

Yusuf Desai: Response to Government Green Paper 4th June 2018.

My personal response to both Green Paper and to Muslim leadership's take on or their perceptions of what social cohesion initiative should look like is as follows:

There are real problems within the Muslim communities in the UK and elsewhere. There are voices of extremism at the very root of these communities and of course there are those that do denounce extremism and violence. The commonality in both these voices is that they do genuinely believe that they are duty bound to correct the "decadent" and permissive society of the West, more so in the UK where they are living. They strongly believe that it is their religious and moral obligation to perform this noble act (combating West's permissive society). This "mind-set" is entrenched in the monopoly of their imagined righteous belief system and more importantly belief in oft repeated glorified Islam that conquered the world. The mind-set remains convinced that it is their sacred obligation and duty to dominate ownership of righteousness over the British society's liberal/secular and democratic values.

Muslims by and large wherever they live find it very difficult to assume a minority status in a majority non-Islamic society. There is no concept of Muslims living as a minority in the UK even though knowing the Muslim population of the UK is less than 3% population of UK.

Muslims in UK are from diverse ethnic, cultural, language and sectarian backgrounds. The thinking described above is not confined to anyone specific group but is consistent and prevalent right across the Muslim communities wherever they live or whatever sect they follow.

Scholars and political/media analysts and social scientist have advocated that deprivation, social exclusion, discrimination, high rate of unemployment amongst Muslim youth, under achievers at schools are the main causes of radicalisation and extremism including lack of social integration and cohesion. That would be quite normal if society on the whole was observed through the same lens. I believe, for the very same scholars and social scientist once the Muslim mind-set is academically and politically analysed and understood then only will they be able to see beyond their academic identified causes and it may actually be a game changer for them to apply new phenomenon to address the issues not thought of or imagined before.

The general 'sense of alienation', or 'deprivation' or 'social inequality' that social scientists normally refer to, in reality for Muslim is compounded into one and only sense, their inability or due to circumstances not being able to establish "The Will of God", where they live which then leads to resorting to self-imposed isolation to preserve Muslim communities' "exclusionist identity". This then is followed by creation of parallel systems defined by its imagined belief system and faith. Establishment of such traditional power houses leads to demands for separation from main stream societies under the guise of faith schools, marriage institutes (Sharia Councils), separate judiciary for personal laws (inheritance and divorce), separate independent Islamic banking system (interest free loans and savings) and faith-based community structures which promote segregation of sexes and genders. I believe, Muslims do generally take advantage of our liberal attitudes in the UK,

knowing full well that under secular democratic governance their equality and citizenship rights would be upheld and protected.

Alas, the establishment and the policy makers have not shown any real seriousness to tackle these extremely serious Muslim community issues at its roots. Our liberal outlook and attitudes have lacked foresight in allowing such parallel systems to evolve and establish a foot hold and grow into phantoms which may be difficult to demolish, and that which has provided a legitimate cause “celebre” to Muslim community to live outside the law of the land and undermine the very real principles of freedom, equality and individual rights. A real tool of radicalising process giving preferences to live under the “Divine law” rather than man made laws.

Inquiries and its subsequent report findings all seem to end up with same old narrative about social exclusion and all its allied clichés and innuendos. Subsequent Green Paper/ White Paper or even policies developed from time to time remain focused on social causes and a need to calibrate existing social provision platforms and departments to become preferentially sensitive to demands of so called “marginalised communities” with emphasis on social cohesion and multicultural aspects of inclusive societies, as though somehow that would solve all social cohesion problem. This in fact has lead to muddled and confused mainstream British societies whose goodwill and liberal attitudes have been compromised and now normal British societies experience neglect, marginalisation and preferentially overlooked.

Higher education establishments have also lagged behind in a real academic response to the new phenomena experienced since arrival of Muslim communities in UK. Research think tanks could have been established to address the Muslim mind-set so that future Muslim generations could easily have become part of the mainstream society while maintaining their faith identity. This gap has forced the government to pass new legislations in order to contain the problems of extremists' violence and terror, but in no way addressed the root causes or provide a long-term solution for the wellbeing, safety and security of the British nation as a whole.

Some recommendations for way forward:

Let us be honest to ourselves and not fudge what the real issues are? Growing extremist and terrorist activity in the UK and Europe is only a mirror image of what is happening within the Muslim communities across the world. Power struggle in the Muslim communities is beginning to identify a common enemy that of democracy and secular world (The West in general). Analysts have identified a struggle from within the Muslim community, that of Old theological order (Non-violent) and the new concept of Jihad. This may be true but only superficially, because everyone is drinking from the same well. If the West or the UK establishments reads too much into such analysis then there is the likelihood of developing myopic understanding of the problem.

For the last two decades, having lived and experienced within these Muslim communities in the UK, I strongly recommend an academic establishment unit specifically to dissect, analyse and understand the Muslim mind-set. A need to inspect and enforce creation of modern Islamic literature to address the following key issues:

- Divine right of Muslims to establish Khilafat (Sharia law).
- Religious obligation to tackle liberal permissive society.
- Self-imposed alienation and segregation to maintain centuries old status quo.
- Ghettoized communities becoming breeding ground for radicalisation.
- Madrasah system established to clone future generation to remain ‘exclusive’ and eradicate any influence of secular system of education and values of majority mainstream society.
- New literature to educate the communities to understand that it is “Textual” obligation to be part of the mainstream society (Social cohesion).
- Years of Interfaith initiatives and dialogues have not penetrated core fibre of Muslim communities due to lack of real academic and scholarly input.

In conclusion, I would very strongly recommend review of current Green Paper plans and strategies to address social cohesion in order to combat UK and global radicalization issues and threats to state security. There is little precedent for the scale of action needed over the next decade. The dangers are clear and immediate to those who are involved in safeguarding life and limb and wellbeing of British society. The battle to protect the democratic systems and human rights lacks definition in the minds of many, which may explain the growing gap between what needs to be done to secure the future and what is being done.

Launching and carrying through the initiatives and policies needed to safeguard the British economy and British society will place extraordinary demands on political leadership and extremely high premiums on imaginative policy makers. The challenge now is for Educators, tabloid and communication media collectively to educate and emancipate the so called marginalized Muslim communities. Equally mainstream media to play a positive role by reporting and informing the public on the success of such initiatives that provide the necessary impetus and positive perceptions for all the communities to be participatory, sharing and caring for the wellbeing of all members of the society.

Britain can play a leading role by creating an environment of stability and progress through some hard and difficult choices so that by the end of next decade the dye will pretty well be cast. Communities of nations will have rallied, reversed and completely halted the threatening trends of religious and sectarian extremism, terrorism and mayhem. The ultimate rationale for such a massive social change will depend less on emotion and more on reason.