"Beware of the bearded man!": Thus, begins Islamophobia

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The world today is maligned by the constant urge to differentiate between the "them" and "us." This differentiation is particularly based on one's cultural background which legitimizes the process of marginalization. It is the most unchallenging way of simplifying a deep-rooted prejudice. Talking about the "popular" in the global space, the burning issue of the day can be nothing but Islamophobia. The "othering" of Muslims and branding them as perpetrators of violence has become a norm of the masses who delve little into the broader spectrum of identity based on one's religious practice. The frequent terrorist activities carried out in the name of Allah, has streamlined terrorism to only one rationale, that is, Islam. The result of which is that all Muslims are categorized as violent, destructive beings. This paper seeks to break this fallacy of Islam being the only reason behind terrorism. Incidents of terror attacks, suicide bombings and so on have clearly highlighted that the terrorists call upon the name of "Allah" for doing such disgraceful things. Little do we think that it's a political ploy garbed under the veil of Islam. In this paper I will try to depict the misnomer of considering all Muslims as a threat against mankind. Emphasis will be laid on the fact that majority of the Muslim population are themselves victims of such terrorist activity and just like the rest, are strongly fighting against this global evil. Varied interpretations of the Qur'an by disparate individuals have led to such aberrant reading and notions like "Islamophobia." Terrorism has no religion. Therefore, if indeed the concept of "othering" must be used then it should be for terrorism and not Muslims in general.

Keywords: othering, culture, terrorism, Islamophobia, muslims, politics

1. Introduction

The "othering" of Muslims and branding them as perpetrators of violence has become a norm of the masses who delve little into the broader spectrum of identity based on one's religious practice. The frequent terrorist activities carried out in the name of Allah, has streamlined terrorism to only one rationale, that is, Islam. The result of which is that all Muslims are categorized as violent, destructive beings. The world started taking a note of the so-called Islam inspired terrorism after September 11, 2001 when nineteen suicide bombers who hijacked four planes stuck head on into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. This incident fuelled the already existing fear of Islam.

Islamophobia is defined as- "An exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life" [Ali et al. (1); 9]. Other scholars have chosen to situate Islamophobia in different ways, including: a "fear laden discourse;" a "single unified and negative conception of an essentialized Islam;" "a rejection of Islam, Muslim groups and Muslim individuals on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes;" or simply "indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims" [Zúquete (2); 321−344]. In the present scenario, Islamophobia has been wrongly directed not toward Islam as a faith but Muslims as a whole, especially if they are immigrants. The presence of such a term is quite problematic

as it further enhances chances of discrimination and injustice. The sentiments of Muslims are greatly hurt when they find that their religion is exposed to such debates and discussions. Muslims feel stripped of their dignity and subjected to humiliation and pain when their religion is described in derogatory terms every now and then.

This attitude of othering every Muslim as an enemy brings forth a very singular attitude. It negates the concept of humanity that is above all differences. The society is too keen on stigmatizing the Muslim religion. Major issues behind a problem is overlooked and only religion is made to bear the burden of all abuse. Marx's critique of the German Workers Party's proposed plan of action had an argument that highlighted that the negative impact of acknowledging workers as "only workers" and ignoring the plural identities that they have – "[U]nequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable only by an equal standard in so far as they brought under an equal point of view, are taken from one *definite* side only, e.g., in the present case are regarded *only as workers*, and nothing more is seen in them, everything else being ignored" [Marx (3); *Critique of the Gotha Programme, 1875* 9]. The tenets of a religion can and should be questioned but that must not in any form lead to hatred and/or violence.

2. Plight of muslims

The Runnymede report, published in 1997, had a major influence in creating an awareness of Islamophobia and also afforded it a public and political recognition. It was the first source to posit a firm definition of Islamophobia: the "shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims." In its 1997 report Islamophobia: a challenge for us all, the Runnymede Trust defined Islamophobia as "unfounded hostility toward Islam." It identifies eight characteristics, including that Islam is seen as: a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change; lacking values in common with other cultures; as inferior to the West; as barbaric, irrational, primitive, and sexist; as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism [Runnymede Trust (4); 10−11].

One needs to conform to the opinion highlighted by Amartya Sen in this regard- "The world is frequently taken to be a collection of religions (or of "civilizations" or "cultures"), ignoring the other identities that people have and value, involving class, gender, profession, language, science, morals and politics" [Sen (5); xvi]. If Islam is what Muslims do then majority of the Muslims are peace loving and only a small percentage among them have opted for the extremist form of terrorism. Depending on these war hungry individuals, it is solely incorrect to condemn a particular religion that is constantly being used as a means of quenching one's thirst for power. These terror seeking individuals distort the teachings of Islam to fulfill their own political motives.

Their piety is not religious but political. The misnomer of considering the world based on a civilizational or religious partitioning annihilates individuals of the various other aspects of their identity thus enhancing the chances of a great deal of misunderstanding. "Civilizational partitioning is a pervasively intrusive phenomenon in social analysis, stifling other- richer-ways of seeing people. It lays the foundations for misunderstanding nearly everyone in the world, even before going on to the drumbeats of a civilizational clash" [Sen (5); 42]. A Muslim is directly discriminated against because of his religious belief. This leads to a Muslim's vehement efforts to get rid of his/her Muslim attributes to avoid being constantly under the radar of judgment. Out of this will also rise an anger, a sense of being wronged at and hence a few will start to rebel against this. This subordination may also lead to a creation of a different ideology altogether. Some may free their piety from politics, whereas others will find their piety at the center of their politics.

The prejudice projected against Muslims lead to a very serious traumatized situation for them. It has been observed that Islamophobia premeditatively crushes and demolishes the Islamic identity that one loves to profess and practice. This subjugation is often achieved using violence and hate-motivated crimes. When any individual is subjugated to such acts of inhumanity, it destabilizes their sense of self and presents the world as a baleful place. He feels like an outsider even in his own motherland as it fails to provide him with a sense of belongingness and security. They always live in a perpetual fear of further assaults, and it heightens their sense of vulnerability. Thus, this leads to a very negative behavioral impact on the part of the oppressed individual. Many a times the victimized Muslim is blamed for "being a Muslim," thus the victim is subjected to all sorts of condemnation as well. Muslims feel that their biggest crime is being born into this religion which leads them to a life of extreme torture and segregation. Prejudiced feelings and behavior of others embark them to follow the path either of seclusion or hatred. Both these options create a major impact on their mental well-being.

Whenever any individual is attacked for being a Muslim, it triggers sentiments of pain and anger in Muslims all over the world. This same feeling is evident when a mosque is demolished, or Islamic symbols are criticized. Thus, both the victim and the community are subjected to the same emotional and psychological pain that the direct victim suffers from. This makes all Muslims defenseless as it is believed that the entire community is facing hostility. Hence it also leads to considering the non-Muslims as their enemies.

People tend to form an opinion about Islam without knowing anything or just a little about it. That, somehow, becomes enough basis for them to harbor hatred toward Muslims. They deliberately shun any opportunity to be elevated with a contrary knowledge. This attitude is a result of a deep-set prejudice born out of ignorance. They feel comfortable in sticking on to their old perspective, however,

derogatory it might be. They quote the religious text to justify their narrow, parochial outlook toward life and living. The context and intentions behind the Quranic injunctions are totally negated mostly because of lack of knowledge and no desire of deciphering the truth. Individuals, who try to have a broadened perspective toward the reading of the holy text is looked down upon and ostracized from their society as well. This same mind-set is also seen in the case of fundamentalists. They purposely tend to show an obstinacy that won't let them see the other side of the coin which finally leads to a society that is unwilling to progress.

3. Islam - meaning and misinterpretation

A person's lack of knowledge pertaining to the Qur'an, wide media coverage of the edicts formulated by the terrorists in the name of Islam has led to the defamation of Islam. Terrorism, the major threat on mankind, has invariably been linked with Islam as the terrorists themselves proclaim that the driving force behind them is Islam. Any act involving the use of violence on innocents for the fulfillment of one's political agenda can be termed as terrorism. The question that now arises is whether the terrorists are actually using the veil of Islam to hide their cruel intentions or does the Qur'an literally promote such acts of violence. They are basically reducing Islam to a single dynamic, power dynamic. Let's first make one thing very clear that there remains a clear distinction between Muslims and Islamists. For an Islamist unlike a Muslim, Islam is not a religion but a political ideology. They want the strictest interpretation of Islam in guiding the society [Spencer (6)]. God is now represented not as the benevolent and loving father but a strict disciplinarian who, as is always seen, is threatening the people with hell fire and constant suffering even for their slight deviation from the injunctions highlighted in the Qur'an. Maajid Nawaz opines that Islamism "isn't a religious movement with political consequences, it is a political movement with religious consequences" [Nawaz and Bromley (7); 86].

Islam is always considered to be a religion that is the "Other." It is looked down upon as culturally and religiously separate. It fails to inspire any positive values in the Western society. Our Westernized perspective has conditioned us to believe that any deviation from the progressive Western mindset is nothing less than perversion. The general opinion pertaining to Islam is that it is a primitive religion that promotes an irrational sense of barbarism and is essentially sexist. It has an aggressively violent tendency that makes it a champion of terrorism. It is also believed that Islam is basically a political ideology that uses religion to get a hold over people. Muslims are excluded from mainstream society because of the hostility and discrimination practiced against them. This kind of hatred is considered normal as

well because the Muslims can never be one among the rest. Thus, violence and discrimination toward them seems to be justified by others. This is basically because of the ignorance that people harbor toward Islam. This ignorance creates an image that incites a feeling of dread toward Islam in general and Muslims in particular. People tend to consider perceptions to be reality and thus this leads to a massive distortion.

Most analysis of Islamophobia foregrounds the fact that Islam is the biggest enemy of mankind. This belittles all the noble teachings of Islam like peace, virtue, tolerance, and compassion. A few perverted individuals who commit malicious crime against humanity can never be the epitome of what Islam truly is. This also shows that the perpetrators embody an unfounded and savage prejudice. Ignorant people only get enchanted toward this immoral ideology. This stereotypes all Muslims into a single dynamic of violent behavior which constantly makes them the subject of suspicion and antagonism. This also secludes Muslims from various political and social fonts. Their crime is sharing of the same community which encourages others to assume their guilt. This makes the spreading of the true message of Islam as pertinent.

Islam means submission and the Qur'an is the basis of Islamic law and theology. Amina Wadud has stated – "Islam means peace: from its S-L-M root form, and as a reflection of the peace achieved when one lives in harmony with the greater cosmic or divine order" [Wadud (8); *Inside the Gender Jihad* 17]. The Qur'an is the basis of the religious life of the Muslim world that governs every aspect of their existence. When any abusive act is carried on in the name of Islam, it becomes a precedent which influences the meaning of Islam in the future. It is a "fact that both Western Orientalists and contemporary Islamists conceptualize Islam as an all-encompassing, determinant, and unchanging cultural entity that is intrinsically different from the modern democratic culture of the West" [Ismael and Rippin (9); 33]. The specific interpretation of the Qur'an takes place primarily within its own evolving and shifting contexts. But the Islam that we are talking about today is a cumulative of years of interpretation done by various communities.

Many people suffer from this ailment of Islamophobia as they harbor very little knowledge of The Qur'an. External factors like media plays a major role in highlighting this image of Islam as the primary motivating factor that is promoting terrorism thus enlarging the gap between nations in a religiously fractured world. Whenever Islam is referred either for explanations or accusations, it becomes a form of condemnation resulting in hostility. They tend to create a synonymous relationship between Islam and fundamentalism. They bring forth all negative attributes pertaining to the religion and demarcate every follower of the religion as one who practices it. The isolation and lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims created a fear that if

Muslims are stronger financially and socially, they will take over and will try to oppress other communities. Discussions and debates on whether Islam is a potential threat does hurt the sentiments of the Muslims when they find that their faith is constantly being questioned and doubted for being a peril to the notion of peace and they themselves are eyed as a probable terrorist. A Muslim woman is invariably portrayed in media as one who is praying, draped in a burqa. Thus, it conforms to the hypothesis that Muslims are defined by only their religious identity and are unfailingly subdued.

Islamophobia has made discrimination a normal and justified aspect of social life. Muslims have assumed that their social acceptance is conditioned by the renunciation of their religious identity. It is evidently noticed that all news connected with Islam shows Muslims involved in belligerent activities of one sort or another. This image lacks appropriate context thus leading to a further distortion of mass opinion. The context can often be completely absent or in certain cases misleading as well. This is done purposely as the aggressive image of Islam will lead to a greater TRP compared to the reality, which might oppose mass opinion. Hence, we find the projection of Islam's image and likewise it's reception are both based on various factors of bias and prejudice which makes the context completely irrelevant. Edward Said has warned: For the general public of America and Europe today, Islam is news of a particularly unpleasant sort negative images of Islam are very much more prevalent than any others (however) such images correspond not with what Islam is, but to what prominent sectors of a particular society take it to be. Those sectors have the power and the will to propagate that particular image of Islam and this image, therefore, becomes more prevalent, more present then all others. [Said (10); 136]. In 2001, 2% of all news stories in Western media focused on Muslim militants, while just over 0.1% presented stories of ordinary Muslims—the mainstream majority. By 2011, the 2% of stories had risen to 25% on militant Muslim images and stories, while the coverage of ordinary mainstream Muslims remained at 0.1%. Failure to provide the full context for Muslim attitudes, events and actions, sufficiently reflecting the faith, lives and diversity of the mainstream Muslim majority, blurred or made invisible the line between the moderate mainstream majority and militant extremists and terrorists for whom there should be zero tolerance (11).

It has been always highlighted that the complete veiling of the woman is an Islamic injunction. Louis Dupree mentions that a detailed scrutiny of the Qur'an, the Hadith and the Hanafi Shari'a of Sunni Islam, "reveals no definite, unqualified requirement for purdah and the veil." Rural women working in the fields did not opt for this dress code [Dupree (12); 531]. Al- Hibri in "talk of the Town" has stated the Islamic rights that women have that are often unknown and unutilized. Islam grants women the right to take up any profession that she wants. She is free to invest her money wherever she so desires. Her husband can never claim her

money. She can specify the amount that should be designated to her in case of a divorce or widowhood. She is not bound to accept her husband's second wife and hence can negotiate for a divorce. Islam does not compel her to do all housework single handedly [Safi (13); 164].

This leads to the liberty of an individual to exercise his/her sense of choice. Choices are usually made under some constraints which do not necessarily mean selection between anything and everything, but it can be considered to be a step toward a change. Change that may lead to progress as it induces the ability of questioning and reformation.

Zeiba Shorish- Shamley states that the Islamic injunctions provide women equal rights in every aspect of life but somehow majority of the people remain unaware of it. She says-

Islam has granted rights for security of life and property and protects the honor and dignity of human beings (Sura 49, Verse 11-12). Islam protects the human rights to security and privacy (Sura 49, Verse 12 and Sura 24, Verse 27). Under Islamic principles, no one can be imprisoned unless his/her guilt has been proven in an open court. To arrest and imprison individuals on the basis of suspicion without due process is not permissible in Islam. Islam has given human beings the right to protest against government's tyranny (Sura 4, Verse 148). Islam protects individuals from being arrested or imprisoned for the crimes of others (Sura 35, Verse 18). Islam grants humans the right for freedom of thought, of expression, of associations and of formation of organizations, on the condition that these rights be used for the propagation of truth, virtue and justice and not for evil purposes. Islam also protects the humans, freedom of conscience, of convictions and of religious sentiments (Qur'an Sura 2, Verse 256). Islam ensures that the human's religious sentiments are respected and nothing will be done that may encroach upon these rights. Islam recognizes the rights of humans to the basic necessities of life (Sura 51, Verse 19). Islam grants humans equality before law and does not hold the rulers above the law. Islam also grants humans the right to participate in the affairs of their State (Sura 42, Verse 38). Islam has granted all human males and females the right to education and work (Sura 35, Verse 28) and (Sura 4, Verse 32). Islam has laid down some universal fundamental rights for humanity as a whole that are to be respected and observed by all human beings (Sura 5, Verse 8) (14).

Muslim accounts have highlighted that the Qur'an was revealed gradually over a period of 23 years. It should be emphasized that these revelations were related to certain contexts and hence the message was clarified accordingly. Moreover, it was taught by the prophet to his followers orally to be heard and experienced. The major reason behind such debates and aberrant reading of the Qur'an is primarily

because of the language in which the original text has been written. It is written in classical seventh-century Arabic, a language that is extremely difficult for interpretation as most Muslims today cannot speak fluently in Arabic. Anyone referring about God or the Qur'an cannot be questioned as it implies that he is potentially questioning God. Therefore, he or she can be accused of blasphemy. James Fergusson states that-

> *Although the Koran has been translated into almost every language on the planet, convenient local versions are rejected by most Islamic scholars, and certainly by the Deobandis. Muslims believe that the text of the Koran was handed down to Mohammed directly from Allah. It follows that translations must be inferior – perhaps dangerously so – because no human scholar can match the perfection of holy writ [Fergusson (15); 66].*

To avoid these hassles, most confusing interpretations of Islam remain unchallenged. Ultimately the onus of the clarification lies on the Mullahs who themselves are not highly literate. The Mullahs are deemed unparalleled as the absolute interpreter of religion and therefore their laws become the unquestionable Islamic or Sharia laws. Authority with a combination of a restricted perspective has made the Mullahs impose rules that went against humanity. The misinterpretation of Islam has been highlighted by Hafizullah (16) when he states-

> *Since the vast majority of people are illiterate, they remain dependent on mullahs for reading and writing letters and performing religious ceremonies. Since Arabic is not a common language, a village mullah interprets religious scriptures the way he understand them and can easily silence opponents by reciting a verse from the Quran or a Hadith, statements by the Prophet Muhammad, in an interpretation to substantiate his point of view. (Emadi 6)*

Amina Wadud has rightly stated that the text should be read in a manner to elevate oneself beyond their narrow parochial outlook. But in most cases people tend to interpret the text to justify their oppressive attitude and prejudiced opinion solely targeted toward women. The interpretations take place on the basis of individual words and the meaning that is understood in isolation. These individual interpretations are not universal in nature [Wadud (17); *Qur'an and Woman* 97]. Quranic interpretation cannot be done in isolation to the context in which it was revealed. Arabic words have multiple meanings. Hence, just a literal interpretation cannot justify the words of God. To understand one particular interpretation, the method of achieving that should also be taken into consideration.

Khaled Abou El Fadl opined – "Building upon the proscriptions of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslim jurists insisted that there are legal restrictions upon the conduct of war. In general, Muslim armies may not kill women, children, seniors, hermits, pacifists, peasants or slaves unless they are combatants. Vegetation and property may not be destroyed, water holes may not be poisoned, and flame-throwers may not be used unless out of necessity, and even then only to a limited extent. Torture, mutilation and murder of hostages were forbidden under all circumstances. Importantly, the classical jurists reached these determinations not simply as a matter of textual interpretation, but as moral or ethical assertions. The classical jurists spoke from the vantage point of a moral civilization, in other words, from a perspective that betrayed a strong sense of confidence in the normative message of Islam" [El Fadl (18); 28−33]. Bernard Lewis states that the religion of Islam inspires a culture that mandates even the lowliest social individual to treat others with courtesy and dignity, the likeness of which has never been found in any other civilization. Yet in situations of mayhem and turmoil, these dignified attributes get replaced by a violent hatred filled with boiling anger that instigates even the highest authority to encourage abduction and massacre. They look into the life of the Prophet to justify these heinous actions of theirs [Lewis (19); "The Roots of Muslim Rage" 59]. But the so-called religious terrorism agreed to disregard these simple but basic facts of Islam. Their intention was identified as terrorizing the defenseless and creating a rampant mayhem by creating this aura of fear. Thus, maligning Islam as a religion that promotes violence. Terrorizing innocents is nothing but a moral wrong and a delinquency against not only society but God as well.

4. Terrorism and islam

Bin Laden, in order to hide his malicious intentions, has used the garb of Islam. He states that the religion of Islam has mandated the acquiring of weapons as a religious obligation. He proudly proclaims his gratitude to the Almighty for helping him carry out this duty of his. He considers it to be a matter of grave sin if Muslims do not conform to this duty as this would protect the Muslims from any defilement caused by the infidels. Those people who have purged Islam of disgrace are the only true ones as they have not even bothered about their own lives. Hence, they are held in a high regard because they have honestly followed the desires of God ["Time Magazine (20)"].

The terrorists have always justified their action by bringing in the precedence of Prophet Mohammad as the Prophet himself had rebelled against the corrupt Arab society. This exemplification of the Prophet has become the quintessential of jihadi Muslim behavior. The terrorists profess that they are waging a jihad against corruption and evil. They promoted the notion that Islam was a complete socio-political ideology which was under threat from atheistic communists. But the reality seems to be totally different. A complete negation of the Prophet's hadith was done- "would you serve Allah? Serve your fellow creatures (first)" [Wadud (8); *Inside the Gender*

Jihad 34]. The strict followers of Islam, the terrorists, seem to have forgotten verse 5:32 of the Qur'an which states: "We decreed to the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person – unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land – it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind" [Haleem (21); 71].

The Qur'an specifically highlights the importance of communal unity- "Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right, and forbids what is wrong: those who do this are the successful ones" [Haleem (21); 42]. It is very important to have a society that believes in inclusiveness by promoting a sense of togetherness among all people without considering any form of discrimination. The most important thing in this regard is to acknowledge the contribution of reasoning and alternatives to make a decision that will not be blindly guided by communal hatred promoted by certain individuals to fulfill their hidden agenda.

For Khomeini, "Islam is politics or it is nothing" and Islam's beginnings as a military religion were associated with the exercise of power [Lewis (22); *From Babel to Dragomans* 303]. We do find that the terrorist groups were on the fringes of the society and by the manipulation of Islam they began establishing their foothold in the social milieu. The terrorists were primarily against a system that had wronged them by the abuse of their power. Faith becomes identified as a form of resistance that brought forth an identity of defiance and self-affirmation. It thus became a game of power politics of the marginal powers. Their attacks exhibited their extreme sense of despair and frustration. Omid Safi has surmised that these impulsive reactions are basically a result of colonialism and modernity. It is far-fetched from the idea of true Islam and it does nothing but reduces Islam to a single dynamic of power. These social malignancies are primarily a result of violently repulsive acts. These acts deaden and deconstruct the societal concept of virtue and ethics. This results in an acclimatization and indoctrination of justifying immorality. What needs to be remembered is that terrorism can have no religion as it's aim is just to spread hatred and destruction. No religion preaches and promotes the killing of innocents.

Many people have joined the terrorist groups not because of their devotion to the cause of believing in the misguided notion of Islam. They suffer from extreme poverty. Lack of job opportunities and fear of physical tortures compel many to join these forces. They are so poor that they can do anything to earn money. Joining a terrorist group would not only ascertain certain benefits for the family but would also give them security. These people cannot be truly termed as terrorists. They are victims of a system that has given only problems in their lives. They are carrying out these activities out of desperation. If they are assured of an income and fulfillment of the basic necessities of life, then terrorism can never flourish in Afghanistan (23). We do forget that any abusive work carried out in the name of Islam becomes a precedent which leads to misleading notions of the religion. Karl Marx has therefore aptly referred to religion as "the opium of the people"[Marx (24); *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*]. Religion sheathes the misleading idea of people that they are attacking a belief and not individuals.

Abdul Raheem Yaseer, coordinator of International Exchange Programs, and deputy director of the Center for Afghanistan Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, when interviewed by Rosemarie Skaine highlights, the basic level of education, received by the Taliban, which instigates them to become violent,–

There are Muslim fanatics and extremists from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries who have been teaching the Taliban in madrassas in Pakistan where they trained them. They taught them their very restricted form of Islam to make them very brutal fighters. Secondly, since these Taliban are immature and they haven't had any background in Afghan history, Afghan culture and Afghan tradition, and Afghan values, training has been very one sided, not taking into consideration the cultural sensitivities, historical background, traditions, and habits of the people. The Taliban deal with the situation in a very ignorant manner, insensitive, and the plans are according to strict lines they have been given, for example, women should not be seen in public, women should cover themselves, and they go to the very extreme.

They misinterpret instructions, like if they say to all people, women should not expose themselves, then they say while they are inside their house, they should paint their windows so they should not be seen from outside. When Islam says all women should be modest and moderate and modestly dressed, then they go as far as to say they should cover their face and hands and feet too, which is not culturally acceptable and religiously correct. And then they say women should not go to school. They should study at home. They should not learn the worldly things but they should concentrate on the religious subjects. These are all against the mainstream Islam which says that men and women are all obliged to acquire knowledge from the cradle to the grave and they should seek knowledge even at the furthest spot from their place of residence.

And, these are all the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed in the instructions from Koran, but Taliban interpret it in a very restricted way and take it too far. And, it is mainly because of their political views, their ignorance, and the push of their supporters and patrons and mentors and those outsiders. This whole thing has been imposed from outside on the people, all these rules and regulations under the name of Islam and the politics and people keep suffering [Skaine (25); 39].

We will not deny that certain terrorist activities do use Islam to justify their act. Similarly, we cannot negate the fact that maximum victims of these attacks are also Muslims.

5. The islamophobics

As has been highlighted by Chris Allen in his book *Islamophobia* is a phenomenon that is directed at Muslims by non-Muslims [Allen (26); 6]. Strong notions about Islam go a long way in ruining the perception of the people about the religion. Islam gradually started being interpreted from a Western secularized point of view. Although Islam has been greatly influenced by various cultures in the past centuries, yet the contemporary interpretation of Islam was based on a Eurocentric intelligence that presented a derision of religion. Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel stated-"We fear nothing but Islam," Yitzhak Rabin, the fifth Prime Minister of Israel, vouchsafed the same by mentioning -"The religion of Islam is our only enemy," and Shimon Peres who served as the ninth President of Israel, the Prime Minister of Israel, and the Interim Prime Minister, also warned against Islam –"We will not feel secure until Islam puts away its sword" [Said (10); 19]. Writers such as Will Cummins rail against "the black heart of Islam" and state categorically that "all Muslims, like all dogs, share certain characteristics" (27). This creates a major impact in spreading Islamophobia. Only a thorough knowledge of Islam will help people to take a stand against the hardliners.

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia shortly after 9/11 had published a summary report on Islamophobia. This identified a rise in the number of "physical and verbal threats being made, particularly to those visually identifiable as Muslims, in particular women wearing the hijab" [Allen and Nielsen (28); 16]. The unnerving matter highlighted here is that although the extent of physical and verbal threats directed toward Muslims varied from one nation to another, but in the fifteen European Union countries there was a tendency for *Muslim women* to be attacked because the hijab made their gendered Islamic identity prominent [Allen and Nielsen (28); 35].

Many a times we find that a Muslim woman's only way of gaining emancipation is thought to be the shunning of the hijab. The hijab is always symbolized as an oppression imposed upon women by the patriarchal culture. It is never believed that a woman can wear the hijab of her own accord as her voice is often silenced. Again, the Western point of view is such that it always believes that a Muslim woman can never have her own opinion. She is viewed as a damsel in distress whose only liberation can come by denouncing the hijab. Hence the only option that women have is either to remove the hijab or banish themselves from the public sphere, condemned to a life indoors.

The bias and prejudice toward Muslims are not a disease that people can cure themselves from. Children are grilled with the notion of hatred directed toward Muslims and this takes on a very crude form as they grow up. Their upbringing teaches them hatred. Hence, this concept of "Islamophobia" is not just a concern for Muslims alone. Discrimination of any form is detrimental to the well-being of a sane society, and everyone has to undertake equal responsibilities for the same.

6. A true muslim

When talking about Islam, we refer to the precedents of the terrorists who in no way conform to the tenets of the religion. Little do we take into consideration the good work done by various Muslims throughout the world to ensure that Islam is not maligned further. Malala Yousafzai, Fawzia Koofi, Maajid Usman Nawaz and so on. But the masses are motivated more by the fiery words of Ayaan Hirsi Ali who has vehemently promoted that Islam is nothing but violence. Omid Safi has lucidly highlighted the true essence of being a progressive and good Muslim-

> *At the heart of a progressive Muslim interpretation is a simple yet radical idea: every human life, female and male, Muslim and non-Muslim, rich or poor, "Northern" or "Southern," has exactly the same intrinsic worth. The essential value of human life is God-given, and is in no way connected to culture, geography, or privilege. A progressive Muslim is one who is committed to the strangely controversial idea that the worth of a human being is measured by a person's character, not the oil under their soil, and not their flag. A progressive Muslim agenda is concerned with the ramifications of the premise that all members of humanity have this same intrinsic worth because, as the Qur'an reminds us, each of us has the breath of God breathed into our being [Safi (13); 3].*

Maajid Usman Nawaz, the founding chairman of Quilliam, a counter-extremism think tank that seeks to challenge the narratives of Islamist extremists, was formerly a member of the Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir. He highlights the way Islam is wrongly promoted to mold the minds of the distressed youth and how he was also a victim of the same- "I was sixteen at the time I started hearing all this. When you're that age, already angry and disenfranchised, you're very susceptible to absolutes. This globalization of our grievance was what many would later come to know as the powerful Islamist narrative. It would go on to stir the hearts of thousands of young Muslims around the world, leading to the creation of groups who would commit many atrocities in its name" [Nawaz and Bromley (7); 89].

An ideal society will only be created if religious tenets are used to lead a beautiful moral life. But the problem arises when at times religious rhetoric, sinks down blatantly to the level of: demonizing members of out-groups and describing them as "ats," "vermin," "parasites," (as an) effective way of activating someone's sense of disgust, and encourages a propensity to think of those out-group members as a threat

to the health of one's own community that needs to be removed." [Emanuilov and Yashlavsky (29); 12] Religion has this schismatic effect of aggravating a sense of exclusivity and superiority into the very fabric of their dogma and it is used by the religious institutions to assert their religious dominance. Narratives take an overarching form although having no historical evidence for justification. Hence, a sense of personal glorification leads to an artificial higher purpose that will be gratified only through martyrdom. This religious fidelity gets transmitted from one generation to the next which even leads to the extent of violence if the piety is questioned or threatened. This religious fervor turns into extremist action, culminating in terrorism.

7. Conclusion

Asaf Fyzee stated that for nearly 700 years Islam has served mankind. But now it has become a victim of fundamentalism and totalitarianism which is drawing its sustenance by killing the true teachings of Islam. He advocated the notion that Islam needs to be separated from law and religion so that we can access it with a modern approach. He understood the conundrum of Sharia and wanted the Qur'an to be "interpreted afresh and understood anew" in every age. Fyzee upholds a modernistic approach where he believes that religion should be an individual's choice unlike law that is implemented by the state [Fyzee (30); 112]. Any segregation done toward Muslims is a violation of human rights. It jeopardizes all possibilities of social cohesion. A country can truly be democratic and practice plurality when it believes in acceptance and despises all forms of discrimination. I am in unison with the opinion that-

> *If being a Muslim were the only identity of anyone who happens to be a Muslim, then of course that religious identification would have to carry the huge burden of resolving a great many other choices a person faces in other parts of his or her life. But being Islamic can hardly be the only identity a Muslim has. Indeed, the denial of plurality as well as the rejection of choice in matters of identity can produce an astonishingly narrow and misdirected view we have to recognize that a Muslim can choose among several different positions on matters involving political, moral, and social judgments without ceasing to be, for that reason, a Muslim [Sen (5); 67].*

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The author of this paper declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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