

## A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN FEVER: A POST COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

The present study analyzes novel American Fever from post colonial perspective. There are many concepts of post colonial studies like: other, stereotyping, subaltern, hybridity and mimicry etc. However, the present study is undertaken from the lens of stereotyping and othering as defined by Edward Said(1995) which is theoretical framework used in this study. The textual analysis of the novel American Fever is undertaken from post colonial perspective .The study establishes that the postcolonial elements of stereotyping and othering are present throughout the novel. The findings suggest that various issues of racism, religious discrimination and islamophobia can also be discussed in the light of post colonial theory.

**Keywords:** post colonialism, other, stereotype, fiction, Edward Saeed

### INTRODUCTION

The study analyzes novel American Fever from post colonial perspective. Post colonial being the study of othering and stereotype as defined by Edward Said (1995) can be found in a range of literary texts. Score of novels like American Fever are written from the cultural perspectives and hence contains cultural themes. A post colonial reading of the novel provides new understanding of literature. The study is aimed at providing the answers of the research question: How far does Dur e Aziz Amna portray the elements of Post colonialism in her novel, American fever?

### THE NOVELIST

**Dur e Aziz Amna** was born in 1992 and grew up in Rawalpindi city of Pakistan. Presently, she lives in Michigan, USA. Her articles have been published in well known dailies like New York Times, Financial Times, and Al-Jazeera etc. She is recipient of many awards including Financial Times/Bodley Head Essay prize in 2019, APALA award for literature in

2023. Besides, she was selected as Forbes under 30 in 2022. In the USA she received her education from Yale College and Helen Zell writers' program Michigan.

### The novel

In the novel, the sixteen-year-old protagonist Hira has been living with her family in Rawalpindi, Pakistan in 2010. Her family includes her father, mother (whom she calls Abbu and Ammi) and younger brother. Her parents are upper class professionals living an ideal life in Pakistan. The family has a maid for domestic work and a driver. The family of Hira is traditional and religious. Hira visits lakeview, a small rural town in Oregon, USA on a year-long exchange programme funded by the State Department. In the USA, Hira stays with her host mother Kelly, who is a white middle aged single mother and her daughter Amy. Although Amy is ambivalent, Kelly decides to host an exchange

student at her home. In the host family there is no maid and she has to do all her work from cleaning her bathroom to work in kitchen for making her food. She struggles to find halal food in the general stores in the town. At school she interacts mostly with only two students Nicole, a French and Hamid, an Omani student. Hira and Hamid face identical experiences of racism and Islamophobia. Nonetheless, both have different approach to their colleagues and fitting into the American society. In the end, due to diagnosis of Tuberculosis, she is quarantined for months and also she receives the news of the death of her grandfather. Resultantly, she feels homesickness and returns to Pakistan at the end of programme.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

No major studies have taken place on novel *American Fever* due to its recent publication. However, the similar studies on other novels about American experiences of the non natives have been undertaken. Hauso (2020) has undertaken study of masters thesis that will investigate how the other is represented in three post-9/11 novels, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011), and H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2010). The scholar has tried to explore the novels under the lens of post colonial theory. The scholar has termed the post 9/11 American muslims as 'new other' and believes that although some critics are of opinion that postcolonial theory has lost ground in modern times. However, postcolonial theory is relevant to understand the response to the events of 9/11, as portrayed in literature. It offers its own insights in to the way we view the world and the way we make sense of history and contemporary affairs. Our comprehension of these issues depends highly on the angle we view it from. We observe the world from context of our beliefs, sex, social class, ethnicity and race etc. The historical progress of post colonialism affects the way we read and interpret literature of "other", a term normally used to define someone different or separated from 'us'(Hauso, 2020).

This knowledge of the other has led to a mythical context of looking at cultural nuances. For example, America's great ideals like tolerance and openness were called into question due to repercussions of the 9/11 incidents in 2001. In her work "Impact of September 11 on Traditional Openness to

immigration and Non-immigrants: An Arab-American Community Perspective" (2001), Carol Khawly explores this even more as she highlights the plight of Muslims after 9/11 visible through discrimination, various civil liberties violations and hate crimes. Khawly points out that "the number of discrimination complaints in the workplace, public accommodations and at airports received by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee(ADC) increased tremendously following the events of September 11" (Hauso, 2020). Wajid et al.(2018) has studied Muhsin Hamid's novel *Reluctant Fundamentalist* from post colonial perspective showing that how the colonialism persists in the western world specially the USA world though indirectly. In another post colonial study of the novel *Reluctant Fundamentalist* of Muhsin Hamid, Pandia and Muhammadi(2022) have explored the elements of post colonialism in the novel such as mimicry, hybridity and diaspora.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research question used in this study is: How far does Dur e Aziz Amna portray the elements of Post colonialism in her novel, *American fever*? Textual analysis approach has been used in this study. Frey et al(1999) demonstrate the textual analysis as a method in which the researcher defines and explains the message in the given text. Hence, the purpose of textual analysis is to define the structure, content and functions of the text. The significant aspect of textual analysis is to opt the types of the text to be studied, appropriate text to be acquired then use a specific approach to analyse them. Hence, the researcher has done close reading of the novel to identify the themes of othering and stereotype. After identifying the concepts of Othering and stereotype in text, it was presented and discussed in the data analysis section of the text. The text has been chosen in this study based on its relevance to the American experiences of a muslim girl.

### **Theoretical framework**

There are three main post colonial thinkers namely Edward Said, Homi K Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, whose contribution is discussed in the following lines. Post Colonialism is based on the false image of orient or the east that has been fabricated by Western explorers, poets, novelists, philosophers, political

theorists, economist and imperial administrators since Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1798. Said is of the view that Post colonialism lies on myth created by the occidents. One of the important concepts of the theory is "the Other". The Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, the "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them"). Edward Said stresses the need to recognize the stereotypes. One such orientalist Sir Alfred Lyall and his thoughts have been given by Edward Said as typical example of stereotypes in the following passage: The mind of the Oriental, on the other hand, like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry. His reasoning is of the most slipshod description. .... they are often incapable of drawing the most obvious conclusions from any simple premises of which they may admit the truth. Endeavor to elicit a plain statement of facts from any ordinary Egyptian. His explanation will generally be lengthy, and wanting in lucidity. He will probably contradict himself half-a-dozen times before he has finished his story. He will often break down under the mildest process of cross-examination. Orientals or Arabs are thereafter shown to be gullible (Said, 1994)

Homi.k Bhabha is second foremost thinker of post colonial theory. He has introduced the concepts, such as: Hybridity, Mimicry, Ambivalence, the Stereotypes, the Uncanny, the Nation, Otherness etc. Through all these concepts the colonized people resist the unsecured power of colonizer. Bhabha succeeds in showing colonialism's histories and cultures that intrude on the present demanding to transform our understandings of cross-cultural relations. Bhabha states that we should see colonialism as straightforward oppression, domination, violence only but also as a period of complex and varied cultural contact and interaction. His writings bring resources from literary and cultural theory to the study of colonial archives(Bhabha, 1994).

Gayatri Spivak is third prominent post colonial theorist. Like Edward Said she is also of view that there is a dire need to re-read the literature produced by the European because the literature specially produced during nineteenth century is mouth piece of imperialist agenda. She has introduced *Subaltern* through her write up *Can Subaltern Speak?* that

demonstrates the earliest political historiography that shifted the voice of subaltern group comprising tribal people, third world, orient and women. She expanded the horizon of subaltern literature including the marginalized women's literature. She attacks the Eurocentric approach of the West towards the East. According to her, knowledge is never innocent and always operated by Western economic and political interest. Therefore, the knowledge of East that is represented by Western scholars and literature is always constructed by the economic and political interest(Spivak, 1988).

The present study has been undertaken from Edward Said's post colonial perspective.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Other**

When Hira arrives in USA in 2010 on high School exchange programme, she thinks that America was cosmopolitan country where all people from the diverse backgrounds are accepted and treated without discrimination. Although she has good and bad experiences as student in the USA, still she feels that she occasionally is being treated as 'other'. In fact American society unlike the commonly held notion has the elements of xenophobia where outsiders specially muslims are oftently treated as other. In chapter VI, Hira goes out to visit Heceta Head Lighthouse with her host mother Kelly and her daughter Amy. At the resort, Hira tries to approach a child at lakeview lighthouse resort she is amazed at the reaction of the kid and his parents:

"Next to the metal railing by the cliff stood a child with a mop of thick brown hair. He was looking intently at the blinding ocean with the same wonderment I felt. As we walked past, I leaned forward and touched his cheek, so pale it looked like the cream that collected on top of milk.

'Hello,' I said. How are you today?' His beautiful eyes looked deep into mine as he opened his mouth and screamed, 'Don't touch me, stranger!'

His mother turned to us .

'What's matter, honey?'

I stepped back, apologizing profusely, she ignored me, calling

out instead to her husband to proudly recount how their son had just protected himself against a stranger”(Amna,2023,p.60).

In chapter VIII, when the students get together at lunch, on the first day, in school cafeteria, Hira looks out for Halal food and experiences othering:

“Are you doing Halal? Hamid asked, looking at the menu scribbled above the counter. ‘I gave it up the first week. Too hard.’

‘Yes,’ I said in a low voice, irritated that Hamid was using our collective muslimhood as a prop for small talk. Does not look like there’s anything you can eat here then,’

At the counter, I asked the cashier if I could skip the beef entrée and pay half the price for the sides of potatoes and fruit. She stared at me wordlessly, too confused to demand clarification. I shook my head and walked over to over to where everyone was sitting.

‘you can have my potatoes,’ Hamid offered when I sat down pushing his plate forward .

“It’s fine. I’ll eat when I get home.’ ‘Are you vegetarian?’ Nicole asked. ‘Not by choice,’ Hamid answered. ‘She has to do halal.’

I felt like kicking him as he began explaining what halal meat was. It was less than a decade from 9/11, and I had read newspapers my entire life, and I really wasn’t going for Halal Girl at Lakeview High.

Basically you let the animal’s blood flow out of the neck,’ Hamid said and Crista pinched her nose in disgust. ‘and you say Allah-u-Akbar when you put the knife to.....” (Amna,2023,p.82).

In chapter VIII, When Hira inquires from Nicole and Hamid about their experience of the English school. Nicole informs her that they both had to give lengthy introduction of their countries. However Hamid tells her that

a fellow student asked him if he knew about the whereabouts of terrorist Osama Bin Laden. But Hamid shrugs it off as joke. When the other girls left Hamid said tells her that he was foretold that he will experience such attitudes in the USA:

‘They told me to expect this,’ he said gently, wary of setting me off again. ‘My coordinator said not to speak in Arabic too much it scares them.’

I stared at a space above his shoulders.

‘You should complain if that happens again.’

(Amna, 2023, p.83).

In chapter XII, When Kelly and Hira go to halal butcher’s shop, Kelly has the most horrible thoughts about slaughtered animal’s meat:

“That smell, huh.

In the ten minutes at the halal butcher’s. Kelly walked around with her nose wrinkled. Now, as I put five pounds of chicken in the backseat, she asked, ‘Have you considered relaxing this rule for yourself? I worry this meat isn’t very hygienic.’ I got into the front seat and we started driving towards trader Joe’s. ‘I was reading online,’ she continued. ‘Many of these religious rules were made hundreds of years ago, to keep people safe from getting sick.’

Her tone was intrepid, revelatory, as if telling me my religion was 1400 years old would shatter some dearly held conviction. The previous week, the church pastor had told us that Christians had a religious duty to stand beside Israel, as if the Bible had been referring to modern-day Tel Aviv all along” (Amna, 2023, p. 125).

### **Stereotype**

In chapter IX, during her stay at the USA, Hira goes to church with her host mother Kelly and hears about the typical stereotypes about Pakistan as prevalent in American society:

“ After the service ended, Kelly took me around to meet people. Sinclair, one of the women who sang with her. Mrs Sinclair beamed at me.

‘welcome! I hope America’s been treating you well’

‘Very much so,’ I said.

On the news, they were talking about a terrorist attack in Pakistan,’ she said, shaking her head at Kelly.

‘ I am glad you’re here, in safer place.’

I had offered banal answer to a banal question, but Americans love any indication that theirs is a country people flee to.

I didn’t hear of any attack,’ I said though I hadn’t checked the news in days, and had no doubt she was right. Those were some of the worst years-school was closed for days the previous December, after a mosque was attacked during Friday prayer.

‘yes, it was in Peshawar.’ Mrs Sinclair pressed on, like a patient teacher explaining an elementary concept. She even pronounced Peshawar correctly, I hated her.

That’s not where I’m from,’

Kelly jumped in, her voice smooth and mediatory.

‘Hira, Mrs Sinclair;s husband was stationed in Afghanistan for quite some years, so she knows a lot about the Middle East” (Amna, 2023, p. 87).

Besides, American society makes muslims feel the incident of 9/11 in the USA. On the 10<sup>th</sup> September professor of history gives half of the lecture on the horrible terrorist attack on American soil in the USA.

In chapter XI, Hira has the following feelings:

“As luck would have it, it was September 10<sup>th</sup>, and the next day being Saturday, the History professor spent the first fifteen minutes of class talking about 9/11. As he spoke, I closed my eyes so they did not catch anyone else’s. In the moment, my clothes felt like

some sort of confession. That’s the magic of America- it will make you feel at least partially responsible for a bunch of Saudi bombers hurtling to their airborne deaths nine years ago”(Amna, 2023, p.109).

In chapter XI, On the Eid, Hamid and Hira were sitting with each other in School. Kyle walked past them and termed Hamid as Ahmed, the terrorist. This worst experience of stereotype has been mentioned in the following passage:

“Out of my corner of my eye, I saw Kyle walk past our table and nod at Hamid.

‘Hey, what’s up, Ahmed?’

I stopped swallowing the bit of bread in my mouth, Hamid nodded back and Kyle kept walking.

‘Don’t fucking call him that,’ I shouted, standing up, Kyle stopped and turned, his eyes moving up and down my frame. I put my hands on the table to stop them from shaking.

‘Wasn’t talking to you, Miss Pakistan.’

Well, I am. That not his name, stop calling him that.’

Kyle stared for another moment, then shook his head. ‘Crazy bitch,’ he said, not too loudly, before walking away as if in a rush. I considered yelling after him but I had made my point, so I sat down, more than a little proud of myself”(Amna, 2023, p.110).

In chapter XVI, Hira has feeling that the USA was land of stereotypes. She narrates her ordeal in following words

“It is important to note that the entire time I was in America, I peddled in one stereotype or another, taking succor in their confirmation. Americans were rural and ignorant, or they were urban and slightly less ignorant, unless they were New Yorkers, who were exempt from any allegations of ignorance. New York was different-home to the dream, away from the nightmare.

Stereotypes happen when you don’t understand the thing itself, and so you interpret it. This is not an account how America was. It is an account how I was.” (Amna, 2023, p. 175).



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is quite obvious that *American Fever* is cultural novel which highlights American society's negative attitude towards muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 incident. Hira being the exchange scholarship student faces the stereotypes and othering in many forms discussed above. On the basis of my analysis, I conclude that the various issues of post colonialism have been discussed in the novel which fall within framework of post colonialism of Edward Said. Against this backdrop, the text of *American Fever* can be used to teach cross cultural themes in novels at various levels. Furthermore, future research on *American Fever* can be done to study the issues of racism, religious discrimination, and islamophobia from post colonial perspective. It will be beneficial for the researchers to understand link between post colonialism and fiction.

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