

## UNVEILING THE THEME OF IDENTITY IN POST-COLONIAL WRITINGS OF PAKISTANI WOMEN FICTION WRITERS

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### ABSTRACT

This study unveils the theme of identity in the works of Pakistani women fiction writers. The main purpose is exploring the postcolonial writings of women fiction writers with specific focus on theme of identity. The representative texts by five well known women fiction writers: Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri, Kamila Shamsie, Muneeza Shamsie, and Uzma Aslam Khan were selected. This qualitative study uncovers the complex ways in which these writers narrate and treat the theme of identity in the context of colonialism and its aftermath. A postcolonial feminist approach was utilized to demonstrate how these authors express a quest for their authentic identities. The key aspects are characterized by feelings of dislocation, fragmentation, and defiance. The findings show how these writers challenge prevailing narratives and stereotypes. They provide valuable insights into the experiences of Pakistani women. This study adds to the body of existing postcolonial literature by emphasizing the importance and literary contribution of Pakistani women's writings in studying and understanding of the theme identity, which serves as a central theme in postcolonial fiction.

**Keywords:** Unveiling, theme of identity, postcolonial writings, women fiction writers

### INTRODUCTION

Pakistani women English fiction writers have acquired a significant global place in world literature. They provide insights into post-colonial era experiences of Pakistan by offering unique perspectives. It is acknowledged that the Pakistani women fiction writers have challenged traditional narratives. Their representative writings present novel viewpoints in post-colonial context. Khan (2018) argues that these writers have overcome a variety of challenges, including social expectations and cultural constraints. They did it to make important contributions to the literary world. The theme of identity is the most significant and dominant theme in postcolonial writings of fiction writers particularly Pakistani women fiction writers of the postcolonial era. Consequently, the postcolonial writings of Pakistani women writers are replete with this theme. Viewed in the context of the theme of identity, the representative

postcolonial writings explore the complexities of selfhood, culture, and belonging in the context of colonialism and its aftermath. Postcolonial writers predominantly examine how colonialism shapes and distorts identities. These key aspects create a research gap and lead to a search for authentic selves and cultural heritage in postcolonial settings. Generally speaking, exploring the treatment of theme of identity in postcolonial writings reflects the following most frequent domains related to identity:

1. Hybridity: the merging of identities, cultures, and languages is examined in postcolonial texts on identity.
2. Fragmentation: The division of identities brought about by colonization.
3. Dislocation: The act of removing someone from their place of origin, both culturally and geographically.

4. Ambiguity: The in distinguishability of identities, cultures, and languages.
5. Resistance: The fight against colonialism to regain and redefine identities.

### **Significance of the Study**

The contribution this study makes to the realm of postcolonial literature makes it significant. The study highlights the significance of women's perspectives and experiences in shaping our understanding of the identity topic. Using a postcolonial feminist perspective, the study analyzes and assesses the most significant aspects of identity within the framework of colonialism and its aftermath.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative study aims to explore the theme of identity in the works of Pakistani women fiction writers, with a focus on their postcolonial writings. This study aims to identify the ways in which writers Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri, Kamila Shamsie, Muneeza Shamsie, and Uzma Aslam Khan negotiate identity, culture, and belonging in the context of colonialism and its aftermath through a textual analysis of some representative post-colonial writings by the prominent Pakistani women fiction writers.

### **Research Objectives**

This study has the following research objectives:

1. To analyze the techniques used by Pakistani women fiction writers in their exploration of identity themes in their postcolonial works.
2. To identify the ways utilized by women fiction writers to challenge and redefine the narratives and stereotypes surrounding Pakistani women and their identities.
3. To trace how these women fiction writers contribute to our knowledge and understanding of theme of identity in the context of postcolonial literature.

### **Research Questions**

The key research questions are:

1. How do Pakistani women fiction writers depict theme of identity in their postcolonial writings?

2. What challenges are created by stereotypes and narratives about the theme of identity and how do these writers address them?
3. How effectively postcolonial writings of Pakistani women fiction writers depict theme of identity?

This study answers these questions to explore the intricate nature of identity in the postcolonial settings. These questions emphasize the role of Pakistani women's writings in enhancing understanding of theme of identity in postcolonial literature.

### **Literature Review**

The theme of identity is extensively explored in postcolonial literature by Pakistani women writers. The researchers such as Edward Said (1978), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) have highlighted the complex relationships among identity, culture, and a sense of belonging. They focused on this aspect in relation to colonialism and its effects. Pakistani women fiction writers have made a significant impact on postcolonial literature because they provide deep insights into the lives of women in Pakistan and the diaspora. The impact of Pakistani women fiction writers on English literature has garnered considerable international recognition. Their literary heritage and women's expression are quite prominent. Malik (2022) applies Elaine Showalter's concept to categorize feminine, feminist, and female literature into three stages. He discovers that via moving and intimate storytelling, Pakistani women authors of fiction are able to celebrate their identities and relate their stories. Their literary works mirror the authors' challenges under a patriarchal environment. They often challenge accepted notions of chastity and purity. They are characterized as a powerful literary force by their vitality and vigor. Salahuddin (2022) conducts a feminist, feminine, and female forms of consciousness classification. He examines feminist elements found in Pakistani women fiction writers' works. The research indicates that sexual freedom-focused feminist stereotypes are somewhat rare. The celebrated writers who have portrayed complicated female characters include Kamila Shamsie. 1. They frequently go beyond conventional feminist

stereotypes to explore broader human experiences.

Mehmood (2021) discussed feminism which is attached with Pakistani society focusing on a pertinent examination of the position that feminism should take in Pakistani society specifically for post-colonial ones. It considered its nature to advocate for women and the challenges that are opposed by worshiped institutions. Highlighting the groundbreaking endeavours of Muslims writers like Professor Ahmed Ali, this study reiterates that Western influences have forever altered the roles and responsibilities for women as articulated with reference to a second feminist movement. At other times the cost of this progress is religious and cultural values. Ahmed (2013) also provides an overview of the history of feminism in Pakistani literature. He traces its roots to colonial times and allying it with Motion Writers Movement. He is of the view that she sets a clear line between western feminism and postcolonial feminism envisioning how Pakistani fiction authors have grappled with these ideas to speak specifically to the female anxieties of their Pakistan-based cultural and political context. Shumaila Ashee (2019), through Transitivity Analysis, explores the portrayal of women in Pakistani-American short fiction. She unveils that narratives sometimes present characters as hapless victims or nuanced entities who struggle to grapple with conventions leading them into a quandary over traditional gender roles and modern sensibilities across activities within Pakistan literature. The idea of gender identities is in part socially constructed through literature and utilizing colours as a born representation. Well-suited to a gendered colour association, while sober colours are identical with masculinity in Asmat (2023). Vibrant and bright colours often distance themselves from lack of energy listlessness. Colour that reflect social norms such is red or blue, and enforce gender roles. Parveen (2015) complements this narrative by examining the role of Pakistani culture in determining literature and the extent to which linguistic bound with cultural diversity that varies along accent geography. The reason behind language as the hand through which on knowing culture is that by using it a society communicates its ideas, believes and customs. Anila in 2000 went on to direct the

part of Dia for Uzma Aslam Khans *Trespassing* (New Delhi, Indian) from 2003 and go a step further in (2023) exploring gender emotions.

Critics have further analysed feminist themes in the works of such notable Pakistani writers as Bapsi Sidhwa and Qaisra Shahraz. In her research, Dr. Shamenaz Bano examines the manner in which these writers champion women rights and challenge traditional gender roles. Their work, for instance, the *Pakistan Husband or ice-candy man* in with these topics they asked questions on the barbaric social norms that perpetuated forced married and domestic violence so presented women perspective through literature shall be enabling an alternative route for women equality. Usharani and Dr. Manisha (2023) add that female characters reinstate, their identities again in patriarchy is also a struggle of womanhood at Sidhwa's "The Women Activist Bride" as such they have been unable to adhere simultaneously made powerless. Another major motif in Pakistani writing has been the horrific event of the 1947 India division. According to Satyajit Pal (2016) many South Asian writers have covered this era. They offer insight into religious and racial crimes, public hysteria, and women's exploitation. It is said that works like Bapsi Sidhwa's "Ice Candy Man," are prized for their personal aspects and evocative depiction of the turmoil during the partition. Abbas et al. (2021) examines "Ice-Candy-Man" with a focus on its representation of indigenous culture and identity. This work questions the colonial mentality. It presents another historical viewpoint. Showkat (2013) asserts that "Ice-Candy-Man" is an effort to change social expectations by stressing women's rights. It reveals the horrific attacks and psychological training they go through in a patriarchal culture. Consequently, it empowers women to resist and seek freedom. Hitesh (2020) also explores how religious, national, communal, and gendered identities became targets of destruction. They result in violence, mass migration, and an identity crisis and resultantly affect identity.

### **Brief Overview of Pakistani Women Fiction Writers**

#### **(i) Bapsi Sidhwa**

Bapsi Sidhwa is a distinguished Pakistani novelist celebrated for her profound, witty, and

poetic explorations of identity, culture, and belonging. Her writing delves into the intricacies of the human condition, with a particular emphasis on the impacts of patriarchy, division, and colonialism on women's experiences. Sidhwa through her postcolonial writings creates a vital stage for expressing women's perspectives. She portrays a vivid picture of patriarchal systems and social injustices. Her representative work "Ice Candy Man" (1988) clearly displays the disintegration of personal identity in the context of colonialism and societal fragmentation. She also presents the clashes of cultural identities as well as the challenges that women face in a male-dominated society.

**(ii) Sara Suleri**

Sara Suleri is an eminent Pakistani-American critic and fiction writer. Her insightful, discerning, and intellectually powerful writing style make her unique. She explores the intersections of gender, culture, and history. She explores the complicated nature of identity and the impact of colonialism and imperialism on experiences of women. Her representative book, "Meatless Days" (1989), serves as a compelling critique of colonial and patriarchal systems, marking a significant addition to postcolonial literature. In Meatless Days she demonstrates the disintegration of identity that results from migration and colonial histories. She reflects the inexplicable aspects of cultural identities. She elaborates the essential role of language in shaping self-perception of an individual.

**(iii) Kamila Shamsie**

Kamila Shamsie is an illustrious Pakistani women fiction writer. She explores societal injustice, displacement and war that are related to the human condition. In her writings, she expresses the effects of colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy on the lives of women. She has a beautiful and sympathetic language style. She portrays the merging of cultural identities between Pakistan and the UK. "Home Fire" (2017) by Kamila Shamsie explores how identity fragments conflict and relocation times and societal and gender-based disparities. She presents the challenges that women face in expressing their identities in a male-dominant society.

**(iv) Muneeza Shamsie**

Muneeza Shamsie is a Pakistani fiction writer and critic. Her profound and stimulating critiques of culture, identity, and the concept of belonging make her different from her contemporaries. She presents the effects of colonialism and migration on self-perception of an individual. She reflects insights into the complexities of cultural identities in her postcolonial writing. "And the World Changed" critiques both patriarchal and colonial contexts. It shows how language shapes identity. She addresses the intricate challenges that women face in modern society. She emphasizes the importance of depicting their voices.

**(v) Uzma Aslam Khan**

Uzma Aslam Khan is a prominent Pakistani fiction writer. She is famous for her empathetic depictions of the human experience. The human experiences are surrounded by conflict, displacement and social inequity. She uses insightful and refined language. She explores the impacts of patriarchy, colonialism, and imperialism on women's lives. "The Geometry of God" (2009), explores the intertwining of cultural identities between Pakistan and the United States. She addresses the fragmentation of identity against the backdrop of war and colonial influences. She presents a critique of entrenched societal and gender norms. She further pens down the challenges that women come across in asserting their identities within a society dominated by the male.

**Place in Global Postcolonial Fiction**

Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri, Kamila Shamsie, Muneeza Shamsie, and Uzma Aslam Khan are acknowledged as the five prominent Pakistani women fiction writers of global stature in postcolonial literature. Their postcolonial works investigate subjects of identity, culture, history, and belonging. They present the complexity of the postcolonial experiences. They challenge accepted and prevailing narratives. They provide views on how globalization and colonialism affect people and societies. These writers play a significant role in global postcolonial fiction. The most frequent subjects of their literary works are: prevailing Western narratives and points of

views, the complexity of identity, culture, and belonging, how migration, globalization, and colonialism affect people and society, the realities of minority, women, and underprivileged people and memory, past, and cultural legacy. Their writings are a part of a larger literary movement aiming at decolonizing works and opposing the dominance of Western creative traditions. These women writers provide a wide range of views through their exploration of the complexity of the postcolonial experiences. They undoubtedly stand tall in global literature as women fiction writers.

### **Methodology**

That study employs qualitative approach for textual analysis to investigate the theme of identity in the representative postcolonial writings of Pakistani women fiction writers. The study focuses on selected texts by Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri, Kamila Shamsie, Muneeza Shamsie, and Uzma Aslam Khan written in the backdrop of postcolonial era.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study explores and analyzes the theme of identity in the selected post-colonial writings of Pakistani women fiction writers as represented and portrayed in their works. It utilizes a postcolonial feminist lens. Post-colonial feminist lens provides a comprehensive comprehension of the various viewpoints on identity in the Postcolonial context.

### **Data Collection (Text Selection)**

This study purposefully selects and focuses on the following texts by Pakistani women fiction writers for the purpose of data collection. These texts are recognized as the well-known works of these writers. Bapsi Sidhwa's "Ice Candy Man" (1988), Sara Suleri's "Meatless Days" (1989), Kamila Shamsie's "Home Fire" (2017), Muneeza Shamsie's "And the World Changed" (2005), and Uzma Aslam Khan's "The Geometry of God" (2009).

### **Data Analysis**

(i) In Bapsi Sidhwa's Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man also known as Cracking India (1988) many events powerfully show the vulnerability and victimising of women under patriarchal

dominance. "Hamida was kidnapped by the Sikhs...she was taken away to Amritsar. Once that happens, sometimes, the husband – or his family won't take her back,"—reveals that won't be able to undo the great shame and dishonour connected with female purity and virginity. Reflecting larger society views that see women as property or emblems of familial honour, Hamida's kidnapping and subsequent rejection by her husband and his family demonstrate how women's identities are perilously linked to their sexuality and perceived honour. This arrangement emphasises the conditional value put on women, therefore strengthening their fragile and subservient position in a society controlled by males. Likewise, the passage "Father has never raised his hands to us, one day I surprise Mother at her bath and see the bruises on her body," highlights the secret domestic violence Lenny's mother suffers. This shocking disclosure of physical violence, in spite of the father's outward impression of control, shows the systematic character of male dominance and female subordination in the home. The hiding of such violence emphasises the obscurity of women's pain, assigned to the private domain where it goes unpacked and fuels the cycle of violence. Moreover, as the book notes, "Muslim community like to keep their girls in the family; so marriages between first cousins are common," hence, the practice of cousin marriages within the Muslim community emphasises the limited agency women have in personal decisions; since their futures are often determined by familial and cultural expectations." Sidhwa shows the larger battle against patriarchal conventions and the quest for human agency and dignity via characters like Hamida, who stands in for the persecuted and victimised women throughout conflicts, and Ayah, who opposes a forced marriage. (ii) Sara Suleri's "Meatless Days" deftly show via many insights and experiences the delicate character of feminine identity amid patriarchal and multicultural forces. Referring to Suleri's grandmother, the sentence "She fell between two stools of grief," emphasises the precarious situation of women stuck between competing cultural and emotional demands. This allegory emphasises women's fragility as they negotiate conventional duties and personal adversity,

therefore highlighting the instability and lack of support they sometimes experience. Likewise, the conversation Sara had with her brother Shahid, "We are lost, Sara," and her reply, "Yes, Shahid, we're lost," catches the confusion felt by those who travel between very different cultures. Emphasising the challenges of keeping a cohesive sense of self among cultural dislocation, this sensation of "lost" illustrates Suleri's attempt to balance her Pakistani background with her new Western existence. Reflecting "One morning I woke to find that, during the course of the night, my mind had completely ejected the names of all the streets in Pakistan," shows a great dissociation from her history and cultural origins, therefore highlighting the loss of identity and legacy. Furthermore alluding to the fundamental fragility of feminine identity, Suleri's mother's comment in Wales, "It's just that familiarity isn't important really," demonstrates an adaptation mechanism to deal with the flux of shifting surroundings. By means of these stories, Suleri deftly examines the complex and often contradictory aspect of female identity, stressing both its fragility and resiliency within the demands of patriarchal and multicultural forces.

(iii) In Kamila Shamsie's "Home Fire," dialogue and narrative devices powerfully tackle issues of female identity and oppression. Directed to Isma, the quotation "You know, you don't have to be so compliant about everything" (Shamsie 2017, p. 6) exposes the outside pressure on women to comply and emphasises the contradiction between compliance and self-assertion. Reflecting a more general female fight against injustice, the narrative voice exhorts Isma to question social limitations. Likewise, the phrase, "She is being left to suffer because she removed her face veil. She has taken off her face veil you can't approach her. We've called the women brigade" (Shamsie 2017, p. 133), thereby highlighting the punitive aspect of society expectations on female modesty. The face veil becomes to represent patriarchal control, and the response to its removal emphasises the severe costs for breaking these expectations. The picture of pain and the "women brigade's" enforcement emphasises both internalised sexism and the little control women have in confronting repressive societal systems. By use of these quotes, Shamsie offers a rich commentary on female identity and

resilience as well as a complex picture of how women negotiate and oppose the demands of a multicultural and patriarchal society.

(iv) Compiled by Muneeza Shamsie, "And The World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women" is a striking analysis of female identity and oppression via feminist stylistics. Using the veil-parda and zenana as symbols of the physical and psychological barriers that confine women, the quotation "Women observed the veil-parda and lived in the women's apartments—the zenana—within an extended family" (Introduction, p. 1) powerfully captures the traditional constraints placed on women. The picture of women living in divided environments emphasises their loneliness and the group application of these restrictions within the extended family framework. On the other hand, the assertion "It is a widely known truth that male is superior to women in every aspect. He is a representative of God on earth and being born with His light in him deserves the respect and obedience that he demands" (Iqbalunissa Hussain). This claim, which presents male supremacy as divinely mandated, supports the ingrained society conventions that support and extend gender inequity. Both quotes highlight the firmly ingrained systems that limit women's identities and also imply the possibility for emancipation by means of narrative.

(v) Through the rich plot and intricate character relationships in Uzma Aslam Khan's "The Geometry of God," the subtle representation of female identity and oppression is clear. The quotation, "It is often women like Noman's mother, Amal, or Mehwish who bear the brunt of the othering processes and yet find the resilience to bridge the gaps, to mediate intersections between faith and love," emphasises the twin weight of women who endure systematic marginalisation while also acting as mediators between conflicting aspects of their life. Their resilience and adaptability, in spite of oppressive regimes are shown with this writings. The comment about divesting from fundamentalist discourses costs that can be serious as its power also includes danger. The image of the opposition then is also one in which women who refuse to buckle under restrictive norms face social and personal costs waged through this image and its associated costs. These statements, viewed

together, highlight the enormous challenges and the contradictory possibilities for womanhood. They also offer a reminder of women's ability to persist or survive against consistent repression.

### Findings

The present study offers a number of significant insights through the textual analysis of the selected representative writings of Pakistani women postcolonial fiction writers. The main purpose of the textual analysis was to explore the theme of identity in the works of Pakistani women fiction writers. These women writers penned down the challenges faced by women regarding gender and cultural identities resulting from diverse facets of identity. Pakistani women writers portrayed identities through various elements such as gender, culture and nationality. They consciously and forcefully contested prevailing identity narratives. The prevailing identity concepts and narratives were predominantly rooted in nationalism, patriarchy, and colonialism. The challenges encountered by women in postcolonial Pakistan, were the product of conflicting dynamics between traditional and modern identities. The textual analysis indicates that these authors subvert conventional narratives, creating new avenues for identity exploration. They employ narrative techniques such as resistance, fragmentation, and hybridity. They voiced their protest against dominant narratives. They also provide innovative platforms for the construction of identity. Pakistani women fiction writers significantly lead readers to comprehend the postcolonial experience of identity, culture and belonging. The feministic lens they applied for creating world famous postcolonial literature is worth reading.

### Conclusion

The study concludes that the theme of identity is the most powerful theme of postcolonial writing by Pakistani women fictional writers. All the prominent women fiction writers of this era focused and portrayed different dimensions of identity in their writings. The major aspects of their postcolonial writings while presenting the issues and crises of identity were the challenges shaped by colonialism, intricately linked with gender and cultural identities. The postcolonial women fiction writers presented women's

experiences and the tensions between tradition and modernity. They used innovative storytelling methods. Their literary contributions rest on deep insights on the formation of identity with an emphasis on novel perspectives on identity and a sense of belonging. They portray the complexities that arise from intersecting religious and cultural identities. They employed a feminist perspective to offer understanding of postcolonial literature through feministic lens. They have created invaluable postcolonial literature and made undeniable contribution to global literature. They have earned and established their unique identity as Pakistani women fiction writers.

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