

Muslim Responses to Islamophobia: An Analytical Study

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ABSTRACT

is fact that the Islamophobia is the mixture of fear, prejudice and hate against all the Muslims all over the world especially against the religion, mosques, Islamic center, the Quran etc. In this article, it will be deciphered the denotative meaning of Islamophobia. Connotative meaning will also be explained. It will also be demonstrated that the behavior of discrimination, stigmatization and all such type of other things will also bring to light. It will also be shown to the people what was the process to respond the non-Muslims working against Islam in the period of holy prophet (PUBH). Going ahead in the age and period of companions of THE Prophet (PBUH) what was the method to discuss to the non-Muslims about the Islamophobia. With the passage of time the events have been occurred just like first world war, 9/11 etc. and islamophobia was flying high. Similarly, many radical groups entered into this line to show their sympathy with Islam against the West phobia such type of events has been took place in the past time and the western scholars and Muslims scholars had been working according to their thoughts, the people were adopting such thoughts of the scholars from both sides and were acting accordingly. The history tells us that the hatred, fear and thoughts against Islam were spreading since the age of holy Prophet (PBUH) till today. keeping in view all the events, seminars and meeting etc., established against the Muslims will be discussed in detail in this article and will try to make out positive results and conclusion at the end of this article so that Islamophobia and the responses of the Muslims will be concluded according to the rules and standards of international laws and religions also.

Introduction

It is fact that one of the most contentious Phenomena impacting the Muslim world in recent years is none other than Islamophobia. Owing to unfounded hostility toward Islam, from verbal violence to brutal bloodshed, Muslims, all over the world are facing the challenges of social, Political, Religious, and cultural discrimination at different level of society. Recent incidents from different European countries affirm the inevitable consequences of Islamophobia on Muslim World. For example, laws and policies have been introduced in France, Belgium, Denmark and India, banning Hijab and religions minarets construction.

It is said that the term islamophobia was first used in Britain. According to some experts, islamophobia, as a term was coined in an American journal “Insight” in 1991. Whereas, Aiten Demit and Salima bin Abraham used this term in 1925, as they said, “occes detive Islamophobia”.¹ Generally referred to as Islamophobia the term is not without debate, as clearly discourse abounds concerning its origins and definition.

Definition of Islamophobia

The term Islamophobia is an amalgamation of two words “Islam” and “Phobos”. The word “Islam” refers to the religion “Islam”, while the “Phobos” is a Greek word meaning a strong unreasonable fear of or feeling of hate for a particular thing such as; Hydrophobia (fear of water), xenophobia (strong dislike or fear of people from other country). So, in literal meaning Islamophobia is the hatred for Islam. However the 12th observatory report of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) explains Islamophobia as “a fear or more precisely, an excessive fear, against Islam, against Muslims, as well as against anything associated with the religion, such as Mosques, Islamic centers, Holy Quran, Hijabs, etc.”²

Thus, Islamophobia defined by United Nations in its special report of UN Human rights Council on contemporary forms of Racism, Radical discrimination in 2007 as “a baseless hostility and fear vis-à-vis Islam and as a result, a fear of and a version towards all Muslims or a majority of them.”³

The Runnymede Trust, a British think tank, in its report, has identified prevailing attitudes regarding the definition of Islamophobia that incorporate the following eight Islamophobic mindsets and beliefs:

1. Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change.
2. Islam is seen as separate and "other". It does not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them and does not influence them.
3. Islam is seen as inferior to the West. It is seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist.
4. Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, and supportive of terrorism and engaged in a "clash of civilizations".
5. Islam is seen as a political ideology and is used for political or military advantage.
6. Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand.
7. Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices toward Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.
8. Anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural or normal.⁴

Historical Background of Islamophobia

Historically, the term "Islamophobia" with its present connotation, came into being in recent past few years ago, while its seeds were sown at the time when the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) started the preaching of Islam as a complete code of life. The enemies of Islam reached the place where the Prophet (PBUH) preached the message of Allah. They accused the Prophet (PBUH) of being as magician and poet etc., and forbade the people to listen to him.

In this context, an example of brief story of Tufail bin Umer al-dausi (RA), the companion of Prophet (PBUH), can be given here to reveal the biased and prejudiced thinking of the enemies of Islam. Hazrat Tufail himself described his visit to Mecca as follows:

When I reached Mecca, the Quraysh leaders came up to me and welcomed me with whole heartedly, and accommodated me in a grand house. They said to me, "O Tufayl! You have come to our town. The man who claims that he is a Prophet has ruined our authority and shattered our community. We are afraid that he

would succeed in undermining you and your authority among your people just as he has done with us. Don't talk to him. Don't put your ears on anything he has to say. He has an eloquent speech by which a son becomes enemy of his father, brother of his brother, and husband of his wife."⁵

So, the people of Mecca tried their best to keep him (RA) away from the Prophet (PBUH). He inserted a piece of cotton in his ears out of fear that some pieces of the speech of Muhammad would reach his hearing. At last, when he listened to the Prophet (PBUH) reciting some verses of Holy Qur'an, he could not help embracing Islam.⁶

This event shows that non-believers of Mecca to what extent were biased against Islam and the Prophet of Islam. The slogan of "Us vs. Them" became prominent in media and literature, and led to the representation that the Us (West) is superior to Them (Muslims). This slogan became more evident when Samuel P. Huntington penned an article in 1993 on Foreign Affairs, titled "The Clash of Civilizations", which was later on turned into a book. Islamophobia is an extravagant sort of enmity and hostility towards Muslims that sprouted from the negative stereotyping, bias, discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civil life.⁷ This not only wreaks harm for an individual but also causes havoc on society.

The United Kingdom, during the chaotic time against the USSR in Afghanistan, portrayed the image of Muslims as heroes of the day and anti-Soviet warriors.⁸ However, the post-9/11 world observed a 180-degree paradigm shift in Western policies. Yesterday's heroes became today's villains. Enmity towards Muslims living in the West and an aggressive attitude towards Muslim countries became frequent. In the same strain, European countries considered Islamophobia is more justified in the post-9/11 era.⁹ Many writings, videos, and pictures started emerging against Muslims to emphasize the notion that they were responsible for the destruction of the world in general and the West in particular. This made significant challenges for Muslim countries.

According to the observations of Islamophobia Observatory of OIC, Islamophobia has four key expressions;

1. Violence (physical assault, verbal abuse, destroying of property)
2. Prejudice (in the mass media and social media and other kinds of conversations)
3. Discrimination (at work place and departments of social services)
4. Exclusion (from employment, politics and government, and from other spheres of national life)¹⁰

Major Incidents of Islamophobia in the West

The phenomenon of Islamophobia can be observed in almost every non-Muslim country, but Europe, North America and Australia are leading in this regard, where leftists and rightists both possess it. These individuals and groups (including organizations) belong to various walks of life in those countries. Therefore, the following information contains high profile cases and incidents of Islamophobia as follow;

US – August 2016: A New York imam and his associate are shot and killed on a busy street near their mosque in Queens. Police say it was a hate crime. The attacker is arrested and charged with murder.

Switzerland – December 2016: A 30-year-old man enters a mosque in central Zurich and starts firing at a handful of men who were drinking tea after evening prayer. Three are wounded. Another victim was killed by the same perpetrator earlier in the day. The suspect escapes but is found dead near a river close to the mosque.

Canada – January 2017: Alexandre Bissonnette, 27, kills six Muslim worshippers and injures scores of others in an attack at a Quebec City mosque during evening prayers. The attacker is identified as 35-year-old Jeremy Joseph Christian. A third man is seriously injured.

UK – June 2017: A 48-year-old man in London drives a van into a group of worshippers who had just come out of a mosque after a late-night prayer, killing a 51-year-old man and injuring nine others. The driver, 48-year-old Darren Osborne, allegedly shouted “I want to kill all Muslims – I did my bit” after the attack. Osborne is sentenced to 43 years in jail on terrorism-related charges.

Spain – August 2017: The number of crimes directed towards Muslims in Spain increases following deadly attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils as

mosques in the cities of Granada, Fuenlabrada, Logrono and Seville are desecrated and firebombed. Three Moroccans are brutally assaulted in Navarre, while a Muslim woman is injured from an attack in front of a Madrid metro.

New Zealand – March 2019: Twenty-eight-year-old Australian Brenton Tarrant allegedly kills 49 people at two mosques in Christchurch. He is arrested and is facing charges.¹¹

Causes of Islamophobia

There are many reasons behind Islamophobia, which vary from country to country and society to society, but there are some common points of references that are counted as reasons of Islamophobia particularly in the West.

1. Islam and its followers are narrowly considered as static and unresponsive to social change.
2. Islam is known as a monolithic religion, which refutes the fundamental authenticity of religious texts of other religions.
3. The West shows a strong reluctance in considering Islam as an enlightened religion. It (West) considers Islam as an inferior and outdated religion on globe of the world.
4. It considers Islam as the strongest opponent of science and technology among other religions in the world.
5. Islamophobia is a manifestation of a population to exclude Muslims and Islam from their host society.

According to observations of Islamophobia Observatory, the following reasons of Islamophobia have been observed as significant,

- * Lack of knowledge and understanding about Islam is the core reason behind Islamophobia. Therefore, the popular propaganda wins that Islam rose through sword, which further preaches hate to non-believers and stands to challenge the modern and Western way of life.
- * Perversion of Muslim societies and their contemporary state of victimization in the American War on Terror and rising level of extremism is contributing to Islamophobia.
- * Misuse of the right of freedom of expression is also contributing to the phenomenon, when mass media in non-Muslim world (particularly in

West) does not discriminate between terrorists and victims of terrorism in Muslim world. Therefore, powerful propaganda of this mind set is contributing to Islamophobia.

- * Seditious behavior of some individuals, groups, organizations and other entities to promote ethnic violence is significantly contributing in the rise of the target phenomenon.
- * Inadequate legal binding is one of the factors to restrict the Islamophobia-based literature and hatred speech is an element of Islamophobia.
- * Lack of political will of stakeholders particularly of host communities of Islamophobia for establishing a serious dialogue upon nodes of conflicts and terms of agreement are contributing in Islamophobia.
- * Phenomenon of cheap labor is one of the momentous factors of Islamophobia in the West, where local citizens face unemployment in their home countries.¹²

Thus, OIC has reported the attitude of the host populations of Islamophobia as irresponsible, offensive, suspicious, and susceptible fear of Muslims and Islam.¹³

Muslims Response towards Islamophobia

OIC recognized the threat of Islamophobia and passed recommendations to take initiative to address this problem at institutional level. Later, OIC in its 3rd Extraordinary Islamic Summit at Mecca adopted its Ten-Years Program of Action in 2005. OIC decided to take measures to diminish the issue. It also formed Islamophobia Observatory to postulate the magnitude of Islamophobia all over the world. OIC took another step to establish a technical body to identify and block the blasphemous and Islamophobic content on the Internet. It is called Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT). It was established by the resolution passed in the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers of OIC in 2009.

While addressing the 42nd Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) of OIC member states, secretary general of OIC described Islamophobia as,

it is a regrettable fact that manifestations and incidents of hostile, defamatory, discriminatory, xenophobic and racist discourse and

actions against Muslims especially in the West is still on the increase in their scope and intensity Islamophobia is also manifested through intolerance, discrimination and adverse political, media and even academic public discourse. Islamophobia is mainly based on radicalization and demonization of a religion and its followers. As such, Islamophobia is a direct and clear assault on the human rights and dignity of Muslims."¹⁴

In his special message to the Journal of OIC, he expressed his concern that Islamophobia was one of the biggest security threats to the world, which carried a very high magnitude to prematurely hurt, discriminate and defame Muslims and Islam. He mentioned that violent acts of individuals were being projected as a manifestation of collective response of all Muslims in the world, who firmly believed to promote in universal and comprehensive message and principles of Islam, such as respect, tolerance, freedom and peace for all. So, a universal community of Muslims cannot be associated with extremism and terrorism at all. He further said that the undefined boundaries of freedom of expression had violated the basic human rights through making caricatures of the most sacred personalities. It offended the faith of Muslims and previously defined code of ethics of journalism.

Since Western school of thought and orientalist have built their perceptions about Muslims and Islam on very weak foundations, he stated, they should revisit their petite understanding of Islam. He assured that OIC will play its key role as a legitimate source for peace and harmony to draw down the magnitude of this "unholy campaign" of ill minded people against Muslims and Islam. He highlighted that OIC had taken up this issue as its policy agenda to spread awareness about Islamophobia at UN and other effective forums in the world. He further highlighted that he personally had made this issue a part of his speeches and points of negotiations at 62th session of General Assembly of United Nations, and other intergovernmental forums including leading think tanks of US, West and rest of the world. In his visit to USA, he visited and spoke in academic and professional research institutions" about the role of media to bridge the gap between East and West. He shared his views about Islamophobia and the role of media in launching and promoting it.¹⁵

He addressed the 6 Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers and reinforced his commitment to harness all available resources to counter the phenomenon of Islamophobia." In his address at Lisbon, he stated that OIC is amongst the biggest forums in the world, which organized interfaith and inter-cultural dialogues. 14 General Secretary. Ambassadorial Group to Geneva of OIC and UN Commission for Human Rights (upon the report of OIC) condemned the political campaign of Swiss People's Party to ban Scarf and Minaret of mosques of Muslims in Switzerland. OIC convinced the target institutions to declare this development as an attack on fundamental human rights and freedom of practicing religion.

He further noted that Muslims living in North America and Western Europe were facing identity crisis. There is no doubt that mass media, biased scholarship and unstructured sense of historical rivalry had made the public in them narrow minded towards Muslims. He mentioned that Islamophobia cannot be prematurely generalized in the West and America at all, because there was an institutional process and sincere or human-rights loving people who took stand against such subversive propaganda, but the momentum of their good manifestation remains inferior to the magnitude of Islamophobia,

It must be noted that Mass Media is not only the launching pad of Islamophobia, but social media is the most effective tool of this phenomenon, which is very hard to monitor and block, as governments of UAE, Pakistan and Indonesia blocked Youtube.com in protest against the presence of blasphemous videos, but the problem and significance of the crisis was not realized by the West and America and they failed to respect Islam and preserve the basic human rights of Muslims.

In 37th session of ICFM, the participants observed that the reporting of cases of Islamophobia all over the world. They were astonished by the fact that local governments are ineffective to solve their social issues for certain communities. They reinforced their commitment to do more in this regard. The Secretary General of OIC shared his observations with the same participants that the right wing political parties in Europe are the real cause of Islamophobia. He mentioned that he (UNESCO) to realize Islamophobia as an international crisis of defamation of religion, where Islam and Muslims are deadly victims of it.¹⁶

Islamophobia Observatory publishes monthly bulletins and annual reports since 2008. These annual reports are written on the basis of observations taken from monthly bulletins, which are made up-to-date of all observed cases of Islamophobia all over the world. This study is limited to organize a content analysis of the annual reports of Islamophobia Observatory only, which is comprehensively aware of actors and reasons of Islamophobia in certain parts of the world and how OIC has played its vital role to develop a legitimate voice of Muslim world to mitigate the phenomenon.

Practical Examples of Diminishing of Islamophobia

OIC frequently conducts conferences, consortiums, seminars, workshops and inter-religious dialogues to make people having awareness about Islamophobia and realization to diminish it effectively. Its target population of address mostly are leaders and representators of inter-governmental originations, states and government officials, civil society, media, educational elite and various stakeholders including those from host population of Islamophobia. The following information has been organized to highlight some high profile developments to diminish Islamophobia, as those were mentioned in the annual reports of Islamophobia Observatory since 2008-2016.

- * OIC convinced United Nations and European Union to condemn the wicked exercise of Danish citizens to produce caricature of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).
- * EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) met with Secretary General of OIC to take up the issue at UN for more international consensus and commitment to avoid defamation of Islamic religion. Later on, Secretary General of Council of Europe' also condemned that act of violence and offense upon the faith of a community.
- * Mayor of Brussels city stopped the rally titled "Stop the Islamization of Europe. Later, Secretary General of Council of Europe also condemned the rally.
- * Government of the Netherlands stopped the campaign of far-right opposition party for banning Holy Qur'an in the country.
- * Italian Interior Minister opposed the campaign of banning veil of Muslim women at public places.

- * European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) issued general policy guidelines and recommendations to prevent minorities from discrimination and defamation.
- * Director of Yale Center for Faith and Culture and 300 people from Christian scholarship (including clergy) gather at Abu Dhabi and wrote a letter to their counterparts for collective apology of sins and crimes of Christians done either in Crusade wars or in contemporary wars (including in American War on Terror) against Muslim community.
- * OIC directorate presented its concerns over celebration of Islamo-Fascism Awareness Week in USA. It raised the issue at 62 UN General Assembly to neutralize the target campaign.
- * OIC has sponsored a number of resolutions to introduce legislation against Islamophobia and defamation of religion. These legislations not only had been passed by UN Human Rights Council, but also had been introduced in some countries too.
- * OIC has precedence in this regard that it made evident the phenomenon of Islamophobia timely and passed a numbers of resolutions and declarations from its forums for commitment, awareness, and countering it effectively.¹⁷ At the same time, it has worked with other intergovernmental organizations and various stakeholders to address it in their own constituencies in host regions of Islamophobia.
- * OIC took initiative and issued (2006) a trilateral joint statement (secretary generals of OIC, UN and EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy) against blasphemous acts of creating cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).
- * OIC issued (2006) a joint statement regarding right of peaceful protest and freedom of expression with secretary generals of OIC, Arab League, UN and with the high profile representatives from Turkey, Qatar, Spain.
- * OIC convinced the UN to make Islamophobia part of its special report of UN Human Rights Council on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Radical Discrimination and Xenophobia in 2007. This was a significant development, when UN defined the phenomenon of Islamophobia first time in its history.
- * Final drafts of declaration and resolutions possessed commitments of participating member countries of OIC at its 11th OIC Islamic Summit to address Islamophobia.

- * OIC introduced, sponsored and made efforts to pass a resolution (no. 60/150) at UN General Assembly titled "Combating Defamation of Religion".¹⁸
- * Council of Europe passed a resolution (no. 1605) in its Parliamentary Assembly (2008) as a warning for Islamophobia activists. Moreover, it issued a White Paper titled 'Living together as Equal in Dignity' for promotion of intercultural dialogue in Europe.¹⁹
- * UN High Commissioner visited OIC head quarter and endorsed the concerns of Secretary General of OIC to address the issue through intergovernmental organizations.²⁰
- * Council of Europe passed a resolution (no. 1743) titled Islam, Islamism, Islamophobia in Europe, in its Parliamentary Assembly and introduced strict regulations of this issue.
- * UK launched an 'All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia' at its House of Commons for tightening the actors of Islamophobia. Ministers of Foreign Affairs of OIC member states passed a declaration for countering Islamophobia through a comprehensive and institutional approach.
- * Local authorities of Germany announced for surveillance and scrutiny of anti-Muslim websites in the country.
- * OIC took initiative of launching 'Istanbul Process' to mitigate religious intolerance.²¹
- * A large number of Western countries have allowed Muslims for building mosques and wearing veils.²²

Conclusion

This target study concludes that OIC, the representative of Muslim Ummah, has successfully built a legitimate and collective response of Muslim world towards Islamophobia through founding an Islamophobia Observatory and sharing its findings with other stakeholders in the world. It makes a right decision to tackle some of the challenges of this social evil through an inclusive and participatory approach. Therefore, Islamophobia Observatory has built a capacity to guide and provide evidence of this menace in its host communities particularly in the West. Its target assessments of Islamophobia had convinced international community to realize this issue as a violation of basic human rights of Muslims. The rising trends of Islamophobia reveal that European governments and to

some extent their media, educational institutions, civil society and intellectual scholarship are either not capable of tackling the phenomenon or they are intentionally reluctant to counter it on a massive scale, as its magnitude has been observed increasing rather than decreasing. Hence, comprehensive and sincere efforts (declarations and commitments) of the international community are being waited for execution in the host communities of Islamophobia.

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