condemn the misuse of blasphemy laws or false accusations. They can educate their followers about the gravity of bearing false witness, emphasising the importance of truthfulness and integrity.

In the Quran, Allah says: "And do not conceal testimony, for whoever conceals it - his heart is indeed sinful, and Allah is Knowing of what you do."²¹⁷ This verse underscores the importance of truthful testimony and the severe consequences of withholding or distorting evidence.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also highlighted the gravity of providing false evidence. He said: "Avoid the seven deadly sins." They (the companions) said: 'What are they?' He replied, "(1) Associating anything with Allah, (2) magic, (3) killing one whom Allah has declared inviolate without a just cause, (4) consuming the property of an orphan, (5) consuming of usury, (6) fleeing on the day of the march (to the battlefield), and (7) slandering (believing) chaste, unwary believing women."²¹⁸

Regarding those falsely attributing fabricated hadith or spreading false information, the Prophet ﷺ warned: "Whoever intentionally attributes a lie to me, let him take his place in Hell."²¹⁹ This highlights the severity of spreading falsehood, especially in religious matters.

In terms of falsely accusing someone of blasphemy, which itself can be considered a form of blasphemy due to its seriousness and potential consequences, there's an important Hadith. The Prophet ﷺ said: "Whoever accuses a believer of something that is not true, Allah will make him dwell in flowing pus on the Day of Resurrection."²²⁰ This underscores the gravity of falsely accusing someone, particularly with allegations related to faith or religious matters.

In summary, the Quran and Hadith emphasise the importance of truthfulness, the gravity of false accusations, and the severe consequences for those who spread falsehood. Scholars should use these teachings to educate their followers about the ethical and religious obligations to speak the truth and to avoid bearing false witness, especially when it comes to matters as serious as

²¹⁷ Surah Al-Baqarah (2:283), Quran

²¹⁸ Sahih Muslim: 89, Hadith

²¹⁹ Sahih al-Bukhari: 109, Hadith

²²⁰ Sahih al-Bukhari

blasphemy allegations or the narration of false hadith, both of which can carry elements of blasphemy themselves.

In misunderstandings or perceived disrespect, scholars can use their influence to mediate between parties involved, encouraging dialogue and peaceful resolution rather than resorting to legal or violent means. After the occurrence of an incident, local scholars can engage in immediate "firefighting" with the guidance and support of senior scholars. This proactive approach aims to prevent escalations and promote understanding within the community, embodying the teachings of patience, reconciliation, and compassion in various religious traditions. By initiating and facilitating these mediation efforts, scholars play a pivotal role in defusing tensions and fostering an environment of unity and amicability.

Considering the sensitive nature of blasphemy cases and the need to prevent violence and misunderstandings, the establishment of local mediation councils at the town and tehsil levels is crucial. These councils would be tasked with responding swiftly to reports of incidents that could lead to tensions or conflicts related to blasphemy. These councils should comprise respected community members, scholars, and leaders who deeply understand religious teachings and local dynamics. By having the legal authority to address such matters without involving the police directly, these councils can play a pivotal role in judging the situation objectively and promoting peaceful resolutions. This approach ensures the protection of human lives and upholds the community's principles of justice and unity.²²¹

3.4.7. Continuous Education:

Religious scholars should strive for continuous education to stay informed and address contemporary challenges related to blasphemy. This involves:

Scholars should actively engage in ongoing discussions and debates within the global religious community, ensuring they are well-informed about different perspectives and approaches to blasphemy issues. This includes staying updated on decisions, interventions, and strategies adopted regarding blasphemy cases worldwide. By being aware of how various societies and legal systems address such matters, scholars can contribute to more informed discussions at the local level. This approach fosters a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding blasphemy and ensures that insights from around the world are considered when addressing similar challenges within their communities. This global perspective enriches the dialogue and empowers scholars to offer well-rounded guidance that promotes understanding, justice, and peace.

²²¹ T. J. a.-. 'Alwani, "The Rights of the Accused in Islam," *Arab Law Quarterly*, p. 14, 1995.

Scholars can encourage research on religious teachings related to blasphemy, providing clarity and guidance on interpreting and understanding these teachings in contemporary contexts. This research can contribute to a more nuanced and accurate understanding of religious texts.

3.4.8. Promote Responsible Speech:

Scholars should advocate for responsible speech, discouraging hate speech or inflammatory language that may fuel tensions or incite violence related to blasphemy.

Scholars should emphasise moral and ethical values such as compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and justice in their teachings, inspiring their followers to embody these values in their daily lives. Religious scholars should continuously learn, stay updated on religious and societal issues, participate in scholarly discussions, and foster intellectual growth to guide their followers.

Scholars can utilise their influence to advocate for legal reforms that ensure justice, protect minority rights, and prevent the misuse of blasphemy laws, actively engaging in public debates and discussions on legislative improvements. Scholars should lead by example, demonstrating tolerance, respect for the rule of law, and peaceful conduct and interactions with others, serving as role models for their followers.²²²

3.4.9. Knowledge and Qualification Checks for Imam and Khateeb:

To ensure the promotion of a nuanced and accurate understanding of religious texts and the responsible and ethical leadership of religious communities, implementing a system that verifies the knowledge and qualifications of Imam Khateeb before their appointment is crucial. This step aims to enhance the quality of religious discourse, prevent the spread of misinformation, and contribute to a more informed and enlightened society. By establishing a mechanism to verify the knowledge and qualifications of Imam Khateeb, religious communities can elevate the discourse, promote understanding, and contribute to a society that values peaceful coexistence, freedom of religion, and respect for all individuals.

3.4.9.1. Components of the Qualification Process:

Imam Khateeb should undergo comprehensive theological education from reputable institutions. This training should cover various aspects of religious texts, history, theology, ethics, and comparative religion. Prospective leaders could be required to pass oral and written examinations to demonstrate their knowledge of core religious concepts, texts, and their applications. Leadership roles demand strong ethics and interpersonal skills. Candidates should be evaluated on their ability to exemplify moral values,

²²² H. Yahya, *The Muslim Way of Speaking*, Istanbul: Global Publishing, 2004.

compassion, and peaceful behaviour. Religious scholarship is an ongoing process. Imam Khateeb should commit to continued learning and engagement to stay updated on evolving religious and societal matters. A panel of respected scholars and community leaders could interview candidates to assess their suitability for leadership roles. Vetting should consider their temperament, understanding of diverse perspectives, and commitment to inclusivity.

By implementing these recommendations, religious scholars can contribute significantly to preventing blasphemy, promoting understanding, fostering peace, and upholding the rule of law within their communities and society. Their efforts have the potential to shape a more harmonious and inclusive society that respects religious freedoms and protects the rights of all individuals.

3.5. Role of Family in Preventing Blasphemy:

Considering the pivotal role of families in shaping individual values and, consequently, societal norms, they can play a significant part in driving positive change. Drawing from our previous discussion on the challenges related to the justice system, blasphemy laws, and minority rights in Pakistan, here's what families can further do:

The rights of minorities and the justice system in Pakistan, it becomes vital to explore the role and responsibilities of Muslim families in the Pakistani societal fabric. A family, the basic unit of society, can significantly shape societal attitudes, norms, and behaviours.

3.5.1. Education and Awareness:

Families should educate themselves and their members about the specificities of blasphemy laws in Pakistan, including their scope, limitations, and consequences. Understanding these laws can help prevent unintentional transgressions and discourage misuse.

Muslim families should impart values of respect and tolerance for other religions. Understanding and appreciating the diversity of beliefs can help reduce religious intolerance and blasphemy. Workers, like sweepers, should be acknowledged during festivals, potentially with bonuses or gifts. Above all, leading by example by modelling respectful behaviour sets the tone for all interactions. Families should teach their members the importance of following laws, not taking matters into their own hands, and avoiding vigilante justice, particularly in cases related to blasphemy allegations.

3.5.2. Promoting Tolerance and Coexistence:

Religious tolerance is crucial in modern workplaces for fostering equality and driving innovation. Yet, challenges persist. A Pew Research Centre study revealed that 83 countries faced high religious restrictions, which

can influence work environments. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission also noted spikes in religious-based discrimination complaints. Harassment due to religion is not only unethical but also harms business productivity. A McKinsey report highlighted that diverse teams outperform their counterparts by 35% in profitability. Employers must promote inclusivity through clear anti-discrimination policies and foster a culture of respect to ensure workplaces remain collaborative and respectful.²²³

It's important to recognise and respect the rights of religious minorities as guaranteed by the Constitution. This respect should be taught among family members from an early age.

3.5.3. Ethical and Moral Responsibilities:

In Islam, the values of peace, respect, tolerance, and justice are paramount, and these principles extend to the treatment of non-Muslims. The Quran and Hadith provide numerous instances emphasising the importance of just and kind treatment to everyone, regardless of their religious background. As followers of Islam, Muslim families have a responsibility to uphold these values, not just in words but in their daily interactions. Doing so ensures that non-Muslims' rights are preserved, any instances of alleged blasphemy are approached with utmost care and fairness, and that society, at large, remains harmonious. Embracing this approach would reflect the true spirit of Islam and its teachings on coexistence and mutual respect.

3.5.4. Civic Responsibility:

If families come across misuse of blasphemy laws, they have a civic responsibility to report these to relevant authorities. Families should actively participate in legal processes, including reporting violations, cooperating with investigations, and providing truthful testimonies if required.

3.5.5. Strengthening Family Values:

Encouraging critical thinking and questioning can ensure that family members don't accept societal prejudices at face value. Analytical skills can help them navigate the complexities of society more responsibly.

3.5.6. Education and Continuous Learning:

Beyond formal schooling, families should promote comprehensive education, including understanding diverse cultures, religions, and historical contexts.

²²³ P. Forum, "Global Restrictions on Religion," Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Washington, D.C, 2009.

With the proliferation of digital media, families have access to global perspectives. This can help family members understand and appreciate human rights standards and the importance of protecting minority rights.

3.5.7. Promoting Dialogue and Open Conversations:

Families can organise or participate in community events that unite people from various backgrounds. This exposure can dispel myths and foster mutual respect.

3.5.8. Active Civic Participation:

Community engagement is an effective way to foster understanding and tolerance among different religious groups. Families can gain firsthand knowledge and appreciation of other religions by actively participating in diverse community events or visiting places of worship other than their own. This not only deepens their understanding but also dispels myths and misconceptions. Such experiences can provide valuable life lessons, especially for children, teaching them the importance of coexistence, mutual respect, and unity in diversity. Moreover, when families are visibly involved in interfaith activities, it can inspire broader societal improvements by setting a positive example for others to follow.

Encouraging family members to be informed voters can lead to better governance and the rule of law. Families can support and advocate for legal and societal reforms that ensure justice, protect minority rights, and prevent the misuse of laws.

3.5.9. Leading by Example:

Elderly family members can lead by example, showing younger generations the importance of tolerance, respect, and fairness in their daily actions. Taking a public stance against intolerance, injustice, or the misuse of laws can set a powerful example for family members and the larger community.

3.5.10. Psychological Support:

Addressing emotional and mental well-being within the family can help individuals process societal challenges more healthily. Teaching conflict resolution within the family context can extend to broader societal interactions, reducing the chances of misunderstandings or conflicts based on religious or cultural differences.

3.6. Promoting Religious Harmony through Family Education:

Fostering Understanding and Tolerance on Macro and Micro Levels

3.6.1. Macro Level: Strengthening Societal Bonds through Family Education

At the macro level, families play a vital role in nurturing religious harmony, as they form the foundation of society. By introducing diverse

religious beliefs, engaging in interfaith dialogue, participating in cross-cultural events, and emphasising shared ethical values, families contribute to a more inclusive and tolerant society.

3.6.2. Micro Level: Nurturing Religious Harmony within the Family

At the micro level, individual families are crucial in cultivating religious harmony by fostering open communication, modelling tolerance, sharing interfaith experiences, teaching critical thinking, and imparting conflict resolution skills. These efforts within families shape individuals' perspectives and behaviours, leading to a more harmonious society.

3.6.3. Impact and Future Prospects:

Educating about religious harmony through family-centred approaches has a lasting impact. Individuals raised with these values are more likely to contribute positively to their communities and promote interfaith cooperation. Families collectively contribute to a society characterised by religious freedom, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence by fostering an environment of understanding, empathy, and respect.

3.7. Research Results Summary:

The Priyantha Kumara incident in Pakistan was a heart-rending episode that signified the multifaceted challenges presented by religious extremism, societal beliefs, and the ramifications of blasphemy laws in the region. This research aimed to delve into the incident's complexities, the nature of blasphemy across religions, and the roles various stakeholders, including the media, played in the incident's aftermath.

3.7.1. Background

Priyantha Kumara, a Sri Lankan individual, found himself tragically embroiled in an incident that was deemed a consequence of alleged blasphemy. The gravity of his case wasn't an isolated one. Pakistan has, over the years, witnessed a surge in blasphemy cases, which often have resulted in violence or extreme disciplinary measures.

3.7.2. Blasphemy in Islamic Context

The foremost finding of this research was the discernible gap between the fundamental teachings of Islam and the way blasphemy is perceived and reacted to by societies. At its core, Islam preaches peace, mutual respect, and understanding. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, whose life is considered a model for Muslims, often chose the path of forgiveness and compassion when faced with those who insulted or opposed him. This historical precedent starkly contrasts with the violence and uproar often seen in response to alleged blasphemy in contemporary times.

3.7.3. Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan

The blasphemy laws, as codified in the Pakistan Penal Code, emerged as contentious instruments prone to misuse. Introduced initially to maintain religious harmony, these laws have sometimes been exploited for personal vendettas, leading to innocent individuals being unfairly accused and punished. The case of Aasia Bibi, among others, stands as a testament to potential pitfalls in the legal and enforcement framework around blasphemy.

3.7.4. Societal Perception and Reaction

Societal reactions to the Priyantha Kumara incident were mixed. The majority condemned the act, signifying a growing awareness and understanding of the inappropriateness of such extreme reactions. However, a significant portion of society sought to justify the violence. This section of the populace typically bases its beliefs on misinterpreted religious doctrines influenced by inadequate religious education and emotionally charged narratives.

3.7.5. International Implications

The incident didn't go unnoticed on the global stage. International human rights organisations, foreign governments, and global media outlets expressed concerns over religious freedom and the rights of minorities in Pakistan. The incident, although tragic, spurred a global dialogue on the importance of religious tolerance, respect, and the role of state and legal apparatus in safeguarding individuals' rights.

3.7.6. Blasphemy Across Religions

Broadening the scope beyond Islam, the research investigated how blasphemy is perceived in other major religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism. Each religion's scriptures and doctrines revere the divine and caution against irreverence. However, none explicitly advocate for violent or extreme reprisals as a response to blasphemy. Instead, spiritual consequences, introspection, and seeking divine forgiveness are often emphasised.

3.7.7. The Media's Role

The media's influence in shaping public opinion cannot be understated. In the Priyantha Kumara incident, the media's role was ambivalent. While certain outlets took it upon themselves to provide objective reporting and underline the need for societal and legal reforms, others arguably exacerbated tensions. Sensationalism, a lack of context in reporting, and a propensity to cater to populist sentiments sometimes overshadowed the core message of peace and understanding that many sought to convey.

3.7.8. Concluding Insights

The Priyantha Kumara incident is a tale of one man's unfortunate fate and a symbolic representation of deeper societal issues. Whether real or

perceived, blasphemy becomes a tool for unleashing broader frustrations, biases, and misunderstandings. As dissected through this research, the incident underscores the urgent need for robust legal reforms, enhanced religious education, responsible journalism, and fostering a culture of dialogue and mutual respect.

The implications of this research are vast. Societies, especially those grappling with religious extremism, can draw insights to re-evaluate their legal structures, educational frameworks, and media practices. With the ever-growing importance of globalisation and intercultural interactions, understanding incidents like these becomes crucial for fostering a more inclusive, tolerant, and harmonious global community.

3.8. Recommendation

Following a comprehensive examination of the Priyantha Kumara incident and its broader implications, a set of informed recommendations is imperative. Addressing root causes and laying out a pathway for future conflict prevention can enhance societal harmony and ensure the protection of minorities and vulnerable groups:

3.8.1. Legal Reforms:

- **Review and Refine Blasphemy Laws:** Amend the Pakistan Penal Code to ensure that blasphemy laws cannot be misused for personal vendettas or to settle unrelated disputes.
- **Fair and Speedy Trials:** Ensure that individuals accused of blasphemy receive a fair trial without undue delay and that their rights are fully protected during legal proceedings.

3.8.2. Religious Education:

- **Curriculum Revision:** State institutions should work with religious scholars to design a curriculum that promotes religious tolerance, understanding, and the historical context of religious texts.
- **Highlight Compassion:** Emphasize instances from religious history, especially in Islamic teachings, where compassion and forgiveness were preferred over retaliation.

3.8.3. Media Sensitization:

- **Training Workshops:** Organize regular workshops for media professionals, focusing on responsible reporting, especially when covering religious and sensitive issues.
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Strengthen media oversight bodies to hold outlets accountable for sensationalism or misinformation.

3.8.4. Societal Interventions:

- **Community Dialogues:** Promote interfaith and intra-faith dialogues at the community level. Encourage religious leaders of all faiths to lead these initiatives.

- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch campaigns that highlight the values of tolerance, coexistence, and the dangers of religious extremism.

3.8.5. International Collaboration:

- **Shared Best Practices:** Engage in dialogues with countries that have successfully navigated religious tensions to understand and adopt best practices.
- **Support from International Bodies:** Seek guidance and support from international organisations, such as the UN, to formulate policies that promote religious freedom and protection of minorities.

3.8.6. Protection of Minorities:

- **Legislative Protections:** Enact and reinforce laws that protect minority rights, especially in contexts where they might be vulnerable to accusations of blasphemy.
- **Community Policing:** Promote community policing initiatives, where local police are trained and sensitised to the unique challenges faced by minority groups.

3.8.7. Counter-Narrative Development:

- **Collaboration with Religious Leaders:** Engage with religious leaders to develop and promote counter-narratives to extremist ideologies.
- **Digital Engagement:** Utilize digital platforms, like social media, to disseminate messages of peace, unity, and mutual respect.

3.8.8. Psychological and Societal Rehabilitation:

- **Support for Victims:** Establish rehabilitation and support centres for victims of religious violence and their families.
- **Community Healing Initiatives:** Organize community events that foster unity, healing, and reconciliation after incidents of religious violence.

3.8.9. Encouraging Art and Culture:

- **Promote Tolerance through Arts:** Encourage arts, theatre, and literature that underscore themes of religious harmony and the shared values among different faiths.
- **Cultural Exchange Programs:** Facilitate programs where individuals from diverse backgrounds can share and learn from each other's cultural and religious practices.

In conclusion, the tragic incident involving Priyantha Kumara serves as a poignant reminder of the potential consequences of unchecked religious extremism. When holistically applied, the above recommendations can be instrumental in creating a society where religious tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect are the bedrock principles.

3.9. Future Avenues of Research:

While our analysis of the Priyantha Kumara incident provides valuable insights, numerous uncharted research avenues warrant exploration. These areas deepen our understanding of religious polarisation and offer potential solutions to its challenges. Some of the promising areas for future research include:

1. Investigate social media's influence on extremism, misinformation, and public opinion in the light of algorithms and the echo chamber's contribution to the spread of extremism.
2. Compare blasphemy laws globally, examining their origins, implementation, and cultural aspects.
3. Explore psychological factors driving extremism in the religious domain, including identity and reasoning biases.
4. Examine historical influences on present religious polarisation and extremism.
5. Assess potential international collaboration against religious polarisation and extremism.

By focusing on these avenues of research, scholars, policymakers, and activists can continue to deepen their understanding of religious polarisation, its underlying factors, and practical strategies to promote tolerance, compassion, and peace within diverse societies.

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