

The Illustration of Racial Discrimination Against British Muslims in Kamila Shamsie's *'Home Fire'*

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the depiction of racial discrimination and to reveal the British Muslim character's resistance toward racial discrimination in the novel entitled Home Fire (2017) by Kamila Shamsie. This study applies the descriptive qualitative research method to describe, interpret, and analyze the data source in which the analysis is presented in the form of text. The data is taken from the quotations in the novel that are related to the theory and the quotations will become the evidence of the analysis. To guide this study, the writer analyzes the data using the theory of Measuring Racial Discrimination by Blank at al. (2004) as the basic concept and framework. This theory book identifies where racial discrimination occurs and measures the extent to which discrimination may contribute to racial and ethnic disparities (Blank at al., 2004). The result of this study shows that British Muslim characters experienced some discriminatory behavior in a form of verbal antagonism, avoidance, physical attack, and segregation because of being Muslim and owing to Pakistani descent. In addition, it also finds that the British Muslim character tries to resist the racial discrimination treatment in the way trying to get justice by doing protest to get the rights that supposed to have. In carrying out the protest action, the British Muslim character is not alone, because it gets social support from many people and institutions.

Keywords: minority, Muslim, Pakistani descent, racial discrimination, racism

A. Introduction

The United Kingdom is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious country that is often used as an immigration place by many people including Muslims from South Asia countries to find a better life. Since the Second World War, Muslims migrated to Britain in relatively much larger numbers with the majority coming from South Asia (primarily Pakistan and Bangladesh) (Ansari, 2002). However, although Britain has many kinds of races, ethnicities, and religions, due to these diversities, some believe that they are more dominant than others. For a long time even when it was acknowledged that there were people of different racial origin within the British

Isles, there was an assumption that the white race and culture was, and should, be dominant (Abbott, 2011). Consequently, the belief or assumption that one race is superior to others, it creates an act of racial discrimination. This action is mostly done by the majority to minority. Muslims from South Asia countries are no exception, they are as a minority, become a victim of racial discrimination because of their race, religion, and immigrant status. Even though many of them were born in Britain and became British.

Moreover, racial discrimination toward Muslims increase since the attacks on 9/11. On September 11, 2001, there were a series of four coordinated suicide terrorist attacks carried out by an Islamic extremist group, al-Qaeda, which the terror destroyed the twin towers of The World Trade Center in New York and killed thousands of people (History, 2018). Consequently, it brought up negative stereotypes wherein many people equated all Muslims with radical and terrorism. A lot of Muslims also became a victim of racial profiling wherein they are detained and interrogated at the airport.

Meanwhile, in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* the writer found racial discrimination issues which happened and were experienced by the three British Muslim characters. This novel is the seventh novel by Kamila Shamsie and was published on 15 August 2017, by Riverhead Books. This novel won the Women's Prize For Fiction 2018, was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2017, shortlisted for the Costa Novel Award 2017, and shortlisted for the DCS Prize for South Asian Literature 2018. The novel is divided into five parts, each using a different character perspective. However, the writer will focus on the three protagonists of this novel, three siblings, British Muslims who have Pakistani descent. Based on the background the writer took the *Home Fire* (2017) novel as an object of this study. The existence of racial discrimination portrayed by the three British Muslim characters in this novel makes the writer interested to be analyzed. To support the analysis of the novel, the writer used *Measuring Racial Discrimination* by Blank et al. (2004) as a theory book. Therefore, "Racial Discrimination Toward British Muslim Portrayed In Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*" becomes the title of this study.

B. Method

This study applies the descriptive qualitative research method to describe, interpret, and analyze the data source in which the analysis is presented in the form of text. The data is taken from the quotations and dialogues in the novel which become the evidence of the analysis.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. The Depiction of Racial Discrimination Toward British Muslims in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*

As state in Blank et al. (2004, p. 40), racial discrimination occurs when a member of one racial group is treated less favorably than a similarly situated member of another racial group and suffers adverse or negative consequences. Moreover, in *Home Fire* (2017), the writer finds some data which show various types of racial

discrimination experienced by British Muslims named Isma Pasha, Aneeka Pasha, and Parvaiz Pasha. They experienced some discriminatory behavior in form of verbal antagonism, avoidance, physical attack, and segregation because of being Muslims and owing to Pakistani descent.

1.1 Racial Discrimination Toward Isma Pasha

A. Verbal Antagonism

Verbal Antagonism is harsh or humiliating comments toward a race. This may not be taken seriously by the law regarding the freedom of speech. However, such harsh comments are a clear form of hostility. Moreover, in *Home Fire* (2017), there is data that show the existence of verbal antagonism experienced by Isma Pasha.

This data tells Eamonn asking about Isma's turban. However, he asks the question in an inappropriate way which contains insults to Isma. It can be seen from the data below.

“Can I ask you something?” he said. “The turban. Is that a style thing or a Muslim thing?” “You know, the only two people in Massachusetts who have ever asked me about it both wanted to know if it's a style thing or a chemo thing.” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 16)

The dialogue above shows how Isma gets verbal antagonism from Eamonn wherein he humiliates Isma and her religion. Isma is a Muslim woman and wears a turban as a sign of her religiosity which also affirm her identity as a Pakistani Muslim. Nevertheless, Eamonn makes a negative comment on her turban, he compares a symbol of spirituality with a fashion thing. Meanwhile, the line “...*the only two people in Massachusetts who have ever asked me about it both wanted to know if it's a style thing or a chemo thing.*” shows another verbal antagonism experienced by Isma. This implies that she often gets racial discrimination from other people regarding her turban.

1.2 Racial Discrimination Toward Aneeka Pasha

A. Physical Attack

Physical attack is a real and deliberate attack on others. According to Blank at al. (2004, p. 58), physical attack is closely linked to hate crimes. Hate crime itself includes unlawful conduct directed at various target groups which involves assault, murder, harassment, and so on. Mostly, hate crime encompasses crimes committed based on race, ethnic or national origin, color, and religion. Moreover, in the *Home Fire* (2017) novel, the writer discovers data that indicate the existence of a physical attack experienced by Aneeka Pasha.

This data proves that Aneeka becomes a victim of physical attack on public transport due to her race and her hijab which is done by some British men. Several British men show their racist attitude to Aneeka by spitting at her on the tube (The

London Underground rail network) as can be seen in the following quotation “*And no, I wasn't showering because I got caught in the rain. Some guy spat at me on the tube.*” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 67). This quotation indicates physical attack which is related to hate crimes experienced by Aneeka in the form of assault. Spitting on a person is an action that can be considered assault. Additionally, it is criminal offenses that include unlawful physical contact although there are no visible wounds.

1.3 Racial Discrimination Toward Parvaiz Pasha

A. Avoidance

Avoidance is the act of getting away from certain races, here people may select friends and decide not to associate with members of disadvantaged racial groups. Moreover, in *Home Fire* (2017), the writer found data of avoidance experienced by Parvaiz Pasha from British citizens. This can be seen in the following quotation “*#[P]ERVYPASHA Just started trending #DONT SULLY YOUR SOIL Just started trending #GO BACK WHERE YOU CAME FROM Just started trending*” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 140). In this quotation there is a form of avoidance in the hashtag “*#GO BACK WHERE YOU CAME FROM*” which is primarily used for immigrants. This implies how British citizens are indirectly avoiding Parvaiz due to his race by ordered Parvaiz's body to return to his home country, Pakistan, and are disinclined if he is *get buried in Britain*. Additionally, this indicates that they also support Home Secretary's statement to repatriate Parvaiz's body back to Pakistan which can lead to long-term exclusion and segregation. As cite in Blank at al. (2004), avoidance may appear harmless in any given situation but, when accumulated across situations, can lead to long-term exclusion and segregation.

B. Segregation

Segregation occurs when people exclude members of other races from access to institutions including denial of equal education, housing, employment, and health care based on race. This implies that members of discriminated races cannot have equal treatment in their society. Moreover, in *Home Fire* (2017), the writer found the existence of segregation experienced by Parvaiz Pasha.

This data tells The Home Secretary speaks to the political correspondent, Nick Rippons, about Parvaiz Pasha. It can be seen in the dialogue below:

“– And Pervys Pasha was a dual national? –That's correct. Of Britain and Pakistan. –Practically speaking, does this have any consequences now that he's dead? –His body will be repatriated to his home nation, Pakistan. –He won't be buried here? –No. We will not let those who turn against the soil of Britain in their lifetime sully that very soil in death. – Has his family in London been informed? – That's a matter for the Pakistan High Commission. Excuse me, Nick, that's all I have time for.” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 139-140)

The data above implies how Parvaiz becomes a victim of segregation that is done by The Home Secretary wherein he actively excludes Parvaiz from equal health

care. He denied and separated Parvaiz from the same access to health care as everyone else. Parvaiz, who is a British citizen and has lived in Britain for most of his life, has the rights to get treatment and services such as burial in his home, Britain. The Home Secretary as the British government was supposed to fulfill the rights of all British citizens including Parvaiz and ensure that every person has the opportunity to access the same service such as health care, instead of deciding on Parvaiz's rights as a British citizen.

2. The British Muslim Character's Resistance Toward Racial Discrimination in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*

Racial discrimination is differential treatment on the basis of race that disadvantages a racial group (Blank et al., 2004, p. 39). This definition refers to unequal treatment because of race. Racial discrimination can invent resistance because of injustice or a situation wherein an individual's or a group's rights are ignored or denied. When individuals or groups get unequal treatment, they will do anything to receive equality.

Meanwhile, the injustice is described in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) wherein Parvaiz Pasha, one of the main characters in the novel, is treated differently and becomes a victim of segregation that is done by The Home Secretary which indicates a form of racial discrimination. Moreover, the writer found some data that show a form of resistance by Parvaiz's twin sister, Aneeka Pasha.

2.1 Trying to Get the Justice

The discriminatory action toward Parvaiz wherein The Home Secretary refuses to repatriate Parvaiz's body to Britain and decides to send it to his relatives in Pakistan, makes Aneeka furious and she decides to go to Pakistan to get justice for him.

This data reveals that Aneeka goes to The British Deputy High Commission in Pakistan. At the park of the British Embassy, Aneeka waits for the arrival of Parvaiz's body as she knows that his body will be delivered there.

"The British Deputy High Commission compound was surrounded by barbed wire, vans bristling with guns, and roadblocks to prevent any stranger's approach. But just a few minutes' walk away there was a park lined with banyan trees... Here she would sit with her brother until the world changed or both of them crumbled into the soil around them." (Shamsie, 2017, p. 154-155)

The quotation above implies that what Aneeka does by facing the British Deputy High Commission is a part of a protest. Protest itself is the most obvious form of resistance. The protest is done to express her strong disagreement against the policies that The Home Secretary made for Parvaiz and to end segregation. According to Winders (2020), protests can change policies, can make governments reconsider monuments and symbols of racism and discrimination, can change public opinion and

can increase the awareness of racial inequality, discrimination, and violence. Therefore, by doing this protest Aneeka hopes that it can change The Home Secretary's policies against Parvaiz and get The British Embassy's attention, so they will help her to repatriate Parvaiz's body back to England.

2.2 Getting Social Support

In an effort to speak out for Parvaiz, Aneeka gets social support from some people and institutions including the Pakistani government, Pakistani Citizens, and the media. Social support is something important because it shows that we are loved and cared for by others. Moreover, the writer found some data which show forms of support for Aneeka in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017).

This data narates The Pakistan High Commissioner talks to The Home Secretary via phone regarding Parvaiz's body which was brought to the park and became a public spectacle. However, The Pakistan High Commissioner makes it clear that Pakistan is on Aneeka's side which can be proven in this following quotation "*Let me put it in language you'll understand: The people, and several opposition parties, have decided to embrace a woman who has stood up to a powerful government...*" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 168). This shows that Aneeka gets support from the Pakistani government and society as well. As it depicts, the country where Aneeka and Parvaiz were born and raised has proved itself inadequate for enabling them to live with dignity. Additionally, it implies that people show their sympathy toward Aneeka and truly understand how hard it is to be an ordinary British citizen who has no power to resist her powerful government.

D. Conclusion

From the depiction of racial discrimination toward British Muslims in the novel, it was found that the first character named Isma Pasha, who experienced verbal antagonism regarding her race and her turban. The second character is Isma's younger sister named Aneeka Pasha, who experienced physical attack in the form of assault from some British men regarding her race and hijab. The last is Isma's younger brother named Parvaiz Pasha, who experienced avoidance and segregation. He was indirectly shunned by British citizens due to his race by ordering his body to be repatriated to Pakistan and are disinclined if he is get buried in Britain. Additionally, he also experienced segregation wherein he was denied to get treatment and burial in his home, Britain. From the British Muslim character's resistance toward racial discrimination in the novel, it was found that Aneeka was trying to get justice for her twin brother, Parvaiz, who became a victim of segregation that is done by The Home Secretary. She made a protest at the park of the British Embassy in Pakistan with the purpose to get justice for his brother by returning Parvaiz's body back to England, so he can be buried there. Moreover, in an effort to speak out the justice for Parvaiz, Aneeka got social support from some people and institutions including the Pakistani government and

Pakistani Citizens. These supports were important because it showed that they were on Aneeka's side and proved that she was loved and cared for by others. Moreover, it also made her voices could be easily heard and could even increase society awareness of racial inequality. Through this study, the writer hopes that it could increase the awareness of the readers about the phenomenon of racial discrimination which frequently happened in society. Meanwhile, to prevent or even to end racial discrimination, the writer suggests that we should treat people equally and respect the differences in people's race, ethnicity, religion, social status, and etc. so that no one group is viewed as superior to the others.

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