



RESEARCH PAPER

Unpacking Jihadist Culture and Identity Reconstruction in Aslam's The Blind Man's Garden

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the Jihadist culture and identity reconstruction after 9/11 in Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*. The 9/11 attacks played an important role in creating a shift in world politics, changed the Muslim-West relations and fueled prejudices against Muslims as extremists. The 'War on Terror' contributes to these factors by combining them with Western stereotypes. The study goes into the psychological aspects of fundamentalist brutality, drawing on Aroosa Kanwal's theoretical framework on rethinking Muslim identities, beyond 9/11. The study argues for a thorough assessment of changing views, adding crucial perspectives to the debate on reconstructing Muslim identities in the backdrop of present-day Pakistani Anglophone fiction. The post 9/11 shifting scenarios need a comprehensive examination of the geopolitical ramifications with a focus on the dynamic interplay between the 'War on Terror' and Muslim depiction in the global world. This study emphasizes the significance of intellectual debate on Aslam's novel to better comprehend the complicated connections between world affairs, cultural depictions, and psychological components of extremism in the present-day world. Future researchers may expand this study by conducting comparative analyses across a wider range of Anglophone fiction to trace budding representations of Muslim identities in the post-9/11 era and broaden the discourse surrounding jihadist culture and identity reformation in contemporary literature.

KEYWORDS Muslim Identities, Cultural Representations, Radicalism, Muslim-West Relations, War on Terror, Extremism, Identity Reconstruction

Introduction

The world political situation experienced a noteworthy change as a result of the 9/11 attacks. President G.W. Bush launched a global "war on terror" that included Islamic extremism and "Jihadist culture" in general as well as Al-Qaeda in particular. In the wake of 9/11, Islamic activities that are perceived as military operations based on the Islamic concept of jihad against Islam's foes and that seem scary to the West are referred to as jihadist culture, or jihadism. To portray Muslims as radicals, the phrase "jihadist culture" was popularized by the media and literary and critical debate.

Anglophone Pakistani literature is distinguished by recurring themes that have influenced Pakistan's history, social structure, and political identity. In the past, Anglophone Pakistani fiction focused on the consequences of events such as the partition of the Indian Subcontinent. Today, however, the focus is on the terrorist acts of 9/11 and how they have affected Muslims, especially Pakistanis. Hence, September 11, 2001, was a turning point in world history. In addition to having a devastating impact on the lives

of Muslims worldwide, particularly Pakistanis, it also changed America from what it was before 9/11.

Terrorism has had the greatest impact in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Jihadist culture in Pakistan and Afghanistan is complex due to the region's superimposed sociopolitical narratives and fluctuating intentions of political and religious propaganda, as well as the presence of various disastrous Jihadist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban. Afghanistan is regarded as the epicenter of Jihadist culture in South Asia since it has provided ample room for survival and development to several Jihadist groups.

Since the horrific terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, Western legislators, academic instructors, and students have attempted to highlight the role of Islamist ideology in motivating jihadi terrorists in Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as to stereotype Islamic ideology as violent and barbaric on a global scale. Many terrorist actions are suspected to have originated in religious ideas. Islamic ideology and Muslim extremism must be distinguished from one another since they have very distinct connotations. Conventional beliefs about Muslims and Islamic doctrine need to be reconsidered. The West has stereotyped all the Muslims as terrorists and Islam as a violent religion and this narrative has to be challenged because judging all the Muslims on the basis of a small clan of Jihadists is extremely unjust. Political and religious beliefs are not the only factors that fuel jihadists' violent behavior; social, psychological, emotional, and economic factors must also be held accountable. Jihadists turn to religious beliefs for solace, transforming these respected beliefs to support their violent and fanatical actions. Even after a couple of decades since 9/11, scandalous levels of ignorance persist in the West about Islamic religious ideology, social constructions in the Muslim world, the fundamental frameworks of Islamic history, and the basic characteristics and motivations of Islam. Indeed, some Muslim fanatics have caused significant damage to the human race and have hampered global development.

Nadeem Aslam (2013), a British-Pakistani writer, was born in July 1966 in Gujranwala, Pakistan. In his works, Aslam examines Islam and highlights its rich religious past as well as its diverse and interesting ethnic groups and customs, which are practised around the world in various forms, especially in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. As a moderate Muslim, he seeks to clarify Islam's image by contrasting moderation with extremism.

In *The Blind Man's Garden*, Aslam discusses the atrocities that innocent Muslims face in the war-torn regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11. He vividly illustrates the devastation caused by the United States' 'War on Terror' on innocent people in Pakistan and Afghanistan, as a result of Western media caricatures and the misuse of Islamic theology by both the West and Jihadists to achieve their political objectives.

In *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction Beyond 9/11* (2015), Aroosa Kanwal, the main theorist of this research study, discusses the depiction of all Muslims as violent and barbaric as a result of a small clan of extremist Muslims, as well as the typecasting of innocent Muslims globally.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, global politics has rapidly changed due to the 9/11 incident, resulting in violence in Pakistan and Afghanistan linked to counterterrorism and Jihadist culture. This situation has fostered misconceptions and

stereotypes about Muslims, particularly Pakistanis, complicating Western relations with Islam and leading to the USA's 'war on terror' in the post-9/11 era.

Literature Review

Given the primary focal points of the study, literature review section engages in an examination of literature dealing with jihadist culture, terrorist studies, islamophobia, stereotypical representation of Muslims on global platform, Pakistani literature and critical evaluation of Nadeem Aslam's works.

The trauma of 9/11

The trauma of 9/11, which within minutes had become one of the most important global media events ever generated by the 'society of the spectacle', left a powerful subconscious state of alert in New York ... (Griffin, 2012, p. 2).

Global politics saw significant shifts as a result of the World Trade Center's destruction on 9/11, but 9/11 also had an impact on society and culture. George W. Bush, the president of the United States, thereupon initiated a "war on terror" against radical Muslims and jihadist ideology. The word "terrorism" first appeared during the French Revolution in the late 18th century, but it became well-known following the September 11, 2001 explosions in New York City and Washington, D.C.

A Critical Appraisal of Nadeem Aslam's Narrative Artistry

The main goal of Aslam's writing is to shed light on the dark, violent misogynistic underpinnings of fundamentalist Islam. In his novels, Aslam delves into Islam and highlights its rich religious past as well as the many fascinating Islamic ethnic groups and customs that are practiced all over the world in various ways, especially in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. In *Postcolonial Writers Make Worlds*, C.S. Bhagya (2018) discusses Nadeem Aslam's writing style and grammar.

Aslam's novels are penned in a lush, poetic prose that has attracted the praise of critics for its vivid imagery and evocative tenor, while also raising questions about the twinning of beauty and terror. (Bhagya, 2018, para. 5)

The *Blind Man's Garden* has received a nomination for the 2014 Ondaatje Award from the Royal Society of Literature. Since 2012, Aslam has also been a member of the Royal Society of Literature. Aslam views literature as a public act and a powerful tool to end injustice, according to Maya Jaggi (2013) in "Nadeem Aslam: A Life in Writing." Whether it's honor killings, female infanticide, or Afghanistan, he finds greatest solace in shedding light on the significance of his chosen topic. As he states in an interview with Maya Jaggi, he is a writer who works nonstop to bring about social change and doesn't want the next generation to open their eyes in a conservative society. She goes on to discuss his fourth book, *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013), which takes place after September 11, 2001. The conflict in Afghanistan is the main subject. According to her, *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) revolves around the Afghan war since Aslam feels that Pakistan suffered greatly as a result of the conflict. She also remembers the figures Aslam previously provided, which show that since 2001, terrorist attacks and jihadi activity have killed over 30,000 people, or one 9/11 per year. Only one of the 50 "surgical strikes" in the CIA drone assaults against northern Pakistan since 2004 has resulted in the death of an insurgent, meaning that innocent mothers, husbands, and children are killed as "collateral damage." (Jaggi, 2013)

The Blind Man's Garden (2013) sheds light on what it's like to live under the stress of war by showing how Afghanistan's warlords sell random captives to American officers as suspected terrorists in exchange for cash. It also exposes how the West has been using the savage justification of the War on Terror since 9/11, which holds that there are no innocent people in a guilty nation. Aslam (2013) vehemently opposes the objectification of Muslim ethnicity due to the jihadists' self-made customs and the stereotyping of all innocent Muslims due to a small clan of Muslim extremists. He thinks criticism is important, but rather than being directed at the entire Muslim community, it should be directed in the proper and targeted way. He talks about the ideas that came to him as he was traveling to visit his ailing mother that

I opened the paper to find Martin Amis's 'thought experiment': that Muslims should be stopped from travelling. I broke into a sweat. They would stop me from getting on a train to see my sick mother because someone who looks like me has carried bombs... (Aslam, Nadeem Aslam: a life in writing, 2013, para. 23)

Maëlle Jeanniard du Dot (2019) highlights Nadeem Aslam's unique writing process, where he writes by hand in isolation. He used tape on his eyes to empathize with his blind character in *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013).

Pratiek Sparsh Samantara (2016) claims that Nadeem Aslam's works relate with devastated people, while combining tragedy and sociopolitical issues. He discusses complex themes like religion while using his distinct poetic style. The use of unique metaphors is also visible in his works. He also combines reality and magical realism very brilliantly. (Samaranta, 2016)

Aroosa Kanwal (2015) in *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction*, highlights Nadeem Aslam's huge contribution in Pakistani English fiction regarding 9/11. She revealed how 9/11 forced Muslims around the globe to reshape their Muslim identities because of the universal partialities post "War on Terror.". Kanwal says:

Aslam felt a need to rethink his identity...Such Muslims, caught in the process of redefining what it means to be a Muslim, shift the focus away from the radicals preaching hardline Islam. They are aware of the fact that just saying Islam is a religion of peace rather than war and violence is not going to suffice and that more is being asked of them. (Kanwal, 2015, p. 175)

Criticism on *The Blind Man's Garden*

Rayyan Al-Shawaf (2013) describes Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* as a portrayal of intertwined fates during the Afghan-Soviet war, reminiscent of his earlier works in style and reliance on coincidence. The novel contrasts the malaise of Pakistani society with vibrant elements of nature and art, showcasing the dichotomy between enlightened Islam and extremism while recounting the tumultuous experiences of Jeo and Mikal in Afghanistan's outskirts.

[Jeo] Wishing to be where he is most needed to be as close as possible to the carnage of this war he has arranged in secret to cross over into Afghanistan from Peshawar. (Al-Shawaf, 2013)

Nina Martyris (2013) also comments on Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* in *Of Pomegranates and Grenades: Nadeem Aslam's The Blind Man's Garden* that Nadeem Aslam has the ability to transform harsh realities into beautiful prose. The novel makes readers

reconsider their viewpoints while evoking the grief of 9/11. With a focus on Afghanistan's dreadful poverty and the frightening danger of landmines, it tackles Taliban narrow-mindedness and America's "war on terror," exhibiting Aslam's unique manner in delivering heartbreaking realities.

Razeshta Sethna (2013) the book reviewer at The Dawn News notes similarities between Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* and his earlier works, particularly *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), highlighting themes of radicalization, extremism, women's misery, and the influence of patriarchal societies and war.

Isra Ansari (2013) also highlights the pros and cons of Nadeem Aslam's novel *The Blind Man's Garden* in her review for *The Missing Slate*; she believes that the novel portrays the conflict between affection and principle, responsibility and belief, humanity and religion. It places together the distinct and complex relationships between people, marriage, brotherhood and our intrinsic concern for those important to us. (Ansari, 2013)

Peter Parker (2013) calls *The Blind Man's Garden* Aslam's finest depiction of war, illustrating its brutality linked to American intervention in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Innocent boys are kidnapped and sold to warlords, facing torture in interrogation cells, amid the chaos caused by bloodthirsty guerrilla leaders labeling them as terrorists.

All wars are savage, but the one depicted in *The Blind Man's Garden* is particularly brutal, not only because of the many competing factions in Afghanistan, but also because of the United States policy of paying large bounties for 'terrorist suspects' in a desperately poor country. (Parker, 2013)

Material and Methods

This research study analyses the social and psychological elements connected to the dreadful and painful acts of terror, by considering Nadeem Aslam's work *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013), it illuminates the Jihadist culture portrayed in Pakistani literature. It also discusses how both Jihadists and the West manipulate Islamic ideology to further their political agendas. The study also focuses on the effect of 'war on terror' on the innocent civilians and how the stereotypical representation of Muslim in the global platform force Muslim to re-negotiate their Muslim identities, while applying the theoretical ideas of Aroosa Kanwal discussed in her book *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction Beyond 9/11*. (2015)

Rethinking Pakistani and Muslim Identities after 9/11

Kanwal (2015) examines how Pakistani authors address and reshape the narratives surrounding 9/11, focusing on the impact of these events on identity in her book *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction Beyond 9/11*. She highlights the need to challenge stereotypes that portray all Muslims as terrorists and to counter the Western perception of Islam as an intolerant and barbaric religion.

Historical Contextualization of 'Post-9/11 fiction'

Kanwal (2015) explores the construction of Muslim identities in Pakistan's literature, linking them to cultural and religious clashes, particularly post-9/11. The author categorizes Pakistani fiction into 'post-9/11 fiction', which addresses the repercussions of the 9/11 incident on Muslim lives and identities, and 'retrospective prologues to post-9/11 fiction', which provides context from before the attacks. This

latter category looks at past political decisions that backed the world's negative opinion of Pakistan and Islam. Kanwal (2015) highlights that in order to make sense of the ongoing disputes between Islam and the West, it is critical to comprehend pre-9/11 circumstances.

The "War on Terror" increased prejudice against Muslims by linking them to radicalism. Stereotypes were encouraged by media coverage and geopolitical events, which led to a biased narrative that mocked and typecast the Muslim population. Following 9/11, Western stereotypes played an important role in forming narratives, influencing public opinion, and promoting cultural biases. A misleading view of Muslims and Islam resulted from these misconceptions, which were supported by the media and political debate. Jihadist culture developed as a result of the "War on Terror". The conflict fueled anger and gave rise to extremism, highlighting the complex connections between international politics and cultural transformation. (Kanwal, 2015)

Re-defining Home and Diaspora after 9/11

Kanwal (2015) reconsiders the huge alteration after 9/11, in the way West was perceiving the Muslims and their connection with terrorism since 9/11. She also highlights that how this shift in the West's thinking negatively impacted Muslims around the globe and how Muslims started renegotiating their existence as a Muslims. She says that there is a dire need to differentiate between the Muslims and people who are actually involved in these activities. Just because someone is Muslim doesn't mean that he or she is engaged in such horrific activities. Furthermore, she highlights that a Muslim's affiliation with Islam does not always reflect someone's beliefs. Kanwal (2015) distinguishes between these cultural and religious aspects using the words "practicing-Muslims" and "non-practicing Muslims". Oliver Roy (2002) also discusses this in his book *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* that 'should the term Muslim refer to a self-declared believer or to anybody with a familial background linked with a Muslim society?' (Roy, 2002, p. 102)

Kanwal (2015) posits that Western assumptions about Muslim identity foster Islamophobic narratives, leading to a homogenization of Muslims, often associating them all with terrorism. This necessitates studying diverse forms of Islam to distinguish tolerant Muslims from extremists. Kanwal (2015) highlights the 'otherness' phenomenon by Homi Bhabha, illustrating how Muslims feel socially, personally, and politically marginalized in the West. She explains this phenomenon by using the term 'homeland orientation' given by Roger Brubaker (2006) in his article *The 'Diaspora' Diaspora* for the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies* and examines how second-generation Pakistani writers depict their characters' complex relationships with their homeland after 9/11. She explains that "homeland orientation" encompasses not only the geographical but also the imaginary, spatial, and nostalgic connections to home. Through this lens, Kanwal (2015) explores how the longing for homeland shapes national and transnational identities, particularly in the works of Nadeem Aslam.

Kanwal (2015) contrasts the pre- and post-9/11 contexts to examine how culture-based stigmatization has transformed into faith-based stigmatization, exposing the evolution of xenophobia into Islamophobia. Through Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*, she illustrates this shift as reflected in the protagonists' identification with a global ummah, while also critiquing the emergence of conservative Western narratives about Muslims and Islam in the post-9/11 era.

Kanwal (2015) argues that Western media, driven by political and commercial interests, spreads partial and misleading information that portrays Islam and Muslims as violent and intolerant, contributing to Pakistan's image as a global center of terrorism. Kanwal (2015) proves her point by referring to Elizabeth Poole's *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (2002) in which she points out that such misleading evidence leaves a perception that 'Islam is stagnant and that Muslims are immune to change,' implying that the news of the media is 'heavily colored...by dictates of Western/US foreign policy'. (Kanwal, 2015, p. 15)

Kanwal (2015) refers to Julian Petley and Robin Richardson's book, '*Pointing the Finger: Islam and Muslims in the British Media*' (2013) to highlight how journalists employ tactics that spread misinformation and construct meta-narratives of fear and terror, contributing to an Islamophobic climate in British media.

Results and Discussion

This study takes a close look at Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) through the perspective of terror studies, exploring the rise of Jihadist culture in Pakistan and Afghanistan after 9/11. Building on Aroosa Kanwal's *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction, Beyond 9/11* (2015), it considers the factors that fuel this culture, such as Islam's tense relationship with the West, the stereotyping of Muslims, misinterpretations of religious and political ideas, and the impact of the "War on Terror." The text also explores the challenges faced by Muslims because of the stereotypes associated with them and how psychological issues become a major cause of extremist action. It also sheds light on the need to reconstruct and re-represent Muslim identities on the global platform in the present-day post 9/11 era.

Islam and Muslims are misrepresented by conservative Western ideologies, which falsely link them to terrorism. The complexity of jihadist motivations, which include psychological, emotional, and economic elements in addition to corrupt religious beliefs, is ignored by this narrative. The West's ignorance of Islam's essence and Muslim societies persists years after 9/11. These issues are vividly explored by Nadeem Aslam in *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013).

'War on Terror' narrative and its representation in *The Blind Man's Garden*

"US has continued to use violence to achieve its imperialist goals as well as to counter terrorism...for its own economic gains, the US is using its military powers to wage a war against innocent civilians in many countries" (Kanwal, 2015, p. 59).

The 'War on Terror' refers to the U.S.-led military campaign against recognized terrorist groups, primarily Islamic fundamentalists, initiated post-9/11. George W. Bush first used the term in 2001 after the attacks. President Bush's narrative falsely differentiated between good and bad Muslims, suggesting that good Muslims would support the 'war on terror' to clear their names. Consequently, remaining Muslims were labeled as bad and associated with terrorism, linking Islamic nationalism to violence. Kanwal (2015) argues that Muslims are redefining their identities post-9/11 as merely stating Islam is peaceful is insufficient. The 'war on terror' has faced criticism for negatively impacting innocent Muslims beyond the intended targets. Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) explores the 'War on Terror' rhetoric against the backdrop of post-9/11 Afghanistan and the fictional town Heer in Pakistan. In *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013), Nadeem Aslam explores the 'War on Terror', set in Afghanistan and the

fictional town of Heer in Pakistan just weeks after 9/11, when Bush declared, “either you are with us or against us” (Bush, 2001). The novel portrays the misery of citizens: “Hundreds of thousands of poor defenseless Afghanistans have been murdered by the Americans in cold blood” (Aslam, 2013, p. 113). It shows the journey of Rohan and his sons Jeo and Mikal, where they are traveling to Afghanistan in order to help the citizens in the war ridden area. Aslam highlights the suffering of these people throughout the journey and societal impact of this war on the people of the area. All three of them find themselves against the Taliban while trying to help their fellow citizens. *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) portrays that how war impacts the emotional and psychological condition of the people of the war ridden area and how it physically destroys a place too. Aslam shows these realities with the help of his characters and fictional setting of war in Pakistan and Afghanistan after 9/11.

Aslam (2013) vividly reveals the mistreatment of Afghans and Pakistanis by Americans. Kanwal (2015), in *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction, Beyond 9/11*, says the aftermaths of the 9/11 are way more disastrous than the actual 9/11 attacks because of the ‘War on Terror’ launched by the US. Despite Pakistan's involvement, it faces US disdain and intensified threats, as depicted in Aslam's novel.

The recent shifts in US policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan from pro-Taliban to anti-Taliban, as well as the monstrous distortion of Afghan jihad in the US media after 9/11, highlight America's own strategic and economic interests. (Kanwal, 2015, p. 97)

In the novel, Aslam (2013) illustrates how history shapes the lives of innocent civilians, demonstrating that characters are ultimately unable to escape its influence. Beginning with “History is the third parent,” the narrative depicts the fallout from 9/11, showing Mikal's abuse in an American cell, Rohan's personal losses, and Basie and Yasmin's trauma from a terrorist attack, portraying the deep oppression in Afghanistan through powerful imagery. Mikal notices that the soles of several boots have left deep imprints on the muddy ground of the bend. America is everywhere. The boots are large as if saying, “This is how you make an impression in the world” (Aslam, 2013, p. 162).

Kanwal (2015) argues that Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* exposes how the ‘War on Terror’ became the dominant Western narrative, turning Muslims from a “terrorized minority” into a “terrifying majority.” Reflecting the hunger for power, the fakir remarks, “whoever has the power desire to hold on to power. That is the case with both the Taliban and West” (Aslam, 2013). The novel's depiction of bombings that kill seventy villagers shows the brutality of war, while Kanwal notes that “the notion of solidarity within the Muslim Ummah serves, above all, to justify US long-term plans to target Pakistan in the name of ‘war on terror’ propaganda” (Kanwal, 2015, p. 102).

Mikal serves as the central example of America's unjust use of power in Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013). Captured and brutally tortured by American officers, he endures horrific interrogations in a cell that ‘smells of vomit’, sleep deprivation, and physical abuse (pp. 204-205). Forced to falsely confess ties with al-Qaeda, he pleads, “He is telling the truth. I did take the oath with Osama bin Laden. Stop hurting him, please, stop hurting him” (p. 212). Mikal rejects radical ideas and maintains his composure in the face of abuse. Even when American officer provoked by saying: “Say something... we infidels will never win against the likes of you because we love life while you love death” (p. 204)—he maintains his truthfulness. Aslam portrays him as a symbol of innocence and moral resilience amid oppression. Kanwal (2015) applauds Aslam for uncovering how the US administration killed numerous innocent people in the fight

against terrorism while claiming that its actions were necessary for national security. Aslam writes, "The opposite of war is not peace but civilisation, and civilisation is purchased with violence and cold-blooded murder. With war" (Aslam, 2013, p. 143).

Western discourse framing Muslims as inherently intolerant and radical

Post-9/11, American politics framed Islam as terrorism, reinforcing stereotypes and blurring lines between extremists and Muslims. Kanwal (2015), in *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction: Beyond 9/11*, argues that 9/11 reshaped global perceptions, linking Muslim identity to extremism. She highlights that Western discourse repeatedly reconstructs the idea of "Muslimness" through racialized stereotypes that erase the difference between moderate and radical Muslims. As Kanwal also says in the book:

As a result of ongoing Islamophobia in the West, negative images of Muslims have continued to shape the Western attitudes and speech in such a way that the figure of the Muslim has become a metaphor for barbarism and violence. (Kanwal, 2015, pp. 135-136)

In *The Blind Man's Garden*, Aslam (2013) reveals how stereotyping Muslims as terrorists enables the U.S. to justify its global dominance under the guise of national defence. He depicts Muslims persecuted for mere faith like a shopkeeper arrested for saying "O Muhammad," and another man killed for washing his hands "in a Muslim-looking manner" (p. 233). Mikal's brutal torture in an American prison embodies this racial profiling, leading him to ask, "If I agree with you that what you say is true, would you agree that your country played a part in ruining mine?" (Aslam, 2013, p. 215).

In *The Blind Man's Garden*, Aslam (2013) broadens the idea of the "other" beyond the East-West divide, showing how people can be alienated within their own homeland. Mikal feels estranged in Heer, Basie and Yasmin face persecution from extremists, and Tara is punished for a crime she didn't commit. Kanwal notes that 'the image of contemporary Pakistan as a land of terror owes a great deal to the ethnic and sectarian conflicts and to the multi-faceted violence that has regularly roiled,' connecting such internal ethnic and cultural problems to the worldwide stereotyping of Muslims following 9/11 (Kanwal, 2015, p. 120).

Kanwal (2015) states that media promotes stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. After 9/11, Western media increased Islamophobia, framing Muslims as "intolerant" while using narratives of oppression to justify war, suggesting that war is a solution rather than the origin of suffering. (Kanwal, 2015, p. 109).

Post-9/11, Muslims faced stereotyping linking them to terrorism, leading to identity renegotiation and global Ummah affiliation. In Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*, characters deal with authentic Muslimness amid extremist violence versus moderate interpretations, showcasing typecasting and sectarian misinterpretations that highlight Islam's unjust portrayal as intolerant. Aslam's novels foreground circumstances (domestic and global) and reasons that compel his Muslim characters to identify themselves with the broader notion of ummah that undermines any kind of reductive and intolerant absolutism within their faith (Kanwal, 2015, p. 183).

Kanwal (2015) argues that post-9/11 discourses should be examined broadly, linking the rise of Islamophobia in the West with the growth of Islamic extremism in

Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistani fiction should address both Western and Pakistani Muslims alongside extremism to present an accurate picture of post-9/11 stigmatization and challenge Western stereotypes of Muslims as intolerant and extremist. She notes that this branding of Islam as barbaric and fanatical intensified the West-Islam dichotomy: "the events of 11 September 2001 triggered a more pronounced dichotomy between the West and its 'Oriental Other' – Islam" (Kanwal, 2015, p. 182).

Islamophobia

Kanwal (2015) argues that post-9/11, ethnic stigmatization shifted to religious stigmatization, with xenophobia taking the form of Islamophobia, portraying Muslims as radical and intolerant (p. 148).

In *The Blind Man's Garden*, Aslam (2013) critiques Western Islamophobia through Mikal's interrogation and showcases Islamic diversity via characters like Rohan and Major Kyra. Kanwal (2015) argues that while Aslam daringly addresses internal Muslim issues, he counters Western narratives that associate Islam with terrorism post-9/11. Aslam dramatizes themes of religious devotion and extremist violence, revealing metanarratives justifying discrimination, emphasizing a moral stance against torture and depicting a stark ideological divide. Kanwal (2015) concludes that the real tension lies not in Islamic fundamentalism but in the West's belief in its cultural superiority, which clashes with Islamic societies' pride in their own civilization.

Suspicious about Muslims in the post-9/11 world have not only triggered hostile feelings towards Islam and Muslims but have serious implications for Muslims in the West such as racial profiling and discriminatory attitudes at airports, workplaces and even in public spaces (Kanwal, 2015, p. 144).

Radicalization among Muslims in Pakistan and Afghanistan

Islamic extremism, defined as any form of Islam opposing democracy, pluralism, and tolerance, gained heightened attention after 9/11 (Kanwal, 2015, p. 39). In *The Blind Man's Garden* (Aslam, 2013), the extremist Muslims are contrasted with moderates, showing the suffering of ordinary Muslims under both extremists and Western Islamophobia. The novel depicts the subjugation of women, violent intolerance toward other religions, and the misuse of Sharia law, as when Tara is imprisoned for failing to produce four male witnesses for an assault she survived (Kanwal, 2015, p. 180). Displacement, ethnic violence, and societal "othering" fuel extremism, with characters like Mikal feeling alienated. Extremists enforce rigid views, while moderates embody personal devotion without radicalism.

Jihadist Culture

Kanwal (2015) notes that the Afghan war exhilarated extremism among Pakistani Muslims. This radicalization in Pakistani Muslims further established the jihadist culture and created networks of terrorists' clans. She further relates 9/11 attacks to be the major cause of establishment of these jihadist clans as it exhilarated them because some extremists Muslims clans found barbaric activities to be the only way to clear out the image of Muslims on the global platform. (Kanwal, 2015, pp. 74,97).

In *The Blind Man's Garden*, Aslam (2013) portrays this jihadist culture in his book that how such activities of jihadists have caused all the Muslims suffer and how innocent minds of young Muslims boys have been influenced by them. Abdul laments:

"...thousands of our boys have gone to Afghanistan... They have destroyed me" (Aslam, 2013, pp. 132-133).

Conclusion

Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) skillfully combines reality and fiction to provide a lens to examine Jihadist culture and the impact of the "War on Terror" on those living in conflict-ridden places. Based primarily on Aroosa Kanwal's *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Fiction, Beyond 9/11* (2015), this study explores the social, political, psychological, and individual dimensions of Jihadist culture. The fiction under study accurately depicts the rise and spread of extremism in Pakistan and Afghanistan, its fundamental causes, and the consequences of post-9/11 strategies on daily life. It claims that Western stereotypes that portray Muslims as intolerant and fanatical have led to a sharp rise in Islamic extremism. Aslam's characters and events in the book *The Blind Man's Garden* are analyzed to understand Jihadist ideology, its reasons, and its effects on moderate Muslims. The study examines how post-9/11 propaganda and foreign activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan fueled radicalism through the injustices that the protagonists experienced. The novel's difference between authentic Islamic teachings and extreme interpretations reflects the struggle between moderate and radical Muslims.

Recommendations

Future researchers may expand this study by conducting comparative analyses of Pakistani English novels by authors like Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, and H.M. Naqvi to investigate growing literary representations of Muslim identities in post-9/11 era of political tensions and cultural studies. Researchers can also combine multiple fields of study and their methodologies, like psychology, political science, cultural studies, and sociology, to gain a comprehensive understanding of extremism, identity, trauma, and the socio-literary effects of the War on Terror. Researchers can employ various theoretical models, including postcolonial trauma theory and narrative identity theory, to analyze modern literature. These perspectives can deepen the understanding of identity conflicts and cultural division; thus, expanding debates on jihadist culture and the reformation of Muslim identities amid global political narratives.

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