



Cultural Assimilation and the Quest for Self in Ayad Akhtar's American Dervish

مجلة كلية الآداب بقنا (دورية أكاديمية علمية محكمة)

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DOI: 10.21608/qarts.2025.392607.2243

مجلة كلية الآداب بقنا - جامعة جنوب الوادي - المجلد (34) العدد (69) أكتوبر 2025

الترقيم الدولي الموحد للنسخة المطبوعة ISSN: 1110-614X

الترقيم الدولي الموحد للنسخة الإلكترونية ISSN: 1110-709X

<https://qarts.journals.ekb.eg>

موقع المجلة الإلكتروني:

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Abstract

This study approaches the themes of cultural assimilation and the negotiation of identity in Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish*, locating the work in the vast discourse of diasporic literature. Within the contexts of modern literary and cultural studies, the fictions that Muslim-Americans have produced have become salient due to their ability to illuminate the complicated dynamics between religion, ethnicity, and national identity. However, despite the widening body of literature on the work of Akhtar, there is an ontological void in analyses that explore how internalized cultural contradictions shape the self-conception. Filling this void, the current paper investigates how the logic of American Dervish reveals the psychological and existential tensions that result from the demands of conforming to a secular, Western world.

Employing the techniques of qualitative literary analysis based on the close reading paradigm, the study utilizes identity studies to identify the moment of strain between conventional religious orthodoxy and the exigencies of modern America experienced by the protagonist. The analysis emphasizes the way the work challenges both religious orthodoxy and secular liberalism and, in the process, reveals the important disorientation experienced by diasporans between conflicting value systems. Accordingly, the paper suggests that assimilation gets framed as an ontological problem, probing the coherence of selfhood and faith and breaking it apart. Here, the work makes an essential intervention in the debates on belonging, faith, and the very constitution of the self, offering an insightful critique of the constitution of the self within multicultural terms.

Keywords: Cultural Assimilation, Identity Construction, Diaspora, Religious Influence, Belonging

1. Introduction

Ayad Akhtar, a renowned author and playwright, draws on his heritage as a Pakistani-American brought up in the Midwest. His novel, *American Dervish* (2012), explores cultural assimilation, the nature of religious self-identification, and the complexities of establishing a home in a diaspora. The author portrays the protagonist's journey through pivotal personal events, such as navigating his Muslim heritage alongside the demands of contemporary American society, with great skill. His life story was told through key events that enabled the reader to look at internal conflicts and external barriers that individuals across cultures face. Akhtar's literary work elucidates the challenges associated with conforming to cultural standards and provides thoughtful perspectives on self-exploration in a multicultural environment (Sorgenfrei, 2013).

Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish* thoughtfully reimagines some of contemporary literature's most defining tropes in the context of cultural assimilation and identity construction. Cultural assimilation refers to how an individual receives and accepts the dominant culture's ideologies, manners, and customs while attempting to assert their own identity (Elaref, 2023). The process is defined by its inherent contradictions because it involves the internal conflict of reconciling the individual's native cultural identity with the demands of the assimilation process. *American Dervish* chronicles the development of the protagonist with precision, guided by the influence of the protagonist's Islamic-Pakistani heritage and the prevailing societal expectations of America. The narrative summarizes a conflict that signifies a persistent process of developing a consistent identity within a multicultural context. Akhtar's body of work elucidates the

complex processes of the modern immigrant experience and the modern ethnic minority in the United States, as these processes are depicted in the narrative of cultural integration and the construction of identity (Bangperng, 2022).

Ayad Akhtar skillfully explores the complex sensitivities inherent in the search for individual identity, which is further complicated by the interaction between various cultures, as exemplified through the extensive transformation of the protagonist. The novel offers a holistic insight into how the protagonist seeks to define himself as a Pakistani-American and the broader issue of American culture, while attempting to hold onto his Muslim identity amidst foreign conditions. It captures the internal conflict faced by the protagonist, as well as the pressure from the outside environment that compels him to seek a sense of home through cultural integration. The spiritual quest undertaken by the protagonist has a profound impact on the individual's identity, underscoring the intricate interplay between the individual's cultural roots and beliefs (Bolaki, 2011).

This paper systematically analyzes *American Dervish* using the dimensions of assimilation. It examines the challenges and coping mechanisms faced by individuals who strive to maintain their cultural identity in situations lacking indigenous social foundations. The characters and thematic elements from the novel will enrich the understanding of immigrant groups as they navigate and negotiate their selves, protect their cultural core, and adapt to their new environment.

2. Literature Review

Cultural assimilation is an important and controversial area of study in the sphere of contemporary multicultural societies,

pertinent both to scholarly discourse and colloquial exchanges. As people live within spaces where prevailing cultural norms practice their influence subtly and overtly, assimilation becomes interwoven with questions of authority, inclusivity, and individual identity. Far from being a monolithic or linear process, assimilation operates in the framework of complex and contentious domains, in spaces where people willingly accept, repudiate, or reinterpret prevailing values of the assimilated culture. This literature review explores the dynamic theoretical perspectives of cultural assimilation, highlighting its conceptual nuances and examining its impact on identity formation, especially in diasporic communities. Focusing on Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish*, the review observes how the protagonist's experience reflects wider theoretical dilemmas connected with cultural conformity, resistance, and incorporation. Through the intersection of sociological theory and narrative analysis, the review attempts to clarify the complex conflicts that emerge between the processes of assimilation and the formation of individual identity.

2.1. Definition and theoretical perspectives on cultural assimilation

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) posit that the process of cultural assimilation, in which individuals from diverse backgrounds are included into a larger culture, often requires or demands that alterations be made to people's modes of thought, action, and practice, such that these modes respect their own cultural background in favor of the dominant or host culture. Cultural assimilation is a complex phenomenon that means that in situations where individuals from diverse backgrounds are often pressured or compelled to assimilate to the practices or customs of the majority culture, it elementarily constitutes a process by which some aspects

of their ethnic identities are likely to be eroded and replaced with practice and customs of the host culture. The nuances of the debate about cultural assimilation are enriched by differences in perceptions, such that proponents maintain that cultural tolerance is fundamental to creating the conditions for appropriately assimilating those who must still develop a sense of identity. In contrast, opponents maintain that removing distinguishing features entirely is critical to effective assimilation. In this respect, assimilation is recognized as a particularly complex phenomenon extensively considered globally that engages several layers of complexity, including power, relations, cultural hegemony, and negotiation of the self.

Infante et al. (2020) note that in the process of interaction, there is a coexistence between the recognized customs of the host culture and recognized customs of minority culture or traditions, as the engagement and interaction between cultures through the process of assimilation continues to position both cultures so each culture evolves. This view suggests important implications for individuals and how to construct personal identity from intercultural experiences where individuals must negotiate intra-personal conflicts and inter-personal conflicts in their conditions of reframing their own identity, and accommodating liberal acceptance of the traditional customs from another ethnoculture. Cultural assimilation is a significant phenomenon worth exploration as it exists within larger social and political realms. Last, cultural assimilation can open opportunities for individuals to powerfully engage in co-creating their cultural tie and personal identity.

Akhtar's *American Dervish* presents a narrative of the difficulties confronting the protagonist, Hayat Shah, as he navigates

his coming-of-age trajectory as a Muslim family member in America. An important aspect of the novel is the subtle exploration of the tensions and ethical dilemmas unresolved by his traditional upbringing, as he interacts with the American sociocultural landscape. Assimilation has become a significant issue that has sparked substantial public discourse and scholarly attention in various contexts, as numerous theoretical perspectives have been employed to assess its implications for identity formation. Particularly useful are theoretical perspectives of the melting pot, segmented assimilation and transnationalism, which permit a variety of analytical lenses for exploring the difficulties involved (Alba & Nee, 2014; Waters, 2019).

2.2. Cultural Assimilation as a Complex Process

Assimilation constitutes a complex and dynamic process that cannot be reduced to simple overall classifications. The shedding of specific cultural traits is often accompanied by an overlay of inherent tensions concerning personal identity attributes. Researchers have noted that assimilation must be viewed as a dynamic process, whereby people may resist or prevent the erosion of their cultural identity under conditions of societal pressure (Alba & Nee, 2014; Waters, 2019).

The act of incorporation, which involves negotiations and compliance with customs, is a complex process occurring when two or more individuals act within their environment. The process of assimilation is of interest, given the contradictory nature of maintaining an individual's identity while complying with established stereotypes within the environment (Bilewicz et al., 2023). The narrative presented in Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish* provides a nuanced representation of the types of experiences the

protagonist faces, reflecting the challenges, confusions, and identity formation. This protagonist struggles with their Pakistani culture while living the American experience. The protagonist captures the nuance associated with the process and highlights the contradictions that define the construction of identity from a multicultural approach. A critical exploration acknowledges the complexities inherent in the specific processes of cultural engagement and how these processes affect the individual and their ultimate position within a collective space.

2.3. The impact of cultural assimilation on identity formation

Assimilation is a crucial process that influences the formation of identity. The process raises many questions about identities and how they relate to culture and belonging. Scholars argue that personal identities are shaped by many aspects of culture, allowing a multidimensional identity to emerge. The points made by Alba and Nee (2014) and Waters (2019) support this argument. Hayat's life, and her inability to define her self-identity in Akhtar's *American Dervish*, demonstrates the importance of assimilation in the development of personal identity.

Cultural assimilation and its dimensions of cultural integration are multifaceted and occur when identities intersect. Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish* portrays a setting where the central character is compelled to grapple with the complexities of integrating the vast differences between his home culture and the culturally dominant mainstream culture. The process of integration is an event that has many implications for one's sense of identity or belonging to a group, where culture dictates implications that extend beyond mere behavioral or traditional adjustment. Individuals who assimilate may face identity-based controversies and personal conflicts that

hinder their progress or development. Taking on a unified identity through immersion in different cultures requires a careful balance between the outside influences of different cultures and the individual's self-concept remodeling. Thus, a closer examination of these parameters will enhance our understanding of how their varied engagements influence identity formation in a multicultural setting (Johnson et al., 2021).

3. Navigating Faith and Identity: Cultural Conflict and Self-Development

The protagonist's background proves to be one of the most critical elements that create his development in *American Dervish*. Having grown up within a family living in the United States, he struggles to balance his Islamic background and all the customs associated with it against the cultural expectations found to be prevalent within American society. His experience in this regard shows conflict and incoherence of self-identity in such cases of immigration. By actively participating in his family, among friends, and within his community, he masterfully navigates the many pressures and internal conflicts that help shape his identity. It is fairly apparent that faith and spirituality, belief systems, cultural variables, and the path to self-development, as well as the protagonist's search into their history, provide the necessary insights into cultural adjustment and identity development in a pluralistic setting (Yasin, 2021; Elaref& Alkhalifah, 2025).

The significant themes in *American Dervish* include the laborious pursuit of identity and the clash of cultures, highlighting the inward struggle of the protagonist with his Muslim identity against the allure and complexity of life in America. The novel examines the duality of struggles the protagonist experiences between the demands placed upon him from society and the internal

problems of prioritizing his pursuit of belongingness. The narrative sets him on a journey of conflict between the collision of values and the dominant norms of social groups. The events demonstrate the role of religion and spirituality in his identification. *American Dervish* has been a great account of how cultural adjustment is accompanied by further efforts of identity search within various societal paradigms confronted with disarray and external challenges. (Hooks 2009).

In Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish*, the protagonist, Hayat Shah, encounters a bundle of challenges and some personal issues. Being a Pakistani American Muslim amidst American society, Hayat faces the challenge of striking a delicate balance between adjustments within the societal structure and retaining his ethnic identity. Following the attacks on September 11th, he encountered problems emanating from Islamophobia and other cultural stereotypes. These are influential external stressors in his struggles as he tries to bridge his religious beliefs and culture amidst the conventional setting. Essentially, Hayat's struggle is intrinsically wrapped in the struggle for social acceptance versus the need for cultural survival, which pushed him to reassess his identity as a form of critique of the call for change in himself from society. Hayat's experience shows the process of assimilation and its substantial influence on forming human identity (Ali, 2015; Elaref,2024).

4. Self-Discovery and Identity Formation

The main character's engagement with his roots plays a vital role in the character development and increase in self-awareness, as shown in *American Dervish* by Ayad Akhtar. Born ~~to be~~ as an American Muslim, Hayat Shah embarked on a quest for self-discovery while grappling with his current identity. Through

discussion groups and social interactions with family, friends, and community affiliates, Hayat undertakes an inquisitive exploration of the dogma and doctrines of Islam in search of a comprehensive understanding of religious beliefs and cultural heritage. His knowledge-seeking attitude manifests in the proactive use of the Quran as a source of solace, drawing strength from and deepening his ties with his cultural heritage. Intensive studies of the Quranic ayahs and their interpretation enable Hayat to confront his belief complications through the challenging of assumptions and acceptance of grey areas; his character is consequently molded by lessons that cement his relationship with Allah and alter his perceptions about the world and the people around him (Akhtar, 2012). Akhtar also deployed Hayat's story to illustrate the significance of returning to one's past for human maturity and identity. This literary work clarifies the nuanced balance between cultural assimilation and maintaining identity, showing the complex difficulties and successes of reconciling personal heritage amidst diverse cultures (Yasin, 2021).

Conflicts that arise from the confrontation of religious convictions in Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish* expose the problems an individual goes through in trying to balance different cultural and religious experiences. The protagonist, Hayat Shah, goes through conflicting influences between his cultural heritage and assimilation into American life. In this light, Hayat struggles with fundamental questions of identity, allegiance, and bounded freedom while living in a time-lag conflict between his family's convictions and libertarian convictions now sweeping the country of America. One of his internal conflicts was due to the influence of dual religions, trying to harmonize demands within society and personal development. Hayat's story represents the psychological boundaries that result from the interaction of different cultures and

faiths, which are not easy to cross. Akhtar argues that the battle to resolve conflicting belief systems is universal and can be seen in Hayat's story. This significantly impacts their sense of identity and association with a group of people (Akhtar, 2012). The protagonist's journey offers a significant understanding of cultural assimilation and its effects on identity development, shedding light on the quest for self-awareness amidst diverse global viewpoints (Piscos, 2022).

American Dervish tells how interrelationships create or destroy an individual's identity. The novel's protagonist, Hayat Shah, grows amazingly because of the influence of the people around him. His relationships with his father, mother, and Mina, as well as his friendships with Nathan and Mina's daughter, all allow for a miraculous transformation in Hayat's perception of himself. Every relationship acts like a mirror to him, reflecting his character, upbringing, and values. These lead to relationships that eventually give way to deep insight into his ambitions, abilities, vulnerabilities, and inner conflicts. In their wake, these seem like huge roles in carving out a person's identity, at least if a man fiddles with love and culturally ingrained expectations. Akhtar showed just how much people are tied to affecting their self-concept by bruising our beliefs and choices between options across a lifetime. Social relations are a source of acquiring information about the self and others; according to Schultheiss et al. (1994), the protagonist, through his active exposure to different kinds of people, experiences many perceptions that are significant in developing his self-concept. Through these interactions, he experiences incongruent expectations and thinks about ways of fitting appropriately into society. The story comprehensively explains the complexity of relations with others and how they help in the growth and insight into the main character's identity.

5. Cultural Assimilation and Its Consequences

American Dervish is a novel about the advantages and disadvantages of integration through its main character's detailed and multi-dimensional experience. Assimilation has many positive and negative aspects, which have been portrayed through the life of Hayat Shah. While providing some advantages of acceptance into mainstream society, economic uplift, and personal freedom, Hayat Shah falls prey to the tantalizing charms of the American way of life: individualism, intellectual excellence, and material prosperity. For the first time, he sees the privileges that come with assimilation: better educational opportunities, wider exposure to different outlooks, and greater effectiveness within social circles and professional networks. However, the negative impact of his integration into society is that his culture is slowly lost, eventually disrupting his family and community relationships. He feels at a loss for a connection with his cultural heritage and carries profound alienation and a strong drive to reconnect with his roots. It also leads to internal conflict within the family and societal context due to the tendency to conform to dominant norms. Other disadvantages of assimilation include the decline of linguistic, cultural, and national identity and psychological turmoil due to the tussles between cultural and religious values. Akhtar critically examines the process of cultural assimilation in his work and has thus cleared up the losses and gains accrued in the name of assimilation. This attitude directs one to consider the struggles and stresses involved in adopting one line of life, yet keeping one's identity. The constant struggle to adapt yet preserve, as Caytas suggests, reveals the incredible complexity of the process through which every person assimilates into one particular society or the other (2012). While assimilation offers certain advantages regarding acceptance and economic benefits, it also has the danger of dislocating individuals

from their cultural heritage and diminishing their identity. In this respect, the play of benefits versus drawbacks displays marked effects brought about by assimilation in the identity development process of an individual within a particular context.

American Dervish explores this familiar theme of disconnection from roots and cultural heritage through its narrative. With all these complications of settling into society, Hayat Shah's ties with the Pakistani culture disintegrate. Longing and feelings of estrangement, part of the perceived slow dissolution of one's cultural heritage, are powerfully portrayed in this text. The erosion of his linguistic habits, ceremonial etiquette, and traditional morality brings him, with a forceful nostalgia, to the realization of irreversible loss. Moreover, the compulsion to conform to societal dictates accelerates the pace of genuineness loss in Hayat. Here, Akhtar explores the tension and psychomoral strife that result from a loss or an abandonment of one's cultural identity. Akhtar makes sense of the importance of holding onto and valuing one's cultural background through Hayat's story amidst the tides of assimilation pressures and society's impacts. This lightens the contrast between the two poles of adopting a culture and continuing with the traditional ways. This exchange underscores what E. Caravello (2023) identifies as the inherently multi-dimensional nature of identity formation in the contemporary world.

Assimilation and its effects on relationships are the central theme in Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish*. The novel explains how cultural assimilation affected the people. It successfully revealed the effects of assimilation on relations, where frictions and shifts that can occur were pointed out. In his quest to be part of society, Hayat Shah increases his cultural and religious differences from his immediate family members. The friction that sets in due to the

difference in their values and the evolved outlook of Hayat thus tenses and breaks down the interpersonal relationship. Relationships in Hayat's life get molded through his effort to live up to his peer group's expectations so that he may fit into their social milieu. The story analyzes altered dynamics whereby hidden conflict arises between individual beliefs and societal expectations in a tug-of-war situation. Akhtar here reflects on the sacrifices and barriers a person goes through during assimilation into a culture and how it forms and strains the most valued human bonds. Blending requires an unstable balance between holding on to culture and including elements of others in it. This dynamic can lead to disputes among relatives, companions, and romantic partners (Hiebert & Ley, 2003). As individuals navigate these complexities, issues concerning authenticity, transparency, and communication surface, influencing the strength and depth of their relational connections. Furthermore, the presence of diverse cultures can restructure power relations in collaborative relationships, thereby challenging established norms and expectations. Once these subtleties are explored, it becomes apparent that cultural assimilation has a significant impact on personal relationships, particularly in how one identifies oneself within specific contexts. This area of research expands the discussion of identity development in multidimensional ways through the various combinations of shared culture, relational fluidity, and heightened cohesion, where the personal level changes introduce metamorphic alterations.

6. The Role of Family in Cultural Assimilation

American Dervish reflects on the profound impact of closely-knit family relations on the protagonist's adjustment to a specific setting. The strong familial ties experienced by the protagonist

represent the social fabric of the community and the expectations pressed upon him regarding where he fits in and how he perceives himself as an entity (Kulu & González-Ferrer, 2014). This novel explores how Hayat Shah's character adjusts to becoming an American, highly influenced by the relations within his family. It excavates the extended use of family expectations and cultural norms, obstructing and facilitating assimilation. In this connection, the family bond with heritage and the upbringing of Islam influence their relativity and interaction, deep-seated in perceptions and attitudes. Such phases of interaction inculcate a sense of responsibility and moral obligation in Hayat to live up to their expectations, hence complicating the assimilation process.

This accounts for Hayat's inner turmoil due to the clash between his family's convictions and the emerging progressive ideas around him. This novel tries to reveal how the family's dynamics force his assimilation process by underlining the teetering pressures between cultural identity and the yearning for freedom and social acceptance. Akhtar elaborates on the interconnection between bonds within the family, cultural heritage, and obstacles to assimilation to explain the complex dynamics leading to the path an individual chooses to take toward cultural assimilation. The interconnectedness of dynamics and cultural assimilation demonstrates how an individual's self-concept is molded, adding that these personal experiences are interconnected with greater historical moments. Looking at the protagonist's interactions with his family members gives significant insights into the challenges and potential advantages of working through the integration process within a social context (Chan, 2012).

Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish* explores the nature of assimilation across generations and how it affects the characters' lives. It sharply contrasts the younger people's changed perception

of assimilation. The older generation, represented by Hayat's parents and the rest of the Pakistani immigrants, is affectionate toward their culture and opposes Americanization. They cherish the view that their cultural mores are essential and maintain a connection with the motherland.

While the parents come from a Pakistani background, the young generation comprises Hayat and the Americans. This indicates a strong assimilation tendency while struggling to hold on to their cultural identities and adjust to the new environment. Thus, the story gave insight into the emergence of conflict due to these differences and how identities were formed and negotiated between tradition and modernity. Akhtar's investigation into generational differences provides an in-depth examination of the assimilation processes within communities, emphasizing numerous approaches to cultural integration and their impact on individual identities. Understanding these interactions among diverse age groups enriches our comprehension of the effects of integration on collective identities, shedding light on the complex process of identity formation in a global context (Tsuda, 2019).

American Dervish probes deep into the internal conflicts and resolutions within the family and deeply analyzes the complex dynamics that guide the relations of family members. It accounts for the tensions that arise from the inter-relationship between different cultures, ideologies, and generation gaps within the family. Hayat's family faces difficulties balancing religious responsibilities and personal ambitions. These problems breed dialogue, misunderstandings, and much emotional hurt. However, the novel simultaneously unfolds with reconciliation and maturity on the part of the family system. The key characters learn to accept and share each other's perspectives through introspection, kindness,

and self-realization. They learn to share the balance between the differences in their traditional background and the changing world they live in. Akhtar's story highlights that compassion, forgiveness, and open communication are necessary for healing and reconciliation. Through this, the novel represents how relationships, understanding, and acceptance are essential to living through complexity and cultural integration in identity building. Facing the challenges in his life, the main character realizes the fine line between maintaining his origin and understanding family dynamics to achieve an authentic self (Fellmann, 2023).

7. Community and Cultural Integration

The community in which Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish* expresses its most profound impact concerns its protagonist's experiences and challenges through their integration journey. Their story highlights the crucial role of immigrants and native-borns in shaping the community's assimilation pattern. Such a group represents a society governed by different expectations, norms, and cultural relations. While it encourages a sense of belonging, support, and shared experiences, it may also propagate stereotypes, biases, and demands for uniformity. Throughout the story, the characters navigate the complex relational dynamics in this community as they try to determine a place for themselves within it. The community's views regarding assimilation, religion, and gender roles greatly influence the characters' choices, their view of themselves, and their relations with others. Akhtar's description of the effects communities have on the assimilation processes depicts the controls communities have over a person and how an individual tries to balance his cultural identity with the urge to be accepted and assimilated. This text invites the reader to reflect on an individual's relationship with society while searching for the fine line between

the preservation of identity and the expectations of society. Analyzing the protagonist's reactions to his environment gives excellent insight into the acculturation processes and strategies employed to manage differential identity in a given context (Fitzpatrick, 1966).

Amazingly, Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish* shows immigrants' challenges in integrating into society. The story focuses on how immigrants struggle to socialize into society. Immigrants depicted in the novel face the problem of adjusting to a new culture, trying to learn a new language, and living according to new social standards. Individuals are faced with discrimination, prejudice, and alienation, which may work against assimilation. This invites one to reflect upon how well the dilemma between cultural retention and assimilation is portrayed: an individual is burdened with a bundle of stress and an emotional and psychological toll of leading a double-cultural life. These issues manifest as communication barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and value conflicts. Akhtar's work highlights the resolute, determined nature and selflessness that immigrants exhibit in their attempt to establish some sense of themselves and foster connections with their new environment. Akhtar explores the process of characters integrating into communities in his work. Tolerance, acceptance, and cultural competency are crucial elements for creating a more accepting environment (Silka, 2023). Immigrants often face challenges of maintaining their culture versus integrating into the new culture. This scenario can bring about identity-related conflicts and crises as well. Thus, adopting a careful balance between tradition and active participation in new community contexts would help promote understanding and integration (Shirazi & Mishra, 2010).

American Dervish is a novel that spotlights at least two essential aspects contributing to fitting into a new cultural environment: a support system is important, and the perpetuation of community culture is essential. It is a fable of community relations; the institutional, artistic, and personal networks of any person attempting to cling to their traditional heritage through supporting scaffolding. These networks have become the only avenue for immigrants to interact with people with similar backgrounds, languages, and traditions, an avenue for reassurance, identity, and common understanding. The novel highlights the need for such networks to further the culture since people resourcefully feed on being part of the same rituals, festivities, and faith. Akhtar shows how communal support is cardinal in helping immigrants keep their identity despite the different challenges of assimilation. Akhtar's work illustrates how fostering cultural heritage within a communal context promotes individual well-being and contributes to societal development. Such networks would comprise relatives, friends, community organizations, and religious entities through which cultural heritage would find value and increase personal identity. All such networks are valuable to a person; now, they have a basis for retaining culture, as there is a method for anyone from any background to express their identity and create relationships. They also offer ethical support, which helps them maintain their traditional customs even as they wish to integrate into the diverse cultural setting. Supportive structures are quintessential in hardening resilience to ensure diversity against the odds of community inclusion (Ghahramani et al., 2020).

8. Language and Cultural Identity

In this respect, the novel highlights the place of language as a method of cultural assimilation: it fashions identity and thus makes

it simple to adapt to one's surroundings. It projects the mastery of the English language as the prime mover in their integration journey into life and the feats made possible in different aspects of life. The reign of the English around them provides access to education, good communication, and job employment opportunities. The person faces many challenges trying to adapt to a new language. Obstacles to understanding and expressive ability trouble them. The story reaffirms that the personas achieve the fluency and confidence required for effective participation in a new community through attaining linguistic competency. Language is an avenue connecting many cultures, through which an individual builds relations, gains knowledge, and is brought into networks.

The text further explores the relationship between language and cultural identity, illustrating how these characters adopt English for integration while retaining their native language. Akhtar's text elucidates the transforming ability of language in general in the assimilation process, as it shapes identities and helps people integrate into new milieus. Consequently, engagement with language facilitates the assimilation process and significantly influences the protagonist's path of self-discovery and individual growth across diverse cultural settings (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1979). Possessing multiple languages contributes significantly to one's identity, particularly when exposed to different cultural contexts. Language proficiency significantly impacts our sense of self and what others think about us (AL Farzai, 2023). *American Dervish* truly narrates the burden of bilingualism, examining how this seemingly advantageous gift has more profound consequences in personal identity construction. The novel describes how the characters face the complexity of bilingualism with its linguistic and cultural switches. In this aspect, bilingualism was seen as empowering and inwardly conflicting when the characters

struggled with their identity in the difference of social circumstances. The novel typifies the project of accepting languages as complex and multi-dimensional, every language serving as a medium for different facets of the self. Akhtar shows through effortless use of shifting languages and prepared speech how these linguistic choices affect interpersonal relations and self-concept: Bilingualism thus becomes at once a means of cultural preservation and a means for self-expression, allowing individuals to stay in contact with their heritage while negotiating both the barriers and privileges their adopted language confers. However, bilingualism provides for a change of identity because of how languages and cultures interrelate in a changed fashion with self-discovery (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1979).

The language barrier is an essential determinant of cultural integration into society, thus affecting society's perception and interaction with individuals of different backgrounds. Language differences create barriers to relationship-building processes, mainly when individuals cannot express themselves or understand others. The communication barriers highlighted in Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish* add to the protagonist's complexities in trying to find his identity within America; this contributes to increasing feelings of loneliness and disconnection. These obstacles influence communication and feelings of belonging and acceptance within a diverse community. Investigating the correlation between language obstacles and cultural integration provides researchers with a significant understanding of the complex process of identity formation and the nuanced interactions of cultural relationships (Khosrow Pour, 2019).

9. Religion and Identity Negotiation

American Dervish glides between religious and cultural assimilation, testing the tensions and moral harm moral dilemma? that may persist due to this relationship. Through their faith and practice, the narrator and the characters take each other to a place within mainstream culture. Religion is a domain in an individual's life interspersed with beliefs, customs, and interrelations. Thus, it can always create an inner tug-of-war between duty and the need to fit in. Character wrestles to balance religious conviction with evolving social mores and cultural expectations. The narration evolves to explain how people balance their faith amidst assimilation and debate, where the lines should be drawn between their legacy and adjustment, the tug of war between retaining identity and seeking acceptance within a culture. Akhtar's narrative compels readers to contemplate the relationship between religion and cultural integration, elucidating this amalgamation's challenges, compromises, and personal development (Gordon, 1961).

American Dervish examines the impact of religious traditions on an individual's sense of self within a diverse cultural context. The protagonist's journey is intricately linked to Islamic principles as he contends with his American heritage and the societal pressure to assimilate (Leer Helgesen, 2019). The spiritual aspects guide his identity as he navigates various domains. It is his relation with rituals and belief systems that not only connects him with his ethnicity but also becomes a source of introspection and perception. Such traditions only connect his cultural identity with the dominant society, pacifying him and making a place for him everywhere. This acceptance results in self-discovery through spirituality and,

therefore, connects religious structure, cultural adjustment, and personal growth within the pluralistic society of America.

American Dervish focuses on the complications accompanying the establishment of personal identity and the strong linkage these hold to the development of the character. A few hardships arise as one tries to get along with the meaning of his cultural background by comparing his Islamic identity with the forces needed for adjustment within the American culture. The conflicting elements within his character taunt him with inner strife and outer conflicts, questioning his identity and belonging. Personal fulfillment will significantly depend on apprehensions about faith and spirituality shaping his views and actions. In response to the complications arising from identity, the protagonist seeks self-understanding and reconciliation through cultural ideas of religion. This expedition results in personal development, emphasizing the interaction of religion, culture, and social integration practices throughout history (Firdous et al., 2023).

10. Gender Roles and Cultural Assimilation

Cultural norms about gender bring with them many assumptions about behavior. These have shaped how men and women live and build their identities. One such exploration can be found in Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish*, published in 2012, a coming-of-age story of Hayat Shah, a Muslim American. The narrative explores the issues faced by characters such as Hayat, who faces the pressures of American societal expectations regarding gender roles. Entrenched cultural traditions dictate specific life standards for men and women, guiding their actions, choices, and aspirations. Akhtar highlights this idea by portraying Naveed, Hayat's father, as a man who strictly follows patriarchal ideologies. Naveed expects his wife, Muneer, to play a traditional gender role of shouldering

domestic duties and subservient roles within their marriage. This can be demonstrated through Naveed's response to Muneer's aspirations of finding work, and he tells her that the duties of a Muslim woman are at home with her family and husband (Akhtar, 2012). Such expectations dampen female independence and limit career and personal growth for them.

Unlike many cultures, American society places little emphasis on gender roles, thus providing women with much independence and an avenue for self-realization. The change in societal expectations is largely brought out through Hayat's interactions with his friends and teachers. His teacher, against the gender expectations that he grew up with, supported his desire to pursue his dreams and goals. This idea is well brought out in thinking that Miss Weatherspoon believes in him. She felt "he could be whatever he wanted (Akhtar, 2012). Such drastic differences between gender roles in both cultures are a relevant backdrop for the conflict and confusion of a character such as Hayat, who is pulled between the strict dogma of tradition and the appeal of newly grasped freedom.

Proceeding further, Akhtar analyzes gender roles in the Muslim community. Auntie Mina speaks for those women who struggle to combine living their faith with living free. Initiating a divorce and forging forward with her goals of passion, Auntie Mina defies society's expectations, period, against the standard view that Muslim women must necessarily be conservative and supportive of traditional female stereotypes. Akhtar relates that she was a Muslim woman, different from any other woman in America, but different from any other woman in Pakistan too (Akhtar). Auntie Mina's resistance and her quest for freedom reveal multiple ways in which Muslim women respond to the crossing of cultural, religious, and gender identity. In his novel *American Dervish* (2012), Ayad

Akhtar evaluates the conflicting expectations regarding gender in most cultures. Characters like Hayat, among others, show teething problems in juggling conservative Pakistani and modern American cultures. Akhtar examines the tensions between well-entrenched patriarchal norms and the burgeoning desire for individual freedom, exposing ever-shifting dynamics of gendered roles in disparate societies. Ultimately, Akhtar calls upon the readers to question and fight these expectations brought on by society in a particular setting.

Gender roles play an essential role in constructing identities through cultural fusion. *American Dervish* narrates the protagonist's experiences negotiating his identity between his Pakistani and American cultures. According to Hyman (2016), gender determines how an individual mediates past and cultural demands. Hayat's gender as a male and his cultural identity shape his perception of himself and his relationships with others. Assimilation shows the interplay of the sexes, revealing how personal identity is related to the functions ascribed to a particular sex. Considering the gender aspect of assimilation, therefore, grants an opportunity to look more deeply into identity development in the integration framework.

Individuals transitioning into a different culture have their unique challenges and obstacles regarding societal norms related to gender roles that shall further develop their competence in the complex process of evolving cultural identity. Individuals do find conflicting views and norms about gender roles that exist between their home culture and the dominant culture in this entire cycle of adjustment. For instance, *American Dervish* shows the tensions the main character in the novel had when he tried to negotiate the traditional approach to the issue of gender as represented by his culture with the more contemporary understanding of the question

defined by the American way of thinking. These cultural differences create conflict and other outside influences on identity and status. Analyzing how gender roles are managed and adjusted throughout the process of assimilation provides critical insights into the dynamics that influence identity across diverse contexts. This aspect highlights the significance of cultural amalgamation and its impact on individual experiences and self-perception (Hyman, 2016).

11. Conclusion

Analyzing the various themes in *American Dervish* suggests that the main character struggles to synchronize his way between several cultures and achieve an individualistic identity. In-depth discursive analysis supported by the application of appropriate theories suggests that the main problem is balancing the characters' backgrounds against the typical patterns and customs of life in America. The point of intersection among cultural practices, internal conflicts, and social norms underlines the complication of reconciling identities in today's globalized world. It highlights the challenges and advantages of cultural amalgamation, noting that the loss of cultural heritage is one of the potential risks. The study deepens our understanding of literature that deals with multicultural themes and builds upon critical questions concerning the impact of assimilation on relationships and the journey of self-discovery. Thus, future studies may further explore the blending of identity within various contexts.

American Dervish by Ayad Akhtar explores the challenges associated with internalizing cultures other than one's own, as well as the formation of identity. This struggle by the protagonist to balance his cultural heritage with societal expectations raises excellent questions about how people navigate different cultural

backgrounds. The study illustrates how people struggle to integrate diverse cultures when examining the intricate details of the melting pot of norms in the story. Moreover, based on the path the main character took, one can glean some crucial insights concerning how this relates to the consequences of assimilation on interpersonal relationships, cultural integrity, and self-discovery. Understanding this process is also essential for researchers and readers to comprehend the interaction between works of literature and the development of individual identity in the globalization era.

In sum, examining the complications of fusion and identity formation, as brought to the surface in Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish*, highlights how individuals navigate cross-cultural influences. Indeed, further research should be conducted on how gender, socio-economic status, and intergenerational differences impact cultural fusion. This could also involve further research on how global connectedness has influenced personal identities and how stereotypes persist in literature for a vital insight into the changing face of multiculturalism. The degree to which language and communication strategies play a role in the construction of identities could also be elaborated to explain the integration process. A researcher can investigate these possible research directions in depth by examining the complications that arise during cultural integration and their impact on identity building in a globalized and interdependent world.

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الاستيعاب الثقافي والبحث عن الذات في الدراويش الأمريكي لأيدأختر

المخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة أبعاد الاستيعاب الثقافي واشكاليات الهوية كما تتجلى في رواية *الدراويش الأمريكي* للكاتب إيدأختر، من خلال مقارنة تحليلية نوعية تستند إلى التأمل النقدي والتفسير العميق لمسار بطل الرواية، حياة شاه، وهو يتنقل بين جذوره الإسلامية الباكستانية وضغوط الثقافة الأمريكية المهيمنة. تكشف الرواية عن تعقيدات التوتر بين الانتماء العائلي والضغط المجتمعية وإغراءات الامتثال، مقدّمة الاستيعاب لا كفعل اندماج أحادي، بل كعملية تفاوضية تتطوي على صراعاً داخلياً ومجتمعياً حول الهوية العرقية والانتماء الثقافي.

تُفكك الورقة عدداً من الحقول الموضوعية المحورية، مثل أدوار الدين، وصراع الهوية، والجندر، وانعكاسات هذه العناصر على تماسك الأسرة والمجتمع وتجارب الاندماج في المهجر. كما تُظهر الرواية الآثار النفسية لهذا التداخل الثقافي، ممثلة في مشاعر الاغتراب، والتمزق الوجداني، والتأمل الروحي، وكلها مجسدة عبر السرد الذاتي لتجربة حياة. وتؤكد الدراسة على مركزية التعاليم الدينية الإسلامية في تشكيل موقع حياة الاجتماعي والأخلاقي، مقدّمة قراءة توطر الروحانية كجزء لا يتجزأ من عمليات التكيف والتكامل.

وتستقصي الدراسة كذلك البعد اللغوي بوصفه عاملاً مزدوجاً: فهو من جهة يمكن البطل من الانخراط الثقافي، ومن جهة أخرى يقيدّه عبر إعادة إنتاج توترات الهوية والانتماء. وتبرز الرواية التفاعلات الجندرية وتوترات الأدوار الأسرية، مسلطة الضوء على فجوات الأجيال والصراعات الثقافية المتفاقمة التي تعيشها الشخصيات النسائية، لا سيما بطلة الرواية.

تُسهم الدراسة في النقاشات المعاصرة حول التعددية الثقافية، موضحةً كيف أن الهويات ليست ثابتة، بل يتم بناؤها ضمن شروط اجتماعية-تاريخية معقدة مدعومة بأمثلة من الأدبيات المعاصرة. وتخلص إلى الدعوة إلى مزيد من الدراسات التي تربط بين الدين واللغة والهوية في إطار أدبيات الهجرة، خصوصاً في ظل تصاعد تأثير العولمة على تكوين الذات في السياقات الحديثة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستيعاب الثقافي، بناء الهوية، تجربة المهاجرين، التأثير الديني، التعددية الثقافية.