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Postcolonial Subject as Modern Orient: A Critical Analysis of Shamsie's *Home Fire*

Zia Ahmed

Professor of English, Emerson University Multan.

Email: zeadogar@hotmail.com

Hafsa Qadir Buzdar

Lecturer English, NUML Multan Campus.

Email: hafsaqadir@numl.edu.pk

Umaima Kamran

Associate Professor, Department of English,

Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad.

Email: umaima@qau.edu.pk

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the evolution and portrayal of the modern Orientals in Pakistani fiction and attempts to determine the causes, factors and impact of this shift from simple orient to New Orient. New orient is a discourse being popularized by the west under the influence of Islamophobia to generate a specific type of violent orient whose main job is to spread terrorism and is therefore dangerous. The similar discourses are being followed by the writers from non-western areas of the world and are deeply connected with the formerly colonized country. The new orient is an unwanted person whose loyalties with the identity, community, race and language are constantly shifting in his portrayal in the fiction. This necessitates a debate and discussion about this new orient. This research study delimits to Shamsie's Home Fire to investigate the new orient and to determine the level of change that has occurred in the patterns of representation in the 21st century under the forces of globalization, neo-colonialism and islamophobia. Above all, this orient is not represented by the European writer but by the Postcolonial writers, such as Shamsie. The writers intend to read the selected chunks of the text under the lens of new-Orientalism, provided by Said, Lau and Haggan, and evaluate the portrayals of Aneeka and Parvaiz as the new-orientals, as portrayed by Shamsie. The most probable outcome of the study is that the post 9/11 fiction has given birth to a new set of issues related to the Orient and their settlements and has brought more sophistication in the characters of orient and hence they have diverted from their traditional portrayals as Orientals.

Key Words: Orientalism, New-Orientalism, Diaspora, Middle East, Pakistani postcolonial fiction, Islamophobia,

Introduction

Orientalism in the age of Trumpism has lost its usual and traditional values and is instead focusing on the exercise of power and so is its new shape. The post 9/11 global and digital culture is introducing modernization in the thinking of the orientalists, causing erasure of cultural diversity, logical thinking, and hence lending them more power to control the Orient. “These losses gave rise to alienation, disenchantment, displacement within a culture” (Ritzer and Atalay, 2010, quoted in Zoobia & Ahmed, 2020). Moreover, Exercise of power manifests itself in contemporary forms of supremacy and awareness which has created powerful manifestation of domination over human beings (Munir & Sumaira 2021). This consequently moulds the human thought process and long-established philosophies begin to manifest themselves in even vigorous ways, for example, the philosophy of orientalism is emerging into new manifestations in contemporary world. “This new Orientalism speaks in the language of deals and, more often, that of force and repression. It keeps Arab despots in power and angry young men of Arab origin in prison” (Varghese, 2019, para 1). The philosophy promulgated by Said in (1978) emphasized on the west and Islam and entailed that the ‘Other’ is portrayed as inferior. But the developments in post 9/11 era is shifting this emphasis to a different level where the orient is itself becoming significant in its literary representations. “Some promising changes, as well as some additional dualistic tendencies, that can define neo-Orientalism are found in this new era” (Samiei, 2010, p. 1145). This entails that a new orientalism has emerged which is less territorialized and holds a new ideologically motivated agenda, constructs new objects, and feeds the social phenomenon called Islamophobia (Kerboua, 2016). The oriental practices of labelling the Orient, especially Muslims has reasserted itself in the 21st century as is evident in many metropolises of the world. The same is being represented the 21st century Pakistani postcolonial fiction but with a new color of new-orientalism. This is exactly in accordance with the market forces of the globalized world and the new-orientalist forces exhibiting themselves through newly renewed racialism and Islamophobia. Though racialism has been the part of the postcolonial theory but the next level of racialism is achieved through popularizing the concept of Islamophobia in order to exercise further control on the representations in literature. Pakistani fiction is also responding to this sense in multiple ways and this is being done by the Pakistani writers like Shamsie, Hamid and Mohammad Haneef. But while doing so they become less the representative of their indigenous people and culture and more toe the lines provided by the wester powerful societies. Why are the Pakistani postcolonial writers doing so? The researchers intend to find out whether this phenomenon is occurring because of their sensitivity towards their writings to be successful

and marketable or as per postcolonial theory and the concept of 'Empire writing back', they have started to follow master's line of action regarding the representations of the postcolonial subject.

Literature Review

New era of Orientalism is found being exhibited through think tanks and journalists and politicians and so it has gained a wider audience and an enhanced scope as well, especially because of its dominance of Islam and Muslims. This image now is not reaching west through its traveler or tourists but the Orient exists very much in the west itself. Bayat (2020) believes that such images about the Muslims are frequently imaginary of the European nations. Orientalism has therefore been always there constructed by the west and so is happening now. However, it has taken a different queue and so added a new dimension of Islamophobia which is ideologically motivated agenda. Kernoua (2016) looks at it as new form of recognition in 21st century orientalism under the influence of the "Clash of Civilisations" popularised in the United States. This image of the orient aided by the globalization has spread far and wide among the general population of the west and hence has exerted much larger influence on the policy formation of the western powers towards non-western nations. Moreover, the journey of the orientalist has reverted itself and now the very orient is travelling towards the west and is residing among the western people. According to Bayat (2020) this image has haunted almost every country of the west. Tuastad (2003) terms it as a hegemonic strategy in order to legitimize the modern colonialism of the Muslim lands such as Palestine, when the west constantly creates such imaginaries about the Muslims.

Lau (2016) is of the view that east has now become even western centred in its representation of the east by following the patterns of representation of the west. She terms it as re-orientalising, which examines the impact of these subversive and discursive strategies in terms of identity negotiations, investigating how the writers with eastern backgrounds gradually reconcile with "orientalised East" (Lau, 2016, P. 78). This enables us to differentiate and establish the definition of orientalism and re-orientalism. For example, Lau says that where Orientalism means the way the West constructs the East, Re-Orientalism means how the cultural East reconciles with an orientalised East (Lau & Mendes, 2011).

Pakistani post 9/11 fiction is also reflecting such tendencies. For example, Shamsie's *Home Fire* runs a live commentary on the role, position and the inability of the orient to adjust within the host communities because of the multiple issues within the host communities. A few of the causes are the

racialism, Islamophobia and the construction of the other in a new and different way as new orient. Shamsie is prolific writer residing the western metropolis and hence having an in-depth experience of the attitudes, scholarship and the social behaviour of the host people with the migrants and the diaspora, especially from the formerly colonized countries. For example, her novel *Kartography* (2002) along with many other themes, manifestly discusses the feelings of rejection of a woman, Maheen, who migrated from Bangladesh and reached Pakistan is still ridiculed and labelled as an other in the Pakistani set up. This labelling keeps on happening and bulging itself big even in case of *Burnt Shadows* (2009) wherein a Japanese woman migrates from place to place and yet can claim no place of hers. In Karachi Pakistan, even her son is labelled as foreigner not only with foreign features but also because he is the one who is infected by the fall outs of the atomic bomb and so is not acceptable for a normal marriage as well. In case of *Home Fire* Shamsie goes one step ahead in her themes of migration and the non-acceptance of the migrant in the former colonizer's home lands.

Home Fire portrays the story of the two young girls and one young boy along with many other partners of Pakistani diaspora. Even after being renamed and re-labeled, the host country is unable to accept them as a part of their land. They are looked upon suspiciously and their loyalties to the British state is frequently doubted and tested. For example, when Isma wanted to join her teacher in USA for pursuing a PhD, after she had lived in London for more than 20 years with an awarded right of citizenship, she is stopped at the airport and is searched thoroughly, and is questioned in such a way that makes her feel a person who is terrorist and is much dangerous to the minds at the airport. Same is the case with her sister Aneeka who is labeled as the misfit girl and is blamed of supporting the terrorist by using her sexuality. Their brother Parvaiz, who was trapped by the recruiters and developed tendencies of the migrating to the home of terrorism, not as a terrorist but as an engineer in media cell, is never allowed to return to England and is declared as the enemy of the British state.

The developments in the name of orientalism have given birth to another phenomenon as well which is, as Saleem calls it, re-orientalism which entails that no longer the literature by a postcolonial writer is that resistance literature and the voice of the subalterns and has instead compromised with its identity in its efforts of being marketable to the western communities. Sara Suleri called this change as the self-contradictory in nature and Spivak told that the gain of the postcolonial writer has become his loss. "There seems to be an implicit understanding between the Western Market pundits and indigenous

writers whereby the latter choose to focus on very selective representation of their culture” (Saleem, 2017, p. 141).

GöL endorses the same notion with a different perspective and asserts that there are many discourses that help establish Western hegemony without necessarily supporting the orient and rather focuses on indigenous and dissident views among the orient state. At the political and social level, the new oriental asserts that after the demise of Soviet Union, the only option left with the world is the Western model of state and democracy and while doing so it rejects all the other models, especially, the violent models. Here, the concept of clash of civilization and that Islamic terrorism is injected in it with the belief that all non-Muslims are peaceful and the only violence is the Muslim and hence it ultimately converges on Islamophobic assertions. Gol (2010) points out that literature produced under the garb of anti-terrorist campaign is mostly about the Muslims and very little about the Christians, which singles out Muslim representations in literature and so, “Much of the literature adopts a rather simplistic and stereotypical view of Islam as a violent, irrational, and backward religion that turns ordinary Muslims into potential terrorists” (Gol, 2010, p. 2). Swamy (2013) has raised the issue of new-orient by pointing out that orient was always there but the discursive practices in Europe and USA have given new meaning to the orient that it is the other which, as viewed by the West, is Arab Muslims.

This research aims at exploring the change visible in thinking and philosophy about the Orient, especially when violence and terrorism has been associated with the orient. The introduction of Islamophobia may look like another phase of orientalism and so, in this situation, how do the writers of postcolonial literature tend to portray this change and while doing so how much they have deviated from the traditional indigenous representations in the context of the Islamophobic-infested western societies and the status of the Muslim Diaspora living in the west. The Pakistani fiction of 21st century has taken up a new turn of representing the people it is about. The Pakistani fiction, with reference to racialism and Islamophobia, is portraying with the characters and situation in accordance with the thinking of the West and is speaking also in terms of new-orientalism which fixes the postcolonial subject in a particular framework which means that the orient is in confusion with reference to its representation is modern Pakistani fiction which needs to be explored for the purpose of understanding the sensibility of the new-oriental developments in the world and as such in the postcolonial theory.

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial literature has mostly been known as literature of resistance because of its particular identity but somehow, somewhere, this genre began to take shape of toeing the line of its master and hence attempted to be acceptable to the western master. With a particular identity of the colonized culture, it began to be a cherished item for the western markets of literature. In modern times, especially in 21st century, western writers have depicted their inability to represent the subaltern other, it has taken the initiative of encouraging the orient other within to represent the subaltern on behalf of the west. Lau and Huggans, according to Saleem (2017), agree with this view and explain that south Asian writers have started to convert their fictions to marketable commodity and while doing so they have represented only a few selected aspects of the indigenous culture which appeals to the mind of the western markets. According to Lau, Saleem (2017) further points out that, this type of representation is an extension of orientalism and has called it re-orientalism which is the representation by the indigenous author but with a reductionist tendency. This interpretation of representation is a clear manifestation of the indigenous writer's tendency to follow the orientalist tendencies initiated by the master himself.

The same holds good in case of Pakistani fiction which is exported to Western readers through the market that would listen the voice of the upper middle class of Pakistan, which “has similar concerns about the world, Islam, and American foreign policy and speaks to a global ideology. The danger is that the American middle-class finds in it a perfect representation of Pakistan” (Saleem, 2017, p. 146). The theoretical frame work based on the studies of Lau and Haggan, therefore, is very useful in discovering these tendencies of the postcolonial writer residing in the wester metropolises. As spoken of by Saleem also, this study will explore the text of Shamsie novel *Home Fire* and would attempt to discover the extent to which Shamsie is writing in conformity with the view of Lau and Haggan and would also trace the background of this change as to how and why the postcolonial writers have begun to speak in terms of west-centred notions about the orient.

Analysis and Discussion

The 21st century brought the concepts of Islamophobia and religious intolerance at the socio-political level. Literature translated these feelings into stories by making the concept of orientalism re-live and make it take different shapes and hues. This study goes one step further in capturing and analyzing the chunks of the text of *Home Fire* by Shamsie in order to evaluate the extent to which Pakistani writers

are representing the other in terms of western representation of the orient under the influence of globalization, new world order, Muslim Diaspora issues in the western metropolises which is largely nurturing the thought of Islamophobia and the Muslim terrorists responsible for the threat to the western ways of life.

Shamsie contends that the west is obsessed with the Islamophobic feeling to the extent that Isma who was born and bred in UK, was being questioned regarding her identity as a Briton at the air-port when she intended to move to US for a PhD program. She expected a thorough search of her bags because of her Muslim identity but this much search and a suspicion about her identity was beyond her imagination. When she was asked, “But do you consider yourself British?” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 10), it was most puzzling because how else she could describe herself as a Muslim British other than her passport which was already in the hands of the security officer. She was further probed for her beliefs regarding different sects of Islam. Actually, the officer explored her regarding her view about homosexuality, suicide bombers, social media websites, US invasions into different parts of the world. This much is the extent to which the western security agencies would probe BRITISH born young woman only because she was a Muslim.

Same is the case with anyone related to her, for example, Aneeka and Purvaiz, though she herself was not treated so fairly by either of these. The writer takes an opportunity in her narrative to let the reader have a glimpse on the life of these three Muslims and see as to what made them to be so suspected and investigated wherever they would land. Their parents died earlier than expected and Isma had to act as mother for the two. She, however, received not the love but rather a type of suspicion as both her siblings did not want her to overshadow their lives. Even Aneeka, after being grown up, “always guarded that part of her life from her sister, who was, perhaps, too inclined to lecture” and, “It was Parvaiz who had talked Isma into accepting it” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 26). The family living in UK for a very long time was now to face their un-britishing and that is what the writers of Pakistani literature are attempting to let the people know. For example, the British media would never term the people of Pakistan living in England as British but they would term them as Pakistani born British or “British of Pakistani descent” or “British Muslim” or, “British passport-holders” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 42), which made Muslim feel less of British and more of Terrorist Muslim.

Not only at the foreign British scene but also at the domestic scene, Isma had to face the neglect because of her father Adil Pasha, who would leave them for longer periods of time alone in order to fulfill his own passions. Ultimately the disappearance of their father was discovered and found to be Muslim terrorist who was imprisoned along with others at Guantanamo Bay and later on died during a take-off flight. This image of their father would make the life of Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz troublesome because they would be counted among the anti-British elements. This happened more than once when Parvaiz and Aneeka had to face shouts of the people at them being the people from the terrorists. The attitude of Parvaiz towards life was impacted heavily because of him being the son of a terrorist. He did not grow up like any other British young guy and was not very good at the educational and social level. So, both Aneeka and Parvaiz would not do well in studies because they were not able to avail the scholarships (Shamsie, 2017, p. 61).

The portrayal of Parvaiz becomes that of an orient who is bent upon destruction and furthering his socio-political designs through the acts of terrorism. This most dangerous element among the Muslim terrorist has popularized the discourses of Islamophobia. For example, the writer describes the feelings of the audience when they listen that Paravaiz is gone to Raqqa and is fighting along with the terrorist groups. Even the sister believes that and exclaims, “They’re watching me because of my brother. Ever since he went to Syria, to Raqqa, last year” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 74). The writer gives graphic details of the acts of terrorism perpetrated by the groups whom Parvaiz has joined. “The black-and-white flag, the British-accented men who stood beneath it and sliced men’s heads off their shoulders. And the media unit, filming it all” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 86). Even the images of the terrorists as have been popularized in the west are given in exact accordance. For example, after Parvaiz has arrived in the middle east, he is met by the two people in the mobile phone shop who enter into the shop very confidently exhibiting as if they were owners and their white robes, long hair and heavy beards make them appear as particular get-up of the terrorist Muslims. This image of the Muslims has been popularized through a different discourse that it is the cause of deep racialism, Islamophobia and hate against the Muslims. Parvaiz even at his school was asked if he knew his father was terrorist and was killed in the US custody. By developing such imagery about the father of Parvaiz, his further alienation from the main stream life was made. This had impacted the life of Parvaiz socially as well as psychologically. He was instilled that his father cannot be claimed publicly because he had done something shameful in his past. Sometime, he was made to see the posters about his father and his activities. Not only this but also

“rocks would be thrown through windows and he and his sisters wouldn’t receive invitations to the homes of their classmates and no girl would ever say yes to him” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 95).

Shamsie has historicized the Islamophobic feelings in the context of clash of civilizations that the hate of the west was not new and rather it was relevant to the centuries of frictions between the two civilizations. Shamsie explorations of the history affords her knowledge of the fear of the Muslims with which Christian nations were obsessed. Muslims remained in ascendancy for hundreds of years till the internal strife and the poverty of wisdom of on the part of rulers that Ottoman and Mughal Empires lost their glory. Historical evidences are available that since then “Christians had avenged themselves for their centuries of humiliation” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 97), and the later on many changes were made in the Muslim world under imperialism, racism ‘civilizing mission’. This further resulted in the creation of client states in the name of independence given with instable boundaries.

The feelings of Islamophobic fear have also been portrayed by the writers in terms of the threats felt by the west about the attempts of the Muslim terrorists who want to occupy their prosperous lands and host flags on their civilizations. There are horrific scenes given in the book to further strengthen the hate of the European public against the Muslims. For example, Parvaiz was involved with the Muslim fighters in the Middle East and was engaged in recording scenes of the deaths of the Christian caught somehow by the Muslims there. Shamsie details the events of execution in her novel by letting her readers know how the executioner’s blade would fall while Parvaiz stood by unable to watch and felt nausea, while the man in charge was quite satisfied and checked the impact of the video being filmed and the sound being recorded (Shamsie, 2017, p. 120). All these descriptions reflect the terroristic image being created, resembling very much the discourses that the west has developed over time about the gruesomeness and brutality of the terrorist orient.

These and many acts of execution were recorded and shown on the media in order to strike further terrorism. Parvaiz other than making this mistake was a very peace-loving person and wanted to listen music and participate in the social gatherings. This claim is further supported by the fact that when he saw the acts of atrocities involved, he wanted to return to his normal life in London, even at the risk of the trial and penalties. But the labeling and discourse under islamophobia was so strong that he budes away from this. The writer talks about his condition that “he was the terrorist son of a terrorist father (Shamsie, 2017, p. 120). His non-terrorist attitude is further reflected from the sadness and sorrowfulness he depicted when he saw and heard a young woman in trouble and could not help her only because her

veil was removed from her face. In the presence of the moral police, he could simply utter out, “Mum! Mum, I’m sorry” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 120). But unfortunately, even after having such goodness, he could neither save himself nor any other innocent victim.

The death of Parvaiz in Turkey while he was trying to enter into British embassy to return is reflective of the fact that if the Orient ‘other’ attempts to get back to normal life, the hate and xenophobic issues propagated by the west are so strong, it could not be made possible. The families of such persons are also demeaned and undermined. Here in case of Parvaiz, his sister Aneeka is declared to be an accomplice of the terrorist, who wanted to get him back by using her influence on the home secretary’s son. Similarly, when Aneeka travels to Pakistan to get the dead body of her brother, she is never allowed to do so. Her family in Pakistan also gets alienated from her and the British Government never accepts her demands. She too like her brother wanted to return to the normal life in England and wanted justice for the burial of her brother in England. She told the press, “I am here to ask for justice. I appeal to the Prime Minister: let me take my brother home” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 157). There in Brittan, powerful discourse is spread with equal hate against her demand for justice that a tabloid reported: “Slag, terrorist-spawn, enemy-of-Britain” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 160). Aneeka was never allowed to return to London even after the son of home secretary gave explanation that Aneeka never approached him but he approached her and that he had no connection with Parvaiz and had never met him. The story ultimately ends with another act of terrorism and both Emmon and Aneeka are killed. The end of the story is again symptomatic of the fact that terrorism is linked with Muslims and that it kills them too and ultimately it is the Orient ‘other’ who is firmly blamed and the west is proved to be cleaned by purging itself of these terrorists and depositing them back to places like Pakistan.

Findings

The portrayals of men and women in the novel *Home Fire* are significantly those of the diaspora which is the source of ridicule and hate, xenophobia and racialism in the western metropolitan centers and are represented by the writer mainly through the characters of Aneeka, Parvaiz and Isma. These three characters appear in outlook more to be the terrorists than the peaceful citizens in London and the novel clearly shows that these have been portrayed in the light of the new-orientalist perception of the west in association with the concepts of clash of civilizations and xenophobic racialism. And above all, the most significant thing is that this portrayal is given by one Pakistani writer living in London.

Though Parvaiz had never seen his father and had grown up like any Asian born Pakistani and was supposed to be leading a normal life in London but very soon he takes sides with the recruiters for Jihad and, like his father, takes up the mission of travelling towards Middle East and join the ranks of the terrorists. But after witnessing many scenes of horror, he decides to return, but then the doors have been closed for a declared terrorist, the son of a terrorist. Though he works only as a media operator and does not want to see the scene of horror in media or live scenes. His decision to return becomes the cause of his death. So, the face of terrorism, as a whole, has been shown to an entanglement which would never let go and the death of its victim is sure. Father of Parvaiz and Parvaiz die a death without making any positive impact on the world. Here, Parvaiz becomes a complete symbolic representation of the dangerous orient who should be restricted and shunned at every cost.

Same is the case with Aneeka who is definitely not a terrorist but in an attempt for saving her brother and for bringing him back to normal life, she becomes an accomplice to the declared terrorist and so, she too become dangerous and unacceptable. Even when she is female, she is not spared from the labelling of the accomplice and so is never given justice she demanded, and, instead, she is labeled a person who uses her body to get favours for her brother. The journey of Aneeka to Pakistan and her stay with the dead body of her brother assigns her the title of being a supporter of the terrorist. A friend of Britain enemy becomes the enemy of Britain and once it is done, even the Muslim Pakistanis living in England become enemies of Aneeka and Parvaiz to assure their solidarity with Britain. This portrayal of characters clearly indicates that the postcolonial texts are being created to reflect the occidental point of view about the new-Orient in the light of the development which have taken place in the world in the name of globalization, Islamophobia, Racism and New World Order. In contrast to Isma, her sister, Aneeka becomes that dangerous terrorist who is now the dangerous orient.

In comparison to Aneeka, her elder sister Isma, after bringing up her siblings and after receiving frequent rejection from them, moves to USA to complete her PhD. She, unwillingly though, disassociates from them in UK and so remains safe from the vitriols of the western media and the tantrums that would be hurled against her because of being a part of Pakistani Diaspora. Her disconnection electronically and physically saves her from all the modes of orientalism, only after she has passed a test at the airport in making the authorities believe that she was not the part of the orient and would love more to be the part of the occident. Though 'otherness' in her does not disappear but

she is counted among the good others and so is not made to feel rejected at the hands of the western governments, is very badly rejected though by her own kith and kin.

The analysis further provides another dimension to the representations of the racialism and islamophobia through the characters in the given text. The representation has been with a binary opposition of Power and the powerless as per postcolonial theory. The same is being repeated in the 21st century Pakistani fiction but with powerful assertions now because of global market forces as well as oriental mutations termed as new-orientalism. So the new debate is open that global postcolonial forces have joined hands in undermining the other with a new vigor and power as it deemed fit.

Conclusion

The question that how orient has been projected as new orient can be safely answered in the sense that under the influence of Islamophobia, the post 9/11 west is desperately trying to prove that the orient is responsible for the risks to the world peace and that orient needs to be snubbed in his or her own territory because he is a direct threat to the western way of life, civilization and peace. The characters of Aneeka and Parvaiz are exactly the characters which can be termed as the new-orient which is not only dangerous but also powerful and needs to be snubbed inside the orient territory. Moreover, why such narrative are being developed, can also be explained in the sense that most of the postcolonial writers toe the line of the masters in the western capitals under the influences of globalization, Islamophobia, and racialism in a xenophobic environment. So, the characters of Aneeka, Parvaiz and their father Adil become maligned and intolerable individual who need to be controlled and managed in such a way that they no more remain capable of harming the peace of the western civilizations.

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