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Re-identifying Muslimah Identity in Sabeeha Rehman's *Threading My Prayer Rug*

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Abstract

Diaspora denotes people or a group of people who have been separated from their homeland and are resettled in a foreign land. Migration is a complex process; it is of different types depending on whether it is voluntary or forced due to enslavement, war, famine, or some other natural or man-made disaster. Globalization has influenced and increased the prospect of migration all over the world. As a result, people are more open to migrating to different corners of the world, especially for work and a better lifestyle. Against this background, the paper deals with migration and the resultant diaspora experienced by Sabeeha Rehman, a Muslim migrant woman from Pakistan to America. Her memoir, *Threading My Prayer Rug: One Woman's Journey from Pakistani Muslim to American Muslim* (2016), deals with the struggles of Muslim women's confrontation and assimilation into a completely alien democratic environment of the West where the followers of different faiths exist simultaneously. Thus, this paper highlights the various experiences Sabeeha faces as a Muslimah or Muslim woman on religious and cultural fronts and her constant battle to retain her religious identity in a non-Muslim (*dar ul-harb*) country.

Keywords: *Muslimah Diaspora, Muslimah Identity, Muslimah Immigrants, Muslimah or Muslim Women, Pakistani-American Memoirs, Religion of Islam.*

Introduction

The etymology of the word 'diaspora' indicates that it originates from two different Greek words '*speiro*' which means to 'sow or scatter' mainly seeds and '*dia*' which means 'over' and thus, the word diaspora in Greek combinedly means 'the dispersion of seeds', "Etymologically, two words '*speiro*' (to sow or scatter) and '*dia*' (over) form the term 'diaspora.' Diaspora is a Greek loanword which is the equivalent of 'dispersion' or 'scattering of seeds'" (Ali et al. 4). In the ancient times, Greeks ventured out to acquire new lands "Greeks were known for their penchant for migration to conquer lands for colonising purposes; as such the term diaspora was used for those citizens of dominant city-states who migrated on such mission" (Ali et al. 4).

The term diaspora over the years:

has undergone transformation by acquiring a wider meaning which transcends the historically known Jewish movement covering movement of other ethno-national migrants for whatever purpose from their land of origin to a foreign country and taking up residence, provided a linkage between the migrants and their countries of origin and other dispersed groups of the country is maintained and there is a longing, hope or desire to return in future to the land of origin (Mideast and North Africa Encyclopedia), and/or build a nation-state of their own in the homeland. (Ali et al 4)

Diaspora also stands to symbolize people of same ethnic origin or nation referred as 'ethno-national' who have undergone mass migration either forcibly or voluntarily and, therefore, share a common experience of rootlessness and identity dissociation because of their being away from homeland:

Going by this traditional 'ethnonational' construction which is associated with Gabriel Sheffer, diaspora may then be described as a voluntary or forcible migration of large group sharing common national or ethnic identity from their land of origin to another country and taking up residence for any purpose. It is not a linear movement in the sense of migration from a developing to developed nations but could also take the reverse . . . (Ali et al. 4)

Diaspora, originally relates to Jews who were dispersed from their Biblical land of Israel and settled among nations occupied by gentiles (non-Jews) under the forced exclusion by Babylonians and Romans in 607 B. C. and 70 CE, and also encompasses the experience of "enslaved Africans shipped to the United States between the 1600s and 1800s, Irish victims of the great famine of the mid-1800s, and Palestinians made refugees with the creation of the modern state of Israel in the mid-20th century" (Rane).

Muslims too have undergone mass migration, especially, the 1960s onwards from Muslim-ruled countries which denotes the hub of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) to *dar ul-harb* (non-Muslim ruled state) in search of better life and facilities:

Interest in Islam and how Muslims organise themselves within the so-called Western world has largely stemmed from the low of Muslim immigration since the 1960s and the 1970s (Loobuyck, Debeer, & Meier, 2013). Many of these immigrants have come to these new lands in the hope of making a better life for themselves economically, or to escape the political or religious pressures of their homeland (Lebl, 2014). (Syed and Pio 1)

Method

Historically, Muslims are looking forward to avenues to raise their living standards; they are even ready to leave their *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam) and migrate to the West, that is, *dar ul-harb* (the land of disbelief) to avail the opportunities of development with the promise of a better and reliable future for themselves as well as for their coming generations. Over a while Muslims have settled down in non-Muslim ruled countries (*dar ul-harb*), and even are ready to live with people of different faiths



rather than just sticking to their community, unlike the medieval times where the classical interpretation of the Qur'an considered it a sin for Muslims to live in a non-Muslim country (*dar ul-harb*) not following the laws of Sharia. "Among the more uncompromising and authoritative fatwas on the issue is that of Ahmad bin Yahya al-Wansharisi (d. 1508), who could not envision an authentic Islamic life in the absence of Islamic law implemented by a Muslim political authority, stating that a Muslim is not permitted to live beyond the boundaries of Islam where he/she may be subjected to non-Muslim laws. He condemned Muslims who accepted Mudejar status under non-Muslim rule, asserting that Muslims whose lands were conquered by non-Muslims, as in the case of al-Andalus, are obliged to migrate to Muslim-ruled lands irrespective of whether the former may be more just and conducive to one's worldly prosperity and wellbeing than the latter" (Rane). Against this background the present paper deals with migration and the resultant diaspora as experienced by Sabeeha Rehman, a Muslim migrant woman from Pakistan to America. Her memoir, *Threading My Prayer Rug: One Woman's Journey from Pakistani Muslim to American Muslim* (2016), is replete with struggles of Muslim women's confrontation and assimilation into a completely alien democratic environment of the West where the followers of different faiths exist simultaneously. Further, the paper underscores the various experiences Sabeeha faces as a Muslim woman on religious and cultural fronts and her constant battle to retain her religious identity in a non-Muslim (*dar ul-harb*) country.

Results and Discussions

This paper focuses on the journey of migration and the experience of diaspora undergone by Sabeeha Rehman (1953) and captured in the form of a memoir, *Threading My Prayer Rug: One Woman's Journey from Pakistani Muslim to American Muslim*. She is a Pakistani-based American Muslim woman who underwent first-hand experience of migration, diaspora, settlement and re-identification in the West. Her memoir, *Threading My Prayer Rug: One Woman's Journey from Pakistani Muslim to American Muslim* gives insights into her subjective experiences as a Muslim woman of the East- *dar al-Islam*, and her re-settlement in the US (*dar ul-harb*), the problems of adjustment she faced in the West, especially post 9/11, besides her being witness to the era of Islamophobia that changed the perspective of people towards Muslims. The rage in the eyes of the residents of the US post 9/11 made Muslim diaspora to submerge their religious identity or forsake it altogether so as to avoid becoming targets of violence and racial abuses that Muslims were subjected to post 9/11 due to the branding of Islam as a religion that preaches violence:

"I stopped talking about Islam altogether. I stopped defending, I stopped mentioning, I stopped praying, I stopped being Muslim. I separated myself entirely from that identity."¹ After 9/11, Muslim-Americans like Shawna believed that the only way they could be presumed innocent of a crime they were not even remotely related to was by renouncing their Islamic identity. This Islamic identity is seen incompatible with one's American identity. Muslim-Americans have been racialized to represent a 'dangerous' and 'uncivilized' group. This racialization is not based on skin color but a religious



identity. Several American establishments and structures, such as the government and media, have contributed to racializing Muslims. (Tariq 1)

Sabeeha Rehman encountered similar circumstances of brutal abuse which forced Muslim diaspora including herself to hide his/her religious identity so as to avoid becoming targets of violence, "Am I safe in here? Do they know I'm a Muslim? Can they tell by the look on my face that I'm one of them? Don't look them in the eye. I lowered my gaze and walked into the crowd, making my way through the meeting hall, up the aisle, through the rows of people waving posters saying, 'No Mosque at Ground Zero.' I found my way to the back, out of sight of the protestors, and took a seat. I am surrounded by hate" (Rehman 1).

She opens her memoir giving glimpses into her upbringing in a conservative Muslim society in Rawalpindi, Pakistan in 1953 when women were treated unequal and inferior to men and considered mostly incapable to earn and confined to menial jobs at home. Sex segregation is a common scenario and thus, public spaces even education institutions follow sex segregation. Women are considered as good at maintaining household and rearing children. If they want to join a profession, professions such as teaching and ladies doctor are mostly reserved for women as men are considered worthy of the intellectual and heavy tasks:

My mother was a housewife, and that was the norm in Pakistan in the fifties and sixties. Among working women, the leading professions were teacher and doctor. And that is because of the segregation of the sexes. All-girl schools had to have women teachers, and women wanted a "lady doctor." I was raised to be a housewife—the perfect housewife—like my mother. Mummy taught me to sew, embroider, knit, and cook. By age twelve, I was sewing my clothes and knitting my sweaters. (Rehman)

They are treated as inferior who are destined to get married and have children as producing children is the only genuine vocation considered fit for women, "It is through motherhood that woman fully achieves her physiological destiny; that is her 'natural' vocation, since her whole organism is directed towards the perpetuation of the species (Beauvoir 537). Education is thought to be of no use to women and as such they are provided only religious and basic education which are considered as essential for them to perform household duties and rear and provide oral education to children, "In Pakistan, the education level is very low" (qtd. in Mustafa, et al. 1747). Further women face severe opposition if they try to enter into a profession as marriage and household are considered as the only profession worthy for women. Moreover, women are only encouraged to read of the Qur'an:

. . . only 46% females of Pakistan were literate in 2011 that increased to 47% in 2012. This shows the poor condition of literacy in females of Pakistan that not even half of the female population of the country knows to read and write their names. In rural areas, 49% population was literate in 2011 out of which 63% were males and only 35% were females in 2011, which in 2012 increased to 64% literate rural population of which 64% males are literate and 35% females are literate. (Mustafa, et al. 1747-1748)



Sabeeha Rehman like other women of Pakistan grew up with the notion of getting married to a suitable man and to live a conservative life devoted to looking after her family and children. Confining to the customs of Pakistani patriarchal society, Sabeeha Rehman too pursued basic education like other women of Pakistan so as to keep up with the customs of conservative patriarchal society where the worth of a woman is measured only by her marital status:

. . . had been mentally prepared to get married ever since I passed the milestone of getting my bachelor's degree. As far as I was concerned, I was ready . . . With my bachelor's degree in hand, my education was complete. The next step was marriage, and nothing in between. Marriage proposals for a girl peak around age seventeen to twenty. Once a girl was over twenty-one, her marriage prospects start declining. Not that I was counting, but I was turning twenty in a month. (Rehman 30-31)

At the age of eighteen, she got married to a Pakistani-American resident doctor. She moved to US along with her husband though she felt little disturbed to sever her roots, family, culture and ethnicity. In the US, she felt alienated each time she had to explain about her national identity, ethnicity, culture and religion which triggered her diasporic experiences of living in a host land and being treated as a 'foreigner':

The migrant, severed from his[her] roots, often transplanted into a new language, always obliged to learn the ways of a new community, is forced to confront the great question of change and adaptation; but many migrants faced with the sheer existential difficulty of making such changes, and also, often, with the sheer alienness and defensive hostility of the peoples among whom they find themselves, retreat from such questions behind the walls of the old culture they have both brought along and left behind. The running man, rejected by those people who have built great walls to keep him out, leaps into a confining stockade of his own. (Rushdie 356)

She felt depraving feeling of diaspora as she witnessed a large cultural clash between the conservative culture of the East and the liberal culture of the West:

The pain I felt for my motherland, the guilt at having abandoned it, the love for the promise it held remained potent. In due time, we would become active in promoting Pakistani culture in the US, but remain conflicted over the shifting boundaries of cultural assimilation. . . But in those early years as I reeled from culture shock, spun around in dizzying confusion, I felt my identity slipping away. The hardest part in those first few months was surviving the unflattering inquiries about my culture and my homeland. (Rehman 74)

Even after many years of settlement in US, she still faces the dilemma of being questioned regularly about her national identity and ethnicity:

Forty-four years later, I am still asked this question.
Fresh off the plane, I would say with pride, "Pakistan."
"Where is that?"
Insulted.
"Is it in the Middle East?"



Shocked.

Isn't this the most advanced country? Don't they study geography in school? I was ten when we would play capitals of the world. I had a world map on my bedroom wall, and we friends would trace our fingers over it, gathering the capitals of new nations in Africa. And Americans have never heard of Pakistan! (Sabeeha 75)

Thus, like many other migrants, Sabeeha Rehman faces the dilemma of being called as an 'alien' in her host land and is viewed as a 'stranger' and 'non-native' which represents the issue of every migrant as they are not accepted and inculcated in the foreign culture and as such are treated as 'other', thereby putting question on their ethnicity:

Those who have left their places of birth to make homes in other parts of the world are familiar with the question 'Where do you come from?' and respond in innumerable, well-rehearsed ways. The past and the present are social constructs that are contested by those with different identities, experiences, genealogies, and histories. This relationship between the past and present is complex and dynamic, with meanings and interpretations that shift with time, place, and social context. (Agnew 3)

Religion and faith play a crucial role in a person's identity formation wherever they go, "Coupled with migration, immigrants bring their faith with them and these faiths may stem from religions such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. In fact, religion at work is increasingly an area of importance in research" (Syed and Pio 1). However, post 9/11, Muslim diaspora in the US witnessed a whole new scenario of hatred and mistrust propagated against Muslims as they were seen with suspicion, considered culprits because of being Muslims, "Phenomenon of Islamophobia refers to emergence and propagation of anti-Muslim sentiments, discrimination and pretending the state of fear and threat from Islam" (Bukhari et al 23). As a result, the US like other countries in the world was gripped under the appalling Islamophobia which put a question mark on the religious identity of Muslims, "I switch on the TV. 'Muslim terrorists blew up ... Muslim suicide bombers ... Islamic terrorists ...' *My religion has no respect in this country. Their point of reference for Islam is terrorism. What will this do to the self-esteem of my yet-to-be-born children?! I cannot raise my children here*" (Rehman 79)

Against this background, it became difficult for Sabeeha Rehman to provide religious education to her growing up sons – Saqib and Asim. For the diasporic people, especially Muslims who leave their country for better avenues still wish their Americanized children should connect with their roots:

Saqib is now six. How do I make a Muslim out of him?
How do I teach him:
To believe: I can just tell him about the Oneness of God.
To pray: I can help him memorize the Arabic prayer.
To fast: It can wait. He is just six. To be charitable: hmmm!
To make the hajj: deferred.
To study the Qur'an in Arabic: yikes!



He is only six. How do I transmit the religious values I was raised with? Faith in God—trusting that He knows best what is right for us; God consciousness. . . . (Rehman 119)

In addition, they should be away from the influence of their peers in educational institutes, and at workplace. However, it was not easy for Sabeeha Rehman to find a *maulvi* in the Staten Island who could impart the requisite religious education to her sons unlike in her homeland Pakistan where Islam is the part and parcel of everyone's life, "There were no maulvis on Staten Island, of course. Bookstores didn't sell Teach Your Child Arabic or Arabic for Dummies, nor was this the age of Rosetta Stone. Dead end" (Rehman 122). Besides, she found dearth of religious matter on Islam in the US. In the absence of the required material on Islam, she brought religious books for her children and this difficulty further encouraged her to create a Muslim community in the US. She looked out for Muslim families in Staten Island to create a community in the US and with many endeavors and toils she succeeded in doing so. She initiated the slow steps of arranging get-togethers and organizing parties among the new founded mostly Pakistani community so that the younger generation would get acquainted with the culture and traditions of Pakistan by witnessing the moral code of conduct, dress codes, food preferences and language that these migrants would use to interact with each other. Thus, she took an important step in initiating the process of acculturation among younger generation. And in the slow process of acculturation, they in a way have built a 'mini-Pakistan' on Staten's Island:

I knew no one. When I first moved to Staten Island, I didn't know any Muslim families. Khalid and I would go through the Yellow Pages looking for Muslim-sounding names. Millennials, that was the telephone directory—in hard copy. We found one name but were too shy to call and say, "Hello, this is your friendly Muslim family." We put word out to our friends in Queens and Long Island, "Does anyone know any Muslim families on Staten Island?" Eventually, through word of mouth, we found one, then two, and then three. Yeah! One Pakistani, one Indian, and one Sri Lankan. She knew someone; he knew someone; and then we were six. Six Muslim families on Staten Island—a dream come true. We now had a network. Not a critical mass to establish a religious center, but enough to get something going. Like what? How about a party . . . Our children made Muslim friends, dressed traditional Pakistani, and indulged in the taste and flavor of kebabs and biryani. They were being immersed in the Pakistani culture, and somewhere in the subtle undercurrent was the awareness that they were Muslims among Muslims. One day one of my Pakistani friends asked, "Are there any Pakistanis in your neighborhood or are they all foreigners?" Get the joke? We had built a Muslim community along cultural lines, based on national origin. But partying and singing alone weren't going to make Muslims out of the children. They needed a community based along religious lines (Rehman 124-126)

After building a cultural foundation for the younger generation, Sabeeha Rehman realized the need to inculcate religion in their community which is the prime driving force behind the strong foundation of a community. Further, she wanted to acquaint and apprise her sons and other young children from the community with Islamic culture. Therefore, she came up with the idea of building a religious place for their



community. Earlier, the community would offer its Eid prayers in Albanian mosque that had Muslim population of Albanian immigrants. Thus, building a place of worship for her Muslim community in Staten Island became the next step in the re-discovering of her Islamic identity in the US, “We had to have our own place, a place where we could hold the sermon in English. But where? And how do we find an imam to give the sermon? Who will lead the prayers? And do we have a critical mass to hold and support a congregation? We did not have an answer and so kept going back to the Albanian Mosque for Eid prayers” (Rehman 128). Firm in her decision, she along with other South Asian Muslim families started the journey of building up a mosque. They started with renting a small hall by collecting donations and offered their first Friday prayers in English so that it could be easily understood by all South Asian Muslims and also, it would be helpful for their children who, being born and brought up in America, could not understand any other language besides English. Thus, Sabeeha Rehman along with her family and community re-discovered their religious identity on the liberal terms of the US:

God was watching over us. We got a call. Eid prayers were being held in Burgher Hall, and the sermon would be in English. Apparently, one of the Indian/Pakistani doctors had rented the hall; another doctor gave the sermon and led the prayers; someone went around collecting donations; and there it was. Someone had made it happen. The small hall was full. New faces—all of Pakistani/Indian descent. Muslims on Staten Island were now separated by boundaries of national origin, language being the driver. And we had a forum for Eid prayers. (Rehman 128)

The second step in the journey of rediscovering of their faith and identity for the first as well as the second generation in their host country, the US, was to start an Islamic school that could provide religious education to their children along with the various rites and rituals associated with Islam and that too on American lines as the second generation recognize themselves more with the country of their birth, the US rather than the native country of their parents, “But we parents knew that congregating twice a year on Eid wasn’t going to do it. We needed a schooling system for our children. Something along the model of an American Sunday school” (Rehman 128).

Initially they started the Sunday-school by renting a small house for the school and few doctors volunteered themselves for the task of teaching the younger children about the Qur’an and Islam. Although the journey of building a Muslim community in an altogether alien country was not an easy process, however the endeavor of weaving a Muslim community by finding new Muslim families of similar origin in Staten Island was not wasted as it brought fruits for Sabeeha Rehman and her family. She was able to feel the warmth of being accepted and acknowledged in a foreign country with an alien culture and she was able to celebrate her own culture in its original flavour. Thus, she was able to create a space of her in her host country. She felt relieved by the fact that she has friends and acquaintances who deeply care for her and her family and would share with them the joys and pains of the various circumstances that life presents. To add to her joys, she felt relieved to witness the fact that her Americanized



children have inculcated Islamic values and culture with much ease which was an impossible task for her had there been no Muslim community. However, as the community grew wider Sabeeha Rehman along with the Muslim community living in the US realized the fact that the only solution to the various pertaining problems that the community regularly witnessed was having a permanent mosque of their own that could solve the numerous problems of the community including holding regular prayers as well as providing religious education to the coming generation:

A godsend. A phone call: "A doctor has bought a house for a Muslim Sunday School for children, and classes are starting on Sunday." Think of it. Someone actually bought a house and just gave it to whomever to run a Sunday school. I had no idea who this generous doctor was, what the arrangement was, or who was teaching classes. I was just grateful it had happened . . . *I belong to a community. There are people who know I exist, people whom I see every week, who care about what is happening in my life, who will call me when my child is sick, celebrate with me, be there for me. Khalid and I are not alone.* Saqib and Asim were now reading Arabic, with an Arabic accent (I read it with an Urdu accent that would make an Arab want to scream), they knew their prayers, and they were learning about the values of Islam. Above all, they were schooling with Muslim children, a prerequisite for confidence building. Khalid and I went with them every Sunday, and stayed. The first time I heard my children say, "Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him," I wanted to fall on my knees . . . We outgrew the space—within months. One day Khalid and I got a call from one of the Pakistani doctors from Sunday school, inviting us to attend a meeting at the school. He explained that our Muslim community would soon outgrow this space and we needed to start planning for a place of our own—a mosque. *Build a mosque! A few families will build a mosque! How thrilling is that!* (Rehman 129-131)

Thus, Sabeeha Rehman through these initiations was able to create an Islamic space, a sense of belonging in a foreign country, where they were able to retain their cultural and religious identity while also attempting to assimilate in a host land. By building a religious community and then a mosque of their own in their host country, Sabeeha Rehman was laying foundational steps for her children to get connected to their roots by learning about their religion and cultural values through the conducive environment of a Muslim community. As children learn mostly in a play-way method so Sabeeha Rehman intelligently chose this method to make the learning process easy for her children and also to develop the feeling of acceptance by indulging in the company of each other:

The mosque has to be beautiful. Our children should take pride in their place of worship.... It should have a community center on the grounds, a place where children can have their activities, apart and separate from a mosque," he said. *I like that. Take the gatherings out of the home parties into a community center. Create a space where children can play sports, have a library, do teen activities, maybe even have a gym, in the company of Muslim friends, within the boundaries of Islamic values . . . My children will be proud of being Muslims.* (Rehman 132)



After creating a Muslim space in Staten Island, Sabeeha Rehman felt the need of developing bond with people of other communities so as to cherish a healthy bond of friendship and acceptance among various communities. Therefore, she indulged herself in various interfaith dialogues so that she would be able to clear the cliches attached to Islam as a violent religion by imparting the true message of Islam, that is, being a 'peaceful' and 'tolerant' religion that respect different faiths. Sabeeha Rehman tried to indulge herself in interfaith dialogues so as to bridge the gap between different communities by coming into contact with each other so as to clear misunderstandings about one another and to promote brotherhood among each other:

An interfaith music feast was planned, and Reverend K. Karpin offered his space at the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, also on the Upper West Side. He opened his office for us to meet, assigned his staff, opened his kitchen and cooked beside us, set up the tables, carried the linen, affixed cables and microphones, and then stood at the dais and offered the opening prayer. All in the spirit of bringing communities together. So Christian! Isn't that what the Qur'an teaches us—building harmony, fostering respect? Maybe I am a Christian at heart. When the music began, I joined the rabbi and the reverend on the dais, and we took turns singing Allah hu, Allah hu, Allah hu, the rabbi and reverend sang Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelu, and the audience of Jews, Christians, and Muslims joined in, swaying in "perfect harmony." . . . Seeing Muslims making fun of themselves in the presence of Christians, Jews, and Hindus, and vice versa, was like nothing he had ever seen or expected. He had some stories to tell when he went back home. (Rehman 257)

She stressed the fact that the initiation of Islam was done to impart the message of 'peace' and 'humanity' in the world full of hatred and intolerance that has long been forgotten unlike as preached by Islamic fundamentalists who misuse Islam to justify their acts of violence:

The word Islam is derived from Arabic root "Salema" which means peace and security and well-being. Islam, in its literal sense, is utter peace. It is as if the meaning of peace and security is within the word Islam. Therefore, in terms of its meaning, Islam is a religion that is peaceful in itself and teaches others peace and security, love and tolerance, moderation and balance and patience and forbearance. (Zoya)

Thus, by devoting herself in inter-faith dialogues she tried to remove the shades of doubts and fears among Americans regarding misperception of Islam so that a strong bond would be developed among Americans irrespective of their faith and community, "We have kept the tradition going. Each year we have a theme for the interfaith feast: green feast, peace feast, fall feast. We read from the scriptures—and guess what, they all say the same thing, and why not, isn't it the same God? We have now taken it to a different level: comedy feast. Enough about educating us. Let's have some laughter; let's laugh at ourselves" (Rehman 257). However, her dreams of acceptance and friendship among different faiths soon faded away with the incident of 9/11 as it shook the bond of mutual trust and respect among different communities from its core.



Sabeeha Rehman realized the fact that all her efforts of indulging in interfaith dialogues to initiate a bond of understanding among communities went wasted post 9/11 as people again started associating Muslims with violence due to the deeds of a few religious fundamentalists who used Islam to justify their acts of violence, *"I am angry. I am angry with the crazy, fanatic killers who have set us back beyond square one. All those years of interfaith work, gone up in smoke. What have the perpetrators done to us?! All those efforts to build mosques, Muslim community centers, raising the profile of Islam, getting our children to feel comfortable and confident as Muslims, all smothered in the rubble of the towers"* (Rehman 280). A new form of the US rose up post 9/11 as Americans now became skeptical about each and every Muslim associating them with the culprits of 9/11. On September 11, 2001, the four American airlines were hijacked by nineteen militants belonging to al-Qaeda, an Islamic extremist terrorist organization and targeted different prominent buildings of America to target as many people as possible. The two airlines crashed with the twin Towers (North and South Towers) of Trade Center, whereas the third one crashed with the Pentagon in Arlington, and the fourth one was intended to crash with a federal government building in Washington, however, due to the protest of civilians present in the flight the target was missed and instead crashed down in a field outside Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The tragedy of 9/11 resulted in the loss of 2,977 lives including injuries to over 25,000 people, besides substantial long-term health consequences and the loss of nearly \$10 billion in infrastructure and property damage. Further, the people who met fatalities belonged to different nationalities including Americans and different faiths including Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, etc. Sabeeha Rehman grieved over the tragedy. She felt that all her efforts of uniting Americans divided on various lines of distinctions including race and faith turned futile. She had worked tirelessly to build a mosque on Staten Island and then indulging in various interfaith dialogues to clear the previously held notions about Islam being a religion that perpetrates violence.

Muslim diaspora who was once recognized as citizens of their host country, US, and contributors of work force, labor force as well as economy of the US, they suddenly felt left out as strangers and 'others' immediately after the attack of 9/11. They were now associated with terrorism, stereotyped as terrorists, supporters of terrorism and violence. Therefore, in order to avoid being pin-pointed as Muslims and the supporters of the attack, Muslims present in the US started living a shadowy life to hide their religious identity as smoothly as possible. They gave up wearing veils, their ethnic attires and beards which marked their religious identity. They were stigmatized to such an extent that they even forsake their names to hide their religious identity. They changed their names to Western ones so that they could be associated more with being 'Americans' than being 'Muslims'. Thus, Islamophobia had crept all over whole US and Muslims were the ultimate victims of it:

And then it happened. The towers fell and the world was never the same again. The horror, the loss, the grief, and the pain consumed us. The Bogeyman had struck and taken us all down with him. Islamophobia reared its ugly head, and Muslims found



themselves encircled by lions. They ran for cover: women uncovered their hair, men shaved their beards, children refused to go to school, the ten-year-old Osama became Sam, Mohammad became Mo, and Salman became Sal. (Rehman 263)

Muslims were living a fearful threatening life in the US post 9/11 where their safety was seriously challenged. Suddenly, the whole perception of Americans and the whole world towards Muslims witnessed a change post 9/11 as Muslim and Islam was scrutinized with judgmental lens and consciously or unconsciously Muslims were now associated with terrorists. Muslims, thus, faced serious levels of exclusion in the US post 9/11. In a way to escape Islamophobia, Muslims tried to renounce their religious identity to fit in the perceptions of the US and the West. Gradually, after some time, Americans cautiously started opening up their ears towards Muslims again through interfaith dialogues and started making acquaintances and friends with Muslims to know more about their culture and religion and consequently, to wash away the stigma attached to Islam and Muslim community. These efforts slowly and gradually earned the lost respect and trust of Muslims in America:

An eerie silence stunned the Muslim community. And then America opened its heart: priests, ministers, and rabbis started calling the imams: "Come talk to us... Come pray with us... Break bread with us." Thus began the transition of the Muslim community in the USA from being inward-focused to reaching out. Reaching out, beyond the comfort zones of their tight communities, extending invitations, exposing themselves, and making friends. It took a tragedy of humongous proportion to come out from behind the veil. And they knew that their work had only just begun. (Rehman 263)

Hence, after the tragic incident of 9/11 Muslims in the US have suffered loss of identity and rootlessness. They are treated as suspects for the felling of towers and loss of hundreds of innocent Americans including Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, etc. Muslims in general were always treated as inferior and 'other' as compared to West. Thus, post 9/11 Muslims face further exclusion and discrimination at the hands of the West whether it is in the representation of media or knowing them. They are often stereotyped as inferior and barbaric as compared to the West and their identity is often evaluated on the standards of Western societal setup. Further, after 9/11 Muslims are now looked upon as terrorist or linked with them. Muslims are now stereotyped as sympathizers of terrorists who love to indulge in violence:

. . . stereotypes and discriminatory actions were nothing new to Muslims, the post-9/11 backlash was absolutely terrible and heartbreaking. People have started to consider Muslims either terrorists or sympathetic to terrorists, and they have been suspected and distrusted. Lots of books, articles and films have depicted Muslims in a derogatory and extreme manner. (Abdullah 52)

Conclusion

The present paper is an attempt to unfold the various dilemmas and struggles that the Muslim diaspora faces in their journey of migration from *dar al-Islam* (a country ruled



by Islamic laws) to *dar ul-harb* (a country ruled by non-Muslim rulers) which is mostly Western countries. The painful process of migration is followed by the process of acculturation that the Muslim diaspora undergoes which involves imbibing the foreign culture while attempting to retain the native culture. Thus, the present paper attempts to unfold the toils of migration faced by Muslim diaspora from *dar al-Islam* to *dar ul-harb* scrutinized through the lens of Sabeeha Rehman, a Pakistani Muslim woman who narrates her struggles of migration from Islamic Republic of Pakistan (*dar al-Islam*) to non-Muslim ruled Western country, the US (*dar ul-harb*). She narrates her struggles of migration and acculturation in the form of a memoir, *Threading My Prayer Rug: One Woman's Journey from Pakistani Muslim to American Muslim*.

Further, the paper puts light on the various issues that migrants face including nostalgia, diaspora, the scuffle of acceptance and the difficulties that they meet in the process of acculturation including the inculcation of new culture while retaining their previous cultural identity which contrasts with their earlier notions of fulfilling 'American Dream': possessing an 'easy and comfortable lifestyle' without much toils and their confrontation with the reality full of discrimination, injustice and hatred based on race, caste, color, and creed. The hopes of the good life of the Muslim diaspora get shattered when they witness the fact that they are viewed as 'other' and 'intruders' into the space of the real deservers, that is, the natives. The paper also attempts to highlight the trauma of hatred and unacceptance that got perpetrated in American society for Muslims, especially post 9/11 and the continuous attempts made by the Muslim diaspora to remove the previously held niche about Islam as a 'violent' religion and to perpetuate the real meaning of Islam as a 'peace-loving' religion and to represent the Muslim community as peace-loving people who are tolerant and respectful to different faiths present in the world.

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