

**Cultural Hybridity as Perpetuation of Americanization: A Study of the Selected Novels
of Mohsin Hamid and Kamila Shamsie**

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Abstract

*Cultural hybridity has prevailed by penetrating its roots in the globalized world. It has influenced the identity of people especially migrants of various countries. Identity in the case of cultural hybridity leads to conflict. Migrants wish to grow by absorbing influences from their own 'roots' but new 'routes' also inspire them. Homi K. Bhabha is of the view that migrants' cultural world changes after crossing the borders; they have an experience of living in an alien culture and thus learn new ideas. He criticizes the idea of a fixed identity which is developed by the migrants' native culture. Bhabha argues that identity is 'hybrid'; it is always in a state of flux because it is constantly in motion, pursuing unpredictable routes. However, Aijaz Ahmad believes that the identity of people does not develop independently. He does not consider cultural hybridity as synonymous with cultural differentials. Bhabha's celebration of hybridity ignores unequal relations of cultural power. He also ignores cultural and historical specifics in his theorization of hybridity. The study is qualitative and is based on interpretive analysis of the novels *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Burnt Shadows* which celebrate hybridity in cultures. The study unveils unequal relations of cultural power in hybridity.*

Keywords: Hybridity, Identity, Racism, Stereotyping, Globalization, Cultural Differential

Introduction

Hybridity is the most criticized concept in postcolonial theory. It has gained prominence due to heated debates about its controversial and politicized status. Some theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha (1994) celebrate hybridity for providing opportunities of knowing about other cultures. However, some critics such as Aijaz Ahmad (1995) envisage that it is a tool of cultural politics that legitimizes transnational capitalism. Avtar Brah (2005) analyzes hybridity by exposing the unequal relationship between the master (the colonizer) and the slave (the colonized).

People in past were restricted to their roots. Identity shaped by roots was fixed and stable. Their identity was shaped by their regional cultural practices. With the prevailing environment of globalization, people of the world are now connected. People move from country to country for various purposes. This has resulted in a shift from stable to fluid identity. Transformation in the identity of the migrants promises rich opportunities but it also leads to some problems.

Migrants living in an alien culture face problems of identity. In a native country, roots have more influence on the migrants. However, in the new country roots lose their strong grip. The culture of the new country attracts them. Thus they are sandwiched between the two cultures.

According to Bhabha (1994), differences of cultures act as a catalyst in reinventing the identity of people. The migrants' experience of living in a different culture is significant. He is of the view that migrants in "in-between spaces" develop new identities that are innovative and involve the migrants' struggle for and their fight with such identities (p. 2). Borders not only separate places, but they also join them. When the migrants cross the borders and live in the new culture, they find

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themselves in an 'in-between' space that connects their native culture (past) with the new culture (present). However, the influence of the past upon the migrants does not vanish. It provides them with a phase of transition which leads to reinvention of the identities of the migrants. Such identities of the migrants develop by taking inspiration from past and present, including new culture and excluding some of the old cultural practices. Consequently, it produces a new and complex identity of the migrants (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). Bhabha calls it "restaging the past" (1994, p. 3). Past is redefined in the light of the present and consequently, a symbiotic relationship develops, "The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity" (1994, p. 10). Bhabha (1994) considers living in 'in-between' space (hybridity) an essential feature of the globalized world. It redefines the migrants' identity since their life absorbs influences of the new culture and retains some of the influences of their native culture.

Aijaz Ahmad (1999), a literary theorist, however, does not support Bhabha's concept of the model of hybridity. He studies culture from a materialistic perspective. He analyzes culture in terms of materialism which does not consider religious or spiritual background for defining culture. According to him, material practices are of prime importance since people live and create meaning based on these material practices (Ahmad, 1999, p. 65). The study of culture from the perspective of Ahmad (1999), creates the problem of lack of equality. Cultural goods are not available with equal access to various social groups. Cultural differences shaped by gender, caste, ethnicity, and class eliminate chances of equal space for the cultural goods shared by people or nations. Various cultural groups do not have equal access to cultural items (Ahmad, 1999, p. 66). Therefore, different cultures do not have equal status; rather cultures are based on the relationship of power. Bhabha's understanding of cultural hybridity does not say anything about the unequal relations between European and non-European cultures (Ahmad, 1995, p. 17).

The relationship between Europe and non-Europe exists based on power. Due to colonialism, their relationship is developed in the framework of power. The culture of Europe is shown as superior while the rest is represented as uncivilized and inferior. Colonialism is not only a political and economic project but it is also a cultural weapon (Ahmad, 1999, p. 68). Brah (2005) refers to the same aspect of hybridity and says that hybridity is propagated and protected by colonial discourses (p. 11). She is of the view that hybridity cannot be detached from the relationship of inequality between the cultures of colonizer and colonized. As exploitation cannot be avoided in the context of capitalism, hybridity fails in intermingling of various cultural traits. The relationship of power creates hurdles in developing the status of equality. The hybridity of cultures does not transcend inequalities which are developed and naturalized by colonial relationship.

It is said that migrants are independent in the hybridization of cultures. Cultures through hybridization are commodified and it is the commodified status that gives them equality. However, in the guise of hybridity, inequalities due to cultural power are protected:

This playful 'hybridity' conceals the fact that commodified cultures are equal only to the extent of their commodification. At the deepest level, however, the stripping of all cultures of their historicity and density, reducing them to those lowest common denominators which then become interchangeable, produces not a universal equality of all cultures but the unified culture of a Late Imperial marketplace that subordinates cultures, customers and critics. (Ahmad, 1995, p. 17)

Cultures are given the status of equality only to the extent of commodification. The status of commodities is not equal. For instance, goods/commodities in a material supermarket are distributed unequally; goods having more demand are displayed in front while goods having the least demand are stored on shelves which are less noticeable. Imperial culture is projected positively through electronic and print media while other cultures are portrayed negatively and given peripheral positions. Jack Shaheen (2003) comments on negative images portrayed in the movies of Hollywood:

For more than a century Hollywood, too, has used repetition as a teaching tool, tutoring movie audiences by repeating over and over, in film after film, insidious images of the Arab people. I ask the reader to study in these pages the persistence of this defamation, from earlier times to the present day, and to consider how these slanderous stereotypes have affected honest discourse and public policy. (p. 172)

This negative stereotyping of Arabs is perpetuated to defame their identity and culture. A stereotype is based on an essentialist approach i.e. people of a certain ethnic group having some stereotypes remain the same. Stereotyping is based on generalization which may prove to be wrong. These stereotypes

are constructed and propagated to distort the identity of the cultures of 'others' having no power. They are seen as enemies who pose threat to the West (Said, 1994, p. 310). This tricky use of power in the propagation of culture and 'imbalanced cultural relations' (Kraidy, 2002) is protected in the guise of hybridity. Annie E. Coombes and Avtar Brah (2005) uncover the role of scientific discourse based on power relations. They unveil the hidden motives behind the categorization of human beings on essentialist traits which develop fixed and unchangeable identities of certain races which are then considered as inferior. Such constructed identities are legitimized through scientific discourses (Coombes & Brah, 2005, p. 6). The objectivity of science is contested to prove science as a cultural discourse. Moreover, essentialist claims are challenged in the case of cultural absolutism. Cultural hybridity is supported with the help of an anti-essentialist approach. However, the valorization of Western cultural values is legitimized based on essentialism. Ziauddin Sardar comments on the hypocritical nature of cultural hybridity. He says that cultural absolutism is rejected in the Postmodernist context which supports valorization of the values of Western culture (as cited in. Brah & Coombes, 2005, p. 257).

This article analyses two novels, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Burnt Shadows*, to unveil problems of cultural hybridity. The study is qualitative and based on interpretive analysis which focuses on "commonalities, regularities, or patterns across the various data texts" (Seliger & Shohamy, p. 205). Selected passages from the two novels are interpreted in light of the views of Bhabha and Ahmad.

Cultural Hybridity and Americanization

Most of the writers are inspired by the new 'routed-identity' protected by hybridity. Mohsin Hamid (2007), a Pakistani novelist, also admires and defends hybridity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. He is of the view that the only solution to the problem of differences is hybridity. According to him, hybridity promotes harmony among people by diminishing their differences of boundaries (2007, p. 8). He negates the differences among various groups. The groups are divided due to geographical boundaries. He is of the view that hybridity overcomes the hurdle of boundaries and makes people willing for absorbing influences of other cultures. For him, hybridity is the essence of human nature. Hamid (2007) depicts the positive side of hybrid identity which is in contrast to the fixed identities. Quratulain Shirazi (2017) has analyzed the novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, by deconstructing the claims of national identity which defines its culture in terms of race and religion (p. 2). In the case of Pakistan, identities are shaped in terms of religion since the partition of Pakistan was based on Islamic ideology. However, hybrid identities absorb the influences of other cultures and transgress the limits of national boundaries.

Changez is the protagonist of the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. He is a hybrid being. He is Pakistani and gets an education in the US where he secures a job. He loves American culture and is also in love with an American girl, Erica. After 9/11, he faces problems due to security issues. Like other Muslims, he is not treated well. He decides to leave America and moves back to his native country, Pakistan where he starts a protest against America though he loves the American people and their culture. His protest is against American policies especially after 9/11, "The US foreign policies interfere in the affairs of the weak and dependent states" (Zubair, 2012, p. 70).

Changez is inspired more by American culture. He wants to be just like the Americans. He wants to behave by acting and speaking like an American (Hamid, 2007, p. 38). He also wants to adopt the identity of Americans and hide his real identity (of being Pakistani) under American dress, "I was the only non-American in our group, but I suspected my Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by my suit, by my expense account, and-most of all-by my companions" (2007, p. 42). He does not want to be introduced as a Pakistani. The American identity has more influence on him. Hybridization of Changez shows that migrants cover their culture by adopting the new 'routed' culture as is evident from the views of Aijaz Ahmad (1999).

Changez falls in love with Erica. He develops intimacy with her despite knowing that Erica cannot forget her boyfriend, Chris, who has passed away. Her mind is still preoccupied with the amorous memories of Chris. Changez gets closer to Erica only by taking the persona of Chris. Hamid (2007) depicts the fragile identity of Changez who takes on the persona of Chris to develop an amorous relationship with Erica. During his physical closeness with Erica, he has to lose his identity because she does not accept him in his guise (p. 63). Changez sacrifices his own identity for the sake of acceptability. He changes his persona to become a lover of Erica, "... my shame was more

confusing. Perhaps, by taking on the persona of another, I had diminished myself in my own eyes ..." (2007, pp. 63-64). Erica accepts him only in the persona of Chris. She thinks about Chris and only in this way she makes love with Changez. Changez loses his identity for being acceptable to Erica and hybridity needs such a sacrifice. Changez does not possess a stable identity; his identity is fluid since he is not attached to one place i.e. his native city of Lahore; he is, therefore, willing to change his persona for the sake of Erica (Hamid, 2007, p. 89). Changez sacrifices his identity for the sake of Erica. But Erica's response is different. Erica loves Changez but she responds to Changez's love strangely; she develops physical intimacy with Changez though she still has Chris in her mind and it is due to extreme depression that she dies (Shirazi, 2017, p. 3). Changez loses his stable identity due to taking inspiration from Erica's culture. A person in such a situation is sandwiched between his roots and the new culture. However, the new culture has a stronger influence on people in the diaspora. Edward Said (1994) is of the view that in the modern age, the exchange of culture means domination; cultures of the third world countries are marginalized; thus some people lose while others gain (p. 195). The cultural identity of diaspora people loses acceptability. This is the reason that Changez has nothing to offer to Erica. Hamid (2007) depicts the centrality of American culture by appreciating diaspora.

Hybrid identity is fragile because of losing too much of one's roots. Changez does not inspire Erica or her parents with his Pakistani culture. They ask him questions about his culture with suspicion. They consider his culture to be eccentric. They do not realize that a universal culture does not exist and that different groups have different cultures (cultural differentialism). Erica's father asks Changez if he drinks and Changez assures him that he drinks, "'I do sir,' I assured him" (2007, p. 32). Changez drinks but most of his people do not due to religious prohibition. Changez is well aware of inequality in cultural practices. He assures Erica's father about the positivity of his cultural practices. Erica's father does not need to do so. It results in the suffering of diaspora people, "... the net effect of cultural exchange between partners conscious of inequality is that the people suffer." (Said, 1994, p. 195). Thus hybrid culture is an attempt of imposing the culture of the first world countries in the third world countries.

Stereotyping of Pakistani Culture

Kamila Shamsie, a Pakistani novelist, has written *The Burnt Shadows*. In the novel, Hiroko Tanaka is the main character, who is a victim of the atomic bomb dropped over Nagasaki on 09 August 1945. Her dream of marrying Konrad Weiss is shattered due to the tragic incident. She finds relatives of Konrad in Delhi. There she develops a relationship of love with an employee named Sajjad Ashraf. Thus different families are tied in the bond of humanity. They move from one country to another and then finally to New York as a result of 9/11.

The novel accentuates the importance of cultural hybridity and it is reflected in the form of Hiroko Tanaka who adjusts easily to different cultural backgrounds. She shifts to Delhi after the tragedy of 1945 and marries a Muslim, Sajjad Ashraf. They are bestowed with a son, Raza Konrad Ashraf. They spend most of their life in Pakistan but are not welcomed by the Pakistani people. Raza is an intelligent student but he cannot pass the paper of Islamic Studies which is a compulsory subject in Pakistan. Uncle Harry, son of Henry Burton, promises him getting admission to an American university. He tells him that there he does not "need to retake the Islamic Studies exam" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 193).

In Pakistan, the fate of Sajjad Ashraf and his family does not change for the good. There Hiroko does not get rid of the burns on her body. Raza faces two different worlds in Pakistan. He is portrayed as Raza Ashraf who does not promote in his studies while his friends join university. He is also treated as Raza Hazara who is not allowed to speak his native language or the language of the past; he has to expel the Soviets from the land of Afghanistan (Shamsie, 2009, p. 207). It is not relevant to the theme of hybridity but it explains how Raza is divided in a country where he is surrounded by Muslims. Raza's parents decide to settle in Pakistan but Raza is not happy there. Anjaria comments on Raza's travel that Raza faces troubles due to his traveling experience while his parents are comparatively at ease, "While his parents ultimately adjust to life in Pakistan, despite living there initially against their will, Raza is perennially out of place" (as cited in Kanwal & Aslam, 2019, p. 50). In Pakistan, he cannot pursue higher studies due to his lack of interest in the subject of Islamic Studies. His friends promote to the university but he fails the paper of Islamic Studies due to

which he remains a failed student. He starts working in a factory. He does not get rid of the stigma of "bomb-marked mongrel" (2009, p. 195).

His other identity is that of a Hazara, a marginalized ethnic group in Afghanistan. He pretends to be a Hazara to develop a friendship with an Afghan boy named Abdullah. Abdullah gives him the task to kick out the Soviets from Afghanistan. Abdullah deceives him and takes him to the camp of *Jihadis* (Muslims fighting holy war). The scenario of the Cold War in the twentieth century offers only two options to Raza; he has to support either the holy war (*Jihad*) or the CIA (as cited in Kanwal & Aslam, 2019, p. 51). In the end, Raza realizes his blunder, "I'm sorry I lied to you. I'm sorry I pretended to be an Afghan. It's only very recently I realized how wrong it was to claim that" (2009, p. 351). His troubles come to an end when he shifts to America.

Raza finds peace of mind and protection only in America because according to Harry, America is a place fit for developing cultural hybridity. Harry tells his daughter, Kim, about the spirit of tolerance of Americans who believe in hybridity; the migrants are accepted easily in America once they show their willingness for becoming American (Shamsie, 2009, p. 171). Harry is of the view that American people accommodate migrants and their children easily and happily. The migrants only need to be identified as Americans. When Harry promises Raza for getting admission to America, Raza is very happy, "None of the rest of this mattered while he had the promise of America" (2009, p. 191). He finally shifts to America where he is welcomed.

Hiroko is not lucky to have a happy life in Pakistan. She faces problems due to cultural differences. She wears a short dress which is not common in Pakistan. Her son, Raza, tells her that his friends do not visit his home because of her indecent dress; he requests her to cover her arms and legs by wearing a Pakistani dress (2009, p. 130). She then wears *shalwar* and *kameezes* at home. She does it only for the sake of her son. However, Raza does not stop complaints about his mother's dress, "But a few months later, when Raza said her *kameezes* were too tight, she returned to the dresses" (2009, p. 130). In Pakistan, she wants to live according to her way. She does not want to wear Pakistani dresses and if she does so that is only on certain occasions. Shamsie (2009) depicts the miserable life of Hiroko to show that Pakistani people do not tolerate other cultures. The novelist does not make any mention that Pakistan has a different culture. Pakistani people, especially women, wear *shalwar* and *kameez*. Women do not normally wear tight dresses. That's why Raza does not like the tight dresses of his mother.

In Pakistan, Hiroko loses her husband and lives a miserable life without her husband. She moves to America where she lives with Kim and Harry's mother; the Weiss-Burtons and Tanaka-Ashrafs join and live together peacefully (Shamsie, 2009, p. 277). Hiroko Tanaka is first in love with Konrad Weiss who dies in the bomb explosion dropped over Nagasaki in 1945. She then settles into Delhi where she finds Sajjad Ashraf and marries him. Both join Pakistan after partition in 1947 but there they do not materialize their dream of happy life in Pakistan. After the death of Sajjad Ashraf, Hiroko along with Raza travels to America where she lives a peaceful life with Kim.

The tragedy of 9/11 makes Americans hate Muslims since they are considered responsible for the death of Americans. According to Kim, Muslims are intolerant and terrorists: he thinks that Buddhists, Christians, and Jews are lovers of peace while Muslims have created terror for the Americans (Shamsie, 2009, p. 361). Such stereotyping of Muslims makes them misfit; Kim's views about Muslims reflect the post-9/11 situation in the U.S where Muslims were considered as terrorists (Kanwal, 2015, p. 144). Abdullah is one of them. He is Afghani and is thus depicted as a terrorist. He shifts to America where he is finally arrested for his wrongdoings, "And he did a lot wrong, the policeman said, your government has been searching for that man. They are very glad to have him in their custody now ..." (Shamsie, 2009, p. 363). Muslims are stereotyped as terrorists. It shows that different ethnic groups are not alike; some are civilized while others are uncivilized. This proves cultural inequality.

In the novel, Americans are shown lovers of peace. Americans accommodate migrants of different cultures. Shamsie (2009) depicts the spirit of the hybridity of Americans. According to her, America is the only place where people of different cultural backgrounds can live together. She supports the relationship of inequality between American culture and Pakistani culture; for her, American culture is superior and needs to be adopted especially by migrants.

Critique

Aijaz Ahmad is of the view that hybridity has a hidden motive of 'unequal relations of cultural power'. Consciousness of cultural differences (at least at a deep level) exists even among Americans. It is evident from the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in which the father of Erica asks Changez if he drinks. Changez has to ensure that he drinks, "I do sir,' I assured him" (Hamid, 2007, p. 32). He does it for the sake of acceptability. It shows that someone who does not adopt American culture is never welcomed in America.

Cultural and racial sensitivity keep migrants away from the native people. Their lifestyle does not reflect any feature of their own culture since they are immersed in the new culture to be acceptable to the English or American people. It validates Ahmad's objection about the validity of culture in hybridity i.e. which culture deserves more hybridization (1995, p. 17). Changez is in love with American culture and adopts it for being accepted by Americans. Hiroko lives with Kim without having consciousness of cultural differences. But she does not feel comfortable in Pakistan. It is evident from her aversion to wearing *shalwar* and *kameez* in Pakistan (Shamsie, 2009, p. 130). Raza is accommodated in America because he sacrifices everything and adopts American culture. His hybrid identity is shaped by American culture. Hybridity is celebrated to challenge cultural absolutism and authenticity.

Racism and stereotyping of Muslims show that the claim of cultural hybridity is a myth. The identity of Muslims and Arabs is constructed on essentialist traits. Muslim migrants are reminded of their low status. Jack G. Shaheen (2003) comments on stereotyping of Arabs that Hollywood distorts the identity of Arabs by stereotyping them on religious and racial lines. He analyzed many movies since 1896 and came to know that the Arabs have been represented as brutal, savages, and religious extremists who terrorize the Western world (p. 172). When certain people such as Arabs and Muslims are stereotyped as uncivilized and brutal, then how they are given equal status in an alien country. This stereotyping confirms the view of Ahmad about "unequal relations of cultural power" (1995, p. 17). Through stereotyping, certain people are shown as inferior who need to be civilized and the only option for them is to adopt American culture. Hybridity does not provide "a universal equality of all cultures" (Ahmad, 1995, p. 17). It gives equal status to migrants only as "lowest common denominators" (Ahmad, 1995, p. 17). Their culture is shown as backward. Changez has to defend his culture in front of Erica's parents. The situation becomes worse especially after 9/11 when Changez feels himself as an outsider despite his wish for becoming an integral part of American culture (Shirazi, 2017, p. 2). The two novels do not say anything about the politics of culture. America cannot be exempted from the politics of culture since the politics of culture due to various ethnicities has flourished in America (Hall, 1992, p. 469). The novels do not say anything about racial discrimination especially after 9/11 in America. Tony Morrison, a renowned novelist and Noble Prize Laureate, remarks about racial discrimination in America:

All immigrants to the United States know (and knew) that if they want to become real, authentic Americans they must reduce their fealty to their native country and regard it as secondary, subordinate, to emphasize their whiteness. (As cited in Hamid Dabashi, 2017).

Migrants must consider their native country and its culture secondary if they want to become real Americans. American culture is portrayed in the novels as an authentic culture that gives equal status to all people including migrants. It is shown, "... as a world power and, consequently, as the center of global cultural production and circulation." (Hall, 1992, p. 468). It is very much true about the two novels which idealize American culture as a hybrid and universal culture and thus fit to be followed.

Cultural differences should not be exploited for assigning inferior status to the cultures of third world countries. The reason is that cultures do not exist in isolation; rather cultures pass through a process of transformation since cultures are not static. Moreover, cultures can never be claimed in the name of ownership; they develop based on experiences, appropriations, and interdependencies of various cultures (Said, 1994, p. 217). Various cultures take influences from each other. The influences are reflected in different cultural practices. All cultures are interdependent and thus the claim of American culture as superior is based just on ethnocentric assumptions.

Conclusion

Cultures do not exist in pure form. They change from time to time and influence each other and thus they are interconnected. This is very crucial for understanding of the real status of culture as transient since various cultures exist and these cultures have differences. The differences should not be

exploited for showing others inferior because culture is not a matter of ownership. The use of scientific discourse for interiorization and subordination of certain cultures is already challenged. People of different cultures living together must respect the cultural values of each other. Only then harmony can develop. Stereotyping of certain people and racism based on essentialist terms show intolerance for their cultural values. This practice indicates ambitions of chauvinistic powers to impose their culture on others in the name of hybridity. It is to legitimize the imperial powers as the centers of cultural construction and its circulation. It is a theorization of molding the other cultures into Americanization or Westernization in the name of hybridity. Migrants in the first world countries lose their own culture and embrace the new 'routed-culture'. Thus migrants living in first world countries such as America and England adopt cultures of these countries by subordinating their own cultures.

Hybridity demands tolerance and respect for cultural differences. Without tolerance, hybrid culture can never promote. Differences cannot be negated. Unfortunately, respect for differences is not seen in real practice. Cultures of underdeveloped countries are put in the box of trash for being considered as backward.

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