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South Asian Anglophone Fiction and the Deliberation of Identity: A Postcolonial Inquiry

Safeer Hussain
Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Georgia, Athens, GA, USA
safeer.hussain@uga.edu

Abstract

Postcolonial literature, especially Anglophone Fiction from South Asia, often grapples with the questions of belonging, migrancy, alienation, hybridity, home, and, most importantly, the question of identity. The paper discusses major postcolonial Anglophone fiction from South Asia and its deliberation of the question of identity and related themes. Utilizing close reading skills along with ideas from major scholars in the field, this paper argues that the question of identity in most canonical fiction from South Asia responds to major political and/or historical events, be they local or global. It also identifies that fiction stages these identities as shifting, evolving, and changing over time, with respect to local-global events. The research not only presents a comprehensive overview of the thread of identity linking canonical postcolonial anglophone texts from South Asia but also paves the way to further isolated and focused research on each of these works of fiction.

***Keywords**: Identity, South Asian Anglophone Fiction, Postcolonial, Belonging, Majoritarianism*

1. Introduction

Questions of belonging, home, migrancy, alienation, return, hybridity, in-betweenness, and the third space, and most importantly, the question that ties all of these together —the question of identity — haunt the imaginaries of the postcolonial world. In this essay, I argue that the questions of identity deliberated in most postcolonial Anglophone texts from South Asia shift, evolve, or alter in response to major political and/or historical events in the history of their respective countries/nations, as well as those of the whole world at large. We will see that these works grapple with the partition of the subcontinent, the majoritarianisms in Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka; the partition of Pakistan and the Independence of Bangladesh; and the religious, ethnic, racial, and linguistic extremism and skirmishes in these South Asian countries. Several works also discuss the Adivasis, Dalits, Kashmiris, the subaltern groups, and the environmentally endangered and exploited groups in India; whereas other works represent the rise of Zia-ul-Haq and his version of Islam in Pakistan; the Afghan war/jihad against the Soviet Union; the tragedy of 9/11 and the 'war on terror'; the 'long running, collectively traumatizing civil conflict' in Sri Lanka, and the plight of 'the wretched of the earth' in all post-colonies of South Asia (Alex, 2016). Thus, as I would argue, the canonical postcolonial works from South Asia present a deliberation of identity based upon the major historical turns the nations as well as the world take, especially such turns that drag these countries into courses of events that affect their present and future, whether they and their public desire it or not.

2. Discussion of Canonical Texts: The Earliest Works

The earliest works of South Asian Anglophone fiction, like Iqbalunnisa Hussain's *Purdah and Polygamy* (1944) or Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), are seriously indulged in the question of representation, the task of writing back, with a postcolonial or even precolonial nationalistic or religious identity, enumerating festivals, cultural days, events, the everyday life, social relations, family life, family structures and dynamics, etc. An ethnographic revisionist approach, which Lazarus calls the "'thematics of existence' of a particular culture by way of challenging (explicitly or implicitly) the authority of colonial discourse, is an important feature of the representational practice" (Lazarus, 2011). However, since the earliest works are dated around independence and partition of the subcontinent, the sheer force of events that happened around the achievement of home rule occupies the writers more than the assertion of a postcolonial identity and the impulse to write back. Thus, the politics and question of identity surrounding the partition of the subcontinent and the idea of nationhood and national identity occupy a central space. Rituparna Roy contends that in the subcontinent, "the novel as a genre has traditionally been implicated in the construction and consolidation of the idea of the nation. The Indian [and Pakistani] novel in English has also in its brief history been visibly concerned with defining such a national identity" (Roy, 2010). Although the main postcolonial event would be the achievement of home rule and independence by the two nations, the sheer force of partition, the chaos of identity crises, formation of (new) nations, nationhood and identities, and the violence unleashed clouds the representations and celebrations of independence, and the writers focus on why, what, and how of the partition including, in specific focus, the question of identity.

2.1. Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) presents the village of Mano Majra as the representative of the pluralistic, syncretic, and peaceful society of the subcontinent, with its people with a pluralistic, syncretic, communal identity before its peaceful edifice is dismantled by the separatist efforts and the hatred and violence that are unleashed later. Although critics refer to the state of Mano Majra before the violence as Edenic or Utopian, etc. (Cilano, 2013), I argue that rather than being Utopian or unreal, it is symbolic of most of the subcontinent and represents the community-based identities that the masses in the subcontinent believed in. I consider the peaceful situation presented in the village as the general condition of the people of the subcontinent towards living with other religious, ethnic, racial, and class-based groups. The idea of this brotherhood, despite the economic differences and classes operative in the society of Mano Majra, is the hallmark of this syncretic, pluralistic identity that these people practiced. But soon enough we find that the "Sikhs and Muslims, who had for generations lived peaceably together as 'brothers', can no longer trust each other after they are made to burn a train-load of dead Sikhs, and Muslims are threatened with retaliation" (Roy, 2010) pointing towards, what I consider, the external and/or top-down coercion of a separatist identity, coercing its peaceful inhabitants into committing mass murder of their own fellow neighbors, brothers, and villagers whom they so faithfully vowed to protect. Further provocative was the influx of migrants and outsiders who incite the Mano Majrans by narrating what atrocities their true brethren of the Sikh religion were suffering at the hands of Muslims in the parts declared as Pakistan. All this contributed to the already tense situation, and the criminal-minded (e.g., Malli dacoit and his gang) and the weak-minded lost their senses and wreaked havoc in the neighboring Muslim

village of Chundunnagar. Interestingly, while commenting on the 'brotherly code' that these villagers have towards one another, Cilano is of the view that "what's striking about this code is its definition in contravention of both bureaucracy and religion" (Cilano, 2013). So, we see the bafflement of Iqbal, an outsider and a communist with an 'anglicized view' of things, when he observes that Meet Singh was worried not that Jugga probably had killed someone, but that he had killed a brother, a fellow villager. Meet Singh and others' pride in the brotherly code that defied both bureaucracy and religion, all point to an identity in the people of Mano Majra that transcended religion, class differences, as well as state/bureaucratic narratives. They yielded to the political identities only after externally infused and coerced violence exerted too much stress on them, and they finally cracked. Still, love proved a stronger identity than political ones, exemplified by the sacrifice of Jugga, a Sikh Dacoit in India, for Nooran, a Muslim girl headed towards Pakistan.

2.2. Female Writers, Partition and Identity: *The Heart Divided, Sunlight on a Broken Column, Ice-Candy Man,* and *What the Body Remembers*

Furthermore, Mumtaz Shahnawaz's *The Heart Divided* (1947), and Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) represent that the separate religious identities, considered to be the basis for the demand of a separate country, Pakistan, existed for centuries in general harmony. In fact, all the novels present a pre-partition and during-partition society of the subcontinent, like Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), Iqbalunnisa Hussain's *Purdah and Polygamy* (1944), Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* (1988), or Shauna Singh's *What the Body Remembers* (1999) as a pluralistic, syncretic society, whose inhabitants have been living in harmony with each other. Most of these novels show the separatist identities, the undue stress on religious differences, and religious identities came from the top, i.e., the political elite, to the bottom, i.e., the masses. Another important factor that exacerbated the separatist, difference-based, religious identities was the fear as well as the experience of Hindu prejudice by the Muslims, exemplified mostly by the prejudiced attitudes of the Hindu leadership and their treatment of Muslims in the 1937's experimental rule by local elections where Congress won a majority of seats. In Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* we find Deputy Bachan Singh's Sikh family in deep-rooted, close connections with all of their neighbors and community, where Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs all live in peace. However, when Bachan Singh encounters an incident where a fellow Sikh is attacked and beaten by Hindu Arya Samaj activists, he loses all sense of community and brotherhood, and orders his family to sever all ties with all neighbors of a different faith. Thus, his daughter is no longer allowed to play with her Hindu neighbor's girl, his Hindu servant is no longer allowed to pray in the household, and he himself severs almost all ties with his Muslim friend with whom he had business ties and with whom he used to have rooster fights. Similarly, Sidhwa's Parsee child narrator Lenny recounts in *Ice-Candy Man* that, "It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves and the next day–they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian" (Sidhwa, 2016), showing that the realization of separate identities was not some prevalent or gradual process of understanding true identities. It was rather a matter of a few decades of charged political atmosphere and the rhetoric of the political leadership and elite, along with other factors, that contributed to the ossification of religious, ethnic, linguistic, and other differences into separate identities, demanding purist, separate geopolitical boundaries. The abruptness and arbitrariness of such identities are further highlighted when Lenny tells us that, "I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that" (Sidhwa, 2016).

In the discussion of pre-partition time, and during and after partition, the female writers in South Asian Anglophone fiction maintain a feminist identity and a feminist view of the whole matter. As Cilano points out that "If Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is male-centered, then Mumtaz Shah Nawaz's *The Heart Divided* presents a female-centered counterpoint" (Cilano, 2013). The main female characters of the novel, Zohra, Sughra, and Mohini, along with a couple of their female friends, hold the axis of the plot and various identities, ideologies, and tensions the plot presents. Similarly, we see Iqbalunnisa's *Purdah and Polygamy* with a main feminist focus as well, which in an Austenian way delineates the lives of Muslim women in their households in pre-partition times. In the same vein, Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*/*Cracking India* has always been analyzed with the help of a feminist lens, with its main narrator Lenny, its major focus on Ayah, and the Godmother who saves Ayah from the clutches of the ice-candy man and male exploitation. Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* also presents the pre-partition and partition times with the help of two major female characters, Satya and Roop. Apart from these novels, other novels by female writers that do not necessarily focus on partition times also have a feminist thrust and major female characters. The female writers give voice to the female, the plight of women, the subaltern place and position of women in all kinds of situations, whether under colonial rule or home rule, whether under secular democracy or Islamic republic, whether in a class-based society or caste based, whether anyone hears it or not. Further, like Devi's *Imaginary Maps*, and Roy's *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* advocate for education, freedom of choice of life style, of life partner and all kinds of freedom that a man enjoys in life and society, for participation of women in the broader social life of the society and the nation unlike the condition of women relegated to zananas in *Twilight in Delhi*, or *Sunlight on a Broken Column* or *Purdah and Polygamy*. But they do not envision/advocate the importing of the western concept of feminism with complete disregard to the social dynamics and situation of the society on the ground, like *Heat and Dust*, the English ayah advocated parks and parties for women when they lacked basic education, basic rights of choice, and freedom in life. Parks and parties were not the basic rights that women in the subcontinent lacked.

The female novelists grasp at the feminist identities lying at the epistemological limits of masculine ideas and identities and represent the partition through the eyes, senses and sensibilities of women characters, rather than relegating them to the position of objects for whom men stand up and fight, like the Ice-Candy Man who is enraged by the bag full of breasts of young Muslim women, or Jugga of Khushwant Singh who sacrifices his life for Nooran. Sidhwa, Shah Nawaz and others grant great agency and awareness to the female characters, for example Lenny's mother and aunt's fuel espionage to help Hindus and Sikhs flee to safety from Lahore, Lenny's Godmother locating, comforting and saving the Hindu Ayah from the clutches of Ice-Candy Man, the violated and sexually tortured Ayah's decision to return to her home in India, Shah Nawaz's Mohini who strives so very hard and eventually dies in her efforts for Hindu-Muslim unity, Zohra's participation in resistance movements and speeches against British colonization, Zohra and Sughra's after-independence efforts for the poor and needy of their city, Roy's critique on patriarchy and caste system through the love between Ammu and the poor Velutha, her upholding of policed, criminalized sexualities and queer sexual identities by presenting incestual love between Rahel and Estha, her representation and glorification of transgender identities in her characterization and focus on Aftab/Anjum and how Anjum becomes a sort of refuge for some of the marginalized characters of her city, Roy's

representation of the homeless whose whole lives are spent on the streets of major cities etc. What all these works of fiction represent is a 'middle passage' in the dominant, masculine, state-sponsored, majoritarian Muslim or Hindu identities, i.e., the interstitial, the subaltern identities, with a great semblance to the Middle Passage of African slavery, showing a graveyard of hopes, aspirations, identities, marginalized voices, cultures, and bodies.

2.3. Conflation of Pakistani and Muslim Identities: *A Case Of Exploding Mangoes, The Golden Legend, Thinner Than Skin, The 13th House*

Fiction further presents that around the partition times, the conflation of Pakistani identity and Muslim identity purported by the Muslim League became the official national identity of Pakistan, and it eclipsed all other forms or conceptions of identity that other groups or people might have had in Pakistan. Something similar happened across the border as well, where the Hindu majoritarian ideology of Congress enforced a Hindu, caste-based identity. These religion-based and difference-based identities have haunted the three countries (including Bangladesh), and their people ever since. The state's definition of what it means to be Pakistani, i.e., to be Pakistani, you must have to be Muslim, and the kind of Muslim that the state defines, has caused trouble to all kinds towards other conceptions of Islam and being Muslim. Exploring the repercussions of the conflation of Pakistani and Muslim identities, Cilano discusses Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, stating that the novel "illustrates the distance between the state and the characters' abilities to establish meaningful, collective identities" (Cilano, 2013). She points to how the state-sponsored identities and the state's intervention in everyday life and identities of the masses created a distrust and distance between the state and the characters' abilities to establish meaningful, collective identities. The state conflated the ideas of nation and state, Islam and Pakistan, Muslim and Pakistaniness, making it hard for someone to criticize the state, equating it with criticism of the idea of Pakistan and the nation of Pakistan, making it hard not to be a Muslim but be a Pakistani. Adam Zameenzad's novel *The 13th House* also allegorizes the Zia-ul-Haq regime, its play with Muslim and Pakistani identity for the consolidation of its own rule, which causes an identity crisis for the country. Cilano is of the view that Zameenzad's novel "illustrates how characters get stuck in dominant identities that…account fully for what it means to belong to the city [of Karachi] and to the nation" (Cilano, 2013). While analyzing the connection between the main character of the novel, Zahid, who lives in the titular house with his wife and sick son, seeking 'spiritual' remedies for his son's fits as well as riddance of all evil residing in his house from a 'fakir' Shah Baba, Cilano explains that "the drama played out between [them] functions as an allegory for the political maneuverings of the state under Zia's rule, which themselves create a specific notion of the nation". The chasm between the state and the nation, as well as the state-sponsored identity and the identity people wanted to assert for themselves and their nation is visible in how the narrator of the novel "distinguishes between the "nation," which he aligns with the demonstrators, and the "government," which violently suppresses the "nation"." Zameenzad's idea of the nation as opposed to 'government' is interesting, showing that the people "refuse the dominant categories the state would impose. As such, Zahid's position as unwilling spectator effectively trapped in a car only underscores the extent to which he embodies a stuck and submissive identity" (Cilano, 2013). While musing on all of this the narrator, living in a hotel, notices it's cafe walls "were decorated with mirrors of different shapes" (Zameenzad, 1987). He also notices that the clients have "[different] faces, different moulds of faces, different colours of skin, different languages, different dresses, different cultures, different attitudes, different values" and interestingly "[one] mirror reflected

all" of this variety (Zameenzad, 1987). Cilano considers that "the mirror metaphorizes a vision of the nation" with all its diversity reflected in one, rather than the state's strategy of negating, oppressing, ignoring, or erasing all diversity and all identities and superimpose its own identity. The narrator reflects on the scene that "[if] it was one nation, the whole of pre-partition India was one nation. If that was two nations, it was many. If these were one because of Islam, what about Bangla Desh [sic], Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey; Muslim countries all over the world? What of the Muslims in India now?" (Zameenzad, 1987). It is very much evident that the novel "[questions] the very foundations of the Pakistan movement by expanding the concept of "nation" to envelop diversity rather than merely accept the dominant definition of nation as homogenized group" (Cilano, 2013). The novel, as Cilano analyzes, also challenges the "post-partition Pakistan's insistence on the unifying power of Islam, a favorite emphasis especially under Zia's rule. Much like the vision of democracy the mass demonstration conjures, the customers at the café represent to the narrator a "nation" (Zameenzad, 2013).

2.4. Majoritarianism and Identity: *Brick Lane, Midnight's Children, Moon on Water, Collaborator, the God of Small Things* & More

Although *Midnight Children* is mostly discussed as a severe satire on the children born on the midnight of August 14 and 15, namely Pakistan and India, their 'bastard' nations and national identities, it also alludes to the later painful birth of Bangladesh, but it has been mainly ignored by scholars who take up the novel for a plethora of other things. Roy, pointing to the same fact, states that "[the] novel's second unique aspect is that unlike the other Partition novels mentioned so far, its characters inhabit all three partitioned states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh" (Roy, 2010). Indeed, Rushdie's novel deals with the 1971 independence of Bangladesh, and the violence and horror associated with it in satirical detail. Pointing to the marred linguistic identity of the Bangla people, and the inability of the West Pakistani state to accommodate, acknowledge or even understand the language of East Pakistan's Bangla people, Rushdie presents a scene where a song in Bangla language (that later became the national anthem of Bangladesh) is played but "the occupying West Pakistani soldiers in Dacca (who were there to enforce unity) could not understand a word of the song when they heard it 'though their feet did tap inadvertently to the tune'". Roy considers it "a perfect attestation of the fact that cultural differences (in which language figures predominantly) divide much more than religion" (Roy, 2010). So, we see that the single nationalist Muslim identity upheld by the state of Pakistan was actually diverse, and the homogenization of all those identities, rather bulldozing of all those identities into one flat identity, was one of the reasons Bangla people felt extremely oppressed and revolted against West Pakistan. It could also be argued that linguistic identities were deeper rooted than religious identities, and like other communal identities, identities linked to the place, to the 'home' where one was born and bred, grew up, were more deeply rooted as compared to the forced separation based on religion and religious identities.

Rushdie's novel does not merely criticize the atrocities committed by the state of Pakistan in the name of a Pakistani, Muslim, Urdu-speaking identity. His novel also allegorizes the Hindu majoritarianism in India and the false aura of secular democracy that the state of India exudes. His depiction of Indira Gandhi's enforcement of the emergency and the murder of all kinds of dissent is particularly lethal as he presents her in the figure of the sinister, murderous 'Widow' who is bent upon finding and killing all the miraculous children born at the exact time of midnight of partition. Thus, the depiction of her intentions of killing midnight's children is akin

to killing the nation that was born at midnight, since the children represent the nations of India and Pakistan, as Saleem Sinai, the narrator and protagonist of the novel himself says that his life story is that of India, and even Nehru passes a similar comment in the newspaper when Saleem Sinai's birth wins the award for having birth at the exact moment of independence. We find the same Hindu majoritarianism in India represented in other works of fiction in other works of South Asian Anglophone fiction. However, it should be noted that the situation is more complex in India, with a multitude of other identities at play there, like those based on caste, class, geography, and language. We have Kashmir that suffers at the hands of a Hindu majoritarian government that has conflated Indianness with Hinduism, and thus Kashmir festers, as we read in Ameena Hussain's *Moon on the Water* and Mirza Waheed's *Collaborator*. We also have the lower castes, Adivasis and Dalits exerting their identities against a behemoth of Hindu majoritarian identity in works like Adiga's *White Tiger*, Roy's *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Orijit Sen's *River of Stories* presenting the fate of the Adivasi-forest dwellers, and Kandasamy's metafictional, postmodernist *The Gypsy Goddess* which ties class system with caste system as well as neocolonial forces. Sinha's *Animal's People* also connects all of these dots to show that the largest Democracy and secular state actually is a farce.

2.5. Postsecular Identities: *the Golden Legend, the Everest Hotel, the Ministry of Utmost Happiness* & More

In defiance of these state-sponsored majoritarian and religious identities, several of the novels purport secular and sometimes post-secular identities. Aslam's *The Golden Legend*, Sealy's *The Everest Hotel*, Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, and Roy's *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, all present a secular Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka as the future for these postcolonies of the subcontinent. Sri Lanka's several decades-long civil war, deeply observed and felt, is presented in *Anil's Ghost*, and *Seven Moons of Maali Almeida,* both of which purport a non-religious, non-ethnic, humanitarian, pluralistic, secular, and post-secular identity as the Sri Lankan ideal identity, that would have the cure to all its ethnic wars and murders. So, we have seen that the identities purported/narrated/challenged/suggested by these works of fiction are pluralistic, syncretic, and hybrid identities in pre-partition times. Before the onslaught of the separatist rhetoric and prejudice based on religious identities, we find the people of the subcontinent inhabiting a cultural hybridity, and a pluralistic, syncretic, hybrid identity, occupying a sort of "interstitial passage between fixed identifications [with] the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains a difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, 1994). Although Bhabha is referring to the interstitial space and in-between identities, we can see that the people of the subcontinent also did not particularly and rigidly occupy fixed, reified identities; rather, their identities were more like hybrid, in-between identities as compared to the rigid religious identities that their political elite propagated and upheld during partition. The onslaught of religious and ethnic differences from the leadership and its insistence and power games to achieve a Hindu majority or Muslim majority, etc., created and spread rifts that led to a violent, bloody partition, where still several areas are stuck in interstitial spaces like Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. We find works of fiction representing marginal, subaltern identities lying on the 'epistemological limits of [the] ethnocentric ideas' of the dominant identities purported by the nation-states of India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Thus, we find on these 'epistemological limits' as Bhabha says 'the enunciative boundaries of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices—women, the colonized, the minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities' (Bhabha, 1994) the 'dissonant' and 'dissident' voices and identities of Parsis,

women, Sikhs, Adivasis, Dalits, the untouchables, the poor, and the 'policed sexualities' and gender identities. So, we see the lunatic of Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* dies in a literal middle ground between the two borders of India and Pakistan, a liminal space, in the interstitial, middle passage, mocking the binary identities and their boundaries.

2.6. The War on Terror, Mimicry, Identity and Return: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Home Boy*

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 are the next major geopolitical events that challenge the hybrid, hyphenated, cosmopolitan identities, especially those worn by Pakistani Muslims in the West, specifically in the US. *Home Boy*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Brick Lane* all challenge these identities, and the former two sort of advocate a return to the roots, a return to the origins, deeply ingrained Pakistani and Muslim identities. In the wake of the dominant portrayals of Muslims as terrorists and terror in the US's 'war on terror,' it forced Muslims all over the globe to return to their religious identities, and in the novels here, we at least find a return and consolidation of Pakistani and Pakistani Muslim identity in our characters. As editors write in *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Novels* that "[the] diasporic novel frequently explores how performance becomes the refuge and source of identity" (Quayson, 2016), we can see it in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* where Changez thinks he is American or New Yorker but 9/11 and the subsequent events of harassment reveal that his American identity was a performance that had taken on the garb of identity, and he gradually loses that performance; and grows a beard as an act of defiance against that identity and against that performance unconsciously. The cosmopolitan identity that he was wearing turned out "as a series of performances, some of which [were] stylized versions of former selves, while others [were] clearly attempts to rebel against lingering homeland ideologies", otherwise known as "the unwritten diasporic rule of theatricalizing identity" (Quayson, 2016). So, there is a choreography of the performance that a migrant or immigrant takes on in order to affiliate with the metropole, which often includes adopting the sexual behaviors of the metropole. Hence, the novel points to the question of identity as essence versus identity as a performance, tipping in favor of the latter in the assimilative, multicultural, cosmopolitan, universal identities adopted by migrants and immigrants in the global North, exemplified by Changez in Hamid's novel, as well as the major characters in Naqvi's *Home Boy*.

Home Boy by H. M. Naqvi is another novel that represents the hybrid, cosmopolitan, assimilated, multicultural, 'melting-pot' identity, plus the hardships of life and living in New York, US, immediately before, during, and after 9/11. We find that the narrator has "arrived in New York from Karachi four years earlier" and in the four years "liked to believe [that he had] since claimed the city and the city had claimed [him]" (Naqvi, 2017). Our narrator, Chuck, has a group of friends, including A.C. and Jimbo, who also suffer the consequences of the tragedy of 9/11 and the resultant racism that surfaces. The modified, hybrid identities are very self-evident, even from the transformation their names have undergone: Ali Chaudhry has become A.C., Jamshed Khan has become Jimbo, and the narrator Chuck, stripped of any and all references to their ethnic, cultural, religious, or geographic identity, making them kind of the 'citizens of the world'. Even in their most intimate conversations, their identity as Pakistanis or Muslims does not show itself; rather, a New Yorker, cosmopolitan, American sort of identity rears its head prominently. The fact that the overcoats of these cosmopolitan, hybrid identities are shaken down by the tragedy of 9/11, and the rhetoric of a return to 'home' these characters purport, is to show that

their adopted identities lacked the dimension of depth that Bhabha discusses. In his *Location of Culture* Bhabha is of the view that it is the "dimension of depth that provides the language of Identity with its sense of reality - a measure of the 'me '" (Bhabha, 1994) that determines identity and since the identities these characters are wearing lack it, their identity does not corroborate with their reality, and though they claim to be New Yorkers, sharers of the cosmopolitan identity with the citizens of the US, it proves to be false "for the sameness of a rational being requires a consciousness of the past which is crucial to the argument - 'as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person'" (Bhabha, 1994). As these boys do not have the depth of identity as explicated by Bhabha, their assimilation and adoption of that identity is very fragile and superficial, for both themselves and those of the Center, easily dismantlable and rubbed off in the face of conflicts such as 9/11, so that the city that had 'seemed' to claim them readily disowns and abandons them on their own, with a return to roots and the depths of their actual identity as the main course of action/reaction left to them.

Naqvi clearly portrays the racism that existed before the tragedy of 9/11 when his narrator tells us that he and his friends "were told half-jokingly, Oh, all you Pakistanis are alike, we weren't the same, AC, Jimbo, and me" (Naqvi, 2017), pointing to the Orientalist fashion of generalizing and homogenizing all orientals as the same. However, the narrator asserts on the very second page of the novel that they were not all alike. This racism becomes overt, intensified, and escalated after 9/11, which makes these characters rethink their identities and makes them look towards a return to their roots. We see the escalated racism in the bar fight scene when the three friends are abused as 'fucking A-rabs'. We also read their later persecution by the state police in the infamous Boston Detention Centers, where they were treated extremely inhumanely. All these plot elements: the irony of the speech in the situation the narrator is facing; AC's efforts to shy away from the reality of racism and prejudice by keeping away from news channels; the FBI and the racism and prejudice knocking on the door instead of justice; and the city and country that they have been claiming as theirs and thought that the city and country considered them its own but turned out that it considered them enemy; all these incidents are not only evocative of the issues 9/11 and the narrative of the United States created for the migrant Muslims in particular and Muslims all over the world in general, but also the crisis in the multicultural, pluralistic, cosmopolitan, inclusive identities the US culture in particular and the western culture in general purported. Hence, Cilano observes that "a migrant identity in pre-9/11 America resembles the optimistic pluralism common to much postcolonial discourse, wherein difference can be the basis for solidarity" (Cilano, 2013). But these "migrant identities undergo a sharp change, post-9/11, as they morph into the latest entry on the list of maligned others with which Chuck opens the novel. Certainly, the three friends' experiences with the FBI represent the most extreme example of the change in their abilities to claim belonging to the US". When Chuck is being interrogated, he "realizes just how far outside the US national fold he is when the federal agent responds to Chuck's rights-based demand to make a phone call: "'You aren't American!…You got no fucking rights'" (Naqvi, 2017). This inward-looking turn re-marks migrant identities as outside a collective US national identity and, in turn, seems to reinforce a Pakistani one by default. Gone are both the appearance of self-definition and the naïveté of believing in such self-determination" (Cilano, 2013). Completely disillusioned and disheartened by how New York has treated them, Chuck decides to return to his true 'home', and tells his mother on the phone, "I want to come home, Ma" (Naqvi, 2017), and the novel ends with the

final action of him making ablution, spreading his prayer mat, and offering prayer right there at the airport before leaving America and the final words of the novel "I left" (Naqvi, 2017).

A similar awakening, a return to 'home' and return to a 'Muslim' identity, is what Changez undergoes in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and "the novel reverses the migrancy trope, and [Changez] discovers that to value the identity the US offers him is to render his own background an absence" (Cilano, 2013). While facing the racism in the US and undergoing the crisis of the cosmopolitan identity he had worn, Changez compares the cultural history and depth of his nation as compared to the relative shallowness of the American/European civilization, and it pushes him towards returning home. The returning home ideology and the Pakistani, Muslim national identity that Changez seems to advocate is a pluralistic, collective belonging towards which Changez himself points when he says that during his political activities, he protests alongside people of "all affiliations—communists, capitalists, feminists, religious literalists" (Hamid, 2007). Another realization contributes to Changez's refusal to become a 'fundamentalist' for the Underwood Samsons (U.S) and that is what he tells the silent American as the US's "constant interference in the affairs of others… Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan" (Hamid, 2007). Changez also points out the role of American aid and its manipulation to control Pakistani government by the U.S and considers "that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power" and thus he considers it fitting "to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination…" and a part of that refusal is shunning the garb of a (migrant) American identity (Hamid, 2007).

3. Conclusion

To sum up, we see that the question of identity wraps a large number of works of Anglophone fiction from South Asia and its diaspora. Although the takes on identity and the kinds of identity deliberated seem to be as varied as the number of works produced and the number of writers, most of the works are informed by the major geopolitical, historical events that shape and define the South Asian nation-states and the world in general. The writers are not only sensitive to what goes on around the globe, but also keen to address the microcosm of everyday life, the internal dynamics and identities that emerge and that are at play within the nation, both separate from and in response to what is happening outside the geopolitical boundaries. Fiction penetrates deep into the past and present of the national and world histories that shape and define individual, communal, national, international, and all kinds of other identities.

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