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## Islamic Identity and Islamic Cultural Hegemony: A Critical Insight into Kamila Shamsie *Home Fire*

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#### Abstract

The study of this paper is related to Islamic studies and main concerns on Islamic identity and Islamic cultural hegemony in the Western country relevant to contemporary Pakistani Diaspora English writing. The paper attempts to throw some light on the aspects of Islamic issues and religious orthodoxy in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire*. Kamila Shamsie is one of the greatest diasporic writers in Pakistani literature. Due to the hereditary writer, Kamila Shamsie has writing skills in her blood, so her novels represent stylistic aspects of South Asian novels. She highlights several issues like cultural identity, nationality, cultural conflict and other socio-political issues through immigrated Pakistani characters such as Isma, Parvaiz, Emmon, etc. By focussing on two British Muslim families in contemporary England, *Home Fire* has reimaged the verse of Sophocles' *Antigone*, when she transported from ancient Greece to today's London using the British-Pakistani characters to highlight several issues like immigration, racism, Muslim identity and discrimination. Through the concept of Antonio Gramsci's *Cultural Hegemony* and the concept of *Identity*, this paper finds out the aspects of Islamic cultural hegemony and Islamic identity in *Home Fire*.

**Keywords:** Hegemony, Islamic, diaspora, identity, immigration and Muslim

#### Introduction

In English, Pakistani literature means the body of literature written by Pakistani including various forms such as poetry, prose, fiction and drama. Now, it is recognized that Pakistani English literature is not only part of Commonwealth literature, but also occupies great importance in world literature. Pakistani Diaspora literature refers to that literature that deals with Pakistani-born British authors' experiences of migration, exile and cultural or geographical displacement especially in the context of postcolonial literature.

Among Pakistani diasporic authors, Kamila Shamsie is one of them and she has an eminent name in the field of postcolonial and diasporic literature of Pakistan. She has received considerable critical acclaim in the English-speaking world with a respectable position. Due to hereditary writer, Kamila Shamsie has writing skills in her blood so her fictions represent the stylistic aspects of South Asian novels. Once, she gives an interview to Hester Lacey, in which she mentioned her earlier ambition-“I was about nine when I first declared I was going to be a writer. Earlier than that, learning how to whistle and blow bubbles with bubblegum”. She wants to highlight cultural and religious issues like cultural identity, nationality, cultural conflict and other socio-political issues.

Shamsie was born in a well intellectual family in Karachi, Pakistan on 13 August 1973. She is the daughter of Anglo-Pakistani writer and literary critic Muneeza Shamsie, the niece of celebrated Indian novelist Attia Hosain and her grandmother Jahanara Habibullah was a memoirist. Shamsie was raised and grew up in Karachi where she has received primary education from Karachi Grammar School. She has finished B.A. in Creative Writing from Hamilton College, and an MFA from the MFA Program for Poets and Writers at the

University of Massachusetts Amherst, Clinton New York, where she was influenced by the Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali, during this time she has written her first novel.

*In the City by the Sea* was published in 1998 when she was at the age of 25. Shamsie was born in Pakistan in the early decade 1970s, a culture in which girls were expected to become only wives and mothers, but Shamsie was fortunate in her family and received support from her affluent and literary family. In her family, several females are writers, including her mother, Muneeza Shamsie, and her great-aunt, Attia Hosain. Consequently, her literary aspirations were positively encouraged. She moved to London in 2007 and became a double national (UK and Pakistan) citizen. As a columnist and reviewer, primarily for the Guardian, his name has been announced for several literary awards including The Orange Award for New Writing and The Guardian First Book Award.

Shamsie is the author of several books including, *In the City by the Sea* (1998) written during college time, shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. Her second novel, *Salt and Saffron* in 2000, *Kartography* (2002), *Broken Verses* (2005), *Burnt Shadow* (2009), *A God in Every Stone* (2014), and her recent novel *Home Fire*, was long-listed for the 2017 Booker Prize, and in 2018 won the Woman's Prize for Fiction.

*Home fire* (2017) is the best-known novel that depicts identical issues towards British Muslims. It won the woman's Prize in 2018 and was long-listed for the 2018 Man Booker Prize. *Home Fire* is a reminding verse of Sophocles' *Antigone*, when she transported from ancient Greece to today's London using the British-Pakistani characters. Shamshi's novel *Home Fire* reimages Sophocles' *Antigone* and sets it in the contemporary context of the struggle of European countries to deal with their citizens who belongs to the Islamic state. Sophocles' *Antigone* revolves around the conflict amongst Antigone, her uncle, the defiance of the laws of Creon, and the Thebes state. At the beginning of the play, Antigone vows to bury the body of her brother Polynices. According to religious ceremony while her sister Ismene refuses to help her and fears of the death penalty. Creon (as a king) refuses to give the permission because he considers him an enemy of the state. On the other hand, Polyneices has become Parvaiz Pasha who becomes a radicalized Londoner and works with the media of the Islamic State Syria in the novel *Home Fire*. There are many characters such as Isma, Parvaiz, Aneeka, Karamat Loe who had been targeted in the context of their cultural and religious identity.

Antonio Gramsci's *Cultural Hegemony* is one of the rarest concepts in post-colonial studies. Cultural hegemony refers to the domination of a diverse culture society by the ruling class which strongly influences the beliefs, values, norms, perceptions, worldview, behaviour, expectation and explanation of the rest of society. In the words of Chris Barker: "There is a strand of meanings within any given culture that can be called governing or ascendant. The process of making, maintaining and reproducing this authoritative set of meanings, ideologies and practices has

been called hegemony"<sup>[1]</sup>. In the novel *Home Fire*, Kamila Shamsie highlights the hegemony of Islamic culture abroad. Isma is a protagonist who faces many harsh situations like cultural hegemony.

According to Chris Barker, "identity is a cultural construction because the discursive resources that form the material for identity formation are cultural in character. In particular, we are constituted as individuals in a social process that is commonly understood as acculturation without which we would not be persons"<sup>[2]</sup>. In the novel *Home Fire*, Kamila Shamsie has shown the Islamic identity through various Muslim characters such as Isma, Karamat Lone, Aneeka, Parvaiz etc.

### Objectives of the study

The original contribution is to bring out Islamic identity and Islamic cultural hegemony in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire*. The main objectives of the research are listed below.

- To see religious orthodoxy in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire*.
- To introduce Pakistani Diasporic literature especially Kamila Shamsie and her works.
- To explore the Muslim identity in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*.
- To represent Islamic Culture and Islamic rituals in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire*.
- To highlight the discrimination of Muslims Abroad in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire*.
- To find out Islamic cultural hegemony in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire*

### Significance of the study

The finding of this study redounds to the benefit of society on the basis of real facts. Due to the lack of prior research in this study area, so I choose this topic. This research attempts to create awareness among readers about Pakistani Diaspora literature. It will also create reference material and provide scope for further study.

### Limitation of the study

The extension of my study confines Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire*. This research paper explores the condition of Muslim women, Islamic identity and Islamic cultural hegemony as well as the aspect of religious orthodoxy.

### Research methodology

This study focuses on Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire* through primary and secondary sources, using textual, critical, evaluative, descriptive, analytic and interpretive methods of research. The M.L.A Handbook of Research 8<sup>th</sup> Edition is followed in the citation and documentation of this research paper.

### 1. Data collection

For the research paper, the data has been used from the primary and secondary sources which are given below.

### Primary sources

- Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017).

<sup>1</sup> Barker, Chris. The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies. London: Sage Publications, 2004. Print

<sup>2</sup> ibid

## Secondary sources

A secondary source is a source that is provided second-hand includes the biography, critical studies of author's works, research paper, and research dissertation, Shodhganga, personal interviews, e-resources, Wikipedia, Britannica and other websites.

## 2. Hypothesis

The present study has something concreted that definitely contributes to present the real picture of the portrayal of Muslim womanhood, cultural differences, Islamic cultural hegemony and quest for Islamic identity in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire*.

## Review of literature

In their research paper 'Muslim Diasporic Identities in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*', Budiman *et al.*, want to examine how Pakistan diasporic community constructs their identity in Kamila Shamsie. Through Stuart Hall's *identity theory* and Homi K Bhaba's concept *Unhomely*, they have been remaining successful to come to a certain conclusion that Shamsie offers his reader an alternative narrative of the Islamic world. In the novel *Home Fire*, Isma maintains her position in the relationship with Eamonn and Parvaiz. Finally, their study finds out the complexity of the Muslim narrative.

Fatima *et al.*, in their research paper, 'Exploring Muslims' Diasporic Identities: A Textual Analysis Of Shamsie's *Novel Home Fire* (2017) From Hall's (1996) Perspective', examine Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* to find out Muslim diasporic identities through Sturt Hall's critical essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". Here, they show that the racial and attitude. In the novel, *Home Fire* Shamsie presents a realistic condition of immigrated British-Pakistani people in the Western Country. "Go back where you come from" like it the characters are faced and targeted. Thus, Fatima *et al.*, find out that the second generation of Diaspora like Isma, Aneeka Parvaiz Pasha Siblings displays their identity.

## Analysis of the text

*Home Fire* is a contemporary retelling that focuses on two British Muslim families in contemporary England. The first family is known as the name of Pashas in which, 28-year-old Isma and her 19-year-old twin siblings, Aneeka and Parvaiz and the second family is known as the name of Lones in which Karamat Lone, his Irish-American wife, Terry and their 24-year-old son, Eamonn. Both families have roots in Pakistan but both consider themselves to be fully British and Pashas follows more conservative Muslim practices, while the Lones does not follow more conservative Muslim practices and are more assimilated into non-Muslim British society.

In her novel *Home Fire*, Kamila Shamsie throws some light on various issues like immigration, racism, Muslim identity and Muslim discrimination. as well as, by focusing on three main characters. Kamila Shamsie portrays how the diasporic community maintains their identities in the novel. Immigration Muslims are often targeted through identical twins similarities and differences between the two families in Britain. In her novel, Shamsie highlights the conflict between what it means to be British and what it means to be

Muslim. Along with it, she shows the realistic picture of conservative Muslims that are subjected to racism quest for identity religious discrimination.

In the novel *Home Fire*, Shamsie uses the Pashas family to present how practicing Muslims are often targeted in Britain and they are made to feel as they are not British by the cause of their faith. Isma (i.e. a member of the Pashas family) faces many problems by the officer at the Heathrow airport. When Isma travels to America, She has tried not to bring anything with her that takes attention to the people toward her at the airport. The evidence of this act is portrayed in Heathrow airport during Isma's interrogation when departing to America, Isma should answer the questions during the Inquiry by the interrogating officer:

"no Quran, no family pictures, no books on her area of academic interest-but even so, the officer took hold of every item of Isma's clothing and ran it between her thumb and fingers, not so much searching for hidden pockets as judging the quality of the material"<sup>[3]</sup>.

Shamsie continues says

"The interrogation continued for nearly two hours. He wanted to know her thoughts on Shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, The Great British Bake Off, the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide bombers, dating websites"<sup>[4]</sup>.

The evidence of this act is portrayed in Heathrow airport during Isma's interrogation when departing to America, Isma should answer the questions during the Inquiry by the interrogating officer. So she has missed her flight.

There are several meanings of the word 'hijab' and often used to be head covering in public by some Muslim women and to maintain privacy and modesty, primarily, from those men who are not family members. Both Aneeka and Isma wear hijabs in the novel, the hijab becomes a symbol in two different senses, first, a symbol of female empowerment and a symbol of pride in one's faith. On the other hand, characters like (second) Eamonn, Karamat and Hira view the hijab as a symbol of female exploitation. Shamsie criticizes prejudice toward hijab as inferior and backwardness. "I get to choose which parts of me I want strangers to look at". Thus, the hijab represents Muslim people (notably women) who are often regarded as a homogenous group (all of the individuals perform their own beliefs and views). From the outside, the hijab may seem like a symbol of Muslim conservatism but for women like Anika and Isma, it is a way to expressing their faith and assertions ownership over their own sexuality.

But the cause of Isma's hijab, Isma has been interrogated for two hours and has missed her flight. One question asked to be by the security officer that; "Do you consider yourself British?"<sup>[5]</sup>. This incident and the question of the police officer alludes that Isma makes to unreliable and less British than a non-Muslim person, while Isma is a

<sup>3</sup> Shamsie, K. (2017). *Home Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

British citizen. This idea becomes far more personal and firm when Parvaiz (Isma and Aneeka's brother) is killed after an attempt to escape ISIS. After the death of Parvaiz, his body is brought to Pakistan rather than England, because the British Home Secretary (Karamat Lone) enacts dual policies revoking the citizenship.

The analysis below presents how Kamila Shamsie constructs problematize representation of her protagonists of Islamic cultural identity, diasporic identity, and Muslim discrimination through the Pasha family (Isma, Aneeka, and Parvaiz). Firstly, Shamsie criticizes the stereotype of Muslim alternative women narrative, because, Isma's characterization incapable to correspond with modernity while she justifies symbolizing traditional and modern values. Shamsie has presented Isma as a woman who proud of her Muslim-ness, she feels comfortable using the turban to cover her head, in public specs. In this sense, the turban is the well-known fashion of Pakistan which associates her identity as a Pakistani Muslim. However, she uses modern hair product in taking care of her hair in a private place, as;

"Isma looked at her reflection in the mirror, hair 'texturized' into 'beachy waves' as Mona of Persepolis Hair in Wembley had promised when she recommended a product that could counter frizzy, flyaway hair without attaining the miracle of straightening it. Her hair said 'playful' and 'surprising'" [6].

Through the above quotation, it has informed that Isma changes her hairstyle into modern style from "texturized/frizzy" into "beachy waves". The model named "beachy waves" itself refers to the modern woman hairstyle in the Western country. Like this, Isma presents herself as a hybrid Muslim who completely co-ordinated with British society as well as maintains her identity as a Muslim.

Beside attribute, in the family of Isma (her brother and sister), English is used to be for daily conversation in both domestic and public place and reflect the hybrid form of Muslim Pakistani identity but they use the Urdu Language to express their inner ideas and experiences of untranslatable expression and maintain their Pakistan-ness and Muslim-ness. For example, Isma uses the word '*bay-takalufi*' to express informal intimacy to Eamonn.

Shamsie shows irony within the characterization of Isma. Then the representation of Isma as the most important ideal Muslim figure as well as in contrast to her sister and brother, Isma's main problem is the problem of economy or class. Based on this belief, she has been motivated to study in America, it can be described as her attempt to climb to a higher hierarchy and build a better 'home' in England. The destructive legacy and traumatic memory of her father have already necessitated her to play double roles; after the graduation and mother die, Zainab Pasha has necessitated earning a family living. So, she prefers to show her loyalty to save her rest family during the interrogation about the case of Parvaiz in England: "We're in no position to let the state question our loyalties". On the other hand, Isma's quality serves as a continuation of the entire conflict in the

novel, as the conflict between her and Anika is the result of Anika's plan to return to Parvez.

As mentioned before, Shamsie presents London as an Islamophobic space and avoids an entire antagonistic narrative in portraying the West. She has presented Eamonn's mother, Terry Lone as upper-class white Irish-American descent who has an open-minded view toward Muslims. Terry coincidentally consists of the Rock against Racism presentation that about to watch The Clash concert. On that occasion, she meets a boy, the leather jacket on which is tagged with Racist Are Bad in Bed. She considers him the boy as Spanish descent, while he was a Pakistani, as the quotation below:

"They'd been marching a while by the same time she discovered his parents were actually from Pakistan, a country she'd never heard of. Considerably later that day, [...] she burst into tears at the thought of saying goodbye to someone so thrilling he vowed to marry her one day" [7].

In contrast to Isma, Aneeka is also a practicing Muslim and believes in Allah, but sexually active and obstinate character. while she is a middle-class Muslim migrated who gained the scholarship to study of law, she has a suspicious point of view toward Western people as portrays in the scene when Aneeka gives suggestion to his sister to answer the question about the Queen if she is interrogated;

"For instance, if they ask you about the Queen, just say, 'As an Asian, I have to admire her colour palette', It's important to show at least a tiny bit of contempt for the whole process.' Instead, Isma had responded, 'I greatly admire Her Majesty's commitment to her role'" [8].

Kamila Shamsie has presented the reality of Muslims immigrated to Britain she puts up the question of the quest for identity. According to Haque *et al.*, in their research paper entitled 'Locating Cultural Hegemony: A Marxist Analysis Of Home Fire', the purpose of the study is to explore the elements of cultural hegemony in the novel Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* through the class system and the hierarchies in a multicultural society. The aims of this paper explore the way that Kamila Shamsie develops a Eurocentric basis through Muslim character and also presents the cultural hegemony in Britain. Thus, Haque *et al.*, conclude that most of the characters face problematic and complained conditions in British Society.

## Conclusion

After analyzing above the point, it cannot be wrong to say that Kamila Shamsie is one of the greatest names in the field of Pakistani Diaspora literature in the contemporary world. Through his recent novel *Home Fire*, Kamila Shamsie presents the real picture of immigrated Muslim issues like Islamic cultural hegemony, Muslim discrimination, Muslim diasporic identity, and Muslim religious orthodoxy. Isma faces many problems like she has been interrogated at the airport because she comes at the airport wearing to hijab and to be questioned by the police officer, "Do you consider British yourself". Like this, Isma

<sup>6</sup> Shamsie, K. (2017). *Home Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

<sup>7</sup> Shamsie, K. (2017). *Home Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

and her family use the English language for daily conversation in both domestic and public places while they use the Urdu language to expressing their inner ideas and expression. Thus, Isma maintains her Muslim identity and Islamic cultural identity in Britain.

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