

## DEPICTION OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN BHAGAT'S *THE GIRL IN ROOM 105*

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**Abstract.** This study discusses the issue of religious conflict in Bhagat's *The Girl in Room 105*. It aims to reveal the characteristics of the religious conflict reflected in the novel. In revealing the issue of religious conflict, Mayer's and Kadayifci-Orellana's theory of religious conflict is applied. This study is a descriptive qualitative study that applies a sociological approach. The result of the study shows that religious conflicts happen between Muslims and Hindus due to their differences in beliefs and ideologies. The religious conflicts occur in several spheres i.e. the sphere of belief: conflict between Muslim and Hindu, the sphere of ideology: the conflict between Kashmiri and Indian, the sphere of organization: the conflict between separatist groups of Kashmir against the Indian government, the sphere of the family: the conflict between Keshav and Zara's family, and the sphere of the individual: the conflict between Zara and Keshav.

**Keywords:** *Religious, Religious conflict, India, Muslim, Hindu*

### INTRODUCTION

A religious conflict that occurs due to religious boundaries is still going on nowadays. According to Kadayifci-Orellana, (2003: 26) religion plays a significant role in influencing people's way of thinking, acting and perception, and interest. This means that religion brings a diversity of thinking, acting, and interest among societies. Due to the diversity, conflict arises.

Religious conflict results in many forms of religious violence that encompasses both physical domain (violent acts) and discursive (violent, i.e. hostile/hate-filled speech). It also raises questions about the exact relationship between these two forms such as how each should be addressed and the degree to

which each is harmful to society. In addition, there are complexities to such violence. Thus, religion is not solemnly the motivation in religious conflict. The motivation can be political consideration, local condition, and the personal motives of the chief protagonists (Mayer, 2003: 2).

Religious conflict is not a new issue. It has a long history of occurrence. The previous term to this issue is a "holy war", a war due to differences in religion. The Crusade is one of the wars that is recognized as a "holy war" (Wikipedia, 2021). The latter, these terms transform accordingly based on the theorists. Mayer names it "religious conflict". However, Kadayifci-Orellana in her article calls it "ethnoreligious conflict" (Kadayifci-

Orellana S. A., 2009: 264). Religious conflict is an enticing issue that is in the ongoing debate. It raises awareness among scholars. It is reflected from scholarly literature that is rapidly growing (Mayer, 2013: 1). It reinforces as some cases are dealing with this issue that is still happening. For example, Israel and Palestine conflict, Sudan genocide, Hindu-Muslim conflict in India, and so forth (Shaukat, 2020).

Religious conflict issues as phenomena of life are often portrayed in literary works such as novels. It possibly happens since the author of literary work lives within the society. Wellek and Warren, (1995: 94) state that literature is an imitation of life that represents the natural world and the individual world in social reality. One of the literary works that portrait religious conflict is a novel entitled *The Girl in Room 105* written by Chetan Bhagat. *The Girl in Room 105* presents a story of a Hindu man, Keshav, that meets a problem after he finds out that his Kashmiri Muslim ex-girlfriend, Zara, is dead. Keshav is suspected as the murderer since he is the first person who finds the dead body in hotel room 105. This murder case gets worse since the victim and the suspect are from different religions. Keshav who is trapped in the murder case then tries to reveal Zara's murderer. He investigates any kind of proof that surprisingly correlates with religion (Bhagat, 2018).

The writer chooses *The Girl in Room 105* because it portrays the religious values within certain societies, especially Indian societies. These religious values lead to religious conflicts among people who

have different beliefs and ideologies. Therefore, *The Girl in Room 105* is chosen as the object of the study.

India is a country with 28 states and many different cultures (Kenoyer & Heuston, 2005: 1). It is considered as one of the most religious and ethnically diverse nations in the world and it is also known as a Hindu-majority country because 79.8% of its population is Hindu (Firstpost, 2015). The rest of the populations are Islam (14.2%), Christian (2.3%), Sikhism (1.7%), Buddhism (0.7%) and Jainism (0.4%).

Muslim is the most second population in India. However, it is still considered a minority. It has a major population in Jammu and Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir are the land of multidimensional interest that leads into turmoil. The major players of this chaotic condition of Kashmir are India, Pakistan, religious militants, and Kashmiri (Tavares, 2008: 277). The first dimension is the tension between the Pakistani and Indian governments. They are bilateral opposition that quarrels over Kashmir territory. The second dimension is the fight between India and armed insurgents operating in Jammu and Kashmir. They are militants who are discontented with Indian policy in Jammu and Kashmir and demand for self-determination. The last is the fight between foreign militants' theocracy, a religious movement from outside of India supported by the Kashmiri people and the Indian government.

Weber (1963) in his book entitled *Sociology of Religion*, states that religion is a complex term that is hard to define. However, there have been some efforts to

define religion. Kadayifci-Orellana (2009: 267) argues that religion is a system of beliefs and practices relating to the sacred. Marx in Rahmani & Tayyebinia (2016: 596) states that religion is a product of class society. Religion is a form of protest against oppression, consolation, and submission to oppression. Further, he states that religion is an ideological phenomenon and religious feeling is a social product. Durkheim in Rahmani & Tayyebinia (2016: 597) regards a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred things as the definition of religion. It is a belief and practice that unites its adherents a single moral community called a religious community. The idea of the community thus becomes inseparable from the idea of religion. Therefore, she suggests that religion should be remarkably collective.

Another method to construct the concept of religion is that religion should be attached to its contexts of use. It is not like the definition that tries to isolate essential characteristics concepts that are derived from its meaning from the wider frameworks. These frameworks may be theoretical, historical, empirical, methodological, and normative (Woodhead, 2011: 122-137). Hence, she proposes five categories as well as its subcategories of religion based on its contexts of use – religion as culture, religion as identity, religion as relationship, religion as practice, and religion as power.

The category of religion as culture consists of six subcategories related to the aspect of culture i.e. religion is regarded as belief and meaning, meaning and cultural order, values, discourse, ideology and

mystification, and as tradition and memory. Then, the category of religion as identity regards religion as community-creating and boundary-forming, identity-claims, and organizational belonging. The category of religion as relationship views religions as social relations, super-social relations, and experience. The category of religion as practices regards religions as ritual and embodiment, quotidian practice, and “popular” or “folk” religion. The last, the category of religion as power views religions as “compensator” and “capital” resources, economic and political power, status and recognition, and power and status at micro-, meso-, and macro-level.

Avruch (2002: 1) says that conflict is a competition over contrary goals, scarce resources. To acquire their source of power is needed. Similarly, Mayer (2013: 2) states that conflict occurs when there is something contested. In addition, Diez et al (2006: 565) define conflict as a struggle or contest between people with contradictory needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals. In line with Diez, Luthans (1985: 386) defines conflict as the condition when one or groups deliberately interfere with others due to incompatibility in values or goals. Furthermore, Rubin et al (1994: 5) defines conflict as the perceived divergence of interest or a belief that parties’ current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously. Moreover, De Dreu et al (1999: 369) argue that conflict involves tension an individual or group experiences due to the difference perceived between an individual or groups and another individual or group. In short, conflict can be seen as disagreement, clash, contest, or

fight between individuals or groups because of the diversity in values, beliefs, goals, ideals, aspirations, and so on.

Religious conflict refers to the conflict that occurs between or within religious groups. It occurs when individuals or groups are contested in the ideological or moral sphere (Mayer, 2013: 2). Religious conflict is a complex phenomenon that engages a combination of contested domains including power, personality, space or place, and group identity.

The religious conflict issue is chosen as the topic of this study due to the fact that the issue is a phenomenon that still exists in countries with religious diversity such as India. This research tries to describe the cause of religious conflict and in what spheres it may occur.

Research in religious conflict issues has been conducted interdisciplinary by many scholars, either through field study or literary study. One of the literary studies that discuss religious conflict was conducted by Bahtiar and Rahman in their study entitled *Religious Conflicts in the Novel Maryam* by Okky Madasari. They published their article in a *Jentera* journal, in 2018. It examined patterns, stages, processes, and resolutions of religious conflict. They found out that the pattern of religious conflict depicted in *Maryam* occurred because one faction of religion, Ahmadi, was considered heretical by people who held other religious factions. This conflict led to the destruction of the Ahmadi people's houses as well as their place of worship. In addition, they were also expelled from their village. The good thing about the conflict was, it increases

the solidarity between the Ahmadi people. However, the conflict resolution between the Ahmadi people against other Muslim factions was not satisfied enough as the Ahmadi people were not permitted to go back to their own houses by the local government for the sake of their safety (Bahtiar & Rahman, 2018: 161-180).

## METHOD

Dealing with qualitative study Denzin and Lincoln, (2005: 1-32) state that qualitative study uses a collection of various empirical data that describes routine, problematic moments and meanings in individuals' life such as case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, and text that is observational, historical, interactional, and visual. Following Denzin and Lincoln's definition, this study is qualitative since it relies on qualitative data. The data of this study is taken from Bhagat's *The Girl in Room 105*. The data is used to support the researcher's interpretation of religious conflict reflected in Bhagat's *The Girl in Room 105*. The result of the study is presented descriptively. Therefore, this study is also descriptive. To clarify, this study is a descriptive qualitative study.

In this study, the research uses the sociology approach and the concept of religious conflict. Researchers use two concepts of religious conflict used are religious conflict as described by Wendy Mayer and Kadayifci-Orellana, as well as a religious conflict characteristic given by Kadayifci-Orellana. The religious conflict will be presented into five spheres which

are sphere of belief, ideology, organization, family, and individual.

Mayer (2013: 4) states that there are two aspects to clarify the definition of religious conflict i.e. the agents involved and the identifier to distinguish the religious conflict. Dealing with the agents of religious conflict, two or more groups are derived from identifiably separate religions, separate factions within the same religion, the same faction within a religion, and secular authority which may also hold religious authority. All of them are considered as the agents of the religious conflict. The second aspect is associated with how one defines religions and determines how broadly or narrowly one focuses his or her investigation. These two aspects can be the identifier to distinguish whether it is religious or political/ethnics or whether it is primarily religious or primarily political/ethnic.

Furthermore, to simplify the complexity, Mayer (2013: 5) proposes four points to distinguish the religious conflict. A conflict can be regarded as a religious conflict when the following conditions are fulfilled:

1. Two or more collective agents are involved and the agents derive, for example, from separate religions, separate factions within the same religion, from within the same faction in the same religion, and/or secular authority.
2. A domain – e.g. ideology/morality, power, personality, space/place, group identity – is contested, singly, or in combination.

3. There are enabling conditions – e.g. political, social, economic, cultural, and psychological.
4. Religion is involved (the degree to which it is involved is deemed irrelevant).

Another theorist that defines religious conflict is Kadayifci-Orellana (2009: 265). She states that religious conflicts refer to the conflicts involved parties that are defined along the religious lines. In religious conflict, religion plays a significant role when conflict is occurring especially when different religious systems encounter each other (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009: 264).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In general, the religious conflict in *The Girl in Room 105* is depicted through the conflict between Muslim and Hindu people due to their differences in beliefs and ideologies. Moreover, to corroborate the religious conflicts that occur in the novel, they will be analyzed based on the sphere of belief, ideology, organization, family, and individual. All of the religious conflicts in each sphere correlates with each other and they can occur simultaneously. All of these religious conflicts are represented through the characters in the novel. Muslims are represented by Zara and her family and Hindus are represented through Keshav and his family.

### **A. Religious Conflict in The Sphere of Belief**

In *The Girl in Room 105*, the religious conflict that happens in the sphere of belief is depicted through marital

issues. The differences in marital beliefs between Hindus and Muslims lead to religious conflict. The marital belief is expressed by one of the Muslim characters, Safdar. As a Muslim, he holds sharia, Islamic canonical law. He believes that a marriage can only be held if both groom and bride are Muslim. It is the basic precondition of Muslim marriage (Muzammil, 2019: 9). Therefore, if one of the couples is not a Muslim, he or she must convert to Islam first before the marriage is held.

‘. . . ‘A nikaah can’t happen unless both bride and groom are Muslims. You have to convert,’ Safdar said (Bhagat, 2018: 124).’

The quotation describes Safdar’s belief as a Muslim in marital issues. He clarifies his belief to Keshav so that Keshav can marry Zara which is through a *nikaah*. However, Keshav as a Hindu does not have the same belief as Safdar has. Therefore, Keshav opposes this demand because if he converts to Islam it can create conflict in his family. Keshav’s opposition generates disappointment in Zara, his girlfriend, and it also makes Safdar furious. Consequently, Keshav receives a death threat from Safdar.

‘You are just a kafir. Taking advantage of my precious daughter. Leave her alone, or it won’t be good.’

‘Are you threatening me, uncle?’ I said, just to be clear.

‘I don’t threaten. I display kindness, and when betrayed, I take action. For my family’s

honor, if necessary, I will draw blood (Bhagat, 2018: 125-126).’

The quotation above denotes the manifestation of religious conflict in the sphere of belief. The difference in belief influenced by religion makes Safdar and Keshav have an argument that leads to a religious conflict.

### **B. Religious Conflict in The Sphere of Ideology**

Religious conflict in the ideological sphere is delineated through the ideological difference between Kashmiri Muslim people who hold Islam law as their basis of a way of life and people beyond Kashmir who hold Hinduism. As Woodhead (2011: 128), states that religion can be regarded as an identity claim. Muslim people in Kashmir are exclusive. They do not want to be considered a member of Indian societies and want to separate themselves from India. They regard themselves as Kashmiri, not Indian even though Kashmir is the part of Indian country. Kashmiri societies view Kashmir as their state, their identity, and their everything.

‘I am Kashmiri,’ he said. All his friends laughed. One of them even clapped. Saurabh nudged me, to say we should leave.

‘But Kashmir is a part of India,’ I said.

‘We hate India,’ another boy said. He spoke in a normal tone as if he had said ‘I hate cabbage’ or ‘I hate radish (Bhagat, 2018: 195).’

The quotation above shows the Kashmiri boys' statement that they are Kashmiri, not Indian. They state it to Keshav who believes that he is Indian and Keshav emphasizes it confidently. He also states that Kashmir is part of the Indian country. However, the boys refuse to accept that statement. They believe that they are not Indian but Kashmiri people who hold Islam as their way of life.

Another portrayal of religious conflict in the ideological sphere is expressed by Farzana, a Muslim Kashmiri when she is having a conversation with Keshav and Saurabh. She states that Kashmir is her everything.

'These kattar mullah types who call for azaadi. Yes, we all hate India. But we don't go around flashing guns. Sometimes you have to accept fate.'

'Fate? Aunty, India is our country.' 'But Kashmir is our state. Our identity. Our everything (Bhagat, 2018: 202).'

From the two quotations mentioned above, it can be concluded that the Kashmiri people regard themselves as distinct societies from other Indian societies. They believe that Kashmir is not part of the country of India, although judicially it is part of the Indian country. Therefore, this ideological difference leads to religious conflict within the Kashmiri people and the Indian government. Because of this conflict, the Indian government puts military power in Kashmir: "Despite half a dozen extra

security checks for flights to Kashmir, we had landed on time at noon. The Sheikh ul-Alam International Airport in Srinagar had more CISF and Army personnel than passengers (Bhagat, 2018: 192)." In addition, the Indian government also restricts the use of communication technology such as cell phones and the internet to the Kashmir region.

'My cell phone doesn't work,' I said.

'A new SIM card can take a week to get activated.'

'What?' I said.

'Indian government rules. What can we do? They do what they want,' Nizam said (Bhagat, 2018: 194).'

'Internet is not working. Neither on Nizam bhai's SIM nor the Wi-Fi' (Bhagat, 2018: 217).'

Indian government shuts down the internet whenever the protests conducted by Kashmiri people turn out to be chaos. The Indian government considers it as a preventive action. By shutting down the internet, communications can be restricted. Thus, the flow of protest is receding.

### **C. Religious Conflict in The Sphere of Organization**

The religious conflict in the organizational sphere is conveyed through the conflict between the Indian government against Tehreek-e-Jihad, and other separatist groups in Kashmir. Their motives are diverse. One separatism group wants to liberate Kashmir to be an

independent country while the others want Kashmir to join Pakistan. For this reason, the Indian government mobilizes the army to stop any separatism attempts.

'The Indian government thinks T-e-J is a terror group. T-e-J and its supporters think they are working to liberate Kashmir.'

'Liberate it from what?' I said.

'From India,' Safdar said.

'And do what? Make their own country?'

'Well, T-e-J wants Kashmir to join Pakistan' (Bhagat, 2018: 153).'

The quotation above delineates one of the separatist groups and its supporters that fight against the Indian government. The motive of their movement is to liberate Kashmir from India to join Pakistan because this separatist group has similar beliefs, ideology, and values with Pakistan which is based on Islam. This religious conflict can be concluded as the result of conflict within both ideology and belief. The religious conflict in the sphere of ideology and belief generates another kind of religious conflict which is occurred in the organizational sphere as experienced by separatist groups such as Tehreek-e-Jihad and the Indian government. This conflict is organizational since Tehreek-e-Jihad is a group of people who work secretly to achieve the same goal.

#### D. Religious Conflict in The Sphere of Family

The novel conveys religious conflict in the family sphere through Zara and Keshav's families. These two families hold different religions. Keshav's family is Hindu and Zara's family is Muslim. Religious conflict occurs in these families because Keshav has a love relationship with Zara and Keshav's parents reject Keshav's interfaith relationship. The rejection is expressed since Keshav introduces Zara to his parent for the first time.

. . . 'I am from Kashmir, aunty. Srinagar. Moved to Delhi more than ten years ago.'

'Kashmiri? Oh,' maa said. She stretched out the 'oh' as if I had brought a Martian home (Bhagat, 2018: 108).

The quotation above implies the negative surprise of Keshav's mother after she finds out that Zara comes from Kashmir. Her expression is interpreted as an allusion "brought a Martian home." The reference of the phrase is based on the movie "*The Martian*." The movie tells an astronaut named Martian who is stranded on Mars, the unknown far planet and Nasa tries to bring him home even it is almost an impossible mission (Seitz, 2015). In this context, Mars refers to Kashmir and Zara refers to Martian. Keshav brings her home as if he has done the impossible mission. Similar to "*The Martian*", it is impossible for Keshav to Marry Zara. It is impossible to hold an interfaith marriage between Muslims and Hindu.



Furthermore, the disagreement is expressed through the hostility of Keshav's mother. Keshav's mother sings her religious song 'bhajan' very loudly when doing aarti to emphasize her identity to Zara. She wants to make Zara understand that her family is a Hindu family and there is no way for Zara to get along with her son. Moreover, this religious conflict in the family sphere gets worse when Keshav expresses his love feeling to his parents. They freak out listening to his confession.

'Together? You want to marry that Muslim girl?' my mother said, finding her voice again. . .

'Being Muslim doesn't matter?' my mother said, her eyes and mouth making three round Os on her face (Bhagat, 2018: 113-114).

In Keshav's opinion, Zara is very qualified as a wife. However, Keshav's parents do not see it. They only see Zara as a Muslim regardless of her quality as a woman. They judge Zara only based on her religion and origin. His father even utters negative assumptions about Kashmiri Muslims in expressing his disagreement.

'Kashmiri Muslim,' my father added, to rub it in that Zara was somehow worse than just a plain vanilla Muslim.

'Papa, she's an educated girl from a good family in Delhi.'

'It's people like her who threw Hindus out of Kashmir,' my father said (Bhagat, 2018: 114).

The quotation above describes Keshav's father's assumption that being Kashmiri Muslim is bad. Thus Zara is not good for her son. Even after Zara's death, the religious conflict is still exists.

'She's dead. Whatever information they give, that Muslim girl is not coming back. Thank God.' 'Maa,' I shouted, 'stop it. She died less than a week ago.' 'She caused enough trouble when alive. Please don't let her affect you now that she is gone.' 'Enough, maa,' I said. I took a phulka from the plate in her hand (Bhagat, 2018: 77).

The religious conflict also happens in Zara's family. It begins when Keshav discusses his relationship with Safdar, Zara's father. The problem arises when it comes to the marital issue. Keshav wants to marry Zara although both of them hold different religions. This marital issue leads to disagreement that is depicted through a death threat given by Safdar to Keshav.

'You are just a kafir. Taking advantage of my precious daughter. Leave her alone, or it won't be good.'

'Are you threatening me, uncle?' I said, just to be clear.

'I don't threaten. I display kindness, and when betrayed, I take action. For my family's honour, if necessary, I will draw blood (Bhagat, 2018: 126).'

The quotations mentioned previously indicate religious conflict in the sphere of the family. The reason is that

both Zara and Keshav's families have a strong belief based on religion in their religion. Both Islam and Hinduism forbid interfaith marriage. Islamic marriage law necessitates both groom and bride are Muslim. Similarly, Hindu also has the same requirement. Even the Indian government establishes the Hindu marriage act. The act is applied to any person who is Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, or Sikh but not Muslim, Christian, Parsi, or Jew (Wikipedia, 2020). This act indicates that Muslim and Hindu is something impossible because it is not regulated in the act. That is why both families resist the relationship between Zara and Keshav. Consequently, religious conflict is inevitable to happens.

#### **E. Religious Conflict in The Sphere of Individual**

Religious conflicts in the individual sphere encompass both conflicts within individuals and conflicts between individuals. The conflict within individuals means that the conflict happens between the individual and himself or herself. That is to say that this kind of conflict occurs in an individual's mind and it involves emotion and identity. Moreover, the conflict between individuals is a conflict happening between one individual and another individual.

In the novel, conflict within the individual is depicted through Keshav and his identity as a Hindu. His identity brings him into inner conflict. Hindu marriage law forbids interfaith marriage. The government of India also emphasizes it in its constitution (Tyagi, 2016). Therefore, Keshav faces a dilemma whether he has to

marry Zara or leave her for the sake of his family. His desire to be with Zara also makes him have a dilemma whether he has to change faith which means that he will lose his family.

The religious conflict between individuals is depicted through the relationship between Keshav and Zara. The conflict starts when both of the families oppose their interfaith relationship. The conflict gets worse as Keshav and Zara hold tightly into their religion. Eventually, Zara chooses to leave Keshav and this makes their relationship comes to end. However, Keshav cannot accept the reality that his relationship ends. He keeps ghosting Zara that has been with someone else, Raghu.

'So that is why you went to him.

For his money,' I said.

'I went to him because I wanted to belong. I wanted a family. And you were running scared. Instead of manning up, you abused my folks (Bhagat, 2018: 14-15).'

The quotation above shows a dispute between Zara and Keshav. Keshav regards Zara as a materialist because Zara prefers to choose Raghu with his valuable company whereas Zara regards him as a coward because he does not want to convert to Islam to marry her. A conversion that Keshav does not do makes Zara leave him and it leads to a conflict between them as an individual from a different religion.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Religious conflict depicted in *The Girl in Room 105* provides a deep insight

into religion-based societies. The novel depicts the religious conflict through the conflict between Muslim and Hindu people because of their difference in beliefs and ideologies. The religious conflict is described in the sphere of belief, ideology, organization, family, and individual.

After doing the analysis, the researcher finds out that religious conflicts that happen in society can bring adverse effects to societies. Hence, people who live in religion-based societies must increase awareness of the importance of being tolerant towards other religions so that it can bring to harmonious societies.

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