



***Framing Muslims as new racist and stereotyped conservatives in post 9/11 world: the study of Kamila Shamsie's home fire***

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**Abstract:** In post 9/11 world, the Muslim identity in the west is framed and stereotyped as unenlightened outsiders who live in the west. The current study explores Kamila Shamsie's novel Home Fire (2017) in this perspective of Peter Morey and Amina Yaqeen's views about Muslim identity in the west (2011). The study also discusses the concept of 'House Muslim' propagated by Hamid Dabashi (2011) in which House Muslims assimilate themselves in the white Britain culture by dislocating their roots from Islamic identity. The study is qualitative in nature and the method of textual analysis and close reading is applied for collecting evidence from the novel. The novel confirms the concept of farming and stereotyping of Muslim identity in the west in post 9/11 scenario in which Muslim representation of identity like beard; hijab and prayers are mocked as signs of ignorance, backwardness and extremism. On the other hand the 'House Muslims' are portrayed as enlightened and civilized entities for they follow the western norms.

**Key Words:** Identity, framing and stereotyping, house Muslims, politics of Hijab and Home Fire.

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**Introduction**

*Home Fire* (2017) is the seventh novel of Kamila Shamsie and it was long listed for Man Booker Prize in 2018. The novel won Women's Prize for Fiction in 2018 and is widely popular in the literary circles. The novel explores the themes of religious indoctrination, immigration, cultural assimilation, radicalism and Islamophobia through the narration of two Pakistani families living in England. The novel depicts the plight of Muslim immigrants in Britain who attempt to maintain their cultural identity in English society and keep their traditional roles alive as well. Shamsie centers her narration at the identity crisis of British Muslims who are torn between the new racist ideology of "home Muslims" and "field Muslims"<sup>1</sup> and stereotyped conservatives for their females wear Hijab as a choice which Turner (1967) describes as "Liminality" and their overall representation seems as "Framed and stereotyped" as theorized by Peter Morey and Amina Yaqeen."<sup>2</sup>

*Home Fire* sheds light on the dilemma of immigrant Muslims who are caught in ambivalence of their own identity and the socio-cultural norms of British society where they struggle for their survival. Thus, the novel presents the phenomenon of new racism in postmodern capitalism with Muslim characters playing the major part in the social political and intellectual interactions as described by Hamza Baglama. Hamza Baglama elaborates that the Muslim characters of the novel who fit socially and politically in mainstream white society are named as 'proper' Muslims and they are acknowledged and recognized by the white dominant society of England, on the

other hand those Muslim characters who do not fit in the image of “proper” Muslims are considered as conservative, criminals and marginalized.<sup>3</sup> We can fit it into description of Peter Moery and Amina Yaqeen who postulate that real Muslim identity is framed in new colonial Britain where visibility and acceptance is accorded to only those Muslims who adopt western cultural norms; the rest are stereotyped as conservatives and criminals.<sup>4</sup>

The study thus explores the triangle of Muslim identity in new racism of white society where Muslim identity is framed and stereotyped; the hijab one of the important factor of Muslim female identity is problematized and how Muslim are divided as House/ Proper Muslims and Field Muslims/ conservative and extremist. The primary source of this study is Kamila Shamsie’s novel *Home Fire* published in 2017. For textual analysis of the novel following research objectives and research questions are set.

### Research Objectives

1. To explore Framing and stereotyping of Muslims in Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire*.
2. To identify the politics of Hijab in Shamsie’s *Home Fire*.
3. To highlight the portrayal of House Muslims/proper Muslims and Field Muslims/ extremists and Terrorists in Shamsie’s *Home Fire*.

### Research Questions

1. How Muslim characters are framed and stereotyped in terms of identity in the novel?

2. What is the role of Hijab in Muslim identity and how it is problematized in the West?
3. What makes House Muslims acceptable and other Muslims demonized and criminalized in the West.

### Literature Review

Fiona Tolan (2019) writes that Kamila Shamsie is a Karachi born Pakistani fiction writer who was educated in the United States where she graduated in creative writing and also attended MFA program for poets and writers at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She has authored seven novels. *Home Fire* is her seventh novel which won ‘Women’s Prize for Fiction’ in 2018.<sup>5</sup>

Claire Chambers explores that *Home Fire* is aimed at listening to those disregarded and feared individuals who turn out to be radicalized extremists.<sup>6</sup> She adds that in this novel Shamsie uses text and sound (spoken words) to explore the confrontation of radicalization and terror. She unfolds the mystery of making of an extremist and terrorist.

The novel *Home Fire* uncovers the strategies carried out by ISIS and British Government to exploit vulnerability of immigrant Muslims in Britain. The thesis is developed by Nesia Monika Al Nindita and Muhammad Al-Hafiz in which both have analyzed the novel through the perspective of identity by using lens of Orientalism and Islamphobia.<sup>7</sup> The study concludes that immigrant Muslims in Britain are deceived by ISIS through extensive propaganda and taking advantage of social, political and economic weakness of Muslims whereas the British Government deceives them through manipulation and limited rights.

Marcelo Brigida and Dari Pinho trace out the themes of instability of national identity for minorities, Islamophobia and racism in the novel *Home Fire* by Kamil Shamsie. Both scholars have studied the novel in the light of Decolonial studies, to explore the tension between the state and ethnical and religious minorities. They conclude that one of the most important themes of the novel is institutionalized violence against the minorities.<sup>8</sup>

Padel Rivaldy, Meuneke Budiman and Shiri Tainbunan explore the issues of identity, immigration and Islamophobia in the novel *Home Fire* by close textual analysis. Their focus was on identity constructs by Pakistani diasporic community in Britain and conclude that in portrayal of Muslim female characters, Eurocentric biasness is evident whereas on the other hand stereotyping of male Muslim characters is achieved through their affiliation with Jihadi organizations and radical groups.<sup>9</sup>

Aamer Shaheen, Sadia Qamar and Muhammad Islam analyse *Home Fire* by juxtaposing two male characters Karamat Lone and Parvaiz Pasha as the representatives of ‘Westoxification’ and Fundamentalism. The concepts of ‘Westoxification and Fundamentalism’ were linked with Klaus Stierstorfer the postcolonial critic. The study sums up that the novel portrays the widespread stereotyping of Pakistani British Muslim in the discursive misrepresentation and Islamophobia which is very common phenomenon in the west especially after 9/11 and 7/7 events.<sup>10</sup>

Syrina Ahsan Ali, Hina Iqbal, Naghma Siddique and Asia Saeed explore *Home Fire* with the perspective of cultural hegemony through class systems in multicultural society.

The study uncovers that the novel in its portrayal of Muslim characters and culture develops Eurocentric biases. The study also examines the ways cultural hegemony gives birth to cultural infidelity and class conflict.<sup>11</sup>

Aroosa Kanwal comments that *Home Fire* is divided in five sections and five locations where different characters narrate their own stories from their perspectives. The novel focuses on the accounts of two immigrant families Lone and Pasha who are settled in Britain but with different destination.<sup>12</sup> Thus the novel seems a family saga where Karamat Lone known as ‘Wolf Lone’ and his son get assimilated with British culture by distancing themselves from Muslim roots and enjoy the privilege. He becomes members of Parliament and then the Home secretary and throughout the novel brands Islam as a regressive and misogynist religion. The Pashas’ who could not attain acculturation suffer as radicals and extremists.

Debijani Banerjee comments that *Home Fire* is the adaptation of Greek play *Antigone* by Sophocles but written in the context of post 9/11 Britain. The novel portrays the struggle of Muslim immigrants who are negotiating with their British Muslim identity.<sup>13</sup>

Rehana Ahmed explores in her research that Muslim representation in secular literary market place is framed and stereotyped. She adds that the novel highlights the frames within which Muslims are normatively seen and read.<sup>14</sup>

Mudasir Ramzan (not dated) explores the themes of women, violence and conflict in his research article and also

examines the attitude of the British towards their Muslim citizens in the novel *Home Fire*.<sup>15</sup>

Shadab Fatima, Dr. Asia Tarique and Siraj Ahmed Channa explore the *Home Fire* in the perspective of Muslim diasporic identities by employing the theoretical lens of Stuart Hall’s critical essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” The study confirms the Hall’s notion that despite every effort of assimilation in the host culture, the diaspora fail to achieve adaptability and recognition.<sup>16</sup>

### **Research Methodology**

The study is qualitative in nature. It employs the method of textual interpretation and close reading. Kamila Shamsie’s novel *Home Fire* is the primary text and source of data for analysis. Peter Morey and Amina Yaqeen, Victor Turner (1967) and Hamid Dabashi (2011) are the secondary sources. Besides a large number of research articles, books and theses are used to consolidate the evidences and the claims.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study explores Kamila Shamsie’s novel *Home Fire* under the theoretical Framework of Peter Morey and Amina Yaqeen’s “Framing Muslim Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11”, Victor Turner’s concept of “Liminality” and Hamid Dabashi’s idea of “House Muslim” in his work *Brown Skin, White Masks* (2011).

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

#### **Framing and stereotyping of Muslims in *Home Fire***

Peter Morey and Amina Yaqeen developed the thesis that throughout the western world the question of Muslim identity is framed and stereotyped as “unenlightened outsiders” who live in the west yet keep their values of Islamic identity intact. They elaborate:

Whether the controversy is over veiling, cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine-Israel or protest about the knighthood given to Salman Rushdie, Muslim appear always as a problematic presence, troubling those values of individualism and freedom said to define western nations...such images are distorted abstractions. Extrapolating from context-specific controversies they paint Muslims as a homogeneous, zombie-like body incapable of independent thought and liable to be whipped into a frenzy at the least disturbance to their unchanging world view.<sup>17</sup>

There lies a wide gap between representation and reality of Muslims who are often misrepresented and stereotyped by politicians, the media, the press and even by those authors who claim to speak for them. The Muslim images portray Muslim as odds and there are ‘structures of Muslim representations’ in which bearded Muslim are depicted as fanatic, the veiled women are shown as the oppressed entities and Muslims in general are dubbed as extremists and terrorists. These stereotypes have emerged as renewed force since 9/11 (2011,02).

In *Home Fire* we see in the very beginning of the novel how Isma is misbehaved and detained in security at Heathrow Airport only because she was wearing Hijab. The stereotyping of Hijab women as association with extremism

and possible link with terrorism speaks volume about Muslim sufferings in the west.

“Do you consider yourself British?” the man said.

“I am Brirish”

“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.

The interrogation continued for nearly two hours. He wanted to know her thoughts on Shias, Homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, *the Great British Bake off*, the invasion of Iraq, Israel, Suicide Bombers, dating websites.<sup>18</sup>

Karamat Lone as a ‘Home Muslim’ is portrayed as a British politician who denies his Muslims identity and portrays British values to become the Home Secretary. Pervaiz Isma’s brother who was working at a grocery to materialize his dream of higher education is shown titled towards extremism who fell victim to Farooq’s connivance and joins ISIS without realizing its consequences. Thus, ‘field Muslims’ are portrayed as easy preys to terrorist activities. It happens because they have not internalized the western values so they remain prone to Jihadi ideals. The novelist has mocked the field Muslim as opportunists, extremists and terrorists to support the concept of ‘House Muslims’ who are westernized and thus enlightened.

### **The ‘House Muslims’ and ‘Field Muslims’ in *Home Fire*.**

*Brow Skin, White Masks* borrows the idea of ‘House Muslims’ from the speech of Malcolm X which he had delivered in 1963 at the Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference in Detroit, Michigan. In his speech Malcolm X had pointed out that there were two types of slaves. The ‘House Negroes’ he described as the slaves who were more aligned towards their masters and were considered as privileged and superior for they lived in the house of their masters and were well dressed having better food to eat and better living conditions.

Dabashi employs the term ‘House Muslims’ in the context of new racism operating in the west where Islam is manipulatively identified as a representation of violence, narrow-mindedness backwardness, barbarism and potential threat to the west. The ‘House Muslims’ adopt the western values and join mainstream white society. Thus, these ‘House Muslims’ are identified as proper and civilized notion of the west whereas the ‘Field Muslims’ who keep their Islamic values intact are considered as demons, terrorists and backward. To attain this proper/ House Muslim identity, the ‘House Muslims’ relinquish their faith, identity and ethnicity. They blindly follow western values and adopt the norms, perceptions and moral values of their masters.

According to Dabashi the ‘House Muslims’ are those individuals who delegitimize their own values for internalization of their new reality and adopt political, ideological and cultural domination of new-colonial stage of globalization.

In *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie, we find Karamat Lone, the Muslim Home Secretary of Britain as an embodiment of ‘House Muslim’. In order to build his own career and win recognition in white dominant society, he discards and rejects his own faith and identity. He tries his best to prove himself as one of them (Whites) and attains new social and cultural mobility. Portraying the advantages and benefits of good Muslims as House Muslim in the new-colonial stage he declares:

There is nothing this country won’t allow you to achieve—Olympic Medals, captaincy of the cricket team, pop stardom and reality TV crowns. And if none of that works out, you can settle for being Home Secretary. You are, we are, British. Britain accepts this. So do most of you. But for those of you who are in some doubt about it, let me say this: don’t set yourselves apart in the way you dress, the way you think, the outdated codes of behaviors you cling to, the ideologies to which you attach your loyalties. Because if you do, you’ll be treated differently not because of racism though that does still exist, but because you insist on your difference from everyone else in this multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multitudinous United Kingdom of ours. And look at all you miss out on because of it.<sup>19</sup>

This rhetoric by Karamat Lone suggests that the only way to enjoy the benefits and fruits of the dominant society is to follow its pattern and they will be treated better if they normalize their manners, values and actions according to the dominant society. Karamat Lone always tries to appease his white mainstream society to enjoy privileges and pursues other Muslims to adopt those values. He tells his son

Eamonn to persuade Aneeka not to wear Hijab (107). He makes fun of her as she told she could not drink (234). He believes Muslims living in Dark Ages and wanted them to come out of it by adopting British values so that they may be treated with respect (59). He is known as Mr. British values, Mr. Strong on Security. Mr. Striding Away from Muslimness (52).<sup>20</sup>

The above quoted citations indicate that in order to attain inclusion and visibility in British culture Karamat Lone was trying to civilize the practices of Islam. This conforms the notion of Stuart Hall<sup>21</sup> (1996) who puts forward that in ‘White aesthetic and cultural discourse’ the racial origin matters little and only conformity with white values work and ‘others’ are positively accepted if they adopt these norms. Jane Harris (2003) in his article elaborates that in new-racism the difference of ethnicity, religion and race are tolerated if they are adequately domesticated to the norms of new-racism.<sup>22</sup> In this situation the ‘others’ relinquish their own identities to adopt new norms of new-colonial centre so that they may be accepted and not disrespected.

In *Home Fire* we are shown that father of Pervaiz, Aneeka and Isma, Adil Pasha who was captured from Bagram, Afghanistan dies in a plane when he was being transported to Guantanamo. The family wanted to receive the dead body however, the local Muslim community including Imam of the mosque and Karamat Lone who was MP then discouraged them to do so. The fear was to be caught by the authorities and Special Branch as well as British Government could dub them all as terrorists and withdrew their citizenship and related benefits (49). After

Pervaiz got killed in Istanbul, his sister Isma gave interview that her brother was misled and had joined enemies of Britain (197). Even the local mosque denied to hold funeral prayers and condemned the campaign against law abiding British Muslims.<sup>23</sup> (197).

Perviaz in the novel is not the representation of true Muslim identity. His decision of joining ISIS was not motivated by Islamic practices or Muslims beliefs; it was result of his directionless anger and personal impulse. In the novel Pervaiz is depicted as disoriented individual who suffered powerlessness, meaninglessness and unbelongingness. He could not adopt the values of neo-colonial centre neither culturally nor economically. He hated his life, his neighborhood, the inevitability of everything (123). Kamila Shamsie in this novel constructs the idea of the ‘House Muslim’ who enjoy the luxurious ways of living for they adopt western and British values of life. On the other hand, the Muslims who could not actualize themselves face sever challenges. In *Home Fire*, she theorizes the fact that Muslim identity is perceived through British lens. Thus, everything positive on the part of Muslims is viewed and associated with Britishness of Muslim in UK and anything negative on the part of Muslims is dubbed as un-British. “The 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’ as ‘British Muslims’ or ‘British Passport holders’ always something interposed between their Britishness and terrorism”<sup>24</sup> (38).

### **Politics of Hijab in *Home Fire***

Hijab is only one of many factors of Islamic identity but in the west it is matter of great controversy. In many of the European countries, Hijab is banned or facing legal restrictions as it is taken as the sign of backwardness, social intolerance and abhorrence. Valerie Amiroux in his work *European Islam*.<sup>25</sup> (2007) writes that in Europe Hijab is taken as a sign of conservative life and reactionary attire which is dangerous, scary, threatening, oppressive and irritating. Alia Al-Saji (2010) explains that hijab itself is not an issue but it is taken to controversy owing to its stereotypical representation in cultural racism of Europe. Hijab is viewed in binary opposition of positive, free and empowered gender roles of the west and conservative, restricting sign of the migrants’ culture.<sup>26</sup> The west views Hijab as a restriction to women’s freedom which denies agency to women and fans gender imbalance. However, for Muslim women wearing Hijab doesn’t employ any negative connotation and never restrict their freedom and agency. Hijab is taken as an impediment in social interaction and community relations in the west.

In Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire* Aneeka wears hijab only as an integral part of her dress. For her, hijab is only a piece of garment which she has chosen on her own will and accord. For her hijab neither restricts her freedom nor snatches her agency.

When Aneeka first met with Eamonn who was there to deliver her the parcel sent by Isma from USA, she welcomed him friendly in her home. She was wearing hijab (head covering scarf). Eamonn stood up, conscious of his

greasy fingers and of his interest in the questions of how he might use them to unpin the white hijab that framed her face (64). However, wearing hijab did not restrict Aneeka to be friendly with Eamonn. Aneeka acted independently and with agency even wearing hijab. This suggests that hijab never restricts the personal mobility.<sup>27</sup>

When she was seeing of Eamonn, Aneeka encountered a stranger passing by. She responded to his interference quite politely and thus thwarted the notion that hijab is symbol of unsocial disposition or obstacle to good community relations. Thus, Aneeka was following the traits of her own culture and the values of British norms as well, without any problem. Aneeka even did not mind or hesitate little in accompanying Eamonn to his flat where he lived alone. She was wearing hijab there as well, for Eamonn was thinking..... “although it was hard to know what to want of a silent beautiful women in a hijab sipping coffee in your flat”<sup>28</sup> (68).

Haleh Afshar (2008) argues that Islamophobia has brought new challenges for Muslim women who wear hijab. They have to face additional problems in their lived experiences. The women wearing hijab are considered as ‘other’ of western culture who are often oppressed and less empowered.<sup>29</sup> However, in *Home Fire* Aneeka breaks these stereotypes and we find her enjoying her freedom in life. She develops friendly ties with Eamonn and hijab is not a restriction in her decision making. She acts independently as most of the girls without hijab do. Thus, hijab for her is a garment or part of her dress which is never an obstacle in her life. Muslim women wear hijab in public as it is the

marker of their identity and recognition. In the west, however, it is always taken as a sign of social intolerance and results in undue controversy over hijab there.<sup>30</sup> (Ismail, 2004). In the same fashion, Aneeka uses hijab in public appearance to maintain her identity but it never hampers her life as wrongly assumed in the Europe. Even hijab did not restrict her natural impulse. She unpinned her hijab, folded it carefully and placed it between the two of them on the kitchen counter (68). She even enjoys intimate physical relation with Eamonn and hijab never comes as a restriction. She exercise her liberty and freedom of choice without being bothered by hijab and related controversy with it. Hijab for her is simply a choice of dressing and dressing does not separate Muslim women from their society.<sup>31</sup> (Ajala Imene, 2017). Thus, Aneeka always prefer to wear hijab as a separate identity of her own but it never restricts her choice. Marc Helbing (2014) asserts that in the Europe radicalism and fundamentalism are associate with hijab.<sup>32</sup> This furthers the gap and hostility towards Muslim immigrants which continues unabated. In *Home Fire* we find Aneeka a moderate girl far away from extremism, though she wears hijab regularly and offers prayers. Shamsie puts it as..... “the hijab nothing more alien than scarf loosely covering her head..prostrating herself to God in the room where she’d been down on her knees for a very different purpose just hours earlier” (70). After leaving Eamonn’s flat she puts on her hijab again.<sup>33</sup> (72).

However, the liberals and those who are assimilated in the western cultural values like the ‘House Muslim’ even object wearing hijab as a garment or piece of dress. Karamat



Lone disapproves Aneeka’s hijab wearing. Though she is quite moderate and liberal in her beliefs. She was far away from religious fundamentalism but her identity is stereotyped and framed for wearing hijab. Her sister Isma was severely interrogated at the airport for she was wearing hijab. Thus, the novel reveals that hijab is made controversial in the Europe and is taken as symbol of backwardness, conservative outlook and extremism. It is taken as a sign of oppression snatching agency. However, for Muslim women it is part of their dress, sign of their identity and far away from the symbols and signs attached to it. But as it is disapproved in the west, majority of Muslim women have to adopt. ‘Liminality’ as described by Victor Turner (1967). He writes that “during the liminal movements between social identities, the individuals find themselves betwixt and between position normally assigned by law, custom, convention etc where they experience a suspension or reversal of normal rules of living”<sup>34</sup>

### Conclusion

*Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie confirms the concept of Peter Morey and Amina Yaqeen who postulated that in post 9/11 world the Muslim identity is being framed and stereotyped. Muslim image is being distorted and the features of Muslim life and custom are being adversely used in connotation. In case of Muslims, body and dress are not taken as cultural constructs but are viewed as a kind of moral index. Muslim representations of beard, hijab and praying or holding beads in hand is taken as a sign of ignorance, backwardness and extremism. Thus in the novel, we see how Isma and Aneeka were badly treated for their

hijab wearing. Pervaiz who was victim of self and social alienation fell victim to Jihadi network and how Karamat Lone urged other Muslims to relinquish their values and join British norms of the life. The novel also discusses the politics of Hijab. Hijab in the west is taken as oppressing piece of cloth which snatches female independence and agency. However, in the novel Aneeka and Isma wear it as a marker of their identity with no obstacle in their choice and decision making. However, the British culture demands them to show liminality as suggested by Victor Turner. The novel also presents the case of the ‘House Muslim’ who serves British values more than his own beliefs and community. Thus, we find Karamat Lone eulogizing British culture and its advantages, inviting other Muslim to follow it for respect and dignity in Britain. He at the same time threatened about the consequence of not following Britishness in England.

We can conclude that *Home Fire* artistically presents the plight of immigrant Muslims in England where for their modest living they need to relinquish their own identity and cultural marks to enjoy in new racist white society. Their adherence to their own culture may result in adversaries, stereotyping and (mis) representation as Jihadis, terrorists and extremists. The novel revolves around the story of two Muslim immigrant families out of which Karamat Lone preferred to adopt British acculturation to prove himself ‘House Muslim’ and ultimately enjoys luxurious life. The Pasha family which was caught in between hybridity and ambivalence suffer till the end and had to struggle for even modest survival. The study concludes that Islamic identity is being framed and stereotyped in the aftermath of

Islamophobia in post 9/11 world and only those Muslim are welcomed who relinquish their faith and culture to adopt the western ways of life.

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