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**A CRITICAL STUDY OF POST 9/11 ISLAMOPHOBIA IN ENGLISH  
FICTION: SPECIAL FOCUS ON HOME FIRE BY *KAMILA SHAMSIE***



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**Abstract**

English fiction has the manifestation of the fear of Islam termed as Islamophobia. This paper is a strive to discuss Islamophobia in English fiction in general and Kamila Shamsie's novel, *Home Fire* (2017) in particular in order to explore the notion of Islamophobia, its impacts in Western society, its influence on Muslim families living in the Western countries and perception about Islam in the modern world, i.e. the world against the backdrop of post 9/11 Islamophobia. By telling the story of a Muslim immigrant family whose two male members Adil Pasha and Pervaiz Pasha are condemned as terrorists, Shamsie has portrayed the pitiable plight of Muslim diaspora living in the West. While narrating the story of a Muslim family Shamsie has also juxtaposed the characters Karamat Lone and Parvaiz Pasha as the two extreme viewpoints; one is an obsessive Westoxification while the second is Fundamentalism which destroy the Aneeka/Eamonn love affair leading to collateral damage. The study concludes by summarizing the realistic approach adopted by kamila Shamsie to highlight obstacles confronted by diasporic Muslim community from Pakistan in the backdrop of Islamophobia/Terrorism.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia, 9/11, Kamila Shamsie, Westoxification, diaspora etc.

**Introduction**

The incident of 9/11, the plane suicidal attack on the World Trade Centre of the United State of America, dramatically changed the perception of the non-Muslim world about Islam. Soon after the attacks, America launched the War on Terror on Afghanistan mainly to punish alleged Muslim terrorists. This action of America, the supporting response of non-Muslim Western world and media, fanned a certain fear about Islam which was later on called Islamophobia. This fear gained its cry in fiction also. Some fictional writers then talked about this misperception about Islam and Kamila Shamsie is one of them. She beautifully conveyed this notion in her novel *Home Fire*. This paper has dealt with the concept of Islamophobia, its history, various scholarly views regarding this term, its different aspects as well as impacts on Muslims and its evidence in this fiction. As far as this notion is concerned, the term Islamophobia has become very popular in academic as well as social use. This is, in

fact, a false identity for the Muslims and is also a stigma for the Muslims around the world. The approach of stereotyping is very ancient. It started from the arrival of Western civilization especially the Latin American continent. The strategies of Imperialism have been to invade and govern including stereotyping. To scandalize colonized nationals in terms of their religion and culture has also been the imperialistic design on the part of colonizers during the malicious practice of colonialism.

Thus, Islamophobia is also a form of xenophobia affecting Muslims as well as Non-Muslims in multiple ways and English fiction has such traces.

### **Literature Review**

H.M Naqvi (2009) in his novel *Homeboy* portrays the Islamophobic approach on the part of Western people. They are under the influence of a certain fear against Muslims. Muslims are interrogated on public platforms. Naqvi speaks through the narrator Chuck,

“Grizzly: You are a terrorist?”

Chuck: No, sir.

Grizzly: You a Moslem?

Chuck: Yes, sir.

A very cautious assessment of the above-said dialogue unveils the Islamophobic forces which are influencing. Through the above conversation, one can easily assess the criterion of a terrorist according to the American order. According to them, Muslims are in routine to recite the Holy Quran and offer prayers five times a day. The conclusion which is found is noted down by him as:

“Boy’s excitable... Defended Islamic religion, terrorism” (Naqvi 117).

Amir Saeed (2015) in his article *Racism and Islamophobia: A Personal Perspective*, wants to highlight the fact that the trend of new racisms is still at work in the recent century around the world. “Tracing my parents’ journey from India and Pakistan to Britain, it explored the political effects of the racism they and their children faced. Locating these reflections in a post-9/11 world, the article describes the media’s representations of Muslims.” (Saeed, 15)

Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu (2011) in his article *Islamophobia and Terrorism: Impediments to the Culture of Peace* says that there is the need to eliminate

misconceptions about Western and Islamic cultures to bring cultural peace. The prejudiced outlook of Islamophobia neglects the lofty ideals of peace, justice, tolerance, and compassion propagated by Islam as a religion. The wrong judgment of Islam as extremist is due to vicious actions committed by some crime-prone individuals and this judgment is inappropriate because it is to label a religion that is one-fourth of the total population of the world, as extremist. And this act of labeling is unfair and it is spreading misinterpreted knowledge about Islam.

Isam Shahida (2015) in his research paper *The Backlash of 9/11 on Muslims in Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has described the pitiable condition of Muslims after the incident of 9/11 where they have become the victims of different types of crimes like the propaganda on media, disappearances, kidnapping, rape, public humiliation, the investigation at different airports and hiding at secret places. All these treatments have affected American non-Muslim society and American official discourse to such an extent that they start associating Islam with terrorism and the people belonging to this religion as terrorists and these people are considered as a threat to Western society. In his research paper, he has also given the warning to message through the character of Changez that Muslims are treated harshly under the bitter and cruel policy of America especially in the wake of the war on terror in which Muslims are to resist the American Dream. In a society like America, after the tragic incident of 9/11 Muslims living in America are being considered as “Others” and fundamentalists.

Saba and Mehvish (2018) suggested that Islamophobia is a self-created perception of the west. According to them, Muslims are stigmatized not because of their fault but because of the wrong perception of the people living in the West. Muslims are feared not only due to a certain religion but as a socio-cultural phenomenon. And Muslims are stereotyped with terrorism and due to this problem, they aroused some incidents like the event of 9/11 world trade center. Then the label for Muslims as terrorists emerged and due to this label, some terrorist organizations emerged in the theatre of the world's politics. Islamophobia is also due to the association of Muslims with terror. It is not only terrorism that is linked with Muslims around the world but also Muslims are being considered as ‘OTHER’ which means an inferior being or an outcast. The mindset obsessed with Islamophobia became

prevalent due to the incident of 9/11. Then the Bush administration launched a war name 'war on terror.

### **Analysis**

#### **Islamophobia**

The 9/11 tragedy marked the beginning of the "War on Terror" by the United States. Subsequently, media propagated a fear-driven narrative, unfairly stigmatizing Muslims as terrorists. This generalization negatively impacted Muslims, especially those in Western countries, who faced heightened suspicion. Regrettably, this perception diverged from the teachings of the Holy Quran. Islamophobia began to influence both Muslims and non-Muslims globally.

Majeed (2019) points out that Islamophobia resulted in violence against the Muslim minority in Rohingya by the Buddhist majority. Despite this distressing situation, there is a significant lack of research on the mental health challenges faced by the Rohingya community. Bauer (2014) suggests that the habit of stereotyping Muslims and Islam is not a recent issue; it became widespread after the 9/11 Twin Towers incident.

#### **Islamophobia in English Fiction**

Numerous novels tackle Islamophobia in diverse ways. For example, the renowned critic Lindsey Moor critiques a Pakistani Muslim novelist for his 2004 work, "Maps for Lost Lovers." Moor contends that this novel contributes to shaping British Muslim identities in the post-9/11 era. He discusses the impact of Islamophobia on both Muslims and non-Muslims, emphasizing how Aslam, by highlighting Pakistan, links intolerance and violence to Islamic institutions and politics.

There is a growing interest in Anglophone Pakistani fiction, catering to an English-speaking readership interested in the portrayal of Pakistan and Islam in English literature and Western media. This genre portrays Muslims living in Pakistan and in Western non-Muslim countries as a diaspora. Notable novelists and their works in this genre include Muhammad Hanif's "A Case of Exploding Mangoes," Uzma's "Geometry of God," Kamila Shamsie's "The Burnt Shadow," and Mohsin Hamid's widely acclaimed "The Reluctant Fundamentalist." These novels often explore the experiences of Muslim characters in the context of the 9/11 incident. Sometimes, they depict Muslim characters living in Western countries, like Changez in "The Reluctant

## **Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review**

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Fundamentalist," a Pakistani who has migrated to the United States and becomes a representative of the Pakistani diaspora in America.

These writers skillfully blend Western literary styles with Eastern themes, a technique noted by Gayatri Spivak in her book "Death of Discipline."

"Rebounding," authored by Jamilah Kolocotronis, delves into the lives of Muslims against the backdrop of the 9/11 incident. The novel introduces Muslim characters living in America and explores their struggles with fear and insecurity. These characters grapple with conflicting loyalties, torn between their allegiance to America and devotion to their religion. The story also addresses anti-Muslim acts, such as the burning of the Quran and the storming of mosques by the non-Muslim majority, highlighting the fear experienced by Muslims and their families in American society.

In "Rebounding," Kolocotronis aims to portray the concept and consequences of Islamophobia, a prevalent issue in contemporary American society. This is achieved through the narrative of Joshua Adams, a character suffering from an identity crisis while living in America. Joshua faces imprisonment after being falsely accused of involvement with a terrorist organization, "Al-Jahidia," despite being a recent Muslim convert. His situation reflects the xenophobia experienced by converts. Through Joshua's character, the novelist sheds light on the challenges faced by converts living in America. When Joshua's father, who had been in self-exile for thirty years, returns, he reacts to Joshua's reversion with the comment, "Just as long as you don't blow up any buildings."

Likewise, another novel which is to be mentioned here is *Love in a Headscarf* and this is written by British-Pakistani writer Zahra Jan Mohammed. She is a Muslim writer. She has highlighted the problem faced by Muslim women living the Western society. The story is about a Muslim girl who needs a suitable gentleman to marry. After the incident of 9/11 Islam has been considered as an evil and terrorist religion in America. Jan Mohammed speaks about the concept of other users for Muslims. Beside portraying the stereotypical depiction of Muslims, the writer also problematizes the multidimensional realities described by religion she teaches. Sometimes she indulges in supporting religion through her presentation of its practices, while sometimes she becomes critical by challenging religion. In the story,

Love in a headscarf, the writer answers the problem of misunderstanding regarding Islam through selecting a topic which “is the essence of the human condition”. As love is the recurrent theme of this novel, the novelist wants to advise the reader to “reclaim love” as love is responsible for “taking patience, dedication, and selflessness,” and makes our connection with the Omnipotent Allah Almighty. It is propagated by the writer that love has a changing force and through love, the antagonism among communities can be eliminated. Jan Mohammed also wants to eradicate the myth that Muslim woman find their mate and a person to be loved. But due to Islamophobia, she faces problems in doing so.

Furthermore, another novel that is to be discussed here in connection with Islamophobia is *The Size of a Mustard Seed* (2009) written by Umm Juwayriyah. It is about the conventional rivalry between Islam and Christianity which is very ancient and it gains intensity with the incident of 9/11. The mustard seed as the title suggests is shows similarities instead of the discrepancies between Christianity and Islam. There is the story of a girl narrated in this novel whose name is Jameelah. She is a single Muslim girl. She confronts grudge and inequality outside is originated from her home space due to her single status.

The consequences of the event of 9/11 are the main concern while analyzing the character of Jameelah who is twenty-seven years old Muslim girl. She is living in the United States of America. She is the narrator of the novel *The size of a Mustard Seed*. The story of Umm Juwariyah discusses the question of what is the significance of the life of a person who is a Muslim and American simultaneously? The traditional antagonism between two big religions i.e. Christianity and Islam gains its pinnacle after 9/11. She asserts that:

“Believe it or not, there was a time when I wasn’t so uptight and angry. I felt good, and people enjoyed my company. Then life changed. The whole world around me changed. New York City wasn’t the only city affected by 9-11.”

Likewise, the novel *The age of Reinvention* written by Karine Tuil is a beautiful piece of literature that has multiple issues originated from Islamophobia. These issues have been brought to limelight by the novelist through the dialogues of different characters, themes, and actions. Furthermore, the problems related to the hijab, humiliation of Muslims, gender discrimination, and physical as well as

psychological violence experienced by Muslims have been dealt with. The writer has employed dramatic and situational ironies to inject an Islamophobic ideology. Through different characters presented in the novel, she portrayed Muslims as barbaric, fraudulent, sex addicts, primitive, and fanatics. Through the analysis of the novel another ideology can be seen which is Eurocentric and perceives Islam as a religion that teaches violence. Another Islamophobic approach on the part of a novelist is that he has raised feminist issues especially the issue of Hijab. According to the novelist, the patriarchal society of Muslims makes women wear hijab. Women have to wear a hijab and face domestic violence. In addition, she propagated through the novel that Islam is an “unreasonable” religion. Tuil also makes fun of the concept of promising heavenly beautiful women who live in paradise for the men who fight for the cause of Islam or do Jihad. She, through her narrative, wants to highlight that Muslims have several bad traits that cannot be tolerated and these traits are a threat to Western society.

The undertones of the notion of Islamophobia can also be heard in another novel named *A Most Wanted Man* written by John Le Carre. The harsh fact is presented in this novel that is the humiliating and blasphemous approach on the part of western media. Print, as well as electronic media working in the Western countries, is senseless enough to feel the sentiments of the minority. The media works irresponsibly. As a proof, this arrogance on the part of Western media can be assessed through the fact that a Danish newspaper published the blasphemous caricatures of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Under the veil of freedom of speech, the said newspaper hurt the sentiments of Muslims around the world. This irresponsible media is propagating racism and Islamophobia. The presentation of this even can be seen in this novel as: “They were pissed off by a couple of very bad Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed that some German newspapers reprinted because they thought they were being brave and setting us free, okay?”

The above-discussed pieces of fiction reveal how hatred, grudge, and discrimination Muslims have been suffering since 9/11. The novelists also brought to limelight different policies and attitudes of the Western public as well as governmental machinery towards Islam. Muslims suffer a lot in the public life of Western countries in the form of mistrust or non-reliability demonstrated by non-



Muslims. The post 9/11 English fiction gives many pieces of evidence of Islamophobic practices that are faced by both Muslim men and women. Men are being considered as fanatics, disloyal, fraudulent, and terrorists while women because of hijab are perceived as dominated and crushed by Muslim tenets. Veiled women, particularly, are considered ensnared in the cage made by their religion.

### **Islamophobia in Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire**

*Home Fire*, one of Kamila Shamsie's most striking novels is at the seventh number. It was published in 2017 with its typical post 9/11 trends especially the presentation of the notion of Islamophobia and its implication. It is also the retelling of Sophocles' tragedy Antigone which was written in 5th century B.C. The plot of the drama is about the girl who buries the dead body of her brother which is restricted by the ruler of Thebes, Creon, who disapproves proper burial on the soil of the state because it is supposed to invite the wrath of their gods and catastrophes.

The novel *Home Fire* was nominated for the award of Booker Prize. This is the story of a Muslim family. The head of the family Adil Pasha, though an absent character has died before the action of the novel takes place. He was a jihadi and was killed during being shifted to Guantanamo. His three children are Londoner-Pakistani, the eldest of them is Isma who is a university student. When the novel opens she is ready to leave her family to pursue her aim to do a Ph.D. in America. She is a sensible and mature girl. She has a younger sister named Aneeka who is only 19 years old and she is the student of Law in a university in London. Aneeka has a twin brother whose name is Pervaiz who has been brainwashed by Farooq a recruiter of ISIS, and after getting knowledge about the reality of the jihadis organization, Pervaiz wants to leave but is murdered. There is another important character whose name is Eamonn, he loves Isma and finally dies with Isma at the ending of the novel.

The action of the novel takes place in 2015 and the novelist narrates the tale of the dispersion of a family. The two male members of the family die due to the influence of Islamophobia. Similarly, another character Eamonn also dies only due to the government's obsession with Islamophobia. The Islamophobic atmosphere has been created by the novelist at the very beginning of the novel when Isma wants to leave and is interrogated at the airport only because she is a Muslim. Her young brother has also been the victim of Islamophobic waves. He was persuaded by a

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recruiter of ISIS Farooq and he goes to join ISIS media wing in Raqqa.

The period of the novel is 2014-15 and it is set in most of the time in Britain, shortly in a part of America and finally in Karachi. And the political scenario of the time was in 2014 a time when there was Theresa May, as the Home Secretary in London. The time of the action of the novel was that when the government of England was very conscious about the certificate of citizenship for the people who were suspected as terrorists. At first, only those who had dual nationality were considered skeptical and being watched. Then the people who claimed to be the inhabitant of another homeland could be denaturalized. And under conceivable circumstances, the state is supposed to declare its citizens as stateless. Some days before and after May called for the authority of Home secretary, she sent vans in different parts of London which had billboards directing the illegal immigrants “Citizens of Nowhere” that they were supposed to quit England or confront imprisonment. The time, about which this novel has been written, was the year 2014 when the militants or extremist groups were claiming to establish their so-called Islamic State in Raqqa. It was the time of 2014 when the Islamic State.

In this novel, the obsession of Islamophobia has degenerated the government of Britain to such an extent that, the Home Secretary of the state cannot tolerate a young man who is harmless and who is good but he considers every Muslim a terrorist. In the novel Pervaiz is misguided but when he comes to know the reality of jihadis he wants to return. But all the doors of return have been closed off to this youngster. This is an awful fact that is presented by Shamsie that the western people are so much under the influence of fear that they do not even appreciate their loyal citizens. They consider all Muslims as jihadis.

The novel also highlights the fact that Muslims who live in Britain are terrified and frightened to such an extent that they keep the secrets of their family with them and do not reveal before the governmental law enforcement agencies. The reason is that if they disclose their loyalty towards Islam or the inclination of their family member towards Jihadis organizations, they will have to pay for it. In this novel, Aneeka is a very careful Muslim girl who wants to keep the secret of her brother's joining ISIS but when her elder sister Isma tells the police Aneeka replies:

“You betrayed us, both of us. And then you tried to hide it from me. Don't call, don't

## **Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review**

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text, don't send the pictures, don't fly across the ocean, and expect me to ever agree to see your face again. We have no sister. (195).

The close spellings similarity with the names of characters of Sophocles: Isma—Ismene; Aneeka— Antigone; Parvaiz—Polyneices; Karamat—Creon; and Eamonn—Haemon, are deliberately used by Shamsie. Shamsie in order to show the similarity of socio-political scenario of Thebes and England which is affected by murder, incest, pollution, and plague. The situation presented by Sophocles is the same like the current socio-political scene of post- 9/11 affected by the opposed social reactions like Islamophobia, fundamentalism, extremism, and Terrorism. According to some critics, Shamsie seems to be influenced by Jean Anouilh's adaptation of Antigone. According to Sophocles, Antigone is the elder sister while Anouilh deliberately reversed the birth sequence of the two sisters.

Through this novel, it has been discussed that Muslims living in a different part of the world especially in liberal democracies seem to undergo various forms of continuous monitoring or observation. Isma, while entering America, is interrogated as if she was a terrorist. For instance, the text in the browser history which is being investigated shows a funny strange perception regarding GWM "googling while Muslim" (65). It is due to her father's 'jihadi' image that it becomes a daily routine for them to be investigated in this way.

Despite presenting the fear about Islam, Kamila Shamsie, through this novel, wants to unveil the true face of jihadis organizations like Al Qaeda, ISIS, Tehreek Taliban, etc. She strives to highlight the fact that such organizations use the name of Islam but inwardly they are terrorists and against the preaching of Islam. These organizations are funded by some hostile agencies who want to blacken the status of Muslims and present Muslims as terrorists. In this novel, ISIS is presented as capturing the young Muslims and train them to perform terrorist activities. Pervaiz in the novel is the victim who is misguided by such terrorist department.

Islamophobia has made citizenship of the dual nationals particularly Muslims a problem. They have been declared terrorists and they are denied the nationality of Britain. Pervaiz's dead body is not allowed to be buried in the soil of England. Karamat, as secretary of the state, "revoked the citizenship of all dual nationals who have left Britain to join our enemies". Karamat very proudly declared that "Pervys

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Pasha's body will be repatriated to his home nation, Pakistan", as the government "will not let those who turn against the soil of Britain in their lifetime sully that very soil in death". This is very harsh and fanatic and this divides further the society into groups: one group is of Isma whose member find themselves helpless, have the sympathies for Aneeka and Pervaiz and consider them innocent. "Shame on you, Mr. Home Secretary...! Give us our boy to bury, give his mother the company of her son in the grave". Above all, the other category has the people like the wife of Karamat Lone. According to her Karamat is a selfish person and an "arrogant idiot. She rebukes Karamat is such words: "I'm talking about a nineteen-year-old, rotting in the sun while his sister watches, out of her mind with grief. He's dead already; can't you leave him alone?"

Furthermore, Hijab is one of the basic practices of Muslim women, but British society obsessed with Muslim fear of Islamophobia victimizes the Muslim women who wear Hijab. At public places, Muslim women are ridiculed because of their appearance or wearing of Hijab. According to several recent surveys even the educational institutions of the West direct Hijab wearing girls not to wear it anymore otherwise they shall be fined or restricted to continue their studies. In this novel, Aneeka is spitted by a stranger for her Muslim appearance at railway station. On seeing Aneeka depressed Eamonn asks her: 'Does anyone give you a hard time because of hijab?'(90)

Karamat Lone, however, is a liberal kind of person who is the representation of a certain type of Muslims who want to save their skin by showing loyalty towards the British state. This is how he has attained the position of home secretary. He has a liberal view about religion and does not follow Islam in a real sense. He is not in favor of women who observe Hijab and lead Islamic life. His son Eamonn, while insisting on his marriage with a Muslim girl of his choice, describes the qualities of Aneeka in front of his father in the following words: 'She prays. Not five times a day, but every morning first thing. Doesn't drink or eat pork. She fasts during Ramzan. Wears a hijab.'(106) Karamat Lone replies:

'Anyway, if she is only nineteen, I suspect she can be persuaded out of the hijab in time. Get your sister to take her off to the hair salon next time she comes to visit.'(107)

Another important effect of Islamophobia is that when youngsters are dissatisfied with the inability of the state to provide due facilities, they easily become the victim of the masterminds of the terrorist organizations like ISIS. It is human psychological fact that when disillusioned people are given some better opportunity, they welcome better things instead of former ones. British society, as well as governments, remain unsuccessful to provide the Muslim minority access to better opportunities. Thus, young teenagers become disillusioned. Pervaiz Pasha in the novel is a teenaged young boy. He is entrapped by the representative and recruiter of ISIS Farooq who seems to promise a better welfare state. He convinces Parvaiz as:

‘There is a place like that we can go now. A place where migrants coming in to join are treated like kings, given more in benefits than the locals to acknowledge all they’ve given up to reach there.’(144)

### **Conclusion**

In short, Kamila Shamsie's novel "Home Fire" presents a compelling narrative rife with compelling evidence that underscores the pervasive influence of Islamophobia on the characters. The Pasha family, central to the story, encounters a series of hardships and discrimination at the hands of a British system deeply entrenched in Islamophobia, leading to their tragic disintegration. While the novel's first half primarily focuses on their intimate family tragedy with subtle political undertones, the second half takes an unexpected turn, revealing that this tragedy extends beyond one family. It becomes emblematic of the struggles faced by Muslim immigrants living in Western countries.

The male members of the Pasha family meet grim fates—Adil Pasha while being transferred to Guantanamo, and Pervaiz falling into terrorist custody. Meanwhile, the female members endure their own ordeals; Aneeka is forced into self-exile to secure her brother's proper burial, and Isma must relocate to America. Consequently, the entire family undergoes a heartbreaking disintegration.

Beyond the Pasha family's suffering, even those liberal Muslims who have embraced non-Muslim British culture fall victim to the scourge of Islamophobia. Karamat Lone, a representative of this group, also experiences the shattering of his family's peace, culminating in the loss of his only son by the novel's end.

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