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EXPLORING MUSLIMS' DIASPORIC IDENTITIES: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SHAMSIE'S NOVEL HOME FIRE (2017) FROM HALL'S (1996) PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores Muslims' diasporic identities in Shamsie's novel *Home Fire* (2017) under the theoretical lens of Stuart Hall's critical essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1996). Via close textual analysis, the study unearths that British nationals, the Pasha siblings, displays a constant effort to get reunited with the past, simultaneously on other level, their identities became the part of the play which Halls (1996) calls the play of power and owing to the phenomenon "European Presence" everywhere. The British shows their extreme racial and islamophobic attitude, owing to that, the characters suffer a constant refusal of recognition consequently Aneeka strategically reverts to more defensive identity. She remains in a pre-marital relationship yet she is a staunchly strict follower of religious duties and rituals, Pervaiz Pasha became a staunch fundamentalist like his father. However, Isma proved her loyalties to British State, yet her brother was branded as "Pervy Pasha", the family as "Knickers" and Aneeka as an accomplice to her terrorist brother and a sexual player. Halls (1996) notions are confirmed that no matter how hard the diaspora tries to get assimilated in the culture, they are always refused as in Shamsie's narrative, even the dead body of Pervaiz Pasha was not brought to his home in England rather sent to his origin Pakistan and hashtags like "#GOBACKWHEREYOU CAME FROM" (Shamsie, 2017, p.190) started trending on social media as a clear evidence of refusal and rejection of recognition to the diasporic members.

1. Introduction

The present study "Exploring Muslims' Diasporic Identities: A Textual Analysis of Shamsie's Novel *Home Fire* (2017) from Hall's (1996) Perspective", is a comprehensive study falls in the domain of post-colonial studies, that offers a fresh and penetrative insight in to a concept called "Diaspora" that is associated with post-colonial studies and with the notion and issue of "Identity" which is an issue, central to postcolonial studies (Asma, 2015).

1.1 Diaspora and Its Background

Diaspora is a key concept in current Post-Colonial Studies and is defined as a forceful or willing dispersion of people from the land of their origin to some other land in search of home (Ashcroft, Griffiths, 2013). Historically the term Diaspora has been associated with Jews specifically and then its associations can be traced from Greeks and Africans too. The term diaspora and diasporic notion was previously found in classical world, but late twentieth and early twenty first century witnessed a renewed interest in diasporic notion and the issues related to it (Robin, 1996). To deal with the issue of cultural identity the study uses Stuart Halls' critical essay on "Cultural identity and Diaspora". With the advent of globalization, the dispersion and movement of immigrants across the borders, the issue of identity and culture emerge as a significant and peculiar issue in recent studies. Swinging amidst different cultures, Diasporic identities are constructed via continuous strive through commonness and differences in the progression of displacement and relocation both (Wenjing, 2005).

1.2 Cultural Identity and Diaspora: Theoretical Background

Diaspora, According to Halls, are a group of people whose cultural identities cannot be defined with one single definitions. He propounds two definitions, the first definition defines their cultural identity with the 'essence', the commonness and the shared cultural identity that they carry with their origin and with this identity they always want to embrace subconsciously, which Halls termed as "Imaginary Reunification with Past". With the second definition, Halls points out that cultural identities originate from history but like history they undergo transformation, developments and changes. Away from being stuck in to some stagnant, essentialist past, they are subject to some constant play of history, culture and power (Hall, 1996). Resultantly Diaspora comes up with plural identities. At one place they have longing to get reunited with the origin on the other side they strive hard to gain recognition in the new culture. Halls asserts that the dominant culture refuses to accept them and in response to that diaspora strategically reverts back to their identities belonging to the past and emerge with more defensive and essentialist identities.

1.3 The Novel *Homefire* (2017) By Kamila Shamsie

Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) specifically renowned for having foundational affiliations with Sophocles' *Antigone* is a narrative that interplays between mythology and world politics. The narrative is set in 2015 England, where Pasha Sibling Isma, Aneeka and Pervaiz, the second generation diaspora, are struggling to survive in the face of renewed racism and islamophobic discourse ignited after 7/7 2005 bombings in England. Shamsie exhibits a crucial history of silence by Pasha Sibling on their Jihadi father (Shaheen, Qamer, 2018).

2. Review of the Related Literature

According to Hall, in the world of visual representations, a new cinema is evolving and taking its rise in the Caribbean representations that is Afro Caribbean. He asserts that "black as the diaspora of the west; A new post-colonial subject" (Hall, 1996). All the representations of the black are centralized upon the question of cultural identity. There are two ways to think and study about cultural identity, which are altogether different from each other in their approach and positioning. The first position outlines cultural identity as a shared phenomenon "a sort of collective one true self" (Hall, 1996). This is an identity which people having similar origins and ancestry hold together. In the circumference of this definition lies shared histories and collective cultural codes that imparts oneness beyond all the apparent differences. This concept of cultural identity has remained crucial in the post-colonial struggles (Hall, 1996). Excavating and rediscovering this collective self is satiating, Fanons calls this as " a passionate research, directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, some beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others" (Fanon, 1963). Halls

questions this notion of what fanon calls passionate research of discovering the past. He puts up question that this one, shared identity is rediscovered which was somehow suppressed due to the colonization or it is reproduced by not recalling archaeology or history but by retelling of the past (Hall, 1996)

Hussy (2014) quotes Halls as, with the essentialist identity which centres itself on common and shared cultures, one cannot comprehend the trauma of colonialism. The second definition of cultural identity views identity in terms of difference, instead of commonness and oneness. From this point of view, cultural identity is “what we really are as well as what we have become” (Hussy 2014). In this second, sense cultural identity is something “becoming as well as of being” (Hussy 2014) as Hall (1996) points out that cultural identities originates from history but like history they undergo transformation, developments and changes. Away from being stuck in to some stagnant, essentialist past, they are subject to some constant play of history, culture and power (Hall 1996). Instead of being in the past waiting to be discovered, identities are those ways in which we are positioned and positioned by the discourse of past. Only the second perspective opens up the traumatic experience of colonialism. The ways in which the black and the black experiences and practices have been positioned and represented in various representations that shows the impacts of dominant cultural power and its normalisation. Hall (1996) quotes Said’s orientalist sense, we are made different, wilfully constructed as “Other’ in the knowledge economy and they had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as others (Hall, 1996). Every domain of representation carries power, Hall quotes Foucault here and his power/knowledge pair. Hall exclaims that this kind of knowledge is purely internal. This internalization of otherness doesn’t come with imposition rather by the power of inner compulsion and conformation (Hall, 1996).

To describe the difference in terms of cultural identities, Halls calls it a play of difference. He aligns his concept with that of Jacques Derrida’s play on words when he writes the word difference with a “difference”. As halls quotes Norris that difference remains oscillating between the French words differ and to defer which means to post pone. Saussure opines that meaning is generated through contrasting differences, Derrida comes up with a new ground that meaning always defers it postpones to the point of endless estimations. That shows meaning is never stable or final but rather always in a process to encompass other meanings. It is with this conception that Halls assert to understand and position cultural identities (Hall, 1996).

Other than difference, in cultural identities, another troubling term is “European Presence” which accompanies power.” In terms of colonialism, underdevelopment, poverty and racism of colour, the European presence is that which has positioned the black within its dominant regimes of representations (Hall). Resistance and refusal against this European presence is complex with this European presence, the essential culture lost its pristine character, it is fused. The diaspora experience is defined not by its purity, virginity or rawness rather by its heterogeneity and diversity. Hence diaspora identities are those which are constantly in process of transforming, changing and making itself anew. Hall (1996) cites examples of Caribbean as the mixes of colour and taste. Black diaspora Critics in England now are openly acknowledging this Diaspora Aesthetics and its formation in post-colonial experience (Hall 1996). There is a presence of syncretic dynamics that actually takes master codes from the dominant cultures and creolises them. This hybridising tendency has reached to the level of language itself, where the master codes from English language., “the nation language of master discourse, through strategic inflection, re accentuation and other performative moves in semantic syntactic and lexical codes” (Hall 1996). The concept of diaspora is not a recent development: whenever there is a

dispersal of people having shared customs, traditions, values, race and identity there emerges a culture that retains the residues of the actual culture trying to get in harmony with the alien or dominant culture.

3. Research Methodology

The present study “Exploring Muslims’ Diasporic Identities: A Textual Analysis of Shamsie’s Novel *Home Fire* from Hall’s (1996) Perspective”, is a qualitative study of the Shamsie’s novel *Home Fire* (2017) in the light of Stuart Hall’s essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”(1996). The study uses textual analysis as a tool for probing and analysis of the data.

4. Discussion/Analysis

In the novel *Home Fire* (2017), Shamsie narrates the story of the orphaned sibling, descent from Pakistan, settled in England, the second generation of the Diaspora. Throughout the novel, she centralizes her narrative around the confusion and struggle of members of diasporic community Isma, Aneeka and Pervaiz, the Pasha siblings.

4.1 The Diasporic Identities and their Imaginary Reunification with the Past

In the light of the Hall’s (1996) idea, imaginary reunification with the past, which is the part of his first definition of Diasporic Identities. Isma, the female protagonist exhibits this trait. Though apparently she is well settled in England who had a degree in Sociology and decided to pursue her PhD in America. But she encountered a humiliating situation when she was detained at Heathrow airport for interrogation. She was interrogated for hours and hours because of her diasporic belongings. Isma, being British national is sub consciously in constant struggle to be stuck to her ‘shared culture’ (Hall, 1996) which people having the same ancestry hold in common, which Stuart calls ‘imaginary reunification with the past’ (Hall 1996). Isma’s use of turban to cover her head along with British clothes symbolizes her constant secret effort to be united with her origin. “Turban” is a symbol of her Muslimness and a secret reminder of ties with her Pakistani culture. Even in her memories she carries those tunes which her cousins from Pakistan used to sing. She exclaims that she has those tunes stuck in her mind for years and she tries to recall those every time. When Eamon plays the song “she recognized the song by the tune more than the words which came out as gibberish tinged with Urdu (Shamsie , 2017, p.28).

Being British national and living in the English speaking world, Isma at several occasions reverts back to her past. though not frequently yet she seldom uses words from Urdu language and even finds its inappropriate if someone of the same origin is not capable of understanding the Urdu words. “Do you know any Urdu? So don’t you know bey takalufi.” (Shamsie, 2017, p.29). She feels disgust that the father had not taught his son even some basic Urdu.

Aneeka the younger sister, though throughout the novel stands as contrast to Isma, yet she has a line of parallelism when it comes to her diasporic identity and her struggle to be in coherence with the past, the country of their origin. Being in a physical relationship with Eamon the son of the home secretary firstly as a part of a plan to bring her brother Pervaiz back to home but later she actually exhibits intimacy for him. In the moments of intense physical unison, she keeps her Hijab spread around her head, “shedding her clothes only the Hijab remained” (Shamsie, 2017, p.88).

Both the sisters when interrogated at high commission regarding their brother who joined Daish, the commission kept aside their British nationalities and draw the judgment on the basis of their appearance, both the sisters appeared in the interrogation with their turban and Hijab on. “the hijabs are still proof that Pakistani British are still caught in the Past” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 202).

4.2 The Diasporic Identities; the Dilemma of “Becoming’ As Well As Of “Being”

In the light of Halls' (1996) second part of the definition of Diasporic identities, the cultural identities undergoes constant transformation, it is a matter of becoming as well as of being. "They are subject to continuous play of culture and power" (Hall). Shamsie to a larger extent portrays "the becoming self" or the hybrid self from the characters especially both the sisters Isma and Aneeka. Inside the turban, that Isma used to wear, she had maintained a perfectly British hair cut with a proper maintaining of her locks with modern hair treatments, "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' (Shamsie 2017, p.45). Isma's use of such hair products to attain the hair like "Mona of Persepolis" unsnarls her attempts to be like modern western women.

Shamsie's account depicts that the second generation of Diaspora are so finely integrated with the British culture that they converse in English outside as well as inside the home even among the sibling themselves. Isma, when she was leaving for Heathrow, she completely tried to hide her Muslim Pakistani origin. In her luggage she did not carry Quran, the Holy Book or even the family pictures. Her strong liking for Karl Marx and constant struggle to manage the finances to upgrade their economic class, to be fit in British social fabric and to build a better "Home" in England show her story of Becoming British despite being a second generation immigrant from Pakistan.

4.2.1 Syncretism and Creolization at Linguistic Level

In connection with the process of becoming, Halls (1996) gives his views about Syncretism and Creolization. The wide influence of syncretism and creolization of the two cultures, one dominant and one that of Diaspora's origin. Halls (1996) asserts that this creolization even occurs at linguistic level. Shamsie articulates the same phenomenon in the spellings of the names of her characters. The son of Karamat Lone "Ayman became Eamonn, an Irish spelling to disguise a Muslim name" (Shamsie 2017, p.15). Just to hide the diasporic side of the Muslim name and to get along with the British community, the spellings of the names changed. At various place the spelling of Pervaiz appears in the text as Pervyz, that shows the syncretism that Halls talks about at the level of language as well.

4.3 The Dialogue of Power and Refusal of Recognition

Halls highlighting the struggle of Caribbean Diaspora, pinpoints the term "Presence Européenne" (Halls 1996), the loud presence of Europe and the play of power. An open refusal from to recognise Diaspora as their own, Halls here confirms the notion of Said "Other". Shamsie opens up the same in her narrative when she narrates the airport scene where Isma was detained and unnecessarily interrogated just because of her Asian complexion and the Turban.

Do you consider yourself British?

I am British

But do you consider yourself British? (Shamsie, 2017, p.5).

She did not carry anything in her luggage that can stir suspicion on her loyalties to England yet her mere appearance proved enough to stand her in front of interrogation team.

Despite all the Islamophobic discourse and racism against the diasporic community, she tries to stay loyal to the state which results in inerasable rift between her and Aneeka. As Aneeka crossed all the limits to bring Parvaiz their brother back home from the clutches of Daish. Isma informs the whereabouts and the plan of his return to the British officials. "We are in no position to let the State question our loyalties" (Shamsie, 2017, p.42).

Shamsie's portrayal of Karamat leone, who turned his back from his own people in order to gain recognition in the British state. Shamsie (2017) highlights that by negating and subsidizing his own people and his cultural values and religious beliefs he endeavoured to get British acknowledgment, Eamon reiterates that apparently the choices he made were wrong if we take those choices from British Muslims' perspectives, but those same choices got him to the place which proved right for him (Shamsie, 2017, p.51). Despite knowing the anti-migrant policies and attitudes of his party along with the culture that isolates diasporic community, he raised the slogan of being British and "#YOUAREWEAREBRITISH" (Shamsie, 2017) start trending on social media. Karamat leone favoured church instead of Mosque for which he was stigmatized by the Muslim community but Eamon justifies this action of his father by assuring the fact that this is the way that he can save the Muslim community from the racist and islamophobic discourse that the British community are involved in. By favouring church, he endeavoured to prove the British community that Muslims are not extremists.

Shamsie's (2017), contriving of events that takes Pervayz Pasha from Wembley to Turkey via Syria where he actually joins Daish just to collect some facts regarding his Jihadi father. Halls ideas on diasporic struggle and the subsequent refusal to accept the diaspora as the part of their community comes to the surface when British government did not allow the dead body of British national Pervayz to enter his home in Wembley England. They refused to accept him by asserting that he is a dual national, Pakistani as well as British so his body shall be repatriated to his own home land, to the home of his ancestors in Pakistan, instead of sending his dead body to his immediate family in Britain. When the officials were asked that whether they have informed his immediate family Britain regarding this decision, the only response they pose is, it's the job of Pakistan high commission to inform his family.

Shamsie's narrative displays the utter refusal of British state to recognize the Pashas as their own. Along with the refusal to own, the attitude of the British Press was derogatory. They used the slang "Knickers" for Pasha Family and forged the news presenting Aneeka as an accomplice to the terrorist brother. In the news, instead of Pervaiz Pasha they used slang and derogatory words like "Pervy Pasha" (Shamsie, 2017, p.204). Pervy is a slang used for a sexually perverted person. The headline news read as "daughter and sister of muslim terrorist, with history of secret sex life- The Exclusive Story of Knickers' Pasha" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 204). This disparaging, racial and islamophobic attitude of the British Press confirms Halls notion of refusal of recognition to diasporic community as their own along with their racism and islamophobic attitude.

4.4 The Strategic Retreat to more Defensive Identities against Racism and Islamophobia

Against the growing islamophobic attitude and racial discrimination of the British, Shamsie's characters in the novel Home Fire, specifically those who belong to second generation of Diaspora like Aneeka and to some extent Isma, strategically retreat to Islamic Fundamentalism. According to Hall (1996), the diaspora strategically bounce back to the more defensive identities against the racial culture and the culture of exclusion (Hall, 1996). The character of Aneeka appears to be liberal and westernized in the matters related to sex. She regularly visits Eamon in his flat and made physical advancement towards him. Even after spending intimate nights with him, she would wake up early morning to say her prayers. She would keep her head covered with hijab even she when unclothed herself, "with a covered head and naked body" (Shamsie, 2017, p.89). She strictly observes fasts in Ramzan, never touch pork or alcohol and prays regularly.

In the character of Pervaiz, there is a glaring evidence of what Halls calls defensive identities turning in to more radical and fundamentalist identity. Belonging to the second generation diaspora, the son of a murdered jihadi, Pervyz Pasha develops a more radical and fundamentalist approach against all the racist and islamophobic discourse he was surrounded by, in Britain. He in the company of Farooq developed the opinions against the liberty of his sisters. He dislikes the fact that Isma is leaving for America, a country who got his father murdered and many of the fathers of his Muslim brethren and the other sister Aneeka who pretends to be get along with the state who claims that the Muslim citizens have rights there (Shamsie 148). In the company of Farooq he is convinced with the reference which Farooq made and asserted its connection with Quran that its Allah's law that Men are in-charge of women and the stronger roles that his sisters enjoy in his family started annoying him. Shamsie narrative confirms Halls ideas regarding the transformation and re positioning of diasporic identities that in response to the refusal of acceptance and recognition, the diaspora develops more staunch and defensive identities, as that of Aneeka and more radical and fundamentalist identity to counter the islamophobia and racist discourse that surround Pervyz Pasha.

5. Findings/Conclusion

The above analysis in the light of Hall's theory of Cultural Identity and Diaspora (1996), offers an insight in to Shamsie's narrative Home Fire (2017) and projects the confirmation of Hall's concept of Diasporic identities. The study concludes that the second generation of diaspora like Isma, Aneeka and Pervaiz, the Pasha Sibling displays their identities at one level there is a constant effort to get reunited with the past, consciously or sub consciously. Isma's use of turban to cover her head and Aneeka's Hijab also points her association back to past, the culture of their origin and on the next level their identities became the part of the play which Halls calls the play of power, they are in a ceaseless effort to adjust in the dominant culture, the British Culture. Isma, instead of showing fidelity to her sibling, showed her loyalties with the British State. As the British community show their extreme racial and islamophobic attitude, the characters suffer a constant refusal of recognition and on the response to that the analyses projects Aneeka as a representative of Diaspora who strategically reverts back to more defensive identity. She remains in a pre-marital relationship yet she is a strict follower of religious duties and rituals. Even in the most intimate moments of physical intimacy, she keeps her head covered with hijab. In response to the islamophobia and racism that the British state displayed, and the attitude of America towards Muslims, Pervaiz Pasha became a staunch fundamentalist like his father. No matter how true Isma remained to the state as she proved her loyalties to British State, her brother was branded as "Pervy Pasha", the family as "Knickers" and Aneeka as an accomplice to her terrorist brother and a sexual player who brought the son of the Home secretary in her physical charms to gain an access for her terrorist brother. Halls notions are confirmed that Diasporic Identities are confused and in a constant phase of transformation, positioning and repositioning, no matter how hard the diaspora tries to get assimilated in the culture, they are always refused as in Shamsi's narrative, even the dead body of Pervaiz Pasha was not brought to his home in England rather sent to his origin Pakistan and hashtags like "#GOBACKWHEREYOU CAME FROM" (Shamsie 190) started trending and Aneeka's return to Pakistan proves Hall's (1996) ideas on diasporic reunion with their origin.

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