Nation and Nationalism in post 9/11 world: A study on Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire*

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Abstract

*Home Fire*, Shamsie’s most accomplished work to date, is a contemporary adaptation of Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Her writings concern about the impact of politics on the lives of individuals. Shamsie vocalises her concerns about how minorities being targeted and erased in the present world. Through rigid law legislation and policy implementation, British government marginalizes Muslims on the ground of global terrorism. Shamsie’s writings mar how innocent lives are tortured, destroyed and victimized in the geopolitical condition of the time. This paper intends to examine how the stereotyping and misrepresentation of Muslim diasporic community could end in negative outcome and also it analyses how the idea of nation and, nationalism as a sentiment have been reimagined over the period.

**Key words:** *Home Fire*, post 9/11, nation, nationalism, Other

Kamila Shamsie’s writings forms part of a large literary production of today: post 9/11 literature. Her seventh novel, *Home Fire*, portrays the place of Muslims in the post 9/11 world. At the outset, novel resembles a family tale, story of three siblings their battles and survival with a legacy of terrorism in present day England. As the novel progresses, the political overtones and religious underpinnings come to foreplay. The novel is divided into five sections exploring different perspectives leading to different political angles.

Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz have been on MI5’s watch list due to their dead jihadist father, Adil Pasha. Isma, eldest of the three had made peace with the injustice of the system and the law despite its cruel treatment towards them. Isma is stoic, impassive and indifferent to their past and family tragedy, and considers differential and suspicious treatment over their lives as ‘normal’. Her younger siblings are smart and intelligent Aneeka and, aimless and confused twin brother, Parvaiz. Isma raised her younger siblings on her own and as they have grown up, she decides to move to US to complete her PhD. Parvaiz’s frustrated and unambitious attitude made him fall in to the grip of ISIS recruiters. When he left for Raqqa to join ISIS, Isma has left of no other option than to inform her brother’s missing to British authorities. Isma kept this as secret but when Aneeka came to know about it, she find her elder sister’s move as family betrayal and accused her for making Parvaiz return- a chance to realize and correct his mistake- impossible.
Aneeka’s entering of a love relationship with Eamonn, British Home secretary’s son was a plan to bring back Parvaiz to England. Started as a manipulative sexual relationship with Eamonn, soon entered to a serious zone of love, hence, Aneeka was able to convince Eamonn about Parvaiz’s regret on joining ISIS and how he wish to return. Eamonn tried to present Parvaiz’s matter and his decision to marry Aneeka before his father, Karamat Lone. But being a staunch politician and diplomat, he refutes his son’s plea and shut down all possible hopes of help to Parvaiz and Aneeka. Parvaiz got killed in the hands of jihadist before he went to surrender before British consulate in Istanbul and, Karamat Lone’s introduction of revocation of citizenship- to British citizens who joined terrorist forces- denies even Parvaiz’s dead body final burial in England. Aneeka’s sit-in protest in a park near Pakistan Deputy High Commissioner’s office with Parvaiz’s dead body, seeking justice to have her brother’s final home in England is heart wrenching scene and it poses questions to the draconian laws of the system.

Muslims- the dangerous ‘Other’

*Home Fire* attacks the British government for creating crude anti-terrorist, anti-immigration laws making the life of Muslim diasporic communities difficult. As a clever plan of propaganda and ideology, United States government posits and criminalises ‘Other’ and presents terrorism as distinct which has least chance to grow in a cultured, sophisticated western, white mind and soil. Moreover, the prejudiced notion extends to brand Muslims and terrorist are one. It was this preconceived tag of ‘suspicious muslim’ kept them always under surveillance and watch list.

In the opening section of the novel, Isma going to US for her education has to undergo lengthy inspection in the interrogation room because of her Muslim identity. “The interrogation continued for nearly two hours. He wanted to know her thoughts on Shias, the homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, the Great British Bake Off, the invasion of Iraq, suicide bombers, dating websites” (Shamsie 5). While having argument with Aneeka, Parvaiz also opens about the oppressive mentality of the British government; “Muslim women, particularly the beautiful ones, need to be saved from Muslim men. Muslim men need to be detained, harassed, pressed against the ground with a heel on our throat”(132).

**Nation and Nationalism**

In the post 9/11 political situation, the idea of ‘nationalism’ is used as a divisive strategy to further the alienation and extermination of the minorities. Karamat Lone, second generation Pakistani-British, known popularly as ‘Lone Wolf’, manipulates idea of ‘national’ for his
personal gains. He rose to the position of Home Secretary not with the support of British-Muslim diasporic community but through disregarding his roots and blind acculturation of the British nationalist ethos. His obsession is complete in line with British culture and its identity. So he takes all effort to prove that he is one among the white British than the British Muslims. He even exhorts the Muslim population to ally with the British culture and civilisation.

… ‘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 ways you dress, the way you think, the outdated codes of behavior 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 multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multitudinous United Kingdom of ours. And look at all you miss out on because of it’ (88).

Thus Karamat Lone emerged as the lone crusader for the cause of ‘good’ Nationalism, judging British Muslims holding their beliefs and sentiments as ‘bad’.

Karamat Lone, Shamsie’s fictional Home Secretary, features to Teresa May like figure. Her call for anti-immigration and anti-terrorist laws are traced to Karamat Lone, so his political statements. When Lone is asked about his reaction on Parvaiz joining ISIS, he reacts, “… the day I assumed office I revoked the citizenship of all dual nationals who have left Britain to join our enemies” (188). In an interview, Shamsie recollects similar political statements from Teresa May, when she was Home secretary then.

It was late 2014, so the very early days of the Islamic State. For the first time you had British men—a few women but mostly men—going off to fight. And Theresa May as home secretary was wanting to strip them of their citizenship. That was still new, and because I’d just become a citizen, I was looking very closely in a very personal way at all the rhetoric around citizenship as it had been changing over the years.

The idea of ‘nation’ as a homogenous whole and ‘nationalism’ as a shared experience and practice tend to jeopardize the essence of multiculturalism and plurality. Insistence on a uniform identity and practice, abandonment of cultural roots, were testing the lives of British Muslims. So the lack of feeling of belonging in a nation, could trick enough the unambitious youth to
channelize their energy towards militancy or co-operation towards ISIS. Nationalism could respectfully fall under the label of patriotism or it could also end up become militancy or fanaticism. Pramod K. Nayar writes:

Nationalism also draws on forms of identification: us and them, insider and outsider, friend and stranger. These forms of identification are very often based on biological (racial) and cultural differences. Thus after 9/11 American nationalism built on already existing suspicions, fear and dislike of Arab, non-white and Muslim cultures. Nationalism therefore remains inextricably linked, along with identification, to racism and xenophobia (Post colonialism 71).

Farooq, the recruiter of ISIS, successfully instill delusions of a nationalism fervor and sentiment in Parvaiz because, the Britain, its government, the law were treating them unjustly. They not only fail to address the issues of minorities, but doubt about their loyalty and citizenry also. Farooq was able to rekindle the frustration piled up in Parvaiz’s mind for Othering and could easily lure with existence of Caliphate, a place with warmth, welcome and peace. Farooq was successful even to convince Parvaiz that his father is not a terrorist to abhor but a warrior fought for the dignity and justice for the Muslims and Caliphate.

**Conclusion**

Shamsie is not glorifying radicalism or fundamentalism through her novel. But she addresses the complexity of the problem with utmost concern. When minorities are being negated and try to shrink the ‘national’ element by preferring and professing homogenous identity, radical forces may thrive dangerously. When Eamonn remarks to Aneeka that ‘… it must be difficult to be Muslim in the world these days’ (21), callousness of the situation should be presumed. Before propagating exclusivist conditions and demarcating territories on the basis of national identity and its politics, Shamsie advises for a compassionate and inclusive attempt on accommodating diversity.
Works Cited


