

A Study Of Faith And Forgiveness In Sahar Mustafah's "The Beauty Of Your Face": A Journey Toward Healing In Modern Society.

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Abstract

This paper deconstructs the concepts of faith and forgiveness with reference to the novel "The Beauty of Your Face" by Sahar Mustafah. It provides context within modern society, by way of Islamophobia, racism, and identity development. "Beauty reflects the purity of one's heart and how mentally and emotionally content a person is in life. This inner satisfaction is achievable through forgiveness, by letting go of negativity stemming from past actions. We're living in a time when many people struggle with their identity, often getting caught up in social media's artificial standards of beauty and success. But this novel suggests something different - that real beauty comes from having a pure heart and finding peace through forgiveness. This qualitative study draws on psycho-social and religious theories to explore how faith empowers individuals and how forgiveness aids in healing emotional wounds. Through the journey of Afaf Rahman, a Palestinian-American Muslim woman and the novel's protagonist, this paper reveals how faith and forgiveness act as transformative tools, fostering healing and self-realization. In doing so, it highlights the profound impact of faith and forgiveness in a modern context, addressing complex issues of race, religion, and identity.

Keywords: faith, forgiveness, Islamophobia, identity, trauma, Sahar Mustafah, The Beauty of Your Face, modern society.

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I. Introduction

Sahar Mustafah's *The Beauty of Your Face* explores fluidity of identity formation in a growingly hostile world toward difference. Afaf Rahman, the Palestinian-American Muslim woman protagonist, stands at the crossroads of personal trauma, racial discrimination, and societal marginalization. Afaf's path of faith and forgiveness is both personal odyssey and reflection of greater social struggles in identity, faith, and belonging within the contexts of rising Islamophobia and pervasive racial biases of the modern era.

The story of Afaf's path toward healing and rehabilitation facilitated by a deeper embracing of Islam parallels that of many other Muslim women in America. Against this backdrop set in the context of the racial tensions present post-9/11, this novel offers the reader opportunities to shift through how faith can become an empowering tool for resilience in the face of society's rejection. Forgiving herself and others is central to Afaf's experiences, creating a framework under which she may be able to heal emotionally and spiritually.

This paper investigates how faith turns out to be a source of comfort for Afaf in trying to overcome adversity and how forgiveness helps her cope with the present moment and scars of the past. This paper also situates these themes within the broader societal context that asks how Afaf's story appeals to the contemporary issues of racism and Islamophobia and the formation of identity in modern society.

In the chaotic and panic-stricken world of today, such scenarios might seem to have decreased, but in the 21st century, dealing with mental frustrations is more vital than ever. This is the "Kaliyug" age, and it's the time when one needs to seek relief from karma and find peace by forgiving others, not for their benefit but to our self-growth and development. Though we can manifest all of our capabilities in order to achieve our wishes, the absence of forgiveness can lead to mental agonies because of the actions of others. Maintaining Faith in Oneself in Modern Life In the modern society, faith in oneself is very essential. Even in a fast-paced world, we can grow, but we have to learn to forgive and forget those things that impede us on our path toward self-growth and betterment. This way we become the best version of ourselves. To quote, "Knowledge without execution is mere hallucination." At such a time, it is ever so important to bring about the concept of faith and face modern problems of insecurity, jealousy, inferiority complexes, mental trauma, frustration, depression, and envy through the tool of forgiveness. Staking up in this contemporary world, embracing faith and forgiveness is what helps navigate the challenges of contemporary life, which will be filled with the succour of growth in one's

personal life.

Faith in Islam means submission to Allah's will. So without faith one cannot be a Muslim. Faith in the present novel act as a leading force navigating her journey ,providing a framework to heal from her traumatic experience of past and forgive herself and others and develop a compassionate attitude .

Surah Al-Baqarah (2:286):

"Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear..."

This verse reflects the idea that faith provides strength to endure life's hardships. In Afaf's journey, her faith in Islam gives her the resilience to overcome challenges, just as the Qur'an teaches that Allah never gives more than one can handle.

Surah Al-Ankabut (29:69):

"And those who strive for Us—We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good."

This verse reflects the power of faith in guiding individuals through life's difficulties. Afaf's efforts to rediscover her faith and live according to Islamic principles are rewarded with inner peace and spiritual growth.

Surah Al-Baqarah (2:153):

"O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient." This line emphasizes the importance of patience and prayer, key elements of Afaf's healing process as she reconnects with Islam and finds solace in her faith.

II. Faith As A Source Of Comfort And Transformation In Modern Society

Faith is a strong factor in Afaf's life, defining the change from individual change to radical transformation. Afaf is born into a culturally Muslim family who practices Islam traditionally but in a superficial way, possessing inwardness that profoundly lacks spirit. This family's relationship with religion is cultural practice and mostly shallowly practicing the religion. This disconnection between culture and faith finds itself mirroring the many Muslim communities in the West, a place where pressures to fit into a broader societal fabric often overshadow deeper spiritual engagement.

In today's Islamophobic world where being religious is placed on a pedestal of prejudice, faith crises are common for many Muslims. For Afaf, this crisis is compounded with personal trauma-the disappearance of her elder sister, Nada, and emotional alienation from her mother. This is the case for many Muslim individuals who, following social and personal distress, may end up estranged from their faith.

However, the real turning point in Afaf's spiritual journey is when she rediscovers Islam at the Islamic Center of Greater Chicago. It is within this nurturing environment that Afaf learns some of the core principles of Islam: Shahadah, Salah, Sawm, and Hajj. These pillars begin to play a great role in Afaf's spiritual journey, giving her a sense of belonging, purpose, and inner peace.

Afaf's renewal reflects the larger process in the lives of many Muslims in contemporary society who look to faith as a source of comfort within external difficulties. The community support that she experiences at the Islamic Center is one of the key elements of faith in modern spaces: the function of communal relations within spiritual resiliency. A whole world stays aside most of its time, disowning Muslims, to say it more especially Muslim women, but Afaf's story is the epitome in which faith may serve as a structure by which individuals are able to draw, cope and navigate with societal pressures.

Afaf's embracing Islam is shown as transformation that gives her a sense of resolution and belonging. she is left abandoned and alienated after the disappearance of her elder sister Nada. Her life is shattered as she is emotionally disconnected from her mother . the novel is written in two time line past and present. Where her family is shown as practicing Islam in a culturally tradition but not profoundly spiritual way. At this stage faith doesn't act a source of comfort or connection for her .

She rediscover Islam at The Islamic center of Greater Chicago through her friend and this became her turning point of her as being Palestine - American women in aftermath of 9/11 attack where Islamophobia and racism is prevailing. She got a supportive and nurturing environment at this Islamic center. It's her faith which helps her to endure all the hardship she faces earlier in her life and she develops her identity as Muslim through the support of the community member by following four pillars of Islamic teaching as faith (shahadah), Salah (prayer), sawm (fasting) and Hajj (pilgrimage). This shows her spirituality and connection with Islam.

In the Islamic context faith is referred to as Imam or belief in the unity of Allah and his prophet. Living according to Islamic rule is having trust, submission and surrender to the will of god. Afaf feeling of detachment and marginalization is determine by her experiences as a Palestine -American immigrant. After her elder sister Nada's disappearance she was neglected and abandoned by her mother. In the wake of 9/11 she often faces discrimination due to her Muslim identity for example when she and her school was attacked by a

white supremacist shooter. All throughout the novel she struggles to maintain a balance towards her devotion to her faith with the compulsion of integration and the Islamophobia she experiences as an adult. It is her faith which helps her to promote a sense of community where she educate young girls from Muslim background and provide safe environment to them who struggle with issues like belonging and identity. Her exposure to Islam is depicted as a trans formative event that gives a feeling of purpose and identity. Islam helps her to reconstruct her identity by offering her society ,a moral code and a way to self discipline enabling her to restore her identity and cope with her pain and isolation.

III. Discussion

Forgiveness as vehicle for healing in modern society

This novel is written from the perspective of forgiveness. Forgiveness act as a tool for Afaf to heal emotionally and spiritually .In Islamic context forgiveness goes beyond personal exercise as it is deeply spiritual act of mercy and compassion. Forgiveness becomes an integral part of Afaf journey towards healing - in that she must forgive others but more importantly forgive herself.

Afaf's traumatic past keeps her in the mercy of a deep sense of abandonment, alienation, and loss. Too much depth of psychological wounds has been witnessed from the disappearance of her sister Nada with an emotionally detached mother. This struggle with self represents challenges in many Muslim individuals living in this modern society where individual trauma coincides with stereotypes and prejudice from society. In particular, such Islamophobia adds one more layer of alienation to people like Afaf, making it even harder for them to find a sense of belonging.

Forgiveness itself becomes a trans formative process for Afaf. It is as if with renewed contact with her faith she begins to forgive her mother for her absence, her sister for her disappearing, and the community for shallow engagement with Islam. Most importantly, perhaps she has to learn to forgive herself for internalizing shame, guilt, and pain that actually define her identity. This is where she can free herself from the emotional weight of those experiences and open her life to a more compassionate and peaceful view.

Forgiveness is depicted in the novel as not giving up and allowing but as a great empowering tool for personal growth, and Afaf reclaims control over her life and does not let the bitterness and anger of the past define her. This is consistent with the teachings of Islam, where forgiveness is the only means of fostering mercy and compassion—toward oneself as well as to others.

In modern society today, where Muslims are constantly portrayed in the media as the "other," it is added meaning to forgiveness. Afaf's journey represents the bigger conflict that any marginalized community must face and reconcile personal trauma with external pressure to live in a prejudiced society. Forgiving both her self and the world that wronged her brings a sense of peace and healing to Afaf which gives her sense of liberation.

Surah Ash-Shura (42:43):

“And whoever is patient and forgives – indeed, that is of the matters [worthy] of determination.”

This verse encourages patience and forgiveness as qualities of the strong. Like Afaf, who forgives those who hurt her, the Qur'an emphasizes the virtue of letting go of anger and resentment to achieve inner peace.

Surah An-Nur (24:22):

“... and let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.”

This verse stresses the importance of forgiveness by reminding believers that they should forgive others just as they seek forgiveness from Allah. Afaf's journey of forgiveness mirrors this concept, as she learns to forgive her mother, herself, and others.

Surah Al-Imran (3:134):

“Those who spend [in Allah's cause] in prosperity and adversity, who repress anger, and who pardon men; verily, Allah loves the good-doers.”

This verse illustrates the virtue of repressing anger and forgiving others. Afaf's emotional and spiritual growth, guided by her faith, aligns with the Qur'an's teachings on controlling anger and showing compassion.

Surah Al-A'raf (7:199):

“Show forgiveness, enjoin what is good, and turn away from the ignorant.”

This verse teaches the value of forgiveness and focusing on good deeds. Afaf's decision to forgive those who wronged her and focus on her spiritual journey mirrors this Qur'anic instruction.

IV. Faith, Identity, And Islamophobia In Modern Society

An important theme of Afaf's journey in *The Beauty of Your Face* relates to faith, identity, and Islamophobia. Afaf is both a Palestinian-American Muslim woman and bears witness to many trials that check her mettle at both a personal and societal level. As Islamophobia sweeps the American post-9/11 world, Muslims are often viewed through a lens of suspicion and fear. For Afaf, this societal prejudice has manifested itself in both overt as well as subtle ways, during the formation of her sense of identity. It is not just an external conflict Afaf faces but also the internal one. The pressure to become part of American society, coupled with the fear of being ostracized for being a Muslim, becomes an internal battle for Afaf; one that many Muslims can understand when imagining modern society. The internalized Islamophobia and the trauma she had experienced in the past ignite a crisis of identity for Afaf.

Through her reconnection with Islam, Afaf begins to assert her identity claims; embracing the spiritual metaphysics of being Muslim helps dislodge from the confine that society had placed on her, such as not complying with how one believes a Western woman or religion ought to be. The freedom allows her to reclaim and control the Muslim identity over her head so that she subverts the dominant stories of the given Islamophobia interested in representing her.

Moreover, in today's society, where in mind the case of Muslims is always terrorism and extremism and all that, Afaf's journey of faith and identity is more meaningful. Because of its argument over the dominant narrative in its attempt to ostracize the Muslim women, this descriptions portrayed what it is like to be a Muslim woman in contemporary America with nuances. In her faith, Afaf takes power, not letting Islamophobia forces do evil to the image of a proud Muslim woman.

In the analysis of Afaf's journey in *The Beauty of Your Face*, this study uses both psychological and religious theories. From a psychological perspective, rediscovery of faith for Afaf would be taken as a part of the identity-formation process in Erik Erikson's theory of psycho-social development. According to Erickson, the most important stage of identity formation is adolescence and young adulthood. But if crisis occurs at this stage, then identity would break into pieces. Afaf has disaffiliated from her family, her sister has disappeared, and lives in an Islamophobic society which leads to Afaf's crisis of identity. Erickson theory of identity vs. role confusion is highly pertinent in trying to understand Afaf's problem. Being a Muslim woman in a society suspicious of Islam, Afaf undergoes a crisis of identification. Her coming back to her faith and finding identity in being a Muslim is a resolution of this identity crisis, and thus she could realize a stage of identity and give meaning to her life.

From the religious perspective, Afaf's journey matches up with the Islamic concept of Iman, that is not the mere belief in Allah but also the total surrender or submission to the will of Allah. This surrender provides a way of understanding and coping with the problems of life; especially, when it is shunned by society. It is seen in the novel how faith made it easier for Afaf to understand her agony by becoming a source of forgiveness and finally developing a personal improvement.

V. Conclusion

Sahar Mustafah's novel, *The Beauty of Your Face*, is a compelling story of faith and forgiveness. The story shows how Afaf uses her faith to overcome challenges and how forgiveness helps her heal from past hurts. It's similar to see what we see in Khuswant Singh's "Train to Pakistan", where true beauty is shown to be more about what's inside than how someone looks. In this instance, in terms of Afaf navigating personal trauma and broader discrimination, it is through her relation to Islam that she pulls away from societal pressure, the external, as well as internalized scars. It explores how the protagonist Afaf Rehman endeavor to recover her faith through her exposure to racism and Islamophobia. It also studies that being a Muslim women in America she faces traumatic experience in her past and creates her own identity by overcoming all the challenges amidst societal pressure. Thus faith becomes the driving force in shaping her life and making her strong enough to forgive and find inner peace and solace. It unfolds amidst the probabilities of modern societal challenges. Afaf's journey within this novel signifies the power of faith and resilience in states of adversity presented to individuals and societies alike. Her story also places much emphasis on forgiveness, for it helps her rid herself of all the burdens of past traumas and thus wear a more compassionate, peaceful garment in life.

In such a society of Islamophobia and racism that defines the experience of Muslims, Afaf's journey is about empowerment and resilience. Her story dislodges the center about the dominant societal narrative that wants to marginalize Muslim women, moving against the hegemonic rhetoric of delegitimization, offering a counter-narrative of faith, forgiveness, and personal growth.

The questions of identity, faith, and belonging are central to contemporary social dynamics and remain relevant; therefore, the novel provides the reader with an opportunity to understand how, under trying circumstances, people derive strength from their faith. Faith and forgiveness are but a couple of those themes that will be used to give the reader a point of understanding of how these issues will come about as tools of healing and empowerment in modern society.

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