

Gender in Hamid's Fiction: A Reflection on the Cultural Paradigm Shift Brewing among Pakistani Women

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Abstract

Modern women are not satisfied with the roles traditionally ascribed to them as obligatory; they rather feel stifled by them. Pakistani women, especially urban women with global exposure, are no exceptions. Hamid's two novels under study, *Moth smoke* (2000) and *How to get filthy rich in rising Asia* (2013), underline the evolving cultural transformation in Pakistan regarding female sexuality and gender in the wake of global cultural interactions. Based on the postmodern theories of fluid and performatively differential identity by cultural theorist Homi K Bhabha and feminist theorist Judith Butler, this study seeks to analyze the transformation of the urban Pakistani woman who is constantly exposed to global cultures by means of globalization and is influenced to redefine her sexuality and gender, through textual analysis of the major female characters of Hamid's two novels referenced above. The study also analyses how the modern Pakistani woman, embarked on her journey to self-fulfilment, defies the religio-culturally sacred institutions of wifehood and motherhood, finding them to be restrictive. However, the resisting impact of the place (i.e., Pakistan) is also obvious; these displaced women are not totally without feelings of anxiety. In addition to contributing to the contemporary discourse on the blurring of boundaries caused by the increasing connection between spatial scales, particularly the local and the global, this paper attempts to make a contribution in the areas of fluidity in sexuality and gender in Pakistani context.

Key words

female sexuality, gender, culture, globalization, Mohsin Hamid, Pakistan

Introduction

Empowered by increasing awareness and mobility gained through global interconnectivity, women in Pakistan are increasingly defying patriarchy and provoking a re-standardization of the local perceptions regarding gender and sexuality. According to the data retrieved from family courts in the provincial metropolis Lahore and published in Pakistani mainstream media, *khula* (Islamic legal avenue to divorce sought by women through courts) cases registered in the Punjab in 2012 were 13,299 which increased to 14,243 in 2013, and to 16,942 in 2014. In 2016, the number of *khula* cases went up to 18,901; around 259,064 separations have taken place in Lahore over the last decade. It indicates a rise of over 40 per cent in four years. The noose of sexual repression and control tightened around women by patriarchy in the name of morality in developing societies like Pakistan appears to be fast loosening as a result of continuous increase in the exposure of Western cultures to the non-western world (Altman, 2004; Brownell & Wasserstrom, 2002; Sassen, 1998)—the contribution of feminist movements resulting in growing awareness about women’s rights, legislations to protect them and the growing number of women getting higher education and entering the job market also cannot be ignored. The penetration of the popular culture of the West to the East has muddled the fixed patriarchal structures of the society. Phenomena like colonization, globalization, and migration are largely responsible for breaking the local attachments or sense of belonging of the women to their native places and gradually encouraging them to deviate from following the local customs, practices, and mores. Though the inroads of the Western culture into the East are, as yet, largely limited to just the private lives of those who move geographically and/or have comparatively greater access to the means that connect them with the rest of the world (Altman, 2004), the society, as a whole, with all its traditional ways of living appears to be under the process of transformation despite renewed intense resistance from the local traditional and religiously fundamentalist circles. This continuous and increasing invasion of the local, traditional, and patriarchal cultures (accelerated by globalization) by Western cultural practices has set off a cultural paradigm shift in the Third World nation states (Pakistan being one of these), to which even the long-standing cultural and religious taboos have been no exception. Given the current trend of this cultural transformation, it is argued that many of the in-

digenous religio-culturally sacred institutions such as wifehood and motherhood are being compromised in the country; they are either losing their originality or are being replaced by more viable alternatives through the fluid processes of cultural interactions and integrations. We can now see women walking around freely in and sometimes even ruling over areas that had previously been exclusively the domain of men and tabooed for women to tread in. Women, though collectively not so independent and empowered as yet in Pakistan, nor considered in the society at large to be completely equal to men, are individually, in their private lives, venturing into businesses, earning for their families, travelling across the globe, writing on issues, driving on roads, having sexual relationships outside marriage. A few even have ceased to believe that the institution of *nikah* (the Islamic religious ritual that legitimises sexual relations between male and female) is necessary for sexual intercourse, taking lead in matters of sex, denying the superiority of men, and doing everything that is traditionally ascribed to the male. But writing about such themes in the society of Pakistan, especially after the Zia era (which is known for its strict interpretations of Islamic injunctions to support oppressive patriarchal designs), has been a daunting task. Mohsin Hamid (though not the first to write on gender and sexuality in Pakistan), in his trendsetting fiction, highlights these tabooed themes in a remarkably bold way. Studies on Hamid's fiction have mostly focused on the themes of class stratifications, corruption of the rich, reaction to the labels of terrorist, hybridity, and binarism and the search for identity (Arif & Zahir, 2015; Hartnell, 2010; Kiran, 2013; Kumar, 2012; Morey, 2011). None of the available studies has made it its exclusive subject to examine the threat to the conventional patriarchal social structure posed by the redefinitions of women's sexuality and gender in the wake of globalization as depicted in the ground-breaking fiction by the novelist.

The "cultural turn" (Richardson, 2007, p. 458) associated with post-modernism and the rise of queer theory has led to reappraisal of sexuality and gender, and new articulations of identity have emerged that negate the binary, fixed, and structural relationship between genders, shifting the emphasis onto the transient, fluid, and dynamic nature of identities and cultures. Richardson notes in one of his studies about the relationship between gender and sexuality that "this theoretical shift to understanding gender and sexuality in terms of performativity associated with the work of Butler (1990, 1996) has opened up new areas for analysis and debate" (p.

458). Interestingly, Bhabha's (1994) cultural theory of the *third space* highlighting performative identity coincides with Butler's—thus providing the theoretical pillars for the framework of this study. This article, therefore, argues that exposure to Western culture through globalization is gradually reconfiguring women's identity in Pakistan, who are observed remolding and/or rejecting the feminist spaces that they are traditionally identified with. Given the level of mobility to and connectivity with the means of global culture, as compared with rural areas of the country, this cultural influence is largely limited to urban areas. This study seeks to analyse the transformation of only those Pakistani urban women that are exposed to global cultures by means of globalization, and are influenced to renegotiate their sexuality and gender. Through textual analysis of the major female characters of two of Hamid's novels, *Moth smoke* (2000) and *How to get filthy rich in rising Asia* (2013), this paper explores how women in the urban settings of Pakistan, influenced by their connection with the Western liberal culture through their geographical movement and means of globalisation, are redefining their sexuality and gender. It also analyses how such women in Pakistan are eroding the long-standing religio-cultural institutions of wifehood and motherhood. The analyses are carried out through a close reading and interpretation of the statements and life styles of the selected characters and their descriptions given by the writer in the novels. In addition to contributing to the contemporary discourse on the blurring of boundaries caused by the increasing connection between spatial scales, particularly the local and the global, this study attempts to initiate a discourse on the areas of fluidity in sexuality and gender in the context of Pakistan.

The selected novels portray the Pakistani society of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the period when the country was growingly accepting means of global interconnectivity. Hamid's women, those dwelling in urban settings in both the novels, charged by the power of a changed socio-economic and technological situation, take off and soar high, refuting the restrictive stereotypes patriarchy has long associated with their sex. The image of a true practising Islamic woman has largely disappeared from the lives of most of these urban women.

Non-fixity of Culture and Performativity of Gender Identity

There is little sexuality-oriented research in Pakistan. This study, there-

fore, attempts to make a contribution by analyzing fluidity in the sexual and gender identity of Pakistani women in the literary works of Mohsin Hamid.

A huge transnational flow of capital and labor has disrupted traditional ways of living; mass geographical movements by men and women have been undertaken to participate in the new economic structures; even those men/women who do not have physical movement at all may not stay unaffected by the new transnational corporative and communicative structures that have disregarded boundaries and overturned the traditional social and family patterns (McDowell, 1999). The stereotypical associations between spaces (e.g., home, workplace, etc.) and traditional gender roles have been disrupted. The increasing interaction and interrelation of the global and the local in the form of geographic movement like migration and non-geographic movement like penetration of media and multi-national corporations has resulted in the “transnational attenuation of local space, and the breaking of space into *discontinuous realities* which alters our sense of ourselves as individuals, members of various groups and communities, as citizens of a nation state” (McDowell, 1999, p. 30, emphasis in original).

The largely increasing global interconnectivity has helped the subaltern move from the periphery to the center, find a voice, and blur the fixed boundaries (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha argues that cultures are constantly interacting, affecting and being affected. He denies cultural fixity and argues that cultures are always hybridizing and evolving. In these modern times of theoretical and material disruptions, effects on gender and sexuality are deep and transformative, mounting a threatening challenge to the conventional gendering of space, forming of sexuality and associating masculinity/femininity with superiority/inferiority even in such places (e.g., Pakistan) which are still deemed as strongholds of religious and traditional ethical values related to gender and sexuality. The feminist theorist Judith Butler (1990, 1996), equipped with the deconstructive techniques of post-modernism, negates any pre-existing sexual/gender identity prior to the social discourses that inform such discursive categories in a social space. Here is found an interesting similarity between postmodern cultural theorists (Bhabha, 1994) and feminist theorists (like Butler, 1990; Moore, 1994) when they argue that “gendered identities and ideas of the subject [...] [are] multiple and fragmented” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 219), that gendered identity is performative, and that spaces in which identity is made are continuously “opening out, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim

to a singular or autonomous sign of difference—be it class, gender or race” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 219). Performativity means identity is not fixed and is shaped by varied cross-cutting social and cultural sets of influences; these transecting sets of influences are themselves in constant process of hybridization and evolution resulting from their interaction with other social and cultural sets at local and global levels. Before focusing on the place, locations of the interlocking discursive forces and their embodiment by the physical female body in the context of Pakistan, it seems appropriate to consider fluidity of gender and sexuality in a few other non-western societies as well.

Gender Transformation in Pakistan in Historical Perspectives

The increasingly intense interconnectivity of world cultures because of advances in telecommunication and a rapid increase in economic and financial interdependence and migration has had a profound influence on urban life style, cultural practices, identity, and sexuality and gender (Altman, 2004; Appadurai, 2000; Arnett, 2002; Giddens, 2000; Richardson, 2007; Sanjaskdar, 2011; Sassen, 1998; Tomlinson, 1999). Booth (2002) observes that young people belonging to the middle and upper classes in urban areas of Arabian Peninsula are similar in many ways to young people in the West. Because of the exposure to the Western culture, the rate of premarital sex and pregnancy are on rise and the traditional institutions of sexual regulation are constantly losing their relevance in sub-Saharan Africa (Nsamenang, 2002; Songue, 1998). The longstanding traditional family structure of Africa is fast losing its significance in the face of increasing proportion of the work force consisting of women working outside their homes, even outside their country, after their schooling and an exposure of global culture (Nsamenang, 2002). Gender roles in Southeast Asia are also dramatically changing in urban areas wherein Western cultural values are seen to be invading the local ones through the media that has given rise to premarital pregnancies (Santa, 2002). The increasing cultural contact with the West has destroyed the collectivistic value system of Japan and China (White, 1993); the values have increasingly become individualistic; young people have increasingly chosen to postpone their marriages to pursue self-development (Stevenson & Zusho, 2002).

However, it is imperative to analyse the concept of performative gender

identity in the context of the particular local cultural settings of Pakistan (of which religion is an important part) as interconnected with the global cultures. Usually, according to the local cultural and Islamic patterns of life, there is a silence around sexuality in Pakistan, while women are supposed to appear as an embodiment of modesty and shame related to their bodily perceptions in public (Hamid, Johansson, & Robenson, 2010; Walter, 2016). However, a gradual deconstruction of the fixity is observed between the private and the public, with the increasing number of women occupying those spaces from which they were previously barred. The seeds of consciousness of their rights among Pakistani women, their activism and increasing untraditional character can be traced back to the colonial experience, the struggle for independence, and through the various re/configurations of power including democracy, dictatorship and Islamization in the country, and the global war on terror (Saigol, 2016).

In each of these historical periods, women's activism for their rights continued to vacillate between being vigorous and moderate according to the contemporary power structures and political ideologies that envisioned the women's role according to their particular perspectives. Beginning from a couple of decades before the independence of Pakistan in 1947 and through the next three decades until General Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship (1977-1988), women increasingly gained a considerable voice in the public. "Active participation of large numbers of women in religious or national causes (in the pre-partition era), ultimately led to an awareness of women's own subjugation and stirred the desire for personal and political emancipation" (Saigol, 2016, p. 1). Islam is an important reality in Pakistan and cannot be ignored in any discourse, analysis, or activism related to the country (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). Though extremist religious ideology initiated during the Cold War era of Zia's regime kept flourishing on a parallel basis during the 1990s, the proliferation of NGOs working for women, the launching of internet services, and the increasing number of women getting higher education and entering the job market added a great deal to the empowerment of women. Pervez Musharraf's regime, from 1999 to 2008, focused on promoting a positive image of the country by supporting enlightenment, modernity, liberalism, and media in the country; he also enacted laws which provided some protection to women against suppression.

By 2017, there was greater interconnectivity between the local and the global through the availability of the latest internet technology and increas-

ing global migration of Pakistanis for education, business, tourism, etc. Literature on tabooed themes like sexuality was easily available in motion pictures through video films as a consequence of the VCR revolution of the 1980s and then through internet services from the 1990s onward. Zubair (2010) has found that magazine reading by a large majority of women in the country helps them reshape their identities. Though viewed as a propaganda, Pakistan was recorded as the highest porn-watching country on the internet in the world, which shows that Internet availability has produced a deep cultural effect (Vrabel, 2015; Lakhani, 2015). Zahra Haider (2016), in her article in *Vice* on her adventures in engaging in premarital sex in Pakistan, says, “I had engaged in sexual relations with almost a dozen people before coming to Canada for college in 2012” (Haider, 2016). Though later killed by her own brother in 2016 to save the family honor, Qandeel Baloch, a Pakistani model and social media sensation, claiming to assert her individuality, boldly pushed the local cultural and religious boundaries by uploading her boldly sensual images and videos on various social media websites, drawing mixed responses from the society. She was celebrated as well as criticised for her boldness during her life, and her murder was widely condemned by many in the country, with vigils held in Lahore and Karachi; a local private entertainment TV channel (Urdu 1) has recently (2017) aired a biopic film *Baaghi*, which means rebel, based on Baloch’s life. Raza (2016) reports about a Pakistani woman, Zenith Irfan, who defies the stereotypes by riding her bike 3200 km into the heart of Pakistan. Aged 20, inspired by her mother, she undertook the ride in the memory of her late father. Intended to challenge the male dominance of public spaces, women in Pakistan rode their bikes in a race organized by feminists as a response when a woman in Lahore was pushed off her bicycle by a group of men for not responding to catcalls (Sayeed, 2017). A constantly increasing number of media reports of love marriages in Pakistan (and violent resistance from the patriarchy), a growing number of women joining showbiz industry, surfing social media websites, and exercising sexuality in an untraditional way can be argued to be some of the obvious cultural effects of exposure to the liberty of the West.

The level of women’s awakening across Pakistan is, however, uneven and lacks uniformity between urban and rural areas. Even in urban settings (similarly in rural areas also), the gender and sexual identity of women after exposure to globalization lacks uniformity due to the varying nature of the

complex intersection of culture, caste, ethnicity, and class.

With the backdrop of the theoretical framework of performative identity and the continuously changing local realities regarding gender and sexual subjectivity in Pakistan as reflected in literary works and media reports, the following questions arise: Is the strong grip of religious and ethical values regarding gender and sexuality loosening? What patriarchal confining institutions are especially being defied? Is the displaced identity of women being accepted with pleasure or resistance? These are the issues, which suggest a gap in the existing literature in the context of Pakistan, and that triggered the idea of this study.

This study, therefore, seeks to analyse the transformation of Pakistani urban women who are only exposed to global cultures by means of globalization (including geographic and non-geographic movement) and who are influenced to redefine their sexuality and gender, through a textual analysis of the major female characters of the two of Hamid's novels. The study analyses how the modern Pakistani woman, embarked on her journey of self-fulfilment, defies the religio-culturally sacred institutions of wifhood and motherhood, finding them to be restrictive. The study also analyses if there is any resisting impact of the place (i.e., Pakistan) in the form of feelings of anxiety on the part of these displaced women who are seen freely enjoying sexual relationships even without wedlock and who indicate through their practices that masculinity is not just male-specific. All the major female characters living in urban areas in both the novels are analysed to understand the uneven transformations in their gender and sexual identity. This study also critically examines if the fictional characters with their increasingly transformed gender and sexual identities have any resemblance to the real social and cultural conditions of women in Pakistan. While examining the characters, this study has underscored the staunch belief of Pakistani society in religiously sacred institutions like motherhood and wifhood throughout its analysis.

Transformation of the Culturally Sacred Institutions

Moth smoke (2000), Hamid's debut novel, portrays young men and women indulged in liberal ways of life in Lahore while it also highlights the widening class and urban/rural division and growing global interconnectivity and cultural hybridity in Pakistan at the turn of the twenty-first century. *How*

to get filthy rich in rising Asia (2013), narrated in the second person *you* as it pretends to be a self-help book with its cynical chapter titles advising on how to become rich in a capitalist society, chronicles an unnamed boy and girl's rags-to-riches ascent in an urban locality of a country that certainly is Pakistan. Both of these novels delineate alluring young characters who reflect an ascending influence of global cultures in their lifestyles. The life events of Mumtaz Kashmiri and the pretty girl, the female protagonists of *Moth smoke* (2000) and *How to get filthy rich in rising Asia* (2013) respectively corroborate what Butler (1990, 1996) and Bhabha (1994) had noted about the performativity of identity in a specific temporal and spatial context shaped by complex intersections of class, caste, colour, religion, and location. Mumtaz represents the modern woman who is highly educated, has world-experience, discovers her abilities, and pursues self-fulfilment by defying the patriarchal roles supposed of her. Alongside the male characters in the play, she too gets time and space to speak about herself and explain her predicament in the society wherein she was fighting for self-discovery. Unconventionally bold, she herself drives to the home of her boyfriend (Daru) and that at midnight, walks fearlessly in the prostitution market of Lahore (Heera Mandi), frequently visits Daru at his home to have sex, takes the lead in sexual manoeuvres, wears his clothes, learns boxing, punches him in the mouth, smokes cigarettes and hash, earns money, leaves her husband and son, and writes for media about social issues—all characteristics normally ascribed to men in a patriarchal society. The restrictive patriarchal norms hold no substance to her. Though she does face the inner conflict of her attachment with her son (conflict of motherhood), this cannot stop her from the journey she has decided for herself. Her conduct emphatically does not conform to the dominant religio-cultural norms of reproduction and looking after her husband's offspring.

Once a New York resident and educated in American institutes, she introduces herself thus: "I'm Mumtaz Kashmiri" (Hamid, 2000, p. 147). Assertiveness, decisiveness, confidence, and power are very obvious from the diction and the pronoun she uses for her introduction. She prefers to be called Mumtaz Kashmiri (her original name) rather than Mumtaz Aurangzeb (her name after marriage). This preference of being called by her original name instead of the one that would indicate her as a wife of someone signifies her sense of self, freedom, independence, and her defiance to the entanglements of married life. The hard punch she lands on

Daru's mouth while learning to box is symbolically a violent attempt to knock down the traditionally proclaimed male superiority and negate the physical weakness supposedly attached to a woman. "I should have known that I am not the marrying sort [...] " (Hamid, 2000, p. 148) is something she utters while repenting her decision to enter the marital bond, which she did because till the time of her marriage she was under the influence of the patriarchal propaganda made by every "aunt, sister, cousin, friend, every woman from home" (Hamid, 2000, p. 148). Now, through self-discovery leading ultimately to self-fulfilment, she feels that she is not the sort that can be bound by such patriarchal bonds. Her psychological makeup and cultural lifestyle undergo such transformation while living in the USA, away from home (Pakistan where everyone believed in patriarchy so staunchly) that now the identity of an Eastern woman leading a life of a satisfied wife and mother looks alien to her. Her stay in America, her education from American institute, her association with those who have direct or indirect exposure of the West and modern urban environment contribute largely to make her conscious of her innate identity and of the oppressive social mechanisms around her. Therefore, she is unlike the other women in the novel because they have lesser/least exposure to Western culture and society. In contrast to the patience and silence of her mother to her father's brutal beatings, she refuses to listen to a single harsh word from her husband, Ozi; she would rather leave him to assert her independence and pursue what she genuinely likes to do.

Mumtaz exhibits much greater audacity and unconventionality that gradually keep growing through her process of awakening to self. The Western ideologies of self-dependence and individualism laying in her subconscious do not take that long to make her feel upset with domesticity and with her sacrifice for the *great* cause of taking care of her child and man. "Most mothers glow when they are pregnant. I sweated" (Hamid, 2000, p. 151). "I felt neglected, resentful at being the one left at home, when I hadn't wanted to have a baby in the first place. Things came to a head when Muazzam was six months old. I decided I wanted to work full-time again" (Hamid, 2000, p. 152). But, the patriarchal ideologies hit at her back by questioning if she actually loves her child. "[...] (Ozi) asked if I loved our son at all. The question destroyed me [...] Staying with my baby was the right thing to do, what everyone expected of me" (Hamid, 2000, p. 153). Even her mother, the patriarchal woman, agrees with Ozi regarding her

daughter's staying at home to nourish her child. Mumtaz, who is young (in her 20s), has the experience of Western culture and lives in urban setting, feels restricted and stifled by these social obligations and ultimately springs up in defiance.

Interestingly, the Pretty Girl too, in *How to get filthy rich in rising Asia* (2013), is young when she voluntarily subjects herself to the influence of Western culture by excessively watching movies and interacting with those who most likely have exposure to the Western culture. Deconstructing almost all the marginalizing, patriarchal, and divisive stereotypes related to sex/gender, Mumtaz and the Pretty Girl establish that they can be financially independent, make businesses, travel across borders alone, live with men without necessarily having a marital relationship, initiate and talk about sexual matters openly and can do virtually everything that a male can traditionally do. “[...] feeling new muscles growing in my back, wing muscles, the kind that mean you're learning to fly” (Hamid, 2000, p. 154). This is actually typical of Hamid's women living in urban settings and having exposure of the world through globalised means of communication and cultural productions. “This is me. Not an act but an identity” (Hamid, 2000, p. 154), Mumtaz exclaims. She can neither become the *perfect mother*, nor the *good wife* the way her own mother and mother-in-law had been (Hamid, 2000, p. 157). She encapsulates her heartfelt experience of transformation as following:

But a crack down my middle was splitting open, and I couldn't be just the good wife and mother anymore [...] I wanted to create a life [...] wings that had been growing for years stretched and pushed and I found myself flying [...] Child birth had hurt me inside, and I was finally starting to heal.” (Hamid, 2000, pp. 157-158)

The woman in Mumtaz that we see later is not the same that was before her self-discovery; she becomes free of all binding manoeuvres of patriarchy:

Sex was a revelation: being touched by another man, declaring my independence from the united state of marriage, remembering myself by being felt for the first time [...] the most liberating

experience I have ever had. (Hamid, 2000, p. 158)

Marriage, she finds, is binding; and sex outside wedlock is liberating as she can realise and materialise her own desires instead of feeling the obligation of pleasing her husband during sexual intercourse. A dramatic transformation of identity is noticed in the Pretty Girl after her frequent connections with the people of the advertisement industry and through watching movies:

She undresses you and lays you flat on the roof, and then she undresses herself [...] She mounts you and you lie still, your arms stiff at your sides. She rides you slowly [...] she stares into your face [...] she pulls off before you ejaculate and finishes you with her hand. After she has dressed herself, she says with a smile, 'I'm leaving'. (Hamid, 2013, p. 55)

After having sex on the roof of her home, the important thing in this sexual intercourse is that it is she who takes the lead in unclothing, in penetration and in riding her male partner, the male protagonist of the story—who's instead lying passively. She shows no shyness at all, normally expected of a *true woman*, she announces her freedom, leaves her familial/collectivistic life in pursuit of her dream of becoming a model and never returns to the same locality (the return would have been symbolic of her journey backwards to the conservative environment) even when she has got old. The more urban and advanced socio-economic environment she enters, the more liberal she becomes in her thinking and living. However, her ascendance to fortune and realization of her dreams is not devoid of exploitation by men who take her as a young female body that is sexually arousing. She is sexually exploited on the promise of giving her a chance to become a model girl. Her journey to assert her will is harsh, but once set on it she never stops.

The institutions of marriage and sacrificing one's individuality, especially on the part of a woman for the sake of her children, are amongst the most effective tools in the hands of patriarchy to limit her mobility and ensure her domesticity. But, these are the very institutions that Mumtaz and the Pretty Girl are seen to be defying. Mumtaz gets rid of wifeness and motherhood after having gone through the experiences, but the Pretty Girl sim-

ply does not let either of them impede her way while she lives her own life, pursuing her own goals till her death.

Both the women love to have sex without the marital bond, indicating their indifference to the Islamic tradition of *nikah* in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. They feel themselves to be misfits in the traditional patriarchal Pakistani society, and they dash the conventional stereotypical labels ascribed to their sexuality by asserting their individuality. Their frequent rejoicing in late-night dance parties held at the homes, hotels, and farmhouses of their friends from the upper class, flirting, dating, and cultivating sexual relationships and modelling for different brands in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad are evidences of the continuous Western influence on the lifestyles of the individuals of upper and middle classes in urban areas of the country. Libertinism seems to have been flourishing in these two social classes in the urban settings as an influence from the West. Women from the middle and upper classes, especially those living in urban areas, are more likely to redefine their sexuality and gender because of their greater access and exposure to the means by which globalization is communicated. Those living in rural areas, like the central character's sister in *How to get filthy rich*, have comparatively lesser and ineffective means of connectivity and virtually no exposure to globalised Western cultures. They, therefore, remain suppressed and even dislike the type of individuality seen on the part of the Pretty Girl and Mumtaz. This is nevertheless a fictionalized representation of the rustic Pakistanis living in rural area; there are many exceptions in real life today.

How to get filthy rich in rising Asia (2013) was produced by the author over a decade after *Moth smoke* (2000). During this period, the exposure to Western cultures intensified in Pakistan through different modes of globalization. As a result, the characters in *How to get filthy rich* are more individualistic than the ones in the earlier novel. The intensity of the inner conflict seen in Mumtaz as she is pulled in opposite directions by the traditional forces of patriarchy imbued with religious obligations and selfhood is not seen in the Pretty Girl, who quite comfortably and devotedly focuses on becoming a model girl. The Pretty Girl never marries (like Mumtaz after her self-discovery), thinking that she isn't the type men normally want as a wife. She enjoys sexuality but never even thinks of giving birth to children or serving a husband, quite in contrast to the traditional patriarchal and religiously obligatory roles of reproduction and submission. She is sole-

ly interested in following the path leading to her self-fulfilment rather than the path to wifehood or motherhood. She has established a business of her own, makes money not only for herself but gives employment to others as well. The exercise of her sexuality and gender overrides the common stereotypes of weakness, shyness, laziness, lesser intelligence, and irrationality traditionally ascribed to women, thus threatening the very foundational premises of patriarchy.

The wife of the protagonist of *How to get filthy rich*, feeling sexually dissatisfied with her husband, divorces him. Usually, in Pakistan, a woman divorcing her husband is not liked. A *good wife* in the country is not expected to exhibit her sexual desires; she is not supposed to unveil the sexual secrets of her husband. But in this case in the novel, a wife divorces her husband due to her unsatisfied sexual needs and then, later, remarries another person of her own choice. Again, quite contrary to the dominant culture, she comes to see her ex-husband in the hospital when the latter is admitted for a serious ailment.

Importantly, in both the novels, the central characters either experience failed marriages or do not opt for marriage at all throughout their lives. Equally important is the fact that motherhood cannot hinder these women from asserting their will once they decide to break free from their husbands and motherly restrictions to lead a life of their own choice. However, in the novels, this is not the case with those women who are living in rural areas or those who are older.

One will actually not find many women in Pakistan with the type of defiantly liberal lifestyle seen on the part of the female characters in the novels—however, it does not mean that liberal ideas and practices are not flourishing in the country; these are flourishing, but not collectively, rather in individual's private lives. The fictitious women were the product of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. During those times in the country's history there was an increasing trend/penetration of NGOs working for women's empowerment, more internet services, a private media revolution, an emphasis on promoting the country's soft image, the young generation migrating to the West for higher education and returning back after graduating, women entering the job market, love marriages, women divorcing their husbands, an increasing number of women in the parliament, and increasing legislation to protect women. Against this backdrop, the liberal lifestyles of Mumtaz and the Pretty Girl may not seem very

surprising. Other than the growing interconnectivity with the Western culture through means of globalization and mobility, reasons like feminist/women movements, education, and legislations also contributed substantially to women's awakening in Pakistan.

However, during the previous three decades, the influence of cultural exposure through globalization on the local social and cultural patterns of women's lifestyles was/is much more pervasive in its efficacy. Mumtaz and the Pretty Girl's prominence in their sexuality—extraordinarily greater than that of the Wife—can be ascribed to their greater exposure to Western culture and to their lesser acceptance of the local Islamic and traditional cultures. There are many in Pakistan who find such liberal females, either fictitious or real, unpalatable and term them non-practising Muslims or even deviants and prostitutes, with some radicals considering them as deserving of severe punishments for their correction. Since the country's inception but more acutely since Zia's era, Pakistani society has shown a growing schism between religious fundamentalists and liberalists. Pakistani media reported scattered incidents of punishments inflicted on women from radical religious elements in the tribal belt of Pakistan before the latest military operations in 2014 to cleanse the areas of Taliban. The type of patriarchal control that is observed in tribal, remote, and/or rural areas is not observed in metropolitan areas like Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore.

In these metropolitan areas in particular and the other urban areas in general, a liberal/Western lifestyle is fast permeating the upper classes, transforming the traditional gender and sexual identities. The state policies that have emerged since the last two decades have also shown a growing tendency to provide greater rights to women. The religiously fundamentalist political parties have never gained majority in any general elections to form the central government in the country. Only once, in 2002, did they succeed in forming a provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through an alliance among them. *Madrassahs* are coming under increasing regulations by the government in the post 9/11 era. The initially developing consciousness of women regarding their rights during the colonial era and the post-independence political situations in the country got a tremendous boost by global interconnectivity through means of globalization in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Hamid's silence, in the novels, on the wider social reactions to his rebellious females, however, is striking; the small social circles in which the characters are found show a considerable

amount of acceptance to them without many signs of disturbance. Mumtaz and the Pretty Girl tear down the perceived image of Pakistani society as a closed one with its women veiled and locked inside homes; they present a modern Pakistani society that is connecting with as well as opening up to global cultural developments, resulting in its women having an evolving consciousness of individuality.

Conclusion

Through their unconventionality and unusual audacity, the modern women in Hamid's novels refute the ideologically divisive discourse of patriarchy regarding sex and gender. Decrying the importance of patriarchal institutions in the way of self-fulfillment, they redefine themselves in the context of cultural interactions facilitated by the global means that help them discover their own identities, thus confirming Bhabha's and Butler's concepts of performativity and non-fixity of culture and gender. To assert their will in a social scenario wherein the media present almost daily reports about cases of honor killing, acid victims, forced marriages, and several other such brutally oppressive norms of patriarchy—the women in fiction as well as in real life are silently gearing up to take a giant leap to bring about a socio-cultural paradigm shift. Although this shift is largely limited to the middle and upper classes of women living in urban areas, a rising call from Pakistani civil society to enact legislation to punish perpetrators of honor killings and torture against women are signs of a changing mindset towards this brutal patriarchal thinking and behavior. The traditional practice of arranged marriages seems to be gradually losing its significance among the younger generations.

Although the stage of such a drastic cultural transformation in contemporary Pakistan is not comprehensively set, the voices like Hamid's novels under study are prophetic voices in the prevailing socio-cultural conditions of Pakistan. Patriarchy, nonetheless, still enjoys its upper hand in the realm of moral regulatory norms. At the same time, however, patriarchy is being frequently challenged and threatened by overarching and inevitable Western cultural and technological influences. This threat to patriarchy is still patchy and fragmented and has yet to take the form of a sweeping cultural transformation. However, given the growing intensity of cultural interactions, this cultural change, limited so far to the individuals' private

lives, will not take long to develop into a full-scale cultural transformation. The findings of this paper would have been further corroborated, had any reliable data been available about the growing number of females entering the entertainment business, having love marriages, suffering honor-killings, using social media, watching/reading entertainment media and breaking the traditional gender and sexual norms every year in metropolitan, urban, and rural areas of Pakistan.

It is highly recommended for the future researchers in this area to identify the signs of cultural fluidity regarding female gender and sexuality in the country. This study has identified that there is a great scope of work in the areas of (literary) feminist geography, gender and mobility, gender and locality and female sexuality in Pakistani context. It has attempted to initiate a scholarly discourse on fluidity of female sexuality and gender in the Pakistani society that is increasingly connecting with global cultures.

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