



# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT *with* RELIGION *and* FAITH *in the* 21ST CENTURY

## Freedom of Speech and Peace: A Case Study Combating Islamophobia

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### INTRODUCTION

#### *Freedom of Speech*

Professor Thomas Irvin Emerson, an American attorney, highlighted the four categories of societal norms and values that establish the right of freedom of expression: The systematic method for free expression is necessary (1) As a procedure of assuring individual self-realization, (2) the attainment of truth, (3) as a process of secured social, political participation and logical decision- making, and (4) the purpose of preserving the balance between strength and change in the society.<sup>1</sup>

Then there are defamation laws in various states that protect the reputation but restrict the freedom of speech. Accepting the law is for the prevention of hate and attacks on one's reputation and identity. Reputation is quite different from the character of one person; character is what a person is and reputation is what people think of him/her.<sup>2</sup> Reputation consists of one's honor, dignity and property. (Nofos, 2014)

The liberty principle as explained by Mill is that freedom is only when we pursue something for our own good, in our own way, as long as this all doesn't harm or deprive others of their rights of obtaining the same. Liberty is desired and meant for happiness, but this becomes negative when it brings chaos to the society. So, it's meant to contribute to development in the civilization instead of interference that inflicts harm upon another community. If freedom of speech needs power, then it has to be rightfully exercised over any member of the community, that is to prevent harm to others. The emphasis is on this fact that one should not make one's own belief a trump card to subdue other's beliefs, a single truth cannot be found by defaming other religions as the law to survive must be universal.<sup>3</sup>

#### *World Peace & Religions*

Struggling efforts of religious identity have existed for centuries and have resulted in tragedies and often, intense conflicts. Various treaties, pacts, conventions and declarations consist of commonalities related to

freedom of belief and faith traditions in the twentieth century. The importance of religious freedom is acknowledged in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The articles states “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his [her] choice elated are also found in many other specialized human rights declarations and in

Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.<sup>4</sup> All religions preach and agree to combat the evil, selfishness and undisciplined human minds that create trouble in society and then these religions preach a spiritual path which is ethical, wise and disciplined.

There are two major factors and mandates for religions preachers that concern world peace. The first is to find the commonality and workable solution among faiths and their understanding of the factors that unite them. This is achievable only if there is respect for humanity that exists among people belonging to various faiths. The second factor is to bring happiness among humans through viable consensus of basic spiritual values that leaves an impact on every human heart and enhances their gratitude towards acceptance. This can be done through finding the common denominator of all world religions, which is a humanitarian ideal.<sup>5</sup>

### **Countering Hate Speech for Peace**

The term “Hate Speech” emerged as a controversial topic after the World War II, particularly in political debates. Also, the American Bar Association defines this term as speech which threatens, insults, offend groups based on national origin, religion, color, disability or other characteristics. While various European states have equalized freedom of expression with respect and equality for all by forbidding the expression of hate.<sup>6</sup>

Discriminating religious groups and incitement of hatred through speech is common. Not only speech, but also, this same speech can be conceived as blasphemy that further leads to violence between groups. The United Nations on Human Rights also worked to counter the incitement of hatred. It states that speech is a fundamental right for all individuals and for communal flourishing. War and conflicts first start in the mind, which is cultivated with the fuel of hatred through propaganda. Positive speech is also the healing tool to counter this. It’s our duty to redress hate speech by remedial compassion and solidarity that heals hearts and societies. The words of peace should transcend religious and belief boundaries and such boundaries must not longer stay as a free land for manipulators, xenophobes, populists and violent extremists.<sup>7</sup>

### **Islamophobia**

Dr. Hatem Bazian, a professor of Islamic Law and Theology, defines Islamophobia as the irrational fear, anxiety, and prejudice people hold against Muslims and the religion of Islam, which leads to discrimination & violations against Muslims.<sup>8</sup> Islamophobic speech often asserts that Muslims are inexpert of their choices and participation because of their fundamental ideologies and commitments to a pre-modern tradition or their essential “otherness” or outsider status (in opposition to European or Western identities, as demonstrated by the Danish cartoons). The petition reflects that the religion of Islam demands a just and proportionate exercise of this responsibility, that the Qur’an also supports the freedom of right for all humans in non-violent form.

Abadi describes Islamophobia as when travelling abroad from Muslim countries, either countries are banned or they put Muslims under surveillance, police, and label them as extremist. Without any proven crime, Muslims are considered criminal. Runnymede Trust (2017) explains that Islamophobia is an anti-

Muslim racism with the purpose of oppressing the human rights and fundamental freedom of Muslims. Religious intolerance includes the denial of accepting the rights of people from other faiths and to express their faith freely.<sup>9</sup>

## **THEORETICAL DISCUSSION**

### ***Social Identity Theory***

Henry Tajfel, a Polish social psychologist, in 1979 brought his theory of social identity that explains the association and belonging of an individual in a group, that group is aligned with their common pride and self-esteem. The communities and groups provide the sense of association in society and the world, which also declare this as their social identity. This identity divides people in the world as “us” or “them” regarding their perception of social kinds.<sup>10</sup>

There is a synergy in a dual function of religiosity that social identity and belief systems facilitate the clarity on why religion is important. Whereas theorists focus on social identity based on race, gender and nationality, but it is recommended that content of identity has an important role. But it should also be noted that people targeted on the basis of religion mostly shows that religious identity is more prominent than others as a weak point. Religious identity is fundamental for all groups and people believe that this identity is for their well-being. And when it's an attack on religion it's an attack on one's self esteem which also increases the status and support of many of the same religious groups. A social group is a collection of individuals who consider themselves as members of a similar social category. This identification of one's own self in the society has evaluative, affective and cognitive horizons reflects the importance of self-concept and membership privilege.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Theory of Liberty***

The theory of liberty was introduced in 1859 by John Stuart Mill. This theory encourages the freedom of expression in any form unless that act is not harming any other person. Mill's theory clearly says that it is necessary to regulate speech but only in the case if the speech is violating the existing criminal code procedure or laws. There are two categories of speech and conduct: non-hate/ speech related and hate speech itself. The speech related content is when it's not harming anyone else but expressed in terms of protest or making an opinion with reference to hate speech. But if it harms anyone, then related law of the state has complete right to regulate that misconduct.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Moral Foundation Theory***

The stance of Haidt on his theory is that humans contain six “Moral Foundations” based on which they divide the policies, religions or politics: Care, Fairness, Loyalty, Authority, Purity, Liberty. Haidt argues that these foundations stay constant for all individuals toward their associated homeland, religions, laws, community and families. Haidt also categorizes these three morals among conservatives and liberals, as his study shows that Conservatives rely heavily on five foundations except liberty whereas the Liberals rely on Care and Fairness.<sup>13</sup>

Haidt's argument reflects that the existence of the religion promotes unity in groups, that this phenomenon is more adaptive than the moral foundation themselves. People are united by faith and religions more than the six indicators of Moral Foundation. The encouragement of groups also reduces the tendency to engage in the upsetting behaviors as there is God in every religion that punishes the morally errant acts protects the evil to overcome. Religion keeps everyone in moral line that shows that morality and religions are directly related to each other.<sup>14</sup>

## **ACTION PLANS TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA**

### ***Role of Youth and Digital Media***

Digital courses, digital literacy, digital laws need to be implemented through youth. Youth ambassadors can be a bridge between young people, society and digital technologies - to create awareness on countering hate speech and fake content on digital media. Also, youth can organize their online and offline campaigns more effectively if organizations working for digital ethics arrange a tool kit for the youth. The deconstruction of fake news is more important than any other activity; they should be trained to break down the key terms of false propaganda against Islam and Muslims. (Latvijas Jauniešu Attīstības Centrs)

### ***Role of Religious Leader and Scholars***

The most crucial role is that of religious leaders. They should preach peace, tolerance and love for all religions, instead of inciting bigotry, hate and extremism in their temples and worship places. Also, Muslims Scholars and leaders need to study about Islam more, as mostly in Muslim countries, the practice of Islam is contrary to the teachings of Holy Qur'an and traditions of noble Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). There are Quranic verses that clearly warns against extremism and fanaticism. (See Qur'an 2:190, 2:256, 5:77, 8:61, 11:112 & 41:34).<sup>15</sup>

### ***Role of Traditional Media***

The representation of discourse related to Islam and Muslims is negative in Western media, and sometimes hostile where it incites hatred among viewers and readers. Edward Said argued that there is a clear depiction of imperialism in the West that divides the East from West and leads to further division of groups based on religion and race. The concept of "Other" among "Us" enhanced the marginalized status of Muslims. Thus, the media role has to reduce

conflict, instead of increasing it through engaging the opinion of the community.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Role of Civil Society***

The civil society has to adopt the grand strategy of zero-tolerance towards Islamophobia. There is a need of alliance for this motive to combat Islamophobia by strengthening and institutionalization of NGOs cooperation. Also, there is a need to empower the role of Muslim NGOs in international forums. Civil society needs to build the capacity of youth to become their ambassadors and hold outreach programs in their respective areas for the advocacy of combating Islamophobia through peace speech.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Role of Academia & Families***

Combating Islamophobia or religious bias is a challenging issue for both teachers and parents in many societies. Youth need to be curious, rather than fearful about Muslims and Islam. In the early ages of children, they need to be taught about various religions and cultures, which are common. Various programs need to be introduced that encourage and help teachers, communities, and families to become more familiar with Islam. Governments of various countries need to make a regulatory authority for curriculum development and suggestions of teachers and scholars need to be contributed to the course. By which, the awareness of Islam teachings can be done wherever possible, which consequently leads reducing islamophobia.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Pakistan Combating Islamophobia***

The Government of Pakistan is continuously addressing the issue of combating Islamophobia through various international forums. There were many misconducts in Europe and the West in the name of freedom of speech that hurt the sentiments of all Muslims. As Imran Khan Prime Minister of Pakistan wrote in a letter to all Muslim leaders to

unite, as incidents that spread Islamophobia happen every other day. Not only this, Khan wrote a letter to social media heads to take down the Islamophobic content from all online platforms.<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Islam has a very clear message of peace for all humanity, as well as the belief that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the last Messenger of God for all the Universe. There are many religions that were introduced before and after, but regardless, Islam teaches peace and tolerance. Many Muslims are still being oppressed in many regions including Kashmir, Palestine, Syria, India, America, France, Uyghur and many more.

The world stays silent when it comes to defend the freedom of speech for Islam and Muslims. Miscreants are ready to hurt the Muslims while either publishing the hate content and ridicule our Prophet PBUH or to oppress Muslims. This is necessary for the advocacy of peace and Islam in the West, in India, as well as Israel. Islam never teaches to initiate war if there is no attack on the dignity or sovereignty of Muslims. The concepts of Islam, Muslim & Jihad are totally being manipulated by offenders and trouble-makers.

Jihad is not the violence directed to any non-Muslim but a struggle against the wrong-doers, oppressors and evil in whatever form it appears, Islamic Law and Quran itself repeatedly guide to fight against the oppression that reflects in cases if first offense is targeted by the opposite party and is not stopped by anyone then its mandatory for Muslims to combat the brutality. Mostly cases found in the West that when anyone kill innocent Muslim, no authority name them as terrorists whereas that particular terrorist bring terror among the community, but they announce the terrorist as mentally unstable, minor or white supremacist. But if someone kill anyone in the name of Islam, he becomes terrorist. So, rule is clearly varied in ethnicities as rule itself here acting as a racist.

Muslims should let the world know that how peaceful Islam is and there are people who in the name of Islam create disturbance among innocents. There was no concept of suicide attack in Pakistan before 9/11 incident. Pakistan played its role in proxy war and lost more than one hundred thousand civilians who had nothing to do with any war or attack, but they have lost their lives, there were children, women, elderly persons. Not only in Pakistan, but many people also lost lives in the name of Islamophobia.

The Muslim world still talks about peace rather than vengeance. Europe and America are considered to be the civilized nations; does it sound civilized even to ridicule someone's religion? Misconduct and violence need not be tolerated and peace processes need to be started to implement the code of conduct for freedom of speech in these countries if laws are weak there.

Islam preaches about Dawah (teaching of Islam peacefully). Everyone needs to study Islam for their better understanding of belief and civilized regulations. The best way to learn is to study the Qur'an. Muslims know that every solution of the problem is in this Holy Book and they want to let the world know about this too, instead of hatred. Unity of the Muslim world is the need of the time. Doing violence in the name of Islam but not being punished nor embarrassed even. At-least one should confess and apologize on any hateful act. The theories and research studies mentioned in this paper states that freedom of speech is allowed but with limitations of ethics, morality. And there is nothing bad if the intention of the initiator of speech is positive, pure and good. Hence, it's concluded that it's not freedom of speech, but racism when an innocent Muslim is called a terrorist. It's terrorism when anyone kills any Muslim around the world. It's defamation when anyone humiliates a Muslim. It's a blasphemy when anyone ridicules Allah Almighty, the Holy Prophet (PBUH), or anything written in Holy Book. The same rule goes for humanitarianism too.

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