



## Juxtaposition of Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction

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### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

Globalization,  
Modern culture,  
Pakistani Society,  
Pre-modern Culture,  
Traditional values

*The current study discusses contemporary Pakistani Fiction in the light of competing forces of tradition and changing trends of modernity in Pakistani society and culture. By using Anthony Giddens' concept of contrast between 'Pre-modern culture' and 'Modern culture', the study analyzes the characters in three novels by Pakistani writers to argue that globalization has transformed the social and individual perceptions. The study also takes into account Muhammad Abdul Qadeer's analysis of social and cultural transformation in Pakistan to highlight the contradictions between 'tradition and family life' which continues to contribute long term stability to the society and 'Modernity' and is thought to be uprooting this stability. Results of the study shows that Pakistani society has become waywardly modern and is actually conditioned to keep cultural and traditional sanctity. Furthermore, it is always oscillating between the former two conflicting forces. This overlapping of pre- and post-modern traditions and values at individual, domestic and social level has resulted in an uncertain and unstable Pakistani society where true happiness is rare to find.*

### INTRODUCTION

Culture and tradition as defined by E.B. Taylor is an integral whole which affects human ideals, actions and modes of living. It is "a complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, customs and all other capabilities, and habits acquired by a man as a member of a society" (Taylor, 1995. p.20) The communities in the modern times have witnessed certain readjustment in the social and cultural consciousness. They often oscillate between traditional affiliations with their community, newly formed national identity and global unrest (Maluleke, 2012).

The society of Pakistan comprises of many diverse cultures and ethnic groups such as the Punjabis, Kashmiris and Sindhis in the East, Muhajirs and Makrani in the South, Baloch and Pashtuns in the West, and certain ancient communities in the North. This diversity gives birth to a mixed culture and diverse traditions in Pakistani society. Muhammad Abdul Qadeer in his Pakistan: Social and

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Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation (2006) writes, “Everyday life in Pakistan is a mosaic of intersecting circles of different lifestyles and separated circuits of activities. Differences are visible in dress, food, language, gestures, working conditions, departments, homes and neighborhoods etc.” (p.231).

Having such a variety of traditions and cultures, Pakistani society is still distinct due to its common features which actually make the mainstream culture of Pakistan. Out of the three main aspects of this culture, the first is the South Asian traditions of domesticity, food, marriages etc. which are traced back to Pakistan’s belongingness to and influence of South Asian civilization. The second is Islamic values and traditions which have a strong impact on cultural practices and traditions. The last is conservative-normative structure of the Sub-continent society and culture (Nauman, 2015). In addition, having all these three components of the mainstream culture, Pakistani society still has headed towards modernity.

## **Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of this study is:

- To investigate the ideas of signification, language arbitrariness, and binary oppositions by examining the setting and social context in Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” (1894).
- To analyze the structural development, diction, lexical choice, and narration by evaluating the fictional characters in Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” (1894).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Today in the multicultural world, Pakistani society and its younger generation face difficulties to reconcile the two conflicting forces of tradition and modernity and are thus experiencing the tensions between “tradition, reform and modernism pulling it in different directions” (Ahmad, 2011). These tensions continue to exist within a largely tribal-feudal structure in parts of Pakistan and explain many of the difficulties facing it today.

According to Muhammad Abdul Qadeer (2006), it is a fact that a close relationship exists between materialistic success and religious or traditional observances which is an important discovery about the social ethos of the Pakistani society. In the post-colonial era, globalization proves to be a compelling force to precipitate the tension between traditional values and Modernity. The social and cultural consciousness of the communities who live in the modern times is in the process of readjustment. According to Maluleke (2012), people who belong to the modern era mostly oscillate between their traditional values and global flux. The emergence of global culture with its constant exchange of commodities and people has overwhelmed the indigenous traditional and cultural norms. This is exactly what Pakistani society has been going through in today’s Multicultural world and is also reflected in the contemporary fiction. Modernity, according to Giddens (1991), is:

*A society can't be fully modern if attitudes, actions or institutions are significantly influenced by traditions, because deference to tradition - doing things just because people did them in the past -*

*is the opposite of modern reflexivity. Because of this, societies which try to 'modernise' in the most obvious institutional sense - by becoming something like a capitalist democracy - but which do not throw off other traditions, such as gender inequalities, are likely to fail in their attempt to be successful modern societies (p. 68)*

Similarly, Muhammad Abdul Qadeer (2006) also observes that social change proceeds by incorporating traditions and receiving religious practices through the adaptation of modern materialistic ways.

Such transnational shifting paradigms are significantly represented in literature written in English by Anglophone writers. Most of the writers use diasporic approach in their studies and reside away from their homeland, but still maintain a decent connection between the national and the international cultures. Therefore, it means that these writers represent the role of juxtaposition between the tradition and modernity in an individual's life.

### **Changing Narrative**

Over the decades, there has been a considerable shift from the local to the international. The global culture has emerged with the advancements in technology and hence, a global culture has overwhelmed the local. It has been noticed that culture does not remain a phenomenon subservient to the local or the national. It becomes a homogenized body which reflects transnational values. The Diasporic literature is a representation of this homogenized body. It reflects not only the shifted narrative of the national culture, but also of the global cultural flow (Appadurai, 2011). Thus, literature today is a representation of tradition, modernity and shifting paradigms.

### **Introduction of the Novels**

*Salt and Saffron* (2000), the novel by Kamila Shamsie is an account of the past memories and traditions as preserved by the family Dard-e-Dil. It also reflects the appropriation of traditional values in a modern scenario by the members of new generation of this family. It not only effectively shows the past Muslim cultural and political glory yet it revisits the issues of modernity. It is the story of Aliya, a young family member of Dard-e-Dil, who revisits the family traditions and values. The story revolves around the cultural norms, traditional fears and prejudices held and entertained by the older generations and the skepticism rampant among the new generation.

*Trespassing* (2003) is a novel of modern Pakistan where Uzma Aslam Khan shows the stifling demands of tradition and family. Through Daanish, a young Pakistani student who is studying in America, and Dia, the gifted daughter of a silk merchant, Riffat Khan explores the interplay between tradition, modernization, culture and prejudice. The importance of this novel also emanates from the fact that it provides a glimpse on the agonies of Salaamat, Nessrine, Dia, Anu and Daanish who not only undergo the processes of identification, assimilation, adaptation and alienation etc. but also experience the structural changes vis-à-vis their society and culture.

*How It Happened* (2013), a novel by Shazaf Fatima Haider also depicts the story of a younger generation caught between the throngs of familial and cultural traditions and modernity. Haider's story is all set to expose contemporary Pakistani society where tradition struggles to reconcile with

changing times, where marriages are not always arranged and women may not be well versed in the arts of cooking and sewing.

The present study selected the above three novels on the basis of representation of clash in cultural traditions between generations and the rise of modernity in new generations. With the help of diversity among the presented schools of thought of the characters, the present study tries to evaluate the gap between the older generation which upholds the traditions and the younger generations who are torn between the traditional ties and the modern world.

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The culture of Caste system “Zat and Biradari” is very strong in Pakistani society and there is strict adherence to it as far as the older generation is concerned. Qadeer (2006) observes that Pakistani society is overlaid with castes like “Sayyids, Qureshis, Ghaznavis, and Mughals” (p, 109). He further adds that “Muslim castes are endogamous and confer identity and status on individual”. This is how even a typical village reflects “Zat and biradari hierarchies, which correspond to the hereditary occupations and corresponding social standing, layered hierarchically into landlords, tenants, farm workers, maulvis and Kammis. ...” (p.114) This is reflected in *Dard-e-Dil*, a sprawling aristocratic family with the shared distinction of “angular features, a prominent clavicle, straight black hair” (*Salt and Saffron*, p. 7) which has a historical presence dating back to Taimur Lang that runs parallel to, overlaps and intersects with that of the Mughals. Almost a similar description of Bandian family is given by Haider in *How It Happened*. One of the main characters, Dadi is fed up with these “modren” times and her favourite method of countering them is through nostalgic recollections of tales of her ancestors that she modifies according to the lesson she wants to dispense at a particular point. Her tales of High-born Shia Bandian family to which she belongs. Bhakuraj, the family’s ancestral village, serves as a guide to the lives she wants her grandchildren to live. She takes great pride in tracing back the origins of her highly valued family to a village in Pre-partitioned India. However, all claims of superiority and royalty are rendered pointless in the modern context as the young members of the families in these novels reject the past traditions and conceptions as irrelevant.

The fact that family’s elders are strictly against of marrying their young ones outside their vaster family circles and their insistence upon arranged marriages for them also comes out very strongly in these novels along with the unrest caused by it in the members of younger generations. In a society as driven by differences of class, caste and community as in Pakistan, the notion of marriage becomes even more complex. For not only must marriages be arranged by the family elders who take into consideration the extent of variations and combinations, but also arranged among one’s own sort. While speaking at Allaince Francaise, White Star on “Broadening Traditional Views on Love and Marriage”, Shazaf Fatima Haider reflected on the presence of authoritarianism in family and the sheer loyalty to tradition, both of which are considered unquestionable and unchallengeable. “We come from a religious culture that places restrictions on open dialogue between man and woman before marriage. But the minute you start questioning this culture or your parents, you are seen as being disrespectful,” she said.

This is only one norm to which reconciliation becomes difficult by the younger generation of modern times. In *How It Happened*, we are introduced to the same unrest that can occur in well-

furnished Pakistani drawing rooms when it comes to young people choosing their own life partners. The drawing room Haider has written about happens to belong to a 'High-born', ultraconservative Shia Bandian family where the narrator has a whole caste of aunts, uncles and cousins who have been programmed by Dadi to get married in time-honoured way: 'correctly and modestly, living their lives the Arranged Way' (*How It Happened*, p.4) because "The Bandians of Bhakuraj, true to their ancestral heritage, married not for love . . ." (*How It Happened*, p.1). As the overzealous matriarch, Dadi, races to get her grandchildren bound by the ties of arranged matrimony we come to be well-acquainted with the problems of making it happen. The idea that a girl opts to find her groom is considered uprooted and the one who is a Sunni (as in case of Saliha's elder sister) is taken as "horrors of horrors" (p. 55) which also makes Umer's case even worse as the Khalif Umer bin Al khattab is thought by the Shias as usurper of the right of Khalifat which belonged to Hazrat Ali.

Trying to bring her spoilt granddaughter to the right track, Dadi recounts innumerable tales of the past where women led a puppet-like life deemed to be the most appropriate one. One such tale with the suggested moral for Zeba goes like this:

My poor sister, Khanum, may she rest in peace. Abba Huzoor came home one day and told her she would marry a young lecturer who taught with him at Patna University. She bowed her head and said: Jee acha, Abba Huzoor. Did you hear that Zeba? That's how good girls respond to their parents. They trust their elders to do what is best (*How It Happened*, p. 35).

Haider's book portrays a culture in transition; the clash between the past when people were "betrothed even before birth" (*How It Happened*, p. 36) and the modern times when youngsters want to have a say in everything which concerns them.

Almost a similar situation is faced by Daanish in *Trespassing*, an Amherst journalism student on his visit home after his father Shafqat's death. He adored Shafqat, an enlightened doctor who traveled the world, but Daanish's smothering and needy Pakistani mother, the traditional Anu, is pushing him into an arranged marriage with Dia's best friend Nini. Hence, the young generation finds it very hard to come up to the traditions of their family and also to follow their own new ways.

Aliya in *Salt and Saffron*, also has a chance encounter with Khaleel, a young Pakistani studying in Britain, first on her way to, and then, in London. She hails from a society where hierarchy is rigid and she begins to feel the burden of the family heritage which she is carrying, especially after she finds her affection growing for Khaleel who has his family from Liaquatabad - a locality far below the standards of the riches of her family.

This brings our discussion to another important point. The culture of Pakistan deeply entrenched in patriarchy and male chauvinism has given rise to constructs of ideal femininity as devotion, endurance, loyalty and self-sacrifice. A study on cultural discourses and beliefs in South Asian communities highlight that patriarchal notions about gender roles have evolved from a number of inter-related discourses held despite changing social contexts. Such notions about gender roles include the ideas:

Sons are more important than daughters; man is the woman's protector; the ideal wife must obey her husband, be loyal, devoted and chaste; children must obey parents and be dutiful towards them at all times; and woman's primary role is towards the family and household. (Shankar, Das, Atwal)

This deeply rooted patriarchal culture in which women are silenced and marginalized to the domestic sphere and also having a liberal and modern exposure through a foreign education is represented in contemporary fiction. In some situations, women remain bound to while in others, they rebel against the gender stereotypes embedded in their consciousness by the traditional male dominated culture of Pakistan.

Thus, we see in Riffat (*Trespassing*), a complete image of a modern woman and wife, an innovative and decisive business woman who is forced into a marriage against her wishes. Later on she leaves her husband on the reason that he demands total obedience and submission from his wife and expects that she would follow his family traditions. As retaliation, being a single mother, Riffat makes sure her daughter Dia gets what she likes. Daanish's father Shafqat, also represents a very traditional figure when comes to strong family bonds and particularly the role of his wife. Otherwise he is a man with not a very narrow perspective when it is about his own travelling abroad or sending his son abroad for education.

There is a clash found between traditional and modern dresses in these selected novels. In *How It Happened*, Zeba's dresses are always a matter of distress for Dadi. She is a handful for her grandmother and is seen as the rebellious one "displaying disconcerting signs of independence" which includes "wearing a sleeveless kameez and then going out to a restaurant for dinner with a group of friends" (*How It Happened*, p. 35).

As the story progresses, the author's main intention to portray a world of changing realities becomes clear; the constant tug-of-war between the old and the new comes to the forefront. According to Dr. Payel Dutta, "most of these traditional ideas in the present-day times are confused ones, of the utmost desire to keep up the orthodox ways and yet to show a liberal-mindedness" (p. 3) As in *How It Happened*, Dadi says: a suitable girl "should not cover her head or wear a 'burqa' like a fundo. Neither should be so liberal that we are forced to stare at her cleavage all day long" (*How It Happened*, p. 33). Haider's depiction of the changed world is mainly through her women characters, Fati Phupps, who refuses to leave a life of blessed spinsterhood, writes for a magazine and lives an independent life; Saima represents a woman's ability to work in a man's world and Zeba, who reads *Pride and Prejudice*, talks of orgasms, discusses politics and dates a Sunni man.

Similarly, in *Salt and Saffron*, Aliya, while sitting on Clifton beach in Karachi, observes:

"Between my jeans and the black *burkha* of the woman climbing gingerly down the rocks to the sand beneath, between Sameer's pin-striped shirt with French cuffs and the bright pink *kameez* of the man selling kites, there was a whole range of styles and colors and materials" (Shamsie, 2000, p.212).

Shamsie's novel is an acceptance of difference on equal terms. The most important contrast for Giddens (1991) is between pre-modern (traditional) culture and modern (post-traditional) culture.

When tradition dominates, individual actions do not have to be analyzed and thought about so much, because choices are already prescribed by the traditions and customs. Furthermore, this does not mean that traditions can never be thought about, or challenged. In post-traditional times, however, we don't really worry about the precedents set by previous generations, and options are at least as open as the law and public opinion will allow. All questions of how to behave in society then become matters which we have to consider and make decisions about. Society becomes much more *reflexive* and aware of its own precariously constructed state. Dard e Dil reflects strong sense of traditions while the sense of being individual is seen in Aliya's character. Through her journey back to her family, quite literally, she becomes reacquainted with her clan members, first in London where she stops midway and then in Karachi. The prejudices and "objects of baseless terror" or 'bugaboo' (p.1) in Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron*, that run in families and are possessed and nurtured by it through generations, the prejudices that are handed down from one generation to the next in legacy and become a vital part of the existence of the members of the family whose beings are sometimes shaped and other times victimized by it, bringing upon an effect which defines their mental space, "We of the royal family of Dard-e-Dil have always held true to our family fears. No marriages, conversations or redistributions of wealth can change that. Not-quite-twins are not-quite-twins; no way around that" (*Salt and Saffron*, p. 2). Often such prejudices have to be accepted without questioning and nonconformity to them calls for banishment from the family.

Anthony Giddens (1991) has described the modern world as a 'juggernaut', that is, as an engine of enormous power which can be directed to some extent, but which also threatens to run out of control. The juggernaut is a runaway world with great increases over prior systems in the pace, scope, and profoundness of change. A micro 'juggernaut' is seen in all these novels under discussion. All the protagonists of these novels reflect a change and deviation from the prior systems and traditions. Shamsie hints at this cultural deviation and reminds us of the diasporic element on play in her work when Aliya landing in London has to adjust " 'cultural expectation' knob in [her] brain from 'America: chatty' to 'England: not' " (*Salt and Saffron*, p. 5).

As Aliya finds herself drawn to this Westernized Pakistani Khalil, her disillusionment with the family snobbery and her identification with Mariam Apa who broke the family tradition and married a servant intensifies. Haider in her novel portrays the same through the characters of Zeba baji who deviates from family traditions and marries of her own will to her love and Saleha, the narrator herself who deviates from traditions at every step. In *Trespassing*, it is shown through Dia's Western-educated mother, Riffat, who has run the family's silk business since her husband's random murder. She has raised Dia to share her independent thinking and assures her daughter that she'll be allowed to marry for love. Therefore, when Daanish and Dia meet, Dia is head-over-heels in first love while Daanish has a more casual American attitude. Daanish never trespasses the tradition that binds him to the role of a submissive son—although he expresses his unhappiness frequently, he consents to the arranged marriage at the end, with no uneasiness over how he may have and will continue to influence the lives of two women—his former lover, Dia, and her best friend he is bequeathed to be married.

In modern societies, self-identity becomes an inescapable issue. Even those who would say that they have never given any thought to questions or anxieties about their own identity will inevitably have been compelled to make significant choices throughout their lives, from everyday questions about clothing, appearance and leisure to high-impact decisions about relationships, beliefs and occupations. Whilst earlier societies with a social order based firmly in tradition would provide

individuals with (more or less) clearly defined roles, in post-traditional societies we have to work out our roles for ourselves. As Giddens (1991) puts it:

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity - and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behavior (p, 70).

Kamila Shamsie infuses a nostalgic streak in Aliya who seems to be psychologically caught between two worlds with a desire to reclaim the past yet revolt against it. Arriving in London Aliya is overtaken by memories, "More than anything else, more than the mangoes, *gal guppas*, *nihuri* and *naans*, more than cricket mania, more than monsoon rains, more than crabbing beneath a star-clustered sky, what I missed most about Karachi was the intimacy of bodies" (*Salt and Saffron*, p. 14).

At another point, she is caught between her past and present:

But actually, I was thinking about America. My college days, so recently finished, were days of empty spaces in my head. Spaces without chatter, spaces without textured silences. I was so utterly foreign there, so disconnected from everything that went on that I could afford to be passionate about the tiniest injustice in the domestic news (*Salt and Saffron*, p. 49).

She loves things about Karachi and about her family, still wishes to revolt against many of its traditions. Thus, Aliya returns to her family and views her culture from a different perspective – of questioning the aristocratic feudal society where a lot of obsolete traditions are carried in the name of family's pride, of environments where rules are rigid and suffocating, burdening the members with the family heritage.

## CONCLUSION

Hence, these traditions over burden the young generation that feels hard to live up to the modernity of the multicultural world along with keeping the traditional heritage. Neither of the characters discussed find true happiness and so continue to live an uncertain life. Qadeer (2006) observes that Pakistani society is compartmentalized into two compartments; Islamic/ cultural traditions and material progress: "Yet they clash as well as complement each other in myriad ways. The result is a state of moral uncertainty and social cleavages" (p, 7). The young generation feels compelled to be driven by the forces of modern and material development which surrounds them. They live in a post-modern world where one cannot avoid the benefits of the modern world. But at the same time the traditions pull them towards the older culture, and these are the ties which are difficult to sever.

In conclusion, this is a state of predicament which gives rise to an uncertainty, chaos and disequilibrium in the society. Such as Daanish and Dia's union in *Trespassing* if takes place, this union will forever rupture the peace of two households and three families, destroying a stable present built on the repression of a bloody past. Similarly, Aliya in *Salt and Saffron* remains reluctant in accepting the family norms and traditions completely till the very end. Saleha, along



with the rest of the family members find it difficult to accept the family norms retold by Dadi and to reconcile to them. This is why there is a great need to adopt a synthesis in order to come out of the uncertainty in which we as a society are living. According to Qadeer (2006), “only a harmonious synthesis between these powerful forces can help the society to make a move towards stability and prosperity” (p. 285).

The terms tradition and modernity have always been used as opposites which could never be reconciled. It has been noticed that traditional forms of the society may provide support to modernity and modernity does not necessarily weaken the traditions. The traditional societies along with being normatively static and structurally homogeneous can still be modern in their attitude and outlook. The rise of modernity in contemporary societies cannot be stopped altogether so it is better to assimilate the two phenomenon and to accept the differences. This kind of a synthesis between these two forces will help the South Asian society to be stable and prosperous.

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