A Societal Interactional Analysis of Imran Khan's United Nations General Assembly 2019 Speech on Islamophobia

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Abstract

The researchers conducted a societal interactional analysis of Imran Khan's speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2019. The study focuses on issue of Islamophobia in Imran Khan's speech. The objectives are to analyse the sentiments and opinions of society toward Imran Khan's speech and to examine how his speech catalyses social discourse. Societal reactions to Khan's speech are examined using by Van Dijk's (1997) theoretical framework. The concepts like action, context, power, and ideology have been analysed in the data obtained from Quora. The research findings emphasise that certain participants acknowledge Khan's endeavours to bring attention and highlight the issue of Islamophobia. However, some have criticised the speech for being oversimplified. The research elucidates how the opinions are shaped and formed by the contextual characteristics of the respondents. The analysis highlights the significance of power dynamics. The ideological analysis reveals a divided reception. The findings underscore the societal impact of Khan's speech.

Keywords: Social Discourse, Islamophobia, Ideology, Societal Interactional analysis

1. Introduction:

The relationship between language utilisation and power disparities underscores the pivotal function of language in the establishment, perpetuation, and modification of social power structures. Language facilitates the subjugation of certain individuals over others. (Fairclough, 2013, p. 1). Discourse, as defined by Foucault (1972) is a compilation of verbal actions; it is the result of clusters of signs (p. 107). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) investigates genuine instances of social interactions that are often extensive and conveyed through language or partially linguistic elements. Critical discourse analysis, encompassing both oral and written forms, is considered a form of "social practice" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). Van Dijk (1997) emphasises the importance of examining discourse not only beyond its surface elements, like form and meaning but also its structures and hierarchies within interactions and social practices. This perspective underscores how discourse is inherently social, portraying it as a tool for action and engagement (p. 6). He discusses how societal injustices and efforts to combat them are parts of discourse reflecting societal dynamics. The overarching goal extends beyond scientific to encompass social and political transformations. Then, social discourse analysis takes the form of critical discourse analysis (ibid, p. 23).

Karen A. Cerulo (2009) opines that "Interaction stands at the heart of the micro-sociological tradition, as we study the ways in which individuals act and react in relation to one another" (p.532). Van Dijk (1997) emphasises that it is crucial to comprehend the intricacies of discourse structures to elucidate how texts and conversations can manipulate individuals to conform to the preferences of dominant groups. This manipulation can manifest in diverse ways, including educational initiatives, information dissemination campaigns, propaganda, media platforms, and other modes of public discourse. He posits that power is not the primary ethical issue in critical discourse research but rather in the illicit utilisation of power, particularly power abuse or domination. (p. 19)

The term "Islamophobia," as defined by Ali et al. (2011) is an expression of an irrational fear and hostility toward Islam and its followers. It generates prejudice and bias and makes it almost impossible for Muslims to engage in social, political, and civic life. The Centre for American Progress Action Fund's report reveals a network that consists of experts, scholars, groups, networks, local agencies, media, and donors. They participate

in creating, normalising, and distributing unreasonable fears about Islam and Muslims (p. 9). Similarly, Rashid et al. (2023) opine that "Islamophobia is linked to unfavourable stereotypes about Muslims and Islam, which leads to the formation of anti-Islam sentiment" (p.608).

Imran Khan, the ex-Prime Minister of Pakistan is a known figure in the world of politics and international relations. He has earned acclaim for his stance on various global issues, particularly advocating for the rights of Muslims worldwide. Khan's address at the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2019 marked a moment in his political journey. This speech was widely praised for its discussions on topics such as climate change, Money laundering, Islamophobia and the Kashmir conflict. His remarks on Islamophobia stood out as an instance where this sensitive topic was addressed on an international platform. Prime Minister Imran Khan's eloquence offers a perspective on combating Islamophobia making it an important subject, for examining societal interaction.

The research seeks to investigate the impact of political discourse on society. Researchers investigate how different segments of society respond to Imran Khan's speech on Islamophobia examining the discussions surrounding Islamophobia within society.

2. Research Questions:

1. What are the dominant sentiments of society regarding the discussion on Islamophobia in Imran Khan's speech?

2. In what way did society respond to Imran Khan's speech on Islamophobia?

3. In what way does Imran Khan's speech act as a catalyst for social discourse around the issue of Islamophobia?

3. Literature Review:

The former prime minister of Pakistan delivered a speech in 2019 at United Nations General Assembly (UNG) in which he dwelt on four main global issues including the issue of Islamophobia. He argued that Islamophobia is "an engineered fear, hatred or else a prejudice" (Khan, 2019) towards the Muslims. Though Khan's speech generated mixed response among the global community yet its repercussions have been far greater as far as the Western attitude towards Muslims is concerned. Previous studies on Islamophobia vis-a-vis Imran Khan's speech have shed light on the presence of anti-Muslim attitudes showing that it goes beyond isolated instances of bias. This issue is deeply rooted in aspects of Muslim communities globally. The review of existing literature provides a framework for understanding the landscape of Islamophobia. It sets the stage for our exploration into how political speeches and public opinions intersect towards Islamophobia. Awan (2016) have conducted an analysis of Islamophobia on Facebook with a more discrete focus, as studied messages of hate toward Muslim groups. The study finds an increase in negative trends and calls for violence toward Muslims, stressing that some groups are using social media to spread Islamophobia. Kinza et al. (2020) has applied Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model to analyse Imran Khan's speech, at the UNGA. Their research delves into the distinctions between "Us" and "Them" showcasing how language reflects the ideologies of political figures and influences societal behaviours. In a study, Javaid et al. (2022) have utilised van Dijk's Ideological Square Model to scrutinise the language used in Imran Khan's address at the United Nations General Assembly. Their findings reveal that Khan employed strategies such as generalization and polarization to address Islamophobia thereby reinforcing the Us vs. Them framework, in discourse. Brohi (2023) has employed a micro-analytical approach to examine how a group of Muslim women used humour as a form of resistance against Islamophobia. The work emphasises the importance of integrating Conversation Analysis (CA) with other critical research methods. This strategy showcases how marginalised groups actively engage in acts of resistance to combat the harm caused by exclusion. Besides the abovementioned research works, there has been research on Imran Khan speech with reference to different aspects such as Ahmed et al. (2020) speech act analysis, Asif et al. (2020), lexical functions and cohesion, Arshad (2020) critical discourse analysis. However, according to the existing research conducted in the domain reveals that former studies have not deeply researched social interactivity and analysis of the speeches related to Imran Khan and Islamophobia. The current research is based on the fundamental notions described by Teun A. Van Dijk. These notions are mentioned in chapter first of Discourse as Interaction in Society (pp. 6-7).

4. Research Methodology:

This study is qualitative in nature. According to Bogdan & Biklen (2007) the analyst is the primary instrument in qualitative research, with the natural environment being the immediate source of data (p.4). In qualitative research, the researcher takes on multiple roles, such as the organiser, receiver, information observer, and journalist of the research findings (Moleong, 2001, p. 121). It can be assumed that the person conducting the study is the human instrument in qualitative research. For this study, the researchers collected and analysed data from Quora, a question-answer platform. The theoretical foundation of the research is rooted in the most significant ideas presented by Van Dijk concerning discourse analysis. According to him, discourse and society are interconnected (Van Dijk, 1997, p. 6). He introduced fundamental concepts that are necessary for understanding the complexity of discourse in society. Therefore, they are used to analyse discourse in terms of societal interaction. However, previous researchers have not given much attention to the research area of societal interactional analysis of speeches related to Islamophobia. This research addresses this gap since it studies social discourse that is analysed by considering essential concepts, action, context, power, and ideology to describe the interaction in society.

5. Action:

Van Dijk suggests that speech is a goal-oriented form of action, considering the speaker's intent. It implies that discourse embraces actions of communication rather than mere oral expressions. They are self-motivated and goal-oriented actions or behaviours of the human who speaks (Van Dijk, 1997).

6. Context:

Context involves considering the roles and goals of the participant in the speech event. This notion considers various contextual factors, such as the society and relation spatial and time aspects. Context is paramount for explaining the subtle allusion of speech and understanding its placement in one's socio-cultural environment (Van Dijk, 1997).

7. Power:

Power in discourse is the ability to control not only action but also cognition. In other words, it considers rhetoric as a source of power. Van Dijk believes that discourse can either reinforce or challenge the power relations in society (Van Dijk, 1997).

8. Ideology:

Ideology is a system of beliefs and values that guide an individual's or group's actions and decisions. Van Dijk refers to ideology as the cognitive counterpart of power. Ideologies are realised, transmitted, and contested by means of discourse (Van Dijk, 1997).

9. Data Collection:

The data for this research was collected from Quora, a known forum packed with comprehensive and insightful discussions. Quora was selected explicitly over other platforms of social media because it tends toward more thoughtful and substantial dialogue. With the exception of social media cites such as Facebook, Twitter and Reddit, Quora creates a unique environment where users engage in richer and more comprehensive conversations.

Specific screening procedures were adopted in this process to ensure that the analysis was relevant and comprehensive. The primary filter used for selection was to have questions and answers belonging directly to Imran Khan's speech at the UNGA of 2019. This ensures that the analysis is closely related to the research focus.

Another requirement was that questions and answers must specifically relate to Islamophobia as mentioned in Khan's speech. This is important for examining the conversation in society around Islamophobia. Only content posted after Imran Khan's 2019 address was included. The timing requirement is crucial for capturing relevant societal reactions to the speech discourse. Totally, 126 questions and answers about Imran Khan's UNGA speech were gathered from the initial content pool on Quora. To be precise, they were then synthesised and reduced to 39 questions and answers that focused directly on the issue of Islamophobia. To provide a comprehensive analysis researchers selected 15 questions and answers out of these 39 questions. The choice was subject to their relevance to the research objectives. Such a careful approach to the choice of sample

ensures its high relevance and enables a thorough analysis within the chosen research framework. Ethical considerations were also a part of the research process. This research ethics were followed properly so that the identity and privacy of Quora users may remain confidential. Therefore, the researchers have made use of only publicly available information, with no personal identifiers disclosed. Thus, the study conforms to strong ethical research principles and assures the protection of individuals contributing to online platforms. Since the topic is quite delicate and it can provoke a wide range of negative reactions. The researchers have used unbiased language and position while examining the subject. It has been taken care that the interpretations should also not be biassed.

10. Data Analysis:

11. Action:

11.1. Assertions and Responses: Appendix N considers Islamophobia, claiming that Khan equated the challenges faced by Muslims in Western countries, including changes in dress codes, as well as police raids, with Islamophobia. Appendix O criticises Khan's portrayal of Islam and Islamophobia, referring to Khan's arguments as superficially apologetic and simplified. Additionally, it discredits Khan's assertion and argues that it was Salman Rushdie who sparked Islamophobia. Appendix H characterised Khan's speech as "a ramble and a ran". It demonstrates his hustle on the platform of the UN with purely domestic political aims. The opinions on the same speech differ, as described in Appendix I.

Some consider Khan's speech to be wholly negative, especially due to its effect on Pakistan's reputation. Appendix E sees this as bad for Pakistan's international image and characterizes it as a "self-goal" and "hate speech," claiming that it was divisive and focused exclusively on Muslim issues. Appendix D also states that the speech was worldview reductionist and contributed to tearing society apart, calling it "hate speech" and reflecting the perception of being harmful rhetoric.

11.2. Communicative Acts: There are mixed reactions to Imran Khan's UNGA speech. According to Appendix D, the speech is criticised because Imran Khan's digging into Islamophobia may mean completely overshadowing or ignoring issues of Islamic terrorism. The expression "giving a clean chit to Islamic terrorism" may indicate concern over a possible unintentional trivialization of various aspects of the problem of Islamic extremism involved there. The concerns expressed in Appendix F relate to the appropriateness of Khan's speech at the United Nations General Assembly. There is too much emphasis on Islamic topics which is not optimal for UNGA's international and global audience. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) would be a more appropriate forum for religious themes. Whereas, the appendix L ardently supports Khan's stance claiming that Imran Khan has accurately presented the feelings and interests of Muslims. The responses indicate that Khan's speech had a profound influence on the Muslim community in Pakistan and Kashmir. The answers hint at the speech's ability to unite and make an impact on these two groups of people. Similarly, the respondent of Appendix M found a personal connection to Khan's speech. He states that Khan's views on Islamophobia have significantly affected him. He admires that Khan is doing a job of educating people about Islam and the difficulties faced by the Muslims.

12. Context:

12.1. National and Regional Backgrounds: While examining the Quora responses to Imran Khan's UNGA address, the researchers noticed the considerable influence of background on the respondent' perspectives. The respondent from the United States of America in Appendix A interprets the speech as redundant. As in the Western context, the views regarding Islam and terrorism are prevalent. Such comments tend to favour a unique selection of topics in the global context. The Indian respondents in Appendices C, F and N tend to reflect the respondents' views shaped by their regional context and Pakistan-India tensions. Appendix C responds sarcastically, and Appendix F criticises Khan for giving attention to Islamic topics at a global platform like the UNGA. These responses are all regional or nationalistic in nature and suggest that international forums need to take a more geographically or culturally sensitive approach to these issues. Appendix N, of an Indian background, suggests that discussions need to be more nuanced about Islamophobia and global terrorism. The

responses from Pakistan in Appendices I, J, K, L and M express strong national support for Khan. As such, these positions demonstrate the national agreement on his focus on Muslim issues, which aligns with the direct feelings of the domestic population. People's admiration of Khan's speech is also not just a cultural consensus, but a national one, representing a state of pride and certainty. Appendix O, provided by the respondent from London, depicts a Western perspective on Khan's way of addressing Islam and Islamophobia. Specifically, the reply indicates Westerner's aspiration for a more thorough discussion on Islamophobia at a global platform, such as the UNGA.

12.2. Time and Place. The respondent in Appendix D describes Khan's speech as a divisive narrative and accuses it of simplifying the whole issue. Thus, it is implied that the UNGA was supposed to celebrate unity, not differences. Further, the respondent calls the speech "hate speech", which indicates that he was disappointed with Khan for failing to deliver an inclusive message that would target the diversified audience gathered at the UNGA. Appendix E critiques Khan's speech at UNGA and considers it bad for Pakistan's image among the other countries and authorities who heard his speech. The respondent sees the element of radicalism and terrorism in Khan's speech. Therefore, the respondent saw the UNGA as a platform through which Pakistan could consolidate its relations with the world but he believes Khan's speech was a failure as he missed this opportunity to dwell on significant global issues. Appendix I, considering the standpoint of a Pakistani citizen, highly praised Khan's speech for prioritising Muslim issues. According to this response, attention to Islamophobia at UNGA was considered appropriate, and the respondent praised Khan for trying to fight for the rights of Muslims and striving against Islam's association with terrorism. Hence, he considers Khan's words as a representative voice of the Muslims and the recognition of UNGA as a platform for discussing Islamophobia. Appendix N highlights the Indian respondent's views on terrorism and Islamophobia by stating that he deems the speech to have been about addressing these issues on a global scale. The Indian respondent focuses on the impact of Khan's speech on European Muslims and the areas where Islamophobia has other severe effects outlining that the UNGA is an appropriate platform to debate this issue. However, this also critiques Khan's approach to navigate this complex issue. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the respondents' interpretation of the speech of Khan is based on their backgrounds and their vision regarding the UNGA's place in global politics. Thus, while some view the speech as contributing to global polarisation and alien to UNGA's rules whereas the others see Khan's efforts to spotlight the hardships Muslims face in a fiercely prejudiced modern world. The diversity of perspectives proves the complexity of discourse on Islamophobia in UNGA.

13. Power:

13.1. Exercise of Power Through Discourse: The respondent of Appendix A denies Khan's speech's effectiveness in relation to the fight against Islamophobia. The respondent believes that the phrase "Islam has nothing to do with terrorism" is a well-known fact and is focused too much. Thus, in this case, Khan's attempt to influence this problem does not bring a new understanding of the issue to the educated global audience. In Appendix D, Khan's speech is seen as deepening divides, with criticism directed towards its "insensitive depiction of the world in binary terms." This view suggests that Khan's language, at the UNGA, could heighten tensions instead of promoting unity, adding to a narrative of conflict through phrases like "Us vs Them" and "Rich, vs Poor." Appendix I praises Khan's speech for addressing Islamophobia and challenging the link between terrorism and Islam. This reaction suggests that Khan effectively used his influence to advocate for Muslims, shaping perceptions and sparking conversations, on this important topic. Appendix N acknowledges the complexity of the topic of Islamophobia addressed by Khan. The respondent admitted Khan's speech to be the manifestation of an effort to raise awareness about the Islamophobia faced globally. Thus, this indicated that Khan's discourse aims to underlie the difficulties of Muslim people as well as the hardships due to islamophobia. In conclusion, the aforementioned analyses demonstrate diverging interpretations of power ignited through Khan's discourse at UNGA. Some see it a negative reinforcement of power dynamics, but others see it Khan's effort to draw global attention to the issue of Islamophobia and marginalisation of the Muslims. The divergence underscores the complexity of Khan's political discourse and its impacts on social discourse.

13.2. Power Structures: Appendix D argues that Khan's speech contributes to the reinforcement of dividing global power dynamics. The speech is performed as a cold-hearted description of the world in Manichaeistic terms, which means that Khan's method only aggravated polarisation rather than mitigating it. This description supports the case that Khan's speech was a sort of hate speech that meant to divide the world rather than enable global togetherness and diplomacy. In Appendix E, the respondent argues that Khan's speech decreased Pakistan's reputation on the global level. The speech was a blow to Pakistan since it harmed the soft image of the country. The speech implicated Pakistan's soft corner for the terrorists and it may hamper global efforts for elimination of terrorism in the world. Appendix H includes the critique of an Indian respondent who thinks that Khan's UNGA remarks were overly focused on domestic matters and ignored more widespread issues. The speech is regarded as a strengthening of a limited power structure unique to specific communities. The criticism implies that the respondent feels Khan should have spoken about world problems on the UNGA platform as opposed to using that as an opportunity to bolster his power base at home.

14. Ideology:
14.1. Selection and Challenge of Ideology: The critique of Khan's interest in Islamophobia in Appendix A also undermines its significance in the modern global context. The respondent defies the emphasis that is put on the separation of Islam from terrorism. He suggests that this approach may no longer work at the global level. Appendix F confirms that he thinks Khan and his speech contribute to the perpetuation of the bad image of Pakistan at the international level. Khan's defence of radicalism and terrorism is non-helpful because it only promises a new wave of accusing Pakistan of sponsoring terrorism. Therefore, this position implies that Khan's words will not change the way Pakistan is viewed at the international level. On the other hand, Appendix K supports that Islam is portrayed accurately via Khan's rhetoric. Therefore, it endorsed his speech related to Islamophobia. Therefore, Islam's portrayal in Khan's speech was considered helpful in dispelling global perspectives based on misconceptions. Appendix M admires Khan's position on islamophobia, reflecting a positive attitude towards Khan's assertion on Islamophobia. It indicates that his speech is influential in changing the view of Islam all over the world. Appendix O provides a critique of Khan's shallow engagement with complex issues of Islamophobia. The critic's evaluation of Khan's assertion that Rushdie is responsible for the spawn of Islamophobia, reveals his advanced understanding of Islamophobia's historical and ideological etymology. This perspective suggests that Khan's speech failed to contribute to the discourse on Islamophobia by neglecting informed viewpoints.

14.2. Impact on Social Ideologies: Appendix B claims that by focusing on Islamophobia during his speech, Khan could inadvertently exonerate Islamic terrorism. Thus, this criticism highlights the apprehension that disregard for terrorism is always enhanced while addressing Islamophobia. Simultaneously, it voices scepticism about Khan's characterization of Islamophobia. The concern here is that this portrayal might ignore the complexities of terrorism within Islam. Appendix F contains the criticism of Khan, according to the respondent, there was too much attention to Islamic matters. It is suggested that the content spoken by Khan would be perfect for the OIC forum, not the UNGA. The critic expressed his displeasure with this kind of ideology, which prevents the leader from addressing global humanitarian and general issues. The respondent notes that Khan was pretending to act as if he was speaking for humanity. But in reality, he was aiming to speak about the ideology of religious bias in global diplomacy. One Indian respondent in Appendix H feels that Khan's speech does not cover global issues and focuses on the concerns of Muslims. Khan only represents Muslims and their interests, his speech isolates and separates Islamic issues from the global discussion.

15. Sentiment Analysis:

Negative, positive and neutral sentiments to Khan's speech on Islamophobia at the UNGA 2019 arose across society**.**

Table 1
Sentiments Towards Khan's Speech on Islamophobia at UNGA 2019

Appendix A	Negative
Appendix B	Negative
Appendix C	Negative
Appendix D	Negative
Appendix E	Negative
Appendix F	Negative
Appendix G	Negative
Appendix H	Negative
Appendix I	Positive
Appendix J	Positive
Appendix K	Positive
Appendix L	Positive
Appendix M	Positive
Appendix N	Neutral
Appendix O	Negative

Most of the sentiments were negative, with a large percentage of the respondents criticizing the address for its focus on Islamophobia. The majority of the respondents claimed that the subject matter was either repetitive in reporting or a distraction from other critical problems. Some of the most recurring themes in the negative feedback were that the speech was detached, divisive, or untenable for the UNGA's international scope. On the other hand, there were also positive sentiments, but on a lower scale. Supporters of Khan's speech praised him for resolutely opposing Islamophobia and drawing the attention of the whole world to this problem. These answers emphasised that Muslims' voice has been expressed firmly in Khan's speech and the Muslims' apprehensions about the discernment of the world are justified. There is one neutral response as well. It is an analytical one as it does not indicate any positivity or negativity towards the speech.

The first research question has been addressed by identifying that most of the prevailing sentiments associated with the discourse of Islamophobia in Khan's speech are negative. Nine Quora users turn to negative criticism, considering the emphasis on Islamophobia undesirable and dividing. Contrary to it, five positive respondents' opinion is in line with Khan's statement. In their opinion, Khan's standpoint on Islamophobia reflects Muslim concerns. To answer the second question, the prevalent discourse of Imran Khan's speech on Islamophobia prompted considerable polarisation in the world. Some people appreciate his efforts to increase awareness and give voice for the Muslim community, while others reject the speech as inappropriate for an international stage.

In the answer to the third question, Imran Khan's speech at the UNGA initiated a social discourse about Islamophobia, which includes different opinions. It caused people to express their thoughts on Islamophobia. Disregard of the ambivalent attitude of the global community, Imran Khan's speech has played an important role in the global politics. It urges the people across the globe not to be hostile and biased towards Islam.

Conclusion:

The findings of the research related to Imran Khan's speech at UNGA in 2019 on Islamophobia reveal a complex social discourse that was triggered through this speech. The results demonstrate different perspectives which reflect respondents' regional and political influences. Moreover, the research indicates mixed responses in raising the issue of Islamophobia at UNGA. However, the speech initiated hot debate at global level and it catalysed social discourse. The findings also reveal that the problem of Islamophobia should be dealt through diplomacy. In addition, it highlights the role of Imran Khan in promoting social discourse on Islamophobia. It recommends future studies to explore diplomatic and cross-cultural strategies that can address the challenges identified in this research.

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