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RESEARCH PAPER

Secular and Religious Humanism in Selected Pakistani English Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Pakistani English fiction has since long been representing the dominant and peripheral currents of Pakistani society. With this background in view the main objective of this research is to investigate the presence of secular and religious humanism in selected Pakistani English fiction. Secularity and religiosity both appear to have coexisted here and this trend has not stopped yet. Some Pakistani writings which reflect secular and religious humanism include *Ice – Candy – Man*, *Meatless Days*, *Moth Smoke*, *Holy Woman*, *The Geometry of God*, and *Home Boy*. Narrative and thematic analysis is used for this research. The study finds that the scope of these two competing isms, because of national and international affairs, has been on the rise despite their progressive and regressive roles. It recommends that humanism in any of its forms, especially secular and religious, needs to be cautiously embedded in literary productions as both may have far reaching consequences for societal make up at home or abroad.

Keywords: Fiction, Humanism, Pakistani Fiction, Religious Humanism, Secular Humanism

Introduction

Fiction appears to be a vital part of the literary culture of any society with a wide-ranging approach towards its existential issues covering and depicting the past, present and the future of the places and times they come out from. Its significance can be realized through the persuasive approach that is embodied in the argument "What we call 'life' is just a necessary fiction" (Eagleton, 2007, p. 9). This analogy does not seem so bizarre when a comparison is drawn between life and fiction because of the structural make up of their events. But there is more to it than meets the eye as fiction is considered "far richer in its representations of embodied life and existential ambiguity than theories of fiction have yet managed to account for" (Morey, 1992/2009, p. 8). This richness may be imparted to the genre through various factors but significantly through the artistic qualities that the writing activity reflects through the pen of the writers who assemble and disassemble the events of life to organize them anew and afresh before their portrayal. In yet another sense, fiction "suggests a cultural reality that has been 'humanly produced' and 'culturally organized' (as cultures invariably must be!) and that is hence not the same in all cultures" (Plummer, 2001, p. 192). A related view is that "Fiction is born out of the society in which it lives and thrives" (Ahmed, 2009, p. 90).

Pakistani society too has produced good fictional stuff and the process seems to have been expedited over the years. The statement that "In Pakistan, one is accustomed to seeing a handful of the usual names tossed around (namely Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohsin Hamid and Kamila Shamsie, among others) when talking about English fiction written by local authors" (Imtiaz, 2010) seems true and is substantiated by the account of Chambers (2011) who says that the way Mohsin Hamid, Hanif Kureishi, Kamila Shamsie, Daniyal Mueenuddin and Nadeem Aslam has been given attention on the Pakistani literary academy that has led to the

neglect of those writers who are relatively less known. But Chambers further adds that these lesser known too are great writers and they include Moni Mohsin, Sara Suleri Goodyear and Sorayya Khan.

It is however important to point out that the fiction here is also familiar with many other writers than those mentioned by Imtiaz and Chambers. One thing is but unsurprising that Pakistani English fiction also represents the qualities contained in the very word 'fiction' itself. It is maintained that "Pakistani English novelists are representing different dimensions of Pakistani life, culture, politics and society" (Kharal, 2008, p. 52). The representational view of the Pakistani English writings along with its historical aspect is documented by Riaz (2014) who believes that Pakistani English literature should not be taken casually as it has been developed fully and is independent. Before the freedom movement of the country could reach at its peak, the literature of this land had started emerging in 1940s. This is the reason that in the earliest writings one can discern the traces of rebellion, quests for identity, and struggle for a separate homeland and the names associated with such writings include Ahmad Ali, Shahnawaz and Shahid Soharwardi.

The themes that the fictions of different places or countries portray may give the impression of sameness in particular times of their histories. A discerning eye can, however, observe the differences even within such thematic resemblances or similarities. It is because of the fact that imaginations are not always the same even if they be of the same times and places, and importantly even if they be from the same author (s). Debating the Pakistani fiction, it is recorded, that "according to Fazli, English Pakistani fiction doesn't just challenge foreign imagination about Pakistan; it challenges the local imagination too, by questioning the dominant narratives" (Asif, 2013). This shows that writing(s) serve(s) different purposes at home and abroad. Further, whenever there is a talk of fiction, the question of its quality definitely comes to one's mind, so it is believed "the quality of Pakistani fiction writers writing in English is very good and Pakistani literature is now coming to its own" (Salman, 2013). Similarly, it is opined

THE Pakistani novel in English occupies a space of contestation and confusion. There are those that believe that it must be a response to global articulations of Pakistan. Others insist that it must be a defence of a culture and context widely misunderstood (Zakaria, 2014).

The tradition of writing Fiction in English language has been strengthening here in Pakistan and the subjects undertaken herein are appealing for national and international readers. The secular and religious humanisms have, however, been the significant subjects portrayed in the novels here with varying degrees and shades in the whole corpus of Pakistani writings. The reasons, if attempted to be located behind this trend, would turn out to be multifarious and the chief amongst them might appear to be the geo-political conditions of the times, both indigenous and foreign, that Pakistan has been through in different periods of its history. Religion, however, before and after the partition had a significant role in the political and social affairs of the society and its influence has been on the rise and this has also always been counterproductive. Secularity, hence, appears to be its natural outcome. It is thus maintained

Pakistani English literature shares with other South Asian English literatures a regional dynamic as well as a long colonial history, but the Pakistani imagination is also linked to the wider Islamic world. This multi-layered heritage is embodied by Pakistan's geography: a long contiguous territory alongside the river Indus, with Afghanistan and Iran to its west and India to its east (Shamsie, 2011, p. 119).

Another important aspect of the description of the secularity and religiosity in (Pakistani) fiction may be attributed to the writers' own secular or religious inclinations or their brought up under such circumstances. For example, it is observed

Many significant Pakistani and Arab writers are secular, agnostic, atheists, or (like Pakistani- US novelist Bapsi Sidhwa, Pakistani-British poets Moniza Alvi, John Siddique, and the late Middle Eastern thinkers Edward W. Said and Mai Ghoussoub) were not brought up as Muslims or come from other religious communities. They all have in common, though, a Muslim civilizational heritage (Chambers, 2011, p. 124).

If Islam plays an important role in the identity formation of the non-Muslims who happen to live in Muslim societies than by the same token other religions or mixtures of religions or religious teachings also exert influence on the identity of the Muslims who live in non-Islamic environments or worlds. It suggests that there is a continuous give and take amongst, especially in the growing global social set up, religious communities unless and until there are elements of fundamentality which might prevent the infusion of cultures, ideas, etc.

Materials and Methods

Broadly speaking, this is a narrative analysis which is narrowed down to thematic analysis. Although illusive, the term narrative has diversified meanings, but is synonymously used with story. "Narrative analysis refers to a family of analytic methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form" (Given, 2008, p. 539). Oral, written and visual texts may be interpreted through this analysis. Various forms of narrative analysis may include: "thematic, structural, dialogic-performative, and visual narrative analysis" (Given, 2008, p. 539). "Thematic analysis is a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set" (Given, 2008, p. 867). It is a descriptive strategy which searches for patterns and their description and the overarching designs which unite them. It is belived that "throughout the analysis, the investigator considers the relevance of each theme to the research question and to the data set as a whole" (Given, 2008, p. 868) and the relationship among categories is then considered by the investigator. As regards the product of a thematic analysis, it includes "both the important concepts and processes identified in the study and the overarching patterns of experience by which those concepts and processes are manifested" (Given, 2008, p. 868). Thematic analysis remains descriptive, primarily.

Humanism

Humanism is though considered to be "a system of thought concerned with human affairs in general" (Kataria, 2205, p. 622), yet it is not a homogeneous term and has shaped over the years into different forms and kinds as is evident from the views of Vaughn (2003) that from being an educational program and outlook of life, it has transformed itself into various artistic and literary movements with a greater focus on the mankind instead of religion, and that it can be found in the movements that are centered around human beings in different societies and cultures. With such a vast appeal for the humanity it has acquired different intellectual and philosophical forms like secular humanism, scientific humanism, naturalistic humanism and religious humanism.

Similarly, for Lamont (1997) there are many kinds of humanism which include 'Renaissance Humanism,' 'Academic Humanism,' 'Catholic or Integral Humanism,' 'Naturalistic Humanism,' 'Religious Humanism,' 'Secular Humanism,' 'Modern Humanism,' and 'Marxist Humanism'. Likewise, there prevails another significant view that "Humanism, like theism, has taken different forms, depending on how the idea of "man" or "humanity" was conceived. Humanism in its various types (scientific, secular, religious) presents different outlooks and orientations on life" (Klemm & Schweiker, 2008, p, 13).

On the other hand, humanism for Murphy (2011) is not monistic but it consists of different ideological sets like religious, secular, existential, and Marxist and these ideologies are woven around the common themes like reason and freedom. Similarly, the diversity that the term has acquired can be reflected in the following lines:

Humanism has figured in a wide range of religious, political and academic movements. As such it has been identified with atheism, capitalism, classicism, communism, democracy, egalitarianism, populism, nationalism, positivism, pragmatism, relativism, science, scientism, socialism, statism, symbolic interactionism, and supernaturalism, including versions of ancient paganisms, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Mohammedanism (Lee, 1978: 44, 45).

Secular Humanism

The secular humanism is not a new phenomenon and seems to have existed side by side its religious other. The secular humanism, according to one source, is considered to be "humanism viewed as a system of values and beliefs that are opposed to the values and beliefs of traditional religions" (Merriam Webster online dictionary, n.d.). And according to another opinion it is "alternative to religious belief" (Norman, 2004, p. 14). Likewise, it is opined that "secular humanism aims to liberate humanity from the tyranny of religious absurdity in order to actualize goods that constitute true ideals for humanity" (Klemm and Schweiker, 2008, p. 156). In yet another broader aspect, it is believed that the secular humanismnames a general tendency toward cultural forms. It defines education, art, politics, literature, economics, etc. in such a way that they owe nothing to religion and cannot, in principle, disclose experiences of religious transcendence . . . Secular humanism is committed to solving human problems in practical ways, to moral principles, to constitutional democracy and protection of the rights of all minorities, and to the maximization of human potential. Redemption is *from* religion and *for* the world (Klemm & Schweiker, 2008, p. 157).

Whether the religious other, its alternative, its functional equivalent, the secular humanism is not a religion as a religion is associated with heaven, something divine, or God. But it seems to be a religion in its own right and manner where liberties of the 'self-reasoning' run supreme and are loved over every other thing including God, though religious God is displaced from the secular world.

Religious Humanism

If secular humanism is the absence of religion from the public domain than by the same principle the religious humanism would be the absence of secularity or secularism from the public domain. One thing is but manifest that both these isms are opposed to each other. The secular notion privileges human rationality only, and considers it the sole governing principle of human life, whereas the religiosity also gives importance to rationality but it considers transcendence and spirituality in any of its shape as a vital element of human life. Both the isms seem to be two mind sets in relation to religion. For the secular minds, "religion is an unnatural imposition on human nature which should be dispensed with," and for the religious minded people the "religion is an intrinsic part of human nature and can no more be expunged from that nature than sexual desire or the need for society" (Evans, 1999, p. 6). Similarly, Evans (1999) also believes that such a humanism which is devoid of the concepts and forms of religion is considered as dry by the religious humanists and the opposite view that prevails amongst the secular humanists is that life would be better without the religious conceots and forms.

And exclusively, the religious humanism for Jakelic (2014) is threefold. Firstly, it is the thought of humanity before God, and secondly, the worth and sanctity of human life is what it takes into account. Thirdly, it is comprehended in terms of moral responsibility that people owe towards the God's creatures. The idea of humanity before God and responsibility toward other God's creatures are such good religious ideas which might put the excessive use of human rationality in control, but they seem to be rarely observed and practiced. The religious humanism is also known as theological humanism which according to Klemm (2007) is a belief system that human beings are prone to mistakes, are free in modest measures, and are quite capable of changing. So the human beings can be guided by the principles which are normative and religious and their activities could be integrated for attaining personal wholeness and the social coherence. Since the integrity of life is considered to be the symbol of God's being so the theological humanism primarily focuses on that. Besides, this ism has the capacity to bring together the opposite forces and convert them into complex unities.

The freedom in 'modest measure,' 'personal wholeness,' and 'social coherence' are the attributes of religion which keep the society intact. This type of humanism also has the potential to identify the threats posed to the society. Klemm (2007), therefore, identifies two major threats that are posed to human existence today. Overhumanization is the first major threat which results from the exercise of freedom that is aimless in nature. Overhumanization is produced when humanism separates itself from theology and tries to inhabit itself in a space that is universalized and nihilistic. In overhumanization there is no constraint of a higher degree on the individual so there is no acknowledgment of the symbol of God and no divinely inspired activity with which the human activities could be guided and measured. This may result from a wild critique of the religion. The second threat that Klemm (2007) identifies is hypertheism which results from a freedom that places itself under certain specific interpretations of divinely inspired laws and by this virtue forgetting the fact that divine laws are mediated by human wills. Though hypertheism shows the commitment to follow God's will in every aspect of life but in the process some specific symbol of God is idolized and is confused with a universal reality. So, hyper theistic people start taking the symbol as a reality. Hypertheism is so much obsessed with God and His will that the critical thought denied its role. It does not allow that the sacred texts and beliefs come under scrutiny. There is a conclusive and security specific desire in hypertheism. It is noted that the chosen sacred language and specially selected religious communities are preferred over others as a refuge from the outside world. The essence of hypertheism is that there is a desire to live according to the details provided by God but at the same time a localized idea of God is upheld. In the presence of these two dominant threats the population is divided into zealots of secular and religious class and Klemm believes that despite the obvious differences the workings of the two are directed towards undignified ends. The freedom in the act is turned into silence and God is presented as supernatural hyperbeing whose laws obstruct the freedom of human beings. These are the two extremes, no doubt. But Overhumanization can be hyper theistic and hypertheism can also be over humanized. Both the extremes are found in societies but life of the majority of the people is lived in between the two. The conflict between the two may also give birth to a mixture of both with the balance tilting towards either end. The religious humanism, with respect to this research, is related with Islam and its teachings which sets standards of living. The characters of different novels chosen for this study are thus seen and analyzed from Islamic religious perspective.

Discussion on Secular and Religious Humanism in Pakistani Novels

Some Pakistani novels wherein one could find the secularity and religiosity expressed and discussed include *Ice – Candy – Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa (1988), *Meatless Days* by Sara Suleri (1989), *Moth Smoke* by Mohsin Hamid (2000), *Holy Woman* by Qaisra Sharaz

(2001), *The Geometry of God* by Uzma Aslam Khan (2008), and *Home Boy* by H.M.Naqvi (2010).

The *Ice – Candy - Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa is a novel that is expressive of secular and religious humanism. It highlights the challenges posed to the humanity in the name of religion, in times of wars, as it divides people into religious groups instead of uniting them and that it fans biases which result in bloodshed on a wide scale amongst other problems. The ideas that "secular humanism is strongly against all types of sectarian, religious, racial, and language based biases and prejudices, as these prejudices create unnecessary and baseless differences among the human beings" (Kharal, 2008, p. 74) can be seen reflected, for example, in chapter five of the text wherein the Parsees gather in their temple and fear for their future in the event of the division of India. Their apprehensions are recorded in the lines "As long as we do not interfere we have nothing to fear! As long as we respect the customs of the rulers – as we always have – we'll be all right!," and that "'As long as we conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present no threat to anybody, we will prosper right here'" (Sidhwa, 1988, p. 39 & 40). The interference, in the novel, in others affairs is seen to be religious as well politically motivated for power as Col. Bharucha maintains "'Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power: and if you jokers jump into the middle you'll be mangled into chutney!'" (Sidhwa, 1988, p. 36). The principle of non-interference in the affairs of others is both secularly and religiously motivated as the pre-partition affairs of the subcontinent reveal. The non-interference thus seems to be a commonality that the secular and religious sides of humanity share.

Another example of the secular humanism can be observed in chapter seven. The scene is set at Pir Pindo where the people of different religions have gathered together to discuss the riots that have been spreading in the country and they fear that such events may not erupt in their village. The gathering is to protect each other and show solidarity. The Sikh *granthi* says "Muslim or Sikh, we are basically Jats. We are brothers. How can we fight each other?," and Jagjeet Singh also expresses similar feelings towards Muslims when he says "'If needs be, we'll protect our Muslim brothers with our lives!," and the Muslims respond with the same spirit when their representative says that "'I am prepared to take an oath on the Holy Koran,' declares the Chaudhry, 'that every man in this village will guard his Sikh brothers with no regard for his own life" (Sidhwa, 1988, p. 56, 57).

Some examples of religious humanism can be found in chapter thirteen of the novel wherein we find the strength of the beliefs and the observance of rituals and rites that people of different religions share and possess. When the news is shared that Mr. Rogers, the Inspector General of Police is dead in the riots, and his body is found in a gutter, Mini Aunty remarks "All Englishmen will burn in hell for the trouble they've started in the Punjab! And let me tell you. The Christian hell is forever!'" (Sidhwa, 1988, p. 112). The same concept of hell is also found in Islam where the sinners are said to suffer forever. Similarly, when Godmother describes what happens in *Dungarwadi* to Lenny we come to know what Parsees do with their dead bodies. "'The dead body is put inside the *Dungarwadi*,' explains Godmother. 'The vultures pick it clean and the sun dries put the bones,'" and that "It's only the body that's dead. Instead of polluting the earth by burying it . . . we feed God's creatures. The soul is in the heaven, chatting with God in any case . . . or boiling in hell" (Sidhwa, 1988, p, 113, 114). The concepts of the death of the body and the life of the soul are also found in Islam as well Christianity. Seeking help from God in times of troubles is customary in almost every religion and one finds the same described in chapter twenty two of the text when Lenny comes to know that their mothers have been secretly transporting petrol in cans and the fear grips her soul at the idea of their possible arrests. In order to deflect this danger she immediately covers her head with a scarf (as it is an obligatory practice amongst Muslim women) as a symbol of obedience towards Allah and recites His 101 names and begs Him earnestly, for it is He who can do anything, for the safety of those women who are out.

Meatless Days by Sara Suleri (1989) is another fictional work – though autobiographical in nature – which describes secular and religious humanisms at work with the later being criticized in a mild manner which is expressed through the mouth of different characters. The time of the publication of the novel is significant in that hardly a few years ago the president of Pakistan "General Zulu was presiding over the Islamization of Pakistan" (Suleri, 1989, p. 17). But despite the Islamization of the country there were writers like Suleri who were trying, either consciously or unconsciously, to present the distorted face of this religion, for example, one of the two Eids that Muslims annually celebrate is described thus:

One such occasion was the Muslim festival called Eid . . . the second Eid, which celebrates the seductions of the Abraham story in a remarkable literal way. In Pakistan, at least, people buy sheep or goats beforehand and fatten them up for weeks with delectables. Then, on the appointed day, the animals are chopped, in place of sons, and neighbors graciously exchange silver trays heaped with raw and quivering meat. Following Eid prayers the men come home, and the animal is killed, and shortly thereafter rush out of the kitchen steaming plates of grilled lung and liver, of a freshness quite superlative (Suleri, 1989, p. 4).

The criticism of Islamic ritual by Suleri, it is opined, but serves a purpose “True that she has criticised Islam, and some of us will not agree with her views, but she has turned veiling, praying, courtyard, mosque, and shab-e-meraj turned into powerful literary symbols” (Talaat & Ghani, 2004, p. 12). As the story develops further, one learns that Dadi is immolated so severely that erstwhile a regular prayer maker she forgets offering them. The incident influences her son so greatly that he – a non-praying man before – turns to regular praying and the sudden change takes his children aback. Suleri thus recounts that one afternoon when she comes home and looks for the father in all the places where he could usually be found, she fails in her endeavors. With a raised curiosity in her mind she meets her sister Tillat and enquires about the father. Tillat reveals that Papa is praying and the father's act of praying astonishes and embarrasses Suleri. Both the sisters however consider it wise to ignore the dramatic shift in the attitude of the father. Suleri's astonishment is partly because of the reason that she does not expect her father to be a religious person, and partly also because she along with others believes that Islam has departed from Pakistan. But to her dismay the same Islam enters into the soul of her father. Suleri's amazement at her father's religiosity seems to be the result of the child's perception that religion meant only for Dadi and that non-religious father would always remain non-religious. But Suleri does not seem to be the ordinary child in the family as she seems to be closely attentive to events both inside and outside the home. Suleri thus appears to have born a Muslim but is not educated to be a Muslim neither by Dadi nor by her father. She is thus brought up in an environment which is both religious and irreligious.

The novelist also seems ridiculing mosque – a symbol of Muslims' place of worship, known also as the house of Allah – "it would be refreshing to live in a house that was shaped like a mosque, basing its center on empty space, with a long kitchen where the imam should pray," she also feels repugnant to the idea of his father, when after their mother's death, he implores his daughters ""Take me to a *masjid*," . . . "just let me live like a holy man," and Suleri says "Now this was preposterous, even for Papa, and tried the patience of his otherwise good-humored children" (Suleri, 1989, p. 80).

Moth Smoke by Mohsin Hamid (2000) – his first novel – is a tale of Pakistani Muslim society based in Lahore that is divided into classes lead by the elites who represent secularity as is evident by the excessive liberties they enjoy daily with no role of religion in their lives. Religion or religious class is scantly mentioned, but for amusement only. It is, however, conspicuous by its absence which is the hallmark of secularized writings and life. One comes to know about the presence of two social classes in a Provincial Seminar on Social Classes in the country. It is Professor Superb who speaks about these classes for whom the

first class is that of masses which is larger but is deprived of the basic amenities of life so there is no question of their enjoying a luxurious life. The second class is that of elites who are though smaller in number but they control the environment and the important resources of the country and they ridicule the rest of the people "They're mixed lot – Punjabis and Pathans, Sindhis and Baluchis, smugglers, mullahs, soldiers, industrialists – united by their residence in an artificially cooled world" (Hamid, 2001, p. 102, 103).

Uzi and Mumtaz – husband and wife – belong to the elite section of the society and Daru, their family friend – represents the lower class. The secular life style of the elites is shown in the very start of the novel when Mumtaz kisses Daru – a male family friend – on the cheek in the presence of her husband which she is not religiously allowed to do and Daru is also religiously bound to repel such advances by a woman who is not married to him. The secularly frank atmosphere of the family wherein liquor – strictly forbidden in Islam – is described

Mumtaz pulls an unopened bottle of Black Label out of a cabinet. My bootlegger tells me Blacks are going for four thousand apiece these days. I stick to McDowell's, smuggled in from India and, at eight-fifty, priced for those of us who make an honest living (Hamid, 2001, p. 13).

And there is yet another scene which bespeaks of the secularized environment of the country when Daru has a confrontation with police on a check post where his car is searched for transportation of unlawful thing. But nothing suspicious is discovered from the car except that Daru is found drunk as a cop victoriously announces it to his fellow sergeants that "he's smelled the booze. He has," and thus a confessional statement is sought from Daru as another cop questions him thus: "Have you been drinking?" he asks," and the reply comes that "What sort of question is that? I'm a good Muslim . . . "Let's take this good Muslim back to the station," one says" (Hamid, 2001, p. 17), and Daru is even reminded of the penalty for drinking. Laws both religious and secular are broken but bribe works.

The scene at Heera Mandi where the madam of a brothel is interviewed also throws light on the secular life style of the feudal lords who use little girls for satisfying their lusts and the poor girls, like Dilaram, land into prostitution business. Dilaram tells Mumtaz that how as a young girl "The landlord of our area asked me to come to his house. I refused, so he threatened to kill my family. When I went, he raped me" (Hamid, 2001, p. 50), and then his sons and his friends and she got pregnant but that was not the end of her sufferings as she still had to undergo through the ordeals of abortion at the hands of a hakim in Lahore. She was sold for fifty rupees and the landlords friend, she narrates, "brought me to Heera Mandi and made me have sex with men until he had his fifty rupees," (Hamid, 2001, p. 50) even then he did not let her go to her village on the pretext that since she had now lost her honor so she would not be accepted back in the society by the villagers. Fearful of the consequences and the circulation of the gory tales of the ladies like Dilaram being killed by their fathers and brothers keeps trapping Dilaram into the prostitution business. She thus says that "I worked for many years, until I was no longer young and had few clients" (Hamid, 2001, p. 51).

Dilaram's story is the story of a forced rape that ended into a business but Mumtaz – her interviewer – willingly offers herself to be raped by her husband's friend Daru. Mumtaz is wealthy but needs affection and love. Daru is poor, is in need of wealth as well as affection and love. Ozi's busy life makes Mumtaz search for a caring person and she finds it easily in the shape of Daru. One night she comes disturbed to Daru's house when Ozi is out of the town. Both smoke hashish (a forbidden act in Islam) in the open air at the roof of Daru's house and under the influence of intoxication they touch each other lovingly and enjoy the pleasures of the flesh. They are so much absorbed into each other that Mumtaz starts shivering. Daru describes the scene in this manner "She takes a condom out of her handbag,

one hand stroking my throat. Then we make love, as my eyes follow the curve of her body above me" (Hamid, 2001, p. 146).

The Holy Woman by Qaisra Sharaz (2001) – her maiden novel – is the story of two families of rural and urban backgrounds where one finds religious and secular humanisms displayed variously. For example

The novel offers an excellent insight into the complex interface between long-standing village traditions, family relationships, and Islamic customs, with an original perspective on the confrontation between old and new, male and female, the East and the West, liberalism and conservativeness (Kharal, 2008, p. 75).

Another comment on the novel tells us about its religious face

Shahraz has touched upon the religion and the religious practices in the most subtle way. She has brought out the irony in the most tactful manner. She has highlighted the laws of Islam and their distortions in the name of Islam. She has laid bare the practices of the Muslim community where the spirit of Islam is being crushed under the burden of traditions (Shervani, n.d. p. 3).

Zarri Bano – the 28 years old protagonist of the novel with post graduate education in Psychology – belongs to a family where religion, secularity and traditions are interfused complexly into each other. While on a visit to a Mela (a village festival) the young lady casually wears a chiffon dupata draping around her shoulders to render her walk bareheaded. On sighting this, Jafar, her younger brother, reminds her about the Islamic as well as traditional culture with a polite request, "Dear sister, I wish you make sure that your scarf manages to stay in place on your head when you are outside in a public place" (Shahraz, 2002, p. 13), but at the same time one notices that Zarri has "lived alone in Karachi in a hostel . . .while she was studying at a University" (Shahraz, 2002, p. 36). And, when the liberally educated Zarri Bano goes to visit the family of her boy friend and stays there, the reaction of her grandfather – Siraj Din - is noteworthy as he is quite annoyed at the protagonist's mother. The annoyance is thus described: "Are you telling me, Shahzada, that my young unmarried granddaughter has gone to stay all alone, in a strange family's home and is in the company of a single young man" (Sharaz, 2002, p. 35). Shazada speaks in support of her daughter and tries to convince her father-in-law that "I think it is good for her to know Sikandar and his family before she marries him," and the response that comes is worth reading "And that means staying in the same house, does it? Spending time with a young man – two people with no blood or any other legitimate ties between them? Since when did we become so immoral?" (Shahraz, 2002, p. 36).

Siraj Din appears to be a spokesman of the dying values, both religious and traditional, so deviation from these within his own family and by his own blood relations is a matter of great disturbance for him. He also seems grieved on the rising secularity that has made inroads into his family. While talking to Shahzada he laments over his fast obsoleteness in a world that has rapidly been changing. He believes that the Western values through a variety of sources have been invading them and it is unfortunate that they have "become so outrageously "advanced", so morally corrupt that we let our beautiful young unmarried daughters stay in strange people's houses un-chaperoned" (Shahraz, 2002, p. 36, 37). Further, he highlights the importance of protecting their land as well as individuals, especially women from the foreign cultural invasion.

Running parallel to the religious zeal in the family are the traditional values which have a firm grip on Zarri's family. The novelist thus makes her readers laugh at the sham morality and the honor that the traditional feudal lords uphold, when they read that Zarri is made 'Shahzadi Ibadat' or a 'holy woman' - a woman who is married off to Holy Quran so

that property cannot bequeath, or to save one's honor. The decision makes Shahzada furious and she comes to defend her daughter but has to face the wrath of her husband Habib Khan who asserts that "I will divorce you on the spot if you rebel against us" (Shahraz, 2002, p. 67), but the mother stands by her daughter's side and is willing to be divorced in protest against the cruelty being unleashed on her daughter, she says "You can divorce me! There will be nothing left between us" (Shahraz, 2002, p. 68) and even Zarri's sister Ruby declares rebellion against the ages old cruel custom of the clan and utters "I will not let this happen! . . . this is insane . . . To have my sister enveloped in burka, covering her from head to toe" (Shahraz, 2002, p. 83). Even Zarri too raises her voice against her father's decision and tells him in his face that "This is madness. Father, you cannot be serious . . . I have accepted Sikandar Sahib's marriage proposal" (Shahraz, 2002, p. 38), and what Habib Khan replies is shocking as it has sexual connotations, he says "what you are trying to say is that you want a man in your life" (Shahraz, 2002, p. 85).

The Geometry of God by Uzma Aslam Khan (2008) depicts also the secular and religious aspects of humanism which are firstly suggested in its contents before one reads the book. The contents include Gateway the First: The World, Gateway the Second: The Man, Gateway the Third: The Word, Gateway the Fourth: The Love and Gateway the Fifth: The Afterlife. There are plenty of references from Quran which are presented in support of faith and are challenged by reason. The followers of faith are known as Creationists while the followers of reason are called Evolutionists. Through these divisions the writer attempts to show that both are dependent on each other despite the apparent differences that characterize them each. Indirectly, she refers to the diffusion and dissolution of the boundaries between the two.

Amal is the first narrator in the novel whose Nana (the maternal grandfather) – a person of religious mind – discusses with her the intellect and the argument proceeds thus:

"He begins, 'Of the two kinds of intellects –'
'What's intellect?'
'Well, intelligence. Aql.' I nod. '*Aql nazari*. A talent for imagining. And *aql amali*. A talent for doing. A person with this talent can plant his ideas in the world" (Khan, 2008, p. 5).

Amal's father, known with its Urdu equivalent Aba in the novel, gets angry over her Nana when Amal starts learning the Urdu alphabets. She narrates:

I learned the first letter alif is for Allah. Nana said alif is for aql. Aba shouted, 'Allah comes before intelligence! You are teaching her to put herself before Him! She will first use alif for Allah then for aql. . . Nana always meant the joke to be on him: aql begins with the twenty-fourth letter of the alphabet, ayin (Khan, 2008, p. 6).

Discussing the theory of evolution are present Nana, his friend Junayd and others.
"Junayd, loudly: 'These are *divine* laws. You cannot corrupt them!' Nana, louder: 'If they are divine, how can man know them, and worse, enforce them? He will naturally bend them to his will the way you shape trees!'" (Khan, 2008, p. 13).

In the Gateway the Second a seminar in a hotel is organized by the Creationist party where people from different strata of society have gathered and Amal's Aba is a participant and a speaker. While addressing a huge audience he asserts that "'The young Pakistani is a cultural freak . . . His religion is whimsy. He has no concept of Al Sirat al Mustaqim, the straight path . . . He is a split. A small wind pulls him" (Khan, 2008, p. 75). Noman, Amal's brother accompanies Aba to the seminars held around the world. On his one such visit to Bangladesh one reads that Aba's own son is not a true Muslim – the one Aba has been

envisioning to be found around the world, chiefly in Pakistan. Noman narrates “Everything's imported, the labourers and the food, wheels and tarmac. Even the bottle opener a Bangladeshi bartender struggles with the night I tiptoe down to the bar, as Aba sleeps. I sip Mexican beer . . .” (Khan, 2008, p. 100, 101).

In Gateway the Third: The Word. Mehwish is the narrator of this part of the story. She describes a game being played indoors when she accidently picks Quran. She says:

I pick the heavy book on the top shelf. Baba says to put it back unless I am clean. It must be the Quran. I am not supposed to touch the Quran if I am 'bleeding' which by now both Amal and Ama have told me I do. Today is the third day of doing 'bleeding.' I put the book back (Khan, 2008, p. 209).

In the Gateway the Fourth: The Love. Amal starts the narration. She is in hospital on her wedding night. She recounts how Noman and Nana drink together “He put down his drink and Nana refilled it. After the second gin his temperature changed again” (Khan, 2008, p. 222). But Noman describes himself "I'm not a cultural freak! I'm a thoughtful deviant! Throw anything at me, even angles, and I won't stray from the straight path" (Khan, 2008, p. 224). Similarly, Noman also describes her mother offering prayer: "She lays the prayer mat on our rug. Her salat is silent. No bones creak and words are spoken in her heart. She bends, kneels, gets back neatly, quickly" (Khan, 2008, p. 239). Likewise, Amal describes her sexual affair with Omar which they enjoy at a "friend's house in the Inner City. The house is always empty" (Khan, 2008, p. 273). While massaging each other's body with oil they feel aroused "He bites my nipples and I squeal. . . He slides a hand into my shalwar, slides it higher, lower. The tip of his penis oozes lubriciously" (Khan, 2008, p. 274) and "He starts to kiss my kus and I don't care how I should call it" (Khan, 2008, p. 275).

Home Boy by H.M.Naqvi (2010) is yet another novel that tells us about the secular humanism and religious humanism. It is the story of three friends of Pakistani origin who had a fanciful idea that being in America they were "boulevardiers, raconteurs, renaissance men," (Naqvi, 2010, p. 1) so they would celebrate themselves with "vodka on the rocks or Wild Turkey with water . . . among the company of women, black, Oriental, and denizens of the Caucasian nation alike" (Naqvi, 2010, p. 2). Enjoying, thus, a fully secular life, they had no religious thoughts on their minds and no such activities that could have labeled them as religious practitioners. But one fateful event of 9/11 turns them into "Japs, Jews, Niggers," (Naqvi, 2010, p. 1) which in turn ends in religiosity of the protagonist of the text.

Chuck – the protagonist, also named Shehzad – recalls how before 9/11 he "aspired to be cavalier about women," but like his friend AC (Ali Chaudhry) he "couldn't manage trysts in toilets, necking in cabs," but during his four years stay on American soil he had fallen "in love routinely," and "It went almost entirely unrequited" (Naqvi, 2010, p. 12). But the secularity that this guy enjoyed along with his friends proved short lived because of their Muslim names – though their conduct and behavior was contradictory to their religion.

There is a discussion on Jihad, hijab and Koran which is worth reading as interpretations of the three seem not to be fixed but flexible depending upon the time, place, and the knowledge, experience, and the life style of the interpreter. Old Man Khan – Jimbo's father – initiates the discussion on jihad in his house while talking about gardening. The gardening is "'you feel like you are doing God's work, making Heaven on earth. This has always been my jihad,'" (Naqvi, 2010, p. 54) he says. The word jihad has been in the air, all around through news of various sorts, since the fall of the twin towers and when Jimbo's father mentions it and Chuck instantly recalls within himself that "It didn't jell with the modern connotation of jihad that had entered discourse with a bang: waging war against errant Muslims and non-Muslims alike" (Naqvi, 2010, p. 54). The protagonist seems further

surprised to know how open and vast the term jihad is, when he listens to the old man who says that jihad is being productive in one's life and there is a need to struggle against one's own self. It makes Chuck state that "Old Man Khan reminded me that the term translates to 'struggle,' particularly the struggle within: to remain moral and charitable, acquire knowledge and so on" (Naqvi, 2010, p. 54).

Similarly, Chuck talks about the important issues mentioned in Koran like eating pork, using liquor, and hijab. He says that he too reads Koran like most Muslims do. But he dares to question the authority over the interpretative matters related to Koran. His thoughts are expressed in these words:

There were issues in the Holy Book that were indisputable, like eating pork, but the directives concerning liquor could easily be interpreted either way. You should not for instance, pray when hammered. As for the hijab, the Koran mentions that women should cover their 'ornaments,' and any way you look at it, that means breasts and beyond. Men are exempt because they do not possess ornaments (Naqvi, 2010, p. 54, 55).

Beside this religious talk that one hears from the mouth of the Muslims-cum-secularists or Muslims turned secularists, there is a thought provoking talk by a secularist girl named Duck and Dora – the Jimbo's girl friend – whose religion is not known. It is Dora's apartment where Jimbo is lying drunk to her dismay and she is heard pronouncing emphatically "*'You're drunk, Jimbo! You're always drunk'*" (Naqvi, 2010, p. 70). AC and Chuck arrive there and try to diffuse the situation as Dora is unhappy with the drunkard lover. Dora's words put a question mark on the secularity and religiosity of the three friends. Though angry, she talks sense, and quite better. She screamingly questions the behavior of Chuck and his friends who are always boozing up though they weren't supposed to. She reveals further, in ironic terms, that Jimbo's father does not know that his son was alcoholic and that for years he had been dating with her.

9/ 11 plays havoc with the secular life of the three friends, they are arrested by the FBI and put into Metropolitan Detention Center where they go through the harrowing experiences of interrogation and the worst punishments of their kind. On their release from the prison they come to know that Old Man Khan has been hospitalized. We find that Chuck has been changed tremendously and his ideas about the religion and religious symbols have also changed. Hijab that once weird him is what he likes now. The scene is hospital, Amo comes to the protagonist and tells him "that she 'came in here cuz that guy was looking at me kinda funny . . . I get that a lot these days . . . I found myself empathizing with the hijab" (Naqvi, 2010, p. 152). And after reading the strange obituary of his friend Mr. Shah in whose search the friends had put themselves in trouble of the worst sort, when Chuck is ready to fly back to his home country – Pakistan – one is astonished to see the religiosity that the protagonist- erstwhile secularist – has embraced:

I took off my boots, tucked in my shirt, and rolled up my sleeves. I washed my face, arms, and feet and parted my hair with wet fingers. I spread the rug from the suitcase that Ma had dispatched four years earlier, stood, heels together, arms folded over stomach, and, positioning myself generally east, toward Mecca, recited the call to prayer (Naqvi, 2010, p. 214).

Conclusion

Pakistani English fiction is very rich in covering and portraying the burning issues as they emerge from time to time because of local or foreign influences. It has therefore been documenting diversified themes with challenges of various sorts. If a careful attempt is made to ascertain the common themes here, from past to the present, then, broadly speaking, one would notice that the writers here in Pakistan have documented the secular and religious

tendencies and sentiments, consciously or unconsciously, to a significant extent. The causes behind this tendency could be numerous but they do not fall within the scope of this research. However, it is worth mentioning here that secularity and religiosity have always been present on Pakistani soil and have since long been accelerated from institutions and masses. The geographical location of the country and its foreign relations and policies too have played an important role in the progression and recession of these two isms. Since writers are the product of any given society so they reflect the societal trends as they find them, and this is what Pakistani English fiction writers have been doing over the years. The present age, both local and global, has once again sown the seeds of secular and religious approaches to life on the literary and non-literary canvas of every country including Pakistan, so there seems no end in sight to the powerful play of these two age old rivals, i.e., secular and religious humanism.

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