RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unvarnished Truth of Islamophobia: A Case Study of Misrepresentation of Muslim Identity in *"The Fatwa Girl"* by Akbar Agha

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Abstract: *This research thesis carefully examines the complex relationships between literature, Muslim identity, and the widespread issue of Islamophobia by critically engaging with the novel The Fatwa Girl written by Akbar Agha. Through content analysis, the study seeks to expose the implicit representations and analyses found in the novel, highlighting the complex ways in which Muslim identity is constructed and Islamophobic myths are maintained in the narrative. Through an analysis of the novel's role in the spread of Islamophobia and a close examination of its complex depiction of Muslim identity, the study highlights the moral obligations of writers and publishers—the current study contributes to the broader discussion of how literature shapes public attitudes towards Muslims and Islam. The study offers a strong analytical framework and is based on postcolonial theory as expressed by Edward Said in Orientalism and multicultural literary theory, which was influenced by Homi Bhabha's The Location of Culture. Literature's transformative effect on societal biases and identity conceptions is revealed, advancing enlightened conversations in a culture dealing with complex Islamophobia.*

Introduction
Background of the Study

Islamophobia is a complicated, multi-layered problem in today's world that needs scholarly attention. This study begins an examination of Islamophobia through a literary lens, concentrating on *The Fatwa Girl*, a work of fiction by Akbar Agha. In addition to reflecting broader cultural beliefs that feed Islamophobia, this story offers a distinctive window into the realities of Muslims. The issues, situations, and perspectives that will be investigated in depth are outlined in this introductory chapter to set the stage for our theoretical investigation. Islamophobia has a modern focus because of 20th-century events like the Iranian Revolution and 9/11. However, it has roots in over a millennium of history.

Analyzing the causes of Islamophobia is essential to understanding it. For more than a thousand years, Islam has been a part of world history, including periods of peace and conflict between Islamic and non-Islamic nations (Aswad and Sayed, 2021). The Crusades, the Ottoman Empire and European colonization in areas with a majority of Muslims are historical events that have influenced the development of stereotypes and prejudices towards Muslims. Modern Islamophobia first appeared in the 20th century, and it is frequently associated with geopolitical events like the Iranian Revolution and the 9/11 attacks, which heightened misperceptions of Islam and Muslims.

The Runnymede Trust Report 1996, which defined "*Islamophobia*" as "*unjustified hostility towards Islam* (Encyclopedia of Race and Ethics, p. 215)," helped the term, which was first used in 1918, achieve widespread prominence in the late 1990s. It is defined as *"indiscriminate negative attitudes towards Islam or Muslims"* in the widely used Erik, Bleich definition (Bleich and Erik, 2011). This idea is consistent with

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dictionary definitions like Merriam-Webster's "*dislike of or prejudice against Islam*," especially irrational fear, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. While the Collins English Dictionary emphasizes "*dislike of Islam or Muslims*," the Cambridge Dictionary defines it as "*dislike of Islam or Muslims*." The emphasis in the Macmillan Dictionary is on "*hatred or fear of Muslims.*"

This study focuses on Akbar Aagha, an accomplished Pakistani novelist whose literary contributions have significantly enriched the discourse on Islamophobia. Aagha's unique insights and narrative techniques provide an invaluable perspective for a nuanced exploration of Islamophobia as portrayed in his novel, *The Fatwa Girl*. Due to growing immigration and their religious and ethnic affiliation, certain Muslims in today's multicultural cultures experience harassment, molestation, murder, and abuse. For instance, 200 police reports with Islamophobic motivations were lodged in Sweden in 2007 (Edvardsson, 2018). The term Islamophobia may be better described as *anti-Muslim*, underlining its focus on individuals rather than the religion itself, according to Fred Halliday (2002), a specialist in Middle Eastern affairs.

Akbar Aagha's literary piece, *The Fatwa Girl*, which was published in 2011, explores the difficulties of Islamophobia. Aagha's story examines how people deal with living in a society that is full of prejudice and misunderstandings. The novel is a useful case study for examining how Islamophobia is portrayed, reinforced, and contested in modern writing. It also offers a subtle examination of the many facets of this complex topic when viewed through the prism of Islamophobia. Readers are symbolically ushered into a comprehensive investigation of religious identity, the complexities of belonging within a Muslim society, and the enormous influence of religious convictions on individual lives in the novel's opening lines, which are taken from the Azan, the Islamic call to prayer.

In Muslim communities, where people can obey to avoid being classified as outsiders, internalized Islamophobia is revealed by examining the socially constructed mindset of young Muslims towards prayer and religious beliefs. The novel examines the difficulties faced by young men and women in Pakistani culture, highlighting the prejudices resulting from Islamophobia, and emphasizes the significance of religious obligations, especially regarding suicide's stigmatization as an irreparable sin. The story sheds light on the challenges of establishing relationships facing opposing religious and cultural traditions through the protagonist's complex interactions and unfulfilled love for Amina.

The novel *The Fatwa Girl* explores the prejudices and dangers that Muslim societies must deal with. It describes how suicide bombers target mosques and looks at how religious organizations contribute to radicalization. It presents a nuanced viewpoint on the idea of Talibanization in Pakistan and refutes Western perceptions of Muslims as possible fanatics. Aagha is a notable character for scholarly investigation because of his substantial contribution to the literary analysis of Islamophobia. To add to the scholarly conversation on Islamophobia and literature, this research thesis will investigate the theoretical underpinnings of the issue, evaluate Aagha's significance as a theorist in the literary context, critically analyze *The Fatwa Girl*, and delve into the life and inspirations of the novelist.

Statement of the Problem

This study examines how Muslim identity is portrayed in contemporary literature, concentrating on Akbar Agha's *The Fatwa Girl*. It further investigates the book's deliberate misrepresentations, their effect on readers, the author's and publishers' ethical responsibilities, and the influence of the socio-political environment on these portrayals.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how Akbar Agha's *The Fatwa Girl* contributes to the representation and perpetuation of Islamophobia, notably in its portrayal of Muslim identity.
2. Explore how the historical setting of *The Fatwa Girl* affects the story, reinforces Islamophobia stereotypes, and suggests moral issues and ethical representation of Muslim identity.

Research Questions

1. How does the representation of Muslim identity in *The Fatwa Girl* contribute to Islamophobia?
2. In the context of the historical backdrop, how are Muslims portrayed ethically in The Fatwa Girl?

Significance of the Study

This study is important for expanding our understanding of how literature like *The Fatwa Girl* might influence public perceptions of Muslims and work to oppose or legitimize Islamophobia. It makes clear the moral obligations of authors and publishers while accounting for the social context, enabling more informed conversations about the potential impact of literature on public opinion and the advancement of inclusive representation.

Delimitation of the Study

As a case study of modern literature, *The Fatwa Girl* by Akbar Aagha will be analyzed in this study. It focuses particularly on how Muslim identity is portrayed in the book and how that could contribute to Islamophobia. The research does not include a thorough investigation of reader responses, author interviews, or the extensive socio-political backdrop. It also does not include a broader examination of the overall literary environment.

Literature Review

The literature review in this research thesis serves as a thorough exploration of key ideas and themes crucial to the study of Islamophobia, Muslim identity, diaspora literature, misrepresentation of Muslims in literature and the media, cultural identity, or the challenges that Muslim immigrants face in today's society. It offers a crucial background for the investigation of these ideas that follow in the context of Akbar Agha's book *The Fatwa Girl*. The purpose of this section is to provide a basis for the investigation of how these issues are represented, debated, and interact in the field of literature by synthesizing the body of extant research.

Islamophobia, defined as an intense fear or prejudice towards Islam and Muslims, has historical roots dating back to the early 20th century. The term "islamophobia" appeared in a 1910 thesis by Alain Quellien, describing a prevalent bias against Islam in Western and Christian societies. It entered the English language in 1923 and resurfaced in the 1970s. Notably, it was absent from the Muslim world initially and was later translated as "*ruhāb al-islām*" in Arabic during the 1990s (Anawati, 1976). The University of California at Berkeley's Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project 2017 offers a comprehensive definition of Islamophobia as a manufactured fear or bias perpetuated by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure. It also justifies the use of violence to achieve the supposed "*civilizational rehab*" of targeted communities. Importantly, Islamophobia reinforces a global racial structure that upholds and extends disparities in resource distribution.

Islamophobia: A fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims or non-Muslim individuals that lead to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world. Motivated by institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility that transcends into structural and cultural racism, which targets the symbols and markers of a being a Muslim. The Runnymede Trust report, Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All, was released in 1997 and was the first to bring attention to the issue of Islamophobia in the UK. According to the Runnymede Trust (Runnymede Trust, 1997: 1), Islamophobia is the shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims.

Early uses of the term "Islamophobia" trace back to the early 20th century, and it has an intricate past. A 1918 history of the Islamic prophet Muhammad by Alphonse Étienne Dinet and Sliman ben Ibrahim has one of the oldest references to the term, where they use the French word "islamophobie." The phrase was translated as "*feelings hostile to Islam*" in their book's English translation (Dinet et al.; 1918). Other early uses of the language in French can be found in 1910 and later. However, they did not have the same significance as modern usage. As opposed to fear or hate of Muslims by non-Muslims, these early references reflected a phobia of Islam among liberal Muslims and Muslim feminists (Allen and Christopher, 2010)

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term entered the English language in 1923 as a result of a publication in The Journal of Theological Studies ("*Islamophobia". Home: Oxford English Dictionary*). However, it became more well-known after the Runnymede Trust report was released in 1997. The term

"Islamophobia" was first coined in the early 2000s by leaders like Kofi Annan to describe the growing intolerance and prejudice towards Islam and Muslims (Annan and Kofi, 2004)

The term islamophobia refers to both a campaign against Islam and Muslims that stems from a fear or phobia of the religion "Islam" and of its adherents, Muslims. Expressions of Islamophobia are based on how the majority perceives the minority (Ouis and Roald, 2003. pp.26-27). Roald, Ouis, and Bunzl all believe that the idea of Islamophobia as a strained relationship between non-Muslims and Muslims has only become stronger since the World Trade Center attack on September 11, 2001. The relations between Muslims and non-Muslims thus become very evident, and this leads to prejudices and discrimination against those who do not belong to us because they do not apply to the norm of the majority. Göran Larsson, a religious scientist, emphasizes that Islamophobia might be based on preconceived notions about Muslims that are ingrained in stereotyping and unfavorable views towards Muslims (Larsson, 2006. pp. 10). Islamophobia is a clear example of how race, ethnicity, and religion are undercut by dominant discourses. To communicate this position, for example, racial stereotypes from the media are often used.

According to Elizabeth Poole (2003), the media has come under fire for encouraging anti-Muslim sentiment. She makes reference to a case study that examined British press articles from 1994 to 2004 and found that Muslim voices were underrepresented and that Muslims were frequently portrayed negatively. These representations frequently painted Islam and Muslims as dangers to Western ideals and security (p. 217). Benn and Jawad stated that media portrayals of Islam and Muslims as being primitive and irrational fuel anti-Muslim sentiment. Egorova and Tudor point out that the media's use of phrases like "*Islamic terrorism*" has reinforced misperceptions about the religion. John E. Richardson's research also revealed that mainstream publications frequently depicted Muslims as a homogenous threat to British civilization, highlighting the media's role in influencing public opinion (Wikipedia).

Research comparing media coverage of "*terrorist attacks*" carried out by Islamist militants with those carried out by non-Muslims in the US was carried out by the Universities of Georgia and Alabama. Researchers discovered that "*terrorist attacks*" carried out by Islamist militants garner 357% more media coverage than those carried out by non-Muslims or people of color. Non-Muslim terrorist attacks (or those where the religion was unclear) generated an average of 15 headlines, but Muslim extremist strikes did so with 105 headlines. The study's methodology involved examining news articles that covered terrorist events in the US between 2005 and 2015 (Chalabi and Mona, 2018).

Mehdi Hasan 2009 wrote in the "*New Statesman*" in 2009 that Western media overreported a few incidences involving Islamist terrorism while underreporting the vast majority of planned non-Islamist terrorist plots carried out by "*non-Irish white people*." According to a 2012 survey, Muslims in many European nations, including France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, encounter the highest levels of media Islamophobia (Kunst et al., 2012). Islamophobia has been leveled against media figures. The Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci was referred to as "*notorious for her Islamophobia*" in The Guardian's obituary. There are many other researchers who stated that Muslims are portrayed as terrorist extremists in the media more as compared to other religious people.

Silva and Meaux have hypothesized that media framing, particularly by news outlets, is a crucial factor contributing to unfavorable interactions, stigmatization, and marginalization of the Muslim population. In the context of mass violent episodes, this framing frequently associates Muslims with terrorism and motivations stemming from jihadist ideology. The results of Silva's analysis, from 2000 to 2016, showed that this media framing has become more prevalent during the sixteen-year period. Additionally, Silva's study discovered that Muslim offenders were considerably more likely to be depicted as terrorists than their White counterparts (Silva and Jason, 2021).

Meaux and colleagues 2020, expand on this concept by citing a study done by Park and others, which showed that Americans' most prevalent link with Arab Muslims and all are supporting terrorism. In essence, the findings of Silva and Meaux's studies highlight the part that media framing plays in maintaining unfavorable stereotypes and biases about the Muslim community, with implications for how people view and relate to this population.

The European Crusades, which took place between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, provide one important historical backdrop. During this time, Christian forces from the West launched military campaigns to liberate the Holy Land from Muslim dominion. The narrative of religious and cultural struggle that was fostered by these campaigns served as the foundation for the dehumanization and demonization of Muslims in European communities.

The period of European colonialism and imperialism, which lasted from the 18th through the 20th century, is another important historical force. Large-scale empires were founded by European nations in places like Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. By doing so, they frequently spread the idea that they are superior to native Muslim communities in terms of culture and religion. This imperialistic way of thinking fuelled a sense of superiority that showed itself in discriminatory laws and the reaffirmation of unfavorable preconceptions about Muslims.

Furthermore, the traumatic experiences linked to the Crusades and the fall of the Byzantine Empire in the 15th century have left a long-lasting impression on European attitudes toward Islam. These incidents contributed to the emergence of unfavorable narratives that persisted for centuries and reinforced the notion of an unbridgeable conflict between the Christian West and the Muslim East. In conclusion, the historical background of Islamophobia is complex and diversified, influenced by various eras and historical occurrences. These historical prejudices and preconceptions have left a lasting legacy that affects how Muslims and Islam are viewed and treated in society today.

The study of Muslim identity is of extraordinary importance in today's multipolar world as a reaction to the problems of globalization and as a way to enhance the world's different multicultural and multireligious landscape. Modern identity systems are more fluid and complicated than ever, with different parts constantly changing. Particularly in America, the United Kingdom, and Russia, religious communities have experienced tension and conflict with one another and within themselves because of Muslim identity. The exploring of complex relationships between various levels of identity, such as ethnic, religious, civil, national, gender, and age, as they develop in various cultural, historical, and political contexts. Mchedlova stated in 2016 that in the contemporary world, religion has moved beyond its status as a purely private affair to take center stage in public discourse. This transition includes a range of aspects, from charitable and socially beneficial activities to troubling manifestations of religious fundamentalism. It includes the resurrection of religious organizations and moral authority as well as their growing influence on determining political goals.

Diverse definitions of religious identity can be found in the field of modern American, European and Russian religious studies. Traditionally, religious identity is viewed as a person's commitment to a particular religion, supported by subjective self-perception as a believer and identification with fellow adherents, as well as by objective criteria, such as adherence to doctrinal principles, ritual practices, and community norms (Smirnov, 2019). Religious identity is described as being more private and individualized, being directly related to moral cohesion, and representing the person's spiritual relationship with the divine when contrasting it with ethno-confessional identity (Ryzhova, 2019).

Racist prejudice against Muslims is fuelled by Islamophobia in the UK and has gotten worse since 9/11. Events like the Rushdie Affair and opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, when religion trumps race and causes racial conflicts, have a significant impact on Muslim identity. British Muslims continue to uphold distinctive aspects of Islamic culture while garnering prominence for their opposition to military action. Extremists use jihad, which has its roots in Quranic theology, to advance their own global aspirations while erroneously associating Islam with violence and cultural intolerance. Despite this impression, UK Muslims frequently encounter silencers that are essential to their academic position (Masoud, 2022). Religious practices and values influence a person's religious identity, which includes their beliefs, ideology, and personality. Thus, the definition of being a Muslim is a personal one that varies from person to person depending on their religious beliefs and practices. Muslim names are another outward manifestation of this identity.

This assertion is based on research done in 2022 by Masoud. According to him, this indicates that most Muslims do not need to hide their identities; however, less pious Muslims may have other needs. He implies that people are generally accepting and that organizations and universities value diversity. Names are

important to one's identity and shouldn't be kept secret. Furthermore, Masoud wrote in the context of higher education in the UK, the study explores Muslim people's experiences. Universities offer encouraging measures and prayer spaces as they explore Muslim identity as it relates to attire, conduct, and spirituality. A noteworthy conclusion is that Muslims feel safe on campus, which is due to how responsible colleges handle hate crimes.

The author of "*Maps for Lost Lovers*" engages with the development of British Muslim identities in the aftermath of 9/11 in this piece. It emphasizes the need for fresh perspectives on how to comprehend and address the problems of this time, and it criticizes the "*war on terror*" rhetoric for maintaining imperialist and gendered discourses. In the end, the article makes a case for a more comprehensive comprehension of vulnerability and identification with marginalized people in the post-9/11 society (Moore, 2009). In particular, within non-European/non-white diasporic populations like the Indian diaspora in the USA, the essay makes an argument for a reconsideration of acculturation theories. It highlights the importance of the 1965 Immigration Act in converting the Indian diaspora from low-skilled laborers to highly trained professionals, challenging linear acculturation paradigms. It investigates how first-generation Indians dealt with issues of racism and prejudice, particularly after the 9/11 attacks, which had an impact on their integration. It draws on an ethnographic study conducted in a Connecticut Indian diaspora community. The work makes use of diaspora tales to show how people changed their appearance to protect themselves after 9/11, which led to a change in racial identity and enhanced self-awareness. The complex interactions of race, geography, and belonging within diaspora contexts are highlighted in these narratives, which call for a revaluation of acculturation paradigms (Bhatia, 2008).

Research Methodology

To investigate Islamophobia and Muslim identity in Akbar Agha's *The Fatwa Girl*, this study uses qualitative analysis. With a focus on a qualitative methodology, the research employs meticulous reading and thematic analysis to examine cultural subtleties and socio-political criticisms. It contextualizes the analysis by drawing on postcolonial and multicultural literary theories, using these frameworks to comprehend how literature reflects contemporary attitudes towards Islamophobia and Muslim identity. The paper examines the depiction of Muslim identity, the socio-political context in which it is set, and how it contributes to the spread of Islamophobia. The importance of ethical issues for authors writing on this subject is emphasized.

Theoretical Framework

In textual analysis, understanding of Muslim identity and islamophobia in the selected novel, the research investigation makes use of a dual theoretical framework that is anchored on postcolonial theory, as expressed by Edward Said in "Orientalism," and multicultural literary theory, which is especially influenced by Homi Bhabha's work in "*The Location of Culture*." In order to examine power structures and prejudices, postcolonial theory is crucial in analyzing historical depictions of Muslims and the Middle East in Western literature. The challenging nature of cultural identity and hybridity in literature is explored by multicultural literary theory. Together, these frameworks give a strong analytical lens through which to study how *The Fatwa Girl* addresses issues of Islamophobia and Muslim identity. They also provide insights into how literature simultaneously reflects and contradicts dominant cultural narratives.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research methodology to examine how Islamophobia and Muslim identity are portrayed in Akbar Agha's novel *The Fatwa Girl*. Through the integration of diverse qualitative methodologies, such as thorough text analysis and a review of relevant literature, the study endeavors to get a thorough comprehension of the research inquiries. The novel's themes, characterizations, and narrative components about Muslim identity and Islamophobia will be categorized using content analysis. Textual evidence and recurrent patterns will be found through thematic analysis. The qualitative approach is preferred because of its interpretive and all-encompassing qualities, even with the emphasis on social, religious, political, and cultural settings.

Procedure

The main source of analysis in this research is *The Fatwa Girl*, written by Akbar Agha, an American-Pakistani writer. Secondary sources offer further insights into Muslim identity and Islamophobia. These sources include research papers, articles, literary works, and literary theories, including postcolonial and multicultural literary theory. These theories provide frameworks for a thorough examination of the content of the novel, assisting in the evaluation of how Muslim identity is portrayed and how cultural diversity is handled. Taking multicultural theory into consideration, the study seeks to ascertain if the tale fosters intercultural understanding or perpetuates stereotypes. This theoretical framework encourages us to analyze the novel's contribution to this discourse and comprehend the intricacies of identity in a heterogeneous society.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the sources used in this study exclusively uses qualitative techniques to examine how Islamophobia and Muslim identity are represented in *The Fatwa Girl*. The study critically evaluates the portrayal in the novel as well as the underlying power dynamics and narratives that shape these depictions by drawing on postcolonial theory and multicultural theory. The main technique used to examine the text of the novel is content analysis, with a particular emphasis on themes, characterizations, and narrative components connected to Muslim identity and Islamophobia. This analysis, which is informed by postcolonial theory, focuses on textual portions that either support racism or Orientalist attitudes or pose a challenge to them. Iteratively reading, rereading, and deeply studying textual data are all steps in the content analysis process. Relevant textual evidence will be offered to support the themes and patterns that correlate with insights regarding Muslim identity and Islamophobia. In addition, elements that contradict or undermine imperialist narratives will be investigated, aiding in the development of a comprehensive understanding of how Muslim identity is addressed in the text.

Results and Discussion

This section focuses on an in-depth examination of Akbar Agha's *The Fatwa Girl*, emphasizing how Islamophobia and Muslim identity are represented in the novel. The current study aims to uncover how this literary work both reflects and challenges current narratives regarding Muslim identity and Islamophobia through the evaluation of the nuanced structure of *The Fatwa Girl*. The study method for extracting textual variations and exploring the underlying structures of power, historical legacies, and cultural complexities that influence these depictions is the content analysis method, which has its basis in the preferred theoretical frameworks. Through this analysis, the approach will further knowledge of the significant subject matter of Muslim identity and Islamophobia while highlighting the ways in which literature affects and changes social views.

Islamophobia

The Oxford English Dictionary defines Islamophobia as a strong dislike or fear of Islam, especially when it comes to its political implications. It includes the expression of hostility or prejudice towards Muslims. Islamophobie, as Quellien first used the term in 1910. This phrase refers to a widespread predisposition against Islam among the populace of Western and Christian cultures. The English-speaking world did not instantly adopt the term Islamophobia. Instead, "feelings antagonistic to Islam was" the chosen English term. The term Islamophobia did not reappear as widely as it is now until 1976 when Anawati used it in an article in 1976.

From the facts given, it is clear that Islamophobia refers to a strong dislike or bias towards Islam or Muslims. This hostility frequently stems from false rumors and misconceptions that are widely disseminated. The current study's focus, the novel *The Fatwa Girl*, provides a clear illustration of this idea. The main character in the book follows the true meaning of Islam instead of its outward forms. She defies the consensus and is vehemently opposed to the propagation of unfounded rumors (p.7). This underlines even more the earlier argument that prejudice and false information are the main sources of unfavorable perceptions about Islam and Muslims.

9/11 Attack

Labeled as 9/11, the September 11 attacks were a string of four planned suicide bombings against the United States in 2001 planned by the extremist organization al-Qaeda. Nineteen terrorists took control of four commercial aircraft that were supposed to travel from the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions of the East Coast to California on that fateful morning. At the time, the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York City were one of the five highest buildings in the world. The hijackers deliberately smashed the first two planes into these structures. They also launched an attack on the nation's capital, directing the next two flights towards locations in or around Washington, D.C. (Gunaratna and Ronan, 2002).

In the novel, the writer mentions that 9/11 is the greatest conspiracy theory in the world (p.6). The story continues past those incidents in the history of Pakistani politics and links them to the devastating 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in the United States. The intricate and sometimes contradictory narratives surrounding the Muslim world, terrorism, and international geopolitics are highlighted by this juxtaposition. As the author pointed out, the US government had prepared this strike as a lead-up to its invasion of Iraq. It should be highlighted that while 9/11 was a major factor in the development and spread of Islamophobia, it was actually a politically motivated attack designed to mislead people about Islam and Muslims worldwide in order to gain political advantage.

7/7 London Bombings

The London bombings on July 7, 2005, also known as 7/7, were a string of four planned suicide assaults carried out by Islamist terrorists. Commuters using London's public transit system in the hectic morning rush hour were the target of these attacks. The attackers carried out their plot by rapidly detonating homemade bombs aboard Inner London Underground trains. Three attacks happened at Edgware Road, on the Circle line close to Aldgate, and on the Piccadilly line close to Russell Square. In Tavistock Square, a fourth terrorist exploded a bomb on a double-decker bus (Timeline of the 2005 London bombings).

Four suicide bombers, Germaine Lindsay, Hasib Hussain, Shehzad Tanweer, and Muhammad Sidique Khan, carried out the bombings on July 7, 2005. Remarkably, These attackers were referred to as "cleanskins" by Charles Clarke, the Home Secretary at the time of the attacks, meaning that they had not yet been apprehended by the authorities. All four attackers drove to Luton, Bedfordshire, on the day of the bombs, and from there, they took the train to London (Lewis and Leo, 2007). To conclude, the term "7/7 Bombing in London" describes a string of suicide attacks that Islamist terrorists carried out on London's public transport system on 7 July 2005. These attacks resulted in a terrible loss of life and affected the UK's perspective on terrorism (Clarke, 2005).

The Political narratives, beliefs, and attitudes about Islam and Muslims are hot topics for both social justice activism and scholarly research. Conversations about these subjects cover anything from tolerance for different religions and open minds to instances of bigotry, discrimination, and xenophobia. Gaining an understanding of these dynamics is essential to understanding the current social and political landscape, especially in light of international events like the September 11 attacks, the 7/7 bombing of Landon and the ensuing war on terror (Allen and Nielsen, 2002). In-depth studies of the effects of counterterrorism measures on civil rights and the Muslim diaspora have also been conducted by scholars (Kundnani, 2009). These studies provide insight into the ways that political narratives influence Muslim lives and the larger socio-political environment by forming social views. An additional topic of interest is how the media creates and maintains biases and stereotypes.

Several major geopolitical events and security concerns have had an important effect on political reactions towards Muslims and Islam globally. Significant changes in views and policies resulted from the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, which represented a turning point in the global scene. According to Juergensmeyer (2003), these incidents have led to an increase in religious violence globally. A variety of counterterrorism measures that affected Muslim communities worldwide were brought about by the United States and its allies' declaration of a "War on Terror."

Political responses to Muslims and Islam in the West, especially in Europe and North America, have included a closer examination of immigration and refugee laws. The domestic components of this reaction

are highlighted by Kundnani (2014), who places more emphasis on intelligence sharing, surveillance, and preventing radicalization inside Muslim communities. This change has affected civil liberties and sparked discussions about how to strike a balance between personal freedoms and security. Islamist and populist movements in the Arab world responded to the Iraq War in different ways (Sayigh, 2003). Regional dynamics shaped these political responses, which furthered the conversation about the consequences of Western participation in nations with a majority of Muslims.

Since 9/11, the way the world perceives Muslims and Islam has changed. To ensure public safety, certain nations adopted additional laws; nonetheless, Muslims were sometimes negatively impacted by these laws, particularly in Western nations. Establishing a balance between everyone's safety and equal consideration is necessary. Different responses across the world to historic incidents such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, and the Burma political conflicts highlight how complex these issues are. It is essential to comprehend and support communities when addressing the issue of radicalization rather than focusing entirely on security measures. Since these are real people's problems, we need to be compassionate and empathetic. In addition to keeping everyone safe, our activities should be just and fair for all.

The variety of perspectives and experiences found around the world is reflected in the diverse and multifaceted social, religious, and cultural responses to Muslims and Islam. Numerous elements, such as cultural dynamics, geopolitical events, and historical legacies, have an impact on these reactions. Ahmed 1992 explores how language and discourse are used to shape how other cultures perceive Islam and Muslims. Another important factor is how the media shapes public perception and opinion about Islam and Muslims. In "Islamdotcom," El-Nawawy and Khamis 2009 investigate how new media is increasingly playing a role in promoting religious and cultural exchanges that can either support or contradict established narratives of Islam.

In conclusion, there is a wide range of complex social, religious, and cultural reactions to Muslims and Islam throughout the world. Numerous elements, such as language, media influences, historical legacies, and cross-cultural interactions, influence these reactions. As Akbar Agha 2011 mentioned in his novel *The Fatwa Girl*, it highlights different facets of Pakistani society that are frequently contrasted with Western settings. The author raises awareness of the concept of obtaining political power in a nation where people without traditional credentials can rise to high positions through military or political channels by hilariously showcasing Pakistan's political scene with the name of religion. This humor highlights how the West can oversimplify or misinterpret complicated realities in the East, influencing views in a way similar to Edward Said's Orientalism. Sectarianism also exists inside Islam and among Muslims; this is demonstrated in the narrative by the conflicts that are portrayed between Ahmadies, Sunnis, and Shias. These sects frequently have different opinions about various aspects of religion, including the caliphate that existed after the Prophet Muhammad's time. The author emphasizes the continuous Sunni-Shia struggle, which is influenced by political and historical issues, by mentioning Islamic nations like Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan (p.126). In general, a complex interaction between history, language, media, and cross-cultural encounters strongly influences ideas and attitudes toward Muslims and Islam.

Muslims Identity

A particular aspect of identity creation is religious identity, which is based on a person's sense of self-concept formation and the importance of belonging to a particular religion. Distinguishing religious identity from religiousness or religiosity is crucial because, although they are related, the three concepts have different meanings. The concepts of religiosity and religiousness include both the importance of being a part of a religious community and actively engaging in religious activities, such as going to church, mosque etc (Arweck and Nesbitt, 2010). Similar to other identities, like ethnic or cultural identity. It gives people the chance to engage with a wide variety of people from various generations and offers them a set of guiding principles for their lives (King and Boyatzis, 2004).

In the social sciences, the notion of "identity" is widely used, and its interpretation might change depending on the study paradigm. Sociologists and anthropologists utilize the concept of "religious identity" and investigate the processes associated with it in particular social situations, in addition to using it in psychological studies (Peek and Lori 2005). Muslim identity is a complicated and multidimensional concept shaped by several variables, including personal experiences, cultural heritage, historical

background, and religious convictions. The Islamic faith, which emphasizes the monotheistic belief in a single God (Allah) and the guidance given by the Quran, Islam's holy text, and the Hadith, which compiles the teachings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, is the fundamental basis of Muslim identity. The beliefs, values, and practices characterizing Muslim identity are firmly rooted in these Islamic foundations (Quran, 2:163).

One essential aspect of Muslim identity is diversity. Islam is practiced by people from a diverse range of languages, cultural, and ethnic origins, with an estimated 1.8 billion followers worldwide (Esposito, 2002). This diversity unites this heterogeneous collective, while common fundamental religious beliefs enrich the global Muslim community with a rich tapestry of traditions and practises (Ahmed, 1992). The cornerstones of Muslim identity are found in the Five Pillars of Islam. They include the following: Sawm (fasting during Ramadan), Salat (prayer), Zakat (almsgiving), and Hajj (the journey to Mecca). These pillars are essential to Muslims' daily existence and are crucial in establishing who they are (Esposito, 1998). Muslim identity is strengthened by this blending of culture and faith (Haddad and Smith, 1994).

Another aspect of Muslim identity is their interactions with other religions. Muslims emphasize common ideals and principles in their discussions and mutual understanding with followers of other religions (Moussalli, 1999). This promotes harmonious coexistence and strengthens the bonds between different religious identities. Muslim identity is shaped in large part by disputes and challenges within the Muslim community. In the Muslim world, opinions on matters like modesty, family life, and women's rights vary and represent a range of viewpoints (Badran, 2009).

Muslim identity is made more complex by contemporary issues, including globalization, Islamophobia, and radicalism. Muslims actively participate in these matters and look for solutions that respect their fundamental Islamic convictions (Roy, 2004). To sum up, Muslim identity is a fluid and complex concept that has its roots in common values, culture, history, and religion. It stands for a multicultural, international community that adds to the diversity of human civilization. Because of this, being a Muslim is an experience that is both personal and communal, always changing but remaining incredibly linked to the principles of Islam. Akbar Agha's novel *The Fatwa Girl* explores the different aspects and struggles that Muslims face as it explores the complicated and multidimensional nature of Muslim identity. An examination of Muslim identity in the text is provided below:

Sunni, Shia, and even Taliban are among the varied range of Muslim sectarianism that is discussed in the novel. This diversity serves as a reminder or Islamophobic element that Islam nowadays is far beyond the true beliefs and practices. It emphasizes the idea that there are variations in Islamic practice and interpretation and that Muslim identity is misinterpreted. The narrative challenges misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. It overcomes many of the prejudices about Muslims, especially those that link them to extremism and violence. The narrative eliminates these myths by presenting Muslims as people who reject extremism and work towards harmony and peaceful coexistence.

The text of the novel promotes understanding and communication between faiths. It encourages a more expansive understanding of religious identity by making references to Jesus Christ and highlighting the love and compassion that are common to both Islam and Christianity. It implies that Muslims and other faiths may coexist and perhaps have common ground. The narrative's appearance of Amina as a main character deepens the examination of Muslim identity. Stereotypes about Muslim women are challenged by her independence, her conflicts with cultural norms and expectations, and her suicide. This demonstrates how complicated gender identity is in Muslim societies.

The Novel examines Muslim communities' potential for harmony as well as their conflicts. The narrative's portrayal of the Sunni-Shia divide serves as a symbol for both historical and modern divisions. The idea that Muslim identity can transcend religious boundaries is furthered by the character Rafi's desire to bring together various Muslim organizations. The novel presents concerns regarding the difficulties Muslims experience, including the influence of extremist ideologies, the decline of traditional values, and the requirement for religious reform. These difficulties are a reflection of how the Muslim identity is changing in the world. Concerns about religious freedom are brought to light by the proclamation made against the Ahmadiyya community by prominent politicians such as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1974 (p.209). It

calls into question what is in charge of defining and dictating what it means to be a Muslim and how political forces might influence religious discourse.

The idea that Muslims are only connected to violence is challenged by the emphasis placed on forgiveness, peace-making, and love as essential components of Muslim identity. It offers a different viewpoint and demonstrates the kind and forgiving spirit of people. In conclusion, *The Fatwa Girl* presents Muslim identity as a complex, varied, and dynamic idea. It dispels myths, promotes interfaith understanding, and sheds light on the subtleties and complexity of Muslim identity in modern society. The novel's fundamental themes of togetherness, peace, and love are reflective of the wider range of Islamic beliefs and practices, as shown in the interactions between the characters.

Misrepresentation of Muslims in the Novel

In the novel *The Fatwa Girl*, Akbar Agha explores various aspects of the Muslim experience and presents a deep, complicated, and varied picture of Muslim identity. The Muslim community is a varied combination of many cultures, traditions, and customs rather than a single culture or group. Agha shows how Islam has molded or changed people's identities while also demonstrating how people's backgrounds and interpretations of Islam have shaped their identities and practices. Agha carefully depicts this diversity of Muslims.

Religious identity, a cornerstone of Muslim life, is explored in great depth throughout the novel. Agha emphasizes the significance of religious practices and beliefs. Also, he stated that most Muslims could translate some of the chapters of the Koran and recite it in prayers parrot-like without understanding, and some of us were not aware of the Koran a little bit. This thing enables the Mullahs to interpret it in any way they want and exercise power over the masses (p.21). That's why Muslims are diverted from their paths and also misinterpreted in the eyes of the world. Readers are offered insights into the role of faith in providing structure and meaning to the characters' lives, underscoring the deep connection between religious identity and personal values.

The author goes into more depth about Islam's historical context and how it has shaped modern Muslim identity. Agha illustrates how historical occurrences, personalities (Al-Khwarizmi invented Algebra-p.46), and customs (The Tribal people believe in three R's–Religion, Refuge, and Rvveange-p.45) continue to shape Muslims' sense of identity and collective memory in by incorporating them into the narrative (p.45-49). The story does a good job of explaining how religious ideas and cultural practices interact, showing how Muslims in various places adopt local customs while adhering to their faith. The novel addresses current challenges while deftly exploring the constantly changing nature of Muslim identity. A variety of viewpoints within the Muslim community are represented by the characters' conversations, conflicts, and reflections (p.111-13). These discussions highlight the continual evolution of religious beliefs and practices and show how Muslim identity responds to contemporary issues and difficulties. This complex representation adds to a deeper comprehension of Muslim identity, which is dynamic and always changing. In addition to the realistic portrayals, the text addresses the misrepresentation of Muslim identity, especially in the context of Islamophobia. Agha skilfully demonstrates the negative effects of unconventional actions committed in the name of Islam, which feed prejudice and a false impression of Muslims; *look at the hatred they're teaching at the madrasas, not like the Jesus camps in the West. And it is not against the foreigners; it is against our own people*" (p.36). Agha emphasizes in these portrayals the idea that the views of the Muslim community as a whole should not be defined by the acts of a small number of extremists. Unfair discrimination and harm are the results of this misrepresentation.

The character of Gulbadan and her terrifying experiences demonstrate how misrepresentation happens as well when it comes to how Muslim women are portrayed (p.103). The work effectively highlights the oppression and exploitation of women, which is more a reflection of cultural norms than of true Islamic principles. An essential topic in countering these distortions is the separation of religious ideas from cultural practices. A key character who persistently addresses misconceptions about Muslims is Amina, who represents perseverance and hope; "*what if we could get our religious leaders to issue a fatwa against suicide bombing? If we had such a fatwa from the Ayatollah in Iran, the Mufti in Egypt and the Iman in Saudi Arabia, and this fatwa was agreed upon by them and announced in mosques all over the Muslim countries, no one*

dares become a suicide bomber for fear of going to hell" (p.59). She is the perfect example of the humanistic and caring side of Muslim identity; "*they call her the Fatwa Girl, her father said, Amina is on a mission to bring peace to our land*" (p.90) as seen by her attempts to interact with young people and address the underlying reasons for extremism.

"*A noble mission, but nothing will stop it until the Americans quit Afghanistan and Iraq and their drones stop bombing civilians in our northern areas*" (p.90). The author focuses deeper on the serious deception associated with suicide bombers. The protagonists are forced to demonstrate that these acts have nothing to do with true Islamic ideals and to question the motivations of those who carry them out. This all is because of the geopolitical benefits of the world, and specifically, America, which is doing terrorism in the east subcontinent in the name of the War on Terror, torturing Muslims and raising more and more suicide bombers. The author addressed all these things, specifically the suicide bombing, "*started by the godless Russians, followed by the ugly Americans and the man I call Osama Bin Satan*" (p.90), and they create all the destruction in this part of the world. This story thread supports the humanistic understanding of Muslim identity and emphasizes the need to distinguish between extremism and true Islamic identity.

In conclusion, *The Fatwa Girl* provides a complex portrayal of Muslim identity, highlighting its numerous spiritual, cultural, and historically impacted aspects. It also addresses the serious deceptions that support prejudice and Islamophobia, especially in light of extreme acts such as suicide bombings. The characters, headed by Amina, are resilient and full of optimism as they work towards a more compassionate and true interpretation of Muslim identity. *The Fatwa Girl* revolves around this intricate web of identities, which includes hardships, goals, and resiliency.

Conclusion

To conclude the current investigation, the literary analysis of the complex domains of Islamophobia and Muslim identity, concentrating on *The Fatwa Girl*, a piece of fiction by Akbar Agha. The study reveals the complex representations of Muslim identity in the narrative, providing a deep understanding of the complex aspects of Muslim identity and the widespread problem of Islamophobia. The study uncovered the novel's subtle nuances that support or contradict Islamophobic narratives and influence how people perceive Muslim identity through in-depth content analysis. To fulfill the research objectives, the study's main goal was to examine how the novel contributes to the propagation of Islamophobia, specifically in the way that it portrays Muslim identity. The study has yielded a thorough comprehension of the novel's handling of Islamophobia and its intricate investigation of Muslim identity, demonstrating the impact of literature in upholding and challenging dominant discourses. This research establishes the groundwork for a more inclusive and knowledgeable conversation on this important topic, in addition to shedding light on the intricate dynamics of Muslim identity and the impact of literature on public attitudes. The issue of how literature, as demonstrated in the novel, affects how the general public views Muslims and Islam is at the center of this investigation. The study explores the internalized Islamophobia that can appear in Muslim communities, works through the socio-political context, and reveals the prejudices and concerns that can surface in a culture characterized by cultural constraints and preconceptions. This study's theoretical framework combines multicultural literary theory—inspired by Homi Bhabha's "*The Location of Culture*"—with postcolonial theory, as expressed by Edward Said. These frameworks provide strong analytical lenses that allow an in-depth analysis of how literature influences how Islamophobia and Muslim identity are portrayed by reflecting and challenging traditional cultural narratives.

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