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CONJUGAL HOMES

Marriage culture in contemporary novels of the Pakistani diaspora

Rahul K. Gairola and Elham Fatma

Contemporary proliferations of Pakistani diasporic fiction in English, mainly post-9/11, have been mapping their way to the global stage of writings about the shared borders and liminal spaces in which people find themselves when moving from their country of ethnic affiliation to that of nationality and vice versa. These narratives of shared borders enfold both the laurels and lapses of diasporic culture, thus serving as empathising counterpoints to the Islamophobic stereotypes that reproduce and expand myths of the closed, static cultural arrangements of Pakistani society. The roll call of Pakistani diasporic writers includes Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Azhar Abidi, Mohammed Hanif, Hanif Kureishi, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Qaisra Shahraz. According to Claire Chambers, these writers, who are mostly 'living or educated in the West, currently feature prominently on the international literary scene as award winners or nominees, best-selling authors, festival speakers and, increasingly, topics for research students and critics' (2011: 122–123). We agree with Chambers' observation concerning these writers' wide popularity, and would add that they situate their craft around themes of home and family, deploying fiction as a powerful site of contestation of xenophobia. Such narrative strategies include dissent, alternative visions, debunking of myths, resistance of bigotry and Islamophobia, and representing a panorama of identities.

Moreover, many novels from the Pakistani diaspora document various tropes of diasporic life from myriad perspectives that include racialism, alienation, identity crisis, acculturation, gendered Islamophobia, cultural shock, etc. Despite the intellectual finesse with which these writers present issues relating to marriage as an institution that envelops nuanced complexities for partners from disparate cultures, it has arguably not been examined as thoroughly as it might be within the frame of marriage as a recurring leitmotif in contemporary novels of the Pakistani diaspora. Our chapter expands on this theme through an extended comparative analysis of three novels by Pakistani diasporic writers: Sidhwa's *An American Brat* (1993), Abidi's *Twilight* (2008), and, especially, Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004). This contribution, moreover, endeavours to offer insights into the dynamics of sociocultural and religious features that the Pakistani diasporic community assumes to engender through cultural friction between parents and their progeny. It engages, in other words, a dialectic of intergenerational mythos and the resulting conflict of perspectives that debilitate matrimonial relations and exert influence on the matrimonial spaces of domesticity in the Pakistani diaspora.

We also argue that these novels reify their characters' idiosyncrasies, which are instituted by the cultural topographies in which they are situated. They adumbrate the two distinct

generations' respective conjugal expectations, beliefs, and views about consent and coercion to sex and marriage against the contradistinction of 'East meets West' tensions. That is, we propose that these three novels narratively represent generational values and the complex ways in which such values are refracted by different characters' geographical positions throughout the Occident and the Orient. In Muneeza Shamsie's appraisal of Pakistani fiction in English, we must be attentive to the 'historical trajectory [...] of the colonial encounter' (Halai 2017: n.p.). We would add to Shamsie's observation that, in these three novels, the various historical links to power relations churned in the crucible of gender dynamics within and between different countries further complicate how home and belonging are refracted by the kaleidoscopic lens of Pakistanis in motion. These diasporic subjects are born and brought up in Western countries and select spouses from those "foreign" countries.

Thus, through the fictive landscapes of *Maps*, *Twilight*, and *An American Brat*, we critically explore issues including sex, family honour, ritual pollution, purity of lineage, and shame, which foment and complicate the subtleties of intimate relations between spouses and lovers. Different complications arise from both similar and transcultural societies, different religions, and/or transatlantic backgrounds with respect to diasporic, domestic configurations that anchor Pakistani characters while marking them as 'other'. Indeed, the historical trajectory of the colonial encounter as we see it locates precisely in conjugal homes of the Pakistani diaspora a nexus of competing identities and desires that carry and imbibe the loaded traces of skewed power relations based on class, sex, and religion. Despite these variations in narrative and manifestations of themes of 'home' and 'homeland', we propose that the figure of the Pakistani mother is central to understanding the ways in which competing constrictions and avenues of identity liberation are made possible by these three authors. We read the figure of the mother as caught in the crosshairs of a xenophobic nation state even as she is the nexus of kinship that links current and former homelands, various family members, and the past with the present.

In recognising the matriarch as caught in the juxtaposed position of both protagonist and antagonist in these narratives, we also note that these figures embody a number of issues that unfold the dichotomy between their own religious views and their children's secular outlooks. As might be expected, the diasporic offspring of these maternal figures are born and raised under the influence of Western ethos and cultural assimilation. As such, their attitudes and positions do, at times, come into conflict with their mothers' righteous observances of Islamic dogma and how life should be lived. While it would be a sweeping generalisation to claim that religion dictates all such developments in diasporic narratives, we note that it often serves as a guiding beacon for mothers as they negotiate connections to their offspring, on the one hand, and their situatedness in the homeland on the other. For example, Sidhwa underscores the predicament and despondency of a Pakistani Parsee mother in *An American Brat*. Zareen, along with her husband, Cyril Ginwalla, fear that Feroza's Muslim peers influence her conservative attitude and internalised diffidence in Pakistan. The couple resolve to send their sole offspring to the USA to live with her uncle in the hope that a change of culture will mediate against her shyness and shape her into a confident woman with liberal views.

However, her stay lengthens with her admission to university, which exposes her to a new lifestyle in modern America where she drinks, dances, drives, and imbibes her transformation without inhibitions. Feroza's love affair with David offers her an excellent opportunity:

She gradually exposes herself to varied experiences of life in the new world. Thus, Feroza evolves from an innocent, conservative, and protected life in Lahore to one

that is marked by the experiences of independent spirit and self-confidence of [the] modern American world.

(Sheela and Muthuraman 2013: 19)

The metamorphosis of Feroza's personality, shown in her attitude and attire, confounds her parents' expectations, and her views on sexuality, especially David as her chosen partner, further infuriate her mother. Zareen believes that her objectives and rationale for sending Feroza to the US have led to the loss of her only child to a world that is insensitive to the religious rigidity and *force majeure* of a minority community like the Parsees.¹ Fearing ostracism from the Parsee community, Zareen repeatedly warns Feroza not to go against the family's wishes by marrying a non-Parsee.

But as G. Kain opines, 'Feroza's resistance involves denying dominant ideological constructs from both her Parsee heritage and contemporary American culture. She perceives herself as "other" from either/both of these vantage points, and thus must contend with the turbulence of an unsettled cultural jurisdiction' (2002: 241). Kain's reading of Feroza's self-assessment is parallel to the way in which xenophobic nation states scrutinise the alien other. In Sara Ahmed's evaluation,

Through strange encounters, the figure of the 'stranger' is produced, not as that which we fail to recognise, but as that which we have already recognised as 'a stranger' [...]
The alien stranger is hence, not beyond human, but a mechanism *for allowing us to face that which we have already designated as the beyond.*

(2000: 3; emphasis original)

The exclusionary dis-identification which the logic of xenophobia invests in the diasporic Pakistani outcast seems to be reflected, at the micro level, in Feroza's domestic milieu. Indeed, it is her self-abnegation through the eyes of the new, promised as other, that acts as a psychological fulcrum engendering her own gendered and racialised oppression.

Through Feroza's inclination towards intercommunity marriage, Sidhwa illustrates contrasting views of mothers and their children. She also elucidates the set of repercussions that children invite *vis-à-vis* the unforgiving and unrelenting ways of the Parsee community, irrespective of their modern thinking and advanced ways of living. Sidhwa fashions her fictional diasporic family into a microcosm of the nation, wherein personal battles, competitions, and incentives drive the plot as the maternal figure is both pivot and pathogen as the harbinger of racialised reproduction. The Ginwalla family in *An American Brat* exemplifies the stereotypical disposition of the Pakistani upper class with its liberal education, high status, and wealth, which they have in common with their Muslim counterparts of the same social class who share the same political orientations. Thus, the reader encounters another prototypical family of the Pakistani elite in Abidi's *Twilight*. The Khan family is spearheaded by a matriarch, Bilqis Begum, who faces a difficult time when her only son, Samad, brings a *gori mem* from Australia (*gori* refers to a 'fair skinned' lady: where *gori* means 'white' and *mem* signifies 'madam').

While she accepts Kate as her son's bride, Bilqis struggles hard to face the reality that she is gradually losing her son, whose ideas, thoughts, and choices seem totally Westernised now. For Bilqis, Samad's white wife symbolises his total embrace, both literally and figuratively, of Western culture with little hope of his return to Pakistan. Samad's ostensible rejection of the 'motherland' through a white wife, who has ideologically displaced his mother precipitates a crisis for the characters in both novels, which, moreover, has ramifications for the delicate class structure of contemporary Pakistani society. Rehana Ahmed examines

the ways in which class and social space intersect with religion and ethnicity at multicultural sites in *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class, and Multiculturalism*. Ahmed opines, in that context, that British Muslims ‘have been the target of verbal and physical attacks, as a group who tend to want to maintain and assert elements of their culture and religion which are not easily assimilable to a majoritarian British way of life’ (2017: 6). Rather, for Ahmed, ‘the British Muslim has become a cipher for the excesses of multiculturalism [...] the supposed cultural excesses of Muslims provide a useful vehicle for criticising multiculturalism’ (2017: 8).

Ahmed’s concerted observation of the Pakistani diaspora in the UK resonates with those of Sara Ahmed in her examination of ‘the alien stranger’ (2000: 3). Like a mirrored echo chamber, the accent of pathological difference fractures the very social discourse that might, even reluctantly, permit assimilation. For Bilqis, then, Samad’s white wife is testament to the extent to which the nation state’s exclusionary tactics become internalised in the hallowed domestic realm of home and hearth. We witness some of these diasporic tensions between competing sites and sights materialise in the class relations in Abidi’s novel. While the dazzling decor of the Khans’ mansion – their ‘social home’, if you will – validates the superior status of its occupants and its visitors, the Ginwallas’ evening parties at their residence, peppered by their friends’ heated debates on dicey politics in Pakistan, exude their social standing and intellectually nuanced, liberal thinking.

The Khans and the Ginwallas seem to conform to these stereotypes of the Pakistani diaspora, and wish their children to have the best educational qualifications which will allow them to secure excellent careers in Pakistan. Yet, ironically, the same parents are aghast or devastated when their children find their spouses from the Western culture of their education. For example, Bilqis is depicted as dejected; her son Samad is oblivious to her explanations and arguments against marrying a partner from a totally different culture, religion, and racial taxonomy. Samad compels her to accept his choice and attend his low-key marriage ceremony with Kate in Australia because he is struck by her beauty and grace, and it is only in Kate that he can envisage his life partner. Abidi illustrates, through the characters of Bilqis and Kate, how people harbour stereotyped views and doubts about each other’s inner essences based on their country of origin (and the more muted ‘race projects’ – to borrow the useful term coined by Omi and Winant (1994) – that attend them). In another example, Bilqis deems Kate an outsider, one of those who ‘don’t understand us or our values, and, to be quite honest they are people of whom we know nothing’ (2017: 25). Here, Ahmed’s notion of the recognisable stranger again rears its xenophobic head, but this time we see the ways in which Bilqis’ ability to dis-identify with Kate have already invoked an intimate familiarity with her.

In contrast, Kate has always thought of Pakistan as a failed nation – a barbaric place with strange customs where young girls are forced into marriage, and where poverty, ignorance, and a lack of education are the rule of thumb. However, after coming to Pakistan, she is surprised to discover an unexpected underbelly that defies orientalist stereotypes: this Pakistan is vibrant, colourful, and developed, even ostentatious. The Pakistanis of this realm are wealthy, educated, and eccentric Muslims whose religious convictions do not ultimately stifle their liberal lifestyles. But despite their magnificent mansions, luxurious cars, and hosts of servants, Pakistan does not meet Kate’s expectations; Samad finds that Australia meets his, however, and thus attempts to assimilate himself into Australian culture. However, he encounters various difficulties there. Samad experiences, on a regular basis, that Australians do not regard him as part of their society, no matter how hard he strives to assimilate. Here, Samad’s social exclusion is an epidermal testament; neither his newly adopted homeland nor his new wife can earn him the impossible pedigree required to belong in Australian society.

We might pause here to meditate on assimilationist discourse as it relates to capitalism. Assimilation, although racially impossible, occurs through a familiar logic of postcolonial commodification since xenophobic foreclosure pre-empts any efforts to truly belong in the new country. Even assimilation into the romantic ideals of marriage, heteronormative ideals of reproduction, the circuits of neoliberal capitalism that buttress them, and all of the pathways in between, cannot bleach away the difference that always marks Samad as a knowable outsider. Such coils on the path to the immigrant's promised land underscore Iain Chambers' observation that:

Migration, together with the enunciation of cultural borders and crossings, is also deeply inscribed in the itineraries of much contemporary reasoning [...] If exile presumes an initial home and the eventual promise of a return, the questions met with *en route* consistently breach the boundaries of such an itinerary.

(2008: 2; emphasis original)

In the context of conjugal homes of the Pakistani diaspora, Chambers' contention enables us to think of not only migratory and cultural border-crossings, but also of spaces in-between. Heteronormative marriage, and the juridical privileges it affords via citizenship and the rights of offspring born in the host country, becomes the most contestable variable on the borders of the nation and its domestic homes. This is also coloured by labour relations which characterise domestic spaces in South Asia. Back home in Pakistan, Samad's mother is not happy with his choice of Kate, while the latter is a curious novelty for both Samad's relatives and friends in Pakistan. Bilqis' servants gaze upon Kate with surprise and awe as her whiteness, and even accent, is alien to them; the tension produced by this fascination with difference also marks the threshold of class which they cannot breach. Here, the diasporic Pakistani home and hearth is characterised by domesticity, or domestic labour to be more precise, that *must* remain alien, estranged, other, like race, within the comforts of home.

We see this unfold through the novel's plot. The dominant notion upheld by the upper echelon of Pakistanis regarding white women compels Samad to realise, through his friend Asim's belief, that white women surely possess something apart from Asian women, yet they cannot fit into the conventional role of daughters-in-law. Although Asim admires their white skin, blue eyes, and blonde hair, he is too traditional to enter into the sacred institution of marriage with any of them. In these narratives, Abidi and Sidhwa chronicle that even the bourgeoisie of Pakistan are controlling and hypersensitive concerning their children's marriages, and generally fuss over the ramifications of their bringing spouses from alien cultures back to them. However, in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Aslam engages an array of cultural, emotional, and physical traumas that Pakistani-British women experience in their conjugal homes, when they are forced into marriages arranged by their families in the Islamic state of Pakistan, having been raised in a non-Islamic multi-ethnic space like England.

In *Maps*, Aslam charts out a fictional enclave called Dasht-e-Tanhaii (a metaphorical expression meaning 'a steppe of loneliness'), situated in the north of England, which echoes 'the story of the British Pakistani community and families at the crossroads of liberalism and orthodoxy' (Kanwal 2012: 57). This ethnic enclave is an immigratory counterpoint, and an 'other' home space, that we encounter in contrast to the neoliberal wonderland of Thatcherite 'meritocrats' in Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Launderette* (Gairola 2016: 79) – in which arranged marriage to consolidate capital and kinship is expected and commanded over and above feminist and queer identificatory affiliations and self-affirmations. Rather, the life trajectories of Pakistani immigrants ghettoised in Dasht-e-Tanhaii delineate their superstitions, conservatism, ancestral

feuds, and cultural practices brought across seven seas to England, where they impose on their children the social and cultural paraphernalia from Pakistan which complicate their familial relationships.

Ironically, this tendency resembles the British race project, under Margaret Thatcher, which looked to inspire a nostalgia for Victorian ideals enshrined throughout the British Empire while assimilating Pakistani immigrants and their families into the machinery of neoliberal capitalism throughout the 1980s (Gairola 2009: 41). These Pakistani immigrants strive to retain a connection to their lost homeland by adhering to their Islamic faith, abiding by the diktats of Muslim clerics, and subscribing to the endogamous xenophobia that haunts the logic of arranged marriage. Yet, here we encounter a sad contradiction – in yearning to be part of their lost homeland, its languages, beliefs, and cultures, they have rejected the constantly dangled carrot of British integration. Aslam's characters are just as much victims of themselves as they are victims of the cold and calculating homelands between which they exist. For example, the double murder of Jugnu and Chanda unravels the timely issue of honour killings, which point to a more extreme modality of social oppression in close-knit communities that wish to punish women for choosing their own partners. After two failed marriages with cousins, Chanda ends up living with Jugnu in the same neighbourhood in which their families reside.

The residents of Dasht-e-Tanhaai consequently label her as wanton, a source of shame to her family, and so her brothers kill her, along with Jugnu. Kaukab, Jugnu's sister-in-law, believes in the part of Islamic jurisprudence which considers their murder the outcome of their sinful living together, outside marriage. She also finds fault with the ethical and moral values of the cultural system of the West, of which her brother Jugnu, and her own three children, Charag, Mah-Jabin, and Ujala, are by-products. She feels offended by her husband Shamas' condescending views regarding Islam, Jugnu's audacity in living with Chanda, and her children's unabashed assimilation into the decadent and dirty West. As a devout Muslim, while residing in Dasht-e-Tanhaai, Kaukab experiences acute estrangement due to acculturation. Her children do not comprehend her inability to assimilate into the culture of the host country in which they have been raised since birth. This aspect reflects Esra Mirze Santesso's observation that Muslim women characters must 'cope with a more severe divide between the private and public spheres, and their bodies frequently become contested spaces through which to negotiate religious identity – as we see not only in terms of sexual politics but also symbolic politics' (2013: 4).

Kaukab belongs to those *desis* (people of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi birth or descent who live in the West) whose fear of moral transgressions is so overwhelming that it prevents them from understanding the culture of the West, which they deem to be morally bereft and corrupt. Moreover, they are antagonistic to their host country and make no attempt to assimilate into it, which creates further mental and emotional distance from their own British-born children. Yet, in the eyes of Britain and its policies, these foreigners are the adopted children of its glorious erstwhile Empire who cannot and will never share the white skin, and thus the same blood, as 'true' Britons. Avtar Brah comments on this stark reality, noting that between the 1950s and 1980s, 'the figure of "the Asian" was constructed in different discourses, policies, and practices [...] South Asian groups appropriated or resisted the meaning of these representations; and the everyday life of Asian people articulated with these discourses' (2006: 35). For example, born and brought up in England, Chanda, Mah-Jabin, and Suraya are expected to establish their marital homes in Pakistan.

The critical account of their forced marriages acquaints readers with the religio-cultural and social issues endured by women like them trapped in arranged (forced) marriages. Indeed, here we see unambiguous links between love and lifestyle, law and libidinal desire, nation and nature. At the age of twenty-five, Chanda has already experienced two

failed marriages. Her first, contracted in Pakistan to a cousin, ended in disaster. Her second husband, another cousin brought from Pakistan, leaves her as soon as he procures a British passport. Despite being in the UK, Chanda is subject to traditional Islamic laws which consider her married until she has completed a stipulated period of separation from her husband which may last years. Nadia Butt avers that, regarding marriage in *Maps*, ‘the family structure and society at large is brutal and callous with respect to rebellious sons and daughters who dare moving an inch from prescribed boundaries of the supposed Islamic “do’s” and “don’ts”’ (2008: 159).

Suraya’s case parallels Chanda’s. Suraya is like a culturally conditioned automaton at the beck and call of her husband, who divorces her by pronouncing *talaq* in a drunken state. Her husband’s wish for reconciliation, or *halala*,² after *talaq* compels her to face the harrowing experience of marrying another man, who should give her a divorce after spending some time with her. Now, she desperately needs a man who can marry and release her, so that she can reconcile with her husband and son. The predicament of both Chanda and Suraya is grave, since the institution of marriage in Pakistan lays special emphasis on women’s *izzat* or honour. Also, male family members’ pride and ego are conjoined with their women’s *izzat*. Chanda’s brothers primarily accuse her for living with Jugnu and sabotaging their family’s honour rather than not abiding by the Islamic rules of divorce and marriage. Suraya’s husband mentally tortures her, anticipating that she will taint his *izzat* by contracting physical relations with her second husband.

These women’s religio-cultural quandaries and socially denigrated states give their close-knit society an opportunity to label them ‘loose women’ who lack feminine virtues of forbearance, acquiescence, and clemency required to establish conjugal homes.³ With scrupulous attention to historical record, Aslam efficaciously records religio-cultural realms and beliefs through which several cultural practices are nourished in Pakistan, as well as those engaged in by the Pakistani diaspora in the UK. In *Maps*, Aslam offers readers domestic scenarios that are historical antecedents of, in the words of Ahmed and Sumita Mukherjee, ‘the very different contexts informing the struggles of the past 150 years’ (2012: xviii). We can extend this notion to recognise that the womanly figure who is at once wife and mother in the Pakistani diaspora in Britain acts as a repository of these struggles. For example, the reason for Mah-Jabin’s suffering with her Pakistani husband lies in his male chauvinism; his mindset is rooted in the social dynamics of Islamic patriarchy, which assumes that beating wives is not violent; rather, blood on the hearth is to be expected. The violent way in which he behaves towards Mah-Jabin suggests that his beliefs are based in the religious dictums, social hierarchy, rites of passage, and status of women found in patriarchal culture.

In fact, a number of passages in *Maps* depict various ways in which Pakistani-British women are tortured in their marriages. The daughter of one Muslim family in Dasht-e-Tanhaii does not comply with her husband’s wishes, stays aloof, and fails to come to terms with her forced marriage as she cannot detach herself from her Hindu boyfriend. The holy man diagnoses her problem as a spiritual one, that a *djinn* has possessed her, and thus prescribes exorcism. Another girl in love with a Hindu boy is coerced to marry her cousin, brought from Pakistan; when she does not respond to her husband’s sexual demands, her mother advises him to rape her. Here, in the crucible of the conjugal home of the Pakistani diaspora in Britain, inter-religious love marks the corrosion of family, nation, home, and homeland; the difference it threatens to bring to the system is an assault on the future as well as the past. In Sara Ahmed’s theorisation, ‘Differences, as markers of power, are not determined in the “space” of the particular or the general, but in the very determination of their historical relation (a determination that is never final or complete, as it involves strange encounters)’ (2000: 8–9; emphasis original). Aslam mocks the culture of

violence immanent in the homes of diasporic subjects, especially the hypocritical idealism of male perpetrators and the paradoxical attitudes of female family members.

Wives who do not accede to their husbands' (excessive) sexual desires and defy them are often appraised as abnormal and uncustomary. Kaukab also accuses Mah-Jabin of being impatient with her husband. The matrix of her beliefs prevents Kaukab from realising that her daughter's trauma is due to her husband's tortuous means of obtaining sexual gratification. She also shows Mah-Jabin her disappointment at the neighbourhood's two married girls, who unabashedly share dark secrets of their sex lives with their mothers. One seems distressed because her husband wants it from behind, and the other is tormented by her husband's demands to ejaculate in her mouth. Kaukab seems to be a patriarchal character who firmly believes in the idealistic notion that a woman is the embodiment of the family's shame. For women like Kaukab, raising one's voice against men's expectations of marital sex is symptomatic of women's lower levels of endurance. It also implies that one is neglecting one's wifely duties and indulging in gross shamelessness.

Through his vivid characters, Aslam throws into sharp relief oppressive cultural practices based on essentialising notions of kinship and home, which ultimately impoverish the social system while damaging the social links that bind partners in conjugal relationships. Forced marriages, (dis)honour killings, fetishising lavish marriages, honour- and status-certifying ceremonies, and dowry demands primarily victimise women and lead to regression in society, impeding its progress. Moreover, Tishani Doshi writes that

[Aslam's] narrative is a palimpsest of some vital Islamic issues of (re)marriage, sex, divorce and conflicts of ideas, as well as what he proclaims in his interview, i.e. that he writes about East, and West, tradition and modernity, the global and the local, and about religion and secularism.

(2017: 2)

Through his narrative, Aslam also suggests that the process of assimilating into a new culture is undertaken at the expense of overlooking several characteristics of the culture of origin, but disengaging from the ossified ideology is problematic.

The diasporic subjects' attempts to translocate the culture of the home country into a new demographic space often end in conflict, which they find difficult to resolve. Because of their inability to accommodate or cope with changing subjectivities of morality, paradigmatic shifts in thinking and the volatility of situations traumatise those who largely stay cocooned in ethno-religious shells, avoid moving beyond their stereotypical identities, and follow the trajectory delineated by their religion, society, and culture. Where 'some migrants identify more with one society than the other', the majority seem to maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation (Schiller 1998: 231). But the rationale that motivates some migrants to identify and build links with other nations does not diminish the paranoia of miscegenation conspicuous amongst Pakistani families. Miscegenation is a *misdeemeanour* against the *nation* as it is both imagined and juridically enshrined. It is perceived as a threat that disrupts the sanctity of 'pure-blooded' families by introducing spouses from other nationalities, languages, religions and cultures. Aslam, Abidi, and Sidhwa show the same fear expressed by the mothers of the elite class of Pakistan, despite their education and purportedly liberal outlooks.

Thus, through the maternal anguish of mothers like Kaukab, Bilqis, and Zareen, who object to their progeny's spouses, a common narrative thread emerges. These plots share the collective experiences of the larger communities of which they form a part as they problematise the

whitewashed trust that communities have in 'consanguineous marriages'. However, consanguineous marriage also involves issues, which Nejat Tongur finds are often based on selfish motives. For Tongur, Pakistanis are 'involved in organized crime called arranged marriages', and stubbornly keep their formalities, codes, rituals, customs, and ceremonies intact while the community tries to cover up the crimes and inappropriate behaviour of fellow countrymen to save the face of the community as a whole (2016: 131). We would, moreover, draw the reader's attention to the success of the institution of consanguineous arranged marriage which Bilqis and Zareen probably explain through the notion that 'the closer the relative, [the] more secure the knowledge about the potential spouse, and so the safer marriage is considered to be' (Charsley 2007: 1122). Thus, the fear of marital rupture is eased by unions between relatives from the same social class, culture, religion, caste, language, etc., although Mah-Jabin's marriage to her first cousin in Pakistan fails.

The consciousness of class/status also features as one of the driving forces of (consanguineous) arranged marriage. Abidi takes Bilqis' wish for Samad to marry his cousin as the vested interest of parents seeking to maintain their social status in the society. This reflects a core argument in Gayle Rubin's 'The Traffic in Women', in which she argues that 'kinship and marriage are always part of total social systems, and are always tied into economic and political arrangements' (1975: 207). In the context of conjugal homes in Pakistani diasporic literature, Aslam presents Kaukab's insistence on an arranged marriage for Charag as a remedy which women deploy to cure sons whom they consider to have gone astray. For she believes it is not unusual for

Muslim men to marry white girls and then divorce them quickly upon learning how difficult and shameless they were, and then having an arranged marriage to a decorous and compliant Muslim girl, preferably a first cousin brought over from back home.

(2005: 57)

Desis' stereotyping of white women as promiscuous and unprincipled in sexual matters criminalises them, whereas they regard their own women as obedience personified in personal, social, and sexual matters, and hence preferred by them for marriage. However, this prejudice disguises and deflects from their subjection to 'the hazards' of 'close kin transnational marriage' (Charsley, 2007: 1127). Robina Mohammad has appropriately identified the predicament of overseas partners, when brought from Pakistan:

These imported partners simultaneously embody strangeness as well as familiarity, often experienced as a shock. As life-long kin, they *are* seemingly a 'known quantity', as co-ethnics they are ostensibly part of a shared culture and religion. But the newness of the spousal bond combines with their hegemonic gender, social conservatism and sheltered upbringing in Pakistani *dehat* (rural regions) where Islamic practices remain localised, to make them disorientingly different, a difference narrated as incommensurable and drawn on as an explanation for emotional distance and difficulties of communication within the marriage.

(2015: 610–611)

Here, we would argue that the primordial consternation over going against dogmatic religions informing self, society, sexuality, and marriage is traumatic. Kaukab, Bilqis, and Zareen anticipate that their children's drifting away from their religion fused with cultural mores will instigate a new order in their society. These women comprehend that this direction is an affront to their religion and coreligionists, because marriage with people of other religions involves

compromises on the religious ideals of either or both partners' religions. Bilqis always winces at the question 'has Kate converted?', about which she conjectures that 'conversions are only partial redemption. It confers the religion but never makes one equal' (Abidi 2008: 25). Zareen surmises that marrying into another's religion weakens one's social standing in one's own religious community, and thus offers Parsee prayers while supplicating for her daughter's disassociation from David.

Although Zareen finds David admirable and appealing, she reasons that 'he would deprive her daughter of her faith, her heritage, her family, and her community. She would be branded an adulteress and her children pronounced illegitimate' (Sidhwa 1994: 289). Beguiled by the American way of life, Zareen thwarts Feroza's courtship with David by insinuating the issues that such unions precipitate. Her harangue over the expenditure incurred by the bridegroom's family while performing the Parsee wedding rituals unnerves David, 'despite his tolerant and accepting liberality' (Sidhwa 1994: 309). He finds the Parsee community unaccommodating and very different from his informal and liberal approach to marriage. His enthusiasm for Feroza and marriage thus cools, and their relationship culminates in separation. The defiance and undermining of traditional practices at home are not expected of women, because conjugal homes are believed to be founded on the premise that women are the transmitters of familial traditions, passing the legacy of cultural practices to subsequent generations. Zareen reprimands Feroza regarding the significance of Parsee cultural heritage, and repeatedly reminds her that 'it's not your culture! You can't just toss your heritage away like that. It's in your bones!' (Sidhwa 1994: 279).

Bilqis opines that 'a family's lineage survived through the continuity of its tradition' (Abidi, 2008: 24); in the same vein, Kaukab firmly believes that children inherit values from their parents, especially the mother; and she foresees a bleak future for her grandson, as he will inherit libertine impulses from his parents, or more precisely from his mother, who is a product of a place where 'the display of wantonness and sex before marriage was the norm and not grave sins' (Aslam, 2005: 309). Society's expectations of women are greater when it comes to preserving the culture, ethics, religious practices, and traditions; even mothers also expect more from their daughters and daughters-in-law than from sons. These diasporic writers' narratives are mired in the quotidian beliefs of South Asian communities concerning the sanctum of the conjugal home, which primarily theorise women's duties as mothers, daughters, and wives, as more stringent and onerous than those of men. They are expected to uphold the honour of the family. Amongst the many virtues expected from them, a restrained sexuality is of primary importance, and bound up with familial regulations. Adherence to this cultural edict enables the residents of Dashte-e-Tanhaii to accept that 'Chanda's murder is labelled as honour killing for bringing shame upon the family, subverting the male dominance, disrupting their life and social values and violating the sanctuary of home' (Karim and Nasir 2014: 132).

In this chapter, we have drawn attention, through Feroza's and Chanda's cases, to the fact that daughters' obstinacy to marry someone they love torments their parents more than sons', while they are more likely to yield to their parents' will than sons. Against popular cultural beliefs regarding marriage, Feroza's, Mah-Jabin's, and Chanda's antagonistic voices are meeker in resisting their parents' moral stance than Charag's, Ujala's, and Samad's and their assertions. Moreover, their obstinate display of their spouses is deemed transgressive by some who cannot stomach the idea of a woman being wedded and bedded by a *gora* (a Hindi/Urdu word meaning a European or light-skinned person), because it is a disgrace for the family and community. Ironically, the same mothers grant space to their *gori bahus* (meaning a fair-skinned/European daughter-in-law) in their homes. Thus, *Maps*, *Twilight*, and *American Brat* explore the complex ways in which some men navigate their way and exercise their right to select and reject

prospective brides. Society is arguably more inclined to tolerate their marital choices, and overlook their pre-/extra-marital affairs, than those of women, who in contrast must face more intense gender chauvinism and social conservatism.

Aslam, Abidi, and Sidhwa write against the backdrop of a globalised world shaped by the cross-cultural communication of people through migration, tourism, educational enterprises, etc., in which they perceive the clinging on to notions of purity of lineage, blood, and strict adherence to a caste system to be a sham. Their narratives are a means of appealing for the redress and recalibration of various orthodox, popular religious and cultural tenets in line with universal values that curb the violation of human rights and stimulate peace, harmony, justice, and equal rights. Therefore, through their narratives that also appeal for transformations of cultures that oppress women, we envisage that the growing interspace between religions, especially Islam with its stereotypical readings as a religion of gender inequality, prejudice, and discrimination, will ease and the horizon of tolerance will broaden globally. Especially for brown women, because their conditions worldwide demand and warrant urgent amelioration – especially in their roles as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters in conjugal homes in and beyond South Asia.

Notes

- 1 Though we do not have the space here to expound upon them, we would like to recognise from the outset that additional theories from Talal Asad, Tahir Abbas, Mehmood Mamdani, and Akeel Bilgrami give us more sophisticated heuristic tools with which to further analyse Pakistani diasporic texts.
- 2 *Halala* occurs when a man who has earlier divorced a woman wants to remarry her. Islamic tradition dictates that such a woman must marry another man, consummate her marriage with him and then, after divorcing him, can return to her previous husband.
- 3 David Lelyveld's discussion of 'Sharif Culture' and the loaded secrecy of the female body in Eastern cultures could be an important reference (1978: 35–92). Suleri too discusses the metaphor of shame with reference to Rushdie's novel in *The Rhetoric of English India* (1992: 186).

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