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## [Be]Longings: Exploring Emotional Territories of Home, Desire and Identity in Shamsie's *Home Fire*

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**Abstract:** The present article is an exploration of Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017). Contextualised in the theoretical narratives of Islamophobia and postcolonial studies, the present paper is based on a qualitative analysis of the selected textual lines to reveal the struggles inherent in the minds and hearts of second and third-generation colonial subjects. The characters desire to be heard, to belong to a nation, a culture, a family, a loved one, an ideology and a home. However, their life trajectories reveal the inherent difficulties embedded in trying to be 'British' as well as 'Muslims', the two identities that seem to be at conflicting ends owing to a surge in Islamophobia. By drawing attention to the complexity of 'belonging' and 'home', this article tries to reveal the ensuing identity crisis experienced by British Muslims in the wake of post-9/11 Islamophobia.

### Introduction

[Shamsie's seventh novel, \*Home Fire\* \(2017\)](#), is a recontextualisation of Sophocles' *Antigone* in contemporary British Society. It centres on three siblings, Isma, the eldest sister and two twins, Aneeka and the twin brother, Pervaiz. This British-Muslim family is introduced as living a life of fear and shame as their father had abandoned them to join ISIS as a Jihadist and consequently had been killed. The mother and grandmother's deaths shortly follow, leaving Isma, the eldest, to play the role of surrogate mother to her twin younger siblings. The ensuing silence on past history relating to their father, in particular, is at times broken through elusive hints and references but is mostly shunned by the children. These British Muslims already face day-to-day racist attitudes, which become harsher as their silently kept family history is voiced by people creating a certain uneasiness, fear, shame, resentment and helplessness in the children. This personal day-to-day battle takes another dimension when Isma, travelling to America for her higher studies, is interrogated on her identity and views regarding

'Britishness' due to being Muslim and wearing a Hijab.

The situation takes a graver turn when Pervaiz falls under the influence of Farooq, a senior guy from their neighbourhood, and with the desire to know more about his father, is innocently manipulated to join ISIS. The shameful and painful past is once again awakened as the sisters, especially Aneeka, try to save her brother by planning his secret return to Britain. She fails to do this as Pervaiz is shot dead whilst trying to escape back to Britain. The racist undertone of the novel comes violently to the forefront as his dead body is denied access to Britain and has to be forcefully repatriated to long-left distant relatives in Pakistan to be buried on Pakistani soil. However, what makes the whole situation poignantly ironic is that it is a Muslim British of Pakistani origin, Karamat Lone, the home secretary, which stops the dead Pervaiz from entering the UK. In other words, the colonised are made to fight each other in order to prove their loyalty to the colonisers.

The article highlights how the concept of desire, home and identity is interlinked in this

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novel in multifaceted ways. Karamat Lone desires to become the next president of Britain and believes it would allow him to carve out his version of his identity. To achieve this, he rejects and shies away from his Muslim origin and tries to discard any association that may indicate his 'Muslimness'. His desperate attempts to identify more as 'British' than 'British-Muslim' is in line with his desire to convince the British public of his flexible and all-encompassing approach. This approach is clearly to dispel the Islamophobic tendencies that generally define the British socio-cultural outlook. His Son, Eamonn, is overwhelmed by the desire to marry Aneeka, and he tries to resist his father's seemingly tyrannical attitude. He is rendered voiceless as his father refuses to listen to him. Aneeka's pleas for permission to bring her brother's dead body are similarly unheard, ironically in a world riven by media and technology. Elif [Shafak, in her collection\(2020\)](#) of essays titled, *How to Stay Sane in an Age of Division* stresses the importance of telling stories, encourages to speak, and questions how one can feel so voiceless in an "era where social media was expected to give everyone an equal voice" (p.8). Eamonn, in order to be 'heard', video records a message to his father, which is then 'heard' by all and sundry. Aneeka, muffled and voiceless, resorts to the media for help as she is covered live by tv cameras as she sits with the dead body of her brother in Karachi, symbolically speaking to the world for help. Isma tries to convince Karamat Lone, but her appeal also falls on deaf ears. The ensuing suicide bombing of both Aneeka and Eamonn next to the dead body of Pervaiz is the ultimate collective silencing of the three youngsters who dared to raise their voices and dared to be heard in a society that is ruled by media images, where it is easier to voice but difficult to be heard, easier to be captured live on tv cameras but rarely 'seen and understood. The novel makes a huge satire on the aloofness, alienation, and cold-heartedness of the people dwelling in a contemporary western society where fear and distrust have driven people to doubt loyalties, identities, allegiances, emotional attachments, nationalities, and belongings.

Shafak explains the concept of 'group narcissism'. She asserts that narcissism is not merely an individual characteristic but rather a collective one. According to her, "central to group narcissism is an inflated belief in the clear-cut distinctiveness

and indisputable greatness of 'us' as opposed to 'them' (Shahfak, 2020, p.19). She goes on to explain how present-day social media and digital communication has accelerated this group's narcissism. Consequently, the ensuing lack of tolerance, appreciation of diversity and regard for pluralism will place anyone who dares to think or speak differently as a threat and a traitor (p.31). *Home Fire* exhibits this phenomenon superbly where Britishness and British values are valorised, and herald and anyone who dares to think or speak differently is outcasted and shunned.

In the context of the above discussion, *Home Fire* is an exploration of the complexities of belonging experienced by British Muslims, especially those of Pakistani origin. These characters undergo emotional turmoil as they try to grapple and make sense of belonging, home and identity. They are rendered homeless, remain in search of a 'home' and experience their home being broken as their parents die, leaving them to fend for themselves. Their personal crisis is intertwined with the national narrative of belonging, of proving to be 'British Muslims' or more British than Muslims. Consequently, these young British Muslim characters are left bereaved, homeless, alienated, and rejected by both Britain and Pakistan, the only two countries they can lay any claims to belong, that too very insecurely. I call these emotional territories because home and identity are closely linked with the emotions of a person. The characters in this novel, such as Pervaiz, Aneeka and Isma, as well as Eamonn, explore these territories and are made to question, ponder and discover the complexity associated with the concept of belonging, whether to a nation, a family or a beloved, even to oneself. This article hopes to demonstrate this 'complexity of belonging' as experienced by these characters, as they desire to belong to a place, a person or a nation.

## Theoretical Framework

### Postcolonialism and Islamophobia: Islamic Postcolonialism

Being the most prevalent, dominant and coercive form of prejudice in the contemporary world, Islamophobia is a deep-rooted phenomenon whose branches continue to flourish and bear the fruits of violence, atrocities, fear, neglect,

misunderstanding and hatred, unfortunately, mostly against the Muslim populace. The term generally applies to fear, hatred and animosity aimed at Islam and Muslims. No agreed-upon definition exists regarding this concept which can be seen in, as expressed by [Fatih Uenal \(2016\)](#), “*the synonymous usage of Islamophobia as anti-Muslim or anti-Islam racism and/or anti-Islamism or anti-Muslimism*” (p.68). Postcolonial criticism, according to Bhabha, “*bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order*” (Bhabha, 2006a, p. 245). Islamic postcolonialism is a cultural movement that seeks to address and explore the colonial discourses embedded in literature and its interlinking with Islam and Muslims. It aims to challenge and subvert the stereotypes that the Western Discourse seems to uphold regarding Islam and Muslims. [Meer \(2014\)](#), in his article, points out three ways in which islamophobia is being informed by postcolonial scholarship. According to him, “*the first functions as continuity...translation and [thirdly] an account of Muslim consciousness*” (pg. 500). Bazian (2018) adds to this insight by explaining how islamophobia is intentionally used as a “*perfect diversion for populist politicians who have no real vision for the future and are able to monetise fear to slither their way into seats of power*” (p.6). This is evidently displayed by the fictional character of Karamat Lone, who is more focused on slithering into political power by exploiting Muslim sensibilities and aggravating uncertainty and mistrust. Building on this, Bazian aptly points out that Islamophobia is: less about Islam or even about Muslims themselves, their lives and hopes but more about the unsureness of the Western societies as a whole...By magnifying the differences and then transforming them into an existential threat in the mind of the US and Western public, the forging of a fictitious sense of patriotic unity and purpose is possibly actualised. (Bazian, 2018, p.5-6)

Another study by Grosfoguel and Mielants (2006) provides four different conceptual approaches to islamophobia, including “*islamophobia as a form of racism, cultural racism, as orientalism, and as epistemic racism*” (cited in Bazian, pg. 3). [Mustafa Buyukgebiz \(2021\)](#), points out the unmissable, “*link between contemporary Western imperialism and European colonialism, as the starting point [as] basic premise of these two concepts is exactly the same;*

*normalising the supremacy of Western civilisation by creating a racist discourse*” (pg.134). *Home Fire* superbly exhibits how western supremacy, as 'Britishness', is normalised and eulogised by the fictional political character of Karamat Lone for both public and personal reasons. In order to achieve political fame and success, he perpetuates and problematises the already existing Islamophobic sensibilities of the British Public. This undermines the British narrative of multiculturalism; as pointed out by Modood (2006), “*Muslim politics in Britain clearly includes an advocacy for multiculturalism*” (Modood, 2006, p. 52).

The reconceptualisation of Islamophobia from a postcolonial perspective allows us to see a continuity between Eurocentric racism and contemporary Islamophobic racism, as explained by [Mohiuddin \(2020\)](#) as he reviews Abbas's book in making a crucial contribution in allowing us to understand “*how Islamophobia can be reconceptualised from a postcolonial perspective and seen as 'a continuation of the historical exploitation, exoticisation and “othering” that have plagued Western cultural and intellectual framing of Islam and Muslims’* (p 148). In many ways, continuity describes a kind of historical institutionalism that establishes the path for relations to be reproduced anew”. Reading *Home Fire* similarly allows us to reconceptualise the colonist's feelings of othering, rejection, mistrust, hatred and lack of understanding in a contemporary scenario anew.

## Literature Review

In the contemporary era abuzz with Islamophobia, literary representations not only examine, display but inform and instruct about a range of perspectives associated with the repercussions of this phenomenon. The conflicted nature of anti-Muslim bigotry can only be understood through the range of experiences and possibilities offered by the much-needed literary contributions. Only then may we hope to tackle this monster which is otherwise eating away the global peace by stirring trouble between the Muslim and the Western world. The dismantling strategies are often hinted at and embedded within the fictional narratives created by authors. [Peter Morey's Islamophobia and the Novel \(2018\)](#) is a critical exploration of the impact of surging islamophobia on contemporary literature. Morey not only draws our attention to

the lived experiences of racism and hatred but also points out how Muslims are presented as a “*focal point of anxieties about citizenship, loyalty and liberal values*” (p.2). He attempts to explore the key elements, including:

*“ambiguity; stereotyping; the effects of polyphony; response to the burden of representation that falls on the minority writers; the fetishisation of authenticity; and the presence of a certain kind of exotic idiom that blends the attractive and desirable (in the Muslim case) with the austere and repressive”* ([Morey, 2018, p.3](#))

In this regard, a significant body of literature, especially British Muslim, pertaining to fictional, sociological and cultural domains exists that crucially informs us in numerous ways. Shelina Janmohamen, Leila Aboulela, Sarfraz Manzoor, Rageh Omaar, Imran Ahamd and Robin Yassin are some of the names that try to “*dispel the putative irreconcilability between Islam and many key traditional British values*” (Hasan, 2015, p.94). Hanif Kureishi, born to a Pakistani father and English mother, explores the issues of integration in his novels, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and *The Black Album* (1995). Homelessness and racism are Kureishi's recurring themes. The former novel is a semi-autobiography based on the life of a bisexual man growing up in London. The latter is based on a young man of Pakistani origin who has torn apart between choosing his white lover and Muslim friends. Kureshei, in his short story, 'My Son the Fanatic', describes the conflict between a secular westernised father and fundamentalist Muslim son, Ali and the estrangement they feel living with each other. This father-son relationship asks a crucial question, in the words of [Jamie S. Scott \(2020\)](#), “*How might migrants in diaspora live an authentic Muslim life in the secular environment of the predominantly non-Muslim United Kingdom?*” (p.1).

Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) is based on a close-knit Asian community dwelling in a town in England that feel stranded amidst the whites. Miquel Pomer Amer (2012), in his article, specifically focuses on the main character of Kaukab, the mother of the family in the novel, to explore the subversion of the unspeakability of the subaltern. Regarding the voice of Kaukab, he asserts that “*her voice lies in the fact that she cannot speak, neither literally nor metaphorically, but she still gives a message that, implicitly, brings the warning that it is misunderstood*” (p.269). Similarly, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) is a much-read

fictional account of a young Pakistani Muslim man, Changaz, who metamorphosises into a so-called fundamentalist after experiencing racism and hatred in the wake of 9/11. The American society he had so keenly invested in emotionally, psychologically, educationally and financially failed to accept, protect and own him after the math of 9/11. H.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2009) similarly captures the lives of three Pakistani Muslim boys living in America who like Hamid's Changez see themselves as a part of the American society and proudly flaunt their cosmopolitan identities. However, the dehumanising and degrading treatment they receive after 9/11 makes them, especially Chuck, the protagonist, leave America because of “*the fear, the paranoia, the profound loneliness that had become routine features of life*” (p. 267). Interestingly, like Changaze, the protagonist seeks shelter in Islam and Islamism, as [Head \(2008\)](#) expresses, “*after having been courted and rejected by the West*” (pg. 144). [Guvén Fikret \(2019\)](#), in the article, 'Resistance Narratives: A Study of H.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*' argues that novels like *Home Boy* “*offer these internationalised and worldlier narratives of protest against the continuities of Orientalism and exploitation*” (p.57).

[Claire Chambers \(2018\)](#) in 'Sound and Fury: Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire' takes Spivak as her main influence to make an auditory line of inquiry. For Chambers, “*Shamsie's novel implicitly focuses on the relationship between the textual and the sonic, asking the urgent question: can the oppressor listen?*” (p.1). Claire points to the less noticed aspect of Spivak's essay by pointing out, “*For me, the question “Who should speak?” is less crucial than?* (Cited in [Chambers, 2018, p.1](#)). This is precisely the lacking, the unwillingness to listen that drives people such as Parvaiz to the brink of madness. [Padel Muhamad Rallie Rivaldy et al. \(2019\)](#), while exploring Muslim diasporic identities in the very novel, explain that Parvaiz's decision to join Raqqa is a combined result of “*gender alienations, inequality, and existential dimensions.*” (p. 970). [Amina Yaqin \(2021\)](#), in 'Necropolitical Trauma in Kamila Shamsie's Fiction', explores the concepts of necropolitics, necropower and trauma. She asserts that “*Her characters negotiate complex emotional journeys navigating unknowable histories, borders and militarised securitised worlds to convey relationships of power and powerlessness to the reader.*” (p.235).

## Textual Analysis

### The desire of Belonging: Muslimness Vs Britishness

Do you consider yourself British? I am British... But do you consider yourself British?... I've lived here all my life. She meant there was no other country of which she could feel herself a part, but the words came out sounding evasive (*Home Fire*, p. 5).

As the above quote indicates, considering oneself British is different to living and being born in Britain. The verbal affirmation required of Isma during the interrogation at the airport, as she flies to America for higher studies at the beginning of the novel, indicates the doubt that accompanies and surrounds not only their lives but the lives of most British Muslims, especially of Pakistani origin, living in the West. The stress laid on the question of feelings and considering oneself British makes Isma confused, and she is forced to think about her sense of belonging. It indicates that raising questions about ones' belonging and associations makes one think about it, too, perhaps feeling rejected and unwanted. This feeling can prove to be lethal, as it makes the individual desperate and at the loss of identification, causing resentment, anger and helplessness.

Karamat Lone, The British Home Secretary, a British Muslim of Pakistani origin, is similarly under huge pressure to prove his 'Britishness'. On one occasion, he quickly rejects any associations with a picture showing him entering a mosque, brushing it away with a casual remark that he had only been there for his uncle's funeral prayers and would never otherwise think about entering a gender-segregated space. Karamat desperately attempts to prove his allegiance and loyalty as a 'British' as he openly lauds the British values and encourages people to adopt a common outlook to 'appear' British rather than insisting on displaying differences even by appearance. "*He has to prove he is one of them, not one of us, doesn't he?*" remarks Aneeka. His intentional use of Irish spellings for his son's name is another way to assert his Britishness, "*An Irish spelling to disguise a Muslim name- Ayman became Eamonn so that people would know the father had integrated (p.16)*". Both Isma and Aneeka, like many other British Muslims, are aware of this subtle and pervasive pressure to conform, which makes people like Karamat Lone into

authoritarian demagogues. The entire novel revolves around the tussle to raise a voice against this marginalisation and discriminatory attitude experienced and observed by British Muslims.

The British citizens are being made 'unBritish', claims Isma, by applying the same colonial laws to the British people. She raises a voice in recognition of the rights she is denied as a British citizen. According to her:

*"The 7/7 terrorists were never described by the media as the 'British terrorists. Even when the word British was used, it was always 'British of Pakistani descent' or British Muslim' or my favourite, 'British passport-holders' always something interposed between their Britishness and terrorism"* (p.38)

As evident, the Pakistani identity is considered synonymous with 'Muslim identity', and both are used interchangeably. The 'Muslimness' and 'Pakistaniness' is brought in direct link with terrorism. The use of the term 'British passport-holders' for terrorists is again strategically used to indicate the foreign association and identification of the terrorist, thereby 'un-Britishing' them by indicating that the only 'Britishness' they may lay any claim to is the 'possession' of a British passport, a position or identity conferred on them, which may be revoked or taken away easily. The novel highlights how precarious and slippery it is to maintain ones 'Britishness' an identity that needs constant affirmation, symbolic, behavioural, mental, and emotional. Any slight lacking in the proper performance of Britishness means a quick 'un-Britishing' of the person.

The difficulty experienced by British Muslims to 'be' British Muslims is expressed by Eamonn in the following words, "*it must be difficult to be Muslim in the world these days*" (p.21). His question though innocently and casually asked, has deep undertones which fully manifest themselves towards the end of the novel. Eamonn also understands that the Muslimness of his new girlfriend, Aneeka, whom he plans to marry, may be problematic for his father's political position. He hesitatingly discloses his relationship to his father in the following words, "*She is a bit, well, Muslim. How well-Muslim exactly? She prays...doesn't drink or eat pork. She fasts during Ramadan. Wears a Hijab...but she has no problem [with] ...sex*" (p.106). This measure of Muslimness adopted by Aneeka doesn't bother Karamat as he expresses, "*she is only nineteen, I suspect she can be*

persuaded out of the hijab in time" (p.109). This strategic and conscious 'un-Musliming' of teenagers is also pointed out by Isma as she criticises Karamat Lone's political addresses to British Muslim teenagers. Ironically, the tolerant and all-encompassing virtue of Britishness as claimed by Karamat in the following words, "*multiethnic, multi-religious, multitudinous, United Kingdom of ours,*" is rejected and twisted in the same breath as he continues, "*You are, we are British...Don't set yourself apart in the way you dress, the way you think, the outdated codes of behaviour you cling to, and the ideologies to which you attach your loyalties. Because if you do, you will be treated differently*" (p.88). This veiled warning to British Muslims or Muslims living anywhere in the West who appear different, especially by dressing, proves true as Isma is spat on in the tube for wearing a hijab. However, probed deeply, it is people like Karamat who, in the guise of preaching Britishness, are actually breeding intolerance, hatred and Islamophobia. Just as Pakistani and Muslimness is associated with terrorism, Britishness in this way is associated with intolerance, narrow-mindedness and a monolithic mindset.

The ambivalence towards Aneeka's Muslim identity, as expressed by Eamonn, is rooted in his own personal experience of growing up in a family, especially with a father who continuously diluted and rejected his Muslimness. Consequently, he too begins to shy away from anything Muslim. In one humorous incident during his walk, as Eamonn approached a Mosque, he crossed the road to avoid it and then crossed back again so nobody would suspect him of avoiding the mosque. His distrust and fear of Islam can also be seen in his conversation with Isma in America, as he jokingly remarks, "*Laughing he said, Cancer or Islam – which is the greater affliction*" (p.21). His ignorance and casual approach towards Islam is further indicated as he inquires Isma, "*Can I ask you something he said, The Turban. Is that a style thing or a Muslim thing?*" (p.21)

### **The Desire for Human Touch and Affection**

The identity crisis and the dysfunctional family make these siblings yearn for reassurance through physical touch. Isma learns to bond with her siblings through physical embrace and touch. Being the eldest sister, Isma plays the mothering role for her siblings. Her sister Aneeka and brother Parvaiz.

"*We'll be in touch all the time*", she and Aneeka had said to each other...But 'touch' was the one thing that modern technology didn't allow, and without it, she and her sister had lost something vital on their way of being together. Touch was where it had all started with them. (p.13)

Her travel to America for higher studies heightens her alienation and hunger for physical touch as she, during her online call with Aneeka, reaches out to her, "*Isma touched her sister's face on the screen, felt the cold glass*" (p.42). The need for physical touch for emotional reassurance metamorphoses into sexual desire as Isma meets Eamonn in America and is drawn toward him, "*She wanted to run her fingers through his thick hair, stroke his arm*" (p.51). This desire for physical intimacy appears vague as Eamonn being four years her junior doesn't respond romantically to her desire and only takes her hand for a friendly patting of emotional support. However, Isma "*wanted his hand back sending currents all the way through her, including in the most intimate places. Almost as if he had touched her there*" (p.51). His verbal confession of being like a brother to her shortly after before he leaves her apartment proves to be devastating for Isma as she breaks down in tears.

Whereas Isma remains stranded between her maternal affection and sexual desire, Aneeka uses sexual intimacy to win over Eamonn. Eamonn falls in love with Aneeka the moment he meets her but Aneeka initially intentionally indulges him in gaining his support and helping to bring her brother back to Britain by influencing his father, the British Home Secretary. However, Aneeka's involvement with Eamonn grows serious as she falls in love with him and confides in him about her previous plan and the troubles her brother had gotten himself into.

### **The Desire for Masculine Identification**

Two pairs of father-son relationships dominate the story of this novel. Pervaiz and his father, Adil Pasha and Eamonn and Karamat Lone. Both the sons have a love-hate relationship with their fathers. Eamonn describes his relationship with his father in the following words, "*they are our guides into manhood for starters*" (p.35). Eamonn takes great pride in his father as he believes that whatever choices he has had to make were due to a greater purpose he had, of Public good, National interest

and British values. Both Parvaiz and Eamonn are misled into believing the valour and heroism of their fathers. According to Eamonn, "*He is one kind of a person as a politician and another as a father. There is nothing he wouldn't do for me*" (p.80). Ironically, Eamonn discovers the sad reality that there is 'nothing' that his father 'can do' for him, as Karamat Lone sacrifices his son to save his political career. Both fathers fail to support their sons, leaving a void in their lives. As Parvaiz recalls, "*He had always watched boys and their fathers with an avidity composed primarily of hunger*" (p.127). This desire for paternal affection is also felt by Isma, who describes him as "*most consistent in the role of absentee father*" (p.47). Eamonn's father absences himself by refusing to support his son. Parvaiz's father never spoke to him, and Eamonn's never listened to him. Adil Pasha and Karamat Lone are both ambitious to follow their chosen ideologies. Adil abandons his family to pursue a so-called Jihadist cause, and Karamat becomes selfish and self-centred to save his political cause.

Parvaiz is shamed for his identification with the female members of his family and is urged to identify with his father in order to be a real 'man'. This masculine identification is rather challenging as Parvaiz knows so little about his father. His ignorance is misused by Farooq as he begins to introduce a new aspect of his identity to him, "*Who am I? Parvaiz wanted to ask*" (124). He grew up thinking of his father as a "*shameful secret*", but Farooq introduced him to *Abu* Parvaiz, father of Parvaiz. Learning to know his father as not 'Adil Pasha' but 'father of Parvaiz' immediately changes the shameful resentments he had for his father to a respectful longing to 'be' like him. Just as Eamonn expresses that we (sons) strive to be like them (fathers). As evident, it is the desire for paternal identification, of male identification, that urges Parvaiz to leave Britain on a journey to discover more about his father and, through that, about himself.

This ambitious journey of self-discovery and heroic valour seems inevitable for Parvaiz, as Isma once expresses, "*For girls becoming women was an inevitability; for boys becoming men, was an ambition*" (*Home Fire*, p.36). Both Isma and Aneeka feel comfortable with forgetting and completely eclipsing their father from their lives, unlike Parvaiz, who is pulled by an invisible cord towards his father, his life and history, which he, being the

son, feels compelled to follow and understand. This masculine desire for identification is not understood by Aneeka, who makes a sharp and cutting comment during one of her conversations with her brother, "*What has Adil Pasha ever had to do with our lives? He Turned away from her, his face against the sofa cushion. "You're just a girl. You don't understand"* (*Home, Fire*, p.142). Evidently, Parvaiz yearns to reconstruct his identity by identifying himself with the male figure of the family and by claiming that "*you're just a girl*", he dismisses the feminine presence of both Isma and Aneeka as insufficient, and insignificant in aiding him to develop a sense of himself as a man. The patriarchal undertones become painfully evident as he "*turns his face away from her*", a gesture that shows his lack of trust, bonding, communication and identification with his twin. This newly gained awareness of the superiority of his gender identity and the need to assert his masculinity is inculcated by Farook by shaming him for being a subordinate male member before his sisters, which is further firmly cemented by quoting the Quranic verses, "*Men are in charge of women because Allah has made one of them to excel the other*" (p.130). Thus, Parvaiz embarks upon the journey from being 'Aneeka's brother' to the son of 'Abu Parvaiz'.

### The Desire for Home and Acceptance

These young British Muslims in this novel are representatives of the third-generation immigrants who are born and bred in the UK and have little or no association with the home country of the parents, Pakistan, in this case. Their position seems far more precarious, complex and ambiguous as compared to those of their parents. Whereas the first and second-generation British Muslims could identify more easily with two cultures, Pakistani and British, were better prepared and could understand the cultural shock, rejection and racism they had to encounter due to their migration and assimilation into a new culture in a new home. Third and fourth-generation British Muslims, however, I believe, are being rendered more vulnerable in the contemporary scenario. When they are asked about their 'belonging' and 'home', they have no answer, only silence to offer. Isma's reaction to her inquiry at the airport regarding her identification and Britishness, as reflected in the opening quote to the analysis section, reflects her silence, confusion, and loss of belonging. She is

rendered and pushed to the category of 'them' due to her Muslim origin and hijab. This binary identification of either being with 'us' or 'them' stands in stark contrast to the claims of multicultural, all-encompassing Britain. Parvaiz is similarly urged to abandon his life in London in the pursuit of home and acceptance. The desire to know more about his father, to be a part of a place that is welcoming and all-encompassing as opposed to the harsh racist environment of London, urges him to make the mistake of joining an extremist organisation.

There are multiple ways in which this novel displays the colonist paradigm of 'us' vs 'them'. The very first bifurcation includes the 'British' and 'British Muslims of Pakistani origin'. Then, we find a clear distinction between the 'upper-class Londoners' and 'lower working-class Londoners'. Eamonn belongs to the affluent upper class of London, whereas Aneeka identifies with the other side of the division. Similarly, another us vs them can be seen between the 'liberal British Muslims' such as Aneeka, who has customised the religious teachings to suit her own needs and the 'traditional British Muslims' like Isma, who believe marriage is necessary before any intimate relationship and expresses that she would, "*find it more difficult not be a Muslim*" (p.21) during her conversation with Eamonn. The colonist paradigm of Us vs Them is much more complex and displays multifaceted repercussions. This subtle and veiled divide aggravates the identity crisis faced by British Muslims as they struggle to be accepted and to prove that Britain is their home.

Amidst the grand narrative of Britain being their home or not is embedded, the smaller, perhaps more emotional narrative of home, the

physical space, the house where the siblings lived at the start of the novel. This home had to be sold as Isma was planning to travel to America. The twins were to live with a neighbour, aunti Naseem. The personal crisis of being rendered homeless is strongly felt, especially by Parvaiz, who opposes the idea of selling their house. However, his inability to afford the house and the inevitable departure of his sister Isma and the vague possibility of the siblings ever returning to life as a family in a home like this leaves a deep mark on Parvaiz and proves to be another reason behind his departure in search for a 'home' which would be much more welcoming, permanent, inviting and safe.

## Conclusion

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The life trajectories of the various characters, as discussed, expose an inherent desire and 'longing' to be accepted, loved, comforted and feel 'at home'. Unfortunately, the contemporary phobia-ridden scenario deeply entrenched in racial discrimination and prejudices provokes the characters to question, challenge and seek the most difficult answer to the most troubling question of 'belonging' in a world that is increasingly becoming paranoid and intolerant of differences. The cultural and religious differences are looked upon as signs of rebellion, needing to be punished, and religious differences are continuously diluted and sublimated to achieve a world with the same cultural outlook. The emotional territories of home, religion and cultural identities are being invaded, filling the people, as demonstrated by the characters, with fear, alienation, abandonment, homelessness, and identity crisis.



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