

Lollywood, blasphemy, and Lynching: An Analysis of Pakistani Media

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Abstract

Public lynching or murdering anybody accused of blasphemy in Pakistan has been occurring for the last about twenty years. However, of late, these incidents have occurred more frequently. The critics have justifiably attributed these extra-judicial killings, in a country where blasphemy can send one to the gallows, to a growing radicalization of the society. This radicalization, in turn, has been explored in a number of ways. Top-down Islamization, Afghan Jihad, textbooks and other such factors have been highlighted to explain the hegemonic hold fundamentalist ideas have gained in Pakistan. However, no attention has been paid to the role of cultural apparatus in promoting fundamentalist ideas in general and death-to-blasphemer discourse in particular. By offering a discourse analysis of three feature films on the blasphemy theme, this paper foregrounds the importance of Pakistani film industry, Lollywood, in popularizing, legitimizing and reinforcing a discourse that unapologetically promotes death-to-blasphemer discourse.

Keywords: Lynching, blasphemy, cinema, Pakistan

Introduction

On December 3, 2021, a Sri Lankan citizen named Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana was lynched on the factory floor by an enraged mob. Mr. Diyawadana, who worked as a manager at a sports goods manufacturing factory, was accused of blasphemy. In August 2017, Wali-ur-Rehman, a member of Tableeghi Jamaat (Party for the Propagation of Islam), was axed to death at a village mosque in District Chiniot. The assassin, Mohamad Ikram, a member of the rival Sunni sect Brelvi, was a madrassa student and a hafiz, someone who has learned the Holy Quran by heart. According to him, the victim held blasphemous views. Back in April 2017, a student at Abdul Wali

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Khan University, Mardan, was mob-lynched; many university fellows recorded the incident due to the charge of posting a ‘blasphemous comment’ on Facebook. It is irrelevant whether such a comment was posted or not. In May 2014, a prominent human rights activist, Rashid Rehman, was gunned down in Multan. Despite warnings not to defend a blasphemy accused in court, he ignored the threats. Perhaps the most high-profile case of assassination in the name of blasphemy was that of Salman Taseer, the governor of the country’s largest province, Punjab. Taseer was killed for supporting a poor Christian woman, Asia Bibi, who was detained in a fabricated blasphemy case. His assassin, Mumtaz Qadri, a bodyguard, gunned him down in January 2011. Mullahs refused to offer Governor Taseer’s funeral prayers, but nearly a million mourners attended Qadri’s funeral prayer when he was executed on court orders in 2015.

Often, mob lynching and murders in the name of blasphemy are justifiably attributed to the radicalization of Pakistani society. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the role of the cultural apparatus that has played through the film medium in promoting violence in the name of blasphemy. For this purpose, a discourse analysis, from a Marxist perspective, of three Lollywood productions is offered.

Discourse, according to Fairclough & Fairclough (2012, p. 81), “is essentially the social use of language in a social context.” However, discourse cannot be limited to language alone. Language serves as both the source and product of discourse. It serves as a source when “people make generalizations about language based on the discourse they engage in” (Johnstone, 2018, p. 2). It becomes a product of language when “people apply their existing knowledge in creating and interpreting new discourse” (p. 2).

Discourse involves ‘meaningful symbolic behavior’ (Blommaert, 2005, p. 2), integrating discourse as both a source and a product of language. Moreover, this behavior contextualizes discourse within the ‘social context’ as referred to by Fairclough. Discourse analysis encompasses a broad scope. Defined as a triangulated examination of language and practice within a social context, discourse analysis in this study serves as ‘an open-ended heuristic, a research method consisting of a set of topics to consider in relation to any discourse instance.’ This method poses inquiries about ‘social roles and relations, power and inequality, communication, and identity’ (Johnstone, 2018, p. 3). Theoretically, this method is rooted in a Marxist perspective. Marxism elucidates the actions of hegemonic powers with a primary emphasis on economic interests, the presence of a class system, and the state’s role in representing and serving the ruling class or classes’ (Malik, 2014, p. 7). The Marxist approach highlights, among other aspects, the significance of ideas

and ideologies in shaping and advancing discourses. Ideology, in essence, correlates with the process of social reproduction (Herzog, 2018, p. 402). To be precise: ‘Ideologies contribute to upholding certain production conditions and relationships’ (p. 402). The genesis of ideology stems from the division of labor, which entails a divergence of interests. Ideology safeguards the interests of the dominant elite as generalized interests (p. 402). Thus, ideology is deemed ‘false’ on one front, while the essence lies in interest. Consequently, within the Marxist tradition, discourse is conceptualized ‘as the ideological guise for material and class interests’ (Malik, 2014, p. 8). Given that the ‘Marxist concept of ideology consistently alludes to a form of falsehood’ (Herzog, 403), a Marxist approach in discourse analysis not only unveils the fallacy of discourses but also critiques the circumstances that spawn and necessitate false ideologies/discourses to present alternative discourses.

I treat these productions as text grounded in a death-to-blasphemer discourse. A text, according to Said (2001, p. 94), purports “to contain knowledge about something actual... Expertise is attributed to it... such texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe... In time, such knowledge and reality produce a tradition... a discourse”. This paper will identify, firstly, how all three productions generate a similar discourse stressing death for the blasphemer. Subsequently, the narratives projected in these feature films will be deconstructed. Notably, this discourse ties in with the state policy of the death penalty for the blasphemer, as well as the message delivered from 100,000 (perhaps 200,000) mosques and 35,000 seminaries. Beginning chronologically, I will first analyze *Ghazi Ilm Din Shaheed*, the first Pakistani movie to take up the cause of blasphemy. Incidentally, the film was produced at the cusp of the Islamisation process initiated by the Zia dictatorship in the country that reformulated the colonial-era blasphemy laws. The film is based on a true story from 1920s Lahore. Ilm Din was a Muslim teenager who stabbed to death a Hindu publisher, Mahashe Rajpal, for publishing Rangeela Rasul (Colorful Prophet). The publication of Rangeela Rasul incensed Muslims in Lahore, leading to agitation and the issuance of calls by the mullahs to incite violence.

Ghazi Ilm Din Shaheed (1978)

In 1978, Lollywood first began to take up blasphemy as a theme with *Ghazi Ilam Din*. The cast included Najma, Alia, Haider, Iqbal Hassan, Qavi, Afzal Ahmed, Badar Munir, and Ali Ejaz. The music was composed by Abdullah. Produced under the banner of G&S Co., the Punjabi-language film was produced and directed by Haider and released on 5 September, a day ahead of

‘Yum-e-Dafah’ (Pakistan Defense Day).² Haider also plays the lead role Ilm Din.

The film is notable for portraying Hinduism and English rulers (Angraiz Sarkar). Hindus are depicted as miserable, corrupt, and sexually depraved, while the British are portrayed as scheming. Muslims, on the other hand, are shown as hard-working and impoverished. Ilam Din (Haider) is portrayed as a blessed Muslim from the moment of his birth. When a mullah recites the Azan (call for prayers) in his ear, the newborn Ilam Din stops crying and listens attentively. In contrast, Raj Pal (Afzal Ahmed) is greedy, scheming, and fond of a girl from the red-light area [brothel] who is also Hindu.

Raj Pal wants to publish an inflammatory book to provoke the Muslims. The white ruler has assured him that no harm will come his way. When the book hits the stall, Muslims begin to protest. Raj Pal is sent to jail by the District Court, and the book is banned.

A Christian High Court judge, however, not only overturns the ban but also orders Raj Pal’s release. This annoys Muslims. A Pashtun, Abdul Aziz Kohati (Badar Munir), goes to Raj Pal’s office intending to murder him but, in a case of mistaken identity, kills his relative instead. Eventually, Ilam Din stabs Raj Pal to death.

Like Abdul Aziz’s mother, Ilam Din’s mother (Najma Mehboob) is proud of her son’s actions. Both mothers keep praying that their sons embraced *shahadat*, martyrdom. Aziz is sentenced to life imprisonment, but Ilam Din is sentenced to death. Agitated Muslims decide to appeal against the verdict in the High Court and engage India’s foremost Muslim lawyer, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (Qavi Khan), later the founder of Pakistan. A fundraising campaign is mounted to pay Jinnah’s fee. Jinnah, however, scorns the people of Lahore for offering him a fee: ‘Don’t you know my name is Muhammad Ali. I won’t charge any fee.’ But his defense is ineffective because Ilam Din, despite attempts to persuade him otherwise by Lahore’s Muslim leaders, refuses to deny his act. As a result, Jinnah’s defense seeks to justify the murder as a response to blasphemy and pleads for the introduction of blasphemy laws in the country.

The authorities are concerned that the execution of Ilam Din could lead to a breakdown of law and order, so they send him to Mianwali Jail, where he is hanged. While Ilam Din is embracing death, Jinnah is addressing a rally in Lahore, telling people, “As long as Muslims do not create a separate country,

² According to official and semi-official narratives, India attacked Pakistan in 1965 on September 6. The day is observed as a sign of defiance to India and celebration of victory over India.

Raj Pals will be born over and over again (*paida hotay rahain gay*).” The film ends with the arrival of Ilam Din’s dead body in Lahore, and as his dead body is taken to Miani Saab, the film ends.

According to Yasin Goreeja’s Pakistan Millennium Film Directory (2003), the film was neither a box-office hit nor a total flop. It is available on YouTube, and by August 31, 2017, it had been viewed 142,562 times. In the comments sections (51 in total), one could spot chants of *Alla o Akbar*.

In 2002, Gujar Art Production produced a remake of Ilam Din Shaheed. The remake is not very different from the original. Therefore, I will skip to Pakistan Television (PTV), Pakistan’s state broadcaster, and the press coverage of PTV play Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed in Pakistan’s largest Urdu-language dailies, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, and *Jang*. This will offer a broad-brush delineation of the role Pakistan’s cultural apparatus has played in amplifying the anti-blasphemy discourse.

In 1991, Pakistan Television (PTV) broadcast a serial entitled *Wafa kay Pekar* (Fidelity Personified), which portrayed great Muslims from Islam’s history. The serial included a play, *Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed*, directed by Iqbal Ansari. Although scripted by Asghar Nadeem Sayeed, it was based on a book by Zafar Iqbal Nagina, who for a few years had worked as a journalist with a couple of mainstream Lahore-based vernacular dailies. Before it was published, the book had been serialized by *Daily Pakistan* in its weekly magazine³.

The TV version not only lacks the typical Lollywood dance and song sequences, but it is also a grim narrative, in contrast to Bollywood’s 1978 production in which Ali Ejaz’s brisk humor at least offered some comic relief.

On the mini-screen, *Ilam Din* was portrayed by TV actor Toqeer Nasir. The *Jang* (15 January 1991) published an in-depth report on the filming of Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed under the headline, ‘Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed ki shooting asal phanis ghat per’ [Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed filmed on the actual site of the gallows]. The report describes the scene where Toqeer Nasir, along with the crew, walks towards the gallows to film the execution scene: ‘The jail inmates began reciting Kalma-e-Shahadat. They were waving at Toqeer Nasir as he was taken to the gallows (Takhta-e-dar). The prisoners waved at Nasir and bid him farewell (haath hila hila kar alwida keh rahay thay).’ The report continues: ‘Meanwhile, a prisoner shouted to his fellow inmates, “Those who want to see their mothers’ faces, better come and join the spectacle.” The prisoners chanted “Toqeer Nasir Zinda Bad” (Long live Toqeer Nasir)’. The report mentions that the shooting had to be postponed for an hour because ‘Toqeer

³ These are personal observations based on my association with the *Daily Pakistan*
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Nasir was overwhelmed by emotions.’ Nawa-i-Waqt also featured a report on Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed. Titled ‘Islami Tareekhi dramon ki ibtada (Launching of Islamic historical plays),’ it states that Toqeer Nasir filmed all the scenes after performing his ablutions (bawazo ho kar).

Neither the press coverage nor the Lollywood and PTV productions either present the actual facts or contend the dominant discourse. Not even the extra-judicial character of executing the alleged blasphemer, let alone the nature of colonial-era blasphemy laws amended by the Zia dictatorship, is questioned. Let us begin with a little fact-checking exercise.

Checking the facts

During the 1920s, under British colonial rule, the Muslims from the Punjab province and the Hindu Arya Samaj were engaged in confrontational politics when a pamphlet was published allegedly by a Muslim depicting Hindu goddess Sita as a prostitute.

In reaction, an Arya Samaj member penned a pamphlet titled *Rangeela Rasool*. Published in 1923 by Lahore-based publisher Rajpal, the pamphlet appeared anonymously. The document focused on the marriage of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with his youngest wife, Ayesha, polygamy, and selected *ahadis* (Sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)).

The Muslims took the matter to a trial court, which convicted Rajpal. However, Rajpal went to the High Court, which acquitted him. The Muslims resented the High Court verdict.

On September 6, 1929, Ilam Din stabbed Rajgopal to death in his bookstore. Ilam Din did not attempt to escape, was immediately arrested, and was taken to Mianwali jail. Ilam Din murdered a person who neither authored the pamphlet nor perhaps read it. Considering Ilam Din’s inadequate schooling, it is highly unlikely that he read the pamphlet.

The film script is significantly different from the actual events when it suggests that Ilam Din’s defense in court was ineffective because, despite urging from Lahore’s Muslim leaders, he refused to deny his act. In reality, not only did Ilam Din plead not guilty through his trial lawyer, Farrukh Hussain, but he also filed a mercy petition with King George the Fifth, which was ultimately rejected. Ilam Din was hanged on October 31, 1929, and his grave in Lahore’s historic Mian Sahab graveyard has now become a shrine, visited daily by the faithful.

Also, he is iconized in fiery speeches by Pakistani mullahs, evident from the honorific bestowed upon him. He is both a *Ghazi* (soldier of Islam who has participated in Jihad against the infidels) and a *shaheed* (martyr). He, along

with Raggopal, has become a reference point that does not even require context. Therefore, there are multiple references to Ilm Din and Raggopal in the next object of this analysis, *International Gorillay* (International Guerillas).

***International Gorillay* (1990)**

Lollywood production *International Gorillay* was released in the context of Salman Rushdie's controversial novel *The Satanic Verses*.

Directed by Jan Muhammad and produced under the banner of Evernew Pictures, the film cast included Neeli, Babara Sharif, Mustafa Qureshi, Javed Sheikh, Ghulam Mohayi-ud-Din, Hamayon Qureshi and Afzal Ahmed. Curiously, Afzal Ahmed played Rajgopal in *Ghazi Ilm Din Shaheed* and Salman Rushdie in *International Gorillay*.

In the opening scene, the film depicts the hatching of a grand conspiracy to destroy the world of Islam. One aim is to ensure that the Muslims of the world do not unite. Pakistan, in this grand conspiracy, is referred to as the 'Fortress of Islam.' The grand conspirer in the scene, Batu Batu (Hamayon Qureshi) later appears as the chief of Salman Rushdie's private army. It is in this context *The Satanic Verses* is published. Understandably, the Pakistanis pour out into the streets to agitate (it is not shown where they are heading while marching against the novel).

Bribed by Batu Batu, a police officer tells his colleagues to fire at the demonstrators. However, an honest police Deputy (Mustafa Qureshi) refuses to obey the order. He thinks that state law or concern for law and order is spurious owing to the issue involved. He argues that one should not care about the honor of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Instead of obeying the order, he resigns. Shagufta (Neeli), the sister of the bribed police officer, also sides with the Deputy and resigns. The deputy's teenage son and daughter are killed in the police firing on the demo. The tragedy unites the police Deputy and his hoodlum brothers (Javed Sheikh and Ghulam Mohayi-ud-Din). They vow to murder Salman Rushdie. They had no idea where he was hiding. However, they board a random flight and end up in the country's mainland, where Salman Rushdie is hiding on a well-fortified island off the mainland, guarded by a private army marshaled by a Jewish general, CJ. Shagufta later joins the three. Together, this combo of four constitutes *International Gorillay*. Not unexpectedly, the Jewish general's sister (Babra Sharif) converts to Islam and also becomes a resourceful aide in reaching Salman Rushdie.

Salman Rushdie's depiction is indeed suggestive. He beheads three Muslim *mujahideen* who manage to reach the island in order to kill Him. Like most villains in Lollywood productions, he is fond of women and wine. He seeks

pleasure in torturing Muslims by making them listen to readings of *The Satanic Verses*.

What one may find remarkable is the depiction of Arabs. Prince Karim (Saeed Shah Rangila) and his personal secretary (Albela) have been featured as clownish, promiscuous, and criminal characters. Their entry is largely aimed at providing comic relief. However, otherwise brilliant comedians, both Rangila and Albela indulge in over-acting and fail to create any comedy.

Finally, our guerrillas reach the island and engage in a gunfight with Rushdie's army. The heroes defeat the villains. As Rushdie attempts to flee the scene, three giant copies of the Quran appear in the sky, and fire energy beams at the writer, incinerating him.

The film was a box-office success in Pakistan and made global headlines, generating a controversy when the British Board of Film Classification denied it a screening certificate in the UK. The ban was overturned when Salman Rushdie intervened.

Salman Rushdie himself recounted the controversy in an essay afterward:

“A Pakistani film portraying me as a torturer, murderer, and drunkard wearing an appalling variety of technicolored safari suits was refused a certificate in Britain. I saw a video of the film; it was awful. It ended with my ‘execution’ by the power of God. The ugliness of those images stayed with me for a while. However, I wrote to the British Board of Film Classification, promising them that I would not take legal action against them or the film, and asking them to license it. I told them I did not want the dubious protection of censorship. The film was unbanned and promptly vanished from sight. Rows of empty seats greeted an attempt to screen it in Bradford. It was a perfect illustration of the argument for free speech: people really can make up their own minds. Still, it was weird to be pleased with the release of a film whose subject was my death” (Rushdie, 2003, p. 238).

Checking the facts

A filmmaker has a fictional license when it comes to the interpretation of historical or real-life events. *International Gorillay*'s script is such a big departure from reality that fact-checking is meaningless. Salman Rushdie went into hiding, protected by Scotland Yard, and to this day is alive and well. Instead of fleeing to an island, he moved to the USA and remains under protection.

Besides Salman Rushdie, the only incident with any semblance of reality is the agitation and police firing on the demonstration. However, blaming it on any foreign-funded agents in the Pakistani police is an escape from reality.

The demonstrators, gathered in the federal capital Islamabad, were marching on the American Center, which housed a library and the office of the United States Information Service (USIS), to present a petition. However, as the crowd surged and turned violent, the police resorted to tear gas and firing, leaving five dead and 80 injured (Crossette, 1980).

Headed by a High Court judge, Justice Ijaz Nisar, the government constituted an inquiry commission. The commission's 160-page report did not find any foreign involvement. Contrary to this, protest march organizers were blamed for creating a situation that led to the tragedy. These organizers included two Islamic scholars, Maulana Kausar Niazi and Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman, alongside a right-wing conservative politician, Nawabzada Nasrullah (Iqbal, 2007). At the time, the government, under Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, only two months into office, viewed the demonstration as a last-ditch attempt to destabilize. Benazir Bhutto's criticism was justified, given the circumstances: (1) the book was banned in Pakistan; (2) it was published in the UK while Salman Rushdie resided there; (3) it was released during General Zia-ul-Haq's rule in Pakistan with no prior protests (Iqbal, 2007). Additionally, the organizers had pledged to submit their petition to the American Center on February 15, three days after the tragic police firing incident. However, they failed to do so, as Mr. Niazi cited poor health when contacted (Iqbal, 2007, p. 47).

Given the stark contempt shown by the film for the facts, the script of *International Gorillay* can only be interpreted as an incitement to violence against Salman Rushdie, who is dehumanized roughly and readily. Even from the viewpoint of aesthetics, the film is an insult to art: immature production, unconvincing plot, poor performances by the entire film cast, vulgar dance and song sequences.

Aik Or Ghazi (2011)

Released soon after Salman Taseer's murder, *Aik Aur Ghazi* (Yet Another Conqueror) is based on a 'True story from Lahore 2002' (Lahore shehar ka sachā waqī'a) if one goes by the film's promotional. And the claim is not baseless. Produced under the banner of Paragon Entertainment, *Aik Or Ghazi*'s cast includes Saima, Malik Heera, Shafqat Javed Cheema, and Haya Ali. Malik Heera, who plays the lead role, is also the film producer.

'Tariq' (Malik Heera) is a loafer and gambler, but he has a religious bent of mind. His father, Haji Saab, runs a small business and is widely respected in the neighborhood for his piety. He is ignorant of Tariq's waywardness as Tariq lives a double life: a gambler in reality and a practicing Muslim in front of his father. Since a Lollywood production is no masterpiece unless peppered with

song-and-dance sequels, Tariq is also seduced by Mohni (Saima) who lives next door. Saima is shown dancing atop a *chobara* (rooftop), presumably in Lahore's Walled City.

Tariq, over a gambling dispute, murders a rival. In revenge, rivals kill Tariq's younger brother. This leads to more revenge: Tariq kills two more rivals to avenge his brother's murder. Unable to bear the loss of a young son, Tariq's father also dies of a heart attack, Lollywood-style. He lands in jail, where he develops a dispute with 'Zulfi', another killer. However, the blood-thirsty killers are transformed when Yusuf 'Kazab' (impressively played by Shafqat Javed Cheema) arrives.

The jail inmates hurl abuses at him while Zulfi hatches a plan to murder Yusuf 'Kazab'. A calm and composed Yusuf, every time insulted by jail mates, politely replies, 'You are ignorant. I will pray for you.'

While jailmates were aggressive, authorities respected Yusuf, who did not claim to be a prophet. Instead, he claims to have been blessed with *Khilaphet-e-Uzma* (Supreme Caliphate). In court, witnesses accuse him of declaring himself a prophet during a Friday sermon at a Lahore Mosque. However, Yusuf insists on his faith in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who bestowed *Khilaphet-e-Uzma* upon him. The court nonetheless finds him guilty of blasphemy.

Meantime, Zulfi managed to smuggle a pistol through his uncle. However, Zulfi is transferred to another jail, and he passes the pistol to Tariq. Both want to decapitate the 'blasphemer' in a bid for redemption. The jail authorities suspect a murder conspiracy, leading to a search. Tariq conceals the pistol in his ration box. During the search, a jail official empties the ration box by turning it upside down. Mysteriously, everything falls out except the pistol. Despite a thorough search, authorities remain uncertain about Yusuf's safety, prompting his transfer to Rawalpindi jail. This move would have thwarted Tariq's plan. However, a low-ranking corrupt jail official, aware of Tariq's intentions, experiences a change of heart. He conspires with Tariq.

Consequently, when Yusuf arrives at the jail compound, the official escorts Tariq to the location. As the police silently watch, Tariq shoots Yusuf. Upon completing the task, he kneels in *sajda* as the entire jail staff salutes him amidst chants of Allah-o-Akbar.

The film was such a massive flop at the box office that the film producer, Malik Heera, gave up on the film-making business. In an interview with Geo TV, he accused the film director, Syed Noor, of cheating on him financially. Noor, of course, denied the allegation (YouTube, 2012). However, the film's tagline *Gustak-e-Rasool ki saza, sir tan say juda* (Punishment for the

blasphemer: decapitation), has gained wider currency. Anti-blasphemy crusaders in the country, including the supporters of Mumtaz Qadri, have adopted this tagline as their slogan.

Checking the facts

First, an anecdote. Friend and colleague Moeen Azhar was president of the Lahore Press Club. In his office at the Lahore Press Club, we were chit-chatting on a fine autumn evening back in 2003. A young man drops by and wants to have a word with Moeen Azhar. The conversation between the two goes on for about ten minutes before the visitor leaves. The visitor was generously swearing at his boss, a media mogul, all along. The media mogul had stashed enormous wealth in one decade, while his media house is notorious for exploitative media practices.

A the visitor leaves Moeen Azhar's office, I ask him about the dispute. "This guy was a reporter. He smuggled the pistol inside the jail that was used to kill Yusuf (mentioned above as the blasphemer in *Aik Or Ghazi*), the blasphemy accused. Now he has been fired by the boss after he was named in the FIR (First Investigation Report),' Moeen replies.

This conversation was still fresh in my mind when I went to Shabistan cinema at Lahore's famous Abbott Road to watch *Aik Aur Ghazi*. Since the film, according to director Syed Noor's claim, is based on a 'True story from Lahore 2002,' I was curious to find the newspaper link. I was not surprised. It is one [and easy] thing to glorify, justify, and validate the cold-blooded murder of unprotected, vulnerable and defenseless people accused of blasphemy. To name a mainstream daily in a 'True story from Lahore' is quite another affair. Hence, Syed Noor's 'Ghazi' in the film receives the weapon from a strange source as nature lends a helping hand too.

An aside: 'Kazab', or liar, is a term with religious connotations. It was the daily newspaper owned by the media mogul mentioned above that not merely highlighted the case but also added the affix 'Kazab' to the late Yusuf's name every time the case was reported in the said daily. Other broadsheets avoided the suffix 'Kazab'. If one goes by the hearsay, the media mogul had a property dispute with Mr. Yusuf.

Aik Or Ghazi not merely shies away from such facts but also dodges pertinent questions emerging in the film script itself. For instance, there is no debate in the film when 'Yusuf' (Shafqat Javed Cheema) denies any claims to prophethood. By law and by Sharia, he was not committing any sin. This anomaly is not resolved in the film script.

Likewise, it is indeed strange to see nature (*qudrat*) intervening only when ‘Tariq’ (Malik Heera) wants to decapitate a blasphemer. However, nature remains nonchalantly aloof when his God-fearing, pious family is gruesomely ruined by his rivals.

Ahead of its release, the film was promoted with religious holiness. Mohni (Saima dancing atop a *chobara* (rooftop), presumably in Lahore’s Walled City, does not offend Syed Noor’s religious sensibilities. Tasteless and vulgar dances do not bother a director advertising a film with a chilling tagline: *Gustak-e-Rasool ki saza, sir tan say juda* (Punishment for the blasphemer: decapitation). This exposes the contradiction between the commercial greed behind the film and an apparent love for Sharia, which strictly forbids dance and songs.

A day after watching the film, I met Moeen and asked him about the *Khabrain* reporter: ‘What happened to him.’ Our reporter became very religious, went to Dubai and started a business. ‘Recently, he contacted me,’ Moeen said. ‘He went bankrupt when the economic crisis hit Dubai and is back in Pakistan.’ Well, it seems the Ghazis, Qadris, their abettors, and eulogizers got all the freedoms in Pakistan. They got freedom of movement from Pakistan to Dubai. They also got freedom of expression. Any censor board can’t ban Syed Noors.

Conclusion

The texts dissected above have many things in common. For instance, Muslims are delineated as victims of conspiracies hatched by the enemies of Islam. They are willing to kill and get killed when it comes to defending honour of their prophet. However, the following three conclusions can be drawn as the salient features of all three scripts.

Firstly, the plot is woven in every case around real-life events, and here is an explicit claim to base the scripts on true stories. However, the facts, details, and their representations are indeed selective. While *International Gorillay* departs from reality whatsoever, *Ghazi Ilm Din Shaheed* as well as *Aik Or Ghazi* also distort, decontextualize and deform reality.

Secondly, none of the script’s questions, even in an implicit manner, the dominant death-to-blasphemer discourse. Even when a ‘blasphemer’ is executed extra-judicially, the action is justified and glorified. *Ghazi Ilm Din Shaheed* justifies the creation of Pakistan as India’s nemesis based on anti-blasphemy discourse.

Finally, there needs to be an intellectual attempt to explore the notion of blasphemy in the context of universal human rights. Even when the charge of blasphemy in *Aik Or Ghazi* could not be established convincingly, the director

does not care to engage in any attempt to prove that blasphemy has been committed according to the definition provided in the country's anti-blasphemy laws.

While the reception of these films at the box office was largely lukewarm save *International Gorillay*, all three have contributed to a dominant discourse. Their availability on YouTube amplifies the message daily. Media scholars glorifying the liberating potential of social media may pay attention to the oppressive role of social media with these films as their case studies.

Filmography

Ghazi Ilm Din Shaheed. Director: Haider. G&S Co. 1978.

International Gorillay. Director: Jan Muhammad. Evernew Pictures. 1990.

Aik Or Ghazi. Director: Syed Noor. Paragon Entertainment. 2011.

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