

EXOTIC REPRESENTATION OF THE EAST IN THE NATIVE WEST: A RE-ORIENTALIST ANALYSIS OF KAMILA SHAMSIE'S HOME FIRE

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Abstract

This study analyzes Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire (2017) from the re-orientalist perspective through Liza Lau's theoretical lens (2009). Re-orientalism deals with the issues of representation and seeks how far the representation is authentic. Analyzing the techniques of re-orientalism in the select novel, the current study considers how the author makes her novel appear as an autobiographical account that in Meenakshi Mukerjee's view creates the problem of authenticity. The study also investigates the problem of generalization with "truth claims" to address the needs of larger Western communities. In practicing re-orientalism, South Asian writers either omit the presence of South Asian culture or reflect on it with stereotypes and sensational materials. The novel seems to critique South Asian shallow educated folks, who blindly admire or practice Western cultures. The commons and subalterns either have no identity and representation or have homogenous representation in such Diaspora writings, leading to the misrepresentation of the common masses. The study employs qualitative, interpretive, and textual analytical methods to codify and interpret the primary and secondary data. Besides addressing the concerned research community and educational needs, the broader impact of the study addresses the UN's SDG No. 04: Quality Education, and 10: Reduce Inequality.

Key Words: Re-orientalism, Stereotype, Representation, Truth claim, Generalizations.

INTRODUCTION

Under the disguise of post-colonial identity and representation, the authors of South Asian origin, mostly write for the Western audience. South Asian authors who claim to represent the East represent Western ideals under the shade of re-orientalism. Orientalism defines the East in the Western constructs whereas in Re-orientalism—the East comes to terms with the Orientalized East. Edward Said takes a stance on the Foucauldian point of imperial discourse that cultural constructs of the East are the power strategies of the West to dominate over the East usually picturing it as exotic, dangerous, and mysterious. Said further describes: the Orient always as "Other" and being a part of the Western culture itself describes the West in contrastive terms. In many forms, orientalism still persists in the popular and institutional constructs of identity and culture. One direction and form of the practice of Orientalism in the modern South Asian diaspora is re-orientalism as defined by Liza Lau (2009). The contemporary intellectuals who have affiliations with the East, either target a larger Western community for readership or play with the expectations of the West under the conceptual framework of Re-orientalism. Sometimes the flexibility of meaning in Orient discourse is used by the re-orientalists to undermine its authority and power (Mendes, 2011).

Re-orientalism investigates the process and functional stereotypes of the East to explore its causes. Re-orientalism questions—whether orientalists deliberately or voluntarily promote this self-other dichotomy to target the Western audience. Shivani argues that the practice of re-orientalism violates the integrity of literature by reinforcing shallow stereotypes, whether it is a deliberate activity empowering or subverting post-colonial literature. The essence of re-orientalism is in collaboration with the Western powers and its elite orientalists to develop a re-orientalist partnership that upholds



the supremacy of Western culture and discourse. Re-Orientalism investigates the sources of powers using deceiving techniques such as the misrepresentation of Eastern characters. Currently, re-Orientalism is crucial to the post-colonial critique of global cultural production. It offers a complex understanding of the power dynamics in post-colonial culture production. (Mendes, 2011).

Home Fire is a story of three British-Muslim siblings residing in London. The two siblings Aneeka and Pervaiz were raised by their older sister Isma after the death of their mother. The father of the Pasha Family is a Jihadi; the only son Pervaiz also is following his footprints. Pervaiz joins ISIS in Syria. After some time, he realizes his mistake. Aneeka his twin sister tries to get him back to Britain but he dies escaping. Aneeka tries to get back Pervez's body to Britain.

Aneeka is in a romantic relationship with Emmon, the son of a British Muslim, Home Secretary, Karamat Lone. He gains his reputation by rejecting his Muslim identity to win a seat in the British parliament. *Home Fire* is about his character. The concerns of the novels deal with the security and identity of Muslims living in Britain. The novel portrays the British-Muslim struggle and the quest for identity in Britain. In one of her interviews, Shamsie calls the novel an account of British Muslim relations with the British state.

The objective of this paper is to investigate the strategies of practicing re-orientalism in contemporary fictional writings of Kamila Shamsie, particularly in her novel, *Home Fire*. Moreover, this study aims to critically analyze the stereotypical representation of South Asian characters, particularly Muslims and Hindus. Besides addressing the needs of research students in social sciences and humanities, the study may prove fruitful for social institutions and NGOs. This study also corresponds to the UN's SDG No. 04 (Quality Education) and SDG No. 10 (Reduce Inequality).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Being qualitative and interpretive in nature, the study aims to codify the target concepts to explore a plausible research solution for the proposed research problems of the study. For the tool of textual analysis, the study relies on Allen's model (sagepub: Mike Allen, 2017). With the close literary exegesis of *Home Fire*, the study enlists the concerned literary criticism, available literature, and authorial commentaries. The data are to be collected from the concerned books, internet sources, research articles, journals, online databases, archives, and media sources. In addition, the study draws upon critical-thematic and textual analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Foundations of re-orientalism are found in various concepts like ethnic orientalism, self-orientalism, internal orientalism, and reverse-orientalism. In Spivak's series of essays, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, she talks about the paradigms of identity, marginality, and multiculturalism. Spivak recognizes various ways in which "concept metaphors" are used strategically either counter or advocate the colonial discourse. She refers to marginality as an exploration of post-colonial pedagogy and a critique of new orientalism whose practice has made the third world the butt of stereotypical writing (Franco, 1996).

Being the concerned theoretical lens of this study, Liza Lau's article "Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals" (2007) identifies three techniques of practicing re-orientalism among South Asian Anglophone authors. According to her, re-orientalism is an extension of totalization, which imposes the culture, attitudes, and values of a specific class over the diverse majority. She further argues that it is not necessarily a deliberate attempt to re-Orientalize the East by the South Asian diasporic authors; rather it is their positionality that drives a re-orientalist perspective in writings. Diasporic authors for creating authenticity usually portray native culture and characters naively, stereotypically, and sensationally. The first problem she calls out is the necessity of being recognizably South Asian. She argues that the major distortion of the characters occurs in re-orientalism by over-emphasizing rigid and traditional ideals associated with South Asia. This striking contrast between native South Asian writers and sojourner South Asian authors is explicitly found in the narrative fashions of South Asian culture. The second problem—in the writings of South Asian diasporic authors particularly women authors—is the issuance of sweeping



statements that generalizes the norms. The third problem, she believes is to mix the boundaries between fiction and autobiography. This mixing of fiction and autobiographical elements provide ground for the truth claims that further confuse the phenomenon (Lau, 2009).

Liza Lau in her book *Re-Orientalism and Indian Writing in English* (2014) elaborates—re-orientalism has two important aspects pertinent to the problem of representation. At the first point, re-orientalism claims that representation is still in the hands of a particular elite class, who are born and educated in the West known as the elite Orientalists. This does not make any difference to the case of authentic representation of the East as this is merely a transfer of power from one dominant group to another. The second aspect of re-orientalism is how the process of self-representation is still looked at from the Oriental lens. Being privileged by the dominance of English and Western ideals and culture, the West still continues to be the center of the known universe (Dwivedi, 2014).

Re-orientalism is based on the three aspects of Said's Orientalism—presented in 1978. In Orientalism, Said talks about the Orient's special place in European Western culture. The first point in the theory of re-orientalism deals with elite class positions or positions of power. Referring to themselves as *others*, the elite group of Orientalists still refers to the West as a source of power and center. They are not in the process of othering by Western powers but rather in self-othering. Moreover, these elite orientalists not only position themselves as *others* rather, through self-representation, but they also put down all individuals.

Re-orientalism also deals with the issue of re-orientalists' position. The second point Said makes is that Orientalism is less to do with the Orient and more with the West. Thus, self-positioning in re-orientalist theory points out the dominance of elite-class intellectuals. Re-orientalists seem more interested in their tension with the former colonizers rather than with their fellow countrymen. The third position Said adopts about Orientalism is the inherent coherence in the process of Orientalism. Thus, the process of re-orientalism works with internal consistency. However, there is a striking difference between orientalism and re-orientalism. Without revealing the identity of the observer, Orientalism presents the voice of the author and narrator as objective and universal. On the other side in re-orientalism authors, narrators and observers use positionality to prove eligibility as representatives (Mendes, 2011).

Most of the elements of this theory correspond to the needs of the selected study; therefore, the study will use the said theory as a theoretical primary lens of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anis Shivani in his article "Indo-Anglian Fiction: the new Orientalism" (2006) argues—the publishing industry is indulging in the commodification of eroticized Orientalism. Most of the recent works of Indian-English writers stereotype Indian characters as paralyzed and fatalists. Shivani further argues that these authors represent the Western concept of the Indian sub-continent as uncivilized, primitive, and conservative. The dominant Western concept about the sub-continent marks shorn of individualism, feminism, and liberalism. The response to this practice of re-orientalism advocates awareness of the diverse Indian national and individual identity. The elite Indian bourgeois portrays Indian society as unchangeable and rigid. Shivani further argues: that instead of creating comfort and awareness among Western audiences, modern fiction creates a strong sense of exotic East (Shivani, 2006).

Mukherjee in her essay, "The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English" (1993) forwards the impact of the English Language and its role in contemporary South Asian English works. The fact is not as simple as it looks—English is not only a colonial language but it is also a language of privileged and power in contemporary society. The cult of "Indian authenticity" in recent Indian novels is not the representation of true and authentic India. It is rather a part of a colonial past. The usage of the English language in the depiction of India in literary works is a Western construct that South Asian authors have overtly reflected in their literary writings.

Considering English mannerisms and language as more sophisticated, the national psyche regards English and Western Culture way privileged. Native writers are not advocating differently. (Mukherjee, 1993). Brushing aside the needs of native Indians, South Asian writers try to



address the expectation of Western readers in their writings. Certain names, words, and images are used to facilitate Anglo-phone readers. In sum, South Asian writers write for the Western audience (Afridi, 2018).

Rehana Ahmad in her article "Towards an Ethics of Reading Muslims: Encountering Difference in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2020)" argues about the ethics of reading in the secular literary marketplace that affects Muslim representation. The relationship of a reader with the text (*Home Fire*) depicts the Muslim encounter with ethnic discrimination around. The Muslim representation in the novel hints that how to deal with the pressures of anthropological reading practices. Relying on the theory of differentiated solidarity –by Iris Marion Young –, Ahmad points out the differences between cultural and religious boundaries.

Aamer Shaheen et al in the article "Obsessive 'Westoxification' versus the Albatross of Fundamentalism and Love as Collateral Damage in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2018)" points out two extremist points of view—westoxification and fundamentalism. These concepts are represented by the two main characters (Karamat Lone and Pervaiz Pasha) in the novel. They explore the novel beyond the popular interpretation of *Antigone* and link it with post-colonial studies. They further argue that Kamila Shamsie portrays Islamophobic representations of British Muslims in post-9/11 England (Aamer Shaheen, 2018).

Debjani Banerjee in the article "From Cheap Labor to Overlooked Citizens: Looking for British Muslim Identities in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2020)" explores the relationship of British Muslims with their native identities. Banerjee points out the political discussions and cultural diversity in the post-9/11 scenario. *Home Fire* is considered a critical commentary on the political situation of the countries that voice cultural and national diversity (Banerjee, 2020).

Focusing on the re-orientalist representations of the East (Muslims) in *Home Fire*, the review of the related literature establishes the gap that is still in totality or in parts missing. The explored space both validates and licentiates the study for proposed advancement.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Home Fire is an example of language appropriation that Mukherjee talks about. Shamsie's use of Urdu language in the novel does not account for the abrogation and appropriation that was used by Achebe. "He shook his head, a response his singing had anticipated, and she said, 'So you don't understand 'bay-tadalafil. He sat up straight and raised his hand like a schoolboy.' 'I do know that one. It's informality as an expression of intimacy'" (Shamsie, 22). The use of Urdu language in the novel does not offer any cultural concept or idea associated with the word. Shamsie's appropriation can be categorized as "Mental colonization" as described by a famous Nigerian scholar Chinweizu in his essay "Decolonizing the African Mind (1987)". *The twentieth* century has seen the globalization of European culture and consciousness. Plenty of European lifestyles and ideas are presented as life norms. Most of the imposition of this intellectual colonialism is practiced by educated and trained Western intellectuals. The process of deculturalization is successfully executed by elite intellectuals (Hotep, 2011).

According to Mukherjee, South Asian authors write not only in the language of the colonizer but also translate the native culture in a self-abasing manner. Most South Asian authors desire to please the Western audience by showcasing their native culture as alien and conservative. The South Asian writings deliberately exoticize Eastern culture. These South Asian writers, who usually live in the West, constantly try to malign their native culture to strengthen their position and identity the Western society (Afridi, 2018).

Home Fire depicts the culture of the West more explicitly than the culture of East–Pakistani culture. The three protagonists of the novel reside in Britain and America. They naturally find themselves familiar with the Western culture rather than their native Eastern. Their only connection to Pakistan is their legacy, which also gets damaged by their father's terrorist activities. Pakistani culture for them is alien and strikingly different. In the interrogation scene, Isma talks about her Britishness. "Do you consider yourself British?" the man said. "I am British. But do you consider yourself British?"



“I’ve lived here all my life.” She conveys there is no other country the UK is to be a part of (Shamsie,10).

Although some weak glimpses of Pakistani hospitality are found in the character of Anti Naseem with the story of her father’s service in the English Army, she also establishes herself as a proud British Citizen, “She said, “My father fought in the British Indian army during World War One. He was in France for a while, billeted with a family there—the sons and husband were soldiers,..” (Shamsie, 37). Another character Eamonn Lone does not identify himself with Islam and Pakistani, because his father Kramat Lone has rejected his Muslim background. While talking to Isma Eamonn says, “You know, the only two people in Massachusetts who have ever asked me about it both wanted to know if it’s a style thing or a chemo thing.” Laughing, he said, “Cancer or Islam—which is the greater affliction?” There were still moments when a statement like that could catch a person off-guard. He held his hands up quickly in apology. “Jesus. I mean, sorry. That came out really badly. I meant, it must be difficult to be Muslim in the world these days” (Shamsie, 17).

However, the representation of Pakistan at the end of the novel grows further weak. The bomb blast in which Aneeka and Eamonn died, takes place in Karachi. The novel signifies Karachi as a place of terrorist activities, which strengthens the stereotypes of terrorism against both Islam and Pakistan. *Home Fire* is a portrayal of British Muslims by the British State and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. “Home” is a place that is full of comfort and protection but in the novel “home” presents destruction and insecurity (Al-Hafizh, 2019). Shamsie contextualizes the concept of home in the UK. The three siblings of the Pasha Family struggle with the crisis of proving their loyalty to their “home” —the UK. The sense of homeliness for all the characters in the novel is associated with the West. From a re-oriental gaze, the author seems to be more interested in their relations with the West rather than with the East. Moreover, the dystopia is associated with Muslim countries like Iraq and Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc. focusing on the orientalist agency of positioning the UK as a center of power.

Shamsie’s portrayal of the lives of British- Muslims with Pakistani parentage has nothing to do with the problems of Pakistani Muslims with a Pakistani background. Finding peace in British culture, British Pakistani find their native culture alien and conservative. At the outset of the play when Isma was going through an investigation scene at the airport, she thinks about the popular British cooking show such as “*Great British Bake Off* (Shamsie, 10) which reveals her interest in her favorite British TV actor. Isma being a British Muslim does not have any information about the native Pakistani culture.

Isma moves to America to complete her Ph.D. after her siblings reach the age of sensibility. Shamsie presents Isma as a stereotypical woman, who wears a hijab and is loyal to her duties. Although Isma wears a hijab she fails to link it with the native culture. She wears it to hide her frizzy hair, “He knew that she was interested in the marital status of an actor from a popular TV series; that wearing a hijab didn’t stop her from buying expensive products to tame her frizzy hair; that she had searched for “how to make small talk with Americans” (Shamsie,10). This represents Isma as a girl with an interest in trivial, ordinary materialistic matters, having a shallow outlook on wearing a hijab. She faces severe interrogation and humiliation at the airport while traveling to America due to her oriental appearance.

Ironically, the negative view of the East is both cherished by the Western and Eastern. These Eastern people are proud to adopt Western culture and ideology. They try to be part of the West because, for them, the West is more educated and powerful. Karamat Lone is a representative of the East, who follows Western ideology and is proud of Western culture to be accepted in Western society. In addition, he eyes a position at the Home Secretary’s office. When he wins with the support of British Muslims, he denounces his Muslim identity and betrays his Muslim community:

“He used his identity as a Muslim to win, then jettisoned it when it started to damage him...Working-class or millionaire, Muslim or ex-Muslim, proud son of migrants or antimigrant, modernizer or traditionalist? Will the real Karamat Lone please stand up? And the final blow, again from Anonymous Cabinet Member: “He would sell out anyone, even his own son if he thought it would move him closer to number 10” (Shamsie, 178).



To further strengthen his position, he marries an Irish-American woman. He is over-ambitious for social status and Western values. He does not keep his promises to make Muslims' treatment better. This is the story of many in the Western World (Al-Hafizh, 2019).

Shamsie's representation of ISIS (Islamic States of Iraq and Syria), as a dystopia also strengthens the position of the West and, in reverse, marks Muslim countries as breeding grounds for terrorist activities. The novel represents ISIS as a militant organization that wants to establish a radical Islamic country. This group can be represented as a dystopia. They recruit Muslims from other countries with nuanced ways of manipulation. One of them is Great Britain. ISIS cajoles British Muslims with better life and security in the Middle East. Parvaiz, the representation of British Muslims is their target.

Parvaiz is 19 years old and has a twin (Aneeka) and an older sister (Isma). They are orphans. Their father died in Guantánamo as a terrorist who fought with the Taliban in 2001. In his whole life, Parvaiz never knew his father. His mother and grandmother died when he was a kid. Thus, he was raised by her older sister, Isma. The character Parvaiz faced many struggles in his life. In his teenage, he met Farooq (ISIS recruiter), who has long been investigating Parvaiz's family. Parvaiz lives with his sister with no direction in life. He falls easy prey to ISIS recruiters who brainwash him and use him as a terrorist. In practicing re-orientalism, Shamsie represents Parvaiz and his father as stereotypes of *others* (Al-Hafizh, 2019).

The concept of Jihad in Islam and Jihadis as Muslims are other stereotypes in the novel. ISIS is brainwashing Muslims on the holy name of Jihad (a justified effort or activity carried out by Muslims for the sake of religion, and Allah). ISIS exploits the concept for their personal gains and designs. The West makes exploits the concept and uses it as a technique to stamp Orient East as exotic, dangerous, and terrorist. With the help of this tool, so far the West has done irreversible losses to the identities and lives of innocent Muslims. Muslims across the world suffered and are suffering from negative propaganda. Now more than the West, the East believes in this propaganda (Al-Hafizh, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Orientalism appears a practice of the West to assert their power and dominance over the East through deculturization whereas re-orientalism refers to the stereotypical representation of the East as exotic, uncivilized, dangerous, and terrorist (sometimes by the elite orientalists). Modern South Asian authors who write in English, use different techniques of *Re-Orientalism* to portray the West as the center of culture and power. These authors usually portray themselves as *Other*. Brushing aside their Eastern identities, these authors seem more concerned with their Western identities. In sum, the practice of re-orientalism in the writings of South Asian authors not only devalues them, but also licentiates the West to discriminate, marginalize, and demean South Asia folks, particularly Muslims.

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