



‘The world where dreams come true’- Using the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to explore the cultural and religious identity issues through an online literary exchange

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents original research which explores university students' perceptions of cultural and religious identity issues in relation to Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* at two public sector universities in Sindh and Punjab, Pakistan. The theoretical concepts of dialogism and mestiza consciousness are used as major frameworks governing this study. The findings are based on data supplied by 16 students through google circles. The key arguments based on findings of this study are that the participants discussed and connected to cultural and religious identity in the novel that was geographically, socially and temporally close in terms of their local and global context. These results are important for curriculum designers, teachers and researchers in dialogism, mestiza consciousness, fiction and education in the context as they provide significant insights into students' perceptions in relation to fiction.

Keywords:

cultural identity, religious identity, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, asynchronous discussion, Pakistan, perceptions, students



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INTRODUCTION

Bakhtin's dialogism is a comprehensive framework that integrates anthropological philosophy, epistemology, humanities, and literary theory into literary works. Bakhtin differentiates between the natural sciences and the humanities. The natural sciences focus on the study of inanimate

objects, whereas the humanities focus on the study of the "spirit" or humanity. The humanities encompass matters of reception, matters of development, and matters of deployment, in addition to the interpretation of speech by others. Due to the inherent attributes of these entities, the only means of understanding the humanities is by possessing a comprehensive understanding of the discourse. Bakhtin argued that the humanities have a specific emphasis on elucidating the thoughts, meanings, and significances derived from humans who only exist within the text. The written and textual data serve as the major source of information for the whole subject of study. Without words, it is not able to generate concepts or ask questions about objects. Considering this, the humanities do not just center on people as their subject matter; instead, they position humans as the creators of literature.

Bakhtin (1973) delineated a notable distinction between two types of communication: speech and discourse. Firstly, there exists a concept called the "discourse of authority" or the "speech of power," which pertains to assertions that are immune to questioning by those in positions of power and align with the dominant perspectives in domains such as religion, morals, politics, and science. According to Bakhtin, this is related to the artistic process of the "epic" in literature. Bakhtin suggested that the term "epic" might encompass works that were not necessarily have to be extended lyrical discourses. It is necessary to provide a more extensive definition of "epic" that includes a set of other characteristics. According to Bakhtin, the idea of epic has long been recognised as a fixed and unchanging definition that describes comprehensively. They are discussing historical occurrences that are beyond what can be afforded. This is a historical account that is completely unrelated to the present circumstances and is not at all perplexing to contemporary readers. However, it is portrayed as an unquestionable authority. The bulk of the work is grounded in religious customs and honourable practices, which cannot be imposed upon ordinary individuals and subjects. Furthermore, the book exposes the authorised perspectives of the ruling elite. Lastly, they possess a solemn countenance and a subdued style of communication. Milton's "Paradise Lost" is an epic poem that encompasses all of these remarkable qualities. This composition employed complimentary language to depict conventional things with a solemn and holy undertone. The message was unequivocal and left no room for interpretation; it "fully justifies the manner in which God interacts with humanity." Bakhtin specifically recognised "Internally Persuasive Discourse" as the second kind of speech in his analysis. This speech was persuasive and compelling, leading us to fully embrace it as the basis for our views and actions. Our acceptance was not influenced by any authority figure, such as the government or the Pope, but rather by the content of the speech itself. In this context, the term "Internally Persuasive Discourse" refers to a kind of communication in which we voluntarily engage rather than having it imposed upon us.

In the seminal work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, written by Gloria Anzaldua in 1987, the concepts of borderlands and mestiza consciousness were presented for the first time. Within the context of her work *Borderlands*, Anzaldua addresses a variety of subjects, including living in the shadows and dealing with boundaries. She claims that her work is an expression of her personal experiences with oppression and brutality. Anzaldua incorporates the idea of mestiza consciousness within the theoretical framework that he refers to as borderlands. Engaging in a variety of activities in order to gain individual freedom is a component of this concept, which is a component of multicultural feminism as an ideology in its whole. You are able to acquire this freedom by either adopting a flexible concept of self or entirely letting go of any kind of identification. People who live in borderlands are required to do an in-depth analysis

of the validity of binary categories, which include gender, sexual orientation, age, social status, racial and cultural background, and physical appearance.

This involves forming new social groupings to move away from an ethnic-centric perspective. The phrase "borderlands" denotes geographical or other regions that create a space resembling "la mezcla," a state of hybridity, and exist between two other locations. The space or boundary in question is intangible, existing solely as a symbolic border or space. Anzaldua argues that this liminal space emerges when two or more cultures intersect, when individuals of different races coexist in the same region, when people from different social classes interact, and when the proximity between two individuals diminishes as they grow closer to each other. The term "borderlands" is inherently metaphorical and includes persons who are marginalised or hybrid, as well as those who may challenge binary thinking. Anzaldua argues that the remedy for this issue is to develop a mestiza consciousness that is based on "la facultad," which refers to the ability to perceive from several viewpoints simultaneously. Anzaldua's intention in behaving this way is to anticipate the potential emergence of a fresh state of consciousness, rather than a distinct sense of self, resulting from the division induced by this continuous internal conflict.

This study explores students' perceptions of culture, religion and identity in relation to the novel studied in the two public sector universities of Sindh and Punjab, Pakistan. It aims to add on to the existing body of literature on dialogism (Bakhtin, 2015) and mestiza consciousness (Anzaldua, 1987) through literature. It further aims to give way to the possibility of investigating dialogism and mestiza consciousness through literature at the university level in Pakistan.

The novel (selected from the university curriculum) included in this research was *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hamid, 2007). The research questions that guided the study were: How do students discuss cultural and religious identity in relation to Mohsin Hamid's novel in an asynchronous online platform? The study's main objective was to explore whether the students thought the two themes of cultural and religious identity were apparent in the novel; if so, how did they relate their perceptions, their experiences and observations with the local and global contexts in an asynchronous discussion with peers from another institute.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mohsin Hamid is one of those writers who talk about issues like culture, politics, economics and religion in the context of globalization. Hartnell's (2010) study, in this regard, talked about "American exceptionalism", "multiculturalism" and "racism" in the wake of 9/11. Moreover, the study emphasized upon the idea that how the novel tends to transcend the racial binaries in the favor of globalization. Haider (2012) discussed *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* from the perspective of contesting the stereotypical notions related to religion and Islamophobia. He researched on the dialogic encounter between Islam and the West and how religion got manipulated in the hands of global politics and American imperialism. Moreover, the researcher significantly pointed out how economic fundamentalism is the new fundamentalism adopted by American culture. The study also allowed the readers to ponder upon East and West beyond the binaries of oppressed/oppressor, uncivilized/civilized and fundamentalist/secular. Monton (2017) study, in this regard, contested the idea of Muslims as terrorist Others. The study revealed how Muslims were the victims of American imperialism in the wake of 9/11. The research study employed the concept of Conrey's "transnational diasporic subjects" which problematized the

identity of individuals like Changez caught between opposing cultures in the era of globalization. Khan (2015) through her study researched on how Changez acted as both an “insider/outside”. The study also explained that the concept of nativity/homeland is very problematic in the contemporary world. She exemplified it through the character of Changez who found refuge in the “liminal” or “in-between spaces” between East and West. Shirazi (2017) researched in the same vein and questioned the idea of a stable nation and nationality and hence, talked about global citizens. The study significantly pointed out the significance of understanding nation and citizenship beyond national boundaries in order to reconfigure transnational and diasporic identities in the context of the novel.

Ajeesh & Rukmini (2022) stated in their research that the story of Changez links to his nation or its religious and cultural emotions were either nonexistent or suppressed before he made his decision to embrace the American culture and identity. Nevertheless, following his experience with Juan Bautista, he engages in some self-reflection and becomes aware of the apathy and cruelty that are inherent in the society that he so enthusiastically embraced. Consequently, this finally results in his going back to his own nation. One possible interpretation of his return home is that it marks the conclusion of his quest for an identity. They opine that transnational individuals are characterised by their capacity to experience the world not as a binary but rather as a diverse blend of cultures and identities. This is the ultimate characteristic of individuals who are transnational.

Theoretical framework

Dialogism is a way to understand multiple voices and perspectives on identity and culture. Bakhtin (2015) explains dialogism as a form of interaction between various ideas. When ideas or beliefs come in interaction with one another they lose their unity. He exemplifies dialogism through narratives of modern times. One such example is the Western concept of human progress and development. According to him, no idea or belief is fixed. Ideas or concepts always remain in the process of change. Bakhtin talks about the role of novels in establishing dialogic interaction between various ideas. According to him, the novel is a discourse which is a representation of a certain worldview. When this belief comes in interaction with other views and concepts it becomes open for a change. Thus, human consciousness like beliefs and concepts is not fixed. According to Bakhtin, it is dynamic and remains in the process of transformation. Gardiner (1992) explains how Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, it negates the authority of an author in a given text. Secondly, it defies the domination of accepted beliefs and concepts. Moreover, according to Bakhtin, the novel is a narrative space where characters move into the past and present easily. In this way, a dialogic is created between past and present which helps readers to think about future possibilities. It also helps human consciousness to question established cultural beliefs and thoughts.

Bakhtin (2015) further explains dialogism in terms of his concept called “embodiment”. Every discourse, according to Bakhtin, has a speaking subject who occupies a specific location or position in a literary text. Hence, words only act as a signifier to define reality. According to Bakhtin, in every dialogic interaction at least “two voices” are at work always. Moreover, this voice works in “dual-directionality”. Bakhtin states that dual-directionality voices a discourse within a discourse. It makes concepts and its meanings inherently dialogic in nature.

Bakhtin (2015) further explains dialogism through Self/Other relations. According to Bakhtin, this refers to interaction between individuals. This may also refer to interaction between cultures. Bakhtin sees Self in a dialogic communication with multiple contexts. That's why, Bakhtin's Self is dynamic and comprises "lived experiences". Moreover, Bakhtin's self is not an isolated entity. It meets Others in the form of various individuals and cultures. According to Bakhtin, these Others play an important role in the development of Self. The reason is that Self is always under the gaze/surveillance of an Other. Through this Self/Other relation, Bakhtin gives the concept of identity as an open-ended narrative (Jabri, 2004). According to Bakhtin, identity or Self remains "unfinalizable" because of its dialogic interaction with other individuals and cultures in a novel. This makes the novel a carrier of an identity with multiple meanings attached to it (Patterson, 1985).

Anzaldua (1987) gives an idea of mestiza consciousness to describe cultural mixing. This happens when individuals shift from one culture to another or come in contact with each other. It consists of a clash between two or more conflicting voices or ideas. This clash becomes a cause for the flow of cultural values from one culture to another. Anzaldua calls it a "struggle of borders" as native cultural values collide with the foreign ones. The consciousness, in this way, faces the problem of multiplicity/hybridity. Anzaldua stresses on the need to accept this new consciousness. It works against binaries to study reality and hence, tolerates ambiguity. The analysis of reality in terms of binaries, according to her, is a conspiracy of the dominant cultures against the dominated ones. Anzaldua emphasizes the interaction between multiple cultures/voices. The reason is that new consciousness accepts and hence, does not negate the opposing views and beliefs. Anzaldua (2002) uses the metaphor of a bridge to show this "shifting consciousness" which symbolizes transformation, transition and displacement. This consciousness acts as a struggle to achieve liberation against established ideologies. Moreover, it allows the acceptance of the commonalities through keeping the differences in cultures intact (Moraga & Anzaldua, 2015). The purpose of mestiza consciousness, according to Anzaldua, is to break free from the ideological narratives in order to give new meanings to various concepts. One such idea is the narrative of a stable identity. Anzaldua (2015), in this context, talks about a new category of identity in the form of *mestizaje*. It is a hybrid identity at the intersection of multiple cultures. According to Anzaldua, identities at the intersection of multiple contexts allow a dialogue between various cultures. Moreover, it paves way to cross the "biological" and allow "cultural mixtures". Identity, in this context, cannot be seen from a single perspective. It is placed at the intersection of race, gender, class and sexuality. A number of studies have used mestiza consciousness to understand literary texts (e.g. Searls, 2006; Jesus, 2004; Aragon, 2001).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a qualitative research design. A qualitative research design provides room for an in-depth study (Cohen et al., 2007). We set out to explore students' perceptions regarding cultural and religious identity in relation to Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. As this was the first study of its kind in the context, rich data was needed to understand the research question at hand.

The participants of the study were university students from two different higher education institutions in Pakistan- one in Sindh and one in Punjab. Students who had read the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as part of their syllabus were invited to participate in an online

interaction with peers from the other institute. Students do not usually get a chance to interact with students from another university and another province, therefore, they showed keen interest in getting to talk to peers from another part of the country.

Data was collected through online interactions between the groups of students from the two participating institutes. Google docs provided the platform for these google circles as suggested by Varga et al. (2020) and Naylor et al. (2022). A total of three groups were created with four participants from Punjab institute and two to three students from Sindh. The unequal number was due to the number of students who volunteered to participate. Students were given three prompts to answer and start the discussion. The questions were:

Q1: What concept of culture/cultural difference did you come up with while reading the novel?

Q2: What do you think about religion and how you relate it to this novel, particularly keeping in mind Changez's mind/consciousness?

Q3: Do you think that the identity of Changez underwent a transformation during the course of the novel? How do you connect it with your own life and the contemporary globalized world?

Students from each institute were asked to make comments at two different points so each group had a chance to respond to the others at least once. The discussion was kept asynchronous for practical reasons, as students were doing it in their own time and not in the class. Even though asynchronous discussions could be difficult (Hrastinski, 2008; Stahl, Koschmann, & Suthers, 2006), it was hoped that the time difference will provide room for reflection and more detailed answers.

The data from the google circles was analysed using thematic analysis model provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). We familiarized ourselves with the data by reading it. The data was then coded. The codes were checked by the two researchers separately to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1999). Themes were generated from the codes which are presented in the following sections.

Standard ethical protocols were followed. Students were given complete information regarding the project and about the use of data. They participated in the google circles voluntarily and were assured that they could withdraw at any stage. The students were given acronyms- S9 (P), for example denotes student 9 from Punjab- to ensure anonymity.

FINDINGS

The students' responses to the given prompts in the google circles were analysed. The following themes were developed after coding:

1. Cultural dichotomy of East versus West
2. Impact of cultural differences on Changez
3. Religion, Muslim Identity and Changez's consciousness in the novel
4. Identity of Changez and Globalization

Cultural dichotomy of East versus West

Twenty nine extracts were coded under this theme. The students saw the cultural divide and commented on it in different groups. S6 (P) in Group 2 pointed out that the world was clearly divided into two parts in the wake of 9/11. According to him, after 9/11 it became really difficult for Changez to remain loyal to both cultures. Hence, the cultural divide got more apparent after 9/11. But West remained a dominating and East a dominated culture throughout the novel, the participant further elaborated. S7 (P) in the same group challenged the clear divide between East and West and stated:

Changez also suspects that the foreigner has come to attend some specific purpose; he may have a mission. The narrator even comments about his sitting style with his back to the wall, this shows him susceptible to security conditions. The American is afraid because he is an American in a Muslim country.

The students in group 1 talked about the changed behaviours after 9/11. S3 (P) wrote: "Changez's girlfriend Erica also left him which symbolizes his shattered dream of American life". Some participants talked about the common perception of the West as having a superior culture in comparison to the East. S4 (S), in this context, reported the racial prejudice of Americans and called it "black-white conflict". S3 (P) talked about the domination and discrimination of West against East in terms of the differences between two cultures. The participant elaborated that it was hard for both cultures to accept each other particularly after 9/11. She also related this cultural clash with a contemporary "postcolonial" world. S4 (S) called Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a representation of Postcolonial literature. He further describes it as a manifestation of binarism in the form of East versus West, Muslims versus non-Muslims and occident versus orient. S4 (S) states:

It manifests cultural differences of East and West, Muslims and non-Muslims, American superiority and eastern inferiority. In a more precise manner, the novel renders the display of politico-cultural differences of the occident and the orient.

The cultural hybridity of the West is coded at 12 mentions. S11 (P) perceived that though cultural differences were there in the novel, America existed as a hybrid culture. After 9/11, America ceased to exist as a hybrid culture and hence, failed to accept cultural differences. The participant further elaborated that Changez tried his best to fit into the Western culture but ultimately failed due to inevitable cultural differences. S1 (P) conforms to the idea given by S5 (S) in Group 1 that the lack of understanding of each other's cultures leads towards clashes in the novel. The same concept is mentioned by S5 (S) that how misconception regarding Islam and its association with "Talibanization" has further damaged the situation after 9/11. He also reported that the media also played a significant role in this regard. S14 (P) in Group 3 talked about the ending of the novel in this regard. She pointed out that the culture of both America and Pakistan are hybrid and hence, both cultures have the capacity to accept each other. S14 (P) in Group 3 associated cultural hybridity with politics. She significantly pointed out how politics became a barrier for Changez to have a neutral picture of both cultures. S4 (S) in Group 1 considered this cultural hybridity as a part of postcolonialism where "racism manifests the cultural values".

Changez as a representative of cultural diversity is also coded at 12 mentions. S11 (P) in Group 3 reported that the cultural gap between East and West became the main reason for making Changez a “reluctant fundamentalist”. S6 (P) in Group 2 described Changez as the representation of Muslims that how they got humiliated and discriminated after 9/11. S11 (P) maintained that Changez tried his best to stay “in-between” the cultures but ultimately failed to do so. She further elaborated that cultural hybridity became the main reason for most of the clashes in the novel. S12 (P) in Group 3 quoted from the novel how Changez described the American manipulation of young talented Pakistanis. Moreover, she also reported that Changez ultimately proved himself as a “Patriot” by showing inclination towards his nation and culture.

Impact of cultural differences on Changez

For this theme, mentions were coded from the students’ discussion of the way they perceived the novel relating to the impact of cultural differences on Changez. Twenty nine extracts were coded. By far, the largest category was the students’ perception of transformation in Changez which was coded at 33 mentions. S7 (P) in Group 2 called Changez as a “postcolonial subject” colonized by the West. The responses of the participants clearly demonstrated the phases of transformation in Changez before and after 9/11. S12 (P) in Group 3 mentioned that before 9/11 Changez conformed to Western values and culture. But after the clear discrimination of Americans after 9/11, he got inclined towards his native culture. S7 (P) in Group 2 quoted from the beginning of the novel how the foreigner got offended from the beard of Changez as the beard is not only the symbol of Eastern/Muslim identity but also Islamic extremism in the West.

S2 (P) in Group 1 perceived the impact of cultural differences in terms of its effect on the psyche/consciousness of Changez. S12 (P), in this regard, described this impact in terms of ideological change in Changez. Previously, Changez was a true admirer of America but after 9/11 his views got significantly changed due to discrimination of Americans against Muslims. S8 (P) in Group 2 also pointed out that due to the discrimination of Americans Changez felt “alienated” in America. S10 (S), in this context, talked about the inevitability of “cultural evolution” and its impact on the expatriates like Changez.

Some participants talked about the identity crisis of Changez. S9 (S), in this regard, talked about the “glocal” identity of Changez. It is a mixture of global and local identities, the participant described. The participant further elaborated that it is a hybrid identity having traits of Western and Eastern culture. S5 (S) in Group 1 talked about the “Global village” where the identities of individuals exist at borders. S1 (P) further elaborated the above mentioned concept in terms of the identity crisis of Changez. The participant described that though Changez had a hybrid identity but, internally he considered East as an inferior culture in comparison to West.

The reasons for transformation in Changez are coded at 19 mentions. Most of the participants perceived cultural hybridity as one of the main reasons for transformation in Changez. In this regard, participants described cultural differences and hybridity in terms of a relation between “Self” and “Other”. Both East (Pakistan) and West (America) remained an “Other” for each other throughout the novel, the participants maintained. One of the participants talked about this Self/Other relation in terms of Changez’s relationship with Erica. Erica being a symbol of America remained an Other for Changez and consequently Changez remained an Other for Erica in the novel. S13 (P) in Group 3 stated:

Concept of otherness is clear in this novel as Erica who is symbolized as America and Changez as a change to them. Americans did not accept this change in the form of Changez. When Changez wanted to build a sexual relationship with Erica, Erica is shown unable to have sex with him because Changez was not like Chris (Erica's childhood love and most importantly he was native) but Changez was not more than the "other".

S15 (S), in this context, talked about the position of Changez between two opposing cultures. He pointed out that Changez occupied an ambivalent position between East and West. S11 (P) in Group 3 also pointed out that the cultural clash resulted due to Changez's ambivalent position between East and West and also Changez's failure to have a strong affiliation with his native culture. S16 (S) in Group 3 talked about the identity crisis of Changez in terms of his non-association with one culture. S1 (P) in Group 1 endorsed the idea of S3 (P) that the reason for the identity crisis of Changez happened due to "oscillating between different ideas" or cultures. S13 (P) in Group 3 significantly pointed out that though Changez was not a staunch Muslim but still he got ridiculed for being a Muslim in America. Hence, according to the participant, Changez remained a "misfit" in the novel. Some participants mentioned the fall of the American dream as one of the causes of transformation in Changez. S1 (P) in Group 1 described the American dream as "good life". S4 (S), in this regard, called Changez as the "victim of the American dream". He suffered because of the "cultural and political interests" of America. S11 (P) in Group 3 mentioned the inner conflict and Changez's weak ties with his own culture as the main reasons for the protagonist. S15 (S), in this regard, mentioned Changez as "American first and foremost".

Religion, Muslim Identity and Changez's consciousness in the novel

For this theme, mentions were coded from the students' discussion of the way they perceived the novel relating to religion, Muslim identity and Changez's consciousness in the novel. Thirty five extracts were coded. By far, the largest category was the students' perception of the representation of Muslim identity which is coded at 56 mentions. Most of the participants believed that the beard of Changez remained the representation of Muslim identity in the novel. S9 (S), in this regard, paralleled religion with culture. He explained that through beard Changez not only represented religion but also his culture. Some of the participants talked about the diversity of Muslim identity and Changez as its representation. S13 (P) and S15 (S), in this context, called Changez as a "moderate Muslim". S15 (S) called this "identity dilemma" of Changez as "he was both too Muslim for the west and too non-Muslim for his people". S1 (P) also reported on the unsettled identity of Changez throughout the novel. Some of the participants talked about the deceptive Muslim identity of Changez. S15 (S), in this context, significantly pointed out that Changez opted for the beard to mock religion not to represent it.

The participants also commented upon the image of Muslims in the West. S12 (P) described how Muslims are perceived as terrorists and how Changez tried his best to save the image of Muslims in America. S5 (S), in this regard, reported on "Islamophobia" particularly on the misperception of the West regarding Muslims. The participant elaborated on how Americans got afraid of Muslims and consequently the Muslims got brutally targeted after 9/11. According to the participant, Changez underwent a huge psychological trauma which "shattered his consciousness".

The representation of religion in the novel is coded at 35 mentions. Some participants tried to define religion. S5 (S) mentioned that religion is a chance not the choice of a person. S5 (S) reported on the division of cultures as civilized versus uncivilized on the basis of religion. S15 (S) and S16 (S) described religion as a “relative reality in the novel”. S15 (S) significantly pointed out that for Americans, Changez was a non-religious person and for Americans he was a religious extremist. Some participants gave the view that religion is used as a political and a social manipulation tool in the novel. S8 (P) mentioned religion as a “multidimensional tool” for exploitation. He elaborated that Changez opted for the beard not for religious purpose but as a reaction against the discrimination of Muslims. The participant also pointed out that the narratives of AlQaeda and Jihad are manipulative tools in the hands of political powers. S4 (S) in Group 1 associated religion with world politics. He stated:

Religion, yes, is a tool to mesmerize the picture of worldly politics for their own benefits.

The role of religion in the transformation of Changez’s consciousness is coded at 11 mentions. Some participants went against the proposition that religion played a role in the transformation of Changez’s mind regarding America. S2 (P), in this regard, called Changez “self-delusional” not a “reluctant fundamentalist”. The idea is endorsed through the response of S8 (P) in Group 2 when the participant hinted upon the relationship of Changez and Erica prohibited according to Islamic strictures. S11 (P) in Group 3 stated:

His decision of abandoning his former life may be attributed to some self-obsessed and delusional narrative but it has nothing to do with religion.

Some participants responded that religion did play a significant role in the transformation of Changez’s mind. According to S6 (P) in Group 2, it was 9/11 which “revolutionized” Changez’s mind into believing in religion and Islamic values. S7 (P) in the same group added that it was religion which became responsible for bringing “stability” to his mind/consciousness. The participant elaborated that this transformation in Changez’s consciousness allowed him to leave his hybridity and hence, became more inclined towards his religious values. She stated:

When Changez decided to go back to Pakistan, this was also a sign of personal growth, since he is no longer acting on behalf of other people and his unconscious mind becomes more vibrant towards Americans and their public abuse towards Muslims.

Some of the participants talked about ambivalence in Changez particularly in relation to his association with religion. S(3) in Group 1 mentioned Changez who tried his best to be a religious person after returning to his homeland, but failed to do so. S2 (P), in this regard, described the transformation in Changez’s consciousness as an inevitable reality for migrants like him.

Identity of Changez and Globalization

For this theme, mentions were coded from the students’ discussion of the way they perceived the novel relating to identity of Changez and globalization in the novel. Thirty two extracts were coded. By far, the largest category was the students’ perception of the identity of Changez as a dialogue between East and West which is coded at 45 mentions. S2 (P) in Group 1 talked about the identity of Changez as “dialectic between East and West”. The participant further related it to the conflict in identity of Changez. Most of the participants, in this regard, described the identity

of Changez as a dialogue between East and West through transformation in Changez. S7 (P) in Group 2 described the journey of Changez from a “lover of America to an anti-American”. Most of the time, the participants talked about the ideological transformation in Changez particularly before and after 9/11. The participants significantly pointed out how Changez used to consider America and its culture as superior to the rest of the world but ultimately got inclined towards his nation. In this context, the participants also described how Changez conformed to Western values in the beginning of the novel but after 9/11 he returned back to his native identity. S4 (S), in this regard, talked about the symbolic representation of Changez’s identity.

The identity crisis of Changez is coded at 23 mentions. Most of the participants talked about the identity crisis of Changez in relation to Postcolonial concepts like hybridity, mimicry, fragmentation and neocolonialism. That’s why the participants are of the view that no single interpretation of Changez’s identity is possible as he is a hybrid but fragmented character in the novel. His identity remained in a flux throughout the novel. S11 (P) in Group 3 explained mimicry in detail particularly in relation to Changez that how under the influence of the Westerners as Colonizers he mimicked Western culture and forgot his own native values. She significantly explained that Changez lost his actual identity in the process. S13 (P) maintained that the binary of Self and the Other remained unchallenged as Pakistanis were Others for the Americans throughout the novel. S3 (P) related the hybridity and identity crisis of Changez to his ambivalent position between his “American dream” and his own native land. S1 (P) in Group 1 significantly talked about the position of Changez in “Third Space” between East and West. The participant explained that the character of Changez established a space in the novel which is “impure” in itself. She stated:

if one is 'reluctant fundamentalist' as Changez, he loses purity because it creates the third space which is always impure.

The impact of globalization on Changez’s identity is coded at 16 mentions. S2 (P) explained globalization as a pathway to “cultural homogenization”. S8 (P) in Group 2 connected globalization with the identity crisis of Changez. The participant explained the point in terms of the contemporary global world where America is a place where dreams come true while South Asian countries are not affluent enough to provide multiple opportunities to the young generation. In the case of Changez, when he opted for his dreams in the form of living in America he also experienced an “identity split” caught between East and West. S15 (S) talked about the inevitable transformation in Changez’s identity in relation to the “geopolitical world”. S1 (P) in Group 1, in this context, talked about cultural diversity where accepting other cultures is a need of the contemporary global world. The participant insisted on remaining loyal to one’s own nation and culture. She stated:

Being in a contemporary globalized world, we will accept and respect others' culture but we will love and stick to ours as well.

DISCUSSION

The participants identified and related to the concepts of dialogism and mestiza consciousness in relation to the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid. The participants tried to link the aforementioned concepts not only with the novel but also with their own context

and contemporary world. The participants were asked to talk about each theme in relation to the novel. Searls (2006) “double consciousness” and Petrilli (1992) dialogism as “a totalizing method” suggest a space for resistance against established ideologies. In the same vein, the novel offers a narrative space to the participants to problematize the notions of culture, religion and identity. Hence, this study suggests that a discussion on the novel and its contextual understanding leads to a better understanding of dialogism and mestiza consciousness among its readers.

The aspect of cultural dichotomy of East versus West that the participants identified in the novel was related to cultural domination of West and discrimination against Muslims, cultural hybridity of West and Changez as a representative of cultural diversity. As Bakhtin (2015) suggests that novel is a narrative space which allows multiple perspectives and their encounter with one another. The participants in this study were able to establish a dialogic encounter between East and West in relation to the novel. Mohsin (pseudonyms were used for all participants), in this regard, challenged the belief that America is an open minded culture. The participant elaborated on the idea by pointing out the American discrimination against Muslims after 9/11.

Alisha pinpointed the clear difference in American approach towards Muslims before and after 9/11. In this way, she has tried to develop a dialogic interaction between the past and present of Muslims in America. Shafqat and Alisha related it to cultural binarism and racial prejudice. This conforms to Bakhtin’s idea that novel as a narrative space makes readers think about future possibilities as well (Gardiner, 1992). Contrarily, Aqsa questions the strict binarism between East and West and hence, challenges the ideology of the dominating versus dominated through depicting the American foreigner as dominated and Changez as the dominating character in the beginning of the novel. Moreover, the study also allows the participants to think about the concept of culture as well. Ammara establishes that the concept of culture is not a stable one. She calls America a hybrid culture in this context. The participants like Ramsha and Rashid elaborated on the idea of dialogism between America and Pakistan when she pinpoints how cultural differences between two cultures lead towards clashes in the novel. Shafqat problematizes the concept of culture when he connects it with racism in the American context.

The study also establishes dialogism by Bakhtin (2015) between East and West through pinpointing that how participants respond on the cultural gap between America and Pakistan and how do they perceive Changez as the representation of it. Ammara, in this regard, suggested that Changez did his best to be a part of a culturally diverse group in America but ultimately failed in the face of cultural discrimination and American imperialism. Moreover, the participant revealed that his efforts to occupy an “in-between” space between two cultures prove to be futile as Changez prefers his own culture at the end of the novel.

The participants related to the concept of speaking subject and embodiment (Bakhtin, 2015) through the character of Changez who occupies multiple positions in the novel. Aqsa called him a “postcolonial subject” present between East and West. Marhaba talked about the ambivalence caused by the position of Changez between Pakistan and America. Akaash termed Changez as having a “glocal identity” with traits of global and local identities. Maarvi, like Ramsha and Alisha, associated the identity crisis of Changez with his ambivalent position between two opposing cultures. The participants maintained that multiple positions of Changez gave way to

“embodied consciousness”. This allowed them to understand the novel beyond the text and made them relate it to the contemporary world. Sindhyaar, in this context, not only talked about the ideological transformation in Changez but also called this change as an inevitable condition in the life of every expatriate. Rashid related it to the identity of expatriates like Changez at the borders of both East and West.

Some of the participants’ responses pertained to Bakhtin’s idea of “dual directionality” of a discourse which gives rise to a certain “voice” (Bakhtin, 2015). This “voice” paves way for multiple perspectives and ideas on a single concept. The participants related to the concept when they gave their views on the levels of transformation in Changez before and after 9/11. The participants pointed out how the novel creates a “double-voiced” medium when it represents Changez not only as an expatriate but also a Pakistani Muslim in the wake of 9/11. Amna, in this regard, pointed out how Changez got humiliated and ridiculed for being a Pakistani Muslim after 9/11. Shafqat related Changez’s suffering with the fall of his American dream. Moreover, the participants came up with multiple interpretations of religion. A dialogic on religion is established when Marhaba and Maarvi discussed Changez’s religious identity from the perspective of both East and West. They maintained that as religion is a relative reality, therefore, Changez was a non-religious person for Pakistanis and a religious extremist for Americans.

The participants significantly related to Anzaldua’s concept of “mestiza consciousness” (Anzaldua, 1987). The participants like Asif and Junaid talked about the multiplicity of Changez’s consciousness through the relationship of Changez and Erica. Changez’s consciousness, according to the participants, is hybrid as his consciousness experiences conflict as Changez is a Pakistani Muslim and Erica an American. The participants also discussed the role of religion in the transformation of Changez’s consciousness. Rashid, in this regard, talked about the impact of Islamophobia on Changez’s mind and how he underwent a huge psychological trauma in the wake of 9/11. Contrarily, Junaid gave his view that Changez used religion as a manipulative tool to influence the psyche/consciousness of the Americans. For this purpose, the participant maintained that he used a beard to make Americans afraid of Jihadis and AlQaedians. The new consciousness of Changez is established in a way when he tried to subvert the authority of the West/America through adopting Eastern/Muslim culture defying Western values and culture, the participant emphasized. Some participants like Aqsa proposed that it was religion which “revolutionized” and brought the mind of Changez to stability through the acceptance of Islamic values and culture.

The participants related to Anzaldua’s *mestizaje* (Anzaldua, 2015) through identifying Changez at the intersection of multiple cultures. Amna and Marhaba, in this regard, talked about the hybrid identity of Changez. According to them, the identity of Changez remained ambivalent throughout the novel as he represented East and West both. Some of the participants related this ambivalence to the relationship of Changez and Erica. They remained Other for each other favoring their own cultures and values by the end of the novel, the participant emphasized. The participants significantly related the identity of Changez as the symbolic representation of dialogism between East and West. Shafqat and Aqsa, in this context, talked about the transformation in Changez before and after 9/11. According to the participants, this ideological transformation in Changez from being an admirer to a critic of America stands as a metaphorical

representation of the identity of every expatriate who migrated from his native land to America to realize his/her American dream.

The participants significantly related to the identity crisis of Changez through Bakhtin's dialogic relation between Self and Other (Bakhtin, 2015). As Bakhtin talks about the surveillance of Other on Self, Ammara related to the concept in a way that how under the gaze/surveillance of Westerners as Colonizers Changez mimicked Western values and culture. She emphasized that this mimicry finally made him undergo the chaos of identity crisis. Talking about the identity of Changez, the participants also related to Anzaldua's mestiza Self (Anzaldua, 2015). Ramsha, in this regard, maintained that Changez occupied a "Third Space" between East and West which made him act as an "insider/outsider". In this way, Changez acted as both Westerner and Easterner which blurred the binary of Self and Other in the novel. The participants related the impact of globalization on the identity of Changez. Asif termed globalization as "cultural homogenization" and Marhaba as "geo-political world". Ramsha and Marhaba, in this regard, took up the concept of fluid identity (Jabri, 2004 & Patterson, 1985) and hence, emphasized that transformation in identity is an inevitable condition in the contemporary globalized world. Moreover, Junaid commented upon the present day state of young people who are under a continuous gaze of an American dream in a global world. They desire to take full advantage of the opportunities which America offers for young talented people. The participant significantly pointed out that as their native land fails to offer good opportunities hence, they suffer an identity crisis with themselves caught between East and West.

CONCLUSION

This study is based on primary data collected online through Google circles from the students of two public sector universities of Pakistan. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism and Anzaldua's (1987) concept of mestiza consciousness were used as theoretical frameworks to explore the perceptions of 16 participants regarding issues of cultural and religious identity with respect to Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Thematic analysis of the data, conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) model, identified four major themes namely, i. Cultural dichotomy of East versus West; ii. Impact of cultural differences on Changez; Religion, iii. Muslim Identity and Changez's consciousness in the novel; iv. Identity of Changez and Globalization. The participants argued that the novel provides a narrative space to show cultural dichotomy of the East and West in which the protagonist Changez tries to navigate his professional life and his Muslim (and Pakistani) identity despite his cultural 'otherness' in post-9/11 America strongly biased towards the Muslims. They were of the view that Changez's glocal and hybrid identity is the cause of his ambivalence, thus, making it difficult for him to continue his allegiance to America and Erica. The participants were able to interpret the novel in Bakhtin's (2015) terms. They stated the novel is a discourse on the geo-political and cultural conflict between the East and West. Hamid has created a narrative space wherein he problematizes the issues of identity and belonging for the diasporic Pakistanis/ Muslims living in the West in post-9/11 scenario. The narrator and the protagonist tries challenge the Western worldview in the presence of a (silent) American. Hence, the novel is a dialogic not only about Changez's past, present, and future but also search for his own identity (self) and a significant discourse on the East/West binarism. The participants pointed to Changez being a case of mestiza consciousness. His Muslim identity notwithstanding his assimilation in the US culture makes him an 'outsider' in America. He is a victim of cultural mixing as despite his American dream, his love for America and Erica, the

post-9/11 discrimination against Muslims and his nostalgia for home push him to ‘a third space’ to navigate his floating identity. It is only resolved when he reverts to his native country and previous identity by grows beard- a religious symbol. Lastly, the participants were able to relate themselves with Changez particularly, like him, the identity crisis they face in with their belonging to their native country and lack of opportunities at home in contrast to their fascination to the Western culture and the opportunities America (West) offers for a better.

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