

**RESEARCH PAPER****Exploration of Cultural Otherness and Generational Gap in Wajahat Ali's *Tom Jones and Biryani Surprise* through Acculturation Theory**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how generational differences in Wajahat Ali's *Tom Jones and Biryani Surprise* reflect varying acculturation strategies, focusing on the tension between cultural preservation and adaptation within immigrant families. Wajahat Ali, a prominent Pakistani English writer, often addresses themes of cultural identity and generational conflict in immigrant communities. This paper applies John W. Berry's acculturation framework (1997) to examine the interplay between native and host cultures, analyzing how characters from different generations navigate cultural otherness and belonging. The research employs a textual analysis of *Tom Jones and Biryani Surprise*, using Berry's acculturation model to investigate generational gaps in attitudes toward assimilation, adaptation, and separation. Key elements such as music, food, actions, and values serve as markers of cultural identity and divergence. The analysis reveals that younger generations adopt diverse acculturative strategies, while older generations strive to preserve heritage. This cultural tension fosters feelings of otherness and highlights the struggle to maintain cultural identity in a multicultural setting. Future studies should explore similar themes in contemporary diasporic literature to further understand evolving patterns of cultural negotiation.

KEYWORDS

Culture, Generational Gap, Immigrants, Otherness

Introduction

Wajahat Ali, a renowned Pakistani English writer and an eminent figure in Pakistani literature, examines, among others things, the intricacies of immigrants or cross cultural issues particularly of Muslims in American Society in his famous drama entitled "Domestic Crusaders." Wajahat Ali is a Pakistani- American diaspora writer, lawyer, journalist, TV host, award-winning Playwright and a consultant for U.S State department. *Tom Jones and Biryani Surprise* is the first scene of Act the drama "Domestic Crusaders" published in 2010. It is a one day story of a Muslim American Pakistani family of six members post to 9/11 incident, who are preparing for 21st birthday of the youngest child of the family. The six members of the family consists of two generations, younger and older generation. The older generation includes *Dada* and *Ammi and Abbu*, and the younger generation include two sons and a daughter. The story exemplifies Pakistani Family navigating life in the USA, illustrating intricate dynamics of generational gap and cultural otherness. The story focuses on the clash between the older generation and younger generations. The exploration reflects the cultural conflict between older generation, who is

influenced by western lifestyle and trends, and younger generation influenced by western lifestyle and trends.

Based upon 9/11 background and the scapegoating of Muslim Americans, the tension runs through between two generations. The each battle entitled as “crusade” struggling, asserting and imposing their respective voices and opinions. Howsoever, they still maintain and understand themselves as a family tied with a thread. First chapter, specifically reflect the common experience of diaspora families where the pressure is to maintain cultural identity intersecting with the allure of assimilating into new society. The family has been hybridized with mixing of American and Pakistani culture.

The older generation, presented by *Dada, Ammi and Abbu* wear traditional *Shalwar Kameez*, enjoy and Prefer Pakistani cuisine like biryani, karahi etc. They uphold their ancestral and cultural norms and sense of identity. This attachment of them to their culture underscores their resistance to fully embrace the foreign surroundings thinking these influence as a threat to their real identity and sense of belongingness. In contrast, the younger generation exhibits their clear inclination for the newly adopted ways of life. They prefer western clothing, music, and food and desire to assimilate and fit into their new environment. This shift represents not just an acceptance of a new culture, but also a form of distancing from their ancestral roots. The generational gap becomes evident on account of younger generation strife to reconcile their hybrid identity, and caught between their family’s expectations and their desire for individuality.

Tom Jones and Biryani Surprise stands as an example of writer’s ability to describe immigrant’s experience, specially of Muslims after 9/11 incident, related to cultural adaptation, assimilation, cultural nuances, generational gap and the psychological impacts of others’ culture on two different generations living in the same society. This Story, although apparently seem comical, funny and debating over trivial things which usually happen between parents and their kids or among siblings, unfolds the philosophy representing east and west. Wajahat crafts an atmosphere based on social unrest in a family because of otherness faced by two different generations. The house and household themselves represent the conflict of thinking personifying hybrid adjustment in new culture. The story serves an insightful case study for generational dynamics, acculturation and otherness.

The researcher in this research article aims to examine the theme of generational gap and cultural otherness in Wajahat Ali’s *Tom Jones and Biryani Surprise* using **Acculturation theory** introduced by John W. Berry in 1970s, exploring how these elements shape the characters’ identities and relationships. Berry theory is based on his work on psychological on cultural exchange and adaptation among indigenous and immigrants folks inhabiting in multicultural society. Additionally, this paper examines how acculturation strategies lead to generational gap and cultural otherness in Wajahat Ali’s *Tom Jones and Biryani Surprise*, offering insights into the challenges of preserving cultural identity in a multicultural context.

Literature Review

Acculturation theories have existed for many years in history in order to analyze and explore issues related to immigrants, and many researchers have devised different models with the purpose of exploring the process of immigration. Berry has formed a model of acculturation that exemplifies an individual strategy along with dimension (Berry, 1992). Intergroup relations and migration issues have increasingly been examined in psychological studies, thus resulting in assessing acculturation and similar groups.

Acculturation can be defined as a process when different individuals from different groups come together with subsequent changes in the original culture of either or both sides (Redfield, 1936). This first-hand interaction and contact result in change on both sides, i.e., attitude, belief, and identities. Berry propounded a model for acculturation that categorizes an individual's adaptation strategies with two dimensions. The first dimension is related to the retention and rejection of an individual's native culture. The second dimension is adaptation and rejection of the host's culture. From these two dimensions, four acculturation strategies occur: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Assimilation occurs when an individual embraces a strong or host culture over his native culture. Separation occurs when an individual rejects host culture and prefers his native culture. Integration occurs when one is able to embrace the dominant or host culture while maintaining their host culture. Lastly, marginalization takes place when an individual rejects both the native and host culture (Romero, 2020).

Identity is a primary element of human psyche because it informs people of who they are as people. When taken logically, identity may also govern every aspect of our lives, as most of our choices are based on who we are as individuals, groups, nations, etc. Identity may be termed as a process of becoming, not being; people pose questions pertaining to their based-on history, linguistics, and culture and are really affected by how they can represent themselves and how they do others represent them. However, the concept of identity is very complicated. Immigrants usually create their own identity and community, and the experience is called a "diaspora." The term diaspora refers to the feeling of dispersion of a group away or outside of their own area (Ruslianti, 2023).

According to Ahmed & Mehmood (2024), like other postcolonial literature, Pakistani English literature also discusses the notion of Otherness and hybridity. Among Pakistani postcolonial writers, such as Kamila Shamsie, Sara Suleri, Mohsin Hamid, Zulfikar Ghose, Bapsi Sidwa, Hanif Qureshi, and H.M. Naqvi, have experienced hybridity, otherness, or alienation, either directly or indirectly, for they are diasporas too. Another important Pakistani-American writer is Wajahat Ali, who is a writer, lawyer, journalist, TV host, award-winning playwright, and the consultant for the U.S. State Department.

There are societies that people distinguish and arrange into binary oppositions; i.e., such conceptual thickening does help us to simplify the information from the not. Group notion – a sense of belonging to the community where the ways of thinking are similar – and, of course, this helps a great deal when trying to separate from other groups. That is why people find great satisfaction in restricting the conception of 'us' with integrative functions and characteristics' along with those who are not part of such unity. In our daily life. We term everything that does not resemble us or our interests and what we regard as our antithesis. This classification system has divided the people into two types. The majority of the people have been classified based on the power and morals they gain after being deemed as superior, while the minority gets considered to be of no importance. This superiority complex is created because of the fact that we as a society do not accept as default the reality created by differences. This dual perception causes division amongst people and rates them against each other, as highlighted by Robbins in 2015. This is then referred to in sociological terms as the concept of 'otherness' (Cilvila, Aguaded, Zabala, & Rodriguez, 2020).

Material and Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach and John W. Berry's concept of acculturation to study how the generational gap and cultural otherness, especially focusing on the textual analysis of the first scene of Tom Jones and Biryani Surprise, of Act One of

Wajahat Ali's drama "Domestic Crusaders." The analysis will be centered on the generation gap and Otherness via dialogues and interactions of characters. The center of attention for this purpose will mainly be two characters: Fatima and Kulsoom, daughter and mother, respectively.

Theoretical Framework

John Berry's acculturation theory, including its four key strategies (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization), is extensively elaborated in his 1997 article titled "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation." This article provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the various ways in which individuals and groups navigate the process of cultural adaptation when living in a new cultural context. This approach is pertinent specifically to views held by non-natives and how they desire to live in host societies by using notions such as acculturation strategies and adaptation. (Inguglia & Musso, 2015).

Assimilation

According to Berry, assimilation takes place when the norms of the dominant or host society are adopted by individuals at the cost of losing their original cultural identity. Berry, in his 1997 article, explains that when individuals do not desire to maintain their cultural heritage and seek daily interaction and encounters with other cultures, the assimilation strategy is adopted (Berry, 1997).

Adaptation (integration)

As per Berry, integration or adaptation occurs when an individual tries to maintain their original cultural norms while also actively participating in the larger society. In his 1997 article, he says that adaptation occurs when an individual is interested both in maintaining one's original culture while interacting with the other groups. Integration is an option or choice, often considered the most beneficial strategy for psychological and social well-being, for it balances heritage and interaction (Berry, 1997).

Separation

Berry says that separation is chosen when individuals maintain their original or indigenous cultural identity and avoid interaction with the dominant culture. In addition, when an individual places a value on preserving their original culture and simultaneously wishes to avoid interaction with others. Separation is the result (Berry, 1997).

Marginalization

Marginalization takes place when an individual neither culturally identifies nor engages with the dominant culture. He states that marginalization implies little to no interest in cultural maintenance and little interest in having relations with others (Berry, 1997).

Results and Discussion

Wajahat Ali's *Tom Jones and Biryani Surprise* is a captivating canvas for applying acculturation theory, particularly Berry's theory of Assimilation, Separation, Marginalization, and Adaptation as a framework. Wajahat skillfully portrays two different cultures that create conflicts among individuals. John W. Berry's acculturation theory is a seminal framework in cross-cultural psychology exploring how individuals and groups

endure while trying to adjust to a different culture. His theory is foundational in understanding how people navigate their identities, living, and relationships within diverse social environments. His four main strategies people use in response to acculturation are assimilation, adaptation, marginalization, and separation. In this way, individuals show different ways in which they balance their original culture while engaging with host culture. *Assimilation*: Assimilation refers to prioritizing the host culture, often at the expense of their original culture. *Separation*: This strategy involves maintaining our native cultural identity and avoiding interaction with the host culture. *Integration*: In this strategy, individuals adopt aspects of both the host and original culture that result in a blended identity of individuals. *Marginalization*: This happens when an individual feels disconnected from both their native and host culture.

Assimilation and Adaptation in Younger Generations

According to John W. Berry's 1997 article, adaptation and assimilation occur when the individuals from other cultures decide to prefer the strong or host culture. In this scene, the younger generation of the family, consisting of Fatima, Salu, and Ghafur, lean toward assimilation by adopting American cultural aspects and asserting their assimilation. They desire to fit into American culture by adopting American cultural values over their Pakistani roots. As it is evident in the behavior of Fatima, who seems to prefer certain things of American culture as opposed to Pakistani culture. She contradicts her mother on different values that prevail in the Muslim community. Her assimilation to new culture is exemplified in various stances. For instance, her dressing is the combination of both her native and host culture.

"Hair covered by white hijab, wearing a stylish red designer sweater and designer blue jeans" (p.6)

She speaks in American accents, which shows the influence of the host language upon her. Her speech is termed in the following words:

"In hijab, speaking American English with something like a Valley Girl accent" (p.3)

A valley girl refers to a speech originating from San Fernando Valley in Southern California, associated especially with young girls, influenced women, in the 1980s, involved vocal patterns such as higher pitch, filler words like "like," Valleyspeak phrases like "totally," "like," and "whatever." However, it has become widely recognized as one of American accents. Fatima's speech, in comparison to her mother's, portrayed the adopted language of the host culture, which also included a few words of Urdu like Ammi, Abbu, etc. In addition, Ghafur, the youngest child of the family and birthday boy in the drama, also prefers junk food like pizza and burgers for his birthday rather than desi food. The older generation of the family prefers desi food like biryani, raista, kabab, karahi, etc. Conversely, Fatima shows a contrast in their choice of music. Fatima likes old music and dislikes her mother's choice.

"Ugh, I hear old people music. Ami, please, anything but Tom Jones" (p. 3). Here, a contrast is found in their choices. Living in American society, the appearance in their attire also shows conflict. Younger generations are dressed up in western attire like short shirts and jeans. Fatima, having been influenced by new culture, now despises her native dress, that is, shalwar kameez. Like when she mocks her mother and late grandmother for wearing shalwar kameez in these words:

“Yes, yes, yes... Abu took you all to the Tom Jones concert. You and grandmother, in your shalwar kameez and dupatta, the only desi FOBs there” (p. 3).

This remark of Fatima on wearing SHALWAR KMEEZ in public and one’s wearing his traditional native dress has become a matter of shame for her. All these instances reinforce the generational conflicts between two generations. This generates the sense of cultural otherness among both the generations who consider each other generation as alien and disconnected from one another. In addition, her refusal to learn cooking to please her future husband is a futile task for her. In her words, “I really don’t care what ‘men’ like. Muslims are all boorish, sexually frustrated, horny juveniles. All these FOB guys...Life doesn’t revolve around marriage” (pp. 5-6). Right or wrong, she seems to be majorly assimilated in American culture and abhors her parents’ cultural values and ended up calling them “obtuse”. Besides assimilation, the younger generation also shows adaptation. For instance, Fatima shows regard for her culture by wearing hijab and disregarding any difference based on color. Salu, the eldest son, even after having affairs with many girls, mostly Americans, wants for himself a Desi girl who can cook tasty Desi food for him, though he doesn’t like it much. His remarks

“And no one cooks biryani and tandoori... .. American girls can’t get along with the mother-in-law. Clash of Civilization, can’t move back to the house due to conflict of interest” (p. 8).

However, this regard of them for their native cultural values is very little and incomplete. Subsequently, leading to culture clashes and highlighting cultural otherness within the family dynamics.

Separation and Marginalization in Older Generations

According to Berry, separation occurs when a culture, and mostly one with strong influence, is rejected by an individual while maintaining one’s original culture. In this scene, the only ideal stand-in for separation is Kulsoom. She makes efforts to preserve her native culture and wants her children to follow their cultural and traditional values. The text gives us many instances through her dialogues that she still holds her native Muslim-Pakistani culture, wants to sustain it, and tries to pass it on to her. Her rejection of the host culture is the counterpart to the generational gap, which stands in opposition to the cultural assimilation of the younger generation. For instance, she is not ashamed of wearing her traditional Shalwar Kameez while presently living in America, as in her remark to the mocking of Fatima of Shalwar Kameez.

“That’s right—we wore our clothes. And why not? Your Ami is an FOB and proud of it” (p. 4).

She is also not bothered about what is perceived of her for favoring her own native identity over creating a newer one, which is shown in her statement.

“I forgot your Ami is some backward, uneducated, ghorn, village woman, hay na?” and “Us FOBs aren’t as slow as you think, Missy. We can teach you Amreekans a thing or two about (p. 4).

Her wish, like every Pakistani and Muslim mother, to teach her daughter cooking for a happy married life is rooted in her culture, and urging her son to get a good girl who will cook tasty food for himself is rooted in her culture. Food occupies a great importance in Muslim culture and is a mandatory skill for all young girls to acquire. It is considered

one of the symbols for the effectiveness of a girl; that is how good a wife a girl can be depends upon how good she is. Thus, Kulsoom says:

Drop those law books – learn something practical – come here, wear that apron. Grab the tamatar, hari mirch, and pyaaz from the fridge...make some food for him on his birthday.” “you’ll learn that the way to please a man –and a family –is through gentleness and good food. (p. 4)

Fatima is unwilling to turn an ear to her mother’s advice because she does not stand for her parents’ culture. For her now, their culture is other, exhibiting cultural otherness shown in the lines:

“Sorry if some of us have other things to do in life besides learning how to cook desi food, Ami... Sorry if I’m not “well-trained, Muslim desi housewife” material” (p. 5).

The element of marginalization is subtler or least in the scene, but it is generally visible when some members struggle to identify their identity, express confusion, or express frustration over their true identity. Further, like a traditional Muslim woman, she likes to see her family tied up with family values and seeing them under a roof, happily living, talking, and sharing food. “This is the first time in months my children and family are all together under the same roof” (p. 11).

Conclusion

Having applied Berry’s acculturation theory to *Tom Jones and Biryani Surprise*, the study exemplifies that a multi-faceted cultural otherness is experienced by the family members on account of their struggling with two different cultures. The two generations living in the same house embody different strategies of Berry’s theory. The younger generation shows assimilation and adaptation, whereas the older generation shows separation and marginalization to some extent of their native culture and identity. Collectively they all experience cultural otherness towards one or the other culture. Therefore, Wajahat Ali, through this little comical scene, has tried to highlight certain critical issues related to non-native Muslims in a new society, especially that is contrary to their culture and religion.

The theory testifies that societal expectation affects people differently based on their culture, religion, and region. Moreover, fitting into a society, especially one that’s not your native one, becomes a challenge for its new inhibitors. The same issue was faced by both generations of the family.

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