

# Traveling Islamophobia in the Global South: Thinking Through the Consumption of Malala Yousafzai in India

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## Abstract

Malala Yousafzai (1997-) became an international icon after Pakistan-based *Tehrik-i-Taliban* militants attacked her on her way to school on October 9, 2012. In the following days, the global media gave extensive coverage to the attack from multiple narrative positions. This article argues that the traveling of Yousafzai as an image of a Muslim girl's right to education was instrumentalized in the context of Kerala, South India, to deny Muslims the right to political agency. By analyzing the traveling of Islamophobia in the Global South, this article shows how the gender-based stereotypes of Islamic political subjectivity were reproduced through the figure of Yousafzai. By looking into the particularities within the Global South, this article argues that Islamophobia as a discourse is now part of a global economy within which the threat of Muslim subjectivity is applied in unique ways.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia, Malala Yousafzai, Taliban, Muslims in Kerala, Islamic political subjectivity

## Introduction

This article considers how the Islamophobic discourse, perpetuated by global powers, is received and debated in the Indian context, by explicitly analyzing the reception of Malala Yousafzai. It shows how the gender-based stereotypes of Islamic political subjectivity are reproduced through the figure of

Yousafzai<sup>1</sup>. This article also contributes to the study of the construction of the Muslim ‘other’ in Indian politics by focusing on the perpetuation of Islamophobic discourses within the broader left-wing politics with reference to the case of the educational development of Muslims in the state of Kerala<sup>2</sup>. Finally, by looking into the particularities within the Global South, this article argues that Islamophobia as a discourse<sup>3</sup> is now part of a global economy within which the threat of Muslim subjectivity is applied in unique ways (Kasim 2018:1-16; Walters 2016:650-670).

There are two interrelated theoretical frameworks on Islamophobia studies that determine the arguments of this work. First, this article is built on the argument that Islamophobia as an apparatus<sup>4</sup> is produced in one place and

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<sup>1</sup> In the public discourse, Yousafzai is routinely referred to by her first name ‘Malala’. This article, however, following standard academic norms, uses her surname.

<sup>2</sup> Kerala is a state in South India located in the South-West coast with a population of 33.4 million, of which Muslims constitute 26.6 percent (Zachariah 2016:9). Formed on November 1, 1956, it comprises of the British colonial regions of Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar.

<sup>3</sup> As a ‘discourse that travels between state, civil society, and citizens, that produces and organizes subjects, and that is used by subjects to govern themselves, Islamophobia could also be seen to embody what Michel Foucault formulated as a distinctive feature of modern governmentality’ (Kaya 2011:24).

<sup>4</sup> The concept of apparatus as a critical description of power is borrowed from the work of Giorgio Agamben (2009:1-24). Foucault departs from the conception of apparatus as an ideology, especially from the works of Louis Althusser (Agamben 2009:1-24). Foucault (2015:230) explicitly rejects the idea of an ideological state apparatus as a way to describe the various forms of power. Instead, he proposes the idea of *dispositif* (apparatus) as a way to speak about power (cf. Agamben 2009:2). Agamben further elaborates on the idea of apparatus by Foucault: ‘I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourse of living beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, juridical measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computer, cellular telephones and – why not language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient apparatus – one in which thousands and thousands of years ago primate inadvertently let himself be captured, probably without realizing the consequence

context, and travels to other places and contexts (Vakil 2010:274). Second, we draw attention to how the place of reception of Islamophobia is different from the place of its production (cf. Vakil 2010:274). The rules that determine and guide the place of production of traveling Islamophobic apparatuses are different from those that govern the place of its reception. In the specific contextual background of this article, the rules that govern the production of Yousafzai as an Islamophobic apparatus in Pakistan are different from the ones that make the reception of Yousafzai possible in India (Qazi & Shah 2017:1597-1612). Thus, there is a need to interrogate Islamophobia as an apparatus that travels without its context and field of production and is inserted into differently configured fields of reception which, to a large extent, reframes its sense and functions (Vakil 2010:274).

Third, Islamophobia is not limited to the unjustified fear of the Muslim subjects. Still, it is an effort to deny the Muslim the right to practice politics by governing Muslim subjects in a particular direction (Sayyid 2014: 19). Therefore, there is a need to look into the context of the Muslim social force when the fear of Islam happens irrespective of left-wing and right-wing politics or a majority and minority context of contemporary nation-states that make Islamophobia a global apparatus of power (Massoumi, Mills, & Miller 2017:234).

## **The Birth of Malala Yousafzai and the Ghost of Taliban**

The year was 2012. Malala Yousafzai was a school child in the Swath Valley of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. On October 9, while on her way to school, the Pakistan-based *Tehrik-e-Taliban*<sup>5</sup> militants attacked her.

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that he was about to face' (Agamben 2009:14). Islamophobia, thus as an apparatus, can travel without a context and find its meaning and produce subjects without the trace of its earlier inception in a particular setting to make it an exercise of power.

<sup>5</sup> 'Tehrik-e-Taliban literally means Taliban movement. In Afghanistan and elsewhere the movement is simply known as "the Taliban" whereas in Pakistan, it is often referred to by the full term. Taliban means "students" and is a reference to the origins of the movement when students in religious seminaries in Afghanistan and Pakistan abandoned their studies in 1991 to bring about some order based on Afghan tradition and a conservative interpretation of Islam in the wake of the chaos of a post-Soviet Afghanistan' (Kunnummal & Esack 2015:55).

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She suddenly became an international icon with the global media providing extensive coverage to the attack from multiple narrative positions (Thomas & Shukul 2015:225-241; Douglas 2017:297-311). Continued reports in the media about the changing health condition of Yousafzai made her one of the most famous school children in the world, and she soon became a global celebrity who lectured on the values of child education, global peace, and the rights of children (Choudhary 2016:3). According to Shazia Sadaf (2017: 857), ‘Malala’s construction as an icon is built on the premise of female education because the theme of liberating women has a special resonance in the global War on Terror discourse’.

We should view the reception of Yousafzai in different contexts alongside the international, national, and local discourse on the Taliban (Kunnummal & Esack 2015:50). There are political conditions that made the global political icon of Yousafzai emerge from a pre-given Islamophobic political framework that depends on a reified and demonic representation of the figure of the Taliban (Kunnummal & Esack 2015:54). It is the ghost of the Taliban that shapes and strengthens the victim’s selfhood in the girl child of Yousafzai (Khurshid & Guerrero 2016:157-172). As David Tyrer and Salman Sayyid (2012:355) put it, ‘[J]ust as ghosts are commonly represented as alternately unreal or terrifyingly hyperreal, Islamophobia represents Muslims as a ghostly presence, as either unreal or as a hyper-real interruption to our consciousness’. Without the ghostly (absent) presence of the Taliban, the figure of Yousafzai would be less influential as an Islamophobic apparatus to travel and circulate the world.

The emergence of the Taliban as a discourse in the global Islamophobic vocabulary, has a history with significant political consequences. For example, analyzing Laura Bush’s speech on November 7, 2001, just after the September 11, 2001 attacks against the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and Pentagon in Washington DC, Leila Abu-Lughod (2013:32) argues:

There was a constant slippage between the Taliban and terrorists so that they became almost one word – a kind of hyphenated monster identity: the ‘Taliban – and terrorists’. Then there was the blurring of the very separate causes of Afghan women’s suffering: Malnutrition, poverty, class politics, and ill health, and the more recent exclusion

under the Taliban from employment, schooling, and the joys of wearing nail polish.

In her speech, Bush also states that the Taliban used to divide what she calls the ‘civilised people’ whose hearts bleed for the women and children of Afghanistan, and the Taliban-terrorists, as she puts it, ‘who impose their world on the rest of us’ (Abu-Lughod 2013:32). These words have haunting resonances for anyone who studies colonial history and the use of women questioned in the colonial policy (Khoja-Moolji 2018:6; Arjana 2015:19-57)<sup>6</sup>.

## **Indian Discourse on Taliban: The Emergence of a New Muslim Metaphor**

The ghostly presence of the Taliban as a pretext to the new apparatus of traveling Islamophobia was already present when Yousafzai emerged in the Indian public sphere<sup>7</sup>. However, the way in which a Muslim figure becomes

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<sup>6</sup> Shenila Khoja-Moolji (2018:6) presents a very insightful account of how she saw the colonial representation of the Muslim woman in need of saving when she examined the contemporary empowerment campaigns to do the same: ‘Several years ago, I started examining the politics of race, gender, and religion in the deployment of the figure of the girl-in-crisis in girls’ education and empowerment campaigns such as #Girl Effect, #BringBackOurGirls, and #IamMalala. I was reminded of how this girl resembles her predecessor, the “Moslem woman” or “Musalman woman” who, too, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in colonial India, emerged as a figure to be saved from backward cultural practices of purdah, seclusion, early marriage, and religious superstitions. Colonial administrators, Christian missionaries, as well as Muslim social reformers – for different reasons – claimed that education would save/civilize/reform these women. Christian missionaries established schools for girls and initiated *zenana*-visitation programs. The colonial administration established book prizes, encouraging local authors to write books in the vernacular for girls. Muslim reformers wrote didactic texts to educate women and girls, guiding them away from “superstitious” rituals and toward the “correct” practices of Islam’.

<sup>7</sup> Talal Asad made the following remarks about the Indian public sphere after referring to the works of Partha Chatterjee: ‘[T]he publicly recognizable personality of the [Indian] nation is strongly mediated by representations of a reconstituted high-caste Hinduism, and those who do not fit into that personality are inevitably

an essential metaphor of evil in the political lexicon in India has a long history of which the Taliban is only a later development (Ansari 2016:xiv)<sup>8</sup>. Indian Muslims ideologically represent the fundamental anxiety of ‘the Indian nation’<sup>9</sup> in its inception, especially after the partition of India in 1947 (Pandey 1999:610). However, after the weakening of state-centric nationalism, the emergence of globalization, and the attacks of September 11, 2001,

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defined as religious minorities. This has often placed the “religious minorities” in a defensive position’ (Asad 2003:9).

<sup>8</sup> In the context of the colonial Indian subcontinent, ‘fanatic’ was one of the early political metaphors used to master the political mobilization of the Muslim community (Ansari 2016:74). The genealogy of the colonial political metaphor can be traced in the postcolonial Indian nation-state by examining the figure of a ‘terrorist’ and ‘fundamentalist’ (Ansari 2016:74). Ansari (2016:74) explains that ‘the “fanatic” is commonly defined, “normed”, as a person excessively, abnormally religious; s/he needs to be controlled. The “fanatic” looks backward to the “heathen”, or the “pagan”, one who believes in a different and “primitive” religion; s/he was to have been educated. The figure of the “fanatic” also looks forward to the “fundamentalist” or the “terrorist”; s/he can only be confined or killed. The “fanatic”, the “fundamentalist”, and the “terrorist” constantly appear in contemporary discourses representing attitudes that have to be condemned outright. However, the slow dissolve of the “heathen” and the “pagan” brings into relief the image of a refurbished “terrorist”, pointing to a metonymic displacement within the metaphoric. Metaphors for the non-modern “other” seem to have undergone a substitution whereby it has acquired an exclusive “Islamic” tenor. Examining the figure of the “fanatic”, as it evolved through colonial procedures and continues to “live” in various nationalist discourses is, hence, a necessity of our “secular-modern” times’.

<sup>9</sup> The relationship between Muslims and nationalism in India has a troubled history and comparatively different from other communities in India. As Gyanendra Pandey (1999:610) puts it: ‘The Hindus – or the majority of politically conscious Hindus, for there were in this view many who formed part of a large inert mass, and at least a few who were loyalists – were, in other words, nationalists first and foremost. Whether they were Hindu nationalists or secular nationalists was a subsidiary question. All Muslims were, however, Muslims. And the matter of political inactivity or inertia made little difference in this instance. Some Muslims were advocates of “Indian” nationalism, and hence “Nationalist Muslims”. The remainder...however, in town and country, north and south, handloom workshop or building site, modest hut or railway quarters were not likely to be supporters of Indian nationalism on account of their being Muslim’.

the ‘local’, ‘national’ Muslim threat started to shift into a global threat of the Taliban and eventually replaced many local variances of Islamophobic metaphors as ‘separatists’, ‘extremists’, ‘communalists’, and ‘anti-nationalists’ (Ahmad 2013a:328).

In the development of global politics, especially after September 11, 2001, specific Muslim signifiers became a powerful political metaphor<sup>10</sup> to denote anything that the global hegemonic powers oppose (Dabashi 2013:99). ‘[Muslim m]etaphor is cerebral. It has nothing to do with facts, defies reason, commands reaction, compliance, response’ (Dabashi 2013:99). The Taliban as a Muslim-related metaphor was one of the episodes in the recent history of global metaphor-making. It has evolved into a state where any form of religiously inspired political expression from the side of the Muslims that is unfavorable to the Indian nationalist imagination is named ‘Talibanism’<sup>11</sup>. Hamid Dabashi (2013:100) argues that these political metaphors are not risk-free words, a casual slippage, and just another instance of lazy use of language. On the contrary, it forms part of a subversive surplus that demands a radical interrogation of the most basic categories and arguments that these metaphors signify. Islamophobic metaphors thus deny the right of self-expression for Muslims as social agents and political subjects<sup>12</sup>.

The language of violence, especially after September 11, 2001, in the Indian public sphere, is that even the systemic Hindu right-wing violence (commonly referred to as ‘Hindutva violence’<sup>13</sup>) is now referred to as a form

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<sup>10</sup> Metaphor (one word for another) and metonymy (one term with another) are the two axis of a language in which a partial – however, unsuccessful – hegemonic fixation of the meaning is achieved (Stavrakakis 2007:69).

<sup>11</sup> It means that a political engagement with language reveals not simply ‘the constitution of meaning, however, terminology is poetical in the sense that repeated attention to it can draw attention to the enigmatic nature of language itself’ (Murray & Whyte 2011:7).

<sup>12</sup> The notion of epistemic Islamophobia by Ramon Grosfuguel (2012:24) is helpful in understanding the relationship between politics of language when we consider the Muslim agency as an ‘epistemological battleground about the definition of the priorities in the world today’.

<sup>13</sup> According to Aloysius (1994:1452), ‘Hindutva as a communalism of vertically constructed communities is the dominant [Hindu] caste’s response to the emergence of the Indian version of “class-struggle”. Setting up of the two religious monoliths [Muslim versus Hindu], thus, is intended to cover up and suppress the

of Talibanism. The twisted use of a Muslim-related political metaphor was not the sole agenda of Hindu right-wing parties to tarnish the image of Islam or Muslims. Talibanism also became a political metaphor for those who oppose the right-wing Hindutva violence and to prevent attacks against Muslim minorities<sup>14</sup>.

Several prominent Indian literary figures and various state award winners returned their Sahitya Akademi Awards<sup>15</sup> and other honors in reaction to the right-wing Hindutva repression of dissenting writers, Muslim minorities and *Dalits*<sup>16</sup>, in the wake of the electoral rise of a fascist government of the Hindu right-wing nationalist party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)<sup>17</sup> between 2014 and 2019. Yet, these same ‘enlightened dissidents’ started framing the growing rise of Hindu right-wing nationalism as a form of Talibanization. For example, Dinesh Abrol, a scientist and professor at

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growth of the class-like formations that have threatened the traditional solidarity time and again in modern history’.

<sup>14</sup> However, from an anti-caste position, the progressive left response to Hindutva is inadequate to understand the politics of Hindutva and has certain structural limitations. ‘Seeing the problem purely at the level of the Hindus vs. Muslims and the multiplying prayer meetings and *Sadhbhavana* [goodwill] committees may to some extent reduce rioting but the permeation of the society and polity by the poison of Hindutva cannot thus be contained...In short, the problem of Hindutva cannot be reduced to the issue of religion. Caste plays a major role in determining the politics of Hindutva and it is an important missing link that many leftist and Muslim commentators do not want to address while giving an explanation for anti-Muslim violence in India’ (Aloysius 1994:1452).

<sup>15</sup> The Sahitya Akademi Award is a literary honor which the Sahitya Akademi annually confers on writers of the most exceptional literary work published in any of the major Indian languages. The award was established in 1954 in India after independence.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Dalit’ means ‘broken people’ in the language of Marathi. Later, in the 1970s, the term ‘Dalit’ became a name to denote the social mobilization of the formerly untouchable mass to form a distinct political identity (Rawat & Satyanarayana 2016:2).

<sup>17</sup> Describing the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party or Indian People’s Party) as fascist is debatable even among members of the leftist parties (Vanaik 2017:18-21). Recent studies researching on the comparative perspectives of European fascism and Indian fascism, however, find significant similarities between these two types of fascism (Banaji 2016).

Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, argues: ‘[While] pluralism and diversity have been the basis of the survival of Indian culture, we should not forget that it can be *Talibanized* and become a breeding ground for intolerance’ (Hasan 2015; emphasis added). Thus, the progressive<sup>18</sup> Indian scientist speaks against those forces that spread violence in India while simultaneously using a global discourse of Muslim demonology<sup>19</sup>.

Similarly, Markandeya Katju, a Supreme Court judge and the former chairman of the Press Council of India<sup>20</sup>, expressed his anxieties about the growing Talibanization of the Indian society and the potential damage to secularism<sup>21</sup> in India, while commenting on the case of the right to wear a beard by a Muslim student (The Hindu 2009; emphasis added):

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Progressive’ in the context of India means a mixture of liberal, nationalist, socialist, and a center-left leaning political position, but not necessarily connected to any of the political parties. There are instances where some members of a movement call themselves progressive, but that does not give them a complete monopoly over the terminology.

<sup>19</sup> The ideology of Muslim demonology in the context of India is both local and global: ‘[W]hat is at stake is a demonization, and the Muslim in India is made to articulate an excess/lack in his/her selfhood. If the colonial is the other of modernity, the Muslim figures as the “other’s other”, both as the other of European and Indian forms of secular-modernity and nationhood’ (Ansari 2016:23).

<sup>20</sup> The Press Council of India is a quasi-judicial body that governs the conducts of print media. It was established in 1964 by the Parliament of India so as to regulate the conduct of the Indian print media.

<sup>21</sup> According to the study of Adcock (2014:171), ‘[o]ne critiques Indian nationalism for failing to transcend religious differences to produce a fully secular national unity; the other promotes a synthetic religious culture as an antidote to the exaggerated assertion of religious difference. In order to write the history of secularism in India, it has been necessary to reconsider the analytical assumptions on which these secularist narratives of history are based’. The problem with a broader survey on the academic debates on Indian secularism is summarized by Nandini Chatterjee (2011:2): “Indian secularism” always needs a long footnote – whether that consists of a revelation of India’s failure to live up to true secular ideals, a prescription for achieving them, a questioning of the ideals themselves or, as in recent academic literature, an attempt to historicize its meaning’. The scope of this article does not allow us to delve into a critical inquiry of secularism and nationalism in India from a critical Islamophobia studies perspective.

We don't want to have Taliban in the country. However, tomorrow a girl student may come and say that she wants to wear a burqa: Can we allow it?...Asserting that he was a secularist to the core, Justice Katju, however, said religious beliefs cannot be overstretched. 'I am a secularist. We should strike a balance between rights and personal beliefs. We cannot overstretch secularism', he added. Justice Katju made the observation while dismissing the student's petition [to wear a beard].

In the context of India, this description of the Taliban as a political metaphor signifies at least four pertinent issues<sup>22</sup>: First, the use of the Taliban as a political metaphor that serves to blame Talibanism is one way to externalize the crisis of the caste Hindu violent nationalism in India; second, it implicitly serves as a mechanism to stop the Muslim political voice from emerging and thereby framing it as a problem of violent assertion of global Muslim politics to denationalize the Muslim minority community; third, by putting the rise and growth of Hindu nationalism into a general framework of religious violence and in the context of the universal secular resistance, the Muslim minority politics also becomes another model of religious politics with the

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<sup>22</sup> The political criticism offered here is followed by the logic of contingency rather than the logic of necessity. The problem of externalization of the political crisis is developed by using the logic of necessity: '[Using] the logic of necessity, we can anticipate the fundamental character of social structures according to laws that are supposed to hold true for each and every case' (Smith 1998:103). The Taliban or various other forms of violent assertions of Islam – if we follow the logic of necessity – governs all the laws that are true for each and every case and there is no other contingent and historical reason for the self-proclaimed Indian public sphere to speak about the crisis of India other than its favorite nationalist/anti-nationalist binary as a state security paradigm. According to the proponents of the logic of necessity, 'it is always possible to distinguish between the just and the unjust, the legitimate and the illegitimate, but this can only be done from within a given tradition, with the help of standards that this tradition provides; in fact, there is no point of view external to all tradition from which one can offer a universal judgment' (Mouffe 1993:15). From a logic of contingency point of view, the externalization of the crisis of the Indian nation by placing all the blame on the Taliban (and Pakistan) as external causes, is actually a byproduct of the essentialist political analysis which follows the logic of necessity.

potential danger of violent extremism; and finally, the purity of the putative construction of the Indian nation is secured by the externalization of violence in India to the hands of foreign agents – invariably, its relatively large Muslim neighbor that is inevitably denied the honor of being named – with little or no scope of assuming internal responsibility for violence inside India in relation to its specific history and politics. A deconstructive reading of the progressive use of the metaphor of the Taliban breaks down the essentialist notions around Muslims, showing its dependence on the power it claims to oppose.

### **Left Politics, Islamophobia, and Reception of Malala in India**

Apart from focusing on the pattern of the Indian public sphere regarding the use of the Yousafzai image, this article considers the Indian progressive leftist position explicitly regarding Islamophobia in India. There are numerous studies on the problem of a right-wing construction of Islamophobia in India with respect to the aggression of Hindu nationalism, and it often left the scholarship on Islamophobia to the problematic Hindu right-wing nationalism (Anand 2010:265-270; Ahmad 2013b:234-252). However, the ways that the Indian progressive left politics have actively reproduced the global Islamophobic rhetoric have not yet been studied sufficiently<sup>23</sup> compared to the studies on the European left and Islamophobia (Massoumi *et al.*, 2017:240)<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> More recent studies on the crisis of left-led movements in South Asia are focused on the decline of class analysis, the rise of neoliberalism and the growth of right-wing politics after the 1980s (Chibber 2006:357-387). The rise of a post-structuralism and post-colonial theory was marked as one of the biggest challenges to the deterministic class analysis proposed by South Asian left movements (Chibber 2006:357-387). A new emerging set of scholarships try to understand the problem of caste in South Asia as a reason for the failure of the left-wing to produce an alternative liberative praxis (Kumar 2019a:7). However, the problem of the Muslim question and its relationship to the left-wing in India is an undertheorized area – even in a recent volume on the left-wing politics in South Asia (Kumar 2019b:1-12).

<sup>24</sup> The Islamophobic tendencies within the many strands of the global left-wing are not engaged with sufficiently in the growing literature on Islamophobia (Massoumi *et al.* 2017:240). A recent study on Islamophobia of the UK-based left-wing movements argues that ‘the pro-war left was not so very Left in the end, but

When the attack against Yousafzai hit the world stage, major leftist students and youth movements such as the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI)<sup>25</sup> and the Students' Federation of India (SFI)<sup>26</sup> of Kerala actively supported the educational campaign in solidarity with Yousafzai. The larger context where one needs to look into the campaign for Yousafzai in Kerala is the campaign against the alleged Talibanization of the Kerala society from a leftist perspective<sup>27</sup> as a pretext to the Islamophobic apparatus of Yousafzai. As a continuation of the larger Indian scenario, there was already a pre-established framework on Talibanization which was prevalent in the state of Kerala to ease the reception of Yousafzai.

For example, in 2010, when a college teacher's hand was chopped off for allegedly insulting Prophet Muhammad in Kerala, it was immediately described as an act of Talibanism even before completing the Police investigation's due process<sup>28</sup>. The CPI(M) Kerala State Secretary Pinarayi Vijayan,

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it was more or less united on its suspicion of religion and in particular of Islam' (Massoumi *et al.* 2017:240). However, it seems that these authors want to focus on the Islamophobia of the Left, not as a norm but only as a deviation.

<sup>25</sup> Established in 1980, the DYFI is the youth wing, affiliated to the communist party, commonly known as CPI (Marxist) or CPI(M). It is the largest communist youth wing in India.

<sup>26</sup> SFI, established in 1970, is the student wing of CPI(M). SFI is the largest left-wing student party in the country.

<sup>27</sup> The relationship between Muslims and the Left parties in Kerala was summarized by Bidyut Chakrabarty (2014:44) in his study on the parliamentary left in Kerala: 'A small faction of Muslims joined the CPI (Communist Party of India) primarily because of its anti-communal stance in the past; nonetheless, Muslims as a community never aligned with the parliamentary left presumably because of its failure to address the communal issue especially in the context of their rising economic importance due to their access to petro dollars'.

<sup>28</sup> The incident was narrated by Nandagopal Menon (2010:22): 'On the morning of 4 July [2010], a group of assailants cut off the hand of T.J. Joseph, a professor of Malayalam at Newman College in Thodupuzha (Idukki district), close to his home in Moovattupuzha (Ernakulum district). Joseph had been in the eye of a storm in March this year after a Malayalam question paper he drafted for an internal examination carried a question allegedly denigrating the Prophet Mohammed. There were widespread protests and he was booked in a criminal case for hurting religious sentiments. Most of the people arrested in connection with the attack on Joseph were members or sympathizers of the Popular Front of

for example, termed the attack against the professor as a ‘Taliban model’ (Menon 2010:22). Moreover, the party’s Chief Minister, V.S. Achuthananthan, interpreted the attack as part of an attempt to establish an ‘Islamic state’ in Kerala (Menon 2010:22)<sup>29</sup>.

For decades, Kerala has been notorious for its political violence and the related culture of politically and ideologically inspired murders. The approximate number of incidents of political violence that include murder and stabbing that happened between the 1970s and 2015, was 4,000, which included around 200 murders (Chaturvedi 2015:164). While most of the violence occurred between the workers of CPI(M) and right-wing Hindutva groups like *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS)<sup>30</sup>, there is no similar amount of violence connected to the entire spectrum of Muslim movements (Chaturvedi 2015:166). Yet, at the same time, Muslim minorities are, and continue to be the victims of the major state violence in the history of post-colonial Kerala (Punathil 2016:187-213)<sup>31</sup>.

Even though both religious and secular forms of violence had long been part of the political culture of Kerala, a predominantly left-led CPI(M) government used anti-terrorism laws like the Unlawful Activities Prevention

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India (PFI), an organisation formed in 2006 to champion the rights of Muslims and other marginalised sections’. A recent study has found that ‘[t]he PFI is...active in more than 22 Indian states, with headquarters in New Delhi. Its stated objectives are the political empowerment of Indian Muslims and the exposure of Hindu nationalism. The PFI was partly a response to the political grievances of Indian Muslims following the political failure of Muslim and secular elites to protect religious minorities from attacks by Hindu nationalists’ (Emmerich 2019:459).

<sup>29</sup> The left-led coalition’s Chief Minister, Achuthananthan, drew attention to the PFI’s alleged plan to turn Kerala into a ‘Muslim majority state’ in the coming twenty years (Menon 2010:22).

<sup>30</sup> RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or National Volunteer Corps) is the upper-caste Hindu ultra-nationalist group of India, formed in 1925 and inspired by the rise of European fascism after the First World War (Vanaik 2017:42).

<sup>31</sup> For example, in Beemapalli, the Muslim fishing community residential area, seven Muslims, including a 16-year-old boy, got killed by the police of the CPI(M)-led leftist government on May 17, 2009 (Kunnummal, Sadique, & Rehman 2017:6-7).

Act (UAPA)<sup>32</sup>, based on the false threat of Islamic militancy in the form of the Taliban (Waseem 2016:81-82)<sup>33</sup>. It is also important to note that when the Indian parliament passed UAPA, it was the non-parliamentary left and few Muslim, *Dalit*, and human rights organizations that spoke out against these anti-terrorism laws and their impact on the poor, marginalized, and religious minorities. However, the leftist parliamentary parties supported these draconian laws (Shankar 2009:191). Most of the time, the victims of the anti-terror laws are religious minorities, especially Muslim, regional, political movements against the coercive apparatus of the Indian state, tribals, and *Dalits* (Verma 2004:213).

The public representation of the Taliban in South India is invoked to mark the Muslim subjectivity in a particular way. Along with this, the threat of the Taliban functions as a tool to prevent the political assertion from Muslim minorities and reduce the Muslim community's political participation in social justice struggles. The traveling of Yousafzai as an Islamophobic apparatus, helped to further the agenda of the anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination against the Muslim minority in the state of Kerala.

## **A Historical View of Gender, Education, and Community Development in Kerala**

When Yousafzai was imported to Kerala as an Islamophobic apparatus to catalyze the rhetoric of a Muslim girl's right to education, it immediately erased at least two sociopolitical factors to impose a global Islamophobic

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<sup>32</sup> Immediately after the attack of September 11, 2001, by following the USA PATRIOT Act, the Indian government implemented an anti-terrorism law, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), to give more power to the Indian security establishment to fight against terrorism (Jones 2012:56). After two years, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) was introduced as an effective anti-terrorism law by replacing POTA (Shankar 2009:127). There are many studies on the use and abuse of these anti-terrorism laws by the state agencies. The mass incarceration of the Muslim youth – without legal procedures and due process – was one of the major drawbacks of these anti-terrorism laws (Shankar 2009:190).

<sup>33</sup> Under the UAPA, an anti-terror law, normal bail is permanently denied, and it is the duty of the suspect to prove that they are not guilty of the charge sheet given by the police (Waseem 2016:11).

apparatus to the context of a local Muslim community: 1) The role of policies of colonial and post-colonial governments in producing the educational under-development of Muslim women in particular, and Muslims in general; and 2) the complex social agency of Muslim women in the region and their struggle for a better living and education, both inside and outside the community. The Islamophobic apparatus as Yousafzai thus became another instance of disciplining Muslims for local left movements and governments.

The root cause of the educational backwardness of the Muslims of Kerala is not solely based on religion. It rather lies in the historical relationship of the caste system and the prevailing agrarian system. The so-called lower caste communities and social groups faced educational discrimination, especially in Malabar during colonial and post-colonial times (Mungekar, Munda, Vijayanand, Rameshan, Sivaraman, Nair, Gopinathan Nair, & Irudaya 2008:56). The majority of the early generations of Muslims in the Malabar region was low-caste/untouchable tenants, agricultural laborers, or domestic workers. Muslims' social and economic status reduced them to one of the most marginalized communities of Kerala (Mungekar *et al.* 2008:57). However, historically the Muslims in Kerala used religion and their caste/class status as a source for social mobility and a creative tool to fight social inequality. Thus, unlike the contention of the Yousafzai campaigners, it is not religion alone<sup>34</sup> which determines the educational under-development of the Muslims of Kerala (Oomen 2009:31).

Rosnani Hashim (2004:ix) argues that historically it was traditional religious education that was a part of the indigenous Muslim communities<sup>35</sup>,

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<sup>34</sup> According to Filippo and Caroline Osella (2008:317), 'Kerala's Muslims (like Kerala's Hindus and Christians) associate religious reformism with a self-consciously "modern" outlook; the promotion of education; rallying of support from the middle classes'.

<sup>35</sup> *Maktabs*, *othupallis*, *dars*, and *madrasas* are the main institutions of Muslim education in Kerala (Haneefa 2012:6). *Othupalli* is a form of primary school for Islamic and Arabic education for Muslim children. This indigenous education system also had similarities with other religious communities. Along with certain temples, there were *othannar madam* in which Hindu children are taught to recite Sanskrit *slokas* (hymns). The same methods were adopted by the early Muslims. That was how the *othupalli* got their name (Pasha 1995:136). *Maktabs*, *othupallis*, and *madrasas* were a part of the Muslim women's education (Haneefa 2012: 54). *Dars* is an Arabic term which is usually translated with 'lesson' (Haneefa

while secular, liberal education came about through colonization and modernization in the Asian context. The colonial education system introduced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, replaced community-initiated indigenous Muslim school systems that led to a seismic shift in the history of the community development of the Muslims of Kerala (Shabirali 2005:60)<sup>36</sup>. For centuries, Muslim women participated in Kerala's indigenous Muslim education system (Banu 2007:117). The colonial record serves as evidence that the Muslims constituted only one-third of the total population in Malabar, but had the largest number of indigenous schools (Banu 2007:119). The study finds that 'the weakening of the Muslim women's education and the indigenous Muslim education systems, in general, was due to the century-long conflict between the Muslim community and the European invaders in the Indian Ocean' (Banu 2007:228).

There were two responses from the Muslim community with regards to the newly-introduced colonial education system. First, when the British educational policy persuaded the Muslim community to distance itself from the indigenous Islamic education system and forced them to adapt to the colonial education system, the majority of Muslims resisted the attempt of the colonial education and tried to preserve the indigenous education system (Shabirali 2005:60). Shareena Banu (2007:230) observes that during the colonial times,

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2012:53). *Dars* is quite unique in its operations and it serves as a hostel education system inside a mosque with the support of the community around the mosque (Haneefa 2012:53). Unlike other models of education, Muslim girls are not allowed in the *dars* system of indigenous Muslim education (Haneefa 2012:54). It is mostly due to a particular interpretation of the Shaf'i Islamic legal school, which is the most dominant school of Islamic law among Kerala Muslims, who had the opinion that it is better if Muslim women were to pray at home rather than at a mosque, and this led to the prohibition of Muslim women's entry into the mosques (Katz 2013:201).

<sup>36</sup> Chatterjee argues that colonization involves 'assuming sympathy with the unfree and oppressed womanhood of India, [through which] the colonial mind was able to transform this figure of the Indian woman into a sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of a country' (Chatterjee 1993:118).

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[i]n those days, the [majority of the Muslim] community members looked at the English language as *Naraka Basha* (the language of hell), and the [upper caste Hindu oriented] Malayalam script was considered as *Aryanezhutu* (writing of Aryan invaders). It was a time when western education was considered [inappropriate] for the Muslim men and it was even worse for a woman, to go out of their house...for modern [colonial] education.

There is another section of Muslim religious movements that adopted the colonial education system and campaigned for the participation of the Muslim community in the colonial education system from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Banu 2007:227). However, the colonial state discriminated against the Muslim community by forcing reform on them through modern schooling. One example is that during colonial times, the number of schools run by the government was higher in Trivandrum and Cochin than in Malabar, where Muslim minorities majorly resided. This also affected the educational progress of Malabar in general and of Muslim women in particular, from the time of colonialism (Mungekar *et al.* 2008:58).

Muslim women went through a double marginalization during colonial times, even after they entered modern colonial schooling. Banu (2007:230) refers to Ayshumma, one of the first generations of Muslim women to enter the modern colonial school system in 1933, and who became a schoolteacher in 1946. In the memoir published in Malayalam<sup>37</sup> – *Kathibinde Makal Schoolil Povukayo? (Does the Maulavi's daughter go to school?)* – Ayshumma narrates that

for the orthodox section [of the Muslim community], girls are not supposed to be educated. If they learned English, they are outcaste from the religion. If it is a girl, her place is in the lower echelons of hell. Muslims were forbidden, those days, to speak grammatically correct Malayalam. Learning to write the Aryan language was *haram*

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<sup>37</sup> The autobiography of Malala, *I am Malala* (Yousafzai & Lamb 2013), functioned as a way to redeposit old colonial narratives over the rich and varied lives of the autobiographies of the Muslim women in the colonized societies of different parts of the world in order to foster what Dabashi calls a post September 11, 2001 culture of 'collective amnesia' (Dabashi 2006).

(forbidden). I can only recollect those days as the *irundakaalam* (Dark Ages) (Banu 2007:230).

Muslim women went through different modes of power and subjectivity after the introduction of the colonial education system. The marginalization of the indigenous model of schooling by the colonial power was the establishment of a new mode of patriarchal power under the pretext of Islamic reform (Banu 2007:230). However, during colonial times, the girls who were brave enough to go through the colonial education system were not supported by the colonial government. While there were boys-only schools after the third form – and few girls went to study at the boys-only schools – girls mingling with boys were regarded as inappropriate (Banu 2007:232). Thus, historically the body of Muslim women became the yardstick of the resistance against colonial culture imperialism (Banu 2007:232). The marginalization of Muslim women from the educational sphere had a colonial legacy. Still, it also connected to the patriarchal nature of anti-colonial nationalism, which placed the burden of the purity of indigenous culture on the bodies of colonized women (Chatterjee 1993:33-157).

During the post-colonial times, most Muslim communities synthesized both the indigenous education system and post-colonial education system by moving away from the early rejectionist position on modern colonial education (Haneefa 2012:122). Following the political independence of India from the British colonial rule, there was a steady increase of women and especially Muslim women's participation in education in Kerala (Shabirali 2005:67). In the subsequent decades of the post-colonial state, Kerala successfully solved the first level education problems, and the gender ratio was well balanced across communities and social groups (Mungekar *et al.* 2008:40). The Muslim movements opposed to the modern education system in the colonial period, started to reimagine themselves to changing conditions of the educational landscape, succeeding in the formation of the post-colonial state of Kerala in 1956 (Mungekar *et al.* 2008:40).

The largest Muslim organization led by a male-only *'ulama* (religious scholars) organization, the *Samasta Kerala Jam'iyatul Ulama* (All Kerala Council of Religious Scholars), started in 1926, and now runs more than 9,000 *madrasas* with around 1.2 million students and 100,000 registered teachers (Abdelhalim 2016:144-145). Most Muslim organizations, irrespec-

tive of a 'sectarian' or ideological affiliation, have also established engineering colleges, medical colleges, arts and science colleges, and religious schools for both boys and girls (Osella & Osella 2008:32)<sup>38</sup>.

The problem of women's participation is not a major challenge faced by the Muslim women of Kerala, as the supporters of Yousafzai in the public sphere of Kerala want to suggest. There were two different reasons for the post-colonial underdevelopment of the Muslim women of Kerala: The first was the regional discrimination of Malabar, which is one of the most important reasons for the educational under-development of Kerala Muslims in general, and Muslim women in particular. An overview of the State Development Report, published by the Planning Commission, Government of India in 2008, shows<sup>39</sup> that the Trivandrum region was historically developed in comparison to the area of Malabar (Mungekar *et al.* 2008:32). It is important to note that Malabar is the region where the Muslim community resides on a large scale. Therefore, the core problem facing the Muslims of Kerala is not the educational participation of women, as the campaigners of Yousafzai want to suggest. It is the rising unemployment and underdevelopment based on regional discrimination that the Kerala Muslims face, where 18 percent of the educated men and 71 percent of the educated women remain unemployed across various religious and caste communities (Mungekar *et al.* 2008:33).

The girl's right to education using the Islamophobic apparatus of Yousafzai, traveled to Kerala by erasing these regional and historical realities and imposing a specific version of oppressed Muslim women narrative over the lived reality of a Muslim minority community. The discussion of the history of Muslim women's education in the region, when compared to the other Indian states, shows that gender consciousness and the participation of Muslim women in the field of education in the region of Kerala is far better than in other parts of India (Kiliyamannil 2018:192-193; Robinson 2007:

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<sup>38</sup> However, there is a visible perception among these organizations around the fact that they are not satisfied with the direction of the growing public participation of Muslim women, especially after the nineties (Osella & Osella 2008:329). The role of educated Muslim women is increasingly restricted to the confines of the family by upholding the religious morality and the pedagogy of the children (Osella & Osella 2008:329).

<sup>39</sup> This report – one of the comprehensive surveys about the status of education and development in Kerala – contains a survey of Kerala's development from the time of the formation of the state in 1956.

840). The instrumentalization of Yousafzai to speak about the lack of educational development of Kerala is to displace the responsibility of the post-colonial/neoliberal state and the role of the state and government in developing the education of Muslim women. It also intends to blame the putatively excessive religiosity of Muslims. Islamophobia thus became an effective tool in the hands of the state and government to displace the political struggles of the marginalized Muslims for sustainable development.

## **Conclusion**

There are two broader political lessons that can be learned from understanding the political function of traveling Islamophobia in the context of India. First, the educational campaign in Kerala in the name of Yousafzai was not invoked to change the educational marginalization of the Muslim minority community, but to challenge the attempt of Muslims to organize for political rights. That includes educational rights and an equal share in economic resources and state power. Second, by invoking the fear of the Taliban in the public sphere of India, the Islamophobic apparatuses attempted to suppress Muslim political aspirations for a new imagination of Muslim development politics after the globalization of the Indian economy and the global events of September 11, 2001.

The Indian context of traveling Islamophobia reveals an essential dimension of global Islamophobia. In other words, the traveling of Islamophobia as an apparatus forms the uniqueness of global Islamophobia. It is not sufficient to speak about global Islamophobia as a global project without contextualization. The traveling of Islamophobia as an apparatus of power and subjectification demands more contextual reading. Sometimes even the site of the resistance of Islamophobia – in our case, a section of the Indian left movements – in various global contexts wittingly or unwittingly forms the global project of Islamophobia. However, by and large, traveling Islamophobic apparatuses have the capacity to thwart the Muslim political assertion in a particular hegemonic direction.

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*Traveling Islamophobia in the Global South*

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