

**RESEARCH PAPER**

## Analyzing Acculturation Strategies and Psychological Outcomes in Post-Colonial Narratives: A Study of "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" and "An American Brat" Using Berry's Acculturation Theory

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**ABSTRACT**

This research paper analyses the acculturation strategies and their psychological outcomes as depicted in postcolonial narrative. For this purpose, John W. Berry's Acculturation Theory is applied to analyze the protagonists in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as well *An American Brat* by Bapsi Sidhwa. It is a qualitative study that applies textual analysis technique to focus on the texts of the two selected novels. The research underscores the differential effects of these strategies in terms of their impact on cultural identity and emotional health by exploring Changez's movement from acculturation to acculturation and Feroza's journey from separation towards integration. Based on textual analysis of the selected novels, these results illustrate how societal and cultural expectations powerfully shaped character experiences thereby showing that creating supportive environments is essential for a successful acculturation process within multicultural settings; with mixed findings about adaptive coping strategies. Here we have an insight into developing post-colonial identities and the nuances of navigating across cultures.

**Keywords:** An American Brat, Assimilation, Cultural Identity, Psychological Well-Being, The Reluctant Fundamentalist

**Introduction**

Acculturation refers to a process of change for either an individual or group caused by regular and direct first-hand contact with another culture, leading to various psychological and social outcomes. John W. Berry (Berry, 1997) elaborates this as four overarching strategies --assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization-- in his acculturation theory for these processes. The most widely adopted theory within the psychology of immigration is acculturation, defined as dual-cultural change (Berry 2005), which has been used across immigrant adaptation research domains so far e.g. cross-cultural psychology and multiculturalism experiences. It works for a lot of... post-colonial literature and how characters occupy... new cultural world.

Two novels, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and *An American Brat* by Bapsi Sidhwa contain elaborate stories which inquire about how cultural identities are shaped over time due to the impacts of acculturation in human consciousness. The essays engage with wider historical and cultural changes; the post-9/11 US landscape, and diasporic experience of South Asian communities. Using these novels to illustrate Berry's Acculturation Theory can provide a closer look at the ways in which characters struggle through their cultural identities and explore the psychological results of various strategies

of acculturation. Such an approach also provides a deeper understanding of the role that cultural identity plays in psychological well-being within postcolonial contexts

Though Berry's Acculturation Theory is widely used in different studies, its intersection with postcolonial literary analysis has rarely been explored. Most of the literature that exists has been looking at how immigrants cope with change, how they integrate in a new culture - sociological and psychological questions- but not by taking into account the richness narratives are able to offer or explore what happens once characters experience personal development. This gap calls for us to investigate acculturation strategies and their psychological repercussions in post-colonial literature. Charged with the task of using Berry's framework to two major protagonists from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *An American Brat*, this study intends on bridging that gap whilst offering a comprehensive examination into their respective acculturation scenarios.

This research further endeavors to apply Acculturation Theory as proposed by Berry (2006) on Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* with reference to correlative acculturations strategies of the characters leading onto psychological outcomes. Adopting a qualitative narrative style, the review exposes how cultural identity and well-being comes into light through concerns of assimilation, separation, integration or marginalization in multiple stories concerning characters struggling with their respective new places. This research also seeks to contribute towards a more general discussion of post-colonial experiences and hybrid identities within literature, both as explanation in its own right so that Berry's theory might become another element better known through understanding the literary context in which it belongs, but also offering an interpretation of cultural adjustment and continuity.

## Literature Review

### Acculturation Theory

Acculturation Theory, as developed by John W. Berry, plays a central role in understanding how individuals and groups cope with changes to their cultures after intercultural contact. Berry (1997) acculturation: a bi dimensional process of psychological and cultural change that takes place as result of the meeting between distinct cultures. This interaction of blurring the lines both mimicry and mutation, creates several degrees from a full spectrum - psychological as well as social results. Four dominant acculturation strategies have been identified (Berry 2005) assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization. These strategies are driven by a number of factors, such as the person's willingness to partake in the new culture or how receptive society where this person is assimilating into that individual. Taxing level on both original and host cultures also plays an important role for migrants' acculturation intentions.

### Assimilation

Assimilation involves individuals abandoning their original culture in favor of fully adopting the new culture. This strategy is often pursued when individuals perceive the new culture as more dominant or desirable. According to Berry (2005), assimilation can lead to increased stress and identity confusion if the individual struggles to let go of their cultural roots. In the context of post-colonial literature, characters who adopt assimilation often face significant internal conflicts and societal pressures as they navigate their new cultural landscapes. For instance, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez initially adopts an assimilation strategy, striving to fit into American society by excelling academically and professionally (Hamid, 2007). His relationship with Erica, an American woman,

symbolizes his attempt to integrate into American culture. However, the socio-political environment post-9/11 forces him to reassess his identity and belonging, leading to psychological turmoil and a shift in his acculturation strategy.

### **Separation**

When people hold on to their original culture and do not interact with the new one, separation occurs. Well, this is a tactic always used in some communities where cultural identities remain intact and resistant to influences from outside. One of the functions identified for separation may be to serve as an avenue of psychological acculturation by maintaining customary cultural practices, however it has also been suggested that a consequence can be social isolation and restricted opportunities for integration (Berry 1997). Migration in *An American Brat*, Feroza displays a separation strategy by retaining her Pakistani cultural norms and rejecting the American cake (Sidhwa 1993). She has been bred with conservative values and is very much in tune with her cultural identity, so she finds it hard to learn the American way. Initially this separation helps in gaining new confidence (but only according to herself) as the film proceeds towards contradictions and hardships she faced after spending good time with Americans.

### **Integration**

The integration of the most acculturation strategy involves individuals who maintain their original culture but also adopt aspects from the new one. Berry (2005) also argues that integration is most likely to occur in multiculturalist societies, where cultural diversity is valued as a resource and there are policies of mutual respect but not assimilation. Literary integration of characters reconciles individuality and community enhancing personal growth hence social-peace. When re-modulated to a diasporic space, Feroza's journey in *An American Brat* tells her story about how she slowly synthesizes the traits of her identity that are shaped by America while still holding on to molds connected with Pakistan (Gul & Kaur 2016). As a result, she is able to integrate (and successfully so) this bicultural identity which translates into pervasive benefits for her psychological well-being and social efficacy.

### **Marginalization**

It can lead to marginalization whereby one loses contact with both their native and the new culture leading into an authentic confusion of identity paired up by psychological distress. This is usually an involuntary strategy, and tends to go along with depression-like outcomes (being discriminated against or excluded). Marginalization; the survival strategy which is least adaptive and overcomes any cultural identity or community. (Berry, 1997) Changez also experiences discrimination and alienation in the aftermath of 9/11, which serves to expose some of the psychological angst experienced by marginalized individuals as explored in his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* The film changes when even his initial success is upended by the cruel environment, leaving him in an existential crisis that eventually drives home to Pakistan (Salmeen 2019).

### **Post-Colonial Context and Hybridity**

Both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *An American Brat* are situated within a post-colonial context, adding layers of complexity to the characters' acculturation experiences. Post-colonial literature often explores themes of identity, hybridity, and the psychological impacts of cultural conflicts. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is particularly relevant, as it refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the

contact zone produced by colonization (Bhabha, 1994). Hybridity challenges the fixed notions of identity and emphasizes the fluid and dynamic nature of cultural interactions.

The same goes for *Changez* in the reluctant fundamentalist whose identity is deeply implicated by his hybrids of experiences. At first, his time in America is syncretic; it sees him fusing the Pakistani culture that raised him with American principles. Because of the post-9/11 antipathy, it disturbs this equanimity which presses him as an outsider (Hamid 2007). In doing so the pendulum swings, demonstrating how such movements are an attempt to build up a hybrid identity only as long as society allows it.

Similarly, *An American Brat* portrays Feroza's navigation through her hybrid identity. Her initial resistance to American culture evolves into a more integrative approach, where she combines elements of both her Pakistani heritage and her new American environment (Sidhwa, 1993). This process of integration aligns with Bhabha's notion of hybridity, where cultural interaction leads to the creation of a new, hybrid identity that incorporates aspects of both cultures (Gul & Kaur, 2016).

### **Psychological Impacts of Acculturation**

The implications of acculturation styles are relevant to psychological factors in many ways. As assimilation is often negatively viewed in host cultures, this process can lead to stress and identity confusion (Berry, 2005). Withdrawing provides psychological support for the rent, but at a social cost. Moreover, integration; which was perceived as the most adaptive strategy led to improved personal experiences and social balance while marginalization frequently result in pronounced problems of identity formation and mental health.

A character that illustrates the psychological toll of being marginalized is *Changez* from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* However, this collective identity is destroyed by the post-9/11 incidents and made him disillusioned so he decided to go back to Pakistan (Salmeen, 2019). On the other hand, Feroza's journey in *An American Brat* depicts its viewers that how overall and mentally better we become through both of our roots i.e. Pakistani as well as newly added Americans (Gul & Kaur, 2016).

### **Comparative Studies**

Comparative studies on acculturation strategies and their psychological impacts provide a deeper understanding of the complexities involved. Studies have found that the effectiveness of acculturation strategies is influenced by a variety of factors, such as societal attitudes towards cultural diversity and individual preferences (Berry 2005); social support being available. Comparative studies highlight variations in the dimensions and consequences of acculturation process comparing different immigrant groups, drawing attention to cultural context.

As an example, the study of Schwartz et al. (2010), discussed acculturation and well-being among Hispanic immigrants in the United States. According to this literature, integration is associated with more favorable mental health outcomes than assimilation, separation or marginalization. This is in line with Berry's (2005) suggestion that integration represents the healthiest. Acculturation attitude Indeed, the benefits of dual identity have been supported by studies showing that integration is associated with better psychological and sociocultural adaptation among Asian immigrants in New Zealand (Ward & Kennedy 1994).

Berry's Acculturation Theory has inspired a useful approach for the analysis of acculturative and psychological experiences of both novels' protagonists. The theory is applied to discuss the complexities of acculturation strategies and their consequences for identity and mental health. Drawing upon the post-colonial context and concept of hybridity also enhances the analysis, providing an understanding by which individual experiences exuding complex cultural identities make sense. By means of an in-depth analysis of Changez and Feroza's acculturative trajectories, this review demonstrates the need to approach acculturation transcontextual in multicultural societies as well as highlights salutary adaptive possibilities when people integrate cultural sense-making (Sam & Berry, 2010; Collins & Reid, 2009).

## **Material and Methods**

### **Data Collection**

The data for this research was gathered through a thorough analysis of the chosen novels-The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid and An American Brat by Bapsi Sidhwa. The novels are selected for their compelling narratives through which we can explore the multifaceted ways in which we manage cultural identity and process acculturation. The raw data were the narratives, which in turn were read and reread to locate similar extracts across texts (and thus find relationships) at a passage-level; themes we are calling patterns of occurrence; as well new constructions made by characters. Working through this close reading process involved taking a lot of notes and focusing on specific passages, quotes, and literary devices that reveal the societies (ye olde society!) or psyches at work regarding post-colonialism or hybridity in so many novels.

Secondary sources included academic articles, books, and critical analyses on the post-colonialism theory and hybridity in these novels generally as well to form a larger background and theoretical base. This list of secondary sources was compiled in a search through academic databases, library catalogs, and other reputable source material on literary criticism as well the wider field of post-colonial studies. The use of secondary literature sought to aid in the interpretation and locate it within prevailing discussions on post-colonialism and acculturation.

### **Data Analysis**

Textual analysis is a qualitative research method where the content of written or recorded material is systematically examined in order to identify patterns and themes that provide rich descriptions and associations among categories and meanings. This choice was motivated by the potential depth in illustrating the experiences of characters as well as their various acculturation strategies and its social-emotional impacts. The qualitative analysis section describes the series of steps undertaken during textual analysis to identify and code text segments that represent Berry's key acculturation concepts – assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization.

The coding consisted of categorizing the text segments by the degree to which they reflected one of the identified acculturation strategies and considering the psychological and social outcomes of each approach. To achieve this, the coding framework was developed from Berry's Acculturation Theory central tenets to sort and organize an author's data. Data reduction was used to generalize by extracting representative examples, as well as examining patterns separately for each category, and across categories. The Reluctant Fundamentalist passage depicting Changez' progression from assimilation through marginalization was coded to explore the nature of his psychological

distress. A similar analysis blossoming Feroza's movement from separation to integration in *An American Brat* revealed that successful application of acculturation strategies involve a protagonist undergoing a positive psychological change.

### **Theoretical framework**

The analysis was based on Berry's Acculturation Theory, which allows for categorization of imaginary between four types of strategies, namely assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization, that results in specific psychological and social consequences. Such perspective was used to categorize all events/decisions in a novel in a construct based on prototypical acculturation strategies, which was guided by the cultural setting. Simultaneously acculturation used Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "hybridity," which illustrates the creation of new transcultural forms and fluidity of presented cultural settings in post-colonial environments.

### **Validation and Triangulation**

In order to guarantee the rigor and credibility of the data analysis triangulation was applied. Triangulation means corroboration of the findings with different types of data: original writings, other secondary literature. It was considered that this method would complement the multiple methods of recruitment and analysis used to both ensure consistency in identified themes/patterns, which confirmed our interpretations/conclusions (credibility). For example, an interpretation on Changez or Feroza was submitted to relevant scholarly analyses for further understanding of their respective experiences in such light.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research was guided by ethical guidelines for literary analysis: all sources cited were identified, and the analyses did not corrupt the integrity of original works. The study aimed to offer an interpretive account of the novels in their proper contexts and with respect for each author's point of view. Ethical considerations included using secondary sources noticed, as well use a precise noting of ideas accurately represented and appropriately attributed.

### **Results and Discussion**

The analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* through the lens of John W. Berry's Acculturation Theory reveals complex and nuanced insights into the acculturation strategies and psychological outcomes of the protagonists, Changez and Feroza. The results highlight how these characters navigate their identities amidst cultural pressures and societal expectations in their respective narratives.

### **The Reluctant Fundamentalist: Changez's Acculturation Journey**

#### **Assimilation Phase**

At first, Changez like the integration strategy and is buying into American culture as he seeks to succeed in it. His story starts with him moving to the States in order to attend Princeton University where he further proves his intellect. Changez's desire to fit in is seen how he tries so hard to be someone that embodies the American Dream-like having a high profile job with an elite company (Underwood Samson) and being involved into a romantic relationship with an acquired taste of what it would feel like for him back home, Erica --an

idealistic individual. This elements are the desire to become fully American, by abandoning his Pakistani cultural identity (Hamid 2007).

Assimilation of Changez, on the other hand, is described in a tone that implies he has to try hard to become more American-like. Instead, he tucks himself down into the local customs with an altered persona and dress to match. His success at Princeton and his professional achievements at Underwood Samson give evidence to this philosophy of optimal performance. But, its this phase also indicates some internal conflicts in a Changez who tries to adjust his original self with the new one.

### **Marginalization Phase**

The aftermath of the September 11 attacks is a major point in Changez being acculturated. Changez is pushed into a fringe scenario mainly due to the escalated suspicion and racial bias against Muslims in America. He becomes more and more acutely alienated from his surroundings; the previous assimilatory struggles are undoing themselves. Salmeen (2019) exemplifies this change through his increasing finding of US policies and the overt racism targeting him because he is part.

The marginalization experienced by Changez is characterized in his changing perception and behavior. He starts to question his previous desires and the ideas/standards he once lived by. This is reflected by the declining dynamic in his interactions with Erica. Its mental health effects go deep: it means confusion of who you are and the idea that every body is a traitor. Changez conflicts internally, trying to hold onto a society that has decided it no longer wants him. This pursuit eventually leads him to come back Pakistan, after initially abandoning these attempts at assimilation and looking for a larger context of identity.

### **An American Brat: Feroza's Acculturation Journey**

#### **Separation Phase**

An American Brat opens with Feroza beginning her separation campaign, which is grounded by embracing the Pakistani cultural norms and fighting against any influence from America that she can. Shipped off to her relations within the US, Feroza hangs onto what she is aware of again in a conservative kingdom along with her first actual flavor of seeing through liberal eyes. To feel psychological and moral comfort in her original practices, the separation strategy is adopted; yet it also entails social exclusion and tensions with others (Naik 1992), especially among American youth.

Feroza's separation is evident in her interactions with her relatives and the broader American society. However, she has been seen to not manage the cultural environment and keep craving for her old Pakistani life. This stage shows how she first unsympathetically responded and desperately held onto her own cultural traits.

#### **Integration Phase**

As the narration continues, Feroza grows to accept the parts of American culture into her identity while still holding onto some aspects from her Pakistani background. This change is in line with Berry's theory of integration (Berry, 2005), where people take on elements from both cultures, leading to more fulfilling individual and social experiences. Feroza merges through her relationships with American peers, participation in different hobbies, and assimilation into the culture.

The path that led to Feroza is one of great personal evolution. In the bicultural experience, she speaks of being in two worlds and begins to find balance between her dual cultural identities. This step provides positive psychological consequences of a successful process or complex phenomenon called acculturation as an increased self-esteem and social inclusion. Feroza is able to belong within culture and so she becomes more united in who she is, which allows her finally to flourish.

## Comparative Analysis

### Cultural Conflict and Identity Formation

The example of Changez and his family also provide a frame for contrasting experiences as he acculturates differently than Feroza which results in different ends. But where Feroza moves from separation to integration, Changez goes exactly in the opposite direction—from assimilation to marginalization. These divergent strategies are indicative of the influence culture and society has on forming acculturation in diverse ways (Berry, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2010)..

- **Changez's Cultural Conflict:** Changez Example of institutionalized cultural conflict: Here we have the starkest example yet in this book, of how a culture clash can turn potentially violent if people are being sidelined. Yet in the post-9/11 climate, he is soon ostracized and "colored", which fuels an entrenched resentment towards his own race --fueling over time a major identity crisis. That his journey also speaks to just how hard it still is having an integrated identity around societal discount and discrimination (Ward & Kennedy, 1994).
- **Feroza's Identity Formation:** On the contrary, in contrast to Nazeera was a positive achievement of integration. Overall, this struggle between her Pakistani heritage and the American culture of which she is surrounded creates a much more whole identity. With that integration, she is poised to thread the needle of cultural conflicts with more grace and enjoy a long-term property in her new-fangled worldview (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000).

### Psychological Well-being

The psychological effects of acculturation strategies Changez and Feroza choose are at opposite ends of the spectrum. The novel delves deeply into the psychological turmoil experienced by Changez, as he grapples with severe identity confusion, alienation and a feeling of betrayal. His return in the end to Pakistan symbolized a renunciation of that earlier accommodation - and, paradoxically enough, a yearning for identity. Thus, this result is in line with Berry's (2005) claim that marginalization represents the least functional acculturation strategy and may lead frequently to high degree of psychological distress (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

On the other hand, Feroza's integration strategy leads to better psychological well-being. Indeed, the ability to retain her culture while also aligning herself with some American values gives Safari improved self-confidence and social acceptance as well as greater overall psychological health. This result highlights the advantages of diversity integration as an acculturation strategy, contributing to a more balanced and less vulnerable self-concept in multicultural surroundings.



### **Role of Societal Attitudes**

Society and cultural diversity Society is an important factor in formation of acculturation experience that Changez and Feroza have. Changez is further culturally marginalized in the United States by hostility and discrimination following 9/11. This unwelcoming world severely affects his mental health after all and, in effect, underscores how necessary it is to feel supported by society for a successful acculturation.

On the other hand, Feroza is being integrated because they provide an environment that accepts and helps her. Her interactions with American peers and participation in activities enable her to succeed at balancing both of the cultural aspects that make up her identity. This mediational role of societal attitudes in acculturation experiences leads to better psychological outcomes as a result of the supportive environment that is formed (LaFromboise, Coleman, &Gerton, 1993).

### **Conclusion**

The comparison of Changez and Feroza's strategies of acculturation in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *An American Brat* illuminates the extent to which cultural assimilation influences mental health and self-identity. Changez's transition from assimilation to marginalization manifests the adverse outcomes of social isolation, as illustrated by the sense of discontent and self-identity crisis. In contrast, Feroza's successful incorporation outlines the positive impacts of maintaining a bicultural self, including increased self-confidence and social integration. The results propose that social integration is pivotal for promoting positive outcomes of acculturation, as it builds resilience and ultimately yields cultural congruence in multicultural societies. The study implies that societal membership, acceptance, and integration are essential for navigating complexities of multi-cultural landscapes.

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