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State-Sanctioned Hostility: The Instrumentalization of Mass Emotion Through Pakistan's Anti-Blasphemy Laws and its Impact on Christian Minorities

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Abstract

Mass emotion plays a pivotal role in Pakistan's socio-political landscape, often acting as a catalyst for mass violence, particularly against minority communities. Negative mass emotion legitimizes sub-state violence and fosters a 'herd mentality', which perpetuates an 'us versus them' paradigm. This dynamic has had dire consequences for Pakistan's Christian minority, who have repeatedly been the targets of state-sanctioned hostility. This paper explores the origins of mass emotion that incites violence against minorities, especially Christians, within the context of Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws. It illuminates how mass emotion incites violence against minorities, particularly Christians, in the context of Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws. The case of Asia Bibi serves as an example of how these laws, manipulated by the state, can arouse mass emotion and incite violence. Furthermore, this paper examines how the Pakistan Supreme Court's discourse during Asia Bibi's trial attempted to mitigate mass emotion by invoking ethical principles derived from the Prophet Muhammad's teachings on the treatment of Christians.

Keywords: Pakistan, mass emotion, Asia Bibi, religious minorities, Christians



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Introduction

The acquittal of Asia Bibi and the restoration of her rights as a citizen by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in January 2019 has been celebrated as a victory for justice in 'Naya (New) Pakistan'. Asia Bibi was an innocent woman who was imprisoned for nearly a decade for unproven blasphemy charges due to the hysteria fuelled by mass emotion exacerbated by the majority Sunni Muslims. Her case underscores a disturbing reality: an innocent woman imprisoned for years on unproven blasphemy charges. This case exemplifies how mass emotion can be mobilized to fuel injustice in Pakistani society, particularly through the application of anti-blasphemy laws. These laws serve as a legal tool to reinforce the hegemony of an 'Islamic' state, perpetuating the systematic othering of religious minority communities by fostering an 'in-group versus out-group' mentality.

This article argues that by embedding anti-blasphemy laws within Pakistan's legal framework, the state has facilitated the erosion of rights for citizens belonging to minority religions. The manipulation of these laws by elites to uphold the dominance of Sunni Islam in Pakistan has not only deepened societal intolerance but also sanctioned the marginalization of religious minorities. This manipulation stirs mass emotion, resulting in a false sense of supremacy and authority among the Sunni majority. The case of Asia Bibi effectively illustrates how the state both perpetuates and seeks to mitigate abuse against minorities under the guise of defending a majority religious ideal.

In the context of this case, mass emotion can be described as the incitement of widespread and intense sentiment within one populace which is directed at other marginalized groups and becomes a significant driver of violence (Loanide, 2015). This concept, first theorized by Sigmund Freud and later expanded upon by scholars such as Collins (2008), Malesevic (2010), Ray (2011) and Žižek (2008), posits that extreme emotional energy, tension, or fear can lead to violence. In

Pakistan, the state has exploits mass emotion to legitimize the ostracism of those outside the majority religious framework, using anti-blasphemy laws as a legal mechanism of othering.

The article explores the origins of the mass emotion that incites violence against minorities, especially Christians, within the context of Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws. By examining the Asia Bibi case, this study aims to understand how mass emotion is manipulated to incite violence and how Pakistan's legal framework, particularly anti-blasphemy laws, plays a pivotal role in this process. Furthermore, the article analyses how the Pakistan Supreme Court attempted to quell the mass emotion surrounding the Asia Bibi trial by referencing the ethical principles set forth by the Prophet Muhammad.

Literature Review: Mass Emotion and Violence

It is important to delineate 'mass emotion' from the term 'moral panic'. Mass emotion is a collective emotional response shared by a large group of people, whereas moral panic ensues when there is a heightened fear or anxiety. The key difference between the two concepts stems from their specificity. While mass emotion is a broader collective emotional response, moral panic is generally case specific (Katz, 2001; Cohen, 1972). In this article, the term mass emotion is used to describe the collective expression of intense negative emotions by large groups, shaping and influencing social behaviour, including the use of violence. Stéphanie Tawa, Lama-Rewal and Amélie Blom's (2021) work provides an in-depth exploration of how mass emotions are intricately tied to political mobilization and violence in South Asia. Their analysis reveals how emotions are not only spontaneous responses but are often systematically generated, sustained, and manipulated by political actors to mobilize communities, leading to both social cohesion and violent conflict.

The study of mass emotion has its roots in early psychological theories, particularly those developed by Sigmund Freud (1975) and

Gustave Le Bon (1974). Both Freud and Le Bon explore how individuals within a group lose their personal identity and moral judgment, leading to a shared emotional experience that overrides individual reasoning. Freud posits that within a group, the Ego becomes submerged in the collective, making individuals more susceptible to suggestion and less capable of critical thought. This dynamic creates a fertile ground for the manipulation of emotions, which can easily escalate into violence, especially when directed at an external enemy or perceived 'other' (Freud, 1975). Furthermore, Le Bon explores how mass emotions can lead to irrational and violent behaviour. He argues that individuals in a crowd undergo a psychological transformation, wherein they lose their sense of self and become part of a 'collective mind'. This collective mind is highly suggestible and easily influenced by leaders or agitators, who can channel mass emotions such as fear, anger, or enthusiasm toward violent ends. Le Bon's work is particularly relevant in understanding how mass emotions can be mobilized in political contexts to incite violence, as seen in revolutions, riots, and other forms of collective unrest.

From a sociological perspective, mass emotion is often analysed in terms of its capacity to fuel collective violence. Randall Collins (2009) offers a nuanced understanding of how violence emerges from social interactions. Introducing the concept of 'emotional energy', a form of emotional intensity that builds up in social encounters (Collins, 2009). This emotional energy can reach a tipping point, especially in high-tension situations, leading to violent outbursts. Collins' theory emphasizes the role of 'emotional entrainment', where individuals within a group synchronize their emotions, creating a feedback loop that amplifies the potential for violence. This framework is effective in explaining the mobilisation of mass emotion.

Furthermore, Sinisa Malesevic (2010) argues, that institutions and ideologies, such as nationalism or religious fundamentalism, often manipulate mass emotions to legitimize violence. He posits that these ideologies provide a framework that justifies the use of violence by

appealing to collective emotions like fear, anger, or a sense of injustice. This manipulation of mass emotion is particularly evident in contexts of ethnic conflict, where violence against minority groups is framed as a defense of national or religious identity. Malesevic's analysis is crucial for understanding how state and non-state actors exploit mass emotion as a tool for legitimizing violence, particularly in conflicts where the lines between civilian and combatant are blurred.

The interplay between mass emotion and political violence is a central theme in the work of Slavoj Žižek (2008). Žižek distinguishes between subjective violence (direct physical violence) and objective violence (violence embedded in social structures and ideologies). He argues that mass emotions, particularly fear and anger, are often harnessed by political leaders to justify both forms of violence. Žižek's analysis highlights the cyclical nature of violence and mass emotion, where each feeds into the other, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of conflict. This dynamic is evident in situations where populist leaders exploit mass emotions to consolidate power, often by scapegoating marginalized groups and inciting violence against them.

Arjun Appadurai (2006) provides a critical perspective on how mass emotions like fear and resentment are manipulated in the context of globalization and economic insecurity. Appadurai argues that in a globalized world, the economic and social anxieties of the majority can be projected onto minority groups, leading to mass violence. He introduces the concept of the 'fear of small numbers', where the perceived threat of minority groups is magnified by mass emotions, leading to disproportionate and often violent responses. Appadurai's work is particularly relevant in understanding how economic and cultural insecurities can be exploited to mobilize mass emotions against vulnerable populations, resulting in ethnic cleansing, pogroms, or other forms of collective violence.

Contemporary scholarship continues to explore the dynamics of mass emotion in the context of modern conflicts and social movements. Paula Ioanide (2015) examines how racialized mass emotions, such as fear and anger, are manipulated in the United States (US) to sustain systems of racial violence and inequality. Ioanide argues that mass emotions are not only reactions to social conditions but are also actively shaped by political rhetoric and media representation. Her work is critical in understanding how emotions like fear of the "other" are cultivated and weaponized to maintain systemic oppression and justify acts of violence against marginalized communities.

James Waller (2007) explores how mass emotions are systematically cultivated by regimes to incite ordinary citizens to participate in acts of extreme violence. Waller discusses the psychological mechanisms that allow individuals to engage in genocidal violence, including the dehumanization of victims and the social pressures to conform to group norms. He argues that mass emotions, particularly hatred and fear, are deliberately cultivated by those in power to facilitate the participation of the populace in acts of genocide and mass killing. Waller's work provides a comprehensive understanding of how mass emotion is transformed into a powerful motivator for collective violence, particularly in contexts of ethnic or religious conflict.

This article seeks to draw on the existing scholarship while presenting a new focus of inquiry which addresses the root problem of religious violence in Pakistan through a social rather than political lens. By exploring the role of mass emotion and its impact on state sanctioned violence, this paper presents a novel understanding of how violence is perpetuated and manipulated by the State.

Asia Bibi

The case of Asia Bibi case became a focal point of attention for both Pakistan and the international community with regards to the protection

of minority rights in Pakistan and how the anti-blasphemy laws are used as a means to preserve the religious status quo. Aasiya Noreen, known as Asia Bibi is a Christian woman from a small rural village in the Sheikupura District of Punjab, Pakistan (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018). She was accused of blasphemy in 2009, a crime which under Pakistan's Penal Code (PPC) carries the death penalty (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 35). Asia Bibi was not formally charged until she was sentenced to death by the verdict of a trial court in 2010, the sentence later upheld by the Lahore High Court in 2014 (Dawn, 2016). Asia Bibi languished behind bars for nearly a decade before her acquittal in early 2019 after her case was heard by Pakistan's Supreme Court.

Facts of the Case

The basic premise of the prosecution case was that Asia Bibi drank water from a cup she was forbidden to use as a Christian and that she committed blasphemy in the subsequent altercation (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 35). Asia Bibi had been harvesting berries with other female farmhands in June 2009 in a village field in Sheikupura, when she was asked to fetch some water from a nearby well (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 35). She complied, but upon her return, she stopped to take a few sips of water from a metal cup which she found next to the well. Musrat, a neighbour of Asia's who had previously been embroiled in a feud with Asia's family regarding damage to property, saw Asia drinking and angrily berated her. Because Asia was a Christian, she was prohibited from drinking from the same utensils as Muslims; some workers also considered her to be 'unclean because of her religious identity.' (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 15).

The Supreme Court established at the time of the incident, Asia actually responded with words to the effect that, "I believe in my religion and Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the sins of mankind. What did Prophet Muhammad ever do to save mankind? And why should it be me

that converts instead of you?” (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018). Hearing this statement, an argument erupted between Asia and the villagers. Five days later, a mob of villagers raided Asia’s house and beat her and members of her family, before the police intervened. The police initiated an investigation about her alleged remarks. This culminated in her arrest under Section 295-C of the PPC (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 35).

At the initial trial, a local police officer, Muhammad Ilyas, gave evidence to the effect that Asia had stated, “that the Quran was fake and that the Prophet remained in bed for one month before his death because he had worms in his ears and mouth. He only married Khadija because of money and after looting her kicked her out of the house.” (BBC News, 2011). The villagers at this point believed the blasphemy allegation against Asia Bibi and went to the local mosque where they told Imam Qari Muhammad Saleem about Asia’s conduct, and alleged blasphemy. Qari Saleem, later claimed in the trial that Asia had confessed to him and had later apologized for her comments about the Prophet (Sayah & Habib, 2010). Nonetheless, the Asian Human Rights Commission published a letter on the incident claiming that;

Five days after the incident, a local Muslim leader, Qari Salem, jumped into the matter and pressured some people in the area to claim that she committed blasphemy. When finding no way to get Ms. Bibi to confess, Salem used the loudspeakers of the mosque, as other Muslim leaders usually do in the cases of alleged blasphemy acts, to spread the news of blasphemy and instigate the people of the locality to punish the alleged blasphemer. The people of the locality beat her severely in the presence of her children (Asian Human Rights Commission, 2010).

On the basis of these claims, Asia Bibi was imprisoned for over a year in 2009, before being formally convicted the following year. The punitive measures taken against Asia Bibi were harsh and not based in

factual or legal grounding. The court showed little sympathy to her during initial proceedings due to an eruption of mass emotion. However, this hyperactive mass emotion was stymied by the Supreme Court of Pakistan's verdict and its reference to the Covenants of the Prophet. In the final decision of the Asia Bibi case the Supreme Court of Pakistan acknowledged, "Islam as stipulated in the Holy Book (*Quran*) teaches us, amongst many other virtues, to live in peace and harmony, with compassion and love to our other fellow human beings" (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 14). John Andrew Morrow's (2013) ground-breaking book on the Covenants between Prophet Muhammad and the Christian community of his time became a central piece of literature in the case referenced by Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa. By imploring for interfaith harmony, the Supreme Court's decision allowed for a de-escalation of mass emotion to happen in an organic way. Despite this the fact that minorities, especially Christians, have endured state sanctioned abuse in Pakistan for decades and that this remains a key issue of concern for the political stability of the state.

Secondary Status of the Christian Minority in Pakistan

Even though the founding father of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), advocated for minority inclusion into the political and social realms of society, minorities in Pakistan have always held a secondary status. In his address to the Constituent Assembly in 1947, Jinnah stated that, "you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed, that has nothing to do with the business of the State" (in Gulam, 1969). In theory, as well as idealistically, minorities in Pakistan were thereby afforded the same rights and privileges as any other citizen, but with the passage of time, these rights started to deteriorate as growing intolerance and sectarianism started to take root in Pakistani society.

Christians make up one of the two largest minority populations in Pakistan after Hindus. Christians account for 1.59 percent of the population amounting to approximately 2.5 million people. (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The history of Christian persecution by the Pakistani state can be traced back to the early 1980s, when tensions started to fester between the majority Sunni Muslims and the comparatively weaker Christian minority. The deliberate exclusion of the Christian community in Pakistan from political and civilian life was a result of increased Islamization of the state and its homogenisation into a dominant Sunni Muslim society (Khan, 2018). Pamela Constable (2015) relates these violent outbursts against the Christian population to a range of factors, including the Soviet War in Afghanistan, the rise of General Zia ul Haq's military dictatorship in Pakistan (1943-1988), and the influence of a stricter more conservative brand of Islam which was being promoted by incoming funding from the Gulf states.

Furthermore, the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001 led to a rapid deterioration in relations between Christians and the Sunni Muslim majority of Pakistan quite rapidly. The majority of Pakistanis saw the US response to the attacks as a deliberate foreign plot to defame and derail their faith. (Constable, 2015). In order to protect and preserve their faith from unwanted and unwarranted external backlash, the conservative Sunni populace of Pakistan came together behind the façade of unity to alleviate ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic divisions in society by ostracising minority members of the community.

With the steady rise of intolerance of the West from the majority of Sunni Muslim Pakistanis, Pakistani Christians came to feel fearful and threatened. Their fear stemmed from the draconian anti-blasphemy laws entrenched into the PPC. The PPC is the apex body of criminal law for the state. It came into effect in 1947, and, through subsequent amendments by several different governments, is now a combination of various elements of Islamic and common law (Haider, 2017). Under Chapter XV (Of

Offences Relating to Religion), section 295C (Use of Derogatory Remarks in Respect of the Holy Prophet) of the PPC states that,

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 (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine (Pakistan Penal Code S295-C).

The punitive measures under this section of the PPC are among the PCC's harshest penalties and have been frequently used in the criminal convictions of minorities accused of blasphemy in the state.

Blasphemy in Pakistan (Legal Framework)

An argument can be made that since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, due to its periodic dabbling, and failure with democracy, there has been an intensifying of the orthodox religious elements in the state (Rumi, 2016). The state itself has become confused as to the nature of its political identity, as to whether it is an Islamic state as espoused by its name or a secular democratic state as anticipated by its founding fathers. In the haze of such confusion, the dominant Sunni paradigm of Islam has been intertwined with the social and political fabric of Pakistan since the military dictatorship of Zia ul Haq. During his dictatorship, Zia used both legal writ and political will, to inculcate Islam as the state religion, instituting a strict, orthodox version of Sunni Islam within Pakistan's social and political structures (Hussain, 2010). Osama Siddiqui (2011) argues that the the blasphemy laws in question were also introduced by Zia for reasons of personal preservation, "under the veneer of pseudo-Islamization" (Siddique, 2011).

The legal and societal changes invoked by Zia led Pakistan down a perilous path of social and political stagnation (Mehdi, 1994). An ethos of orthodox Islam penetrated the state's social framework and Islam was invoked to spread discord amongst society under the justification of state unity. Thus, the Islamization of state policies and the legal structures gave rise to the anti-blasphemy laws. Although, Zia was not the stalwart for the inculcation of the anti-blasphemy laws in Pakistan, as they were an inheritance of the colonial period, Zia's regime did nonetheless solidify them into the legal and political structures of the state. Initially, theorised to 'protect' religion from blasphemy, the political climate of Pakistan with its reliance on the Constitution has tended to veer towards the use of anti-blasphemy provisions to alienate the minority community, especially Christians from mainstream political and social life in Pakistan.

The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan explicitly holds under Article 2 that Islam is to be the official state religion of Pakistan. Therefore, the primacy of Islam is embedded within the Pakistani state's paramount legal document. Furthermore, Article 31 of the Constitution holds the 'Islamic Way of Life' as a fundamental right and principle of policy, asserting under subsection 1 that,

Steps shall be taken to enable the Muslims of Pakistan, individually and collectively, to order their lives in accordance with the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam and to provide facilities whereby they may be enabled to understand the meaning of life according to the Holy Quran and Sunnah (Pakistan Constitution, Article 31).

And under subsection 2 that,

The state shall endeavour, as respects the Muslims of Pakistan:

- (a) to make the teaching of the Holy Quran and Islamiat compulsory, to encourage and facilitate the learning of Arabic language and to secure correct and exact printing and publishing of the Holy Quran;
- (b) to promote unity and the observance of the Islamic moral standards; and
- (c) to secure the proper organisation of zakat, ushr, auqaf and mosques.

It is this document which has become the status quo for the majority of Pakistanis, leaving the state's minority populations in a situation of social vulnerability and political flux. Due to the sanctification of Islam in the Constitution, the PPC also enshrines the primacy of Islam, with several sections codifying anti-blasphemy principles within them. The PPC is the main judicial criminal law body of the state and it prohibits blasphemy against any recognised religion (Pakistan Penal Code, Chapter XV). The overtly punitive anti-blasphemy laws have become a mechanism of state power to discriminate against its minority religious communities. During the process of politicising Islam from the late 1970s into the 1980s, three ordinances were implemented in Pakistan, as an addition to the PPC (XLV of 1860). These ordinances were initiated for the purposes of providing a penalty for the criminal offence of making derogatory remarks about Prophet Muhammad, his family, and the Quran (Mehdi, 1994).

The first addition, made in 1980, stipulates that,

Whoever by words either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by imputation, innuendo or insinuation, or directly or indirectly defiles the sacred name of any wife, or members of the family of the Holy Prophet, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, or with a fine, or both (Pakistan Penal Code, s298A).

The second ordinance, made in 1982, asserts,

Whoever wilfully defiles, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Quran or an extract therefrom or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable with imprisonment for life (Pakistan Penal Code, s295B).

The third ordinance addresses derogatory remarks against Prophet Muhammad, stating that,

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 (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life and shall also be liable to fine (Pakistan Penal Code, s295C).

The above sections have all been used in some way to assert the primacy of Islam and to marginalise the minority communities of Pakistan, such as Christians and Ahmadis (Julius, 2016). Therefore, the legal framework which protects Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws not only provides a legal justification for violence, but is also used and manipulated to delegitimise

the rights and liberties of the minority population of Pakistan. The legal framework of the anti-blasphemy laws unfairly sets up minorities to be easily accused of blasphemy, yet does not provide any legal protection for them. This was highlighted in the Supreme Court's judgement on the Asia Bibi case, in which Chief Justice Khosa relied upon the Covenants of the Prophet to allay mass emotion.

Legal Judgement of Asia Bibi Case and its Reference to The Covenants of the Prophet

In its decision to acquit Asia Bibi of all charges of blasphemy, the Supreme Court upheld and paid respect to the promissory commitment of Prophet Muhammad in his relations and Covenants with Christians. Part of the judgment from the bench reads:

I will end this Judgement on a Hadith of our beloved Prophet, Muhammad; "Beware! Whoever is cruel and hard on a non-Muslim minority, or curtails their rights, or burdens them with more than they can bear, or takes anything from them against their free will; I (Prophet Muhammad) will complain against the person on the Day of Judgment" (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 56).

The Covenants were a set of treaties and documents that Prophet Muhammad had made with the Christian community. The treaties set out the moral codes of behaviour and ethics of how Muslims should conduct themselves with people of differing faiths (Wakil, 2016). Morrow's (2013) nuanced work deciphers the position of the Prophet in determining the behaviour and conduct of Muslims in relations to their Christian brothers and sisters. The Najran Covenant, one of the primary sources analysed by Morrow, stresses alongside other treaties, the theme of protection of Christians by Muslims. Wakil (2016), in his analysis of the Covenants, stipulates that the covenants seek to address that:

1. The Muslims would protect the churches and monasteries of the Christians. They would not demolish any church property either to build mosques or to build houses for the Muslims;
2. All ecclesiastical property of the Christians would be exempt from every tax;
3. No ecclesiastical authority would ever be forced by the Muslims to abandon his post;
4. No Christian would ever be forced by the Muslims to become a convert to Islam;
5. If a Christian woman married a Muslim, she would have full freedom to follow her own religion.

In his judgement, in the Asia Bibi case, Chief Justice Khosa asserted that, by acknowledging the Treaties of the Prophet, if anyone had gone against the teachings of the Holy Prophet in this case, it was those witnesses who had lied about the words and actions of Asia Bibi. He held that,

In view of the glaring contradictions in the evidence produced by the prosecution it has appeared to me to be equally plausible that due to the quarrel taking place between the appellant and her Muslim co-workers at the spot without any offending word having been uttered by the appellant the quarrel was reported by the Muslim ladies to others who then, after deliberating over the matter for five long days, had decided to go after the appellant with a false allegation regarding commission of blasphemy. If that were so then the Muslim witnesses in this case had violated a covenant of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) with those professing the Christian faith (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 54).

With this statement, Chief Justice Khosa acknowledged the mass emotion of the public and disabled it by invoking the same mechanism against the witnesses in the case against Asia Bibi.

Chief Justice Khosa went further indicating that the ethos of Islamic ‘dignity and morality’ as advocated by the Prophet in his commitment of friendship towards Christians had not been followed by the witnesses in this case:

It is unfortunate that while utilizing the sacred concept of *Namoos-e-Risalat* (honour and dignity of Prophethood) the ... promise made by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) to those professing the Christian faith had not been adhered to by his followers in the present case (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 55).

In fact, Chief Justice Khosa turned the accusation of blasphemy towards the accusers of Asia Bibi:

Blasphemy is a serious offence but the insult of the appellant’s religion and religious sensibilities by the complainant party and then mixing truth with falsehood in the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) was also not short of being blasphemous (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 55).

Nonetheless, although concerted effort was made by the Supreme Court to address the mass emotion, the fact remains that minorities, especially Christians, have long been the bearers of state sanctioned abuse in Pakistan.

Discussion and Analysis

Negative mass emotion can engulf a society reducing its capacity to think of and perceive events in a rational and or logical manner. The display of exaggerated emotion can cause detrimental effects when undertaken by a large group of people for a cause for concern in which they have implicit faith and belief. The anti-blasphemy measures in Pakistan often arouse such sentiments within the country's majority Sunni populace. The rhetoric surrounding these laws stems from the preservation and sanctification of religion, and this ideal has been used and abused by both the state and individuals. The need to preserve religious primacy arises from the intrinsic need for self-preservation and security. The masses of Pakistan's Sunni majority hold on to religion as a means of self-preservation. Despite being a majority, they still subconsciously appeal to, believe in, and promote the notion that they are a threatened minority. They liken themselves to a secondary status as was their 'norm' and considered role in pre-partition India. Therefore, to hold on to a 'false' sense of superiority in Pakistan, the masses prioritise the known. In such a situation society tends to adopt an 'us' versus 'them' paradigm. It is this mentality that allows not only for an ignorance of, but also an arrogance towards, those deemed to be outside of the majority.

The literature developed on mass emotion and violence makes reference to how people tend to conclave amongst the known and accepted majority to ostracise and scapegoat those who do not fit into the dominant category (Wilson, 2015). Christians have become 'othered' from the overtly Sunni Muslim majority of Pakistan. Therefore, to maintain a perceived sense of superiority, the majority of Sunni Muslims have coalesced against Christians. As Christians exist outside the framework of the majority in Pakistan, their marginalisation and sometimes violent persecution reinforces the primacy of the dominant Sunni Muslim society (Khan, 2018). Christians are not the only minority community to be impacted and ostracised by mass emotion in Pakistan, the Sunni status quo asserts its violent hegemony on other minority sects as well regardless

of their adherence to Islam. The 2017 lynching of Mashal Khan, a Muslim student who was killed by an angry mob for allegedly posting blasphemous material online, is a prominent example of this (Sarmad, 2017). In other words, violence fuelled by mass emotion has long been a staple of societal grievance in Pakistan, irrespective of the target group.

In recent years, 'mob rule' has become the staple of Pakistani societal violence, as it is through the 'mob' that violence is legitimised and carried out. Nonetheless, the mass emotion involved around Christians regarding the issue of blasphemy implicates not only society but Pakistan's political structure as well. By not addressing the anti-blasphemy laws, despite court cases being dismissed on the basis of unsubstantiated evidence, the government of Pakistan has adversely implicated the state with the mob in extra judicial killings and entrenched religious violence. The cause of this violence can be linked to the advancement and protection of a specific 'sect' of Islam over all others. The state and society at large, have turned towards a reactive rather than a proactive understanding of the Quran and Islam as a whole (Jalal, 1995). By oscillating between meagre understanding and actual directive, particular verses from the text of the Quran have been manipulated to fit according to a precise and specific understanding. Blasphemy in this context is alleged against any person who goes against the dominantly perceived notion of religious doctrine.

The case of Asia Bibi, alongside blasphemy accusations in Pakistan more generally, is a stark reminder of how mass emotion can overturn reality, so much so, that an innocent life is adversely impacted. The mass emotion invoked in this case is an issue of special concern. Here an initial rise of individual indignation during an interaction between Asia Bibi and her neighbour ultimately led to a charge of blasphemy as well as libel against Asia Bibi (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 12). The spreading of the news of this event and the allegation of defamation of the Prophet then led to the rise of mass emotion. In a country such as Pakistan, where the tenets of Sunni Islam are considered sacrosanct, the mind-set of the

majority tends to rest on the perception of a moral superiority of those who 'follow' the paradigm of state religion. Therefore, blasphemy, in this context is seen by the 'religiously abiding' majority not only as a crime, but a grave sin, one that is punishable by death.

The punitive measures inserted into the PPC were a result of the implementation during the 1970s and 1980s of preserving and revering (Sunni) Islam over all other practiced religions within Pakistan. In relation to the creation of the mass emotion, Urdu media fanned hate and othering. As Ed Hussain (2011) states, "they used the Asia Bibi case as a national symbol of defiance and assertion of Muslim supremacy over 'the other'". Furthermore, the blatant disregard for the facts in the initial hearing of the case and the vilification of Asia Bibi on the basis of being a Christian, shed light on the issue of how mass emotion can be activated to create difference and othering in society.

In the legal judgement of the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Khosa expressed concern about the othering of a minority community based on manipulation of the anti-blasphemy laws. He asserted that,

... [No] one should be allowed to defy the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and be left unpunished, but there is another aspect of the matter; sometimes, to fulfil nefarious designs the law is misused by individuals levelling false allegations of blasphemy. Since 1990, 62 people have been murdered as a result of blasphemy allegations, even before their trial could be conducted in accordance with law. Even prominent figures, who stressed the fact that the blasphemy laws have been misused by some individuals, met with serious repercussions... (Mst. Asia Bibi v The State, 2018, 56).

The judgement also illuminated the issue of mass emotion in the context of the role of Islam and religious othering. The legal maxim '*lex injusta non est lex*' ('unjust law is not law') sets out an example of how to treat the law

of blasphemy in Pakistan. Although, the judgement of Chief Justice Khosa does not explicitly assert that the laws are ‘unjust’, his verdict does admonish the application of these laws. Administering a legal framework based on the explicit primacy of one religion over others paves the way for negation and othering within the broader community.

The criminal justice system in Pakistan works under the presumption of innocence principle. The case of Asia Bibi stands as a clear abdication of it. It is an example of the abuse of Christian minority rights by the criminal justice system. Perhaps this particularly heinous situation partly as a result of the timing of the events and the fact that Asia Bibi was a Christian. During the early years of the twenty-first century, the 11 September 2001 attacks altered Pakistan’s global public image to one that exuded a staunch stance against terrorism (Nasr & Shahbaz, 2015). However, the fragile internal political situation soon became a reason for shared dissatisfaction against the West. The majority of conservative Sunnis believed that support of the West against terrorism meant an internal weakening of Islam (Abbas, 2017). Therefore, attempts made by the state in order to stamp out terrorism only fuelled the public disquiet of the Sunni masses against the West. The paranoia of anti-Americanism, fuelled by mass emotion to preserve the Islamic faith from any internal or external threats, was at the forefront of both the social and political psyche of the state during that time. In such a tense political environment then, a slight misdemeanour snowballed into an allegation of blasphemy and imposition of a death penalty against an innocent woman for merely taking a sip of water.

The arousal of mass emotion to ‘safeguard’ the religion of the state and vilify members of a minority community represents the extent of how an ‘unjust’ mechanism of law can propagate not only social control but exclusion and othering as well in society. The Asia Bibi’s and other prior cases exemplify this principle. Pakistan’s anti-blasphemy laws therefore are not just dogmatic legislation but have also been the purveyors of mass emotion in society. Advancing an ‘unjust’ legal mechanism under the

façade of preserving religious sanctification provides a weapon for the more extremist elements of society, who use mass emotion to garner legitimacy for acts of violence.

Conclusion

This paper addresses the reasons why mass emotion has been incited in Pakistan around the issue of blasphemy. The Pakistani Constitution and the PPC provides legal mechanisms to invoke the anti-blasphemy laws to incite othering and violence against minority religious communities. As highlighted by the Asia Bibi case, these laws have been abused by the country's dominant Sunni majority against other religious minorities of the state. The issue of mass emotion and blasphemy go hand in hand in a country such as Pakistan, as it is the overt irrationality of religious supremacy which fosters a paradigm of othering within society.

Analysis of the Asia Bibi case shows that the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan creates mass emotion and obsession because of the primacy placed on Islam as a state religion and also the dominance of (Sunni) Muslims over other religions. This superiority fosters a mentality of othering so as to maintain and preserve a religious status quo. Due to the fact, that Pakistan was conceived as a homeland for Muslims, the primacy of Sunni Islam (and its maintenance) is considered to be at the very heart of nationalistic pride in Pakistan. Negation of the other becomes a way in which to not only maintain but safeguard authority for the Sunni Muslim. The Asia Bibi case stands as primary example of this issue in modern day Pakistan. On a more positive note, however, with the final verdict on the Asia Bibi case, Chief Justice Khosa did try to defuse the negative atmosphere through a discussion of, and reliance on, the Covenants of the Prophet. However, as long as the Pakistani mind-set is reliant upon a doctrine of religious supremacy, minority communities within Pakistan will suffer disproportionately due to the state's anti-blasphemy laws.

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Annexures

Table 1 lists the sections of the Penal Code which have codified blasphemy as a legal doctrine.

Table 1:

Pakistan Penal Code	Description	Penalty
Section 295	Injuring or defiling places of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class	Up to 2 years imprisonment or fine, or both
Section 295A	Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.	Up to 10 years imprisonment, or fine, or both
Section 295B	Defiling of Quran.	Imprisonment for life
Section 295C	Use of derogatory remarks, spoken, written, directly or indirectly, etc. defiles the name of Muhammad or other Prophet(s).	Mandatory Death and fine Trial must take place in a Court of Session with a Muslim judge presiding.

Section 298	Uttering of any word or making any sound or making any gesture or placing of any object in the sight with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person.	1 year imprisonment, or fine, or both
Section 298A	Use of derogatory remarks etc., in respect of holy personages.	3 years imprisonment, or fine, or both
Section 298B	(Ahmadi blasphemy law) Misuse of epithets, descriptions and titles etc., reserved for certain holy personages or places, by Ahmadi's.	3 years imprisonment and fine
Section 298C	(Ahmadi blasphemy law) or Ordinance XX, If a Muslim, or preaching or propagating his faith, or "in any manner whatsoever" outraging the religious feelings of Muslims, or posing himself as a Muslim.	3 years imprisonment and fine