

Revisiting History and Reconstructing New Forms of Belonging and Identity in Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron*

Quratulain Shirazi

Abstract

This article is a study of Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000). The novelist uses family stories as symbols of Indo-Pak history and represents the Pakistani nation allegorically through the family stories that are narrated in the novel. It will explain how these family stories reveal national history, where history is deconstructed as a linear and fixed entity. The characters in these family stories sustain as well as resist dominant nationalist discourse. Their family politics interlocks with national history, and home becomes an ambivalent site where the effects of national history and a shifting national modernity are explored. This article will also argue that this nationalist discourse is a gendered phenomenon where women are confined within the boundaries of the private space of home, which is away from the public sphere of modernity and progress. Therefore, Shamsie rewrites nation while using the family stories to highlight the ambivalence of both family and nation as sites of domination and resistance. After negotiating the complexities of past and present, ultimately Shamsie has reconstructed Pakistan as a space of cultural integration, assimilation and coexistence.

Keywords: Kamila Shamsie, *Salt and Saffron*, nation, gender.

Introduction

As a study of Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000), this article will argue that the novel revisits South Asian history while deconstructing the periodisation of South Asian historiography and its narration in terms of the stories of kings, rulers and ruling dynasties. This narration of South Asian history highlights the position of those who were ruled and whose stories were either lost or were silenced by the dominant political and social narrative. This analysis of *Salt and Saffron* explains that the nationalist discourse is a gendered phenomenon where women are confined within the boundaries of a private space of home, away from the public sphere of modernity and progress. Therefore, Shamsie uses a transnational feminist perspective in her novel to critique the oppressive forms of nationalism while narrating the women's experiences. The first part of this article will explain how nation should be reanalysed as an open and enunciative space against different forms of nation-centred narratives, including the British imperial and the anti-colonial Pre-Partition nationalist narratives which reinforced themselves by their hegemony over the 'Other'. It will explain how Homi K. Bhabha points out the fixities in the discourse of nationalism and suggests the narration of a more open and inclusive form of nation and nationalism. As Kamila Shamsie identifies the unequal gender positions within the patriarchally-controlled home/family and nation, she reconstructs the family/nation as a space of reunion and reconciliation where gender roles are redefined and the family/nation is reimagined

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as a space of refuge and reconciliation. In doing so, she is revisiting the South Asian history and reconstructing a new Pakistani-transnational feminist identity that is removed from the fixities of patriarchally-controlled Pre-colonial, colonial, and Pre-Partition nationalist narratives of identity.

Postcolonial Nationalism and its Contradictions

Modern nations like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are political communities which are products of colonial history, but are also products which have been forged during the struggle for power by the national bourgeoisie, who took control from the colonial masters. South Asian postcolonialism is informed by the moments of independence, and the newly acquired nationhoods are charged by the emotional vocabulary of nationalism and love for nation. Such postcolonialism often frames the early twentieth-century anti-colonial nationalist surge as a revolutionary moment against the cultural/racial oppression of the colonial era. Franz Fanon endorses anticolonial nationalism's agitational resistance against the forms of dominance and oppression. It is a source of recovering from colonial wounds and furthering the process of decolonising. This recuperative power of nationalism is expressed through national symbols such as anthems, slogans, images, leaders, narratives and poetry. Such symbols constitute an imaginative unity between disparate cultural and religious props of identity. On the contrary, such a nationalist narrative is also fixed around selective appropriations of religion, history, culture, region and language. Ayesha Jalal points out that in the case of the postcolonial nation-states of India and Pakistan, such a selective appropriation of religion, history and culture is quite obvious. She opines that independent India justifies its separate national identity in terms of an (imagined) ideal, secular and inclusive nation and Pakistan justifies its creation by projecting a distinctive Islamic identity.¹

Bhabha postulates in *Nation and Narration* that 'nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realise their origin in the mind's eye'.² He explains that it is the 'instability of cultural signification' from which the narration of nation originates.³ It is a 'dialectic of various temporalities' such as modern, colonial, postcolonial and native, which are unstable sets of signifiers.⁴ In other words, traditional national narratives are static and closed, and within the space of a modern national narrative such fixities should be contested and national identities should be narrated as if they are in a state of flux. Bhabha points out the fixities in the discourse of nationalism and insists on a focus on temporality instead of historicity.⁵ He points out that, 'historians, who are transfixed on the event and origins of the nation ... never pose the essential question of the representation of the nation as a temporal process'.⁶ He further explains that people are not products of simple 'historical events' or a

¹ Ayesha Jalal, 'South Asia', *Encyclopedia of Nationalism* (n.d.) 2.
<http://emerald.tufts.edu/~ajalal01/Articles/encyclopedia.nationalism.pdf>.

² Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990) 1.

³ Bhabha, *Nation* 218.

⁴ Bhabha, *Nation* 218.

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 200.

⁶ Bhabha, *Location* 204.

‘patriotic body politic’; in fact a nation’s people must be thought of in terms of ‘double time’.⁷ This double time refers to the pedagogical which is a set of pre-written nationalist narratives given by empires and nation states. The other side of this double time is a production of nation through narration, where scraps, patches and rags of daily life are reassembled to narrate the coherent national culture. Such a production of nation deconstructs national subjects as objects of national pedagogy and records their performativity. In this context, there is an ambiguity that lurks within the idea of nation as it originates from the contradiction between the romanticism of national narratives and the suppressed and oppressed reality of those individuals who live in these nations. When nations are narrated, nationalism also becomes a literary genre that explicates the dichotomy between the national idealism and the reality of individuals who comprise nation.⁸ Such a nationalist narrative is ambivalent in its nature because it captures the position of national subjects who remain at the margins of a national centre occupied by the rulers or administrative heads of nation-states. This narration of nation is dialogic and enunciative. It generates a dialogue between central and marginalised subjects. It gives voice to the subalterns and oppressed people who remain outside the fixed national narratives and static national histories. Eurocentric histories, British colonial history and the post-independence Indian or Pakistani state-controlled histories carve such fixed national identities that exclude what Antonio Gramsci calls the ‘subalterns’. Therefore, any postcolonial nationalist representation of subaltern voices exposes the fixity of these dominant histories. Aijaz Ahmad informs us that nation and nationalism are not the only available forms of collective identification for dismantling the fixities of postcolonial nationalism. He suggests that nation should be replaced by a much more open and inclusive ‘collectivity’ – in terms of class, gender, caste, religious community, trade union, political party, village, prison – combining the private and public without necessarily referring back to colonialism and imperialism.⁹ Another problem with nationalist narratives is that they are a gendered phenomenon grounded in the patriarchal imagination, so they often exclude the narration of the experiences of women.

Nation and Feminism

It is therefore evident that within the current postcolonial nationalist discourse, the nation cannot be studied as a male-dominated, monolithic construct, excluding the role and experiences of women. The discussion of nation needs to relate the issues of gender and feminism so that it can be better understood. Gayatri Spivak points to the fixity of first world colonial discourse; it cannot represent a third world female colonised subject because, as a discursive platform, it is closed for postcolonial and feminist scrutiny. In ‘Nationalist Resolution of the Women Question’, Partha Chatterjee points out a modernist/traditionalist dichotomy at the heart of anti-colonial nationalism that emerged in the early twentieth century in united India. This nationalist ideology was based on the separation of culture into two spheres; the material and the spiritual. The material refers to modern, outer, public and colonial/local cultural exchange, while the

⁷ Bhabha, *Location*. 204.

⁸ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998) 118.

⁹ Aijaz Ahmad, ‘Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and ‘national allegory’, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995) 88.

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spiritual refers to the inner, homely, culturally pure and sacred. Within this cultural dichotomy, women are confined to the spiritual sphere. They have to guard the sanctity of religion and purity of culture and have to stay at home to do so. Yet men are assigned the material, they engage in cultural exchange, have the opportunity to modernise and to collaborate within the imperial enterprise to attain material benefits.¹⁰ This dichotomy is instrumental in understanding the nationalist project and its implications for women. This assignment of gender specific roles prevents the benefits of modernity from reaching women, and so they become the carriers of tradition. Mrinalini Sinha proposes to situate gender and feminism within the global, where gender is not a binary between male and female; indeed, it is a more open form of understanding which when removed from its local and indigenous misinterpretations, goes beyond national, local and indigenous to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity.¹¹

In an effort to dismantle the fixities of Pakistan's nationalist discourse, Moon Charania highlights the tension between feminist activism and contemporary collective consciousness in Pakistan. She points out that feminist activism is usually mistaken for a reinstatement of Westernisation. A female activist is rejected as a western propagandist or as Uma Narayan points out, she is framed as 'a privileged native woman in white face'.¹² Therefore, Charania identifies that those who raise a voice for women's rights in countries with a strong patriarchal hold are usually united in a transnational field of international social justice where they work for women's right in the 'backyard of (Pakistani) state and feudal powers, empire, militarised patriarchy and violent domesticity'.¹³ If contextualised within Charania's and Narayan's suggestions, the feminist resistance against patriarchal structures of power should be framed within a transnational feminist discourse. Kamila Shamsie, as a Pakistani-diaspora feminist novelist, is attentive to this tension between Pakistan's patriarchally-controlled nationalist narrative and transnational feminist resistance. Therefore, in her novels, she reconstructs the new forms of transnational feminist identity and belonging for a Pakistani female subject. In her writings, we can see a strong drive for expressing the aforementioned inclusive and more open form of Pakistani identity. Cara Cilano suggests that contemporary Pakistani writers should endeavour to explore the ways in which the literary texts imaginatively look into the past, express the present, and project a future in terms that facilitate a collective sense of belonging'.¹⁴ In light of what Cara Cilano and Moon Charania are pointing out, this article will explore Shamsie's technique of investigating postcolonial national modernity, and her objective to carve new postcolonial identities for female subjects in transnational spaces outside Pakistan's territorial boundaries.

¹⁰ Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women Question. *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989) 237.

¹¹ Mrinalini Sinha, 'A Global Perspective on Gender: What's South Asia Got to Do with It?' *South Asian Feminisms*, edited by Ania Loomba and Ritty A. Lukose (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012) 356.

¹² Uma Narayan, 'Contesting Cultures: "Westernization," Respect for Cultures, and Third-World Feminists', *Dislocating Cultures: Identity, Cultures and Third World Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 3.

¹³ Moon Charania, 'Precarious Citizens: Feminism, Sexuality and Rhetoric of Westernisation in Pakistan', *Routledge Handbook of Gender in South Asia*, edited by Leela Fernandes (New York: Routledge, 2014) 330.

¹⁴ Cara N. Cilano, 'Writing from Extreme Edges: Pakistani English Language Fiction', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 40 (2009) 23.

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Salt and Saffron is an affective narrative which employs family stories and family history to represent processual national identity. Family is a site of memorial transfer and continuity across generations; it is also a trope that expresses longing, loss and desire for reunion. This novel about family becomes a melting pot where the political and social intersect with the familial and homely. This intersection revisits the history and reconstructs national identity. Another important tropological function of family is to symbolise the hierarchies of gender and power dynamics within a home/nation. Family, as a social structure, legitimises the subordination of women and children as natural dependents on fathers. Anne McClintock explains that nation and family relationship as family trope is a natural way for ‘sanctioning social hierarchy within a putative organic unity of interest’.¹⁵ Susan Strehle explains that an ordinary home, in traditional context, is a patriarchal realm and is more connected to public space, and therefore resembles a nation. Thus, if seen from the feminist perspective, home and family carry the same agenda that a nation and empire carry in producing subjects and subalterns’.¹⁶ When seen from the feminist perspective, family is also a site where the subalterns reside and resist against dominant power structures. Family stories are also similar to nationalist narratives of history; any heroic, progressive and constructive achievement is labelled as a male domain in which women remain foreign, and are delegated as inactive, traditional and regressive, and their agency is confined within the home.¹⁷ Femininity, within such patriarchally-controlled nationalist history, is usually a symbol of weakness, with all internal and external enemies labelled as feminine, and who are outside the nation’s masculine centre.¹⁸ However, when family is revisited as a space where female characters remember the past and transfer it to the next generation, family becomes a space of transmission and femininity becomes an idiom of remembrance and memory. Therefore, in a postcolonial novel, any new reimagining and narration of national identity from a feminist perspective diverges from more traditional patriarchal family narratives, because the focus is on women’s contribution in the process of nation-building, and this new focus dismantles the dominant patriarchal, historical and nationalist narrative. Consequently, a postcolonial feminist reading of family and past is a source of counter histories, and this highlights the role of women and marginalised characters that resist patriarchal control and unequal gender positions. Both family and home in the postcolonial feminist context are ambivalent sites of oppression as well as of resistance against that oppression.

When reading nation through family narratives, history remains a common denominator. Jalal postulates that South Asian historiography is seemingly unchanging and is often locked in an ‘essentialising mould’ when it is narrated in terms of Hindu rulers, Muslim rulers or colonial masters. She emphasises the need for an identity which should be outside such rulers based on the periodisation of history. In such a narration, the history of the ‘ruled’ should be more prominent than the ‘rulers’.¹⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty points out that Indian history needs to be

¹⁵ Anne McClintock, ‘Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family’, *Feminist Review*, Summer, 44 (1993) 64.

¹⁶ Susan Strehle, *Transnational Women’s Fiction: Unsettling Home and Homeland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 1.

¹⁷ Strehle 64

¹⁸ Strehle 64.

¹⁹ Alexander J. Motyl (ed), *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*, Vol. 1 (San Diego: Academic Press, 2001) 3.

liberated from the metanarrative of nation-states such as India and Pakistan.²⁰ In the light of this argument, Shamsie performs this corrective task of liberating South Asia's history from the metanarrative of nation-states (both India and Pakistan) by revisiting history through the lens of family past. She revisits 'history' at three different levels: the pre-colonial, colonial, Partition and post-Partition. In this way, she resists Pakistan's state-controlled nationalist tendency to forget the past or to frame it within a state-controlled narrative. Her motive behind revisiting 'history' is to gauge its processual temporality, to deconstruct its fixities and to invent new ways of national belonging. In this way, she cures the condition which Leela Gandhi calls 'historical amnesia'.²¹ In *Salt and Saffron*, history is not treated as a 'Eurocentric' concept where all other histories remain silenced.²² The reading of history in terms of family past focuses on both the central as well as peripheral subjects. As a result, the narration of the family past in *Salt and Saffron* inculcates an open and inclusive understanding of South Asian history and the Pakistani nation. This bonding reconstructs new forms of belonging that not only includes the stories of elites but also those of subalterns such as women and colonised men, who were traditionally silenced or ignored in patriarchally-controlled colonial, anti-imperial and post-partition nationalist narratives. The next section will give a brief summary of *Salt and Saffron* and an introduction to its characters and situations.

Salt and Saffron

The main conflict in *Salt and Saffron* is between the protagonist Aliya and her grandmother, Abida. Aliya has internalised her parental past through the stories told to her about her parents and grandparents, and about the family patriarchs and rebels. She also has a strained relationship with her grandmother, Abida, because Abida once called Aliya's cousin Mariam a 'whore' because Mariam married the family cook. Aliya reacted to this remark and slapped her grandmother. In the Dard-e-Dils family, there is a perpetual fear that Aliya will behave as rebelliously as Mariam; therefore, in order to resolve her own dilemma of whether or not she will bring down the nobility of Dard-e-Dils, Aliya engages in an inquiry into her family past. The name Dard-e-Dil is a symbolic Urdu title that signifies an ache in the heart. The writer has meticulously chosen the title to convey a sense of belonging to the past, and it is grounded in the North Indian Muslim religio-cultural linguistic and historical idiom of *Dard* or *pain*. In Urdu literary tradition, such a pain or ache is a suppressed emotion, a longing or an enduring struggle in love, or a love that perhaps remains unrequited and unfulfilled.

Salt and Saffron depicts two sets of characters based on the generational divide. One group comprises the ancestors of the Dard-e-Dil family such as the founders, their successors, the princes and nawabs; all of them mostly male patriarchs who are revered within the family tradition as paragons of power and control. This group also includes the female matriarchs such as Abida (in Pakistan) and Baji (in India), who, after the death of family patriarchs, assumed authority and control to retain family superiority and pride. These characters comprise the first

²⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the artifice of history', Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 340.

²¹ Gandhi 6.

²² Gandhi 340.

two generations of the Dard-e-Dil family. They are conspicuous by their high aristocratic lifestyle and manners during the Mughal rule and the colonial era. Their names display the nomenclatures that signify social superiority and aristocratic pride, such as nawabs, sahibzadas and begums. Some of the prominent characters in the novel are Nuruljahan (the founder of the Dard-e-Dil clan), Nawab Hamiduzaman and Qadiruddin (the commander in the army of Nuruljahan who died while fighting for freedom). Aliya revisits the family archives to check the authenticity of the claims of family superiority and nobility. While doing so, she discovers the other set of characters, who rebelled against the family traditions. These characters include Taimur, Mariam, Taj, Taj's mother and the unnamed fourth cousin. They are silenced within the family traditions and are marginalised as outcasts and rebels. In the narrative, Aliya retrieves their lost voices and reclaims their honour.

Dard-e-Dil family past

The Dard-e-Dil family past revolves around the family patriarchs (who are imagined to be at its centre) as progressive, heroic and creative heads of family. Aliya sets the record straight by working out the ambivalence and contradictions within these gendered narratives of heroism and glory. In order to maintain class distinction and social superiority among other ethnicities, north Indian Muslim migrant families often claim to be the descendents of the Mughal dynasty. Such claims were common among all north Indian citizens before the Partition as well as after the Partition. The members of that imagined north Indian Muslim elite (ashraf) were primarily the residents of urban quarters like Delhi and Lucknow, and after the Partition, most of such families resettled in Karachi.²³ In the post-Partition days, they continued to take pride in reconnecting with their rich historical and cultural heritage that had been interrupted by British colonialism. These claims of cultural and social superiority were also founded on the financial stability that this class had attained throughout pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial times. As far as the authenticity of such claims is concerned, all the families who claimed to be of royal lineage were not the Mughals or the Nawabs. Many families who acquired economic well-being and accumulated wealth while being entrepreneurs also claimed to be royal descendents. The motive behind such claims and connections was to establish the family as a noble household and to pose as aristocrats. The Dard-e-Dil family also narrates such stories and anecdotes to keep alive the memories of their royal past and lost glories. Their past comprises a corpus of family traditions, prejudices, fears and generationally-transmitted myths and stories.

In order to conceptualise a more open form of identity, the past is narrated in *Salt and Saffron* as a nonlinear, irregular and fluid concept, which has not been retrieved from any colonial, national, postcolonial state-controlled archive. Rather, it is retrieved from more irregular forms of collective memory, such as storytelling, anecdotes and family gossip. Shamsie uses the epistolary mode, subplots, dialogues, discussions and flashbacks to tell the story of the Dard-e-Dils. She explores the intergenerational transmission of past in her novel through memoirs,

²³ Sarah Ansari, 'The Movement of Indian Muslims in West Pakistan after 1947: Partition-Related Migration and its Consequences for the Pakistani Province of Sind', *Partition and Postcolonial South Asia: A Reader*, edited by Gyanesh Kudaisya and Tan Tai Yong (London: Routledge, 2007) 96.

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stories, photographs, the behaviours of parents and other relatives, family trees, letters, oral narratives and genealogies. Jopi Nyman points out that memory and storytelling are two important techniques that Shamsie adopts to revisit the past. She retrieves the past through memorial repertoire and retells the story coloured by her own feminist and diasporic awareness.²⁴ This performance of revisiting the past is also a form of rewriting history, which dismantles the metanarratives of the patriarchally-controlled historical archives of pre-colonial and colonial India. Due to being generationally removed from Mughal rule (1526-1707 CE), The Revolt (1857), colonial rule (1858-1947) and Partition (1947), Shamsie revisits these events through the ancestral memory of the Dard-e-Dil family. Family gossip and family archives are significant sources for retrieving the lost information about these historical events. Meanwhile her generation has to come to grips with the nationalist, territorial and identity politics of postcolonial subjectivity and Pakistani citizenship. The residual effects of these past events are felt by the new generation and are therefore discussed in *Salt and Saffron*, particularly in the stories of the nawabs and patriarchs of the Dard-e-Dils. The next section will examine the Dard-e-Dils as a family whose past symbolises South Asian history, which Shamsie employs as a symbol to explore and understand the intricacies of modern national identity.

The first phase of Aliya's revisionist approach is to investigate the benign role of the fathers and patriarchs of the family. She embarks on a journey of separating myth from reality. She meticulously works out the real character of family patriarchs against their constructed and imagined righteousness and unquestioned glory. For example, despite the constructed family image that the *Kingdom* of Dard-e-Dil was a significant ally of the Mughal kingdom, Aliya sceptically reveals that this *Kingdom* was completely non-existent. Instead, the head of the Dard-e-Dil family was only a landlord and his land was not big enough to be a state or a kingdom. Like the Mughals, the descendants of the Dard-e-Dil family traced their origin and lineage back to the Turco-Mongolian Timurid dynasty and heritage, though in reality, they were not competent enough to establish a kingdom like Timurlane (1336-1405 CE) or Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur (1483-1530). Therefore, what remained behind were the myths and stories on which the lame claims of dominance were founded and were transferred and authenticated through family stories. Aliya also discovers that the title of 'Sultan' was posthumously given to NurulJahan.²⁵

The protagonist deconstructs the claims of family superiority in another anecdote where she describes a scuffle between Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, who was the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India, and the then patriarch of the Dard-e-Dil family, named Zain. Zain was the favoured son of Nawab Asadullah whose ascension as family patriarch was a result of his father's partiality. Out of sheer incompetence, Zain made an offer to Emperor Babur that, if he (Babur) felt homesick in India, he could make Zain his vicegerent in India and should travel back to Bukhara to enjoy the bounties of his homeland. The offer ignited the Mughal emperor's wrath and resulted in Zain's assassination. His brother Ibrahim replaced him as the head of Dard-e-Dil. The playful, humorous and sarcastic tone of this story has strong ironic

²⁴ Jopi Nyman, *Home, Identity and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009) 109.

²⁵ Kamila Shamsie, *Salt and Saffron* (Bloomsbury: London, 2000) 141. Further references to this novel will be included as page numbers in parentheses in the text.

undercurrents in the novel's plot. It recreates the truth about famous family patriarchs, as Aliya deconstructs the assumption that the Dard-e-Dil was a 'kingdom' in itself and the family patriarchs were infallible beings. She discovers that the Dard-e-Dil was just a part of the Mughal Empire and one of its members, Nawab Hamiduzaman, was not a nawab. Indeed, the title was conferred upon him, posthumously, to assign honour and reverence (45). The Dard-e-Dil family past abounds in stories of such fixed identities that were imposed upon certain male members by the patriarchally-controlled family narrative of the Dard-e-Dils. Aliya highlights the ambivalent character of the Dard-e-Dils, where there was social intimacy between the Dard-e-Dil's royalty and the Mughals, and on the other side, they were the collaborators with the British forces in sabotaging the Mughal ruling establishment.

As Aliya challenges these preconceived traditions in the family, she also produces a counter narrative to expose the fragility of those constructed family traditions. Despite the fact that traditional servicemen were employed to preserve the record of who is royal and who drifts away from the royal lineage, Aliya revisits the family tree with educated feminist criticism. She finds out that claims of royal lineage were a gendered affair and royal honour was only bestowed upon the male descendents. Aliya discovers that although the Dard-e-Dil patriarchs were good administrators, they were also notorious for their sycophancy and were not brave enough as warriors and statesmen, to pose any threat to the Mughal establishment. Therefore, the Mughal rulers never perceived them as potential threats to their kingdom. The Dard-e-Dils were heavily dependent on the Mughals for their feudal pride and power and thus their claims of family superiority, nobility and high social pride revealed shades of perversion, moral laxity and sluggishness.

This narration of the ambivalent character of the Dard-e-Dils during the Mughal rule helps a new postcolonial Pakistani subject to understand the pre-colonial and colonial past that shapes his/her modern national identity. In doing this, Shamsie has reacted against what Jalal calls an 'elitist tendency' inherent within all historical narratives of South Asia. Jalal explains that pre-colonial South Asian history 'over emphasises on kings and courts' and the colonial and national historians are transfixed and bedazzled by a handful of English educated elites 'imbued with notions of liberalism and nationalism borrowed from the West'.²⁶ Shamsie and Jalal both are pointing out that South Asian history is not simply a history of 'privilege and exceptional' rulers; indeed, it should also narrate the identity of those who were 'ruled'.²⁷ Aliya's critical reading of her family's patriarchy is a reaction against the pride of the Dard-e-Dil (imagined) rulers and as the story moves on, Aliya further investigates her family past by reading further Dard-e-Dil archives and exploring the role of family patriarchs during the 1857 Revolt and the advent of British rule in India.

The Ambivalent role of the Dard-e-Dils during the 1857 Revolt and British rule in India

Apart from the evident sycophancy, weak administration, and the treacherous feudal character of the Dard-e-Dils, their moral laxity was also evident in their relationship with the British. As the

²⁶ Motyl 3.

²⁷ Motyl 5.

filthy rich, they played a treacherous role during the collapse of Muslim rule and the subsequent establishment of British colonial rule in India. The role of the Dard-e-Dil family during the Revolt or the first War of Independence (1857) is discussed in the novel, laced with heavy undercurrents of sarcasm and irony. Aliya investigates how the Dard-e-Dils avoided the series of punishments inflicted upon the common Indians, who fought against the British invasion during the Revolt and the War of Independence. Aliya mentions that the then nawab in the Dard-e-Dil family sent his heir apparent to join the supporters of Bahadur Shah Zafar (1775-1862 C.E), who was the last Indian ruler before the advent of colonial rule. She recognises the disguised incompetence of the heir apparent. He was sluggish by nature, and he delayed from joining the Revolt because for him joining was a bad idea; he preferred pleasure before duty and found no serious reason to gallop around the country like an ordinary messenger (143). Instead of fulfilling the mission of joining the Revolt, the heir apparent entered into an illicit love affair with an unknown woman, who later gave birth to his illegitimate child.

Aliya discovers this story with all its disguised negativities which were silenced within the circle of family gossip. While investigating the imagined nobility and family honour of the Dard-e-Dil family, Aliya discovers that it had shades of impurity and perversion. Within the gossip circle, the family celebrated the heir apparent's inability to join the Revolt, because it saved them from disgrace and the capital punishments that British law in India inflicted on the Muslim rebels. Consequently, the Dard-e-Dils joined the British establishment and supported the advent of British rule. However, Aliya critically revisits this story where she, as a postcolonial subject, is attentive to the ambivalence of the Dard-e-Dils as collaborators and facilitators of colonial rule. Aliya juxtaposes this disloyalty of the Dard-e-Dils with another forgotten story of loyalty and sacrifice within the Dard-e-Dil family. While reading the Dard-e-Dil archives, Aliya discovers that there is a tragic story of the unnamed and uncelebrated 'fourth cousin' of the same nawab or 'heir apparent' who did not join the Revolt. As Aliya revisits the disloyalty of the Dard-e-Dils, she explains the tragic story of the fourth cousin:

From the roof of the Dard-e-Dil palace you could see trees in neighbouring states from which the Rebels were hanged ...There was one tree in particular which the Dard-e-Dil royals could not bear to look at – the tree from which the Nawab's fourth cousin, ruler of the neighbouring state and participant in the Revolt, had been hanged. In Dard-e-Dil (home), you could hear the creaking rope as his body swayed in the breeze. All his lands were annexed by the British and a portion was also given to the Dard-e-Dils as a recognition of their loyalty. (144).

As Aliya listens to this story, she expresses her resentment and mentions her personal desire that the British should also have hanged the unnamed 'heir apparent', for not fighting back and resisting the colonial rule. He did not join the Revolt, did not resist against the foreign invasion in his native land and deserved a punishment for his infidelity to Muslims while supporting the British rule in India (145). While narrating this injustice within the Dard-e-Dil family, Aliya represents and recognises the plight of the unnamed 'fourth cousin', who sacrificed his life as a martyr during the Revolt, and who should have been a celebrated person. Instead, his name reminded the Dard-e-Dils of the capital punishment for participants of the Revolt, and became a symbol of fear. They feared that they could also be punished like he, in the case that the heir

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apparent had joined the Revolt.

The 'fourth cousin', along with many other characters, features in the narrative as an important subaltern whose sacrifice and contribution is unrecorded within the family past. While revisiting the family archives, Aliya retrieves his position in the family as an unsung hero. Such a revisionist reading is an intervention into the 'guardianship of meanings, histories and interpretation' of these family archives.²⁸ As a postcolonial novelist, Shamsie insists that such forms of controlled interpretation should be challenged. Bhabha also points out that the process of archiving a tradition only bestows a partial form of identity. Therefore, a reconsideration of such archives is necessary to establish the shifting reality of an event. In new times, any revision of the past introduces the cultural temporalities that were previously left aside in the 'invention of tradition'.²⁹ Aliya's objective behind reading the archives of her family past is to analyse these originary and principle characters from whom the narratives of family superiority originated. Aliya intervenes into these fixed familial (national) narratives and identifies the anxieties in them against their historical certainties. She disputes and questions the ideas and ideals that come to her most naturally. Aliya questions the conventions and customs that she inherits thus she displays a creative behaviour that allows her to represent the life she leads. When contextualised within postcolonial modernity, Aliya's reading of the Dard-e-Dil's patriarchal order is a palimpsestic reading of the precolonial and colonial family past. The protagonist resolves her own dilemma by reanalysing the past of the family and by narrating a revised family story that overcomes the fixities of patriarchal dominance.

A Deconstruction of Family Fears and Prejudices in *Salt and Saffron*

Another conflict in the story revolves around the exclusions and dispossessions of some family members which include Taimur, his (unnamed) wife and his daughter, Mariam. This conflict erupts from the tension between her family's claims of nobility, the demands for pure royal lineage and the rejection of both by rebel family members. This clash has given rise to some traditional family fears and prejudices according to which some family members were expected to rebel against the family's (imagined) pride. Shamsie uses the trope of not-quite twins to explain the fear, prejudice and anxiety that lurk within these unfounded claims of nobility in the Dard-e-Dil family. The not-quite-twins trope encapsulates family fears due to certain trends set by rebellious members of the family. The Dard-e-Dil family remains under a perpetual fear of the appearance of certain individuals who brought down their family pride and grandeur either by marrying into lower classes or rebelling against the royal decorum of the Dard-e-Dils. The not-quite twins were not biological twins, but they are likely to exhibit certain behavioural similarities that make them resemble twins. These characters are Taimur and Mariam. Aliya probes the story of Mariam to check the validity of the not-quite twins myth. According to this myth, Aliya is considered Mariam's twin. Thus, Aliya's bonding with Mariam holds significance within the narrative of the Dard-e-Dils as both are imagined to be outside the family, Mariam as a rebel and Aliya as the possible twin of Mariam. Aliya revisits Taimur's and Mariam's story as

²⁸ Eleanor Byrne, *Homi K. Bhabha* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 53.

²⁹ Bhabha, *Location 2*.

rebels and outcasts in the family, whose exclusion, she discovers, is also a gendered issue.

In Mariam's story, there is a strong criticism of family prejudice and class consciousness. In the Dard-e-Dil family stories, Mariam becomes a symbol of shame and humiliation, as she marries the family cook. This rebellious act against the royal decorum of the Dard-e-Dils is believed to be the result of her impure birth and impurity in the blood due to Taimur's (Mariam's father) marriage to a commoner. Both Mariam and her mother were excluded from the family as imperfect and unexceptional characters. Mariam's return to the family after her parents' death is shrouded in ambiguity, as she has been sent to the house of the Dard-e-Dils after a long separation between them and her parents. The writer addresses the repercussions of forced displacement, family dispossession and gendered identities in the novel through Mariam's story. The feminine subjectivity of Mariam remains unique in the novel as the protagonist Aliya continuously looks up to Mariam as a role model and a source of inspiration. Through Taimur's and Mariam's marginalisation, Shamsie introduces an opposition between feminist resistance and patriarchal constructions of family pride and honour. Taimur, Mariam and Aliya are quintessential rebels against the family's imagined royalty and this confrontation is a source of tension and drama throughout the course of the family past.

Aliya's reading of Mariam's story intends to redress the injustice done to Mariam in the past. This injustice intertwines with the injustice done to her father, Taimur, and due to that, the Dard-e-Dil family had dispossessed both. As Taimur underwent the toils of displacement, migration and expulsion from familial comfort, so did Mariam. In order to understand the gendered exclusion of Mariam and her mother from the Dard-e-Dil family, the explanation of Taimur's plight in the family past is important. This gendered conflict intertwines with the nationalist issue where the emancipation of women either within a family or a nation is not a standalone, isolated phenomenon. It is inextricably interlocked with the emancipation of men. Taimur appears as one of the three sons of Aliya's great-grandfather, and was born into the Dard-e-Dil family on 28th February 1920. In 1938, he challenged his family's aristocratic tradition of travelling to London and graduating from Oxford. Instead of going to London, he mysteriously disappeared from the family scene and moved to an unknown destination to realise his nationalist dreams which were anti-imperial. Within the dominant family narrative, he remained silenced and unrecognised. After his departure, he was labelled a rebel and discussion of him only reignited the Dard-e-Dil family fears and prejudices. Taimur was born after the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre or Amritsar massacre in 1919, when British soldiers, led by General Dyer, killed the Indians mercilessly for attending a public gathering during a curfew. The incident ignited strong anti-imperial sentiments among the Indians.

Aliya finds Taimur's real story and his nationalist stance in a letter which he wrote before defying the family tradition of joining the Imperial army or Indian Civil Service and rebelling against the tradition of acquiring a higher education from Oxford. He reveals his stance against his anglicised upbringing before leaving the Dard-e-Dil home forever. He writes.

My brothers, we were born the year after the Jallianwallah massacre. Think of this when you are strolling down paths in Oxford, studying how to be Englishmen and do well in the world. I lack your gift of erasing, nay! evading history ... those years of English schooling

have robbed me of the ability to write Urdu ... I am not an Englishman nor are you. ... No more the Anglicized Percy. I.

I am now Taimur Hind. (24).

This letter is famous within the family lore as a last statement that Taimur gave before disappearing. However, no Dard-e-Dil family member later investigates what happened to him or whom he married. Taimur lived up to his words till his death and remained outside the Dard-e-Dil family.

Within the context of the early twentieth century anti-imperial nationalist movement in colonial India, Taimur belongs to the group of anti-imperial, nationalist elites. Elleke Boehmer highlights the appearance of certain anti-imperial elites in colonial India, whose education and training were anglicised but they were poised between local cultural traditions and anglicised education.³⁰ In such a situation, they worked out a new space for themselves, where they resisted against the colonial rule and nurtured their nationalist dreams. In *Salt and Saffron*, Taimur personifies what Boehmer calls 'anticolonial intelligentsia' in colonial India.³¹ As a rebel, he loved his local traditions, the Urdu language, and he preferred a local religio-cultural identity as an Indian Muslim. He relished indigenous culture from which he was distanced due to his anglicised and aristocratic upbringing in the Dard-e-Dil home. Therefore, he carved out a third space for himself, out of the two polarised cultural spaces that were colonial India and the United Kingdom. Bhabha calls such an act of carving new spaces 'regenerative interstices' that emerge out of the strategies of resistance and empowerment.³² While carving out such an interstice, or third space, between London (as an imperial centre) and colonised India, Taimur moved to Turkey where he lived his life independently. Thus, he was relieved from the dual pressures of colonial rule in India and from the imperial centre of power that was London.

This reclamation of Taimur's honour within the family story is related to Aliya's own empowerment in the Dard-e-Dil family. Through Taimur and Mariam's story, the writer establishes that within the collective family lore there are forgotten stories of injustice and marginalisation. As a feminist, Shamsie is sensitive to these gender inequalities and she criticises this discrimination due to class and gender. The symbolic placement of Taimur's story, Mariam's story and Aliya's scepticism about claims of superiority and royalty of the Dard-e-Dils, directly opposes the stories of family patriarchs; the ill-founded accounts of their heroics and their celebrated nobility. While narrating these two contrasting realities of the Dard-e-Dil family, Shamsie describes modern postcolonial subjects as descendents of the collaborators of the colonial set up as well as of the nationalist rebels like Taimur, who nurtured their anti-imperial dreams. For Shamsie, a young Pakistani should revisit the historical archives to retrieve such suppressed realities of the past and to have a more informed view of his/her temporal national modernity which should be removed from any elitist appropriations of the South Asian history.

³⁰ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 115.

³¹ Boehmer 115.

³² Bhabha, *Nation* 291.

Treatment of the Partition in *Salt and Saffron*

The discussion of nation continues in *Salt and Saffron* and the feminist and nationalist identity of the new-generation Pakistanis is redefined in the discussion of Partition and its repercussions. Just as she returns to the Revolt and colonial times, Shamsie also revisits Partition as a significant event in South Asian history. The discussion of Partition is framed within intergenerational dialogue, resolution of family conflicts, and reconciliation between family members, who were separated and estranged due to Partition. The story of three brothers is related to the division of the Dard-e-Dil family during Partition, when half of the family members stayed back in India and the other half migrated to Pakistan. In America, Aliya meets the family relatives who stayed back in India and discovers then that there is division in the family due to Partition. Within the family lore, Taimur's other two brothers, Akber and Sulaiman, were famous as siblings who disagreed politically when the Muslim league demanded a separate homeland for Muslims and the Congress favoured the demand of united India's independence from British rule. It was a common belief within the family lore that Akber went to Pakistan as a Muslim league supporter and Sulaiman remained in India, as a supporter of Congress's united India doctrine. Their separation is framed within the family tradition as a politically motivated decision. However, Aliya discovers that their separation was not entirely motivated by politics, because Akber came to Karachi in 1946, and it was a personal fight over their cousin Abida that prompted Akber's departure to Karachi, which was wrongly framed within the family stories as a migration to Pakistan. In her meeting with Indian relatives, Aliya records and contemplates the lack of trust and absence of communication between the relatives divided across borders. The relatives on both sides of the Pakistan-India border continue to blame each other for the division of family.

In this novel, Partition is treated as a trauma which invites two different reactions from two generations. In order to understand this interrelation between generations, a brief understanding of the notion of postmemory is required. Postmemory is an ambivalent term which explains the connection between a generation and its parental past. It is used when a member of a new generation connects with the previous generation's remembrance of the past. 'Post' in postmemory signifies a belatedness, a critical distance as well as a profound interrelation with parental memory.³³ Marianne Hirsch explains that 'it helps in understanding the structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but at a generational remove.'³⁴ Hirsch also explains that when an individual grows up with 'overwhelming inherited memories' he is under the risk of being dominated by narratives that preceded his birth. In such situations, his own experiences are at risk of being displaced or even erased by those of the previous generation.³⁵ In *Salt and Saffron*, Aliya has this sort of troubled relationship with her parental past. She is confused by the deeply internalised yet strangely unknown past of the Dard-e-Dil family. Therefore, in order to connect with her parental past, but also to make things clearer for herself, Aliya meets Baji and her

³³ Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, 29.1 (2008) 106.

³⁴ Hirsch, 106.

³⁵ Hirsch, 107.

relatives from the Indian side, in order to understand their stance towards Partition. Thus, she is using postmemory to connect with her parental past and using her own discretion to resolve her dilemma.

The microcosm of the divided Dard-e-Dil family in India and Pakistan reflects the macrocosm of the post-Partition rivalries between India and Pakistan. The older generation of family members in the Dard-e-Dil family, which include Baji, Aliya's uncle and Taimur's brother, Sulaiman, could only visualise Partition as a moment of division. They repeatedly insist that 'Pakistan was a huge mistake', a statement which Aliya, as a Pakistani, could hardly tolerate or understand (37). Being a member of a new generation, a Pakistani and a female subject, who crosses territorial borders to meet her Indian relatives, Aliya interprets Partition differently. After meeting her Indian relatives, she realises that they were still traumatised by Partition, a trauma of which she didn't have a firsthand experience and therefore could not relate to it sentimentally in the way that they did. Aliya's reaction to the Partition story is interesting. She cannot find any interest in the traumatic stories of Partition to which her Indian relatives still relate after fifty years. In her meeting with her Indian relatives, she declares that her interpretation of Partition is not one of lament and regret. Her interpretation profoundly focuses on 'moving on', where Partition is synonymous with 'Fruition, Revision, Condition' (37). However, her Indian relatives (such as Baji) had witnessed Partition, so had only understood it as a 'division' (37). Believing that Partition was division and holding fast to their insistence, they remain separate from the relatives in Pakistan. They made no effort of reconciliation with those residing in Pakistan. Baji's insistence on framing Partition as 'division' is similar to what Jalal calls post-independence state-controlled narratives of India and Pakistan, which call for 'territorial sovereignty based on the singular and homogenising idea of nation'.³⁶ Contrary to the fixed interpretation that Partition was only a division, Aliya's act of reconnecting with her relatives in India is a form of reversing the divisions that Partition had caused and finding new connections across the (imagined) impermeable borders between India and Pakistan.

The divisive status of Partition is problematised in the plot. Thematically, Partition is an ambivalent moment of transition in national and colonial history and a lived reality with its good and bad consequences, conspicuous in India's and Pakistan's national history. Related to this ambivalent moment of transition, postcolonial national identity is redefined in *Salt and Saffron* to be in close relation with temporality. In recording two entirely opposite responses to Partition, one of 'division' and the other of 'Fruition, Revision and Condition', Kamila Shamsie articulates the processual and ambivalent nature of national identity (37). Vazira-Fazila and Yacoobali Zamindar argue that Partition is a 'prolonged process', rather than an event that took place within the states of India and Pakistan, and not just on their borders.³⁷ Shamsie implies that as a process, it needs recurrent 'revision' and it is also a still prevailing 'condition' that persists as a current political reality in the subcontinent. India and Pakistan are still present as two separate nation states, as they were expected to be after Partition in 1947.

³⁶ Motyl 2.

³⁷ Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries and Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) 1.

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However, in the transnational field, in which Aliya moves, the territorial borders between India and Pakistan are rendered less closed and more permeable. Interestingly, the novel concludes with a moment of reconciliation between the Indian and the Pakistani sides of the Dard-e-Dil family. At the end, one of the three brothers, Sulaiman, arrives all the way from India to set the records straight about Taimur, Akber and himself. Thus, the divisions in the Dard-e-Dil family that occurred during colonial rule and Partition days are reconciled in new post-Partition times. The family members unite and negotiate the longstanding misunderstanding between them. Taimur's connection with Turkey helps Aliya to figure out that Mariam is in Turkey, happily married to Masood (the family's cook) and they are running a food business. At the end, the Dard-e-Dils, as family and home, is reconstructed as a space of mutual understanding and harmony. The long-standing differences between family members, differences of class and gender, are resolved through reconciliation. The revision of family myths and prejudice brings relief of the tensions within the family.

In revisiting history and reconstructing new forms of belonging, the protagonist in *Salt and Saffron* redefines national identity at three different levels. At first, she interrogates the family past as symbolising nation, and explicates that the boundaries of nation as an imagined community which are constantly shifting and therefore need continuous redefinition. Her national identity is shaped by the socio-political reality of her originary home that is Pakistan but this national modernity is a part of a historical antiquity comprising complex South Asian historical phases, such as Mughal rule, colonial rule and Partition. At the second level, Pakistan's national identity is also redefined in terms of a feminist position, where Aliya deconstructs the nation as a male-dominated sphere and rewrites it in terms of more balanced male and female identities. At the third level, she rethinks nation in terms of the multiple homes she has in Karachi, London and New York. In this case, she is articulating the Pakistani nation in terms of a transnational feminist perspective, where certain women like Aliya and Mariam are marginalised from the central family and symbolically from the business of nation. They are excluded, dispossessed and silenced. But Aliya brings their stories to light and situates them within an irregular, non-territorialised transnational feminist space. To conclude, such a narration of identity and belonging is ambivalent because it is informed by past, multiple spaces of existence and negotiation, and is still evolving under transnational influence. Through multiple stories, Shamsie destabilises the traditional territorially and culturally fixed nationalist narrative, while imagining new ways of belonging and a processual form of Pakistani national identity.

Quratulain Shirazi completed a doctorate in English Literary Studies at the International Islamic University Malaysia in 2017. Her areas of research interest are Pakistani diaspora literature in English, Classical Urdu literature and the Indo-Persian popular literary tradition. She has previously published research articles in *South Asian Diaspora*, *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, *Annual of Urdu Studies* and *International Journal of English and Literature*.

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