

UWTSD

Islam Today (HPRS7006)

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7. “9-11 damaged the status of Muslims in the United Kingdom”. Discuss.

Introduction

In the United Kingdom (UK), 9-11 exacerbated the negative image of Islam and further damaged the status of the Muslims. Following the attack on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001 by the Islamic extremist group al Qaeda in the United States (US), the association of Islam with terrorism, radicalism and violence has been almost synonymous.¹ There is a growing xenophobia among the Western governments and the non-Muslims communities towards Muslims residing in the West.² Specific to Islam, the term “Islamophobia” is now commonly used in public and political discourse to describe the “hatred, hostility, and fear of Islam and Muslims, and the discriminatory practices that result.”³ Post 9-11, Islam is increasingly perceived as incompatible with Western values and culture and seen as a major political threat to the West.⁴

In the UK, Todd noted that the Runnymede Trust was established in 1968 during a time of major social and cultural changes in Europe and the US to advise the British government on race relations.⁵ Subsequently, in 1996, the “Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia” was set up by the Runnymede Trust to examine the discrimination faced by the Muslims in Britain.⁶ The Commission was also to make policy recommendations for the government to battle against islamophobia and prejudice against the Muslim community in the UK.⁷ It must be noted that the Muslim community in the UK consists mostly of South Asian origin, and approximating 75 per

¹ William Shepard. *Introducing Islam*. (USA: Routledge, 2009), p. 9.

² Todd H. Green. *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction To Islamophobia In The West*. (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2015).

³ Green, *The Fear Of Islam*, p. 9.

⁴ Bryan Turner. ‘Islam’, in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Modern Social Thought*, 2nd edn., ed. by William Outhwaite (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), pp. 309-312. (p. 311).

⁵ Green, *The Fear Of Islam*, p. 10

⁶ Green, *The Fear Of Islam*, p. 10-11

⁷ Green, *The Fear Of Islam*, p. 10-11

cent of the total British Muslim population.⁸ The Muslims in the UK consists mainly of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins with a small percentage from India.⁹ The South Asian Muslim community first came to the UK in small numbers as merchants and seafarers from the late nineteenth century and subsequently in droves as immigrants from British colonies and Commonwealth countries after WWII.¹⁰ With this background of the UK Muslims in mind, this paper will discuss the status of the South Asian Muslims prior to 9-11 and post 9-11 to evaluate the impact of the 9-11 incident on them in the UK.

Status of Muslims in UK Prior to 9-11

Politically, from the onset of the South Asian Muslims' presence in the UK, "colour" and "race" has determined their status.¹¹ The migrant Muslims were always deemed as inferior as a racialised minority vis a vis a homogenous white British majority.¹² Being former colonies of the British empire, it was challenging for many of these South Asian Muslim migrants to be disassociated from being subjects of white colonial rule and lay claims to becoming citizens with equal rights in the UK. Post WWII, in seeking to include the migrant minorities as part of its national integration programme and recognising the difference of minorities amidst the white majority, the UK government adopted a multiculturalism policy.¹³ However, in 1984, Ray Honeyford, then headmaster of Drummond Middle School¹⁴ saw the perils of the policy of multiculturalism and argued that it was damaging for the successful ethnic integration of the minorities in British society.¹⁵ He "feared that it [multiculturalism] promoted

⁸ Green, *The Fear Of Islam*, p. 16; Mohammad Ghaly, 'Religio-ethical Discussions On Organ Donation Among Muslims in Europe: An Example Of Transnational Islamic Bioethics', *Medicine, Health care, and Philosophy* 15.2 (2012), 207-220. <DOI: 10.1007/s11019-011-9352-x>. p.213; Nahid Afrose Kabir, *Young British Muslims: Identity, Culture, Politics and the Media*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 31.

⁹ Tahir Abbas, 'British South Asians Muslims: Before And After September 11', in *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure*, ed. by Tahir Abbas (UK: Zed Books, 2005), pp.3-17 (p.4).

¹⁰ Prior to the end of World War II (WWII), many of the South Asian countries were under British colonial rule. See Kabir, *Young British Muslims*, p. 31, 45, 56; Uzma Jamil, 'Multiculturalism And The Muslim Question', *ReOrient* 6.2 (2021), 219-225 (p. 221).

¹¹ Stefano Bonino, *Muslims in Scotland*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 41.

¹² Jamil, 'Multiculturalism', p. 222.

¹³ Jamil, 'Multiculturalism', p. 219.

¹⁴ 95 per cent of Drummond's intake was of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin. See Leo Mckinstry, 'Farewell to a martyr to political correctness: Bradford headmaster Ray Honeyford - hounded for warning of the perils of multiculturalism - dies a saddened but vindicated man', *MailOnline*, 10 February 2012 <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2099068/Bradford-headmaster-Ray-Honeyford--hounded-warning-perils-multiculturalism--dies-saddened-vindicated-man.html>> [accessed 20 December 2021].

¹⁵ Bonino, *Muslims in Scotland*, p. 41.

division, hindered integration and undermined pupils' opportunities to succeed in wider British society."¹⁶ Honeyford's views were not tolerated by the policymakers and migrant communities then and he was condemned as a racist. However, some four decades later, Honeyford's concerns have been proven right. The Muslim community in the UK has become increasingly segregated rather than integrated into majority British society.¹⁷ Till this day, under the political framework of multiculturalism, Modood is still arguing for the Muslim minorities in UK to receive equal rights as citizens and to be recognised as racialised and religious minorities.¹⁸

Economically and socially, in the post WWII era, many South Asian Muslims moved to work in the industrial sectors and settled down in the UK with their families over time.¹⁹ They constituted a significant number in the blue-collar labour force in the UK industries.²⁰ They quickly formed the main bulk of immigrant labour in UK, as lowly educated individuals placed below the white working class.²¹ With the advancement in technology, de-industrialisation and growing capitalism happening at a rapid speed in the post WWII environment, many of these working-class South Asians become quickly displaced.²² This worsens their economic status and social mobility. As Abbas noted:

The South Asian Muslim groups in Britain are more likely to be living in the most inferior housing stock, possess the poorest health, underachieve in education, and are 'underemployed' or more likely to be unemployed in the labour market.²³

Today, many of the Muslims in UK remains disadvantaged in terms of their race/religion, education, and work qualifications, resulting in them being economically and socially disenfranchised in the UK.²⁴

¹⁶ Mckinstry, "Farewell to a martyr to political correctness".

¹⁷ Bonino, *Muslims in Scotland*, p. 42; Mckinstry, "Farewell to a martyr to political correctness"; Jocelyne Cesari, 'Securitization of Islam in Europe', in *Muslim In The West After 9/11: Religion, Politics, And Law*, ed. by Jocelyne Cesari (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 9-27 (p. 12).

¹⁸ T. Modood, *Essays on Secularism and Multiculturalism*. (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2009), p. 8.

¹⁹ Abbas, 'British South Asians Muslims', p. 9.

²⁰ Kabir, *Young British Muslims*, p. 53; Turner. 'Islam', p. 312.

²¹ Abbas, 'British South Asians Muslims', p. 9.

²² Abbas, 'British South Asians Muslims', p. 10.

²³ Abbas, 'British South Asians Muslims', p. 10.

²⁴ Abbas, 'British South Asians Muslims', p. 13, 27; Ceri Peach, 'Muslims in the UK', in *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure*, ed. by Tahir Abbas (UK: Zed Books, 2005), pp. 18--30 (p. 23, 29); Kabir, *Young British Muslims*, p. 53.

Status of Muslims in UK Post 9-11

The 9-11 incident further damaged the status of the Muslims in the UK. The “Report on the Inquiry into a Working Definition of Islamophobia / anti-Muslim hatred” published by the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims in 2017 highlighted the ongoing inequality and discrimination experienced by the Muslims in Britain. It further confirmed that post 9-11, Islamophobia has increased significantly in the UK and has caused significant damage to the status and the everyday life of the Muslims in UK.²⁵ As noted by the report,

Across policy domains, from employment, education and criminal justice to housing, healthcare and hate crime, Islamophobia has a significant negative impact on the life chances and quality of life enjoyed by British Muslims.²⁶

Prior to 9-11, the Rushdie Affair in 1988-1989 has become a watershed event for the identity of Muslims in the UK. The publication of Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 was condemned by Muslims around the world with a fatwa issued by Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini to kill Salman Rushdie.²⁷ In England, this led to the burning of copies of the book by Muslims in Bradford.²⁸ The collective consciousness of the UK Muslims in adopting “‘Muslim’ social identification rather than ‘Asian’ in Britain arose in the wake of the Rushdie Affair.²⁹ Post 9-11, and following the 7/7 London bombing in 2005, the discourse on UK Muslims has been largely discussed along the lines of religion. As Abbas opined, “religion has emerged as a major social signifier” in UK and the 2001 UK census included a question on religion.³⁰ The stronger identification of UK Muslims with Islam as their religious identity, the 9-11 horrific terror act by al Qaeda and the prominence given to the negative portrayals of Islam by the media have largely contributed to the increase in racial and religious discrimination in the UK in the post 9-11 environment.³¹

²⁵ All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, *Report on the Inquiry into a Working Definition of Islamophobia / Anti-Muslim Hatred*. (2017), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf> [accessed 20 December 2021].

²⁶ All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, p. 7.

²⁷ See Bonino, *Muslims in Scotland*, p. 41.

²⁸ See Bonino, *Muslims in Scotland*, p. 41.

²⁹ Abbas, ‘British South Asians Muslims’, p. 13; Bonino, *Muslims in Scotland*, p. 41-42.

³⁰ Ceri Peach, ‘Muslims in the UK’, in *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure*, ed. by Tahir Abbas (UK: Zed Books, 2005), pp. 18--30 (p. 18).

³¹ Chris Allen, ‘Muslims in the UK’, in *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure*, ed. by Tahir Abbas (UK: Zed Books, 2005), pp. 18--30 (p. 18).

The 9-11 incident also further damaged the relationship between the minority Muslims in the UK and the majority British. Stereotypes of Muslims being “violent, antidemocratic, and misogynist” and Islam being an antithesis to the Western world arose.³² As securitization became a key policy emphasis since 9-11, Muslims were seen as potential national security threat.³³ There is an increase in the erosion of trust and hate-crimes towards the Muslims in the UK, and extensive profiling and surveillance of the Muslim community through state-sponsored initiatives like “Preventing Violent Extremism” (PVE) strategies.³⁴ These included expanded government and law enforcement authorities to investigate suspected terrorist activity and the employment of stop-and search practices by the police freely.³⁵ Muslims were specifically and frequently targeted as part of the PVE strategies to combat terrorism as a result of the 9-11 and subsequently 7/7 incidents. This has led to the UK Muslims feeling discriminated by the government, on top of being second-class citizens within the policy of multiculturalism.³⁶

Conclusion

9-11 has a tremendous negative impact on Islam and the Muslim community in the UK. It has caused Islamophobia to be heightened at an alarming speed such that it is “now so prevalent in society and dispersed across institutional, social, political and economic life that it deserves to be recognised at Britain’s ‘bigotry blind spot’”.³⁷ The policy of securitization has overshadowed the policy of multiculturalism in the UK which directly impacts the minority Muslim community in the UK. Instead of being increasingly integrated with the British society at large and working towards achieving equal rights as citizens, 9-11 has drawn a deeper wedge between the UK Muslims and her host country. Politically, socially, and economically, the UK Muslims are increasingly disenfranchised and marginalised because of the government’s policy of securitization and the PVE strategies. Psychologically, the hate-crimes by ordinary non-Muslim UK citizens has caused the Muslims to be scarred and to more withdrawn

³² Green, *The Fear Of Islam*, p. 103.

³³ Cesari, ‘Securitization of Islam in Europe’, p. 9-10; Jamil, ‘Multiculturalism’, p. 224.

³⁴ Green, *The Fear Of Islam*, p. 276-277, 284-285; Jamil, ‘Multiculturalism’, p. 224.

³⁵ Green, *The Fear Of Islam*, p. 276.

³⁶ Green, *The Fear Of Islam*, p. 276-277; Jamil, ‘Multiculturalism’, p. 224.

³⁷ All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, p. 9.

towards their own community rather than being integrated with the larger British society. With regards to religious freedom, the rights and freedom of expression is also being curtailed. Post 9-11, islamophobia is no longer confined to an individual's discriminatory attitudes towards Muslims but has taken on a systematic and institutional form by the state in the UK.³⁸ The institutionalization of islamophobia by the UK government has relegated the status of the UK Muslims to a poorer state than ever. 9-11 has indeed worsened the negative image of Islam and further hurt the status of the Muslims in the UK.

(Word Count: 1498)

³⁸ Green, *The Fear Of Islam*, p. 309.

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