Global Voices, Local Roots: Cultural Hybridity and Gendered Identity in Manal al–Sharif's Daring to Drive and Daisy Khan's Born with Wings

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ABSTRACT:

This paper attempt to examine cultural hybridity and gendered identity in two contemporary autobiographical writing : Manal al–Sharif's Daring to Drive and Daisy Khan's Born with Wings. Applying a cultural–studies through theories of identity formation, diaspora, and hybridity–specifically, Stuart Hall's idea of cultural identity as "a matter of becoming as well as being" (Hall 225) and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" (Bhabha 56)–the study explores both writers journey in transnational contexts conflicting cultural expectations, religious belonging, and feminist agency. Although the two texts come from different political and sociocultural contexts–the diasporic Muslim–American and Saudi Arabia's public activism and east to west –they both create hybridized self–representations that explain the simplistic classifications of "tradition" and "modern". This study explores new kinds of cultural belonging that are both local and global by tracing storytelling strategies, gendered rhetorical tactics, and the interaction of memory and public action.

KEYWORDS:

Global Voices, Local Roots, Cultural Hybridity, Gendered Identity, Memory.

Introduction:

Autobiography is powerful tool to examine the cultural identity that connects the personal experience with more general socio–cultural structure. Hall states that identity is a process of positioning within historical and cultural settings rather than a fixed

essence (Hall 226). Specially, in the era of globalization migrated Muslim women's narratives increasingly depict hybrid forms of identities created across borders normative expectations. Daisy Khan's Born with Wings and Manal al–Sharif's Daring to Drive are the fine example of such stories. Each text lights on their fight for independence and dignity both inside and outside of Muslim–majority cultures. This paper highlights how cultural hybridity operates not only as a descriptive condition but as a rhetorical and ethical project: both authors actively recompose their attachments to family, faith, and nation.

Theoretical Framework:

Homi Bhabha's states that hybridity means new forms of identity and meaning created in the "third space" that exists between civilizations (Bhabha 55). Al–Sharif and Khan's stories are derived from encountering multiple cultural codes, can be interpreted with the help of this framework. The way that people renew themselves via historical rupture and transformation is also highlighted by Hall's idea of cultural identity as a dynamic process (Hall 223). The background is also provided by Edward Said's critique of Orientalism: both writers reaffirm Muslim women's agency inside Islam in order to challenge Western preconceptions of them (Said 272).

Methodologically, close textual analysis of autobiographies focusing on narrative voice, structure, and key episodes–public protests, family conversations, and encounters with institutional power. The comparative element elucidates parallel strategies of self–fashioning while attending to local specificities: the Saudi public sphere, Kashmiri Muslim culture and the American diasporic context.

Manal al–Sharif became the first woman who struggle to end the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia's, the land of men. Her memoir recording the emotional and cultural dimensions of dissent within a patriarchal system, recounts personal testimony and activist

discourse. As she writes, "To drive was to claim a space denied to us, a space that belonged to every man but to no woman" (Daring to Drive 118). Through this assertion, al-Sharif redefines the act of driving as a political act of reclamation-an effort to occupy both literal and symbolic spaces from which women had long been excluded. Her narrative thus focuses on multiple levels: it recounts moments of fear, courage, and negotiation within her family while simultaneously articulating a claim to political subjectivity in a culture that polices female autonomy.

In contrast, Daisy Khan's Born with Wings explores the formation of hybrid identity across geographical, cultural, and spiritual boundaries. It explores her life journey from South Asia to the United States and explains how a life can be shaped by spiritual inquiry, social responsibility, and feminist engagement. Khan reflects, "I was constantly balancing between the call of faith and the need to belong to a world that often misunderstood it" (Born with Wings 63). This narrative defines her diasporic experiences through the ongoing negotiation between belonging and belief.

Scholars such as Myra Mendible and Sara Ahmed describe as diasporic feminism-a form of feminist consciousness that resists the universalizing tendencies of Western feminism while remaining rooted in the cultural and ethical frameworks of Muslim societies, best suitable example of both the writer. This approach emphasizing internal reform as a pathway to gender justice without discarding tradition. Khan's assertion that "spiritual equality is the foundation of social justice" (Born with Wings 190) closely relates with this perspective, articulating empowerment as an extension of faith rather than its rejection. Similarly, Al-Sharif's activism embodies an indigenous feminist ethos that seeks change through civic participation, ethical courage, and social responsibility, rather than through cultural detachment. Through their voices, Al-Sharif and Khan construct a new discourse of cultural hybridity-one that blends activism with spirituality, and self-expression with collective transformation.

Both writers construct narrative voices that negotiate between intimacy and authority. Al–Sharif's tone is notably urgent and grounded–she speaks as a firsthand observer of everyday life under systemic constraint. Her storytelling depict vivid, scene–based moments such as driving, her arrest, or family exchanges, which bring into focus the clash between personal determination and public restriction. This sense of immediacy not only draws readers into her experience but also reinforces her authenticity as a participant in a broader struggle (Daring to Drive 132).

By contrast, Khan's voice assumes a more contemplative and instructive register. Her narration operates through acts of mediation–interpreting faith for secular audiences and translating cultural values across social contexts. She weaves memory with reflections on leadership, activism, and spirituality, crafting a voice that functions both as storyteller and interpreter (Born with Wings 155). This stylistic layering–part memoir, part manual–reflects the very hybridity that defines her engagement with diverse communities.

A key concern linking both narratives is the contestation of gendered space. Al–Sharif's defiance through driving and public demonstration is inherently spatial–it reclaims streets as arenas of expression and transforms motion itself into a political statement. Driving functions as a lived rejection of enclosure, with the vehicle serving as a threshold between private restriction and public assertion. The significance of such acts intensifies against the backdrop of laws and traditions that constrain women's physical mobility. As Homi Bhabha observes, "The act of cultural translation unsettles the very terms of authority" (Bhabha 112); in this sense, al–Sharif's driving performs that translation, turning resistance into motion.

Khan, though not centered on a single physical act, challenges gendered limitations through institutional and interpretive engagement. Her confrontations unfold within administrative spaces, interfaith dialogues, and civic forums where meaning and power

are debated. Her form of agency is articulated through discourse–by redefining piety as strength, reinterpreting scripture in favor of equity, and developing frameworks for women's leadership (Born with Wings 189). Both writers, through distinct yet complementary modes–al–Sharif's embodied resistance and Khan's institutional mediation–reshape the very notion of legitimate female agency within their cultural contexts.

Hybridity in these autobiographies is enacted through narrative technique as much as through content. Al–Sharif's memoir juxtaposes traditional familial scenes with digital–era activism. She narrates how social media amplified private acts into public disruptions and how diasporic networks mediated local repression (al–Sharif 176). The hybridity here is technological and relational: local acts are re–signified by global attention, and cultural codes are reworked through new channels of storytelling.

Khan's hybridity centers on intertextual movement–between devotional traditions, feminist thought, and civic discourse. Her narrative frequently translates Islamic concepts into idioms of universal human rights, thereby producing a hybrid ethical vocabulary. As she notes, "Faith is a bridge, not a barrier" (Khan 211). This translational work is both rhetorical and political: it allows her to speak across communities and to construct coalitions that are not confined by geocultural boundaries.

Both authors confront trauma–personal threats, political repression, and the aftereffects of public scrutiny. The role of memory in shaping identity is prominent. Al–Sharif reconstructs moments of fear and courage with sensory detail, inviting readers into the affective reality of resistance. Her retelling is therapeutic and strategic: it humanizes activism and makes the stakes clear to a global audience (al–Sharif 202).

Khan's recollections often involve negotiating loss and displacement in a diasporic frame. Her memories of migration and adaptation resonate with the ambivalences of belonging: gratitude

for opportunities in the host society, alongside longings for cultural continuity. Her public testimony integrates personal sorrow with a vision for communal resilience, turning private memory into a source of moral authority (Khan 234).

Religion operates in both texts as a contested terrain. Al-Sharif does not reject faith; rather, she contests particular readings of religious law that underpin gendered exclusions. Her struggles are often framed as appeals to justice within an Islamic moral vocabulary, challenging monolithic portrayals of religion as uniformly oppressive (al-Sharif 243).

Khan explicitly engages in theological reinterpretation. Her work in the realm of Islamic education and interfaith dialogue demonstrates an activist theology-one that mobilizes scriptural interpretation to argue for gender equality. As Bhabha asserts, hybridity is "the rearticulation of cultural difference" that generates new forms of meaning (Bhabha 114). Khan's approach models a feminist ethic grounded in faith, where reform is achieved through hermeneutics as much as through policy.

Although both narratives articulate cultural hybridity, they diverge in form and emphasis. Al-Sharif emphasizes street-level activism and the embodied gesture of mobility; her hybridity is often performative and immediate. Khan's hybridity, conversely, is institutional and discursive; she works through organizations and public pedagogy to reshape cultural meanings. Yet, as Hall suggests, identities formed through struggle are inherently hybrid, "always in process, and always constituted within representation" (Hall 228).

Convergently, both authors resist reductionist binaries-East/West, secular/religious, traditional/modern. They claim belonging in multiple registers and reject the idea that modernity necessitates abandoning cultural or religious commitments. Instead, hybridity becomes a creative mode of belonging in which identities are reconstituted through negotiation, translation, and praxis.

The juxtaposition of these two life narratives suggests several broader implications. First, autobiographical texts produced by Muslim women can be read as interventions in public discourse: they reframe debates about gender, religion, and citizenship by centering lived experience. Second, hybridity as a theoretical construct benefits from attention to pragmatic strategies–embodied acts, institutional negotiation, and rhetorical translation–rather than remaining solely conceptual. Finally, reading these texts together underscores how gendered identity in transnational contexts demands interdisciplinary methods that combine literary analysis with political and sociological insight.

Conclusion

Manal al–Sharif's Daring to Drive and Daisy Khan's Born with Wings offer complementary models for understanding cultural hybridity and gendered identity. Their autobiographies demonstrate how women negotiate contradictory cultural expectations through performative acts, theological reinterpretation, and institutional leadership. Far from being passive subjects of cultural forces, they are active cultural producers who write themselves into new forms of belonging.

By attending to narrative voice, embodied agency, and the politics of translation, this paper has shown that hybridity functions as both lived condition and strategic resource. Future research might extend this comparative approach to other Muslim women's autobiographies or examine the reception of such texts across different publics–national, diasporic, and digital–to trace how meanings of hybridity are contested and reconstituted beyond the pages of memoir.

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