

# Exploration of Re-Oriental Tendencies in Shamsie's Burnt Shadows and Home Fire: Re-Orientalization of the Orient

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## Abstract

*Re-orientalization of the modern orient has become a new phenomenon in South Asian Literature. This research tended to analyze the re-oriental tendencies in Shamsie's critically acclaimed novels Burnt Shadows and Home Fire. Lau's (2009) framework of Re-Orientalism was selected for the analysis along with the basic concepts of Said's (1979) Orientalism. Within this framework, the researcher selected ten random samples from both novels for textual analysis. The analysis reveals that the modern orient encounters more hate and prejudice in the host country for being an orient and a diaspora Muslim. The new orient has been labeled as a terrorist under the concept of Islamophobia. This representation, interestingly, was not given by the Occident but by the postcolonial writer itself. Post-9/11 fiction highlights the settling issues of the modern orients significantly which make it different from the traditional ways of writing. A linguistic and pragmatic analysis of both novels can be done. Both novels can be compared in terms of similarities and differences in the linguistic styles of diasporic male authors.*

**Keywords:** *Burnt Shadows, Home Fire, Orientalism, Re-orientalism, South Asian Diasporic Literature*

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## Introduction

Postcolonial literature in Pakistan in English emerged to resist colonization and its impacts even in the postmodern era. The authors of postcolonial literature seem to condemn the hegemony and prejudice

of the colonizers during the British Raj. South Asian literature throws light on the issues like cultural hybridity, dislocation, diaspora, and orientalism which are the main features of postcolonial literature. A grave and deep study of Shamsie's fiction proves its roots in South Asian

Literature. These writers from South Asia share political, cultural, and identity issues of diaspora families residing in the host countries in their writings. World War II impacted the thought process of these authors and their orientation. As Muneeza Shamsie (2008) states,

“World War II and the compromising situation left its effects on the writing and the orientation of the narrative. Pakistani writers use English as a language of creativity that resides between the East and the West. So, they write in its full extreme by using figurative to convey their voices to be heard” (1).

Rudyard Kipling (1889) wrote a ballad entitled “The Ballad of East and West” in which he has described the concept of “Us” vs “Them” in the following manner:

“Oh, East is East, and West is West,  
and never the twain shall meet.

Till Earth and Sky stand presently at  
God's great Judgement Seat.”

Orientalism is known as a masterpiece of Edward Said (1979) to dig out the differences between the East and the West. It creates a

stereotypical series of representations about the Orient by the Occident. McLeod (2000) argues that the most obvious concept given by the theory of Orientalism lies its basis in “binary oppositions” which is a clear division between the East and the West. Riaz and Ahmed (2020) hold a strong debate on representing the Orient for the West and the West by mentioning that these fixed representations of the Orient have created an unchangeable discourse that makes them exotic and barbaric. Re-Orientalism extends the ground for defining the Orient that was early defined by Said (1979). Lau (2009) in her theory of Re-orientalism defines that the modern orient is now defined and redefined by the diaspora authors themselves rather than the west. The modern East has compromised on defining the new or modern Orient on Western terms to grab the western metropolis readers. These writers have adopted one of the approaches that are faulty in their writing process is their “inclination towards the generalization and totalization with sweeping statements about the Orient” (584).

Kamila Shamsie is known as a renowned South Asian female

diaspora author who brings forth the issues of diaspora communities living abroad. The study takes up her critically acclaimed novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and award-winning novel *Home Fire* (2017). Both novels reflect all the tendencies of Re-Orientalism in the postcolonial era. She represents the picture of modern orients who are submissive, marginalized and considered terrorists because of their orient descent and religion. *Burnt Shadows* (2009) explores certain apprehensions and miseries of the diasporic characters after 9/11 who faced American hegemony and cultural imperialism. On the other side, *Home Fire* (2017) is truly an oriental novel highlighting the terrible experiences of three modern orients in England. The characters are not supported by the state even though they have been a part of the state throughout their whole lives. They are labeled “others” and “terrorists”.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The modern Orient in today's world is facing more troubles and challenges than before in the host countries. Colonialism has a deep imprint in the 21st century. The orient

of the colonial era has become the new or modern Orient with diverse challenges of Islamophobia and identity. Postcolonial literature written by women is highlighting the significant problems of diaspora men and women living in the west. Their lives are getting affected by the stigma of terrorists and “Other”, disqualifying them to claim their birth right despite being citizens of the western metropolis. The present study creates a diverse angle by analyzing the orient as represented by Shamsie in her both novels, *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and *Home Fire* (2017).

The basic objective of the study was to deconstruct and locate the re-oriental tendencies in the narrative of both the selected novels. A research question was formulated on the basis of the designed objective to be achieved:

1. How does the narrative of the selected novels reflect the re-oriental tendencies?

This study holds much significance as it discusses the issues of diaspora and orient in the postcolonial age to reveal how the orient is being re-orientalied by the

South Asian authors. The representation has now shifted from the occident to the orient themselves. Lau's (2009) Re-Orientalism fulfils the purpose of this study by serving as a theoretical framework. The representation of Orients is more in the hands of South Asian authors residing in the west for years (584). The 9/11 Re-Orientalism has become a popular phenomenon in non-fictional writing in the present time. The study contributes a significant part to the literary world as it explores the problems of modern orients after the 9/11 incident.

### **Literature Review**

This section of the research paper provides details and reviews of the previous research about Orientalism and after 9/11 Re-Orientalism in South Asian Literature by the diaspora writers.

Said (1979) states that Orientalism can be called a tradition that takes the responsibility of describing the non-Whites and Orients. This idea of Orientalism generalizes the images of the Orient in an exotic way by the Occident. It

came forward as an "imaginative geography" in which the orient is barbaric, uncivilized, and ruthless. Women are oppressed in their veils. This whole attitude of the Occident towards the Orient creates the binary opposition of "us" vs "them". The lens through which the west creates the boundaries and defines the East as ruthless and heartless is "Orientalism".

Lau (2009) claims that the East has come to western terms while representing the image of the modern orient. Orientalism can-not be seen as a dominant phenomenon by the Occident or the non-Oriental. This role of representing Orients has been fully taken by the diasporic writers. This process is basically Re-Orientalism. Now, South Asian writers are more in power and authority in the literal representations of the Orient. The concept of Re-Orientalism comes forward in form of generalization and totalization. Women diasporic authors are more in dominance to explain and represent the sensitivity, expectations, and perceptions of Asian women in their writings.

Lau and Mendes (2011) explain the process of orientalizing the orient from the viewpoint of the Occident by the diasporic writers. The Orientals are seen as more involves in this process of representing themselves. The diasporic writers have become a constant source of representing Asians and their cultural values on their own terms.

Sharma (2014) argues that Europe is encountering issues of assimilating migrants into their own culture. Migrants are always “Others” for the west who cannot be well settled in the host countries. The cultural, political, economic, and social differences are creating friction between the orient and the occident.

Lau and Mendes (2018) did a comparative analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* novel and then the movie adaptation of the novel to explore the 9/11 re-orientalist tendencies. They took the temporal axis covering the years 2001-2007-2009 to highlight how the west has changed its behavior towards Pakistan. The novel begins seven years prior to 9/11 and it was published after seven years of the

9/11 incident whereas the movie was created in 2012. Both the novel and the movie reveal the Muslims as Orient and the wide gap between both nations that is not easy to be covered. The Muslims remain deviant “others” and they have been re-orientalized in all spheres of life. This gap is becoming wider with the passing of time which creates divisions between the east and the west.

Rizwan (2019) states that the mass media is putting its contributing to stereotyping the images of the orients to distort the real essence of their past and cultural values. Her research work entitled “Depiction of Identity in *Burka Avenger: A Re-orientalist Exploration*” highlights the role of media in presenting the stereotypical negative images of a nation. The ineffective role of the mass media is distorting the cultural values of Pakistan.

Yuin (2019) analyzed Martel’s *Life of Pi* by using Said’s (1979) Orientalism and Lau’s Re-Orientalism (2009) to find out the ways the narrative of the novel uses exoticism. Pi represents a modern orient whose identity is not stable in

the west for being a diaspora man. He, as the protagonist of the novel, encounters identity and cultural issues. The story of Pi as a survivor reveals his efforts of being a true western man. Orientalism and Re-orientalism go side by side in the narrative of the story.

Karagoz and Boynukara (2019) opine that two different generations of Orients possess different characteristics and values that cannot be compromised or adapted by the both. In their study of Lahiri's *The Namesake*, they analyzed two generations of India by using Lau's model of Re-Orientalism. The results show that the generations of Orients living in South Asia are chained in many conflicts with their elders who are considered orthodox. The new generation of the orient does not want to adopt the cultural values of their ancestors. They are moving towards modernization that is creating space for the new Orient. The first generation is conventional and traditional in their values, culture, and progress. On the other hand, the second generation seems more inclined towards western ethics and

values, setting new meanings for their own lives without others' interference. The gap between these two generations is getting intense.

Riaz and Ahmed (2020) have probed the idea that re-orientalizing Afghans in Afghanistan is due to the international conflicts that make a space for the world to exercise its power and hegemony over the weakest. The study analyzes Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* (2008) to search for the tormented and distorted voices of voiceless Afghan women. Considering Lau's Re-Orientalism (2009) and Dirlik's Self-Orientalism (1996), the analysis shows that the portrayal of the orient is based on colonial perspectives. The stigma of "Us" vs "Them" is the production of the colonial age that can be witnessed up till now.

Saeed and Ain (2020) studied the Orients represented by the writers in the same ways the West wants to represent them deliberately. The normalization of the Orient is continued as a primitive and submissive entity. The binary relationship between Occident and

Orient is the same as the colonizer, and the colonized share the relationship of superiority and inferiority. Colonized communities are degraded and disrespected in all walks of life. The study reveals that the glorification of this status is done by the Orient itself in the postcolonial era. South Asian authors play a vital role to depict women as seductive, tempting, shy, and submissive which is no doubt stereotypical. All the short stories of *Austenistan* tend to have re-oriental images of the orients.

Weiss (2021) states that Home Fire (2017) can be seen as a polyphonic novel by the way it is representing and re-crafting the modern form of the Greek tragedy, *Antigone*. It adapts postcolonial themes such as disturbed and conflicted identities of Asians, citizenship issues, discrimination, and suppression.

Abbasi et al. (2021) have explored that Orient and the new Orient are encountering similar issues, particularly among diaspora women. This qualitative study highlights that women of both eras have been subjugated and oppressed

due to their Asian backgrounds. Patriarchy chains their liberty and identity. Orients are taken as “Others” by the Occident. Women are more mysterious, and cowardly in both colonial and postcolonial eras. They are rather detached from the modern society in which they have been living for years. Hence, their representation has become stereotypical and less authentic.

Ullah et al (2021) opine that the colonial efforts of stereotyping the East, suppressing people, and labeling them as terrorists and backward haven’t come to an end with the end of the colonial era. Their study analyzing *Blasphemy* using Lau’s conceptual framework of re-Orientalism explores that the negative marketing of the new orient is progressing in the western literary markets by East’s own writers brought up and experienced their lives in the West.

This study aimed to explore the visible and drastic changes in the roles and positions of the new Orients living in the west.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Lisa Lau’s (2009) “Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and

Development of Orientalism by "Orientals" is basically the extended explanation and form of Said's (1978) Orientalism which defines the thin line between the east and the west where they are on the verge of unambiguous binary oppositions: superiority vs inferiority. Lau (2009) explains the phenomenon of the re-orientalist approach with particular reference to the South Asian social contexts that are being written in English. South Asian authors re-orientalize the image of the orients more in terms of deterioration rather than representing their particularities. This situation arises the enigma of authenticity. The role of developing the extreme binaries of "Orients" vs "Occident" itself is the self-conscious efforts of the Asian writers (572). The diasporic authors hold absolute power when the matters of construction of images and representations of the Orients arise.

### **Methodology**

Kothari (2017) elaborates on research methodology as a way of solving selected research problems systematically. This research is based upon the qualitative research method

which follows the interpretive paradigm to interpret the selected data. Textual analysis was chosen for this purpose as the selected material was in textual form. Belesy (2013) states that textual analysis is obviously helpful for the researcher because its main focus is on the in-depth study of the selected characters in association with social and cultural values.

The excerpts for the research were selected from the two novels by Kamila Shamsie, the South Asian diasporic writer. These novels are entitled "Burnt Shadows (2009) and "Home Fire (2017). The story of both novels revolves around the major issues of the new orients in the west. The selected novels are written by the same writer with a gap of nine years between them. The author reflects on how issues of diaspora Muslim men and women are getting more intense with the passage of time. The postcolonial era brings forth the identity and stability issues of the new generation residing in the west. The sampling of the data was done through purposive sampling. Ten excerpts from each of the novels were chosen for the textual analysis from

the perspective of Lau's (2009) *Re-Orientalism*.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the excerpts from both novels is given in the following interpretation.

#### **Burnt Shadows (2009)**

The postcolonial period throws light on the resistance element in literature and highlights the oppressed and marginalized orients through writings. The novel describes the condition and position of the Orientals who served the English in India during colonization. Sajjad, one of the prominent characters of the novel works at Burton's who is an English family and is fond of poetry. In Shamsie's (2009) he wonders, "if there was a couplet to be written about pigeons and the Indians who worked for the English" (34). Being oriental, he is not a respectable and acknowledgeable human. He is the least liked by Elizabeth Burton.

This dominant conduct presses down his abilities and the authenticity of a being. His inner self is brutally crushed by this British Raj. The protagonist of the novel, Hiroko, symbolizes east Orientals who are of no

worth. After the bombing on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Hiroko loses her fiancé and flies to India where she is welcomed by the Burtons. Her character shows resistance as she tries to get out of the pitiable circumstances. Her character puts James in thought as he is "oddly perturbed by this woman whom he couldn't place. Indian, German, English or the Americans..." (46).

She meets Sajjad and is brave enough again to fall in love with him outside of religious boundaries. But Sajjad knows his limits and explains to her that "I could see you were going to speak to me as an equal. They would have held it against both of us. You would not have been asked to stay" (60) he brings Lau's (2009) concept to reality that the west never treats the east equally and respectfully. It has always been an effort of taming the orientals as if they were barbaric or animals.

On the other hand, Hiroko shows how she is told by an American staff member with an innocent face at the airport that the bombing on Japan was "a terrible

thing, but it had to be done to save American's lives" (62).

America was the country she abhors the most but she also chooses to live at the end in New York. The worst instability of the Orient shown in the novel is at the turning point where Elizabeth accuses Sajjad of raping Hiroko without any proof. Although Hiroko explains that he isn't "an animal, a rapist" (105), no one believes her. Further, the novel reveals that the orient doesn't deserve even an apology from the Occident for their misconduct. As Sajjad says to James "you are right. It is not the question of nation. It's of the class. You would have apologized if I'd been to Oxford" (111). Here, Sajjad reflects Oxford as a symbol of status.

The novel further explains the status of new Orients among Occident. Sajjad and Hiroko's son, Raza, face identity issues when Harry, the son of James, wants to give him a designation at the CIA. Steve can't accept this because of his Asian and Orient background. He shared his views with Harry:

You are an idiot to hire these third country nationalists. Economically, sure, I see the sense. But stop recruiting them from Pakistan and Bangladesh. You are acting as if this were a territorial war and they're neutral parties. Go with guys from Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Philippines. Indians are OK, so long they aren't Muslims. (280)

Raza's Asian background with Muslim identity makes him the new orient who is not acceptable by the west. He is always judged by his parental links to Pakistan and Islam. He is labelled as a terrorist even and is made to move to Guantanamo Bay.

### **Home Fire (2017)**

Home Fire shares the same themes of identity and stability issues of the Orients. The new generation suffers more than the previous one as depicted in the story. All three main characters of the story are the new generation of orients with different aptitudes though suffer the same dilemma of being orients. One of the protagonists of the novel, Isma, goes through possible complications in life

because of her Asian diaspora background. Although she is born and raised in London, her identity is questioned all the time. When she decides to leave for America for her PhD, she is in hot waters at the airport where she faces a long and tiring interrogation. As Shamsie states “she had expected the interrogation but not the hours of investigation that proceed it” (3) she has to justify that she has never been into any criminal activity and she is much loyal to Britain. Things goes complicated due to her hijab also which is a symbol of threat and terror.

Diaspora Muslim women are more marginalized and suppressed due to two main reasons. Firstly, they are of Asian background, and secondly, they are women of Muslim identity. Before leaving for the airport, her younger sister Aneeka told her to remain silent as much as possible because “the more you said, and the more guilty you sounded” (4). This visibly depicts Lau’s (2009) notion of Re-Orientalism where neo-orientals are not free rather, they are chained with the invisible chains of identity crisis and the core theme of

“Others”. The investigator asks her whether she considers herself British. This is ironic as she is born and grown up there. So, what is the need of the hour to prove her citizenship and loyalty? To which she replies peacefully that she completely belongs to England.

On the contrary, Aneeka seems to be rather more smart, practical, and known to the western culture. She is pursuing her law degree. But her character isn’t void of troubles and hardships for being a diaspora woman. She puts herself in more trials when she decides to bring her brother, Parvaiz, to home who is declared a terrorist by the state for assisting ISI. Isma wants her to realize that “we are in no position to let the state question our loyalties”. Aneeka who seems to be smarter is compelled in front of her brother’s love and goes against the state which results in death for both.

Her twin, Parvaiz, is a boy of carefree nature in the beginning who earns the title of a terrorist for himself as the story proceeds. He is another example of a new orient being suppressed in the west. They are left

alone by their father at a very young age, brought up by Isma, and later on excluded her from their private matters. Isma's father leaves the house to join ISI and later is found at Guantanamo Bay and finally dies. Her grandmother wants to search for her son but can't because the Imam Masjid tells her that "the British Government would withdraw all the benefits of the welfare state..." (49). Lau (2009) expresses that the new orients are of no significance in the west as they are merely being treated as an object. There can be seen as a wide gap and binary opposition between the "Us" vs "Them".

Like her grandmother, Isma wants to save her sister from the troubles of the state but can't. Parvaiz is entangled by his father's fast friend, Farooq who brainwashes him by telling him about the adventures of his father and makes him feel ashamed of his cowardly attitude. Finally, he is entitled as a terrorist after his visit to Syria. He is "the terrorist son of the terrorist father" (171) consequently, Aneeka is declared a terrorist too as she wants her brother back home. Both meet a

terrible ending and pay the price of their being Orients.

## **Results and Discussion**

The concept of hegemony and power are the influential ones described by Said (1979) and extended by Lau (2009) to define the role of power and powerlessness between the "Orient" and the "Occident". Lau's Re-orientalism has found new ways to put forward the distorted images of the orients by the west. These images are reflected by South Asian female writers. The formulated research question has answered the way the narratives highlight the re-oriental tendencies.

## **Diasporic Identities of the Orients**

Burnt Shadows (2009) deals with two generations facing the same dilemma of identity and stability in the west for being an Orient. While the first generation including Hiroko and Sajjad resists the stereotypical roles of the Orients in the west. Despite all the resilience, Hiroko's son Raza meets all the sad happenings in the novel for being the son of a woman with an orient background. Hiroko is seen as a diaspora woman

everywhere she travels to. She detests the word “*Hibakusha*”, a term particularly used for the bomb attack survivors. But people are more biased.

The narrative of *Home Fire* (2017) is more intense in nature. All three characters suffer sadly because of their orient descent. Both diaspora men and women are tortured, ridiculed, and humiliated. Aneeka is punished for supporting her twin brother Parvaiz. She goes against the laws and the state goes against her. When she protests against the state. She makes headlines in the newspaper as “she was barking up the wrong tree...daughter and sister of a Muslim terrorist, with history of secret sex life -the exclusive story of *Knickers Pasha*” (204).

### **Orient as an Outsider**

Orients are always outsiders to the west no matter how long they have been part of that place. Hiroko in *Burnt Shadows* (2009) remains an orient woman and this identity affects her son too. Hiroko and Sajjad are in love which is strongly opposed by Elizabeth because he is an “outsider”. Sajjad and Burtons represent two

worlds that can't come close together. Forster's (1942) novel *The Passage to India* depicts the same: “The Englishman and the Indian wanted to embrace. But the land, the sky, and the horses didn't want. So, they are kept at a distance” (111).

On the other side, *Home Fire* (2017) tends to explore the difficulties of Orients living in the west depicting the miseries and misfortunes of the Pasha Siblings who always remained significant “Others” in the west. Isma suffers loneliness and tries to pursue her PhD degree but faces discrimination in return. She is interrogated at the airport if she were a criminal. Parvaiz is declared a terrible terrorist by the state whose dead body isn't even allowed to enter the state where he is born and grown up. Aneeka's support towards Parvaiz leads her to endless troubles. She is pronounced a woman of loose character and seductive to Eamonn. She protests to bring Parvaiz's body back to England which results in her own death. All the characters meet disastrous and sad endings because they are the least valued orients.

### **Conclusion**

Characters of both the novels are projected by Shamsie in such a way that the reader can find themselves as an eyewitness of the scenes. The notable dimension of Re-Orientalism is found in both novels through different series of events. The 9/11 has made the situation worse for the Asian Muslims who are known as diaspora in the western countries they live in. *Burnt Shadows* (2009) replicates the identity issues of Sajjad, Hiroko, and Raza at different levels. The old and the new generation face the same problems of orientalism. *Home Fire* (2017) reveals how the west can detach even those orients who are born, and brought up there. Even after having the rights of citizenship, they need to prove their loyalties whenever demanded.

This study is limited to the two novels of the same author who belongs to the age of post-colonialism. The study was based on the analysis of the selected narratives from both novels. However, the character of Raza in *Burnt Shadows* (2009) is multi-shaded that can be analyzed psychologically and

linguistically. Both novels can be compared and contrasted in terms of their linguistic and social elements.

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