



Ayaan Hirsi Ali: An infidel

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Abstract

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is not a name that needed any introduction to recognize in English literature world as well as in political scenario. This Somalian writer makes her name not only famous but controversial also with her book *Infidel*. *Infidel* is her autobiography. It is not only the autobiography but also her call to be infidel and being rebellion to her religion. She is one of those feminists who refused to be silent when it comes for the name of women rights to live by their own. She was wholeheartedly praised by the world for her Fearless thoughts about being infidel and criticizing her own religion. Her book *infidel* reflects her own journey. The series of thoughts and impression of self-realization reflects in her book. There is no room for imagination as the novel is based on her true story and the incidents, which happened with her while travelling from Somalia to USA. The opposite circumstances of the religious bindings made her infidel though she did not want to be one. Now she is always ready to help those who want to get freedom and live life. She is still fighting for women rights and making a metamorphosis all around.

Keywords: infidel, autobiography, memories, religion, thoughts, courage

Introduction

Ayaan Hirsi Ali grew up in Somalia learning the values of her clan from her grandmother and mother. Her father was not there to teach and protect her but she was attached to him. Somalia, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Kenya and Netherland were the countries where she spends most part of her life. She learns to fight with all the odds during this period. Her father and mother made her such a girl that she never looked back and took her own decisions bravely.

Very intelligent from the beginning she learnt about her Clans, holy book and then she did attain degree in Political Science. Knowledge of English, Somali, Sohali, Arabic, Dutch, and Amharic shows her ability and hold on languages. She worked as a perfect translator in asylum center and earned a lot from it. As a political leader, she won elections and became a Parliament member. All these things show her perfect intelligent personality.

Ayaan being Infidel

Being infidel was not her choice it was the time and the circumstances, which lead her to be infidel. Certain reasons made her nomad, and she wrote the reasons in her novel. Before studying about Ayaan's life as infidel, we must know the meaning of infidel. Infidel is used for a person who does not believe in religion.

According to the *Cambridge dictionary*, "It is used especially between Christians and Muslims, someone who does not have the same religious beliefs as the person speaking."

According to the *Merriam-Webster*, "One who is not a Christian or who opposes Christianity. An unbeliever with respect to a particular religion or one who acknowledges no religious belief."

Ayaan provoked to be infidel

From her childhood, she was very religious. She learnt

every religious thing taught to her by her grandmother and mother. She learnt all the series and the names of her clan. Being a girl, she learnt how to behave. She also learnt to serve the family. All those values followed by her. Nevertheless, some of the things, which were not acceptable by her, were the religious intolerance for a woman and treating her as a servant.

Religious woman has to follow the Hadith, which means rules to live otherwise she will be punished. She needed to have a male member accompany with her all the time if she wishes to go outside the house. She has to cover her body from the world outside the house. The religious woman must follow Hadith or the rules or she would get the punishment for not doing so. Some of the hadith are like:

1. She should pray at home, as it is better for her.
2. She should submit herself to the will of God.
3. She should cover her entire body as it protects her and save her from corruption.
4. She should be kept in the protection of the male members of her family.
5. She should take permission of male head- either her father/ brother or her husband if she wanted to go outside and a male member should be always there with her.
6. She should be punished if commits adultery.
7. She should not interact with strangers, keep distance and not talk to them.
8. Before marriage she should obey her father and brother and after marriage her husband.
9. She should follow every instruction given by her husband, be obedient and grateful to him. To disobey him is to disobey God and it is a sin.
10. She should not try to look like a man or wear dresses like him. (important-hadith-about-women-in-islam, n.d.)

Many more rules are there which are just for woman not for

man. A woman is infidel if she denies following these hadith. A woman is to follow these rules by every now and then. She is a mere puppet in the hands of male members of the family and society. There is no question to refuse or deny the orders given to her. She has to follow them anyhow. It is compulsory for her to have a male member as a guardian with her; otherwise, her life will be problematic. According to the rules, the male is the commander of the life of the female. Without a man, a woman could be merely a thing available every time to everyone. Any male can use her as he desires or commands. The man is always a step above her. Men are in charge of women because women are weak, stupid and crooked. Women will never be equal to men. (Hadith_and_Scholars)

Ayaan found a distinctive way of living in foreign. It was very different from those places where she spent her childhood and young days. There she could live on her own conditions. It was not needed to follow the hadiths of religion. She did not require any male to go outside to do any work. She needed not to cover her entire body in the fear of being raped. Talking with any male was not a sin. In addition, many other things were totally changed. She had the rebellion self which came out. Some conditions went just opposite of her thoughts which lead her towards infidelity.

Ayaan did not become infidel in a day or two. The conditions and the circumstances lead her towards the path of infidelity. Once she was a true believer of her religion. She used to follow every instruction and rule taught to her by her grandmother, mother or father. During her childhood, her grandmother would teach her to save herself from strangers, to perform prayer, follow the religion and so on. It was due to the belief of her grandmother that she had to bear the pain of genital mutilation.

Ayaan's life became complex seeking cogent results in future. In her books, her thoughts are the reflections of her experiences of her personal life. Sometimes the thoughts show her life's mirror image to us. Her autobiography, *Infidel*, reflects and shows the trajectory from Islam to *Infidel*.

When she was supposed to marry Osama, her father told her that she was not needed in her own marriage. No body forced her at gunpoint or tied her but she knew she could not escape. It was the religious believe that there was no need of woman at all while her own marriage. Even her permission was not desirable and unfortunately, it was legal in Islamic law. It was indigestible from her point of view. She planned to flee from her marriage. It was very difficult for her to accept that kind of marriage in which she had to spend all her life with a person who was not at all of her choice.

When Ayaan was working in asylum-seeker center, many incidents happened which made her mind firm to leave the religion. She came to know that there was no such practice as genital mutilation in foreign countries, which was supposed to be compulsory for them to be pure. It was just like a part of their life in Somalia but not in foreign. The West was like a revelation for her.

She was fighting continuous with her own self. The changes, which were coming in her life, divided her mind into two parts. One in which she was carrying the teaching of her religion and other was of the modern world. One was old and carrying the myths and other having logical and scientific reasoning. Religious life was taking her towards to

be an obedient housewife to follow the instruction given by her husband. However, modern life would make her a self-dependent vibrant personality. She kept on asking herself, "If I was not doing anything wrong, then surely Allah would not punish me." (Ali, *Infidel* 214)

She was to choose between right and wrong, ancient and modern, logical and illogical and so on. She became analytical and sensible towards the problem of woman. Condition of her mother, her sister and her own made her more obvious about being infidel. Her personal life was creating conflicts in her mind. She was seeking a kind of freedom. That freedom was not only for herself but also for all women whether known or unknown, may be Muslim or any other religion, near or far and religious or infidel. She wanted to come out of all confusions and conflicts.

Many a times she mentioned about her mother's condition in the novel. Her mother was all alone and with the passing of the time, she had a dry and empty heart towards her father. There was no emotion left in her and a rage was increasing day by day. Her anger was outburst on Ayaan in various situations and she started beating her. However, Ayaan was always helpless in her mother's case. She could not fight against her father. It was an irony of her life.

Ayaan shared the experiences of the unpleasantness of the world while working as a translator in the camp. She heard the stories of women telling about rapes, assaulting by relatives, beaten by men and fleeing from the men dominated houses. Female Mutilation causing physical problems was one of the major issues among them and men suppressed women.

She, on the other hand, was gaining "an education in suffering, abuse, pain, misery and the evils of ignorance." While translating the painful stories of women, she herself was filled with guilt and pain. She would stuff all the stories behind her brain and go for work constantly. She had to translate all the wrongs and rights to the victims every time. She sometimes had to visit "awful places-the police stations, the prisons, the abortion clinics and penal courts, the unemployment offices and the shelters for battered women" to translate for the victims. (Ali, *Infidel* 243)

These places were full of migrant people with depressing conditions. She had to keep the stories of these people secret. Women from Morocco, Afghanistan and Turkey were also there but the Somalian cases were almost the same. They would be beaten by the husband or abused physically. These stories were working as the fuel to burn the religious thoughts in her mind and removing the blind faith.

Her Dutch friends helped her to clear her thoughts about right and wrong. Sylvia was one of them. She encouraged her to go for higher studies as she was having the only option to go further and not to look back. Now she was having the option to work as a translator there.

Her novels provide very remarkable and inspirational commentary on human courage. Ayaan worked hard to attain the self-esteem status in society. She dared to fight alone with the opposite circumstances. She questioned about the humiliation and pain cause to women. A question of trust and sin that was always confusing made clear in West. It seemed that she had chosen her path apart from those values. She cleared her thoughts and decided to be different. Her sister Haweya always supported her. She was also different in many ways. She gave Ayaan a moral sustenance. At first, she was looking ok but again she

became ill and started hearing voices. Sometimes her mother and brother used to beat her. She became more violent. It was very pathetic that they did not pay attention to her problem in a scientific manner but called it as a curse by God because of her sins. On January 8, 1998 she died. Ayaan could never say goodbye to her at the last moment and she was buried. After her sister's death, she had a very different vision of moral system in her mind. She was angry about the religious system. Therefore, after graduation in September 2000, she stopped bothering about her religious rules.

Uneducated, burdened, psychologically humiliated women will give birth to unenlightened children and she wanted to change these consequences. She was fully determined to her work. She was elected as a Parliament member but in a previous interview calling Prophet Muhammad perverted, she again came in the controversies.

But being infidel, she can give a meaning to her own life, to her own decisions, without any God. She is no longer slave to any religion. "The God meant only that which is good, and Satan that which is evil, then both were in me. I wanted to be developed the good side of me-discipline, generosity, love - and suppress the bad: anger, envy, laziness, cruelty. No guideline was needed to tell what to do and what not to do." (Ali, Infidel 281)

Honor killing was also going on. Little children were excised on kitchen tables. Girls were tortured. Their husband was beating them to death. Their suffering was unspeakable and the government was ignoring these issues. When Ayaan left Islam, it was unbearable by the so-called Gods of religion. She was her father's favorite but he also became very angry. Ayaan faced racial prejudice. Culpability of Ayaan was that she did not follow the religion. The religious thoughts were crossed by the scientific and western thoughts.

In West, human relationships are better than in Muslim countries. Life is in a better way with freedom and rights. Citizens are protected by the state. They can freely live their life without unnecessary laws. They never carry the fear of death and going against God. The fear of sinning was no more there while wearing any kind of clothes and going out without a male.

Reading more about Ayaan Hirsi Ali and work done by her, anyone can be curious to know more. Her writing urges to highlight the position of women in this world. Ayaan Hirsi Ali strongly opposes the wrong use of religion, which suppresses women. Islam is infamous in this manner. Most of us never think question to the basic principles and practices of law. Under Sharia, law it is precisely the most vulnerable who are also the most constrained women, homosexuals, the insufficiently faithful or lapsed Muslims, as well as worshippers of other gods. She makes everyone to rethink on these laws.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali proclaims that women will not enjoy full human livelihood until female sexuality was freed from the limitations of patriarchal dissertations framed in terms of female chastity. Infidel shows the coming of age of this distinguished political star and champion of free speech as well as the development of her benefits iron determination and extraordinary fortitude to fight inequality, prejudice and discrimination.

She revealed the bitter truth of FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) to the world. Ayaan wrote that, "In Somalia, like many countries across Africa and the Middle East, little

girls are made "pure" by having their genitals cut out. There is no other way to describe this procedure which typically occurs around the age of five." (Ali, Infidel 31)

Female Genital Mutilation is a traditional practice that involves the partial or complete removal of female genitalia and causes lifelong physical and psychological harm. Ayaan Hirsi Ali wrote freely in her book about female genital mutilation. It is horrifying that ordinary blades or knives used in houses do the work of female genital mutilation and any professional person does not do it. Female Genital Mutilation was being practiced not only in the African or Muslim countries but in India also.

"What I tried to explain in the "Infidel" is there's no - zero tolerance against female genital mutilation will not help unless you really discuss the sexual morality on which it rests, pretty much like the veil. You have to tackle questions such as virginity. You have to tackle the fact that for example my grandmother thought we would never find a husband if we were not mutilated. And in that context, it was true. She was doing me a favor. The superstition that if you don't cut off the clitoris, it might grow into something very big that will then go in-between your legs, that - those are the root causes that we have to address before we start to look at the symptom which is female genital mutilation." (Ali)

The writer, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, makes a powerful case that a religious reformation is the only way to end the evils against the society especially in case of a woman. The author is surprisingly optimistic. She believes that, "a reformation – a revision of Islamic doctrine aimed at reconciling the religion with modernity – is at hand and may even already have begun." She is seeking a kind of freedom for herself and for women, which is necessary for the wholesome development of personality.

Hundreds of millions of women around the world live in forced marriages and small girls are exercised every day. She wanted to be just on the base of her argument not on the base of her as a victim of genital mutilation. By oppression of women, Muslim countries are lagging behind the west and are back from generations to generations.

According to her it was high time to change to look into reality is now the demand of the time. The only values which matter is those values given by the parents. So, changes were needed. She was one of those lucky persons who escaped from this. However, without courage it was difficult to set oneself free. Luck also matters in the case of Ayaan.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali gave message that "We in the West would be wrong to prolong the pain of that transition unnecessarily, by elevating cultures full of bigotry and hatred towards women to the stature of respectable alternative ways of life." (Ali, Infidel 348)

Ayaan always raises the banner of gender equality. She is against the gender discrimination. She wants freedom and justice for all women around the world. Ayaan believes, like other feminist, that there should be no difference while treating with women. She wants not to ignore the desperate situation of women, as now liberation of women is the demand of time.

The author discusses Islamic views on the role of women, the rights of individuals, the roots of Islamic fanaticism and proposes western policies towards Islamic countries and immigrant communities.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali always thanked Holland for being what she

could be. It was the land, which made her a real woman with all what she wanted to be. She could have the courage to take the right decision just because of the support by the government. She got the panoramas to attain herself in the different consequences.

Writers other than Ayaan known as infidel

Nazanin Afshin-Jam, Dr. Qanta Ahmed, Nazie Eftekhari, Manda Zand Ervin, Fahima Hashim, Zainab Khan, Raheel Raza, Juliana Taimoorazy, Raquel Saraswati, Jasvinder Sanghera, Chloe Anthony Wofford, Wangari Muta Maathai, and many more are the names of the writers who fought for women rights and became infidel to seek freedom from so-called conservative social injustice. These women's right activists worked against the injustice done to them. These are not just the names but symbol of courage and bravery. They not only inspire but show path of Enlightened life. (Kweskin, 2013)

Conclusion

Ayaan had messages for all of us. "First, men, and even women, may look up and speak to Allah" to have a dialogue with him. "Second, the rigid interpretation of the Quran in Islam causes intolerable misery for women". In addition, not to violate human rights. Third, one was denial of submission to God. According to Ayaan, faith should not have oppression. She asked a provocative question by writing the lines "Criticism of Islam is apparently too painful for Muslims to bear. Tell me, how much more painful is it to be these women, trapped in that cage?" (Ali, *Infidel* 350)

The mechanisms forced her to be in that way. It became hard for her to stay with those religious values, which became outdated with the modern era. Ayaan proved that a woman could change her own life by taking right decision at right time. Courage leads towards freedom and makes a total difference. Thus, Ayaan became a symbol of courage and resolution.

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