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**QUEST OF LOST LIVES AND HYBRID IDENTITIES IN SHAMSIE'S  
BURNT SHADOWS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study seeks to explore the effects of war upon lives and identities and attempts to look into the efforts of the female protagonist to relocate and reassert herself in a postwar scenario, especially within the war on terror and hybrid wars era. The study further highlights the traumas of identity loss and the quest for a new life while connecting it with the post-World War II and post 9/11 phenomenon. The post 9/11 agenda of the new world order has forced individuals to undergo a global migration resulting in the liquidity and fluidity of their identities and lives which is called by Homi. K Bhabha postcolonial hybridities. This new shift of postcolonial lives calls for an investigation through the lens of hybridity about the migrant characters introduced by postcolonial writers of Pakistani origin. The researcher would read critically the selected chunks of the text of Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* to study this shift and to question the consequences and new developments because of this migration.

**Introduction**

Fiction as a genre has provided a multimeter space to the writers of the modern age but how the post-colonial writers have exploited it is more convincing. The writers from the subcontinent have contributed much thematic apperception to this genre. However, some writers write for modern socio-cultural diversities and among these Kamila Shamsie are renowned with a large

following. Her themes of hybridity and loss of identity emerge from the system of exploitation where one-to-one competition to get one's self-gain is very severe. Shamsie belongs to the third generation of Anglophone writers from Pakistan. The first generations of writers share with their audience the issues of partition and the problems of nationalism after and before the partition. The second generation of writers adopted themes of social exploitation and servitude of women in a post-colonial society of traditional patriarchy. The third generation of writers is writing on jihadi movements which are threatening modern social development and advancement. One focus of their writings is the miseries of the immigrants in the post 9/11 European and American society.

Pakistani English Literature mostly highlights the events like partition, World Wars and 9/11 terrorist attacks. This kind of literature also focuses on how these events have changed the lives of people. The present study explores the effects of wars upon lives and identity in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* under the Postcolonial theoretical framework. It has been investigated those wars can prove disastrous and this study analyzes the influence of these wars upon the lives and identity of people and especially on the life of the protagonist of *Burnt Shadows*, Hiroko Tanaka.

Wars though bring about both peace and destruction but the aftermaths have far-reaching effects on common people. In the first and second world wars, many millions of people were killed and many became handicapped. But the physical challenges can be compensated but the psychological challenges can be addressed. The protagonist of *Burnt Shadows* has been shown relocating herself in the post-war scenario. Women in this world face many suppressions and oppressions and this oppression has a navigational character. Especially, the women of third world countries are called the bearers of cultural differences. Hiroko, from *Burnt Shadows*, is the best example of this oppression, displacement and enforced migration from one place to another due to the war. Hiroko has to leave the job of a translator in Nagasaki in 1945 because of his father, who has been alleged as a traitor. She lost her family and lover, Konrad in the war of 1945 and got three bird-shaped scars on her back. Here the attack represents the authority and destructive power and she leaves her native land and moved towards India, to Ilse, Konrad's sister.

Transfer or mixing of different cultures is called "Hybridity" and after the Colonization, the natives had to adopt a new culture willingly or unwillingly because the native people were going to find themselves knotted down between two cultures and which deprived them of their identities. In postcolonial writings, we encounter the characters who are struggling for their original identities. The post-war or post 9/11 scenario has forced the people to undergo a new global migration that results in liquid identities and it leads towards the hybridity that Bhabha has called postcolonial hybridity. The character of Hiroko undergoes the same process of shifting the cultures and faces the dilemma of liquid identity and after the great struggle, she relocates herself with the scenario and starts to find new ways of living life in the post-war world.

## Literature Review

Many researchers address the problems of immigrants implied in the postcolonial literature; however, their main focus was identity, racism and hybridity. And Pakistani literature has migrant and independent status and this status has been gained after decolonization. Hybridity is the main

element in this kind of literature and the post 9/11 event has transferred it into liquid hybridity and identity. It means that everywhere the concept of hybridity changes and inter-mixing different cultures in itself. Bhabha has explained this mixed-ness in a very impressive way. In his collection of essays, *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha claims:

“There is a space in between the designation of identity and that this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (p.4).

Hybridity means the transfer or amalgamation of different cultures. During this process of hybridity, people lose their lives and identity and sometimes this leads to the transformation of new identities and developments. Habib (2000) says:

The notion of hybridity is central to Bhabha's work in challenging notions of identity, culture and nation as coherent and unified entities that exhibit a linear historical development. Hybrid expresses a state of in-betweenness in person who stands between two cultures” (Habib, p. 750).

The present study of *Burnt Shadows* (2009) focuses on the global issue of people who faced different conditions in different countries by forced or intentioned migration. The novel highlights the certain impacts and destructive actions of different events like the Hiroshima bombing acts, the partition of the sub-continent, the advent of 9/11 etc. Bhabha delineated this polarized concept with the help of self and others. It creates impurity in people. Huddart (2006) also has the opinion that no culture in this world is pure due to the interaction of different cultures. It gives birth to globalization. Apart from this, Bhabha has given the idea of liminal space. This liminal space creates instability of identity and this instability paves the way for cultural hybridity and this cultural hybridity moves towards the changing lifestyles of characters. This instability has been observed in the protagonist of *Burnt Shadows*, Hiroko, with the shifting of cultures.

Sarvat (2014) examined this that during the colonial setting, different cultures come across with each other and create mixed-ness in the world's cultures and this mixed-ness leads towards the confused identities. Hiroko transforms herself but, in this process, she has lost the originality and got the new transformed shape that created confusion and liquidity in her personality.

Huddart's (2006) comment implies that history and identity are hybrid forms. They are not pure. Cultures make layers over other cultures, but the former cultures are also visible under these layers. Layering is not over painting some culture in the sense of blotting it out with some alternative, 'but laying an alternative, promised land text or texture over it like a gauze.' Similarly different cultures of the world especially the cultures of the postcolonial countries are multilayered and no culture effaces the identity of other cultures.

*Burnt Shadows* (2009) as such is the story of different places of the globe and every place shows the significant commencement of the main character's life and history. All the experiences which she faces in her life during different journeys, like loss of home, loved ones and identity, shape her new identity and life are significant events.

Vitolo (2016) discussed in this regard that identity is a performative and productive act that creates hybridity and revolutionary places of identity construction. These are called the liminal spaces which Bhabha has also explained. Characters in *Burnt Shadows* endorse identities in shifting places and this concept has been called transformation. Vitolo is of having the opinion that Hiroko's transfer from one place to another, not only developed a transnational identity but also concepts of transnational solidarity have prompted to sustain in her personality.

Gayathri (2019) analyzed the character of Hiroko with the help of the lens of transnational feminism who has faced oppression and this oppression has a different influence regarding the different places. This is concerned with cross-cultural interactions and the process of migration as the character of Hiroko has an unstable identity due to displacement and she struggles to settle herself and she wants to maintain her identity. This unstable state creates weaknesses in the concept of feminism and colonialism. But my analysis of this state is that this fluid identity weakens her original identity and she gets settled in different places to gain a new spirit of life and identity. And naturally, she creates hybridity in her character.

### Objectives of the Study

The present study aims at achieving the following objectives:

- I. To define the main characteristics of Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows*
- II. To identify the traumas and struggles of the protagonist with the changing cultures
- III. To highlight the issues of identity crisis, hybridity and quest for a new life in Shamsie's novel, *Burnt Shadows*

### Research Questions

- I. How does Hiroko relocate herself in the post-war scenario?
- II. How do the traumas of identity loss and quest for new life have been portrayed by the writer in the novel, *Burnt Shadows*?

### Analysis

In every century wars provide an ideology but rather one can conclude a counter ideology. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, people favoured and admired Napoleon and then a war that diminished the ideology of monarchy. The 19<sup>th</sup> century modified the existing ideology of liberty to colonialism and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the two wars targeted nationalism and ethnicity because to illuminate these two isms was essential to sustain the rule of one fraction of humanity over the others. After destroying nationalism and ethnicity the colonizer could easily liberate the colonized.

Clausewitzian (1940) definition of wars as an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will, 'directed by political motives and morality, is too much unconvincing when one tries to conceive the effects of war on the individuals who face the post-war events.

Thus, this definition of war is just a political justification of wars that do not bring in the scope which concerns the social and personal justifications. Individuals mainly non-political individuals who have very little to do with political affairs, fall victim to different psychological, social and nationalistic crises. So, this can be concluded that there are two dimensions of post-

war dilemmas: one that is related to the physical being of the individuals e.g., people get injured or lose their limbs and become handicapped and the second is the psychological aspects through which they lose their nationalism identity and social role.

This second effect of the war has recently proved more deadly and has caused much havoc on the national and international canvass. On the national level, there are emerging micro-scale groups of people and the unified role of nationalism is compromised and people have started to work with ethnic, linguistic and territorial groups, for example, Czechoslovakia and Bosnia. Whereas on international levels there is an increase in the number of people who migrate from the areas which are under war conditions or have faced the war, as Pakistan and India from where a large population of local literate migrated to Europe or America for a better future of their coming generations. This again resulted in more complex issues and these issues are related to their sense of hybridity, diaspora and displacement. In her *Burnt Shadows* (2009) Shamsie engages all these issues on both the levels, national as well as on the international.

Hiroko is a Japanese teacher and a translator who has dreams about a happy life with her German fiancé like many of the young girls do in oriental society. But the war shatters her dreams when one day the American launched atomic bomb hits Nagasaki. This attack may have political gains but she losses; she losses her fiancé, her country which was a stream of identity and nationalhood for her, and her place where she was a legal habitat. Her bereavement at the cost of annihilation of identity and nationalism is not a fair square deal. Her surrounding becomes dystopic and she has physical trauma when she finds three scares on her body but these scares are bird-shaped thus she tries to re-adopt her identity three times.

Nagasaki is more beautiful to her than ever before. She turns her head and sees the spires of Urakami Cathedral, which Konrad is looking up at when he notices a gap open between the clouds. Sunlight streams through, pushing the clouds apart even further. *Hiroko. And then the world goes white" (Shamsie, 2009, p.23).*

Identity is a self-image that always exists with ambivalence at its side and these two phenomena occur at the same time. The first stage of identity ambivalence is nationalism. The greater the nationalism is the greater the ambivalence. So, nationalism is the most important aspect of identity and people all over the world feel pride in their nationalism.

Inter-nation's identity is the major concern of Shamsie's work. Hiroko's affairs in Japan are romantic and there is very little information about her national hood and her attachment with the Japanese cultural affairs. Her heart like affair with Konard is very dear to her. She has intimate relations with Konrad. She goes to her work as her routine was on the same day when the bomb hits her city thus the development of nationalism is quite neutralized by the writer. Her story in Nagasaki ends and the plot shifts from Japan to Indian. This is 1947 which is a year of partition and the two countries Pakistan and India are emerging. This is when there is a wave of nationalism all around and people on both sides, are defending their nationalism and so a mass massacre is committed. The Hindu nationalists are killing the Muslim nationalists in broad daylight and this gives out an even worst response by the Muslims. During all these inconsistent circumstances Hiroko's focus is on learning Urdu and developing relations with Sajjad. Sajjad on the other hand has less to inculcate nationalism in her. She remains a Japanese girl.

During this year she remembers only the days of destruction in Japan. This is very particular of Shamsie's characters that they are developed in a transnational scenario. This may be the conscious strain of emotions that she does with her characters which may be due to her own experiences of living in Pakistan as well as in the United States. After a very short stay in India Hiroko moves to Pakistan. She goes to Pakistan owing to her developing relations with Sajjad who is a Muslim and wants to settle in Pakistan. Consequently, she stays in Pakistan and marries Sajjad and there is a loop over in the story and it again starts from 1982. This is the time when there is an emergence of Afghan jihad and the situation in Pakistan is very perturbed. Everywhere, there is an epoch of jihad and the Pakistani youth is engaged in a war that is not their own. Now the focus of the story is Raza, Hiroko's and Sajjad's son. She remains Hiroko a Japanese girl after so many years of living in a Muslim society and that Muslim society which is famous for its patriarchal behaviour. Whether she assimilated the Muslim culture or not remains a question. Then her stay in Afghanistan after the world trade Centre crisis gives a temporary view of Muslim nationalism. She moves to America now she is Japanese with a Pakistani passport going to America. She faces certain incidents which give out the treatment of the Muslims by the Americans.

Hiroko says, "I've lived through Hitler, Stalin, the cold war, the British Empire, segregation, apartheid, God knows what" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 266). This shows that she is aware of her shifting nationalism and the deviations that she has regarding her identity.

Bilgrami (2006) establishes two aspects of identity on a personal level, the one is subjective identity and the other is objective identity. By subjective identity, he means the way one thinks about one's self and by objective identity; he means one biological or social aspect. Hiroko even though is not a Muslim like her Pakistani husband but she thinks herself close to be Muslim and subjectively she inspires herself with the Muslim background. However, she is a Japanese woman of Japanese ethnicity. In the post 9/11 background, she is conceived with better prospects in the American society but her son Raza a Pakistani Muslim and so-called fundamentalist is viewed differently. So, identity depends on ethnicity.

There is an interesting aspect of the story that the American had done the same with Nagasaki what the Afghans has done with New York, so on ethnic grounds, Hiroko thinks of herself in confusion because "the American with gentle face said the bomb was a terrible thing, but it had to be done to save Americans lives' (p. 62). This ethnic mentality is very common in the world that countries decide their issues on national and ethnic grounds.

Language is another deciding factor in the process of identity reshaping and readopting. It's a historical fact that there have been divisions on the linguistic difference among the people even though they used to live in the same territory. The conflict between the Arabic speaker and Hebrew speaker is now becoming complex and sophisticated. Hiroko, while she stays in Japan, speaks Japanese, English and German and also works as a translator in a school. Afterwards, she learns Urdu and during her stay in Pakistan, she works as a language teacher. But surprisingly she makes Raza learn all those languages that she knew. Thus, after losing her national hood, she migrates from one place to other. Commonly it is assumed that a migrant is the one who crosses the border physically and enters into a new world. But there is always a psychological effect of what one does. Thus, migration is not physical it is psychological too. And the expression of that psychological migration is practised through language. Thus, it is very

common among the immigrants that they learn the language of the country where they migrate. This process is not just a process it shows the level of their mental re-adoption of identity. Hiroko's process of learning languages is actually about obtaining a chance for survival like those of millions of migrants who learn the language just to reshape or relocate their identity. And their language competency also reflects the level of re-adoption of the identity, the higher the competency greater the adoption. Hiroko learns many languages so she involves herself in a process of shaping and reshaping and erasing one and writing another identity which is Shamsie's dissatisfaction for the human being that they try all their lives to shape identity. Another reason for her process of relocation of identity is her inexpressibility. She fails many times to express herself because she is out of words. She says 'nothing in the world could ever be more unfamiliar than my home that day. That unspeakable day. Unspeakabl' (p. 99). Raza's identity also becomes complex in this situation now he is Pakistani from an Indian father born to a Japanese mother. Thus, Hiroko realizes his difficulties and provides him with a chance of survival in the world by teaching him different languages because language is also a player in the process of acquiring identity.

Sayonara,' they all called out to Hiroko as the bus picked up speed again. Or at least, all of them except Raza called it out. He only spoke Japanese within the privacy of the home, not even breaking the truth when his friends delighted in showing off his mother the one or two Japanese words they'd found in some book, some movie. Why allow the world to know his mind contained words from a country he'd never visited? (Shamsie, 2009, p. 139).

Language is thus as complex for him as his identity. There is another complexity that he faces. It's about religion. Raza fails to pass her exam in Islamic studies. The reason for this may be that his father and mother are not so religious and that doesn't let him develop a religious passion that could bring him to assimilate the basics of Islam which are essential for him to pass the exam. He is brought up in such an environment where there is less pomposity of religion. Then this also shifts his liberal idea to get stuck and he joins Afghan Mujahideens after the Russian attack on Afghanistan.

Gender and identity are correlated and can be actualized as the same. In the recent post-colonial scenarios when there is a lack of communication between the women and the women. And the pro-subaltern ideas are there to justify the "speech" of women that is refused to listen, provides a ground that a female has her identity levels on which she estimates herself. This self she finds first with-in her and then with-out of her. The response she expects from her within some timeless intensified and she feels herself at loss. But as long as Hiroko's character is concerned as a female, she has her "self" with her "last week when we talked about travelling around the world after the war---in which capacity do you think I was agreeing to go with you, if not as your wife." She wants to gain herself from the use of her body. She uses her body as a tool to attain her identity. Her relation with Sajjad is guided by those ideas that were in her mind imprinted by Konrad. So, like most of the oriental females, she has a duality of meditation when she is drawing from one man the ideas for the other. Her coming to Pakistan is part of the process of self-transition and re-adoption of identity. Shamsie highlights this she says "*She had become in fact, a figure out of myth. The character who loses everything and is born anew*

*in blood*". (Shamsie) thus very accurate here is the justification of a war-hit woman's identity. But one thing that needs justification is that does she belong to the same genre of women as are presented in a post-colonial society? The possible answer to this question is "yes" she is, she adopts all the characteristics of a post-colonial woman as she lives in Pakistan. She has a disposition that is very particular with the women of Pakistan i.e., reception and ability to adapt to new situations.

Bhabha's concept of "third space" argues that this third space does not exist when the two meets to give out the third rather his concern is the place that "enables the third position to emerge". So, hybridity is not just the mixing of two but it is the character that generates the third. This birth of the third may be social, political or economic. But this creation of third is layered the first influence over and gives it the shape of the third. Hiroko travels from Japan then goes to India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and at last in the United States. This seems that her "self" is multilayered as she travels through multicultural situations and circumstances. Bhabha also expressed that the influx of multicultural move over is resistance. Thus, there is a difference in the hybridity and liminality that she faces and the other that is faced by Sajjad. Sajjad only travels from Pakistan to America and faces the sense of liminality but Hiroko has a layer of Japanese background in herself and this layer has not been bloated out. So, her personality is multi-layered but there is a justification for this idea. All the post-colonial oriental societies share the same characters of personality and mentality. The same is the case with the western world that all belong to the same background. For example, Americans who have very little to do with imperialism and the colonial process consider themselves part of that process. Thus, the world is divided into two groups Western and Eastern. This division becomes territorial and Japan is on the side that is called the Eastern side, the colonized. That is why for her, Nagasaki is the centre of a culture where Konard had come for inspiration.

Sajjad draws his inspiration from the rich history of India and Pakistan. He tells Hiroko that throughout history, India was attacked and conquered by foreigners- Arabs, Turks, and Mongols. He is very happy with his cultural belonging that is related to the enlightened Muslims. He imagines for Pakistan a place that will provide everyone with a shelter who-so-every had come with the Turks, with the Arabs and with the Mangols. Thus, Pakistan is a cultural centre for him. He also envies the English that they would be leaving for home, this hints that when one physically migrates there is always an influence of the place where a person migrates but in the case of colonizer the influence remains the same, that is why it was also a pleasure for the English too who worked in the colonized territories.

George Orwell's and Hemingway's experiences are the same as that of Sajjad's. Harry Burton is the son of James and Elizabeth. Harry has a yearning in his heart to see all those places where he had lived during his early childhood. He keeps in touch with Sajjad and wishes to see and go to Delhi. Later he comes to Karachi as a CIA officer and he considers Karachi a slum as a visitor. His wish to come to see Delhi proves that there is a layer over his personality and this sense of liminality has a stir for nook.

There is a sense of "other" in James and Sajjad's relations and this "otherness" persists when Harry comes to Pakistan and this is the cultural phenomenon of colonizer thus as the English also faces duality and liminality but the difference is that their centre of inspiration



provides them with a haven that holds power and grip and takes them when they become weak. This power orientated cultural centres are also responsible for the cultural disintegration throughout the world because their power transited to the other cultures and especially towards the weak culture and developed a sense of liminality among them. Sajjad worked with James to gain some legal experience but James kept him busy in playing chess, thus the idea that favours the colonial expansion that they had come to educate and illuminate the people seems weak because they didn't impart anything neither knowledge nor enlightenment, they just provoked disparity and increased its intensity.

Raza's hybridity is the worst as he is not Pakistani besides he is born Pakistani because his features are Japanese which he inherits from her mother. He never visits Japan nor knows Japanese but he is still no Pakistani. "Why allow the world to know his mind contained word from a country, he'd never visited? Weren't his eyes and his bone structure and his bare-legged mother distancing factors enough?" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 139).

His beloved Salma abandons him just because of his physical duality. He lives two lives like his mother; he is Raza and Raza Hazara (Hazara is a tribe living in the northern areas of Pakistan. These people have the same physical feature as those of the Japanese and the Chinese, yellow race. One segment of the tribe lives in Afghanistan thus they have close relationships with the Afghan history and interiority.) Raza whose dream is to go to America for studies but Harry refuses to take him to America and Sajjad also doesn't want him to leave. Raza develops relations with Abdullah an afghan jihadi and with whom Raza leaves for Peshawar and goes to one of the training camps established by the CIA to expel Russians from Afghanistan. Harry dies in saving Raza. Later he is prey to Islamic terrorism and is kept at the Guantanamo Bay in an orange prisoner's dress.

Diaspora or displacement provides clarity to the identity. It is because the land is not just a place it contains language, rituals, customs and social values which constitute the identity The phenomenon of diaspora is an influential aspect of identity. When a person leaves his habitat of origin his cultural defamation damages his "self".

There are types of diasporas: general diaspora and postcolonial diaspora. Shamsie herself has experienced diaspora when she left Karachi and settled in America. Thus, Diasporas are ambassadors of their country in the host country. This is very common among them that they idealize their country's origin and become nostalgic at the time but they willfully re-adopt an identity at a new place. Sajjad after living so many years in Pakistan remembers Dilli Mohallas. "...he would not ever have believed that he would come to think of Karachi is home and that his bitter regard about his separation from Dilli would be the absence of safety nets that the joints family system had once provided" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 134).

His conscious lost in those days when he used to live in Dilli. Dilli is not Delhi for him it is "dill he" for him. Abdulla living in Pakistan does not assimilate Pakistani values; he remains in his own country Afghanistan and his love for guns, hatred for Russians and show of resilience are the inherited features of his country of origin. Hiroko while in Dilli remembers the cool niche of her country where a bomb had exploded. She has a longing to go back and see all those places where she was born. She feels alone in the whole world. Shamsie uses many Japanese

Arabic and Urdu words that describe the intensity of the inner self that has lost its existence after leaving origin and she wants to relocate herself.

### Conclusion

It is concluded that the novel is persuasive reading and forces one to think about the life and identity of different people especially the protagonist, Hiroko in and after wartime. The present study shows the effect of wars waged by the world power stakeholders and their disastrous impacts on the lives of the characters of the novel as poor victims. It has been analyzed that identity travels as one travels in socio-political regions. The analysis exposes how in the novel the events like war, bombing and attack of 9/11 can become the driving forces to enact a process of identity construction that questions certain social conventions concerning, for example, issues of an identity crisis, hybridity and quest for a new life while developing critical attitudes towards nationalistic ideas of national belonging.

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