

Pakistan & blasphemy laws: Liberal Muslim Punjab Governor Salman Taseer's Killer Hanged

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Thursday 7 April 2016, by [MUGHAL Aftab Alexander](#) (Date first published: 29 February 2016).

After Five Years of Former Governor Salman Taseer's murder, his Killer Mumtaz Qadri Hanged

29 February 2016 - Mumtaz Qadri, a hardliner and self-confessed killer, who killed the former governor of Punjab Salman Taseer, a vocal politician, was hanged today in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail at 4.30, early in the morning. Last night, his family members, including his wife and his son, met him for the last time. He told his family that he had no regret. Security measures were taken inside and outside of the jail. His body was handed over to his family also in tight security.

Protests erupted in many major cities of Pakistan by Qadri's supports, mainly from Islamic parties, including Sunni Tehrek, who considered him a hero of Islam. The protesters blocked roads in Rawalpindi and in some other cities. However, these protest gatherings were relatively small.

Qadri killed Taseer, a liberal Muslim, for his views about Pakistan's much debated blasphemy laws, which have been widely used against religious minorities, including Christians and Ahmadis, and many Muslims as well.

Qadri, who was Taseer's official bodyguards from the Elite Force, shot him 27 times with an AK-47 sub-machine gun at Kohsar Market in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, on 4 January 2011 because Taseer publically called for reforms of blasphemy laws.

Moreover, he defended an illiterate and poor Pakistani Christian women, Asia Bibi, who was convicted and received the death sentence under blasphemy laws. Her appeal is still pending in the Supreme Court. Bibi was arrested in June 2009, after allegedly insulting Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) during an argument with her Muslim co-worker. Taseer not only visited her in jail, but sent a mercy petition to the president of the time, Asif Ali Zardari.

Since Qadri's arrested, various religious groups have been demanding for his unconditional release. Two weeks ago, Professor Ibrahim, a former provincial leader of Jammat-e-Islami, an Islamic party, threatened that this is a case of blasphemy, and that cannot be taken lightly and if Qadri were executed, president and the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif cannot protect them from the rage of people.

In the 1980s, military dictator General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq introduced Islamic blasphemy laws against the insult of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Holy Quran. Human rights activists have been demanding for the repeal of these laws as these laws have been widely used against Christian and Ahmadi community in Pakistan. According to a report, from 1987 to 2014, 166 Christians have been accused under these laws. In the extra judicial killings, more than 50 people have been

murdered by the religious hardliners.

Qadri's sentence was first awarded by a judge of an anti-terrorist court in Rawalpindi, in October 2011. The judge subsequently left the country for fear of his safety. Against the trial court's decision, Qadri filed an appeal to the Islamabad High Court (IHC), where on 9 March 2015 the court upheld the death sentence. Later, Qadri filed an appeal in the country's highest court of law against the verdict of IHC. The Supreme Court of Pakistan too upheld the death sentence and also rejected his review petition on 14 December last year. On 19 January, he filed a mercy appeal to the president of the country, in which he said that he was the only breadwinner of his family, so he deserves the state's mercy.

Despite the ongoing high security and protocols, the security of President Mamnoon Hussain had further increased because of backlash of Islamists as he was expected to decide on the mercy appeal. After the president rejected Qadri's mercy appeal, he was hanged without much publicity in Rawalpindi.

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P.S.

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