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A Multiculturalist Reading of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Exit West and Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend*
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Abstract: *This paper explores Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and Exit West (2017), alongside Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* (2017), through the lens of multiculturalist theory. These novels, written in the aftermath of global crises such as 9/11, the War on Terror, and the refugee crisis, interrogate the tensions between cultural pluralism, identity, and belonging in both Western and South Asian contexts. The methodology is grounded in close textual reading, informed by theoretical frameworks from Bhikhu Parekh, Charles Taylor, and Homi Bhabha, the study examines how Hamid and Aslam depict the fragility of multicultural coexistence, the politics of recognition, and the hybrid identities that emerge in transnational spaces. The analysis highlights Hamid's allegorical and transnational approach to migration and identity, contrasted with Aslam's realist portrayal of religious persecution and communal violence in Pakistan. Ultimately, the paper argues that these texts critique the limitations of Western liberal multiculturalism while simultaneously reimagining multiculturalism as a fragile but necessary mode of coexistence in a globalized world. By situating these novels within broader debates in postcolonial and multiculturalist literary criticism, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about cultural diversity, migration, and the politics of belonging in contemporary literature.*

Introduction

The post-9/11 era has witnessed a surge of literary works from South Asian writers that grapple with questions of identity, belonging, and cultural difference in an increasingly interconnected yet polarized world. Among these, Mohsin Hamid and Nadeem Aslam stand out for their nuanced explorations of multicultural tensions, migration, and religious pluralism. Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *Exit West* (2017) engage with themes of alienation, hybridity, and transnational mobility, while Aslam's *The Golden Legend* (2017) foregrounds the precarious position of religious minorities in Pakistan. Taken together, these texts provide fertile ground for a multiculturalist reading that interrogates both the promises and failures of cultural pluralism in contemporary societies.

Multiculturalism, as a political and philosophical framework, emphasizes the recognition and accommodation of cultural diversity within a shared civic space (Parekh, 2000; Taylor, 1994). In literary studies, multiculturalist perspectives often highlight how texts negotiate cultural difference, hybridity, and the politics of representation. Hamid and Aslam's novels, situated within both Western and South Asian contexts, reveal the complexities of multiculturalism as lived experience. They expose the fragility of coexistence in societies marked by xenophobia, religious intolerance, and geopolitical conflict, while also imagining alternative modes of belonging that transcend rigid cultural boundaries.

This paper seeks to answer three central research questions:

1. How do Hamid and Aslam represent multicultural tensions in their respective novels?
2. What role do migration, religion, and identity play in shaping characters' experiences of belonging and alienation?
3. How do these texts critique Western liberal multiculturalism while reimagining multiculturalism in South Asian contexts?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to postcolonial and multiculturalist literary criticism, offering insights into how contemporary South Asian fiction engages with global debates on cultural diversity and coexistence. The comparative analysis of Hamid and Aslam's works underscores the importance of literature as a site for negotiating multicultural anxieties and imagining new possibilities for pluralism in an era of heightened cultural conflict.

Literature Review

The multiculturalist perspective in literary studies has been shaped by a wide range of theoretical interventions, from political philosophy to postcolonial criticism. Scholars such as Bhikhu Parekh (2000), Charles Taylor (1994), and Homi Bhabha (1994) have emphasized the importance of cultural pluralism, recognition, and hybridity in understanding the dynamics of identity and belonging in diverse societies. Within the context of South Asian literature, these frameworks have been applied to interrogate how writers negotiate cultural difference in the aftermath of colonialism, globalization, and transnational migration. Mohsin Hamid and Nadeem Aslam, as prominent contemporary Pakistani novelists, have attracted significant scholarly attention for their engagement with these themes, particularly in relation to post-9/11 anxieties, migration, and religious pluralism.

Multiculturalism and Literary Studies

Multiculturalism, as a political and philosophical concept, emphasizes the recognition and accommodation of cultural diversity within a shared civic space. Taylor (1994) argues that the "politics of recognition" is central to multiculturalism, as individuals and groups seek acknowledgment of their cultural identities within broader social frameworks. Parekh (2000) similarly stresses the need for societies to embrace cultural pluralism, moving beyond assimilationist models that demand conformity to dominant norms. In literary studies, these ideas have been extended to examine how texts represent cultural difference, negotiate hybridity, and critique exclusionary practices. Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space" has been particularly influential, highlighting how cultural identities are formed through negotiation and hybridity rather than fixed essences.

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) has been widely discussed in relation to post-9/11 identity politics and multicultural tensions. Scholars such as Shamsie (2009) and Morton (2010) argue that the novel foregrounds the disillusionment of South Asian immigrants in the United States, particularly in the wake of heightened suspicion and xenophobia. Changez's narrative reflects the fragility of multicultural coexistence, as his initial embrace of American culture gives way to alienation and resistance. From a

multiculturalist perspective, the novel critiques the limitations of liberal multiculturalism in the United States, exposing how recognition and belonging are undermined by racialized suspicion and geopolitical conflict. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is central here, as Changez's identity oscillates between assimilation and resistance, ultimately rejecting the promise of multicultural inclusion.

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) has been interpreted as a global allegory of migration and multiculturalism. Scholars such as Gopal (2018) and Rahman (2019) highlight the novel's use of magical realism—through the motif of doors that transport characters across borders—as a metaphor for transnational mobility and cultural hybridity. The novel envisions a world where migration is both inevitable and transformative, challenging the rigid boundaries of nation-states and cultural identities. From a multiculturalist perspective, *Exit West* imagines a utopian possibility of coexistence, while simultaneously acknowledging the xenophobic realities that migrants face. The novel resonates with Parekh's (2000) call for cultural pluralism, as it depicts characters navigating diverse cultural contexts and forging new forms of belonging. At the same time, it critiques the failures of Western societies to fully embrace multicultural inclusion, as migrants encounter hostility and exclusion.

Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend*

Aslam's *The Golden Legend* (2017) offers a more localized exploration of multicultural tensions, focusing on religious pluralism and persecution in Pakistan. Scholars such as Ahmed (2018) and Khan (2020) argue that the novel foregrounds the precarious position of religious minorities, particularly Christians and Ahmadis, within a society marked by intolerance and violence. From a multiculturalist perspective, the novel highlights the fragility of coexistence in contexts where cultural and religious diversity is not adequately recognized or protected. Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition is particularly relevant here, as the novel exposes the consequences of denying recognition to marginalized groups. Aslam's realist portrayal contrasts with Hamid's allegorical approach, emphasizing the lived realities of persecution and the urgent need for multicultural accommodation in South Asian societies.

Comparative Scholarship on Hamid and Aslam

While Hamid and Aslam have been studied extensively in isolation, comparative scholarship remains relatively limited. Scholars such as Mufti (2017) and Anwar (2021) suggest that Hamid's global, transnational lens complements Aslam's local, communal focus, offering a broader understanding of multicultural tensions across contexts. Hamid's novels engage with migration and identity in globalized spaces, while Aslam's work foregrounds the challenges of religious pluralism within Pakistan. Together, these texts reveal the multifaceted nature of multiculturalism, encompassing both global mobility and local coexistence. From a theoretical perspective, Bhabha's hybridity, Taylor's recognition, and Parekh's pluralism provide useful frameworks for analyzing these texts in tandem.

Gaps in Scholarship

Despite the rich body of scholarship on Hamid and Aslam, several gaps remain. First, there has been limited comparative analysis of their works from a multiculturalist perspective. Most studies focus on postcolonial or political readings, without fully engaging with multiculturalist theory. Second, while Hamid's global lens has been widely discussed, Aslam's localized exploration of religious pluralism has received less attention in relation to multiculturalism. Finally, there is a need for more sustained engagement with multiculturalist theorists in analyzing these texts, particularly in bridging the gap between political philosophy and literary criticism.

This literature review highlights the relevance of multiculturalist theory in analyzing Hamid and Aslam's novels. It situates their works within broader debates on cultural pluralism, recognition, and hybridity,

while identifying gaps in existing scholarship. By bringing these texts into dialogue, the study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of multicultural tensions in contemporary South Asian fiction.

Theoretical Framework

Defining Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism, as a political and philosophical concept, refers to the recognition, accommodation, and negotiation of cultural diversity within a shared civic space. It challenges assimilationist models that demand conformity to dominant cultural norms, instead advocating for pluralism and respect for difference. Parekh (2000) defines multiculturalism as a framework that acknowledges the legitimacy of diverse cultural traditions and emphasizes the need for societies to adapt to cultural plurality. Similarly, Taylor (1994) argues that the “politics of recognition” is central to multiculturalism, as individuals and groups seek acknowledgment of their cultural identities within broader social frameworks. In literary studies, multiculturalism provides a lens for analyzing how texts represent cultural difference, negotiate hybridity, and critique exclusionary practices.

Hybridity and the “Third Space”

Homi Bhabha’s (1994) concept of hybridity and the “third space” has been particularly influential in multiculturalist literary criticism. Hybridity refers to the process by which cultural identities are formed through negotiation and interaction, rather than being fixed or essential. The “third space” is the site where these negotiations occur, producing new, hybrid identities that challenge binary oppositions between cultures. In the context of Hamid and Aslam’s novels, hybridity is central to understanding how characters navigate multicultural tensions. Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* embodies hybridity as he oscillates between assimilation into American culture and resistance to its exclusionary practices. Similarly, the migrants in *Exit West* inhabit a “third space” as they move across borders, negotiating new forms of belonging. Aslam’s *The Golden Legend*, while less focused on transnational hybridity, highlights the negotiation of identity within a local context marked by religious pluralism and intolerance.

Politics of Recognition

Taylor’s (1994) notion of the politics of recognition emphasizes the importance of acknowledging cultural identities within broader social frameworks. Recognition is not merely symbolic; it has material consequences for individuals and groups, shaping their sense of belonging and legitimacy. In Hamid’s novels, the failure of recognition is evident in the suspicion and hostility faced by immigrants in Western societies. Changez’s disillusionment in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reflects the denial of recognition in post-9/11 America, where multicultural inclusion is undermined by racialized suspicion. In *Exit West*, migrants encounter similar challenges, as their presence is often met with hostility rather than acceptance. Aslam’s *The Golden Legend* foregrounds the denial of recognition in Pakistan, where religious minorities are marginalized and persecuted. From a multiculturalist perspective, these texts highlight the consequences of failing to recognize cultural difference, underscoring the need for more inclusive frameworks of belonging.

Cultural Pluralism

Parekh (2000) emphasizes the importance of cultural pluralism, arguing that societies must move beyond assimilationist models and embrace diversity as a fundamental aspect of civic life. Cultural pluralism involves not only tolerance but also active engagement with difference, recognizing the legitimacy of diverse cultural traditions. Hamid’s *Exit West* imagines a form of cultural pluralism through its depiction of migrants forging new communities across borders. The novel envisions a utopian possibility of coexistence, where diversity is embraced rather than feared. Aslam’s *The Golden Legend*,

by contrast, highlights the fragility of cultural pluralism in contexts where intolerance and violence undermine coexistence. Together, these texts reveal both the possibilities and limitations of cultural pluralism in contemporary societies.

Multiculturalism in South Asian and Global Contexts

While multiculturalism has often been discussed in relation to Western liberal democracies, Hamid and Aslam's novels highlight its relevance in both global and South Asian contexts. Hamid's transnational lens engages with multicultural tensions in Western societies, particularly in relation to migration and identity. Aslam's localized focus foregrounds the challenges of religious pluralism within Pakistan, emphasizing the need for multicultural accommodation in non-Western contexts. By bringing these perspectives into dialogue, the study highlights the multifaceted nature of multiculturalism, encompassing both global mobility and local coexistence. This comparative approach underscores the importance of situating multiculturalist theory within diverse cultural contexts, moving beyond Eurocentric frameworks to engage with the complexities of South Asian societies.

This theoretical framework establishes multiculturalism as the central lens for analyzing Hamid and Aslam's novels. Drawing on Parekh's cultural pluralism, Taylor's politics of recognition, and Bhabha's hybridity, the framework highlights how these texts negotiate cultural difference, belonging, and exclusion. By situating multiculturalism within both global and South Asian contexts, the study provides a comprehensive foundation for the subsequent textual analysis.

Textual Analysis: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Identity Crisis and Multicultural Disillusionment

Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) is a seminal post-9/11 novel that interrogates the fragility of multicultural coexistence in the United States. The protagonist, Changez, embodies the immigrant's journey from hopeful assimilation to disillusioned resistance. Initially, Changez embraces American culture, excelling academically at Princeton and securing a prestigious job at Underwood Samson. His success reflects the promise of multicultural inclusion, where immigrants can thrive by adopting dominant cultural norms. However, the events of 9/11 mark a turning point, as Changez becomes increasingly alienated in a society that views him with suspicion.

From a multiculturalist perspective, Changez's trajectory highlights the limitations of liberal multiculturalism in the United States. Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition is central here: while Changez initially receives recognition for his talents, this recognition is withdrawn in the aftermath of 9/11, replaced by racialized suspicion. The novel exposes how multicultural inclusion is contingent and fragile, undermined by geopolitical conflict and xenophobia. Changez's disillusionment reflects the denial of recognition, as his identity is reduced to a potential threat rather than acknowledged in its complexity.

Hybridity and the "Third Space"

Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity and the "third space" provides a useful lens for analyzing Changez's identity. As a Pakistani immigrant in the United States, Changez inhabits a hybrid space, negotiating between his cultural heritage and the demands of assimilation. His initial embrace of American culture reflects an attempt to inhabit the "third space," forging a new identity that transcends binary oppositions. However, the hostility he encounters after 9/11 undermines this hybridity, forcing him to confront the impossibility of full assimilation.

The novel thus critiques the limitations of hybridity in contexts where multicultural inclusion is undermined by suspicion and exclusion. Changez's eventual rejection of American culture and return to Pakistan reflects a refusal to inhabit the "third space," highlighting the fragility of multicultural

negotiation in hostile environments. Hamid's narrative suggests that hybridity, while theoretically promising, is often constrained by political and social realities that deny recognition and belonging.

The Politics of Belonging

The novel also foregrounds the politics of belonging, emphasizing how cultural identity is shaped by recognition and exclusion. Changez's relationship with Erica symbolizes his attempt to belong within American society. Erica, however, remains haunted by the memory of her deceased boyfriend, Chris, representing the persistence of cultural boundaries that prevent full inclusion. Changez's inability to replace Chris reflects the impossibility of fully belonging in a society that clings to its dominant cultural narratives.

From a multiculturalist perspective, this relationship highlights the challenges of recognition and belonging in multicultural contexts. Erica's inability to embrace Changez fully reflects the denial of recognition, as his identity is marginalized within dominant cultural frameworks. The novel thus critiques the limitations of multicultural inclusion, emphasizing the need for more robust frameworks of recognition and pluralism.

Critique of Western Liberal Multiculturalism

Hamid's novel ultimately critiques Western liberal multiculturalism, exposing its fragility in the face of geopolitical conflict and xenophobia. Changez's disillusionment reflects the limitations of multicultural inclusion in the United States, where recognition is contingent and easily withdrawn. The novel suggests that liberal multiculturalism, while promising in theory, often fails in practice, particularly in contexts marked by racialized suspicion and exclusion.

Parekh's (2000) emphasis on cultural pluralism is relevant here, as the novel highlights the need for societies to move beyond assimilationist models and embrace diversity more fully. Changez's rejection of American culture reflects the failure of assimilation, underscoring the need for more inclusive frameworks that recognize and accommodate cultural difference. The novel thus contributes to broader debates on multiculturalism, emphasizing the importance of recognition, pluralism, and hybridity in fostering coexistence.

Narrative Form and Multicultural Tensions

The novel's narrative form also reflects multicultural tensions. Told through a dramatic monologue, the narrative positions Changez as both speaker and subject, addressing an unnamed American listener. This narrative structure foregrounds the dynamics of recognition and suspicion, as Changez's identity is constantly negotiated in relation to the listener's gaze. The ambiguity of the listener's intentions reflects the fragility of multicultural coexistence, as recognition is always contingent and uncertain.

From a multiculturalist perspective, the narrative form highlights the challenges of recognition and belonging in multicultural contexts. The listener's silence symbolizes the denial of recognition, as Changez's identity is never fully acknowledged. The novel thus critiques the limitations of multicultural inclusion, emphasizing the need for more robust frameworks of recognition and pluralism.

Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* offers a powerful critique of multiculturalism in the post-9/11 United States. Through Changez's disillusionment, the novel exposes the fragility of multicultural inclusion, highlighting the limitations of liberal multiculturalism in contexts marked by suspicion and exclusion. Drawing on Bhabha's hybridity, Taylor's politics of recognition, and Parekh's cultural pluralism, the analysis underscores the novel's contribution to debates on multiculturalism, emphasizing the need for more inclusive frameworks of belonging.

Textual Analysis: *Exit West*

Migration as Metaphor

Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) is a novel deeply concerned with migration, displacement, and the reconfiguration of identity in a globalized world. The central conceit of magical doors that transport individuals across borders functions as a metaphor for transnational mobility and the permeability of cultural boundaries. These doors collapse geographical distance, foregrounding the inevitability of migration in the contemporary era. From a multiculturalist perspective, the doors symbolize the "third space" (Bhabha, 1994), where identities are renegotiated and hybridized through encounters with cultural difference.

The novel's protagonists, Saeed and Nadia, embody the migrant experience, navigating diverse cultural contexts as they move from their unnamed homeland to Mykonos, London, and eventually California. Their journey reflects both the possibilities and challenges of multicultural coexistence, as they encounter hospitality and hostility in equal measure. The magical doors thus serve as a narrative device that foregrounds the global dimensions of multiculturalism, emphasizing the need for societies to embrace cultural pluralism in the face of inevitable migration.

Hybridity and Identity Transformation

Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity is central to understanding *Exit West*. As Saeed and Nadia move across borders, their identities are transformed through encounters with diverse cultural contexts. Nadia, in particular, embodies hybridity, as she adapts to new environments with resilience and openness. Her willingness to embrace difference contrasts with Saeed's attachment to tradition, highlighting the tensions between assimilation and cultural preservation.

From a multiculturalist perspective, Nadia's adaptability reflects the potential of hybridity to foster new forms of belonging in multicultural contexts. Her identity is not fixed but negotiated through encounters with difference, embodying the "third space" where cultural boundaries are transcended. Saeed's reluctance to fully embrace hybridity, by contrast, reflects the challenges of negotiating identity in contexts where cultural traditions remain deeply rooted. The novel thus highlights the complexities of hybridity, emphasizing both its potential and its limitations in fostering multicultural coexistence.

Politics of Recognition and Hostility

Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition is also central to the novel's exploration of multicultural tensions. As migrants, Saeed and Nadia seek recognition in the societies they enter, hoping to be acknowledged as legitimate members of diverse communities. However, their presence is often met with hostility, reflecting the denial of recognition in contexts marked by xenophobia and exclusion. In London, for example, migrants are confined to specific neighborhoods, facing suspicion and resentment from local residents.

This denial of recognition underscores the fragility of multicultural coexistence in Western societies. While liberal multiculturalism promises inclusion, the novel exposes its limitations in practice, as migrants are marginalized and excluded. The hostility faced by Saeed and Nadia reflects broader anxieties about migration and cultural diversity, highlighting the need for more robust frameworks of recognition and pluralism. From a multiculturalist perspective, the novel critiques the failures of Western societies to fully embrace cultural diversity, emphasizing the consequences of denying recognition to migrants.

Cultural Pluralism and Utopian Possibilities

Despite its critique of Western multiculturalism, *Exit West* also imagines utopian possibilities of coexistence. The novel envisions communities where migrants and locals coexist, forging new forms of belonging that transcend cultural boundaries. In California, Saeed and Nadia encounter a more inclusive

environment, where diversity is embraced rather than feared. This vision resonates with Parekh's (2000) emphasis on cultural pluralism, highlighting the potential for societies to move beyond assimilationist models and embrace diversity as a fundamental aspect of civic life.

The novel's utopian vision is not naïve; it acknowledges the challenges of multicultural coexistence, including hostility and exclusion. However, it also emphasizes the inevitability of migration and the need for societies to adapt to cultural plurality. By imagining communities where diversity is embraced, the novel contributes to broader debates on multiculturalism, emphasizing the importance of pluralism in fostering coexistence in a globalized world.

Narrative Form and Global Perspective

The novel's narrative form also reflects its multiculturalist concerns. Hamid employs a global perspective, weaving together multiple narratives of migration alongside Saeed and Nadia's journey. These vignettes highlight the universality of migration, emphasizing that it is not confined to specific regions but a global phenomenon. From a multiculturalist perspective, this narrative strategy underscores the need for societies to embrace cultural diversity as a global reality, rather than a localized challenge.

The novel's use of magical realism also reflects its multiculturalist concerns. The magical doors symbolize the permeability of cultural boundaries, foregrounding the inevitability of migration and the need for societies to adapt to cultural plurality. This narrative device highlights the global dimensions of multiculturalism, emphasizing the importance of pluralism in fostering coexistence in diverse contexts.

Hamid's *Exit West* offers a powerful exploration of migration and multiculturalism in a globalized world. Through its use of magical realism and global perspective, the novel foregrounds the inevitability of migration and the need for societies to embrace cultural pluralism. Drawing on Bhabha's hybridity, Taylor's politics of recognition, and Parekh's cultural pluralism, the analysis highlights the novel's critique of Western liberal multiculturalism and its utopian vision of coexistence. By situating migration within broader debates on multiculturalism, the novel contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of cultural diversity and belonging in contemporary societies.

Textual Analysis: *The Golden Legend*

Religious Pluralism and Fragile Coexistence

Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* (2017) is a deeply poignant exploration of religious pluralism and the precarious position of minorities in Pakistan. The novel foregrounds the persecution of Christians, Ahmadis, and other marginalized groups, exposing the fragility of multicultural coexistence in a society marked by intolerance and violence. Unlike Hamid's transnational lens, Aslam's narrative is rooted in local realities, emphasizing the urgent need for multicultural accommodation in South Asian contexts.

From a multiculturalist perspective, the novel highlights the denial of recognition (Taylor, 1994) faced by religious minorities. Their identities are marginalized within dominant cultural frameworks, undermining their sense of belonging and legitimacy. The novel's depiction of violence against minorities underscores the consequences of failing to embrace cultural pluralism (Parekh, 2000), emphasizing the need for more inclusive frameworks of coexistence.

The Politics of Recognition

Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition is central to understanding *The Golden Legend*. The novel exposes how religious minorities are denied recognition in Pakistan, marginalized within dominant cultural narratives that privilege majority identities. This denial of recognition has material consequences, shaping the lived realities of persecution and exclusion.

Characters such as Nargis and Helen embody the struggles of minorities seeking recognition in hostile

environments. Their experiences highlight the consequences of denying recognition, as their identities are marginalized and their lives endangered. From a multiculturalist perspective, the novel underscores the importance of recognition in fostering coexistence, emphasizing the need for societies to acknowledge and accommodate cultural difference.

Hybridity and Local Negotiations

While Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity is often applied to transnational contexts, *The Golden Legend* highlights its relevance in local negotiations of identity. Characters navigate hybrid identities within a society marked by religious pluralism and intolerance, negotiating between tradition and resistance. Nargis, for example, embodies hybridity as she navigates her identity as a Christian woman in a hostile environment. Her identity is not fixed but negotiated through encounters with difference, reflecting the complexities of hybridity in local contexts.

From a multiculturalist perspective, these negotiations highlight the potential of hybridity to foster new forms of belonging, even in hostile environments. However, the novel also underscores the limitations of hybridity, as intolerance and violence undermine the possibilities of coexistence. The fragility of hybridity in *The Golden Legend* reflects the urgent need for more robust frameworks of recognition and pluralism.

Critique of Intolerance and Violence

Aslam's novel offers a powerful critique of intolerance and violence in Pakistan, exposing the consequences of failing to embrace multiculturalism. The persecution of minorities reflects the fragility of coexistence in contexts where cultural diversity is not adequately recognized or protected. From a multiculturalist perspective, the novel highlights the urgent need for societies to move beyond exclusionary practices and embrace cultural pluralism.

Parekh's (2000) emphasis on cultural pluralism is particularly relevant here, as the novel underscores the need for societies to recognize the legitimacy of diverse cultural traditions. The violence depicted in *The Golden Legend* reflects the consequences of failing to embrace pluralism, emphasizing the importance of more inclusive frameworks of coexistence.

Narrative Form and Local Context

The novel's narrative form also reflects its multiculturalist concerns. Aslam employs a realist style, foregrounding the lived realities of persecution and intolerance. This narrative strategy contrasts with Hamid's allegorical approach, emphasizing the urgency of multicultural accommodation in local contexts. From a multiculturalist perspective, the novel's realist style underscores the material consequences of denying recognition, highlighting the fragility of coexistence in hostile environments.

By situating its narrative within Pakistan, the novel emphasizes the importance of multiculturalism in non-Western contexts. While multiculturalism is often discussed in relation to Western liberal democracies, *The Golden Legend* highlights its relevance in South Asian societies, foregrounding the challenges of religious pluralism and intolerance. This local focus complements Hamid's global lens, offering a more comprehensive understanding of multicultural tensions across contexts.

Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* offers a powerful exploration of religious pluralism and multicultural tensions in Pakistan. Through its realist portrayal of persecution and intolerance, the novel foregrounds the fragility of coexistence in contexts where cultural diversity is not adequately recognized or protected. Drawing on Taylor's politics of recognition, Bhabha's hybridity, and Parekh's cultural pluralism, the analysis highlights the novel's critique of intolerance and its emphasis on the need for more inclusive frameworks of coexistence. By situating multiculturalism within a local South Asian context, the novel contributes to broader debates on cultural diversity and belonging, complementing

Hamid's transnational lens and offering a more comprehensive understanding of multicultural tensions in contemporary literature.

Comparative Insights and Discussion

Convergences: Shared Concerns with Multiculturalism

Despite differences in style and scope, Hamid and Aslam share a commitment to interrogating the fragility of multicultural coexistence. Both writers foreground the precariousness of identity in contexts marked by suspicion, intolerance, and violence. Hamid's protagonists grapple with alienation in Western societies, while Aslam's characters confront persecution in Pakistan. In both cases, multiculturalism is depicted as fragile, undermined by the denial of recognition (Taylor, 1994) and the failure to embrace cultural pluralism (Parekh, 2000).

This convergence underscores the universality of multicultural tensions, highlighting that they are not confined to Western liberal democracies but also manifest in South Asian societies. By situating multiculturalism within both global and local contexts, Hamid and Aslam contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of cultural diversity and belonging.

Divergences: Local vs. Global Lenses

While Hamid adopts a transnational lens, emphasizing migration and global mobility, Aslam focuses on localized struggles with religious pluralism. Hamid's *Exit West* imagines utopian possibilities of coexistence across borders, while Aslam's *The Golden Legend* emphasizes the lived realities of persecution and intolerance within Pakistan. This divergence reflects different approaches to multiculturalism: Hamid highlights the global dimensions of cultural diversity, while Aslam foregrounds its local challenges.

From a multiculturalist perspective, these divergent approaches complement each other, offering a more nuanced understanding of multicultural tensions. Hamid's global lens emphasizes the inevitability of migration and the need for societies to adapt to cultural plurality, while Aslam's local focus underscores the urgent need for multicultural accommodation in contexts marked by intolerance and violence.

Hybridity and Identity Negotiation

Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity is central to both Hamid and Aslam's works, though applied differently. In Hamid's novels, hybridity is explored through transnational mobility, as characters negotiate identities across borders. Changez's oscillation between assimilation and resistance in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Nadia's adaptability in *Exit West* reflect the complexities of hybridity in global contexts.

In Aslam's *The Golden Legend*, hybridity is negotiated within local contexts, as characters navigate identities in hostile environments. Nargis's identity as a Christian woman in Pakistan reflects the challenges of hybridity in societies marked by intolerance. Together, these texts highlight the multifaceted nature of hybridity, encompassing both global and local negotiations of identity.

Politics of Recognition

Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition provides a useful framework for comparing Hamid and Aslam's works. In Hamid's novels, the denial of recognition is evident in the suspicion and hostility faced by immigrants in Western societies. Changez's disillusionment in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and the hostility faced by migrants in *Exit West* reflect the fragility of recognition in multicultural contexts.

In Aslam's *The Golden Legend*, the denial of recognition is evident in the persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan. The novel foregrounds the consequences of failing to recognize cultural difference, emphasizing the urgent need for more inclusive frameworks of coexistence. Together, these

texts highlight the importance of recognition in fostering multicultural coexistence, underscoring the consequences of its denial in both global and local contexts.

Critique of Liberal Multiculturalism

Both Hamid and Aslam critique the limitations of liberal multiculturalism. Hamid's novels expose the fragility of multicultural inclusion in Western societies, where recognition is contingent and easily withdrawn. Aslam's novel highlights the fragility of coexistence in South Asian contexts, where intolerance and violence undermine multicultural accommodation.

From a multiculturalist perspective, these critiques underscore the need for more robust frameworks of pluralism and recognition. Parekh's (2000) emphasis on cultural pluralism is particularly relevant, as both writers highlight the consequences of failing to embrace diversity. By critiquing liberal multiculturalism, Hamid and Aslam contribute to broader debates on cultural diversity, emphasizing the importance of more inclusive frameworks of coexistence.

Literature as a Site of Negotiation

Finally, both Hamid and Aslam highlight the role of literature as a site for negotiating multicultural anxieties. Their novels foreground the complexities of identity, belonging, and recognition, offering insights into the lived realities of multicultural tensions. By situating their narratives within both global and local contexts, they contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of multiculturalism, emphasizing its relevance across diverse societies.

From a multiculturalist perspective, literature serves as a powerful medium for critiquing exclusionary practices and imagining alternative possibilities of coexistence. Hamid and Aslam's works exemplify this role, offering nuanced explorations of multicultural tensions and contributing to broader debates on cultural diversity and belonging.

The comparative analysis of Hamid and Aslam's novels highlights both convergences and divergences in their engagement with multiculturalism. While Hamid adopts a global lens, emphasizing migration and hybridity, Aslam foregrounds local struggles with religious pluralism and intolerance. Together, their works critique the limitations of liberal multiculturalism, emphasizing the need for more inclusive frameworks of recognition and pluralism. By situating multiculturalism within both global and local contexts, Hamid and Aslam contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of cultural diversity and belonging, underscoring the importance of literature as a site for negotiating multicultural anxieties.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Exit West*, alongside Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend*, demonstrates the profound ways in which contemporary South Asian fiction engages with multiculturalist concerns. These novels, though distinct in scope and style, converge in their interrogation of identity, belonging, and cultural pluralism in contexts marked by suspicion, intolerance, and violence. By applying multiculturalist theory—drawing on Parekh's (2000) cultural pluralism, Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition, and Bhabha's (1994) hybridity—this study has highlighted the novels' contributions to broader debates on cultural diversity and coexistence.

Hamid's works foreground the global dimensions of multiculturalism, emphasizing migration, hybridity, and the fragility of recognition in Western societies. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* critiques the limitations of liberal multiculturalism in post-9/11 America, exposing the conditional nature of recognition and belonging. *Exit West*, by contrast, imagines utopian possibilities of coexistence across borders, while simultaneously acknowledging the hostility migrants encounter. Together, Hamid's novels highlight both the failures and possibilities of multiculturalism in global contexts, emphasizing the need for societies to embrace cultural pluralism in the face of inevitable migration.

Aslam's *The Golden Legend* complements Hamid's global lens by foregrounding the local challenges of religious pluralism in Pakistan. Through its realist portrayal of persecution and intolerance, the novel underscores the fragility of coexistence in contexts where cultural diversity is not adequately recognized or protected. By situating multiculturalism within a South Asian context, Aslam highlights the urgent need for more inclusive frameworks of recognition and pluralism in societies marked by intolerance and violence. His work demonstrates that multiculturalism is not only a Western concern but a global imperative, relevant in diverse cultural contexts.

Taken together, Hamid and Aslam's novels critique the limitations of liberal multiculturalism, emphasizing the consequences of denying recognition and failing to embrace cultural pluralism. Their works underscore the importance of hybridity in negotiating identity, while also highlighting its fragility in hostile environments. By situating multiculturalism within both global and local contexts, these texts contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of cultural diversity and belonging, offering insights into the complexities of coexistence in contemporary societies.

This study contributes to postcolonial and multiculturalist literary criticism by bridging the gap between political philosophy and literary analysis. By applying multiculturalist theory to Hamid and Aslam's novels, the research highlights the relevance of cultural pluralism, recognition, and hybridity in understanding the dynamics of identity and belonging in diverse contexts. It also identifies gaps in existing scholarship, particularly the need for more comparative analyses of South Asian fiction from a multiculturalist perspective.

Future research could extend this analysis by examining other South Asian writers who engage with multicultural concerns, such as Kamila Shamsie, Jhumpa Lahiri, or Salman Rushdie. Comparative studies across diasporic and homeland contexts could further illuminate the complexities of multiculturalism, highlighting how cultural diversity is negotiated in different societies. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches that integrate political philosophy, sociology, and literary criticism could provide more comprehensive insights into the dynamics of multicultural coexistence.

In conclusion, Hamid and Aslam's novels offer powerful critiques of multiculturalism while also imagining alternative possibilities of coexistence. Their works underscore the importance of recognition, pluralism, and hybridity in fostering cultural diversity, highlighting both the challenges and possibilities of multiculturalism in contemporary societies. By situating multiculturalism within both global and local contexts, these texts contribute to broader debates on cultural diversity and belonging, emphasizing the role of literature as a vital site for negotiating multicultural anxieties and imagining new possibilities for pluralism in an era of heightened cultural conflict.

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