THE ROLE OF WESTERN MAINSTREAM MEDIA: HOW ISLAM IS BEING BRANDED AS PROMOTER OF VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Whenever we see any terrorist incident committed by a Muslim, happened anywhere in the world, instantly some of the newspapers and TV channels start screaming that it's a 'Jihadist' activity. Jihad has become the synonym of Islamic Terrorism. The western media tries to portray that through Jihad, Islam is encouraging its followers to kill non-believers and people from other religion. This paper is a research on the rise of Islamophobia in the contemporary world and the role of media in spreading it. This wave of anti-Islam sentiment is prevalent in various forms in all the spheres of life but here the ones related with media are emphasized. Here in this paper discussion has been done as to how the media is portraying Islam as the religion which promotes violence and the Muslims as terrorists and ultimately playing a significant role in the global rise of Islamophobia and Xenophobic attack against Muslims. It is important to analyze the role of the media because there is a nexus among Islamophobia-Radicalization-Social marginalization-Security threat. The research contains review of the cases where the media has been biased

against Muslims and the further condemnation of this biasedness by the media itself and the views of the expertise thinkers in this field.

Keywords

Islamophobia, Western Media, Islam, Anti-Muslim Campaigns

1. Introduction

The medieval age was full of enrage against the Jews, which continues to this date, but the intensity has been lowered to a great extent with the rise of the Jewish State of Israel. And that intensity has been filled up by the contempt and hatred against Muslims which got the current after the end of cold war, especially with the theory of Clash of Civilizations given by Samuel P Huntington.

The paper has been divided in three main chapters. In the introduction part, a general overview of the whole topic has been written and the problem statement is stated. A simplified idea on Islamophobia is also written here. Then the research questions are drawn on to which the research has been conducted. In the next section of theoretical framework, the subject of this research has been analyzed on the basis of the theories which are followed to describe the situation.

Islamophobia is drawing scathing attack and nuisance upon the Muslims, so the topic has grave importance to understand the media, its role in the contortion of the scenarios and the ultimate overwhelming effect. So the importance of this study has been written in a section. After that few case studies and literature are reviewed to have a real time understanding and knowledge about the role of media in the rise of Islamophobia. Islamophobia is a curse for the Muslims in the same time a fear mongering scenario for the non-Muslims residing alongside them. As of dictionary meaning Islamophobia means the general fear and suspicion of the Muslims as a threat to the life and surroundings and to bear a hatred and violent attitudes towards Muslims as stereotypically obnoxious creatures. As published by the British Home Secretary Jack Straw in 1997, the report of the commission for studying the ongoing Islamophobia in the British society, Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All, said that, it is an outlook or world view, involving a dislike and unfounded dread of the Muslims, which often results in discrimination and exclusion from the society and creates a marginalized community (Straw, 1997). Since the 9/11, politicians and media used that attack blatantly to achieve their own agenda that fear and

suspicion about Islam has been on the rise since (Sheehi, 2011). It has further accelerated after the creation of the terrorist groups like Islamic States of Iraq and Syria, and attacks in Brussels airport, Paris city hall and stadium, Nice festival of Bastille Day, Orlando gay club shooting and Munich New Year's celebration day attacks and several other places. And one section of the mainstream media left no stone unturned to portray the entire Muslim community of more than a billion and the religion Islam as the main terrorizing force for all these attacks.

We are aware of the fact that media outlets like The Guardian, The Independent, VOX and some more are really playing constructive role to reduce the amount of Islamophobia and hatred towards the Muslims though their effort is too limited. In this paper, the hypocrisy and biased nature of one particular section of the media in labeling the Muslim community and attaching them with all the nuances happening will be critically analyzed.

2. Theoretical Framework & Perspective

The topic is so vast that it can be explained by most of the theories related to media. The prominent media theories like hypodermic theory or agenda theory can well explain the nature of media relating to this particular case. However, the theory which has been used here, to analyze the nature of media in promoting Islamophobia, is the Propaganda Model Theory.

Propaganda Model Theory: The theory was proposed by MIT linguist and renowned analyst, thinker and scholar Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman. This theory is used to criticize the biased nature of the media against Muslims. The theory is on the field of political economy and explains how the media biases and propagandas are used to achieve certain goals in economic, social and cultural field.

The theory was first published in the book Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media, in 1988, this theory explains how the private and also public media commoditize a news as product for the audience for their sole economic and political benefit, befitting their ideology, rather than valuing the quality of the news. The media often become biased and even untrue to promote their agendas (Chomsky & Herman, 1998). It postulates five criteria which determine the type of news the media is publishing and broadcasting which are ownership of the media, media's funding sources, sourcing, flak, anti-communism and fear ideology. The fifth criterion was replaced by War on terror and counter terrorism in 2002. The manipulating strategy of the media to get consent of the mass people for any work of the

authority and administration in this war on terror was described by Chomsky as a tool for the US led western coalition to justify their indiscriminate bombing for their hidden agendas, in any part of the world. The Politico-Media Complex of the state works to hide all their evil works and focuses on the evil of the counterpart more (Chomsky & Herman, 1998).

The ten manufacturing strategies given Noam Chomsky are crucial here, to understand how the media works. They distract the audience from the real scenario and shift their focus by bringing in any other topic to the limelight, like the media brought the Manhattan bombing and terrorism case in front to justify the government's policy against the refugees (Vox Insider, 2015).

And as professor Herman and Chomsky said, these propagandas are shield of the government to carry out their operations, and the same time they did in Iraq and now are trying to do with North Korea. The media accused Saddam Hussein of having weapons of mass destruction and thereby manufactured consent of the people for the attack as the invading countries were democratic. Although the conscious people protested who did not buy the false propaganda story of the media but the governments carried on anyway destroying a country to ashes and killing millions of innocent men, women, and children, only to admit after three years from the attack which started on August 2003, that there was no WMD in Iraq (Afia, 2015).

Today in case of bombing Syria the US government is using the same policy which falls under this propaganda theory. The media is showing the scenarios of chemical gas attack which, without any prior investigation are blamed on Bashar al Assad, and thus the US government gets an excuse to bomb the Syrian Airbase. And thus they shift the focus of the US people from the US election scandal and relation with Russia about which investigation is going on against the president Trump (Hasan, 2017). The same thoughts were echoed by George Orwell in his classic masterpiece 'Nineteen Eighty-Four', where he told that government uses a draconian policy of spreading false propaganda, coercion, manipulation of the past, surveillance and denial of truth to subjugate the people and carry out the objective (Orwell, 1949).

Today the western media are vilifying Islam, portraying Muslims as terrorists, in other words, Muslim countries as threats to the national security of the western countries with whom, the Muslim society are in war with. However, this concept of clash and conflict did not come up from any Muslim, but from a pro-Western thinker Professor Samuel P Huntington in his 'Theory of Clash of Civilizations' (Huntington, 1996). So they western governments got their pretext for

starting the war which was smoothen by the electronic and print media. This demonization of the Muslims is necessary to justify their illegal war for oil and gas and arms industry, in the name of fighting terrorism and establishing democracy to liberate the people (Frantzman, 2016). With these excuses of being terrorist nation, which needs to be civilized otherwise westernized, US government bombed more than 26,000 times across seven predominantly Muslim countries, as done by the Obama Administration in his last year at office in 2016 (Kurt, 2017). There were not even 26 attacks by Islamic militants in USA in last ten years but the government bombs indiscriminately killing civilians and children. The media keeps on blaming some terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda, Taliban and ISIS, but do not focus much on the governments who provide the logistics, arms and ammunitions to these groups (Markaz, 2015).

But where is to protest as the mainstream media are controlled by the western powers and backed by their money. So Islamophobia is on the rise in an uncontrollable pace thanks to the efforts of the media and sponsorship of the states who need it for oil, gas and arms trade (Werelam, 2015).

2.1 Literature Review

As this paper is done on the media, so works are more on the articles and news published by the media outlets than that of the scholarly articles and books. And as for scholarly views, the Orwellian Concept and the Manufacturing Consent ideologues are discussed before. Here in this literature review part, few articles and books are reviewed, and alongside this, a thematic not literature based review has also been done.

2.1.1. Fake News and False Flags

In 2016, from a leaked cable of WikiLeaks, it was revealed that, Pentagon paid a UK PR firm; to produce fake videos of Al Qaeda Attack while the Iraq war. The amount of payment was huge amounting to $540 million (Black & Fielding-Smith, 2016).

They used similar territories to film the false videos with crews having make up like Muslim terrorist and uploaded those videos on internet which reached millions, creating hatred towards Muslims. Hence, the questions come now, all the videos that we see today, of the beheadings and other propaganda videos of the terrorists' groups are really of theirs? Or those were created by the firms paid by US government, to demonize the entire Muslim community. Even doubts arise whether all the news that we hear about terrorist activates, and published by

the media in lucrative way of condemnation are true or just fake news on the basis of false flag attacks.

2.1.2. Media Promotes Islamophobia

Long before the current surge in media about Islamophobia, in 2002, European Union Commission on Racial and Xenophobic attack reported that, the British media, politicians and commentators are promoting Islamophobia (Allen & Nielsen, 2002). This resulted in xenophobic attacks on Muslim women wearing Hijab or attacks in Mosque and even children of Muslim family studying in schools.

British writer Allen (2016) wrote in his book Islamophobia in UK that, media is playing a notorious role in shaping the attitude of the British people towards the Muslim community by associating them with all kinds of terror activities that are happening long way from mainland Britain in Middle East where the case is also different. But as a result a fear stricken situation is building up in the community where the followers of this particular religion are seen with malice and enmity.

2.1.3. The Halliburton Agenda: The Politics of Oil and Money

Written by Dan Briody, this book unveils the real reason the US led coalition invaded Iraq. The then vice president of USA, Dick Cheny was a former CEO, and major shareholder of the Halliburton, the oil company from Texas. For their dirty politics of oil and money of the arms manufacturers they waged an illegal war, which was then justified by the media unanimously, by labeling Iraq as a harboring place of terrorist and Saddam Hussein as a supporter of radical Islamic terrorism (Bridoy, 2006). And thus the media sold the Iraq war to the US people.

2.1.4. Muslim Terrorist vs White Mentally Ill Shooter

It is the all usual strategy of the media in promoting Islamophobia that, whenever an attack is carried out by a Muslim, it is labeled as terrorism. But if the attack, of whatever magnitude that be, is carried out by a white Christian, they are labeled as mentally ill. In USA the number of people died since 9/11, in gun violence, school shooting exceeds thirty thousands, but not a single of those incidents were labeled as terrorist activities unless they were committed by any Muslim. As the Fox News channel commentator Brian Kilmeade said, all the Muslims are not terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims (Awn, 2016). This is a perfect example of how the media is promoting Islamophobia. In fact religious terrorism is there in every religion, there are extremist, like Haganah from Judaism, Lord's Army from Christianity, Shivsena from Hinduism,

Hans of Xinxiang from Buddhism, Islam is no exception from that, the problem lies with those wrongdoers not the religion itself (Allen, 2015). But labeling only Muslims with terrorism shows the biasedness and hypocrisy of the media.

2.1.5. Terrorism by Muslims vs Non-Muslims

According to Kurt (2017), 90 percent of all the terrorist attacks committed on the US soil were committed by non-Muslims, but it was never highlighted nor even blamed upon them. In case of terrorism or any other criminal activities never the religion of the criminal or terrorist become a concern if not he is a Muslim. Any kind of unlawful activity done by a Muslim; be him religious or non-religious is blamed upon the entire religion and whole Muslim community (Wurth, 2015).

When the Palestinians try to defend their homeland from the Israeli settlers it is blamed upon them and they are termed as terrorists. And Israel gets the sympathy and rights to defend itself. Never Judaism is blamed here. For the atrocities of Hitler, nobody talked of his religion, media never called him a white supremacist Christian terrorist. But when a Muslim does it, all of them become terrorist by the media (Ghilan, 2015).

2.1.6. Getting the Focus

Prior to the 9/11 attack, few in the west had idea about Muslims and their religion Islam. But after the attack, the media took that responsibility of educating the general people about Islam and ended up creating Islamophobia (Ghilan, 2015). As the US and other coalition army soldiers kept dying in the battlefield of Afghanistan's and Iraq, the media fuelled more Islamophobia and people also bought the stories (Ludwig, 2015).

That initial growth of Islamophobia is today a grace for the media. Because, it was observed that, reports and news relating to Islam and terrorism get more audience attraction (Stephanie, 2012). So, media reports are aimed at defaming and labeling Terrorism upon Islam.

2.1.7. Islamophobia and refugee problem

The racist and white supremacist administration of the west, like Hungarian Prime Minister or French presidential race candidate Marine Le Pen or President Donald Trump do not want Middle Eastern Arab Muslim refugees in their country. But when pictures of dead Alan Kurdi on the shores of Europe come to the media, the general people creates an outcry in favor of refugees fleeing the conflict, violence and war. So to generate anti-refugee sentiment among the general people, the administration and media keep on publishing news about the brutality and barbarity

of the Muslims to create an Islamophobia so extreme to repeal the plea of the refuges who are all lost (Nossiter, 2015).

2.2. Case Study

Here in this section, few cases will be reviewed and analyzed to understand how the media is promoting Islamophobia by being biased in cases related to Muslims.

2.2.1. Bowling Green Massacre

The Trump administration adviser Kellyanne Conway made up an entire fictitious and false story of Bowling Green Massacre committed by Muslim terrorist in an interview with Cosmopolitan magazine, which never happened. She told that, two Iraqi refugees carried out terror attack to defend the Trump administration's Muslim ban but later on it was found that no such attack ever happened. Later on she apologized for her false statement (Vox News, 2017).

2.2.2. Munich Shooting

On 22 July, 2016, there was a shooting inside a McDonalds' restaurants in mall in Munich Germany. World media was quickly categorized it with Islamic terrorism. Even, CNN correspondent, Doug McConnell said that, the shooter shouted 'Allahu Akbar' before shooting at the people at random killing nine people and injuring more than 30 (Middle East Eye, 2017).

But later on it was revealed that, the shooter was David Sonboly, a right wing extremist who believed in the ideology of the Norwegian mass shooter Andres Breivik and he was a Christian.

So when it was found he was not Muslim, rather Christian, the charges of terrorism were dropped immediately, and Munich police chief Hubertas said that the incident was a 'classic shooting rampage' not terrorism. And he was not called terrorist anymore rather a mentally ill shooter (Reuters, 2017).

2.2.3. Chapel Hill – Charleston Church – Sandy Hook vs San Bernardino Shooting

There are hundreds of cases of mass shooting in USA and various other western countries. In the years after the 9/11 attack there were two cases of mass shooting in USA by Muslims, one in San Bernardino and another in a gay club in Orlando (Al Jazeera, 2017). Both the cases the blame was put on the entire Muslim community and Islam.

But compared to this there were mass shooting in school in Sandy Hook where 26 children died, shooting in church in Charleston where more than 10 persons died, the deadliest

mass shooting in Las Vegas where 58 people were killed, even three Muslims were killed by Christian right wing activists in Chapel Hill, two white Christian died in Portland trying to defend Muslim women from abuse and there are numerous other cases like this which even do not appear in the international media, remain simple domestic news (News Week, 2017). But if it's done by Muslims only then, immediately, the religious identity of the criminal is brought up. And it becomes a global security concern and terrorism alert ring up.

2.2.4. Jo Cox Killing

British MP Jo Cox was killed on 16 June, 2016 by a man named Thomas Mair, who stabbed the Labor party MP several times and also shoot her twice. She was a vocal opponent of the Israeli settlements in West Bank.

But the media neither raised a question about terrorism related with religion in this case as the killer was a white Christian nor was much vocal about him following the Britain First party which is staunchly anti-Islamic (VICE News, 2017). Rather it was said, she was killed for political cause which is Brexit and the killer was undergoing treatment for mental disorder and depression (BBC, 2017).

2.2.5. Case of Anders Breivik

The most notorious of all these shooters is Anders Breivik, a Norwegian, who killed 77 people, in July 22, 2011, in three separate attacks around Oslo. He killed maximum number of people as a single person. He is a self-declared fascist, who gave Nazi salute in the court. He wanted to make people known about the threat of the Muslims immigrants coming in Europe (The Telegraph, 2015).

He was at times labelled with terrorist. But never his religious beliefs were brought in front to tell him a Christian fundamentalist terrorist. This is how the media behave in a biased way with the Muslims and promote Islamophobia.

2.2.6 Borussia Dortmund Bus Attack

On 11 April, 2017, when there was a bomb attack on a bus of the German club Borussia Dortmund, the media was quick to blame the Muslims, and published news that it was terror attack, committed by Islamist fundamentalist terrorist. Two Muslim were arrested in this case (The Telegraph, 2017).

But after one week it was found that a German-Russian man was behind the attack as he wanted to gain profit from share market (The NY Times, 2017). The media as usual changed its tone from terrorism to profit motive attack.

2.2.7. Frankfurt Sexual Assault

On February 6, the most circulated German newspaper Bild published a report that 50 Arab looking man assaulted women celebrating the New Year in Frankfurt (Melissa, 2017). The blame directly went upon the Syrian refugees. Police carried investigation for months. Meanwhile there was a hatred grown in Germany against the Muslims Syrian refugees.

But months later, police came to conclusion that there were no such incident and the entire repot was a false report to stop the refugee acceptance program by German government (Melissa, 2017). The German newspaper Bild publicly apologized for their lies but the false propaganda which had fuelled anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe remains alive.

2.2.8. BDS Movement

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement is a non-violent movement which aims to stop the use of products produced in the occupied west bank and other settlements in Palestinian territory. It is a completely peaceful movement, which is also endorsed by states like Iceland and Sweden and many non-Muslim students and activists around the world. But it's harming the interest of the state of Israel, so the media is now playing the anti-Semitism card by labeling the movement as anti-Semitic, which the authority uses to silence any criticism of Israeli government (Hasan, 2017). Hamas and Hizbullah which claim to be resistance forces against Israeli occupation are termed as terrorist for their violent measures by the media but this peaceful new movement has also been labelled by media as a heinous approach by radicalized Muslims. The Israeli justice minister Ayalet Shaked even called it a terrorist organization (Andrew, 2015). And the media is promoting their views and defaming the movement as a radical Islamist move raising Islamophobia.

3. Policy Implication & Recommendation

This paper suggests that, there should be actions and strategies, which will promote the real face of Islam to the people in the west, letting them know that Islam is not a religion which has the doctrine of violence and persecution of non-Muslims. The Muslims living in the west,

who are the main victim of this rise in Islamophobia, will have to propagate their peaceful religious ideas.

Islam is 14 centuries old whereas this religious terrorism is only thirty or forty years old. The people in the west do not know much about Islam, so they are vulnerable to the media propaganda which is fed to them (Awn, 2016)

4. Conclusion

This research is based on the contemporary incidents that is happening around the world. For that reason it is dependent on some of the reliable news articles and media resources which are often biased. However to avoid inclusion of politically or ill-motivated news, the facts were checked from different sources and the most neutral narratives were accepted.

In this age of science and technological advancement, media is a very strong factor in our day to day life. We cannot imagine a moment without the social media, blogs and television channels. This all powerful force, when become bias and scornfully attack a particular community, it becomes really troublesome for that community to survive peacefully.

In the medieval era and even now, the Jewish community had to and has to suffer the anti-Semitic attacks. This destroyed the harmony in the society and those anti-Semitic views ultimately led to the Holocaust.

Today, Islamophobia is the new face of racism and communal violence, replacing the Anti-Semitism. And these hateful views are further exacerbated by one section of the media, strengthening and increasing this wrong perception to a great extent. And this propaganda is allowing the consent of the mass in the west for the killing of millions of innocent Muslim souls in the name of counter terrorism and war on terror, and exacerbating hate crimes in an alarming number (Torrens, 2015). These xenophobic attacks often radicalize society which is not at all expected and pose threat to the whole community (Tavakoli, 2017).

Muslims in general, in all spheres of life, along with rational people, irrespective of religion and nationality, who are highly critical of this biased nature of one section of the mainstream media, should take the initiative to promote a serene image of Islam for the betterment of the entire society and humankind.

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