

Diasporic Mediation in Shaila Abdullah's *The Saffron Dreams*

Abstract

The present study explores the diasporic identity formation and pain of being dislocated in an alien land in Shaila Abdullah's The Saffron Dreams. To build a new life, something extant must first be destroyed. This paper looks into the mode of interpretive in-between-ness as well as the sense of identity and belongingness of the characters who are US immigrants of Pakistani origin. From the perspective of first- and second-generation immigrants, the question of a fixed identity seems ambiguous and in a dilemma. The title of the novel, The Saffron Dreams, symbolizes the feeling of richness in the construction of transcultural identity. Although nowadays, people voluntarily move to different places in the world, they cannot change their cultural identity easily, resulting into a struggle between their new environment and cultural roots. Therefore, this study proves that the target land's scenario always influences the diasporic people. The situation means the target country's culture, political ideology, human behavior, and rule and regulations, which is the main finding of this study. Using the theoretical concepts from Muslim diaspora studies, it can be argued that the trauma of Muslim life is imprinted in Arissa Illahi's memory.

Keywords: diaspora; identity; trans-culture; third space/contact zone; multiculturalism; diasporic mediation

The study explores the position and identity of immigrants in an alien land. Specifically, it concentrates on the American/West's view of Islam/the Orient. It focuses on a widow's struggle in her adopted land, which is also responsible for her

melancholy. Furthermore, this paper discusses the causes of the pain experienced by Muslim woman by generalizing their constructed identity through their religion, as shown in Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*. This paper intends not to compare the Western world with the novelist's homeland but rather focuses on the homeland of the protagonist, Arissa Illahi. Illahi is the main character of the novel, who represents Pakistani women's struggle in America as a diasporic member. In the book, Illahi gains money for survival by portraying the lives of immigrant women in both Pakistan and the United States, as well as the lives of the Muslim American community in general.

Abdullah shifts her narrative from the troubles and heart-touching experiences of Pakistani women to American experiences. Furthermore, she compares Illahi's first living experiences in America before attacking in twin-tower (9/11) and further experience of 9/11 to the experience of being Muslim in the USA. Through one Pakistani woman's experiences of widowhood, loneliness, single parenthood, and lack of maternal love, Abdullah attempts to represent the society at large. Moreover, she shows the external and internal conflicts of an immigrant woman by focusing on the psyche of an Asian woman who is very traditional and follows norms passed on from ages, while still wanting to show the hidden psychological strength of a Pakistani woman by over-coming her struggles with a firm attitude towards life, which is representative of Abdullah's notion of self-actualization. Although Illahi's siblings experience the absence of their mother during occasions such as marriages and childbirths, they manage to move on with their lives. However, after Illahi's

mother misses her marriage and fails to come to her side during the 9/11 crisis, Illahi refuses to be moved by her mother's request to set their differences aside.

Abdullah is a novelist and a civil rights activist. Her prose centers on excessive emotional expression, civil rights, her wrath toward social, cultural, racial injustices, and the representation of the female Muslim identity. Her maternal Muslim West Pakistani heritage and relationships with women have inspired her artistic creations. In her novel, she has narrated her life story by recalling select incidents and experiences from her childhood to adulthood. Moreover, she is largely considered a writer with vigorous political and philosophical longings.

The historical and ideological bases of the trend that artists of the diaspora are setting for contemporary art in the region have remained unexamined. Why has the concept of diaspora proven so amenable to the curatorial and collecting policies of western art institutions? Furthermore, why has the location of diaspora been linked to a “universal and humane” consciousness?

People living in a postcolonial era are not necessarily forced by war or colonization to abandon their homes and live under the hegemonic control of a foreign country as they have more freedom to move around and choose where to live. Therefore, they intentionally begin a new life in a new environment, which brings with it unknown and unpredictable obligations. While they move as they wish, they end up carrying their cultural identity to the new land, which results into an inter-generational clash.

This paper critically examines the concept of diaspora as applied to the experiences of a Pakistani woman, describing in particular the creative practice of Pakistani woman artists who live and work outside their countries of origin in Europe or America. The concept of diaspora has become popular in critical writing, artistic statements, and the general journalistic surveys of art from Pakistani women. What are the implications of doing so? Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, cites “diaspora” as one of the many new boundary locations that characterize the postmodern condition. These boundaries, in his words, are “the place from which something begins its presenting” (115). In Bhabha's study, diaspora offers one among a number of positions that offer the possibility of a “third space,” a place of enunciation from which the false “mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code” may be destroyed and a non-essentialist version of culture realized. He frames diaspora as a third space because the figure who lives in diaspora are positioned wholly neither in the home country nor the host country. In this sense, Bhabha offers an analysis that is linked to classical postcolonial studies which have located diaspora as an outcome of the power relationship between the colonial and the postcolonial.

Abdullah identifies with the reader by including certain experiences, issues, events, and expectations. Her autobiographical narrative supplies different ways of thinking and being in the human world, which helps to induce an alternative reality and truth. The life narrative genre celebrates the subject matter of the self, where other subjects such as identity, memory, experience, embodiment, and agency work

together. However, what autobiographical authors include and in which manner is always mediated.

Therefore, this analysis of an autobiographical novel, especially based on subject identity as the constitutive part, explores the forms and functions of identity. The portrayal of identity in autobiographical novels shimmers through the incorporation of differences and commonalities with people, as well as the acceptance and rejection of certain historically specific models of identity, which outlines discursive way of addressing identity and approaching its intersectional nature. Abdullah identifies as a lesbian and shows the differences between her identity and that of heterosexual women. Her racial, sexual, religious, and political identity makes her different, as they are cast by historically and culturally specific experiences in her life. Therefore, both the manner in which she accumulates her identities and what they entail are not natural; they are constructed and consumed through discourse. The multiplicity of identity is reflected in her intersectional identity. Hence, she constructs an abstract life by identifying with the other in the novel.

Commonality and difference are culturally formed over a period of time. Commonness can be formed in one particular culture, and an understanding of something is always marked by certain shared beliefs in a particular culture. Abdullah's parents were neglected and marginalized by the white community, and her mother was fired from her job.

In developing countries, the society imposes the dominant identity on an individual. Those who are in the position of authority and power or belong to

the bourgeois family have more choices in how their identity is formed and, therefore, can enjoy the liberty of life. Besides, the youth wish to construct an identity that is more socially rewarding, and they struggle to find that reward. If society regards an individual right from their childhood, they feel empowered. This inspires their identity formation. However, when it comes to developing countries, the formed identity is based on their parental income and social status. Moreover, the schools and colleges they attend also play an essential role in shaping their identity. Therefore, it is hard for young people who come from a poor economic background and have fewer academic qualifications to form a distinctive or socially accepted identity, unless they are extraordinary in either their studies or in any field such as art, literature, and sports. As Radhakrishnan identifies:

Any acknowledgment of another's reality necessarily involves the acknowledgment of 'the self in the other' and 'the other in the self.' Neither identity nor difference, neither self nor other is an immutable state of being: the two are necessarily intermixed. This was a point that Jackson made quite memorably in his speech at the Democratic convention when he declared that although he and Dukakis had reached the United States on 'different' boats, they were now in the 'same' boat. (6)

Here, Radhakrishnan says that, in a way, the study of diaspora provides an excellent opportunity to think through some of the vexing questions related to solidarity and criticism, belonging and distance, insider spaces and outsider spaces, identity as invention and identity as natural, location-subject positionality, and the politics of

representation, rootedness, and rootlessness.

In the realm of the art world, after postcolonial theorists began to redefine diaspora as a keyword that signaled an indefinite or flux place, critics began to use the term to identify a position of artistic criticality. As the entry concludes, to identify some kind of categorical difference without that difference, any substance becomes more essentialist than otherwise. According to Radhakrishnan, it is clear that the model of “identity” and its corollary, the representational algorithm, are inadequate when the realities, exclusions, and jeopardies that we are experiencing are, at the very least, multiple. To speak, then, un-problematically of a single black, feminist, or third-world model of revolution is as repressive as it is naive. These emergencies are pressing for a different language, a different politics and temporality, and an infinitely complex program of action that has to fulfill the following objectives: empowerment and enfranchisement of contingent “identities,” the overthrow of the general hegemony of identity, and the prevention of the essentialization, hypostasis, and fetishization of “difference” (11).

Many previous studies have examined this novel from different perspectives. The problem that they identify from the socio-political and sexual activities in this novel is that everything is perceived through a warped lens that exaggerates the virtue of the individual over evil totalitarianism. Abdullah challenges men through her writing. Deborah Hall critically reviewed the novel on a Pakistani journal, writing about the main characters, Illahi, as a determined lady struggling in American society even though she belongs to the Pakistani community of Muslims.

Moreover, Hall refers to this novel as a cultural and religious rejection of the veil. In the novel, Illahi demonstrates her strong nature as she copes with her rejection from fellow Americans before and after her husband's death. For instance, she had to deal with offensive behaviors from many Americans after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.

Similarly, Abdullah herself provides an analysis of the story in a Pakistani journal. She finds Illahi a woman struggling to cope after her husband's death. She also portrays her story as that of a woman fighting for her urban son, the struggle of which fuses in her mind with the unfinished novel she's writing into one life-defining project that becomes, at once, the struggle for her emotional survival and redemption of her race. Moreover, this novel is about our ever-developing identities and the events and places they shape them. It reminds us that in the midst of tragedy, our dreams can become a lasting legacy.

Azeem, in his analysis of the novel, describes the form of Pakistani-American fiction as introducing a double narrative that resists the imperial realism and sovereign violence that the protagonist suffers simply for being Muslim. While other critics only discussed Illahi's struggle to survive, Azeem also identified the aspects in it that deal with racial discrimination in society.

The immigrant nostalgia has a socio-economic and political underpinning. Therefore, by exploring the various nuances of the immigrant experience, defined in terms of the literary works of South Asian artists in the present paper, the researcher explores the dynamics at work in generating nostalgia in the character of the

immigrant Illahi.

The novelist depicts the post-terror rise of oppressive Islamic autocracy in a new-born country along with its effects on Illahi's family. Illahi is first seen rebelling against her fundamentalism through drastic conversion. Later, however, she attempts to negotiate with her identity in order to bring about a tolerant situation. The reality of the women in this community cannot be compared with that of those who do not share the memories of colonial structures and the violence of unchecked patriarchy. This novel about Pakistani immigrants in the US facing difficulties in holding on to a personal sense of identity across cultural boundaries also discusses and questions the sense of displacement in the lives of its characters. Illahi's mother represents the Pakistani culture, but her daughter represents American culture; therefore, there is an inter-generational conflict. The feelings of displacement, dislocation, and decline all merge in the novel. Abdullah herself is an immigrant from Pakistan who is living in America. Moreover, she is an independent designer. This term only has meant something for Arabic literature.

Due to the experience of displacement, a diasporic population's quest for identity and their inability to feel belongingness becomes all the more desperate. The root-lessness, coupled with the indifference attitude of the host culture, adds to the sense of otherness and alienation. The diaspora's sense of loss becomes tragic when they think of returning to their homeland. However, the homes to which they want to return to undergo a complete transformation and turn out to be romanticized illusions. If seen from a metaphysical perspective, human beings turn out to be eternal exiles, as

people do not have permanent homes anywhere. It is a displacement that gives diasporic activities such as writing and filmmaking their peculiar qualities of loss and nostalgia. As Rushdie states in *Imaginary Homelands*, they are obliged to deal in broken mirrors, from which some fragments have been lost. Immigrants, even if they have been westernized, go through a painful experience. They are vexed with an identity crisis, and their native culture unconsciously interferes in their logically grasping an alien civilization.

Moreover, he argues, "The broken glass is not merely of the mirror of nostalgia. It is also I believe to be a useful tool with which to work in the present" (12). Most of the diasporic people who perform any literary work reflect not only on nostalgia but also use them as a useful tool to work in the present.

After the failure of Illahi's mother to come to her wedding and be on her side during the 9/11 crisis, Illahi is not moved by her plea to resolve their differences. Ultimately, at the end of the novel, Illahi conjures the strength to absolve her mother of all obligations toward her. In an act that horrifies her mother, Illahi says there is no chance of a relationship. When the mother yells, "You can't discard me like day-old trash" (223), the irony is palpable. In *Illahi*, the novelist captures a female character who has escaped the typical confinements of her culture by using tradition when it benefits her.

The research identifies the existing and evolving trends which help to map the emerging changes, making significant contributions to understanding the development of contemporary South Asian American women. Diaspora refers to the

idea of displacement and the maintenance of a connection with a real or imagined homeland. Similarly, I have chosen not to choose between these two options. Instead, I consider both extremes by showing that they belong to the history of the world.

Illahi's mother has a love affair and abandons her family. Although Illahi's siblings suffer through the absence of their mother during their marriage and the birth of their children, they move on with their lives. However, the mother returns to their lives through long-distance calls, which Illahi does not accept. After missing Illahi's marriage and failing to come to her side during the 9/11 crisis, Illahi is not moved by her mother's plea to resolve their differences.

Cultural factors are essential in the quest for the identity and the self, especially for immigrants. Cultural identity is the point of recognition, and it is made within history and culture. The question of identity becomes crucial when a person is culturally displaced and cannot correlate with any of the two worlds in which they are living. Therefore, this paper analyzes Abdullah Shaillah's novel from the perspective of the quest for identity.

The novel is entirely written from the first person point of view of Illahi as she tells her own story to an American stranger. The novel is written in the form of a dramatic monologue between Illahi and American stranger which explores the American attitude towards the Muslims. In her narration, Illahi speaks about the time when he worked with Underwood Samson, and how he did not have any feeling for Muslims when he traveled to Chile for Underwood Samson.

In the book, Illahi struggles in two countries where she finds racism as well as

multiculturalism. Illahi was not born in the US, where she came to study and later worked to be a fundamentalist. Although she is not a US citizen, there is no doubt she wants to be. Therefore, two societies, namely, the Muslim and the western, are shown in two different ways. In the novel, the US appears to be harming its cultural and racial identity. Therefore, the protagonist desires to control social, political, economic, and cultural situations through unifying Muslims. The progressive ideas in the novel include the themes related to the increasing faith of Muslims in mosques, as well as the role of Muslim unity, political ideology, traditional norms and values, and identity.

In recent years, many fictional representations of 9/11 have been created, which attempt to decode the traumas associated with this date. On the one hand, these representations have memorialized an idealized pre-9/11 world and included commemorations of the victims and heroes of 9/11. The main themes in the feminist scholarship of the last decade are issues of women's identity, community creation in the diaspora, gender and development practices, and international links between the so-called "northern" and "southern" feminists. There is, however, a paucity of research on the explicitly political organization of women in the diaspora. In this very journal, I came across only two articles that were highly relevant to my current research. Refer to the following lines from the novel: "‘Goodbye, Jaan!’ Faizan was saying, and I mumbled a response although I am not sure what I said. Faizan left early most weekdays for his job at Windows on the World. I loved it when he called me Jaan, the traditional name for a sweetheart" (1). In these lines, we experience, more

urgently than ever before, the need to posit common humanity in solidarity that faces global threats of unprecedented magnitude. On the other hand, our situation is characterized by an unbounded heterogeneity of subject positions, each of which is a world unto itself insofar as it is informed and semanticized by its own macro-politics. Furthermore, consider the following passage:

Faizan, my silent mind screamed. Juhi came around and grabbed hold of my shoulders and sat me down on the couch. My body was shaking uncontrollably, and her hands kept slipping off. I blinked back tears and watched with blurry eyes as people, dazed and bloodied, passed by the camera: a man's arm at a crooked angle, a woman's terrified face covered in blood and grime, panicked firemen looking for comrades, saving lives, losing their own, running toward the smoke-filled hallways to save one more life, never to return. Moreover, as we watched transfixed, another plane crashed into the South Tower. (51)

The extracted lines show the woe of Illahi in an alien land. She does not find a clear way to identify as an American woman in the post-9/11 atmosphere. Therefore, she is gripped by the terror of her community and the immigrant place.

The novel's examination of Illahi's journey in a terror-stricken atmosphere without any fixed identity is unique in its own way. Illahi gathers up all she is left with after facing a great tragedy and joins the bits and pieces of her without for even a moment losing her hold on the subtle possibility of hope and positivity. This optimism makes her stand on her feet once again and understand the real meaning and

purpose of her life, which is reflected in the lines, “A man with half of his tie blown away walked past me stunned, and I realized that he was missing an arm. He had, in his other hand what appeared to be the remains of a file folder. We live a sheltered existence” (53). Abdullah is in no way unaware of the prevalent issues that vex the contemporary Pakistani society. In this book, she moves from the general plight and heart-touching experiences of Pakistani women as they made crude attempts to hold their own in the society to a larger perspective one Pakistani woman who experiences widowhood, loneliness, single parenthood, lack of maternal love, and other external and internal conflicts.

In the eyes of Mark J. Goodman, Abdullah, in her modernist style, explores the urge to figure out a form of life from the chaotic framework of external circumstances and deciphers how, through progressive psychological development, Illahi’s struggle blesses her with life. Abdullah believes that by an optimistic interpretation of the hardships of life and rejuvenation as the key to the acceptance of darker reality, be it the loss of a loved one who is the sum and substance of your life, your life no longer remains tragic. This is reflected in the following lines from the novel:

Many postponed plans to visit the country of their origin any time soon. Those who did travel preferred to remain quiet during their journey and choose not to converse in their native language even among family members. A few close friends changed their names—Salim became Sam, Ali converted to Alan—in an

attempt to hide identities. When asked their nationality, they offered evasive answers. We were homesick individuals in an adopted homeland. (60)

Pakistani fiction concludes that the writers, in one way or other penetrate the same issues that are already known to the audience at the international level. These issues are identical to those present in contemporary debates where Pakistan is depicted as uncivilized, barbaric, emotional, irrational, violent, fundamentalists, and exotic.

Through such portrayal, the writers recognize themselves as new Orientalists with the same knowledge but different race and color. Through male and female characters, the writers represent the anonymous identity of Pakistani people who are portrayed as vile, devious, corrupt, and nefarious.

Ultimately, Illahi is alone as an isolated island of subjectivity in an objective world, but she has absolute freedom over her internal nature, and the source of her value is only internal. Existentialism propounds the slogan of existence preceding essence, by which it is meant that a human being has no predetermined nature or essence that controls him, as reflected in the lines, “We were silent for a minute, swaying against each other, reflecting on God's strange ways of bringing people together. The tradition of arranged marriage had done just that in our case” (92).

The novel explores questions about the type of space that is provided to an Arab immigrant artist for creation within the existing diasporic community and the relation of that space to the theoretical formulations of the diaspora position that postcolonial theorists developed in the 1990s. It also asks what the uses and limitations of these different models of diaspora might be for my own practice.

Abdullah writes:

It did not register at first. The tone of the content. “Where to?” “Pakistan.”
 “What?” I jerked my hand away and snatched the blanket away to cover my chest, leaving his body bare. “I think it is the right thing to do,” he said, smoothing a crease on the bed. “Ma and Baba are getting old, and they are at the stage in life where they need me.” (111)

Saffron Dreams seems to make a case for the existence of core reality on which personal identity is based, founded on the notion of origin, or “home.” This hard kernel of self-corresponds to the widespread belief that each of us, behind the façade of culturally-performed identity, possesses a real “me,” which is unalterable and distinguishes each of us from everyone else, and while there may be an element of truth to that, as we will see, it nevertheless requires contact with an “other” to bring to the fore the “me,” in other words, an identity which, according to Sophie Duchesne and Vanessa Scherrer, takes into account the simultaneous permanence and change of the social actor, not to mention the existence of identity within a “relational field,” wherein relations are never understood as fixed.

As in Janine Dahinden’s *The Dynamics of Migrants’ Transnational Formations: Between Mobility and Locality*, this paper will analyze the migrants’ transnational practices, spaces, and ways by taking into account their mobility and locality. My central argument is that transnational formations result from a combination of cross-border mobility on the one hand and area in the sending or/and receiving country on the other. Here, mobility is to be understood as the physical

movement of people in a transnational space. Similarly, the locality is to be understood as being rooted or anchored socially, economically, or politically in the country of immigration and the sending country. Moreover, it means developing/having a set of social relations at specific places and looking at transnational formations as the effect of the combination of the two dimensions of mobility and locality, which provides interesting insights into the multiplicity of the forms of existence, as reflected in the following lines:

I silently inched away from the crowd without being noticed and then stopped to watch the procession pass. Losses mean different things in different parts of the world. Where I come from, healing begins with forgetting; in other societies, healing is achieved by dedicating yourself to specific causes. The concrete walls of women's hearts in the peninsular landmass of the Pakistani subcontinent seal off emotions, thereby achieving absolute sterility that can only lead to isolation. The dreaded word death scares my people; losses make them uncomfortable, nervous. They do the only thing they know to do: shy away and distance them. As I do now. (117)

With the rise of globalization, people and cultures are interconnected economically, culturally, and socially like never before. While nationalism defined much of the modern period based on how people formed social bonds and allegiances as well as how nations develop industrially and institutionally, the current period of globalization is defined by the transnational interaction in all spheres of human life. Multinational corporations are dissolving economic borders, and cultural products and

commodities flow through a global network of interlinked cities.

Moreover, the global capitalist system defines, organizes, and largely determines the lives of people the world over. This inescapable interdependency is reorganizing social and cultural life, and with this reorganization, how people, nations, and cultures do and can coexist is being reexamined. Therefore, being sought are newer and more appropriate ways of viewing an emerging global culture that promotes cohesion and similarity while, at the same time, pulling away from the emphasis on difference. Abdullah's work seeks to display these commonalities, providing a narrative which proposes to establish empathetic bonds by unmasking the deeper, foundational aspects of the global system. Rather than promoting ethnic and racial divides, which are, as recent studies have shown, culturally constructed and empirically unfounded, her novels demonstrate that access to monetary and cultural capital are much more formative in determining how and by what means humans can globally and interdependently exist.

It also underlines the Qur'anic traditions of tolerance, humanism, and respect for other religions upon which the spread of Islamic world culture was based (160–1). In the process, it questions the effect that historical and cultural memories, or the consciousness of the earlier flowering of a “Muslim cosmopolis” and knowledge of its loss, may have had on diverse Islamic self-perceptions in the present day (157–60). It also probes the relationship of a twenty-first-century Islamic *umma* both to Western neoliberal and global capitalist “cosmopolitanism”, and to an “alternative cosmopolitanism...interspersed with many cultures” which may coexist with Western

models or, in a quest to dominate the world with one tongue and culture, reject them altogether (166–7). The orientalist discourse laid the theoretical keystones for the progress of Islamophobia. The most significant works to define this practice of Muslim racialization are *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam* by Edward Said. Said argued that the biased philosophies of the Westerners about Muslims were a product of a psychological process assisted by substantial material ventures. Said argues that the “the Orient” was constructed by the West in relation to the West and existed solely for the West. In a Freudian sense, the West was established as the standard of measurement and; therefore, Orientalism was “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” Moreover, it represented the collective dichotomy of “us” (the Europeans), juxtaposed against “them” (non-Europeans).

Moreover, *Orientalism* describes the Orient as a subordinate class that was "manifestly inferior" to the West (Said 301). Thus, Said meticulously explained how literature and media discourses emulated these theories and standards to such an extent that they could legitimize fundamental ferocity against groups that seemed to intimidate Western security.

Therefore, in the first section of this research, I am going to talk about how Illahi becomes a victim of unprecedented hate violence in the aftermath of 9/11. Although she herself loses her husband in the catastrophic ruins of the World Trade Centers, she was accused of being associated with terrorism based on her Muslim and Pakistani identity. With this, Abdullah illustrates that the 9/11 calamity can never

be a singular American tragedy because 9/11 is equally tragic for Illahi as she too loses her husband in the terrorist attacks. Moreover, she is faced with a myriad of obstacles while she continues living in America with her mentally and physically challenged son. She is bombarded with stereotypical misrepresentations and is constructed as the inferior other in American society. However, despite all these challenges, she chooses to resist Islamophobia by staying in America and fighting back. She is determined to accept all of America's faults and assimilate into society. However, for this, she has to take her veil off. In fact, the removal of the veil signifies the beginning of her new life in America in the aftermath of 9/11. This is reflected in the following lines: "I was the product of a country where I always expected to be driven to places. My brain did not process and resolve the geographical challenges effectively. To get around, I plotted my destinations carefully, always starting at a familiar point to avoid getting lost"(153-4). A socially inclusive society is defined as one where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity. Culture is set up as a nonorganic, free-floating ambience that frees intellectuals and theorists from their solidarities to their regional modes of being. It is within this transcendent space that post coloniality is actively cultivated as the cutting edge of cultural theory.

In particular, as Radhakrishnan asserts, in isolating race as a determinant, the reality that at any instance culture is multiply and heterogeneously determined is not being denied. In the American context, race, among the many determinants, plays a preeminent role. The race has indeed been coextensive with the very birth and

consolidation of this country. Walter Benjamin's thesis that every document of civilization is equally a document of barbarism is particularly relevant to this new and revolutionary world, whose very genesis and growth into international power have also been the narrative of racism and the willed production of a hierarchized "difference." In the novel, this is reflected in the following lines: "We still have a home back in Karachi and a handful of relatives. Masha Allah, you are doing quite well now, Illahi. I think it is time we said our goodbyes and left you in peace" (213). Opening her eyes in an affluent Pakistani family, Illahi finds herself in search of genuine maternal love, which her mother fails to give her because of the other base concerns that govern her life. Illahi struggles against insincere relations and realizes that it is the expectation that is the cause of sorrow and blood does not determine the presence or absence of love. Afterward, a series of ominous happenings continue to disturb her before she is wedded to Faizan in a typical arranged marriage.

Identity is largely connected with the institution where people share common values, beliefs, and behaviors based on gender, age, and so on. Therefore, it is essential to know the importance of society and culture, where institutions work as a system practitioner. As Edward Said states:

Therefore, the West is modern, greater than the sum of its parts, full of enriching contradictions and yet always "Western" in its cultural identity; the world of Islam, on the other hand, is no more than "Islam," reducible to a small number of unchanging characteristics despite the appearance of

contradictions and experiences of variety that seem on the surface to be as plentiful as those of the West. (45)

Collective identity demands shared understanding and practices. In the lesbian community, along with with other lesbians and Abdullah practice certain behaviors and values, which is a way of reflecting on common features over particular time and place. This process leads human beings into collective identification and, subsequently, they begin to identify with a particular group. Similarly, Jenkins argues that “similarity and difference are always functions of a point of view; our similarity is their difference and vice versa. Similarity and difference reflect each other across a shared boundary” (102–3). We also notice that the “ethnic” is entangled within a circular logic that condemns it to “irrationality” and “violence.” From the mainstream perspective, the “ethnic,” by definition, is that category which has not been successfully factored into the national equation and is, therefore, alien or eccentric to it. Moreover, it is a threat to national identity. She shares her feelings, love, experience, and life with various women, some of whom are white and some divorced from relationships with men.

However, an institutionalized or explicit conflict of objective interests between groups does not provide a fully adequate basis, either theoretical or empirical, to account for many situations in which the social behavior of individuals belonging to distinct groups can be observed to approach the group extreme of our continuum. The conflicts in Sherif’s studies were institutionalized. These stories offer a wonderful variety of experiences mainly gathered from the cultural clashes rippling outward in

different directions. The trauma of cultural dislocation and displacement, an acute sense of loneliness, and the pangs of estrangement suffered by the millions of “exiled Pakistanis” who try desperately to balance themselves, between “home” and “abroad” are the significant maladies that these studies attempt to interpret. Most of the characters in these stories grapple with the changed pattern of life in an alien land, but they also realize that the land of their parent’s birth still remains somewhere in the background to haunt them.

Identities are discursive as they are socially and culturally constructed. Language is not natural, and the identity that is practiced consists of multiple discourses. Smith and Watson further explain: “Thus auto biographical narrators come to consciousness of which they are, of what identifications and differences they are assigned or what identities they might adopt, through the discourses that surround them” (34).

A person can experience multiple identities, but the circumstance that surrounds them can lead them to perform certain identities, and identities are constructed, practiced, and performed through the ground of language and social performance. Therefore, they are discourse-based or discursive. Moreover, the representation and misrepresentation of identity are also based on language and society, which is why they are not natural or fixed. In the novel, multiple identities are practiced, but none of them are not inherited. In Mexico, Abdullah was frequently asked questions in the Cuban language because of her appearance. In the novel, she writes,

Apart from the religion, that we strived to preserve came another necessity of the times: salvaging our reputation. What proof did I have of the innocence of the rest of us? Couldn't I be considered a living attestation like many others? Couldn't Faizan, with his intention of leading a common life by earning an honest living? The trouble is people like us stay too low and off the radar to ever be of any real use or value to media. (155)

The extracted lines show the novelist's appreciation of the working people and the immigrant experience of sacrificing for the sake of identity.

The outcome of the cruel association, the ferocious hate crimes and the Indescribable anguishes of Illahi are heartrendingly portrayed by the novelist on several occasions. As an expatriate and expecting widow, Illahi's contact with conservative American society after the death of Faizan is an account of such experiences. For instance, while at a subway station in the aftermath of 9/11, she is confronted by four frightened and angry teenagers. After seeing the veil on her head, they start to come closer toward her with a feigned frantic attitude to punish her for the very terror attack in which she lost her husband. It is on account of her veil that the teenagers immediately associate her with the race of the murderers, which is demonstrated the blond boy "[pulls] out his knife and aiming the point at [her] hijab," tells her that "the veil that you wear is all facade. You try to look pure, but you are evil inside. You are the nonbelievers, not us" (62). Even though she is pregnant, she is not spared by them, and the blond boy tries several times to stab her with the knife. However, the moment they notice a man approaching the spot, they leave her

crawling on her knees and screaming, “You’re a moron. My religion does not preach terror. They are using it to fulfill their own objectives” (62). At this, the group returns to stab her once again but fails to do so because of the presence of the passers-by. Instead, they pick her up and throw her to the ground. None of the passers-by come to her rescue, and due to the violence of the hate crime she is subjected to, her unborn child is critically harmed, as, afterward, the medical tests show that the baby would be born mentally disabled and suffer from “heart defect, urinary tract malformations, kidney abnormalities, and cleft lip” (67).

Identity is carried out through multiple external and internal factors of life. Smith and Watson opine that "Identity is socially constructed in gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, class, family genealogy and religious and political ideologies, to cite the most obvious" (33). In Abdullah’s case, her identity is formed by gender, race, sex, class, society, and religion.

Identity formation means a process of finding one’s own value in life. Therefore, it is a process of self-discovery. The overall process involves trying to define who an individual is, what his interests are, as well as his gender, sexuality, social status, academic qualification, way of life and other various social factors they have come in contact with during their lifetime. In other words, identity represents the distinct personality of an individual. Once a young person knows what their identity is, their position in society is established. James E. Cote and Charles G. Levine, in their book *Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture* state that identity formation occurs no matter what the individuals’ choices and negotiations may be.

Furthermore, they say that is why the problems associated with these activities are not common (1). If we look at the process of identity formation of an individual here, it is different from the identity formation of young people in developed nations.

Thus, as Ashrafa claims, “the consequential attitude of Americans hit by the attacks of 9/11 is hostility towards “yellow race.” There is a high degree of hatred nurtured in Western society towards others. Illahi, therefore, becomes a victim of ethnocentrism (106). Devastatingly, Illahi turns into a target of bigotry, intolerance, and aggression for preserving her Muslim identity.

By delineating the character of a Muslim widow in her book, Abdullah captures the tragic lived experiences of the Muslim women immigrants in America after the collapse of the World Trade Center. Abdullah illustrates the miseries, pain, challenges, and difficulties that Illahi encounters as a Muslim woman in the aftermath of 9/11, even though she has been a victim of the attacks. Hence, Abdullah defies the notion that 9/11 is a singular American tragedy. Through this novel, Abdullah also counteracts the mainstream 9/11 literature, which suggests that all Muslims are associated with terrorism just because they share the same religion. However, despite all the hatred and prejudices against Muslim Americans, Illahi does not succumb to Islamophobia; instead, she resists the bigotry by staying behind and fighting back. To resist oppression and survive in America, she had to take her veil off while still keeping her religious faith intact.

Abdullah’s life is constituted by the multiplicity of experiences and memories as well as the factors of agency, embodiment, and identity. Therefore, her novel

constructs a discursive identity through these different factors. Identity is also influenced by history and historically specific models of identities. Her cultural identity is different from other women, particularly on account of her homosexuality. Moreover, the novel presents an intersectional identity to question the perceived fixedness and constancy of identity. Her identity is intersectional in that it pertains not only to her being a woman but also her being a Muslim. Furthermore, her intersectional identity as both a helper and lover to women is a response to the status quo, that is, the traditional concepts of gender and sex. As her identity and position is defined by society and redefined by her own self, she fails to hold a fixed identity. Therefore, her identity is flexible, constructed, reconstructed, altered, and ephemeral. In the end, it can be said that internal and external factors such as contingency of truth, society, history, power politics, and culture shun the autonomy of identity.

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