



SHARIA LAW- THE WEST ENGULFED IN A FRENZY OF FEAR

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Abstract:

Our paper aims to decode the immense fear which is evoked by the word Sharia in the West. For the masses of the West-mainly European and North American, Sharia is no less threatening than Lord Voldemort himself- something which is widely misinterpreted as medieval legal system with only one version of extreme interpretation which is used by bearded mullas to oppress women and give draconian rulings. However, at the back of their minds they also have a deep-rooted suspicion that Muslims want to impose Sharia law in Europe and America to dominate the West, this view is often pumped by the media when they generalize the whole 1.8 billion Muslims based on the actions of a few. Our main purpose is of writing this paper is to convey that this gloomy image of Islam and the massive ignorance at understanding Sharia did not come out of the blue. It is a deliberate manipulation to support western foreign policy goals. Throughout the paper we would elaborate the misinterpretation of Sharia by debunking 5 popular myths and how media made it worse, by quoting these peddlers of hate. We would trace how this fear was exploited by politicians to increase their vote bank and manipulate general population into supporting their interventionist foreign policy. Later on, we establish the link between these Islamophobic statements and spike in hate crime against Muslims-a direct consequence of ingesting fear 24/7. Towards the end, we give an insight about what the word Sharia really is and give solutions to actively combat the underlying hysteria of Sharia threatening the West civilization.



Keywords: Law, Sharia Law, Western Law, Islamophobia, Muslims, Civilization.

Introduction:

If we examine the trend of western societies fearing Sharia-majorly stems from ignorance, lack of communication by Muslim state heads to western world (i.e., these terrorists do not reflect the 1.8 billion Muslims around the globe) and 78% of media coverage about Muslims being casted in a negative light (The guardian, 2020). September 9/11 was the first time when western population started hearing about the religion named Islam on all media outlets. Their first introduction to this religion was the images of twin towers being bombed. So, they automatically developed the correlation between terrorists and Sharia/Islam. Later, media cells predominantly created five popular myths about Sharia which further worsened the situation.

Myth No.1: Sharia law is Islamic law

The politicians like republican Joe- go on claiming to know Muslim intentions better than anyone else, i.e., that Muslims want to implement Sharia law in the U.S., ignorance of such xenophobic bigots is to such an extent that they are not even aware that Sharia means law (The Washington Post, 2016). When they say Sharia law, they are saying law-law- it is like saying chai tea. This level of ignorance and lack of research is reflected in those 11, 000 stereotypical articles about Muslims- published within the last three months of 2019 in Britain (The Guardian, 2020).

Sharia is not how westerners understand it- it is not a set of statutes imposed by government. Most Muslims who embrace Sharia do not think of it as a substitute for civil laws. It is taken as a guidance about matters regarding their personal and public life.

Myth No.2: law of the land in Muslim countries is Sharia

For instance, Saudi Arabia is seen as a literal embodiment of Sharia- from public beheading to imposed veils, it is seen as completely operating on Sharia. Similar view is reflected by Saudi ambassador in London who demanded British officials to respect Saudi laws which are “based on Sharia” (The Washington Post, 2016). However, the Islamic conception of state negates monarchy and dictatorship which is prevalent in Saudi Arabia- thus, it won't be an ideal country to look for implementation of Sharia.

Myth No.3: Sharia is anti-women

This view is strengthened when you only televise the views of critics of Islam, leaving out those scholars who published more than 30 volume books about Sharia e.g., *Imam Sarakhsi*. We have critics like ex-Dutch parliamentarian Ayaan- ‘Islam is hostile to women’, and French



P.M Macron- who categorizes hijab as a 'symbol of woman enslavement' (Landes, 2016)- notwithstanding, that the countries expressing the most anti-Sharia views are the same countries who had a rancid history of colonizing Muslim lands, looting and conducting mass murders. For example, France-the most anti-Muslim European country, executed over 10 million Muslims in Algeria (AA, 2019).

Myth No.4: Islam imposes inhumane punishments

This view is depicted from news channels to Disney movies like Aladdin- where the merchants intended to chop Jasmine's hand only because she stole a fruit. Just like Ku Klux Klan (the Washington Post, 2016), is the worst place to judge Christianity; these self-proclaimed Islamic states (ISIS and ISIL) are the worst places to understand Sharia and its application.

Myth No.5: Sharia calls for world domination and conquest

Looking at the views of Newt Gingrich- Muslims want to replace western civilization with radical Sharia (the Washington Post, 2016), you would be under the false impression that world domination is a religious obligation upon Muslims. On the contrary, Muslim jurists insist that Muslims should obey the law of the land and if the law prevents them from carrying out their religious practices than they should migrate.

This misunderstanding is then deliberately exploited by western politicians during elections. Multiple studies show that the most hate crime reported and spike in anti-Muslim sentiment is around elections (Gallop report). One such author of a report Robert says that after analyzing statistics rise in Islamophobic incidents are closely tied to election... when electoral candidates use megaphones to talk how dangerous Muslims are for their society (The intercept, 2018). Rather than having an educated discussion about Sharia, politicians use this fear to create us versus them mentality to bag maximum votes and get elected.

Even after elections misrepresentation of Sharia in specific, is used to support western interventionist foreign policy objectives (The Vaqeen Institute, 2020). This view is supported by studies who showcase how a western population having anti-Muslim sentiments is more supportive of having anti-Muslim laws e.g., banning hijab, and invading a Muslim country (Gallop report) - e.g., Iraq invasion 2003.

The following is a collection of quotes laced with anti-Muslim sentiment by media personalities-which no longer makes you wonder questions like what is driving this unprecedented fear of Sharia in the wider western population.



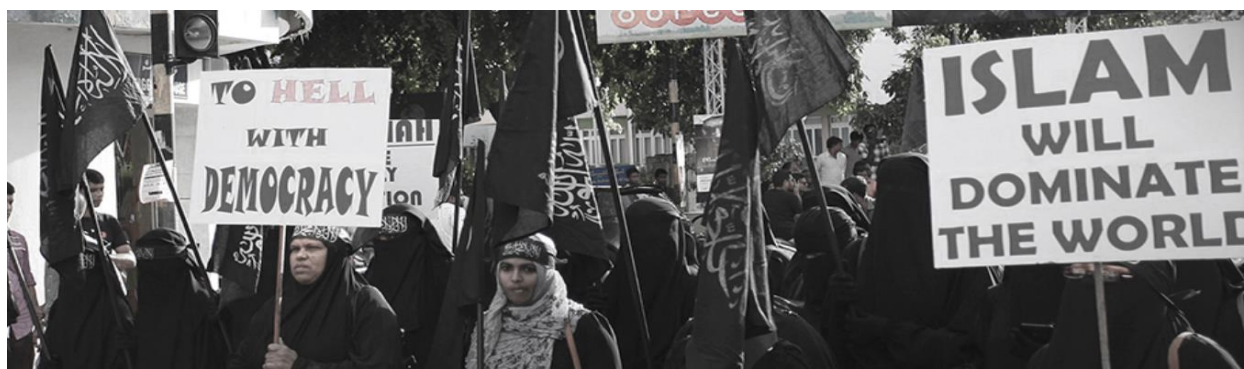
T.V host Mark Levin	Sharia Law is creeping in this country (Landes, 2016)
Donald Trump	European Muslims want to go by sharia law (Landes, 2016)
Republican ex-Presidential candidate Newt Gingrich	Muslims are bound to wage war against non-Muslims (The Washington Post, 2016)

This fear is then translated into instances like:

1. 120 U.S. states introducing anti-Sharia bill and 13 of them passing it- 2018 (Oxford University Press, 2018).
2. Some 33 U.S based Islamophobic networks receiving a total of \$200 million revenue by promoting fear and hatred for Muslims.
3. Bigots monetarily contributing to such media cells which would be responsible for promoting fear of Islam and Sharia, e.g., according to www.islamophobicnetwork.com (2008 to 2013) eight donors contributed \$57 million to incite negative sentiments about Sharia and Muslims- (Oxford University Press, 2018).

These figures are astounding to look at, that there are active campaigns which heavily targets Muslims with the intention to expel them from the West. A more shocking fact is that Islamophobia has become a multi-billion-dollar industry with media giving exaggerated accounts to gain maximum viewership and donations (Aljazeera, 2016). This can be one of the reasons why the western media is so obsessed with this one directional and stereotypical view of Islam, framing the narrative of Sharia threatening their “western civilization”.

It has resulted in an online campaign of bias and questionable sources of information about Islam which is cherry picked and not fact checked. For instance, sites like “Sharia Watch” (Media Bias Fact Check, 2020) and “Creeping Sharia” (WordPress, 2019) - the latter was thankfully identified as malicious content and taken down by the web. This type of propaganda is very dangerous because it seeks to represent the whole muslim community as an extreme, backward, and intolerant body of people. E.g., the image below was widely circulated in western media but most Muslims living in Middle East and east did not even realize that such a protest occurred:



So, now the reason behind fearing Sharia is glaringly clear- it has resulted in at least nine U.S states banning Sharia to be used in American courts, but if you think rationally, you will conclude that U.S courts have never in their history given rulings based on Sharia. There is a clear division between religion and state in the West, so how is it plausible to fear the domination of Sharia? E.g., Only 1% of the American population is Muslim (Pew Research, 2017), so how is it logical to think that the 1% will somehow dominate the remaining 99% and impose Shariah?

Currently, A massive name change is happening in Europe- countries are deporting Muslim refugees but on media they will be referred to as illegal immigrants who have suspicious intentions-which is very different and hypocritical to how Ukrainian refugees are being openly welcomed in Europe and North America. This is because Europe is fearing an influx of Muslims- even if they are refugees who want to escape war torn countries the underlying fear is that Muslim



birthrates would outnumber native population. This fear was sparked when demographic reports were published, stating that Muslims had the highest birth rate in Europe and that Islam was the fastest growing religion. However, these reports very tactfully concealed the fact that increase in Muslim population in Europe was limited to 1% in one decade. Such media framing



leads to intolerant behavior and hate crime.

Also, visible symbols like beards, veils, mosques and halal meat are seen as foreign which will cause loss of European- modernized and white Christian, identity and culture. That is why most European countries label Muslims as 'people who do not integrate into the European society due to their barbaric Sharia'- these allegations do not consider that Islamic teachings are not diametrically opposed to principles of freedom and equality of the western society and that Sharia does not call for world domination.

There is a very similar fear of danger, Islamization and implementation of Sharia in United States- that 'oh, soon Muslims will dominate our legal system by becoming a majority because of their high population and immigration rate. So, we should ban Muslim immigrants and closely track Muslim community'. Looking at the ground reality, any layman will know that no Muslim or Muslim organization has ever tried to replace American legal system. Despite this fact, Texas and Arkansas legislated anti Sharia bill in 2017. These deep-rooted demographic fears and myths which can only be overcome by knowledge and looking at statistics.

After Understanding how mere lack of knowledge and misunderstanding is being used to manipulate the masses and gain personal interests, the question arises how do we altogether stop this fear of Sharia which is slowly being turned into a hysteria? How do we stop radio channels like "Could your Muslim neighbor be an extremist?" which sows seeds of discord among multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious, in short diverse societies?

First you must understand what sharia is because fear and suspicion can only be battled with knowledge. After seeing so many anti-sharia bills, one must think what is this Sharia which has deeply disturbed and rattled policymakers into introducing, passing, and legislating such bills? Sharia is commonly thought of something which violates human rights, and it is often confused with Islamic law. However, that is not the case. Sharia basically it refers to values, objectives and principles found in Quran and authentic prophetic narration-revolving around the



matters like justice, protection, life, and property. For majority of Muslims sharia at state level is



good governance, social welfare programs and individual accountability. These principles and values cannot change, however Islamic law-how to put these principles and values into practice, can change because this is human interpretation and elaboration on the implementation of Islamic Fiqh (Jurisprudence).

Islamic law changes according to the needs and demands of society. For instance, Islamic law in the past was developed to serve Islamic dynasties and empires- when majority of the Muslims lived under Muslim rule. However, today we do have Muslims living as permanent minorities in non-Muslim states, so, we need the Islamic law to cater to them. Rather than blindly adhering to the past, Islamic law should serve its basic purpose of guiding and protecting the lives of believers wherever they live.

Second, more open mosque days should be conducted. The Muslim response to growing Islamophobia is open mosque days which facilitates dialogue. Although, the mosque is open for non-Muslims to visit throughout the year, for the westerner this concept of an open mosque day represents an idea that they are free to enter the mosque, and they can openly observe and interact with Muslim devotees and ask questions. It removes the barrier of being hesitant. These interactions of Muslims and non-Muslims are crucial, because when you have only one percent of Muslim population in countries like America- only one in five people would have ever met a Muslim, which means the remaining four would be easy prey for hate peddlers and fear mongers. Also, how else are you supposed to know the other side of the story if you do not have the opportunity to interact with Muslims?

Third, Muslim head of states must take an active role in setting the right narrative. They must pick up the microphone to resonate the views of the wider Muslim population which staunchly opposes extremists and bigots. As it was done when 9/11 occurred, all Muslim states and Muslim leaders from around the world poured in their condolences and condemnation of the event. However, the fatwa of Usama bin laden ended up being published in the western media



rather than the fatwa of the scholars from around the globe who condemned the event.



Therefore, more narratives should emerge by our politicians, like the address of Pakistani politician Imran Khan in UN. The narrative should focus on the golden age of Islam, how Sharia influenced western legal system, 1000 year old splendor of Baghdad along with the views of academics like Harvard professor Noah who said, Islamic law has offered the most liberal and humane principles for the most of its history and mere idea that 'Sharia threatens American security' is very similar to the hysteria and accusation that Jewish law (Halacha) would dominate Europe in 19th century (Time, 2016).

The example of 19th century hysteria against Jews showcase how they were once casted in a sinister light- like Islam and Muslim today, and how they survived that era. It can serve as a beacon of hope for Muslims who are stuck in this constant cycle of hate, ignorance, violence, and racial profiling due to their faith. It would give hope to Muslims to have patience and stand up against being called racial slurs like raghead, jihadi, sand nigger and bomber daily. So, the solution to combat to contagious fear of Sharia in West lies in a loop:

You start by knowledge (what sharia really is), and this knowledge gives birth to open interfaith interactions, these interactions give rise to mutual understanding and by understanding people stand in solidarity with each other and wait for a better tomorrow with hope. Only by understanding and knowledge can people merge the streets of Europe and northern America in solidarity and support of their fellow Muslim citizens. The following is a classic example:

Conclusion:

In a nutshell, before 9/11 most Americans and Europeans had no knowledge about Islam. After the unfortunate incident, suddenly they started being bombarded with foreign sounding words like jihad, Sharia, Islam, Muslims, hijab etc. Since these words were only discussed in a negative connotation, the public started correlating words like Sharia with something bad, evil, and sinister. However, the problem was made worse when politicians started exploiting this ignorance to either get elected, create favorable sentiment in public to attack/bomb a Muslim country for their ultra-nationalistic foreign policy objectives or to introduce anti-Muslim laws and policies within the country.

On the other hand, reporting Muslims in a negative light in media became a multibillion-dollar industry so the media focused on making documentaries and reporting on the worst Muslims out there-giving no attention to normal Muslims nor allowing them to speak for themselves to set their own narrative. This ultimately led to myths about Islam and half truths about Sharia being propagated without any in-depth research.

The situation was further worsened when people started donating to sites and media cells who primarily produced Islamophobic content. All these elements created hysteria in the West that Sharia law is creeping into their societies, that Muslims are soon going to outnumber them



which will allow them to impose the 'inhuman and medieval Sharia' over them. Sharia was soon



casted as a threat to 'modern and civilized western civilization' which resulted into fiery and xenophobic debates about Sharia phobic on TV shows.

In the end, the solution which we propose to all this madness is to educate the western population about what really is Shariah and have more interactions with them by conducting open mosque these to shatter this to typical image of Muslims that westerners hold- i.e., bearded men who oppress women into covering themselves, which would give birth to mutual understanding and allow a peaceful coexistence.



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