

“Socio-Cultural Analysis of Moral Ethics Syllabi at Under-graduate Level to Manage the Blasphemy Issue in Pakistan.”

Mr. Abdur Rahman

Research Scholar Department Quran & Sunnah, University of Karachi.

Dr. Aziz-ur-Rehman

Chairmen, Social Science Dept., Mohammad Ali Jinnah University, Karachi.

Prof. Dr. Hafiz Munir Ahmed Khan

Dean, Faculty of Islamic Studies, University of Sindh, Jamshoro.

ABSTRACT:

In the context of blasphemy issue, the present study examines the socio-cultural elements in the Moral Ethics syllabi functional at the different universities of Pakistan. As per our hypothesis, ME syllabi lack some important socio-cultural elements responsible for handling hate crimes, especially the issue of blasphemy. For testing the proposed hypothesis, available ME syllabi were collected from the official websites of different universities. Collected ME syllabi were examined through the method of content analysis. After examining literature review, necessary socio-cultural factors (SCFs) were listed and the selected syllabi were evaluated through this list of SCFs. Our study findings endorse the primary hypothesis that majority of universities has adopted the foreign model of ME syllabi without adapting them according to indigenous social and cultural needs. Additionally, the most important SCFs; knowledge of blasphemy laws (KBL) and real-life dilemmas (RLD), are mostly absent in the existing ME syllabi.

Keywords: Blasphemy, Moral Ethics, Socio- Cultural Factors, Curriculum, Profaning

Introduction:

Pakistan is the second largest Islamic country where Muslim population is 96.28% and rest of the 3.72% population, including Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Qadiyanies, Parsi, etc, is non-Muslim (PBS, 1998). Constitutionally, non-Muslim groups in Pakistan enjoy the same civil and religious rights as Muslim majority. For example, they are free to choose study ME in lieu of Islamic studies (IS), which is mandatory for Muslim students from primary to tertiary level. After a cursory analysis of available Moral Ethics (ME) syllabi, some flaws surface as: present ME syllabi lack necessary SCFs, most Public and Private Universities in Pakistan has implemented ME syllabus without any prior research and adaptation and being secular in nature, ME syllabuses are unable to comply with indigenous social and cultural norms. Although Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan is responsible to provide necessary guidelines for ME syllabus formation, all these Public and Private Universities are free to select ME course contents on their own.

Munir (2015) argues that as peace and tolerance are developed through education, it can also contribute to disseminate extremist attitudes (Sukarieh et al., 2016; Munir, 2015). Possibly extreme educational contents can provoke violence and terrorism where religious and ethnic conflicts are already common in the society (Brockhoff et al., 2016). Several research studies show that socio-cultural reforms in a syllabus can control violent behaviour in students (Aly et al 2014; Dhabi, 2014). So, an educational approach (including syllabus design) should be comprehensive in nature and helpful in developing the following key attributes in students: informed and critical, socially interconnected and respectful for diversity and ethically committed (Peach, & Clare, 2017; Dickson, 2006; Crosthwaite, 2006).

During the recent years, the issues related to blasphemy incidents have increased dramatically in Pakistan. These issues have two prongs; on one hand, the social media groups and websites have continuously involved in producing material which hurts the feelings of common Muslims (Eijaz, 2010; Mubeen, & Qusien, 2017). On the other side, in the absence of rule of law and credible justice system, people who strongly believe in religious faith, try to take matters in their hands against the convicts of blasphemy incidents. From 2009 to 2011, some cases related to blasphemy issue drew world's attention and criticism; such as the murder of Federal Minister for Minority Affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti who was assassinated in Islamabad on March 2, 2011 by three unidentified gunmen. In the second incident, the governor of Punjab province Salman Taseer, for opposing the blasphemy laws, was shot dead in Islamabad on 4th of January 2011 by his own guard who voluntarily surrendered himself to police.

Such cases not only affected the common people but also caused to start debates in national and international media which advocate securing the freedom of speech and protecting of religious sentiments. Apart from legal framework, it is also the responsibility of a society to infuse morality in its citizens for creating harmony and peace (Kaarthikeyan, 2013). Especially in the context of blasphemy acts, purposeful learning is based on moral education which helps in creating positive social attitudes in a society. (Raihani, 2014; Ashraf, 2018).

At this point, it would be pertinent to discuss the concept of blasphemy in the context of major religions. According to Webster's definition, the act of blasphemy is defined as "the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence to a deity, to religious or holy persons or sacred things, or toward something considered sacred or inviolable". Similar to Webster's definition, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) describes blasphemy as, "the act of showing insult or contempt or lack of reverence for God or other sacred personalities of any religion (Johnson, 2017). Every divine religion has anti-blasphemy laws which interdict from any sort of implicit or explicit blasphemy act. In Judaism, speaking evil of God is considered as blasphemy (Bock, 2016; Abraham, 2016). Profaning the Holy Spirit and disagreeing with the concept of the Trinity are punishable in Christianity (Crescas, 2012). According to Islamic exegeses, it is reported in the Qur'an that "The punishment for those who wage war against Allah and his messengers and strive with might for mischief through the land is: execution or crucifixion, or the cutting off hands and feet from the opposite sides, or exile from the land: that is their disgrace in the world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the hereafter" Surah ALMaida 5:33 (AbAziz&Hussin., 2017). According to a Hadith, a person who tries to insult the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) would be subjected to death (Standke, C, 2008). As reported by Ali ibn Talib, Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever insults the Prophet (peace be upon him) should be killed and anyone who abuses the companions of the Prophet should be whipped." (*al Tibrani al saghir*, page, 236 vol: 1).

A multicultural country like Pakistan is needed to solve the religious conflicts; like the issue of blasphemy which is threatening the peace and harmony of our society. This situation demands for necessary review and planning of our educational system according to our social and cultural needs.

The focus of the current study is to evaluate the ME syllabi, employed at under-graduate level for non-Muslim students in the Pakistani universities. The rationale for choosing ME syllabi at this level is that ME syllabi from primary to intermediate level is available for students, but it is missing for under-graduate level. Officially, Higher Education Commission (HEC) is responsible to provide a model ME syllabus at this level. But in the absence of a model syllabus at under-graduate level, public and private Universities use traditional syllabi which are secular in nature and lack

indigenous cultural elements. In the present study our hypothesis is that local ME syllabi at undergraduate level miss important socio-cultural factors responsible for creating religious and cultural harmonious in the society.

Socio-Cultural theory by Lev Vygotsky is an emerging theory in psychology that looks at the important contributions that help in developing a society. This theory stresses the interaction between people and social culture. In his seminal work, Vygotsky describes that parents, caregivers, peers and the culture at large are responsible for the development of higher order functions. According to him, “every function in the child’s cultural development appears in twice; first, on the social level, and later on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This theory focuses on how adult and peers influence individual learning and how cultural beliefs and attitudes affect instruction and learning.

Literature Review

In the context of Globalization, education can play a pivotal role to solve the challenges caused by growing religious and cultural diversity. In other words, the dream of a peaceful society can only be fulfilled when a society is comprised on morally informed individuals. Morality, in educational context, is directly linked with meaningful learning which depends on socio-culturally oriented syllabus. A basic syllabus is defined as “the intended course of study and sequence of learning opportunities in formal schooling”(Schmidt et al, 2011). The project work of Keast (2007) entitled “The challenge of intercultural education today: religious diversity and dialogue in Europe”, developed by the Council of Europe between 2002 and 2005. This project was established after the events of 9/11 to develop a new dimension on intercultural education in Europe. Its purpose was to construct an approach to intercultural learning that could promote dialogue, mutual understanding and living together. Initially, the book covers some of the theoretical perspectives of intercultural education that educators are needed to be aware. The second section begins to relate the conceptual elements of intercultural education to various approaches for teaching and learning. In this section, some methodological approaches are described with examples which are based upon research and practice in several European contexts. The third section deals with wider questions of religious diversity in schools and different settings. It deals with, how to apply intercultural education principles in different educational settings, for example, formal and non-formal learning in public and faith schools. The last section consists of some examples of current practices which are continued in some member states of the Council of Europe. These examples show different levels of expertise and provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on and apply these insights to real classroom and other practices.

Bialik et al., (2015) analyzed in their study that a true syllabus requires the students to deliberately cultivate personal growth and skill to fulfill their social responsibilities. Christian de Duve states “We have evolved traits [such as group selfishness] that will lead to humanity's extinction – so we must learn how to overcome them.” An important element in ME syllabus is character education. Some critics oppose the character education and consider it as indoctrinatory and an infringement of children’s rights” (Pike, 2010). Mohammad Chowdhry (2016) rationalized the presence of moral ethics and character education in science curriculum and science teaching. The author initially examined complexities of social life caused by globalization in the context of scientific and technological advancements and then underpinned the importance of moral and ethical values. In order to conceptualize a solid theoretical framework for school curriculum, philosophical and pedagogical questions related to morals ethics were analyzed. The author pointed out obstacles like; disagreement on what character is, limited space in pre-service curricula for character education training, limited scientific data on effective character education elements, scarcity of

expertise etc. which hindered implementation of character education in the social sciences. For universal acceptability and further research, philosophical and theoretical basis of Western and Islamic moral values were outlined. A range of pedagogical techniques; teacher training, role play, historical case stud, discussions etc are proposed to foster moral values and ethics in science students.

In a recent study, Cletus and Edinyang (2014) analyze the socio-cultural factors in Nigerian society which is already disintegrated with civil war in past some years. The authors claim that forces within a society like student's family, community background, social organization, culture, language, law, religion etc., affect students' thought and behaviour. Both the authors claim that social studies education is not such a smooth sailing enterprise in Nigerian schools due to certain socio-cultural factors at play. They recommend that conceptualizing of multicultural education into the schools can help to curb socio-cultural differences in students and effective teaching of social studies in Nigerian schools will yield better results in future.

Currently when the local and international media is unable to present a true picture of Islam and a balanced relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim communities of Pakistan, it would be pertinent, to introduce reliable and valid knowledge in the existing under-graduate-ME-syllabi regarding the minority rights. Minorities in Pakistan enjoy complete religious and civil rights which the Islam ensures to its non-Muslims citizens. While describing the minority rights, Policy Institute of Islamabad PII (2009) has explained that historically there are two types of non-Muslim citizens, *mujahidin* and *Ahl al-dhimma*. The first category is that who signed a contract and chose to live with the Muslim state, the second one is belonged to those who chose to live in their lands as protected or guaranteed citizens. Historically, the former category of minorities had the same rights as Muslims in civil and religious matters and at the time, they even enjoyed a better status than the Muslims. However, in Pakistan Non-Muslims have constitutional protection to exercise their religious and civil right freely.

To explore the local media attitude towards social issues, Syed (2008) examines ethnicity, race and religion, as represented in Pakistani print media. The author explains that different ideologies are operative in the media texts. For data analysis, newspaper columns related to ethnicity, race and religion, published in two leading Urdu-language newspapers between February and July 2006 were analyzed. In the context of data analysis, the author claims that the issues of sub-cultures in Pakistani society remain generally ignored. Pakistan's Islamic identity is overwhelmingly emphasized over other forms of identity such as race, ethnicity and religion. Consequently, there is a significant discrepancy in the concept of Pakistani identity and it hardly fits the realities of a multicultural society. This study is divided into three parts. Firstly, it offers an overview of ethnic and religious diversity in Pakistani society and the current social and legal discourse about it. Secondly, the role of the media in the creation of 'mainstream' and 'other' identities in a society and its implications for diversity and discrimination are discussed. Finally, an empirical analysis of cultural diversity in two leading Urdu-language newspapers in Pakistan has been offered. In the end, the author sums up that despite the diversified population, socio-political policies in Pakistan are predominantly assimilating rather than multicultural.

In a multicultural society, children's psychological growth is as important as physical upbringing. Sar (2016) focused her research on identifying the possibility of a children's philosophy program for the application of ethics education in Australian multicultural contexts. The study examined ethical curricular material related to immigrant experiences and the teachers' manual guide accompanied them. The data was based on curricula of Community of Inquiry classes used in some elementary schools of Australia. The framework of concepts from the sociology of pedagogy by

Bernstein, 1996 applied to materials. The study concluded with the relevance of materials for ethical education in multicultural societies of Australia. In the outcome of the study, the author concludes that engaging students in an ethical discussion and using specially written texts and textbooks as an incentive to create a philosophical discussion can become a philosophical worldview from which students will critically observe the moral and social problems that arise in their daily lives. Additionally, accompanied guides can also provide teachers with a critical and philosophical ability to understand the cultural differences of the student community. At the same time, this can be crucial for teachers who lack sufficient philosophical training.

Since the growth of social and electronic media has accelerated both the spread of information and confusion simultaneously, there is a need to draw a boundary between them. Similar sort of confusion is occurred when the two contradictory concepts like the right of free speech and respect for religious beliefs confront each other. Adherers of free speech, infact, cross the limits and disrespect others' beliefs which results in violence like the incidents of "Salman Taseer" and "Charlie Hebdo", the later occurred on January 7, 2015. It was perpetuated by two individuals who entered the satiric Charlie Hebdo journal office in Paris around 11:30 a.m. and killed twelve people: the cartoonists, the journalists and the editor's police bodyguard (Pelletier & Drozda-Senkowska, 2016). In his seminal work, "Freedoms Collide" Kuznetsov (2014) examined both the models of freedoms followed at the international level including Europe and in Russia. First, he introduced general approaches like the Human Rights Committee and the European Court towards balancing of fundamental rights. In the second phase, he evaluated both the types of freedoms in Russian context, especially, relevant international and domestic cases. Kuznetsov's analysis was restricted to legislative work and court cases, he noted that international standards and regulations were incomplete and lack uniformity. Additionally, in Russia courts were influenced by the state, however, Russian constitution guarantees freedom of ideas and speech for every citizen.

Generally, syllabi vary from country to country, regardless of the pointers used to evaluate the curriculum. There are variations in success and learning (gains in performance), no matter how limited by the way success is measured. However, our hypothesis is that the national culture has an impact on the curriculum. We believe that this also has an impact on learning. Regardless of how culture impacts syllabi and learning separately, culture also has an impact on the relationship between the two. The way in which syllabi is linked to learning varies across national cultures. So, to obtain the desired result in the society there is need to adopt the prevalent ME syllabi according to our national and cultural needs. As per our discussion regarding the syllabi of Moral Ethics education in Pakistani context, the existing syllabi of ME in post-intermediate level lacks some important socio-cultural aspects. In this section of our literature review, the variable which is used in this research to measure the strength of existing ME syllabi at graduate especially in the context of Pakistani society would be discussed and linked with the given research.

Study Objectives

The initial objective of this study is to analyze the selected ME syllabi of undergraduate level in the context of socio-cultural elements. Another important objective was to identify, how the ME syllabus can help in resolving the issue of blasphemy, especially, in Pakistan?

Methodology

During the present study total, 55 out of 163 degrees awarding institutes of Pakistan were approached. Within the 55 institutes, 50 of them responded positively and showed their consent to participate in the given study; rest of the 5 institutes refused our request due to the sensitive nature of our research. Remaining 108 institutes either do not teach Moral ethics or they prefer to teach professional ethics in lieu of ME course. One possible reason for not teaching ME is that,

sometimes, non-Muslim students themselves choose Islamic studies in lieu of ME as they have already been studying IS previously. However, to obtain the written approval, consent form and the list of SCFs were sent to these institutes. After getting the approval, the syllabi were collected from internet and official websites of these institutes.

After a rigorous literature review of relevant material, following eight categories of SCFs were selected for conducting content analysis:

Religious diversity and intercultural education (RDIE)

Character education (CE)

Punishment as deterrence (PD)

Knowledge of blasphemy laws (KBL)

Minority rights in Islam (MRI)

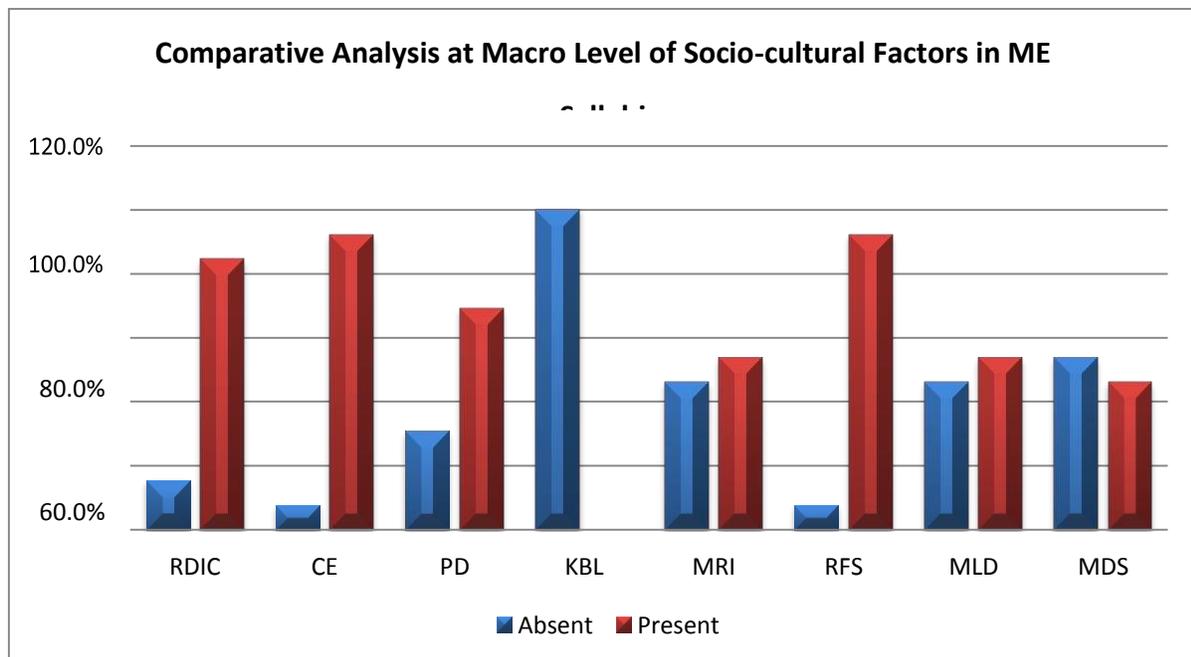
The right of free speech and respect for others' beliefs (RFS)

Use of moral life dilemmas in ME classrooms (MLD)

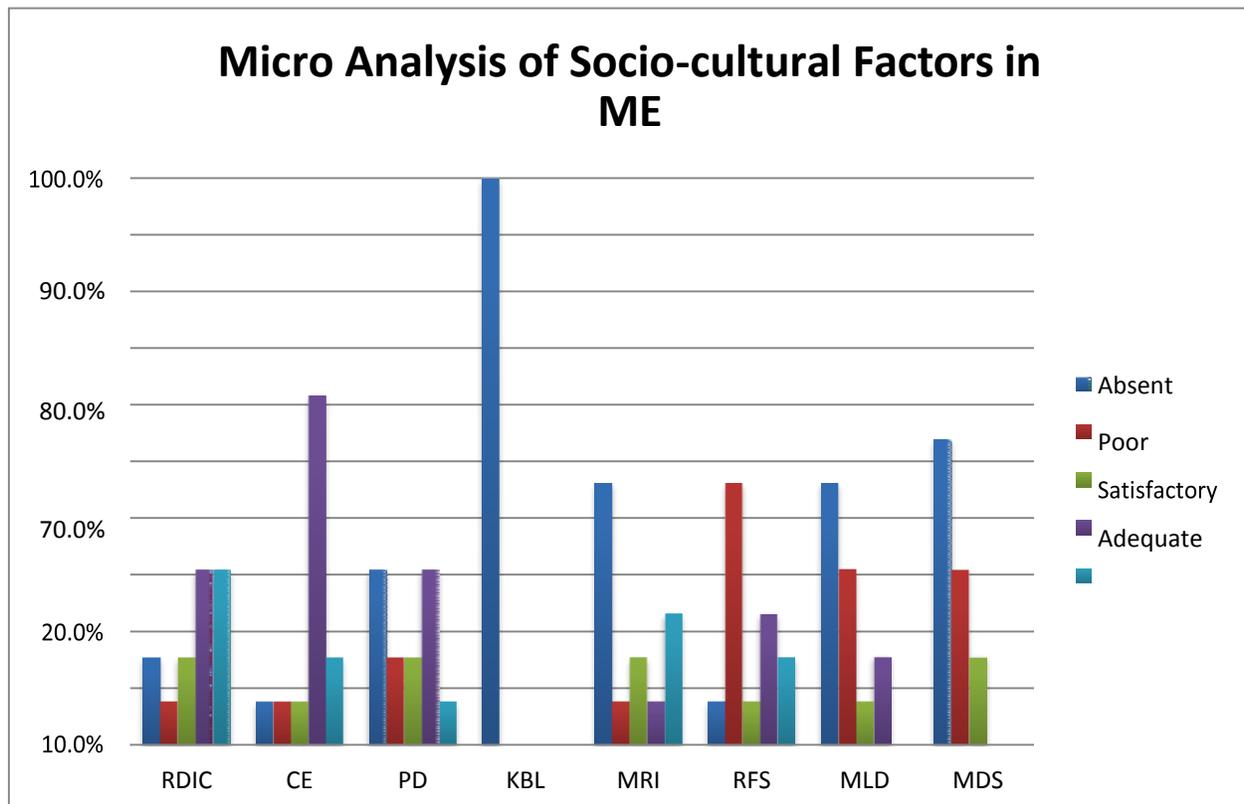
Introduction to other models of diverse societies (MDS)

To evaluate the selected ME syllabuses, quantitative content analysis has been performed, as Douglas Ezzy (2002) identifies, content analysis the “most deductive of all forms of data analysis,” and believes to be used in testing empirical data”. Furthermore, during the evaluation frequency of SCFs' occurrence in the ME syllabi have been examined. As the quantitative content analysis is based on inferential statistics, a scoring scale is set from 0 to 4: where “0” means that SCFs are completely absent from the selected ME curriculums. “1” indicates poorly highlighted; it meant 3 or less than 3 out of 8 SCFs are found in the syllabi. “2” identifies satisfactory, it conveys that 4 to 5 SCFs are present. “3” implies that more than 5 SCFs are adequately reflected in the investigated ME syllabuses. Moreover “4” establishes “excellently present” which reflects that 7 to 8 SCFs are present in the ME syllabi. The contents of the syllabi have been statistically analyzed by using the statistical software SPSS version 22. The socio-cultural factors of the syllabi are estimated with frequency by the help of chi-square test.

Results



To evaluate frequency and percentage of SCFs in ME syllabi at tertiary level in Pakistan, bar charts were used to identify the true picture in the scenario of blasphemy issue in Pakistan. In Figure: 1, 8 SCFs were illustrated side by side to show their presence and absence in terms of frequency. In all the SCFs the most important factor KBL which could help to manage the blasphemy issue at domestic level in Pakistan, was alarmingly absent 100.0% in all the selected ME syllabi. However, both CE and RFS responsible for creating confidence and free thinking in the students were present 92.3%. in all the ME syllabi. Apart from CE and RFS, SCFs which could be found in sizable frequency; PD, MRI and MLD were also 50% part of the ME syllabi. Over all it was clear that KBL was completely missing in all the ME syllabi at tertiary level, although other SCFs such as CE, RFS, etc., were relatively better in their presence.



In the Fig:2, which depicts Micro Analysis of SCFs in ME syllabi; all the 8 SCFs are sequenced from completely absent to excellently present. The KBL is completely absent, but CE is adequately present with 60%. Some other factors like MDS, MLD and RFS are also missing the satisfactory level, as all these three elements are poorly present, only 30% to 46% respectively. Besides KBL, absent ratio of MDS, MLD and MRI is 46% to 53% which indicates the inefficiency of these examined ME syllabi. Noticeably, all the SCFs are “excellently present” less than 8%.

Discussion:

Our results of socio-cultural analysis of selected ME syllabi at tertiary level, confirm the deficiency of socio-cultural elements in the prevalent ME syllabi. As per our findings, the most important socio-culture factor KBL which includes, knowledge of blasphemy concept, Islamic sources of anti blasphemy laws and Muslims sensitivity towards their religion, is completely missing in ME syllabuses. Secondly, the approach of real-life dilemmas (RLD) for solving routine life conflicting issues is also neglected in existing ME syllabuses. As per the given hypothesis ME syllabuses in

Pakistan at tertiary level lack important socio-cultural elements. One important socio-cultural element in Pakistani society is Muslims' veneration to their religion, related personages and artifacts. Nearly 97% of Pakistanis are Muslims and sentimental to their religious beliefs. It is all the Muslims firm belief that religion and its related personalities are above any criticism, otherwise it would be considered an act of blasphemy which is a punishable crime according to Islamic exegesis. The issue of blasphemy is not a new phenomenon; it has long been a bone of contention between Muslims and non-Muslims in the History. In the British India, the colonial government of that time introduced blasphemy laws to solve the religious issues between Muslims and Hindus who were in majority and often accused of blasphemy acts against Islam. After the divide of India in 1947, Pakistan was founded as the Muslim homeland where according to Islamic *shria* laws (laws extracted from Quran and Hadith) the act of blasphemy is considered a heinous crime which demands capital punishment. Same penalty is sanctioned in the constitution of Pakistan for a blasphemer. In 1986, Pakistani blasphemy laws were amended to include the death penalty. In 1991, the Federal Sharia Court of Pakistan ruled out life imprisonment and prescribed death penalty as obligatory punishments under 295-C (Shemeem, 201).

For controlling hate crimes like blasphemy, which is the cause of ethnic and religious differences among different religious communities in Pakistan, there is a need to implement socio-culturally oriented ME syllabi for non-Muslim students. However, Muslims students are bound to study Islamic studies as compulsory subject which properly cultivates their moral attitudes on religious grounds. The obtained results in our study clearly indicate the weak areas of indigenous ME syllabi at tertiary level. Both the SCFs; KBL and MLD are neglected largely, although both of them are directly related to the social fabric of Pakistani society. KBL, the concept of blasphemy, is evaluated in two different perspectives in the modern world. Religion is thought to be a personal matter in the West; although, freedom of speech is given the utmost importance even one can freely criticize others religious beliefs like in the case of Muslims. Contrary to it, for the Muslims religious beliefs are part of their eternal faith and the Islamic society is governed under these beliefs. KBL and MLD are directly linked to multicultural syllabus approach which advocates complying SCFs in school syllabuses. Findings of Cletus and Edinyang's (2014) research study support our results. Both the authors point out SCFs; community background, language, cultural and religious differences ought to be considered during the process of learning and teaching. Besides emphasizing teachers' impartial and analytical approach towards their students, Cletus and Edinyang recommend that social and cultural laws should be explained for the enhancement of the students' approach towards practical solutions of moral issues. While considering the SCFs in a multicultural classroom setting Suleiman and Hashem (1997) identify that those factors such as values, beliefs and cultural norms, help in creating successful communicative skills both in teachers and students. This research study strengthens our findings which advocate implying socio-culturally oriented syllabus in classrooms by claiming that multicultural communicative proficiency helps in developing learning opportunities and cultivating cultural relations among students.

The second SCF element MLD is equally significant because it can provide students an empirical approach to solve the moral and ethical issues in real life situations. Class discussions on real life dilemmas would also enhance students' level of confidence to handle the tough situations with care and responsibility. So, through the inclusion of these SCFs; KBL and MLD in ME syllabi, other non-Muslim communities would have a better chance to understand the Muslim perspective on the issue of blasphemy. Explaining the phenomenal use of real life moral dilemmas, Gilligan (1982) provided the similar results to our research findings. Her use of real life moral dilemmas in

ME classes proved to be more practical and realistic in realizing the students' moral point of view. She founded that everyone had their own interpretations of the moral problem because MLDs encountered in real life were spontaneous and critical by nature. Kohlberg (1975) employed pre-conceived MLDs in his research to present the development stages of children in their moral life, the main weakness of hypothetical MLDs was that majority of students fail to take sensible and wise decisions on the right time (Krebs et al., 1997). At the same time, a single case may be perceived separately by two different individuals. Thus, every individual in routine experience interprets those moral problems according to his own moral progression, context and orientation. Due to missing socio-cultural elements in ME syllabuses, the main focused of our study is on the issue of blasphemy. The scope of the study is limited to the degree level ME syllabuses. Being limited to syllabus analysis at tertiary level, it is not the scope of our study to identify the causes of blasphemy in common masses. A further area of study would involve seeking the reasons behind this phenomenon in the convicted individual. Other import aspects are moral awareness and moral decisions making which to be investigated in students because sometimes people do not take into account the context of the problem. In contrast to the informal character of these ME syllabuses, the given analysis is limited to the formal nature of these syllabuses. The formal nature is a bureaucratic process by which the characteristics of the syllabi are developed and then determined. Informality refers to the actual implementation of the course by a specific teacher with a certain class. Evaluating the informal components may inevitably bring these courses to life.

Conclusion

The issue of blasphemy has crumbled the social and political situation in Pakistan by dividing the different religious communities into rivals. Moreover, this vulnerable scenario has also created rifts in the country's internal security fabric which is already the target of various terrorist groups. As more than half of the blasphemy cases in Pakistan have registered against the non-Muslim individuals, it would be pertinent to design the syllabi of ME in such a way that it can help in creating harmony and respect among all the religious fractions of Pakistan. It is previously mentioned in the paper that for non-Muslim communities, ME is recommended in lieu of Islamic studies; compulsory for every Muslim student. To solve the blasphemy issue at academic level this research paper seeks to examine the socio-cultural (SC) elements in the existing ME syllabi in Pakistan.

The results of the given study prove our initial hypothesis that most of the ME syllabi at tertiary level follow the foreign and outdated approach without considering the social and cultural factors of Pakistani society. During the analysis, the two most important SC elements; knowledge of blasphemy laws (KBL) and the use of real life dilemmas (RLD) in class rooms are found nearly absent in the all functional syllabi for ME. Despite all the reservations from the west regarding the right of free speech, the majority of Muslims in Pakistan, especially, are very emotional to their religious beliefs and sacred personalities. As the present research is restricted to academic level, more research on the public level is required to deal with this issue.

It is noticeable that unlike other natural science subjects, ME syllabi is nearly neglected at the tertiary level in Pakistan. Countries, where the diverse religious minorities live side by side, ME subject at educational level is given the utmost importance to strengthen the national agenda of unity. Would we ever realize how important it is to resolve this issue to intact our unity and peace?

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