
Sadia Shepard's Foreign-Returned: Pakistani Immigrants' View on American Values

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Abstract

Sadia Shepard's *Foreign-Returned* talks about the life of Pakistani immigrants in America, especially Hasan, who struggle to live a better life in the U.S. American values become the main focus in this study to see their influences in certain characters' point of view of this short story. The data are selected conversations and the narrations in *Sadia Shepard's Foreign-Returned* as well as traditional American values and the sociological data of Pakistani Diaspora in America in the 2000s. This research reveals that most of the characters, both first- and second-generation Pakistani immigrants, practice American values in certain ways. However, values are fluid. Not everyone in the U.S.A believes in American values; on the other hand, non-Americans are possible to practice American values. In brief, how much the American values influence the characters' minds and behavior does not depend on whether they are first- or second-generation immigrants.

Keywords: American values; first-generation; second-generation; foreign-returned

INTRODUCTION

People believe that America offers them a promising future for everyone who wants to make a significant difference in their life, and this is popularly known as the American Dreams (Datesman et al., 2005; Wang & Fan, 2013). This belief triggers lots of people around the world are eager to be in America to pursue their dreams. Dream, for many Americans, is an integral part of their own identity and it has vital functions within American culture (Kasiyarno, 2014). American dream and American values are inseparable. The dream is traditionally understood as an American myth to have success, fame, and wealth through hard work and thrift. The values of democracy, personal freedom, upward mobility, and openness are often expressed in American popular culture (Kasiyarno, 2014; Laitinen, 2009). Americans trusted and asked for the American Dream to become a reality in which there was space for solidarity and humanity.

This condition, however, might be different after the 9/11 bombing incident (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2012; *The 9/11 Commission Report*, n.d.) because of the rise of Islamophobia. This phobia leads Americans to be skeptical about their Muslim brothers. Thus, it became a complicated situation for immigrants especially those who came

from Muslim countries (Considine, 2018). However, this does not stop people to come to America. This is interesting, then, to figure out why America is like a "magnet" for the immigrants? America's becoming an attractive place for newcomers is not a brand-new idea. Europeans are interested to go to the U.S.A. since a long time ago to establish colonies that were free from the controls that existed in their former society, which then leads them to believe in American exceptionalism (Bancroft, 1874; Datesman et al., 2005). With their notion of exceptionalism, Americans shape "the American values" which has allowed the United States to take in millions of people from diverse cultures all over the world and create a remarkable American identity (Datesman et al., 2005; Wang & Fan, 2013). There are at least three pairs of American values; Individual Freedom and Self-Reliance, Equality of Opportunity and Competition, and The American Dream and Hard Work. These values are depicted in countless literary works that represent the life of immigrants in the United States. The stories are varied, one of them is about their decision to leave their homeland to survive in America. Sadia Shepard, a Pakistani American, represents the life of immigrants in her short story entitled *Foreign-Returned* (Sadia Shepard, n.d.). This short story talks about the life of Pakistani immigrants from both first-

and second-generation, from the way the characters live their life as immigrants in America to how they believe and live their values in their daily life. This short story depicts also that not all immigrants can easily achieve American dreams because they have also to compete with everybody else in America (Ashila, 2019). Therefore, it is hard for those who have high expectation and they cannot gain it.

METHODS

This paper implements a postmodernism approach to literature, which believes that truth is a matter of perspective. In postmodernism, truth is considered as a matter of perspective and not universal. Moreover, because of the huge globalization, different cultures are getting mixed (Khalique et al., 2015). We can see the effect of this on literature. Furthermore, postmodern authors tend to use irony in their writings (Connor, 2004; Sheeba, 2017). Therefore, the data on Pakistani diaspora in America in the 2000s (Considine, 2018; Quraishi, 2019) are taken as well as the terminologies related to immigrant integration, traditional American values and elements of literature are used to give a clear explanation on the depiction of American values in the short story. The data of this research also consists of Shepard's *Foreign-Returned*. Dialogue, narrative, plot, and the characters as well as some key points related to the characters' point of view on American Values are used as the discussion in this paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hassan's Ideology on His Religion Practice

As a first-generation Pakistani immigrant in the U.S.A., Hassan is expected to be the unofficial ambassador of his home country. His family and relatives in his former country expect him to be wealthy or successful when Hasan decides to move to the U.S.A. It is, then, something that becomes a big responsibility or "burden" for him. Before leaving for the U.S.A., Hassan has arranged to marry Sara, his cousin, who then he brings along to the U.S.A.

Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country which leads to the assumption that every Pakistani is a religious person. This, however, is not the same as Hasan's belief. "Back home, his religious practice had been limited to an annual trip to the masjid for Eid..." (Shepard, 2018). It shows that Hasan is not a person who does five-time prayers a day as what is taught in Islam. Living

in America and believing in individual freedom strengthens his idea that he does not necessarily practice the rituals in his religion. When Hina asks Hassan on her first day of work on whether he practices his five-time prayer in office, Hassan said to Hina, "Prayer was a personal matter,... Best avoided in the workplace," (Shepard, 2018).

This is quite contrary to what Hina does. Although she is a second-generation Pakistani immigrant in America, of which we can assume that she believes more in the American values, she is told that she is very disciplined in doing the Muslim five-time prayers. From this contradictory condition, Hasan might be considered as a "not-so-good Muslim". Muslims are out in two different stereotypes. One can be considered a good Muslim if he or she obeys the rules and regulations about what can and cannot be done, and what should and should not be done as a Muslim (Considine, 2018). Americans may see Hassan as an ordinary, typical, or maybe liberal Muslim, but inside the Muslim community, Hassan can be considered as a "not-so-good Muslim".

There are various probabilities why Hassan chooses not to do prayer in front of the public. Hassan might be afraid that if he appears to be a typical male Muslim like what American media portrayed (Considine, 2018), he would be seen as an 'extremist'. Or it can also be a stereotype breaker that not every Moslem Pakistani does the five-time prayers a day. Hassan comes from Pakistan to U.S.A to participate in the persistent lure of the American dream (Shepard, 2018); therefore, he tries to fulfill the expectations of his families and communities by not ruining their expectations, by avoiding American prejudice of being an extremist Muslim. Moreover, it can be concluded also that someone's religiosity is not related to his condition of being the first or the second generation of immigrants.

The way Shepard contrasts the first and the second generation of Pakistani immigrants in America is interesting. Shepard offers a condition that might be controversial from what is stereotyped in Pakistani America. However, Shepard's surprise here is interesting to make the readers realize that one size does not fit all, in this case, not every stereotype applies to all.

Hina's Attempt to be a Good Muslim

As it is mentioned before, everyone has a choice for their life, and this is believed by Americans as individual freedom. Therefore, people in the U.S.A. are free to believe (or not) in a certain religion or way of life. In Shepard's *Foreign Returned*, Hina chooses to believe in Islam as her re-

ligion and she takes it responsibly, one of the proves is that she manages to keep her daily prayers even in her workplace, "She reached under the desk and pulled a prayer rug from her duffel bag. She explained that she had arranged with Tom, their team leader, to offer her daily prayers in the conference room on the eleventh floor," (Shepard, 2018). Furthermore, in another scene, Hina is portrayed not eating any meat given by Hassan and his wife, Sara, because she is afraid that the meat is not halal, "'Thank you, but I only eat Halal,' Hina said, piercing a roasted potato with her fork and chewing it methodically," (Shepard, 2018). These conditions show how consistent she is in practicing her religion. Also, she even joins the Islamic Center. Her demeanor reflects how she works for her freedom to do her responsibility as a Muslim.

Hina's choice to be a good Muslim is quite challenging because, after the 9/11 tragedy, those who are considered good Muslims may be labeled as extremists, terrorists, and also being very conservative (Considine, 2018). Hina, however, breaks all those stereotypes. She proves that she can be considered a good Muslim as well as a good American. She fulfills her duty as an American, one of the proves is that she went campaigning for the election, it means that she is aware of her country's political condition and she took part in it.

Shepard's interesting way of depicting Hina as a brave Pakistani American tells the readers that it is not always easy to achieve the American dream as a Moslem American because of the labels that might be imposed on his/ her. Hina, however, is told as someone true to herself. She does not sacrifice her belief just to be what Americans want her to be. On the contrary, she lives her American values by maintaining her freedom as well as her duty as an American citizen.

Hina's Decision to Make A Life on Her Own

Hina Bhati is a second-generation Pakistani immigrant who was born and raised in America. She is raised in Michigan, then in New York along with her family from Gujranwala, Pakistan. She is the oldest sister among her four siblings; therefore, she has to take care of her siblings. Some principles are not the same between Pakistani's and American's. As a Pakistani, it is a common thing to get married to someone chosen by the parents at an early age – this happens with Hasan. Hina, on the other hand, rejects a marriage proposal when she is twenty years old because she does not want to get married at that time. This, of course, shocks her parents. Even though she

knows that her parents forbid her to do this and that, she knows and believes that she can be whatever she wants to be because she has the right to choose whatever good for her life. By presenting this sequence of event, Shepard highlights Hina as someone who believes and relies on herself, as to how the individual freedom works. Hina said, "I'm not interested in marriage. I want to make a life that I choose." It is pretty clear that Hina has a vision about her life and she takes care of it even though she has to sacrifice her relationship with her parents. Hina thinks that marriage is not what she wants for her life. Hina's parents, as the first-generation immigrants might see marriages are a form of exchange between kin groups and women are seen as precarious gift (Tarar & Pulla, 2014), which is in contradictory with the notion of equality as one the American values which posit both men and women at the equal position. Hina, on the other hand, does not see herself as a gift and she does not think that rejecting marriage can be such a shame for her family. To be more extreme, Hina believes that as an American she can survive without her parents' help, a point of view that is on the opposite of Pakistani's; which then leads Hina to leave her parents and live her life with her personal choice.

Competitiveness between Hassan and Hina Bhati

Hassan has been eight weeks working in the bank when Hina was assigned to his desk. When he sees Hina for the first time, he is questioning why his boss places Hina at the same desk as him, especially when he knows that Hina is much younger than he is. Hasan's uneasiness proves that he does not believe in the notion of equality. Hasan sees himself as someone more superior than Hina; because he has stayed longer at the office and because he is a man. Ideally, while living in the USA, Hasan should realize that this thought may not be applicable in the U.S.A. because Americans believe in equality: everyone can work together regardless of their sex or their seniority. By this notion, Americans believe that everybody has the same right to do anything so long as it does not hurt anyone else. It is not easy for Hasan, however, as the first generation of Pakistani in the U.S.A to practice the value of equality.

Hasan's belief is normal as a Pakistani because most Asian nations are highly valued seniority (Chen & Chung, 2002). They believe that the older the people are, the more experienced they are. Hassan, as a first-generation immigrant whose Asian values still deeply rooted in his mind-

set, undoubtedly sees Hina as an inexperienced employee. This is an occupational closure, a term in a patriarchal society where a contest between men and women happens (Kruger et al., 2014). Men, as the dominant groups' established gender inequality in the labor market by setting the criteria that make women ineligible for powerful positions. In Hassan's case, he is also worried and irked to the fact that the office places them together.

The equality and competition issue that Hassan and Hina have is reasonable because they both come from a different social background (Hina is grown up in America, while Hasan is not) even though they share the same home country. Hasan should realize that occupational closure (Kruger et al., 2014) cannot be applied in America's workplaces which applies the equality of opportunity where women and men are having the same chance to have a powerful position in their work or job. Hina, even though she is a female employee does not make her less appreciated, she even gains compliments from her team leader instead. Even though Hassan is a male employee and has been in the bank longer than Hina, it does not make him an ace employee either.

Hasan's being annoyed because of his superior feeling is not surprising for the Asian readers. The way Shepard presents this issue might lead the readers to understand that this kind of problem might occur due to Hasan's culture shock. There are some contradictions among his values brought from his country of origin and the American values. Shepard exaggerated something that Hasan is annoyed because he has stayed eight weeks longer in the office. Eight weeks is not a long time to feel that superior. This exaggeration, however, is a clear depiction for the readers that such a thing might happen in real life.

Hina Bhati as Tom's Secret Weapon

Fighting for decades, the equality of opportunity in the American workplace cannot be easily realized equally all over America, especially in terms of gender and race. Hassan feels isolated and annoyed because the only interaction that Hassan can have is with Hina, the Pakistani girl that he felt most competitive with. Shepard does not mention explicitly on why this happens. Thus, it leads the readers to various interpretations. This, however, may be highlighted that it is not always easy to be immigrants in the U.S.A. because of this paradox of equality.

Also, for Hina Bhati, being a Pakistani woman in an American workplace is not easy. As

a second-generation Pakistani immigrant, Hina gets some privileges, one of them is to learn a lot since she was a child in the American education system which she believes better than Pakistani's. Hina, moreover, knows the boundaries she will face as an immigrant but she keeps on trying, as the practice of hard work as the American value. On the other hand, Hina got better preliminaries as she is growing up in America. Both experiences and preliminaries make her works suitable in an American workplace and make her works stand out. Even though she is a minority in terms of her race and religion, her works are preeminent and it is approved by her team leader, Tom. "Watch out, Hassan! She is unstoppable!" Tom said as he passed their desk, chuckling to himself" (Shepard, 2018). The way Tom acknowledges Hina as the unstoppable worker means a lot to Hina, as one of the appreciations and recognition of being herself.

Hina believes as long as she keeps her works right and remarkable, she will be doing fine in her workplace, and Tom, her team leader, will keep satisfied with her works. However, Hina is quite competitive towards Hassan. She likes to think that she is the only Tom's secret weapon, someone that no one recognizes about and that will give a person a benefit over the competitors (*SECRET WEAPON | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary*, n.d.). It is portrayed in a dialogue when Hassan also considers himself as Tom's secret weapon. "Well, he has two secret weapons, then," Hassan suggested. "Me and you." "Perhaps," Hina said as if she didn't quite agree" (Shepard, 2018). Hina does not agree with the idea of Hassan's statement because when Hassan makes an occasional mistake in his works, Hina catches them. She has great attention to detail and that is why Hina does not think Hassan has those qualities to be a secret weapon.

Hassan, on the other side, thinks that he is more experienced than Hina because he is older and has been working longer than Hina (although it is only eight weeks long), cannot excuse the way Hina talks about how great she is on her works. Hina believes that the education she gets in America is what makes her works different and better from Hassan's, as she says mockingly,

"It may be because of the way that I was taught in school. Instead of using rote memorization, we were taught cognitive problem-solving. My father says that's the real advantage of American education." (Shepard, 2018)

On the other hand, as the first-generation immigrant, Hassan does not have the privilege of American education as Hina has. That major

difference builds a great difference in their works, too. Moreover, Hassan is irked by the way Hina distinguishes them as different Pakistanis since Hina is an American-born Pakistani. It is stated in the dialogue between Hassan and Sara when he retells his conversation with Hina in the office later that day. "That evening over dinner, Hassan did his best impression of Hina for Sara. 'You see, that's why American Pakistanis like me are superior to Pakistani Pakistanis like you,'" (Shepard, 2018). Hassan is aware that he cannot get the privilege of great education like Hina Bhati. Nevertheless, they still have the same opportunity in their workplace as America serves the value equality of opportunity.

Shepard not only presents the superiority between man and woman but through Hina, Shepard mentions the superiority between first- and second-generation Pakistani Americans. This can be seen as a paradox of the notion of equality. Americans who are proud of the notion of equality are competitive which then leads to the sense of superiority between one another.

Hina Bhati's Hard Work

As a second-generation immigrant, Hina Bhati goes through the acculturation process where she performs American along with Pakistani culture. One of the American values that she possesses is hard work. Hina, in her early twenties, takes her job seriously. She teams up with her co-worker, Hassan, "Hina suggested that she and Hassan review each other's work for errors, sharing files back and forth, before forwarding them to Tom" (Shepard, 2018).

Hina is a second-generation Pakistani American who learns how to work hard from her parents. When she was a child, "When her three younger sisters and brother were small, it was Hina who took care of them while her father finished the night shift in his store and her mother worked at the hospital" (Shepard, 2018). As the first-generation immigrants, Hina's parents have to build a proper living for their children, because they start everything from zero. The only way to do that is through hard work and since then, Hina learns a lot from them. Even though Hina has an issue with her parents which makes her move out of her parents' house when she rejects an arranged marriage, she does not stop her education. She even finishes her degree in two years. Her hard work and struggles despite her family issues make her the first college graduate in her family. Hina's hard work in her job also has an outstanding outcome. Her busy day prepping presentations, studying traffic studies, checking her,

and Hassan's work, makes her promoted to the managerial position.

Hina Bhati possesses hard work value and chases her American dream as an immigrant who does not forget her roots. Her hard work makes her a visionary yet bold and remarkable American-Pakistani Muslim who aims for her American dream. She beats the odd and proves herself that she is going to live her American dream. She has a dream to move to a big house with her siblings and to become a Vice President as well as to pursue her master's degree. Hina Bhati proves that her hard work and diligence make her eligible for a powerful position in her job than Hassan.

Ali and Mona Ahmed's American Dream

Having a steady job is one of the ways Americans manifest their material wealth to get their American dreams. All of the private fortunes in the USA are built by people who are successful in business, many of whom start life with very little (Datesman et al., 2005). Therefore, many immigrants came to America bringing nothing but hope and a strong belief that they can change their life. Hassan, as a first-generation immigrant, has his American dream to settle in a proper house for him and his wife, Sara. Therefore, as a first-generation immigrant who just came to America and started everything from zero, Hassan still has a long way to go to have a Victorian house, the house that Sara dreams of. Every Sunday when he goes to Ahmed's house, he sees a life he aims in America, "On Sundays, they felt closest to the people they wanted to be" (Shepard, 2018). The reason he felt that way is that the Ahmeds have everything that Hassan works for.

Ali Ahmed is a pediatric gastroenterologist, he has a wide circle of acquaintances, membership at a local golf club, a timeshare in Florida. His wife, Mona, organizes charity events for the Islamic Center in Stamford. Ali Ahmed and his wife are the characters who possess material wealth and they are living their American dream as immigrants. The reason is that both of them have reputable and steady jobs. They possess great wealth and keep on being productive. Mona Ahmed also goes canvassing with her group and holds a multicultural book club in her house with her husband, Ali. One evidence of their material wealth is his big house where he invites their relatives for a BBQ and lunch by the pool every Sunday in summer, "The Ahmed's house was a big white Colonial with green shutters, framed by carefully landscaped shrubs and trees. There was a semicircular driveway and a four-car garage with a guest apartment above it" (Shepard, 2018).

A home, that Hassan says, will take a decade for him to get.

The Ahmeds show a perfect picture of what it likes to be a successful immigrant in America. As first-generation immigrants, they taste the American dream and their acknowledgeable success. Ali and Mona Ahmed are symbols of what Hassan and Sara imagine in America, a successful life that remains out of reach for Hassan and Sara. Sara values material wealth that she does not want and does not like to be seen as ordinary. She aims for a life that Ali and Mona have, but she does not work as hard as they do. Sara still has a mindset like most Pakistani women, she is dependent on her husband, that is why Sara does not do much in her life. That is also a reason why she tells a lie to Mona because she sees Mona as her role model she aims in America. Hassan, on the other hand, thinks that there is nothing wrong to be ordinary. In the end, Hassan is fully aware that maybe what he has and offers to fulfill his American dream with his wife is not enough. His effort and struggle to gain success, great material wealth does not attain the standard of American hard work.

Hassan and Sara as the Foreign-Returned

When Ali and Mona Ahmed hold lunch by the pool in their house every Sunday in summer, Hassan and Sara do not miss this opportunity. Unfortunately, their visit to the Ahmeds every Sunday makes Hassan's wife, Sara, commits a lie to Mona Ahmed when she exaggeratedly says that she also has a high-class way of life. It is stated in the dialogue between Hassan and Sara on their car on their way back to their house after their visit to Ahmed's. "Because," Sara said, her voice becoming small, 'I can tell what she thinks of us.' 'What does she think of us?' Hassan asked, surprised to find that he cared. 'She thinks we're . . . ordinary,' Sara said. Hassan started to interject: What was wrong, he wanted to argue, with being ordinary? With fitting in?" (Shepard, 2018). Hassan thinks it is better to be seen as ordinary, as it is the fact than to commit a lie. He realizes that his qualities to gain a successful life in America just have not met the standard. In the end, Hassan and his wife have to leave the U.S.A. and go back to Karachi because Hassan cannot renew his H1-B visa.

"They sit in Sara's parents' kitchen drinking tea and talking about their time in the U.S., trading theories about why Hassan's contract was not renewed. True, it might have been his performance review. But it could also have been his name. Or his nationality." (Shepard, 2018)

The reasons and probabilities are varied, maybe Hassan does not try so hard that his performance review cannot get him to stay in his job, or maybe he cannot renew his H1-B visa because of the rise of the Islamophobia. He flies back to Karachi and calls himself a Foreign-Returned.

CONCLUSION

The American values in Sadia Shepard's *Foreign Returned* are implicitly and explicitly seen within the characters, especially the main character, Hassan, and Hina Bhati. Coming from different backgrounds, these two characters show different points of view of each value. This study shows that value is fluid and someone's origin country affects the way characters think and react towards each other. American values may not be able to be possessed by everyone. Even non-Americans can also possess American values and apply them in their daily life. The characters in this short story practice both the values of their former country, Pakistan, with the American values.

Therefore, it is suggested for the next researchers who have the intention to conduct a study over Pakistani Immigrants in America to see over the cultural assimilation and cultural habits of Pakistani Diasporas in America. Researching the portrayal of cultural identity is also suggested. It is also suggested that the next researchers conduct a study about the feminist side of the women characters in the story since the main character in this short story is a Pakistani woman who plays a big role in the story even though she is a minority in terms of her race and her religion.

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