

Islam Versus Western Media, Literary World and Society

By Shamenaz Bano

This is the age of globalization, and in this global world, media plays a vital role and it has a great impact on the society. And as we are now more inter-connected with each other around the world than before, we are more familiar with the events and incidents taking place around the globe than before. We are aware of the happenings of the world because of media. But it is not that media all the time shows the right or clear picture of any fact. Today is the age of embedded journalism and media is greatly affected by this trend. Now we receive news depending upon personal interest. And Western Media takes more and more advantage of it. They only show the fact relevant to their own interest.

Western Media has associated the word ‘terrorism’ with Islam and given it a name as ‘Islamic Terrorism’. Are they not able to see the presence of Non-Muslim terrorist groups rather than the Muslim terrorist groups? There are example of many events, incidents and anti- social activities around the world, which has been regulated by the groups which are Non-Muslims.

The meaning of the word, ‘Jihad’ coined by Western Media is- killing of the Non-Muslims by the Muslims for the sake of religion, which is totally wrong interpretation. The word ‘Jihad’ literally means to strive, to raise your voice again injustice and tyranny. It also means, exerting one’s utmost power contending with an object of disapprobation, and this is of three kinds, namely (1) with a visible enemy (2) with Satan, and (3) with one’s self.

The Holy Quran teaches that when a war breaks out, it should be waged in such a way as to cause the least possible amount of damage to life and property, and hostilities should be brought to close as quickly as possible.

Even some terrorist and miscreant groups have wrongly interpreted the meaning of the word ‘Jihad’ according to their own vested interest, which is wrong. They are doing many wrong things in the name of religion which they should not. If any individual or any group does anything wrong then the whole community should not be blamed. According to Quran:

“They commit a gross sin, then say, we found our Parents doing this and God has commanded us to do it.” says ‘God never advocates sin.’

‘Are you saying about God what you do not know?’¹

Like all the religion of God, Islam ‘submission’ in English promotes peace, love, harmony and brotherhood among the people. Actually the word ‘Islam’ in addition to meaning ‘submission’ (to God) is also derived from the Arabic word ‘Salaam’ (peace). The Muslims (submitters) greet each other by Salaam (Peace be upon you). “How can a religion in which people greet each other by conveying the message of peace, can promote violence?

Many people think that Islam encourages suppression and subjugation of women. Moreover, Western Media shows all the incidents relating ‘mistreatment of women’ in a more comprehensive way. They also popularized that all the rules and regulations regarding the subjugation of women is written in Quran, the holy book of Muslims. The Quran is addressed to all Muslims, and for the most part it does not differentiate between male and female. Man and woman, it says “were created of a single soul,” and are more equal in the sight of God. Women have the right to divorce, to inherit property, to conduct business and to have access to knowledge.

In marriages, Islam insists on the free consent of both, the bride and groom. So girls forced to marry strangers against their will could even be deemed illegal under religious laws. The Act of banning girls from school is forbidden in Islam, which the Taliban should know. Islam on the other hand encourages all Muslims, irrespective of gender to seek knowledge from cradle to grave, from all possible sources.

The veiling of Muslim women is a more complex issue in the Islamic World. People have different opinions, views and logic regarding it. Certainly, the Quran requires them to behave and dress modestly— but these restrictions apply equally to men. Only one verse refers to the veiling of women, stating that the Prophet’s wives should be behind a hijab when his male guests converse with Him.

People have different notions regarding, polygamy in Islam which Quran endorses up to the limit of four wives per man. The Prophet, of course, lived at a time when continual warfare produced large numbers of widows, who were left with little or no provision for themselves and their children. In these circumstances, polygamy was encouraged as an act of charity. Needless to say, the widows were not necessarily young women, but usually mothers of many

¹ The Sacred Text of the Muslims.

children, who came as part of the deal. Polygamy is no longer common, for various good reasons. The Quran states that:

Wives need to be treated fairly and equally—a difficult requirement even for a rich man. Moreover, if a husband wishes to take a second wife, he should not do so if the marriage will be to the detriment of the first.²

So, in a way all the rules and regulations regarding veiling of the women, polygamy or any such were because of the need of the time, which has no relevance in the present time. At that time women were weaker so they needed protection but now, women can defend themselves. Now, the women belonging to any caste, community or any country are strong enough to defend themselves.

There is an anti-Islamic wave in the Occidental world and country like America is a shelter of all un-Islamic activities and miscreants. So because of this, a film like 'Slumdog Millionaire' has bagged 8 Oscar Awards. Danny Boyle, inspired by Vikas Swaroop's novel- *Question and Answers*, directed the film. But there is no Muslim main character in the novel. Thinking in mind the fact that anything against Islam will be a hot cake in the Western World, he has characterized all the Muslim Characters in the novel depicting the juvenile criminalization. He is very well succeeded in his attempt and the outcome is that, 'Slumdog Millionaire' won 8 Oscar Awards and many other prizes in the world, which no Indian has ever dreamt because Indian Films are hardly selected in the international awards and functions. What about Classic films like— 'Mother India' and 'Do Beegha Zameen'. Even if we see in the new era, then there are some very good and remarkable films like— 'Lagaan', 'Border' and 'Rang de Basanti'. Although they were selected but they haven't won any prizes or awards in the international arena. Then what is the significance of these awards and prizes? It seems clear that they like the criticism of the Third World countries or their religion?

This anti-Islamic wave is also utilized by many writers like- Salman Rushdie, Taslima Nasreen, Ayaan Hisri Ali and now Khaled Hosseini. Salman Rushdie can be termed as pioneer in term of criticizing Islam through writing. He has started a trend which has been followed by many others. Born in Bombay (now Mumbai), he went to a school there but later completed his

² In the Sacred Text of the Muslims.

schooling and other education in England. After graduation he went to Pakistan in 1964, where he worked in a television as a copywriter for an advertising agency. After that he returned to England and started writing. He published his first novel, *Grimus* in 1975. His second novel and the most prestigious, *Midnight's Children* was published in 1981. It won many awards and prizes including the distinguished Booker Prize for fiction. In 1993 it was even judged fit for 'Bookers of Bookers, the best novel to have won the Booker Prize for fiction in the award's 25-year history. Though he wrote many novels and a children's book, his fourth novel, *Satanic Verses*, led to accusations of blasphemy against Islam and demonstrations by Islamists groups in India, Pakistan and the world over. He was banned by the Islamic World and a *fatwa* was issued on him by the orthodox Iranian leadership on 14th Feb 1984. As far as he is concerned, he is more British than Muslim? How can he write about Islam when he does not know anything about it? Or he can even be called as Anglicized Muslim.

Taslima Nasreen is the most controversial and the most radical female writer of the Indian sub- continent. Being born in a country like Bangladesh, which is socially and economically very backward, she was deprived of all kinds of freedom in her childhood and youth. Living in such a place, she has been a witness to the miserable condition of the society; she has a great agitation for that, which she has reflected in her writing. Though her writing career started in 1977, but she became famous the world over with her fourth novel, *Lajja*, which came out in February 1993. It is a documentary novel about the precarious existence of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh especially in the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, in India, by the Hindu fundamentalists on Dec 6, 1992. The Muslim mob in Bangladesh took their revenge on Hindu minority there. Her documentary novel, *Lajja*, is a protest against the torture on the minority community of Bangladesh.

It is good that she protested against the injustice done to the minority community in her country. It is good on the humanitarian ground but it is the people who are wrong and not the religion. Religion does not teach people to maltreat or kill anybody on the basis of any kind of differentiations or for the sake of it. Rather it teaches people to love with all human beings irrespective of caste, creed and color. So, she should criticize people and not the religion.

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghani writer based in America has established himself internationally because of his criticism of the Islamic World. He is an Americanized Muslim because he has little knowledge of his religion. In his novels, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *A Kite Runner*, he has portrayed the atrocities of the Taliban in Afghanistan. We, Muslim all over the world condemn

Taliban but what about the destruction done by the American forces on Afghanistan, why is he not able to depict that? If he is unbiased then why he is not able to portray the impact and effect of United States on Afghani people and their country?

Though Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1965 but he completed his schooling and other education in United States and he still lives there. In 2003, he released his debut novel, *The Kite Runner*, which became a bestseller, selling in more than almost 48 countries. In 2006, he was named as goodwill envoy to UNHCR, the United Nations Refugees Agency. It is so because of the popularity of his novel. His second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was released in May of 2007. In 2008, the book was the best novel in the UK (as of April 11, 2008), with more than 700,000 copies sold. Currently it is published in 40 countries. The books written by Hosseini are so popular in the West because of his criticism of Islam.

Ayaan Hisri Ali is a Somalian born African Muslim, who lives in Netherlands. She is a Dutch writer, activist and a politician. She is the internationally renowned author of her memoirs, *The Caged Virgins* and *Infidel*. Ali published *Infidel* in 2007, her autobiography that details Ayaan's life from childhood to her current years in America. She is living under the shadow of a fatwa issued by Islamic fundamentalists for her anti-Islamic views. She is a critic of Islam and she has reflected this in most of her writings. She has received death threats for her controversial writings and views on Islam. Ali is a controversial political figure and very much admired in the West. Being an African still she has a successful career in the politics of Netherlands because of her anti-Islamic views and ideas. In the West she is considered champion of free speech and a political superstar. But she is disowned by her own father and expelled from her family which considers her a traitor.

Among all these writers, the one common thing is that, they are living in West and they have patronized by the Western Countries because they are criticizing Islam. They are often getting Awards, Prizes and Honours. Though, being exiled from their own countries they have been patronized by the Western world, which is providing them a permanent refuge. All these writers want to reform Islam but with the negative approach. They should see the examples of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma and many other social reformers who have reformed the Hindu society by abolishing many unjust age-old customs and traditions without criticizing the Hindu religion.

But there's a strong movement now developing in the Third World, in Africa and in India and Pakistan and elsewhere, where people from the Third World are becoming increasingly more resistant to any critical portrayals of them, whether it's the Islamic Community or whether as with, say, Naipaul's, *Among the Believers* or with Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, where they reacted strongly to it, or whether it's the Parsi Community or whether it's the West African's— they are saying, “ Why are our own people criticizing us?” Bapsi Sidhwa thinks on this question:

There is a distinction to be made between those who have been brought up in the West writing and those who are writing within their countries do tend to be more critical. It almost appears sometimes that they're pandering to the Western world, reinforcing the stereotypes the Western world would like to see reinforced and perhaps feel they can't do it themselves would prefer somebody else to do it for them. And here again the question of trust comes up. For one thing, writers who are writing from outside their part of the world are using English as a medium. They are writing in a different language from that of the native person they are talking about, and these people feel that they have to wait and see, “are these people to be trusted because they are writing in a foreign language?” Very often the trust, they find, is misplaced. I do find that each writer has to develop trust within his or her own country individually... Then, of course, there's this whole new body of writers who live in England, let's say, or perhaps in France, who writes about their countries, be it Africa, Be it in the Subcontinent, and their way of presenting things, their whole slant on the world and their part of the world, because they're living in a foreign country and they've adopted another country, does change. It somehow alters. There's less compassion. There is less realism, and they start seeing their backgrounds the way the West has been seeing them. They see them through almost pitiless glasses, not tempered with tolerance and compassion. They paint the whole image with the faults and the better points, and they bring out

a human fabric, the condition of people there in its entirety, rather than just one aspect.³

Although there is an East–West conflict in the world, still there are examples of many people in the East who though belonging to the West have served there. In the East there is the big example of Mother Theresa, who despite being born in Yugoslavia has given her entire life serving to the poor and the destitute in India.

Freedom of expression is necessary for every individual but it should not hurt the religious or any kind of sentiments of any. Any writer writing in East or West should respect the feelings of other people. They should tend to write such things that can unite people and it should not discriminate on any basis or bring hatred in the minds of people. Same is the case with media also because pen works better than the sword.

We should build a world free from all kinds of prejudices of caste, creed, religion, gender or East–West conflict. A world where there is love and compassion for every individual irrespective without any discrimination. Because humankind is grater than anything in this world.

“There is no religion, greater than the religion of humanity.
And that no service is greater than the service of mankind.”

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Feroze Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock, eds *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World* (Jackson and London University, Press of Mississippi, 1992) p. 207.