

Blasphemy and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw)

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The issue of blasphemy is a hot issue that remains in news particularly in Pakistan. In 2010, a Christian woman Asia Bibi, who was charged with blasphemy in Pakistan, made the international headlines. But charging Asia Bibi under the blasphemy law did not apparently quench the radical thirst of the clerics of Pakistan. A Muslim cleric offered \$6,000 to a person who would kill Asia Bibi. Tragically, the late governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, who visited Asia Bibi in prison, was later gunned down by his own security guard, Mumtaz Qadri. Salman Taseer's crime was to speak up for the victims of blasphemy law. The insanity continued unabated when after few weeks of the murder of Salman Taseer, a Catholic and Minister for minorities, , Shahbaz Bhatti, was assassinated allegedly over his stance on blasphemy laws. The issue of blasphemy has once again reared its ugly head: the death penalty imposed by anti-terrorism court against Mumtaz Qadri, the murderer of Salman Taseer, has been reversed.

The issue of blasphemy is not a new phenomenon. The instances of blasphemy are found throughout recorded human history. The Holy Quran, for example, points out very clearly that all the prophets and messengers of God were persecuted, harmed, abused and mocked, not only during their life time but also after their demise. *“Alas for My servants! There comes not a Messenger to them but they mock at him.” (36:31) “Then We sent Our Messengers one after another. Every time there came to a people their Messenger, they treated him as a liar.” (23:45)* Noah, Abraham, Lot, Saleh, Shuaib, Moses and Jesus, peace be on them all, just to name a few, were all mocked and blasphemed by their enemies and opponents.

Questions naturally arise: How did Prophets react to blasphemy? Did they ever punish the blasphemers? What was the end of those mockers and blasphemers?

The Holy Quran clearly speaks about the treatment of those mockers and enemies of God's prophets; *“And surely, Messengers have been mocked at before thee; but I granted respite to those who disbelieved. Then I seized them, and how was then My punishment!” (13:23) “And Messengers indeed have been rejected before thee; but notwithstanding their rejection and persecution they remained patient until Our help came to them. There is none that can change the words of Allah.” (6:35)*

These verses make it abundantly clear and manifest that all the messengers observed extreme patience whenever they were blasphemed and they never tried to punish or respond to those blasphemers violently. All those mockers, blasphemers and enemies faced deadly consequences. Another common element in their stories is that all the enemies were punished by God, and this is one supreme reality that can never change; *“There is none that can change the words of Allah” (6:35).*

Alas! This blasphemy did not stop even at the time when the sun of eternal truth rose over the skies of the Arab peninsula and the world was soon to bask in the light of the message of Muhammad, may peace be on him. The one waited for thousands of years, prophesied by thousands of prophets, and for whom the whole world was created and who was the clear

manifestation and reflection of the full glory of the Creator. The one who was titled by the Almighty God as “mercy for all the worlds”, our beloved Master and Lord, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw), endured every form of punishment, torture, persecution, blasphemy, mockery and torment suffered by the earlier prophets and messengers. He was called “*the one most mean*” (63:9), he was treated as a ‘liar’ (35:26), he was labelled as a ‘*fabricator*’ (16:102) and he was called as ‘*madman*’ (15:7).

He was also physically tortured, persecuted and blasphemed. “*The Prophet was stoned by ruffians and vagabonds and was chased and pelted by urchins till the cobblestones of Taif ran red with his blood. And at the battle-ground of Uhud the Prophet was seriously wounded.*” (Murder in the Name of Allah p. 6)

His followers were severely persecuted and the land became very tight and narrow for them.. They were laid out in the blazing sun, heavy stones were put on their chests, they were dragged through the streets like dead animals and chattels, they were socially boycotted, and they were forced to live in a valley for three long and hard years. They were deprived of all their freedom, property and belongings. Their dead bodies were cut asunder; the liver of the Prophet’s uncle Hamzah, may Allah be pleased with him, was even eaten. Pregnant women were thrown off camels.

The Holy Quran states:

“Verily, those who malign Allah and His Messenger — Allah has cursed them in this world and in the Hereafter, and has prepared for them an abasing punishment. And those who malign believing men and believing women for what they have not earned shall bear the guilt of a calumny and a manifest sin.” (33:58-59)

How clearly the Holy Quran has mentioned the fate of the opponents of God and His Messenger that God alone has the authority to punish those who malign, mock or blaspheme God and His prophets. God did not permit anyone, not even the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) to punish such people.

Unfortunately, many people around the world including many Muslims believe that blasphemy is a worldly punishable act, and Muslims are duty-bound to punish mockers and blasphemers. They believe that if someone speaks against God, the Holy Muhammad (saw), the Holy Quran and Islam he must be punished with death penalty;

However, the reality completely differs from such concepts and the Islam taught by our beloved Master Muhammad (saw) speaks of no worldly punishment whatsoever against blasphemy. No question of death or anything else for that matter. The Holy Quran has provided a clear guidance on this matter and states:

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

It should be noted that instead of punishing the blasphemers, believers are advised to leave the company of such people until they change their discussion.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) through his practices made it absolutely clear that there is no worldly punishment for blasphemy and the matter rests in the hands of Almighty Allah.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) once owed money to a Jew. The Jew came to him mistakenly thinking that the amount was overdue, and confronted the Holy Prophet (saw) and demanded his money using very harsh and blasphemed words and accused him of not honoring his promise. He also insulted the Holy Prophet (saw) and also his tribe. Hadhrat Umar (ra), who was also there, extremely annoyed and perhaps was about to strike him. The Holy Prophet (saw) stopped him for doing so and said: *“Umar (ra), you should have behaved differently”*. He didn't even let Umar (ra) to speak harsh words to the Jew. This was the Holy Prophet's (saw) behavior when openly insulted and blasphemed in the company of his companions.

As mentioned earlier, when the Holy Prophet (saw) went to Taif for preaching them the message of God, they mocked at him, blasphemed him and tortured him and his whole body was ripped red with blood. God sent his angel to ask him if he wishes the whole village should be tore into pieces. That was an opportunity for him to say yes to teach a lesson to the rest that if anyone blasphemes him, he can be punished or destroyed. But, our beloved Master Muhammad (saw) instead punishing those mockers and blasphemers prayed for them to God *“My Lord! Forgive them, because they don't recognise me”*.

The history of mankind also witnessed those moments when the Holy Prophet (saw) – the King of Peace, entered into Mecca as a victorious and declared an open forgiveness::

“By God, you will have no punishment today and no reproof” (Hisham). He forgave all his enemies including Ikrama son of Abu Jehal the leader of opponents and Hinda who tore the chest of the Holy Prophet's (saw) uncle Hamzah (ra) and ate his liver out of spite, after he was martyred during the battle of *Uhad*. He also forgave Habbar who had murdered several Muslims including the murder of the Holy Prophet's (saw) daughter Zainab (ra). He also pardoned Abu Sufyan, one of his greatest enemies who also led many wars against him..

One cannot describe in detail the enormities, atrocities, blasphemous behaviour committed against Islam and the Holy Prophet (saw). Yet how easily the Holy Prophet (saw) forgave them!

Let me also quote a particular incident which took place during the life of the Holy Prophet (saw), also briefly recorded in the Holy Quran, and alone can refute the idea of punishing the blasphemers. No Muslim can claim to know Islam more than the Holy Prophet (saw), so, let us have the true understanding of this issue from him directly and let us see how he treated with blasphemers.

“Before the Holy Prophet's (sa) arrival in Medina, there was a prominent leader who by the consensus of Medinite, was rising to be their joint leader. His name was Abdullah Bin Obey Bin Salul. After the Prophet's (sa) arrival things gradually changed and instead of Abdullah, the Holy Prophet'sa was accepted by the common consensus of people as their new leader. This made Abdullah Bin Obey Bin Salul extremely jealous. He went on giving voice to his injured feelings

in one way or another. His behaviour was such that the other Muslims referred to him as the chief monaafiq, meaning the chief of hypocrites.

Once, when returning from an expedition which was overall a failure and all participants were extremely tired and disappointed, this man Abdullah, thought it a fit time to take his revenge. In the presence of a few people, he declared that upon returning to Medina, the noblest among them would turn out in disgrace the meanest of them. The message was clear and everyone knew what he meant. Hadhrat Umar^{ra}, upon hearing this, asked permission of the Holy Prophets^{sa} to kill this man; he said that the insult on the person of the Holy Prophets^{sa} was far too much for them to tolerate. But the Holy Prophets^{sa} did not allow any retribution.

It is reported that after this, Abdullah's own son also approached the Holy Prophets^{sa} and said: "Oh Messenger of God, perhaps you thought that if you had permitted someone else to kill my father, I being his son, may harbour a private sense of revenge. However my father deserves this punishment for the insult he has hurled against you, so please permit me to slay him." The Holy Prophets^{sa} smiled and said: "No, there is nothing to be done. Your father will not be punished by anyone."

They all returned to Medina and for many years this man lived in peace under the full protection of the Holy Founders^{sa} of Islam, against whom he had blasphemed. When he died, the Holy Prophets^{sa} decided to lead his funeral prayers. This was a bit too much for some of his companions. Umar^{ra} reports that he blocked his passage and said: "Is he not the leader of the hypocrites? Is he not the one about whom God has said that even if you ask forgiveness for him seventy times, he would not be forgiven? Then why O Prophet of God, who is the recipient of all these revelations, have you decided to lead his funeral prayer?"; The answer was: "Umar, get aside; if God has informed me that he would not forgive the hypocrites even if I prayed for them seventy times, I would pray much more than that in the hope that Allah will ultimately forgive them".

Such was the character of the Holy Founders^{sa} of Islam. He was a man of extreme compassion, a man of principles, a man who lived a life of truth and nothing but the truth." (The Seal of Prophets Pages 33-34; edition 2003)

The teachings of the Holy Quran and the examples of the life of the Holy Prophet (saw) refute all the misconceptions and misunderstanding about the punishment of blasphemy by any human being or any state; and entirely leave the authority in the hands of God, and this is a supreme reality and commandment of God and *'there is none that can change the words of Allah.'*