

Clash of Ignorance: Freedom of Expression and the Honor of Muhammad Rasulullah (S)

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Abstract: This paper looks at the offensive cartoons of Rasulullah (S) first published in a Danish newspaper and later reprinted across Europe. It argues that these cartoons are not isolated events, but part of a wider pattern in which the Western world uses the idea of “freedom of expression” to attack Islam and hurt Muslims. The discussion is placed against the background of the so-called “War on Terror”, which has led to the global suspicion and persecution of Muslims. The paper explains how political, media and religious leaders in parts of the West have created a climate where insulting Islamic beliefs is treated as acceptable, even respectable. Church leaders and other senior figures rarely guide their followers to show respect for Muslim feelings, but instead sometimes add to the negative image of Islam. This silence and selective concern shows a double standard: Christians and Jews expect protection for their own beliefs, but often do not support similar protection for Muslims. Drawing on the words of Aga Khan at the University of Evora in 2006, the paper describes the controversy as a “Clash of Ignorance” rather than a clash of civilizations. No true civilization allows the deliberate wounding of human dignity. The paper argues that using “freedom of speech” to justify insults to Prophets and divine personalities is a misuse of that freedom. Freedom of expression should not mean the freedom to damage human dignity, provoke hatred, or destroy social harmony. Reference is made to the 2005 United Nations human rights resolution which urged states to act against religious hatred, especially against Islam. The paper calls on Muslim governments, institutions and communities to respond through lawful, peaceful and intelligent means: by engaging international forums, using traditional and social media to present the true Talim of Rasulullah (S), and insisting that international law protects both free speech and religious dignity. The paper concludes that real peace requires mutual respect: Muslims will continue to respect other faiths and rightly expect the same respect in return.

Keywords: Freedom of expression; Islam; Rasulullah (S); Islamophobia; media ethics; human dignity; United Nations; defamation of religions; interfaith relations; Clash of ignorance

It is clear why the developed world would find it in their best interest to produce offensive material that creates negative feelings amongst the second largest population of the world. Isn't it sufficient that the alleged "War against Terror" has persecuted the Muslims globally on a scale never seen before? Israel and her illegitimate parents in the international Zionist establishment were able to produce a lot of the sponsorship (to maximum heights), which it benefited from throughout the Cold War. The reprinting of the cartoons in the name of "freedom of expression" has once again illustrated that the West is not ready to tolerate Islam and Muslims. The spirit of Crusades is burning alive and the role of the Church in this regard is paramount. The Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, along with the leader of the Protestants, Archbishop of Canterbury, never played any role of guidance towards their disciples to refrain from hurting the sentiments of Muslims. Instead, they pass comments time and again against the laws of Islam. If in any part of the Muslim world garbage is found in the vicinity of the Church they make noise, but remain silent about the atrocities against the supreme personality of Islam. By publicly giving statements these anti-Islamic minds act as if they are guardians of tolerance and harmony between different religions, but their silence on the western intelligentsia speaks volumes about their philosophy and thinking which they have inherited from their notorious predecessor Pope Urban-II (1035-1099).

Referring to the offensive material against Rasulullah(S), first published in a Danish newspaper, at the ceremony by University of Evora for awarding Honorary Doctorate on the subject of "Material and Spiritual Service to Humanity" Evora, Portugal, on 12 February 2006, Late Aga Khan explained that it was more a "Clash of Ignorance" than a "Clash of Civilizations". By using the word "ignorance" he beautifully explained the approach of the stone-age-era since no civilization allows hurting human feelings. The Western world is demonstrating the mindset of the stone-age era with reference to Islam and Muslims. Their purposeful ignorance is more dangerous than a snake's venom. Due to this ignorance, the Muslim world is facing danger and it gives birth to a breed that believes that freedom of expression denotes the legal right to insult the divine personalities. Freedom of expression does not mean damaging human dignity, decency, and harmony in any society; it does not mean the freedom to insult.

Zionist Jews and Orthodox Christian think tanks are afraid of the spread of Islam around the world. They calculated well in advance that the next century was for Islam and hence adopted a strategy to crush the Muslims with all possible methods. Western governments hold aloft the banner of "freedom of speech" when it comes to insulting Muslims and Islam. The provocative moves by the Western media to insult and attack Islam is an old mission. Moreover, many Western countries keep silent on the war crimes committed by the Allied Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. They even prevent Muslim women from wearing Hij'ab citing that it is sexist. With all possible methods they force Muslims to accept their definition of 'freedom', which is nothing but an insult and abuse of the laws of Islam.

The cartoons published are in contempt of the most divine personality to ever grace the earth. The media repeated the same attack as if they were trying to re-open an old wound when they argued in support of the published images. What can one say in response to this open declaration of enmity? Should we look on the other side, pretend to be deaf and maintain silence even when our hearts burn? By the honour of Rasulullah (S), our graves are dearer to us than the lust of the world and its affairs. The honour of our ancestors was in sacrifice for Rasulullah (S).

There is no phrase that can cover all the great attributes of Rasulullah (S), and there are not enough words to describe his divine status a loftiness that overwhelmed all and was decreed to be eternal. It is this greatness that is instilled in all hearts, settled in the souls, and felt by all.

None of the constitutions of the World allow disrespecting Anbiya or Rusul. Moreover, they confirm the necessity to respect the divine messages, and to not attack the privacy, dignity and principles of others. The media must be alert of the risks that may arise as a result of prejudice and discrimination implied by it. They should exert every possible effort to avoid being involved in such calls which are based on prejudice and religion, gender or other social discrimination. Furthermore, the Intelligentsia should realize that it is their duty to give honest attention to the aforementioned issues through the general framework of the law in each country. Undoubtedly, what the 'evil-minded' publish is harmful not only for Europe and America but to the entire world.

I would like to discuss the decree which the Human Rights Agency in the United Nations adopted on the 12th of April, 2005. This decree insisted on the ban of distortions and vicious attacks against religions and especially Islam which had been strongly attacked in the last few years. It is therefore imperative that Muslims promote the Talim of Rasulullah (S) through the media, especially social media. If every Muslim country held a convention to counter the attack against Rasulullah (S), this by itself would convey a message to the modern world that attacking Rasulullah (S) is something that the Muslims will not tolerate. We Muslims will defend the honour of our religion, Qur'an, our beloved Rasul (S), his Ahl al-Bayt (as) and the Ash'ab. Muslims will not allow people to humiliate them in the name of freedom of expression. Respect for freedom of expression does not justify allowing such shameful acts which represent a blatant attack on other peoples' beliefs and their sanctities leading to more tension, conflict, and violence. We respect the beliefs and the heroes of other religions and rightfully expect a reciprocal response from the followers of other religions or ideologies. Offending, insulting and defaming someone is also a breach of human rights. It is the firm duty of all Muslim countries to discuss this matter forcefully with the UN, EU, governments of all member states of the UN. At this critical juncture, it is the dire need of the time to understand the conspiracy and kick the slave minded mentality.

The controversy surrounding the West offensive Literature against Rasulullah (S) is not merely a question of taste or sensitivity; it goes to the heart of how modern societies understand freedom, dignity and coexistence. For Muslims, love for Rasulullah (S) is not a marginal sentiment but a central element of faith and identity. An attack on his noble person is experienced as an attack on the community's very being. Any legal or moral framework that ignores this reality will fail to build genuine peace. Contemporary human rights instruments recognise both the right to freedom of expression and the duty to protect individuals and groups from hatred, discrimination and incitement. These rights are not absolute in any constitution. Speech that deliberately humiliates sacred figures, inflames hostility, contempt for a vulnerable minority cannot be defended as a harmless exercise of liberty. Rather, it undermines the very values of decency, equality and mutual respect on which plural societies depend.

It is therefore essential that states, media institutions and intellectuals in the West acknowledge their responsibilities. Editorial freedom must be matched by ethical judgment and by an awareness of the real-world consequences of symbolic violence. Religious leaders, too, bear a duty to guide their followers away from prejudice and towards a principled respect for other faiths, including Islam. On the Muslim side, the appropriate response lies not in despair or lawlessness, but in confident, principled engagement.

Muslim institutions should use international bodies such as the UN, the EU to press for legal protections against religious defamation, and to highlight existing resolutions that condemn such attacks. At the same time, Muslims must invest seriously in media, education and social networks to present the luminous charisma of Rasulullah (S), the beauty of the Qur'an, and the mercy at the heart of Islam. Defending sacred honour does not require rejecting freedom of expression; it requires insisting that this freedom be exercised with responsibility. A just global order demands reciprocity: as Muslims respect the sanctities of others, they are entitled - in law and in conscience - to demand that their own sanctities be treated with equal respect. Only on this basis can we move from a "clash of ignorance" to a future of informed, dignified coexistence.

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