



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation

ISSN: 2582-7138

Received: 01-03-2021; Accepted: 05-04-2021

www.allmultidisciplinaryjournal.com

Volume 2; Issue 2; March-April 2021; Page No. 183-186

An Imbroglia of Islamophobia in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*

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Abstract

Islamophobia is spreading rampantly in the world especially Western world, assuming different forms and dimensions. Hate crimes against Muslims and Islam have become order of the day. Kamila Shamsie's magnum opus *Home Fire* (2017) depicts how a family with a Jihadi history is pushed to the wall both by stringent laws of the State and the social boycott faced by them. The paper discusses in detail the worst

repercussions of Islamophobia, providing ample incidents of the indignities that Muslims face on daily basis in the post – 9/11 World. *Home Fire* can be viewed as a clarion call for the Islamophobic world leadership. World leaders have to abstain from making anti- immigration laws – which add fuel to the fire and make life difficult for expatriate population.

Keywords: Islamophobia, immigrants, diaspora, nom de guerre, radicalisation

Introduction

The aim of the study is to explore working of Islamophobia and its repercussions on Muslims all over the world in general and overseas Muslims in particular. Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire* depicts the effects of Islamophobia and how it ruins a family, the apathy faced by them from society and stringent immigration laws lead to the doom of Pasha Family. The purpose is also to explore how Islamophobia industry works, while highlighting the perennially continuous suffering of Muslims all over the world.

Methodology

The paper involves a qualitative analysis of the novel *Home Fire* within the paradigm of Islamophobia. The paper also analysis how the novel produces critical dialogue and establishes the working of Islamophobia machinery in the west. The novel depicts the indignities that Muslims face in the Islamophobic west while going about their business. In the post 9/11 era the tensions and conflicts between Muslims and westerners are highlighted by this explosive novel.

Islamophobia can be defined as the unjust fear, hatred of, or prejudice against Muslims all over the world. Various scholars consider it as a form of xenophobia or racism. The word is a neologism formed from 'Islam' and 'phobia' a Greek suffix meaning 'fear of' 'aversion to' Islam. During 1990's the term got translated in Arabic as 'ruhab al- islam' meaning phobia of Islam'. Contemporary people have become consumers of western thought besides the products and services. Zionist funded anti- Islam atmosphere is found globally, a rumour, a lie is nurtured and that engulfs the world like a wild fire. Muslims all over the world more or less are indolent and think that it is better to have tolerant mind-set that will solve their problems. Major events which triggered the Islamophobia and changed the shape of the contemporary world are 9/11 terror attacks (2001: USA); 7/7 bombing (2005: England) and the 11-M bombings (2004: Spain). Since then Islamophobia is spreading and rampant hatred crimes are prevalent against the diasporic Muslim communities settled in every corner of the world. In 1996, British Government, commissioned the Runnymede Trust to compile a report on British Muslims and Islamophobia. In 1997, the report entitled "Islamophobia: A Challenge for us All" confirmed that the prejudice against Muslims have reached a scale requiring action to protect the basic rights of Britain's Muslim citizens (Green 9-11). Muslims are suffering restrictions on their civil, political, social, moral, religious, and personal liberties. Muslims are suffering extreme Islamophobia- ban on head scarfs, unlawful detentions and deportations, heinous hate crimes and counter terrorism measures.

Ashraf (2014) said that in the global region due to its strategic and geopolitical standing, South Asia is the most targeted region, and the stereotypical convictions such as fundamentalisms and nationalism have categorized the people of South Asian region in the stifled cabins of creed, nation, cast, culture, and religion. So, in such type of critical time, literature can no longer remain just a piece of story which is used to entertain, rather it's bound morally to fill the gaps for the sake of breaking those boundaries that leads us to destruction.

The post – 9/11 period has witnessed a mushroom growth of Muslim writings in contemporary debates about Muslims and Islam; they represent their point of view not only via media channels but also via literary modes of memoirs and fiction (also a new wave of Pakistani English writing within South Asian fiction); and a significant rise represented by Muslim academia practitioners.

Madeline Clement in her book *Writing Islam from a South Asian Muslim Perspective* writes, "The novels Shamsie has produced in an era of 'war on terror' are inscribed with globally anticipated tropes of a stereotypically 'fundamental' Islam and Islamic identity, and endeavour to map related affinitive and affiliative trajectories in South and Central Asian lands". Kamila Shamsie is a Pakistani English novelist, born in Karachi. Her eight novels have been published so far. She is daughter of the famous literary compiler, editor and journalist Muneeza Shamsie; niece of Attia Hosain (British-Indian novelist, author, writer, broadcaster, journalist and actor) and granddaughter of Begum Jahanara Habiullah who was also a writer. In *Home Fire* Shamsie clearly manifested how people exploit ethics, morality and relations in the name of love. We can clearly see the political imbroglio creating complex situations at personal, political and social levels. Shamsie's 'global' fiction sets apart itself by the fact that their frames of reference are not limited to- Huggan's "postcolonial exotic" parameters. They shift the focus to contemporary anxieties about Islamic difference or otherness both at home and abroad.

Shamsie's *Home Fire* has been defined as 'a gripping novel of racial prejudice, radicalisation and cross-cultural love'. It is Shamsie's seventh novel, set in the backdrop of rising prejudice against Muslims in the west. The novel depicts worst repercussions of Islamophobia that a family faces on daily basis. Novel is a story of three siblings Isma and twins- Parvaiz and Aneeka.

Home Fire by Kamila Shamsie, set in 2015, portrays the trials and tribulations of a family plagued by terrorism. Isma Pasha and her twin siblings: Aneeka Pasha and Parvaiz Pasha, are silent about their terrorist father: Adil Pasha who abandoned the family in 1995 to fight in the Bosnian war and died after being tortured during his transportation to Guantanamo. The family – three siblings are suddenly claimed by their father's 'dark legacy' when Parvaiz is trapped by Farooq, an ISIS recruiter.

When the novel opens Isma is leaving for America to pursue Ph D, before leaving she reports the truth about her brother to the British authorities. Aneeka believes in Parvaiz's redemption and plans to get him back to England. She begins an affair of convenience with Eamonn, the son of Karamat Lone – Home Secretary of Britain. Convinced by Aneeka that Parvaiz's motives of joining the ISIS were more because of his frustration as an idle young man rather than the politics of dissidence, Eamonn puts in a word with his father for Parvaiz that he is repentant, wants to seek forgiveness and come back to Britain. Karamat Lone, passes the Bill in the Parliament introducing the law of revocation of citizenship for those British citizens who have joined terrorist forces and have a dual citizenship – which includes Parvaiz Pasha and Adil Pasha.

Parvaiz, at the other side, is intercepted by Farooq in his efforts to flee from Raqqa to England via Istanbul and is killed just outside the British Consulate in Istanbul. His dead body is sent to Pakistan. Aneeka angry and heartbroken too flies to Pakistan to collect Parvaiz's dead body. She stages a

sit-in protest near the British Deputy High Commission in Karachi with Parvaiz's dead body, 'to get justice'. She requests the British Prime Minister, via media, to allow her to give proper burial to her dead brother in England as a British Citizen. Eamonn too joins Aneeka in her endeavour in Karachi, as soon as he enters the park, he is made to wear a detonation belt and both are blown up. Isma being the eldest takes the role of de facto mother. The first incident of Islamophobia can be seen in Isma facing a humiliating interrogation at Herthrow airport. She has to catch a flight to US to pursue her deferred dream of Ph d. At the airport she is nearly questioned for about two hours. The very first question she is asked "Do you consider yourself British?" She manages to keep an even tone of voice and avoid the temptations while being quizzed about "Shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, The Great British Bake off, the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide Bombers, dating websites". Even browser history of her laptop is checked and questioned. This airport episode serves as the prologue to the novel.

Claire Chambers in *The Hindu* (2017) calls *Home Fire* as "a post- 9/11 Antigone". Chambers reiterates Gayatri Spivak's argument regarding the treatment to the other- by observing that "We must listen to the other as if it were a self, neither to punish nor to acquit- even when that [other] is a terrorist". Chamber's rephrased Spivak's rhetoric question 'Can the subaltern speak?' as "Can the oppressor listen?" She marks the novel as "all about hearing and being heard". Michael Schaub in NPR (2017) observes that "tension between Muslims and Westerners in the post 9/11 era form the basis for *Home Fire*". Julia Felsenthal in *Vogue* traces the roots of thematic link of Shamsie's *Home Fire* with Theresa May's efforts in 2014 to change the British laws of citizenship by "revoking the citizenship of naturalized citizens suspected of terrorism". In 2014, Home Secretary Theresa May, the British government expanded its power to revoke the citizenship of naturalized citizens suspected of terrorism. *Home Fire*, preoccupies the same conflict of loss of naturalized citizenship. According to O, the Oprah Magazine, Shamsie's *Home Fire* depicts the present world, and scrutinizes the family's pull and radicalism's roots. She said that her novel revealed skillfully all the ways where personal ia as political as political is personal. In *Home Fire* Pasha family has a history of a jihadi father. This family history clings like Albatross to the family members which cannot be got rid of like Cain's mark, till it consumes the family. Parvaiz knew that, "he was the terrorist son of a terrorist father.... He didn't know how to break out of these currents of history, how to shake free of the demons he had attached to his own heels". (171) John Boyne in *The Irish Times* (2017) observes the novel with its "nuanced examination of the place of Muslims in a hostile world" and as a "provocative work from a brave author" which at the same time runs the risk of infuriating a particular set of "readers expecting a more black and white depiction of terrorists versus non-terrorists, Muslims versus non-muslim, the role of the State versus the right of the civilian". Abeer Hoque in *The Aerogram* (2017) reads the subject matter of the novel as that which stretches "from family ties and community to the wider global terrorism, religion and radicalism, immigration and nativism, and what we do for love and war."

Home Fire is overflowing with incidents which vividly show the Islamophobia embedded in western society. An event of spitting on hijab wearing Aneeka, cause of her taking

immediate shower- is an act of racism and Islamophobia. Aneeka while talking to Eamonn about the achievements of British Muslims, says, "that among the things this country will let you achieve if you're Muslim is torture, rendition, detention without trial, airport interrogation, [and] spies in your mosques..." (90-91) Eamonn in another incident says to Isma, "cancer or Islam- which is the greater affliction?" (21) He further adds, "it must be difficult to be Muslim in the world these days". The very language used in British newspaper stories, about Parvaiz Pasha's burial controversy, confirms the Islamophobia in British society using the epithets for Aneeka and dead Parvaiz like: "Hojabi! Pervy Pasha's twin sister". "Aneeka' Knickers' Pasha"; and "Muslim fanatic Parvaiz' Pervy' Pasha" (201). All these incidents point towards the growing Islamophobia in the west and the condition of the Muslims living in the west in post 9/11 world. Media rubs salt on the wounds of the jihadi family. On the contrary they marginalize them in society by making stringent laws and boycotting them. Eamonn tells to media:

The woman you've been watching on your TV screens is a woman who has endured terrible trials, whose country, whose government and whose fiancé turned away from her at a moment of profound personal loss. She has been abused for the crime of daring to love while covering her head, vilified for believing that she had the right to want a life with someone whose history is at odds with hers, denounced for wanting to bury her brother beside her mother, reviled for her completely legal protests against a decision by the Home Secretary that suggests against a decision by the Home Secretary that suggests personal animus. Is Britain really a nation that turns people into figures of hate because they love unconditionally? Unconditionally but not uncritically. While her brother was alive that love was turned towards convincing him to return home; now he's dead it's turned to convincing the government to return his body home where is the crime in this? Dad, please tell me, where is the crime?" (245)

When Parvaiz's dead body is not allowed to be buried in Britain. A news appears in a newspaper titled "How Many Parvaiz Pashas will it take for the Government to Wake Up?" highlighting the theme of alienation which the overseas citizens or 'British passport holders' feel. This news traces the life history of Parvaiz Pasha, his father Adil Pasha – the report ends saying that it is the failure of the state that citizens are joining extremist groups like ISIS.

Kamila Shamsie wrote in *The Guardian*, "I had thought dual citizenship would feel like a gain, not a loss," "Instead, as I took my seat in the chamber I found myself reflecting on what it means to be from a country in which acquiring a second passport is regarded across the board as reason for celebration". Same feelings are depicted by an incident in the novel, when Aneeka visits Karachi to take dead body of her twin, her cousin tells her, "did you or your bhenchod brother stop to think about those of us with passports that look like toilet paper to the rest of the world, who spend our whole lives being so careful we don't give anyone a reason to reject our visa applications. Don't stand next to this guy, don't follow that guy on Twitter, don't download that Noam Chomsky book". (209) this speech clearly shows the threats of overseas citizens. The sacrifices of overseas citizens and

what they give up – "family, content, language, familiarity" (215) in order to achieve British nationality.

In the novel most of the characters play politics and create political imbroglios-Karamat Lone, Aneeka Pasha, Isma Pasha and Farooq- nobody has trust upon other, Isma on Parvaiz; Eamonn on Aneeka; Eamonn on his father, Karamat Lone; Karamat Lone on his son, Eamonn; Terry on her husband, Karamat Lone; and Parvaiz on Farooq. Shamsie accentuates politics of Karamat Lone, how he first used religion and his own speech to the students at the Muslim School in Bradford says:

There is nothing this country won't allow you to achieve- Olympic medals, captaincy of the cricket team, pop stardom, reality tv crowns. And if none of that works out, you can settle for being Home Secretary. You are, we are, British. Britain accepts this, so do most of you. But for those of you who are in some doubt about it, let me say this: don't set yourselves apart in the way you dress, the way you think, the outdated codes of behaviour you cling to, the ideologies to which you attach your loyalties. Because if you do, you will be treated differently- not because of racism, though that does still exist, but because you insist on your difference from everyone else in this multiethnic, multi-religious, multitudinous United Kingdom of ours. And look at all you miss out on because of it. (87-88)

Shamsie satires on the politics of Muslims who becomes mimic of Western ideology and leave their religion, their culture and their ethics and values to get political power and luxuries in life. The novel builds up slowly to the crescendo at the end. Political conflicts get personal in this gripping novel. The novel has been declared unanimously as "the story of our times". The novel remarkably reveals the ways in which the political becomes personal and the personal becomes political. The novel is a brilliant attempt of themes mentioned in the media's demonization of British Muslims Isma says:

The 7/7 terrorists were never described by the media as 'British terrorists'. Even when the word 'British' was used it was always 'British of Pakistani descent' or 'British Muslim' or, my favourite, 'British passport holders' always something interposed between their Britishness and terrorism." (38)

Root cause of Islamophobia is the misrepresentations and mischaracterizations of the religion Islam in the world scenario. Stereotypical images, ideas and ideologies are fed to media about Islam and Muslims. Islamophobia collectively and collaterally affects all Muslims all over the world besides stigmatizing as suspicious, violent, and alien monolith group. Political Islamophobia can be easily seen in the bigoted and bellicose rhetoric or policies disparately targeting Muslims or Islam both blatantly and latently. Home Fire can be viewed as a wake-up call for the world, for making exclusive anti-immigration and anti-terrorist laws which fuels the Islamophobia, isolating and estranging Muslim diasporic Communities. The novel is a clarion call that families with terrorist legacy deserve more attention socially and politically, to keep them away from estrangement. Such families should not be demonized as 'others'. Peter Carey regards the novel as "Recommended reading for Prime

Ministers and Presidents everywhere”.

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