IMPACTS OF THE NEGATIVE RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES ON A SOCIETY IN *THE PRISONER* BY HAMID

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Abstract
This Study critically analyzes the work of a negative religious identity in the book The Prisoner by Omar Shahid Hamid (2013), in this case, the portrayal of Muslim characters in the context of terrorism and extremity. Based on a qualitative research methodology, the study uses the theory of religion by Emile Durkheim, especially the sacred and profane dichotomy to determine the sociocultural meaning behind these representations. The paper concludes that although the novel is trying to bring to the fore important issues in the society, it is also in danger of promoting harmful stereotypes that portray Muslim identity as violent. These portrayals help to create a larger story of stigmatization of religious groups and blurring the line between religious piety and extremism. This paper proposes that literature has a major role in determining the perception of religion and identity among the people. Through this study, the research adds to the literature and cultural studies by making the ethical accountability of fictional narratives focused on presenting religious identities, but without stigmatizing or involving bias.

Introduction

Religious identity is something of literary criticism, and scholars have debated how it affects the lives of individuals and the society (Turner, 2018; Smith, 2015). The topic is particularly topical as the impact of the negative religious identities on the social relations and their tendency to enhance marginalization, conflict, and division is investigated (Khan, 2017). In the contemporary literature, authors tend to use the concept of religious identity to talk about the issues existing in the society, which implies the conflicts that happen when individuals or communities are negatively characterized with reference to their religious identities (Adams, 2019). Religious identity of the main character is also an issue with The Prisoner, (2013) by Hamid, and the religious prejudice integrated into the characters turns out to contribute to the growth of social conflict and segregation. This research aims to discuss the under-publicized negative impacts of religious identities on influencing the

actions and attitudes of the society since most works about religious identity focus on its positive or non-departing connotations (Norris, 2020). This paper aims to provoke the broader discussion about the ways in which literature can be used to discuss the negative influence of bad religious identities on social peace and integration by exploring this relationship in The Prisoner, (2013).

Although there is numerous scholarly work on religious identification in literature that discusses the beneficial influence, including the creation of a sense of belonging (Patel, 2019; Harrison, 2016), there is a scarcity of studies that mention the detrimental effects of religious identification, especially its divisive nature and conflict in society (Green, 2018). Most of the existing research emphasizes the opportunities of using religious identities as a way of fostering unity and cultural identification (Sullivan, 2017), less consideration is given to the ways they may encourage social exclusion, intolerance, and polarization. The gap is particularly prominent in postcolonial literature where authors exploit negative religious identities as one of the critical instruments to question injustice and institutions in society (Thompson, 2020). In The Prisoner (2013) by Hamid, the theme of negative religious identities forms one of the core topics, which explains the devastating impact of religious confrontation on the unity of the society and its stability (Ijaz & Rabi, 2022). This research seeks to examine the way this novel has criticized these identities and elucidate how they contribute to religious intolerance in the literary world today.

It is also important to grasp the depiction of bad religious identities in the Prisoner by Hamid (2013) as per the literary and societal viewpoints. Although a lot has been said regarding the effects of the religious identity on individuals, scarcely anything has been said concerning the effects on socially constructive features of the modern literary criticism (Khan, 2020). The absence of this is also a key difference in the work of Hamid in which religious identity does not only provide the characters with their individual dimensions, but also the source of social tensions and separations within society (Javed Ashiq, Usman,

Rabi, & Uzma, 2024). This study will also seek to critically analyze how negative religious identities in The Prisoner, (2013) have contributed towards division in the society. Also, since religious intolerance frequently causes inequality and societal instability, this paper attempts to reflect the practical consequences of the problems (Anderson, 2018; Nawaz, Khan, & Rabi, 2024)). As world religious tensions increase, a discussion of the role literature plays in creating religious conflict would provide valuable knowledge into how the divisions are maintained. By casting some light on how the negative religious identities were represented in the novel, the study will inform the readers and policy-makers who are keen on promoting mutual understanding and respect in the society (Lee, 2019; Rabi, Ahmad, Hussain, & Ullah, 2025).

This study attempts to examine the negative religious identities in The Prisoner and their association with conflict and polarization of the society (Rabi, Ullah, Ibrar, & Akbar, 2024). The main issue that will be addressed in this paper is the following: How do negative religious identities of The Prisoner create social relations and support the broader social meaning of intolerance and fragmentation? To answer this question, the research will look at how Hamid uses religious identity to criticize institutions in society, that is institutions concerning power, marginalization, and discrimination (Ahmed, 2020;Ali, Hamid, Ejaz, Aziz, Gul, & Ibrahim, 2025). The study will also focus on the effects of such negative religious identities on interpersonal relationships and community relations that lead to disintegration in the society and loss of cohesion (Ullah, Rabi, Khan, & Ahmad, 2025). It is assumed that in the book, Hamid employs the religious identification to expose the socioeconomic divisions within the society, as well as to classify people. In this study, the question is how these negative identities are employed to maintain a broader criticism of power relations and social norms through the analysis of the character formation of Hamid and the techniques of presenting the story (Singh, 2019). Moreover, the study will establish whether problems are still relevant to the existing issue of

religious intolerance and social disintegration and develops on how literature describes and experimentalizes real social processes (Zhao, 2021; Rabi et al., 2025).

This study discusses anti-religious identities and their effects on social relations and conflict in the movie The Prisoner by Hamid (2013). Dwelling on the religious identity of the protagonist and its impact on the relations with the other characters, the analysis examines how these identities can foster the relationships between the characters and the social segregation. It will analyze the ways in which Hamid uses religious identification as a prism of social criticism of such phenomena as isolation, power relations, and intolerance (Rahman, 2018; Rabi, Zahir, Aziz, Mukhtiar, & Bibi, 2025). Although the novel can have reached other types of identifying, including political or cultural, this study will focus on religious identity and its implications to society. The main goal is to discuss the way of how religious discord is represented in The Prisoner (2013), without direct comparisons to other literature works (Ali, 2020).

Literature Review
Personal Identity
Personal identity involves the concept of self i.e. goals, values and beliefs that guide the interaction with the world. It is also affected by a number of constructs including identity exploration and commitment (Marcia, 1966), identity consistency (Dunkel, 2005) and identity capital or stock of skills and self-knowledge which is applied to negotiate social settings (Côté, 1996). These elements of individual identity concur with the theory of Erikson, which was interested in seeking and finding self-definition that promotes self-motivated activities and interpersonal interactions (Schwartz, 2001). Personal identity is different to cultural identity that is more concerned with values, practices, and group affiliations that an individual acquires within his or her cultural or ethnic groups (Ullah, 2025). Personal identity does not mean cultural identity, which is influenced by the value, traditions, and group relationships one acquires based on the cultural or ethnic background (Schwartz,

Zamboanga, Rodriguez, and Wang, 2007). Personal identity provides an answer to the question Who am I? Generally speaking, the cultural identity deals with the question: "Who I am, as a member of my cultural or ethnic group? (Jensen, 2003). The two identities are complementary and as the individual identity develops by the means of social roles and group memberships (Hitlin, 2003), while cultural identity is created by cultural orientations, such as individualism, collectivism, and family values (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). It is the combination of personal and cultural identity that allows one to understand the definition of the self through a social context in holistic manner (Schwartz et al., 2006).

Social Identity
Social identification is the process by which people identify themselves in terms of group affiliation, which is the attribute of common values and attributes. Social identification involves people belonging to larger social groups like ethnicity, religion, political affiliation or profession unlike personal identity which is unique and distinctive. According to the social identity theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986), group affiliations determine the manner in which self-conception is created and determine the emotional value attached to group membership. To illustrate, by identifying as a feminist, individuals could be more active on such matters as gender discrimination, birth control, and so on, which proves that social identity influences awareness and behavior (Deaux, 2001). Social identity and personal identity interact with each other with group roles affecting and even restricting individual growth (Hitlin, 2003). This communication is particularly applicable when considering the issue of immigration where people find their way between their cultural background and the desires of the host culture (Ponterotto et al., 2001). Social identities may be ascribed, as in the case of ethnicity or gender, or achieved, as in the case of professional roles, and may have different social value, between most stigmatized and least stigmatized identities (Côté, 2006). The

increasing importance of global migration and multicultural societies points to the necessity to examine social and cultural identities in connection because they facilitate personal self-identification alongside general social processes (Schwartz et al., 2006).

Cultural Identity

Although there is a close relation between cultural identity and personal identity, cultural identity has historically been examined as an independent construct and it has frequently differed in terms of theoretical framework and emphases in research. The discussion on personal identity has been traditionally learned in relation to self-direction and individual development particularly in Western and individualistic cultures as described by Erikson (1950) and extended by Cote (2000). On the contrary, cultural identity studies have mostly been restricted to ethnic and cultural groups and acculturation and ethnic values are emphasized (Berry, 2006; Phinney, 2003). This difference was partly informed by the fact that historically, the ethnic majority groups, especially in the West, did not have to think about their culture identity because according to their perception, it was natural (DeVos and Banaji, 2005; Satti, Zaib, & Mangrio, 2025). Nonetheless, as the world is becoming more and more globalized and mass migration is becoming a reality, this has actually shifted to the realization that personal and cultural identities should be examined as a unit, particularly where people with different backgrounds are in complex social settings (Arnett, 2002). With the blurring of the ethnic majority and minority demarcations, mixed studies on the personal and cultural identity have become a necessity (Ahmad, Rabi, Sardar, Khan, & Begum, 2025). There are recent findings of the interaction between personal identity status and ethnic identity, which propose that a powerful personal identity can add to the strength of the ethnic identity (Miville et al., 2005; Riaz, Qureshi, & Zaib, 2025). The modern literature underlines the necessity to take into account both sides of the identity when exploring the experience of people with different backgrounds in the world (Roberts and Donahue, 1994).

Gender Identity

Gender identity is a central part of self-concept, meaning how people classify themselves as male or female. It is influenced by cultural roles and behaviors, commonly linking competitiveness or nurturance to masculine and feminine expectations (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Academics have argued over whether gender can be thought of in terms of a binary or as a continuum of identities. The gendered identities approach recognizes the fluidity of gender-based social roles such as occupations, roles, and individual ideologies (Settles & Buchanan, 2014). For example, a woman's gender identity could differ depending on whether she is a feminist or subscribes to traditional gender roles. The intersection of gender with race and class produces multifaceted self-concepts affecting behavior and social interactions (Epstein, 1973; Stets & Burke, 2000). Gender identity, too, is fluid and changes throughout one's life (Tobin et al., 2010). The awareness of the intricacies of gender identity lies at the heart of understanding how people deal with societal expectations and how gender constitutes more general social structures and behaviors (Wood & Eagly, 2012).

Religious Identity

Religious identity is an important consideration in the workplace, impacting the behavior of individuals as well as organizational functioning. With close to 80% of individuals in the United States claiming a religious identification (Pew Research Center, 2015), it is a key facet of diversity in the workplace. Nevertheless, it is frequently neglected in human resource (HR) theory and practice, often resulting in conflict, particularly where religious commitments are incompatible with occupational obligations. Significant legal judgments, like the UK Supreme Court ruling against Catholic midwives who requested exemption from abortion procedures (BBC News, 2014) and the European Court of Justice ruling on hijab bans in the workplace (BBC News, 2017), illustrate how religious

identity can conflict with occupational demands. These conflicts may have implications for both organizational performance and the well-being of employees, as the compatibility between an employee's religion and the requirements of their job can either support or detract from work performance (Morrison & Borgen, 2010; Ghumman et al., 2013). However, research into the intersection of work and religion remains underdeveloped in organizational and HR literature, with increasing demands for research examining religious diversity and how it influences workplace practices (Cantone & Wiener, 2017). This is a relevant gap since it not only impacts employee well-being but also workplace diversity management, further emphasizing the necessity of frameworks that integrate religious identity into the workplace (Gebert et al., 2014).

Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature and seeks to investigate and explain the influence of negative religious identities on society in the context of Hamid's The Prisoner (2013). The research is descriptive and inductively oriented, seeking to offer vivid, comprehensive descriptions of the representation of religious identities in the novel. Being an exploratory research, its key aim is to explore and analyze the different means through which religious identity, particularly Muslim identity and Islamic values, are represented. By conducting a qualitative examination, the study aims to know how negative religious identities affect social relationships and individual actions, providing a detailed exploration of these intersections in the novel.

This study employs primary and secondary data. The primary data are Hamid's The Prisoner (2013), with reference to sections related to the depiction of religious identities, especially Muslim characters and Islamic practice. Sections of religious limitation, conflicts between religious and occupational identities, and the perceptions of religion from society are critically examined. Secondary data consists of books, journal articles, essays, and critiques on religious identity, Islamic

representation in literature, and identity in the context of society. These secondary sources supply background and contextual information regarding the social and religious climate at the time the novel was published. The main text is subjected to qualitative content analysis in order to investigate how The Prisoner (2013) approaches religious identities with patterns, motifs, and themes that emphasize the harmful effects of religious identities on people and society. The analysis focuses on religious tension, discrimination, and internal conflict suffered by characters who are subject to religious restrictions. Secondary data is contrasted with the primary text to situate the novel's handling of religious identity within wider social and academic discourse.

This research uses Émile Durkheim's profane-sacred theory, as presented in The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912), to structure the analysis. According to Durkheim's theory, religion divides the sacred (religious life) from the profane (secular life), and conflict will arise when religious identity is stigmatized. Durkheim's functionalist theory offers a perspective through which to examine how religious identity influences social order, character relations, and overall social attitude towards religion. Using this theoretical perspective, the study examines how religious identity constructs action within the novel and its wider significance for social cohesiveness, presenting an extensive discussion on the theme of religious identity in modern fiction.

Data Analysis

This chapter explores the representation of negative religious identities in Hamid's The Prisoner (2013) and their impact on society. The novel negatively portrays religious figures such as the "Mullah" and religious institutions such as madrasas, linking them with extremism, violence, and terrorism. The term "Mullah" is represented as being synonymous with terrorism and manipulation, perpetuating stereotypes of religious leaders. Madrasas, although a vital school in poor neighborhoods, are also associated with criminal behavior such as jihadi

brainwashing, further tainting them. The novel juxtaposes madrasas linked to violence with others such as Sheikh Noman's, which are both described positively, and emphasizes the misrepresentation of Islamic schooling. Referring to Durkheim's concept of the sacred and profane, the paper explores how the novel mirrors wider societal anxieties about religious extremism and its wider implications for stigmatizing Muslim communities around the world. The representation of religious identity within the novel is significant in shaping the imagined society, even directly affecting the jihadi characters' families, indicating the wider repercussions of such representation.

On page 112, and 113 the term "Mullah" has been used as extremist and an individual who is answerable for ill deeds like terrorism. It has been told that Mullahs are scarcely God's chosen ones. i.e.

"Arre sahib, what God and what honor? Besides, these mullahs are hardly God's chosen ones. When I was in jail the first time, I got sucked in by their rhetoric about defending Islam and all that." (Hamid, 2013, p. 113).

The usage of the term "Mullah" in The Prisoner is negative, and it represents the writer's partial attitude. Instead of applying objective words such as "practical Muslim" or "scholar of religious studies," the term "Mullah" is applied to create negative impressions by calling them "God's unchosen" and to blur the understanding of the reader. In case it goes in line with propaganda, it becomes hard to provide a fair and realistic description of religious leaders. Propaganda, described by theorists such as Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, habitually employs language for strategic purposes in order to manipulate popular opinion, such as in previous media campaigns against communism and more recently, Islamist terrorism. The portrayal of religious identity, especially in male-dominated cultures, is often distorted, contributing to media bias and misrepresentations of Islam. While contemporary Muslims' mistakes cannot be ignored, the way they are depicted in literature and the media is far from accurate, reinforcing stereotypes and fueling bias.

Could Islam be used to justify the attacks? Even though the 9/11 terrorists claimed to have carried out the assaults in the Muslim religion, the participants of the study clearly did not. On Islam Online, a web site, a male poster placed his remark alongside a copy of Sheikh Yusuf Al Qaradawi's fatwa (Islamic judgement). The fatwa states in part: We are very sorry for the terrorist assaults on the World Trade Centre and other American targets. This is despite our opposition to the United States' pro-Israeli strategy armed, political, and economic fronts. This is because our faith values and defends the human soul, and it forbids such attacks on mankind, which it considers a major crime. "If anyone slews a person—except for killing or causing ill-actions in the land—it will be as if he slews the entire people; and if anyone saves a life, it will be as if he saves the entire people," states the Quran. Islam forbids the random slaughter of people, both innocent and not-so-innocent, because no one should bear the burdens of other. As a result, in the eyes of Islam, these killings are a severe crime (Abdulla, 2007).

On page 13, the novelist has given a very ridiculous description of the religious fanatics and kidnappers. i.e.

"An American journalist was kidnapped, his name was Jon Friedland... two days after the abduction, a group calling itself Lashkare-e-Jihad Waziristan posted a picture of him on the internet. They said he was Jew." (Hamid, 2013, p. 13).

Durkheim's theory of religion, derived from his study of totemic religions in Aboriginal Australian clans, emphasizes the idea that religious symbols, such as totems, represent society itself. According to Durkheim, by honoring the totem, clan members are indirectly honoring society, reinforcing the belief that society is more important than the individual. This is crucial in functionalist philosophy, as it highlights humanity's dependence on society. In the Aboriginal religion, the totem is a more understandable symbol of worship than the abstract and complicated idea of the clan. In The Prisoner, religious leaders, such as Sheikh Noman, are depicted as being capable of committing immoral acts, such as kidnapping, in

the name of religious obligation. Noman, a highly respected religious scholar with much political power, is regarded as the guardian of the kidnapped man. His impact is felt in the government, which requests his protection because of his massive support base. His devotees, who hold him in awe, are able to precipitate widespread disturbances if anything happens to him. The kidnapping, staged close to a madrasa—a Quran and Islamic teaching school—raises fear since it carries connotations of extremism, meaning a contradiction with real Islamic teachings. The madrasa is implicated as fostering the kind of behavior that contradicts Islam's core values, reflecting a negative portrayal of religious institutions in the novel.

The name madrasa is taken from the Arabic word "Dirossah," which represents "to study". Many people think of a madrasa as a location where they can learn the Quran and Hadith. Madrasa will now be classified as an Islamic academic institution that provides religious education as well as performing other community tasks (Ismail, et al., 2019). Throughout the narrative, anytime they are looking for the American, they must investigate the madrasas, as this is where the criminals live and feel protected. The madrasas are undoubtedly being searched by police officers. As on page number, 144.

"If you want to find someone in Karachi, it is important that you know where to start looking. This idiot Mahr is sending his men all over the city, checking every madrasa." (Hamid, 2013, p.144).

According to the above, Maqsood Mahr, a police officer, began searching the madrasa first. It demonstrates that the madrasa is where the prisoners are held and that it aids the kidnappers. When the reader reads this, he incorrectly assumes that these madrasas are crime hotspots, and that anytime a kidnapping case arises, the madrasas should be examined first. A madrasa is a place where Muslims can learn about Islam. The negative portrayal of this institute is unjust, as it generates a false picture and misunderstanding. Disrespect and suspicions taint the otherwise holy and revered location (Sajjad, 2013).

In another place the image of Madrasa has been shown in a positive way in the novel on page number, 290 i.e.:

"Although the sheikh had created a sufficient following to consider himself one of the city's movers and shakers, his name had never come up in relation to any sort of jihadi activities. His madrasas were not known to impart kind of military training, nor had they sent any of their students to fight in Afghanistan or the tribal areas." (Hamid, 2013, p. 290).

Although this specific madrasa has demonstrated no interest in promoting military trainings, which is a positive and true picture of the madrasa, the idea that other madrasas have military training practices and are transported to Afghanistan for execution is generally shown in the preceding discussion.

"The madrasas represented an affordable means for the inhabitants to enable their children to gain some sort of basic education even if it was just the rote learning of the Quran. Although the madrasas did not necessarily have any sinister agenda, the abject poverty and hopelessness of the area had made orange a rich recruiting ground for jihadis." (Hamid, 2013, p. 273).

Following the September 11th terrorist attacks, the world's attention was drawn to Pakistan's Madaris. Even though none of the suspected twin towers attackers were Pakistanis or had studied in Madaris, these historic places of education became the center of international attention as breeding grounds of religious extremism and radicalization. Numerous studies have been performed in Pakistan by Western and local researchers, reporters, and political figures in order to determine if there are any links between escalating religious extremism and madrasa education. In academic journals and print media, several papers, articles, and opinions were published. At first, everyone focused on the role of madrasa education in spreading religious extremism and anti-Western Muslim youngsters have a positive attitude. These studies offered deterrents, alerted the public to the 'threat of madrasas' in their community, and called for madrasa education reform (Sajjad, 2013).

"What if his fraudster image was a cover, and he was always a jihadi deep down inside? Or he decided that

taking part in this would win him a greater following, get his madrasas extra funding from radical groups?" (Hamid, 2013, p. 292).

Another reference regarding Madrasas and the usage of powers illegally by the administration of Madrasa. i.e.

"Hmm, if you go to him directly, there will be trouble. The sheikh and his friends on the Sectarian Peace Committee have already been protesting against Maqsood's raids on their madrasas". (Hamid,2013, p. 293).

Since the Islamic golden eras till today, as a center of learning and a source of knowledge for the local area, the madrasa has played a significant role. It's because many people regard the madrasa as an Islamic symbol that fosters the true essence of Islam by fostering ideas of brotherhood and collaboration among the Islamic community. Nonetheless, when civilized society began to develop, the old madrasa's utilitarian function and presence as a communal center began to change. This occurred because of factors such as modernization and Western educational influence. The conventional madrasa, which formerly served as a hub for societal growth, is now cut off from daily life, and its contemporary significance has shifted to that of a center for spreading Islamic instruction rather than that of a communal hub.

On page number 152, Hamid (2013) has ridiculed the education system of madrasa and introduced the Sheikh Noman in a ridiculed manner. i.e.

"It's Sheikh Noman now. Our friend is going into a new business – the business of religious education. He has ... religious scholar equivalent to an English Masters level. And he miraculously got all this education in two weeks. Heh heh." (Hamid, 2013, p.152-153).

One must understand that there are approximately 18000 registered Madaris in Pakistan where millions of pupil's studies, according to Maulana Mufti Qari Yousaf. These pupils arrive after completing their basic school education. Dars Nizami is taught to them, which comprises of 25 subjects that must be completed in ten years. On a very modest remuneration, the teachers teach these topics from dawn to dusk.

The students are from the most impoverished sections of society. On a very low pay, Madaris teachers are now expected to teach 25 courses as well as the modern university syllabus to these lower-class students with limited abilities (the maximum they get is 10,000). What are we expecting of these poor souls? It's something we should consider. A university professor earns a good salary but becomes exhausted if he teaches four classes per day. These madrasa instructors are merely people (Sajjad, 2013).

In the Madaris, reforms are required. Madaris, according to Mulana Adul Malik, need improvement. Madaris must teach modern subjects in the same way as they teach religious subjects at all levels. Students in Madaris must be brought up to date on current events and languages. They should be informed about the Muslim world, its geography, natural resources, and location, among other things. This requires the application of modern technology. We need to develop good Muslim Ummah spokespeople who can successfully raise their voices on crucial issues (Sajjad, 2013).

Recommendations

The examination of religious identity in The Prisoner, (2013) by Hamid brings to the fore several issues that must be answered to, particularly representation of religious establishments and officials like the mullahs and the madrasas. Subsequent work is encouraged to adopt a more balanced and multilateral depiction of religious identities to move from one-sided depictions that would serve to confirm and propagate disparaging stereotypes. In addition, academic writers and the press must be attuned to presenting positive representations of religious institutions, such as madrasas, that are not oversolated as hotbeds of extremism. By shifting the focus to the diverse roles religious institutions play in society, such as community building and education, there can be a more comprehensive image of religious identity. Also, it is crucial that madrasa reforms introduce modern subjects alongside religious teaching so that generations to come are not merely well-informed but also well-rounded in their understanding of global issues,

as suggested by experts. Finally, policymakers and education administrators must join hands in developing more inclusive and richer stories encompassing the richness of religious identities rather than media hype and bias, which skews public perception.

Conclusions

Symbolism of religious identities in The Prisoner, (2013) raises certain fundamental questions about the interconnection between religious identity, literature, and the social outlook. The novel is a negative critique of religious clergy, particularly the mullahs, who are traditionally associated with extremism and terrorism. Use of the negative meanings associated with the name "mullah" in the novel demonstrates the intention of the author to criticize religious involvement in particular violent circumstances. But this portrayal risks diminishing the complexity of Islamic identity to reduction and warping the definition of religion. These depictions, even if intended to highlight concerns in society, end up contributing to stigmatizing religious groups, reinforcing stereotypes about Muslims being linked to terrorism. This is one of the greater social tendency to associate Islam with violence, particularly after events such as the 9/11 attacks, which sparked worldwide anti-Muslim sentiment. Along with this, *The Prisoner*, (2013) provides the image of madrasas complicating even more this narrative. Madrasas, commonly regarded as hotbeds of extremism, are described under the same shades of negativity in *The Prisoner,* (2013). Although true that certain madrasas were associated with being hotbeds of radicalization, the preponderant number of them were schools that acted as useful community services, most especially in marginalized communities. By emphasizing the derogatory representations of these institutions, the novel propagates an ill-informed and stereotypical vision of religious schooling, neglecting the wider purpose of madrasas in providing spiritual guidance and communal support.

Moreover, the novel demonstrates the overlap between occupational and religious identities, as in the case of religious scholars such as Sheikh Noman. The fact that religious figures are also portrayed carrying out reprehensible acts like kidnapping makes religious identity even more complex to understand. It is a representation of a culture in recent literature and media in which religion has come to be conflated with undesirable social acts and thus perpetuates stereotypes associating Islam with extremism and violence. But these are not considerations of the diversity of thought and activity in the world of the Muslims, where most religious practitioners and thinkers live out their lives in peace, charity, and integrity.

This study underscores the necessity of more informed and balanced depiction of religious identity, both in literature and media. The depiction of religious institutions and individuals must be addressed with greater sensitivity and maturity so as to avoid the perpetuation of negative stereotypes that can result in discrimination and social disintegration. It is important that future research and media portrayals move beyond prejudice and stereotypes in how they portray religious identity, presenting an improved, more comprehensive, and accurate sense of this term, sensitive to both the positive and the negative. Finally, the educational system, especially in the religious institutions such as madrasas, must be revamped to address modern subjects and opinions, allowing students to become a part of the global arena with greater knowledge and assistance. Through such efforts, society can be made more inclusive and harmonious, in which religious diversity is valued, not dreaded.

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