**Erroneous hurt** [Muhammad Ahsan Kureshi](https://nation.com.pk/authorpost/columnist/muhammad-ahsan-kureshi/)

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In April 2019, Julian Assange was dragged out of the Ecuador embassy in London. Since then, he’s been locked in a category A prison in the UK. Priti Patel, the home secretary has since approved his extradition to the US. Assange has appealed against it but, we all know what a bully the US is. Assange’s crime was ensuring free access to information and cementing freedom of speech. He, via WikiLeaks, publicly published whistleblower accounts that completely dismantled the meta-narrative the powerful US had been imposing on its local events and international misadventures (read atrocities). The drama around holding Assange accountable has spread over a decade. However, no event was as tragic as the brief clip of a bound Assange being carried outside of the Ecuador embassy in London. Since then, his supporters have pushed for his release. However, the noise around it has barely been audible. No survey noticed an increased rise of WikiLeaks access the day Assange was scooped up, which is strange for the man who had basically been fighting to ensure the freedom and right to both speak and know. His project was a noble one: he allowed for a counter narrative in an arena that is congested with monotonic propagandas and prophecies. And yet, his arrest did not increase any interest in his project.
Let’s jump forward a few years to 12th of August 2022. It’s New York, and Salman Rushdie is on the stage. Suddenly, a man jumps on to the stage and does what he did. Today, Rushdie is recovering and off the ventilators. As I write these words, Hadi Matar is imprisoned somewhere by the security authorities. Today, ‘The Satanic Verses’ is trending as number one on amazon bookstore in both Literary satire Fiction and Contemporary British and Irish literature lists. Moreover, it is #7 most sold audiobook on audible. These customers, who are undoubtedly from the clumped-up category of ‘the west’, are now excited about the book. Or, maybe, which is a more probable case, they buy copies of Rushdie’s books both as a protest against his stabbing as well as a sign of their solidarity with him. Satanic verses is popular once again. The fact that the west would react in this manner to Rushdie’s stabbing and not to the tragedy around Assange’s case is curious. If the reaction to the Rushdie incident is indeed to support freedom of speech towards a work of fiction, why wouldn’t the west react similarly to a project that disseminates non-fiction, real-life accounts? The hypocrisy there is quite obvious. The reaction to the stabbing is not unique. The engagement became relevant again when some European media houses recognised how to cash-in to such reactions. They published cartoons that were motivated to hurt Muslims. Reactions ensued. And, as predicted, amongst other things, everyone in the west somehow wanted to be Charlie.
That said, wrapping directed attempts at hurting someone under the guise of freedom of speech is simply lazy. Europe continues to be a geography clogged with contradictions. While it protects sentiments of those that it values, the sentiments of Muslims are regularly invalidated. And the reaction of the west towards Rushdie’s stabbing is just another example of that. None of these new customers of Rushdie’s book have sought to understand why Muslims act as they do. Again, this is not to say that Matar represents the global Muslim population. Instead, what I point towards is the feeling of hurt that encapsulates Muslims when such derogatory projects are undertaken. This response is not limited to the states and their policies alone. As the recent popularity of the book shows, the west at large would rather support actions that hurt Muslims than try to understand and accept their lived-reality. This is similarly observed in integration programs where Muslims are told to exactly replicate the western form of living in order to be ‘integrated’. However, this expectation softens when immigrants who are deemed as exotic settle in these cities. Their more fashionable customs are easily adopted and even commercialised. Muslim customs though are, and will always remain, problematic.
A vast majority of Muslims recognise that no matter how wicked circumstances become, physical violence is never an option. That said, the west also needs to realise that emotional violence on Muslims of the world is equally condemnable. Sure, you should critique Islam through how its practiced today. You should also criticise the adoption of archaic dogmas that are senseless in this time and age. But, let’s be honest, neither the cartoons, nor Rushdie’s book are critiques. Instead, these are instruments designed specifically to hurt the sentiments of Muslims. Regardless of our religions and backgrounds, I am sure we can all agree that hurting people should be discouraged. So, how about we just stop encouraging and appreciating when someone hurts another? Unfortunately, it seems like this is too much to ask today.