

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Misread Verses Missing Voices: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Faith, Fear and Identity in *Khuda Kay Liye*

Ume Habiba ^a Safa Rauf ^b

Abstract: The research study investigates the identity crises, ideological conflict, and gender politics portrayed in Pakistani film *Khuda Kay Liye* (2007) by Shoaib Mansoor through Qualitative content analysis. The current study explores how *Khuda Kay Liye* portray the ideological clash of fundamentalist Islam and modernity, highlighting the intersections of religion, culture and global politics in post 9/11 Pakistan. The research is inspired by Edward Said's orientalism and Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity. The research study examines the narrative's treatment of Islamophobia, patriarchal control and forced marriage, alongside the paradoxes in religious practices and the lived realities of hybrid cultural identities. The movie's characters are caught between minarets and the microphones of artistic freedom that embody the struggle of negotiating personal liberties with rigid cultural and religious boundaries. The researcher extracted five themes through the use of the technique of thematic analysis. The results reveal that *Khuda Kay Liye* not only challenges Western stereotypes of Muslims as extremists but also critiques internal misinterpretations of Islam that perpetuate gender inequality and social intolerance. By unravelling these multifaceted narratives, the study underscores the film's role as a cinematic space for contesting radical ideologies, upholding women's rights and picturing more inclusive and peace-oriented Islamic discourse.

Keywords: Misread, Missing Voices, Faith, Fear, Identity, *Khuda Kay Liye*, Ideological Conflict, Gender Politics

Introduction

The confluence of cultural identification, religious conservatism, and liberalism has significantly impacted Pakistan's social dynamics, which frequently contribute to critical societal issues (Sheikh,2009). Religious conservatism in Pakistan, grounded in stringent and commonly rigid interpretations of spiritual values, strictly opposes liberal influence. This has perpetuated strict norms and conformity, which lead to the marginalisation of individuals who transgress, simultaneously promoting intolerance and highly legitimising gender-based violence (Haqqani,2005).

On the other hand, liberals challenge established traditional norms and support individual rights and secular concepts. Consequently, these opposing ideologies, when combined with multiple ethnic identities and cultural norms, lead to the formation of a fractured, hybrid identity within Pakistani society (Elaref & Alkhalifah,2025).

This paper analyses the Pakistani movie “*Khuda Kay Leyia*” (In the Name of God), directed by Shoaib Mansoor (2007), using a qualitative content analysis method. The movie tackles several social issues that haven't been addressed previously in Pakistan's popular media. *Khuda Kay Leyia* addresses post 9/11 Islamophobia that Muslims around the world have to deal with, as well as the movie highlights the religious conservatism and the misinterpretation of Islamic teachings that justify gender inequity and the oppression of women.

^a Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Rawalpindi Women University, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.

^b M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Sociology, Rawalpindi Women University, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.

Additionally, it shows the continuous battle of Pakistan's hybrid identities, which are trapped between cultural and modern values. The purpose of this study is to understand how crimes are depicted and how they link with the film's topic, including Islamophobia, religious extremism, and forced marriage. Furthermore, the paper explores how the film represents hybrid cultural identities impacted by religious, cultural, and modern ideologies in Pakistan, either through critique or through its narrative and symbolic components. The current study explores how *Khuda Kay Liye* portray the ideological clash of fundamentalist Islam and modernity.

Literature Review

The perception of different cultures and nations is increasingly shaped by mediated visual sources rather than experience. These depictions often influenced societies' perspectives, promoting selected narratives and changing the understanding of foreign identities (Heersmink, 2021). Studies show that the media frequently creates an ideological framework that promotes dominant state narratives; therefore, media representations are biased and are profoundly ingrained in political settings (Rumta et al., 2025).

Specifically, in post 9/11 era, a large number of films revolved around social issues, where the main recurring theme in the cultural context revolves around religious identity and extremism, which shows Muslims as antagonists and terrorists (Langah & Sengupta, 2021). Such prejudices are well ingrained in Western mainstream media, since Arabs and Muslims are usually depicted as extremists and terrorists or other undesirable characters (Cobin, 2017).

Consequently, this depiction of Western media profoundly affected Pakistan's identity, fuelling hate towards Muslims. Political, religious, and secular issues cause conflict among a society's members (Hassan, 2014).

The issue of cultural identity in a globalised society stresses the tension between religion and modernity in Pakistani society (Iqbal et al., 2023). Similarly, migration and displacement also lead to the creation of hybrid identities by maintaining religious practices and cultural expectations while simultaneously adopting modern principles (Zubair et al., 2021).

In "*Khuda Kay Liye*", diasporic and cross-cultural identities are depicted, highlighting the identity conflicts that Pakistani members have when balancing Western cultural influences with traditions. Moreover, researchers have noted that moral ambivalence is becoming more prevalent as society deals with shifting socioeconomic relations, educational settings, and ideological influences (Ali, 2015). Consequently, this frequently results in a sense of liminality, in which individuals feel neither entirely in line with modernist principles nor traditional values, leading to a hybridity (Abbas & Gohar).

According to Haqqani (2005), Pakistani society has been impacted by religious political parties, which frequently conflict with modern and secular values. This contestation may be seen in legislation, mainstream media, and academia, as religious discourse often overshadows other perspectives. Particularly, under the Zia government, state harsh, anti-democratic, and gender biased 'Islamization' triggered a profound shift in society, in which laws, official institutions, and social norms all negatively impacted women.

According to Babur (2007), women in Pakistan are subject to conservative religious ideologies and familial and tribal norms. They frequently encounter prejudiced and discriminatory norms and cultural practices. According to Pakistan's interpretation of Islam, women need to be safe and secure, which ultimately leads to their physical, mental, and emotional oppression (Sidani, 2005).

Patriarchal norms oppress and control women through the limitation of activities and code of conduct, gender segregation, and a value system that strongly associates honour with female character. Conservative religious scholars misinterpret religious teaching based on their false assumption, exacerbating violence against women (Shaheed, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial theory helps to analyse how Western and Eastern differences shape identities and generate sociocultural and ideological struggles in Pakistan. Postcolonial theorists Edward Said's theory of Orientalism (1978) and Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity and third space (1994) are adopted for the analysis of the "Khuda Ke Liye" Film.

The concept of "Orientalism" criticises how the West has exploited the image of the East. The West constructs the "us vs them" image to justify the colonial power and exploitation. The Western representation is considered powerful and superior, while the image of the East is extremist, backwards, terrorists, and dangerous. This notion is in particular pertinent to the analysis of Mansoor's character in Khuda Kay Liye. The film discreetly criticises how both the West and elements of the East misinterpret Islam, while also challenging Western prejudices by giving a broader view of Islam. It highlights post 9/11 negative effects on Pakistani identity.

Additionally, Bhabha's (2004) concept of "hybridity" describes this as 'third place', a metaphorical setting where individuals come together from different cultures, leading to the creation of hybrid identities. An individual's sociocultural background establishes their cultural identity. According to this theory, "all forms of culture are continuously undergoing a process of hybridity. As a result, identities in these sittings are neither traditional nor modern, creating diverse cultural forms and hybrid and diasporic identities.

This theory explains the ideological conflict of Pakistanis. Which member is struggling between fundamentalist Islam, modernist, and cultural influence? The characters in Khuda Ke Liye, such as Maryium and Mansoor, illustrate the conflict between liberal principles and traditional Islamic standards. Mary, a young Pakistani raised in England, is caught between cultures. Her father doesn't let her marry a British boy and puts her in a forced marriage with a Pakistani man, although he is in a live-in relationship with a Christian woman. Sarmad's transition from liberal artist to fundamentalist Islamist exemplifies how people overcome internal cultural conflict. This emphasises the tension between fundamentalist and modernist Islam, as well as the complexities and opportunities of hybrid identities in a worldwide society.

Methodology

For this study, the researcher employed a qualitative research design, using the content analysis method to analyse the Movie 'Khuda Ke Liye' narrative. Content analysis identifies and analyses patterns in recorded communication, including text, images, audio, and video. It entails carefully gathering data from a set of media and then arranging and interpreting the data. This approach is used in both quantitative and qualitative research designs.

The sample for this study is the Pakistani movie 'Khuda ke Liye' by Shoaib Mansoor. Which genre is based on crime and thriller, and addresses important socio-cultural issues, ideological conflict, and gender discrimination in Pakistan? Data was obtained from the movie ' Khuda Ke Liye' (In the name of God) directed by Shoaib Mansoor, released in 2007. By watching the movie on Netflix. The film was viewed twice by the researcher. The researchers note down the film scene and dialogue for the interpretation of data.

Researchers use thematic analysis for the interpretation of the data. By focusing on recurring scenes and dialogue in the film. Through which I identified and chose the selected theme concerning social issues related to religion and gender, and interpreted the data accordingly.

Results and Discussion

The film depicts Pakistan's dual identity problem, as the nation is experiencing both religious fanaticism and an expanding entertainment sector. 'Khuda k Liye' is a Pakistani film based on the story of two brothers, Sarmad and Mansoor, who are two budding Pakistani rock musicians. Sarmad, who comes under the influence of a religious Mullah in Pakistan, gives up music and adopts an extremist interpretation of Islam.

Meanwhile, Mansoor leaves Pakistan to study music and marries an American woman, Janie. After the 9/11/01 attack, Mansoor was called a terrorist since he's a Muslim.

The story follows Sarmad's uncle, who lives in London and worries that his daughter will marry a non-Muslim guy, even though he is living with Christian women. He takes her to Pakistan on a pretence to visit his relatives. Mary was tricked into marrying Sarmad. She is forcibly married off to him at the outskirts of undeveloped Afghanistan. Following these events, Mary attempts to escape her situation but is caught and punished.

Theme 1: 9 /11 and Racial Profiling

Khuda k leyia shows the consequences of post 9/11 islamophobia. Post 9/11 not only altered US and international and domestic policies but also gave rise to Islamophobia. That also had devastating effects on the livelihood of ordinary Muslims, including those overseas Pakistanis who live in peace. The movie character Mansoor, a liberal Pakistani musician studying and living with his American wife, is subjected to unfair detention based only on his identification. A Sikh who is also mistaken for a terrorist accuses Mansoor of being a terrorist during the 9/11/01 incident, frightening a neighbour who then contacts the police. During custody, when the FBI asked about his relationship with Osama bin Laden, he replied, *"I don't know Osama bin Laden. I'm not a terrorist; I'm a musician."*

And the FBI agent replied:

But your name is Mansoor, and you're a Muslim. All your hobbies are related to flying kites, flying planes, don't worry, I'm not accusing you of crashing the Twin Towers. But in those missions, who performs the act is much less important than those who plan it.

It's the same old Western pattern: Baseless details are utilised to blame the innocent. If they focused the same amount of energy on important things, they would grasp what Mansoor is accused of, who accuses him, and in what context. However, they just consider what benefits them.

This shows the Western hypocrisy of freedom and rights, which Edward Said's concept of Orientalism shows the picture of the West denying the rights of others, labelled Arab and Muslim, as terrorists and extremists. Mansoor was brutally beaten and subjected to torture for one year to the point that he became paralysed and was deported to Pakistan. Mansoor is blindfolded, beaten, exposed to deafening noise, and forced into confessions for crimes he did not commit. Unfortunately, that was the lived experience of the majority of Muslims, especially Pakistanis, in the post 9/11 era.

Theme 2: Paradoxes in Religious Practices

This theme illustrates the manipulation and hypocrisy of fundamentalist religious Mullahs (scholars) of Pakistan. He misinterprets religious teaching for his benefit and twists the text for political and ideological control. On one hand, he praises Americans for their financial and military support; on the other hand, he criticises Western culture for its negative impacts on Pakistani youth. When a reporter asks about Jihad, he responds, "I'm grateful to America's CIA for reminding me of Jihad. Right now, Mujahideen from all over the world have congregated in Afghanistan. And with Allah's permission, many more will follow."

He manipulates the young minds with the preaching of Jihad, who have no idea who they'll fight and where they're going to end up, as we saw in the Sarmad character, who was a musician but was highly influenced by him. By giving his preaching that denies women's rights and justifies violence against them, and strictly opposes music and art, and considers Jihad the only goal. This narrative suggests that Islamic identity is not just caused by Western influence but by these types of fundamentalist scholars' preachings. "The government has knelt to the west, but we will not surrender. We prefer to kill them for Islam."

The wrong counselling of radical scholars often marginalises innocent minds. If someone raises a question or brings an opposite view, they take a radical stance by imposing that it is a sin. For instance,

when Sarmad asked about his concern about whether music is forbidden or not, Mullan Tahiri replied, "If you're taking steps in the name of Allah, do so without any question, avoid digging into logic. Excessive thinking causes people to be misled."

Here is how it shows culturally inspired and the deeply flawed assumption of Islam. That only promotes ignorance in Pakistani members and does not allow people to think freely and critically.

Theme 3: Ideological Clash

The movie depicts the confrontation over the religious interpretation of Islam in Pakistan. One is the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, who adhere only to strict and radical interpretations, and another is the modern interpretation of Islam, who advocate for a more moderate, peaceful, and thoughtful view of Islam. In the courtroom scene, a fundamentalist Islam first appears and gives his thoughts on those remarks. "I have only come here out of respect for you. Otherwise, neither is your court in line with the Shariah/Islamic laws, nor does anyone here know more about Islam than I do." This shows the superiority complex of Pakistani scholars, who also give rise to sectarian conflicts and gender inequalities.

On the other hand, a liberal scholar, Mulana Tahiri, appears to support equality and justice in the courtroom by quoting references from the Quran. When asked a question about the appearance of a Muslim wearing jeans, he replied.

"The dress has nothing to do with religion, but rather with culture. Correct the inner self, not the appearance." Also, about forced marriage, he criticises a fundamentalist scholar for his misinterpretation and gives a reference from the hadith. That force marriage is not permissible and should require consent from the female. He saved an innocent female from exploitation and Sarmad from radical influence. This depicts that religion should guide people with kindness and knowledge, not fear.

Theme 4: Forced Marriage

The movie's central theme revolves around gender inequality and the issue of forced marriage. It shows that the oppression of women in Pakistan stems only from a misinterpretation of Islam. And that extremist and misogynist attitude in Pakistan is mostly influenced by patriarchal culture, followed by fundamentalism as well, which shows in the Mullah Taheri character that he encourages Sarmad to be forcibly married to serve Islam, an act which is non-Islamic. He justifies this in court by saying:

It is important to save a girl from becoming irreligious, then let her do her own will.' And "You can ask a female about her will, but it is not necessary, only her parents can decide whom she can marry.

Islam has given women fundamental rights in marriage, particularly in terms of consent, dignity and autonomy. At the same time, some scholars have interpreted the Islamic teaching in the wrong way. And it shows how women's rights are frequently violated under the false guise of religion and culture. Movie narrative emphasises that a correct and modern interpretation of Islam can lead to the prevention of forced marriage and gender inequality.

Theme 5: Hybrid identity

Khuda kay Liye shows the continuous battle of Pakistan's hybrid identities, which are trapped between fundamentalist Islam, modernist, and cultural influences. On the one hand, they admire Western values. However, still feel stuck with their cultural identity to save their real identity trying to balance both identities. As the movie has in the character of Sarmad, who is going through an identity crisis during which he becomes associated with religious clerics, stops playing music, and grows a beard, all just by the influence of a fundamentalist version of Islam. He was misguided and manipulated, but later he returned to his old activities after he listened to a modern Muslim scholar in court.

Meanwhile, Mary, being a Pakistani living in London, also faces an identity crisis. She faces disagreement with her father, who is against her marriage to a non-Muslim. Even though he lives with non-Muslim women in a marriage, he insists, by stating, "She is a Pakistani girl; she cannot marry a white boy." He argues with his girlfriend about his view on his daughter's marriage by saying "I'll be the laughingstock of the Pakistani community if she marries a British guy"

This shows the societal pressure and double standard of Pakistani Men. He embraces British traditions, yet becomes extreme when it comes to his daughter, trying to impose a culture she was neither raised in nor faced directly. According to research, parents of Pakistani diaspora members, especially those who reside in Western nations, have an increased tendency to uphold and enforce traditional cultural norms on their children.

Conclusion

The study indicates that Khuda kay liye presents three different individuals facing issues connected to Muslim and South Asian culture, by showing misinterpretation of Islam in Pakistan and Western culture. It draws attention to post 9/11 effects on society, particularly Muslims. The widespread spark of Islamophobia in the West leads to prejudice against Muslims and Pakistanis. This was reflected in Mansoor's arrest and torture in the United States. The film also highlights the identity crisis of Muslims in Sarmad's character, when he attempts to balance between religious principles and modern life, which in bad choices. The film also shows ideological conflict between fundamental Islam and modern Islam. Two opposing views of Islam, one is the radical and the other is open and contemporary. The misinterpretation of religion is revealed by Maryam's forced marriage and subsequent struggle for justice. Overall, the film conveys a clear message that Islam is not associated with radical ideologies and, rather, it is fundamentally a religion of peace and opposes extremism and gender inequalities.

References

- Abbas, S., & Gohar, S. (2023). Another Gulmohar Tree – A Tale of Identity and Hybridity: Sehar Abbas, Sundus Gohar. *Journal of English Language, Literature and Education*, 4(3), 117–140. <https://doi.org/10.54692/jelle.2023.0501159>
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). The postcolonial and the postmodern: The question of agency. *The location of culture*, 171-197.
- Corbin, C. M. (2017). Terrorists Are Always Muslim but Never White: At the Intersection of Critical Race Theory and Propaganda. *Fordham Law Review*, 455 <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/flr/vol86/iss2/5>
- Elaref, A. I. A., & Alkhalifah, I. (2025). Interrogating hybridity: Approaching identity clash in Hanif Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic*. *World Journal of English Language*, 15(5), 311. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n5p311>
- Hassan, K. (2014). The Role of Private Electronic Media in Radicalising Pakistan. *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 103(1), 65–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2013.874164>
- Heersmink, R. (2023). Materialised identities: Cultural identity, collective memory, and artifacts. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 14(1), 249–265. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-021-00570-5>
- Iqbal, M., Ahmad, R., & Umair, M. (2023). Fostering a Sense of Belonging among Pakistani Youth: An Exploration of Cultural Heritage and Identity in the Reluctant Fundamentalist. *Global Sociological Review*, VIII(III), 43–49. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2023\(VIII-III\).04](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2023(VIII-III).04)
- Langah, N.T., & Sengupta, R. (Eds.). (2021). *Film, Media and Representation in Postcolonial South Asia: Beyond Partition* (1st ed.). Routledge India. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003167655>
- Rumata, V.M., Karman, Sastrosubroto, A.S. (2025). Religion in Urban Politics: Social Media and Its Regulatory Debates in the Aftermath of the 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election. In: Budiman, M., Kusno, A. (eds) *Collective Memory, Marginality, and Spatial Politics in Urban Indonesia*. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-4304-9_13
- Schaar, S. (1979). Orientalism at the service of imperialism: A review article of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, and New York, Pantheon Books, 1978). *Race & Class*, 21(1), 67–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030639687902100107>
- Shabbir, G., Ali, S., & Jawad, K. (2024). The Role of Religious and Secular Dynamics in Shaping Pakistani National Identity: Challenges and Opportunities. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 642–650. [https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2024\(5-II\)59](https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2024(5-II)59)
- Shaheed, F. (2010). Contested identities: gendered politics, gendered religion in Pakistan. *Third World Quarterly*, 31(6), 851–867. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2010.502710>
- Zubair, H. B., Naqvi, S. S., & Larik, S. (2021). Dissimilar cultural patterns and hybrid identities in Jamil Ahmed's selected literary fiction. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 9(3), 1682–1689. <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2021.93170>