

## ISLAMOPHOBIA IN UZMA JALALUDDIN'S *HANA KHAN CARRIES ON* (2021)

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### Abstract:

In the modern age of the West, Islamophobia emerges as a prevalent issue where Muslim minorities experience unjust treatment and violent actions. This issue affects many areas of Muslim culture, including contemporary literature. This study aims to reveal the depiction of Islamophobia in contemporary literature within Uzma Jalaluddin's *Hana Khan Carries On* by employing the framework of Islamophobia as a manifestation of cultural racism. Results showed that the novel illustrates Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism, exemplified by characters addressing issues related to Muslim attire, exhibiting an anti-Arab perspective, and expressing disdain towards Islam and Muslim values.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia; discrimination; cultural racism; Muslim

## INTRODUCTION

In recent times, there has been a notable increase in global Islamophobia, characterized by growing discriminatory attitudes and actions directed towards Muslims, especially in the West. This rise can be linked to various factors, including geopolitical tensions, acts of terrorism associated with extremist groups, and the dissemination of misinformation through digital platforms. “A good number of Westerners think of Muslims as violent individuals while some believe that they support al-Qaeda” (Ciftci, 2012). Muslims have been disproportionately affected and are experiencing a rise in hate crimes, discrimination, and biased policies. “Islamophobia and religious intolerance have led to a proliferation of attacks on Muslims, incessant loss of lives, wanton destruction of property, violation of Muslims’ fundamental rights and freedom, rising fear of insecurity, and distrust between Muslims and non-Muslims” (Dauda, 2021). Efforts to address Islamophobia entail tackling its underlying causes, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and implementing policies aimed at fostering inclusivity and tolerance in our increasingly diverse global landscape. One such means to educate the issue of Islamophobia is through popular media such as novels.

The novel *Hana Khan Carries On* by Uzma Jalaluddin provides a compelling story that delves into the prevalent issue of Islamophobia and prejudice faced by the protagonist, Hana Khan, a young Muslim woman living in Toronto, Canada. Being a minority population in Canada, Muslim citizens receive many discriminations and prejudice. “The tragedy of September 11, 2001, created significant consequences for most Muslims in Canada” (Hanniman, 2008). In the contemporary context, where instances of discrimination based on religion and ethnicity are prevalent, the novel offers a portrayal of the challenges and microaggressions that Hana encounters in her daily life.

Widjayanti (2017) studies the phenomenon of Islamophobia in *The Age of Reinvention* by Karine Tuil. Moreover, Al Nindita and Al-Hafizh (2019) also study the portrayal of British Muslims in the novel *Home Fire* by Khamila Shamsie and found Islamophobia. In addition, Shoumi and Koiri (2021) study the occurrence of Islamophobia in S.K. Ali’s *Love from A to Z*. Conversely, Al-Sayed (2021) examines the portrayal of Muslim characters and stereotypes in *Terrorist* by John Updike. Results showed signs of Islamophobia. Furthermore, Haqqani et al. (2023) studied *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* novel and found instances of several Islamophobia portrayals through

the novel's plot and the characters' interactions. While previous studies have conducted examples of Islamophobic sentiments through the medium of contemporary literature, there were no studies that examined the portrayal of Islamophobia in the Canadian Muslim population.

The study aims to analyze the representation of Islamophobia and prejudice in the novel, contextualizing it within the broader societal framework. By examining the specific incidents and dialogues within the book, the research seeks to reveal the subtle and overt forms of discrimination that Hana experiences and shed light on the impact of Islamophobia. Furthermore, the study will draw upon existing literature on Islamophobia and prejudice to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural implications depicted in the novel. By doing this research, the study contributes valuable insights into the portrayal of Islamophobia and prejudice in contemporary fiction, using *Hana Khan Carries On* as a lens to examine the complexities of intercultural relations.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Islamophobia

Islamophobia is the irrational fear, dislike, or bias against Islam and Muslims. It includes negative attitudes, stereotypes, discrimination, and hostility aimed at people or groups seen as linked to Islam. Similar to racism, Islamophobia is linked to notions of superiority and inferiority, wherein the religious identity of Muslims, rather than their genealogy or origin, determines their societal standing; this complex issue intertwines economic, psychological, social, political, and pathological elements, leading scholars worldwide to define Islamophobia as a mental state and a manifestation of bias against Muslims, who are generally perceived as an inferior group in Western societies, particularly in the United States (Riaz & Qadir, 2020). Islamophobia can result in different forms like verbal abuse, social exclusion, physical violence, or unfair policies. Islamophobia often comes from a lack of understanding of Islam and its varied followers, resulting in the misinterpretation or misrepresentation of Islamic beliefs and practices. It may be heightened by media portrayals, political language, or incidents of terrorism wrongly associated with Islam as a whole. "The tragic occurrence of September 11th

contributed intensely to the viewing of Islamic religion with suspicion” (Alshammari, 2013).

Islamophobia in popular literature refers to the inclusion of negative stereotypes, biases, or distorted portrayals of Islam and Muslims in widely read literary works. This can take various forms, such as depicting Muslims as inherently violent, regressive, or as outsiders. Characters who practice Islam might be shown using clichéd and exaggerated characteristics that perpetuate stereotypes instead of offering nuanced and truthful representations. These portrayals can reinforce existing prejudices and contribute to a climate of fear and misunderstanding about Islam and its followers. Islamophobia in popular literature can happen unintentionally due to ignorance or reliance on simplistic narratives. Alternatively, it can result from deliberate choices made by authors to conform to prevailing stereotypes or biases in the audience.

Grosfoguel (2012) outlines various conceptual forms of Islamophobia. Firstly, Islamophobia is identified as a type of cultural racism, involving an outlook of cultural superiority toward a particular group, expressed in terms of their perceived inferior habits, beliefs, behavior, or values. Secondly, Islamophobia is a form of orientalism. As a means of establishing Western superiority over Muslims, an argument involving cultural racism is employed by highlighting allegations of patriarchal and sexist abuses against women within Islamic communities, essentially accusing Islam as barbaric and uncivilized. Thirdly, Islamophobia serves as an instance of epistemic racism. The dominance of identity politics and epistemic privilege in the West results in a superior attitude that devalues non-Western knowledge, creating epistemic racism, evident in orientalist perceptions of Islam where Muslim thinkers are considered inferior to their Western/Christian counterparts. Lastly, Islamophobia is a Eurocentric social science. European scholars believe that Western knowledge surpasses Islamic knowledge, claiming that Islam lacks individuality, rationality, and scientific values. They view Islam as an irrational belief system, characterize Muslims as irrational, and ultimately conclude that substantial knowledge cannot emerge from Muslim sources.

While the media can contribute to the emergence of Islamophobia, it also has the potential to serve as a tool or strategy for addressing and mitigating such prejudices (Istriyani, 2016). Addressing Islamophobia in popular literature involves promoting diversity, cultural sensitivity, and accurate depictions of Muslim characters and their

communities. Encouraging authors and publishers to engage in responsible storytelling and avoiding the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes is crucial for fostering a more inclusive literary environment. This approach can help in building understanding and connection between different cultures and beliefs.

## METHOD

This research is a descriptive qualitative study. This research is a literary analysis that adopts a post-colonial perspective to explore the theme of Islamophobia as a manifestation of cultural racism. This research borrowed Grosfoguel's (2012) framework, which includes various dimensions of Islamophobia, including cultural racism, orientalism, epistemic racism, and Eurocentric social science. The primary data for this research consists of narrations, statements, monologues, or dialogues extracted from the novel. In addition to the novel, the study references articles, books, and other sources to enrich the understanding of the phenomenon of Islamophobia.

The study gathered data through a series of steps to facilitate analysis. Initially, the novel was closely read multiple times to grasp its contents thoroughly. Subsequently, relevant narrations, statements, monologues, or dialogues pertaining to the research issues were highlighted or labeled. Lastly, the data were categorized based on different forms of Islamophobia, and responses to Islamophobia were classified. Following data collection, the analysis continued with several steps. First, the data from the novel were interpreted in light of the concepts of Islamophobia and the minority identity development model. Second, references from articles or books related to the study were consulted to support the analysis. Third, the data from the novel were analyzed, and classifications were made based on various forms of Islamophobia and resistance strategies. Finally, the study concluded by summarizing the findings of the data analysis.

## FINDINGS

The analysis findings reveal a discussion centered on the portrayal of Islamophobia in Uzma Jalaluddin's *Hana Khan Carries On* which aligns with the study's focal point. The ensuing analysis is outlined as follows.

## Portrayal of Islamophobia

### *Muslim Attire Issue*

Individuals of the Islamic faith are frequently identified by certain characteristics, such as women donning hijabs or headscarves. In Uzma Jalaluddin's *Hana Khan Carries On*, various depictions address challenges related to Muslim clothing, particularly the hijab, proving how these issues contribute to Islamophobia as a manifestation of cultural racism. One instance of this portrayal is evident in Hana's perspective when she retells the story regarding Muslim attire which can be seen in the following passage: "Then FIFA, the official governing body for international football, had enacted a new dress code that banned all "headgear." The rule was unsubtly aimed at hijab-wearing Muslim female athletes. Fazeela had decided to stop playing soon afterwards" (Jalaluddin, 2021, p. 26).

The context of the aforementioned passage is that Hana's sister, Fazeela, is an aspiring football athlete. However, due to circumstances issued by FIFA, the International Football Association, headgear in football was banned altogether. The restriction is told in the novel as targeting hijab-wearing Muslimah. The situation Fazeela encountered represents a type of discrimination against a Muslim in a public setting. The imposition of a ban on religious symbols and attire serves as a clear instance of indirect discrimination targeting minority religious groups.

### *Anti-Arab Issue*

People often think of Muslims as coming from Egypt, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Islamophobia is tied to prejudices against Black, Arab, and South Asian groups (Grosfoguel, 2012). The following passage describes the experience of Islamophobia:

My heart began to pound. "What did you call him?" I said, and my voice shook. The man looked at me, dismissive. "I wasn't talking to you, bitch. I was talking to your little Brown friend here. Why are you taking videos of the tower? Where are you from? You got a passport, buddy?" The man took a step closer to Rashid (Jalaluddin, 2021, p. 157).

The context of the passage is that Hana's cousin, Rashid, is encountering a white man who goes into a racist tantrum after he notices Rashid's skin color. The tantrum continued into violence later on. Hana's family is rooted in South Asian descent, particularly in Pakistan. This is in line with Grosfoguel's statement regarding prejudices against Muslims of South Asian groups. Thus, this passage is a strong indicator of

Islamophobia in *Hana Khan Carries On* because Rashid eventually has been treated unfairly due to the circumstance where he is accused as a bad person just because he is of South Asian descent.

### ***Disdaining Values of Islam***

The expression of cultural superiority, involving the disdain for values, habits, or behaviors of Muslims as a minority in Western societies, is identified as a manifestation of Islamophobia. This form of Islamophobia is exemplified in the novel through the character Mr. Nielson, who introduces an explanation of the Islamic pillar during a class discussion, "Mr. Nielson looked at me indulgently. "I know you might not be comfortable with the truth, Hana, but you don't need to feel ashamed. Fighting the jihad is a pillar of Islam" (Jalaluddin, 2021, p. 64).

The passage above displays a form of intolerance and disdain for Islamic values because it generalizes one of the fourth of the Five Islamic pillars to jihad which is incorrect. The Five Islamic Pillars are essential practices for Muslims. They include the declaration of faith (Shahada), ritual prayers performed five times a day (Salah), giving to charity (Zakat), fasting during the month of Ramadan (Sawm), and the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj), which is required for those who are physically and financially able. Mr. Nielson insists on being correct with an aggressive tone even though Hana, the only Muslim student in class, says that he is not. This generalization may be caused by terrorist groups using the name of jihad to justify their cruelty. A teacher, entrusted with the role of an educator and expected to provide a secure environment for students, deviates from this responsibility by displaying intolerance by guilt-tripping Hana that jihad is supposed to be 'shameful'.

### **CONCLUSION**

Muslim people experience many difficulties living in a country where the religion of Islam is a minority. Muslims frequently encounter unjust treatment and discrimination, with Islamophobia being a prominent issue. The increasing instances of Islamophobia in Western countries have led to its frequent exploration as a central theme in literary works. Such an issue is highlighted in the novel *Hana Khan Carries On*. Indeed, Uzma Jalaluddin incorporated examples of these prejudices into her story. This portrayal is a representation of hardships faced by Muslim minorities.

This study concludes that Islamophobia is manifested as a negative disposition toward Islam, rooted in sentiments of hatred, fear, or misconceptions about the religion. The acknowledged potential of Islamophobia to result in discrimination or acts of violence is depicted in Hana Khan Carries On, where characters face Islamophobic attitudes. The characters' actions and statements towards Hana and her family reflect fear or hatred towards Islam. Furthermore, the novel illustrates Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism, shown by characters addressing issues related to Muslim attire, exhibiting an anti-Arab perspective, and expressing disdain towards Islam and/or Muslim values.

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