

Muslim Women vs. Islamism: An Interview with Gina Khan

Gina Khan is a British Muslim woman who lives in Birmingham's Ward End, an area in which men were recently convicted of a plot to kidnap and kill a British Muslim soldier. In this interview she sets her story of oppression and liberation against the backdrop of the unchecked growth of Islamism – 'this backward and male-dominated ideology,' – in her city over the last 20 years. Questioning the adequacy of the government's response ('I don't see how the British Government can defeat the ideology in Birmingham Sunni mosques by handing them half a million pounds to eradicate radicalism when no one has even banned the anti west, anti gay, criminal edicts on minorities or apostates, or books on the "War on Islam"...') Khan proposes the empowerment of Muslim women as the heart of the fight back that could, in time, see 'the silent majority stand up to counter doomsday Jihadism.' The interview took place in January, 2008. Thanks to the *Westminster Journal* for kindly granting permission to reproduce this important act of witness.

Question: So, Gina, tell us a little about yourself, your background and your motivations.

Gina Khan: I'm a British Asian Woman from a Pakistani ethnic background; a Sunni Muslim and a lone parent. I grew up in Birmingham in the English Midlands – in an area with a preponderance of Muslims.

I used to be a victim of psychological aggression. With hand on heart and head, I can say this was just because I was born a female into a Muslim family in the West. (Pain figures in the lives of many Muslim women because of accepted Muslim social practices. I was no exception to the rule).

Today the rhetoric you hear from extreme Islamists or the stories you read in British papers about honour killings or forced marriages doesn't shock me or many others at grassroots level. It's an old story, one that has been repeated for hundreds of years. Just that today the voices are amplified after 9/11 and there are more extreme mosques and more extreme Islamists than ever on the streets of areas like mine.

I was once one of the 'silent majority' who remained silent. I was told silent and good Muslim women are respected and honoured. I was told Islam protects and

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gives special status to Muslim women/mothers compared to the Western woman. My life experience proved otherwise.

I have always had an issue with aspects of my religion and culture but was taught never to question. Now I question, seek and acknowledge the truth – the truth as I see it, as I lived it, and as I observed it from others around me, all of my life.

I am not liked by the Islamists. I've had bricks thrown through the window and I've had family members beaten up. I've been told to move on. But I'm not budging. This is my home and I belong here. The Islamists where I live – in Birmingham's Ward End – are an awful scourge.

Question: Why are you not like them yourself?

Gina Khan: I was 10 when I first started to reason and listen to what my inner voice was telling me, compared to the voices that were drowning out my own authentic voice. I remained silent back then though, and I have since paid a very high personal price for that silence, as I could not get on with the confined ways as laid out for me. Looking back – I suppose I was only young – I participated in my own oppression and thought I was being a good Muslim woman. As hard as people tried though, they couldn't take the Britishness out of me! I fought suppression and oppression until I have become who I've become.

I think in English, I talk in English. I wasn't even fluent speaking Urdu and Punjabi until I was 18 years of age. The women in my family were not backwards, my Mum was the head of the family, and she was a strong independent woman who made sure Dad could never engage in polygamy in this country (as he had done before in Pakistan before they migrated to Birmingham). But don't get me wrong – I'm a Muslim alright.

Question: And your parents?

Gina Khan: Mum had herself been a victim of polygamy before meeting my father and had been forced to abandon her studies to get married at 15. My mum was educated at a British school in Pakistan; she wasted no time in integrating and making herself familiar with the rules and regulations of Britain when she arrived. She spent most of her life trying to perfect her English or trying (and usually failing) to pass her driving test! She ran a business and took care of her family.

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Dad was 30 odd years older than Mum. He was illiterate and could only sign his name, but he learnt English to get by. In fact I recall one of Dad's regular visitors in the 1970s was his 'gaffer.' Like many immigrants, Dad had come years earlier than Mum and worked in a factory. Every Thursday the 'gaffer' would come in his white rover and every Thursday I would wonder what they had to talk about because Dad's English embarrassed me even as a child.

We ran shops and we all had to contribute, whether it was behind the counter or stacking shelves. In the early 1980s, when I was about 9, we moved to Ward End, at a time when we were the first Asian family who had bought a business on Washwood heath road. I grew up with friends who were English, Jamaican, Greek, Indian, Sikh, and Chinese. We integrated into the wider community.

My parents had friends who were non Muslims, who came into our homes, shared our food, and shared our culture with us. I didn't know any different except when mum would teach me about Allah. On the one hand the Christian God in school was a loving God but our God was to be feared. Though now I believe religion was used to control us in our version of Muslim society.

Question: To control you?

Gina Khan: Muslim women were not allowed the freedom of love then and they're not now. Arranged marriages are the norm, yet I remember many of Dad's friends who had English wives, who hadn't been subjected to conversion. Muslim men have freedom, choices. I learnt that young – Muslim women don't. We're controlled from birth to grave.

Women were taught to be submissive and listen to our elders, slave around to the whims of older brothers. My parents were 'modern' Muslim, we didn't cover our heads, and in fact my mum didn't either – unless we were praying or reading the Quran.

Question: You loved your family?

Gina Khan: Yes, very much so. I inherited my Mum's love for Indian/Pakistani classical movies, music, saris and her respect for Bhutto in Pakistan. She shaped my thinking from an early age. The first book she gave me was about The Creation of Pakistan and Jinnah the founder.

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I was closer to my father. I was subjected to a lot of 'double-talk.' On the one hand my Mum had hopes that I would study and go to University. On the other hand Dad was plotting my arranged marriage, with his extended family, to his nephew in Pakistan behind Mum's back.

I was closer to my Father but was manipulated later by him as a young teenager when Mum sent me to Pakistan for the first time on a holiday with him. The excuse they use is 'it's in our culture or in our religion' but endogamy (against British law) didn't apply to us.

Question: Endogamy – the practice of marrying within a particular social group?

Gina Khan: I still remember the day one of my older sisters was leaving to go to Heathrow airport in the late 1970s, Dad lowered his head, put the palms of his hands together and said 'please keep my honour my daughter' – almost pleading.

Such were the sacrifices Muslim daughters made because of extended families and the pressure of family honour. Mum objected but she could do nothing as a man's word is meant to be sacred. It was a Muslim man's world and still is.

In the 1970s, another sister who was in her twenties and has since died became a victim of polygamy. As a child I watched her being sectioned under the mental health act. Mum and Dad had arranged her marriage to a Muslim man who was a driving instructor, homeowner, respectable on the outside. Just after the birth of her second child they all discovered that he was already married. On being found out, he ran off to Holland with the secret wife and abandoned my sister and her two daughters. She fell apart. She knew she was finished in the eyes of Muslims, though we still loved her. Polygamy was the norm – and British Pakistani men hadn't abandoned the practice even though it was banned under British law.

Question: And you? You had tough times on account of not being willing to submit, though you remained a Muslim?

Gina Khan: Yes – and events shaped me. These family events shaped my mind, my thinking. I left home early after divorce myself and became distant from Islam – but only temporarily. It's not for me to say but I think I am a good Muslim. I do not conform to outdated norms but that does not stop me from being a good Muslim in Britain today.

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I have lived in a hostel, abandoned and alone, I had lost my first child and sister within a few months and post natal depression wasn't recognised in those days. Certainly nobody understood my plight as a young divorcee, stigmatised by a label, accused of dishonouring the family. Amazing really, because divorce rates are so high amongst British Muslims – the community loses so many of its 'daughters' this Way

Question: As your home area became more Islamist, so did your father?

Gina Khan: In the early 80s, my Dad was a pensioner even though I was only 13. Dad had gone to hajj when he became a pensioner and religion took over. Soon after becoming more religious, Dad started to attend the local mosques in Alum Rock, Washwood heath and Small heath. Tablighi Jamaat ran these mosques and even then in the 80s they had established quite a few prominent mosques, where only men attended.

Dad and I spent a lot of time talking as this change was occurring. It was before I was married – as I lived life as a 'caged virgin.' He would say 'there will be mosques everywhere. Islam is the true religion, Islam will take over and kafirs (unbelievers) will burn in the fire of hell.' In hindsight Dad was obviously being brainwashed into an ideology. He visibly changed. It's the same kind of rhetoric the West hear Islamists and Jihadists preach today. Tablighi Jamaat are part of it – I can't understand why politicians can't see this.

I was frightened and didn't question my father's beliefs. In time I saw mosque after mosque being built in my area. I witnessed the power of dynamic preachers on satellite, on tapes.

Question: Your area changed dramatically?

Gina Khan: In the 90s, my family had sold up and moved out of Ward End. I had returned after I had married to live in Ward End. Ward End was not the same place anymore. Non Muslims were moving out as more Muslims were moving in. I recall seeing posters and flyers asking Muslims to attend meetings, I didn't understand why the Muslims suddenly hated the West or what they meant by the 'Ummah.' I and my friends were witnessing the rise of more and more young Muslim men growing beards and wearing Arabic style tunics.

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Women who were once 'normal' British Asians were now wearing the black veil or head coverings. Islamic bookshops and clothes shops sprang up from nowhere. It was Islam going backwards not forwards. I used to joke that soon they will be importing camels.

Little did I realise that influence was coming from desert Islam, Wahhabism, and there were other branches too: Sunnis who adhered to Maududi's interpretation of political Islam. If I hadn't researched or educated myself into the rise of political Islam and Jihadism, I would have thought my Dad was right and extreme Islamism is the only true religion.

Question: So Islamism – that of Tablighi Jamaat and other Islamist cults – is a distortion?

Gina Khan: Everybody's religion is 'true' to them but why go force it on others? The Islamists think by forcing us, embedding their violent ideology and creating fear they are forcing the hand of God on us in communities. They use bloodcurdling language but when you see through their ideology you realise they are actually pretty feeble little men behind the ranting, really.

More and more British born Muslim girls were being and still are being subjugated and downtrodden 35 years on. No one cared then about our plight and no one cares now. Those of us who got out, even mentally – we have had to fight from within the break the chains of even the cerebral part of the slavery the Islamist ideology forces upon you.

Question: How did the Islamists get a foothold in communities like yours?

Gina Khan: Mullahs were forever knocking on the doors asking for charity towards mosques. What I do remember is most Pakistanis didn't trust the local mullahs, they were driving their Mercedes Benz in the 80s, where as most people like my brothers, were working hard to build the family business year after year. The community was funding these backward thinking mullahs.

It was a slow invasion in my eyes, built brick by brick, year by year, infiltrating the education system, the councils and central government offices in the region. It was planned, co-ordinated and clever. Since 9/11 the speed of the invasion has picked up considerably.

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Question: Now your father was one of the Islamists – how did you feel about this?

Gina Khan: After Mum passed away, we buried her here in the UK as Dad was in Pakistan. They loved each other and Dad had wanted mum to be buried in his village. Mum loathed the village and his extended family, Britain was her home since her 30s when I was born. We respected her last wishes regardless of Dad's persistency to have her buried abroad.

Dad had been laying down the foundation for his holy project – a madrassa – in his village in Pakistan. He had just made it back to Mum's deathbed. Dad returned to Pakistan to continue his project but would come over now and again to collect funding.

I had visited him when he was ill and had observed young male orphans at the madrassa who were fed, clothed and sheltered but could only study the Quran and Islam under the authority of a mullah and never integrated with the villagers.

I really questioned my Dad's belief for the first time then. Why build a madrassa for boys only and not a girls' school or hospital that would have benefited the whole community?

He answered 'that even if just one of these children from my bloodline memorises the Quran, 7 generations of my family will go straight to heaven.' His belief was resilient – he had been brainwashed well. Every penny he had or whatever properties Mum had in Karachi were donated to the madrassa.

Dad had gone colder and oblivious to anything else around him. He had promised himself to complete the madrassa before he died and he did. He requested to be buried in the compounds of his madrassa. My Dad was an honest, hardworking man who became indoctrinated into an Islamist ideology. I see his last years as a great pity, as he had been changed – this was not My Dad but a brainwashed Tablighi Jamaat drone in his place.

Question: After your Father's death you saw radical changes in your community as the years passed by?

Gina Khan: Back home in Britain, this was not the Britain I knew. This was not Ward End as I knew it. Every empty house and shop was being turned into a mini

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mosque and unemployed Muslim women could earn extra money by teaching 20 to 30 children a day at home. Islamic revival was here to stay without anyone questioning the motives or the ideology.

Even I was stunned at some of the translations the Islamists were using that clearly discriminated against me as a woman, a wife, a mother and as an equal human being. Did Allah really ordain what they were saying for Muslim women? I refuse to believe He could.

Question: Was your husband taken in by any Islamist teachings?

Gina Khan: I had been a victim of domestic abuse and polygamy myself. The first time my husband slapped me after I questioned him he said ‘don’t question my authority – in our religion you are not allowed. I’m your husband.’

After divorce I made a promise to him that I would raise the issue of polygamy in the community and expose the consequences Muslim women silently endure, a woman would rather see her husband burn on a pyre than take on another wife. I stated that it wasn’t him I was after. I was after the true kafirs – the extreme Islamists who advocate the practices that taught him that he could slap a woman across the face and take on another wife in the name of Islam. Backward practices must be erased. What happened in the 7th century or 18th century can’t be continued in the 21st century. Women have a right to their full humanity as full human beings.

He wasn’t a bad person; he had been forced into an arranged marriage with a cousin. Our children were ostracised from his family as a consequence of it not working out.

Polygamy destroys the soul of a woman. I knew polygamy wasn’t beyond him. In any case our love story had ended. Polygamy and forced marriages destroy the lives of both men and women. Children often pay the price for broken homes and witness escalating domestic violence and oppression. The British Government hesitates in stamping it out – not wanting to instigate racial tensions; they should show some backbone because right now we are suffering.

Question: Surely local religious leaders step in and help women out, as would say a vicar or parish priest?

Gina Khan: Not one mullah or leader of any mosque locally has ever done anything progressive for the emancipation of Muslim women, let alone help them out when they are divorced and lone mums. No one is addressing these issues seriously.

My children have been hit several times around the head in the local mosque and I was treated like an outcast – as if my stigma of being a lone mother was deserved. They wanted me to think that it was my entire fault – that I was mad not to have conformed to their ideologies. This hurt my kids – it felt like we were being punished.

Question: But you still rose up above all this negative pressure?

Gina Khan: It wasn't until after divorce and after 9/11 that I decided I wasn't mad. I wasn't an apostle or a kafir or Islamophobe. Islamistophobic perhaps! I pulled my children out from the Islamists' bubble of influence for good. I decided to get to know my enemy – get to see what was behind the Islamist ideologies that had hurt me and were hurting so many others so much.

I realised that to understand Jihadists I had to understand the roots of Jihadist history myself – not depend on the books or translations I was being subjected to. I started to read the Quran, study my religion and Islamic history. My reading helped promote my respect for democracy, as well as the values and principles of this great country, Britain, which is my home and my motherland too.

As a lone mother I learnt a lot about myself and who I am. The Sharia law was designed with the 'family' framework in mind. The lone mother isn't in the Islamic conscience; Islamists claim 'there are no lone mothers in Muslim communities.' Of course there are. The more reason why lone mothers need to protect their children from being indoctrinated or recruited into Jihadism.

So far I had been de-humanised as a Muslim woman. I thought about converting to another faith or renouncing the religion I was born into, but no, I realised I was a Muslim. To convert – that would be pointless. Just because I think Osama Bin Laden is wrong doesn't mean that I should change my religion – the Islamists are wrong too.

Question: Now you are at peace even if the Islamists are not?

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Gina Khan: My identity isn't in conflict with itself anymore. I'm a British Asian and we are a proud breed apart – but very much part of Britain.

To be a Muslim you have to adhere to the 5 pillars of Islam – that in itself is a struggle and it's a spiritual, personal struggle. Jihad – an unofficial pillar devised by early Muslims – is not a compulsory pillar as the Islamists would have you believe. The meaning of Jihad is complex in the Arabic language but for the Arabs Jihad means Holy War, not a yoga experience as many apologists in Islam claim.

Modern Jihadists have twisted verses using the Quran's historical edicts. I'm still on a journey to discover the truth. I am a secular Muslim. I live in a secular country where we had freedom to practice our faith, and freedom to have no faith, where I have learnt to respect people from all religions and races, regardless of their gender or sexuality. As the humanist I now know myself to be, I have faith in myself, faith in the Almighty and faith that modern secular Muslims – the silent majority – will emerge and stand up to counter doomsday Jihadism. We just have to.

Question: What do you think of the 7/7, 21/7 and Glasgow bombers?

Gina Khan: When I watched 3000 people die within 30 minutes on 11th September 2001, I was horrified and the first thought that came into my mind was, 'My God, they have started the war.'

For me, after reading the anti west, anti American flyers and posters in the 90s, watching the rise of a backward Islam, it came as no surprise that America was attacked. In fact I thought it would be Britain first. I had already imagined a suicide bomber walking into a British night club or shopping centre planning to commit mass murder in the name of Islam. I was always taught your life belongs to God, He alone knows when your time is up so to take your own life a huge sin.

My Mum used to teach me as a kid that to stamp and kill an ant is a sin, all living creatures belong to God. Such simple, meaningful teachings of the Prophet and God's wisdom kept my faith going.

These men on 9/11, 7/7 and 21/7 believed they are the soldiers of Islam. Amazing. They lived in the 21st century with the mindset of the 7th century. They are fools.

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In 2001 on the al Jazeera channel, Osama Bin Laden stated 'We (meaning Jihadists) love death as much as you in America (or infidels) love life.' Hence this has become the rhetoric Jihadists adhere to. They believe they are on a mission as martyrs for the revival of a Caliphate, they believe they are dying for their beliefs and their religion.

The Islamists lure the would-be suicide bombers into believing they will be rewarded with virgins, milk and honey and eternal life in heaven. The suicide bomber believes he is dying for the 'ummah' – another powerful myth. They believe they are on a mission to defeat the 'kafirs' and represent true Islam.

If you have ever studied Osama Bin Laden or even people like Moazzam Begg from Birmingham, you will observe that they use the Quran, certain verses related to the historical events of Jihad in the Quran and twist verses to suit their ideology.

Question: You knew Moazzam Begg from Birmingham?

Gina Khan: Moazzam Begg was in Guantanamo. He was a local turned mujahid who was once a member of a Birmingham gang called the Links alongside Shahid Butt (during the 90s Butt was arrested in Yemen for planning a bombing and there are videos of him around sitting next to Abu Hamza and appeared on Dispatches ranting as any Jihadist would).

The civil rights lawyer (this seems a contradictory term for her) Salma Yacoob fought for their release. When I look and see what they are doing to Birmingham now I wonder why they were ever let out.

After being released from Yemen in the 90s Shahid Butt still roams free in Birmingham as a mujahid, while Moazzam Begg is still preaching from the Quran on British TV about the 'Ummah' and attempts to mobilise Muslims using extreme interpretations. He claims all Muslims all over the world are all from one body of Islam – a huge myth that needs to be dispelled. These guys embarrass me and the majority of British Muslims. Their notion is for Muslims to discredit the countries they are born in and join their 'ummah' to revive political Islam to revive a Caliphate. Similar attempts and doctrines are used by Hizb ut Tahrir. There is no 'ummah' anymore.

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Question: So you are not part of this 'Ummah?'

Gina Khan: For Muslims like me I prefer to read the last message the Prophet gave to his people in reference to the society and community he ruled. The 'Ummah' is a powerful myth. It comes from the root word 'motherland' and the only motherland I have and would stand up for is my country, Britain.

Even if there was this exaggerated 'ummah' and a Muslim deferred from their nationality, Islamists would disable half the body of Islam by reversing the rights of women as they have done in Afghanistan or Iran. This reversal was also attempted in Pakistan by General Zia to reverse the freedoms and rights of Pakistani women in the 80s who engaged with Islamists. And for anyone who wants to debate me then read Maududi's version on Human Rights in Islam. He avoids the issues regarding equality of minorities and Muslim women.

Question: Women round here (Ward End) look like they think they are part of the Ummah?

Gina Khan: I don't believe that wearing a ninja outfit will protect any Muslim woman against rape or sexual harassment. In the Quran it only states that 'The believing woman should cover her bosoms and private parts' and most women in the world do that anyway. There is no 'true Islam' to return to unless they are going to totally reject western modernity and ship in camels as well.

Osama bin Laden didn't create this ideology, the ideology created him. Syed Qutb, Maududi, Al Wahab to name a few were inspired by the 13th century scholar Ibn Tammiya who badly distorted Islam and attempted to shut down Muslims' thinking and reasoning. That's another great myth the Butts and Beggs can't get a grip on. They can't shut down women's thinking or independent reasoning, or that of the majority of Muslims in general. No Islamic ummah will protect any woman. Women need a reality check if they believe that.

Question: How best to combat the Islamist ideology round here?

Gina Khan: It's because of these 'mujahidin' and the Islamists who have a voice in Britain today (why? Oh government, please wake up and help us out here!) Muslims have to re interpret the Quran again in the 21st century. I am in no denial that there are verses that discriminate against minorities, women or the infidel. Fund more

modern women to become Imams. It is not against the preaching's of the Prophet for women to lead Friday prayers or teach pluralist Islam. Lets debate the Islamists who claim to represent this 'true Islam.'

Ex Hizb ut Tahrir member Hassan Butt clearly stated in the media 'that until Muslims acknowledge the violent streaks in the Quran, nothing will change.' And he is right because those are the edicts that Islamists and Jihadists perpetrate to mobilise our minds. Osama Bin Laden swears by the Quran on video that he is not lying, and I'm telling you he is not lying. The Quran gives two messages and we as Muslims have a choice which message we want to adhere to. If the Quran speaks of war, it also speaks of peace. The Prophet Mohammed states in the Quran that 'there is no compulsion in Islam, difference of opinion in my community is a manifestation of divine mercy.' You wouldn't get any Islamists mention that passage in the Quran. They suppress the spiritual message of the Holy Quran. They have managed to establish their extreme version of Islam into the West because of imported, distorted translations and imported imams who can dynamically quote the Quran. Hence we tend to rely on them for the interpretation of the Quran.

With respect to the old historical Jihads, well those wars were similar to the biblical wars. These men fought face to face on battlefields, the Prophet had set principles in war; that women, children and the elderly must not be killed. So when it suits Islamists they reject what the Prophet preached and they transgress international laws. Islamists, be they Salafists, Wahhabists, Khomeinists, twist verses of the Quran reading it off into the present century as timeless, quoting historical edicts and interpretations that have not only hijacked the religion but blacklisted the name of Allah and Mohammed round the globe. These are not men you can sit around a table and negotiate with like the IRA. Jihadists won't even coexist with other reformed or moderate schools of thought. It is a supremacist ideology – it's their way or the highway.

Question: What about the suicide bombing ideology?

Gina Khan: These suicide bombers are not 'martyrs.' They are brainwashed (like my Dad became), become brain-dead and then used as pawns in this modern Jihad. These human bombs blow themselves up as well as innocent bystanders – it's a pathetic human carnage. They don't care what religion, race, gender or age we are. How can this just be a Muslim problem? It's criminality not religiosity.

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We need to collectively oppose this ideology and name the ideology as Jihad. It is jihad. Osama's Jihad is a unholy war. Secular, modern Muslims in the 21st century with even half a brain know that and we must break the Islamists' silence to oppose it. It's no good repeating Islam means peace because we have been blacklisted as a religion globally thanks to their perverse and dangerous version of Islam.

For Muslims and non Muslims to feel secure in opposing this ideology there must be a law against Jihadism as there is for racism or Nazism – one that works on a community level. Jihadists' literature must be challenged and opposed – better just pulped.

Politics must be kept out of mosques and the likes of Dr Nassem in Birmingham must be forced into retirement. His politics and views are dinosaur-like to the great majority of Muslims. We – British Muslims – are not being victimised (though victimisation is a key Islamist strategy). The whole world is being victimised here by this extreme violent ideology that uses Islam as its doctrine.

If you don't challenge the interpretations intertwined with the oppressive theology thrust upon Muslim women, you cannot defeat the enemy. I don't see how they (the British Government) can defeat the ideology in Birmingham Sunni mosques by handing them half a million pounds to eradicate radicalism when no one has even banned the anti west, anti gay, criminal edicts on minorities or apostates, or books on the 'War on Islam' – when this country gave us full freedom to practice and worship our religion. We were never under attack for our religion until Jihadists and Islamists sent their human bombs to attack innocent bystanders.

This war should be renamed clearly as the war on modern Islamism. Muslims don't have a Caliph, no-one authorised Osama Bin Laden to advocate and start Jihad. If the War is against the West then it's a war against British secular Muslims too – that means we Muslims in the west and our children will not be spared. When will Muslims understand that? No 'ummah' or silly veil can save us if Osama manages his recruits, while we allow Muslim leaders and Islamists to play down the threat. Gordon Brown can only mobilise the mind of the public by better defining the ideology and hopefully he can get his act together – he must understand that the solutions are mainstream even when the subject matter is not. They now know the name of this global ideology so they have to show some backbone.

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Millions and millions of Muslims, in Saudi Arabia especially, cannot claim to understand the Quran word for word. It is a complex Arabic language that has been preserved but is not spoken even by today's Arabs. A beautiful language has now been turned into ugly aggressive tones by members of Hizb ut Tahrir, Anjem Choudhary, Shahid Butt, Abdu Abdullah. They use theology and politics. The suicide bomber's mind is indoctrinated with all these mens' misinterpretations to subtract the fear of death.

This war isn't just a militant war; it must be against the ideological intellectual Jihadists, Islamists, Imams and organisations who plant the seeds of Jihadism into the minds of Muslims.

Question: In Ward End this war is hard to escape?

Gina Khan: My son was approached by dynamic Islamists in Ward End. It was only because I had told him to be vigilant that he recognised their motives. These areas lack facilities and youth centres for the youth to access. Whatever sport centres there are, are dominated by sporty mullahs. Women/girls have to go into non Muslim areas or wait for specific women's' programmes. And yet there are mosques, mini mosques every few yards. Difficult to escape them – that's how the Islamists want it. You know the Tablighi pride themselves from spending days inside mosques?! They sleep, exercise and eat in there?

I observed many mosques that are empty all day except on a Friday afternoon. Most serve no purpose at all to women and children or to non Muslims in the community unless you're seeking conversion. There are book shops where the wrong interpretation is being promoted, I have dozens of books I collected myself in the 90s when I was in search of my religion. Now in hindsight I realise I too could have been indoctrinated. I was pretty depressed back then, searching for peace of mind. I could have easily fallen into this trap.

Question: And in schools?

Gina Khan: I read the book Islam Beliefs and Teachings by Ghulam Sarwar. (Ed Husain pointed him out in his book – The Islamist). The first few chapters of Sarwar's book are devoted to the 5 pillars of Islam. He then goes on to discussions and questions on political Islam and Sharia law (which is outdated and was actually initiated by Caliphs not subscribed by Allah or the Prophet in any form), the status

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of Muslim women and our rights (which is less about rights and more about our duties) and he praises the 'great' Islamic states of Iran and Sudan (lovely places?!).

Sarwar's ideas and teachings have been infiltrating British Education in Muslim communities (communities with high concentrations of Muslims) since 1966. These books were aimed at Muslims like me born here. Written in English.

'How do we create an Islamic State?' Sarwar asks the children. He tries to compare Sharia law with 'man made laws' but gives no indication what Sharia law will implement in his vision of a Islamic State. 'A Muslim's happiest occasion in life is to see the Rule of Allah established on earth,' he writes. I don't think so – ask the women of Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, and Afghanistan (countries which are living hellholes for Muslim women). Ask Muslim women here in Britain – Somalians, Iranians or even Pakistani women. Would they dare go back as lone mothers?

These writers – so-called scholars and Imams – are indoctrinating our children and as mothers we exert the most power over our children in shaping their minds. We should pulp all these books. Question their ulterior motives and interpretations. We must educate our children against extreme versions and promote the values and principles of our democracy. The problem with Britain is that it still wants to hang onto the history of guilt regarding colonialism and imperialism. Today if India is a successful democracy in Asia, it's because it teaches it's young generation to love and respect it's Motherland. We spend too much time putting this country down instead of promoting our values and principles as a nation. There might be a high rate of teenage pregnancies in the west but at least you guys don't murder you daughters and you don't reject an illegitimate child. Muslim girls have been murdered and the 'bastard' child is stigmatised and abandoned. What kind of God would want that as justice for mankind?

Question: Mothers should be teaching their kids that suicide bombing and Islamism are wrong?

Gina Khan: Absolutely...These Islamists are every modern Muslim mother's nightmare, in fact many non Muslim mothers are very concerned. I would urge Muslims to reject political Islam outright. It's a myth that Islam and politics are one theology. How do I know that? Well millions of Muslims have lived in the West without a Caliph or Sharia law and lived as secular Muslims whether they use that term to define themselves or not. Millions of Muslims in countries like Turkey,

Egypt and Tunisia aspire to democracy and reject Sharia laws as being outdated. It doesn't mean they are not Muslims. It means we evolved as Muslim People too. Men like Jinnah and Bhutto and Ghandi Ji studied in Britain and took back the tenets of Democracy to their countries.

Jihadism emerges and opposes the tenets of democracy. If women are fighting for the soul of Pakistan which is what Benazir Bhutto was hoping to implement, then why are we as British Asian Muslim women participating in our own oppression by remaining silent thinking someone else is going to come along and create change? We should let our feelings cascade down onto our kids.

We all have a moral duty to create change and condemn the suicide bombers as pure evil and unIslamic. We need to get our facts right. They have targeted Muslims born in the west for over 40 years, with their interpretations and indoctrinations on satellite TV, through cds, books. We have to hit back too. So I believe this war will last a minimum of 40 years, silence won't get us anywhere.

Question: The ideology won't just fizzle out even if the Islamists are cracked down on by the government?

Gina Khan: Even if Osama bin Laden was arrested or shot dead, the ideology will create another Osama Bin Laden aspiring to be the revived Caliph or Mahdi. Sitting in caves and creating massacres, murdering Muslims who convert or women who seek freedom, assassinating activists and reformers who stand up for their natural rights. Islam does not give Islamists authority over matters of life and death. They will continue to unleash their violence to instil fear into the masses. They want to create this clash of civilisations and anti west propaganda but there's only one civilisation and they're not part of it. They have studied the weaknesses of the countries they want to target and they use our democracy to pursue their own distorted Islamic agendas. MCB are a good example. They should never have been nominated to be the voice of British Islam. Dr Bari should be concerned about the poor people of his own motherland instead of getting on the nerves of British people who don't believe in arrange marriages and don't have to conform to their 'Islamic' ideas. It's bad enough for Muslim women that they advocate our 'status' without consulting us.

They shut down debates. I'd like to see more debates on the veil, on the so called status and rights of women that Maududi interpreted. Muslim women all over the

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world fight to free themselves from oppression and abuse, while these leaders are writing Muslim manifestos for our school children without consulting with any of us. They are taking us step by step backwards and manipulating the positioning of being British and Muslims.

What gets me are the likes of Anjem Choudary. If this war wasn't so dangerous I would have laughed at his rants. He lives with a 7th century mindset, believes in Sharia law, and demonises the west and democracy so why is he still here practising as a solicitor? They are hypocrites – it's an easy life for them here either way and they are the last people to sacrifice the easy way.

Question: Who in particular is exploiting the weaknesses of Britain?

Gina Khan: MCB spokesman Inayat Bunglawala is a good example of what I mean by the extreme version of Islam. He is always playing down the real threat. People like Bunglawala have read the same books as me and understands Jihad like most Muslims do. In number the Islamists like him may be a minority, but the influence they represent is powerful because they use historical edicts in the Quran to mobilise the masses. It is up to Muslims to reject and lead the way by rejecting this modern Jihad and rejecting backward practices.

Why oh why do TV stations allow these men on their shows to talk about us Muslims? They do not represent us – they enslave us with a backward mentality.

We are free agents we didn't need backward-thinking Muslims representing us.

It's proved counter-productive. They do not represent plural Islam. They have an issue with gays, with the Jewish, with liberal Britain. The government has been taking advice from the wrong people for the last 10 years. That is obvious.

Question: Who do you blame?

Gina Khan: I blame the government of this country for the rise in Islamism. They were too slow while Islamists leaped ahead in order to turn British Muslims into Islamists. Europe and America have been given the wrong advice for the last 10 years too. If the best they can come up with to win the hearts and minds of people is a Bunglawala or Tariq Ramadan – who isn't even a citizen of this country – then we're in big trouble.

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Why the government appeases Islamists and engages with men who advocate a backward Islam beggars belief. The government needs to create space for reformists and secular Muslims to lead debates – to push away the Bunglawalas who, for example, tried to shut down the debate on the veil, and believes Osama Bin Laden is a ‘freedom fighter.’ I don’t know whether to laugh or cry.

Question: It’s not a battle between men and women amongst the British Muslim community?

Gina Khan: No. Just recently, modern British Muslim men pointed out to me that they are just as alarmed when they see an increasing number of Muslims (British Pakistani women) adopting the full veil. The same happens to all of us – you end up just staring at them, on the Ladypool road, Stratford road In Birmingham, Alum Rock Rd etc

British Pakistani Muslim women have steadily shrugged off the beautiful chadors and head scarves full of vibrant colours that have always reflected the Indian or Pakistani culture and are turning to morbid colours of black. I personally call this revival of desert Islam. It really is beginning to look and feel like a cult; a political statement and a sign of women participating in their own oppression believing Allah ordained it. What’s wrong with the Pakistani outfits? It didn’t happen at this rate in Pakistan until the media showed us the veiled women with sticks demonstrating outside the Red Mosque. Such an event could happen here – we may have democracy here but that isn’t stopping Islamists from demanding Sharia law or special treatment in schools, councils or in the public sphere just because they are Muslims.

Dr Naseem Nawaz – a member of Hibz ut Tahrir – is a good example of a woman who wishes to live under the raw power of Islamists, dreaming of a revived Caliphate.

Men look at these people as though they are weird as well but they believe they are superior. There are women totally subjugated in some Islamic states forced to wear the veil, that’s a different issue. The veil causes segregation in the West and these women know it.

Question: Is the area becoming a no-go area for non-Muslims?

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Gina Khan: It is becoming a no go area in some parts of Birmingham. Non Muslims are becoming suspicious and uneasy as are secular Muslims. Why should Rev Ali (the Bishop of Rochester, pictured) be accused of racism when he is actually speaking the truth? Trevor Philips was spot on too – non-Muslims are leaving these areas because Muslim leaders have allowed our areas to turn into Muslim ghettos.

Hazel Blears and William Hague say they don't recognise these areas? Well they only need to visit and see. I have respect for Blears and Hague and I'd like to put them right. It's one thing trying to be diplomatic, it's another if you don't face up to a serious ideology that is aiming to mobilise the Muslim community and the next generation. No other religious group has asked for special demands. Who is instigating this special need for Muslims and Islam? Not Muslims like me or people I know.

So many British people from nearly every religion and race have said to me that something is going on but they just can't put their finger on it. I know exactly what they mean.

Question: So British mainstream politicians are missing the point here?

Gina Khan: They have missed the point for the last 40 years. Mr Brown, Mr Cameron should pay close attention next time they want to visit a Muslim community like mine. They could start counting the mosques springing up like mushrooms and the lack of resources for the youth in the community, especially for Muslim Girls. They should introduce a law prohibiting total square metres of one religion's buildings exceeding a certain amount in a given area per capita. Next time when they are up here they could visit bookshops and run-down Islamic schools. They have abandoned these communities.

Polygamy is more common than the British realise. Young teenage forced marriages and honour killings have escalated. So why was our plight ignored and why the Islamists appeased? I could take them to some really nice mainstream English, Irish, Indian, Jamaican, Sikh and 'Modern' Muslims who sense and fear this rise of Islamism but because Britain is a civilised, tolerant society they remain silent. Most fear being called Islamophobic or racist. The public needs educating. As one decent Indian family told me, Islamists were trying to buy a pub in Hodge Hill to turn into yet another Islamic centre.

There are not many Muslims in Hodge Hill but this is how the Islamists operate. People in Hodge Hill are going to either get angry and move out or worry about their young becoming converted. Muslims and non Muslims at grassroots level know something isn't right. They should talk to people, not just representatives or leaders. I am not scaremongering.

If you integrate you get to hear all sides like I have. Anyway I was in the minority who was standing up to radicals 20 years ago, no-one would listen to me then either. I feel the tide is turning – the Islamists have gone too far too soon. Britain is waking up and will show the world how to deal with these people.

Britain's political leaders have ignored the plight of Muslim women, although every day now the media is reporting honour killings, forced marriages and even the BBC Asian network debated polygamy recently. The silent taboos are being broken.

The forced marriage unit run by the foreign office will tell you that (although our hero is a British Sikh woman Jaswinder Sanghera, who had raised the issues of honour killing and forced marriages) they established the crimes against Muslim women are amongst the highest in the Pakistani communities in Britain. Take a look at Britain's most wanted list and a shocking amount of those wanted are Muslims. Young British Asian girls are still taken out of school and taken back to South Asia, denied a British Education and freedom of choice.

My God, it was the British themselves who passed the Marriage Act setting the minimum age to 14 for girls and 18 for boys in 1872 during the British Raj. They were themselves shocked at the practice of child bride marriages then. Over a century and half later and regardless of the abolition of slavery we didn't get very far did we? Thank God for Jaswinder Sanghera and other activists like Dr Shazia Sovaisi.

Question: And meanwhile unelected groups are setting the local agenda?

Gina Khan: A union member, a British Muslim mother, emailed me the 'manifesto for schools' that the MCB printed. She, as well as her Muslim female students, were stunned and opposed the manifesto. Others echo the same concern. They should read the emails I get.

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I went to school in Britain too, my parents were Muslims and desired no special treatment for me at school – thank God. My faith was my business, between me and God, that if I wanted to fast, I didn't expect every one else to put up with my whims, we never asked for special treatments above everyone else. But the Islamicisation of this country is headed by men like the MCB and their focus is on women's status as they perceive it and British Muslim children's education as they want it.

They have been manipulating government bodies and want to influence foreign policies. Hello? Are we all living in the same country or not? Gender apartheid printed on an MCB letterhead isn't going to stop the young from falling in love or marrying non Muslims. Human beings are human beings. Teenagers will be teenagers. I'm sick of these ringleaders of Islam forcing their backward anti-Jewish, anti-gay, anti-women, anti-ex Muslims ideologies down our throats. Who gave them – these unelected nobodies – the right?

They are not Gods ambassadors, God doesn't need any. They have no right whatsoever to tell Muslims how to live in Britain.

They have to stop forcing the hand of God on us all and reject the writings of Maududi and Syed Qutb. They need to stop inflicting one brand of Islam on us all. They politicised young Muslims the wrong way. The Middle East are not what every Muslim worries about. The situation in Britain has to be addressed.

Question: You say the MCB and the other self-elected Islamist groupings are affecting your human rights?

Gina Khan: The declaration of Human rights in 1948 is now being used by Jihadists. We never got a look in as abused Asian Muslim women. The defenders of freedom are letting the people of this country down. There are 52 Muslim countries around the world. If you don't like the West and their liberal way of life no one is stopping an Islamist from leaving the country on a one way ticket.

The likes of Dr Bari – the MCB leader – should be more concerned about his own people and their tragedies in Bangladesh than whether the British should adapt to arranged marriages. He's really getting peoples backs up. He has no right to put down the western woman or compare her to the pious Muslim woman, there is no such thing as the perfect religion or perfect human being. And they have no right

to dominate and stress our status in British Islam. Islam is not as rigid as they would want it to be because it is still down to Muslims making their own choices, we are free agents. There's real inadequacy shining through these men in their actions and their ideology.

Another big Islamist myth is that arranged marriages rarely end in divorce. Today every other British Muslim woman I have come across is divorced or a lone mother. The lone mother isn't in the Islamic conscience but she is in the conscience of this great country. Sharia law defines the family structure but is silent on the status of the lone mother. Islam nor can God protect women from the raw power of male hierarchy exercised in Muslim communities. Arrange marriages are the norm. What isn't normal is being forced into or being manipulated into marriage for the sake of honour or extended family. They pretend to be in denial about the real issues Muslim women endure in the name of honour or because of the status they wish to keep us confined in.

They have done nothing for the emancipation of Muslim women, in fact they advocate the opposite. They emphasise our duties not rights. Just like Maududi, who was not a scholar – he was a journalist who engaged with Syed Qutb in the mid 19th century. Men, who wanted Muslims to control the sexuality of women, advocated the burkha and a revival of 7th century Islam. They welcomed extreme Islamists from the Middle East. In so doing they fouled up. They do not represent the majority of mainstream Muslims.

We have to protect ourselves through learning to be independent, through education, skills, employment, housing, money for food, clothes and shelter. Where else in the world is the lone mother protected so that she can live with dignity? Most move out of Muslim communities that have turned into ghettos. It's no place for a lone mother.

Islam's ambassadors and spokesmen don't protect you here just because you're a Muslim woman. Ask the Muslim teenager who was ganged raped in a Muslim area by Muslim men. Was Islam's ringleaders or Sharia law there to protect her or give justice? No – only the British law and the services in place to support her protected her. These men have no idea what they are talking about except when it comes to reinforcing the burstable bubble that is political Islam.

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Question: You believe that these organisations serve Muslim women no purpose?

Gina Khan: Absolutely no purpose. Community leaders are in denial about the real issues manifesting in Muslim communities besides Jihadism. Rape, sexual harassment, forced marriages, honour killings, polygamy, forced conversions, domestic violence, depression, drugs, gang culture and paedophiles all exist on our streets too, in our communities. And we remain shamefully silent. There is no such thing as a pious, true Muslim country or community. Not in Pakistan or in ‘the great republic of Iran,’ where religious police force the subjugation.

No wonder Muslim women feel they need to wear the veil in Muslim communities. We get harassed in Muslim areas. But I’m not afraid to speak the truth now.

Public harassment is on the rise in such areas. Ask the local women. That’s what happens when communities go backwards and not forward. That is the consequence when women are denied leadership in mosques or not given the space to have dialogue with the government. *Our voices are drowned out by the Islamists.*

I hope Hazel Blears succeeds in this idea to empower Muslim women against extremists. What did Bunglawala have to say this time in response? Instead of welcoming the idea he said the government is asking women to be spies. With this obfuscation you can see that he is actually at war. The thought of Muslim women being empowered and standing up to their ideology threatens them.

I’d like to tell Bunglawala, I know who I would want outside my house protecting me and my children against harassment, extremism or Jihadism. Not the likes of him, who are part of the problem not the solution. If they’re not blaming the police, they’re blaming the Americans or the Zionists or they latch onto foreign policies. They never look within. They take on the mindless rhetoric that we Muslims have lost our true path and must return to 7th century Islam. Millions of Muslims want to live and let live and that’s why we have to break our silence.

Question: So strong women are the answer?

Gina Khan: The empowerment of Muslim women is crucial against this backward male dominated ideology. Any change in the thinking and behaviour of mothers has a strong impact on children and the next generation. Benazir Bhutto is an inspiration, even after her death, Muslim youths in colleges are signing up to join

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the PPP and Muslim women and men respected her, If she can oppose this ideology, oppose Islamists, why aren't we doing the same in Britain? Isn't this ideology in collision with democracy?

Why are we allowing Islamists to mobilise our minds? Why are we participating in our own oppression?

If my son hadn't been approached by radical Islamists on the streets of Ward End and if I didn't know a British Christian woman from Birmingham whose teenage son was converted by Salafists and then tried to kill her because she refused to convert, I would have been ignorant too of the power of Jihadism embedded in our communities.

Mr Bunglawala doesn't fool me. These men like Bunglawala are exactly the kind of Islamic men that Pakistani women in Pakistan wouldn't trust or give their vote to.

In fact Hazel Blears could be thinking of empowering non Muslim women too. The rate of conversions is alarming. Most converts seem to be indoctrinated with extreme Islam and political Islam. I have met British black and white, Indian, Sikh mothers who have the same fear as I do for our growing children. If the government continues to fail its people and the next generation through lack of knowledge and education then we are in a lose-lose situation. The gulf they want to create will widen.

The MCB don't give a damn about the Muslims or non Muslims. They are using their position to mobilise the masses towards political Islam. Why? What's wrong with the British law? It trumps their barbarity. It's about time the voices of British Muslim women and secular and reformers were heard. Why doesn't the government ask British born Muslim women to advise them?

Women like Samina Malik (the self-styled 'lyrical terrorist') were on the conveyor belt towards Jihadism but she clearly hadn't read up enough about the rewards for women jihadis, or asked her Islamist male mentors enough questions. I hope the Samina Malik case deters other radical females from dreaming of 'martyrdom.' According to what I have read, women won't enjoy the bounties of heaven as much as the men will. Even in the after life women will be treated as sub human and have to put with all the virgins they will inherit, so say the Islamists.

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Question: Where's the platform for you to promulgate your feelings and solutions?

Gina Khan: Peaceful mainstream British Muslims are the silent majority. We have no platform where we can oppose the Jihadists' propaganda.

There are millions of Muslims in this country that are proud to be British, that abhor honour killings, forced marriages, polygamy, the veil, abhor the Islamists, abhor the suicide human bombs that Jihadism has created. There are thousands of British Muslims who respect the Jewish people, accept Israel as the one of the best democratic countries in the Middle East and would never abuse let alone behead a Jew or apostle.

Contrary to interpretations, mainstream Muslims respect people of other religions and the importance of a pluralist modern reformed Islam. We live and let live. There are millions who supported a woman leader Benazir Bhutto as she was the only beacon of light who could have instilled democracy in Pakistan. The last thing modern Pakistanis want is an Islamist party running the country. It's Islamists who discriminate or assassinate women in power as they have with Benazir.

People like my mother respected the British education, wanted their rights and freedoms, wanted their full humanity back. I hope Pakistanis makes the right choice.

Question: And you, Gina. What lies ahead for you?

Gina Khan: I plan to carry on writing and doing interviews, I plan to work as an anti Jihad activist. I plan to challenge in any way I can the status that Islamists have enslaved us into. I will repeat over and over that I don't believe for one moment that the God who created me wanted me to walk out of my front door using only half the IQ he gave me. Nor is my brain deficient and nor are we any less human to the Muslim male.

I live in a democracy. I am lucky. I will exercise my freedom of speech and champion democracy, oppose Jihadism and empower women to stand up for their natural rights and full humanity. And I won't stop until the government of this country hears the voices of women/men like me who know they are living in one of the best democracies in the world.

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No one owns Islam and the Islamists can't pressurise Muslims or non Muslims any longer. We must break our silence. British people are the nicest, the most tolerant and the most humane people on earth. I learnt more about kindness, forgiveness and humanity from the English, Welsh, Jamaican, Indian, Irish, Gays and Atheists, that no script on earth could have taught me.

We need to stop putting the country down and playing into the hands of Islamist. There's a dangerous ideology out there that is doing everything to cause a clash within this humane civilisation. I hope to God that one day we can all as British people oppose this ideology from the mainstream without fear – as that is all it takes – or the future is bleak.

Staying silent just isn't an option anymore. What will we say to the next generation, our children, their children? That we had no backbone?

Mahatma Gandhi said 'I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills.' That says it all for me.

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