

Muslims fought and died for this country ... don't paint us all with militants' brush

MP on his faith's vital gifts to UK

By SADIQ KHAN, Labour MP for Tooting

NEXT week, on Remembrance Sunday, we honour those who made the ultimate sacrifice to protect our country and our British values.

But one thing you rarely hear is that among the ranks of those fighting to protect Britain were 3.5million soldiers from what is now India and Pakistan.

Many of these were Muslim. Tens of thousands lost their lives.

In the early months of the First World War, without the brave efforts of the volunteer Indian army many miles from home, the Germans might have broken through and taken control of the Channel Ports.

Memorials across northern France and Belgium are littered with names such as Muhammad, Aslam, Abdul and even Khan.

As a proud British Muslim I'm sad when all I hear are negatives about my religion.

Muslims make an enormous positive contribution to the UK yet are often only seen through the lens of terror and intolerance.

Growing up on a council estate in south London, my mum and dad stressed the importance of taking pride in my country, working hard and contributing to society.

I know how hard my own dad worked as a London bus driver — sometimes having to resort to taking a trip on the 44 bus he drove just to see him!

The same attitude to working hard and having pride in the UK has stayed with me into my adult life. I'm not alone.

Many British Muslims either run their own business or work in professional jobs.

Research published this week shows British Muslims contribute **£31BILLION** to our economy every year.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy and, in London alone, one in three is owned by Muslims, despite their being only one in eight of the population.

And they aren't all curry houses!

They are employing 70,000 people, and this is repeated across the country.

More than 100,000 British Muslims are senior professionals such as civil servants, doctors, lawyers and accountants.

Partly, this is a product of children in Muslim families being taught from a young age to aim for a professional career.

My own memories are of seeing the school careers adviser and being told I could make it as a dentist.

Instead of teeth, I opted for a law career before becoming an MP.

But it shows the kind of culture and work ethic that's common across the Muslim community.

But the contribution of British Muslims goes further than the economy. Look at the arts and sports.

Mo Farah, a British Muslim, was the face of Team GB at the London Olympics. And there was Nasser Hussain, who captained the England cricket team in 45 Test matches.

Monica Ali's books, including the brilliant *Brick Lane*, have been read by a generation.

British Muslims are also a growing influence in music, from Zayn Malik in One Direction, to Boyan Chowdhury in The Zutons to Natasha Khan, aka Bat For Lashes.

Ordinary British Muslims who aren't stars or celebrities contribute just as much to society. One of the five pillars of Islam is "Zakat" — charitable giving to those less fortunate than yourself.

Research shows Muslims gave more to charity than any other UK community last year.

So today I call on *The Sun on Sunday's* great army of readers — don't do, as others have done, and tar a whole community because of the actions of a very small minority, whatever that community.

Not only do I refuse to make excuses for those who use Islam to promote hate and violence, I unequivocally condemn it — this is a million miles away from the values the religion promotes.

Instead, let's not ignore but celebrate the contribution of our Muslim community.