

Power Dynamics and Personal Autonomy in Kamila Shamsie's

Home Fire

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Abstract

Contradiction between the state and individual is a recurring theme in literature. This dichotomy explores the complicated interplay between the needs and desires of the individual and the demands and control imposed by the state or society. This article attempts to make a cautious study of the tension between state and individual in the novel *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie. The tension takes centre stage as the characters navigate the complex web of state control, societal expectations, and personal desires. The work explores the tremendous struggles faced by individuals as they wrestle with their identities, confront the consequences of their decisions, and try to maintain a sense of autonomy while operating under the restrictions set by the government. This paper aims to critically analyse and contrast the portrayal of the state versus individual conflict in Kamila Shamsie's highly political novel *Home Fire*, shedding light on the ways in which the characters negotiate their personal agency, cultural identities, and allegiances within the framework of societal norms. The paper wraps up by analysing strategies adopted by the author to make it suitable to address the issues of diasporic journey of the Muslim community from Pakistan in the backdrop of Islamophobia

Keywords: Diaspora, Islamophobia, Individual autonomy, Power structure

Kamila Shamsie is one of the new wave Pakistani writers who is based in Britain and successful in both Pakistan and the West. Her first novel titled *In the City by the Sea* (1998) and other works include *Salt and Saffron* (2000), *Kartography*(2002), *Broken Verses*(2005), *Offence: the Muslim Case* (2009), *Burnt Shadows*(2009), *A God in Every Stone* (2014) and *Home Fire* (2017), which won the Women's Prize for fiction 2018, and was long-listed for

the Man Booker Prize 2017. Her novel has been shortlisted for the DSC Prize of South Asian Literature 2018. Kamila received many awards including Prime Minister's Award for Literature in Pakistan, Anisfield - Wolf Book Award and Women's Prize for Fiction. The novel *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie is an engrossing examination of the intricate interactions between the state and personal identity.

The novel analyses the struggles, tensions, and sacrifices people make in their pursuit of cultural, personal, and political identity in the face of governmental scrutiny via the lives of its protagonists. Shamsie explores the complex experiences and difficulties faced by those living in diaspora who battle with cultural integration, competing loyalties, and the search for a feeling of belonging through the narrative of a British Muslim family. The conflict between one's own identity and the needs of the state has gained prominence in today's society. By separating the intricate web of tensions and sacrifices that develop from it, Shamsie deftly investigates it. Shamsie vividly describes the lives of her characters through her poignant storytelling, shedding light on the challenges they encounter as they battle the state's invasive power and their search for personal and cultural identity. By focusing on the experiences of those caught between the competing demands of their own aspirations and the scrutiny imposed by the state, *Home Fire* takes readers on a trip through the lives of the British Muslim family. Shamsie deconstructs the complicated webs that connect identity and state control with great writing and incredible human characters, prompting readers to consider the fundamental nature of who we are and how much influence we actually have over our own lives. Shamsie vividly depicts the challenges that diasporic cultures encounter when assimilating into Western culture.

In *Home Fire*, the main characters struggle with the pressure to fit in with the mainstream culture while yet honouring their roots. The primary character, Aneeka, for example, enjoys her British identity while maintaining ties to her Pakistani heritage and navigating the difficulties between the two. Shamsie draws attention to the challenges diasporic people confront in balancing their need for individual autonomy with cultural norms. The character also reflects the competing loyalties that result from living in a diaspora. When Parvaiz, Aneeka's twin brother, gets involved with ISIS, a significant dispute arises. Parvaiz's trip is a reflection of the conflict several Diaspora's experience as they try to uphold both their adoptive country and their ancestral roots. Though sometimes it seemed like she lived in a time capsule, "her past was never too far away—half in the world of her mother's memories, half in the world of her own unspoken experiences" (Page 9). Isma, one

of the main characters, struggles with her dual identity as a British-Pakistani, split by her mother's recollections of their native country and her own experiences growing up in Britain. This quote captures her battle with this dual identity. Offering a sophisticated analysis, Shamsie investigates the internal conflict faced by the diaspora, whether loyalty should be determined by geography, family, or personal views.

The central theme of *Home Fire* is the search for identity and a sense of belonging. The book digs at the struggles of those who have multiple identities or hybrid selves and must balance competing loyalties. Isma and Aneeka, who were born in Pakistan but were reared in Britain, struggle with their multiple identities the entire time. Isma, for example, struggles to define her own identity as a British citizen while grappling with the weight of her family's history and her Pakistani heritage. Isma expressed this internal tension by saying, "I am the sister of a terrorist... but the twin of a man who died ashamed of his homeland." Shamsie depicts the conflict and difficulty that come with balancing multiple identities under a system that is governed by the state. The eldest sister, Isma, represents the internal conflict experienced by diasporic people who feel torn between various cultural identities. She struggles with balancing her need for individual freedom with her duty to her family and cultural heritage. Shamsie questions the idea of what it means to belong, posing questions about accepted ideas of identity and illuminating the ongoing challenges encountered by people who live in diaspora. The work also depicts the sacrifices made by CT citizens in the name of national identity. Aneeka's twin brother Parvaiz joins ISIS after succumbing to extremism's attraction. Parvaiz's decision reflects the internal struggle faced by individuals torn between their personal desires and the pressure to conform to a singular national identity. As Parvaiz reflects on his decision, he states, "I thought it was love for my family, love for my sister, but love is also something they manipulate"(42). This quote emphasizes the conflict between individual identity and the narratives imposed by the state:

Isma looked at her reflection in the mirror, hair 'texturised' 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'. Or it would if it didn't come attached to her face. She opened the drawer in which she kept her turbans and headscarves, closed it, looked in the mirror once more, opened it again. (Shamsie 45)

According to the quotation above, Isma switches from "texturized/frizzy" to "beachy waves" in her hairstyle. The word "beachy waves" itself alludes to a modern woman's hairdo in the

West. Additionally, the poem emphasizes Isma's self-assurance by personifying her hair, which "said 'playful' and 'surprising'". Shamsie dismantles barriers between becoming a modern lady who considers how to treat her hair and maintains traditional values at the same time by demonstrating the rationale between two contrast traits above. In addition to this characteristic, Isma's family's use of English in daily activities reveals a hybrid type of Muslim Pakistani descents' identities. Isma, her brother, and her sister can converse in English with ease in both public and private settings, but they also maintain their Pakistani identity by using Urdu to express their innermost feelings in ways that are difficult to translate, such as when Isma refers to Eamonn as "bay-takalufi" (29).

The characters have been forced to respond differently under various circumstances by the surroundings. The best performances occupy the space between the artist and the audience. They are discovered assuming new identities and denying who they truly are in an effort to establish who they are as the greatest and acceptable. They must assume many personalities (masks) in order to be accepted by society. Everyone is giving a face-off performance. Their bodily roles are shifting, and because their true selves are hidden under many personalities, nobody knows where they are. They are playing their roles on stage in front of the chosen audience. Their appearances are displayed based on the audience's level of interest. The demands of their audience are being met by their talking, walking, and other actions. Because everyone is aware of their requirements, it is virtually difficult to explore their identities. They are aware of what to showcase publicly and what to conceal. They are aware that the audience does not care about what they do backstage.

The novel highlights the widespread prejudice and discrimination experienced by diasporic communities, especially those with South Asian ancestry. Important issues including racial profiling, government spying, and the loss of civil freedoms are raised in the book. *Home Fire's* characters deal with a variety of forms of prejudice, illustrating the conflicts that exist between the protection of individual rights and national security considerations. Shamsie's portrayal puts light on marginalised populations' struggles and the effects of xenophobia on diasporic people's daily lives. Islamophobia is one of the main types of bigotry that the book highlights. Due of their Muslim beliefs, the characters in *Home Fire* frequently encounter skepticism and hatred. The protagonist of the story is Isma, a young woman who endures continual scrutiny and prejudice due of her religious upbringing. Isma has trouble traveling because she is subjected to extra security screenings and profiling at airports because she identifies as a Muslim. It is understandable to anticipate such a time-

consuming and humiliating "interrogation on Heathrow Airport, London awaiting Ismaili while she is leaving for America"(3) given the familial history of a terrorist father and brother. However, Aneeka, who was "spitting on the hijab" (90), pointed out the accomplishments of British Muslims to Eamonn:

Do you say, why didn't you mention that among the things this country will you achieve if you're Muslim is torture, rendition, detention without trying, airport interrogation, and spies in your mosques, teachers reporting your children to the authorities for wanting a world without British injustice? (Shamsie 90-91)

These incidents serve to emphasize the prejudices and preconceptions that Muslims encounter in Western societies. The experiences of characters who have either been radicalized or are thought to have ties to extremist ideas are also explored in *Home Fire*. This portrayal captures the discrimination that diasporic cultures experience since they are frequently wrongly linked to terrorism due to their race or religion. The novel depicts the effects of such prejudice on the lives of the characters, who are subject to continual inspection and live in constant fear of being branded as risks to public safety.

The novel also sheds light on the role of politics in perpetuating prejudice and discrimination against diasporic communities. The story explores the experiences of a British Muslim family of Pakistani origin, highlighting the challenges they face due to their religious and cultural identity. The characters experience the repercussions of government policies and anti-immigrant sentiments, which further marginalize and isolate them. They are confronted with biased immigration laws, racial profiling, and surveillance, all of which exacerbate their struggles for acceptance and belonging. Through the representation of national security concerns and the ensuing measures, politics in the book frequently serves to reinforce prejudice and discrimination. The role of Karamat Lone, a prominent British Muslim politician with Pakistani ancestry, symbolises the government's effort to combat terrorism.

Karamat's claim to be the British Home Secretary is also tenuous, like Creon's in *Antigone*. Despite all of his integrationist efforts, he is not white, and the British Muslim diaspora, the ethnic and religious group to which he belongs, does not support his political position. In order to support his claim to British politics, British public office, and British nationality as well, it is only natural for him to behave as a steadfast believer in British nationhood and unshakable obedience of the state rules. He lacks any ambivalence and is a mimic man. His wealthy Irish-American wife Teresa O' Flynn, who goes by Terry, his older

son, Ayman, whose Muslim name is spelled as "Eamonn" in Irish, and his daughter, Emily, are signs of his Westernization. Since they "voted him out in the elections," Karmath Lone runs for office from a safe seat with a predominately white population. This is due to his compulsive "Westoxification," as described by Stierstorfer (35). He is called a "sellout, coconut, opportunist, traitor" by the British Muslim community because he is allegedly an atheist with a strong stomach for expensive wines, and Isma calls him "Mr. British Values," "Mr. Strong on Security," and "Mr. Striding Away from Muslimness" (52). His notion of national identification is wholly in line with the white British since he is so enamoured and obsessed with white British values. His method is thought to support bias and discrimination against the diasporic group, nevertheless. He favours divisive measures that disproportionately harm Muslims and increase the perception that they are regarded as second-class citizens, such as withdrawing citizenship from those who are accused of involvement in terrorism.

The book focuses on the role political discourse plays in the marginalisation and stigmatisation of the diasporic population. The fictional Karamat Lone, a British Home Secretary of Pakistani descent, takes advantage of his ethnicity to advance his political career. He takes a tough line on immigration and counterterrorism, playing on public fear and prejudice. All British Muslims, according to Karamat's rhetoric, are potential terrorists, creating a hostile environment for the diasporic population. According to Shamsie, "Karamat Lone [...] whose jingoistic bile against anyone who disagreed with him was a stream of consciousness in their sitting room"(57). This quotation serves as an example of how politicians use prejudice to achieve their own agendas and worsen the injustice encountered by people of diaspora. Karmath Lone is therefore just as anti-Muslim as the white British are. He is actually more British than the white British people themselves since he has been so heavily "Westoxified."

In addition, Karamat Lone must "prove he's one of them (white British), not one of us (British Muslims)" (34), according to Aneeka, in order to deal with the new phenomenon of a rising trend among young Muslim British people to join terrorist organisations. This is their way of protesting white Islamophobia in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the 7/7 bombings. As Karamat Lone handled the Adil Pasha situation when he was an MP, he handles the Parvaiz Pasha matter in a same ruthless manner now that he is the British Home Secretary. Since assuming the position of Home Secretary, he has stripped all dual citizens who left the country to join "enemies" of their citizenship (188). Theresa May, the former

British Home Secretary (2010–2016) and current British Premier (as of 2016), serves as the inspiration for Shamsie's caricature of Karamat Lone. Her anti-immigration and anti-terrorist legislation is given a mirror image by the laws enacted by the made-up Karamat Lone. Shamsie, through her fictive imaginary, seems to make a political statement on these laws, timely enough, as they at times lack compassion and forgiveness. She further complicates the situation by imagining a Muslim Home Secretary in Britain, which, in her fictional portrayal of Karamat Lone, she claims is only feasible and attainable when such a person is completely blinded by Western culture, losing all memory of his true ancestry and religious affiliation. As illustrated by the hypothetical desertions of Muslim British youth like Farooq and Parvaiz Pasha to join the fundamentalists and terrorists, Shamsie criticizes such 'Westoxification' because it will not only be Islamophobic but also attract a more fundamentalist response, lethal enough, to further rip apart the multicultural fabric of British society. While it is troublesome to tell Muslims that they cannot freely practice their religion, there is merit to integration into the society in which they live. The removal of British citizenship from dual nationals who act against British interests is Karmat's most contentious policy. This action just overlooks the issue by retroactively labelling some young British Muslims as being outside of British society, rather than addressing the reasons why they feel cut off from the greater population. The political atmosphere in the book also reflects the wider social divisions and conflicts between various populations. Due to their Muslim identities, the characters in *Home Fire* experience prejudice and animosity, which is made worse by the rising Islamophobia and populist politics. Diasporic populations find it challenging to completely integrate and engage in society without running afoul of mistrust and prejudice due to the politics of fear and division. It underscores the need for comprehension, empathy, and inclusive policies to fight prejudice and discrimination by highlighting the negative effects of these political processes on marginalised communities. In *Home Fire*, the topic of discrimination towards the diasporic community is explored in detail. The government can exacerbate prejudice against communities of colour through enacting immigration laws, national security measures, cultural assimilation efforts, job discrimination, and housing policies. Innocent Muslims are frequently profiled and monitored as a result of the Prevent plan, which was put in place to combat radicalisation. Immigration laws that target particular diasporic communities might lead to discrimination. Governments may enact stringent immigration regulations or give priority to some nationalities over others, limiting the options available to members of diasporic

communities to reunite with their relatives, find work, or find sanctuary. Such regulations might reinforce marginalisation and exclusion. Moreover, in response to global dangers, governments frequently enact security measures, but these policies may unfairly target diasporic people and result in prejudice. Communities from particular areas, or belonging to particular religious or racial origins, may be the target of enhanced racial profiling, higher scrutiny, or increased monitoring at borders, airports, or in public areas. This might encourage a climate of dread and mistrust.

Diasporic populations may also be disproportionately impacted by policies or practices that fail to address job discrimination. People from these communities may not be able to fully participate in the workforce or advance in their jobs due to limited access to job opportunities, unequal compensation, glass ceilings, and discriminatory hiring practices, which perpetuates systemic discrimination. Above all, discriminatory tactics by real estate brokers or landlords, a lack of cheap housing options, and exclusive zoning rules can exacerbate spatial inequality and impede the social integration of communities of colour. It's critical to keep in mind that, depending on the nation, area, and particular historical and political situations, the degree and kind of discrimination against diasporic people can vary significantly. While analysing the book, one can identify the key factors that contribute to the discrimination. The effects of such measures are felt by Aneeka and Isma when her brother Parvaiz is persuaded to join a jihadist organization. Aneeka is forced to face the systemic unfairness by the actions of the British government. In the words of Shamsie, "She had tried to talk to people in authority about what was happening, her brother's story and her own; she had tried to reason with them about the violence they were perpetrating; she had pleaded, wept, and shouted" (149). This text emphasizes the difficulties experienced by people like Aneeka, whose cries for justice are answered with hostility or indifference because of the discriminatory laws in place.

The media has a major impact on maintaining bias against the diasporic group. Muslims, especially those of Pakistani descent, are frequently portrayed negatively in the media, which feeds preconceptions and discrimination against the diasporic population. Shamsie draws attention to how political discourse and media coverage feed mistrust and distrust, alienating and marginalizing Muslims in British society by depicting them as terrorists or risks to the security of the country. The media is portrayed in the book as biased and sensationalist, having a propensity to favour dramatic stories above accurate reporting. Instead of presenting members of the diasporic community as unique people with a variety

of experiences and viewpoints, the media tends to focus on the sensational parts of their lives, such as their claimed affiliations with terrorism. It also demonstrates how politicians can use the media to further their own objectives. Politicians exploit media outlets to sow division and terror throughout society, using the diaspora as a convenient scapegoat to increase their hold on political power. This deception also legitimises prejudice towards the diasporic group and maintains a hostile environment. In addition, the media's representation of the diasporic community lacks context and complexity, simplifying complex problems. The media fails to confront prejudiced views and perpetuates stereotypes by oversimplifying the experiences and motivations of diasporic characters. It is abundantly obvious that the sensationalised and biased reporting of the media affects public opinion and adds to the stigmatisation of the diasporic group. It frequently focuses on the characters' negative traits, connecting them to terrorism or portraying them as security risks. As a result, the diasporic group is constantly subjected to prejudice, discrimination, and the need to demonstrate their allegiance, which reinforces its marginalisation and othering.

The portrayal of Parvaiz, an ISIS recruit, in the book is one instance of media bigotry. By portraying Parvaiz as a terrorist and ignoring the complexities of his personal journey and the sociopolitical reasons that influenced his decisions, the media's depiction of his biography strengthens the narrative of radicalisation. The way Parvaiz is portrayed in the media not only reinforces prejudice against him but also denigrates the entire diaspora. Another example is how Karamat Lone, the British Home Secretary and a significant character in the book, was treated by the media. Despite holding a prominent position, Lone continuously comes under suspicion and vigilance because of his Pakistani heritage. Lone is the target of ongoing racial and religious prejudice in the media, which frequently casts doubt on his allegiance and moral character because of his ancestry. This representation illustrates the prejudiced lens through which the media views members of the diasporic community, feeding preconceptions and impeding their advancement on the social and political fronts. The book also looks at how the media shapes social narratives via the perspective of Isma, a sociology student:

If you look at colonial laws, you'll see plenty of precedent for depriving people of their rights; the only difference is this time it's applied to British citizens, and even that's not as much of a change as you might think, because they're rhetorically being made unBritish? Say more. 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 favorite, British passport holders, always something interposed between their Britishness and terrorist. (38)

Isma is aware that how the media portrays the diasporic population affects public opinion and legislative choices. She understands the importance of narrative and uses it to challenge stereotypes by sharing personal experiences and stories that challenge them. Isma's initiatives emphasize the value of alternative narratives and the demand for a diverse range of perspectives in order to challenge the prejudiced media representations. Kamila Shamsie underlines the detrimental effect that media plays in upholding discrimination against the diasporic people through the representation of media in *Home Fire*. The book emphasizes the need for more nuanced and ethical media representation to dispel myths, advance knowledge, and build empathy for underrepresented groups. Overall, *Home Fire* emphasizes how preconceptions are reinforced through sensationalism, biased reporting, and media coverage of the diasporic population. The book by Kamila Shamsie highlights the need for more inclusive narratives to combat and demolish prejudice and raises awareness of the negative impacts of such media practices.

Through the experiences of Aneeka and Isma, the two main characters who manage the intricacies of their identities as women of Muslim ancestry living in the Western world, Shamsie explores the interconnectedness of gender and diaspora. It offers a detailed examination of the difficulties experienced by Muslim women in the diaspora as they negotiate social preconceptions, patriarchal structures, and cultural expectations. Shamsie defies traditional representations of Muslim women by showcasing them as multidimensional, autonomous individuals who exhibit fortitude and resilience in the face of adversity. The stories of Aneeka and Isma, siblings of Pakistani descent who were born in Britain, demonstrate the connection of gender and diaspora in a number of ways. First of all, they struggle with the conflict between their cultural background and the demands that Western society places on them as women. They struggle to strike a balance between their desire for personal independence and self-expression and their commitment to maintaining their Muslim identity and traditions, frequently in conflict with cultural norms and family expectations. Aneeka and Isma are Muslim women who are vulnerable to prejudices and preconceptions based on their faith and upbringing. They suffer gender discrimination, racial profiling, and Islamophobia, which combine to influence their experiences. They must negotiate the complicated landscape of identity politics while addressing sexism and racism at the same time.

Aneeka, a young British-Pakistani lady, represents how gender and diaspora connect in the book. In a society that frequently marginalizes both Muslims and women, she struggles with her cultural background and her identity as a woman. The difficulties faced by many Muslim women navigating their place in Western society while upholding their cultural and religious values are reflected in Aneeka's experiences. She continuously negotiates her identity, working to balance her Britishness with her Pakistani ancestry and dispelling myths and preconceptions about being a Muslim woman. The confluence of gender and diaspora is also represented by Isma, Aneeka's older sister, in *Home Fire*. Isma exemplifies the sacrifices frequently made by diasporic people because she has had to care for her younger siblings while also dealing with the loss of her parents. She continuously struggles to strike a balance between her own desires and objectives and the demands made of her as a woman in her community. The struggles and difficulties women endure within patriarchal structures are highlighted by Isma's experiences, as well as the sacrifices they make to uphold cultural and familial ideals. The experiences of Aneeka and Isma in the book also speak to the larger political and social environment that surrounds Muslims and communities of colour. The story takes on subjects including Islamophobia, racial profiling, and how counterterrorism policies affect Muslims' daily life. It examines the conflicts between individual aspirations and the shared obligation felt by people of the diaspora to overcome these obstacles and preserve a sense of cultural identity.

The book also emphasises the compelling tension between a person's individuality and the expectations of the state, engrossing readers with its examination of the stark contrast between the two. Shamsie challenges us to consider the restrictions and constraints placed on us by outside forces, as well as the challenges we encounter in paving our own paths towards self-actualisation, through the experiences of her characters. As we reach the end of *Home Fire's* chapters, we have a strong awareness of the far-reaching effects of the state's interference with personal identity. Characters like Isma, Aneeka, and Parvaiz are just a few examples of how Shamsie's portrayals of them illustrate the loss of individual autonomy and the sneaky ways in which the government can erode our sense of self. We see the restrictions on personal freedom, the difficulties of cultural assimilation, and the compromises people make to juggle competing commitments through their experiences. The book serves as a moving reminder that the pursuit of identity is not an individual undertaking but rather involves a complicated interplay of individual goals, cultural traditions, and outside influences.

Shamsie challenges the dominant conventions and prejudices that constitute a threat to our originality and challenges the narratives that are thrust upon us. Additionally, it forces us to face the significant influence that governmental surveillance has had on our lives. Both Parvaiz's ascent towards extremism and Aneeka's anger with the state's penetrating gazeserve as potent reminders of the negative effects that result from undermining personal agency. We are left feeling uneasy by Shamsie's superb writing, which compels us to think critically about the relationships between the state and the individual. The novel's discussion of multiple identities highlights the difficulties involved in the state versus identity dichotomy. Readers who also deal with the difficulties of cultural dualism can identify with Isma and Aneeka's effort to integrate their British upbringing with their Pakistani origin. Shamsie asks us to appreciate the diversity and richness of our identities while challengingthe need to live up to social expectations through their storylines.

Home Fire is a powerful example of the tensions, sacrifices, and conflicts that result from the struggle between individual identity and state objectives. Shamsie's superb storytelling and insightful inquiry push us to consider the intricacies of modern life. The story forces us to think about our own search for self-actualisation and the necessity to protect individual identities in the face of external pressures by illuminating the effect of state intrusion on personal agency. The delicate balance between our own identities and the state's influence over us is brought to our attention as we end the pages of *Home Fire*. In the end, *Home Fire* serves as a potent reminder that our identities are complicated, nuanced, and essentially human and not just established by the state.

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