



The Role of Media in Stereotypical Representation of Muslims in My Name is Khan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at providing answers to the questions of how Muslims were portrayed in Western media before and especially after 9/11, as well as how the dominant role of popular media helped spread stereotypical representations of Muslims throughout the world and create numerous obstacles for Muslims who live both abroad and at home. The study project emphasises the detrimental impact of media on Muslims, the historical context of distortion, foreign policy, and public opinion, as well as the crucial role of the Indian filmmaker in presenting his own viewpoint to the world through the chosen film. Because of the biased media representations, an examination of the movie My Name Is Khan reveals to the public the untrue face, the harmful attitudes, and the lifestyle of Muslims. As a result, the west's media gave an inaccurate and biased portrayal of Islam and its adherents, particularly because of the American government's partial response to 9/11, the influence of oriental ideas, and the dearth of Muslim voices in creating their own image. Additionally, media portrayals of Muslims were unfavourable and completely at odds with their liberal worldviews. These conclusions provide an explanation for why Muslims suffered because of the stereotyped image of Muslims and Islam in the west media in such a short period of time. This article will assist in exposing the unfavourable perception that Muslims have as a result of the media's enormous influence, but more study is also necessary to understand Muslims' attitudes and behaviours towards life and other people.

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1. Introduction

This essay seeks to analyze the film My Name is Khan by Belinda Marie Balraj against the backdrop of cultural theory to explain the western media's depiction of Muslims. This study looks at Muslim culture in more detail and analyses how the western media sometimes exaggerates negative aspects of Muslim culture and its adherents. (E. W. Said, 1978) asserts that Orientalism has not accurately depicted Islam in this sense. He thinks it's simple to categorically characterize the traits of the Islamic way of life and its precursors. However, in my opinion, this is only a reflection of how the media presents information and has the power to shape how viewers perceive the world. The media plays a significant role in understanding how one country perceives and engages with another. The view of Muslims and Islam in the era of mass media, according to E. Said (1981), comprises both factual and subjective realities. According to him, humans manufacture these realities based on their religious beliefs and also provides evidence that these facts are altered in response to objections from non-Muslims. As they experience conflict, either individually or collectively, they mark their identities. However, in my opinion, this is only a reflection of how the media presents information and has the power to shape how viewers perceive the world. The media plays a significant role in understanding how one country perceives and engages with another. The view of Muslims and Islam in the era of mass media, according to E. Said (1981), comprises both factual and subjective realities.

According to him, humans manufacture these realities based on their religious beliefs, which are imparted to them by their cultures, histories, and traditions. He also provides evidence that these facts are altered in response to objections from non-Muslims. As they experience conflict, either individually or collectively, they mark their identities. He is neither a terrorist or an instigator, but rather a person of weak character who cannot assert himself in society. He exudes an odd, outsider appearance. He even recites Muslim prayers while raising money for those who lost their lives in the 9/11 attacks in their homeland since the media tries to portray Muslims as odd. By portraying an inaccurate image of Muslims, films and other forms of media also have a long-lasting effect on viewers' thoughts. Cultural theory emphasises the role of media in shaping various types of culture that shape human existence in this regard. It also shows how media both reflects and generates culture.

The study's aim is to demonstrate to the world how Christians and Muslims have long been labelled as adversaries. In this context, Eriksen (2001) asserts that it is nothing new to portray Islam as a belligerent and aggressive faith. Since the Middle Ages, it has been a hot topic and a powerful rhetoric in the west. The definition of Muslims and Christians as mortal opponents has existed for a very long time. People have been pestering, denouncing, and criticizing their religions for being useless, immoral, and disorderly. Religious differences have been inflated and used by both sides as a justification for annexation, cultural supremacy, and violent conflict. Islam and the west have always been adversaries. Additionally, several academics contend that 9/11 had a significant impact on how Muslims were stereotyped. Muslims have experienced significant prejudice, demands, and conflict by American culture because of the events of September 11, 2001. The media primarily portrays Muslims as having only negative associations. Muslims seldom ever make headlines. Particularly when it comes to young people who still practise their traditions or women who left their cultures, media coverage of women's cases is quite scant. Derogatory terms like Osama Bin Laden, 9/11, jihad, veiling, honour murders, forced marriage, suicide bombers, and Sharia are frequently used in cover pieces or features on Islam or Muslims. Two significant stories have dominated American media after 9/11. The media's main focus was on terrorism and Islamic extremism.

The dominant media also stereotypically portrays other minority groups in addition to Muslims. According to Gottschalk and Greenberg (2008) and other academics, Muslims are stereotyped in the media much like any other minority group. The media has frequently been charged with stereotyping and presenting minorities in a bad light. Muslims are currently the minority group targeted most frequently. Every minority group in the United States has, however, struggled against the media's stereotypes at some time, which have confined them to roles and given them distinctive physical attributes. Stereotypes about Muslims are not new nor unique. Jews, African Americans, and Irish people are examples of outgroups who have historically been subject to unfair media depictions. Additionally, prejudices of minority populations frequently arise on a particular agenda. The "lazy and ignorant black slave" used to defend slavery is one of many blatant illustrations of how stereotypes work. In a similar manner, Asians were stigmatized as the "yellow peril" to prevent them from entering the country. To stir up anti-Japanese sentiment and support the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, the unfavourable "Jap" stereotype was deployed. For many years, it has been standard custom to employ stereotypes to elicit a certain response from the audience. Media stereotypes have lately focused on Muslims and Arabs during the previous forty years. Due to the extensive media coverage of recent terrorist acts, social unrest, and political turbulence in the Middle East, both popular support for American military involvement and Muslim immigration to the country have increased. The basis for biases towards outgroups is a sense that they pose a danger to the ingroup. The fear of expanding Islamic movements, terrorism, and authoritarian governments, as well as the purported Muslim cultural invasion of Western nations, is a major contributor to the unfavourable stereotypes about Muslims that are prevalent today. This study tries to dispel popular misconceptions about Muslims that relate them to terrorism and fanaticism, as shown in popular culture. It digs further at how Muslims are portrayed in the media. It aims to dispel the notion that Muslims are fundamentalists and terrorists and that Western stereotypes of their culture are untrue. Since the beginning of the modern world, the West has had a strong grip on the media, which has consistently portrayed Muslims incorrectly. This distortion has given Muslims a false identity, and this identity is negatively harming Muslims' lives across the world. An examination of the movie *My Name Is Khan* demonstrates

the numerous issues Muslims in other countries have because of media representations that are inaccurate.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

It is an undeniable worldwide truth that Muslims are stereotypically portrayed in the media. For the Muslims who live all over the world, this stereotype is always causing major issues. The movie *My Name Is Khan* is a good illustration of this stereotype of Muslims. Scholars have used a variety of microscopes to see *My Name Is Khan*. Some have said that it represents Muslims as terrorists, while others have argued that it portrays Muslims as immobilized, weak, and abnormal. However, using the fictitious, false, and stereotypical portrayal of Muslims in *My Name is Khan* as well as cultural theory, this study looks at the media's significant role in misrepresenting innocent Muslims who live abroad and the worst effects this misrepresentation has on their lives.

1.2. Research Questions

- How do prominent media outlets contribute to the stereotyped portrayal of Muslims in *My Name is Khan*?
- In the chosen movie, how does the bigotry towards Muslims negatively impact Rizwan Khan's life after 9/11?

1.3. Research Objectives

- To demonstrate how the media had a significant part in the stereotyped portrayal of Muslims in *My Name is Khan*.
- To investigate how prejudice, as depicted in the film, had a detrimental impact on Rizwan Khan's life after 9/11.

2. Literature Review

Considering cultural theory, this literature review aids in the analysis of how media shapes identities and plays a significant part in shaping culture. By using *My Name is Khan* as a case study, this study also demonstrates the detrimental impact that the media plays in painting an inaccurate portrait of people and their culture in Indian movies. It is possible to trace theoretical concerns in the creation and consumption of culture to communications research in the 20th century. Most people think of communication as a three-step process including a sender, receiver, and message. Exploring the connections between these factors has been a major focus of mass media research. The relative potency of the sender and recipient message has generated a great deal of discussion. In the 20th century, there was a broad trend away from models that placed most of the power in the hands of senders (such as media organisations) and towards ones that placed emphasis on the audience's ability to shape how these messages are interpreted. The creation of the mass society theory coincided with the development of new technologies in radio, television, and film during the 20th century. According to this concept, industrialisation has produced a sizable population of uniform citizens and customers. These individuals need guidance since they were relatively naive or ignorant, drawn to everyday pleasures. A tiny, bright, educated, and sometimes manipulative elite stood out from the crowd. This idea that elites were able to create meanings that were injected into the mass is related to culture theory (Smith & Riley, 2008). *My Name Is Khan*, the movie chosen for this research, shows the influence of media or elites in creating the stereotyped picture of Muslims, Islam, and those who follow it. The proposed questions have had logical responses provided using cultural theory. The idea provides the framework for this study, whose focus is on how media shapes culture, cultural practises, and their connections to power.

The article organises the media analysis to determine how the media affects viewers. Paul Lazarsfeld and others began their most significant early research with an examination of the 1940 American presidential election. According to Lazarsfeld's research, exposure to radio and print media had very little of an actual effect on how people voted. The opinion of the leaders was crucial in this situation. These individuals resembled home chiefs, prominent members of the society, representatives of the labour union at work, etc. They were believed to be the biggest media consumers. In a two-step communication process, the opinion leader would evaluate material from the media, influencing the meanings that other people perceived from them. According to the overall conclusion (as described in (Smith & Riley, 2008)), personal influence had a significant role in determining how those messages were understood. In the

context of cultural theory, the study's key issues include the impact of western media on public opinion seeing Muslims as terrorists and Islam as a religion that encourages violence.

The Lazarsfeld model showed the most promise in 1970 since at this time it was the dominant paradigm in cultural theory. As the decade progressed, many other theorists began to contribute to cultural theory and provided new insights for others. Gitlin (1978), who advanced the notion that the media can only inform people of what to think about rather than what to believe, was the most significant critique. According to others as noted in (Smith & Riley, 2008), the media was effective because it could highlight significant concerns while downplaying or ignoring others. He gave a personal illustration of how media outlets may take a complex perspective and simplify it so that it fits the desired ideological spectrum. In an interview with a television interviewer, he expressed his opinions on the approaching Gulf War of 1981, being sure to make clear both his opposition to the conflict and his support for American soldiers. When he watched the interview that had been broadcast, which had been manipulated to make him seem like a straightforward or uncomplicated supporter of the war, he was utterly astonished. CT aims to examine how western media ignores some concerns and marginalizes others. The chosen film is examined from the same angle to investigate how Western media has focused on the bad elements of Muslims and Islam while disregarding the benefits. The perception of Muslims as terrorists grows because of the media's constant portrayal of them as such. As a result, hostility, and prejudice towards all Muslims stem from that root (as mentioned in (Amiri, 2011).

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1993) offered a significant variant in cultural theory, which holds that individuals dread isolation (as quoted in Smith & Riley, 2008). When a topic is covered in the media in a certain way, speaking out against this orthodoxy while running the danger of social exclusion requires a lot of guts. A clear illustration of this conduct in British media discourse is the discussion of Princess Diana's unfortunate death in 1997. The media repeatedly emphasized how much they loved her and carried various articles about how everyone was grieving. They never discussed the opinions of most individuals who differed with them. Those who did shout in front of others experienced bullying and hate mail. The only cure for those who favored Diana remained quiet. In this regard, analysis of a particular film reveals the opinions of people who were unable to express their sentiments over stereotyped portrayals of Muslims and Islam. CT offers a suitable technique to comprehend and demonstrate a specific media function in the broadcast of various tales.

One of the key tenets of cultural theory is the notion that all cultural representations in the media are political (Ben, 1997). The primary illustration of this are the stereotyped and prejudiced images of cultural representation. Cultural representations are never innocent or pure, according to cultural theory, and they frequently include ambiguous, positive, or negative depictions of various social groups. Certain groups may appear to be inferior to or superior to dominant social groupings in media representations. In this approach, the study seeks to illustrate how Islam and Muslims are stereotyped under various political influences. It argues unequivocally that the way the West portrays Islam and those who practise it is neither fair nor innocent but is instead a covert propaganda campaign to further certain goals. Cultural theory demonstrates how media changes people's perceptions of the world and their core beliefs, defining right and wrong, their goals and sense of who they are as individuals, as well as the risks and adversaries they face, frequently dividing society into "us" and "them" (Kellner, 2009). The examination of this survey makes it quite evident how the media effectively distances us from Muslims by portraying them as foreigners, strangers, and outsiders. CT tries to show how the media affects individuals.

Media spectacles show who is in control and who is not, and who is permitted to use violence and force and who is not (Kellner, 2009). This is the most contentious and narrowly defined aspect of cultural theory. In his post *My Name Is Khan but I Am Not a Terrorist*, Balraj discusses how Muslims are portrayed in the film *My Name Is Khan* and illustrates the significance of media (Balraj, 2011). This will be the main idea covered in this study endeavour. It examines how the western media portrays its dominance and influence over the rest of the globe in relation to Muslims. This research aids in examining the role that western media has played in influencing how the entire world perceives Muslims and Islam in terms of behaviour, thought, emotion, and terror. CT offers a useful method to examine these problems. According to Lash (2007), the

post-hegemonic has this kind of authority. The media emphasises and devotes more attention to the influential factors. They are hence more prominent. He continues by stating that the power flow is increasingly coming from inside and acting as a creative force.

3. Research Methodology

I used the methods of scene and dialogue analysis to analyse and interpret the chosen movie within the CT theoretical framework to meet the study's goals. Everyone appears to be talking about "culture" as an essential topic. Many people believe that the economy in our current society is growing increasingly reliant on signs, symbols, and the media. If we look at our own daily life, we can see that culture is present everywhere. It influences our choices for what to buy at the mall, what we watch on television, how we connect with others in person, how we react to world events, and even how we perceive ourselves. Understanding culture in such a setting is essential for engaged citizenry. One crucial resource for this job is CT. I tried to demonstrate in this study how media may manipulate emotions and feelings by portraying white people as black people and vice versa. Additionally, it aims to demonstrate the extent to which media influence on culture dictates how people behave. In order to choose the scenes and phrases from the chosen movie for analysis and interpretation, it was helpful to take into account the study methodology, the filmmakers' agendas, and the framework of cultural theory. The persona of Rizwan Khan is examined to better understand how Islam is stereotypically portrayed in the media.

4. Data Analysis

One cannot deny the prevalent influence that media plays in forming identities. According to Patel (2007), the irrational fear and loathing of a group of people because of a characteristic of their identity is a very un-American phenomenon unfolding in America. Every other community member, even children, has had the perpetrators' photos superimposed on them. In the film *My Name Is Khan*, the character of Rizwan Khan (RK) debates the notion that Muslims are terrorists. Many pictures of how Indian Muslim immigrants have been stigmatized come to mind after watching the film and accepted some sort of discrimination from American since the tragedy of 9/11. This stereotyping is quite appropriate given the current situation, in which it is normal practise to stereotype members of the Muslim community. The stereotype implied by the character RK is that of a person who promotes hostility towards other religious communities, is unreliable, and is the primary driver of devastation. The plot of this film, which explores the life of a Muslim immigrant while bringing up the topic of stereotype in the context of CT, merits analysis. The role of popular media in creating the perception that Muslims are terrorists is examined in the context of CT.

Stereotyping, according to Hall (1997), creates a symbolic boundary between what is "normal" and what is "deviant," what is "acceptable" and what is "unacceptable," what belongs and what does not or is "other," between "insiders" and "outsiders," and between "us" and "them." Stereotyping is a practise that labels some groups of individuals as 'other' and harmful. In this movie, Rizwan Khan experiences the same thing. He has Asperger's syndrome, a type of illness that affects him from birth and makes it difficult for him to communicate or engage with others. It positions RK as the "other," which is the fundamental reason why director Karan Johar gave him this affliction. It also suggests that unless a Muslim has a mental or emotional disability, no Muslim can truly redeem himself or even Islam. The tragedy of 9/11 is one of the special factors that has an impact on the development of stereotyping. The 9/11 catastrophe gave rise to bigotry and a derogatory view of Islam and Muslims. Ansari (1998) summarises the current state of the Arab Muslims in his assessment, *Thwarted Dreams*:

Regarding the Arabs, it is current to make fun of them. Arab becomes a synonym with Islamic, which is now perceived as radical and retrograde. The undivided middle fallacy is freely employed, broad strokes are painted without distinction, intellectual scrutiny tools are disregarded, modern history is disregarded, the joys and suffering of a whole region's inhabitants are forgotten, and media stereotypes, unconsciously reinforced by prejudices of one kind or another, are ingested as gospel truths. Islam frequently occupies a lower position in Western perceptions of the religion. After 9/11, the movie *MNIK* also takes several dramatic turns. Because his classmates think he is a Muslim, they cruelly beat his stepson, who later succumbs to his injuries. Mandira loses trust in her marriage after losing her son. She requests that Khan leave and then come back after informing the president. Khan here, and I'm not a terrorist. Even though it was an unexpected request, he accepts the task and sets off to meet

President George W. Bush. Film frequently distorts certain historical events, thus the analysis in this study also shows the 9/11 historical incident and its effects on people's lives in the context of CT.

5. Results

It sums up that RK used the slogan "My name is Khan, and I am not a terrorist" during his quest to alter how Americans view Muslims. If we contrast this slogan with reality, the situations, and the instances Muslim Americans have encountered since 9/11, it becomes quite clear how true it is. The slogan asks if a person's identity should simply be based on their country of origin, religion, and ethnicity when only a small percentage of terrorist organisations' members have Muslim backgrounds. A person who is a member of the Muslim community and has travelled across seven oceans to another country may be labelled a terrorist based on his alleged affiliation with terrorists. Though these remarks seem rational, straightforward, and truthful, prejudiced Americans are unable to understand them. Like RK, young children (his stepson) and those with mental disabilities (like RK) who can only grasp basic concepts and reason logically cannot be biased. That he is being victimized not because he has a mental problem but rather because he is a Muslim is a powerful reason for the phrase. There is no denying that the media can communicate significant things. When RK was assisting the residents of Georgia Town in the film, the media exposed the issues of underprivileged minority groups. The minority' substandard living conditions were visible to the public. In two other moments from the film, the media's multiple and strong roles are also on display. During the breaking news of 9/11 on television, radio, and newspapers, the media at one point depicted all Muslims as terrorists, while at other times it supported the idea that not all Muslims are terrorist. These topics provide a supportive setting for the study of cultural theory that emphasises the function of media in shaping culture. Cultural theory demonstrates how media spectacle's function. These spectacles demonstrate who is in control and who is helpless. Anyone who refuses runs the risk of either dying or going to jail. movie does the finest job of illustrating the political function of media. RK gets beaten and brought into arrest without a lawyer when he declares he is not a terrorist during the presidential rally. Laws have been altered or new laws have been drafted to allow for indefinite detention of anyone accused of being a terrorist.

6. Conclusion

The chosen Indian film, My Name Is Khan, has been examined in this study using CT's theoretical underpinnings. This movie portrays the media's influential role. The negative role of the media and its detrimental consequences on society have been considered in the analysis of this film. The purpose of this study is to draw conclusions on how misrepresentation affects people's lives and how crucial it is to provide the world with the truth. It emphasises how misconceptions affect Muslims and how internal and external hostility affects their life, creating issues for their families and having a bad impact on their psychology. This film has refuted the widespread prejudice towards Islam and Muslims. Following 9/11, the west started to obstruct them. They ceased to accord them their proper rights. This treatment of Muslims by the west encouraged both internal and external racism in the community. All Muslims are terrorists and fanatics in the perspective of the west. Racial profiling often results in the victimisation of innocent individuals, including children. Through popular media, the west has ingrained the idea that Muslims are terrorists, and that Islam is a religion that condones terrorism in the hearts and minds of Americans and people all over the world.

Muslims felt exposed and unsafe in society because of these photos. Muslims face racial issues both inside and outside of their society because of regular individuals and various institutions. People across the world have a very bad perception of Muslims, and the main explanation for this is how frequently Muslims are stereotyped as terrorists and fanatics. In the society, this stereotyping brought about disorder, discontent, and bewilderment. Because to media bias and inaccurate depictions, the status of Muslims is deplorable, pitiful, and sad. The CT framework has considered each of these concerns. The way the west treats Muslims, which has a detrimental impact on their lives and families, shows the impact of media. The society mistreats Muslims. They endure continuous suffering by becoming the subject of several investigations. This has not only had a negative impact on Muslims' daily lives but has also brought bigotry in society to light. Muslims have had their lives ruined because of the media's destructive impact. The results of this study show that media misrepresentations exacerbate victims' resentments and animosity and negatively impact their lives in such a way that they

are unable to contribute to the general welfare of society. As a result, the media should carefully assess its role and be objective in its depiction. In future, scholars can further evaluate the issue in the backdrops of colonialism, imperialism and Marxism.

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