



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Literatures in English in a Microcosm: A Discursive Review of Works  
by Pakistani-English Writers**

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<b>PAPER INFO</b>	<b>ABSTRACT</b>
<b>Received:</b> February 03, 2022 <b>Accepted:</b> June 02, 2022 <b>Online:</b> June 04, 2022	The article offers a critical inquiry into Pakistani English Writing over a period of more than half a century; beginning with writers who had published works before Partition and later became Pakistani writers in the wake of independence in 1947. How the writers born in Pakistan reclaim their historical ties is further contrasted against authors writing after political upheavals such as session in 1971 and 9/11. The diaspora writers along with these categories of Pakistani writers writing in English have enriched the literary tradition and rendered Pakistani English writing as a canon. The article looks into the artistic consciousness being shaped as a result of the socio-political milieu of the times. The regional and topographical landscapes of the writer's locale have been subjected to critical consideration against the backdrop of a more of ephemeral and fluid 'inscapes' sought on the postcolonial frame. The article seeks to fill in the gaps on the spatial-temporal level by bringing together Pakistani writers works in a microcosm.
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**Introduction**

The present study delves into the writings of Pakistani English authors who have enriched the literary canon with their internationally acclaimed works against the backdrop of rapidly changing contours of the socio-economic and geo-political landscape. The study marks a departure from the current methodical approach of dealing with one, singular genre for critical inquiry. 'English Literature' as a term has evolved from a singularly colonial epithet of being 'English' to a more fluid and liminal nomenclature; embracing a host of ethno-linguistic affinities in 'literatures in English' Within the over-arching ambit of these literatures, Pakistani authors have carved a niche and produced literature which has been accredited as a canon. Thus we can classify Pakistani authors as a cohort of authors writing during the age of colonization; those who lived to witness the making of Pakistan and migrated to the newly found independent state came to be known as Pakistani writers. The Partition of the subcontinent had a deep-seated impact on the intellectual schemata of these writers. Thirdly, the writers who are members of the Pakistani Diaspora, many of whom rose to prominence in the aftermath of 9/11.

The postcolonial poets however elude such neat and rigid compartmentalization on account of linguistic, national, cultural or ethnic affinities. The fact remains that a Postcolonial writer like other writers belongs to a certain locale, yet the works cannot be circumscribed by territorial limits. The poet in this instance makes use of the unique spatial-temporal experience to make his art communicable globally. Thus it is not singularly Delhi, Karachi, Dhaka and other cities located in parts of the world hitherto under colonial rule, rather bringing these locales in a unique interface with the rest of the world without sounding the colonial anxieties of 'writing back' to the colonizer, or writing 'from' the vantage point of the colonized, 'for' their interest turns these spaces into third spaces. As an art form, postcolonial authors prefer to break free from a preconceived identity conveniently conferred upon them. The break offers them a larger avenue away from the easy colonial past to reinvent their artistic affinities. Divisions ensuing from partition meant bifurcating the collective pool of shared cultural, linguistic and even religious values; a common past and shared history precipitating the distances in times to come.

### **Literature Review**

The research article delves into the rich repository of texts written by Pakistani English writers, spread over a vast range of spatial-temporal epochs and juxtaposes a broad range of genres. The works written before Partition, succeeded by the writings of authors writing in the post-independence era and contrasted against works produced during the new millennium and pitted against the gross socio-economic and geo-political arena. Apart from the works of Pakistani English authors which furnish the primary texts for this study, critical studies around these texts have been resorted to for an exhaustive, postcolonial inquiry.

### **Material and Methods**

The paper employs a discursive analysis of the texts written by Pakistani English writers and aims at analyzing the disparate and distinct responses of the artistic imagination to colonial anxieties. The mixed-method approach utilizes both descriptive and deductive methodologies to bring together an eclectic range of genres such as short stories, fiction, poetry, drama and even letter writing to contextualize in a broader postcolonial context. Postcolonialism helps supplant an overarching conceptual framework for the discursive review allowing a close interface among Pakistani English writers of diverse spatial-temporal roots. Thus, postcolonialism affords the conceptual framework to evaluate and assess the departures and transitions in literature produced during different historical epochs.

### **Results and Discussion**

The resonance of contemporaneous thematic concerns in literature produced by Pakistani English writers can be contested along the postcolonial lines. The pioneering writers who published their works before Partition were influenced by the rapidly evolving socio-political contours of the times. The subtle, nuanced departures which shaped the aesthetic outlook of the writers who witnessed Partition and later came to be known as Pakistani writers is a unique juncture on the literary arena. Comparing with authors born in free and independent Pakistan and more so, with diaspora writers, we infer that these authors have engaged with global, contemporary and topical issues so that their works reverberate with a universal resonance.

Ahmed Ali (1910-1994) and Shahid Suhrawardi (1890-1965) had written copiously even before independence as both had published phenomenal works before partition. Bilingualism was a salient feature of writers like Ahmed Ali writing in both Urdu and English with facility. Ali, with his penchant for languages went onto translating Chinese poetry against the backdrop of his brief sojourn in China in 1947. Ahmed Ali was considered one of the luminaries of the age along with Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan. His mastery of Urdu and English afforded him with the energy to improvise and innovate contemporary art. His ardour for Marx culminated in his co-authored Urdu book *Angarey* (1932) (Askari, 2017). His stories unravel the disparity between 'appearance' and 'reality' and challenged the complacency posed by the static status quo. The leftist Writers Movement further changed the literary landscape. His English novel, *Twilight in Delhi* was published in 1940 (Ali, 1940). Set in the unsettling times of 1911, the novel is a significant chronicle of colonial history and absorbs the sights and sounds of the then Delhi. Two temporal frameworks are at work and overlap in the rituals, conventions and histories of the times preceding the World War I. Ahmed Ali's migration to Pakistan however was looked at with a pinch of salt as Khushwant Singh considered it a breach of his arduous love for Delhi (Singh, 1974).

In 1960 Ahmed Ali's anthology of poetry titled *The Purple Gold Mountain* was published which yoked together the Urdu and Chinese literary traditions (Ali, 1960). Employing metaphors from Chinese contemporary art and history, Ali demonstrates the relentless totalitarianism of fascists of his times as a foil to Pakistani dictators. This turned out to be a viable measure to evade stringent censorship policies in Pakistan. Ali completed his unfinished piece of fiction, *Ocean of the Night* which he set about writing before independence (Ali, 1964). *Ocean of the Night* came out in 1960, coinciding with Ali's anthology of poetry, *The Purple Gold Mountain* (Ali, 1960). Ahmed Ali emerges as a versatile author who experiments with different genres without giving up on fiction.

Shahid Suhrawardi had published his collection of poems *Faded Leaves* in 1910 during the prime of his youth, followed by another one titled *Essays in verse* in 1937 before Pakistan came into being. Suhrawardi's poetic renditions turned from predominantly 'orientalist' works to a modern and innovative improvisation of poetry as an aesthetic form. Although South Asian writing has been largely attributed to the increasing readership of fiction that it has garnered over the years, yet it is interesting to note that poetry has a longer history. Critical inquiry suggests that poetry by South Asian poets also suffers a certain 'marginality' with respect to the centrality occupied by fiction. More so, postcolonial poets struggle for a distinct identity that transcends the rigid classifications of ethno-linguistic bounds. There are attempts to highlight as to how his poetry not reflective of any 'local' idiom but the result of a carefully contrived artistic and stylistic rendition.

Like Ahmed Ali, Suhrawardi who was considered a 'formidable presence' in the undivided India was criticized for becoming a Pakistani citizen. They think his station of a transcendental writer sank into oblivion after independence. Despite close proximity that existed in the undivided subcontinent, a huge mileage set the writers apart without letting them experience the sense of 'sameness' springing from a shared communal past. And yet there is no denying the fact that poets who lived long enough to witness partition waded through a troubled past and a chaotic present in terms of the increasing acidity between the neighbouring countries.

Mumtaz Shahnawaz (1912-1948) was a gifted woman who died accidentally in a plane crash. Her family published her novel *The Heart Divided* posthumously in 1957 (Shahnawaz, 1957). Punctuated with allusions to political events, the novel brings together the socio-political developments of the times. Since the novel was published without being subjected to editing, the narrative is woven with rhetoric and persuasion in its delineation of history of the independence movement. The authorial voice is vocal and meta-fictional as Shahnawaz herself was a robust political activist of the times. The novel however is conspicuously devoid of details regarding communal riots and skirmishes which broke out in the aftermath of partition bringing out the author's unique imagination in adding to and taking away from the 'wholeness' of a troubled history.

Zaibun Nissa Hamidullah (1921-2000) published an anthology of short-stories *The Young Wife and Other Stories*, in 1958. Her disparate career as a columnist and her devout feminist leanings are manifest in her short-stories in which she paints women in their multifarious roles and responsibilities with great dexterity. Her women appear larger-than-life and grow out of the conventional roles of daughter, wife, mother, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. Her famous short story *The bull and the She Devil* subverts the patterns of conventional morality, with the male protagonist pitted against the wife, disparagingly referred to as the 'she devil'.

Shaista Ikramullah, another prolific author like Zaibun Nissa Hamidullah published her works after the independence of Pakistan. Her *Letters to Neena* and *Behind the Veil* were published in 1951 and 1953 respectively and established her as a celebrated writer (Ikramullah, 1951). After a lapse of 10 years, her autobiography *From Pardah to Parliament* was published in 1963, which created interesting parallels between her struggle for women emancipation and Pakistan Movement (Ikramullah, 1963).

Muneeza Shamsie dilates in the Preface to *Hybrid Tapestries* on the contributions of the authors basking in literary eminence especially during the 1990s (Halai, 2017). Looking at the spatial-temporal ethos of the precolonial and colonial epochs, literary works can be contrasted against yet another spatial-temporal backdrop of the new millennium in the aftermath of 9/11. Shamsie exercises a reticence against the wanton use of terms such as 'postmodern' and 'postcolonial' for the purpose of precision. *Hybrid Tapestries* has been divided into two sections namely: 'Pioneering Writers', while the other one is known as 'Developing Genres'. Both the sections are evasive of the term 'colonial' as a marker of time, which subtly points out that eluding the fixity of an oft-quoted term such as 'colonization' can be more liberating and self-assuring to the creative pursuit. Shamsie revisits the notion of being a "Pakistani writer"; for anyone laying claims to 'Pakistani' identity affirms certain unities of belongingness and identity (Shamsie, 2017). Dwelling further upon the term "Pakistani English Literature", Shamsie deems it a remarkably rich canon; however adding that Pakistani English literature has been impacted by the colonial interface (Shamsie, 2017). Illustrating the works of pioneering writers, Shamsie sheds light upon the numerous challenges faced by the choice to express in the language of the colonizer. It is always a formidable enterprise to render the vernacular of a language into another, thereby absorbing the nuances and subtleties into the language of the 'other'. Thus Shamsie carefully constructs the narrative, growing out of the limits of historical fixity, and brings to light the host of challenges faced by the writers after the inception of Pakistan. Although English as a language is beset with colonial

anxieties as it was introduced in South Asia by the colonial agency, yet many native denizens of the subcontinent chose to express themselves in English and it turned out to be conscious choice on the part of the writers. *Dawn* and *Pakistan times* both supported the Pakistan movement despite being English dailies.

The Pakistani writers can further be classified as diaspora writers such as Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid and Uzma Aslam Khan. The list however is long and can be looked at in contradistinction to works by Zulfikar Ghose, Taufiq Rafat, Bapsi Sidhwa, Samuel Fyzee, Hanif Kureishi and Sara Suleri, writers of the former generation writing in the temporal epoch close to the inception of Pakistan. Contributing profoundly to literatures in English, these authors can be further looked at in tandem with poets such as Imtiaz Dharker, Alamgir Hashmi and Moniza Alvi who further enriched the literary tradition. Interestingly Alamgir Hashmi's anthology of poetry named *America is a Punjabi word* stands out as a 'double entendre' that suffuses the nuances of postcolonial discourse. Aamer Hussain, Jamil Ahmed, Daniyal Mueenuddin as short-story writers have been just as prolific. Although dramaturgy can be a challenging art form, yet Rukhsana Ahmed, Ayub Khan-Din and Sayeed Ahmad fared well as playwrights writing in English.

An insight into English drama written by Pakistani writers unravels interesting facts. The history of English Drama by Pakistani playwrights is interspersed with writers who had started writing before the inception of Pakistan. Taufiq Rafat, known for his poetry, also wrote a play, *The Foothold*. The play, although unpublished was staged in Lahore and received wide acclaim. English drama as a genre offered liberty to Pakistani playwrights such as, Sayeed Ahmad, who experimented with drama, both as an art and formalistic rendition with great finesse. Ahmad hailed from East Pakistan and the fact that Bengali boasted of an entrenched dramatic tradition in comparison to Urdu, Ahmad's plays were readily translated from English to Urdu, to Bengali and even Punjabi. The translations furnished a third space, promising possibilities for provincial harmony. Sayeed Ahmad produced three dramas, *The Thing*, *The Milepost* and *Survival* in 1962, 1965 and 1967 respectively (Benson, & Conolly, 2005). Inspired by the 'absurdist' playwrights, Ahmad assimilated abstract symbols so that his critique of the social conditions eluded censorship laws. In the aftermath of 1971, Bangladesh seceded from Pakistan; hence Ahmad rose to prominence as a Bengali writer and playwright. This brings us to the notion of contesting affiliations on the national, linguistic and cultural front confronting an author whose art springs from a certain spatial-temporal reality, liable to undergo change with concomitant changes on the political front. The author was presumed to 'belong' to a certain nationality which morphs into another identity with simultaneous changes on the political front.

Sara Suleri, Taufiq Rafat and Zulfikar Ghose belong to the group of writers who had already started writing before the independence of Pakistan. Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989) delineates cultural fusion manifest in her own mixed race identity. Suleri belonged to a renowned political family and her father commanded respect among the political counterparts. Her memoir is therefore an exercise to bring out the drastically shifting contours of Pakistan's political milieu in art together with her journey to self-empowerment. Zulfikar Ghose likewise in his poignant poem "Silent Birds" recalls the tumultuous memories of the past where hankering for the past gives in to the equally unnerving experience of an abysmal present rooted in bloodshed.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988), *Cracking India* (1991), and *An American Brat* (1993) lay down Sidhwa's deep affiliation with Pakistan, recounting events that led to independence, contrasted against the predicament of the immigrant communities in the US. Her Parsi identity carves out a distinct niche for her as a Pakistani-Parsi writer. The major thematic concerns of her novels are the lives of Parsis living in Pakistan and in the US. *The Crow Eaters* (1980) catapulted her to fame as a South Asian writer of Parsi descent (Sidhwa, 1990). Employing comic devices her novels bring to the fore the foibles and fallacies in the top echelons of society. Her sarcasm tilts on the side of buffoonery and ribaldry which was unusual for a South Asian, female novelists. Poised against the backdrop of colonial Lahore, *The Crow Eaters* is a mock-heroic on colonization. *The Bride* (1983) depicts a woman's struggle for survival; trials ranging from the humdrum grind of life to bearing the pressures of misogyny, chauvinism, and patriarchal ascendancy. Sidhwa is vocal in her criticism of patriarchy and eon-old customs based on honour and shame operating with respect to women (Sidhwa, 1990).

Apart from fiction, prose has been an oft-frequented avenue by writers such as Eqbal Ahmed, Anwer Mooraj and Moni Mohsin. Within prose, letters and memoirs have been experimented with. The epistles exchanged between Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Alys Faiz and travelogues written by Firoz Khan Noon offer an interesting insight into the art and craft of writing in English. Firoz Khan Noon (1893-1970) who rose to become the premier of Pakistan wrote a novel *Scented Dust* (1942). Noon also belongs to the group of authors who had been writing before the inception of Pakistan. *From Memory* (1966) looks back in retrospect and relives the political underpinnings of the pre-independence era, contrasted against the time when the young, independent state had been born. Atiya Fyzee (1877-1967) published *Iqbal* a compendium of letters exchanged between Iqbal and herself in 1948. Atiya Fyzi attended Maria Grey teachers training college in London and rose to become one of the pioneer fiction writers, having published her debut novel, *The Music of India* published in 1914 (Halai, 2017). Thus letter writing was relatively improvised by writers of fiction whose artistic acumen afforded them with the autonomy to navigate spaces elapsing between genres, blurring the hard and fast distinctions.

During 1960s, Pakistani-English poetry assumed a distinct identity followed by the publication of three anthologies by Oxford University Press; namely *First Voices* (1965), *Pieces of Eight* (1971) and *Wordfall* (1975). This created a distinct identity for Pakistani English poetry. Maki Kureishi (1927-1995), became the first Pakistani female poet, who rose to international acclaim. Kureishi's poetic musings aim at preserving the trivial and seemingly insignificant lives which become a hyponym for the suppressed at large. For example her poem kittens contextualizes these 'small lives' growing out of the thin and slender frame of feline creatures and becoming one with the lives of numberless downtrodden people. Violence becomes a recurrent motif bringing the human and creatural life on a common median. Kureishi's detachment from the fleshly is a defining feature of her art in which the bodily is bracketed with death, disease and decadence.

Maki Kureishi was born in Calcutta, Kaleem Omar in Lucknow and Adrian A. Husain in Kanpur which can be contrasted against Indian poets like Keki Daruwalla, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and Imtiaz Dharker who were all born in Lahore. Despite these shifting locales, the poetic voices have still come to be recognized by their national affiliations. The quotidian implication of citizenry was largely contested in

the postcolonial context which was rife with movement and displacement in search of 'centre'. Adrien A. Hussain is among the prominent poets of the age who espoused the view that writing in English was not by mutually exclusive with regards to one's affiliation with the motherland. Kaiser Haq points out the marginalized treatment meted out to Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and Pakistani authors merely considered as footnotes to an entire canon of Indian writing in English. He mentioned how the Ohio State University Press restricted him to compile a volume based on Indian writers leaving out voices from other parts of South Asia (*The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*, 2017).

Pakistani novelists have created a mark on the literary arena. It is interesting to note that the diaspora writers have dwelled deeply on the turmoil back home. Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Story of Noble Rot* (2001) and *Thinner than Skin* (2012) rework the homely vibes envisaged in an 'alien' context. *The story of the Noble Rot* is preoccupied with the economic challenges, widespread oppression and the menace of child labour. *Thinner than Skin* boasts of the breathtakingly splendid beauty of the Hunza valley, deconstructing the mountains-plains binary which culminates in the pastoral-cosmopolitan polarity. Uzma Aslam Khan has a natural proclivity to delineate nature with artistic finesse which is evident in *Geometry of God* (2009). The novel explores the vast swathes of the outskirts of Islamabad until a rare fossil is discovered. The novelist juxtaposes the eon-old friction between reason and convention and seamlessly weaves the scenes into the fabric of the novel where Mr. Zahoor, a teacher maltreated for having taught the theory of evolution. The novel brings to light hide-bound, rigid fanaticism that reigned supreme in the 1980s.

Mohsin Hamid's novels delve deep into the socio-political fabric. *Moth Smoke* (2000) sifts metaphors from remote history (Hamid, 2000). Fratricide of Dara Shikoh by his brother Aurangzeb, the Mughal Emperor, becomes an analogy for rupture between India and Pakistan. The characters Daru and Ozzie signify 'Dara' and 'Aurangzeb' from Mughal history. Daru is a downtrodden orphan while Aurangzeb has been portrayed as dirty rich. The contentious ties between Ozzie and Daru, allegorically manifest the uneasy relationship between Pakistan and India at one level, and the familial rivalry between Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb at another level. Akbar Ahmed's *Two Plays: Noor and the Trial of Dara Shikoh*, unravel the tussle between fanaticism and the real, peace-building message of Islam. The latter play entails a debate between Dara Shikoh, the mystic with great intellectual acumen and Aurangzeb, the religious zealot.

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), evolves as a monologue, through the mouthpiece Changez, the narrator who hails from Princeton (Hamid, 2007). The locale is a Lahore tea-shop. The protracted, yet persuasive monologue works in the direction of metafiction where the reader treats dialogue as a figment of imagination. *How to get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* by Hamid is a mockery of a twenty-first century self-help book (2013). The rise in consumerism is seen as a breach of individuality in the self-help books' claim to be addressing none other than 'You', the receptive reader. Hamid despite addressing pressing issues as breaking stereotypes in the shape of 'bearded men', does not completely touch upon what it takes to be a 'Muslim' thereby broadening the breadth of western readership. Changez is therefore not to be treated as a prototype of a bearded man, but one whose dubious temperament offers an insight to the reader to reinvent his identity as a 'hybrid' or even androgynous character. Thus challenging the one-dimensional appeal of a

character lies at the heart of postcolonial discourse. Approaching characters from a single dimension, pigeonholes them and defies critical scrutiny.

There are a number of novels which revolve around the theme of secession. Interestingly many of these novels were produced in the new millennium. Moni Mohsin's debut *The End of Innocence* by Mohsin (2006), Roopa Farooki's *Bitter Sweet* and *Half Life* published in 2007 and 2010 respectively; grapple with the issues of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh (Farooki, 2010). It appears that despite the divisions, the umbilical cord has not been severed and the countries are still locked in an easy geo-political and socio-cultural interface. *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* by Mohammad Hanif, was published in 2008. The novel furnishes answers where political narrative is silent, affirming that art has the fluidity to fill in gaps. This can be likened to Bina Shah's latest *A Season for Martyrs*, which chronicles the momentous last three months of Benazir Bhutto's life. Shah resorts to the rich cultural legacy of Sind and incorporates mystic poetry of Shah Abdul Latif (Shah, 2014).

Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* is a compelling novel absorbing the myriad challenges in the wake of growing *Talibanization*. The novel highlights issues of extremism, sectarianism and terrorism (Bhutto, 2014). Known for her precision in terms of detail and delineation, her debut novel puts to question barriers and boundaries, borders and divisions and how terrorism has plagued the collective unconscious of the hapless people in Afghanistan.

There is a wealth of literature being produced by Pakistani-English writers. Most of the writers are experimenting with fiction, given that novels allow greater freedom to appropriate discourses and manipulate aesthetic techniques and plot structure. The narrative pattern ranges from wide and varied discursive patterns, which can be loosely grouped under postcolonial discourse. The hybrid cultural make-up, heterogeneity of cosmopolitan societies, and polyphonic linguistic patterns lead us to another antecedent in the shape of 'resistance', which is pivotal to postcolonial discourse as well as in Pakistani-English literature. Since official narrative remains conspicuously hidden around political upheavals such as secession in 1971, the contemporary, postcolonial authors have bridged the uneasy spaces with creative narratives. The secession of Bangladesh gave an opportunity to reconfigure the Pakistani outlook in a new found geography and the deeply entrenched history. Most of these writers address the political milieu bringing the political and diplomatic together where Pakistani imagination is always coloured by its locus within the larger realm of the Muslim Ummah. Thus the writing after 9/11 is also informed by the broad classifications of and the friction between east and the west, the orient and the occident and more precisely 'them' and 'us'.

## **Conclusion**

Looking at Pakistani English literature within the over-arching South Asian English literature, the role of topography situates Pakistani consciousness to a range of concentric realities on the geographical, religious and cultural levels. Therefore the contemporary writers challenge territorial fixities for a more liberated aesthetic experience and tends to 'deterritorialize' readership for a fulsome engagement with the text. The approach generates a concurrent preoccupation with the historical to relocate the current.



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