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# Research Innovator

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Editor-In-Chief  
Prof. K.N. Shelke

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A detailed still-life composition featuring a white quill pen as the central focus. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged, yellowed parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder casts a warm glow. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside sits on a wooden surface, alongside a red wax seal and a small wooden object. The overall scene evokes a sense of traditional scholarship and research.

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**A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed  
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**Home as the Location of History: Reading Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron***

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**Mansi Chauhan***Research Scholar, Department of English, KSKV Kachchh University, Bhuj, Kachchh, (Gujarat) India***Abstract**

The proposed research paper aims to trace the trajectory of Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 through Kamila Shamsie's novel *Salt and Saffron*. It examines the mysterious and fascinating anecdotes of a powerful Dard-e-Dil family and its divide which signifies the divided and distressed nation. This partitioned family stands for the partitioned nation; the rupture deeply affects the family like a nation which is haunted by this tragic history that is alive in minds of people even after the decades. The research paper explores the ways in which the story of Dard-e-Dil family reflects and echoes the history of nation.

**Key Words:** Nation, History, Home, Partition, Dard-e-Dil, Kamila Shamsie.

*"Ye daaghdaaghjaalaa, ye shab-gazidasahar;*

*Vointizaarthaajis-kaa, ye vosahar to nahin."*

- *Subh-e-Azaadi* by Faiz Ahmad Faiz

(This mottled dawn; This night-bitten morning;

No, this is not the morning; We have had set out in search of.) (qtd. in Hasan)

**Introduction**

The nation had subjected to numerous disturbances and became the prey of negative forces marking human beings with the tragic seal of destruction and Partition was a major event in the history of sub-continent when the nation went through inevitable and continual turbulence. The author tells the history of nation interlinked with Darde-e-Dil family in form of various stories of this aristocratic and eccentric clan that portray the rich and jovial history and its tragic turn, the division that re-designed their lives. Through many narratives of her family's history, she hints at the larger tale of a partitioned nation.

**Personal Stories Depicting National History**

Kamila Shamsie's novel *Salt and Saffron* which gained a place in Orange's list of '21 Writers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' portrays different phases of the Indian sub-continent. Spanning from Muslim invasion to division and globalization, a family in a novel persistently signifies the nation and particularly, Kamila's treatment of history, class, customs and gender is appealing and engaging. The novel doesn't mere chronicles or gives journalistic details on the events but focuses on the humanitarian aspect by viewing the past in the larger perspective; traces the unsaid and unseen of the past and shed light on new perspectives of the Indian history. The "not-quite-twins" who were the curse on a family and the cause of separation symbolises fissures in the united nation as Pandey argues in *Remembering Partition*:

*Violence, Nationalism and History in India:* Communities of shared, inherited cultures – bonded by common memories and ‘irrational’ rituals, themselves contested and variously interpreted. (Pandey, 8) They were poles apart who had different perspectives and supported two different political parties which remind the rise of political upheaval in mid-forties and the beginning of division. Their disagreement intensifies by turning into the combat and family members were obliged to take sides:

“the two brothers (Taimur now ling gone) disagreed politically. Akbar was a leaguer, Sulaiman was a Congress man. One believed that Nehru and the Congress were dangerously power-hungry; the other believed the same of Jinnah and the League. The brothers fought; the fighting turned bitter. The whole family Pakistan camp and India camp.” (Shamsie, 164)

This hostility developed in a family is not just a personal account but describes an aggression spread thorough the country and the way it increases and leads to the marking of borders, the bloody history of the subcontinent. The cracks in a royal and unified family portray the ‘cracking India’ and its consequences, physical and psychological cracks which has been remained unhealed. Man was exceeded by events he couldn’t control and carried away like a wisp of straw that had resigned him to undergoing them. As the whole family was divided into two camps, India and Pakistan, the nation was also split into two parts, both fighting against each other:

“When Partition actually took place,

one country coming to life on 14 August, the other on 15 August, the Dard-e-Dils sighed, said, ‘Born on opposite sides of midnight like Akbar and Sulaiman,’ and took that as a sign that the family rift was inevitable. It was the curse of the not-quietes raining down on the Dard-e-Dils yet again, except this time, instead of losing land, wealth or architectural plans, they were losing each other.” (Shamsie, 164)

Aliya, the narrator and explorer of the mysterious history of Dard-e-Dil clan, represents the third generation affected by the bygone era and attempts to unveil the history, the past which is present, still living in people’s mind. However, the history turns out be more complex and intricate than Aliya assumes when she was bitterly alienated by her relatives but inclines more about her family’s tangled accounts, particularly her grandmother’s life and the three brothers divided during the division. Partition brought abrupt change in the family like the nation, which was transformed by this metamorphosis. The mysterious anecdotes of a powerful Dard-e-Dil family and its disintegration signifies the fragmented and disturbed nation. Aliya bitterly states: “Don’t you see that history has left us behind? [...] ‘The other not-quietes shaped history; we are shaped by it. We have no power except over our own life.”(Shamsie, 168)

This segregated family stands for the broken nation; this ripping apart still profoundly impacts the family like the sub-continent haunted by the awful days and incapable of coming out those hard times. The story of a

family in the larger context replicates and mirrors the history of a nation. The 'not-quites'— Akbar and Sulaiman are representative of India and Pakistan and other family members were obliged to choose are spokespersons of the citizens who were compelled to make a choice of their nationality. Like the country, people also gained new national identities; family members were uprooted and received new labels, Indians and Pakistanis. Reshaping of Darde-e-Dil family pictures is the re-forming of the nation in terms of both, geographically and historically because this was not just a geographical divide but the borders were drawn also in minds which are not erased yet. Aliya and the reader gradually realize that these untold stories points towards the unseen boundaries existing between family members that have been still a barrier in re-uniting them:

“Perhaps there is no escape from wounding memories. Time was, I thought time was all it took to move on. But how could I be a part of my family and believe that? We are all the walking wounded.” (Shamsie, 33)

### **Divided Home, Divided Nation**

The history and heritage of hundred years was coupled with home and family which was broken at the time of Partition. Home is the signification of nation-space in the novel and the borders drawn in a home defines the border of a nation. Home was divided into two parts and some family members parted with their home, migrated and this departure resulted in the loss of their identity and the sense of belonging. “Pakistan isn't as obvious as America. Our love stories are all about pining and separation and tiny

gestures assuming grand sacrifice.” (Shamsie, 99) The battle in the home/nation resulted in a black chapter of the history of nation and a clan. At the time of Partition, leaving a home meant leaving a nation which gave permanent scars on the psyche of people. Aliya wonders; “That whole generation of my relatives mystified me. How had they sustained, for so long, the bitterness brought on by the events of 1947?” (Shamsie, 33)

Home is associated with culture, heritage and most importantly with the history in the context of this novel. Home is a space where this magnificent private as well as national history is blended with joy and sorrow is preserved. The author interlinks the private space of home with the public space of nation by interweaving the events occurred in both the spaces. The incidence that takes place in a home is the resonance of the national events, its twist and turns that shook the nation. Tearing apart of home and its loss of coherence reverberates the split of nation, its loss of the unity, wholeness and oneness. Home is the miniature of the nation and the incidence takes place in home reflects the events of the country, the turning points of the history. The chaos and uproar that shook the nation ended with bloody and violent days. The amalgamation of the personal and public history conveys the collective experience and the macrocosm of Indian history that is looked through domestic history. Home is the connotation used for the nation and its breakdown pictures the falling and ruptured nation as the novel blends the private and fictional with public and historical. Division of home implies the divided landscape resulted in chaos and



unresolved conflict. The borders which were drawn in a home mark the boundaries of the nation leaving the permanent scars of separation. It was not just a geographical border; it was drawn between the cultures and religions ending of the era of amity. Dislocation only brings the loss of identity and sense of belonging as people are unable in re-adjusting in the new socio-cultural settings. Isabella Bruschi ponders on it in *Partition in Fiction: Gendered Perspectives*:

“The re-definition of the self is a substantial motif [...] it has mainly to do with the loss of identity caused by Partition and originating from the interrupted sense of belonging to ‘home’, meant not only and not so much as hearth but rather as social and cultural milieu.” (Bruschi, 287)

They became the makers of a new nation and this forced migration leaves them unable to be rooted again in a new soil. This shattering gave the endless sufferings and wounds which has been remained unhealed and haunts the psyche of people who passed through this trauma. Partition performed “on the collective and individual bodies and memories-wounds which have turned into permanent scars, the indelible marks and reminders of a trauma which is still fresh.” (Bruschi, xiv) The small kingdom of Dard-e-Dil family breaks down into pieces and divided into small campgrounds leaving behind only a hope of joining again which seems difficult into the near future. Thus, the dispute in the public sphere affected the private space and both the strings are interwoven finely in the novel. Partition is the thread with which the pre-Independence and post-Independence history is

realistically and delicately woven; both have been fused together into a single strain of narrative. Power generated all kinds of conflicts and inflicted misfortune to populations and the circumstances, in which events arouse, shook the established order. It became a breeding ground where failings of the society were stimulated and shattered all the dreams of a utopian nation. The long story of troubled and disturbed nation has not finished yet and the disordered state cannot easily be remedied. Ranabir Samaddar states in *Divided Countries and Separated Cities: The Modern Legacy of Partition*:

“We live in partitioned times; it is within our post-colonial being, in our agony, pessimism, and strivings [...] Partition lives on in post-colonial times to such an extent that we should truly prefer the phrase ‘partitioned times’ to the more common post-colonial times.” (Samaddar, 24-25)

People were driven by the threads of their destiny, unable to do anything in face of the great tragedy that emerged. The country posed great crisis, it had reached extremes and every effort to calm men failed. This painful transition and transformation of the nation was saddening it in many respects. Each fiction has its own characteristics which make these fictional representations the hindsight necessary to understand the reality of bygone era. This re-fabricating of the history urges to re-investigate and re-examine and broaden the definition of the history and “transcends the limitations of the historian by allowing the reader to see public issues and events through the consciousness of [...] major characters; and

by [...] evolving and changing human perspective on those events.” (Hilal, 96)

The novel gradually de-historicizes splendid but at the same time disastrous history of home and nation and the silence shrouded around it from the decades was revealed. “Why had the history of Partition been so incomplete, so silent on the experiences of thousands of people it affected? Was this just historiographical neglect or something deeper: a fear on part of some historians, of reopening a trauma so profound, so riven with pain and guilt, that they were reluctant to approach it?” (Butalia:1993, 13) It goes beyond the stereotyped history; information and documents by writing not political but the social history. Aliya is the focal character who uncovers the hidden past; of the family and nation which has always been bypassed. The novel becomes the voice of the unspeakable but unforgettable past still living and troubling the generations. This crash of private and public forces lines up with Bhabha’s term of “unhomeliness” about which he writes in the *The Location of Culture* that:

“the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, borders between home and world become confused; and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting.” (Bhabha, 13)

The novel in its own way describes the enormity of the disaster engulfing both and tries to diagnose the trauma of Partition. It

brings to light the way past is viewed today, in the contemporary time by the first generation who were not the witness but the victims of that vicious time and by the second and third generation puzzling about the partition. Freidrich Nietzsche in his book *The Use and Abuse of History* postulates: “The things of the past are never viewed in their true perspective or receive their just value; but value and perspective change with the individual or the nation that is looking back into the past.” (Nietzsche, 19)

### Conclusion

The novel goes beyond the typical presentation of the history which includes only politics and statistics. The various narratives and the stories equivalent to any biography, autobiography or a memoir redefines the history by opening new pages of the bygone era as “Private memories and ‘individual histories’ continue to feed upon the ‘memory-histories’ of states.” (Pandey, 45) More than a novel depicting tradition, cultural hegemony, colonialism, post-colonialism and globalization, it is a strong assertion of the transformation that altered the history. The novel seems to be following the teaching of Norman Mailer:

“...the novel must replace history or precisely that point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, physical, moral, existential or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian in pursuing the experience would be obliged to quit the clearly demarcated limits of historical inquiry (qtd. In Hilal, p. 117)

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