

Research Article

Islamophobia in Media: Stereotypes, Misrepresentation, and Societal Impact

Mohd Ashraf Wani ^{1*}, Dr. Asif Raina ², Mohammad Amir Khan ³

^{1,2}PhD, Independent Researcher, Department of History, Kashmir, India

³Research scholar, Department of History, Jamia Milia Islamia University, New Delhi, India



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ABSTRACT



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This study aims to examine the prevalent and pressing issue of Islamophobia and religious intolerance worldwide. It will analyze the multiple causes, diverse manifestations, and profound social consequences of these phenomena, with a particular focus on media portrayals and cinematic depictions in the post-9/11 era. These representations and images significantly contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes and biases against Muslims. This paper has combined interpretations from multiple sources of supplemental material using rigorous content analysis. The objective of this endeavor is to identify and elucidate the patterns of anti-Muslim bias, analyze the media narratives that shape public opinion, and examine the socio-political ramifications experienced by Muslim communities worldwide.

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1. Introduction

There is a growing global trend of prejudice, fear, and intolerance towards religion, according to recent developments. The media's portrayal of the prevalence of violence and religious intolerance has a negative impact on society's cohesiveness and coherence. This paper examines the trends, causes, and effects of religious intolerance and Islamophobia in relation to world peace and peaceful coexistence (Ahmed S. , 2017). The examination of content from secondary data sources is advantageous to it. This statement highlights the connection between religious intolerance and the following: laws that contravene Shari'ah, the bulk of physical and verbal abuse, prejudice against Muslims, racism, xenophobia, high-profile acts of terrorism, and the emergence of far-right and right-wing extremism. As a result, Muslims encounter prejudice and animosity toward Islam. The proclamation draws attention to the connection between Islamophobia and religious intolerance, which has resulted in a marked rise in incidents of violence against Muslims. These attacks have caused significant property damage, many fatalities, violations of Muslims' fundamental rights, increased security concerns, and growing hostility between Muslims and adherents of other religions (Rane, 2014).

In the current world, prejudice, discrimination, and marginalization continue to be largely rooted in religious beliefs. Instead of encouraging tolerance and harmony, the activities of religions in the modern world have increased the feelings of dread, mistrust, and other unpleasant emotions among their adherents. The upkeep of international peace has frequently been threatened and damaged because certain religious and nonreligious organizations have been hesitant to accept the

beliefs and practices of other groups merely because of their religious membership. The news is filled with horrifying and heinous stories of religiously motivated violence every day. According to Limon (2014), it is very difficult to watch television these days without seeing acts of intolerance, violence, or hatred committed in the name of a religious belief or conviction. This is a perfect example of how bigotry and intolerance against religion are becoming more widespread worldwide (Limon, 2014). Islam encourages tolerance and peaceful coexistence between people of all religions, including Jews and Christians. Islam is a peaceful religion in both its tenets and its practices. This principle forbids the needless killing of innocent people as well as any forms of injustice, prejudice, and stereotyping. Still, there has been a discernible rise in anti-Islamic sentiment in recent years. Islamophobia has grown over time, especially in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. Reports of this have been received not only from the US but also from Australia, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Moreover, it has become worse and keeps growing worse (Haqparast & Salangi, 2024).

This indicates that there are an increasing number of hostile and violent crimes committed against Muslims. A few instances of violence against Muslims that are connected to Islamophobia include abuse, acts of violence, bombings, mass killings, and vandalism of mosques, Islamic facilities, schools, clothing, religious artifacts, Muslim graveyards, and Muslim communities (Samantha, 2022). However, the worrisome growth in anti-Muslim prejudice around the world may be partly attributed to the spread of misleading information about Islam (Sway, 2005). As a result, the rate at which anti-Islamic sentiment and

*Corresponding Author:

Email: waniashraf121@gmail.com (M. A. Wani)

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religious intolerance are spreading is concerning, and further research is required to try to reduce the hazards. To the best of the author's knowledge, however, no academic study has looked into the purported dangers that Islamophobia and religious intolerance pose to world peace and harmony. Contemporary research has focused on analyzing anti-Muslim speech or examining the origins and consequences of Islamophobia. As previously said, when Muslims are seen as an essential component of (the superior) us rather than as the other, Islamophobia is clearly visible (Samari, 2016). The orientalist point of view is thus partially supported since the idea of "Us against Them" is highly ingrained in society and excludes Muslims and/or individuals who identify as having Islamic sympathies (Anderson, 2015). It becomes evident that there is a power dynamic between them, the Orient, and us, the Occident (or West). Islamophobia is considered to be a relatively "new" notion, despite its historical history. Edward said claims that throughout history, Muslims in Europe have been associated with mystery, heresy, and desertion, making Islam a demonic faith. This concept originated in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Said, 1997). This clarifies the historical disparity between the Orient and the Christian West. While daily life in the West was chaotic, Otterbeck and Bevelander stress that the concept of the Orient offered a liberated zone. Compared to today, when Islam is usually linked with extremism, terrorism, and patriarchy, in the 1940s it was more of an exotic frame, a side-scene that indicated something distant and remote (Otterbeck, 2007).

Thus, images of the exotic and alien continue to conjure connotations that have evolved throughout time and give rise to Islamophobia, depending on the period and location that are taken into consideration. Regarding the same shift, novelist and journalist Trevor Mostyn queries, "Has the romantic orientalist of the past become the Islamophobe of the present?" (Mostyn, 2002). Otterbeck and Bevelander's assertion that literature from earlier eras demonstrates indications of how the elite (or dominant discourse) writes about (and sees) Islam and Muslims is one example of this development (Otterbeck, 2007). France is another instance of how Muslim communities may be affected by elite authority. The French government made it illegal to make overtly religious remarks in 2004. Though it's probable that the norm itself has weaknesses, the author, Joan W. Scott, emphasizes how colonialism and the *raison d'état* that try to eradicate people who do not fit the mold are the sources of this constraint. Scott claims that the act of making the headscarf or veil illegal is symbolic; for some European countries, it is a way to oppose Islam since they see Muslims in general as a threat to peace and harmony inside their countries (Scott, 2007).

2. Significance

This research has numerous important implications that enhance our understanding of the dynamics surrounding Islamophobia and religious intolerance in contemporary society. This text provides a critical analysis of how media and movies influence our perception as individuals belonging to the general public. This highlights the significance of implementing additional programs that educate individuals on media criticism and ethical journalism practices in a prompt manner. This study examines the significant impact of islamophobia on global peace and intergroup relations. The primary objective of the study is to encourage effective communication and comprehensive recognition among collaborators.

3. Methodology

This study utilizes a rigorous methodology for doing content analysis, which entails a thorough review of many sources such as scholarly papers, reports, and articles that analyze media outputs. After analyzing the literature on Islam and the available

empirical data, we may identify common themes or challenges related to the representation of the religion and its followers worldwide after the September 11 attacks. Content analysis allows for a comprehensive investigation into how particular narratives, visuals, and speech patterns contribute to the spread of harmful stereotypes or beliefs about Islam and its followers. Furthermore, the research design that relies on this technique facilitates the discovery of further information regarding the broader socio-cultural processes in operation. This methodology also enables the assessment of the influence of media depictions on public perceptions and actions towards religious minorities (Shufaq, 2023).

4. Media Portrayal of Muslims: From Stereotypes to Social Exclusion

Because of this, Islamophobia has historical origins as well as the conviction that we should accept individuals for who they are, regardless of how they differ from us. As a result, it is preferable to exclude than to include. The multicultural society faces a threat if Muslims are not regarded as integral parts of the community (Yudi Wili Tama, 2013). Runnymede Trust says that this is the reason that "'WE' are civilized, sensible, benevolent, efficient, knowledgeable, intellectual, and non-sexist." They are brutal, violent, irrational, crafty, archaic, and oppressive (Trust, 1997). Laws, extended unemployment, disparities in immigration and asylum processes, and other such matters are blatant instances of social exclusion because Islamophobes would much rather have Muslims and anyone associated with them shunned than accepted members of society. Two more traits are forced integration and segregation (Allen, 1984). When Muslims attempt to make a name for themselves in public, they encounter severe challenges such as physical and psychological suffering, as well as marginalization in their community (Ansari, 2012).

According to the Runnymede Trust, Islam is seen as a violent religion, just like Ouis and Roald. They assert that this might be the case if the religious beliefs of a small number of terrorists were taken to be indicative of Islam and the Muslim community at large. In the end, this leads to extrapolating every action taken by Muslims to everyone else (Otterbeck, 2007). Ouis and Roald's comments underscore a crucial aspect of understanding how Islamophobia is depicted in the media: it is a fluid concept that is not specific to any one nation or group of people. Because of this, there are many types of biases and discriminatory practices associated with how Muslims are portrayed in the media, depending on the circumstances. It is theoretically possible that Muslims continue to be portrayed in the media as overly sexualized, archaic individuals. This may ultimately culminate in prominent displays of Islamophobia (Ahmed A. , 1995). Otterbeck and Bevelander contend that, despite the possibility of legal repercussions, there are circumstances in which criticizing Islam—for example, through the use of hate speech—may be permissible (Otterbeck, 2007). Cartoon imagery plays a significant role in the way Muslims are portrayed in the media, as the Runnymede Trust emphasizes. It also emphasizes how the freedom of expression, speech, and religion is a cornerstone of democracy and a means of fomenting intolerance and prejudice. Because of this, it's important to acknowledge the crucial role journalists play in making sure that no photographs that discriminate are released (Trust, 1997). Moreover, according to Runnymede Trust, media portrayals of Muslims mirror gender viewpoints (Trust, 1997).

The claim that Islam oppresses women in ways that are both separate from and worse than how women are treated in other religions and civilizations is a recurrent theme in a lot of media coverage and discussion. Arranged marriages frequently end in divorce. In these stories, the father of the bride and the groom are usually portrayed negatively (Trust, 1997).

In this situation, the insights offered by Ouis and Roald are helpful, notably that in a hegemonic relationship, the other is constantly perceived as something negative in comparison to one's own rightfulness. This could create the perception that Islam is the only faith that supports the exploitation of women, in contrast to non-Muslims who stand up for women's rights (Otterbeck, 2007). Roald therefore surmises that the victimized woman's appearance might be a reflection of an Islamophobic mindset. Additionally, Scott draws attention to similar issues while focusing on a French setting that may be related to integration and sexual liberation (Scott, 2007). These circumstances make the French government's prohibition on the display of blatantly religious symbols and associations' all the more necessary; viewed as the liberator, it ought to stand up for Muslim women who are persecuted by their own "people." This demonstrates an Islamophobic attitude that views wearing a veil as a human right rather than a threat to national security. According to Scott, a Muslim's sexual orientation determined the extent of their integration into French society (Scott, 2007). Therefore, stereotypes about Muslims are employed to both confirm what is true about them and to determine what it means for a Muslim to fit in with a certain community.

Islamophobia shows itself in behavior even if Said's comment highlights how Islam is perceived as a monolithic, unchanging entity rather than a dynamic, diverse philosophy. As a result, through the use of stereotypes and misleading information, incorrect views about all Muslims are likely to proliferate. When a Muslim makes a mistake, they are held responsible together with the Muslim society at large (Said, 1997). Despite these contrasts, Muslims in Bosnia and Somalia are very different from Muslims in the Middle East. Rejecting the range of gender viewpoints and Qur'anic interpretations available in Islam, which may or may not be relevant to Muslims' ancestry, is another example of Islamophobia in action. People consequently take in and understand various religions and/or cultural norms. On the other hand, islamophobic viewpoints assert that all Muslims abuse and oppress their women, unlike non-Muslims. This is a fantastic illustration of a gender perspective where distorted images are considered standard traits of the orthodox Muslim, incapable of adjusting to contemporary culture. Thus, even though this is untrue, patriarchal tendencies are only highlighted within the context of Muslim discourse (Said, 1997).

This paper will compare and contrast popular opinions of Islam with cinematic portrayals of the religion. The public's perception of Muslims will be examined in this study in relation to various representations, both positive and negative, with a focus on how they are portrayed in movies. Social cohesion has been aided or hampered by the various interpretations of Islam, which is the second most common religion in this region after Christianity (Young, 2011). Underlining the ways in which these viewpoints have changed the lives of millions of people and significantly influenced how Islam is viewed in diverse cultural contexts is crucial.

5. 9/11 and media representation of Islam

There is no denying the impact of the 9/11 incident on the global society. Studying international politics makes it clear that the entire world has been involved in the war against terrorism. This argument started after the tragic events of 9/11 (Burke 2007). In New York, two passenger jets struck the twin skyscrapers (Burke, 2007). The west blamed "Muslims" for this catastrophe. After that, Muslims of all ages and genders are accused of being terrorists everywhere in the world. The idea

that Muslims are terrorists almost exactly coincided with the surge in terrorism (Bokhari, 2011).

In Western cinema, the topic of Muslims and Islam has long been examined. Hollywood has played a major role in the demonization of Islam and Muslims since the turn of the 20th century (Baker, 2013). Hollywood frequently portrays certain Muslims as plotting attacks against the United States; two such instances are the James Cameron films *True Lies* (1994) and *The Siege* (1998). Following the 9/11 attacks, anti-Islamic sentiment grew in Western nations, especially the United States, due to the criminal behavior of certain extremists. The media was quickly dehumanizing the opponent and portraying them as an animal (Wills, 2010). A plethora of plays, comic books, TV series, films, and novels have been produced to illustrate the various ways in which individuals in the West reacted to 9/11. For example, national US TV stations created nearly sixty 9/11 "memory" program productions during the week of September 11, 2002 (Dixon, 2004). In actuality, American patriotism was exhibited in films like *United 93* (directed by Paul Greengrass) and *World Trade Center* (2002), as well as television series like *Jack Bauer's 24* (2001–2010) and *11'09"01–September 11* (Rawi, 2014). Dixon observes that there is diversity in 9/11 films, noting that "some seem to critique the warrior mentality, while others embrace it, and some still completely avoid the subject." Dixon claims that the desire to mimic the concept of the "just war," in which a military reaction and the ensuing escalation of hostilities seem both inevitable and acceptable, has apparently motivated the majority of mainstream western films released since 9/11. Regardless of whether the films were in production on 9/11, this remains valid (Dixon, 2004).

This line of reasoning makes logical, considering that the American public likes to watch films that show some form of "poetic justice," when villains are held accountable for their horrible crimes (Akhtar, 2011). Both viewers and critics were clamoring for more 9/11-themed movies, but the main problem was that Hollywood's existing happy-ending paradigm was difficult to bring off (Serjeant, 2011). Few scholarly studies explicitly address how Muslims are portrayed in films reacting to Islamophobia and how it impacts their lives. The films stated above, according to Downing and Husband, might have a detrimental effect on other racial or religious groups, leading to a situation called "ghettoization"—the underrepresentation of minorities in the media (Husband, 2005). As per Haynes, the reason behind this trend is that "Western-owned and produced mass media continue to indicate the centrality and normality of Whiteness and White privilege." Yet, "racial" and ethnic minorities continue to be aberrant and depart from the conventional understanding of what it means to be White (Haynes, 2007). The movies in this study can really be categorized as alternative media since they offer essential platforms for spreading public opinions and thoughts on global events in a manner that Hollywood was unable to (Rawi, 2014).

Many Western media outlets have misrepresented Muslims, invented false identities for them, and disseminated false information regarding Islamic principles. They asserted that Muslims are a distinct group with a violent, ugly, destructive, and anti-rational worldview. Ali (2015) report that following the 9/11 attacks, over 60% of media stories on Islam in Western nations were negative, accounting for 75% of the coverage (Ali, 2015). Western media generally avoid taking an empirical or ethnographic stance in favor of theoretical concepts. Since the 26/11 Mumbai event also affected Muslims in India, there is a current widespread perception of Islamophobia (Sengupta, 2015). (Gottschalk 2008) defines Islamophobia as the fear, hostility, or prejudice directed against Muslims and the Islamic faith because Muslims are seen as a potential source of terrorism

and violence (Gottschalk, 2008) and are hence the target of suspicion and inquiry (Bhat, 2012).

6. Stereotypes and Misogyny: Muslims in Indian Films

The films made in British India during the first phase showed the impact of Parsi theater on Indian society, with a significant emphasis on religion and religious figures. In films that marked the beginning of a new phase in Hindi cinema in an independent India, intercommunal cooperation took the stage (Vasudevan, 2015). However, there's a recent trend in which movies that show social unrest are used to further Islamophobia. The Indian film industry frequently associates the Islamic sign with a repressive caste system; Muslims are characterized as suspicious individuals, and terrorists are used to symbolize them. By making multiple films about Muslims that falsely and negatively portray them as terrorists, the Indian film industry fanned the flames. Muslims are frequently portrayed in Bollywood films as low-level criminals, mafia bosses, or feudal landlords. They also frequently sport odd cultural symbols like "beards" and "caps." The way Muslims are portrayed in Bollywood films has a big impact on the public conversation about Indian Muslims. This effect not only affects the Indian populace but also the Muslim diaspora abroad, where there is a stronger commitment to religious preservation. In this instance, Muslim symbols have an impact on popular political narratives that portray Muslims as "terrorist/anti-national" groups. Muslims have always had a bad reputation in India, particularly in Hindi cinema. In Hindi movies, Muslims are frequently portrayed inaccurately as terrorists, evildoers, or antisocial people. In addition, there is a problem with the rise in "missing Muslims" in the modern, globalized, and liberated age. Bollywood and Hindi films usually dehumanize and classify Muslims since they are dedicated to the monoculturalist ideology. It encourages stigma, presumptions, and pervasive misconceptions. Mainstream film stresses popular content that conforms to mainstream expectations, instead of challenging the majority's devotion to politics, history, and culture.

Because of the links between sexism, patriarchy, ethnocentrism, misogyny, and oppression, Islamophobia has become more common in Indian cinema. It can be extremely difficult and intolerable to be a Muslim in the modern world, particularly for Muslim women. Bollywood films provide a wide range of topics, from romance to suspense, which has unintentionally made it easier for audiences to relate to Islamophobia and their frequently ludicrous fixation with it. The most well-known movie produced by Indian film studios, which has received great praise and critical acclaim, shows love, hate, separation, and honesty. To prevent people from committing the crime of disclosing their religious affiliations in public, Bollywood uses derogatory language directed towards Muslims and other religious minorities. The widespread false information could support nationalist perceptions of Muslims as radicals who inspire and brainwash their followers (Khanam, 2021).

Even now, the media frequently spreads outdated preconceptions and false facts when discussing Muslims or countries where Muslims constitute the majority population. (Terman R. , 2017) One recent study, for example, discovered that Muslims are often shown in the media as enemies rather than allies and as a distinct society rather than one that has blended in with other cultures (Abid, 2021). Ultimately, there is a widespread misconception that Muslims are "foreign." Muslims are portrayed in popular culture as "foreign" people because they emphasize their religious garb, speak Arabic as their primary language, and are typically depicted in historical settings (Khan, 2021). The media regularly portrays Muslims as dangerous immigrants (Hussain, 2009). This supports the US government's "war on terror" while disseminating false propaganda that Muslims are a threat to American security,

democracy, and culture. These misconceptions about Muslims affect both men and women equally, despite the fact that many of these biases and lies target Muslim women in particular. Muslim women are generally represented in films in a consistent manner. Muslim women are often shown as spouses, belly dancers, or forced sex workers; they are consistently portrayed as exotic, highly sexualized, and promiscuous. The image of Muslim women as the quiet, obedient, and/or submissive spouse of a harsh Muslim husband is also widely held. Muslims are perceived as being out of touch with modern society and obsolete as a result of this power disparity. Narratives about Muslim women often portray them as oppressed and unbearable, reinforcing the assumption that they are limited by traditional culture or their family background (Terman R. , 2017). Additionally, it was discovered that there were parallels between Muslim women and women of other faiths, between Western and Eastern ideas, and between Muslim women and Western societies (Bromley, 2011). Eventually, we learn that horrific assault of Muslim women is part of these reports of persecution. This merely serves to highlight how important it is to defend Muslim women, regardless of whether that defense is provided by a feminist spouse or a white male. The social-cultural paradigm claims that Muslim women are either misrepresented or underrepresented in Indian cinema. Starting in the 1970s, the focus on women's incomplete identities continued well into the twenty-first century. The way that race is portrayed in Bollywood is constant.

With a selection of some of the most well-known tawaif photos of women (courtesans or dancing girls) from that era, I'll transport you back to the 1970s. The most well-known movies, such Umrao Jaan and Mughal-e-Azam, are excellent examples. Muslim women appear to enjoy dressing up and trying to imitate the elaborately ornamented, shimmering-gold bodies of Umrao Jaan and Anarkali. Madhubala features two characters played by Rekha. Nawabs would voluntarily participate in a sexualized image of women because they lacked a secure family and stable financial circumstances. Contrary to popular belief, one must be celibate if they lack overt sexual desires. On the other hand, a modest Muslim woman is shown as docile and subservient in the film Veer Zara. Actually, this is a perfect example of how losing control over love relationships can compromise one's moral integrity. A similar idea may also be found in more recent works like Raanjhanaa and movies like Fiza and Mission Kashmir. Muslim women are portrayed in these films as lifeless, boring components of the total. It seems unimaginable that a Muslim woman in Indian cinema would come to terms with her own sexuality, political identity, and agency. There is still a shortage of comprehensive representations and character development (Khanam, 2021). The veil is a major component of Muslim beliefs and is a representation of Islam. In Indian cinema, veils or abayas are often worn by con artists and robbers. In the film "Secret Superstar," a veiled woman who achieved everything was shown in an extremely positive way. Liberals and the general public actually make fun of the woman who is wearing the veil because they believe she is being persecuted. Bollywood is therefore primarily to blame for the propagation of false beliefs, biases, and misunderstandings about Indian Muslim women. Hegemonic narratives and political articulation have historically supported it.

7. Conclusions

Finally, the conclusion emphasizes how dangerous Islamophobia and religious intolerance have become as a result of media and film portrayals that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks. These biases reinforce stereotypes that dehumanize Muslims and portray them as aggressive or barbaric people, marginalizing Muslim communities. These prejudices affect how

the public views Muslims as well as laws pertaining to the government and society, public discourse, and people's daily lives. A number of tactics must be used to combat Islamophobia, including changes to the educational system, the media, and the law to ensure truthful representations and foster peaceful coexistence between many religious traditions and viewpoints. We must address Islamophobia immediately if we are to effectively advance world peace and maintain universal ideals of fairness and human rights, regardless of an individual's religious beliefs.

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