

FRAGMENTED SELVES AND DISLOCATED IDENTITIES: A POSTMODERN
STUDY OF KAMILA SHAMSIE'S *HOME FIRE*

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Abstract

This paper endeavors to investigate fragmented selves and dislocated identities in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* from a postmodern perspective. The study uses prominent ideas like the incredulity towards metanarratives by Lyotard, deconstruction by Derrida as well as the theory of simulacra by Baudrillard in analyzing how Shamsie has deconstructed the concept of identity, nationhood and belonging in a post-9/11 transnational environment. The narrative form of the novel, which is characterized by multiple points of view, time dislocation, and the use of intertextual references to *Antigone*, is examined to provide the insight into the mental, cultural, and political fragmentation of the characters of diasporic Muslims. *Home Fire* signifies postmodernist aesthetics in the study which argues that identity has become fluid, unstable and influenced by surveillance, migration and ideological conflict. This research highlights the importance of postmodern fiction in voicing out marginalized/hybrid subjectivities because it is based on the internal conflict and external alienation of individuals who struggled to find their place in British and Pakistani socio-political spheres.

Keywords: Postmodernism, dislocated identity, fragmented self, diaspora, hybridity

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The issue of identity has become even more challenging because, in the era of globalization, migration and hybrid culture, the problem of identity has been transformed into a more intense contest. This reality is commonly manifested in contemporary postmodern fiction where fragmented selves and questionable identities are brought to the fore of the narrative, particularly, a diasporic situation. In Kamila Shamsie *Home Fire* (2017), a postmodern reinterpretation of Sophocles *Antigone* in the context of post-9/11 Britain, is a perfect laboratory to apply the theory of postmodern literary trends to consider these questions on the big picture level. Exploring the lives of British-Pakistani Muslims who deal with ideological extremism, national allegiance, and family responsibility, the novel showcases the frictions in between that take place when a character regards an individual identity layer clashing with political pressure and also the lucklessness of metropolitan immigration.

The postmodernism, with its destruction of the grand narration, multiplicity of truths, and the lack of determined meaning, can be discussed as an effective tool to analyze *Home Fire*. This becomes quite regarded in the claim by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) of incredulity towards metanarrative that the novel subverts the dominating political and cultural narratives of terrorism, citizenship, and belonging. Similarly, the instability and plurality of the identity of the characters can be revealed with the help of the concept proposed by Jacques Derrida (1978), deconstruction, and the instability and ambivalence of the diasporic subjectivity are reflected by the Homi Bhabha (1994) theory of hybridity and “third space”.

Home Fire is really rooted in the post-9/11 culture of surveillance where the identity of Muslim people tends to be criticized and politicized. Shamsie presents the realization of the impact of such situations on the inner world of her characters, especially Isma, Aneeka, and Parvaiz, who represent various solutions to cultural strangeness and ideological confrontation. The novel outside of the binaries involved in East/West or good/evil, using the postmodern narrative style (contains fragmented chronology, changing points of view, and metafictional allusions toward classical tragedy). This plot reflects the deconstructed personality of people torn by conflicting national, cultural, and family loyalties.

This study is a diversion because identity is usually studied in the context of psychological or sociological paradigm in the literature circles. Hassan (1987) and Hutcheon (1988) have stated that postmodern fiction has a tendency to subvert coherent characterization and plot to assert the displacement of modern living. *Home Fire* is one such outcome that makes identity out to be not only an essentialized entity but an enacted and contested one, determined by power, religion, and state politics discourses. As has been pointed out in the previous studies, the novel addresses the themes of terrorism and migration (Zubair & Khalid, 2021; Hussain, 2020), yet few scholars paid attention to the ways in which the postmodern techniques used by Shamsie specifically contribute the rendering of identity as broken and displaced.

This work will address that gap by conducting an analysis of the present day *Home Fire* through the lens of postmodernism in adopting the view of how fragmentation of narratives, intertextuality, and ambiguity of ideologies are utilized to conceptualize unstable and hybrid identity. At that, it also gets involved in more general questions of diasporic writing, Muslim presence in the West, and literary discourse of postmodern subjectivities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Due to the escalating problems of Islamophobia, apprehension of Muslim identities and the ongoing trend of global terrorism, diasporic narratives have emerged as a powerful tool of studying the intricacies of cultural belonging, as well as the performance of certain identities in the West. *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie brings postmodern narrative that questions the unmaking of self and fragmentation of identity under the stress of ideological, familial, and national desires. Nevertheless, although the novel has been examined in both political and postcolonial discourses, scanty academic research has been given to the argument that how Shamsie employs various postmodern elements; these include fragmentation of narratives, intertextuality, metafiction in drawing out the unsteady, hybrid and displaced identities of her characters. This literature deficiency has brought about a need to conduct a keen postmodern literary critique on *Home Fire* with an endeavor to understand how form and content can be utilized to express fragmented identities within a diasporic and politically tense environment.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are postmodern narrative approaches Kamila Shamsie employs in *Home Fire* to depict dislocated and fragmented identities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern diasporic fiction can be well analyzed within the framework of postmodern literature that is typified by its narrative experimentation, pessimism about grand narratives, and focus on disjointed identities. As Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) is famous to have stated, postmodernism was a condition of incredulity towards metanarratives, a turning away of the coherent views of history and identity and a move towards more pluralistic, defended and lean concepts. This collection is usually echoed in a narration form, psychological screens of the characters and metafictional methods (Hutcheon, 1988). Issues of displacement, hybridity and cultural negotiation manifesting in the context of South Asian diasporic literature have been broadly examined with postcolonial perspective (Bhabha, 1994; Brah, 1996). Nevertheless, through the post-modern approach, psychologically and structurally deeper questioning of identity fragmentation is made possible. As an example, the concept of the third space promoted by Bhabha emphasizes the fact of the diasporic person being in a liminal positionality, but the postmodernism takes it further and states that no coherent identity can exist altogether in such modern global circumstances (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996).

The above-mentioned tensions between the individual agency and socio-political structures are in the focus of Kamila Shamsie *Home Fire* (2017), being a retelling of Sophocles *Antigone*. The political commentary on terrorism, citizenship, as well as familial loyalty of the novel have been discussed by scholars (Majumdar, 2018; Freeman, 2020), but the postmodern aspects of the novel have been left unexplored critically. The juxtaposition or fragmentary view of multiple perspectives, the non-linear time sequence, and the reliance of the intertext to classical Greek tragedy betray the intentions to reject linear realism. Such methods represent the so-called ontological dominant of the postmodern fiction described by Brian McHale (1987) as a bringing to the fore the questions of being and reality instead of knowing and truth.

Moreover, *Home Fire* develops identities that are never stable and badly divided. Such characters as Parvaiz and Aneeka have troubles with the conflicting requirements of faith, love, family, and national identity. They are not unified in their subjectivities but in fact torn apart along the lines of culture, ideology and emotion. This kind of image hits

home with the postmodern view of the decentered self-broken down by discourse, surveillance and media (Foucault, 1977; Baudrillard, 1994).

There are many scholars mentioning that contemporary Muslim characters in diasporic fiction are forced to manage themselves between visibility and invisibility in post-9/11 reality (Ahmad, 2009; Grewal, 2013). The work by Shamsie can be referred to as part of this discussion; it presents a postmodern take on it by lacking closure and moral definiteness. We can refer, by way of the example, to the unclear conclusion of the given novel and its alternating variants of narrative voices that disorient the reader and underline the concept of plurality and vagueness that is characteristic of the aesthetics of postmodernism (Hassan, 1987; Waugh, 1992).

In addition, culture in *Home Fire* is not merely dissected in the characterization of the identity but also dispersed in the narrative. The formal format of the novel structure-five-part story, written in turn by a different character in the story, reflects the idea of heteroglossia Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) has, that is, the presentation of several voices in one text. This plurality undermines the rule of a single account and the breaking down of fixed identity groupings.

Overall, the political and ethical aspects of *Home Fire* have been the primary frames of inquiry in existing scholarship, but little to nothing has been said about how the postmodernism narrative style influences and characterizes the fragmented personalities. This paper is an attempt to readdress that lacuna and present the postmodern theoretical approach to the narrative strategies and thematic issues that Shamsie employs, in order to illustrate how the contemporary diasporic subjectivities are constructed, destabilized, and eventually dislocated in the world deprived of ideological and cultural coherence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study takes a qualitative research approach with a textual approach to the study the postmodern aspects of the identity and fragmentation in the *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie. In the study, close reading is mostly used as the tool of investigation to address the issue of narrative formation, language, voice, and character building. Special emphasis is paid to intertextuality, dislocation in time and polyphonic narration as the attributes of a postmodern aesthetics. The analysis conducted within the text is based on the thematic approach with the patterns of fragmentation, alienation, and displacement of identity within diasporic characters being identified. The research is based on secondary academic works that provide the necessary background as well as interview focus on the piece of literature. The methodology of the study as an interpretive study, based in a library, can be taken as being post-structural literary criticism and multiple readings of meaning in literature are permitted and therefore, meaning as a notion, is not very definite in the text.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is theoretically influenced by the postmodern concept of literary theory specifically taking the cue of the writings of Jean-Francois Lyotard, Linda Hutcheon, and Brian McHale, as well as poststructuralist theorist like Michel Foucault and Homi K. Bhabha. The notion of incredulity toward metanarratives in the work by Lyotard (1984) serves as a conceptual tool in exploring the way in which *Home Fire* has broken the grand ideological stories of identity, nation and morality. The idea of the ontological dominant attributed to McHale (1987) in his analysis of the postmodern fiction helps to evaluate the actions of shifting perspective and blurred realities in the novel, whereas Hutcheon (1988) coinage of the historical metafiction provides a clue on how to perceive intertextual play and narrative fragmentation. Also, Foucault approaches to subjectivity and surveillance

contribute to the interpretation of identity as a construct socially constructed and regulated by an institution, and the theory of hybridity and the so-called third space presented by Bhabha (1994) helps to investigate the possibility of diasporic identity and its fluid, fissured, and in constant negotiation nature. This framework brings together the mechanism to provide a subtle discussion to the extent to which the postmodern condition is realized and criticized in the novel.

DATA ANALYSIS

The theme of fragmented selves and dislocated selves goes through vividly in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, especially in diasporic and post-9/11 setting. This novel is the sign of a postmodern obsession with the hybrid identification, the groundlessness, and the lack of stability of meaning, in the case of British Muslims who manoeuvre cultural duality and the suspicions of the political sphere.

Among the most notable ones is the character of Parvaiz Pasha, the identity fragmentation of whom is expressed through the inner disagreement between familial attachment and the need to belong to a male living organism. Parvaiz, having been seduced by the testimonies of Islamic State recruiters, is depicted as a teenager aiming to become a part of the narration of his father with whom he had never met but always idealized as a martyr. The desire is not a religious, but emotional one and Parvaiz tries to fill the blank in his life which is dominated by absence and strangeness. This desiring corresponds to the idea of the simulation developed by Jean Baudrillard, according to which Parvaiz starts experiencing the hyperreality of the jihadist heroism he has been imagining, a simulacrum with no simulacrum.

By contrast, Aneeka, the twin sister of Parvaiz, represents the conflict between individual choice and political typology. Grief is only one of the ways that she gets transformed into a racialized target of the kind of gaze she suffers as a highly visible Muslim woman. The great passion and rebellion that is Aneeka are highly representative of what Fredric Jameson would term postmodern loss of historical foundation because she in effect rejects the narratives of the state and finds her narrative in the truths of her own emotions. Her stunt of sitting in the protest in which her brother was tortured and killed reminds us of the moral defiance of Antigone but lacks any ideological focus, pointing toward the destruction of moral absolutes, in a postmodern world.

In addition, not only does his son Eamonn experience a destabilizing of the self as he is in conflict with privilege and empathy, but he is also the son of the British Home Secretary. The crisis he faces with the love interest of Aneeka leads him to a state of crisis of self; an aspect to the vision of Homi Bhabha regarding the state of unhomeliness, or a sense of being psychologically uprooted even in the indigenous culture. The fact that Eamonn eventually tries to assist Parvaiz even in the face of his father policies shows the confrontation between acquired political identity and newly awakened sense of ethics in an individual.

The postmodern stylistics of the novel may be seen in such fragmentation of narrative (changing views, time, and inner monologues). Every single character narrates about what happened according to his or her own interpretation, just like Lyotard thought that the grand narratives were finished. This fragmentation is thematic but also structural and it prompts the readers to make their way through the plurality of subjectivities and moral ambiguity without being led by a voice of authority belonging to an author.

Home Fire, therefore, breaks the idea of stable, coherent self. It exemplifies that identity in the postmodern condition is an input of the forces of migration, surveillance, narration of

media and family trauma. Shamsie does not provide a closure; she highlights uncertainty, multiplicity, and dislocation, which are the main indices of the postmodern identity.

DISCUSSION

The results of the given study support the thematic concern of the novel of *Home Fire* with dislocated identities and fractured selves that locates the novel in this respect within the stream of the postmodern literature. According to Lyotard (1984) theory of the postmodern condition, the theory focuses on destruction of the grand narratives and emergence of local stories with fragmented truth. In *Home Fire*, Shamsie breaks down the unified concept of national or religious identity and allows characters whose identities are enchained with webs of contradiction and cultural permeation.

This reading resonates with Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space," where identity is not a fixed entity but an ongoing process shaped by historical, political, and cultural encounters. This relation is seen between Aneeka and Parvaiz where Aneeka attempts to maintain her cultural and family identity in a hostile sociopolitical environment and Parvaiz is seduced by radical narrative which promises a sense of belonging, yet is contrary to one of belonging. The same issue has been also identified in previous studies by Ahmed (2020) who suggests that the post-9/11 diasporic fiction tends to struggle with the presumable identity crises caused by the external surveillance and internal conflict which can also be spotted in the work by Shamsie.

Moreover, Karamat Lone's character reinforces earlier critiques of assimilation and identity politics in postcolonial discourse. As it is noticed by Zubair and Yaqoob (2019), political representatives of minorities tend to be subjected to the performative erasure of their ethnic backgrounds by being forced to adapt to the dominant ideologies. The fact that Karamat rejects Muslim immigrants although he is of that heritage makes reference to the internalization of colonial night-sections and the idea of power/knowledge formulated by Foucault (1977) who says that the subject does the job of policing himself to create credibility within the power systems.

The intertextuality of Shamsie with *Antigone* a classical play about state versus individual has already been commented upon by scholars such as Khan (2021) who states that postmodern texts tend to borrow works of the literary canon in order to put into question injustices in the modern world. Relocation of *Antigone* to a contemporary British-Muslim setting, the author Shamsie does not only criticize literary traditions but recontextualizes such themes as loyalty, justice, and civil disobedience. This aligns with Hutcheon's (1988) concept of "historiographic metafiction," where history and literature are shown to be constructed narratives open to reinterpretation.

Moreover, as the supporters of the emotional and psychological complexity and fragmentation depicted in *Home Fire* can ask, the affectivity instability that is interspersed in other postmodern diaspora narratives is comparable. As an example, Rizvi (2018) focuses on the problem of emotional dissonance in diasporic literature, where the characters are likely to feel homeless in terms of culture. It is in line with the existential crisis experienced by Parvaiz and the hopeless search of the justice and belonging among Aneeka.

Thus, *Home Fire* is not only a narrative of a British-Muslim family; it breaks down the very categories according to which identity is processed, nurtured, and constructed and narrows sense of belonging and citizenship. The theoretical changes in the fields of postmodernism and postcolonial studies are found in the novel, as subjectivity is regarded as unaffected, contested, and ever-revised.

CONCLUSION

As an intense apologue of the shattered identity and the displaced self that is so much a part of a postmodern and postcolonial existence, displaced communities of diaspora, Kamila Shamsie *Home fire* resounds as nearly perfect. Mirroring the psychology of its characters, its political issues, as well as its cultural dilemma, Shamsie manages to expose the tension between the ideological rule over the nation and the individual causes, between the national identity and the cultural one. These characters reflect the complications of the nature of hybrid identity, being trapped in an intermediate state of surveillance, xenophobia, and the colonialism heritage. The interlinear connection the novel has with the *Antigone* of Sophocles also advances its postmodern aesthetics by breaking down classical in order to question the contemporary crises of citizenship, justice, and identity in modernity. Based on the theories by postmodernists, such as Lyotard, Bhabha, and Hutcheon, this paper will make a conclusion that *Home Fire* does not only illustrate the narrative qualities of the postmodern book, which are fragmentation, metafiction, and irony, but it also questions the sociopolitical systems that underprivilege voices of minorities in modern Britain. In the end, the novel places its main emphasis on the necessity to reinvent identity and belonging without being tied to harsh binaries, presenting a resounding literary alternative to the cultural and ideological division of our days.

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