



Of Belief and Believers: Abdul Sultan's Graffiti and Question of Identity, Faith and Security in The Subcontinent

KEYWORDS

Indianness, Fundamentalism, Gaze, False Consciousness, Muslim, Jihad, Graphic Novel, The Believers.

Eeshan Ali

Junior Research Fellow, Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad, Jharkhand-826004

Nirban Manna

Assistant Professor, Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad Jharkhand-826004

ABSTRACT *Not all Muslim are terrorists but all terrorists are Muslim! These phrases are the central concept of media about Muslim and terrorism after 9/11. The whole concept of the Islam and the Muslims are determined by the image drawn by the 'West'. The Indian media has also adapted the same concept of the 'West'. Here the big question is that whether the tag given by the western world is really applicable to the Indian Muslim. As the civilization of India is a kind of amalgamation of various different civilizations. The people of India belong to the various faiths. The form and content of "Indianness" are sharply different from the other civilizations. The western culture is watched over by the materialism; whereas the Indian culture is punctuated with the spiritualism. Moreover, after partition in 1947, the great division was created among the mass. India was split along the ground of the sentiments and beliefs. This effect of the partition left a mark in the psyche of the people of India. The present paper will seek into the fear and the security of the subcontinent with special reference to Abdul.Sultan P.P.'s *The Believers*.*

Due to India's multifarious histories, pluralistic cultures, paradoxical sub-cultures, linguistic diversities, and different geo-political and ethnic expression, it is virtually impossible to define India as a nation-state in the conventional sense and thereby the inhabitants. But from a potentially different point of view, being emerge from the culture, re-lected in her history and confirmed by her ethnography, the idea of pluralism is truly the celebration of the reality of "Indianness". The above affirmation is the mainstay of the establishment of Indian culture, content and faith. It not just reflects the organic law of India, but also depicts the beauty of India, where people from several cultures, diverse residential districts, and various religions live together. It is a secular state, where unity in diversity is the fundamental mantra, which serves to unite the masses from the different cultivations. But in 1947, when India and Pakistan were spitted into two different nations on the basis of religions, things started to change rapidly not only in the socio-political and cultural level, but in the psyche of the people. The partition witnessed one of the greatest migrations in human history. Ten million people migrated to India and Pakistan and over one million people died in riots and fighting. Ultimately people of both the countries after independence have been driven time and again to the deadly political vortex of bitterness and hatred for each other. So from the political bureaucrats, the political discourse of partition, the struggle for power, subsequent effects and blame game subsequently became common phenomena among the people of both the counties. Later on all kinds differences, behavioral codes, cultural difference between the two communities somehow or the other channelized into the narrow trench of religions and the partition. During the partition, most the Muslim intellectuals left the country and opted for Pakistan and on the other hand the people who choose India were mostly farmers and poor who were yet far from education and evolution. So it is one of the major reasons of the underdevelopment of the socio-political position of the Indian Muslim which subsequently gave advantages to the all political classes irrespective of religions to use it as a tool to gain power. The Britishers left the nation long ago, but it is distressing to notice that the 'brown colonizer' and the political class

adopted the same old colonial 'divide and rule policy' and for this the common Indians are paying the political price which resulted in their struggle to gain their identity beyond the religious dogmas. Various reports came out regarding the status of Muslim in India, like Gopal Singh Committee report in 1983, the Sachar report in 2006 and Rangnath report 2007. Unfortunately, all the committee reported the same problem that goes against the views of the Indian government that Muslims are progressing. The plight of Muslims is the same as it was before. Sometimes the plight comes under the veil of discrimination and sometimes in a sort public violence. It is difficult for the Muslims to get flat or shelter in the metropolis. They are the victims of 'gaze'. 'Gaze' is something when the subject loses a level of autonomy upon realizing that he or she is a visible target. Placing the 'Muslim' as 'other' the relationship between the majority and the minority has been under the surveillance of 'gaze'. It is not something which someone uses but a kind of situations and relationship in which one is forced to enter. "The gaze is integral to systems of power and ideas about knowledge" (Sturken & Lisa 94). Sachar committee reports confirmed it. The report categorically describes, "Muslims carry a double burden of being labeled as 'anti-national' and as being 'appeased' at the same time" (Purie 22).

After 9/11 the perception of the world towards the Muslim world has been changed. The way media has projected the things before the world, the Muslim has become the 'other'. In most of the cases, they are being targeted as either terrorist or inferior community. The Muslim community is forced to be a kind of alien in the world. The scenario of the Muslim community is nothing much difference in India. Indian media somehow copied the same concept of the western media that "Every Muslim is not terrorists, but every terrorist is Muslim". No doubt after getting such tag from the world the Muslims in India is somehow suffering from the identity crisis and insecurity.

The story of *The Believers* is based on the recent issue of 'fundamentalism'. Though, it was a reaction to theological liberalism and cultural modernism. But now the theory of

'fundamentalism' can be interpreted in various terms. For example in present India there are various fundamentalist groups and these groups have their different notion of fundamentalist activity i.e. some are involved in political status, some are religious, some are economical etc. Depending upon the region and continent the motto of the fundamentalists varies. Abdul. Sultan's presentation of the two fundamental groups, Muslim fundamentalism and Hindu fundamentalism, is somehow near to reality. Actually, Sultan is a trained journalist; his experience is highlighted in his graphic novel *The Believers*. The basic argument of the novel is how the feeling of insecurity captures the mind of both the community.

The Believers starts in Scotland where Hamid, an academic from India receives a fax from his home about the death of his granny. After entering into his town Mallapuram he recollects the old memories of his childhood days. Hamid and Rashid are siblings. Rashid is the elder one, who sacrificed his education for Hamid. Drifting here and there after the funeral, Hamid comes to a place, Kavu, where he used to sit in his childhood days. But this time he feels strange as he sees a board where it is written "Only For Hindus". Hamid comes to know about the fundamental activities from one of his friends Anwar, who is a local newspaper editor. Then the story highlights some of the political destruction and the riots like serial bomb blast of Coimbatore, Babri Masjid issue etc. It also talks about some of the fundamentalist organizations like Sunni Tigers, Jihad Committee, and RSS and so on. He comes to know that Rashid is involved and even the leader of the fundamentalist organization. They held a live discussion about the need of such organization. Rashid justifies fundamentalism by stating about the attack on the Muslim community like Godhra riot, Babri masjid issue etc. and simply avoids Hamid by saying that his organization is nothing but a defense mechanism against such issues like riots and suppression. There is another character named Asif, who has been simply projected as a victim of the situation. He wanted to be an Auto mechanic but fate brought him here in this establishment where he believes himself to be the soldier of the God, but the reality is that the young boys like Asif are nothing but the mere puppet in the workforce of the fundamentalist leaders who controlled their thoughts and put in to achieve their own goal. At the end of the graphic novel, during an escape plan Rashid is shot dead by the police. Hamid goes back to Scotland with his mother and Asif comes out from those misconceptions about the religious leader and opens his automobile shop.

Hamid, an Indian academic, lives in Scotland, the other brother Rashid is in India. Hamid has been depicted as a symbol of tolerance and peace and on the other hand, Rashid symbolizes the victims of the situation and intolerance. The first element, which reflects the fundamental ideology has been portrait in a place, called Kavu. The protagonist, Hamid visits the place Kavu, he used to sit in that place in his childhood, but now after twelve years he feels strange as a sign board is prohibiting him to enter into that area. On that board, it was written that "Only For Hindus" and notices that some masses are being coached in some sort of warfare.



Fig.1((Sultan 18) : The Sign Board Prohibits Hamid to Enter into the Place

Here the board symbolizes the sense of right of a community. The sense of right also can water the seed of fundamentalist outcome. This is what happened to this graphic fiction. Definitely, when there will be a kind of sense of right then naturally one party will not be given any right. It is something like the Derrida's concept of center, i.e. we can never be out of the center if we try to decenter the conscious the unconscious self will capture the center.

Rashid, the brother of Hamid has been projected as one of the members of a fundamentalist group. Now the question is why Rashid turned to be a fundamentalist. The basic reason was to gain the identity – identity of individual in terms of belonging to a community. Somehow, due to some unfortunate accidents like the demolition of Babri Masjid, Godhra riot etc. Rashid started to suffer from identity crisis and this identity crisis which lead him to feel insecure in the so-called secular society. Rashid operates this organization only to strengthening the identity of the minority. As he feels that being the minority in India they are being exploited in every area, the political parties promise a bunch but the outcome is zero, moreover such organization is required to protect the minorities from the Hindu fundamentalists. The fear of 1983 Nellie massacre, 1969 Gujarat riots, 1992 Bombay riots after the demolition of Babri Masjid, 2002 Godhra riot roused an instinct of awe among the minorities. Thousands of people were killed in these riots. These incidents created a feeling of insecurity among the Muslims. These accidents gave the minorities a kind of negative impact on the administration and they also developed a fear of being 'other' which definitely causes damage the ethnic values of the nation.

On the other hand, Muslim like Hamid is tolerant and believes in non-violent activity. He justifies his point by stating that because of these fundamentalist groups the common Muslims are suffering, they are confronting the problem most and moreover, Muslim has contributed in most of the arenas like in astronomy, science, medicine, literature, architecture etc. who is going to remember the Muslims because of these donations? All will look the Muslims with their hateful eyes if these fundamentalists do not give up their vicious dirty work. Today Muslims have become the victim of 'false consciousness'. False consciousness is a term which has been used by Karl Marx. According to him, it is a process of how the consciousness is shaped and controlled by the bourgeoisie. For the Muslim community, the formation of 'false consciousness' is triggered from the both the dominant group and the fundamentalist Muslim groups. The media and administration have been controlled by the dominant group and the media always call a terrorist 'Muslim terrorist' if he bears a Muslim name. This word Muslim represents the whole Muslim community, but the reality is terrorism has no colour at all. On the other hand, the youths are forced to develop a false consciousness by their religious leaders in the fundamentalist groups, as in the case of Asif. Abdul Sultan clearly shown by projecting Asif as chess piece, the youth like Asif is the mere puppet in the hands of the fundamentalist leaders.

Hamid argued with Rashid about the need of such fundamentalist group for which the whole family is now out of the home. Hamid directly asked him that he is making a militant organization in the name of 'Jihad'. Jihad in Quran has been used for various reason, for example to control, to fight against one's anger itself, to fight against one's own desire, to fight against the self and sometimes it is the fight against the falsehood, it means to strive and

struggle in the battlefield for self-defense, "jihad" means to fight against the anti-social elements in the society. But some selfish people wrongly explain the term to pollute the mind of the innocent people and mislead them. Rashid shouts at Hamid and says "What happens when there is an attack on Muslim community in the name of Godhra, for example? Thousands of Muslims are killed. Do you expect us to react by writing learned articles? It is easy to preach peace but not when your back is against the wall. My organization is not creating problems but is a defense mechanism" (51). Hamid reminded him that the *Hudaibiya Treaty* is the first peace treaty in history that was signed by Prophet. It reflects the greatness of Islam, which is a strong symbol of peace. Hamid mocks at Rashid and said that when a Muslim says 'Bismillahir Rahamanerrahim' it means Allah the most merciful and compassionate. Islam forbids the killing of any innocent human being in any shape. Rashid simply heard the things from Hamid without any comment, which indicates his sense of guiltiness. Even Hamid's life is in danger as he has been accused of being attached to the police. The fact is that the PWD engineer is a spy. Hamid continues to blame Rashid for his hate speech, which creates violence among the multitude. Asif, a boy not more than of nineteen has been depicted here as a simple tool of fate. The story of Asif is quite heart touching and shows a variety of discrimination attitude of the majority society. Asif lost his father when he was just eleven. He believes that his father was killed by a Hindu politician. After the death of the father the mother worked hard for the survival, finally Asif also started to go for work. Then Rashid took him to a *madrasa*, where he has been attending various lectures delivered by the leaders. Sometimes it was hate speech, sometimes it is not. Here the *madrasa* took advantage of the helplessness of Asif, which symbolizes that the psyche of the young people are being fouled in the name of faith and sacrifice which goes completely against the Islamic preaching.



Fig.2 (Sultan 69) : Orphan Youths are Mere Puppet in the Hands of the Fundamentalist Leaders

Asif is one of the thousands victims of the situation, whose demand has been exploited with the false precepts of Islam. Asif is of the view that "As a person from the minority community, you are made to feel like unwanted rubbish. Your identity becomes your course. "We suffer daily discrimination and humiliation" (60). Though the above statement of Asif is not deniable but still by instilling fear in the minds of innocent people will never gain respect, rather it will hamper the life of the common people. For Asif's situation, the majority as well as the people who gave shelter to him is responsible. He is simply the victims of the situation. The people like Asif simply become the mere puppet in the foul hands of the fundamentalist group. Abdul Sultan highlighted in his graphic novel that the youth like Asif also has a dream, a dream to live a happy life, but unfortunately, their dreams are moulded by a particular group of people. Asif is always in dilemma of what to do and what not to do. Hamid believes that it is because of these fundamentalist groups the common Muslim suffers a lot,

"waiting and watching with their hands tied, stereotyped, humiliated and looked upon with suspicion"(81).

Towards the end of the graphic novel Rashid shaved off his beard and on the other hand Hamid dons a beard, which symbolizing their changing identity in the present society. In the present situation, it is difficult for them to live with their existing identity, that is why it is not only the physical violence but also the violence inflicted on the individuality and the identity. Still the changing identity could not save the life of Rashid. He was shot dead by the policemen; Hamid was also injured by the bullets of the policemen. And Asif with the help of Hamid started a garage. Hamid with his mother left India and started a new life in Scotland. The scene where Hamid is shown praying plays an important role in the entire cosmos of the novel. Here perhaps, the author tried to establish that religions and codes of religions are extremely personal in nature, any attempt to mobilize religions in the public sphere is extremely vulnerable and it simmers on the level of communalism and fundamentalism.

At any cost, one cannot use the wrong mean to come at the right goal. Rashid's activities cannot be justified from a humanitarian point of view as well as Islamic point of view. But to stop the people like Rashid and the other Hindu fundamentalist the government of India should take care of this. First of all, the politicians who manipulate the minds of the innocent people for their vote bank should stop their trick. Secondly, the people who sit on the top, the people in the center can easily stop any violence with the proper care. Simple logic is that the implication of proper energy can reduce the riots and violence. Next are the innocent masses who are being instigated for such vulgar activity, the political parties paid them to obliterate the other groups, which should be checked. The innocent people who are being instigated should realize the fact that they are just the mere puppet of the situation, today they are being compensated by the parties tomorrow the same party will compensate the opposite group to drink down them. To stop any kind of violence, the role of the administration is much more responsive, but in India sometimes it is evident that the administration reacts in negative and helps the killers to kill the innocent people, which happened in Gujarat massacre where the police officers helped the killers. On the other hand, when there is any bomb blast they randomly pick up the Muslim without any proof, without even informing the family members and they are being harassed and humiliated for days together and at last, it is proved that they do not have any connection with any terrorist organization. To catch the few terrorists if the policemen arrested thousand innocent people and they are being harassed and humiliated, surely they are making hundred new terrorists. Julio Ribeiro published an article on 9th September, 2006 where he wrote "More the unnecessary arrests that are made, to get a breakthrough becomes more difficult proportionately". If the foremost one is terminated, then all the following three periods will hold no home at all.

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