

A Miserable Maniac, a Salacious Saracen, or a Distressed Demirep: Fighting the Erasure of an Inspiring Muslim Woman

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Abstract

This article adds to the existing literature on the distorted representation of Muslim women in a fictional world. It is distinctive in its approach, in that it explores the clichéd representation of Muslim women by Anglophone writers who claim to have better access to reality because of their ethnic background. This incomplete picture is deficient in many respects, but the focus of this paper is on two main categories: first, the medievalists' resonance of charming white Saracen and repulsive black Saracen women in Pakistani Anglophone fiction, and second, the radical exclusion of an inspiring religious Muslim woman from the fictional world. We merged the theory of social actor (SA) representation by Van Leeuwen (2008) with corpus methodology to analyze Aslam's *Maps for Last Lovers* (2004) and *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013). The research concludes that the basic plot of the selected novels has only three types of Muslim women: a miserable woman resonating with Saracen, a salacious Saracen full of hatred for her community, and a distressed demirep in need of rescue. The research concludes that the latter two categories are an amalgamation of the medieval fantasy woman known as the white Saracen. This research calls for attention to this specific type of oppressive writing practice targeting Muslim women by erasing the category of inspiring Muslim women from all kinds of discourses.

Key words

Anglophone literature, corpus methodology, social actor, clichéd representation, radical exclusion

Introduction

The Reverberation of Islamophobia in Recent Postcolonial Scholarship

Ethnocentric anchoring recurring in European academia is discernible in the fiction of postcolonial writers, as implied by Said's 1985 description of Orientalism. The concentration of postcolonial texts on connecting with the colonial or neo-colonial center sustains colonial ideas. This is one theory behind why "Western consumers of 'non-Western' items" exist (Santesso, 2013, p. 75). According to Mukherjee (1990), postcolonial textual interchange is still founded on the deeply ingrained binaries of the East and West, even after many years of decolonization. Political theorists such as Boehmer (1998) contend that when postcolonialism fails to challenge global capitalism, overt neo-Orientalism manifests itself in every discipline that bears the label.

Consequently, one of the effects of coexisting with, adapting to, and being supported by global capitalism is not demonstrating appropriate opposition. In this vicious loop where "the discursive and textual traffic of postcolonial literature is controlled from the neo-colonial centres of the capitalist globe," he looks for a way out (Boehmer, 1998, p. 3). Challenging the underlying material conditions and inequity of cultural hierarchies can be the first step toward releasing mediated postcolonial consciousness. However, he was worried that more was required. As academics, we are responsible for learning more about the economic and political contexts that influence the creation and continuation of postcolonial scholarship. Understanding the forms of oppression and exploitation of postcolonial writers is challenging, as postcolonial studies promise to dismantle and challenge colonial authority. The importance of finding answers to the issues highlighted by post-modern postcolonial theory is noteworthy. Investigating the rationale for employing postcolonial theory, comprehending the connection between nationalist and anti-colonial literature, and examining how self-referentiality and self-reflexivity function in postcolonial literature are a few of these (Boehmer, 1998). Poststructuralist theories and postmodernist concepts have provided literary text analysis from this angle using handy analytical tools. They aid researchers in challenging the veracity of experiences depicted as postcolonial in postcolonial literature. They cast doubt on the veracity of how reality is depicted in postcolonial literature by viewing it through the cynical prism of anti-foundational thought. These theoretical tools break down the essential ideas of Western thought that postcolonial writers have repeatedly and occasionally reaffirmed. The post-

modernist school of thought examines the colonial self as a monolithic character on the one hand, and the uncertain autonomy of postcolonial hybridity or its status as a by-product of unplanned European colonization on the other. Boehmer (1998) cautioned against neo-Orientalism and metamorphosis of postcolonial texts with a new name, Anglophone literature.

Radical Exclusion of a Social Actor

As highlighted by Van Leeuwen (2008), discourse producers often strategically exclude specific social actors (SAs) to advance their interests. This linguistic or literary exclusion serves various political, social, or psychological purposes and is typically employed to conceal responsibility for unfavorable actions. Namaste (2007) pointed out that purposeful erasure can be considered a form of violence, especially when it involves not reporting women's achievements and crimes against women, leading to the collective indifference and invisibility of certain segments of society. The term "erasure" has moved beyond academic discourse and is associated with practices that dismiss inconvenient facts, groups, and their histories, problems, pain, and achievements. This concept raises questions about whose life stories are told, whose suffering is acknowledged, and whose deaths are mourned. Sims (2017) calls this phenomenon the "Matilda effect" when it pertains to the suppression of women's achievements in science and technology. It is similar to the notion of the dangers of the single story, which reinforces existing orders and includes gregarious whitewashing of minority groups like transgender women of color.

This study argues that a similar title should be used when inspiring religious Muslim women are targeted for erasure. The complete absence of inspiring religious Muslim women in the literature of the Muslim world represents a symbolic erasure (Anderson & Anderson, 2021). Some exclusions may be naive, assuming that the audience is already aware of the details, but this is often not the case in Anglophone literature. Exclusion is also practiced in news reporting, where the police, for instance, may be excluded when force is used to control riots (Van Leeuwen, 2008). Radical exclusion leaves no trace, necessitating the comparison of multiple representations of similar events. Situating the research questions in a broader context provides nuanced insights. Omitting the SA prevents readers from verifying or contesting the representation and allows writers to evade responsibility (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

In a fictional world crafted by writers, readers often find it challenging to re-introduce excluded SAs once they have been omitted. Readers deeply engrossed in a story may not notice the absence of these excluded SAs and the fictional realities presented in the narrative are rarely questioned or examined. Recent research, such as that of Khan et al. (2021), has explored the exclusion of Muslim characters from mainstream media. However, this study focuses on a specific type of exclusion: the absence of female characters with inspiring personalities. The argument put forth in this paper is that none of the female Muslim characters depicted in “*Maps for Lost Lovers*” (2004) and “*The Blind Man’s Garden*” (2013) by Aslam can be considered esteemed or inspirational figures in any Muslim society worldwide. According to the authors, none of these characters is crafted in a way that would make readers want to emulate them. Female Muslim readers did not identify with any of these characteristics. In the fictional world created by Aslam (2004, 2013), Muslim women are portrayed as social maniacs, miserable fanatics, and salacious termagants. The authors assert that they could not find a law-abiding, cultured Muslim woman in Aslam’s literary work.

Literature Review

Islamophobic Strands in Recent Anglophone Literature

Meer (2014) outlines the relationship between Islamic phobia and current post-colonial studies. He shows how modern postcolonial studies exhibit *continuity* and contends that they replicate previous colonial dynamics (p. 504). He claimed that religion is intertwined with race, resulting in the racialization of Muslims. This, in turn, highlights that opposition to Islam cannot be separated from discrimination against Muslims. In cases where Islam plays a central role in Muslim identity, disparaging Islam negatively affects respect and self-esteem. Islam is fundamental to the identities of Muslims from various civilizations worldwide as he elucidates this idea (Meer, 2014). This situation’s intricacy is comparable to earlier colonial practices, when the British could dominate thanks to assistance from the Crown or home country and by constructing numerous political and constitutional structures in the colonized areas. These political and cultural linkages created under colonialism continued to exist even after independence and, surprisingly, are the foundation of a better explanation of the neo-Orientalist components reflected in post-colonial studies (Meer, 2018).

Is Anglophone Literature an Insider's View of the Muslim World?

After 9/11, an emerging genre mushrooming in the diaspora has been observed called “Muslim writing” (Moghissi, 2005; Chambers, 2011). Although the authenticity of these writers’ perspectives has often been challenged, the literary canon continues to serve as a powerful tool of Muslim representation. Initially, this genre was hailed as a creative tool for writing back and dispelling fabricated Muslim identities. They were acclaimed to have charted diverse aspects of Muslim identities and deconstructed false identities. However, soon exotic cultural efflorescence withered and gave way to the critics’ questions about thematic *ghettoization* for the sake of commercial success (Král, 2009, 2014). Some sarcastic terms, such as *halal novelists* and *multi-culti halal writings* also appeared to refer to the ethnic background of Anglophone writers (Chambers, 2010; Santesso, 2013; Squires, 2012, 2013). In this literary scenario, the representation of Muslim women is complicated and convoluted, demanding careful disentanglement. Some of these nuanced readings are discussed below, before explaining the critical approach of the current article.

Lau and Mendes (2012) discuss three key aspects of feminist Orientalism. First, it highlights how feminist Orientalism creates a binary contrast between the Western and Eastern worlds, portraying the West as progressive and ideal for women while characterizing the Muslim Orient as regressive and uncivilized for women. Second, it emphasizes that feminist Orientalism tends to view Oriental women as passive victims, rather than recognizing their agency in effecting social change, leading to the belief that they need Western saviors. Third, it assumes uniformity across all Eastern societies and that all Muslim women have identical experiences. Bahramitash (2005) argues that during the colonial era, colonizers believed that they were introducing civilization to the Orient. Today, similar methods, including warfare and occupation, are used to promote democracy in the same region, along with a war on terror, to safeguard civilization from perceived threats. To garner public support for these campaigns, a strategy from the colonial era that focused on the treatment of women in the Muslim world was revived. Bahramitash suggests that self-proclaimed feminists and Anglophone writers played a significant role in advocating this campaign, using their supposed first-hand experiences with women under Islam to portray the religion as primitive and misogynistic.

Cahill (2019) begins her book by discussing how the appearance of a Muslim woman can reinforce two contradictory stereotypes: one portrays Muslim men as

oppressors and the other depicts Muslim women as passive and oppressed. Cooke (2007, 2008) introduced the term “Muslimwoman” to describe the distorted representation of a veiled Muslim woman portrayed as having a passive existence in a private harem, silenced, and devoid of agency. This neo-Orientalist stereotype serves a dual purpose and continues to be effective in today’s public discourse. It is still a matter of debate whether this stereotype arose from cultural constraints, cultural biases, or the complex historical intersection of Anglican religiopolitical authority over the past two centuries. Nonetheless, what is clear is that this portrayal of the Muslim woman as a negative ideal has persisted for centuries, denying the existence of inspiring religious Muslim women who defy these stereotypes.

Concept of Saracen: Historical Perceptions and Modern Re-evaluation

The term “Saracen women” historically referred to women from the Saracen culture, a broad and often derogatory term used in medieval Europe to describe various non-Christian, particularly Muslim, societies in the Middle East and North Africa. This term, borrowed from Latin, has been used in Old English since the ninth century, with some referring to its generic meaning as “pagan” (Bly, 2002; Speed, 1990). The concept of Saracen women was shaped by medieval European perceptions of the Islamic world during the Crusades and subsequent interactions. Europeans held stereotypical views on the roles and status of women in Islamic societies, often portraying Saracen women as exotic and mysterious figures in literature and chivalric romances (Belloc, 1913). European encounters with Saracen women during the Crusades and on trade routes sometimes led to misconceptions and misunderstandings about their cultures and practices. While modern scholarship has challenged many of these stereotypes and fallacies, emphasizing the diversity and complexity of women’s lives in the Islamic world, there is still work to be done, especially in the realm of fiction (Moghissi, 2005; Maalouf, 2012). It is important to note that the term “Saracen” carries negative historical connotations.

Tales about Muslims were a significant topic of preoccupation during the Middle Ages, as Bly (2002) noted. Recently, this practice has resurged in the literature produced and circulated by third-generation Anglophone writers. This research focuses on the portrayals of female Muslim characters, both in general Anglophone literature and specifically in Aslam’s works, as a manifestation of neo-Orientalist themes. The study identifies a reflection of medieval concepts associated with Muslim women in the female characters created by Aslam (2004, 2013), using terms like “black warrior Saracen woman” and “white Saracen woman.”

Methodology

As this is corpus-based research, we used two acronyms repeatedly to avoid repetition. The acronyms used in the article are as follows: SCBMG Study Corpus *The Blind Man's Garden* (Aslam, 2013) and SCMLL Study Corpus *Maps for Lost Lovers* (Aslam, 2004). The analysis in this article is divided into four sections.

- Section one discusses the representation of Muslim women's representation as social monsters. It includes Kaukab from SCMLL, the miserable maniac, as an incarnation of the black warrior Saracen woman, and compares her with her counterpart Tara from SCBMG.
- Section two discusses two female characters, Mahjabin (SCMLL) and Sofia (SCBMG), as distress demireps. They represent the Western "prototype" of the oppressed Muslim woman fabricated throughout history.
- Section three focuses on the characteristics of Naheed from SCBMG, and Chanda and Suraya from SCMLL. All three are discussed as amalgams of distressed demirep and salacious Saracens, to varying degrees.
- The fourth section discusses the radical exclusion of inspirational religious Muslim women from Aslam's fictional world.

The following research question guided this research. How is a Muslim woman portrayed in the fictional world created by Aslam (2004, 2013)? This broad question needed to be narrowed down to more targeted questions.

- Which type of Muslim woman is portrayed as included or excluded SAs?
- What type of identification and evaluation do Muslim female characters receive directly from the author or through other SAs' appraisals?

Analysis and Discussion

Kaukab and Tara: A Collectivized Embodiment of Muslim Women as Social 'Monsters'

In literary discourse, characters often symbolize real-world groups. Kaukab in the SCMLL and Tara in the SCBMG are Aslam's representations of religious Muslim women, reflecting his perceptions, rather than reality. This calls for a thorough deconstruction of these characteristics.

Kaukab: The Miserable Maniac in SCMLL

Kaukab, identified as Shamas's wife and the mother of his three children, represents being in the diaspora and blames her husband. We find textual proof (Table 1) that Aslam sees her as an embodiment of religious Muslim women. In Table 1, our comments are on the left and SA's name is in square brackets on the right. These examples show that Kaukab sees herself as distinct from the white population and identifies with the Muslim Ummah.

Ujala and Mahjabin's critical comments on the novel reveal their broader critiques of the Muslim community when speaking to their mothers. Table 1 shows how they often use generalizations instead of directly addressing Kaukab. Shamas, Mahjabin, and Jugnu also mock Muslim values and attribute their challenges to Islamic culture. In a polarized situation, Kaukab aligns with Muslims, while her family identifies more with Western and non-Muslim communities. Kaukab's cockeyed personality traits offer insights into Aslam's views on Muslim women.

Table 1.
Use of Deixis Proving Kaukab and the Muslim Ummah vs her Family and Non-Muslims

Comment	Textual Evidence
Us, We used for Western white community and Kaukab's family excluding her	Come sit with us , Kaukab, and talk. Let's prove to our guest that Pakistanis are the most talkative people on earth. [Shamas] She has harmed every one of us [Ujala about Kaukab]
Us is used for Muslim migrant community and Jugnu is excluded from this community	The barber's son would say later, in the months to come, and I was afraid Jugnu would grow suspicious and land us in trouble. He was an educated man. Not like us : the sons had failed their O-levels just as, in another time, another country, the fathers had failed their Matriculations.
Kiran , the Sikh woman, using they for Muslims	I approached the mosque earlier—knowing there would be people there, hoping I would bring one of them back with me but they were busy with their own troubles.
Muslim migrants huddled in a Group	They were in tears at the realization that Allah does not consider them worthy enough to have placed them in a position where they could have prevented this insult to His home. When they arrived in England, some of the migrants had become confused by the concept of time zones, and had wondered if the months too were the same at an
Kaukab using Them for the Westerners	"But were they dirty unclean sinners?"
Us & We used for Kaukab and Pakistani Muslims	Sister-ji, the white police are interested in us Pakistanis only when there is a chance to prove that we are savages who slaughter our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters.
You lot used for all the Muslims	And, incidentally, would these Western doctors be the same Western doctors whose advice that first cousins shouldn't marry each other, you lot ignore? (says Ujala)

They is used for the US police and us for the Muslims	<p>The matchmaker narrows her eyes: Imagine, they flew all the way to Pakistan just to be able to brand us Pakistanis murderers, at £465 a ticket, £510 if they minded the overnight stop at Qatar and went direct.</p> <p>The Television keeps informing us in the news bulletin that we are defeated yet again. The newspaper headlines scream. They say we are defeated, irrelevant, finished. And the reins are now in the hands of those who neither say their prayers nor keep the fast. On Allah's vast earth, we small and humble Muslims are everywhere in ruins. Our lives and our lands lie like a pile of rubble. Our women have become disobedient like Western women. Our children seduced by the West into being strangers.</p> <p>Let's trust Him to help us out of this predicament.</p> <p>We are stranded in a foreign country where no one likes us</p>
Kaukab representing Muslim Women in general	<p>No retirement age for us housewives though, Kaukab.</p> <p>You men can do anything you want but it's different for us women</p> <p>"Leave us women alone"</p>
Whenever Shams uses <i>us</i> for Muslims, it always carries sarcasm, irony or criticism	<p>Most of us don't know how to think – we've been taught what to think instead.</p> <p>My goodness, we use seven syllables just to say hello: Assalam aualaikum.</p>
Reporting SA	Textual Evidence
Mahjabin uses we for herself and siblings while you for Kaukab and the whole of the Muslim immigrant community	<p>We did what you asked us to do.</p> <p>Why do you people keep doing the same things over and over again expecting a different result?</p> <p>She pauses for a moment and repeats her question: "What's wrong with Pakistan? I grew up there" – "And look what happened to you, you fool!"</p> <p>Here we have proof that Chanda was murdered by her brothers, that a family can kill one of its own. I wonder if this will stand up as evidence in court so that those two bastards can be put away for life. My god, for all of you she probably didn't die hard enough: you would like to dig her up piece by piece, put her back together, and kill her once more for going against your laws and codes, the so-called traditions that you have dragged into this country with you like shit on your shoes."</p>
Ujala about Kaukab	<p>. "If you lot had tails, they would wag every time you approached a man with a beard." [use of deictic <i>you</i> for Muslim immigrants]</p> <p>I've read the Koran, in English, unlike you who chant it in Arabic without knowing what the words mean, hour after hour, day in day out, like chewing gum for the brain"</p>
Kaukab is not assimilated with her own family. She is the one alienated among them.	Kaukab is distraught : "How they all come to the rescue of their father , refusing to hear a bad word against him, and yet they abuse me openly."
A well-to-do woman from Pakistan uses you lot for describing the Muslim migrant community	And it's all the fault of you lot, you sister-murdering, nose-blowing, mosque-going, cousin-marrying, veil-wearing inbred imbeciles.

Kaukab as a Volatile, Tear-jerking Muslim Woman

Her word sketch showed her appearance in the subject position, with a high T-score of 72.45, suggesting her dominance. Notably, the object position had a much lower T-score of 13.96, indicating that its portrayal was dominant. Many collocations in Table 2 have a negative tone.

Table 2.

Immediate Collocations of the Name Kaukab

frowns, sighs, puzzled, preoccupy, contradict, overtook, repulse, warn, curse, hurt, stun, terrify, pain, slapped, somewhat relieved, is concerned, fears, busied herself, realised later, explained, fornicator, matchmaking, darkness, death

The elevated T-score in Table 2 indicates nonrandom word usage with her name. We initially compiled a comprehensive list of collocations spanning seven words on either side of the node word (NW), totaling 1500 words. To make it more manageable, we trimmed the list to an MI score of six, retaining only the words used to describe Kaukab in Table 3.

Table 3.

Collocations of Kaukab that Construct her as a Volatile Tear-jerking Personality

worrying, worst, wistfully, wary ward, twitches wilderness, sobs, shriek, ungrateful, unforgivable, sentiments, contemptible, trembles, surreptitiously, overexcited, mood, glaring, fuming, fiercely, fierce, tolerate, frowns, weep, abandoned, sighed, deteriorating, shit, restrains, shames, rescue, reassurances, unsterilized, unshakeable, unsettles, uneasy, unbounded, preoccupied, overflowing, misguided, misfortune, imbeciles, lunges, indignant, indecisively, endure, endanger, eccentricities, cursing, contemptuously, contemptible, confrontation, clash, awful, antagonisms, strikes, denied, wretched, warn, dares, cracking, corrosive, harder, argument, resists, repulsed, impossibly immovably indecisively, ignoring hissed hesitantly, shuddered, ridden, poisoning, obstructing, suspicious, fiercely, bitterly, apprehensive, abominable distraught, feeble, disapproved, affliction

Table 3's emotive words depict Kaukab as a highly emotional and volatile individual with strained family relationships. The recurring phrase "Kaukab's eyes appear" in Table 4 objectifies her through possessive somatization, a technique repeatedly employed by the writer to emphasize her sense of detachment.

Table 4.

Kaukab's Eyes: An Example of 'Possessivated' Somatization

1	Islam": these three had been within earshot and	<u>Kaukab's</u>	<u>eyes had boiled over with tears</u> at the shock and
2	before dawn to begin the fast." The wall before	<u>Kaukab's</u>	<u>eyes dissolves in her tears</u> and the wooden spoon
3	a nice boy she married, but she abandoned him."	<u>Kaukab's</u>	<u>eyes fill up with tears</u> . "He wrote to her earlier
4	still at the lake," she announces, and, holding	<u>Kaukab's</u>	<u>eye</u> , makes the smallest possible movement of

Table 4 highlights Kaukab's actions, stripped of agency and portraying events unfolding beyond her control. This technique, known as the *eventuation* of social actions (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 66), shapes Kaukab as emotionally charged and lacking control over her actions, thus emphasizing their involuntary nature.

Table 5.
Identification and Functionalization of *Kaukab* by the Author and Other SAs

	Identification and functionalization of <i>Kaukab</i>
The authorial opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The air itself seems to contract away from <i>Kaukab</i> as a school of fish twitches itself to safety at the approach of a predator. • ...the daughter of a cleric... • ... a cleric's daughter—born and brought up in a mosque all your life... • ...the daughter of a cleric, born and raised in the shadow of a minaret.....[repeated for ironical effects] • The mother is quick to construe any voicing of opinion or expression of independent thought by the girl [<i>Mahjabin</i>] as a direct challenge to her authority.
<i>Shamas</i> about <i>Kaukab</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you sitting here making fun of her, a foolish old woman?" • <i>Shamas</i> has been careful not to tell <i>Kaukab</i> about his chance encounter with the girl and the Hindu boy—their secret trysts must remain a secret. • He [<i>Shamas</i>] has told her [<i>Suraya</i>] about the sometimes-vague sometimes-sharp antagonisms within his marriage to <i>Kaukab</i>. • "Come sit with us, <i>Kaukab</i>, and talk. Let's prove to our guest that Pakistanis are the most talkative people on earth. My goodness, we use seven syllables just to say hello: <i>Assalam aualaikum</i>" [Ironical and sarcastic comment]
<i>Charag's</i> views about his parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...his fucking spineless father [<i>Shamas</i>] must've just gone along with what she said because she was a poor immigrant woman [<i>Kaukab</i>] in a hostile white environment who deserved everyone's compassion, what with her sons and daughter away, leading their own lives, and to cap it all she was also going through the menopause.
<i>Mahjabin's</i> views about <i>Kaukab</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Trapped within the cage of permitted thinking, this woman—her mother—is the most dangerous animal she'll ever have to confront. • may I add that I am not afraid of Father." Oh your father will be angry, oh your father will be upset: <i>Mahjabin</i> had grown up hearing these sentences, <i>Kaukab</i> trying to obtain legitimacy for her own decisions by invoking his name. • She wanted him to be angry, she needed him to be angry. She had cast him in the role of the head of the household and he had to act accordingly. • Sometimes <i>Mahjabin</i> wonders whether her mother knows <i>Shamas</i> at all. • I knew it was not the distance that worried you; you had after all sent me a thousand miles away [to Pakistan] at sixteen. • You must be a moral cripple if you think what you did to me wasn't wrong [<i>kakab</i> blames <i>Mahjabin</i> for her failed marriage] • She [<i>kaukab</i>] pauses for a moment and repeats her question: "What's wrong with Pakistan? I grew up there—" "And look what happened to you, you fool! [<i>Mahjabin</i> thought but did not dare to speak] • "How fucking wise you are, Mother, such wisdom! • "She is the reason why father [<i>Shamas</i>] won't condemn the idiocies of Islam"
<i>Ujala</i> about his mother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You put things in my food!" he shouts • ...he [<i>Ujala</i>] is in touch with his siblings—the only ones he can't bear are his parents, or, rather, <i>Kaukab</i>. •it was all the fault of his cunt of a mother who had decided not to speak to <i>Jugnu</i>..... • It's turned her into a selfish monster. She is the reason why Father won't openly condemn the idiocies of Islam. He thought it would hurt her. She and her like don't do any harm? She has harmed every one of us. She won't allow reason to enter this house."

The concordance lines in Table 5 reveal Kaukab's struggle to manage her emotions, portraying her as a lonely mother who simultaneously pushed her children away because of infuriating habits while yearning for their presence. Mental and perceptive cognitive processes like "hear," "see," "remember," "know," "hope," "look," and "puzzle" are used to shape her character. The lines in Table 5 demonstrate her inability to understand her family's needs.

Authorial comments and assessments from other sources help identify her characterization as a social outcast consumed by her thoughts, causing misery for others. Metaphors such as "predator" and "trapped within the cage" paint her as a wild beast (as seen in Mahjabin's opinion and authorial comments in Table 5). Her family members describe her using derogatory terms, including "cunt," "moral cripple," "foolish older woman," "fucking wise," and a "selfish monster." These descriptions not only reflect her family's negative views but also reinforce the idea that Kaukab is the primary source of familial chaos and emotional turmoil.

Table 6.
Kaukab's Opinions About Other SAs

<u>Kaukab about Mahjabin</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom is what you wanted, not education; the freedom to do obscene things with white boys and lead a sin-smeared life. <u>Kaukab</u> moves closer and stares at her as though pinning a dangerous animal to the ground with a lance. [<u>Kaukab</u> is identified as predator by the author table 5.5] "Get away from me, you little bitch!" "How dare you throw questions at me like stones!"
<u>Kaukab missing Ujala</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have felt you moving and walking about in the world the whole time. They take the baby out of the mother but not all the way out: a bit of it is forever inside the mother, part of the mother, and she can hear and feel the child as he moves out there in the world.
<u>Kaukab about Charagh Jugnu and Shamas</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The news stunned and repulsed <u>Kaukab</u>, and she held Jugnu responsible for her misfortune. . . . she accused Jugnu of leading her children astray. After <u>Jugnu</u>, her mind, flooded with bitterness and sorrow, had turned on <u>Shamas</u> because <u>Shamas</u> himself had confused the children with his Godless ideas, undermining her authority and devaluing her behaviour as though it was just neurotic and foolish—<u>Jugnu</u> only finished the job <u>Shamas</u> started years ago. <u>Kaukab's</u> thoughts reveal her discomfort, "he [<u>Jugnu</u>] may have thought these things [blasphemous ideas] before, but the white person [his girlfriend] enabled him to say them out loud. . . the white woman's presence was just a catalyst for the two brothers [<u>Jugnu</u> and <u>Shamas</u>] to air their blasphemies.
<u>Kaukab about Shamas</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Her parents were responsible for marrying her to an infidel. Her in-laws were Godless. Afflicted with loneliness and maddening fury, she finally accused <u>Shamas</u> of not being a Muslim at all, the son of a Hindu, whose filthy infidel's corpse [referring to <u>Shamas' father</u>] was spat out repeatedly by the earth no matter how deep they buried it the next day

Kaukab about Mahjabin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Freedom is what you wanted, not education; the freedom to do obscene things with white boys and lead a sin-smeared life. ▪ Kaukab moves closer and stares at her as though pinning a dangerous animal to the ground with a lance. [Kaukab is identified as predator by the author table 5.5] ▪ "Get away from me, you little bitch!" ▪ "How dare you throw questions at me like stones!"
Kaukab missing Ujala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I have felt you moving and walking about in the world the whole time. They take the baby out of the mother but not all the way out: a bit of it is forever inside the mother, part of the mother, and she can hear and feel the child as he moves out there in the world.
Kaukab about Charagh, Jugnu and Shamas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The news stunned and repulsed Kaukab, and she held Jugnu responsible for her misfortune..... she accused Jugnu of leading her children astray. After Jugnu, her mind, flooded with bitterness and sorrow, had turned on Shamas because Shamas himself had confused the children with his Godless ideas, undermining her authority and devaluing her behaviour as though it was just neurotic and foolish—Jugnu only finished the job Shamas started years ago. ▪ Kaukab's thoughts reveal her discomfort, "he [Jugnu] may have thought these things [blasphemous ideas] before, but the white person [his girlfriend] enabled him to say them out loud.... the white woman's presence was just a catalyst for the two brothers [Jugnu and Shamas] to air their blasphemies.

Kaukab's views of her children and husband portray her as a secretive schemer, concealing things from those surrounding her. Table 6 provides textual evidence of mutual animosity in these relationships.

The Muslim Woman as Bewildered and Perplexed: A Victim of Alienation

Three female characters, Kaukab, Suraya (SCMLL), and Tara (SCBMG), share common mental traits: self-doubt, paranoia, and overthinking. They often engage in irrational self-talk and are presented in a detached narrator tone. Table 7 provides evidence of Kaukab's perplexing personality. The other two characteristics are explored separately in relevant sections.

She often succumbs to temper tantrums stemming from biased overthinking and irrational beliefs. Aslam (2004) skillfully linked Kaukab's frenzied outbursts to her religious and self-doubting thoughts. Her fixation is consistently on the West, while her deep remorse is directed toward Allah, the one God in Islam. She is portrayed as unwavering in her convictions, which leads to loneliness and misery. The frequent use of emotive words like "sob," "alone," "darkness," "desert of loneliness," and "empty" underscores this portrayal.

Table 7.

Kaukab's Affective and Cognitive Reactions (p.no 79)

.... she **begs forgiveness** from Almighty Allah yet again for having wasted the food that He in His limitless bounty and compassion had seen fit to provide her with, a creature as worthless as her. But the fact of the matter is that she doesn't **really remember doling out** the portions into the shoes and carrying them to the table; she **remembers coming to her senses only once all the actions** had been performed and she was standing in the room with Jugnu and the white woman staring at her, aghast. Kaukab **can remember** the evening as though she is reading it in the Book of Fates, the book into which, once a year, the angels write down the destiny of every human being for the next twelve months: **who'll live, who'll die, who'll lose happiness, who'll find love**—Allah dictates it to them, having come down especially for one night from the seventh heaven to the first, the one closest to earth. Allah gave her everything, so how can Kaukab not **be thankful to Him**.....

Kaukab is portrayed as someone trapped in the past and anxious about the future. However, the writer does not sympathize with her. Any sense of disappointment in her sad state is quickly dispelled as it implies that she is responsible for her situation. This characterization is achieved through authorial judgments and the opinions of other characters who see her as a nagging wife and a cynical mother. The phrase “everything she stood for” in Table 8 is significant. Through this authorial attitude, Kaukab is presented as a symbol of the Muslim world in the eyes of Aslam. She embodies the alienation experienced by Muslim women, particularly religious ones.

Table 8.

The Muslim Woman as an Alienated Being (p.no 58)

She [Kaukab] shook with fear as she heard the sounds of conversation from the table, the clinking of glasses, the cutlery on the plates: it sounded like a normal family gathering, yes, but she herself—and everything she stood for—was excluded from it (SCMLL).

In Aslam's view, Kaukab elicits the disdain that he believes every religious Muslim woman should receive. Her complex psychology, which shifts between intense attraction and aversion to the West, reflects a form of double consciousness, a concept articulated by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (2008). This psychological struggle, characterized as unspeakable by other researchers like Amer (2012), leaves her torn between fears of appearing doubtful about Islam and a state of self-denial. Malpas and Davidson (2012) describe this mental state where mi-

nority members evaluate themselves through the lens of the Other.

Kaukab's ambivalence toward modern Western society places her in a dichotomy, marked by "nagging anxiety over the inner contradictions of modernity and a radical skepticism toward the ideology of progress with which it is associated" (Malpas & Davidson, 2012). Table 10 notes her involuntary attraction to the West, a portrayal fittingly described in the discourse analysis as an eventuation and involuntary event (Van Leeuwen, 2008). The language used to depict her feelings of attraction, shame, or awe stemming from her sense of inferiority is highlighted in bold in Table 9.

Table 9.
Kaukab's Ambivalent Feelings for the West

1	<u>Kaukab</u> unknots the thread, remembering the first time she had made a knot in something in <u>Stella's presence: she had suddenly gone numb, wondering</u> if there was a Western way of tying a knot—more sophisticated, better. Perhaps the way she tied knots was an ignorant way of tying a knot?
2	"It's your birthday?" <u>Shamas</u> asks quietly. "You didn't know?" The doctor looks at him, amused. " I didn't remember myself, " she interjects. She scrutinizes <u>Shamas's</u> face. Surely, he is more embarrassed about what the white man is thinking of him than upset that he'd forgotten the date, that she would be hurt by it..... Out there, there was nothing but humiliation: she's hot with shame at what the white doctor would now think of Pakistanis, of Muslims —they are like animals, not even remembering or celebrating birthdays. Dumb cattle.
3	The white woman wore a lilac blouse of shimmering silk that <u>Kaukab</u> couldn't resist the urge to finger just for the pleasure of it—it looked like a fabric known in Pakistan as <u>Aab-e-Ravan</u> , the Flowing Water—
4	She is ashamed whenever these marks appear on her own nails, yet another proof for the white people that the Pakistanis are unhealthy people, disease-riddled, filthy bearers of epidemics like the smallpox they brought with them to England in the 1960s.
5	Ever since <u>Charag</u> and <u>Stella</u> arrived she has been worried that she has forgotten to brush her teeth in time for their arrival, to get rid of any bad odour before the white girl came
6	On the way to the train station, she longed to nestle her future daughter-in-law in her arms, call her by her name, Stella, but at the ticket-office window she lost heart on being told that she would have to change trains, fearing she would be lost without her lack of English as she searched for the correct platform, too humiliated by her pronounced accent and broken words to ask someone to guide her to the connecting trains. And where and how do you get a taxi in a strange city? She was a beggar who did not want to stretch out her hand because that hand was dirty.
7	Yes, she had grown to like Stella eventually.

Tara: An Oppressed Character of the Past, an Oppressor in the Present

The name "Tara" is mentioned 184 times in SCBMG, often in possessive form with apostrophes. There are also metonymic references to Tara that use parts of her (see Table 10).

Table 10.
‘Possessivated’ Somatization of Tara

Tara's ...		5.43
place	2	12.19
Tara's place		
move	1	11.41
Tara's lips move		
pocket	1	11.41
Tara's pocket		
home	1	11.30
Tara's home		
word	1	11.19
Tara's words		
neck	1	11.19
Tara's neck		
shoulder	1	10.91
Tara's shoulder		
room	1	10.19
Tara's room		
eye	1	9.57
Tara's eyes		

The concordance lines reveal Tara's lifelong struggle against oppressive circumstances. She is portrayed as a widowed mother fighting poverty and patriarchal oppression within Muslim society.

Table 11.
Tara's Oppressed Condition

1	Everyone would have said that I, being a wanton woman , had raised a brazen disgraceful daughter .” [Tara is aghast at <u>Naheed's</u> idea of eloping with Mikal]
2	"I didn't invent this world , <u>Naheed</u> . [Tara saying helplessly to <u>Naheed</u>]
3	A woman who has spent most of her life in impoverished solitude She [Tara] lost her husband when she was very young: she knows her [<u>Naheed's</u>] condition
4	"Life gets in the way of your grief ." She begins to fan herself with a palm-leaf fan. "You make yourself forget about the pain because there are other things to take care of. But when you do remember it ... well ... it's a strange kind of hurting , like someone has lost a razor blade inside your soul ."
5	Sometimes Tara thinks she has asked too little from life . Sometimes she thinks she has asked too much. When <u>Naheed</u> was fourteen years old, Tara had been assaulted by a man she had recently met. She went to the police and they demanded—in accordance with Sharia law —proof from four male witnesses that it was indeed an assault and not consensual intercourse . There were no such witnesses, of course, and Tara was jailed for adultery . <u>Naheed</u> went to live with her village grandmother while Rohan tried to have Tara released. It was while she was incarcerated, terrified of the future , that Rohan had reassured her by promising to make <u>Naheed</u> his daughter-in-law.

Tara as a religious Muslim	<p>The clock sounds its alarm to awaken her mother, Tara, for her predawn prayers. The amplified call from the loudspeakers attached to the mosque’s minarets cannot be relied upon, because electricity is sometimes absent. So Tara sets the alarm as a precaution. But Tara remains asleep now. This happens on occasion, when she has stayed awake late into the night with her seamstress work, her back bent over the sewing machine. <u>Naheed</u> will not rouse her. So what if she misses a prayer? Allah understands. Sometimes <u>Naheed</u> even gets up during the night and switches off the alarm so it won’t go off. Let her rest.</p> <p>Sometimes on hearing this, <u>Naheed</u> mutters to herself. “And what about us ladies?”— earning herself a look of admonition from Tara, who is unable to accept criticism in any matter concerning the mosque.</p> <p>Eleven p.m. and Tara is in a nearby room with a lamp and a Koran. Midnight and there is a perfect quietness as if the house has become detached from the earth and floated clear.</p>
Tara as an oppressor	<p>Tara moves towards the door and shuts it while <u>Naheed</u> looks on aghast. “No one will marry you if you have a child.” “I don’t care about that.”</p> <p>“Stay away from the door, <u>Naheed</u>. I can marry you off if you are just a widow. But a widow with a baby—you’ll be alone for the rest of your life.”</p> <p><u>Naheed</u> can hardly believe she is living through these moments. Tara strikes her face with such strength that she has to back away and lean against a wall. In the few seconds it takes her to recover, Tara has gone out and bolted the door from the other side.</p> <p>“And are you sure you are intelligent enough to get a diploma? You didn’t even pass high school.” <u>Naheed</u> looks fiercely at her, stung. “I failed my classes because of you. Your imprudence, that landed you in prison for two years. And you were mad even before that.”</p>
Tara as the oppressed	<p>One day a child even threw a stone at Tara as children do at lunatics.</p> <p>Sometimes Tara thinks she has asked too little from life. Sometimes she thinks she has asked too much.</p> <p>When <u>Naheed</u> was fourteen years old, Tara had been assaulted by a man she had recently met.</p> <p>Sharif Sharif used Tara for a few years after she was widowed and then threw her aside.</p> <p>She works until midnight and then 1 a.m. and it seems no one is awake but her. She alone is Islam.</p>
Naheed’s opinion about Tara	<p>“Let me finish, Mother. It was wrong of you to frighten me into destroying my child. It was wrong of you to frighten Mikal away. I don’t care what you have been through, but you should never ever frighten those younger than you with your own fears. Caution is one thing, but you filled me with terror. Just leave me alone please. Just take this world of yours and go away with it somewhere and leave us alone. All of you.”</p>

Her most significant concern was marrying Naheed into a respectable family. Joe was her last hope as a son-in-law. In Naheed’s teenage years, despite being innocent, Tara faced a sexual assault and was imprisoned. This made her harsh and stringent. Tara forces her daughter Naheed to have an abortion because having a daughter reduces the chances of her second marriage. She did not want history to repeat itself. Tara herself is unable to marry again because of her daughter, Naheed. Aslam wants her to appear as a religious woman by frequently referring to her acts of worship. The last line in Table 11, uttered by Naheed, provides strong evidence that Aslam wants Tara to appear as a collective representation of Islam.

The Western “Prototype” of the Oppressed Muslim Woman

The term “Saracen” historically referred to Arabs and Muslims in Western literature. Scholars such as Kirner-Ludwig (2021) have studied this concept extensively in medieval English literary texts. This has evolved over time, as noted by Haddad (2007) and Hoodfar (1992). Kahf (1999) highlights two significant constructions: the “termagant” and the “odalisque,” depicting a transformation in the portrayal of Muslim women from feeble virgins to lascivious figures. Beckett (2003) explored the Western perceptions of Muslim women, particularly in Middle English Arthurian texts.

This one-dimensional Orientalist representation oversimplifies Muslim women’s diversity and complexity. Anglophone writers often claim insider knowledge, which further complicates problematic portrayals of Muslim women. Therefore, it is crucial to critically examine the stereotypical tropes introduced in this type of literature.

In Anglophone literature, Muslim households are depicted as gender-segregated spaces (Moghissi, 2005; Zayzafoon, 2005). The debates in the SCMLL and the SCBMG revolved around the unfulfilled desires of Muslim women. Recent Anglophone literature introduces two distinct categories of Muslim women in addition to the black Saracen warrior figure. These categories, termed “distressed demirep” and “salacious Saracen” in our research, encompass characters like Mahjabin and Sofia (distressed demireps) from SCMLL and Chanda and Naheed (salacious Saracen) from SCBMG. Suraya, also from the SCMLL, embodies a blend of these categories and can be termed a “distressed salacious demirep.” Across all these characteristics, Muslim women grapple with the conflict between their religious and natural needs versus their societal, physical, and psychological ones.

Mahjabin: Kaukab’s Scapegoat and the Distressed Demirep

Mahjabin often plays the role of a peacemaker in domestic conflicts involving Kaukab. She represents a stereotypically victimized Muslim girl pushed into early marriage by her mother. Despite enduring abuse, assault, and torture from her husband, her mother refused to consider the divorce justified, and Kaukab continually chastised her for obtaining one.

A notable parallel arises between Mahjabin’s character and the description of third-generation Anglophone writers, as outlined in an interview by Aslam

(Chambers, 2011, p. 146). This generation serves as a bridge between parental traditions and the Western world. Interestingly, Kaukab's discomfort with speaking English and her reliance on Mahjabin for medical appointments aligns with this portrayal (Chambers, 2011, p. 146).

Table 12.

Mahjabin and Kaukab's Lethal Relationship

<p><u>Mahjabin/ Mah-jabin</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our daughter, <u>Shamas's daughter Mahjabin</u> (9 times) • explained, bolster the lie, slap the thirteen-year old <u>Mah-Jabin</u>, wishes <u>Mahjabin</u>. <u>Mahjabin</u> is puzzled, allow, gasps • loosens <u>Mahjabin's grip</u> from her stomach and pushes her away to give herself • She pointed to the one-year old daughter, <u>Mahjabin</u>: No one will marry her if your mother-ji does what he is asking. • Don't patronize me, <u>Mahjabin</u>. • In these fantasies he [<u>Mahjabin's husband</u>] does not grab her by the throat– in a grip as strong as a tree root–to call her a wanton shameless English whore • <u>Mahjabin</u> does not wish to enter this perilous game that recognizes no rules, where a mere comment may be a lure to entice the other into a confrontation. [Referring to the unpleasant atmosphere of her home because of Kaukab] • The hard-open palm of <u>Kaukab's hand</u> lunges at <u>Mahjabin</u> and in striking her face takes away her breath. • will this terrible thing called life extract concessions out of her, teach her to compromise, and force her to become less than her best self, force her to reduce the amount of honour due the memory of her lost ones! One day she is going to wake up and not recognize herself. • The only thing for <u>Mahjabin</u> now is to wade upstream and begin the journey anew, this time making sure that the bend leading to the vortex is avoided, but she cannot think of anything to say. • How your tongue has lengthened in the past few years. Is this what they taught you at university, to talk like this, [Kaukab talking to Mahjabin]
<p>8/202 times</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom is what you wanted, not education; the freedom to do obscene things with white boys and lead a sin-smeared life. Mah-Jabin's head not only hums like a wasp's nest but also feels as weightless as those oblongs of chewed-up paper glued together with spit. [Kaukab talking to Mahjabin] • And you would love me to go back to Pakistan to my husband, wouldn't you, back to my earthly god? [Mahjabin talking to Kaukab] • Get away from me, you little bitch! The hungry steel slices an arc as Kaukab swings around and then Mahjabin stumbles backwards with one arm raised and the other across her stomach. • like every other decent mother she had told her daughter that the house you are going to–the house of your husband and in-laws–is Heaven but you are not to desert it even if it becomes Hell, that as far as the parents are concerned a daughter dies on the day of her wedding. • Remember the tip of my cigarette on your skin, Mahjabin? Keep that fire in mind. The fires of Hell are a thousand times hotter. [Mahjabin's husband's comments in a letter] • Remember the sewing needles in your thighs, Mahjabin? [Mahjabin's husband's comments in a letter]

Mahjabin often bears the brunt of Kaukab's intense arguments with her sons. Throughout the novel, she is predominantly identified in relation to Kaukab, referred to as "*my daughter*" and "*your daughter*." Pronominal possessives are employed seven times to describe Mahjabin's characters. Table 12 provides textual evidence from the SCMLL regarding Mahjabin's portrayal in the novel.

Sofia: An apostate with strong moral values

Sofia, Rohan's deceased wife in the SCBMG, plays a crucial role in influencing all of Rohan's family members, although she is no longer alive when the story unfolds. Her name is mentioned 39 times in the novel, but her presence is primarily conveyed through her impact on the thoughts of the other characters. Sofia is not depicted as actively participating in significant actions. The process types associated with Rohan differs from those associated with Sofia. Rohan endeavors to impart his teachings to his children and influence the world through speech and communication.

In contrast, Sofia is objectified by Aslam and portrayed as a vague yet compelling presence without direct engagement. Her enduring influence is conveyed through possessive somatization, a discursive strategy in which characters are indirectly referred to by associating them with a body part or something that belongs to them (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 47). This impersonalization adds an element of alienation, highlighting her passive yet glorified role in the discourse.

Table 13.

Sofia's Legacy Continues

1	<u>Jeo</u> walks along it and enters the room that had been his mother's study .
2	He places the burning candle on the desk, its surface covered with ink stains from her fountain pen .
3	The leaf of the calendar hasn't been changed since her death , the month he was born.

Sofia's portrayal in the novel is predominantly associated with two settings: the garden that she paints and her deathbed. The narrative constructs the space around her using positively connoted words, evoking respect and pity from the reader. The initial word sketch of Sofia includes terms like "study," "soul," "paint box," "crisis portrait," "mistake," "die," and "death."

The concordance lines reveal that her name sets her apart from other girls of her age and sociocultural background, thus individualizing her (Table 14). She

stands out as a unique figure among her peers, pursuing a Master's degree at Punjab University in Lahore. Sofia is depicted as having a refined taste in painting and calligraphy, a love for books, and the ability to instill a similar love for books among her children and students (lines 7-11, Table 14).

Table 14.

Sofia's Identification and Positive Appraisal by Other SAs

Sofia's Identification	
1.	...when she [Sofia] went back she prospered at the university.
2.	...only at Sofia's pragmatic insistence had decided to build Ardent Spirit
Sofia as a loving wife in the beginning	
3.	Decades ago when they formed the idea of Ardent Spirit, Rohan had used matchsticks to explain the layout to Sofia .
4.	The crescent-shaped house was the original building of Ardent Spirit, the school Rohan and his wife Sofia had founded .
5.	This building then became Rohan and Sofia's home.
6.	When after a quarrel with Sofia he would forgo a meal, saying quietly from his room that he was not hungry, she would take food to him in secret, and she would grin as he pretended not to care initially but would then ask, "What have you brought?"
Sofia's Fine Aesthetic Sense	
7.	The calligraphy is in Sofia's hand and its grace makes the reader aware of, and even feel responsible for, the soul of the calligrapher.
8.	From their faultless portraits painted by Sofia , Naheed can recognise almost all the trees and plants in this garden, the seedpods and leaves and the berries dense with sugar.
9.	Twenty of the boxes were placed here in Sofia's room and the rest distributed elsewhere in the house, a corridor suddenly narrowing to half its size.
10.	On the table are various magnifying glasses brought out of Sofia's study and Rohan hears him touching them. With them she would study twigs, petals, beaks, feathers and pollen grains before beginning to paint
11.she [Sofia] who had made an entire life out of seeing, possessing an enraptured view of the everyday, who knew which section of the house received the most moonlight on any given night of the lunar calendar,.....
Sofia - The Apostate	
12.	"I [Sofia] will continue to pretend for the sake of appearances and for our safety. But I have to share with you [Rohan] the fact that I am no longer a believer. "
13.	She had loved them and the world in which they existed, saying, " God is just a name for our wonder. " There was no soul, only consciousness. No divine plan , only nature, and we were simply among the innumerable results of its randomness. Saying, " I will miss this because this is all there is, " her last words, and then she had slipped out of his life,
14.	In itself it is somewhat beautiful, speaking of the rewards awaiting the faithful and the steadfast in Afterlife, but when he had quoted it to Sofia in her dying moments she had corrected a small mistake of his.
15.	Sofia had died an unbeliever, an apostate.
16.	It was a gradual and un sudden thing, her loss of faith, growing slowly around them like a plant, its rings widening.
17.	Saying, "I will miss this because this is all there is, " her last words, and then she had slipped out of his life , consigning him to decades of apprehension on her behalf, because he knew that the soul existed, and not only that, it was accountable to Allah and His providential rage.

Sofia – The Victim	
18.	She [Sofia] had also made pictures of living things but Rohan had burned them during her last hours, fearing she would be judged for disobeying Allah, who forbade such images lest they lead to idolatry.
19.	"She [Sofia] was dying and he didn't want her to be damned eternally. He withheld her medicines till she let go of her doubts, forcing her to embrace Allah once again before it was too late. Some people say she had a heart attack during those moments ... The sudden lack of drugs ... "
20.	And he knows some people in the neighbourhood, on hearing the news that his vision is slowly deteriorating, comment that it is Allah's retribution for tormenting her during her last hours. "He didn't want to see what she had painted, now he won't be able to see the real things.
Sofia – Still Alive in Memory	
21.	He [Rohan] is tired, tired of living without Sofia,.....
22.	He [Rohan] wishes Sofia were here so he could ask her to describe these things for him,
23.	He [Rohan] was half mad after <i>Sofia's</i> death.
24.	It is now twenty years since she died, four days after she gave birth to Jeo.
25.	She [Naheed] was using <i>Sofia's</i> paint box and one of her thin brushes.
26.	Her [Sofia] voice seems present in the walls. Everything in this room has outlived her: he [Rohan] senses the lamp looking at him with that knowledge, the paintings of flowers on the walls, the ink-stained table. It's all here except her. It is as though she still exists but is choosing to stay away from his eyes.
27.	He [Father Mede] comes to stand before the small painting on the wall that <i>Sofia</i> had made for him.... The crucified Christ, and the weeping figures at the foot of the cross.
28.	He [Father Mede] sits wordlessly looking out of the car window for several minutes, imagining the rain falling on the frangipani tree that Sofia had sent to be planted outside his office, the flowers large and beautiful like mysteries in a tale.

This individualization allows Aslam to showcase her exceptional qualities as a loving and faithful wife (lines 3-6), a scholarly achiever at the university (lines 1-2), and ultimately, a victimized apostate (lines 12-20, Table 14).

Aslam presented Sofia as a successful female student who achieved her education after rejecting the burka, a symbol of traditional norms. Even though she renounced the burka at her father's insistence, her act still signified a rebellion against the convention. Father Mede refers to Sofia's daughter, Yasmeen, as her mother's daughter, emphasizing the continuation of Sofia's legacy. Yasmeen is depicted wearing her mother's tunic and wristwatch, underscoring this connection.

Sofia's character is distilled by combining the generalization and abstraction of various practices. Her desire to establish the Ardent Spirit reflects her passion for education, while her refined aesthetic sensibilities earn her praise, particularly from individuals with discerning tastes such as Father Mede (lines 27 and 28, Table 14). These positive attributes justify her departure from Islam, despite her deep knowledge of the religion (lines 13, 15, 16, and 17, Table 14). These evaluative references align her with the principles of aesthetics and associate her with individuals who appreciated art, music, and literature. Such associations grant her role-model status

and enhance the credibility of her moral, political, and religious judgments.

Ultimately, Sofia is depicted as a figure worth emulating, as both her children follow in her footsteps and reject their fathers' staunch religious ideas. After her death, Rohan, Yasmeen, and Father Mede cherish her memory, indicating the writer's positive appraisal (lines 21-29, Table 15).

Chanda: The Captive Beauty Forced to Become a Salacious Saracen

In the SCMLL, Chanda embodies the archetype of the white Saracen. Despite enduring humiliation, threats, and abuse from her husband, she struggled unsuccessfully to obtain a legal divorce. Aslam portrays her as a poignant symbol of misery and powerlessness.

Table 15.
Sensualized Images of Chanda

1.	People said it was my brother Jugnu and his girlfriend Chanda. Jugnu's hands glowing as always. Chanda's stomach glowing brightly because of the baby she's carrying.
2.	All he has to do to be reminded of Chanda is to draw a breath. Once, during the brief few months that the couple lived together—in radiant ignorance of the fate that awaited them—Jugnu had tacked one of Chanda's veils to the window to keep out insects, and Shamas had walked into a space saturated with a scent he had understood to be the scent of Chanda's body and hair.
3.	... he feels shame because her brother-in-law Jugnu is partly, no, not partly, entirely, responsible for the woman's distress. Chanda, the girl whose eyes changed with the seasons, was sent to Pakistan at sixteen to marry a first cousin to whom she had been promised when a baby, but the marriage had lasted only a year and her mother had been devastated by the news of the divorce.
4.	She stands in the shop, holding a dozen bottles of rosewater, and brings Chanda's face before her eyes.
5.	... and he wonders what colour Chanda's eyes became after her murder, she whose eyes used to change with the seasons.
6.	While he was up there, the heat from Chanda's face had roused the Bhutan Glories.
7.	The foetus's hands were luminous, that they could be seen glowing through Chanda's stomach and clothing...
8.	They were asleep in each other's arms just over an hour later;
9.	Shamas had walked into a space saturated with a scent he had understood to be the scent of Chanda's body and hair.
10.	The younger spat on the bed she had shared with Jugnu, the sheets awry....

The author uses sexual imagery to describe Chanda's illicit relationship with her lover, Jugnu. Phrases like "Chanda's body," "Chanda's face," "Chanda's mouth," and "Chanda's veil" recur in the text, as depicted in Table 15. Like a white Saracen woman, Chanda must defy her father and brothers to be with Jugnu, a modern liberal Muslim man. Her character serves as a symbol deserving liberation from the

oppressive, patriarchal Muslim males, exemplified by her brother's derogatory name-calling of "bitches" and "whores."

Table 16.
Chanda's Representation as the Distressed Demirep

SA	Important collocation phrases and concordance lines showing interpersonal, physical, and relational identification
Chanda 305 times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor, sinner, divorce, murder, disappeared, rumours, death, poison, shocked recede, befall, condemning, erased, leave, hurt, lying, dead • 10 times as sinner • ... ever since his younger brother, Jugnu, and his girlfriend, Chanda, vanished from their house next door. • ... dragged unsuccessfully for the bodies of Jugnu and Chanda • Chanda's family had disapproved of her "living in sin" with Jugnu, • And so, had Chanda brought shame on her family by living with Jugnu: Chanda and Jugnu—the two missing bodies that were not found in the lake • partly or wholly responsible for the deaths of Jugnu and Chanda, having been outraged when they set up home together. • "And as for Chanda: What a shameless girl she was, sister-ji, so brazen". [A Muslim woman]

The three Muslim female characters from the SCMLL share traits reminiscent of beautiful, talented, and voluptuous Muslim women who find themselves ensnared by sinister and wicked Muslim men yet remain prepared to escape if the chance arises. These characteristics mirror those attributed to the captivating white Saracen women of medieval times.

Suraya: Incarnation of the Lewd White Saracen

Suraya's personality is an amalgam of contradictions as her public appearance differs entirely from her private persona. She is torn between Islam and her essential needs. After surviving a life of thrashing and abusive behavior by her husband, Suraya is divorced by him three times while he is drinking. Aslam portrays her suffering due to domestic abuse and religious oppression. She cannot reunite with her husband and son unless she marries another man and is divorced by this second man. She begins by alluring Shamas, who is already married, for this purpose. In a state of two-ness, she loathes and enjoys her illegitimate physical union with him (Table 17). Aslam often shows her in dialog with herself, asking Allah whether this humiliating punishment is meant for her or her husband, allowing him to pass many censoring remarks on Islamic system.

Table 17.

Suraya: The Typecast Oppressed Muslim Woman

Suraya/ Perveen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • someone called Suraya, who has now been divorced by her drunk husband and is now looking for someone to marry temporarily • And so, under Islamic law, the punishment Suraya's husband must receive—for getting drunk and for not taking the matter of divorce seriously enough—is that he can have any woman except one. [Sarcastic tone] • ...if the woman who has been recklessly divorced can fulfil the requirement that Suraya is having to fulfil, then the original husband can possess her again. • But if she wants her husband back, she has to let another man touch her. This is her punishment: a punishment she deserves, perhaps, because she did not know how to teach her husband to be a good man, how to teach him to control his anger and be a good Muslim, stay away from alcohol? • Suraya had almost screamed out in pain [Physical torture by her husband] • "I won't tolerate another woman as a rival wife," Suraya had roared down the telephone. • ...suddenly she is shamed: Such cold-blooded shrewdness, Suraya! What would Allah think?— • Suraya had resented being sent to the Muslim girls' school, but that was just a young person's petulance, she knows now • There is a red pricking in both his eyes, both have caught a fresh glimpse of the humiliations Suraya went through with him in order to be united with son and husband.
136 times	

Suraya's character embodies the recurring archetypes of victimized Muslim women often found in postcolonial literature. To attain salvation, Suraya must engage in a sensual extramarital relationship that aligns with the concept of white Saracen. Shamas assumes the role of the white/French savior, and their love is depicted through sensual imagery. Her portrayal of Shamas as an object of desire, combined with her suppressed circumstances, evokes sympathy from the readers.

Despite internal debates regarding the conflict between her actions and beliefs, Suraya is willing to conform to the desires of modern liberal Muslims, whether through intimate relationships or elopement. Her character resonates with the notion of the charming white Saracen, yielding to the demands of the white man.

Table 18.

Suraya's Portrayal through Sensuous Imagery

1.	The reeds lick her skin as she weeps quietly, desperately cleaning herself between the legs, on her breasts. Licking those orchid-sap stains from her breast and thighs. He hates himself for acting like an animal, a bull rejoicing in the cow.
2.	He turns his face to look at her, towards that body that smelt differently in different places
3.	He imagined herself beside him as his lover, naked, her tresses parted in a two panelled robe along the front of her body, playfully identifying on his person the thirty-two signs of excellence in a man.

4.	Of course, intercourse was so dirty that the body had to be made pure afterwards by bathing.
5.	Her upper body is wrapped in a yellow shawl printed with white penny-sized stars;
6.	He kissed off the pale red orchid-sap that his hands had smeared on various places of her body when he helped her undress—the saliva a magical liquid erasing bruises from her body. He whispered, saying he was surprised that he was already familiar with her breathing when he placed his face against her body.

Notably, to deserve the writer's and target reader's commiseration, like the white Saracen, Muslim woman must possess two qualities simultaneously (Ramey, 2001). First, the Muslim man must oppress; second, the Western lifestyle must be alluring to her (Ramey, 2001). The first condition is satisfied by creating an abusive drunkard husband and the second is by enticing her to have a physical relationship with Shamas. In the following section, we discuss how Naheed (SCBMG) satisfies these conditions.

Table 19.
Summing up the Representation of Chanda, Mahjabin, and Suraya

SA	What is the oppression?	What does she do?	Who is shown as the oppressor?
Chanda is victimized as a girlfriend, sister and daughter.	Muslim society asked her to wait for a divorce before getting married again and her drunkard husband refused to give one.	Chanda loved Jugnu and wanted to marry him so starts living with him without marriage in <i>Dasht-e-Tanhaii</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her husband who refused to give her a divorce. • Her brothers who were her murderers. • The Islamic system is blamed openly for its law of divorce.
Mahjabin is victimized as a daughter when she is beguiled to marry an abusive and drunkard husband.	She is brought up in an oppressive environment and is forced to pacify Kaukab who persuaded her to marry at a young age and later blamed Mahjabin for ruining her marriage.	She had a failed affair at a young age. After a failed marriage she stops living with her parents to minimise interaction with her mother and to get higher education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her mother • Her ex-husband • The system Islam is blamed for being patriarchal.
Suraya is victimized as a mother and as a wife.	She cannot meet her son unless she is successful in marrying a man and then getting divorced from him in order to marry her first husband again.	She develops an adulterous relation with Shamas and satisfies her conscience that this is the only option she has to be united with her husband and son but secretly enjoys her sexual encounters with Shamas to the extent that she want to tell her ex-husband about the pleasure she is experiencing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her first husband • The Islamic system is blamed openly for its laws of remarriage of a Muslim woman. • Her second husband whom she marries toward the end of the narrative

Naheed: The Aggrieved Temptress in SCBMG

Naheed was mentioned 222 times in the SCBMG. In Naheed's word sketch, two prominent features emerge: First, she was predominantly associated with mental processes and portrayed herself as a perceptive and sentient individual (Table 20). This construction highlighted her sensitivity and emotional depth. Second, these processes allowed the writer to delve into Naheed's inner thoughts and psychological experiences, thus providing insight into her character.

Table 20.

Naheed as a Sensor and as a Phenomenon

Naheed in the Subject position	wonder, know, cautions, expect, forget, learn, unaware, Naheed has always wondered, Naheed had become afraid, Naheed had wondered, Naheed meanwhile <i>was</i> under the impression... Naheed <i>was</i> unaware of this..... Look, watch (behavioral)
Naheed in the Object position	Notice, approach, allow, happen, betray, convince, mention, Remember, love, hear, think, find, make sure Naheed watch, see (behavioral)

Another notable feature of Naheed's word sketch is the frequent appearance of an apostrophes in her name, a possessive construction often associated with victimized characters. Considering these indicators, examining Naheed's concordance lines reveals her portrayal in the following context.

In Aslam's fictional world in the SCBMG, life is oppressive for Muslim characters, such as Naheed. She is coerced into marrying Joe only for him to leave her on the 66th day of their marriage to join the Afghan Jihad. After being widowed, she is advised by her mother to terminate her pregnancy, as it would diminish her prospects for a second marriage. Within this fictional realm, Muslim women with dowries are preferred for marriage over impoverished women, and girls as young as ten are forced into unions with much older men. The stark class disparities make it seem peculiar to how someone like Tara, a seamstress, managed to arrange her daughter's marriage into an affluent household.

Numerous studies have pointed out the recurring Western "prototype" of the Muslim woman, often depicted as a captive beauty or a lascivious Saracen, created by the West to serve its interests (Moghissi, 2005; Zayzafoon, 2005). These scholars argued that Muslim women are frequently portrayed as symbols of unfulfilled desire. Western narratives, particularly in literature, tend to associate Muslim women in harems with notions of sexual despotism and sensuality (Hoodfar, 1992;

Kahf, 1999). In presenting a Muslim woman as a counterimage to a Western woman, she is often portrayed as unhappy in her harem (Alloula, 1987).

In response to the prevailing post-9/11 images, the choices made to represent Naheed tend to cast her as a stereotypically oppressed Muslim woman in search of greater freedom. This aligns with the racist discourse against Muslims, wherein the white man assumes the role of savior. However, a subtle shift can be observed, replacing the white man of past representations, and aiding the Muslim captive beauty in fulfilling her sexual desires with a contemporary native figure. Table 21 provides textual evidence supporting these observations.

Table 21.
Naheed as a Captive Beauty and Lewd Saracen

1	“Maybe this new waiting is just part of the old one.” [Naheed] “Did you two plan all this?” Tara says quietly. “He took Jeo away to have him killed and now you’ll wait for his return? Is this Mikal’s child?” “It’s nothing like that, Mother. I just know he’s alive, I feel him.” [Naheed]
2	Naheed had become afraid lest she think about Mikal strongly enough to make him appear in the room, unable to explain to Tara who he was.
3	He saw her near Rohan’s house when he was eighteen, the girl with the serene yellow gaze. He noticed her more and more after that and she was too beautiful for him to think about without suffering, but then one afternoon she had held his gaze. The smile was brief. Nothing when seen, everything when contemplated.
4	One day—after they had been exchanging letters and meeting in secret for six weeks— she mentioned the beauty of a neighbourhood boy and then quickly offered something like an apology, in case his pride was injured. But he had just shrugged. “But then I am sure you look at other girls,” she said. He had shaken his head. “That means you love me more than I love you.” “I know.”
5	Is it his ghost, here to convince her to build a life without him? Or is he real and her thinking has summoned him into her presence? [Naheed talking to herself]
6	“I am in Hell without you.” [Mikal] He had said this to her before, sixty-six days into her marriage, and

Van Leeuwen (2008) argues that *positive evaluation* is not always explicitly expressed linguistically expressed; rather, it often resides beneath the surface and needs to be inferred within the cultural context of social practice. Aslam’s choices in representation emphasize childhood suffering, unfulfilled desires, and Naheed’s role as a savior after Rohan’s blindness and Basie’s death while avoiding direct mention of the illegitimacy of their relationship. This *distillation* process accentuates one aspect of the practice at the expense of others, contributing to the *legitimization* of Mikal and Naheed’s relationship through evaluative associations. Some of these distillations involve abstracting the relationship and emphasizing the emotions involved, as shown in Table 21; these include waiting (line 01), intense thinking (line 02), contemplation (line 03), and experiencing profound distress (line 06).

Resonance of Atheism and Disbelief toward Islam

The picture of a white Saracen is not complete unless a Muslim woman shows skepticism toward her religion and cultural norms. Naheed's doubts resonate with atheism or, at least, agnosticism, and she is frequently found doubting Tara's beliefs and openly blaming the Islamic system for her plight (Table 22).

Table 22.
Naheed's Agnostic Views

1	<p>Pray," Naheed mutters. "Who listens to our prayers?"</p> <p>"How dare you talk in this manner? One or two prayers going unheard doesn't mean none will ever be heard." [Tara]</p> <p>"One or two?" [Naheed]</p> <p>"Be quiet. It was praying to Allah that got me through my time in prison." [Tara]</p> <p>"It was Allah and His laws that put you there in the first place." [Naheed]</p> <p>Tara takes a step towards her. "Be quiet! Don't you ever utter anything like that again." [Tara] Naheed gives her a look of fury, her eyes swimming at her entrapment and yearning, and turns away.</p>
2	<p>Nothing anyone does can alter the fact that he [Joe] is dead. Not even God can change the past. [Naheed thinking aloud]</p>

Another recurring feature of Aslam's fiction is the depiction of glorified or victimized female characters with atheistic beliefs and tendencies. The similarities between Tara and Kaukab are listed in Table 22. Kaukab is portrayed as a gullible individual incapable of persuading her children with rational arguments in favor of Islam, while Tara is similarly depicted as unable to provide logical explanations to dispel Naheed's doubts (line 01, Table 22).

Radical Exclusion of an Inspiring Muslim Woman

"Erasure is a form of oppression—the refusal to see." Chanel Miller (p.no 244, 2020)

After analyzing the six most frequently appearing female characters in the SCMLL and SCBMG, it becomes apparent that none of the Muslim female characters created by Aslam were inspirational women.

Conclusion

This article's analysis of the SCMLL and SCBMG justifies the initial observation that Aslam reinforces the neo-Orientalist tradition by portraying Muslim women in negative roles. This time, the vilification of Muslim women involves the erasure

of inspirational Muslim women from fictional worlds. This has resulted in the maintenance of Western women's cultural superiority over their Muslim counterparts. Haddad (2007) posed the reasonable question that the liberation of a Muslim woman is always highlighted in colonial endeavors, but the answer to the question 'Liberation from what?' keeps changing with the changing demands of the masters. Puritans in the nineteenth century propagated the view that the Muslim woman was a victim of overindulgence in sex; the 20th century saw a shift of focus, and political rights and education were brought forth as excuses; at present, Islam is playing with the representation of Muslim women by portraying her either as a miserable religious maniac, a salacious Saracen, or a captive beauty. The recurrent surfacing of extremely stereotypical and hardly relevant portrayals must be investigated in the works of other Anglophone writers, such as Shamsie, Hanif, and Hamid. Moreover, analyzing the positive portrayals of Muslim women alongside negative representations within the media and fiction can be profoundly beneficial for fostering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of this diverse group. Exploring positive depictions, such as those in Leila Aboulela's literary works (2015, 2018), can counterbalance harmful stereotypes and misconceptions, showcasing the richness and complexity of Muslim women's lives, aspirations, and contributions. Due to space constraints, it is not feasible to incorporate other literary works into the scope of this article. Nevertheless, we recommend that the works of Aboulela, Shamsie, Hanif, and Hamid provide compelling avenues of study for future research.

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