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AN ECOCRITICAL TEXTUAL STUDY OF SHAMSIE'S *HOME FIRE* (2017)



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Abstract

*The 21st century began with its own set of challenges for the entire world, but it soon engulfed the world in a war and a state of confusion unlike any before. The world was caught in a fight, both conscious and unconscious, and clearly against conventional and hybrid warfare, leading to an uncountable number of victims. The researcher aims to conduct a thorough textual study of Shamsie's seventh novel, *Home Fire* (2017), to elaborate on the notion that the concept of environment is not limited to the bounds of Nature. Human beings play an active role in creating environments in ways that meet their desired goals, and this is mostly practised by nations from the global north. The global south does not have enough resources to be as influential as the global north. The countries of the global south end up paying the price for the fights of other strong nations, as has been the case with Pakistan and other Muslim nations. The study has been conducted by conducting a textual study, keeping in view the concepts of environmental justice, assimilation and Spivak's notion of subalternity.*

Keywords:

Introduction

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The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) defines environmental justice as “*fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.*” (Scott) On thoroughly analyzing the current events of the world specifically since the beginning of 21st century, or if analyzed any age of history, the concepts of justice, eco-justice and fair treatment seem to be an ideal utopian perception. ‘Ideally utopian’ because each age of history will present instances of violation of rights, unfair treatment, exploitation, discrimination, unfair distribution of resources, either no representation or misrepresentation, etc.

The concept of capitalism and colonization got official terms, and became part of historical records officially only in the recent past, but the concepts have been practiced in every age of human history. Just like colonization or the World Wars had a deep influence on the lives of the people all over the world, many instances, incidents or tragedies can be quoted from the recent past that have had effected people tremendously among which 9/11 and 7/7 are the areas of concern of this textual study conducted on Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017). The impact has not diminished yet and many people are still facing the repercussions of the tragic events.

The study has been conducted with an attempt to explore the notion that environment in the ongoing era is as much a manmade as is the product of nature keeping in view the concepts of environmental justice in relation with acculturation, assimilation, and Spivak's concern regarding the giving the subaltern a voice to speak and the oppressor giving the chance to speak. Spivak's research titled, “*Terror: A Speech After 9/11*” led to development of body of work based on “politics of

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listening.”(Chambers) Acculturation is defined in simplest of terms as “the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into prolonged, continuous, first-hand contact with each other... with subsequent changes in the original patterns of either or both groups.” (Redfield et al.; Celenk and Vijver)

Home Fire, published in 2017, is a story of a common family bearing the consequences of the western policies of 9/11 and 7/7. Immigrants that had been settled in the west for generations were insecure and alienated even after becoming a part of the western community. Same is the story of the Pasha siblings who were home yet they were cast away first because of their father joining the Jihadis and the Pervez, one of the 19-year-old twins, being mentally manipulated and brainwashed into joining the Jihadis which led to his death after he escaped from the group. The story is to a great extent like *Antigone (441 BC)* by Sophocles which is the story of Oedipus’ children after he has been exiled and cast away. “The novel has a power and a truth that nonfiction does not possess to the same degree; it is a capacious form that exceeds borders and rules. The novel is able to transcend fiction and nonfiction, and to bring together different historical periods, geographical locations, and political contexts, while all the time keeping the emphasis firmly on people.” (Chambers 203)

This research is a textual study of *Home Fire (2017)* that aims to explain the notion that environment is not limited to nature. Environment, due to the influence of human beings can also be taken as a manmade phenomenon and environmental justice is not being provided unbiasedly.

1. Intertextuality: *Home Fire (2017)* and *Antigone (441 BC)*

Though some changes can be observed, Shamsie admitted in an interview that a came up with *Home Fire (2017)* upon a theater director asking her to rewrite *Antigone (441 BC)* in a contemporary British setting.

“When I read the play -- which has at its center two sisters who respond differently to the legal repercussions of their brother’s act of treason -- I knew immediately that I wanted to connect it to a story that was very much in the news at the time, that of young British Muslims and their relationship with the British state. I didn’t end up writing it as a play; I’m a novelist, so that’s the form I wanted to use to tell the story” (Shamsie, “Interview: Kamila Shamsie Talks about ‘Home Fire’, Minorities and Terrorism”).

Creon takes over the throne because Oedipus’ sons are too young to rule Thebes but when they have grown up Eteocles takes over the throne and exiles his brother Polyneices. He gathers an army for himself and fight against his brother but both end up killing each other. Creon reclaims the throne and announces that Eteocles will get a proper burial while Polyneices’ body will be cast away to the dogs and vultures. Antigone decides against it and decides that she will get her brother’s body and give him a proper funeral. Antigone is also Creon’s son, Haemon’s future bride and tries to plead to his father to release her and her sister Ismene from imprisonment for going against his decision. Creon’s pride leads to death of Antigone which leads to loss of his family.

In *Home Fire (2017)*, Aneeka plays the role of Antigone and Isma that of Ismene. Aneeka decides to help her brother get back home after he escapes from the Jihadis but eventually dies. She is vocal about her twin brother deserving a proper funeral but Karamat Lone, the Home Minister, like Creon, is against it considering his moto that Pervez has betrayed his home. His pride leads to his family getting destroyed as he is cruel to Aneeka and her family while Eamon Lone, son of Karamat Lone, plans on getting married to her.

2. Ecocritical Analysis of *Home Fire* (2017)

2.1. Connection to Land of Origination and the Practices and Beliefs of the Ancestors

Ecocritical literature has always been vocal about staying close to nature, culture and tradition. The characters that are drifting away from their origin are always shown to be trapped in various problems and the only solution for their troubles is getting back to the ways of nature, or adopting the practices of the ancestors in harmony with the advancements of the modern world. To name a few *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko and *Tracks* by Louise Erdrich are few good examples. The characters in both the pieces of literature bear consequences of their actions according to their relation to their homeland, tradition and culture that they originally belong to. The same aspect can be observed in *Home Fire* (2017) as well.

The novel begins with Isma worried about the interrogation she must go through because she missed her flight to The United States of America to pursue a Ph.D. program in Sociology after she has raised her twin siblings Aneeka and Pervez enough to be capable of taking care of themselves. Together the two sisters had rehearsed how to avoid any kind of suspicions from the interrogation officers at the airport and had also ensured that nothing packed in her luggage seems suspicious as well. Luckily, she gets through but one aspect is very striking in the interrogation.

"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 meant there was no other country of which she could feel herself a part, but the words came out sounding evasive. (Shamsie, "Home Fire" 5)

The Pasha family has been settled in Britain for generations but the interrogation conveys the notion that being a practicing Muslim is a hurdle for her being accepted in Britain even after spending all her life there and her ancestors spending their life there and getting buried there as well. Here a perception is being conveyed that Britain is divided into two groups of people that are British and Muslims keeping in view Said's concept of Orientalism presented in 1979.

The incidences changed the dynamics of international politics and international system regulation and sparked off an environment of inter-faith distrustfulness. "Starting from America the whole of the West was grazed by the fire of Islamophobia and extremist reactions became rampant against the diasporic Muslim communities settled in the West for centuries." (Shaheen et al. 151) Muslims around the world started living in fear and insecurity. The world got engulfed in conventional and unconventional war which made Muslims in the Western World fear one another and couldn't freely practice their traditions.

Karamat lone is disliked by the Muslims residing in Britain for generations and is known as *Lone Wolf* publicly. He feels indebted to Britain for giving him and his family the opportunities that weren't possible for them to get in Pakistan but he is inconsiderate to the fact that Britain is not originally where he belongs to. He looks down upon practicing Muslims and believes that practicing Islamic teachings will become a hurdle in progressing in his career that he worked hard for.

Karamat Lone, his actions and decisions show that he is of the view that if a person, especially a Muslim wants to prosper, they must distance themselves from the East and get closely affiliated with the West. Keeping this notion in view, he got married to an Irish-American woman, named his daughter Emily and son Eamonn instead of Ayman (Shamsie, "Home Fire" 15) to seem closer to West rather than East, rather to be more specific, the Muslims.

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Eamonn, that was his name. How they'd laughed in Wembley when the newspaper article accompanying the family picture revealed this detail. An Irish spelling to disguise a Muslim name—"Ayman" become "Eamonn" so that people would know the father had integrated. (His Irish-American wife was seen as another indicator of this integrationist posing rather than an explanation for the son's name.) (Shamsie, "Home Fire" 15–16)

It seems to be a matter of shame or disgrace to be seen near a mosque by the paparazzi. Being Muslim, he is happy in showing the world that he is against Islam because of *gender-segregation* but he is fine with going to the church because it's not so.

All the old muck. He meant the picture of Karamat Lone entering a mosque that had been in the news for its "hate preacher." LONE WOLF'S PACK REVEALED, the headlines screamed when a tabloid got hold of it, near the end of his first term as an MP. The Lone Wolf's response had been to point out that the picture was several years old, he had been there only for his uncle's funeral prayers and would otherwise never enter a gender-segregated space. This was followed by pictures of him and his wife walking hand in hand into a church. His Muslim-majority constituency voted him out in the elections that took place just a few weeks later, but he was quickly back in Parliament via a by-election, in a safe seat with a largely white constituency, and the tabloids that had attacked him now championed him as a LONE CRUSADER taking on the backwardness of British Muslims. Isma doubted very much that "the old muck" would rise again—oh, unless he meant the opposing side of that story: all the accusations she'd heard, and that seemed entirely accurate, that Karamat Lone had precisely calculated the short-term losses and long-term gains of showing such contempt for the conventions of a mosque. Sellout, coconut, opportunist, traitor. (Shamsie, "Home Fire" 35)

He seems to be in a state of confusion what to follow and what not to follow, what to believe and what not to believe as his views keep conflicting with each other. He should have been the voice of the Muslims in a nation where Muslims are being treated as parasites.

"Can I ask you something?" he said. "The turban. Is that a style thing or a Muslim thing?"

"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."

"I'd find it more difficult to not be Muslim," she said... (Shamsie, "Home Fire" 21)

The tragic events of the 21st century, and the politics at the level of religion has been directed solely towards Islam. It led to an environment of fear and hatred as can be seen in the following lines. Life for Muslims immigrants had become difficult whether in the US, Britain, or any other country round the globe if they were not in their own nation of origination as the Pasha family and Lone family are originally Pakistanis whose ancestors had migrated to Britain. Eventually, after attaining nationality they have become citizens of Britain officially but they were still not accepted like other Pakistanis or Muslims.

Isma, like other well-practicing Muslim, wore a turban and in a foreign land, wearing a turban makes

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them stand out. The ongoing situation was such that practicing Muslims 9/11 had created a fear among non-Muslims which made them turn against Muslims and the Muslims too were in a state of fear among each other.

Assuming women who wore turbans as “a Muslim thing” couldn’t possibly shake hands with men. As she walked home she thought how much more pleasant life was when you lived among foreigners whose subtexts you couldn’t hear. (Shamsie, “Home Fire” 22)

The way a person practices a religion varies from person to person but the culture, tradition of land of origination of that individual. This element can be observed in the novel when Isma and her teacher and sponsor Dr. Hira Shah are preparing a meal and a strange music is heard but the source of the music is a mystery. They check the house thoroughly but the source can still not be found. A neighbor laughs that it might be a ghost. Isma takes it as a joke but is taken back by Dr. Shah’s reaction.

The music kept on, coming from everywhere and nowhere, following them as they moved through the apartment. Hira, gripping her knife, whispered something that turned out to be the Lord’s Prayer—she’d been educated at a convent school in Kashmir. Finally, the supremely rational, razor-minded Dr. Shah said they should go out for dinner despite the unpleasant hail. Perhaps the sound would have stopped by the time they returned. (Shamsie, “Home Fire” 11–12)

Chapman, in his study titled *Acculturation: Cross Cultural Consumer Perceptions and the Symbolism of Domestic Space*, very rightly states, “...there is still, however, a need for empirically-based theory concerning the question of why some immigrant communities do not readily assimilate or acculturate, but rather segregate or isolate themselves, attempting to keep the new cultural environment at arm’s length; this can continue even when the immigrant population has been established in the new environment for decades. The self-imposed segregation of the immigrants is often mirrored by a discourse of ‘otherness’ on the part of the host population.”

Many people around the globe tried to show that even when they despite being born Muslims and belonging from well practicing Islamic families, they had given up on their relation with Muslims and their Islamic identity. They wanted to show the western world that they are one of them and wanted to get rid of the feeling of Otherness. Shamsie has very masterfully shown that the characters in *Home Fire* (2017) believed that they were home but they were not and the very clearly showed it to them. Karamat Lone’s profession and the reputation he had built for himself was always at a state of risk because of Muslims but the fact is that the British never really accepted any Muslim as one of them whether they practiced Islam or not, whether they had newly migrated or had a long list of ancestors that had spent their life in Britain. The Muslims were unconsciously the subaltern who chose to get free from Spivak’s concept of Subalternity but no matter how they tried, the title of Pakistani and Muslim never left Karamat Lone no matter how much he tried to avoid it. Rather his efforts led to destruction of his family. It led to him losing his son as well as his wife because he was more dedicated to Britain and his profession rather than his religion passed on to him by his ancestor’s, his family and his bond as a parent with his son.

2.2. Justice and Environment: The Key Tools for Betrayal and Manipulation

A fact can be observed while living day to day life or through historical records that a person who betrays always has a reason for why they chose to change the side they supported earlier or had a change of thought. The reason is that that either they have been manipulated or they themselves have been betrayed by someone, and in many circumstances both. The same aspect can be seen in the

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Shamsie's modern day version of *Antigone* (441 BC) as well.

The story does not have a victor, rather it has antiheroes. Pervez decides to embark on his father's journey only to later realize that the noble cause they had set out was nothing more than a propaganda and there is no way to go back home. He provides his services and talent to protect his religion but when he understands the agenda behind the Jihad he escapes only to get killed. Aneeka fights for her brother's right to get a proper burial and her right to return but fails eventually.

The tragic story begins with Pervez's departure for joining the Jihadis but Shamsie also gives a history to the deceiving nature of Karamat Lone. His mindset is such that of a person who takes away credit of other people's hard work. Such people are never appreciated by society, especially the people who worked hard for an achievement.

"Oh yes, the new MP," the uncle said, coming to see what had drawn out a pronouncement of such uncharacteristic venom. "On the day of the final we were a player short and this one, Mr. Serious, was visiting his cousin, our wicketkeeper, so we said, Okay, you play for us, and gave him our injured batsman's uniform. Did nothing all match except drop a catch, and then ended up holding the trophy in this official photograph, which went into the local newspaper. We were just being polite to offer it to him, since he was an outsider, and only because we were sure he'd have enough manners to say thanks but the captain—that was me—should be the one to hold it. We should have known then he would grow up to be a politician. Twenty pounds says he has it framed on his wall and tells everyone he was man-of-the-match." (Shamsie, "Home Fire" 14–15)

Similarly, when the Pasha family contacted Karamat Lone as they were expecting that he would help in finding the whereabouts regarding Adil Pasha, father of Isma, Aneeka and Pervez Pasha, his response is very cruel and selfish.

"No one told you he was dead for two years?"

"Who was going to tell us? The Americans? British intelligence? We weren't told anything. We still haven't been told anything. They haven't released records of Bagram from that time period. We don't even know if anyone bothered to dig a grave."

"I'm sure they dug a grave," he said.

"Why? Because they're so civilized?" She had promised herself she wouldn't lie to him, and that included not curtailing her rage.

"I'm sorry. I was trying to . . . I'm sorry. I can't imagine what that must have been like for you, for your whole family."

She made a helpless, hopeless gesture. "We didn't talk about it. We were forbidden to talk about it... On my grandmother's behalf, this man went to visit his cousin's son, a first-term MP, and asked if the British government could find out any information about Adil Pasha, who died on his way to Guantánamo, and whose family deserved answers. 'They're better off without him,' the MP said, and left the room."

"That was my father?"

"Yes."

He slumped forward, his face in his hands. (Shamsie, "Home Fire" 50)

Had the Home Minister tried to make a little attempt, or at least had he pretended to try regarding

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searching about the whereabouts of Adil Pasha to comfort the grieving family, perhaps it would not have led to the hatred the Pashas had for the Lone family. Had he been a little bit kind to them, perhaps Farooq's attempt at manipulating Pervez would not have worked. He took advantage of their grief and made constant attempts at manipulating Pervez by presenting himself as a trustable brotherly figure who knew Adil Pasha. After winning his trust, he took help advantage of natural elements to torture Pervez physically as well as mentally under the disguise of the claim that his father had gone through the same pain that he was feeling to protect Islam. Farooq and other men chained him in Farooq's apartment, tortured him with extremely loud sounds of a video game in such a way that no matter how much he tried yelling for help, no one could hear him. Farooq didn't help him either and just let him bear the torture he was inflicting on Pervez. Then his head was dunked in the water collected in the kitchen sink and to play with his emotions for achieving his purpose, Farooq tells him that all that Pervez experienced was what his father, Adil Pasha, went through for months when he was imprisoned in Bagram. (Shamsie, "Home Fire" 136–38)

Due to the consequences of 9/11 and other such tragic incidents, "Survival of Muslim immigrants reached such a level of precariousness that they feared even walking in the street any voice from anywhere would shout out loud at them, "bloody Muslims, go back to your country." As an answer to that question, they ask themselves, "Which country?" They were born here. They belong here." (Abbasi 3) This aspect is also shown in the novel through experiences of Aneeka one of which is a man spitting on her while she is going to Eamonn's place.

"Does anyone give you a hard time because of the hijab?" he said.

She tilted her head back to rest it against his chest and look up at him. "If you're nineteen and female you'll get some version of a hard time for whatever you wear. Mostly it's the kind of thing that's easy to shrug off. Sometimes things happen that make people more hostile. Terrorist attacks involving European victims. Home secretaries talking about people setting themselves apart in the way they dress. That kind of thing." He didn't say anything to that, just gripped a fistful of her hair and squeezed while moving his hand down along the length of it, water dripping onto the wood floor. "And no, I wasn't showering because I got caught in the rain. Some guy spat at me on the tube." (Shamsie, "Home Fire" 90)

Since 9/11, in the words of Jacob, "Pakistan may often be in the news for all the wrong reasons — such as the political crisis brought on this summer by an increasingly assertive judiciary and a defiant prime minister — but it has arguably outshone its giant neighbor, India, in producing fine novelists for some years now." Daesh, ISIS, and other such terrorist groups were their creations let loose and eventually a global war against terror was launched. The terrorist groups also known as the Islamic terrorist groups which led to the concept of Islamophobia did not arise out of thin air. They had been funded and each member of these group passed through a designed system. Keeping this point in view, the concept of radicalization has been limited down to the Muslims while it is not just a Muslim phenomenon.

Prior to Dearey's intervention, attempts to explain radicalization tended to rest on three approaches: a sociological methodology, which searches for a common social background among jihadists; the psycho- logical attempt to look for a radical personality type; and a communitarian approach examining group dynamics. The first, sociological explanation was discredited as it emerged that the stereotype of young, brainwashed men from deeply deprived backgrounds in the poorest parts of

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the “Third World” did not tally with the extensive range of terrorists that exists. While some jihadists are deprived, others have been drawn into a criminal milieu, while still others again are relatively wealthy and have higher than average levels of educational attainment. Few terrorists based in Euro- America attended madrassas or had unusually religious upbringings, and many jihadists are married, often with children, rather than being the loners often identified in sociological explanations. The psychological approach also has pitfalls, for example because there is little evidence to suggest that jihadists who work in groups (as compared with lone actors) have higher instances of mental illness than the wider population. Fanaticism often denotes not mental disorder, but deeply held belief. Even suicide bombing — the facet of terrorism with the clearest link to mental illness — forms part of this belief system. Nor is there evidence to suggest that a higher than average proportion of jihadists have experienced childhood trauma that, according to a psycho- analytic approach, might have sent them down the route of violence. (Chambers 203–04)

In the words of Hillary Clinton who served the US govt as an American politician, diplomat, and former lawyer, as well as the 67th US Secretary of State under President Obama from 2009 to 2013, stated in an interview, “We had this brilliant idea that we were going to come to Pakistan, and create a force of Mujahideen, equip them with stinger missiles and everything else to go after the Soviet’s inside Afghanistan... and then we said, ‘Great! Goodbye!’ Leaving these trained people who were fanatical in Afghanistan and Pakistan, leaving them well armed, creating a mess. The people we are fighting today, we were supporting in the fight against the Soviets.” (*Journey to Peace- Defence and Martyrs Day 2017*)

To conclude, Clinton’s statements, which she has stated in various other interviews, are the proof that Pakistan, the Pakistanis in and out of Pakistan, and the Muslims all around the world have been paying the price of their own investment for the creation of terrorist groups which were created to fight against the Soviets. Once the goal had been achieved, they were let loose. The West created such an environment that made themselves be fearful of their own doing, and put the whole world in such a state of confusion that Muslims that had migrated to the West and adopted it as their home no more felt secure at home. Muslims were afraid of themselves as well of other Muslims. Same is for the Non-Muslims. They were afraid of and were letting them become a part of their nation and community after giving up their homeland. The Muslims that tried to assimilate and adopt the British culture like the Karamat Lone were not trusted well and had to strive more than the natives of the West yet by the end of the novel, he loses everything. Pervez, who departed from Britain to provide his services for the greater good as Farooq led him to believe through constant manipulation, loses his life when he realizes the ridiculousness of the journey he had chosen to begin and eventually escapes. Therefore, the fearful life that people have been living around the globe after 9/11 is the result of the environment that was created by man rather than nature.

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