



## **Remembering Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed: The Construction of Memory, Religious Affect and Blasphemy in the Muslim Public Sphere in Colonial Panjab and Contemporary Pakistan**

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*"This young son of a carpenter has surpassed us, O educated ones"*

– Sir Allama Mohammad Iqbal

*"We have already expressed our regrets on the murder of Rajpal...the reasons for regret in the current situation were two: one, that an individual was killed against the constitution, and, two, that the atmosphere had, to a great extent, been temperate and this event has allowed selfishly motivated groups to spread chaos."*

– *Inqilaab*, 12 April 1929, 'Rajpal's Murder: Attempts to Spoil the Atmosphere'.

The specter of Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed continues to haunt Pakistan. The convicted murderer of a Hindu publisher in Lahore in 1929 continues to be remembered as the role model for how a Muslim should respond to blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammad. When the Aasia Bibi case erupted in November 2010, pamphlets and sermons on who he was and the need for someone to take on his legacy was articulated across clerical circles. The entire affair ended with the ghost of Ilam Din possessing another individual: Mumtaz Qadri. The young



boy who murdered a Hindu publisher, Raj Pal, guilty of circulating the blasphemous book, *Rangeela Rasul* on 2 April 1929, near Taxali Gate in Lahore is remembered as a hero. He continues to reappear in the body of new Muslim males.

This chapter will examine how the idea of blasphemy and the appropriate affective response to it has been constructed in the Muslim public sphere in Pakistan through an examination of the sources of remembering Ilam Din. It will proceed to examine what Ilam Din's own confession statement could add to debate. The first section of the paper will look at how the hegemonic memory of Ilam Din has been created in postcolonial Pakistan. This will be done through a reading of biographies of Ilam Din and films made about him in the postcolonial period. I will show how these sources gloss over the internal contradictions and alternate explanations of Ilam Din's story to present a hegemonic narrative of how Muslims should respond to blasphemy.

The second section of the paper will work through the archives to look at how the memory of Ilam Din was constructed through a contested process in the colonial period. The task will be performed by analysing one Urdu newspaper, *Inqilaab*, being published from Lahore before and after Raj Pal's murder and looking at Ilam Din's own admission of guilt to the police. The sources will show how the Muslim public sphere adjusted its discourse in response to public events (as the situation developed), instead of articulating a single hegemonic, affective position.

The third section of the paper will look at how Ilam Din's own confession statement provides a complicated emotional landscape from which to understand his motivation for murdering Raj Pal. The inner contradictions of betrayal in a homoerotic relationship, a suicide wish and a communalised religious context open a landscape where Ilam Din's murder of Raj Pal becomes a way of articulating a meaningful death, instead of acting out of some inner and inarticulateable "religious affect". Through this analysis, the paper aims to contribute to the debate between modern European critical theory and non-Western/post-Enlightenment critical theory projects, especially through an examination of the problem of blasphemy.

By excavating how the Ilam Din narrative was constructed, the essay will argue that the idea of the ordinary Muslim who suffers moral violence when he encounters blasphemy is a product of contestations in the Muslim public sphere—and the inner world of Ilam Din. In a sense, this is an attempt to grapple with how one interpretation of



Ilam Din's murder of the Hindu publisher Raj Pal in 1929 won out in contemporary Pakistan. It is a story of how the critique of Raj Pal's murder that emerges in the Muslim public sphere in colonial Panjab in April 1929 is silenced in favour of Allama Iqbal's tenuous poetic tribute to Ilam Din.

### **'Religious pain': a false debate**

One of the key contributions to the debate between Western and non-Western critical theory is the series of essays *Is Critique Secular?* Mahmood argues for the need to understand 'religious pain' (2009: 71). Using the example of the Danish cartoon controversy, Mahmood is interested in 'what constitutes moral injury in our secular world?' (ibid.: 70). Mahmood's narrow focus on 'devout Muslims' in her essay itself glosses over the complex experiences that her own interviewees express. One British Muslim male she notes is upset about the 'lack of understanding on the part of my secular friends (who are by the way not all White, many are from Pakistan or Bangladesh)' (ibid.: 75). By putting the experience of these Pakistani or Bangladeshi friends within brackets, Mahmood makes their experiences inauthentic—or outside what she claims is the "habitus" (ibid.: 78) of Muslims. Mahmood continues to state that

for many Muslims, the cartoons committed were not a moral interdiction, but against a structure of affect, a habitus, that feels wounded. This wound requires moral action, but its language is neither juridical nor that of street protest, because it does not belong to an economy of blame, accountability or reparations. (ibid.: 78)

In contemporary Pakistan, the moral action required by those who feel wounded is murder. The individual must follow in the footsteps of Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed. To call this 'internal to the structure of the experience' (ibid.: 78) as Mahmood does glosses over the complex and contested ways in which narratives around blasphemy are constituted in South Asia. This ignores the way these responses take the form of the language of street protest and moral imperatives. In this case, it is clear that Ilam Din's action is not purely affective, or, 'internal to the structure of the experience.' It produces a concrete act of murder. This act of murder provides a template to structure religious affect for the emerging Muslim nationalist movement and the postcolonial state of Pakistan.



When the story of Ilam Din is re-told after every public accusation of blasphemy is made, it is done to *produce* an affective response. If this was a pre-existing habitus, then the repetition of the Ilam Din narrative at a particular moment in time would not be necessary. The narrative of "moral injury" could be said to be as much a product of the workings of the Muslim public sphere as it is a response of any imagined *a priori* Muslim habitus. I will argue that it is more useful to look at contestations within the Muslim public sphere to understand the *production* of moral injury and *religious affect*, instead of the essentialised Muslim subject that Mahmood posits.

Butler questions whether Mahmood would be able to distinguish between the meaning of the injury and the evaluation – or judgment – of it (Butler 2009: 103). Instead, Butler suggests questioning whether blasphemy exists within a single framework—as Asad<sup>1</sup> (Asad 2009) and Mahmood suggest—or whether it 'exists precisely at the crossroads of competing, overlapping, interruptive, and divergent moral frameworks' (ibid.: 104)? The rest of the paper will attempt to adhere more to Butler's suggestion that it is 'most important to ask, what would judgment look like that took place not "within" one framework or another but which emerged at the very site of conflict, clash, divergence and overlapping?' (ibid.: 104). Butler argues that

when we ask what historically formed schemes of evaluation condition and inform our shock and outrage over suicide bombing and our righteous coldness in front of state-sponsored violence, it seems to me that we are trying to delimit the historical conditions of possibility for affective and evaluative response. (ibid.: 104)

I would instead insist that using the Danish cartoon controversy provides a landscape that can easily be rendered uncomplicated based on an imagined opposition between the "secular West" and the (global) Muslim subject. The case of Ilam Din reveals a much more complicated schema that cannot be reduced to the West/non-West divide for looking at the issue of blasphemy. Similarly, an examination of the Muslim public sphere should allow us to open up the complicated issue of how a particular affective response to blasphemy became hegemonic in late Muslim nationalism in South Asia and contemporary Pakistan.

### **Constructing affect: Ilam Din in post-colonial Pakistan**

It is perhaps not insignificant that the first film titled *Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed*<sup>2</sup> to create a popular visual imagination of the story is



released in 1978. This is the same year that the left-wing government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is overthrown by an Islamist military coup by General Ziaul Haq. The cultural and political backdrop is the Nizam-e-Mustafa movement<sup>3</sup> led by the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), which creates the narrative that the Pakistani state was becoming too secular under Bhutto<sup>4</sup> and it needed to be returned to its origin ideological origin. The work of Abbas (2014) points to the need to understand what the postcolonial state has added to colonial social relations. Abbas notes that

in Pakistan, the Sunni Muslim majority has come to define the dominant inflection of the state; and the marginalization of minorities as citizens *does not* emanate from the failure of state sponsored secularization to ensure "absorption". It issues instead from attempts to secure the religious underpinning of the postcolonial state [...] neutralization of progressives [...] combined with the addition of the sensibilities of a particular Islamic inflection that [...] is attempting to secure a particular meaning of Islam and create a proper Muslim persona—by way of controlling the image of the Prophet—in and through the structures of state. (Abbas 2014: 112)

One of the most popular films of the time, the film *Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed* presents the story of a young boy consumed by the desire of martyrdom for the love of Prophet Mohammad since his early days. The discovery of the *Rangeela Rasul* pamphlet only allows him to manifest his desire and destiny. The film presents Ilam Din as more than just a lover of the Prophet Muhammad. He is a working-class hero, a woman's dream, and an impeccably honest man concerned with justice.

In the film, Ilam Din is shown to have escaped after murdering Raj Pal only to surrender himself to the police and admit his guilt after he sees that an innocent bystander has been arrested. Despite the protests of his lawyer, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Ilam Din continues to admit his guilt in court and almost demands that the court hang him to complete his martyrdom. He expresses anger when he learns that his death sentence has been appealed, as it would delay his martyrdom. When he learns that the Privy Council has rejected the appeal, Ilam Din is filled with joy: it is the culmination of his desire and his mother's. Contrary to fact, Jinnah is shown to have rejected any fee to appear in court. After Ilam Din is hanged, the film concludes with an image of Jinnah proclaiming that the hanging ends the possibility of Hindus and Muslims living together.



The exaggerated image of Ilam Din set in the film sets the tone for the resurrection of Ilam Din's memory to create a new affective template for the ordinary Pakistani Muslim. It is this last scene, which creates the centre stage for why the country needed to return to its so-called original Islamist vision. A new Pakistani citizen must be imagined who must reject the so-called secular Muslim subject template generated in the Ayub dictatorship and the Bhutto period. The films provide the template for this new imagined Pakistani subject. It is this exaggerated construction of Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed. He is constructed as the Bhagat Singh figure of the Pakistan movement—the spilling of whose innocent blood by the colonial state makes the creation of Pakistan inevitable. In this imaginary, then, Ilam Din is not only the ideal Pakistani subject, he is the first Pakistani. The spilling of Rajpal's blood for the love of the Prophet is the moment of its conception.

It does not take long for fundamental changes<sup>5</sup> to the blasphemy laws in the country to take place. The introduction of Section 295C of the legal code requires a mandatory death penalty for anyone found to be defiling the name of Prophet Mohammad. The spirit of Ilam Din is sublimated into the spirit of the State of Pakistan. But this is not sufficient. Ilam Din's spirit must possess the spirit of each Muslim frequently. This is the narrative that religious groups in the country, led by the Tehreek Tahfuz-e-Namoos-e-Risalat (Movement to Protect the Persona of the Prophet) take on. In the same period, a number of biographies<sup>6</sup> of Ilam Din begin to appear. Similar to the film, the biographies rely on as many imaginative leaps as the film. They steer clear of linking Ilam Din to the two-nation theory but continue to provide a narrative that sees Ilam Din as the template of a true Pakistani Muslim.

Each of the books begins the narrative through sketching the family history of Ilam Din's family. It talks about the first convert from the family, a certain Baba Lahnoo<sup>7</sup>, who both marked the point when Ilam Din's ancestry broke into the fold of Islam and the moment where special religious status<sup>8</sup> was endowed upon the family. From a noble origin is produced this story of this simple young man, who by one act of murder, manifested the truth of the Love of the Prophet. This is not a "break" from character—but a manifestation of it.

Ilam Din is born in Kashmiri bazaar, at the centre of Lahore, to a carpenter, Talay Mand on 4 December 1908.<sup>9</sup> Of his early life narrated to us is his inability to cope with education, his being trained in his father's trade and his journey to Multan and Khanewal. The authors



trace his "spiritual enlightening" by narrating his visits to the graves of various saints.<sup>10</sup> The origin of his desire for martyrdom<sup>11</sup> is traced to 1928. It is narrated that he saw the grand burial of Maulvi Tajdin and was moved by it. Noorani narrates his statement upon seeing this janaza, 'Oh! If one gets life then death must be like this: one from whom some lesson may be learnt!'

Creating the story of a true lover of the Prophet Mohammad, the writers are faced with a significant challenge. The controversial book *Rangeela Rasul*<sup>12</sup> had been published in May 1924. Protests against the book had been ongoing. There had been two attempts on Raj Pal's life in late 1927 after the court case against him was rejected. The question of why this man who was destined to manifest the love of the Prophet Mohammad did not do so for five years seems a difficult one to navigate. The books produce a simple solution: they project Ilam Din as ignorant of the controversial book.

These books present him as ignorant of the political fervours of the day<sup>13</sup>, and, that the discovery of the book's publication occurred for him during a public meeting outside the Dehli Gate<sup>14</sup> about two or three days before he murdered Rajpal. It is in 1929 that Ilam Din flares up after suddenly learning about the pamphlet and he asked his father whether it was fair to kill such a man. His father is supposed to have granted him legitimacy. The next day he is said to accompany a friend, Sheeda, in a discussion on the subject and attends another public meeting at the Wazir Khan Mosque<sup>15</sup>. The same night he is said to have an old man appear in his dream asking him to take revenge, which when he narrates to Sheeda, Sheeda confirms seeing a similar dream. Now the problem becomes: who amongst them shall undertake the "noble act"? A coin is tossed. Ilam Din wins. He gets the same dream again. The next day he buys a dagger, heads to the shop of Rajpal and kills him.

Ilam Din flees the scene of the murder and is captured in the midst. At the time of capture, each of the witnesses recollect him uttering the statement, 'I am not a thief, I have just taken revenge for my Prophet.' During the course of the trial itself, Ilam Din denies his involvement in the crime.<sup>16</sup> This denial is ignored in the narrative of most of the books but printed in the appendix. It is resolved in the Zafar Nagina book by pointing to a dream received in prison in which Ilam Din was forgiven for his lie.<sup>17</sup>

The narrative of the court is simple enough. Jinnah is paid Rs18,000 to plead Ilam Din's case. Unlike the film, this narrative is consistent in





the books. It is after Ilam Din is hanged without notice on 31 October 1929, and buried without funeral that the Muslim intelligentsia is supposed to have been mobilised. The books narrate mass civil upheaval in Mianwali and Lahore. The Punjab governor is forced to return the body to Lahore where the funeral process is held on 14 November. This is reported as one of the largest funeral processions seen in Lahore. The books end with Iqbal's statement, 'We all were left talking and this son of a carpenter did the deed.'<sup>18</sup>

These narratives created after the 1980s show how the construction of Ilam Din's memory as heroic at a particular moment reflect the cultural engineering of the Islamic postcolonial state that was being consolidated under the Zia dictatorship. The construction of this heroic figure wipes away all the inner contradictions in the narrative to make it appear as if the murder of the Hindu publisher Rajpal was his manifest destiny—and therefore of all Muslims. The affective response of the Muslim subject of the state of Pakistan is not primordial, but it is generated through careful construction in the national public sphere through film, pamphlets, and books.

### **A contested memory: Ilam Din in the colonial period**

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The almost unified narrative around Ilam Din in the postcolonial state seems to suggest that the murder of Rajpal was met with the same resounding applause in the colonial period. Abbas points to the need for a

more systemic understanding of the colonial production of religious affect [...] the law configures the subject population as a body to be engaged and humored at the level of feeling; that is, it produces an understanding of the native's relation with religion as a series of affects, a mess of feeling rather than principled commitments or propositions [...] (Abbas 2014: 114)

If Ilam Din's response to blasphemy is indeed the *affective* response of every Muslim (in South Asia) at least as the postcolonial narrative around him suggests, then one would expect the colonial public sphere to demonstrate that unity. Instead, what we find is that the response to his murder is tenuous in the Muslim press. Since there is no consensus on whether Raj Pal should be killed during the colonial period, the first response in the Muslim press is to condemn the murder. This shows a contested Muslim public sphere, which nonetheless, eventually decides to celebrate Ilam Din once Mohammad Ali Jinnah becomes his defence lawyer.





It is impossible to extract a coherent affective response to the murder of Raj Pal. One of the key reasons for which is that five years have passed since *Rangeela Rasul* was published when Raj Pal is murdered.<sup>19</sup> There are two attempts on the life of Rajpal in 1927 before the British government agrees to amend section 295 of the Indian Penal Code to add 'hurting religious feelings' to the law.<sup>20</sup> After the changes, the controversy around the publication of *Rangeela Rasul* does not reappear in the Muslim press until Raj Pal is murdered. In fact, if anything, there is an attempt to play down the murder. I will work through the Urdu newspaper *Inqilaab* which is published from Lahore to look through these narratives.<sup>21</sup>

### *Raj Pal's acquittal*

After Raj Pal's acquittal in 1927, the Muslim press continues to construct an affective sentiment around the issue of hurting religious sentiments. When Raj Pal is acquitted of the charge of hurting religious sentiment, *Inqilaab* runs the headline 'Is the Hurting of Muslim Religious Sentiments not a Legal Crime?'<sup>22</sup> It continues to query the law<sup>23</sup> and the governor<sup>24</sup> and runs headlines such as 'Every house is mourning!'<sup>25</sup> and 'The Issue of the Prophet's Respect: The Test of the Faith of India's 60 Crore Muslims.'<sup>26</sup> The reporting runs from May-August 1927 when it reports the planned induction of section 295A of the *Indian Penal Code* as 'The Problem of the Respect of the Prophet: The New Law of the Government of India.' The newspaper pits itself against the perceived injustice of the law, especially when a case is filed against another Muslim newspaper *The Muslim Outlook* and it defends it reforming on the decision to acquit Raj Pal to justify legal reform.

The press coverage stops after the legal changes are approved—but the issue makes news again in a more muted sense when there are two attempts on the life of Raj Pal on September 24, 1927 by Khuda Baksh and, then, 10 October 1927 by Abdul Aziz Khan. The incidents are reported without comment.<sup>27</sup> The second murder attempt is merely reported as 'A Scuffle on Hospital Road,'<sup>28</sup> which suggests that this was the product of a fight. The newspaper criticises the trials of the two. In an editorial titled *Abdul Aziz Khan Ghaznavi*, the paper laments, 'like Khuda Baksh Lahori, Abdul Aziz Ghaznavi's trial was concluded within two days.'<sup>29</sup> It continues to print an article titled, *Khuda Baksh and Abdul Aziz—Through the Eye of Hindu Newspapers*, in which it first defends the Muslim newspaper's reporting on them as 'concentrating on the issue of fair trial' in which the two defendants were not allowed



a 'fair defence.'<sup>30</sup> It continues to deny the accusation that the murder attempts were the result of a Muslim plot. In later reporting it prints another article, *The Appeal of Khuda Baksh and the Proof of Framing*. The focus remains on perceived injustices in the law.

#### *Raj Pal's murder: condemnation*

On 9 (?) April 1929, Raj Pal is murdered. *Inqilaab* reports it calmly before printing a condemnation of the act on 12 April titled, 'Rajpal's Murder: Attempts to Spoil the Atmosphere.'

We have already expressed our regrets on the murder of Rajpal. This type of act is condemnable given any circumstances and the reasons for regret in the current situation were two: one, that an individual was killed against the constitution, and, two, that the atmosphere had, to a great extent, been temperate and this event has allowed selfishly motivated groups to spread chaos.<sup>31</sup>

The article continues to complain: 'People are trying to give this event a religious color [...] it is better to forget the aforesaid book and not ignite the emotions of others.'<sup>32</sup> And then makes direct reference to the nature of the act to locate it within a certain type of existing religious sentiment that was deplorable: 'Even if a religious sentiment motivates this act, there is no reason to hold the entire community accountable for the act of one individual [...] these types of individuals do not exist amongst only Muslims rather every nation has these types of individuals.'<sup>33</sup> The clear attempt here is to present Ilam Din's act as a deviation from the right course of action—and an appeal is made not to affiliate it with the Muslim community. Ilam Din is not presented as the archetype of the affective response of Muslims, but rather as a departure. This is a narrative that will slowly change.

#### *Jinnah's appeal*

Once the trial starts, Ilam Din denies committing the murder.<sup>34</sup> It is after his denial that the first article questioning the trial appears in which the accused's right to be presumed innocent is raised.<sup>35</sup> When Ilam Din is sentenced to death on 24 May, *Inqilaab* does not protest. This narrative begins to change once Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who would later become the head of the Muslim League, takes up his appeal. The news that Jinnah would take up the case to defend Ilam Din appears as an advertisement on 29 June.<sup>36</sup> On 17 July, the newspaper reports, 'Ilam Din's Appeal: Mister Jinnah's great speech. Appeal rejected.'<sup>37</sup> The report prefaces itself with the couplet:



Mudat se lag rahi thi lab i baam taktaki  
Thak thak ke gir pari nigah i intazaar aaj  
(For ages did sight look on in wait of thy lips tired,  
the eye that waits, fell today)<sup>38</sup>

This move into symbolic appropriation of Ilam Din is significant. It is also out of character with the earlier imagination. The verse itself signifies a failed longing. The object of the longing is Ilam Din himself. The appropriation of religious and poetic symbols becomes a norm in the Muslim press after this moment. A report on 19 July begins with a Quranic verse. The contents of Jinnah's appeal in court, based on Ilam Din's denial, are irrelevant to how he is imagined in the Muslim public sphere.

It is only on 19 October 1929, that Ilam Din is imagined/ constructed as the fulfilment of the love of the Prophet Mohammad. After the Privy Council rejects the appeal to suspend the death sentence based on Ilam Din being underage, the newspaper runs the headline, 'The Moth of the Flame of the Respect of the Prophet: Ilam Din's appeal is rejected!'<sup>39</sup> The period in which Ilam Din is made into a martyr has started.

#### *Making a religious martyr*

Once the appeal is rejected, the reporting begins to focus on where Ilam Din will be buried. Ilam Din's father makes periodic requests to allow a burial in Lahore. Instead, Ilam Din is transferred into Mianwali prison. On 26 October, *Inqilaab* begins to give Ilam Din's murder special religious significance. The paper narrates Ilam Din's meeting with his mother when he reports a dream,

Don't you remember that one night I woke up afraid after a dream? You asked me why. It was not wise to narrate it then. This death sentence is the manifestation of that dream. I was told, "You shall be hanged for the crime of my [The Prophet's] love. Be happy that you will be the companion of Hussain."<sup>40</sup>

On 29 October, the newspaper publishes details from his will. It stipulated what is to be done with his body, where he is to be buried, the size of his grave and its surroundings. The report concludes with Ilam Din inviting the readers to meet him after he is dead by stating that 'if anyone amongst you desires to meet me then recite the darood and ayat karima. With the grace of God I shall indeed meet him.'<sup>41</sup>



It is one day before his hanging that *Inqilaab* first labels it *Shahadat*<sup>42</sup>, or martyrdom. The same day a strike<sup>43</sup> is announced in his honour on the day of the hanging. The reporting of his hanging itself plays highly into symbolism. *Inqilaab* reports: 'On Thursday morning, around 8 am, the Ghazi was given the drink of martyrdom. His face was glowing and he was shouting, "Allah o Akbar!". All other prisoners were answering you back with such power that the voice was heard outside the jail.'<sup>44</sup>

Following this, Ilam Din is reported to be buried without a funeral prayer in Mianwali with police guarding his grave. This leads to the initiation of civil disobedience and formation of a committee, including notably Mohammad Iqbal, to let the body be returned to Lahore, and, that it be allowed a funeral procession. The paper continues to cover the efforts to reclaim the body and confirms the acceptance of the demand on the 10 November.<sup>45</sup>

The day before his scheduled funeral procession, *Inqilaab* prints a front-page poem, and reports the completion of the preparations for his funeral at Chowburgi ground and invites all Muslims to attend.<sup>46</sup> The headline after the funeral summarises the completion of the construction of Ilam Din as a hero in the 'Muslim' imaginary:

A Huge Crowd on Ilam Din Shaheed's Funeral  
A Sea of Four Lakh Crying Muslims  
The Greatness of the Love of the Prophet<sup>47</sup>

To complete the myth, *Inqilaab*, printed another editorial titled, 'Three Great Funerals', in which the funeral of Ilam Din is compared to the funerals of Iman Abu Hanifa and Mustafa Kamal Pasha in significance.

### **Ilam Din: in his own words**

The Muslim public sphere in the colonial and postcolonial period continues to speak *for* Ilam Din but it does not speak *to* him. The only site at where Ilam Din is spoken to is before being charged with Raj Pal's murder by an Investigating Officer. The narrative is contained within the Zimni Report<sup>48</sup> of the Ilam Din case. The report is not difficult to access. It is available at the Panjab Archives in Lahore along with the case record. It could reasonably be assumed that Ilam Din's postcolonial biographers would have had access to the Zimni report. Much of the larger narrative constructed in these biographies mirrors the timeline that is narrated by Ilam Din in his confession statement to the police. However, the larger narrative can also easily be recovered



from the court record, which is available from the Lahore High Court and now published in each of the biographies.

But there are significant reasons for why any of the post-colonial biographers of Ilam Din who may have come across his confession statement would choose to ignore it. The confession statement challenges two key elements of the narrative constructed in the post-colonial period. First, that Ilam Din was unaware of the *Rangeela Rasul* controversy until February 1929.<sup>49</sup> Second, and more fundamentally, Ilam Din's own words change his motivation for the murder from religious to suicidal.

### *Ignorance*

The post-colonial narratives suggest that there were two public meetings on the Rajpal case one day after another in April 1929. The first at Dehli Gate, and, the second, at Wazir Khan mosque, both of whom Ilam Din attended. According to these narratives, these meetings were where he first discovered that a book offending the Prophet had been published. The story itself is hard to believe on its own. There is no reporting of any public gatherings to protest *Rangeela Rasul's* publishing in 1929 in the Muslim press. As noted earlier, the reporting as well as protests ended in 1927. Moreover, it is hard to believe that Ilam Din, a resident of Lahore, missed the agitation in 1927 but was able to attend two rallies against the publishing of the offensive pamphlet in 1929.

Ilam Din's own confession clarifies the confusion. Recording on 8 April, Ilam Din narrates that he made a trip to Khanewal, 'five or six months before the Lahore riots.'<sup>50</sup> He continues to speak of specific knowledge of the book and the agitation around it,

during my stay in Lahore, I had heard that a Hindu shopkeeper of Anarkali had published a book titled "Rangila Rasul" against the Holy Prophet for which he was prosecuted but acquitted which excited the feelings of the whole of the Mohammadan Community to which they gave explicit vent at various meetings.<sup>51</sup>

He also admits knowledge of the first attempt on Rajpal, 'about 1 $\frac{3}{4}$  years ago, when I was at Khanewal, I heard a news given in a newspaper that Khuda Baksh, kabab seller of Lahore, had made an attempt to murder that Hindu who had escaped and Khuda Baksh was convicted.'<sup>52</sup> Ilam Din's own narrative itself dismisses the idea that Ilam Din was ignorant of the alleged offense against the Prophet. This raises



a crucial question: if Ilam Din did not think much of the ongoing public agitation against the book's publishing a few years earlier, why did he murder Raj Pal in April 1929?

*Motivation?*

Getting to the bottom of motivations is not a simple task—which is indeed what Asad and Mahmud seem to indicate—but instead, they reify a particular kind of motivation over another in the name of the impossibility of accessing them. But if that is true, then it should be equally impossible to distinguish between *religious affect* and other forms of *affect*. In the previous sections, the paper has shown how *religious affect* was constructed in the colonial period and reified in the post-colonial period as the motive behind Ilam Din's act of murder. In his confession statement, Ilam Din narrates a more complex motivation, which traverses the terrain of an inner struggle with homoerotic betrayal, suicidal thoughts and religious meaning.

Ilam Din's narrative of why he decided to murder Raj Pal starts at a strange place. He begins to narrate the story of a certain Haji of whom little is narrated in any of the sources studied earlier. He narrates that Haji had stopped speaking with him a few days before Eid. Ilam Din says, 'I felt [it] very much. Consequently he did not accompany me to the Chiraghan Fair.'<sup>53</sup> With the loss of Haji's affections affecting him, Ilam Din narrates that on the second day of the Mela Chiraghaan, 'Ghulam Nabi Carpenter [...] told me he had committed sodomy on Haji and I felt it very much.'<sup>54</sup> From all impressions, it seems Haji's infidelity left him with a desire to 'end to my life and his (Haji's)' which he expresses to his friend Fatta. His friend discourages him by stating 'people would say I had destroyed my life for the son of a villain [...] and I would gain nothing by doing away with Haji.'<sup>55</sup>

Ilam Din jumps from this story to the first time someone told him about Raj Pal's publishing office at last year's Mela Chiraghan. He narrates having passed the office three times over the year. The third time, Ilam Din narrates 'on the occasion of the Chiraghan fair, I went to the Zoo on a Tonga from Lohari Gate and passed through that bazaar where I had seen the Hindu.'<sup>56</sup> Within two days of expressing his desire to kill himself and Haji, Ilam Din narrates that

On the same night, when I went home, I felt tired of life. I thought that if I were to put an end to my life, I should better do it by to vindicate the Holy Prophet's honour by doing away with



the said Hindu and then get martyrdom. I was fully determined to do so.<sup>57</sup>

The confession statement then moves to narrate how he carried out the murder of Raj Pal. Ilam Din's own story of how his motivations for choosing to kill Raj Pal come from a place that cannot be reduced to *religious affect*. One newspaper report narrated, 'it is said that only eight days had passed since Ilam Din's engagement,'<sup>58</sup> which adds further complexity to his desire to end his life by killing Raj Pal. If the confession statement can be trusted—and it is hard to note any reason why it should not be placed in the same bracket as the narrative of the books, film and newspapers—then the picture of Ilam Din's motivation for murdering Raj Pal is much more complex from an academic point of view. From a political point of view, they would cause a scandal.

### **Beyond religious affect**

The discussion about how to deal with blasphemy—and what constitutes blasphemy—is very much part of contemporary debates in Muslim societies. The paper hopes to have substantively shown how there was a much more complex interpretation of the moment when Ilam Din killed Raj Pal for allegedly publishing a blasphemous text within the Muslim public sphere. The complexity is lost as the Ilam Din story meets the postcolonial state of Pakistan undergoing a push for Islamization.

It is perhaps irrelevant to debate whether the condemnations of Ilam Din in *Inqilaab* are the true representation of Muslim sentiment or whether it is the utterance of Allama Iqbal venerating the young boy that reflect the true sentiments of Muslims. Both are—and are not—at the same time. However, what we can say is that there is a significant difference in the ambiguity of discourse around Ilam Din that exists in the Muslim public sphere in the colonial period when compared to how he is venerated in the postcolonial context.

The absence of Ilam Din's own confession statement from the narratives created around him—and his motivations—provide a site which shows the complex inner workings of individuals represented in the public sphere in Pakistan as true representations of 'love of the Prophet.' The simplified representations of his motivation as "religious hurt" are simply untrue—and it is dangerous to peddle an academic discourse that renders "religious hurt" to be something completely inaccessible. The deepest reaches of human emotion—and motivation—are always unreachable whether in a secular or a religious con-





text.<sup>59</sup> But it does not mean that the complexities of the contexts that produce human action cannot be untangled.

In the context of Ilam Din, we see that a narrative that emerges in a specific context, i.e. the high point of communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims in colonial Punjab in the 1920s and the perceived injustice of colonial law, is universalised in the postcolonial state of Pakistan. This allows for the creation of a particular *affective* ideal type of Muslim in response to the incidents of alleged blasphemy. Mahmood's comparison of 'the bafflement many liberals and progressives express at the depth and scope of Muslim reaction over the cartoons' to the 'dismay that Protestant Christians felt at the moral consequences that followed native epistemological assumptions' (Mahmood 2009: 71) misses the point. It is the construction of a hegemonic affective response by the postcolonial state that has silenced alternate epistemological assumptions within the Muslim public sphere.

It is also clear that Ilam Din's action is *not* the 'eruption of medieval irrationality and religiosity that threatens modernity' as Mahmud caricatures. It is also not as simple as Ahmed's (2009) suggestion to try to understand the sentiments with respect to the blasphemy law by pointing to the colonial origin of the law itself. However, Ahmed has a point. The construction of the *religious affect* around blasphemy in Pakistan is very much the product of the encounter with modernity. Instead, as Butler suggests, it lies 'precisely at the crossroads of competing, overlapping, interruptive, and divergent moral frameworks.' (Butler 2009: 104)

In a post 9/11 world where progressive intellectuals have rushed to counter Islamophobia, it has left us with insufficient critique of the inner machinations of Muslim societies. Limited attention has been paid to the inner functioning of the Muslim public sphere<sup>60</sup>, even when dealing with an issue as controversial as the so-called Muslim response to what is called "blasphemy". The construction of particular religious *affects* through the Muslim public sphere and the strong contestations within it have been lost. Scholars have focused too much on how the West constructs Muslims; and not on how Muslims construct *themselves*. In the cause of defending Muslims, this literature does the opposite by fetishizing the Muslim self as an (almost purely) affective self that cannot be grasped by theory.

The trouble is that the Ilam Din story, as this paper has shown, does not leave us with simple conclusions. Killing a Hindu publisher living



under British rule cannot be understood as resistance to subjugation; but the communal politics that British rule engendered in South Asia certainly played a part. Moreover, reviving the story in the late 1970s, in a context where Pakistan no longer had either the British or Hindus to deal with, serves a different purpose. It is to construct a new ideal type of Muslim citizen. Ilam Din is presented as his ideal destiny. The irony of M.D.Taseer, father of the slain Panjab governor Salmaan Taseer—murdered by his gunman, Mumtaz Qadri, for asking for a repeal of the blasphemy laws—being part of the committee to organise the funeral of Ilam Din captures the complex contestations around what is—and is not—religious affect in Pakistan.

More difficult is the task of reckoning with the founding father of Pakistan's decision to take on the Ilam Din case. This is why it is unlikely that such a historical re-examination of the Ilam Din moment will provide catharsis for anyone. It is certainly not for the writer. The popular story of Ilam Din is a difficult one to dismantle—and so is the *religious affect* that its uncomplicated telling continues to produce. Each Ilam Din incarnate will have his own set of complicated rationales. To reduce them to an inaccessible *religious affect* is to obfuscate a process that can very much be recovered through an analysis of the inner dynamics of the Muslim public sphere and structuring factors, such as colonialism, communalism and imperialism.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Asad (2009) insists that he is "neither offering an apologia for Muslim reactions for the cartoons nor criticism of those who defend them." Instead, he insists that he wants to treat this as a site that "crystallizes some moral and political problems in liberal Europe."

<sup>2</sup> Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed (1978), Director: Haider.

<sup>3</sup> The movement started in 1977 under the banner of the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) through an alliance of nine political parties. See: Farooq Ahmed Dar, *Pakistan National Alliance: a study in its formation & political mobilization* (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Bhutto's own role in the Islamization process cannot be discounted. The decision to declare Ahmaddiya's non-Muslim in 1974 and the banning of alcohol in 1975 as well as efforts to reach out to the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) happens under Bhutto.

<sup>5</sup> See: Hayat, Zahra & Osama Siddique. 2008. *Unholy speech and holy laws: blasphemy laws in Pakistan—controversial origins, design defects and free speech implications*.

<sup>6</sup> I have looked at four biographies of Ilam Din.

<sup>7</sup> Noorani, *Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed*, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Baba Lahnoo, or, Baba Lehna Singh, also became revered as a saint with a Shrine to his name in Mauza Patana.



<sup>9</sup> Noorani, p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Directly translated as “The eruption of the seed of the desire of martyrdom”.

<sup>12</sup> The trial and events surrounding the publication of this book and its publisher, Rajpal, can be studied through the court record.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Nagina, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-86.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 90-153.

<sup>17</sup> Nagina, p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> Kamal. p. 165.

<sup>19</sup> See: Thursbay, G.R. (1974).

<sup>20</sup> See: Ahmed (2009), *Specters of Macaulay: blasphemy, the Indian Penal Code and Pakistan’s postcolonial predicament*; in Kaur, Raminder & Mazzella, William, *Censorship in South Asia: cultural regulation from sedition to seduction (172-205)*.

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed reading of the Muslim press in the 1920s, read: Markus Daeschel, *The Politics of Self-Expression: The Urdu middle-class milieu in the mid-twentieth century India and Pakistan*.

<sup>22</sup> “Is it not a crime to offend the religious sentiments of Muslims?” *Inqilaab*. 25-5-1927. Lahore. [All titles translated by author]

<sup>23</sup> “*The Rangeela Rasul Case: The Ineffectiveness of Section 153A.*” *Inqilaab*. 27-5-1927. Lahore.

<sup>24</sup> “*The Rangeela Rasul Judgment and the Governor Punjab.*” *Inqilaab*. 19-6-1927. Lahore.

<sup>25</sup> Hundreds of Lovers of the Prophet come to the High Court. *Inqilaab*. 23-6-1927. Lahore

<sup>26</sup> The Issue of the Respect of the Prophet: The Test of the Faith of India’s 600 million Muslim. *Inqilaab*. 21-6-1927. Lahore.

<sup>27</sup> Murder attempt on Raj Pal: Sensation in Lahore. *Inqilaab*. 28-9-1927. Lahore.

<sup>28</sup> Chaos on Hospital Road: One exiled Muslim trapped by Hindus. *Inqilaab*. 10-10-1927. Lahore.

<sup>29</sup> *Abdul Aziz Khan Ghaznavi. Inqilaab*. 15-10-1927. Lahore.

<sup>30</sup> Khuda Baksh and Abdul Aziz Khan – The Perspective of the Hindu Elite. *Inqilaab*. 20-10-1927. Lahore.

<sup>31</sup> Publisher Raj Pal’s murder: Attempts to spread discord in the air. *Inqilaab*. 12-4-1929. Lahore.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> The Murder of Raj Pal: Ilam Din denies committing the murder. *Inqilaab*. 26-4-1929. Lahore

<sup>35</sup> Raj Pal’s murder: One important question? *Inqilaab*. 24-4-1929. Lahore.

<sup>36</sup> Mister Jinnah is appearing for Ilam Din’s appeal! *Inqilaab*. 29-6-1929. Lahore.

<sup>37</sup> Ilam Din’s appeal – Wrong statements about the date of appeal. *Inqilaab*. 13-7-1929. Lahore.

<sup>38</sup> Ilam Din’s appeal – Mister Jinnah’s eloquent appeal. *Inqilaab*. 13-7-1929. Lahore.



<sup>39</sup> The Moth of the Flame of the Prophet's Love: Bring Ilam Din's body to Lahore. *Inqilaab*. 19-10-1929. Lahore.

<sup>40</sup> Ilam Din's greatness. *Inqilaab*. 26-10-1929. Lahore.

<sup>41</sup> Ilam Din's will to his mother. *Inqilaab*. 28-10-1929. Lahore.

<sup>42</sup> Ilam Din executed on Thursday – Refusal to bring his body to Lahore. *Inqilaab*, 1-11-1929. Lahore.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> The last moments of Ilam Din, the martyr. *Inqilaab*. 3-11-1929. Lahore.

<sup>45</sup> Ilam Din's body allowed to be buried in Lahore. *Inqilaab*. 10-11-1929. Lahore.

<sup>46</sup> The Martyrdom of Ilam Din: Preparations for Burial. *Inqilaab*. 15-11-1929. Lahore.

<sup>47</sup> Thousands gather at Ilam Din Shaheed's Funeral Prayer. *Inqilaab*. 16-11-1929. Lahore.

<sup>48</sup> The Zimni Report is the police investigative record. It includes first witness statements that may not be presented to court – but are central to the police investigation.

<sup>49</sup> Pointed out in Section 1 of this paper.

<sup>50</sup> Appendix 1. Zimni Report.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> The Chiraaghan mela occurs on the 29 of March every year and continues for three days to celebrate sixteenth century Sufi poet Madho Lal Hussain.

<sup>54</sup> Appendix 1. Zimni Report.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Raj Pal murdered. *Inqilaab*, 9-4-29. Lahore.

<sup>59</sup> For a more detailed discussion, read: Talal Asad (2003) Formations of the Secular.

<sup>60</sup> Abbas (2009) is an exception.

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### **Appendix: Zimni Report**

6-4-29 "Enquiry was made from the accused but he did not make any useful statement. He confessed his guilt and stated he had committed the murder."<sup>61</sup> (11.30 PM)

7-4-29 "On enquiry Ilam Din accused stated that on the day of the Chiraghar fair at B hagbanpura, he and one Din Mohammad had got a photo drawn together by Sirdhari La;, Photographer, Anarkali, Lahore."  
(1 PM)

"On enquiry Ilam Din accused stated that a few hours before the murder, he had purchahased the Chhuri, lethal weapon, from a Kabari's shop at Sumli Bazar for Rs. 1/-." (2 pm)

"While doing so we reached the shop of one Atma Ram Kubariya who on enquiry produced two Chhuris and made the following statement:



"Yesterday at about 1030 or 1 am one mohammedan youth aged 20/22 years having small stature came to my shop. He had, on one or two occasions before, purchased articles from my shop and so I was acquainted with him. He came and said that he had come to my shop the day before and that I was not present at my shop. He said that he wanted to purchase a chhuri. On the than near the threshold, some Chhuris were lying in a small box. I showed them to him. He took out one of them and enquired about the price. I shaid that it was worth Rs. 1/8/-. He offered me Rs. -/10/- then -/12/- then -/14/- then -/15/- and at last the bargain was struck at Re. 1/-. He asked me to keep that churri separate from others saying that he would return in a short while and take it away. IN his presence I wrapped a paper over the chhuri, and placed it in the same box, in his presence. He then went away.

About ½ or ¾ of an hour later he returned, paid me Re. 1/- and took away the chhuri. He went towards Lahore mandi. I can fully indentify that man..."<sup>62</sup>

(Atma Ram at 6 pm)

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"Enquiry was made from Ilam Din accused. He admiited having committed the murder but did not give his statement in details."

(Ilam Din at 10 pm)

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8-4-29 "I am illiterate and have been working as carpenter with my father since childhood. I have an elder brother who works in the Railway Work Shop. I have also one sister. She is married to Mohd. Ali, watch repaired of Kharadi Mohalla, Katara Muali Rangan. My father was previously a contractor. But for the last ten or twelve years, he has been working at his shop or has been doing labour work.

Five or six months before the Lahore riots, I had gone to Khanewal District, Multan, where my father was making furniture for the Hospital. After the disturbance I came to Lahore for a week or so and then again returned.

More than a year ago I had gone to my father at Kohat where my father was working as carpenter with Rehmat Ullah Contractor of Charsi Gate. I returned to Lahore in the ned of December, 1928. At Kohat I had acquaintance with...I was also on friendly terms with Din Mohd. Alias Dina, Mohd. Hussain betel leave seller and Tatta painter of Sabatwali Gate Bazar.





A few days before the Id Cast, Haji, the boy, stopped to speak with me, which I felt very much. Consequently he did not accompany me to the Chiraghar Fair. On the next day of the fair, Ghulam Nabi Carpenter r/o the same bazaar, told me that he had committed sodomy on Haji and I felt it very much. Consequently I enquired of Haji about the fact but he denied saying that Ghulam Nabi be brought face to face with him. But we could not find Ghulam Nabi. Haji was sitting at Din Mohd. Betel sellers shop on Friday last i.e. at the evening of the day previous to the recurrence. Ghulam Nabi was also present in the bazaar. I asked him to repeat the story, he had told me about Haji, in the presence of Haji himself. But Ghulam Nabi declined to have told me any such story, whereupon I slapped him. At the quarrel that ensued \_\_\_\_, Fatta and others intervened and stopped us quarreling. Ghulam Nabi then went away and I also went to my house where from I brought one rupee from my mother. I then accompanied Fatta to the olden Mosque where we hired a Tonga with a red horse belonging to a Mohammeden...While in the Tonga I told Fatta that Haji's indignation was a great shock to me and that I wished to find an end to my life and his (Haji's) whereupon Fatta remarked that the people would say that I had destroyed my life for the son of a villain. He further said that I would gain nothing by doing away with Haji. We reached back at ... and met Din Mohd. in our bazaar...

After the quarrel today had taken place at the evening, Haji had told me that he could not now bear my sight even \_\_\_\_ did he want to speak with me. This shocked me very much and I felt myself tired of the world.

During my stay in Lahore, I had heard that a Hindu shopkeeper of Anarkali had published a book titled "Rangila Rasu" against the Holy Prophet for which he (the shop keeper) was prosecuted but acquitted which excited the feelings of the whole of the Mohammadan Community to which they gave explicit vent at various meetings.

About 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  years ago, when I was at Khanewal, I heard a news given in a newspaper that Khuda Baksh, Kabab seller of Lahore, had made an attempt to murder that Hindu who had escaped and Khuda Baksh was convicted.

At the occasion of the Chiraghar fair of 1928 when I had come to Lahore, Bassa Mat of Sirianwala Bazar happened to meet me in the Anarkali Bazar. Bassa told me that he had to get the advertisement printed about a wrestling match. Cause we both went to the road where the said Hindu's shop was situated Bassa pointed me out that



Hindu sitting in his shop where some constables were present in order to keep watch.

On the occasion Shab-i-rat last, I was returning from Meha Mandi and I passed through that bazaar and saw the said Hindu.

On the occasion of the Chiraghan fair, I went to the Zoo on a Tonga from Lohari Gate and passed through that bazaar where I had seen the Hindu.

On the same day Din Mohd. And I got ourselves photographed at the shop of Girdharnath Lala Photoprapher Anarkali Street. We obtained three copies of the said potos. Din Mohd. got them framed by a frame maker having his shop near the Golden Mosque. On the same night, when I went home, I felt tired of life. I thought that if I were to put an end to my life, I should better do it to vindicate the Holy Prophet's honor by doing away with the said Hindu and then get martyrdom. I was fully determined to do so.

On the next morning i.e. on the day of recurrence I woke up at 6.30 or 7 pm. I took my shirt and Sa... and went away to the shop at Khalifa Gawar barber, situated inside Mochi Gate. I took bath and also got myself shaved. I then returned to my house, drank satoo and went away to Ravi to have a walk. On returning from the walk, I went directly to Data Ganj Bakhsh and prayed at the shrine that I should succeed in murdering the publisher of "Rangila Rasul." On my return from the Data (Shrine) I passed through Guriti bazaar where I saw some knives in a box at the shop with a kabaria there whom I had seen previously while passing through the bazaar. That Kabari, an old hindu of small stature. He demanded 1/8/- for a knife but agreed to sell it for a rupee. I asked the Kabari to keep the knife separate from the others saying that I would take it away after a short while. Consequently he wrapped that knife in a paper and placed the same in the box. I then went to my house, took one ruppe from my mother and again went to that Kabari. I paid him one rupee to that Kabari and obtained the Knife. Thereafter I went directly to Lohari Gate.

Din. Momd. And Haji met me in the bazar before I had left the mohalla. I told them that I was going to Kohat and that they should excuse me if a thing bad had been spoken by me. I concealed the knife in the Nefa (fold) of my Shalwar. When I reached the shop of that Hindu, he was sitting at his shop and was reading something. Consequently I went inside his shop and sat aside in order to make water. I then took out the knife from the nefa, kept it in hand concealed under my shirt, ran to the shop and thirsted the knife in the



chest of the said Hindu. He shrieked and I pulled out the knife from his body and threw it there and ran away. I ran towards the bazaar. At that time two other men were also collecting books – one inside the shop while the other in the Veranda. One of them threw books at me while I was running. I ran away and entered in a woodstall. Men ran after me. When I attempted to come out of the wood stall they caught me. In the meantime police in uniform came there and took me to the shop.

Consequently men came there.”<sup>63</sup> (Ilam Din, 9 am)

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**Reference:**

Trial of Ghazi Ilam Din Shaheed Under Section 302 I.P.C. 192  
(Pages 1 to 74) Part-3-III, Punjab Archives.

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<sup>61</sup> Abstract Translation of Zimni Report No. 1 (a), pp. 30.

<sup>62</sup> Extract Translation of Zimni Report No. 2, pp. 36-8 (prepared by Inspector Jawahar Lal).

<sup>63</sup> Extract of Translation of Zimni Report No. 3, pp. 39-54 (by Inspector Jawahar Lal C.J.A.).

