

MS THESIS

**CARICATURES OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PBUH): AN
ANALYSIS OF OFFICIAL RESPONSES OF THE MUSLIM
WORLD**



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FINAL APPROVAL

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
FN	Front National
FO	Foreign Office
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
JD	Jyllands-Posten
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NA	National Assembly
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Countries (now Organisation of Islamic Cooperation)
PM	Prime Minister
SANA	Syrian Arab News Agency
SBY	Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, former president of Indonesia
SPA	Saudi Press Agency
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

ABSTRACT

Unfortunately, every now and then, an act of blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is committed, with at times, the explicit intention to enrage and provoke Muslims. Islam means "peace" and promotes the ideals of tolerance and mutual respect. Muslims are the fastest growing religious group in the world and number approximately 1.9 billion. An overwhelming majority of Muslims have the highest regard for Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), such that any act of blasphemy against the Prophet causes them immense emotional and psychological hurt and pain. This highest level of esteem and love for the Prophet by Muslims continues from the beginning of Islam till this day.

This study attempts to analyse the responses of the Muslim World especially leading Muslim-majority countries to the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) published by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in September 2005; and those published in September 2012 by the French satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo, and to the same republished in September 2020.

Responses of the Muslim countries in the form of Foreign Office statements, state responses, and statements of heads of state will be analysed. Moreover, the responses of the organisations comprising Muslim-majority member countries such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab League will be analysed to see whether they are proposing any solution to the intermittently occurring incidents.

Chapter – One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The history of religious intolerance is as old as the history of religions. It is replete with instances that have led to internal discord, persecution of weaker segments of society, and even full-scale wars. In the post-9/11 world, Islamophobia shot through the roof. In the case of some countries, it enjoyed State backing. Religious right-wing groups too gained in support and their hateful narrative currency (Bergmann, 2020)

Unlike the Western world, where a segment of people grew distrustful of religion over the course of centuries due to what they see as the excesses of the Church, in Muslim-majority countries, the respect for religion has by and large stayed. It has also to do with the fact that the golden age of Islam was an age of learning, an age of progress and prosperity for the people. Muslims are 24.7 per cent of the global population and number approximately 1.9 billion. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is held in the highest regard by Muslims and any act of blasphemy causes great distress and hurt to them.

The research looks at the responses of the Muslim World especially leading Muslim-majority countries to the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) published by daily newspaper Jyllands-Posten which has its headquarters in the European nation of Denmark in September 2005; those published in September 2012 by a satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo, headquartered in the French capital, Paris, the cover it published in 2015, and to the republication of disrespectful caricatures in September 2020. The study tries to analyse the responses of the Muslim World i.e. Muslim-majority countries and that from the organisations with states having Muslim majority population as its members such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab League and attempts to ascertain whether they were proposing any solutions.

1.2 Problem statement

Whether responses of the Muslim World to the Jyllands-Posten's caricatures in 2005 and Charlie Hebdo's caricatures published in 2012 and re-published in 2020 proposed any solution.

1.3 Significance of the study

The study holds significance as it looks at the response of the Muslim world in the form of Foreign Office statements, speeches of the heads of state and governments, and official responses of organisations such as the OIC and the Arab League that have member states with majority Muslim population. It analyses the responses and attempts to ascertain whether they are suggesting any solution to the periodically occurring such incidents. The study will be of importance to practitioners of international diplomacy and advocacy groups.

1.4 Objectives of the study

- 1) To analyse the responses of the leading Muslim States and their organisations such as OIC and Arab League to Charlie Hebdo's and Jyllands-Posten's caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).
- 2) To ascertain whether leading Muslim states and their organisations were proposing solution to the issue of caricatures.

1.5 Research Questions

- 1) What were the responses of the leading Muslim-majority countries and that from the organizations comprising Muslim-majority countries such as OIC and Arab League to Charlie Hebdo's and Jyllands-Posten's caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)?
- 2) Why do West and Muslim World view the caricatures differently?

1.6 Delimitation(s) of the study

- 1) The study focuses on the responses of Muslim World to the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) printed by Charlie Hebdo in 2012 and republished in 2020, its cover of 2015 and those published by Jyllands-Posten in 2005.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.7 Review of related literature

Fairly extensive literature exists on the broader subject of Islamophobia mainly in the form of articles and reports; however, the study given its limited and defined scope will focus on the official responses of the Muslim-majority countries such as their Foreign Office (FO) statements and that of their heads of government and/or state, and that of organisations such as Arab League and the OIC, to the publication and republication of offensive cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

The official responses, -- Foreign Office press briefings, press conferences, official statements, reports, and interviews are usually available on government websites of these countries as well as reported by news media, – state-run as well as independent, available predominantly on the Web. Similarly, a reasonable volume of literature primarily in the form of news reports carrying extended official responses from Muslim countries, their leaders and organisations is available on the websites, especially those that cover the more recent acts of publications of offensive and insulting caricatures. Below is a review, snippets of what is available and is briefly discussed.

Other more focused literature on the subject also includes a book titled, “After the Paris Attacks: Responses in Canada, Europe, and Around the Globe” authored by two accomplished writers Edward Iacobucci and Stephen Toope that looks at the responses in the aftermath of the attack at the main office of Charlie Hebdo located in the French capital in which over a dozen people lost their lives, and the various proposals suggested (Toope, 2015).

Indonesia, the most populous Muslim-majority country in its response strongly condemned the reprinting of the deplorable caricatures of the most respected personality in Islam by Charlie Hebdo (Indonesia denounces Quran-burning incident in Sweden and republishing of Charlie Hebdo cartoons, 2020). Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi in 2020 while addressing a press conference stated, that the “provocative acts” had offended and hurt hundreds of millions of Muslims around the globe, adding the acts were not just irresponsible and provocative they also ran against the values and principles of modern democracy (Indonesia denounces Quran-burning incident in Sweden and republishing of Charlie Hebdo cartoons, 2020).

Former president of Indonesia Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is a well-respected figure in the Muslim world as he was crucial to the sustained progress and development of the largest Muslim Southeast Asian nation of Indonesia during his term in office. In response to the caricatures’ controversy, former president Yudhoyono or SBY as he locally known, in a series of over 40 social media posts came down hard on the issue. He while maintaining that for West, disrespectful cartoons of the Prophet (SAW) is part of freedom of expression or of speech which they believe is absolute and unlimited but for Muslims it is “blasphemous and is defamation” and the person must receive sanction for the act, underlined that there is a basic distinction, there is a “clash of values” and a “clash of perception” and the Western leadership need to make sure that the abuse of right to freedom of speech does not happen to insult Islam through the deplorable cartoons of the Prophet (SAW) (Parameswaran, 2015).

Similarly, Pakistan has always officially responded to the issue of printing of caricatures of the Prophet (SAW) and condemned their publications irrespective of which political party or military dictatorship was running the government. In 2015, spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of (MoFA) Pakistan in a briefing to the press while replying to a question regarding the caricatures published by Charlie Hebdo, stated, that the FO had released a statement to the press reproving the printing, before that both the heads of government and state flayed the publication of caricatures, the national security and foreign affairs advisor to the premier wrote a letter to the secretary general of the OIC, requesting him to begin steps on behalf

of the Múslim Ummah and the OIC to “criminalise publication of caricatures and cartoons”, since they have hurt the feelings of 1,700 million Muslims across the world (Record of the Press Briefing by Spokesperson on 22 January, 2015).

The MoFA spokesperson stating that the freedom to express oneself was not unlimited as it has been observed when it comes to the tragedy of Holocaust, where questioning any facet of the event invokes criminal law argued that “If it can happen in case of a historical event, why can’t it happen in case of Muslims where the most sacred personality of Islam is attacked and Muslims feel insulted and humiliated?”; moreover, it was told that the Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament headed a resolution condemning the printing of caricatures in a Muslim MPs’ moot in Turkey (Record of the Press Briefing by Spokesperson on 22 January, 2015).

“We do not condone violence, we condemn the attack on Charlie Hebdo” ...but we condemn any attempt to castigate the most revered personality in the religion of Islam, the official spokesperson said, adding that Pakistan’s permanent representative in Geneva who was heading the OIC Contact Group at the time, had a meeting with the Human Rights Commissioner at the United Nations and brought to his notice how Muslims worldwide feel on the issue (Record of the Press Briefing by Spokesperson on 22 January, 2015).

In 2020, after the republication of the caricatures, Pakistan’s MoFA spokesperson in a press briefing stated that apropos the Charlie Hebdo issue, the foreign minister and the FO spokesperson have already issued their condemnations; moreover, the spokesperson also confirmed the Government of Pakistan discussing the matter with the French government using various diplomatic routes (Transcript of the Press Briefing by Spokesperson on Thursday 10 September, 2020).

In an official response on the matter in 2020, the Upper House and the Lower House approved resolutions, unanimously, condemning both promoting Islamophobia and acts of printing offensive disrespectful caricatures of the Prophet (SAW), arguing that such acts, especially when backed by governments foment differences and augment disharmony among

people following different religions (Pakistan's parliament unanimously approves resolution condemning blasphemous French cartoons, 2020).

As the resolution moved in the Upper House categorically declared that there is no question that the love for the Prophet (SAW) is part of the faith of all Muslims and such “horrendous acts” cannot be tolerated by any Muslims, the Senate pressed upon the global community to work out a framework to stop the repeat of such hurtful and deplorable acts in order to ensure that all people live in social harmony and peaceful coexistence with one another (Pakistan's parliament unanimously approves resolution condemning blasphemous French cartoons, 2020).

While the resolution in the Senate was moved by Senator Dr Shehzad Waseem, similarly, a resolution in the National Assembly (NA) tabled by then Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi aired apprehensions at hate speech against Muslims by President of France Emmanuel Macron and others in support of provocations and insults, and condemned both “the practice of blasphemy and of insulting the holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW)” along with acts of violence committed in the name of faith (Pakistan's parliament unanimously approves resolution condemning blasphemous French cartoons, 2020).

National Assembly suggested government some measures, recall Pakistan’s ambassador from Paris; work within the OIC framework for observing International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15; and ask OIC member states to go for a boycott of French goods (Pakistan's parliament unanimously approves resolution condemning blasphemous French cartoons, 2020). Moreover, the French envoy in Islamabad was summoned and was handed a demarche and conveyed by the FO that Pakistan strongly protests the insulting sketches published in France (Pakistan's parliament unanimously approves resolution condemning blasphemous French cartoons, 2020).

Reacting to the caricature controversy in 2020, Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan accused the leader of France Macron of "attacking Islam" and penned a letter to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg asking him to ban content deemed offensive to Islam, in a way similar to

Facebook's decision to ban any content that denies or distorts the Holocaust (Pakistan's PM asks Facebook to ban Islamophobic content, 2020).

The government of Saudi Arabia, in response to 2020 republication of insulting caricatures by Charlie Hebdo, issued a statement through its official Saudi Press Agency that while dismissing any attempt to link terrorism and Islam, categorically condemned the offensive caricatures of the Prophet (SAW) (Thousands in Bangladesh protest Macron's racist rhetoric against Muslims, 2020).

The Council of Senior Scholars is the highest religious body in Saudi Arabia which wields considerable official authority in the conservative monarchy, reacting to the reprinting of the caricatures in 2020 said that disparaging the Prophets (AS) merely "served extremists who aim to spread hatred" and had nothing to do with the right to free expression (Mahathir denies promoting violence, says remarks taken out of context, 2020).

In 2020, while an overwhelming majority of leaders from major Muslim countries protested the republication of caricatures, the Bangladesh leadership reportedly did not come out in criticism of France as Turkey, Pakistan and others did since it was argued that the South Asian country is governed by a "secular" Constitution (Muslim-majority countries protest, condemn France over Muhammad cartoons, 2020).

Moreover, reacting to the 2020 caricature controversy, Malaysia's Foreign Ministry summoned the French diplomat and conveyed its concern regarding "hate speech", and flayed "inflammatory rhetoric and provocative acts" aimed at insulting Islam (Chargé D'affaires Of The Embassy Of France In Kuala Lumpur Summoned To, 2020); moreover, Malaysia's top diplomat Hishammuddin Hussein in his official remarks stated that "tarnishing Islam's holy Prophet (SAW)" and linking Islam with terrorism is beyond the scope of rights of freedom of speech and expression (Malaysia summons French diplomat over alleged anti-Islam speech, 2020).

Different Muslim countries attempted to address the issue differently. In 2015, Egyptian former military general and President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi through a ruling allowed Prime

Minister Ibrahim Mahlab to exercise when needed the power to ban foreign publications, considered insulting to Islam and could resultantly lead to public disturbance and violence (Gulhane, 2015). Given Egypt is a predominantly conservative Muslim Arab country, it may be safe to assume that Sisi, considered controversial by many for his crackdown on opposition voices, did have public support on this issue.

In 2020, the Grand Imam of widely known Al-Azhar encouraged the world community to enact universal laws that make discrimination and anti-Muslim actions illegal, further calling the caricatures a “blatant hostility”, he remarked that insulting Islam has turned into a Western tactic used to garner votes (Fraser, 2020).

In response to the republication of the caricatures by Charlie Hebdo in the year 2020, Spokesperson for Iran's Foreign Ministry Saeed Khatibzadeh flayed the French magazine for insulting the Prophet (SAW), moreover, arguing in a statement against the publication of the caricature, he stressed freedom of expression should be in line with the goal of peaceful co-existence of human beings and furthering better understanding among religions (Spokesman Condemns Charlie Hebdo for Insulting Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), 2020).

“Opportunistic abuse of freedom of speech,” is what the Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Javad Zarif called the insulting caricatures, warning that such provocative acts were bound to “fuel extremism” only (Insulting Muslims is an abuse of free speech, Iran's Zarif says, 2020).

Turkey President Tayyip Erdogan, in 2020, saw a boycott of French products as a way of registering protest against the offensive caricatures of the Prophet (SAW), warning his fellow countrymen against France’s “anti-Islam agenda” (Gumrukcu, 2020)

Qatar, an oil-rich Gulf nation, in its response in 2020, while condemning the publication of insulting caricatures, issued a statement terming the act as part of “populist rhetoric inciting the abuse of religions” (Gumrukcu, 2020).

The OIC in its response to the caricatures in 2020, strongly condemned the abusive cartoons, called it irresponsible behaviour, a provocation, inconsistent with the ideal of peaceful coexistence and a disregard for the emotions of more than a billion and a half Muslims, that was bound to fuel violence and extremism and anti-Muslim and anti-Islam sentiment (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020). The organisation's secretary general, Dr Yousef A Al-Othaimen called for peace, dialogue and tolerance and stressed the need to combat Islamophobia through a global concerted effort and boost respect for all religions (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020). Al-Othaimen maintained that such hateful acts go against the principle of the right to practise any religion or belief which is guaranteed by international laws and "called for all to observe the universal principles of respect for religions" imperative for peace (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020).

Suggesting a solution for the recurring issue, the OIC urged local governments and international organisations to implement laws that effectively combat Islamophobia and make it illegal to disparage religious beliefs (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020). The OIC also encouraged the activation of pertinent existing resolutions, such as the United Nations Resolution 16/18, which addresses intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatisation, and discrimination, as well as inciting violence and violence against individuals based on their religion or belief (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020).

In 2012, the Arab League called the caricatures that appeared in Charlie Hebdo, "provocative and outrageous", and issued an official statement that warned they had the potential

to increase volatility in the Arab and Islamic world (Arab League urges restraint over Prophet cartoon, 2012).

The incidents and the official responses in detail along with an analysis will be discussed in the chapters ahead.

1.8 Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This research looks at the issue of offensive caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) from a culturalist perspective.

The cultural perspective provides an important basis for the study under focus since it looks at the complex relationship between culture, society, and power, and helps in its analysis and understanding.

The cultural perspective explores how social, economic, political, and historical contexts are shaped by culture as well as shape culture.

The issue of offensive caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is a manifestation of Islamophobia which gained roots in some sections of the Western societies, especially after the tragic incidents of 9/11.

The culturalist perspective helps to understand how the caricatures are not just offensive but an attempt to further suppress and marginalise the already-cornered Muslim minority citizens of these Western countries.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.9 Research Design

The research will be qualitative, descriptive, and analytical. Official responses such as those of the Foreign Offices of Muslim countries and statements of heads of state and/or governments will be used for this study. Interviews through email or in person will be done with diplomats and practitioners of international diplomacy as well as subject specialists both international relations scholars will be conducted.

1.10 Operational definition(s)

The caricatures is the independent variable and the responses of the Muslim World are the dependent variables.

1.11 Instrument(s)

Available official responses and statements will be used.

1.12 Procedure (data collection)

Official statements and responses to the caricatures will be the primary data. Moreover, for secondary data academic articles and books on the subject will be consulted.

1.13 Data analysis

Official responses to the publication of caricatures and the interview responses will be analysed and it will be ascertained if the official responses provided any solutions.

Chapter Two

Historical Background

Immigration to Europe and the Western world increased substantially after the conclusion of the Second World War. The rise in the immigrant population saw a parallel rise in anti-immigrant feelings. The anti-immigrant feeling manifested itself in a rise in racism. Islamophobia in the West became a serious issue first, following the release of Salman Rushdie's novel "Satanic Verses,". Later, the unfortunate attacks of 9/11 and the 7/7 bombings saw an alarming rise in Islamophobia. The factors that contributed to the rise in Islamophobia in Europe included a failure of government policies to ensure equal rights for Muslims (Islamophobia in Europe, 2019). Moreover, populist parties fanned the myth of an ongoing European "Islamisation" and the Muslims were posed as "inherent threats" to the European culture, way of life, and traditions (Islamophobia in Europe, 2019).

Before incidents of 9/11 which proved to be a watershed event in the history of ties between the West and nations with a majority of Muslims; dominant theme in the Western discourse towards the rest was not Islamophobia but rather generic racism towards the other. That had its various reasons. Ceri Peach while stating, Western Europe after the war was hit by a "demographic shock", elaborates that while there is a long history of migration across European nations—Ireland to Britain and Italy, Spain and Poland to France, for instance — the continent, which saw itself as a population exporter prior to the war, discovered itself the recipient of sizable waves of immigrants following the conflict, - approximately 31.1 million migrants and refugees between 1945 and 1993 crossed to Western Europe (Peach, 1997).

Peach writes, "The causes and consequences of these movements are complex and contested." (Peach, 1997) According to him, there was a surge in worker immigration brought on by ageing populations and growing economies, as evidenced by the immigration of Turks to Germany, Algerians to France, and West Indians and Indians to Britain (Peach, 1997). Peach also notes the influx of refugees and asylum seekers into Europe, which is exemplified by two

groups: first, by Iranians and North Africans escaping Islamic uprisings, and second, by Eastern Europeans after the dissolution of the former Soviet bloc (Peach, 1997).

It may be argued that many in the West predominantly belonging to the right wing and those identifying as “new atheists” had their view of the Islamic world clouded by the events of 9/11. The same can be argued post-9/11 about the younger generations of Muslims living in the Western countries which did not have historically a comparatively larger population of Muslims such as the Scandinavian nations, i.e. to say, a view of the West clouded by the treatment of Muslims in countries that came under Western occupation such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

Moreover, a segment of the diaspora from Muslim countries with authoritarian governments also further seemed to endorse the negative perception of Islam among those Westerners who already appeared to carry such views.

According to Muslim scholars and clerics, religious customs that have developed throughout time banned these representations in order to honour Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and deter idolatry; moreover, the restriction also stems from a more general ban on pictures or statues of people (Depicting Muhammad, 2015). Bigotry, be it in the guise of allegiance to a religion or no religion, hatred in the name of a God/s or no God, is hatred and bigotry and must be condemned. The primary reason for hate of any kind is rooted in ignorance of the other. Islam is not the cause of extremism, violence and bigotry, but rather the opposite. On the other hand, it is a force that can help counter it. Global Muslim population is currently over 1.9 billion and continues to rise. The majority of them identify themselves as Muslim first before referring to their national or other identities. If Islam was inherently a violent religion, the much-trumpeted “clash of civilizations” would have long been won by the Muslims.

When it comes to provocative acts such as “Everybody Draw Mohammed Day” or “Burn a Koran Day”, aimed at maligning the Prophet (SAW) and the holy book, non-Muslims need to take a look at the life of the Prophet (SAW) himself. Quran says about the Prophet (SAW), “And We have not sent you forth but as a mercy to mankind.” During his lifetime, the people of Makkah mocked the Prophet (SAW) and abused him. They boycotted him and his tribe. After

the Prophet (SAW) fled to Medina, they organised other tribes and launched attacks against him. They had planned and tried to kill him. Still, he did not exact revenge on anyone upon leading an army of 10,000 into Makkah after winning the battle.

Here we will look at selected incidents of caricatures drawn in Europe and the historical background of Islamophobia in those countries leading up to the publications and will touch upon the debates surrounding the historical background of issues of freedom of speech against freedom of religion.

2.1 Danish caricatures

September 2005 saw the publication of twelve caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the Danish center-right newspaper Jyllands-Posten. The publication of the offensive caricatures incited anger and provoked protests across the Muslim world. The incident also led to official outrage from the Muslim world. These protests continued for months as dozens of outlets outside Denmark republished the caricatures.

The publications that re-printed some of the caricatures in solidarity with the Danish newspaper included those from The Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, and France as well as a less-known Norwegian magazine (Cowell, 2006). The incident brought to the fore the historically differing perspective that the West and the Islamic world hold on the issue that is the former sees it in the light of freedom of expression and the latter from the perspective of freedom of religion.

Cristiana Cianitto in an article cites the example of inflammatory cartoons published by the Danish daily Jylland Posten among others, while speaking about the conflict between the values of freedom of religion and freedom of expression giving rise to controversy and violence (Cianitto, 2018). This is a recurring issue and every time something unfortunate like this occurs it turns into an inevitable and apparently unresolvable debate about the so-perceived conflict in values of freedom of expression and of faith and belief.

This debate is not restricted to Islam in the West. Cianitto underlines that it is significant to figure out the answer to the question – “...in what way [do] democratic societies have to intervene to protect religions in cases like those of the Danish cartoons and of Charlie Hebdo” (Cianitto, 2018). It is important to understand how the Danish media by and large looks at the issues concerning minorities, especially Muslims. A limited or lack of understanding of the Muslim perspective is quite evident, which really came to the fore with the publication of the caricatures by Jyllands-Posten.

A research report was published in 2011, highlighting the experiences of minority groups, including Muslim population and role of media in Denmark. It pointed out that there existed “widespread consensus” among media, minorities researchers in the country, and representatives of minority communities on one point i.e. the mainstream Danish language newspapers and television play “the most important and negative” role when it comes to the portrayal and representation of Muslims in specific (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011).

The role of the media becomes extremely important because not a large percentage of the population from developed countries travel to the mostly less-developed Muslim countries and have rather limited first-hand interaction with Muslim societies. This demonization of an already marginalised community by the media is nothing short of negligent, unprofessional and lazy if not downright criminal. Generally speaking, too, a lot of the Western media discussion on minority issues is “agenda setting” rather than a statement of facts.

The report while emphasising that this unfavourable representation influences political discourse in Denmark and shapes popular sentiments, adds that the findings of the report are “in accordance with the” various other international studies on the impact and role of media and representation and portrayal of marginalized and minority communities (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011). The negative role of the Danish national media as far as the portrayal and representation of Muslims and other minorities are concerned was not just a finding of an academic report or a consensus among researchers and representatives of minorities. Survey and focus group interviews conducted by the Open Society Foundations also

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highlighted participants noting the negative role of the Danish media (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011).

The Danish daily Jyllands-Posten's printing of anti-Islam cartoons was not an isolated and one-off instance of Islamophobia. The history of Islamophobia in the country goes a few decades back nurtured by prejudiced media, biased reporting and negative portrayal of refugees and immigrants. Highlighting the historical background of the issue of caricatures and unfavourable portrayal of Muslims and Islam, the report states, according to key conclusions drawn by the few studies on media representation of minorities undertaken in Denmark suggest that in Danish media, it has become commonplace to report on ethnic affairs with bias, particularly when it comes to Muslims (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011). In this context, it is important to look at the timeline of certain events that led to the rise in Islamophobia in Denmark that culminated with the publication of caricatures by Jyllands-Posten. In the mid-1980s Denmark saw an increase in the number of refugees coming the Middle East including Iran, the early 1990s saw the Danish Association (Den Danske Forening) fomenting hatred by launching a persistent mass media campaign opposing immigration of Muslims, which became so intense, that by April 2000, over 1,000 intellectuals published an appeal, protesting against the extremely harsh stance that Danish political and media discourse has taken on immigrant communities (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011). The role of media has been a significant factor in fomenting Islamophobia in Danish society. Especially, given the time when the caricatures were first published by Jyllands-Posten, the mainstream media had a considerable sway on the general masses of any country, since, social media was not at all as influential or as widespread as it is now. The access to alternative sources of opinion to any news besides the mainstream media and the press was close to non-existent or extremely negligible compared to how things are today with a plethora of social media platforms and fact-checking websites and the openAIs of today were, of course, unthinkable for the layman. The reaction to the caricatures also needs to be understood in this context among other factors.

Before the publication of caricatures by Jyllands-Posten, studies conducted in 1997 and 1999, highlighted the impact of national media in shaping the image of Muslims specifically as

the "binary opposition" of everything that is thought to be a part of Danish identity (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011). Criminal behaviour was attributed to Muslims by the Danish media and some of their cultural values were portrayed as "incompatible" with the values of the Danish society and the Muslim integration in its society was highlighted as difficult (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011). So, the soup of bias and bigotry has been brewing for some time flamed by a rather antagonistic and irresponsible media bent on gaining traction among its viewers/readers by creating a "nuisance value".

As it is said, we tend to fear what we do not know and the regressive media in Denmark, like in any other country, just did what it should not have and played on public fears and anxiety to the disadvantage of the already marginalised Muslim community. The snowball effect of this fear-inongering, at a time when social media was almost non-existent when Jyllands-Posten published those caricatures, is hard to control and the responsibility of mainstream media was all the more needed. It is said that "what bleeds, leads" and "negative is news" – with these editorial strategies, it is anyone's guess that harmony and understanding were hard to come by.

The studies conducted in Denmark in 1997 and 1999 highlighted that it was not just the private mainstream media rather unfortunately even the public service television had a nose specifically for negative news and intended to stir up a "moral panic" by playing on the concerns and fears of the general masses and this resultantly carry an impact on their attitude and outlook towards the members of a specific community since their views are shaped by constant bombardment by the media on particular themes and topics (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011). This is how media becomes an appendage of regressive state policies, instead of presenting an objective and independent view to its readers and viewers

Jyllands-Posten's negative position towards ethnic minorities had not been a one-off occurrence or something that happened in thin air. As part of a Parliamentary Power Inquiry that delved into media content dating back up to 30 years, a research carried out in 2000 discovered that Jyllands-Posten, the most widely circulated daily at the time, had shown an unfavourable attitude towards ethnic minorities in general (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of

the Media, 2011). Similarly, a study conducted in 2005 that went through the content of various national newspapers including Jyllands-Posten up to the 1970s, found “a significant polarization” in the way they had taken their position on minority issues (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011). It may be argued here that if a country’s mainstream media including public media has a history of well-documented bias towards a minority community stretching back decades then it probably should look into its own editorial standards and what is shaping its public discourse towards issues related to Islam and Muslims, instead of hiding behind the façade of freedom of expression. Moreover, stereotyping and painting an entire community with a single large brush is unwarranted and defeats the purpose of peaceful co-existence, mutual understanding and promoting harmony and not just that it is downright unwarranted and misplaced. Any policy towards a people built on such faux narrative be it at the domestic level or foreign policy level will be counterproductive and is bound to ricochet.

Even before the publications of the caricatures that specifically exposed Jyllands-Posten’s bias towards Islam and brought to light the prejudice towards minorities prevalent in the Danish mainstream press, the Danish media had adopted a “culturalist approach” while reporting news concerning Muslims.

The study conducted in Denmark in 2005 that researched content of widely circulated and most influential media covering the exhaustive period from 1971 till 2004 concerning ethnic minorities, pointed towards the same “culturalist approach” to reporting, i.e. representing social crime and deviance as the “cultural attributes” of Muslims on the whole, while crimes committed by Danes were reported as individual cases stressing on their individual backgrounds and not the wider community (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011). This sustained negative coverage and portrayal from the Danish media spanning decades prior to the publication of the caricatures cannot be discounted in understanding the editorial thinking of the media persons at the helm of affairs. Knowing the other and listening to the other are keys to fairer and objective journalism. Armchair journalism from hundreds of miles away does not even provide the right cultural context to reporting on the other.

This narrow focus and selective reporting through a constricted and clouded lens not just had an impact on domestic policy but of course, carried its impact on the outlook of the country in the comity of nations. It was not just the case with selected reports but the situation was found overwhelmingly the same in a large number of reports of major media outlets.

The study conducted in 2005 highlighting that a solitary case of purported rape in which five Middle Eastern boys were accused and subsequently freed by court for lack of evidence not just saw reporting of over 240 news stories in major Danish media outlets through a cultural lens targeting Muslims, it was also used by a political party, Liberal Party (Venstre) to garner support for its anti-immigrant political agenda in the general elections of 2001 (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011). The publication of defaming caricatures by Jyllands-Posten was not about a discussion contrasting religious freedom with freedom of expression, rather it was culmination of years of negative portrayal of Muslims, their culture and Islam in Denmark, a representation that showcased the Western man depicted as sophisticated and reasonable, whereas, the Muslim man was portrayed as violent, angry, lacking in civility, and not compatible with the Western values. It is noteworthy that Denmark's largest minority religion is Islam. This negative media coverage persists to date, though, social media if used wisely has provided access to alternate opinions about both Islam and the West to everyone – those living inside Denmark as well as those outside.

2.2 French caricatures

The issues highlighted earlier in the case of Denmark in relation to its Muslim minority and with Islam as a religion, exist with greater intensity in the case of France. The reason among others is the country's colonial history. France colonized a number of Muslim lands and the history of exploitation and interference is a lingering baggage in the country's relations with the Muslim world. Besides, its geographic proximity to a number of African Muslim countries means a constant influx of refugees and immigrants to the country. Moreover, France is home to the largest population of Muslims of all the countries in Europe. These factors are among some of the sources of intermittent friction and tension in the country.

When the French satirical weekly, Charlie Hebdo, in September 2012, published the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the deplorable act led to protests across the Muslim world (Saudi Arabia holds off from backing action against France over cartoons, 2020). It is important here to look at what constitutes Islamophobia and how the caricatures were Islamophobic and racist.

Swiss academic and renowned Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan who has his critics particularly in France, in response to a debate question at Oxford Union about were the caricatures Islamophobic, provided a definition of Islamophobia and how he saw them as racist. Ramadan commented, "When there is a critical take on an Islamic religious principle, when it is criticizing the behaviour of Muslims or what they are thinking this is not Islamophobia. Islamophobia is a type of racism, when we are targeting Muslims because they are Muslims whatever they think and whatever they do, and when it comes to Charlie Hebdo, the way they were treating Islam it is quite clear that we have to look at what was done within a specific atmosphere in the French society" (Islam In Europe | Was Charlie Hebdo's Cartoon Islamophobic?, 2016). Ramadan speaking further in support of his argument, elaborates, "75 per cent of the people in France when it comes to a survey are thinking that the perception of Islam is negative. So, Islam is a problem per se, it has to do with violence, it has to do with discrimination of women, so we are not dealing in a void. We are dealing within an atmosphere and the way they were treating Islam was quite specific" (Islam In Europe | Was Charlie Hebdo's Cartoon Islamophobic?, 2016).

When it comes to the upholding of principle of freedom of expression, many scholars have pointed at the double standards followed by various Western publications, in their application of the principle. Similarly, a number of scholars have pointed out the double standards being followed by Charlie Hebdo when applying the principle of freedom of expression vis-à-vis Islam and other religions. This double standard is what, they argue, exposes the Islamophobic and racist nature of the caricatures and the publications' other such take on issues related to Islam and Muslims.

When it comes to Charlie Hebdo, many scholars have pointed at the double standard followed by the publication in its application of the freedom of expression and lack of consistency, especially given an atmosphere of hate and discrimination towards Islam and Muslims and a negative perception cultivated by years of negative media coverage and portrayal. For instance, Charlie Hebdo fired Maurice Sinet, better known as Sine, a cartoonist in 2008 for a column targeting the son of Nicholas Sarkozy that had triggered accusations of anti-Semitism (Former Charlie Hebdo cartoonist 'Siné' dead at 87, 2016).

In relation to religion and the right to free speech in Europe, it is argued that incidents and the reactions to them highlight the ongoing challenge of reconciling religion with the declared ideal of freedom of speech, and that the existence of Muslims in Western countries and their adherence to their religious and cultural heritage are being seen as a sign that Muslims are assuming control of Western customs on the one hand and as Islamophobia on the other (Religion and Freedom of Expression in the European Context, 2020). Moreover, anti-Muslim racism or Islamophobia, hate speech and discrimination are in fact creating an atmosphere of lack of freedom, and it can be argued that this is incompatible with modern Western democratic values, moreover, The hard-won principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity—which are upheld and supported by national and international laws and exemplified by the ideals of globalization—are being replaced by this trend and movement (Religion and Freedom of Expression in the European Context, 2020).

Charlie Hebdo's caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and their objective needs to be understood in the broader perception of the Muslims and Islam in the French society created by a less than sympathetic and biased media. The French print media has been not just misrepresenting Islam and Muslims but has also been framing them as members of a radical faith which was incompatible with the local culture and values; their goal was "to control and moderate Islam and to domesticate it" hence, attempting to make it compatible to what they believe were true French values and culture, forgetting perhaps that no culture has evolved and developed in isolation with the other (Muhammad Kamran Sufi, 2022).

Here it is important to mention that according to a study the Maghrebis or those belonging to North Africa i.e. of Arab or Berber origin faced the highest level of Islamophobia of all Muslim minority groups; moreover, populist political parties such as Front National (FN) in France used fear of Islam to stir their political base and gain political mileage while others used to cover their own failings and “gain control over social, political, and legal forces” (Muhammad Kamran Sufi, 2022). It is pertinent to mention that the French participation in the war in Libya was also viewed by many critics as a result of the country’s political leadership’s domestic political concerns.

Scholars while condemning the prejudice and defamation of Muslims and Islam by the media have urged for fair reporting and just treatment for Muslims as equal citizens of France, quoting Article 1 of the French Constitution which states, that “it [France] shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race, or religion” (Abdeslam, 2019).

Hence, it is argued that the media in special needs to abide by its constitutional duty and portray a fair picture of all French people, including Muslims, which unfortunately like most Western media in Edward Said’s words report on Muslims and Islam using Orientalist perspectives (Abdeslam, 2019). The portrayal of Muslims by the media as a homogenous group, with “no difference or distinction among them” is what Edward Said calls an “unacceptable generalization of the most irresponsible sort, and could never be used for any other religious, cultural, or demographic group on earth” (Abdeslam, 2019). As far as Muslims and Islam go, it is not just Charlie Hebdo but newspapers such as Le Figaro and Le Monde too have been accused of presenting Muslims as a collectivity who have a belief system unsuited to French culture, are perpetrators of violence in the country where they believe there is no space for any culture other than the French to prosper (Abdeslam, 2019).

2.3 Republication of caricatures

In September 2020, Charlie Hebdo republished the caricatures, which resulted in worldwide protests and calls for a boycott of French goods (Saudi Arabia holds off from backing action against France over cartoons, 2020). The republication of the caricatures was widely

regarded by Muslims from across the world as a display of insensitivity towards what Muslims hold dear, their religious beliefs and an outright provocation, the caricatures' republication was strongly and rightly condemned from all corners of the Muslim world.

2.4 A Clash of Values?

It is important to understand why Muslims and Westerners view the caricatures differently. For Muslims, it is an issue of Islamophobia and hatred towards their religion while many in the West see it through the lens of freedom of speech or expression that they hold valuable. The West sees "freedom of expression" as a cornerstone of their liberal democratic system. The citizens of Western democracies enjoy a considerable degree of "freedom of expression" and there is a history of struggle that they have gone through to achieve it.

A year after the publication of caricatures by the Danish newspaper, Pew Research Center published a report in 2006 titled, "The Great Divide: How the Westerners and Muslims View Each Other". The report noted that most people in Muslim-majority countries of Jordan, Egypt, Indonesia, and Turkey blamed the "disrespect for Islamic religion" in Western nations for the controversy, whereas, the majority of US citizens and Western Europeans, who had heard of the debate, criticised the intolerance of Muslims for the different points of view (The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other, 2006).

Many such Europeans quote, François-Marie Arouet, the French writer known by his nom de plume, Voltaire, saying, "I may disagree with what you have to say, but I shall defend, to the death, your right to say it" (Bransten, 2006). Here it is important to note that this proclamation is widely regarded as a symbol of the secular, humanist ideals that the continent ought to uphold as a fundamental idea (Bransten, 2006). What many who consider Voltaire a "shorthand for rational and liberal thought" tend to ignore are his links to the slave trade and his anti-Semitism (Ramdani, 2020). Nabila Ramdani, an expert on Islamic affairs and French politics, in an article for Foreign Policy highlighting this, wrote, actually, Voltaire is still a poster child for individuals who are exceedingly selective in their approach to his work, either because they haven't studied it at all or because they purposefully cherry-pick certain parts, adding these

people are intellectually dishonest and dangerously ignorant (Ramdani, 2020). She argued, Voltaire continues to provide justification to many extremists for his support of biological racism and white supremacist (Ramdani, 2020).

Muslim scholars and governments have advocated the use of free speech with responsibility steeped in the idea of mutual respect and tolerance. They have argued against undue provocation and using freedom of speech to foment hatred of the other, especially a minority community living in Western countries. This becomes all the more important when it comes to expressing oneself on sensitive subjects such as religion that are close to people's hearts and emotions.

An Egyptian expert on religion, Dr Nemat Ahmed Fouad, in the aftermath of the Danish caricatures, commented that "with free speech should come responsibility" (Bransten, 2006). According to Fouad, discussing religion should first and foremost guarantee regard for the emotions of the believers, and freedom of thought "does not mean the freedom to harm religions" or "extend to the prophets of others" (Bransten, 2006).

The Western idea of freedom of expression should not become a license to offend Muslim minorities and peddle hate against them and their faith. This becomes increasingly important since Muslims in Western countries continue to experience prejudice, discrimination, bias, and hate. Muslims are a diverse, tolerant and largely respectful community and come from all the regions of the world and they have historically adapted to their respective host communities and nations (Gallab, 2001). It can be argued that Islam and Western culture are attempting to adjust, if imperfectly, to one another's morals and worldviews (Gallab, 2001). It is however important to state, that controversies such as the publication of caricatures and other acts of hatred towards Islam and Muslims pose a serious obstacle in the way of such efforts.

Muslim scholars have tried to clear misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims among Westerners. Akbar S Ahmed has argued, Islam is basically a religion of harmony and tolerance; it promotes a broad perspective, global perspectives, and the realisation of human destiny in the cosmos (Gallab, 2001).

In the contemporary information age, both the voices spreading misunderstanding as well as those favouring building bridges have mediums available which historically was not the case.

Scholars have argued that the publication of caricatures goes against the social conditions that make democracy flourish since cartoons perpetuate prejudice and an Orientalist discourse, marginalise the already marginalised and create hurdles in inter-faith, inter-cultural dialogue and promotion of better understanding among countries (Peetush, 2009). In a fast-globalizing world, where Artificial Intelligence is the new norm, the importance of global intercultural dialogue is indispensable both for domestic peace within a country as well as for international peace and harmony, so very essential for flourishing global trade, commerce and exchange of ideas – in such a world bigotry, bias, misrepresentation, negative portrayals and poor generalisations should have no place.

Ashwani K Peetush argues that the caricatures eat up at the very roots that make international inter-cultural dialogue possible all in the cover of freedom of expression, adding that this framing by the media of reconciling a “conflict between “Western” idea of the freedom of speech with non-western nations, is problematic” (Peetush, 2009).

Of course, the idea of free speech, debate, discussions and criticism is not just a Western ideal, historically linked and developed in Europe alone; rather discussions and dialogue are common around the globe in nonwestern societies and indeed, our world is one of borrowing and combinations, where customs, music, art, and values all come together to form a multicultural collage (Peetush, 2009). Usually, an argument is given that in a liberal democracy publication of such caricatures should not be an issue. This is incorrect since it is argued that the conditions that require democracy to flourish are the same that are needed to promote global intercultural dialogue, moreover, a question is raised in the confines of secular, liberal democracy, “why would anyone knowingly present information about another religion that most of its adherents find explicitly offensive and disrespectful,” and this cannot help any effort to understand or appreciate another’s religion (Peetush, 2009). Such a provocative and disrespectful approach

defeats the purpose of dialogue and discussion so essential for political participation, especially of the marginalized segments of society which indeed is of the essence of any liberal democracy.

It is quite clear that the Western media has different standards for Islam and Muslims. Indeed, Muslims believe in all the Prophets (peace be upon them) and hold them in the highest regard and respect. Regarding Jyllands-Posten's double standards and bias against Muslims, it is important to note that three years before it published the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), it had refused to publish caricatures of Jesus (Prophet Isa (AS)), on the grounds that it might offend Christians [and indeed, rightly so] (Fouché, 2006).

In 2003, Christoffer Zieler, a cartoonist from Denmark submitted a number of unsolicited cartoons of Prophet Jesus (Prophet Isa (AS)) who was told by the newspaper's Sunday editor, Jens Kaiser, through an email: "I don't think Jyllands-Posten's readers will enjoy the drawings. As a matter of fact, I think that they will provoke an outcry. Therefore, I will not use them" (Fouché, 2006). Though it may be argued on behalf of the paper that those caricatures were unsolicited by the reply is enough to expose the double standard in practice.

Moreover, it is argued that hate speech is a form of activity involving identifying a group and characterising them as violent, dangerous, uncivilised, and fundamentally inferior, followed by shunning and alienating them due to bias and degrading generalisations, which turns hate speech into more than just speech (Peetush, 2009). The impact of such an activity is to create such an environment for the target community that is not liveable, that is the reason that hate speech cannot be categorized as an inert activity and the caricatures of the Prophet (SAW) fell in the category of hate speech that carried a terrible, overgeneralized and racist message: Islam is a violent religion by nature, and those who practise it are terrorists (Peetush, 2009)

The caricatures gave a window into the mindset of those who carry a narrow view of the world and limited understanding of the history of human civilisations, a worldview that refuses to shed the long-held crooked view, wherein, the West, which is logical, progressive, and libertarian, marginalises and alienates the Muslim world by portraying it as fundamentalist, primitive, and in need of civilisation (Peetush, 2009). It is important to remember that the

caricatures, the “vast overgeneralisations” in the form of the publication of those caricatures are not isolated incidents nor are acts of discrimination against Muslims a new phenomenon, what the caricatures did was they furthered those long-held prejudices and stereotypes, aimed at humiliating an entire group of people, thus, spreading hate and in turn, in fact, undermining the values of truly liberal democratic order that the West claim to protect and promote by shunning an already marginalized community from public sphere/political participation (Peetush, 2009) When it comes to the cover or guise used by the publishers and champions of printing such caricatures of that of freedom of expression, it is important to stress that “no freedoms are absolute” and “individual freedom is restricted by the harm principle” – and a racist or humiliating speech be it verbal or in the form of printed caricatures can cause immense psychological and social harm at times even more than physical harm as a result of a physical attack/hate crime (Peetush, 2009).

It is argued that individual liberties are weighed against other liberties because, in principle, no one freedom is of an absolute nature, for instance, the ability to own private property does not grant someone the right to go and steal the property of another person; similarly, freedom of expression cannot take precedence over all other values, since freedom of speech is not an inert activity because if it is degrading or humiliating as in case of the caricatures can cause immense psychological and emotional harm, though may be difficult to quantify but it does (Peetush, 2009). And this is exactly the reason why in many countries we have libel and defamation laws, there are laws against anti-Semitism in countries such as Germany, and the use of racially charged words such as the N-word is considered offensive and discriminatory in the United States because such acts are not inert and cause emotional and psychological harm to the other person or group.

The caricatures are symbols of hate speech and are counterproductive to the essence of a participatory democracy and a liberal society, since it is argued that constant exposure to degrading and humiliating images about their community might lead them to internalize and adopt such narrative about themselves, pushing them away from political participation, incapacitating them from accessing the benefits of a liberal society i.e. freedom and equality (Peetush, 2009). It is argued that freedom of speech has its limits and other freedoms such as

freedom of conscience which is the right to live according to one's beliefs should not get trumped by the freedom of speech, and in countries such as England there are legal provisions that limit abusive and threatening speech, humiliation and intimidation of groups is banned in Australia, degrading speech is not allowed in Canada and a speech that infringes upon the dignity or degrades a group is banned in Germany; moreover, there are legal penalties for lesser offences in many countries such as for defamation or libel (Peetush, 2009) Scholars argue that hate speech be it in the form of caricatures or verbal does not just "caricaturize the goals and ends of free speech" it also socially alienates the targeted population by discouraging its equal political participation and threatening even its very existence. (Peetush, 2009) If the history of discrimination and media bias in the West against Muslims and Islam is kept in view and the double standards followed, it is not difficult to see why the caricatures were seen as racist and Islamophobic by a vast majority of the Muslim population across the globe, and why the excuse of freedom of expression presented by the publishers was not bought in the Muslim World.

By giving, harassment, social intimidation, alienation of population based on religion, making a mockery of a group or of what they hold dear, a legal cover or protection, a democratic society ceases to be democratic and free for that group; moreover, hate speech in the form of the caricatures only aims to destroy the conditions which are a prerequisite for a functioning and flourishing democracy. (Peetush, 2009) Furthermore, some scholars have argued that the way Muslims and Islam are portrayed in the caricatures fits into the historical power dynamics between the West and non-West, colonial and neo-colonial domination, and the oppression of the weaker nations. These caricatures appeal to people who mistakenly believe that Muslims are violent, uncivilised, misogynistic, and irrationally religious and anti-scientific, and that the West is the embodiment of democracy, science, and freedom, and that is why Muslims are perceived as violent and racist thugs who despise women (Peetush, 2009). The historical mindset behind those drawing and publishing the caricatures in the West is the one who sees the world in "black and white" and attempt to perpetuate the "us versus them" rhetoric, who shouts at the Muslim immigrant to "go back to where you came from", stress on their assimilation in society and tell them to "like it or leave" fundamentally treating them as inferior citizens, forgetting that as citizens of a plural and liberal democracy, Muslims also have the right to express their opinions and viewpoints in the political sphere and have an equal role in the entire democratic process

(Peetush, 2009). Salman Rushdie has his share of admirers in the West belonging from both sides of the political spectrum, i.e. the conservative and the liberal. The line of argument usually followed by him is: Being able to express oneself artistically is fundamental to who we are as people.

Given that caricatures are regarded as forms of artistic expression, it is critical to recognise the flaws in this line of thinking. It is argued that artistic expression cannot be recognized as having an absolute value that supersedes all other values in society, such as the freedom of others to live in a peaceful environment where they can raise their children without fear; additionally, we should not allow something unchecked license simply because it may be a part of human nature, such as aggression (Peetush, 2009). Proponents of the publication of caricatures argue that if we start by banning few offensive words, or books we will end up in a totalitarian society. Nothing can be further from truth, condemning prejudices is not advocating for a totalitarian state and there already exists laws against hate speech, defamation and libel even in Denmark (Peetush, 2009). The guise of freedom of expression should not be allowed to obscure the dark reality of racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and Muslim stigmatisation in the media and press (Bosch, 2023).

2.5 Conclusion

The evolution of religious thought itself is an important part of human history that has and will continue to shape the way we think. Calls for waging wars on religion, use of provocative hate speech, and degrading and uncalled-for caricatures in the guise of freedom of speech would not help the cause of promoting a rational, productive and most importantly civil and respectful debate on serious issues. Rather, it will dent such efforts.

Healthy satire, artistic expressions, productive criticism and town halls in the form of panchayats and jirgas have been part of many Muslim societies for centuries, and the values of freedom of speech, debates, discussions, and art are not exclusive to European or Western societies. Those thinking to the contrary in the West need to look at the history of Muslim world

and study their societies closely which shall help them shed their patronizing mindset that wants to “civilise the uncivilise” Muslim every now and then.

Islam means peace and its teachings can help ameliorate the influence of barbaric organisations such as ISIS and others. The peace-loving people in the West, too, must stand up and question their governments’ ties with the despots and the oppressive militaries in the Arab Middle East and the broader Islamic world. This assisted authoritarianism is among the root causes of the rise in extremism in those societies.

Muslims are the biggest victims of the religious extremists and as comedian Aamer Rehman once tweeted, “Satire is about challenging power, not belittling the oppressed.” The solution lies not in demonising Islam but in tackling the political, environmental, social, and economic roots of the various conflicts and issues that exist.

Cultural exchange from the West to the East is also needed because lack of exposure and interaction with Muslims and Muslim societies too create misunderstanding among a common Westerner about the others. Those from urban areas usually are less biased towards minorities because of greater exposure as compared to those from rural areas because of lack of exposure and resultant greater misunderstanding. According to a 1997 study, native Danes who lived in metropolitan areas like Nørrebro and frequently interacted with members of ethnic minorities on a daily basis showed significantly less prejudice against them than native Danes who lived in small towns; since negative media stories clearly had an impact on the attitudes of this latter group, who had little or no personal experience interacting with members of ethnic minorities (Experiences of Muslim Communities: The Role of the Media, 2011).

What comes under freedom of speech and what does not can be arrived at together through civil dialogue and discussion in a multicultural society instead of provocation and degrading treatment and physical violence (Peetush, 2009). The conditions that make possible democracy and intercultural dialogue in general, at the global level, are bound by norms of mutual civility, respect, recognition, and, freedom of speech. The cartoons published by the Danish and the French paper erode the very foundations that make possible such global dialogue.

In today's global multicultural environment, they undermine the social fabric of respect and recognition necessary for mutual accommodation and cooperation, and they also constitute hate speech and perpetuate prejudiced stereotypes against Islam and Muslims (Peetush, 2009).

Chapter Three

Official Responses of the Muslim World

The chapter below looks at the official responses of the leading Muslim states and their organisations such as the OIC and the Arab League to the offensive and disrespectful caricatures of the holy Prophet (SAW), published and republished by far-left French satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo and centre-right Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten.

3.1 Danish caricatures

The Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten (formally Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten) also abbreviated as JP, first published the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in 2005 that were received as provocative, degrading, and offensive by a vast majority of Muslims across the Muslim world. In the following weeks, dozens of papers in Europe reprinted the caricatures. The Jyllands-Posten's caricatures were met with condemnations and protests from across the globe, some violent. Here we will fundamentally look at the official responses from Muslim world to the publication of the caricatures. The chapter looks at the response of the Muslim world in the form of Foreign Office statements, speeches, interviews and remarks of the heads of states and governments, and official responses of the Muslim organisations such as the OIC and the Arab League etc.

Bahrain

In 2006, in a categorical response to the publication of the caricatures, the cabinet of Bahrain in a meeting condemned the caricatures calling them "a deliberate attack against the glorious Prophet Muhammad (SAW)" that has upset Muslims across the globe (Muslims seek UN action on blasphemous cartoons: Libya closes embassy in Denmark, 2006). This condemnation at the cabinet level came after members of the parliament both from Shiite and Sunni sects issued condemnation statements protesting the lack of action taken by the Danish

government against the publication that printed the offensive cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) (Toumi, 2006).

Sheikh Ahmed Attiyatallah al-Khalifa, Bahrain's State Minister for Cabinet Affairs, said that the government had sent out a warning about the possible harm that the printing of the cartoons could cause; moreover, Sheikh Adel al-Mouwdah, another parliamentarian, declared that they would launch a campaign to boycott Danish goods in order to make it very evident to the Danish government and people how the Bahrainis felt about the caricatures, and also demanded an apology from the Danish government and the newspaper that published the caricatures (Muslims seek UN action on blasphemous cartoons: Libya closes embassy in Denmark, 2006).

Bahrain also hosted an international conference of Islamic scholars titled, "International Conference for Supporting the Prophet (SAW)" which was also participated by Danish Muslim imams, where it was stated in clear terms that they would call for ending the boycott of Danish products only and only after Danes apologised for the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) (Danes must apologise for cartoons: imams, 2006).

The conference, which took place in March 2006, was intended to discuss ways that Muslims can educate the West about the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and to urge the Bahrainis to continue with the boycott of Danish products to register their protest at the insensitively published humiliating caricatures (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015).

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a major Islamic country with a predominantly large Muslim population. Foreign Minister Morshed Khan while briefing the nation's parliament on the Bangladeshi government's response to the caricature issue, said that a formal diplomatic protest was filed with the Danish government on November 7, 2006, and he asked them to apologise for "such heinous

acts" and to stop them from happening again (Bangladesh requests Denmark to tender apology on Prophet cartoon, 2006).

In addition to strongly denouncing the caricatures, the parliament of the South Asian nation demanded an official apology from the Danish government (Venkateshwaran, 2006).

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The reported response from the small European Muslim-majority nation was that a protest was organized against the caricatures published by the Danish newspaper and a letter demanding an apology was delivered to the staff at the embassies of Denmark, Norway, and France (Bosnian Muslim Protesters Burn Danish, Norwegian And Croatian Flags In Sarajevo, 2006).

Pakistan

Besides, street protests by the masses, officially at the government level, the caricatures drew strong condemnation from the Upper House (Senate) of the Parliament, echoed by President General Pervez Musharraf, and a diplomatic protest was made by the government in a number of European countries (Venkateshwaran, 2006).

Moreover, the Pakistani Parliament passed a resolution denouncing the Danish media organization's publication of the caricatures as a "vicious, outrageous, and provocative campaign" (Bransten, 2006).

Turkey

Turkey is a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member and an influential Muslim-majority country on the global stage. The Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was quoted in the Turkish press apropos the publication of caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) saying that they were an attack on the nation's spiritual values, and that the press should only be allowed so much freedom (Ewen MacAskill, 2006).

Afghanistan

The then-president of conflict-ridden Afghanistan Hamid Karzai disapproved of the caricatures and called for “calm and forgiveness”. Karzai stated: the freedom of the press does not grant us the authority to disparage the cultures, religions, and beliefs of others, and this is not something we should be allowed to do in Afghanistan, Europe, or any other place; moreover, press freedom needs to be based on respect and observance of people's culture, religion, and morals (Bransten, 2006).

Jordan

After the Danish newspaper published the caricatures, Jordan's King Abdullah II issued a statement in 2005 describing it "an unjustifiable crime" and vowing to not stand for any insult to Islam (Bransten, 2006).

The OIC

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation or the Organisation of Islamic Conference as it was then called is the largest organisation of Muslim countries on the world stage.

In response to the publication of the caricatures, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the Organization of the Islamic Conference's then-secretary general, informed reporters in Cairo that the international organization would request that the UN General Assembly adopt a resolution outlawing attacks on religious beliefs. (Muslims seek UN action on blasphemous cartoons: Libya closes embassy in Denmark, 2006).

At a press conference in 2006, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) stated that his country, along with other OIC member states, had urged the Danish government to take corrective action regarding the case (Govt Condemns Publication of Prophet Muhammad's Caricature, 2006). During their extraordinary summit in mid-December 2005 in Makkah, Saudi

Arabia, the members of the OIC demanded a concerted effort to counter the issue of Islamophobia (Govt Condemns Publication of Prophet Muhammad's Caricature, 2006).

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is the most respected and religiously significant Muslim-majority country in the world and is among the most influential within the Muslim countries.

In its response, Saudi Arabia denounced the caricatures (UN urged to ban attack on religion, 2006). The Middle Eastern country also withdrew its envoy from Denmark while the Saudi religious leaders called for a boycott of Danish goods and products (Muslims seek UN action on blasphemous cartoons: Libya closes embassy in Denmark, 2006).

Arab League

The Arab League, in response to the caricatures, declared that they were looking for a UN resolution, supported by possible penalties, to defend religions (Muslims seek UN action on blasphemous cartoons: Libya closes embassy in Denmark, 2006). While acknowledging that talks were in progress to present such a proposal to the UN, Ahmed Ben Helli, the Deputy Secretary General of the Arab League, stated: The OIC and Arab countries are currently holding highest-level consultations to request that the UN draft a binding resolution outlawing the contempt of religious beliefs and establishing the imposition of sanctions on nations or institutions that violate this resolution (Muslims seek UN action on blasphemous cartoons: Libya closes embassy in Denmark, 2006).

Libya

Libya took a stricter position in its reaction to the Danish caricatures. Libya protested the publication of the caricatures by closing its embassy in Denmark and the country's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Libya had chosen to close its embassy in Copenhagen because it felt Danish authorities were not acting responsibly on the matter and that additional steps would

be taken (Muslims seek UN action on blasphemous cartoons: Libya closes embassy in Denmark, 2006).

Syria

At the official level, the Syrian government called on the Danish government to take action against those who were involved in the publication of the disrespectful caricatures. The government media source, the Syrian news agency quoted an official as stating: Syria urged the Danish government to take the appropriate steps to penalise the offenders, underlining "dialogue of civilisations is based on mutual respect" (Muslims seek UN action on blasphemous cartoons: Libya closes embassy in Denmark, 2006). Indeed, it was not all peaceful in the unfortunately, ever-volatile Middle East, in a violent reaction to the caricatures, on February 04, 2006, anger-fueled and charged demonstrators set fire to the Embassy of Denmark in Syria (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015).

Lebanon

Lebanon is a Middle Eastern country with a history of civil conflict and strife and has a population with diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. On February 3, 2006, according to reports, the Lebanese minister for foreign affairs criticised the cartoons, stating that freedom of speech stops when sacrosanct principles are violated (Caricatures de Mahomet: Les réactions à travers le monde, 2006).

In a violent public reaction on February 5, 2006, the Danish Embassy in Lebanon was set on fire, (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015) and following the incident, Hassan al-Sabaa, the interior minister of Lebanon, proposed to step down due to the way the incident was handled (Fattah, 2006).

Malaysia

Malaysia is an East Asian country with a majority Muslim population. It is a fairly progressive country and has a relatively stable economy.

In response to the caricatures, Malaysia called it a deplorable and insulting act. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said in a statement: This disgusting act shows a blatant disregard for Islamic sensitivities regarding the use of such images, which are particularly offensive to and prohibited by Islam; moreover, it is further regrettable that, in spite of international outcry against the publication of those images, newspapers and journals in some other nations, including Norway, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Spain, felt it appropriate to reproduce the offensive caricatures from the Danish newspaper (M'sia Expresses Regret Over Publication Of Prophet's Caricatures, 2006). Badawi who was also the chairman of the all-important OIC, while calling upon the citizens of his country to keep calm and stay rational, stated very clearly that the act of publication of caricatures was “deliberate and provocative” and the publishers from all these countries must “cease and desist” from doing so; adding: Let the offenders of the act recognise the seriousness of their own mistakes, which they alone are capable of fixing and should fix (M'sia Expresses Regret Over Publication Of Prophet's Caricatures, 2006).

Iran

The situation at the level of the reaction of the masses turned ugly and the Embassy of Denmark came under attack for two successive days in February 2006 by violent demonstrators; moreover, the embassy premises was also torched (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015).

Mohammad Khatami, a well-known reformist and former president of Iran who also presented the idea of “Dialogue among civilisations” as a counterargument and way forward to the thesis of “Clash of civilisations”, while strongly criticising the Danish caricatures for hate-

mongering, urged Muslims to avoid saying offensive things and rather provide logical criticism (Sayid Mohammed Khatami In an Interview With ISNA, 2006).

Iran is a country where after the Islamic Revolution, the conservative clergy has managed to use anti-West sentiment some warranted and some unwarranted to garner public support for themselves.

The ex-Iranian president, Khatami, in his reaction to the caricatures, stated: It is not appropriate to offend or insult someone when you are expressing a viewpoint that is subject to analysis, debate, and eventual acceptance or rejection; But we too have issues in this area as a people, not just the West as we simply keep making unpleasant remarks about liberalism, democracy, and modernism in place of reasoned critique or discussion, and I've previously told a few of our elders that 'liberalism' is the religion of the modern world, and we have no right to disparage it, so phrases like "the corrupt culture of the West" and similar ones ought to be abandoned as the holy Quran also states, "Do not insult the gods of others, otherwise you are indirectly insulting your God" (Sayid Mohammed Khatami In an Interview With ISNA, 2006).

In October 2006 after a video surfaced related to the caricatures, in his reaction the then Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who was labelled by the West as a hardliner, categorically stated, that those who insulted the Prophet (SAW) are "low lifes and devoid of human values", adding, "Such measures reveal the depth of weakness and failure of the leaders of liberalism" (Danish PM, Iran president condemn Muhammad cartoons, 2006).

In the aftermath of the video, a majority of the Iranian parliamentarians urged President Ahmadinejad to suspend ties with Denmark and a letter signed by 232 lawmakers was sent to Ahmadinejad complaining about the video; moreover, the Iranian government in an official response summoned the Danish envoy to its Foreign Ministry to register their protest about the video (Row over Danish cartoon escalates, 2006).

Iraq

Iraq is the heartland of the Islamic and Arab Middle East. Shia cleric Ali al-Sistani commands and commanded respect not just among the local Iraqis but also among the occupying

US military and civilian leadership in Iraq, and was considered to be a reasonable voice at a difficult time in the history of the country. In his reaction to the caricatures, he did not just condemn them but also in his remarks regarding extremists who denigrate Islam by their actions, emphasised how attacks on Islam are justified using acts of extremism that are not in keeping with Islamic teachings (Protestolar yayınyor, 2006).

In a barely concealed reference to the terrorist organization al-Qaeda, Sistani in a statement blamed the “unjust and stray faction” that has “misinterpreted and manipulated” the sacrosanct the principles and meanings of Islam by choosing the path of extremism thus, painting a bleak image of “a religion of love”, resultantly providing an opportunity to those who hold hatred towards Muslims, spread their malice through “pathetic attempt[s]” like the one done by the Danish daily to insult the holy Prophet (SAW) (Ridolfo, 2006).

Egypt

In an official response at the Egyptian government level to the printing of the insulting images of the Prophet (SAW), in 2006 in Denmark, Egyptian envoy Mona Omar Attia held a meeting with the then premier of Denmark Anders Fogh Rasmussen and told the European head of government that Denmark’s response to the controversy had so far been “inadequate”, implying that a lot more was needed to be done (Bransten, 2006). In February of 2006, a Danish delegation seeking conciliation arrived in Egypt which it was reported was “well-received” (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015).

Before this, on December 11, 2005, the foremost and highly respected Sunni institution of higher learning, Al-Azhar, promised to bring up the matter of the offensive caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that were just released by the top newspaper of Denmark with the United Nations as well as global human rights organisations (Halim, 2005). In a statement released on December 10, 2005, the Islamic Research Academy at Al-Azhar addressed the publication of insulting cartoons, saying: This has crossed all boundaries of "objective criticism" into disrespect and denigration of the religious beliefs of more than a billion Muslims worldwide, including those in Denmark, and Al-Azhar plans to protest these

caricatures with the relevant UN bodies and rights groups globally and experts hold the view that "freedom of expression should not be in violation of other guaranteed freedoms and rights" (Halim, 2005). The statement issued while urging the government of Denmark to "reconsider its position" warned that this had the potential to impact the Danish interest and could hurt "cooperation between Danes and Arabs and Muslims" (Halim, 2005).

Qatar

Qatar is an oil-rich Gulf state. It is demographically and geographically a small country but with a high per capita GDP. Despite that in Middle Eastern affairs, as well as in other issues of international significance it is known to punch above its weight. In 2006, Qatar denounced the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) caricatures that were printed in the Danish newspaper (More papers join cartoon furore, 2006).

Indonesia

Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority country in terms of population of Muslims. It is an East Asian country with a multicultural, relatively progressive society and is relatively economically stable.

The then President of Indonesia Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, on February 10, 2006, in response to the caricatures controversy said that the Indonesian government denounced the printing of offensive images of the Prophet (SAW) and he could understand the strong outcry of the masses against the Danish news outlet but he added that as people of faith they ought to accept the apology from the newspaper's editorial staff as well as from the Danish government's envoy in Jakarta (Govt Condemns Publication of Prophet Muhammad's Caricature, 2006). President Yudhoyono along with ministers of Religious Affairs Maftuh Basyuni and Foreign Affairs Hassan Wirajuda at a press conference expressed the optimism that such caricatures would not be printed again as they reflected a lack of sensitivity, a desecration that has hurt the

feelings of Muslims which cannot be justified based on the right to free speech (Govt Condemns Publication of Prophet Muhammad's Caricature, 2006). He said that the issue is of very basic principle and the government had taken bilateral and multilateral diplomatic measures and demanded that "corrective measures" be taken by the Danish government apropos the caricatures issue, adding people should maintain law and order and remain peaceful for the good of the country (Govt Condemns Publication of Prophet Muhammad's Caricature, 2006)

The Indonesian president while stressing the need for intensifying inter-religious conversation and collaboration in Asia and the Pacific region and between Asia and Europe supported by Indonesia, said the Indonesian government flayed the insulting image which was initially printed in Denmark and subsequently, carried a dozen newspapers in France, Germany and Norway, since the exercise of one's rights should not infringe upon the rights of others or disrespect their beliefs (Govt Condemns Publication of Prophet Muhammad's Caricature, 2006). Later, when the issue of the video related to the caricatures surfaced, Indonesia, in its official reaction, formally protested by calling the Danish envoy to the country's Foreign Ministry (Row over Danish cartoon escalates, 2006).

Diplomatic efforts in response to the caricatures

As part of various multilateral diplomatic efforts in response to the caricatures, on October 12, 2005, 11 envoys from nations with a majority Muslim population asked to speak one-on-one with the Danish prime minister at the time, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, that request was surprisingly not granted (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015). In November 2005, a delegation comprising Danish Muslims went to the Middle East on an "information trip", to speak about the caricatures and called for international condemnation. (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015)

Later, 11 Arab and Muslim diplomats, representing Egypt, Palestine, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Indonesia, while protesting the images called for an official apology from the newspaper, in a letter to Danish Premier Anders Fogh Rasmussen in December 2005 (Halim, 2005).

Other responses, boycotts and protests

As a backlash, Danish businesses in the Middle East had to deal with boycotts of goods, canceled business meetings as well as purchases and many Gulf businesses removed Danish merchandise from their shelves, all while protest demonstrations were continued outside Danish embassies in the Gulf region (Muslims seek UN action on blasphemous cartoons: Libya closes embassy in Denmark, 2006).

In various countries individually, politicians as well as religious leaders demanded a prohibition on Danish goods and products to protest the printing of caricatures; moreover, a global association of Muslim scholars urged Muslims worldwide to boycott products from Denmark to register their protest (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015).

In Egyptian capital, Denmark's Evangelical Lutheran Church's Bishop Karsten Nissen held a meeting with Grand Imam Mohammed Sayyed Tantawi of al-Azhar University. The imam stressed the Danish premier must apologise for the caricatures and demanded that he, Pope Benedict XVI and other religious leaders from throughout the world ought to get together to draft a piece of legislation that denounces ridiculing any religion, including the sacred texts and the prophets, further suggesting the law should be then enforced by the UN on all nations (15 killed in Nigerian cartoon protests, 2006).

3.2 French caricatures

A satirical French publication, Charlie Hebdo leans to the far-left of French politics. The magazine is reportedly known for following a tradition that "combines left-wing radicalism with a provocative scurrility that often borders on the obscene", and "does not have a very big circulation" (Charlie Hebdo and its place in French journalism, 2015).

On February 8, 2006, Charlie Hebdo published reprinted one of the insulting images of the Prophet (SAW) that the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten had published in 2005. On November 02, 2011, Charlie Hebdo published an issue with a caricature of the Prophet (SAW)

on the front page. In 2011, the magazine's former office was firebombed. On September 19th, 2012, Charlie Hebdo again published caricatures of the Prophet (SAW). On January 02, 2013, the satirical magazine released a special edition of 65 pages of caricatures of the Prophet (SAW). Twelve people were killed when armed attackers stormed Charlie Hebdo's new Paris headquarters on January 7, 2015, following the publication of an issue that included Michel Houellebecq's novel *Submission*, a fictitious account of France under Islamic rule in 2022 that has been criticized for being "Islamophobic." One week after the incident, the magazine published a special edition that carried a caricature of the Prophet (SAW) (Prophet Mohammed cartoons controversy: timeline, 2015). In 2020, Charlie Hebdo republished caricatures of the Prophet (SAW) in early September.

Every time the caricatures were published, they were received as provocative, degrading, and offensive by a vast majority of Muslims across the Muslim world. The caricatures were met with condemnations and protests from across the Muslim world, some violent that led to a number of casualties too.

Here we will essentially look at the official responses from the Islamic world to the printing of the deplorable images. The chapter looks at the response of the Muslim world in the form of Foreign Office statements, remarks made by state and government leaders, and official responses of the Islamic organisations such as the OIC and the Arab League etc.

(a) Charlie Hebdo - 2012

Arab League

After Charlie Hebdo reprinted the offensive caricatures of the Prophet (SAW) in September 2012, its response The Arab League labelled the caricatures, "provocative and outrageous", and in a statement expressed its apprehension that the caricatures could further hurt the volatile situation in the Arab and Islamic world, all while appealing to the Muslims hurt by the caricatures to employ nonviolent methods to convey their strong dismissal of the act (Arab League urges restraint over Prophet cartoon, 2012).

Egypt

Egypt is a very significant country in the Arab world because of its geographical location and population size, which is the highest in the Middle East. During 2012-2013, right after the Arab Spring, Muslim Brotherhood was the most popular political party in Egypt.

Late Mohammad Morsi of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party remained the president of the country from June 2012 till July 2013.

In September 2012, reacting to the caricatures reprinted by Charlie Hebdo, the acting head of Freedom and Justice Party, Essam Erian, encouraged the French judiciary to handle the matter with the same rigor as it had handled the case against the magazine that had published private photographs of Prince William's wife, the Duchess of Cambridge of Britain, adding that if the duchess's case involved privacy, then the caricatures were offensive to a whole group of people and it was important to regard other people's beliefs (Arab League urges restraint over Prophet cartoon, 2012). Speaking out against any violent response from Muslims, the acting leader of the Freedom and Justice Party emphasized that only nonviolent protests were appropriate (Arab League urges restraint over Prophet cartoon, 2012). While the Muslim Brotherhood lauded the French government's condemnation of the caricatures, it stressed that French law must address insults against Islam in the same manner as it handles denial of the Holocaust, elaborating, the most that France does when someone attacks the Prophet (SAW), his companions (RA), or Islam is to issue a two-word apology; however, if someone questions the veracity of the Holocaust [which is indeed wrong], they face imprisonment, which is not rational or fair (Arab League urges restraint over Prophet cartoon, 2012).

Tunisia

Tunisia, an Arab country on the Mediterranean, is known for being the birthplace of the Arab Spring of 2011. A moderate political party, Ennahda, won the first ever elections held in the nation's history and formed government. In response to the publication of the caricatures by Charlie Hebdo in 2012, Ennahda flayed the caricatures terming them as an "aggression" against the Prophet (SAW), while urging Muslims to make sure that their reaction to the publications,

does not derail the effort for reform in the region or make it into a dispute between Muslims or the West (Arab League urges restraint over Prophet cartoon, 2012).

(b) Charlie Hebdo – 2015 cover

In 2015, Muslims around the world categorically disapproved and condemned Charlie Hebdo for its magazine carrying a caricature of the Prophet (SAW) as its cover. Various Muslim-majority countries while condemning the publication, termed the cover “offensive” (Atef, 2015).

A week prior to the publication, the magazine’s office was attacked. Majority of the countries condemned the attack and the resultant loss of lives and foreign ministers of Jordan, Turkey, Algeria, and Egypt travelled to Paris and participated in a march organised to express solidarity with those who were attacked and assaulted but when the publication announced that its new issue would include fresh caricatures of the Prophet (SAW), Jordan, Egypt, and others flayed the move (Atef, 2015).

Saudi Arabia

Given the continuous disregard and lack of sensitivity to the religious feelings and sentiments of Muslims worldwide by the French satirical magazine, Saudi Arabia in response to the printing of a new image of the Prophet (SAW) in 2015 deplored what it termed as the continued “mocking of Islam” while the state-run Saudi Press Agency (SPA) citing a source at the Saudi Foreign Ministry remarked that the country is “surprised and deplored” (Saudi Arabia deplores Charlie Hebdo continued ‘mocking of Islam’, 2015).

The official Saudi source stated that the Kingdom fails to find any plausible reason for the “deliberate abuse” against Islam, which hurts the feelings of 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide; moreover, right to free speech and expression does not justify making a mockery of others' religious beliefs (Saudi Arabia deplores Charlie Hebdo continued ‘mocking of Islam’, 2015).

In Saudi Arabia – the official clergy is assigned a significant position. The top clerical council denounced the “disrespectful drawings” (Saudi's top clerical body condemns Prophet

Mohammad cartoons, 2015). Warning against the role the caricatures could play in serving the interests of the extremists, in a statement issued by state-run SPA, Fahad bin Saad al-Majid, a member of the Senior Scholars Council was cited as saying, that offending the sentiments of the Muslims with these cartoons will not accomplish the correct goal and these caricatures will play into the hands of extremists and provide them a reason to murder and spread terror (Saudi's top clerical body condemns Prophet Mohammad cartoons. 2015)

Egypt

Egypt's centre for religious edicts, the Dar Alfta, while denouncing Charlie Hebdo for its printing of the disrespectful cover, termed the caricatures that the magazine had been carrying on its pages, an unwarranted action that hurts the sentiments of 1.5 billion Muslims who revere and adore the Prophet (SAW) (Atef, 2015). Similarly, Al-Azhar released an official statement on its website, that denounced the special edition of Charlie Hebdo, called the cover caricature of the Prophet (SAW) – a product of “sick imagination” and urged people to ignore the magazine's issue (Atef, 2015).

Jordan

Jordan's ruling family enjoy close friendly ties with many Western countries and plays a crucial and active mediatory role in many of the region's conflicts. Following the attack on Charlie Hebdo's head office that left many dead in 2015, the King and Queen of Jordan travelled to France to take part in the solidarity march condemning terrorist violence (Atef, 2015). After the king's visit, Hayel Abdulhafez Dawud, the Jordanian Minister of Islamic Affairs and Awqaf (Endowments), denied a media story that said he had advocated for a boycott of French products by all Muslim nations, rather he stressed that there are many peaceful ways to condemn the caricatures considered offensive by Muslims (Atef, 2015).

Syria

Syria under Bashar Al-Assad had been at loggerheads and in conflict with the West. The Syrian head of state, Bashar Al-Assad, in response to the attack on Charlie Hebdo's Paris office in 2015, stated as per a report by Syrian state news agency SANA that the Middle Eastern country condemned the killing of innocent masses anywhere on Earth but termed the incident, a reaction to European government's policy of "politicizing terrorists" (Atef, 2015).

Morocco

Morocco's Minister for Foreign Affairs Salaheddine Mezouar in a gesture of support with the victims of the attack on Charlie Hebdo's office in Paris, also visited the Elysee Palace and expressed profound sympathies to the families of those affected (Atef, 2015). But because of the "blasphemous cartoons depicting the Prophet," the Moroccan government declined to participate in the march against extremism (Atef, 2015).

Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran's government condemned the deadly Paris attack of 2015 and soon after when Charlie Hebdo published its special edition with an insulting image of the Prophet (SAW) on its cover, it also released a statement that castigated the magazine (Atef, 2015). Speaking during a press briefing, Marzieh Afkham, a spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry about the recently published disrespectful Charlie Hebdo's magazine cover, stated that it provoked the sentiments of Muslims across the globe and hurt their feelings; moreover, warned that such an act could stoke "the flames of a vicious circle of extremism" (Atef, 2015).

(c) Charlie Hebdo – 2020 republication

In 2020, Charlie Hebdo republished the deplorable caricatures of the Prophet (SAW) in early September.

Pakistan

In 2020, in a reaction to the republication of disrespectful sketches of the Prophet (SAW), the then Pakistan Premier Imran Khan condemned the fresh publication and urged the United Nations to effort against increasing Islamophobia (Pakistan PM condemns 'Islamophobic' Charlie Hebdo cartoons, 2020). The Pakistan prime minister also sent a message to the UN General Assembly in which he blamed increasing “global nationalism” for “accentuating Islamophobia” and deplored the continuing targeting of Muslims in various countries with impunity, and the episodes in Europe including the reprinting of the images by Charlie Hebdo (Pakistan PM condemns 'Islamophobic' Charlie Hebdo cartoons, 2020). The prime minister of Pakistan stressed the UNGA to establish an international day to combat Islamophobia and form a coalition to confront the menace, while emphasizing that deliberate provocations and incitement to hate and violence must be forbidden globally (Pakistan PM condemns 'Islamophobic' Charlie Hebdo cartoons, 2020).

The then top diplomat of Pakistan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, while strongly flaying Charlie Hebdo’s action and declaring that the deplorable act has emotionally hurt and offended the hundreds of millions of Muslims, expressed the optimism that this will not happen again and the perpetrators would face legal consequences (Pakistan backlash grows over Charlie Hebdo cartoons, 2020). The top envoy also stated that he had lodged a protest with the ambassador of France in Pakistan’s capital Islamabad (Pakistan backlash grows over Charlie Hebdo cartoons, 2020).

The Opposition Leader in the National Assembly or the Lower House of Parliament, Shehbaz Sharif also categorically condemned the French satirical magazine for reprinting the disrespectful caricatures, arguing freedom of speech does not give someone the carte blanche to offend the sentiments of millions of Muslims across the globe (FM Qureshi denounces French magazine's decision to republish blasphemous sketches, 2020). Emphasizing the need to promote interfaith harmony to ensure global peace, he regretted the extraordinary rise in the instances of racial profiling and incidents involving Islamophobia would only broaden the divide instead of bridging it (FM Qureshi denounces French magazine's decision to republish blasphemous

sketches, 2020). The Foreign Office of Pakistan also condemned the decision by the French publication in the “strongest terms” (FM Qureshi denounces French magazine's decision to republish blasphemous sketches, 2020). Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri in a Twitter post, stated that the decision to republish the extremely offensive caricatures amounted to weakening the international desire for peaceful coexistence and posing a risk to interfaith and social unity and that such purposeful action cannot be excused as in the name of press freedom (FM Qureshi denounces French magazine's decision to republish blasphemous sketches, 2020).

OIC

In reaction to the derogatory depictions of the Prophet (SAW) that Charlie Hebdo republished in 2020, the OIC posted a statement on its official website on September 02, 2020, strongly condemning the reprinting of the abusive caricatures that it said were a “provocation” to the sentiments of 1.5 billion Muslims, was “irresponsible behaviour” and ran “counter to the freedom of expression” (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020). In a strongly-worded rebuke, the OIC statement read, “such reckless practices fuel extremism, violence, and terrorism, encourage anti-Muslim sentiments, and deepens the phenomenon of Islamophobia” further adding that it is “inconsistent with international norms” that called for “preserving the values of dialogue and coexistence” and “respecting others’ feelings” (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020).

The OIC in its statement “called on local authorities and international organizations to enact effective laws that address Islamophobia and criminalize defamation of religions, and activate the relevant existing resolutions, including the Resolution 16/18 upheld by the United Nation on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, and discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief” (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French

Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020). The Secretary General of the organization, Dr Yousef Al-Othaimeen, while arguing that the matter contravenes global human rights standards, especially the freedom of belief, stressed concerted efforts to promote tolerance, dialogue, and peace, and combatting terrorism and religious extremism (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020). Additionally, he emphasized the necessity of urgently establishing legally binding agreements on a global scale to combat racism, prejudice, provocation, and religious intolerance while fostering tolerance for all faiths (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020). He stated that Islamophobic acts violate the right to freedom of belief and religion protected by international legislation and called for promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue for global peace (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020).

OIC-IPHRC

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)-Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) is an expert panel that the OIC established with advisory authority. The IPHRC while terming the caricatures a “targeted manifestation of hatred and absurd stereotyping” “violative of international human rights laws”, expressed profound anguish over manifest stereotyping and ridiculing of the most respected personality of Islam who is deeply loved and revered by Muslims across the globe (OIC-IPHRC strongly condemns Charlie Hebdo’s republication of blasphemous caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, 2020). The commission also criticized French officials for attempting to defend the republication of caricatures in the name of “freedom to insult”, terming the reprinting “an exercise in bigotry and hatred” and not a legitimate expression of free speech or constructive criticism (OIC-IPHRC strongly condemns Charlie Hebdo’s republication of blasphemous caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, 2020).

Regarding freedom of expression, the commission cited Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that it makes it very clear that in order to maintain societal cohesion, the exercise of this right of freedom of expression is subject to specific duties and responsibilities based on preventing harm to others and includes the State's obligation to forbid by law any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that would incite hostility, violence, or discrimination (OIC-IPHRC strongly condemns Charlie Hebdo's republication of blasphemous caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, 2020). The commission stated the oft-repeated argument that the attacks or terrorism had nothing to do with Islam or for that matter any other religion, adding that the entire Muslim world condemned the incident at Charlie Hebdo's office that resulted in loss of life and a Muslim police officer laid his life defending the premises (OIC-IPHRC strongly condemns Charlie Hebdo's republication of blasphemous caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, 2020). Arguing that the publication of such caricatures without regard to the emotions of hundreds of millions of Muslims would only "strengthen the hands of the extremists on both sides of the cultural divide" which is counterproductive to achieving the goal of multiculturalism (OIC-IPHRC strongly condemns Charlie Hebdo's republication of blasphemous caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, 2020). The Commission also called upon the media to engage in responsible journalism that helps the cause of building an inclusive, peaceful and pluralistic society (OIC-IPHRC strongly condemns Charlie Hebdo's republication of blasphemous caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, 2020).

The Commission urged all states to completely and successfully execute the Action Plan UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, to combat religious intolerance and establish consensus on the boundary of freedom of speech where it converts into incitement to hatred, prejudice or violence requiring its criminalization as provided in Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (OIC-IPHRC strongly condemns Charlie Hebdo's republication of blasphemous caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, 2020).

Turkey

Turkey is a significant Muslim country with a strong economy that is located at the crossroads of East and West and is an important NATO member nation. The country because of these features enjoys significant leverage and say in international affairs.

In response to the republication of sketches of the Prophet (SAW) by Charlie Hebdo in the year 2020, Turkey condemned the “disrespect toward (Muslims) and the Prophet Muhammad (SAW),” arguing that the insult and disrespect toward Muslims could not be justified in the cover of freedom of art, expression or press; moreover, the Turkish Foreign Ministry flayed French Head of State Emmanuel Macron’s position on the issue (Turkey condemns Charlie Hebdo's decision to republish cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, 2020).

Saudi Arabia

In reply to the reprinting of the images, offensive to Islam and Muslims by Charlie Hebdo in 2020, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia condemned the degrading caricatures (Saudi Arabia holds off from backing action against France over cartoons, 2020).

The Foreign Ministry of the Kingdom issued a statement that while condemning “all acts of terrorism”, stated that freedom of expression and culture should be the guiding light of respect, tolerance, and peace, opposing actions and behaviors that incite extremism, violence, and hatred and that go against the spirit of cooperation (Saudi Arabia holds off from backing action against France over cartoons, 2020). Saudi Arabia-based Muslim World League’s head Mohammed al-Issa, in the aftermath of the attack and the republication of caricatures, warned that a negative “overreaction” would only benefit the “haters” (Saudi Arabia holds off from backing action against France over cartoons, 2020)

Iran

Iran is an important oil-rich Middle Eastern country that has been at loggerheads with the West ever since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In response to the reprinting of the caricatures by

Charlie Hebdo in 2020, Iran not only condemned the caricatures and called it a “provocation”, it also condemned the attack on the magazine’s office in Paris that left a number of people dead (Iran lambastes French magazine over reissue of Mohammed cartoons, 2020).

The Iranian Foreign Ministry also issued a statement that called the reissue of caricatures an “insult” to over a billion Muslims, adding any disrespect towards the holy Prophet (SAW) or the other Prophets (AS) was “absolutely unacceptable” (Iran lambastes French magazine over reissue of Mohammed cartoons, 2020).

Egypt

Egypt lies at the heart of Arab Middle Eastern affairs with the West. In response to the reprinting of the deplorable caricatures by Charlie Hebdo, President El-Sisi of Egypt remarked, “To insult the Prophets (AS) amounts to underestimating the religious beliefs of many people,” moreover, he also underscored the need for promoting “coexistence and tolerance” among religions (France’s Le Drian in Egypt amid tensions over prophet cartoons, 2020)

Al-Azhar

Al-Azhar in Egyptian capital is one of the oldest and considered among the most prestigious and esteemed seats of Islamic learning in the world. While Al-Azhar vehemently condemned the French satirical magazine for reprinting the caricatures offensive to the Prophet (SAW) in 2022, Islam and Muslims, its Observatory for Combating Extremism requested the world community to take a solid position on the invasion of Muslims’ “sanctities and symbols” (Arab News, 2020). While repeating its condemnation of the deadly attack on Charlie Hebdo’s head office in 2015, it urged the publishers and editors of the magazine to respect the beliefs of others, not to undermine interfaith dialogue and coexistence and refrain from hate speech (Zaid, 2020).

Chapter Four

An Analysis of Official Responses of the Muslim World

The following chapter looks at the official responses of the leading Muslim states and their organisations like the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab League to the offensive and disrespectful caricatures of the holy Prophet (SAW), published and republished by far-left French satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo and centre-right Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten, and an attempt is being made to analyse those responses and to ascertain whether the leading Muslim states and their organisations were proposing solution to the issue of caricatures.

Despite the general level of angst and unhappiness in a majority of Muslim-majority countries towards their leadership, democratic or otherwise, at least in rhetoric, the statements issued by officials, heads of government, heads of state, ministries of foreign affairs, leading religious institutions having governmental backings, were to the point, conveyed the feelings, heartfelt sensitivities and sentiments of the masses towards reverence worthy Prophet Muhammad (SAW), raised critical issues of caricatures' impact on levels of extremism in Muslim societies, impact on interfaith and intercultural dialogue, efforts for global peace and harmony, bridging the East-West divide, and the issue of rise in ultra-nationalism in European countries and its threat to the idea of a diverse and multicultural West etc.

In some cases, things turned ugly and violent and totally out of control, exacerbating the already tense situation.

Indeed, many in the West and the East look at the issue of caricatures differently, the West through the lens of freedom of expression, speech, and art and the East through the prism of freedom of religion and belief. In this respect, not much headway appeared to have been made as far as the Western views are considered, as is obvious from a repeat of the publication of the offensive caricatures after regular intervals, that or the acts have been deliberate -- designed to provoke, with one group of extremists feeding off on another group of extremists i.e. those in the

West provoking deliberately without regard to the emotional hurt and sensitivity of the Muslims and those extremists in the East reacting violently instead of reaching out to better understanding and conciliation to stop the recurrence of the offensive and deplorable printing of sketches of the beloved Prophet (SAW).

Some proposals were suggested during the course of the past two decades to curb the recurrences of such deplorable incidents and promote interfaith and intercultural harmony and peaceful coexistence. What has been lacking is a very limited understanding of Muslim societies among the Western masses due to very limited travel to the East despite resources, hence, limited interaction, a negative media and the fear of the less known or unknown, adding to the misunderstandings about Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) who was indeed sent by Allah Almighty as mercy to all mankind.

Indeed, there is a severe lacking in the ability of public diplomats, academics, Muslim media, and artists to reach out to the Western governments, media, academia, civil society, and the masses in general and show them the true face of Islam that promotes, peace, harmony, mutual respect and co-existence.

Lebanon has a history of civil strife and conflict and has a society with ethnically and religiously very diverse and historically very divided backgrounds. Following Jyllands-Posten, a Danish daily originally published the disrespectful caricatures in 2005, outrage and protests spread across the globe like no one in the West had imagined. In the case of some Muslim countries, outrage turned violent and things went ugly, which happened due to a slow response and apparent inability to foresee the situation on the part of the administrations/governments concerned as what happened in the case of Lebanon.

The Danish and Swedish missions in Damascus, Syria, were set on fire by demonstrators; moreover, Thomas May, the general consul of Denmark in Dubai, described the situation as a worst-case nightmare, acknowledging that no one could have predicted the kind of rapid rise in intensity that has taken place (Fattah, 2006). Consequently, the Danish Foreign Ministry rushed to urge its citizens to leave Lebanon, while Hassan al-Sabaa, the interior minister of Lebanon,

volunteered to step down due to the way the situation was managed, but it was already too late (Fattah, 2006).

The behaviour of the premier of Denmark and of the Danish government at the beginning of the issue was of arrogance, dismissiveness and of inability to comprehend the gravity of the error, despite fair warnings and attempts to reach out to them. The behaviour of the newspaper seemed even more unwilling to understand the other side. It may be argued that the Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the time who three years later became the secretary general of NATO was himself not entirely free of the influence of the post-9/11 anti-Islam global atmosphere.

When 11 ambassadors from various Muslim countries sent him a letter in October 2005 his reply, he wrote: "Freedom of expression is the cornerstone of Danish democracy and wide-reaching. The Danish government has no possibility of influencing the press" (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015). Later in the same month, Rasmussen, surprisingly, refused to meet the envoys despite their request (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis. 2005 – 2015, 2015).

In an opinion piece for Politiken, 22 former Danish diplomats criticised Rasmussen for turning down the 11 Muslim envoys (Lauta, 2006). They wrote: "After a sharpening of public debate in Denmark in recent years, we are now witnessing a sharpening of the tone, which can only be perceived as a persecution of the minority that consists of fellow Muslim citizens," adding, "Both freedom of religion and freedom of speech are among the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, but it has never been compatible with Danish attitudes to use the freedom to deliberately hurt a minority on their faith" (Lauta, 2006).

Under pressure from response to the caricatures from both within and outside Denmark and the increasing number of protests across the world, Prime Minister Rasmussen had to address the issue in the new year, when he flayed attempts to stigmatise sections of the population because of their ethnicity or religion (Watt, 2006).

In January 2006, the Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten had refused to apologise for the hurtful and disrespectful caricatures and the government of Denmark too had expressed their inability to intervene on the pretext of the country's freedom of expression (Muslims seek UN action on blasphemous cartoons: Libya closes embassy in Denmark, 2006). The editorial staff of the publication defended the deplorable act on the pretext of freedom of speech; moreover, due to a constantly negative press in the time of the international war on terror, a poll suggested the majority of the local population in support of their government not tendering an apology over the caricatures (Muslims seek UN action on blasphemous cartoons: Libya closes embassy in Denmark, 2006).

What to speak of a solution to the issue, in some conflict-prone regions of the Muslim world like Gaza, the situation became too dire because of the caricature controversy for the Danes. On January 29, 2006, all Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes were asked to pack up and evacuate the area within three days (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015).

After a lot of protests worldwide and demonstrations and official and diplomatic outcry in the Middle East and the wider Muslim world as well as because of the voices inside Denmark that questioned the Rasmussen government's handling of the entire episode, better sense prevailed and Jyllands-Posten, on January 30th 2006, which at the time was the broadsheet newspaper of Denmark with the highest circulation, issued an apology to the "honourable citizens of the Muslim world" (Watt, 2006). The editor-in-chief acknowledged that the sketches had caused "serious misunderstandings". Carsten Juste said: "The 12 cartoons ... were not intended to be offensive, nor were they at variance with Danish law, but they have indisputably offended many Muslims, for which we apologise" (Watt, 2006).

Prime Minister Rasmussen while appreciating the apology, stressed that the government could not do the same on behalf of the press, adding: "I personally have such a respect for people's religious belief that I personally never would have depicted Muhammad [SAW], Jesus [AS] or any other religious character in a way that could offend other people" (Watt, 2006).

Al-Azhar is one of the most esteemed institutions of Islamic learning and has been at the forefront of issues related to Islam and Muslims. It too played its role in addressing the issue of caricatures and the Grand Imam suggested his proposals to avoid the recurrence of such publications that deeply hurt the sentiments of the Muslims.

When Denmark's Evangelical Lutheran Church's Bishop Karsten Nissen visited Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mohammed Tantawi, the imam told him that demanded that the Danish prime minister issue an apology for the cartoons and proposed that he and Pope Benedict XVI convene to draft a law that would forbid insulting any religion, including the prophets and the Holy Scriptures, and that the UN enforce the law on all nations (15 killed in Nigerian cartoon protests, 2006). Nissen did not respond to the suggestion of a law but said an apology from Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen was not possible because he did not draw the caricatures (15 killed in Nigerian cartoon protests, 2006).

When in February 2006, newspapers throughout Europe including Charlie Hebdo published the derogatory depictions of the Prophet (SAW), Prime Minister Rasmussen tried to calm the situation by saying that "Danes have no wish to insult Muslims," but it was too little, too late. The issue had spiralled out of control to the other European countries and later, the same month, Denmark had to recall its ambassador from Syria (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015).

The response of the Muslim countries where their envoys tried to reach out to the Danish prime minister by writing a letter as well as requesting a meeting which was declined, were laudable, peaceful way of responding to the episode. The situation would have likely moved further towards a conciliatory path with the newspaper's apology but the Danish prime minister remained unmoved on apologising on behalf of the paper, and to add insult to injury, things went completely out of hand when newspapers from other European countries published the disrespectful caricatures. The publications sent a wave of outrage throughout the Muslim world and the masses demanded a ban and called for boycotts of Danish products and goods.

As a way of civil protest to demonstrate to the Western countries that Muslims hold the honour of the Prophet (SAW) close to their hearts, boycotting Danish goods was both an

effective and civil way of registering protest at the repeat publication of highly offensive and deplorable caricatures of the Prophet (SAW).

By March 2006, the boycotts of Danish products had started yielding results and started hitting the European nation's dairy exports (Danes must apologise for cartoons: imams, 2006). Arla Foods is a Denmark-based dairy giant, and in March 2006 it placed full-page advertisements in over two dozen Arabic-language media to convey its "respect and understanding for Muslim society" (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015).

Though Rasmussen "regretted the hurt caused to Muslims but refused to apologise on behalf of" Jyllands-Posten; moreover, "the editor of the paper apologised for offending the Muslims but defended the newspaper's right to publish the caricatures." (Danes must apologise for cartoons: imams, 2006)

The increasing diplomatic pressure put by various Muslim countries and organisations at the international level highlighting the racism being pedalled in the guise of freedom of expression begin to yield results and spread awareness about the real issue.

On March 7, 2006, Doudou Diène, UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, in a scathing criticism hit the nail on the head when he told the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Geneva: the caricatures point to rising racism and xenophobia and that the birth of the caricatures had occurred in a political context in Denmark which is that an extremist party enjoying just 13 per cent of the vote had formed a coalition government – and development of Islamophobia or any racism takes place in the context of extremist political parties and an absence of political counter forces (Racism and racial discrimination on rise around the world, UN expert warns, 2006).

The UN expert, Diène, suggested international mechanisms including the UNGA to look at cases such as Danish images, as a discussion on striking a balance between the rights of

freedom of expression and that of religion, instead of looking at it as a clash of civilization; moreover, since the law “could not provide [a] satisfactory answer”, there is a need for “accompanying thinking on interreligious” and cultural debate (Racism and racial discrimination on rise around the world, UN expert warns, 2006).

Boycotts, peaceful protests, and media outcry, coupled with a robust diplomatic response from the various Muslim countries again led to some flexibility in an, otherwise, adamant Denmark. Hit by boycotts and diplomatic and public outcry, on March 16, 2006, the Danish Foreign Ministry invited all the foreign envoys to a meeting, -- an attempt at damage minimisation (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015). The United Nations Special Rapporteurs concluded in a report on 18 March 2006 that the government of Denmark has “failed to meet its international obligations,” apropos “racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance” (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015).

Politiken, another Danish newspaper is aligned politically with social liberals, in May 2006 published the caricatures originally published by Jyllands-Posten in 2005; similarly, in 2008, a dozen Danish newspapers republished a caricature of the Prophet (SAW). (Ten years of the Muhammad cartoon crisis: 2005 – 2015, 2015) Eight Muslim organisations in response to the publication of the caricatures decided to take legal action against Politiken, this pushback resulted in Politiken printing a front-page apology for re-publishing the offensive caricatures as part of a settlement with the Muslim organisations (Eriksen, Danish newspaper apologises in Muhammad cartoons row, 2010).

This way without resorting to violence or threats, the organisations through formal peaceful legal means managed to protect the honour of the Prophet (SAW) and metaphorically speaking the newspaper had to bite back its words.

It is important to mention how this amicable settlement was unfortunately received by the various local political parties and the Danish media; to highlight that the response to such disrespectful acts needs to keep evolving, through all available legal and institutional means in the short term and by raising awareness about Islam and the life of the Prophet (SAW) among

the non-Muslim populations in the long run, to dispel misunderstandings and build bonds of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence – which provides for a basis of a prosperous and flourishing society.

On the settlement, Jyllands-Posten's editor called it a “sad day” for the Danish press and expressed his disappointment for him Politiken has surrendered before the enemy in the good fight for freedom of expression; moreover, a far-right Danish People's Party leader, Pia Kjærsgaard, blamed the Politiken of “selling out” and termed the situation “absurd”, while the leader of the Social Democrats, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, called Politiken's decision, “crazy” (Eriksen, Danish newspaper apologises in Muhammad cartoons row, 2010).

Former president Mohammad Khatami of Iran, a reformist, in response to the issue of caricatures, stated in 2006: It is not appropriate to offend or insult someone else when you are presenting a viewpoint that may be examined, debated, and ultimately accepted or rejected, but we too have issues in this area as a people, not just the West, we merely speak negatively about liberalism, democracy, and modernism instead of engaging in reasoned discourse or critique (Sayid Mohammed Khatami In an Interview With ISNA, 2006). To solve and address the issue and not just criticize for the sake of criticism the former Iranian president suggested Muslims too should refrain from making hurtful remarks and instead offer reasoned critique (Sayid Mohammed Khatami In an Interview With ISNA, 2006).

Similarly, former Pakistan premier and cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan in the aftermath of Charlie Hebdo's publication of offensive caricatures proposed the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) declare an International Day to Combat Islamophobia and building a coalition to fight the menace (Pakistan PM condemns 'Islamophobic' Charlie Hebdo cartoons, 2020). The then Pakistan's top envoy Shah Mahmood Qureshi, while strongly flaying Charlie Hebdo's publication of caricatures, expressed the hope that this would not happen again and those responsible would be legally proceeded against (Pakistan backlash grows over Charlie Hebdo cartoons, 2020).

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012 after the Arab Spring on the issue of the publication of caricatures in French media suggested that in France, insults directed at Islam should be dealt with under French law in the same manner as Holocaust denial (Arab League urges restraint over Prophet cartoon, 2012).

It is important to understand that every time there are deaths and casualties anywhere in protests and demonstrations on this issue, it is the failure of Muslim countries, their leaders, diplomats, academics, media persons, and their organisations, in chalking out an effective institutional, civil and legal response to the unfortunately periodically recurring issue of publications of such offensive and deplorable caricatures of the profoundly revered and deeply loved Prophet (SAW).

4.1 Solutions suggested:

Over the years, different Muslim countries, leaders and organisations have suggested different solutions to the recurring issue of the profoundly offensive and deeply disrespectful caricatures of the most revered personality in Islam, the holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

Egypt

In Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood in 2012 after the Arab Spring on the issue of publication of caricatures in French media suggested that in France the same standards that apply to Holocaust denial should also apply to insults directed towards Islam under French law (Arab League urges restraint over Prophet cartoon, 2012).

Al-Azhar

Moreover, the top cleric of Egypt's Al-Azhar in 2020 in his suggestion, stressed upon the world community to enact laws criminalising anti-Muslim activities and prejudice (Fraser, 2020).

Pakistan

Pakistan in 2015 suggested steps to criminalise publication of caricatures and cartoons. In 2015, the spokesperson of the Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Ministry in a briefing to the media persons while replying to a question regarding the caricatures published by Charlie Hebdo, informed the foreign affairs correspondents of various media outlets that the advisor on national security and foreign affairs to the premier dispatched a letter to the OIC secretary general, requesting him to begin steps on behalf of the Muslim world and the OIC "criminalise publication of caricatures and cartoons", since they hurt the feelings of 1.7 billion Muslims across the world (Record of the Press Briefing by Spokesperson on 22 January, 2015). The MoFA spokesperson further argued that freedom of expression was not limited as it has been observed in the case of Holocaust that questioning any part of the event invokes application of criminal law, arguing if it can occur in this matter, why it cannot happen where the most revered personality of Islam is attacked and Muslims feel degraded and humiliated (Record of the Press Briefing by Spokesperson on 22 January, 2015)?

The public representatives in Pakistan in response to the republication of caricatures in 2020 suggested a boycott of French goods as well as working towards marking March 15 as International Day to Combat Islamophobia, the effort towards the latter goal proved successful which indeed was a major step realizing the goal of an international society where peaceful co-existence, mutual respect and global harmony is a norm. In 2020, Pakistan's Lower House suggested the government some measures, recall Pakistan's ambassador from Paris; work within OIC framework for observing March 15 as International Day to Combat Islamophobia; and ask OIC member states to boycott French products (Pakistan's parliament unanimously approves resolution condemning blasphemous French cartoons, 2020). Moreover, the French envoy in Islamabad was summoned and was handed a demarche and conveyed by the FO that Pakistan strongly protests the insulting sketches published in France (Pakistan's parliament unanimously approves resolution condemning blasphemous French cartoons, 2020).

OIC

Similarly, suggesting a solution for the recurring issue, the OIC in 2020 urged local governments and international bodies to implement legislation that effectively combat Islamophobia and make the defamation of faiths illegal, and execute the pertinent available resolutions such as Resolution 16/18 that deals with fighting against violence against people based on their religion or belief, negative over generalisations and prejudices (OIC: Republishing of Abusive Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by French Charlie Hebdo Newspaper, is an affront to Islam and a Provocation to Feelings of Muslims, 2020).

Turkey

Turkey President Tayyip Erdogan, who is widely regarded and respected in the broader Islamic world, in 2020, saw a boycott of French products as a way the challenge of recurring incidents of printing of derogatory depictions of the Prophet (SAW) could be answered and addressed (Gumrukcu, 2020).

Chapter Five

Conclusion

We have all heard about Dar-ul Harb (the House of War), and Dar-ul Islam (the House of Peace) From a demographic point of view, today those distinctions are not strictly valid, today there is a part of East in the West and there is a part of West in the East, - the more recent history of the East and West is increasingly intertwined and overlaps like never before. Today, given the risk of the high human cost of conflict due to highly sophisticated arms and weaponry and cyber gadgetry, and the high economic cost associated with conflict in a highly interdependent and globalised world, there is a greater need to embrace and work towards Dar-us Sulah (the House of Conciliation), and to achieve that both the East and the West will have to strive and take steps in the direction of peaceful co-existence, inter-religious and inter-cultural harmony and above all mutual respect.

The recurrent publication of the offensive and insulting caricatures of the most revered personality in Islam, the holy Prophet (SAW) simply throws a spanner in the works – of reproachment, reconciliation, and bridge building, ultimately, putting global peace and prosperity in jeopardy – both in the country in question and at the global level.

The publication of caricatures draws their support from the political far-left as well as the far-right in the West, interestingly the two extremes have more in common than most people would assume. The far-left in the West has joined the ranks of neo-atheists, hence its antagonism with organised religion, and the far-right in the West is just too ultra-nationalist, anti-immigrant, and xenophobic to come to terms with the multicultural and increasingly multi-ethnic reality of the contemporary Western society. Today or tomorrow, the latter will have to grapple with the changing reality of what constitutes, let us say the French identity or what being Danish means.

There has been a failure on the part of leaders, organisations, media, academics, and masses to effectively and with civility communicate to the West just how revered the Prophet (SAW) is for the Muslims, that any caricatures of the Prophet (SAW) deeply hurt them –

psychologically and emotionally, and so freedom of speech should not and cannot be absolute, to the extent that it infringes upon other fundamental rights such as freedom of belief and religion. Indeed, Islam does not condone violence. The publication of caricatures also plays right into the hands of the religious extremists and does not help the cause of peace.

Muslim leaders, governments and the various organisations have attempted to raise their concerns at available forums while responding to the controversy in order to stop a repeat of such incidents. There has been only a degree of success on this path. When it comes to Muslim leaders the issue and the struggle also involves shaping the message for Westerners' ears too, and not just suggesting a solution. Many a times, due to cultural differences and communication gaps, the meaning of well-intended messages because they are not tailor-made for a Western audience, are lost in translation. Many leaders from the East fail to communicate effectively with a Western audience even if they have the solution to ameliorate the situation and address the issue. Former Pakistan premier Imran Khan in his speech at the UNGA in 2019 told the West: "It is important to understand this. The Prophet (SAW) lives in our hearts. When he is ridiculed, when he's insulted, it hurts" (Batrawy, 2019). The message resonated with the foreign audience.

Ted Anthony, who covered the fallout of 9/11 in Afghanistan and Pakistan and has written about global issues for The Associated Press since 1995, and Aya Batrawy, who covers the Persian Gulf for the same organisation and has reported from the Middle East for the past 15 years, wrote an analysis of the former cricketer-turned-politician's speech for the American news agency, the Associated Press. They wrote of the former premier's speech: "He spoke of Islam but used references like Charles Bronson's "Death Wish" movie, Monty Python and Japanese kamikaze pilots during World War II. He built linguistic and pop-culture bridges as he carefully made his points. Khan reached across the gulf to be a translating dictionary for two cultures that find themselves at odds. He delivered an appeal familiar to many Muslims but somewhat extraordinary for a global forum: a full-throated defence of Islam shaped for a Western audience's ears" (Batrawy, 2019).

This seems to be lacking in the responses from the Muslim world in general, a message cut out for the West, because what good is the message from the East if it fails to reach across to the West – the East already knows and accepts that the Prophet (SAW) was sent as a blessing for

all mankind, communicating it to them would just be preaching to the choir. There is an Urdu couplet by Indian poet Abdul Hayee known by his pen name, Sahir Ludhianvi, that can be interpreted to highlight the importance of effective communication. It goes:

“Fun jo nadaar tak naheen pohancha; abhi mayaar tak naheen pohancha”

It loosely translates to: "A skill that hasn't reached the needy; that skill hasn't achieved [the desired] standard".

In the age of “fake news” and the Artificial Intelligence (AI)-generated content that will soon flood our computer tablets, mobile phones, and other gadgets, effective communication and spreading awareness would become all the more important. Legislative and regulatory bodies will have to stay ahead of the current for keeping and maintaining the desired ethical standards. This area too seems wanting as far as tackling issues such as the insulting caricatures and others are concerned. The legislators, public representatives and civil servants from the relevant departments will not just have to work within their respective countries but also in coordination with other nations at the global level. AI education and awareness will become all the more important to be able to discern facts from fiction and real from artificial, and a lot of focus and effort will be needed in that direction both at the public as well as private level, and at individual as well as collective level.

Here it is important to remember howsoever new and complex advancements are made in the world of science, we, humans will not stop being human. This, is what should be at the heart of our communication, a humanistic message to the rest, as Pakistan’s former PM appealed at the UNGA: “We human beings understand one thing: The pain of the heart is far, far, far more hurtful than physical pain. Do not use freedom of speech to cause us pain by insulting our holy Prophet (SAW). That's all we want” (Batrawy, 2019).

Moreover, depicting Islam as a faith that promotes violence and terrorism and insulting the most respected personality of Islam, fundamentally reeks of racism. Muslims are the biggest victims of religious extremists and terrorists and as Australian stand-up comedian Aamer Rehman once tweeted, “Satire is about challenging power, not belittling the oppressed”, mocking and stigmatising an already marginalised community in the West is not satire, it is not fair. The

solution lies not in demonising Islam but in addressing the social, political, environmental and economic roots of the many conflicts and problems. Indeed, how well and justly Muslim countries treat their non-Muslim citizens, will go a long way in spreading awareness about Islam's and Prophet (SAW)'s message of love and peace in the Western world and will resultantly, positively impact their treatment of their minority Muslim citizens.

As discussed earlier in the official responses from the Muslim world, the West should treat the issue of insulting caricatures the same way it treats the issue of Holocaust denial. Indeed, Holocaust denial is wrong, insensitive and offensive and a crime against a people. The West needs to realise that the holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is the most revered and respected personality in Islam and for Muslims the love of the Prophet (SAW) is a part of their faith, any insulting or derogatory act against the Prophet (SAW) causes Muslims great hurt and pain. Freedom of expression should not become a license to cause hurt and pain to millions of people and it goes against the spirit of a multicultural, plural society that takes pride in standing for the oppressed and lifting up the marginalized.

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