Islamophobia in Context of Freedom of Speech: A Critical Analysis of Media Representation

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Abstract

This study focuses on the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim youth. Islamophobia is, nowadays, a much-used but little understood term that is universally accepted by worldwide governments and international organizations. The study also highlights the spread of Islamophobia through media and its effect on Muslim youth residing all over the world. Phobia is an irrational fear of something so Islamophobia is synonymous with fear and anxiety against Muslims. No group is left unaffected by the effects of Islamophobia, a threat to one is a threat to all. In this study, critically analyze the role of media and Islamophobia by studying the various research studies and books. It has been analyzed that media representation is the major cause of the spread of Islamophobia. Youngsters in different parts of the world face verbal assaults. The major problems they face lie in the sectors of education, job, and employment, physical appearances, housing, and residence, stereotyping as well as domestic violence. Thus, by collaborating with the government, Islamic organizations, and higher education institutions, the media can be a tool or tactic to combat the upheaval of Islamophobia.

Keywords: *Islamophobia. Media, effects of Islamophobia, Youth and Islamophobia*

Introduction:

1.1 What is Islamophobia?

The term "islamophobia" is broad. It was started by political activists, NGOs, public commentators, and international organizations in the late 1990s and early 2000s to attract attention to the negative actions taken against Islam and Muslims in Western liberal democracies. Islamophobia has evolved in recent years from a political notion for analytical reasons to an emerging comparative concept in the social sciences. This phrase doesn't have a generally agreed definition. As a result, it is challenging to compare the degrees of Islamophobia over time, space, and social groupings, as well as to other categories like anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia.

Since the release of Edward Said's Orientalism in1970, "the West" has associated the religion of Islam with negative images, attitudes, as well as stereotypes, leading to the acceptance of the word[1].

The definition has been given:

"A good shorthand method of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, consequently, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims"

Islamophobia is taking its roots in the political, public as well as academic discourses. It is now existing not only for renowned political reasons but also it is an attempt at social reality, which means that in modern liberal democracies, fear, aversion, and animosity have been directed at Islam and Muslims[2]. Another definition is:

"Any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference toward Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the intention or effect of obstructing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal footing in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other area of public life is known as Islamophobia."

In November 1997, Islamophobia was uncommon, but it was justified because 'anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed'. The original Islamophobia states that it refers to three phenomena:

1. Unjustified animosity toward Islam
2. As a result of this animosity, Muslims and their communities are unfairly targeted for prejudice.
3. Islamists are kept out of customary political and social matters[3].

The terminology of Islamophobia is not new to this world now, it first appeared in its French form, Islamophobia, in a book by Etienne Dinet in the year 1918[4]. Islam is different from the West. After the emergence of Islamophobia, Islam is thought to be barbaric and irrational in comparison with

the civilized, enlightened as well as gender-equal West. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Muslim who criticizes Islam, contrasts Islam with the fundamental values that the West upholds about its fear of Islam, such as open inquiry and individual freedom. "Islam is irreconcilable with the libertarian ideas at the core of the tradition of the Enlightenment," she argues[5]. She contends that one of the things that makes Islam so repulsive is its "obsession with subjugating women[6].

Islamophobia in the context of freedom of speech

Two words are combined to form the terminology; Islam and phobia. Muslims practice Islam, according to which HAZRAT MUHAMMAD (P.B.U.H) is the Prophet of Allah. Islamophobia is the term for irrational dread of Muslims; phobias are defined as unreasonable fears. It consists of actions that affect society, the law, and the economy. The illegal arrests of alleged terrorists by Densus in late 2015 and Siyono's death during this time of arrest, which culminated in the challenging times of human rights breaches in 2016, are two instances of acute worry. These events show how worry can become a catalyst for taking practical action without understanding the underlying causes of the issue.

In the last 20 hatred toward Muslims has been gradually revealed with extremism and danger. In America, this extreme suspicion as well as the negativity towards Islam is seen as widespread after the incident of 11th September 2001. Some noted perceptions are listed below:

1. Islam presents a homogenous culture and is unwavering in its acceptance of the new social realities.
2. In contrast to other religions and cultures, Islam has diverse ideals.
3. According to the West, Islam is inferior. It is thought to be illogical, antiquated, and has barbaric characteristics.
4. Islam endorses terrorism and other forms of violent crime.
5. In the global political sphere, Islam has a violent ideology.[7]

1.3.1   Media's Representation and its effects

Modern technology allows us to live in the information era. The use of "mass media" like television and the internet is one example of how information may be distributed more quickly and in large quantities thanks to technology. Anyone everywhere can easily access these two. The speed at which information may move allows it to cross both temporal and spatial boundaries. Uncomfortably, the use of news about violence, radicalization, and terrorism linked with Islam by the mass media, especially electronic media, has contributed to Islamophobia across the globe. One could argue that political representation is overrepresented in the media.

Many viewers agree with how the news is presented in the media, particularly on television and the internet. In truth, the reality is blurred by the

media's hyperbolic exaggeration of it. After all, the majority of news organizations are owned by a small number of corporations, making the mass media a component of the corporate world[8]. Islamophobia is being promoted as a result of media in primarily two ways: sociologically and psychologically. Sociological perspectives emphasize the media's power dynamics in the display of information and news, and they examine these dynamics using media representation theory. The cognitive method used by psychological perspectives emphasizes how people are viewing and comprehending this information, which leads to stereotypical behavior that fuels Islamophobia.

1.3.2 Islamophobia, Social Media, and the Cognitive Approaches

Cognitive techniques that may relate to "the ability of persons or individuals to comprehend or absorb and understand the information from the media and the environment" can be used to study how Islamophobia spreads through the media. The cognitive approach's emphasis on how social information is received, evaluated, and processed has been described in the psychological context. In the event of an Islamophobic outbreak, it is important to stop not only the dissemination of inaccurate information about Islam but also the practice of stereotyped behavior or the promotion of a bad opinion of Islam among Muslims as well. It is important to comprehend how humans categorize and stereotype to process large amounts of information. To describe "beliefs that are transmitted on the qualities such as personality, expected behavior, as well as the values of the individual," the term stereotype first appeared. According to the cognitive method, the majority of a person's knowledge and stereotypes about Islam, terrorism, and related topics come from the media. Extreme bias against Islam has been revealed in the news by the media.[9]

Impact of Islamophobia on Youth

The effects of experiencing discrimination in public and the harmful effects of Islamophobia are stronger for Muslim youngsters. Young people from immigrant communities frequently experience stigmatization, negative stereotypes, and prejudice. Around the world, verbal abuse is directed at children.[10]

2.1 Youth is less "Thriving"

Islamophobia has a very serious impact on the well-being of Muslims in America. Some of the effects are as under:

1. Muslim youth are less likely to be described as "thriving" than youth in other religious groups. In comparison to 7 in 10 Jews and 6 in 10 Mormons, 4 out of 10 young Muslims are considered to be thriving, according to Gallup's measurements. More than half of the youthful generation in the country is considered to be "thriving" and is between

the ages of 18 and 29.

2. In comparison to young of other faiths that live in America, the Gallup Center has shown that Muslim youth, aged 18 to 28, are the least content and most furious. Young Muslims report experiencing anger at a rate of 26%, which is similar to Protestants' reported rate of 14%.

3. According to a troubling Pew Center survey, 26% of Muslim young Americans favor suicide bombings against civilian targets.

2.2 Youth is "depressed"

1. Clinical depression is present in 50% of Arab Americans.
2. After the events of September 11th, 2001, the wages of young Muslims decreased by 10%.
3. Higher rates of divorce and domestic violence have been recorded by Muslim social service organizations.
4. Muslim men are being stereotyped as terrorists, criminals, and violent[11].

2.3 Youth experiencing "Negative Attention"

Some of the examples are:

According to experts, Islamophobia is the driving force behind the unfavorable attention that various ethnic minorities are subjected to. In Canada, this assertion has been verified:

1. "Terrorist attack at Quebec City mosque leaves 6 dead, 8 injured" (30 January 2017 Montreal Gazette)
2. Following the mosque incident, hate crime reports in Montreal have increased dramatically. (Post National, February 1, 2017)
3. "Liberal MP overloaded with hate mail, threats over Commons anti-Islamophobia motion" (The Star, February 16, 2017.)
4. "Anti-Islamic demonstrators gather outside a mosque in Toronto, calling for an end to Islam" (17th February 2017 Global News)
5. "Voters reject plan for Muslim cemetery in Quebec City area" (Montreal CTV News, July 16, 2017)

2.4 Youth in experiencing "Threats"

In German public debate, Muslims and their religion Islam are contextualized as:

1. A symbolic threat (i.e., the threat to norms, values, and the culture)
2. A realistic threat (i.e., a threat to the social welfare system, political power, job, safety, and well-being)
3. A terroristic threat (i.e., the threat to physical safety as well as well-being[12].

2.5 Youth in Pakistan as "Hyper-Securitized"

As a result of the "war on terror" that was waged on Pakistani soil, the Pakistani-Muslim nexus has exposed a unique vulnerability, whereby Pakistani Muslims have been "hyper-securitized." After the 7th of July 2005, some young people shunned political reasons connected to Pakistan but continued to support causes relating to the Arab Spring or Palestine, while others admitted to lying about their nationality.

Depending on how a woman looks, her experiences have changed. Young women have defined what it means to be called an extremist or "Osama bin Laden's wife" by donning the niqab, which has gained attention. A veil has come to represent an unfamiliar identity physically. Particularly when the term "lesbian" had been employed as an insult pointing to niqab or hijabi Muslims, females have described being the target of racial slurs that have revealed more about the speaker than the target. This phrase reflects the heteronormative attitude of Islamophobes who view Muslim women as aberrant because they might engage in segregation. Muslim women who did not identify as religious thought that they were never "Muslim enough" for the non-Muslim gaze or to support their beliefs. The Pakistani Mulsim appearance provoked stereotypes of culturally oppressed, an uneducated Pakistani female, a victim of a culture supporting honor killing and forced marriages.[13]

2.6 Youth and Education

In a social and political climate where Islamophobia is becoming more accepted, bullying of Muslim students is a prevalent issue. Because of this public portrayal of Muslims, anti-Muslim prejudice is evident in school cultures among students, teachers, and administrators.

It is observed that for a variety of reasons, kids do not report this kind of bullying, harassment, or discrimination. They are reluctant to notify their parents or other adults out of concern for their peers' judgment. They regard hostile conduct as "natural." Bullied adolescents frequently experience longer-lasting effects like a higher risk of depression, difficulties falling asleep, anxiety, lower academic achievement, and difficulty adjusting to school[14]. Because bullying is so common, Muslim youth are more likely to experience mental illness and participate in risky activities. Due to these difficulties, Muslim teenagers may now experience a lack of support and misunderstanding in a variety of contexts throughout their life[15].

One of the main obstacles to academic success is Islamophobia. The bulk of research has examined the impact of negative perceptions against young Muslim radicalized students on their academic accomplishments. Some of the instructors and counselors have unfavorable opinions about these Muslim students. Muslim girls who wear the hijab struggle with the widespread

misconception held by their teachers[16].

Joint General Secretaries, National Education Union stated:

"Islamophobia is blighting the lives of many of our students. Anti-muslim statements by politicians and other opinion formers are dangerous for everyone in our society. The growth of any one form of racism permits all other forms of racism to re-emerge. We must do all we can to ensure Islamophobia does not become 'respectable' racism but is tackled vigorously in all our schools and communities[17]."

It is important to point out the lack of education and exclusion from the political power that is experienced by Muslim women, mainly. A higher percentage of women is facing this exclusion and abuse in a manner unparalleled in the West[18].

2.7 Youth and Unemployment

A significant proportion of the difference in the wages, employment types and the rate of unemployment belongs to the Muslims which is indicating insistent exclusion, disadvantages, and discrimination.

Muslim youth have poor employment rates in various states. Lack of success in the job market may be related to qualifications and skill levels. For instance, Muslims in the UK had the highest male unemployment rate (13%) and the highest female jobless rate in 2004. (18 percent). The highest rates of unemployment were among Muslim youth aged 16 to 24. According to the 2002 census in Ireland, 44 percent of Muslims were employed, compared to 53 percent of the entire population, while 11 percent of Muslim youngsters were unemployed[19].

2.8 Youth and Housing

Religious groups are rarely singled out by national housing officials, yet it is impossible to separate religion from ethnicity as the root of prejudice. The migrants, particularly those from Muslim nations, have increased rates of homelessness, subpar housing conditions, subpar neighborhoods, and greater vulnerability or housing status insecurity. Serious housing issues include a significant amount of overcrowding, a lack of access to essential amenities like drinking water and bathrooms, and exploitation through exorbitant rent or purchase pricing[20]. The failure of integration is typically associated with residential segregation, however, the topic of discussion is the ethnic minority dispersal intended to lessen residential segregation. The lack of social housing, rise in real estate values, and desire of various ethnic groups to coexist in one area are all aggravating this dilemma[21].

2.9 The impact of Islamophobia on the daily life of the Muslims

Islamophobic dialogue dominating politics and the media has been

created for the last few decades. Muslims feel and experience Islamophobia more than ever in their daily lives. In the years after the incident of 9/11, the situation has deteriorated. Muslims became more isolated and are being negatively portrayed as the enemies of society. The threats against Muslim youths are not only restricted to Masjid attacks. The Muslim women who wear scarves have become the targets. Elsewhere the threat of physical violence, as well as harassment, the Muslim women with scarves, experience difficulty in finding jobs or internships. As a result, Muslim women are mainly vulnerable. But this is not limited to females, males are better off. Compared to the native youths, Muslim graduates have fewer chances of being called for job interviews. This is the case when older Muslims apply for any job. There are cases when Muslims were refused when they applied for jobs.[22]

2.10 Lack of power to control the public narrative of Islam

Muslims cannot talk for themselves in front of Western audiences because they are seen as suspects, and when they do try to speak for themselves, they are more correctly not heard. They are unable to influence how Islam is portrayed in the media. The purposeful silencing of Muslim views and the deliberate exploitation of anti-Islamic sentiment by influential people and groups are unparalleled in political and media circles. In essence, this is referred to as "professional Islamophobia." The group of conservative politicians, activists, and bloggers is responsible for this professional Islamophobia[23].

2.11 Hate Crimes

The cruel treatment of Muslim youth after the incident of 9/11 had not started from the Western governments and agencies. The ordinary non-Muslim citizens were also found to exhibit hostile behaviors toward the Muslims and reached the level of hate crimes. Hate crimes involved violence and criminal behaviors motivated by biases against race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion. These crimes included actions against property and actions against the person (terrorization, aggravated assault, sexual assault, and murder). [24]

3. Conclusion

Islamophobia is harming the youth. It is been associated with anger, fear, anxiety, threats as well as terror. The negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims is seen everywhere. The negativity is influencing Muslim youth and their day-to-day lives including education, employment, physical health, residential issues as well as stereotyping. It is also playing a role in how the Muslim youth conduct themselves daily. Muslims are portrayed as victims as well as oppressed and there lies a greater focus on outer appearances.

4. Recommendations

It is necessary to create a positive self-image for Islam, especially among the younger population, and address societal issues. Although the media is one of the factors that cause outbreaks of Islamophobia, it can also be a tool or a tactic to combat it. During this time, the media can be used to create and rehabilitate preconceptions about Islam. Increasing public understanding of Islam through various media, making it easier for people to study Islam, disseminating interesting experiences and knowledge about Islam, and spreading the idea that jihad should not be justified by politics, economics, education, or popular culture are all important goals. The work of the mass media and electronics should be under the supervision of the government, which collaborates with Islamic organizations in power. The government, Islamic organizations, institutions for education and research, and the media should all work together to reduce the overall negative effects of Islamophobia, such as conflict and violence.

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