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Title Depiction of Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Enlightenment in the Horizon of a New Dawn

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Depiction of Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Enlightenment in the *Horizon of a New Dawn*

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Abstract

This article is about the ways religious fundamentalism versus religious enlightenment is represented in the novel The Horizon of a New Dawn written by Asmat Ali and Karim Khan. The first aspect of this study examines different events of the novel from the perspective of Gregg's theory of religious fundamentalism through the rebels, the main characters of the novel. The second aspect of this study analyzes the counter impact of Dominguez's theory of religious enlightenment through Barkhia, the protagonist of the novel. The researcher uses a qualitative closing reading method for collecting data. The finding of the research implies that the effect of religious fundamentalism is identified in the novel in the form of violence on Afghan society. This study also finds out the instances of religious enlightenment through Barkhia's nonviolent action. Barkhia opposes rebels' false beliefs through his teaching and organization in Afghanistan to create peace in Afghanistan.

Keywords: *Religious fundamentalism, religious enlightenment, violence, peace.*

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Religious fundamentalism versus religious enlightenment in the novel *The Horizon of a New Dawn*

It is generally agreed upon that religion is the most important part of human existence as every individual has a distinctive religion, its beliefs, and rituals. Everyone adheres to certain specific beliefs and practices and regards their religious beliefs as sacred, holy, and absolute. According to Stibich (2022), religion is a set of organized systems of faith that provide a sense of community and connection to tradition. However, for many reasons religion and its religious beliefs become the reason for conflicts and disputes around the world. Such conflict of religion has been found in the form of religious fundamentalism.

There is no single theory of religious fundamentalism. Historically, “the term fundamentalism developed in twenty century, which stressed upon the literal interpretation of the Bible as a basic principle to Christian life and teaching” (Mustansar, 2020, p.54). It insists upon the practices of only one and single faith aiming to pursue all aspects of society on absolute ideologies. Religious fundamentalists are firm in their beliefs and assume others' values and philosophies as wrong. They are also inflexible in their ideology, leaving no room for compromise with others.

On the other hand, the religious enlightenment is considered to be in opposition to the religious fundamentalism. The Enlightenment period was marked by a refusal of old traditional beliefs, ideas, and suppositions. The Enlightenment insisted upon religious tolerance to accept different religious beliefs and practices to prevent holy war. The Enlightenment encouraged secularism while questioning traditional religious ideologies. Dominguez (2016) stated that the Enlightenment was an intellectual movement that emphasized scientific progression, and social harmony. The Enlightenment emphasized reason over superstition and science over blind faith.

Context of the study

The novel *The Horizon of a New Dawn* was written by Asmat Ali and Karim Khan in 2015. This is the story of an ordinary man with an extraordinary dream of war-torn Afghanistan. The story revolves around the protagonist of the novel Barkhia who believes in the power of reason and education so, that Afghan society and its people would not let themselves to limited circumstances.

On the other hand, the authors depict the rebel characters in the novel as religious fundamentalists and violent extremists as they were afraid of reason and transformation in Afghanistan. They imposed their religious ideologies on Afghan society through power.

Religious Fundamentalism

Religious fundamentalism is the resistance against modernity with all its values as fear of losing their religious identity in modern society. Religious fundamentalists use different ways to misrepresent the holy sacred text in their own selected and distorted way. Thus they construct their religious groups to uphold their identity in public to occupy the whole society with their ideologies (Pandele, 2021). Additionally, religious fundamentalists believe that the rise of modernity is a danger to their values, so they become aggressive in striving to secure religious values.

Sibani & Excellence (2022) investigated the main cause of religious fundamentalism was a very high level of conformity to their religion and old traditions. It was an expression of strong opposition towards modern teaching. As a result, their fixed religious ideologies are violently exposed to society causing them to act in a rigid irrational way and thus cannot compete with different ideas.

Religious Enlightenment

The Enlightenment is an intellectual movement, which brings secular thoughts to improve people's understanding of basic facts such as freedom, happiness, religious tolerance, and liberty. Instead of believing in traditional religious beliefs, enlightenment stresses reason and logic, which can give more knowledge and understanding (Sullivan, 2021).

The Enlightenment celebrates the power of reason where every individual can use reason to liberate himself/herself from old and outdated traditional faiths, thus attaining the state of enlightenment. The Enlightenment movement advocates against superstition and obscurantism while resisting oppressive traditions (Virtijai, 2020).

This study aims to explore the clash between two different ideologies such as religious fundamentalism versus religious enlightenment in *The Horizon of a New Dawn* written by Asmat Ali and Karim Khan. The researcher in this study explores the effect of religious fundamentalism and its connection with violent extremism in the selected novel and, the counter impact of religious enlightenment as manifested through nonviolent resistance.

Problem Statement

Religion is an important part of human beings, which they regard as holy, sacred, absolute, and worthy of special reverence and people tend to follow it. However, conflicts that are driven in the name of religion take the shape of religious fundamentalism. The conflicts caused by religious fundamentalism can be opposed through religious enlightenment. The selected novel has different

perspectives but the purpose of this study is to examine the clash between religious fundamentalism and its effect and the counter impact of religious enlightenment on Afghan society.

Research Objectives

The basic aim of this research is:

- 1) To explore and analyze the effect of religious fundamentalism in Afghanistan in *The Horizon of a New Dawn*.
- 2) To examine the counter-religious enlightenment and its impact on Afghan society in *The Horizon of a New Dawn*.

Research Questions

- 1) How is the effect of religious fundamentalism reflected in *The Horizon of a New Dawn*?
- 2) What is the counter impact of religious enlightenment on Afghan society in *The Horizon of a New Dawn*?

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to explore its readers about two contrasting ideologies such as religious fundamentalism in the form of violence and how it affects Afghan society and the counter ideology of religious enlightenment to create peace in Afghan society through nonviolent resistance in the selected novel.

Research Methodology

This study employed the method of qualitative research and used close reading for the analysis. Grossoehme (2014) defines qualitative research as “a systematic collection and analysis of non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions and experiences”. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem and to come up with new ideas for research.

Data collection source

The primary source of data for this study is the novel *The Horizon of a New Dawn* written by Asmat Ali and Karim Khan. Those aspects of the novel, which comprised religious fundamentalism and the counter-religious enlightenment, were taken into consideration.

Data analysis technique

The researcher used a close textual analysis technique to conduct this research. According to Caulfield (2019), textual analysis is a qualitative research method used to explain, interpret, and understand text and all kinds of information can be gleaned from the text. For this purpose, *The Horizon of a New Dawn* has been read repeatedly to understand the content of the text.

Theoretical Framework

The present research aims to examine religious fundamentalism and its effect on Afghan society in the light of Gregg's theory and the counter impact of religious enlightenment in the light of Dominguez's theory in the selected novel.

Gregg (2016) presented the theory of religious fundamentalism known as fundamentalism theory and violence. According to this theory, the term fundamentalism refers to a range of conditions under which religion becomes the source of religious extremism aiming to defend specific interpretations and practices of faith. Additionally, religious fundamentalists assume that their religious values are being corrupted by modernity and thus cultivate intolerance, extremism, and exclusivism. Furthermore, religious fundamentalists advocate violence as an instrument against those who support different views within the same religion and against secularism.

Dominguez (2016) presented his theory of religious enlightenment known as the Enlightenment and religion. According to this theory, religious enlightenment is the representation of religious tolerance, which come to be regarded as an essential feature of modern civilization to prevent another age of intolerant war. Similarly, the Enlightenment has given too much importance to critical thinking, as individual thinking and rational logic are more valuable than tradition. Thus, it is the process of transitions from old traditional religious obstacles to modern views with its stressing upon reason by which humans can understand reality.

Results and Discussions

This chapter of the research deals with the detailed analysis of the novel *The Horizon of a New Dawn* by describing different events caused by religious fundamentalism with a focus on violence and its effect on Afghan society in the light of Gregg's theory and its clash with religious enlightenment to create peace in Afghanistan from the perspective of Dominguez theory.

Critical Analysis of Religious Fundamentalism and its Effect on Afghan Society

The authors introduce the characters of the rebels in the novel as religious fundamentalists who reacted against advances in the education system in Afghanistan they assumed that it could eradicate their orthodox religious learning. The authors stated in the novel "The rebels only knew how to react against advances in science. They mistrusted modern education. They were afraid of teaching medicine" (Ali & Khan, 2015, p. 14). This quote highlights their opposition to progress in modern education in Afghanistan.

Another example of religious violence by the rebels can be seen in the novel

where they were afraid of Barkhia's modern teaching. They were fearful of Barkhia's revolutionary ideas in the classroom. The rebel's commander said that tomorrow he would be a roadblock. "Within his deep voice, the commander said coldly, "kill him" (Ali & Khan, 2015, p.43). He called his subordinate to kill Barkhia because he was preaching to his students about new perspectives contrary to the rebels' ideology.

Abbasi (2022) highlighted that religious groups restrict Afghans' basic human rights in the name of religion and sharia. The armed religious group bombed a high school in 2019 killing more than 20 students and education staff in Afghanistan. The authors have portrayed the same instances in the novel in the following quote. According to Ali & Khan (2015), "As he heard a strange sound, he paused in mid-sentence. There was this buzzing in his ear. Time just seemed to stop. The feeling was incredible. The sky opened up with a thunderclap" (Pp.43-44). This quote indicates that the blast by rebels created a dark cloud over Afghanistan as people could hardly make sense of this heart-wrenching event as many students and teachers lost their lives.

Gregg's (2016) theory of religious fundamentalism states that religious fundamentalists advocate violence as a means to suppress opposing views that challenge their ideology. This tendency of religious fundamentalism can be drawn from the novel when Gul Muhammad who was one of the friends of the rebels realized their false ideology and finally devoted his life to Barkhia. The commander said "Gul Muhammad has been our friend for a long time. He knows our secrets. More than what he should know, and that could become dangerous for us. Gul Muhammad needed to be removed" (Ali & Khan, 2015, p.57).

The effect of religious fundamentalism on society cannot be neglected as it affects the social development of people. Such effects can be seen in the novel when Nadar Malik refuses to be a part of Barkhia's organization. Ali and Khan (2015) mentioned, "I respect you and your friends. I admire your cause but, you are asking the impossible" (p.84). This quote implied that the rebels fostered fear in the public mind through violence so; they would not do something for positive change in Afghanistan.

The female character who sparked her interest in the Barkhia organization was DR Gullala. According to Marekera (2021), one issue involving religion and its relationship with violence is the threat by religious fundamentalists to women's rights and equality. The authors have given another example of violent extremism by rebels when they plan to destroy Gullala's hospital. According to Ali and Khan (2015)

At seven-fifteen, there was an immense explosion, and the entire structure of

Gullala's office was turned into dust as debris flew everywhere. The dark black smoke of the bomb quickly filled the air. (p.209)

This quote implies that the violence makes them more ruthless. The rebels just worked hard to brainwash people according to their ideologies.

Critical Analysis of Counter-Religious Enlightenment

The instances of counter-religious enlightenment are revealed through Barkhia, the protagonist of the novel. He represents the counter impact of religious enlightenment through his teaching and organization to create peace in Afghanistan. The rebels were engaged in a war with Barkhia and his friends but they favored ending the war through nonviolence strategies.

Barkhia first of all defended modern education that the rebels were ignoring. Barkhia pointed out in the novel "Not everyone trusts modern science. We know that science is part of our Islamic heritage. But many people have forgotten our origins" (Ali & Khan, 2015, p.22). However, the rebels were just claiming to be confined to religion but they refused to study and recognize their religious values. According to Dominguez (2016), the theory of enlightenment has given too much importance to critical thinking, as individual thinking and rational logic are more valuable than tradition. Barkhia taught his students to open their minds to the world to oppose rebels' false beliefs. Barkhia taught his students "You need to learn how to be true to your own beliefs. You have to resist the bad influences that surround you. You have to choose the life that you want for yourself" (Ali & Khan, 2015, p.5). He wanted to advance his student's intellectual development before it was overwhelmed by rebel circumstances.

Another example of the counter impact of religious enlightenment can be depicted in the novel when Afghan society recognized the paramount importance of education, and their fear of rebel ideologies diminished. Thus they reunited for the reconstruction of the school after the bomb attack.

On this coming Friday, all of the people of the village are humbly requested for the reconstruction of the school. Today's lecture is focused on good deeds, and I would like to urge everyone to help one another in the reconstruction of the school. (Ali & Khan, 2015, p.62)

Another example of religious enlightenment can be seen when Nadar Malik first refused to be a part of the Barkhia organization. However, Barkhia and his friends presented their vision and offered him a clear reason to change his views of old traditional beliefs about Afghanistan. "With a smile on his face, he stood up and held the three friends together and said don't give up so easily. I am ready to endure any sacrifice" (Ali & Khan, 2015, p.85).

Dominguez's (2016) theory of religious enlightenment emphasized

religious tolerance to accept other religious groups in the same state. It also embraced the idea of enlightened citizens for social peace by rejecting intolerant fanaticism. This theoretical statement has a practical example in the novel when Barkhia and his friends saved rebels injured soldiers and commented “That is the difference between us and them, that we are saving lives and they are talking lives” (Ali & Khan, 2015, p.75). This quote implies that Barkhia and his friends gave awareness to everyone about what is good and what is bad for Afghan society to improve their condition.

Another example of religious enlightenment is presented when DR Gullala declares that she wants to join the Barkhia organization to take revenge on her father and brother from the rebels. However, Nadar Malak shed light on the vision of the organization. He cleared to Gullala that this is not the organization's aim to take revenge on opponents. Barkhia and his friends believe in nonviolent action and want to encourage society to avoid violence and war. Finally, she changed her views of taking revenge on the rebels rather than assisting the rebels patient. This event shows that she rejected the intolerant philosophy of the rebels, and became the enlightened citizen of modern society as she stabilized the rebel's emergency status. Ali and Khan (2015) added, “Her education had provided her with the way to use reason through her anger. She could use this as a model for virtue” (p.164). Initially, she has the desire to take revenge on rebels but then she understands the principles of organization and starts a conscious effort for peace.

The counter impact of religious enlightenment portrayed by Barkhia in convocation regarding tolerance of religious difference. According to Dominguez's (2016) theory of religious enlightenment, that religious toleration came to be regarded as an essential feature of modern civilization, insisting upon the acceptance of other religious groups in the same state. Barkhia stressed this point, stating that it is crucial to tolerate differences for the progress of Afghanistan. It can be seen in the following text from the selected novel when authors Ali and Khan (2015) mentioned, “We must stop our differences, reunite as one body, create our destiny, build up this beautiful land of ours, and establish a future for our children that will light up the nation” (p.248).

The final instance of religious enlightenment is evident in the novel when the rebels finally agree with Barkhia's vision of a peaceful Afghanistan. After Barkhia's speech, all the rebel leaders looked down, seemingly feeling ashamed of the damage they had caused to the country.

Afghanistan had returned to a time of prosperity. The education system was reformed, scholarships were funded on merit, and more jobs were created for

fresh graduates. Women were given opportunities in every field and they were encouraged to take different avenues to help the country. Finally, Afghanistan achieved prosperity like other developed nations in the world. (Ali & Khan, 2015, p. 379)

Findings

This study found that authors have portrayed juxtaposing ideologies in *The Horizon of a New Dawn* in the form of religious fundamentalism and religious enlightenment. This study revealed the effect of religious fundamentalism in the form of violence through the rebels, the main characters of the novel. The rebels have very strict ideologies of their religion, thus triggering them to become religious extremists. The rebels imposed their way of life in Afghanistan and thus the society was afraid of any transformation. Their religious ideologies shaped Afghanistan as a war-torn country. The rebels were against any transformation in Afghanistan as they assumed that it would eradicate their traditional beliefs.

This study also analyzed the counter instances of religious enlightenment through the protagonist of the novel Barkhia. His teaching and Organization became the foundation of peace in Afghanistan. The Afghan society discovered the fortitude to resist rebels and stay committed to positive transformation as they embraced the Barkhia ideology of peaceful Afghanistan. The education system was reformed on a modern basis. The researcher finds out that the Barkhia organization countered rebels through non-violent approaches which made them responsible and enlightened citizens of Afghanistan.

Conclusion

This study concludes and unveils the analysis of religious fundamentalism versus religious enlightenment in the selected novel which reveals the clash between these concepts, as both are different in their perspectives and ideologies in the selected novel. The researcher effectively concludes that rebels with their extreme religious beliefs enable them to act terribly against those people who disagree with their ideologies and support modernization. The researcher reveals the dangerous consequences of religious fundamentalism and the way it can drive individuals to perpetrate violence even against their people in the selected novel. The contrasting perspective presented through Barkhia's reaction demonstrates the potential for religious enlightenment to challenge and counteract such extremism. To sum up, Barkhia first defends modern education that Afghan society needs because the rebels are threatening the educational system of Afghanistan. The researcher concludes here that Barkhia's nonviolent action makes a peaceful conflict resolution with rebels as finally they agree to take part in the country's progress. This victory symbolized the triumph of religious

enlightenment over religious extremism as this revolution changed Afghan society from the rebel's violent ideologies into peaceful Afghanistan.

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