

ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – II Issue-IV (July – August) 2024

Frequency: Bimonthly



Hybridity and Otherness in Wajahat Ali's *Tom Jones and The Biryani Surprise*

Mashhood Ahmad^{1*}, Syed Zia Ullah Shah²

¹ Department of English, FATA University, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan

² Government College Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan

| Received: 07.08.2024 | Accepted: 10.08.2024 | Published: 14.08.2024

*Corresponding author: Mashhood Ahmad

Department of English, FATA University, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan

Abstract

This research paper explains Ali's *Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise* from a postcolonial perspective. Considering Bhabha's Theory of Cultural Hybridity, this paper attempts to show the adaptation and transformation of a Pakistani-American family into a new society. Qualitative in nature, this research analyses the play textually to reveal that when one culture asserts its influence on the other, a third space is created. This third space asserts that identity and culture are fluid entities that are in a constant process of becoming. Moreover, through the lens of Edward Said's concept of Otherization, the study has explained the marginalization and discrimination of the Orientals in post-9/11 America. Also, it has revealed American hegemony and the racist attitude of the West.

Keywords: Culture, Discrimination, Marginalisation, Otherization, Racism.

INTRODUCTION

As an umbrella term, postcolonialism, socially, exemplifies the experiences of people of the colonies of Great Britain wherein, it addresses issues like suppression, migration, injustice, resistance, race, gender, identity, independence, and certain other issues. As a literary theory, it studies literature produced by the colonized authors who have been trying to deconstruct the colonial narratives. Being natives of the British colonies once, colonized writers, like African and Indian authors, have been focused on producing postcolonial literature that highlights the social problems of the people, living in these colonies. Their primary concern is to write back to the colonial narratives that dominated literature in English for decades, characterized by the misrepresentation of the colonized nations. As O'Reilly (2001) writes in his book *Post-Colonial Literature* "the use of indigenous

cultural traditions, the appropriation of English, and the impact (whether cultural, psychological or political) of colonialism and its aftermath" (61) are the primary tenets of the postcolonial literature and it is characterized with certain important themes like injustice, domination, racism and the cruelty of the colonizers on the colonized nations. Postcolonial literature is particularly focused on the distorted reality, cultural hybridity, and Otherness of the colonized nations in the colonial literature. Responding to the colonial narratives, postcolonial literature writes back to the centre to retrieve colonized cultural purity and deconstruct the "Otherness" narrative. Writing back to their colonial centre, postcolonial writers have been trying to reclaim their identities, in any form, and challenging the colonial canon of misrepresentation of the colonized nations in English literature. Resistance to colonial

mastery, reclaiming their identities, deconstructing otherness (in all domains), and rejecting marginalization are the major concerns of postcolonial writers while shading off colonial narratives. Literary critics and theorists like Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are prominent postcolonial writers (rather I would call them masters instead of writers) when it comes to postcolonial studies and the above-mentioned issues. Appreciating them, John McLeod (2000) writes:

“They were deemed to pose direct challenges to the colonial centre from the colonized margins, negotiating new ways of seeing that both contested the dominant mode and gave voice and expression to colonized and once-colonized peoples. Postcolonial literatures were deemed actively engaged in the act of decolonizing the mind, worldly rather than abstract, local and political rather than general and liberal.” (28)

The term “postcolonialism” was roughly used in the 1980s to address various social issues but Ashcroft et al (1989), in their book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* have declared that “We use the term ‘post-colonial’, however, to cover all the cultures, affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day (11).” In *The Empire Writes Back*, the postcolonial authors have responded to the linguistic imperialism of the colonizers, re-representation of the ‘others’ and have reclaimed their identity

Similarly, Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* explores the colonial construction of the binary oppositions; the Orient-colonized and the Occident-colonizers. Said has explained the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized in terms of how the Orient culture is indebted to the Occident. Giving a positive caricature of the West, the Occident, and a negative caricature of the East, the Orient, this book refers to the representation of the two parts of the world in colonial literature. If, for instance, the West, termed as Occident in the book, is the seat of knowledge, power, superiority, and civilization, then, Said (1978) asserts, that the East, termed as Orient in *Orientalism*, is the seat of ignorance, weakness, inferiority, and savagery, respectively. Regarding Said’s (1978) *Orientalism*, McLeod (2000), in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism*, writes that “...the West occupies a superior rank while the Orient is its ‘Other’, fixed eternally in a subservient position. This makes the relations between them asymmetrical.” (39). Considering it mere fabricated fantasies and assumptions of the colonizers, Said has explained the concept of ‘Otherness’ in colonial (Western) literature. Concluding, Orientalism is an imposed fabricated construction of the Eastern reality by Western writers in their colonial literature. This construction of the Eastern reality will, perhaps, help Western writers to legalize the dominance of their literary canon in English literature.

Similarly, Bhabha’s (1994) *The Location of Culture* identifies the same fabricated identity, constructed through colonial narratives in English literature. According to him, cultural hybridity, third space, and liminality have been the objectives of postcolonial literature. Bhabha (1994) writes, “You cannot just solder together different cultural traditions to produce some brave new cultural totality” (82). He is of the view that the constant transformation of cultures and their mutual flexibility assert a refinement in identity. Thus, he summarizes postcolonial cultural identity as a ‘becoming’ process with no rigid root affixed to one culture.

Relating to Said and Bhabha’s postcolonial thoughts, Spivak (1999) also shared relevant thoughts in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* about colonial narratives. She, like the earlier discussed postcolonial critics, has also addressed the misrepresentation of the colonized nations through characterizations in literary works by the colonial writers and hence becomes a member of the ‘Holy Trinity.’ These postcolonial thinkers have established ‘postcolonialism’ as a discipline rather than a mere theory and that is why McLeod (2010) writes about them “Indeed, by the end of the 1990s, this ‘Holy Trinity’ of postcolonial thinkers had become established at the vanguard of what had come to be known as ‘postcolonial theory’” (30).

Pakistani literature in English, like other postcolonial literature, too carries the characteristic notions of hybridity and otherness. Pakistani postcolonial writers like Kamila Shamsie, Sara Suleri, Zulfiqar Ghose, Mohsin Hamid, Bapsi Sidhwa, H.M. Naqvi, and Hanif Qureshi have experienced otherness, alienation, or hybridity either directly or indirectly since they are diasporas too. Wajahat Ali, a Pakistani-American, is a writer, lawyer, journalist, TV host, award-winning playwright, and a consultant for the U.S. State Department. Ali’s most celebrated work, *Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise* written in 2010, has beautifully highlighted the tenets of postcolonial Pakistani literature in English. The plot of the mentioned play is focused on Pakistani American Muslim family in post-9/11 America. The family has been hybridized with intervening American culture in Pakistani culture and that is why experiencing Bhabha’s Cultural Hybridity. Preferring Pakistani food but adapting American culture in dressing and considering American pop music as superior to Pakistani music put the family in the third space which tempers their cultural identity. In the professional life of Salman, the head of the family, he experiences marginalization and otherness when mistreated by the boss during his job. Not only Salman, but the other two male characters, Ghafur and Hakim, too face the same otherness when looked at through the fabricated identity of Muslim and Islam. Focusing on these issues of cultural identity and otherness, this research article attempts to explore Ali’s (2010) *Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise* from postcolonial perspectives of Bhabha’s Cultural Hybridity and Said’s concept of Otherization.

Methodological Approach

Textual Analysis

This research article is framed qualitatively, using the selected play for analysis to achieve the intended objectives. This study involves interpretation of the play, using closed textual analysis by Catherine Belsey (1980) that studies events, and happenings and analyses the treatment or presentation of character/s in the overall construction of the plot in the targeted text, in the current study, the play. It helps to decode the meaning of the text, hidden in the layers of the language. Catherine Belsey’s textual analysis is incorporated to explore the relationship of readers to the author through the written text. She explains that any selected text carries its ‘internal dialogue’ pattern that is deconstructed by the readers in terms of their approach towards the text to find its intended message. Frey et al (1992) are of the view that textual analysis attributes meaning to the text that is under study. Imputing this meaning to the text, they consider, helps to comprehend factors and influences of various kinds on the author/s. These impacts on the author and his texts enable research scholars to extract meaning from the written texts. This research study has conducted textual

analysis of Ali's (2010) *Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise* to explore the postcolonial narrative that affects the characters in the play. This study has used postcolonial perspectives of Bhabha's Cultural Hybridity and Said's Otherization to explain the (re)presentation of the characters. With close textual analysis as a research tool, this work has dissected and analyzed the play to explore the impacts of the colonial narratives.

Bhabha's Cultural Hybridity

This research study has used postcolonial perspectives of Bhabha's (1949) Cultural Hybridity and Said's (1978) Otherization as theoretical frameworks to explain cultural alienation and social marginalization of the characters in the selected play. Generally speaking, hybridity is shaping a new form when two or more different forms mutually contact. In the field of postcolonialism, the term 'hybridity' is associated with Bhabha (1949) who explains that 'hybridity,' in postcolonial studies, is the creation of the new space which Bhabha calls as 'Third Space of enunciation.' This new space is the hybrid space and is formed when two or more cultures get amalgamated and cross-transfer their impacts. (37). He declares "[f]or me, the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather a hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" (Bhabha, 1949:211). Hybridity results in the formation of "double consciousness" or "double vision" which impacts the individual in two ways; either the individual merges his/her identity into the new space created or s/he loses his/her identity completely when interact with the new culture. The author, Wajahat Ali, being a Pakistani, has mixed two cultures: Pakistani and American, together and living life with a hybrid identity. Perhaps, that is why his introduction carries the coinage "Pakistani-American" as an adjective whenever surfed. Assimilating into new cultures and absorbing new traditions always lead to cultural hybridity and social alienation. Hence, the individual starts living in the "Third Space" where new enunciation is experienced. And this "in-betweenness" results either in merged identity or loss of identity. Moreover, the individual finds himself 'beyond' his cultural identity in the spatial distance which leads to a constructive future. Bhabha (1949) declares that this "beyond" spatial distance is a transitional phase wherein the individual stays in the "in-betweenness" and transforms her/himself into a new being and then starts assimilating into a new culture/s. In Bhabha (1949) writes:

"The beyond is neither a new horizon nor a leaving behind of the past...we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction in the 'beyond', an exploratory, restless moment..." (1).

Furthermore, he is of the view that fluid culture and floating identities end cultural and social hierarchy. Postcolonial cultural identities, Bhabha (1949) asserts, are in a transitional stage of transformation and trying to assimilate into the colonial identity. This transformation and assimilation never end because the colonized nations have lost cultural hierarchy and have entered into the 'third space.' This "becoming" of cultures and identities has tampered with the hierarchal modes of domination. He considers hybridity as a regain of colonial domination through "disavowal" (Bhabha, 1949:154). Bhabha (1949) writes, in his book *The Location of Culture*, about hybridity which is the "reevaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of

discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power." (Bhabha, 1949:191). Rather than a radical identity, Bhabha's hybridity offers a possibility for a postcolonial intervention. His concept of hybridity can be seen as a direct challenge to the "temporal dimension of colonial discourse" (Mizutan, 2008:09).

Said's Otherization

Edward W. Said (1978), a Palestinian critic, discusses the concept of Othering in his famous book entitled *Orientalism*. Said shows how the biased and prejudiced picture of the Orient as the "other" has been produced and perpetuated by the colonial discourse. Not only *Orientalism* but his other book entitled *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981) also reflects how Muslims are seen as the "others" and are discriminated against and marginalized. He asserts that it is the West who Orientalized the Orient on purpose i.e., depicted them in their literature and other texts as savages, raw, uncivilized, barbaric, and ignorant, so that they could dominate the Orient. To support his argument, Said cites Aeschylus's *The Persians* and Euripides' *The Bacchane* and asserts that texts like these portray a very false image of the Orient and deem them as the "others". He argues that such writings are wholly and completely based on the West's false imagination of the Orient for the sole purpose of spreading their authority over the Oriental world. With the help of their so-called power of knowledge, the Western writers fabricate a false image of the Orient to make them their subordinates. In his own words: "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said, 1978:5). Furthermore, he declares that the West has stereotyped the Orient according to its own will and choice. In his opinion, the media plays a primary role in the depiction of "the mysterious Orient" (Said, 1978:26) and makes the Orientals the mere objects of study, stigmatized with passivity and otherness. However, Said's criticism does not stop at the Orient being the "other", in fact, he also shows how the West sees Muslims as the "others" too. His concept of otherization cannot be separated from Islam. In *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981), he shows how the media misrepresents Islam and Muslims as extremists and terrorists, hence as the "others", having uncivilized cultures and radical and extremist personalities. Indeed, in Said's opinion, the media tries its best to link every terrorist activity to Muslims to marginalize them. He asserts that through Western media, texts, and cultures, the Orientals are made to feel inferior, archaic, subaltern, and primitive. By creating the binary oppositions between the Orient and the Occident, Said has been successful in exposing the hegemony of the West to the whole world. Through *Orientalism* (1978), we can see how the Western discourse has distorted the reality of the East and fabricated the idea of the Orient as the "other" through *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981), we can see how the Western media and the fundamentalist scholars of the West depict Muslims as the "others".

Literature Review

A study by Laurie Goodstein (2009) entitled "A Pakistani-American Family is Caught in some Cultural Cross-Fire" highlights the life of a Pakistani-American family in the post-9/11

era. The study brings forth the efforts of Pakistani-American writers in the said era. Goodstein (2009) reveals that plays by Pakistani playwrights are not always about defending Muslims against the stigmas of terrorism and extremism “but about the cultural cacophony that ensues when you drop three generations of a Pakistani family into Silicon Valley.” (Goodstein, 2009:21). The study also shows that the play discusses some universal themes like sibling rivalry, expectations of parents, and the gap between the older and the younger generations. For instance, Fatima, the only daughter of the family, describes her mother Kulsoom as “Fresh Off the Boat” or “FOB” (Ali, 2010:04). Moreover, the article claims that Pakistani fiction has much more to offer than merely postcolonial issues and the trauma that Pakistani-Americans had to go through in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Shaimaa Mohamed Saeed (2017) studies Wajahat Ali’s (2010) *Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise* from an intersectional point of view. She merges postmodernism with postcolonialism to show the ideological and textual significance of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The study illuminates how the said terrorist attacks influenced the literary arenas. For instance, on one hand, Muslims were being portrayed as terrorists, extremists, and the “others” of Westerners in the American discourse/fiction, while on the other hand, Muslim writers were trying to remove the stigma and were attempting to redefine their personal and political identities. Furthermore, Saeed makes use of stylistic devices like metaphor, irony, allegory, and intertextuality to stress the dramatic meaning of the date of 9/11. Additionally, the study attempts to show the representation of history in the play. The voices of the past ages can be heard in different places. For example, the names of all the characters; Khulsoom, Fatima, Salman, Salahuddin etc are echoing the past. Saeed remarks:

“...the voice of the past is heard while referring to the classical song of the old Welsh singer Tom Jones, the terrorist Osama bin Laden, the Afghans who seek asylum in the United States, the prophet Muhammad’s tradition of feeding upon “honey”, “dates” and “milk.” (2017:521).

Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise (2010) offers a great deal for the postcolonial study, especially through the perspective of Bhabha’s theory of Cultural Hybridity and Edward Said’s concept of Otherization. Bhabha (1949), in his book *The Location of Culture*, stresses the point that people of the postcolonial era live in the “beyond” i.e., a postcolonial person very much resides in a point of transcendence, a state of in-betweenness, which he terms as the “third space”. According to him, such people suffer from “a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement” (Bhabha, 1949:11). For him, this third space acts like a connective tissue between “the upper and the lower, black and white” (Bhabha, 1949:13). This theory of cultural hybridity has been used as a theoretical framework for several studies. Humaira Sarvat (2014) studies Kamila Shamsie’s (2009) *Burnt Shadows* through the perspective of Bhabha’s Cultural Hybridity. Whilst analyzing the character of Hiroko Tanaka, the protagonist of the novel, Sarvat asserts that Hiroko does not accept one identity for the other whenever she shifts into a new geographical location. Her identity is quite fluid because she assimilates the new cultures and traditions with the old ones instead of replacing the old with the new ones. She is the epitome of a cultural hybrid. Sarvat remarks: “She is now, beyond all the scales that measure identity... Hiroko is the true spokesperson of

the creative power of this hybridity... Hiroko is the valorization of the ‘third space’” (Sarvat, 2014:473). The ease with which she masters the art of speaking multiple languages to adapt to a new society is praiseworthy. The study concludes that the world of postcolonialism is quite polarised where many cultures and traditions encounter each other, however, they do not overlap but assimilate into one another leading to cultural hybridity.

Edward Said’s notion of Otherization is utilized as a theoretical framework for many postcolonial studies. For instance, Asma Mansoor (2012) studies H.M. Naqvi’s (2009) *Home Boy* through Said’s concept of Otherization. The study investigates how a Muslim boy named Chuck and his two other friends are put under a microscope and marginalized after the fall of the Twin Towers on September 11th, 2001, and how their identities are defined as terrorists by the West. At first, Chuck is struck by the grand city of New York and the opportunities that it lays bare in front of him. In his overwhelming feelings, he goes to the extent of saying, “...I’d since claimed the city and the city had claimed me” (Naqvi, 2009:3). However, his dreams are shattered after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. He is seen as the “other”, the inferior, the misfit. The “Girl from Ipanema” leaves him after getting to know that he is not an Italian but a Muslim. Although Chuck is innocent, he is arrested after the incident of 9/11 because of his religious identity. The study concludes that Said’s notion of otherization is quite prevalent in the treatment that Chuck receives at the hands of the West.

Amani Sami Salmeen (2019), similarly applies Said’s concept of otherization to Mohsin Hamid’s (2007) *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The study highlights how a hardworking person like Changez, the protagonist of the novel, who could have had a very bright future ahead, is disillusioned and faces identity crises because of the unjust marginalization and othering that he is subjected to after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 only because he is a Muslim. The research concludes that as a result of being seen as the “other”, Changez alienates himself from society and ultimately leaves America. “The feeling of foreignness and being out of place haunts Changez throughout the novel” (Salmeen, 2019:34).

Discussion

Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise by Wajahat Ali (2010), a Pakistani-American playwright, focuses on the story of a Pakistan-American Muslim family in the post-9/11 era. The family comprises six people belonging to three different generations. Hakim; the grandfather, belongs to the first generation. Salman and Khulsoom, the father and the mother, respectively, belong to the second generation while the three children named Salahuddin, Fatima, and Ghafur are the representatives of the third generation. This dramatic comedy reveals the marginalization of Muslims in the West humorously and comically. Wajahat Ali very skilfully cloaks the biased and prejudiced attitude of the West towards Muslims in subtle irony. A postcolonial textual analysis of the play reveals the cultural hybridity that the family goes through while living in a foreign land as well as the marginalisation and otherization that comes as a result of being a Muslim family in the West in the aftermath of 9/11.

Bhabha (1949), in *The Location of Culture*, asserts that cultural hybridity appears in moments of transformation. When one’s geographical location changes, one’s identity cannot remain the same. However, it does not mean that a completely new identity is formed, instead, a fluid and mixed identity is created which

Bhabha terms as the “third space”, and a state of in-betweenness. He asserts that “...these ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity.” (Bhabha, 1949:34). Wajahat Ali’s (2010) *Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise* can be seen as one of the best examples of this cultural hybridity since almost every character of the family is a hybrid. The very setting of the play projects cultural hybridity. The play is set in a “...contemporary suburban home, with the kitchen area (stage left) opening into the family room” (Ali, 2010:02). A Pakistani family living in a house decorated in American style is the epitome of cultural hybridity. However, not only the setting but the behaviour and the attires of the characters also reveal Bhabha’s cultural hybridity. For instance, the reader comes across Khulsoom at the very beginning of the play. At first, she is seen covering her head as it is the time of “adhan” (Ali, 2010:02) but then, as soon as the call for prayer ends, she goes to the radio and plays a classic American song “Tom Jones”. Here the Muslim way of covering one’s head during Adhan and the Western way of listening to music, which is prohibited in Islam, coincide, showing the fragmented and bicultural life of the Pakistani community in America. The covering of the head during Adhan shows that albeit living in a foreign land, Khulsoom has not abandoned her traditions, culture, or religion altogether but merely assimilated the new one with the old one leading herself towards cultural hybridity. Furthermore, in Bhabha’s opinion, hybridity is constructed through a process known as “mimicry”. In their desire to fit in, the “others” usually mimic the superior West and, as a result, have mixed cultural identities. “Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power.” (Bhabha, 1949:154). This act of mimicry can be seen in *Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise* when Ali uses the phrase “accented English” for Khulsoom. He writes: “Taking off her hijab so that it hangs like a scarf around her neck, she sings the lyrics in accented English” (Ali, 2010:03). Khulsoom fakes the accent to act more like an American so that she can ultimately fit in. Moreover, the outfits of the family reflect cultural hybridity. For instance, Fatima, the only daughter of the family, wears Western clothes but covers her head with a Hijab. Her physical appearance is described in these words: “Hair covered by a white hijab, wearing a stylish red designer sweater and designer blue jeans. Green armband.” (Ali, 2010:14). Similarly, Salman is wearing a white business shirt with khaki pants but to keep his Pakistani culture alive, he has “desi sandals” on. Salahuddin and Ghafur, the eldest and the youngest sons, respectively, are also cultural hybrids like the rest of the family. Salahuddin has “dark black designer pants, shoes, and jacket” on whereas Ghafur is wearing “average Western clothing, green shirt, but also a black *kufi*” (Ali, 2010:13-14). Here the mixing of Western clothes with a Muslim prayer cap proves Ghafur to be a hybrid. Although all the family members adopt the American way of life and fashion, they do not completely forsake their own culture. This mixing of Eastern and Western clothing proves Bhabha’s claim that one cannot bring two cultures together into a completely new totality. There is always a third place of enunciation whenever two or more cultures meet one another.

The analysis of the daily life language of this Pakistani-American family further elucidates hybridity. It is through the mixture of English and Urdu language that one sees the influences of American life on Pakistani migrants. For example, Khulsoom tells Fatima: “Grab the tamatar, harimirch, and pyaaz from the fridge. You’ll make the raita for Ghafur’s biryani” (Ali, 2010:20). Living

in America, they must adopt the English language for their survival, however, Urdu is not forgotten altogether. Moreover, it is not only Khulsoom who mixes the two languages. One might claim that belonging to a second generation and being a simple housewife, she cannot speak English properly and consequently, switches codes at her convenience, however, that is not the case because educated members of the third generation like Salahuddin, Fatima, and Ghafur, also code switch and mix English with Urdu. For instance, when Khulsoom asks Salahuddin to get married, he replies: “Who will cook me *khana*?... no one cooks biryani and tandoori chicken like my *amijaan*.” (Ali, 2010:24). This intermingling of the two languages vividly reflects the cultural hybridity in the play. Additionally, Salahuddin is the most hybrid character. Firstly, throughout the play, he is addressed as “Sal”, the short form of Salahuddin. This clipping of names is chiefly an American tradition. Secondly, among all the family members, the American way of life affects his morals the most. He always mocks Fatima for she wears a hijab and speaks up for the rights of Muslim girls. American life changes Salahuddin to the extent that, unlike his father, brother, and sister, he does not see Muslims being marginalized and discriminated against. He tells Fatima: “Typical Muslims—blame America for *everything*. Whine, whine, whine, nag, nag, nag. Listen up, Hij-Abbie Hoffman—people are still dying, just like they always have, and just like they always will.” (Ali, 2010:26). He mocks his family for upholding Pakistani traditions. When his mother simply asks him to stop bickering and set the table, he mocks her saying that “only in a Muslim-Pakistani family” a twenty-seven-year-old man can be told how to live his life. (Ali, 2010:27). At one point, when he tells Ghafur that his parents might have been afraid that he will not fit in, Ghafur says: “Fit in a little too well, didn’t you?” (Ali, 2010:80). In contrast to Salahuddin, Hakim, the grandfather, is the least hybrid character in the play. Although he speaks in English and keeps an open mind to Fatima’s feminist activities, he upholds his traditions wholeheartedly. After living in America for several years, he does not let go of his traditional morning routine of eating honey with dates and milk. Being proud of his religion, he tells his grandchildren:

“These are the traditions of the prophet Muhammad; peace be upon him! Honey, the blessed nectar of paradise, as mentioned in the Qu’ran. Dates, the blessed fruit of Medina, the city of the prophet Muhammad and milk, the Prophet’s favourite drink!” (Ali, 2010: 37)

Apart from hybridity, otherization is another major aspect of the play. Edward Said (1978), in *Orientalism*, asserts that the East is seen as the “other” of the West. It is looked down upon and discriminated against because of the cultural hegemony of the West. His concept of otherization is quite prevalent in Wajahat Ali’s (2010) *Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise*. Every character of the play faces marginalization and unjust treatment at the hands of the Americans. They are seen as “freaks” by their next-door neighbors and labeled as terrorists (Ali, 2010:32). For instance, Hakim is asked by a white boy if he is a relative of Osama bin Laden (Ali, 2010:32). The incident shows how every Muslim in the West is stigmatized as a potential terrorist because the superior “self” associates Islam with terrorism and sees Muslims as “others”. Similarly, the treatment that Ghafur receives at the airport is indicative of the otherization of Muslims. To elaborate, the food that he is offered in the name of a “Moslem Meal” is tasteless and includes “nonedible substances” (Ali, 2010:53). Moreover, the airport security takes away even a little nail cutter that he is

carrying with him. Khulsoom gets angry with Ghafur out of concern because belonging to the Eastern side of the globe, she understands the downsides of being a Pakistani and a Muslim in America. Scolding her son, she says: “Why did you have to pack a stupid nail cutter, uloo? Idiot! Great, make them lock you up next time! You read—you should know better. The FBI probably has a file on you now!” (Ali, 2010:54). These dialogues may come off as an exaggerated reaction of an overly worried mother however, a deeper analysis would reveal the tragic reality and truth behind Khulsoom’s words because small mishaps like these are enough to make the “others” potential terrorists in the eyes of American government. Indeed, Hakim shares her doubts and worries when he says: “Now all the elderly Muslims—even the Indian Hindus and Sikhs—are seen as terrorists. La Hawla wa la Qhuwata!” (Ali, 2010:55). This is how the Orient is othered in the West. Just the brown colour of their skin is enough for them to be discriminated against. Furthermore, the beard is, stereotypically, considered another sign of potential terrorists. Regardless of race, nation, or religion, beard is always associated with fundamentalists and terrorists. Ghafur narrates the mishap of a Sikh man whom he read about in an article in the airport magazine. The said man was a tax-paying English professor with American citizenship. However, because of his complexion and beard, he was asked to step down from the plane “so as not to *endanger and disturb the psychological and mental comfort of the airline passengers.*” (Ali, 2010:55). Through italicized words, Ali emphasizes the extent of the West’s otherization of the East. It is quite tragic that people with beards and brown skin are considered a threat to the mental, physical, and psychological state of the superior White race. Ghafur wonders that perhaps it is the turbans that scare people off or maybe just the way brown people carry themselves. Ironically, he is othered in the same manner at the airport. His “grizzly beard”, kufi, and a “paperback of *Jihad and Terrorism*” (Ali, 2010:56) bring him under a microscope and he is asked to step aside just like the Sikh man was asked. His whole body is searched along with his wallet, bag, belt, shoes, magazine, and even his keys. Ghafur sarcastically remarks: “The other passengers stroll on by, witnessing the Muslim-mammal zoo exhibit. I’m sure it made them feel really safe, that I was being sanitized.” (Ali, 2010:57). Apart from Ghafur, the only other person who is searched in the same manner is another man of colour who probably has an Eastern European name. The incident, quite rightfully so, gives rise to more worry in Khulsoom. The fear of her son being taken as a terrorist makes her forbid Ghafur to grow his beard. The difficulties that Pakistani people faced while living in America in the post-9/11 era are quite evident here. They had to give up their culture, clothing styles, and a religious feature like a beard to save themselves from being othered. Khulsoom forbids Ghafur to wear his “topi” too as it would make him the target of the so-called War on Terror. Scolding her son for wearing a topi and not shaving his beard before flying back to America, Khulsoom exclaims: “Oy, uloo! Why didn’t you hold a sign saying, I’M AN EXTREMIST. ONE WAY TICKET TO ABU GHRAIB, PLEASE” (Ali, 2010:57).

Salman, like Hakim and Ghafur, also faces otherization. At work, he is marginalized and after sacrificing thirteen years of his life for the company, he is not given the position that he deserves only because he is a Pakistani. He is treated poorly and his boss, after having Salman for thirteen years at his company, cannot even pronounce his name properly and chooses to call him “Sal”.

Salman’s sheer disappointment is reflected strongly in these dialogues:

“A man works, faithfully, competently, not a single blemish on his entire record, night and day, like a dog. As they say in America, give a dog a bone, or throw one—at least once in a while, right? This brown, foreign, Muslim dog—” (Ali, 2010:95)

As a foreigner, he always must take a beating because his path, as Hakim tells him, is not made of gold but of blood. Khulsoom also recognizes the racism and discrimination that her husband is subjected to, however, like Salman and everyone else, she is helpless. Moreover, when Salman comes home and gets to know Ghafur’s treatment by the Americans at the airport, he is overwhelmed with annoyance and disappointment. He exclaims: “Same nonsense every day! Blame Islam. Blame Muslims. Blame immigrants for everything! Tired of the daily propaganda! (Ali, 2010:39). These lines reveal the mental torture that Pakistani Americans were subjected to in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11. However, the president of America at the time termed the unjust, racist, and biased treatment of brown people as “unfortunate but inevitable sacrifices.” (Ali, 2010:60). The television voice-over in the play repeats the presidential address which states that “these sacrifices are necessary to ensure our freedom, and to help protect the liberties and values of *all* freedom-loving people against those dedicated to tyranny and hatred—” (Ali, 2010:60). The lexical choice in the above lines demands a closer analysis. Words like *sacrifices* and *our freedom* show the narcissism and selfishness of the American government. It reveals that their government only cares about its natives and the security of the country and wants to give freedom to its people at the expense of others’ pain and misery. For their prosperity, they are ready to sacrifice the inferior “others”. For instance, the American army sends missionaries and soldiers to Iraq and invades their land and lives but then their government claims that it is sending “*lovers of Christ to help preach the gospel*” to spread the word of God. (Ali, 2010:63). This attitude further reveals the hypocrisy of the West. On one hand, they see Muslims as extremists and otherize them while on the other hand, they invade Iraq to spread Christianity by force while claiming that they are the soldiers of peace. Fatima sarcastically remarks on this issue: “Yeah, right! How Christian is it to bomb innocent civilians?” (Ali, 2010:64). Furthermore, the TV commentators also have a debate over the issue of invasion. The male commentator raises a logical question about how the people of Iraq love Americans when their land is being invaded by them and their homes are being bombed. However, the female commentator, with much ease, answers: “That’s the problem! They don’t understand. They just don’t get it. We’re not invading them. Hello, stupid! We’re liberating you!” (Ali, 2010:108). Liberating from whom? one might ask. These lines clearly reflect the American mode of thinking. According to them, their invasion of Iraqis is rather an act of kindness that ultimately exempts them from being labelled as extremists and terrorists. In addition, it also highlights that they are the superior “self”, hence, the matter of labels is wholly in their hands. It shows how much control America has over the Orient as well as the rest of the world. Edward Said asserts that the Orient is actually a mere fantasy that the Occident has fabricated to meet its own goals and ambitions. In *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981), the author claims that the West has portrayed Muslims as extremists and terrorists so that it can take full liberty to wipe out the whole

Muslim race. This is very skilfully displayed by Wajahat Ali (2010) in *Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise* when Ghafur says: “Americans, and these Christians here, thinking every Muslim is a Jew-hater, about to go berserker-rage and blow himself and everyone else up.” (Ali, 2010:65). His point is quite right because it is very common for a Muslim in America to be misunderstood as a terrorist whenever he says, *Allahu Akbar*. This is how the media, as Said claims, has portrayed the picture of Muslims around the globe. This unjust portrayal, racial discrimination, and otherization reach the point where Khulsoom is forced to tell her husband that they should move back to Pakistan. It is noteworthy that after the struggles and all the sacrifices that this Pakistani American family made in fifteen years, nevertheless, they are not welcomed in America. They are always seen as the “others”, the outsiders and the inferiors, who can easily be disposed of once they have played their part in raising the economy of superior countries like America.

Conclusion

The postcolonial study of Wajahat Ali’s (2010) *Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise* highlights the struggles and turmoil of a Pakistani-American Muslim family in post-9/11 America. The injustice, racism, marginalization, otherization, and discrimination that this family goes through serve as the microcosm for the lives of all Pakistani Americans in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Salman’s marginalization at work, Ghafur’s unjust treatment at the airport, and Hakim’s association with Osama bin Laden, all prove Edward Said’s notion of Otherization quite valid. Moreover, the textual analysis of the play focuses on Bhabha’s Cultural Hybridity and elucidates the process of hybridization of each character. The Western clothing but Pakistani food, the American music but the Muslim traditions, and the mixing of English and Urdu; all these hybrid characteristics create Bhabha’s “Third space of enunciation” (Bhabha, 1949:86) and make the culture of this Pakistani-American family an ambivalent process. Consequently, the study shows that culture and identity are not unifying or homogenizing forces, rather, they are fluid entities which, as Bhabha claims, are in a constant process of transformation and becoming.

References

1. Ali, W. (2010). *Tom Jones and the Biryani Surprise*. San Francisco: McSweeney’s Books.
2. Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H. (2002). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London, England: Routledge.
3. Belsey, C. (1980). *Critical Practice*. London: Methuen.
4. Bhabha, H. K. (1949). *The Location of Culture*. London, New York :Routledge.
5. Frey, L., Botan, C., & Kreps, G. (1999). *Investigating Communication: An Introduction to Research Methods*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
6. Goodstein, L. (2009). A Pakistani-American family is caught in some cultural cross-fire. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>
7. Hamid, M. (2007). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Toronto: Bond Street Books.
8. Mansoor, A. (2012). Post 9/11 identity crisis in H. M. Naqvi’s Home Boy . *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, 4 (2), 54-68.
9. McLeod, J. (2000). *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

10. Mizutan, S. (2008). *Hybridity and History: A Critical Reflection on Homi K. Bhabha’s ‘Post-Historical’ Thought*. India: Kyoto University.
11. Naqvi, H. M. (2009). *Home Boy*. New York: Shaye Areheart Books.
12. O’Reilly, C. (2001). *Post-Colonial Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
13. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
14. Said, E. W. (1981). *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. New York: Pantheon Books.
15. Salmeen, A. S. (2019). The Reluctant Fundamentalist: Hybridity and the struggle for identity. *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science*, 7 (3), 31-37.
16. Sarvat, H. (2014). Cultural hybridity in Kamila Shamié’s *Burnt Shadows*. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development, Literature*, 3 (7), 470-474.
17. Shaimaa. (2017). Post 9/11 American Dramas: A postmodern postcolonial study of Wajahat Ali’s *The Domestic Crusaders* and John Shanley’s *Dirty Story*. *Annals of the Faculty of Arts*, 1 (45), 508-531.
18. Shamsie, K. (2009). *Burnt Shadows*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.
19. Spivak, G. C. (1999). *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.