

**The Image of America in the Eyes of
Immigrant Minorities: A Study of Sheila
Abdalla's *Saffron Dreams***

صورة أمريكا في أعين الأقليات المهاجرة:

دراسة لرواية «سحابة الزعفران» لشيلا عبد الله

إعداد

الدكتور / ا.م. ابراهيم محمد الحلفاوي

استاذ اللغوب الإنجليزية المساعد كلية الآداب جامعة كفر الشيخ

The Image of America in the Eyes of Immigrant Minorities: A Study of Sheila Abdalla's *Saffron Dreams*

Abstract

This paper examines the portrayal of America in Sheila Abdalla's novel *Saffron Dreams* (2009) through a postcolonial lens. Focusing on the perspective of immigrant minorities, the study explores the nuanced and complex image of America as depicted in the novel. By analyzing the themes of cultural assimilation, identity formation, and the challenges faced by immigrant minorities, the paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience in the United States. Through an analysis of *Saffron Dreams*, this paper highlights the significance of literature in shaping perceptions of America and fostering cultural understanding and empathy. Drawing on a postcolonial approach, the paper tackles Islamophobia in Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*. Postcolonialism sheds light on the way in which particular groups of people, because of race, have been excluded and represented in ways that devalued or dehumanized them. In a postcolonial period, the feelings of insecurities among Muslims immigrants are clear in the West because of the negative impact of Islamophobia. Islamophobia refers to anti-Muslim sentiment. It increases discrimination against Muslims by portraying Muslim men as violent, evil, and sexist, and Muslims women as harem, belly dancers, and oppressed. Thus, Abdullah (1971-) focuses on the negative impact of Islamophobia on Muslims Women in *Saffron Dreams*. As a result, the paper has reached three findings: (1) Islamophobia leads to hate crimes, hate speech, and social and political discrimination against Americans Muslims; (2) Muslim women face many obstacles because of wearing hijab and being an identifiable Muslim; and (3) Pakistani Muslim females can face the societal barriers in the American Society, including religion crisis, identity crisis, and discrimination. Hence, the main concern of the paper is to show how Abdullah handles the theme of Islamophobia and its negative impact on American Muslims in *Saffron Dreams*.

Keywords:

Assimilation, hate crimes, identity crisis, Islamophobia, Pakistani Americans, *Saffron Dreams*, Shaila Abdullah

صورة أمريكا في أعين الأقليات المهاجرة: دراسة
لرواية أحلام الزعفران" لشيلا عبدالله

الملخص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية صورة أمريكا في رواية "أحلام الزعفران" (٢٠٠٩) لشيلا عبد الله من خلال منظور ما بعد الاستعمار. يركز البحث على منظور الأقليات المهاجرة، ويستكشف الصورة المعقدة والمتنوعة لأمريكا كما تم تصويرها في الرواية. ويسعى هذا البحث من خلال تحليل تيمات التكيف الثقافي وتكوين الهوية والتحديات التي تواجه الأقليات المهاجرة إلى المساهمة في فهم أعمق لتجربة المهاجرين في الولايات المتحدة. يسلط هذا البحث من خلال تحليل رواية "أحلام الزعفران" الضوء على أهمية الأدب في تشكيل الانطباعات عن أمريكا وتعزيز التفاهم الثقافي والتعاطف. حيث يتناول البحث من خلال دراسة ما بعد الاستعمار مشكلة الإسلاموفوبيا في رواية شيلا عبد الله "أحلام الزعفران" كموضوع رئيسي يساهم في صورة أمريكا في نظر المهاجرين. يسلط المنهج البعد الاستعماري الضوء على الطريقة التي تم بها استبعاد وتمثيل مجموعات معينة من الناس، بسبب العرق، بطرق تقلل من قيمتهم أو تتجاوز إنسانيتهم. وفي فترة ما بعد الاستعمار، تظهر مشاعر عدم الأمن بين المهاجرين المسلمين بوضوح في الغرب بسبب التأثير السلبي للإسلاموفوبيا. تشير الإسلاموفوبيا إلى الشعور المعادي للمسلمين. وهي تزيد من التمييز ضد المسلمين من خلال تصوير الرجال المسلمين على أنهم عنيفون وأشرار ومتحيزين جنسيًا، والنساء المسلمات على أنهن حريم وراقصات ومضطهدات. وبالتالي، تركز الكاتبة على التأثير السلبي للإسلاموفوبيا على نساء المسلمين في رواية "أحلام الزعفران". ونتيجة لذلك، توصلت الورقة إلى ثلاثة نتائج: (١) تؤدي الإسلاموفوبيا إلى جرائم الكراهية وخطاب الكراهية والتمييز الاجتماعي والسياسي ضد المسلمين الأميركيين. (٢) تواجه النساء المسلمات العديد من العقبات بسبب الحجاب وكونهن مسلمات مميزات. (٣) يمكن أن تواجه النساء المسلمات الباكستانيات عوائق اجتماعية في المجتمع الأمريكي، بما في ذلك أزمة الدين وأزمة الهوية والتمييز. وبالتالي، يهدف البحث إلى إظهار كيفية التعامل مع قضية الإسلاموفوبيا وتأثيرها السلبي على صورة أمريكا في نظر المهاجرين إليها. يؤكد البحث أن فهم منظور الأقليات المهاجرة ضروري لتطوير فهم أكثر عمقا وشمولية لأميركا.

الكلمات الرئيسية:

التكيف، جرائم الكراهية، أزمة الهوية، الإسلاموفوبيا، الأميركيون الباكستانيون، أحلام الزعفران، شيلا عبد الله.

The immigrant experience in America has long been a topic of interest and exploration in various research fields. This paper aims to address this topic by focusing on Sheila Abdalla's novel *Saffron Dreams* (2009), and conducting a postcolonial study of the image of America as depicted through the eyes of immigrant minorities. Delving into the themes of cultural assimilation, identity formation, and the challenges faced by immigrant communities, this paper seeks to illuminate the complex relationship between immigrant minorities and their host country.

The United States, often referred to as a nation of immigrants, is a diverse and multicultural society that has been shaped by centuries of migration from various parts of the world. However, the experiences and perspectives of immigrant minorities are often overshadowed by dominant narratives that tend to focus on mainstream or majority experiences. This paper seeks to rectify this imbalance by examining the immigrant minority perspective as portrayed in *Saffron Dreams*.

Sheila Abdalla's novel, *Saffron Dreams*, provides a compelling narrative that explores the immigrant experience in America, particularly through the eyes of Arissa, an Indian Muslim immigrant. Through the protagonist's journey, the novel delves into the complexities of cultural assimilation, the negotiation of identity, and the challenges faced by immigrant communities in the United States. By analyzing the novel's portrayal of America, this paper aims to uncover the nuanced and intricate image of the country as perceived by immigrant minorities.

A postcolonial approach serves as a valuable framework for this paper, as it allows for an examination of the power dynamics, cultural hegemony, and historical legacies that shape the interactions between immigrant communities and the dominant culture. By situating the analysis within a postcolonial context, the paper aims to shed light on how historical, social, and cultural factors influence the image of America as seen through the eyes of immigrant minorities.

Understanding the image of America from the perspective of immigrant minorities is crucial for developing a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the American

society. It allows for a deeper exploration of the challenges, aspirations, and cultural negotiations experienced by immigrant communities. By examining *Saffron Dreams* through a postcolonial perspective, this paper seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the immigrant experience in America and foster a greater appreciation for the diverse narratives that shape the nation.

In this paper, the themes of Islamophobia, cultural assimilation, identity formation, and the challenges faced by immigrant minorities in *Saffron Dreams* will be analyzed in order to reveal the complex image of America as perceived by immigrant communities. Through this analysis, the paper attempts to deepen the reader's understanding of the immigrant experience and contribute to the ongoing dialogue on cultural diversity, inclusivity, and empathy in America.

Indeed, the main aim of this paper is to show how Islamophobia affects Muslims, in general, and Pakistani Muslims, in particular; and how the Pakistani immigrants face the societal barriers in the American Society, including the religion crisis, identity crisis, and discrimination. All these factors contribute to the image formation of America in the Eyes of its Immigrant Minorities.

Postcolonialism refers to the representation of race, culture, ethnicity, and human identity, after many colonized countries get their independence. Lisa. M. Given defines postcolonialism as “[a] broad theoretical approach that examines the past and present impact of colonialism and racism on social, political, and economic systems. It focuses on the ways particular groups of people because of notions of race or ethnicity have been excluded, marginalized, and represented in ways that devalued or even dehumanized them” (650). It is clear that postcolonialism focuses on issues related to culture, religion, and power.

The main aim of postcolonialism is to combat the effects of colonialism on culture. It is not about salvaging past worlds, but it shows how the world can move beyond this period together, towards a place of mutual respect. According to Agboola Olatunji,

“postcolonialism is a historical phenomenon which is linked to the observation, consideration and interrogation of the philosophical orientation, praxis and effects of colonialism on other societies” (125). Thus, postcolonialism helps in understanding both colonizer and colonized in many issues such as politics, geography, education, customs, and culture.

Numerous scholars have explored the immigrant experience in America and its representation in literature (Thomas J. Ferraro, 1993; Susan Koshy, 1996; Irene Bloemraad & Karen Schönwälder, 2013). Postcolonial scholars, in particular, have contributed valuable insights by examining the power dynamics, cultural hybridity, and colonial legacies inherent in the immigrant narrative. They argue that a postcolonial lens allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and nuances of the immigrant experience, challenging dominant narratives and shedding light on marginalized perspectives.

Literary works have played a significant role in representing the immigrant experience and shaping perceptions of America. Novels, such as *Saffron Dreams*, provide a platform for immigrant writers to share their stories and explore the intricacies of Islamophobia, cultural assimilation, identity formation, and the challenges faced by immigrant communities. Through these narratives, readers gain insights into the multifaceted experiences, emotions, and aspirations of immigrant minorities, fostering empathy and cultural understanding.

Studies analyzing the immigrant experience have highlighted the importance of understanding the immigrant minority perspective in shaping perceptions of America (Dario J. Almarza, 2001; Erik Bleich *et al.*, 2015; Robert Michael Kunovich, 2017)) They emphasize the need to move beyond monolithic representations and embrace the diverse narratives of immigrant communities. By examining the themes of Islamophobia, cultural assimilation, identity, and the challenges faced by immigrant minorities, scholars have illuminated the complexities of the immigrant experience and challenged prevailing notions of assimilation and integration.

In a postcolonial period, the feelings of insecurities among Muslims immigrants are clear in the West. For example, in 1947, Pakistan got its independence from British India. It is created on the basis of religious identity. Around 2500 Pakistani immigrants go to the United States, especially between 1947 and 1965. Since 1965, the number of Pakistanis immigrants has increased when the U.S. lift the existing immigration restrictions. For all immigrants, America is a dreamland where they can get a better life and education. They believe that America is a land of freedom; the land that offers economic and social security. According to Chimamanda Adichie (1977-), an African writer, most immigrants believe that “[America] is the future” (74).

In 1965, The Immigration Act, a federal immigration law, excluded all Asians, including Pakistanis and Africans. However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the majority of Pakistanis immigrants have made their presence in America. They are well-placed professionals, such as engineers, software workers, physicians, or scientists; many of them either come directly due to a demand in their profession or as students who stay back after their graduation. Moreover, along with these professionals come their less educated relatives who work in blue-collar jobs. They are either eligible for immigration under the immigration visa preference for relatives or through the visa lottery, the winner of the visa lottery is chosen at random.

The pioneering Pakistanis become a source of motivation for other immigrants. The type of human immigration includes migrant labor, wherein community families and members follow the primary immigrants to another country. This is the beginning of a Pakistani ethnic community in America. So, the Pakistani Americans are the fifth largest Asian-American group in America. Most of them are Muslims whose traditional values are significant to them.

One of the issues related to immigration is Islamophobia. In the 1970s, especially since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, it has been accepted that the West has relegated Islam to negative sentiments, stereotypes, and images. According

to Gordon Conway, Islamophobia “refers to unfunded hostility towards Islam. It refers to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affair” (14). These lines confirm that Muslims are socially and politically excluded and marginalized due to the negative impact of Islamophobia.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the word ‘Islamophobia’ seems to have emerged. While in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was developed by political activists and international organization in order to draw attention to harmful actions directed at Muslims and Islam in Western societies. The term ‘Islamophobia’ refers to anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Islamic. Erick Bleich, a scholar of race, states that “[Islamophobia] provides a language for denouncing [Islam and Muslims]” (1581).

In 2001, the term ‘Islamophobia’ has been used by the media. Media label Muslims as enemies. According to Amir Saeed, “the media is guilty of reinforcing anti-Muslim racism” (454). So, the marginalization of Muslims in the West is disturbing and prevalent. They are exploited by the media and those who held political power. In 2004, Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General, opened a United Nation Conference on “Confronting Islamophobia” by saying: “When the world is compelled to coin a new term to take account of increasingly widespread bigotry, which is a sad and troubling development. Such is the case with Islamophobia” (qtd. in “Nikola Krastev’s World: UN Forum Explores Ways to Fight Islamophobia” para. 4). It is clear that Islamophobia increases discrimination against Muslims.

In the wake of 9/11 attack in America, the international perception of Islam as a source of violence against civilians was growing. Post-9/11 attack, the western media portray the negative image of Islam and Muslims by portraying Muslim men as violent, evil-doer, and sexist, and Muslim women as harem, belly dancers, and oppressed. Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg believe that “Islamophobia accurately reflects a social anxiety toward Islam and Muslim cultures that is largely unexamined by, yet deeply ingrained in, Americans” (15). It is obvious that this phobia results from the social experiences that Americans have

continued in popular memory. So, this term draws attention to an unjustified discrimination and prejudice. In recent years, researchers have started using this term to identify the history, dimensions, causes, and consequences of anti-Muslims sentiment.

Hence, Muslims are the most disadvantaged group in the west, with lower employment rates than other migrant group. P. Werbner, a British social anthropologist, states: "The significance of Islamophobia as a form of differentialist racism" (8). Therefore, Islamophobia has become more dangerous. This phenomenon promotes anti-Muslim discrimination, harassment, stereotyping, and even violence.

Crucially, most definitions agree that Islamophobia is anti-Muslim attitudes. Sherman Lee *et al.* see that Islamophobia is "fear of Muslims and Islamic faith" (93). Many Americans believe that Islam helps stroke violence against non-Muslims. Lee *et al.* argue that "[i]n the case of Islamophobia, threat-related terms such as terrorism and violence, for example, have been connected to Islam and Muslims" (94). So, post-9/11, most non-Muslims avoid contacting with Muslims. Hence, Islamophobia means the stigmatization of all Muslims. In other words, it is considered a social evil. Islamophobia also exists for political reasons and tries to label a social reality that Muslims and Islam have emerged as an object of fear, hostility, and aversion.

As for features of Islamophobia, Muslims are seen as using their faith for political and military advantage, and Muslim culture is seen as unchanging, monolithic, and different from other cultures. According to the publication of *The Runnymede Trust led by Conway*, "Islam seen as monolithic"(5), "Islam seen as other" (6), "Islam seen as inferior" (6), "Islam seen as enemy"(7), "Muslims seen as manipulative" (8), and "anti-Muslim discourse seen as natural not problematic" (10). It is clear that sweeping generalizations are made about all Muslims. Therefore, Islamophobia sees that there is a difference between Muslims and non-Muslims.

As a result, Islamophobia has had a negative impact on Muslims, in general, and American Muslims, in particular. For American Muslims, the post-9/11 attack has led to dehumanization, disempowerment, and discrimination, which have been normalized through government policies and media in

the U.S. In 2017, for example, the American president Donald Trump banned Muslim citizens from seven countries from entering America. As a result, Pakistani Muslims become the targets for hate crimes, and they have to undergo more security checks in airport because of their Muslim background. So, Pakistani Muslims began to change their names to hide their Muslim identity. José Pedro Zúquete, a political scientist, points out that “as a widespread mindset and fear-laden discourse in which people make blanket judgments of Islam as the enemy, as the ‘other’, as a dangerous and unchanged, monolithic bloc that it is the natural subject of well-deserved hostility from Westerners” (323).

Moreover, Islamophobia leads to hate crimes, hate speech, and social and political discrimination. Hate crimes have risen against Muslims and other marginalized communities. Hate crimes are the umbrella concept used in order to describe incidents motivated by prejudice, hostility, or hate towards an individual’s identity. From this perspective, Imran Awan and Irene Zempi define Islamophobia-triggered hate crimes as “as any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated wholly or partly by a hostility or prejudice based upon a person’s religion or perceived religion that is, their Muslim religion” (3). So, anti-Muslim hostility includes physical attacks on mosques, discrimination in employment practices, and the widespread and stereotypes in the media.

In addition, the experience of discrimination has been related to negative life choices among Muslims in America. Moreover, Muslims suffer from depression, stress, and anxiety in areas of work. They are worried about the future of their children because there is a backlash against Muslims. Many Muslims feel disrespect by those in the West. Areeza Ali states that the negative impact of Islamophobia on Muslims leads to “psychological sufferings, identity negotiation, and collective trauma” (1). This confirms that, since the early 21st century, there has been a rise of anti-Muslim sentiment in the West. This part analyzes the portrayal of stereotypes and prejudices faced by immigrant minorities in *Saffron Dreams*. It explores the characters' encounters with discrimination, Islamophobia, and racial bias.

Additionally, Muslim women face many obstacles because of wearing hijab and being an identifiable Muslim. They are pressured by others (non-Muslims women) in order to take off their veil. Therefore, Muslim Women are afraid of going outside with the hijab because they get stares and feel unsafe.

It is known that literature is the window through which one can see the aspiration of people. Literature is an index of any nation's pride, culture, history and future. So, there are many postcolonial writers who have decided to mirror the American society and show how the West see Muslims such as Salman Rushdie (1947-), Hanif Kureishi (1954-), and Khalid Hosseini (1965-). Moreover, many novels display the suffering of Muslims in the West, such as Mohsen Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Michael Gruber's *The Good Son* (2010), G. Wilson's *Alif The Unseen* (2012), Aisha Saeed's *Written In The Stars* (2015), and Sayed M. Masood's *Sway With Me* (2021).

The second part of the paper handles Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*. The main aim of this part is to show how Shaila Abdullah addresses the impact of Islamophobia on Muslims and how it has a negative impact of the image of America in the novel. In addition, it highlights the suffering of Muslims, especially Pakistani Muslims, in America in the post-9/11 attack.

Shaila Abdullah (1971-) is an award-winning Pakistani American writer and designer. Abdullah is the author of five novels: *Beyond The Cayenne Wall* (2005), *Saffron Dreams* (2009) and three children's novels: *My Friend Suhana* (2014), *Rani In Search of a Rainbow* (2014), and *A Manual for Marco* (2015). Abdullah has received various awards for her works including the Golden Quill Award, the Patras Bukhari Award for English Language, the Norumbega Jury Prize for Outstanding Fiction, and Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award. Several academic institutions have adopted her novels as a recommended reading or course study. Critics call Abdullah as "Word Artist".

The paper selects Shaila Abdullah because she displays the suffering of Muslim females in Pakistan and America. At the same time, among Abdullah's novels, the researcher picks up *Saffron Dreams* (2009) because it handles the theme of Islamophobia and its negative impact on American Muslims. Moreover, *Saffron Dreams* deals with the conflict between the

East and West which is an essential factor in forming the image of America in the eyes of immigrants.

Saffron Dreams is a significant novel written in the aftermath of 9/11. Numerous persons lost their lives on this attack. Arissa, the protagonist, narrates her painful story; she suffers from the death of her husband and being a Pakistani Muslim immigrant in America after the terrorist attack of 9/11. She also faces racism. It is difficult for Arissa, as a widow, to live alone without the support of her husband.

Thus, the main aim of *Saffron Dreams* is to show how Muslims are oppressed, marginalized, and subjugated in the West. Moreover, it portrays Muslim women as more independent, active, responsible, and decisive. The writer depends on the first-person point of view and flashbacks technique. Arissa looks back at the darkest and most difficult period of her life, tracing her self-confidence and recovered faith.

First of all, pre-9/11 is easy for Muslim immigrants because they are not suspected though they are thought to be different. Post-9/11, there is a line dividing Muslim from non-Muslim Westerners, creating an environment of suspicion. Muslims are blamed for disturbing harmony in the wake of 9/11. Arissa grows up in a wealthy family in Pakistan. Her family is open-minded and liberal. She gets married to a Pakistani man, Faizan. Both begin their new life in America as immigrants. Arissa enjoys her life with Faizan. After two years, she becomes pregnant. However, conditions of living are not comfortable; Arissa's life is ruined in the morning of 9/11. She watches the news that there is a terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre, the place where her husband works. Then, her husband died. Arissa finds it is hard to accept the loss.

For Arissa, this incident is the first struggle she has ever had in her life. The enthusiasm in Arissa's life begins to diminish. She faces a series of hits in her life that make it impossible and difficult for her to survive. Before the death of her husband, she always tells her husband, "we live a sheltered existence" (50). But after the death of her husband, Arissa feels "never again will I live the same way. We are sheltered no more" (52). This line confirms

that Arissa finds her life coming to end and she has nothing to live for.

For Pakistani Americans, the significance of family cohesion is important. The Pakistani man is the breadwinner and he drives most of his authority and power. He is also seen as the protector of his wife and children. Most Pakistani men prefer that their wives stay at home. On the other hand, the wife is seen as the centre of family by doing cleaning and cooking. Women are traditional in their roles to preserve their cultural and religious values, and they cannot forget their own traditions. Thus, Pakistani Americans keep their ethnic preservation in the face of Americanization. According to L. Sam and J. Berry, “the traditional cultural values and norms coupled with little or [...] the members and the culture of the dominant society” (12). So, it is clear that the cultural values that immigrants bring with them from their societies are significant in understanding and knowing family life and their integration into the host society.

After the death of her husband, Arissa has to face life as a pregnant widow; she finds herself lonely, painful, alienated, and without home or support. During the night, she does not sleep. Arissa spends nights thinking of her husband. Arissa says: “The empty space next to me in the bed seemed to grow bigger each time I looked, and the darkness magnified my loss to an incomprehensible degree [...] Many nights, I [...] sat at the foot of the bed [...], trying to make up for the person [her husband] I’d lost” (69). These words reflect Arissa’s suffering after the death of her husband.

As mentioned earlier, Arissa has to face America as a different place from her own country. She realizes a different treatment from Americans towards American Muslims, in general, and Pakistani Americans, in particular. Post-9/11 attack, Muslims are seen with suspicion, as they are all responsible for the attack of the World Trade. For instance, Arissa’s neighbors turn stranger. Arissa states: “I [...] had witnessed all sorts of looks in the past few days, the gazes from familiar friends who had turned unfamiliar, the silent blank stares of strangers, the angry, wounded looks wanting to hurt, the accusatory sidelong glances screaming

silently, You did it, your people [Muslims] brought the towers down” (58). It is clear that Arissa witnesses the sudden patriotism of Americans.

When Arissa gets out of her apartment for the first time after the death of her husband, a few boys follow and chase her. At the beginning, she believes that they chase her for money, but soon she notices they chase her because of her hijab; the veil that makes these boys follow her. They begin to blame her: “Where is the good in you? [...] You race of murderers. How can you live with yourself? [...] The veil that you wear [...] It’s all a façade. You try to look pure, but you are evil inside. You are the nonbelievers, not us” (59). It is clear that Islamophobia spreads prejudice against Muslims and Islam. Anti-Muslim hate groups frame Islam as a source of threat to the U.S. For them, Islam is a synonym of violence, death, and terrorist.

It is worth mentioning that Islamophobia has a negative impact on Muslim women in the field of hate crimes. They suffer from inequalities because of religion. The media portray the image of Muslim women as dangerous, especially when they wear hijab. In other words, discrimination is related to perceptions of their muslimness. As a result, Muslim women are the target of Islamophobia hate crimes, violence, and hate speech because of the veil.

Arissa tries to explain to these anti-Muslim hate groups, the American boys who chase her, that “[She is] much a victim as you are” (59). They refuse to believe her trying to stab her with a knife. Then, she is taken to the hospital because there is no movement of the baby in her womb; the doctors tell her that she should think of keeping or aborting the baby because the baby is not normal. Arissa feels that “the room lost all of its oxygen” (66). Therefore, she decides to “carry [Her] baby to term” (66). For Arissa, her baby is the final memory of her husband, and it is the only reason for her survival. For her, it is a gift from Faizan and a symbol of his memory that provides her with hope.

After this incident, Arissa refuses to be a source of pity. She wants to “take this journey [herself]” (6). She decides to earn a respectable life and looks for a job by giving up her hijab and

wearing a red shirt and a pair of jeans in an attempt to assimilate into American society. It is one of the negative impacts of Islamophobia on Arissa. Hijab becomes a symbol of violence and it is related to terrorism. Moreover, hijab hinders Arissa from moving on life because it is refused in an America overflowing with racial hatred. According to Dinah Zieger, “in post-9/11 American ideology, the veil has become an overtly political symbol for the oppression and violence of Islamic belief, and unveiling is seen as a corrective action” (278). Women who wear hijab are treated abusively and differently. Arissa recalls:

Some women took down their hijabs, afraid of being targeted, and adopted to a conservative but Western style of dressing. Men cut their beard. Many postponed plans to visit the country of their origin any time soon. Those who did travel preferred to remain quiet during their journey and chose not to converse in their native language even among family members. A few close friends changed their names – Salim became Sam, Ali converted to Alan – in an attempt to hide identities, when asked their nationalities, they offered evasive answers. (57-58)

These lines reflect the negative impact of Islamophobia on Muslim immigrants. They feel insecure in America because of the rise of anti-Muslim sentiments. So, Muslim men, on the one hand, change their names and appearance. On the other hand, Muslim women give up their veil to hide their Muslim identity. Suffice to say that there is no religious freedom in America.

Moreover, Islamophobia affects the identity crisis of American Muslims. Most Muslim immigrants try to hide their true identity under the American identity. Arissa states: “After the first list of hijackers’ names and nationalities was published, many Arab and Asian immigrants put up American flags on cars and shops, sign of solidarity laced with the hope of evading discrimination. It was a desperate attempt to show loyalty to a nation under attack” (57). It is clear that Muslims are conscious of the stereotypes that surround their community. As a result, Islamophobia has affected their decision to get involved in the American community.

For Arissa, giving up hijab helps her to avoid being stereotyped in America. So, she gives up her cultural tradition to be accepted and has the ability to cross her cultural barriers. According to Amir Shehzad and Shaheena Bhatti, “[Arissa’s] perception of the self is reflected through social identity formation. It is society that gives her the sense of identity when she interacts with society and the social constructs that allow her to define her self-image in relation to people and society” (7). Arissa negotiates her religious and cultural identity by crossing the barriers of traditional Islam to non-traditional secular world of America.

After giving up hijab, Arissa gets confused and feels guilty due to giving up what her husband desires. She sees herself as a prostitute. Arissa “feels naked, like a prostitute, my wares exposed for all to see [...] I longed for the veil I had let go” (116). These lines confirm that Arissa is torn between two selves: the old self represented in her Islamic identity; the second self is represented in new American identity.

On the other side, Arissa thinks that taking off her hijab allows her to free herself from the clutches of her tradition. She says: “the wind tore the veil from my hand, making my task easier,” (7) and she bids farewell to “the age-old tradition” (8). Arissa hates hijab because she wore it at the age of tenth. So, she does not enjoy her childhood. According to Arissa, “[...] colors define me [...] black reminds me of all that is sad and wrong in my life [...] it is also the color of my hijab – the dividing line between my life with Faizan and the one without him” (9-10). So, hijab reminds her of her past.

It is worth mentioning that Arissa’s removal of veil is a new beginning and her need for empowerment in American society. Ma, her mother-in-law, tells Arissa, “What I am saying is that, Arissa, it’s your life. I know why you’re making this decision [giving veil], and I am not the one to stand in your way. It’s always been a tradition in the family, but the tradition also was to live back home. We have modified our lives, and we do what we can do for those to come” (102). These lines mean that Arissa

assimilates into the American society for the sake of forthcoming generations.

Thus, one of the negative effects of Islamophobia is identity negotiation because Americans Muslims experience trauma that reshapes their identity. Saeed points out: “One aspect that has impacted Muslim American identity formation is the negative stereotypes that label Muslims as “terrorists,” “terrorist sympathizers,” or “the enemy”” (51). American Muslims have been victimized because of religion. So, the identities of Muslims are shaped by their perception of how non-Muslims feel about them. Needless to say that Islamophobia has stripped many Muslims of pride of who they are and how they feel about themselves.

Then, Arissa gives birth to an autistic boy, Raian, who needs special care. She decides to work to fulfill the economic needs of her family. According to M. Rajenthiran and K. Vijaya, Arissa’s life “fluctuates between past, and present, and the future” (614). Arissa thinks of Fizan, her past with him, and her painful nights. Arissa also thinks of her family’s need. At the same time, she is worried about her son’s future.

Ba and Ma, her family-in-law, encourage Arissa to fight back against Atrocity of life. Arissa says: “Ma came to me in each morning with a cup of steaming tea and helped me sit up, forcing me to face the new day. She smelled of soap and water, fresh like spring. She would draw the curtain and sit next to me and encourage me to talk” (73). Despite the death of their son, Ma and Ba try to hide their sadness and immunity to the loss. According to Arissa, “throughout their son’s death and afterward, they [Ma and Ba] held each other through the waves of sadness and the ripples of lost hope that crashed against the giant rocks of desperation and made it ashore – always together, generously passing on that gift to me” (76). They play an important and vital role in Arissa’s recovery and healing process. For example, Arissa says: “[Ma] had cried many nights by herself but always woke up with a vow in her heart to be a healing balm to others around her” (90).

At the same time, Arissa works as an editor of Chamak; the Asian magazine, especially after giving up her hijab. The job provides her with the opportunity to develop social connections and lessen the threat of isolation. During her work, Arissa gets a phone call asking her “Muslim harmed by Muslim, how do you react?” (115). She replies, “They [terrorists] are not my people [Muslims], those few whose beliefs do not even reflect the religion” (115). Actually, she has gone lifeless after the 9/11 attack because she loses her husband in the same attack. Arissa continues: “When you put all your potatoes in a sack, you should know they all have flavours. Some are rotten, some fresh. Just because they are clumped together doesn’t make them all the same” (116). She means that not all Muslims are terrorists because terrorist has no religion.

Arissa again is caught in dilemma after finding the incomplete book, *Soul Searcher*, for her husband. Before his death, he used to work on it; it is his dream. Arissa finds it is her duty to complete her husband’s work. Although she is not near her husband in writing, she decides to accomplish the dream of her husband. According to Arissa, finishing her husband’s novel is “a very significant part of my life [...]” (218). She means that the novel immortalizes her husband’s name and brings his name into life. So, she decides to choose saffron to be the color of her husband’s book cover.

Hence, the title of the novel *Saffron Dreams* means that Arissa’s husband’s dream is to publish the cover of his book with a background of saffron colour. Arissa says: “[...] the color of saffron [...] It was [...] the color that Faizan dreamed of having on the cover of his unfinished book, a project he thought would make him a famous writer one day” (9). She adds: “dreams are never easy to create; they take a lot out of you [...] saffron [...] that would be the cover of *Soul Searcher*” (13). These lines confirm that Arissa becomes successful, independent, and strong. Rabia Ashraf states that “giving life to the pages of Faizan’s *Soul Searcher* gives life to Arissa’s soul” (109). Therefore, Arissa is proud of herself and her husband.

It is worth mentioning that Arissa begins her journey in America of loss and suffering and finishes her journey with empowerment. Arissa says:

My journey spans half a decade, from the biggest loss of my life to where I am now. It is a tale of grief and happiness, of control and losing control, of barriers and openings, of prejudices and acceptance, of holding on and letting go. It is about turning my heart inside out, mending it, and putting it right back in as it is about looking at life from the perspective of someone trapped in time. (10)

It is clear that Arissa becomes Americanized, and she overcomes all societal barriers against Muslim Women in America. Arissa, finally, buys her own home and lives with her disabled child who signs: “you’re shining, Mama” (224). This is a declaration about her happiness in America.

To conclude, *Saffron Dreams* dispels the notion of Islamophobia and the stereotypes of Muslims and Islam. Moreover, it represents Muslim women as independent. *Saffron Dreams* chronicles Arissa’s journey from Pakistan to America, from a widow to recovered woman, and from a traumatized woman to a professional editor and a strong single-mother. Actually, it is a novel of hope in dealing with life’s cruel turns. Arissa becomes self-sufficient to overcome her grief, become a good mother, nurture her talent by finishing her husband’s novel in his honor, and find her womanhood again.

The conclusion summarizes the key findings of the paper and highlights the nuanced and complex image of America as depicted in Sheila Abdalla's *Saffron Dreams*. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the immigrant minority perspective in shaping perceptions of America and fostering cultural understanding and empathy. By examining the portrayal of America in *Saffron Dreams* through the eyes of immigrant minorities, this paper has contributed to the presentation of a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience and the complexities of cultural assimilation in the United States.

The paper findings reveal that *Saffron Dreams* provides a multi-dimensional portrayal of America, challenging simplistic stereotypes and presenting a nuanced perspective on the immigrant experience. The novel explores the struggles and aspirations of the protagonist, Arissa, as an Indian Muslim immigrant, in the course of navigating her identity, cultural heritage, and the American society. One of the key findings is that *Saffron Dreams* highlights the tension between the desire to preserve one's cultural roots and the pressure to assimilate into American society. Arissa grapples with her Indian heritage and Muslim identity while striving to fit into the predominantly white and Christian American environment. The novel showcases the challenges faced by immigrant minorities in reconciling their cultural background with the expectations and norms of the host country. Furthermore, the paper uncovers the importance of empathy and cultural understanding in bridging the gaps between different communities. Through the narrative of *Saffron Dreams*, readers gain insights into the experiences, emotions, and aspirations of immigrant minorities, fostering a greater sense of empathy and encouraging a more inclusive and tolerant society.

The paper highlights the significance of literature as a tool for promoting dialogue and understanding between different cultures. Indeed, *Saffron Dreams* serves as a powerful medium to shed light on the complexities of the immigrant experience, allowing readers to engage with the diverse perspectives and challenges faced by immigrant minorities in America. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes that understanding the immigrant minority perspective is crucial for developing a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of America.

Works Cited

- Abdullah, Shaila. *Saffron Dreams*. The United States: Loving Healing Press Inc., 2009. Print.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013. Print.

- Ali, Areeza. *The Impact of Islamophobia on the Muslim American Community: Accounts of Psychological Suffering, Identity Negotiation, and Collective Trauma*. Northampton: Smith College, 2017. Print.
- Almarza, Dario J. "Contexts shaping minority language students' perceptions of American history" *Journal of Social Studies Research*; Cedar Hall Vol. 25, Iss. 2, (Fall 2001): 4. Web.
- Ashraf, Rabia. "An Optimistic Evolution of Existence in *Saffron Dreams* by Shaila Abdullah." *LII*, Vol, 15, No. 6, 2015, pp. (93-125). Print.
- Awan, Imran & Irene Zempi. "A Working Definition of Islamophobia." *Human Rights Council*, 2020, pp. (1-20). Print.
- Bleich, Erik. "What Is Islamophobia and How Much Is There? Theorizing and Measuring an Emerging Comparative Concept." *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 55, No.12, 2011, pp. (1581– 1600). Print.
- Bleich ,Erik, Irene Bloemraad & Els de Graauw . "Migrants, Minorities and the Media: Information, Representations and Participation in the Public Sphere", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41:6, 857-873, 2015, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2014.1002197.Web.
- Bloemraad, Irene & Karen Schönwälder . "Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Representation in Europe: Conceptual Challenges and Theoretical Approaches", *West European Politics*, 36:3, 564-579, 2013. DOI: [10.1080/01402382.2013.773724](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2013.773724)
- Conway, Gordon. "Islamophobia: a Challenge for All Of Us." *The Runnymede Trust*, 1997. Print.
- Ferraro, Thomas J. *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in Twentieth- Century America*. USA: University of Chicago, 1993. Print.
- Given, Lisa. M. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. California, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2008. Print.

- Gottschalk, Peter & Gabriel Greenberg. *Islamophobia: Making Muslims The Enemy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007. Print.
- Koshy, Susan. "The Fiction of Asian American Literature." *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 9 no. 2, 1996, p. 315-346. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/yale.1996.0017
- Krastev, Nikola. "World: UN Forum Explores Ways To Fight Islamophobia." *Radio Free Europe*, 2004. Web. Accessed on 22nd June 2022.
- Kunovich, Robert Michael. "Perceptions of Racial Group Size in a Minority-majority Area". *Sociological Perspectives*, 60(3), 479– 496, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121416675869>. Web.
- Lee, Sherman *et al.* "The Islamophobia Scale: Instrument Development and Initial Validation." *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, Vol. 19, No.2, 2009, pp. (92-105). Print.
- Olatunji, Agboola. "Thematic Changes in Postcolonial African Literature: From Colonialism to Neo-Colonialism." *Sino-US English Teaching*, Vol.7, No. 10, 2010, pp.125-134. Print.
- Rajenthiran, M. & K. Vijaya. "Survival Struggles in Shaila Abdullah' *Saffron Dreams*; A Neo-Orientalist Perspective." *IJIRT*, Vol. 8 , No. 10, 2022, pp. (611-615). Print.
- Saeed, Amir. "Media, Racism and Islamophobia: The Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Media." *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 1, No.2, 2007, pp. (443–462). Print.
- Sam, L. & J. Berry. "Acculturative Stress among Immigrants in Norway." *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 36, No.1, 1995, pp. (10-24). Print.
- Shehzad, Amir & Shaheena Bhatti. " Self-Transformation Through Traumatic Encounter: Pakistani Diaspora Women After 9/11." *ResearchGate*, 2021, pp. (1-9). Print.

- Werbner, P. "Islamophobia: Incitement to Religious Hatred—Legislating for a New Fear?" *Anthropology Today*, Vol.21, No. 1, 2005, pp. (5-9). Print.
- Zieger, Dinah. "The Afghan Girl! Ideology Unveiled in National Geographic." *The Veil: Women Writers on its History, Lore, and Politics*, Ed. Jenifer Heath. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. Print.
- Zúquete, José Pedro. "The European Extreme-Right and Islam: New directions?" *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 13, 2008, pp. (321-344). Print.