

# The Prevent Duty Act Through a Teenage Girl in *I Am Thunder*

## Genç bir Kız Aracılığıyla *I Am Thunder* Romanında Terörü Önleme Kanunu

Alper TULGAR 

Department of Foreign Languages,  
Atatürk University, School of  
Foreign Languages, Erzurum,  
Turkey



### ABSTRACT

On July 7 and 21, 2005, the London transport system was attacked by four bombers. The 7/7 attack was the largest terrorist attack in the United Kingdom, resulting in 775 casualties and 52 deaths (four bombers not included). The 7/7 London bombings altered the policy of the United Kingdom's counterterrorism policies radically because it was realized that within the country, those bombers were raised and radicalized. With the implementation of the Prevent Duty Act in 2015, the formal institutions of the government in the United Kingdom particularly educational establishments were asked to get involved to defeat organized terrorist attacks and to prevent young people from being radicalized and brainwashed. It has been shown that the Prevent act has had adverse effects on Muslim students by creating a "new suspect community." Muhammad Khan's novel titled *I Am Thunder* deals with how young Muslim British students are affected by these new precautions. Muslim students are considered to be potential terrorists and ready to be radicalized. The protagonist of *I Am Thunder* is a 15-year-old high-school student who is creative and smart but is constantly oppressed by her parents. Islamophobia is a recurring theme in the novel since Muzna's peers constantly criticize and mock her due to her darker skin and religion. Particularly after various terrorist attacks, Muslims are targeted and blamed of taking part in attacks, even though they are not associated with those attacks. The author aims to show the hypocrisy of people who takes advantage of people's religious beliefs. At the end of the novel, Muzna succeeds in stopping a terrorist attack aiming to kill innocent people. She, in the end, accepts her British identity and learns how to practice Islam regardless of other people's thoughts.

**Keywords:** Britishness, *I Am Thunder*, Islamophobia, Muslim identity, Prevent Duty

### ÖZ

7 ve 21 Temmuz 2005'te Londra ulaşım sistemi dört bombacı saldırgan tarafından saldırıya uğradı. 7/7 saldırısı, Birleşik Krallık'taki en büyük terörist saldırıydı ve 775 yaralı ve 52 ölümlü sonuçlandı (dört bombacı saldırgan dâhil değil). 7/7 Londra bombalamaları, Birleşik Krallık'ın terörle mücadele politikalarını kökten değiştirdi; çünkü bu saldırganların ülke içinde büyütüldüğü ve radikalleştirildiği anlaşıldı. 2015 yılında terörle mücadele yasasında yapılan değişikliklerle Terörü Önleme Kanunu'nun yürürlüğe girmesiyle birlikte, Birleşik Krallık'taki hükümetin resmi kurumlarının, özellikle eğitim kurumlarının, organize terör saldırılarını durdurmak ve gençlerin radikalleşmesini ve beyinlerinin yıkanmasını önlemek için görev alması istendi. Terörü Önleme Kanunu'nun "yeni bir şüpheli topluluk" yaratarak Müslüman öğrenciler üzerinde olumsuz etkileri olduğu gösterildi. Muhammed Khan'ın *I Am Thunder* adlı romanı, genç Müslüman İngiliz öğrencilerin bu yeni önlemlerden nasıl etkilendiğini ele alır. Müslüman öğrenciler potansiyel terörist ve radikalleşmeye hazır bireyler olarak kabul edilir. *I Am Thunder* romanının başkahramanı, yaratıcı ve zeki ama sürekli olarak ailesi tarafından baskı gören 15 yaşında bir lise öğrencisidir. Muzna'nın yaşattıkları koyu dini ve dini nedeniyle onu sürekli eleştirdikleri ve onunla alay ettikleri için İslamofobi romanda tekrar eden bir temadır. Özellikle çeşitli terör saldırılarından sonra Müslümanlar, bu saldırılarla ilgisi olmasa da saldırılara katılmakla suçlanmakta ve hedef gösterilmektedirler. Yazar, insanların dini inançlarından yararlanan insanların ikiyüzlülüğünü göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Romanın sonunda Muzna, masum insanları öldürmeyi amaçlayan bir terör saldırısını durdurmayı başarır. Sonunda İngiliz kimliğini kabul eder ve diğer insanların düşüncelerinden bağımsız olarak İslam'ı nasıl yaşayacağını öğrenir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İngilizlik, *I Am Thunder*, İslamofobi, Müslüman kimliği, Önleme Yasası

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Corresponding Author/Sorumlu Yazar:

Alper TULGAR

E-mail: alper.tulgar@atauni.edu.tr

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“Being a brown kid was tough. Being a poor brown kid was way harder” (Khan, 2018, p. 53).

### Introduction

Muhammad Khan is a British-born Pakistani. His novel, *I Am Thunder*, narrates the story of Muzna, the protagonist, who is a 15-year-old high-school student under parental pressure to be a doctor. Constantly thinking that she is not a teenager but an innocent girl, her mother expresses disapproval of Muzna due to her unmaidenly desires. Muzna is mocked at school due to her physical appearance, especially her facial hair, the removal of which has been prohibited by her parents. Thus, she is prone to be held up to ridicule and humiliation at school. The offensive and rude remarks about Muzna stem from her ethnicity and religion. Non-Muslim characters humiliate her because of her ethnic background.

Her best friend, Salma, had a strict Pakistani father as well and knows exactly how Muzna feels. As Muzna's only friend, she supports her; however, since Salma does not obey any rules forced on her, Muzna's parents do not condone their friendship. Muzna's father is portrayed as a Muslim with an underpaid salary. Losing his job, he has to work at his brother's restaurant. He condemns the international terrorist organizations believing that he is the victim of racism as a result of their terrorist attacks. Muzna's parents are clearly oppressive, but their despotic power over Muzna is not the result of their religious beliefs. They do not practice their faith or live according to the rules of Islam. However, they are unable to free themselves from the cultural rules imposed upon them in their homeland. Muzna is repressed by her parents not because of their religious beliefs but the fear of the possibility of being targeted by the Islamic community. They struggle to lead their lives in line with a front they have been building to look like proper pious Muslims. The hypocrisy they exhibit is criticized in the novel immensely. Muzna thinks, “being a ‘good Pakistani’ was everything and being a ‘good Muslim’ came second. I could belt out Noor Jehan's top five hits in Punjabi, but don't ask me to recite five surahs from the Qur'an” (Khan, 2018, p. 21)<sup>1</sup>. Through this extract, it is clear that for Muzna's parents, complying with the societal rules of Pakistan is attached much importance. Living in obedience to the rules of Islam is of secondary importance and sometimes not vital at all. Muzna admits that as a family they are not devoted to the practices of Islam: “With nothing more I could do, I turned to prayer. I don't mean the full-body movements, facing-Mecca type of prayer. We just weren't that sort of family” (41). Muzna's parents feel that being targeted by the government can best be avoided by not practicing Islam.

### The Implementation of the Prevent Duty Act at Schools and Counterterrorism

Terrorism is believed not to have a fixed definition that encompasses all sides of it since it can be used subjectively in the case of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Richards, 2018, p. 14). Both sides can accuse the other of committing terrorist acts and consider their own fight as an act of freedom. Especially after the 9/11 attacks, terrorism became a subject of interest, and people instantly started conducting research on terrorism and counter-terrorism (Silke, 2018). For the UK, the 7/7 terrorist attacks changed the policy of counter-terrorism completely, and British people faced the reality that those terrorists were radicalized without any foreign associations within the country (Ray, 2022, August 26).

The act to fight against radicalization is called “Prevent” in the UK (Barrett, 2017). It became a counter-terrorism strategy of the UK in 2015 that involved formal government structures including schools to take necessary actions (Lundie, 2019). The aim of Prevent is stated to prevent “vulnerable people” from taking part in any terrorist activities (Home Office, 2018, p. 31). It also enhanced “the mechanisms of surveillance and governance” in the UK (Whiting et al., 2021, p. 531). With the introduction of Prevent Duty, Muslims are negatively and disproportionately impacted, and the trust between academic staff and Muslim university students has been damaged (Abbas et al., 2021). Studies have also demonstrated that Muslims are negatively affected by policies related to counter-terrorism in the UK (Hart, 2021; Heath-Kelly, 2013; Jerome et al., 2019). A study examining the experiences of 25 university students who identified themselves as “British Muslims” showed that the Prevent Duty stigmatizes Muslim students by implying that they are potential terrorists. Due to the prejudice, they avoid practicing Islam for fear that they be labeled as dangerous and radicalized people (Zempi & Tripli, 2022). Pantazis and Pemberton claim that Muslims have been identified as the “new suspect community” because of the legislations introduced to combat terrorism. Muslim communities are under suspicion of carrying out terrorist attacks (2009). The term “new suspect community” refers to the term “suspect community” introduced to literature by Paddy Hillyard (1993). Hillyard's (1993) book focusing on Irish people's experiences after the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was enacted in 1974 demonstrates how 115 people were arrested in England, Wales, and Scotland between the years 1978 and 1991. He discusses how the PTA affected people's lives and its general effect on the Irish community. Hillyard stresses the exploitation of the Act in the direction of the manipulations of those in power and that the whole Irish community was targeted as with the claim that terror should be stopped. From Paddy's accounts, one can note that various civil and political rights were violated during this era, and the PTA had severe consequences that changed the lives of Irish people irrevocably. Stigmatizing a certain group or community and blaming them for possible acts of terrorism that they are not associated with create a community that is constantly suspected. Hillyard's term “suspect community” is adapted to the experiences of young British Muslims by Pantazis and Pemberton. However, the Prevent Duty is criticized on the grounds that young British Muslims are marginalized with the claim that they are more vulnerable to being radicalized by certain terrorist groups. British Muslims are believed to suffer from acculturation and discrimination (Robinson et al., 2017). The question why some people become radicalized while others do not arises, and it is stated that various social, political, personal, and religious events may trigger the radicalization process (Christmann, 2012). Muslims suffer from being labeled and the effects of being stigmatized (Cherney & Murphy, 2016). Young British Muslims have been suspected to be radicalized due to their assumed vulnerability (Hosseini, 2013; McDonald, 2011).

<sup>1</sup> From now on, only page numbers will be given for the novel *I am Thunder* (2018) by Muhammad Khan.

Muslims in general have been the subject of “criticism, intolerance, and abuse” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Morey, 2018, p. 2). The approach to modernity is criticized because “claims that Muslims and their holy book are ‘backward’ or ‘barbaric’ are always predicated on the assumption that ‘we’ in the West have a monopoly on ‘modernity’ and ‘normality’” (Morey, 2018, p. 16). This false sense of superiority creates arrogance and self-righteousness that both end up with othering Muslims. Madeline-Sophie Abbas addresses how Muslim parents try to raise their children as moderate Muslims according to the instructions of the state. Parents especially want to evade some markers signifying Islam such as the beard, hijab, and the ritual prayers of Islam for fear that they could be labeled as extremists (Abbas, 2019).

The 7 July 2005 London bombings were a turning point for the UK in terms of counterterrorism. Four suicide bombers killed 52 people, and hundreds of people were injured (“7 July London Bombings: What Happened That Day?,” 2015, July 3), and over 72% of the survivors of the bombings suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which was a predominant diagnosis (Brewin et al., 2008). The July Seven bombings affected people’s lives significantly and had long-lasting grave effects. The 11 September 2001 and 7 July 2005 terrorist attacks are marked as “the era of jihadi terrorism, with its global ambitions and disregard for mass civilian casualties, in contrast to the more confined nationalist and ethnic campaigns which predominated before those times” (Walker, 2018, p. 406). The effects of these attacks are frequently portrayed in both fiction and nonfiction such as *Londonstani* by Gautam Malkani, *Out of the Tunnel* by Rachel North, *Black Swan Green* by David Mitchell.

### Islamophobia Represented in the Novel *I Am Thunder*

Making a generalization about all Muslims is problematic, and it is shown explicitly in the novel, similar to a white Christian man’s actions cannot illustrate the essence of Christianity, those people who call themselves Muslims but do not practice its main principles should not create an image of Islam. The author purposefully places some characters who are prone to violence and intolerance to show that not all Muslims are the same. While making a classification on white Christian people is impossible, the same is not equally valid for Muslims. The author exemplifies this view with a tragic real-life example. Arif reads an article on the bombing of a government building in Norway that killed eight people. Later, it was revealed that the bomber called himself one hundred percent Christian (p. 145). Muzna is aware of the biased reporting of the journal because the perpetrator is referred to as crazy in the journal published in the UK.

The dominant discourse relating to Islam and Muslims is negative and associated primarily with violence and radicalization. Especially post-9/11 fiction represents Muslims as potential attackers to their civilization. The identities of Arabs and Muslims are still assessed in connection with terrorism (Alsultany, 2013). In the works of Hamid, Sahota, Updike, and Coetzee, this prejudice is questioned (Morrison, 2017). The West is glorified as having the power to fight against any potential terrorist attacks while Muslim people are generally categorized into one single group. Islam is depicted as the religion of violence and dictatorship without any hopes to be democratized. According to the dominant discourse, Middle Eastern characters are thus threats that need to be eliminated. If this type of unjust representation is sustained in literary texts and in the media, reality is shaped accordingly upon non-Muslim people’s requests. Muzna accepts her parents’ oppression because instead of free thought, her perspective on life is formed on the basis of traditions and her parents’ uncompromising dogma. She, for instance, thinks: “I was so often reminded: Allah punished kids who disobeyed their parents” (p. 14). In light of this quotation, it can be concluded that however irrational her parents’ requests are, total submission is demanded of her. Submissiveness is praised while the protagonist’s individuality is dismissed entirely. The most important factor to be considered as a virtuous daughter is to be a quiet and submissive girl obeying without questioning. Muzna’s parents wish her to be a doctor since having a job with a high salary is assumed to minimize their daughter’s shortcomings. As a teenage girl, she does not have a right to make her voice heard. Despite her dream to be an author, she is forced to be a doctor. The mother is portrayed as an illiterate and highly traditional woman who is strongly attached to her roots. Without questioning, she accepts societal rules that were imposed upon her in Pakistan. She tries to lead a Pakistani life in England. The key elements such as freedom of speech, gender equality, and democracy are ignored by her. The expectations of the Pakistani community are crucial to fulfill regardless of her daughter’s wishes to have a free life. She cannot speak English and only speaks Punjabi, an Indo-Aryan language spoken by the Punjabi people in some regions of Pakistan and India. Although she is not a religious woman, she tries to manipulate Muzna by giving references to Islam about how to become a decent woman. A terrifying crime, bride burning, is also mentioned in the novel. Muzna still adamant to become a doctor due to her parents’ pressure wants to write a story as a tribute to all those women burned.

Muzna’s interactions with men are described as problematic from the beginning of the novel owing to being confined to a life with limited socializing. Muzna becomes friends with a man claiming to be 17 on the Internet. He turns out to be much older, catfishing young girls online. She writes, “How could something like this happen to someone like me? I was too smart, too wise, too careful. I hadn’t even been looking for a boyfriend” (p. 25). This first threatening event serves as a foreshadowing in the novel, and it shows that living under constant pressure causes her to make unreasonable decisions that will dramatically change her life. Later in the novel, Muzna gets married to her crush Arif in a mosque at the age of 15. Being catfished online and getting married underage prove in the novel that Muzna’s sudden and immature choices backlash against parental and societal pressures.

Born and raised in England, Muzna does not feel attached to Pakistan or its traditions. In the novel, it is stressed that whenever a Pakistani man gets arrested, it is instantly assumed that there needs to be a link with terrorism (p. 38). It is ironic that there is not a proper Muslim character who is both intelligent and open-minded and at the same time follows the pillars of Islam. After every violent terrorist attack targeting innocent people, society loses its religious tolerance and sympathy with immigrants. A large immigrant population is implicated in committing horrific crimes. There are about 3,400,000 Muslims in Great Britain, which makes Islam the second largest religion (*Muslim Population in the UK*, 2018). In the novel, a feeling of insecurity against the Muslim population is stressed especially after a brutal terrorist attack: “Society was waiting for the next brown person to snap and run around screaming ‘Death to infidels!’” (p. 39). Muslim characters are thus suspected of being potential criminals. Anyone who did not conform national, racial, or cultural stereotypes in the past was subject to suspicion and was quickly identified as a possible enemy. However, it is stated that this approach

was before the fluidity of borders (Walker, 2009, p. 123). Neighbor terrorism thus has become a recent phenomenon after September 11 (Walker, 2009). Neighbors thus have become invisible threats, and especially young British Muslims have been suspected.

Muzna is aware of the fact that her parents adopt a course of actions that could potentially change her life; nevertheless, she is unable to defy them for the fear that she be reprimanded. As for Muzna's mother, she is a passive member of the family without any thoughts or dreams. She struggles to maintain societal rules without even considering them. Her father, on the other hand, is overwhelmed with the unwritten rules of his community. He, for fear of being stigmatized by other Pakistanis, dismisses her daughter's wishes and dreams. He does not allow Muzna even to pray. Individual free will is ignored, and accountability is not stressed. According to the father, living according to Islamic teachings is an outdated practice that needs to be abolished:

Dad waited at the zebra crossing for a girl in a hijab to cross. She raised a hand in thanks. "Don't thank me!" Dad seethed. . . . Sometimes I thought Dad should join Britain First. He had major beef with religious types. I'd asked him about it before. Dad insisted it was only the "ignorant" who clung to Islamic teachings. "We live in modern times, so religion must evolve," he'd said. Still couldn't see what that had to do with dissing someone's beard or hijab (p. 49).

Muzna thinks that her father should join a far-right political party because of his intolerance. He turns out to be the most racist character in the novel due to his intolerance for religious freedom. Muzna's father feels that he is being victimized by society and eventually wishes to return to Pakistan: "I have unjustly been given a criminal record, yes. But at least I am still respected in my own community. Do you understand me, *beyta*?" (p. 42). He seems to be protecting his family from discrimination because of their religion; however, he is defined as a Muslim only in appearance due to his motherland. He undoubtedly does not hold any religious beliefs but cannot acknowledge it for fear of being denounced by the Muslim community.

Muzna's father is aware of the fact that the news forms the public opinion on foreigners. The killing of a Western journalist is celebrated by the leader of a terrorist organization on TV, and he instantly senses that this horrendous crime is likely to affect every aspect of their lives. When Muzna protests that they do not represent them, Muzna's father says that the public fails to include every detail before making a judgment about a certain group. Muzna finally realizes that she as a teenage girl has been discriminated multiple times at school: "The scary girl in my tutor group, Sade, was a prime example of what Dad meant. It hurt because she didn't even know me, but judged me all the same" (p. 61). It is worth including to mention that before being introduced to someone else, people already have a formed idea on Muzna's personality. Her outer appearance is enough for people to have fixed ideas about her even though she was born in England and has never left the country. As a native citizen, her right to live in England can easily be dismissed by other people. Although she has never been radicalized and turned into an enemy of the state, she is treated as if she were one of those extremists shown on TV. At the age of 15, she begins realizing how Sade sees her: "My mind turned back to Sade. With one insult, she'd reduced me to a victim" (p. 62). As a creative teenager, her parents restrain her from chasing her dream to be a writer, and some of her peers ostracize her for crimes she has never committed. Sade is the most racist student at school: "So is Sade the only one I have to watch out for then? I asked. 'You mean bullies? Oh there's a few. But if you mean Islamophobia – I think Sade's Queen'" (p. 67). As it is clear from the dialog between Muzna and Sarabi, who is Muzna's new best friend, Sade keeps abusing Muslims at school, especially during times when there is a visible increase in Islamophobia because of cruel attacks. Combating racist abuse and remarks is an unaccustomed struggle for the protagonist. The perceived racism has an adverse effect on the health statuses of individuals (Compton, 2021; Kaholokula, et al., 2017), and students from minority ethnic groups are reported to have more racist experiences than those in the majority groups, which leads to higher levels of loneliness (Priest et al., 2014). Muzna clearly exhibits the feeling of loneliness in the novel.

The representation of Muslims in the media is criticized by the narrator on the grounds that Muslims are merely attributed negative connotations and defined in association with terrorism. Muzna says to Sarabi, "You don't hear about Muslims period. Unless it's to do with something bad. The media's got the world believing we're a bloodthirsty cult or something" (p. 69). Sarabi is an Indian Sikh. Their friendship is formed thanks to mutual understanding and respect since they both have similar experiences. The media is accused of being biased while Muslims are chastised for not being able to prevent the latest misrepresentation. Muzna says, "We definitely need to fire whoever's in charge of our PR. I want people to read my books and go, 'You know what? Muslims are all right'" (p. 69). Muzna stands out as a character to defy the status quo instead of maintaining it; however, she tries to work toward a solution rather than merely criticizing it like her father does. She wants their voices to be heard through the media and to have the right to the freedom of religion.

Tallulah, a popular girl at school, makes an insulting remark on Muzna's appearance saying that she looks like a boy because of her facial hair. Having few friends at school, being ashamed of her appearance, and never being complimented by a boy forces her to have poor judgment on Arif, who is the first boy showing an interest in her. Later, it was revealed that Arif was an impostor deceiving teenagers into thinking that he was in love with them. After a religious marriage ceremony, Arif's brother radicalizes and manipulates them to get involved in terrorist attacks. Muzna's innocence is lost with her marriage to an extremist. She even defines herself as "a repressed fifteen-year-old" (p. 85) and a "two-shades-too-dark girl" (p. 85). Arif is portrayed as a boy who is continuously brainwashed and radicalized by his older brother. According to the report of the Home Office, "[f]ew of those who are drawn into terrorism have a deep knowledge of faith" (Home Office, 2018, p. 32). Arif is one of them with limited knowledge of Islam. Arif's extreme views are clear through the dialog between Muzna and him:

"They hate us, Muzna," Arif said, his eyes wide and intense. "Islam proper scares 'em. Teachers here, yeah, all nice to your face and that, but behind closed doors it's a different story. Don't believe me? Google 'Prevent Duty.'" "Is that the anti-radicalization thing?" I asked. "Anti-Islamic, more like!" . . . "The government wants teachers to report students with 'extreme views.' Like if some kid in Year Six says, 'The West is always starting wars in Muslim countries,' teachers are supposed to snake 'em out to the feds" (p. 87).

The Prevent Duty aims to prevent children from being radicalized and taking part in terrorist attacks. To determine those who are vulnerable to the possibility of radicalization, schools and childcare providers are asked to take active part in the act of prevention (Department for Education, 2015, p. 5). Statutory obligations are emphasized to prevent extremist views from spreading among students. Extremism is defined as “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs” (Department for Education, 2015, p. 5). In the novel, the school administration and teachers fail to assess his risk of being radicalized by a terrorist group. It is difficult to understand his extremist views since he manages to hide his true motives. From his behaviors, he is assumed to be a sociable teenager with respect to the fundamental British values. Arif prefers not to talk about his views to a non-Muslim because he is obviously aware of the risk of being exposed. According to him, anti-radicalization means anti-Islamic, and the Prevent Duty is considered to be an act to silence their Muslim identities. He believes that the school is not a safe environment for him to voice his thoughts. Especially teachers are regarded to be their enemies. He tries to promote his idea: “Insult the Prophet or burn a Qur’an, and it gets defended as ‘freedom of speech’” (p. 87). According to Arif, the Prevent Duty specifically aims at identifying Muslims and neutralizing them: “‘But Prevent is all about gagging Muslims. Funny how they get to pick and choose what you can and can’t say’” (p. 87). Arif’s comment is associated closely with Paddy Hillyard’s term “suspect community” (1993). Muslims as a community are under accusations of involving in terrorist attacks. The same prejudice was made for the Irish community with the PTA introduced in 1974. With this act, the whole Irish community was assumed to be criminalized and involved in violent attacks. Individuality at this point was dismissed, and although the key point was to stop violence, the act is thought to have been misused. As Meryem Odabaşı (2022, p. 125) states, PTA was misused by the authorities to take dissidents under control more easily because individual freedom and collective freedom were easily overlooked by the group in power. Such manipulation and the misuse of power are highly risky in terms of liberties because unjust practices can simply turn into common practices. The same misuse is suspected to be implemented since the introduction of the Prevent Duty in 2015. In a lesson, some questions such as the importance of national identity and the true meaning of Britishness are asked to students whether they are still connected to their roots. Muzna finds herself “trying to balance British values with Pakistani ones, especially when racists were always ready to throw words like ‘coconut’ and ‘oreo’ at any Asian or black person with a British accent” (p. 89). Her father does not want her to lose her ancestry. In the novel, the German roots of Queen Elizabeth II, who was the UK’s longest-serving monarch, are given as an example to show that people are not supposed to be born in a country to have commitment to its values and morals. Muzna as a Muslim and Pakistani should be able to live freely without being targeted. Britishness is reflected in the novel as the combination of values rather than being born in a specific territory. The reason Muzna’s father is attached to his Pakistani identity can be based on the partition of India and Pakistan. The partition of leaving one’s environment where their “extended family and community had lived for centuries; witnessing atrocities on neighbors or family members; the terror of what would or could happen to oneself or one’s family, not knowing if anyone would survive” (Roland, 2010, p. 387). Many people have not recovered from the severe traumas the partition caused (Mollan, 2022, August 23). After the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, about 14 million people were displaced with Muslims in India fleeing to Pakistan and Hindus living in Pakistan fleeing to India (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees & Cutts M., 2000, p. 59). It is considered to be “the largest mass migration in human history” (Bates, 2011, March 3). During the partition, 50,000 Muslim women and 33,000 Hindu and Sikh women were abducted in India. Women were sexually abused, raped, and suffered from numerous sexual atrocities. Furthermore, women killed themselves to save the “honour” of their community (Menon, 2012, p. 120). It was “the greatest refugee migration” of the last century (Talbot, 2019, p. 8), and this social displacement had traumatic effects on individuals. The resettlement of refugees, for instance, in Pakistan and India “encouraged ethnic nationalism” (Talbot, 2019, p. 13). That is the reason why Muzna’s father is devoted to his Pakistani roots than his Muslim identity.

Sade is unwilling to be taught about Britishness because she is not a Muslim: “‘Cos if that’s it, well, can’t the Muslims be sent off to learn about it elsewhere? I mean the rest of us would never even think about bombing Britain” (p. 91). As a whole community, Muslims are accused of being potential fighters against the Western society. These hateful remarks demonstrate the fixed and prejudiced stereotype that all Muslims are liable to use violence as a tool to make a point. Islam and violence seem to be intertwined. Sade represents religious intolerance in the novel. Muzna’s father believes that some British people regard Muslims as “their obedient servers” (p. 91). Thus, they are not supposed to voice their thoughts unless they are entitled to. As foreigners, they are assumed to serve and work under conditions that the British are not supposed to work. As an attempt to disparage foreigners especially Muslims, a hate language is used as shown in Sade’s speech. Even for trivial topics, Muslims can be victims of discrimination. Muzna is accused directly in the classroom in front of her peers of unspeakable crimes. It is worth noting that Sade is half-Nigerian. Muzna assumes her to be more tolerant because of her darker skin tone as she is not a Caucasian. Thus, it can be put forward that in the novel rather than somebody’s ethnicity or background, religion is the primary cause to be segregated from the rest of society. However, because of a darker skin tone, a person is thought to be a Muslim as people assume Muzna and her parents to be Muslims instantly due to their physical appearances.

Muzna’s personality change is triggered by a false accusation of sexual assault made against Mr Dunthorpe by a boy. When Mr Dunthorpe touches the boy accidentally not to fall, he accuses the teacher of sexual harassment. Muzna does not keep silent and remonstrates against her teacher’s layoff. She launches a protest movement at school, and students do not attend the lessons. With the success of the protest and Mr Dunthorpe’s getting back to work, Muzna gains self-confidence and realizes the oppression she goes through in her daily life.

Muzna reflects her parents’ sheer hypocrisy by stating that they refuse to take anyone else’s views into consideration and that they use Islam to despise others. It is worth mentioning that Muzna’s parents do not respect other religious practices and beliefs; however, they think that Islam is an outdated religion that needs to be reformed. While they look down on non-Muslim individuals claiming that they do not believe in “true religion,” they ignore their nauseating hypocrisy and ignorance. Muzna criticizes her parents severely:

I hated the way “Honour” was always chucked in my face to stop me from having any fun. Dad had a criminal record, for crying out loud, and Ami was an illiterate stay-at-home mum. What was honourable about that? Believing they were good Muslims was the biggest joke of all. The only time they visited the mosque was at Eid, and the only time they remembered Allah was to look down on others (pp. 117–118). As it is clear from the extract, Muzna’s parents take advantage of certain rules and religious duties to shape their daughter’s life. A religion they do not believe in becomes a tool for them to manipulate Muzna. Muzna admits to Arif that her parents do not pray or fast. Although they know that these are the pillars of Islam, they overlook the obligations claiming that being a Muslim hinders them in their efforts to fit in society. However, the correlation is still not clear. The questions such as, “have they lost their faith owing to being in a minority group in England or have they always been sceptical?” remain to be answered. Blaming a Western country for their lack of faith is problematical, and the author does not seem to convey this message. The author, instead of blaming England for their lack of faith, conveys how difficult it may be to be attached to someone’s religion while being in a religious minority. Criticizing Muzna’s parents for their lack of faith does not mean that being nonpracticing should be condemned. What is reprehended is that despite their impiety, they oppress Muzna based on Islamic teachings. The author’s main aim is clear through the following extract: “It made me sick that they could be so liberal when it came to TV, but would never give their own flesh and blood the same freedom” (p. 128). They want a man and a maid in a TV drama to have a relationship despite the man’s parents’ disapproval. Muzna’s parents criticize the man for not being courageous enough to defy his parents. Their mentality toward nonfamily members is open-minded and understanding; however, they do not show empathy toward their own daughter. With a criminal record, her father tries to set an example for her to lead a moral life while her mother whose knowledge consists of dogmatic claims, unquestioned traditions, and irrational assumptions presumes to be the rightful decision-maker in her daughter’s life. Muzna is justifiably deeply disappointed with the general situation she is in as a teenager. She does not have a role model in her life to guide her and lead a life with good grace. Being exposed to her parents’ immorality, she realizes that she needs to understand the essence of Islam. Muzna is the only character in the novel who is willing to be submissive to the will of God. Other Muslim characters like Arif and his brother, Jameel can be best described in line with their radicalizations. The term “radical Islam,” despite its controversial usage, can be understood through Arif and Jameel’s actions and speeches. According to Jameel, the wars (ended and ongoing) in Palestine, Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria (p. 133) aimed at destroying the Muslim population. Arif tells Muzna that a black person committing a crime is assumed to be a member of a gang while a white perpetrator is called a lone wolf; however, a Muslim committing a crime is instantly thought to be a terrorist (pp. 135–136). The Charlie Hebdo Attacks in 2015 are condemned in the novel by Muzna. Muzna thinks that the shooting made the image of all the Muslims globally be destroyed. The offices of Charlie Hebdo were targeted by 2 armed men killing 17 people, 11 of whom were journalists (Petrikowski, 2022, January 1). The cause of the attacks was a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad. The visual depiction of the Prophet is prohibited by Islam, which is a part of aniconism. The attacks were carried out by the French Islamist militants in 2015 (Reuters, 2008, August 28). A bombing in Pakistan killing 90 people is not given a place in the newspapers. Arif claims that brown lives do not matter in the world (p. 145).

In terms of communal pressure, it can be noted that Muzna abstains from wearing a hijab. She wants to be a proper Muslim and thinks that wearing a hijab is one of her duties: “My parents freaking out wasn’t the only factor here. I didn’t fancy becoming a hijabi either after all the news stories I’d read about Muslim women getting their scarves ripped off or being spat at” (p. 131). In the novel, women wearing hijabs are targeted. Muzna assumes that even being a Pakistani is enough for students to target and exclude her. Wearing a hijab means more bullying and teasing at school. However, she secretly wears a hijab without her parents’ knowing.

When Muzna recites one of Yeats’ poems, Arif comments that God “puts beautiful thoughts in the dirty minds of the *kuffar*” (p. 149). Arif thinks that disbelievers cannot be trusted. *Kuffar* is a word that is used to define disbelievers, especially those who do not believe in the tenets of Islam. According to Arif, non-Muslims are disbelievers who reject the authority of God and thus not worth being respected. Muzna realizes after Arif’s comment that the intolerance is mutual, and it is highly likely that they are perceived by non-Muslims in a negative way. Muzna protests the fact that after every attack carried out by a terrorist organization, Muslims are blamed without exception: “‘They kill people, we get blamed,’ I explained, refusing to be intimidated. ‘Then haters feel justified taking it out on us’” (p. 178). The prejudice that Islam is closely associated with violence is mentioned in the novel via Sade. She says that there is a verse in the Qur’an commanding that all nonbelievers should be killed (p. 178). Muzna rejects this idea and does a little research on the connection between violence and Islam. She later concludes:

The verse was about a specific time in history when a peace treaty had been violated in Makkah: a time of war, not everyday life. The online translation also used the phrase “strive hard against,” while the printout said “fight.” One sounded like a battle of minds; the other, a call to arms (p. 197). Ms Pawsey, the deputy principal, warns Muzna against the intimidations and manipulations of Arif; however, she trusts him full-heartedly, especially after their marriage. Jameel bans all fictional books saying that the Qur’an is the only book to be read. Later, Muzna realizes that she and Arif were radicalized by Jameel by saying “I’d swapped the prison of my parents’ rules for the prison of Jameel’s radical Islam” (p. 239). Jameel and a group of terrorists have been planning a terror attack on the metro. Muzna finds a tube map on Jameel’s laptop. They are doubtlessly part of a terrorist organization. Jameel, as the head of the organization, takes advantage of innocent young people by brainwashing them. At the age of 8, Arif was sexually abused by his uncle, and his mother died of cancer. Jameel chooses the most vulnerable young people to manipulate. He sees no harm in using his own brother as a tool. Arif becomes the victim of an ideology. Muzna does not want to be used by Arif and Jameel: “Arif and I had been radicalized by Jameel. Jameel was in my brain, making me act and react in ways that weren’t me. A parasite who’d woven twisted ideologies round both our minds, filling our hearts with suspicion and hate” (p. 239). Muzna finally understands that she has been manipulated and turned into a radical opposing the Western world: “Jameel and Arif had me believing the world was ‘Black and White’, ‘Good and Evil’, ‘Muslim and *Kafir*’. But it wasn’t that way at all” (p. 247). She now understands that extremists like Jameel take advantage of vulnerable people by exploiting the religion: “Classic Jameel. Take a story from the Qur’an and twist it to meet your own ends” (p. 268).

At the beginning of the novel, Muzna ends her friendship with Salma because she thinks that Salma tarnished her own reputation by spending the night with a boy. The pressure of the community is clear through the extract: “You’ve got the community calling you and your mum filthy names! They’re boycotting your family and attacking anyone who won’t follow their rules” (p. 43). Muzna, as a round character, changes her entire perspective on freedom and equality. While she is in favor of maintaining the status quo at the beginning of the novel, her entire personality changes, and thus she acknowledges Salma to be right. She understands that her views on freedom are in contrast with those of her parents’. She accepts the fact that Britain is her home now: “Britain was my home, and I wasn’t about to leave it. Not for those vicious women. Not for my parents either. I was as British as Big Ben” (p. 247). She untethers herself from abusive relationships and states that “extremism was a virus of the mind” (p. 267). Muzna is the only character in the novel who truly wishes to follow her faith: “For me, faith was my way of being a better person. It had helped me find a way to fight Jameel’s warped version of Islam” (p. 289). Among other hypocritical characters, she does not lose her true identity.

### Conclusion

The 7/7 London bombings changed the policy of the UK’s counterterrorism policies dramatically. With the introduction of the Prevent Duty Act in 2015, the government agencies in the UK especially schools and universities were involved in the efforts to fight against terrorism and radicalization. Teachers are expected to take action against students who are vulnerable and prone to manipulation and coercive persuasion. The act, however, resulted in making students feel more uncomfortable and distressed since Muslim students are constantly under surveillance and suspected of being potential terrorists. Despite its adverse effects on Muslim students, the Prevent Duty is still in effect. Muhammad Khan’s novel *I Am Thunder* narrates Muzna’s experiences as a teenage Muslim girl who is oppressed by her parents’ expectations. The fear and prejudice against the religion of Islam are reflected in the novel through the students at Muzna’s school. The fact that vulnerable teenagers are manipulated and coerced into organizing terrorist attacks is criticized by the author. At the end of the novel, Muzna stops a terrorist attack aiming to bomb the underground system of London, and she can finally be at peace with her British and Muslim identities. Despite its evident adverse effects on certain vulnerable groups, including Muslim students, the Prevent Duty remains in effect as one of the UK’s counterterrorism policies. The novel *I Am Thunder* by Muhammad Khan explores the experiences of Muzna who faces oppression both due to her parents’ expectations and predetermined societal rules. The fear to be called a potential offender, prejudice, and suspicion associated with Islam are depicted in the novel through the attitudes and behaviors of students at Muzna’s school. The novel also criticizes the manipulation and coercion practiced by certain terrorist groups of vulnerable teenagers into participating in terrorist activities. By highlighting the struggles experienced by Muzna and her eventual intervention and courage to stop a terrorist attack targeting the London underground system, the author wishes to emphasize the importance of countering terrorism and extremism by promoting peace and mutual understanding. Muzna’s journey represents a reconciliation of her British and Muslim identities, neither of which should be in conflict with the other, finding peace within herself and her place in society.

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