

## British Raj in India: A Postcolonial Critique of the novel

### “Burnt Shadows”

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#### ABSTRACT

*The present paper intends to discuss the elements (Metropolitanism, Other, Hybridity, Nativism and Diaspora) of post-colonial theory found in Kamila Shamsie's novel "Burnt Shadows". The study addresses the conditions of the people who suffered before and during India's partition. The aim of this paper is to see how colonizers (British) treated colonized (Indians) and how natives reacted against their injustice. The paper also tells the history of India before and during the British Raj. Moreover, it discusses treatment of the previous rulers who had also conquered India before advent of English. British also occupied and ruled India, but how their ways of the ruling were different from all others previous rulers.*

**Keywords:** *Post-colonial theory, India's Colonization, British Raj*

#### INTRODUCTION

Post-colonialism is basically a reaction of colonized nation which emerges from the pens of postcolonial writers. How people were colonized and treated is discussed in the literature based on post-colonial theory. Colonizers' injustice and limitless cruelty remained main theme of postcolonial literature. The present research has intends to critically discuss the postcolonial elements found in the novel. Metropolitanism, Hybridity, Other, Nativism, Diaspora and Unhomliness are the elements found in the novel. According to "metropolitanism" colonizer considers "colonized" undeveloped, and think that without their assistance they could never be progressivists. In colonizers' eyes their culture was superior to other. Europeans said that they had colonized lands to develop backward people, but their argument was totally opposite to their actions. They basically occupied lands to loot natural resources of the occupied soil. "Hybridity" represents transfer of culture. After colonization native people had been knotted between two cultures. They, willingly or unwillingly, had to adopt new culture. The same case was with Indians. When English occupied India, they ruled India cruelly and crushed people under their feet. Indian had to follow fixed rules set for them. During colonial period India had lost its identity because of

amalgamation of English culture. "Other" as a Post-colonial element represents discarded people. Colonizers considered native people different; that's why they kept them away. They treated brutally them as though they would be worst creature of the world. They (colonizers) could not join their company and even their entrance was not allowed in their colonies and hotels. E.M Forster writes in "A passage to India" that it was mentioned on the sign board of their clubs "Indians and dogs were not allowed. (1924) "Nativism" is basically an expression of lost culture, which shows that even now love of pre-colonial culture is alive in their hearts. Post-colonial people by readopting their past culture betray colonizers. Ex-colonials prove themselves nativist by rejecting imposed rules and culture of colonizers. Nativist prove that they were and will ever be civilized, no colonizer can crush their noble culture under their feet. To cast aside western ways of living and to readopt native culture is called Nativism or nationalism. In post-colonial theory people separated from their original homeland come in the category of "Diaspora" or unhomliness". During colonization native people were used for different purposes. They were taken for work far away from their residential areas. They were enslaved there and behaved like animals. Workers did hard work from dawn to dusk. Sometimes months and years passed, but they could not see the faces of their family members.

They were provided low quality food and at night they were chained and locked. To separate someone from his native place where he was born and grew up is called “Diaspora” or “unhomeliness”. Feeling of Unhomeliness is different from the feeling of homelessness. Unhomed people represent the people who are away from their native place. Whether they are settled or unsettled in their new place but recollections of their birth place recall the days which are unforgettable. When they remember the days of separation their sorrows renew and their rage reaches its peak of taking revenge from the people who caused separation.

British came to India, divided Hindus and Muslims and ruled over them. They colonized Indians and considered them other, which means savage, undeveloped and unsophisticated. Sajjad is protagonist of the novel represents India; on the other hand his employer James Burton represents British Raj. English as colonizers considered themselves culturally superior to other, and Indians were culturally backward people in their eyes. This way of thinking comes in the category of metropolitanism. Feeling of otherness of Burtons for Sajjad germinates another element of Post-colonialism that is called nativism. In this element Sajjad leaves Burton’s job and puts off English clothes and puts on kurta Pyjama. Sajjad has also been depicted as hybrid knotted between two cultures.

Sajjad Ashraf and James Burton’s relation is technically mentioned in the novel. Sajjad is puppet in the hands of James. Sajjad is microcosmic of Indian natives whereas Burton is that of British Masters. There was no choice for Muslims except to accept British government. In same fashion sajjad was bound to follow the instructions of his master “Burton”. Sajjad is depicted “Hybrid” tied between eastern and western cultures. Hiroko’s arrival in sajjad’s life gives rise to a sense of freedom. Her love enables him to prove himself nativist. Hiroko Tanaka had already suffered from which Sajjad was going to undergo. She was victimized by the Americans. In same fashion by observing Sajjad and Burton’s company she had drawn result from premonition of the incidents going to happen soon in future shortly after the partition of India. Hiroko Tanaka Warned sajjad to leave playing chess and concentrate on his studies. She said that Burton was making him fool by distracting his attention from his studies. He did not want you to be a lawyer and stop to entertain him. She

made Sajjad clear but he replied “he’s promised, there will always be a place in his law firm for me” (Shamsie, 89) Reality behind game of chess desecrated by the India’s partition when Sajjad had to migrate; leaving his family, friend near and dears. Moreover, he had neither property in newly born country Pakistan nor had he any qualified degree that could help him out in getting good job to live a satisfactory life. After struggle of leaps and bound he got a post of manager ia soap factory.

### RESEARCH QUESTION

How has Kamila Shamsie presented the treatment of English with Indians in British Raj in her novel: Burnt Shadows?

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Descriptive Qualitative Research

The present research in its nature is qualitative and employs textual-narrative analysis of the novel “Burnt Shadows” from the vantage point of Postcolonial Literary Discourse. The collected data for the present paper are descriptive and narrative. Therefore, the qualitative tools like definition, explanation, interpretation are employed to analyze the data and draw generalization and conclusion.

According to Kothari the writer of “Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques” discusses the major purposes of the descriptive research and description of the state of affairs as present. The research can report what has happened or what is happening. (Kothari, 2008, p.3). Moreover, in the eyes of Calmorin et al (2007) Descriptive Research is to find new truth. According to his deep study in the field of research methodology truth may have different forms such as increased quality of knowledge, a new generalization or a new „law“, an increased insight into factors which are operating the discovery of new causal relationship, a more accurate formulation of the problem to be solved and many others” (p. 70)

#### Post-Colonial Literary Discourse Research Method

So far as Postcolonial Literary Discourse Research Method is concerned Ashcroft et al. (1989) maintains the very momentous aspect of this literary discourse in which Indians have been colonized and made them slave in their own territory. After taking a bird eye view of the British Raj, the paper has undergone the experiences of colonized to foreground their tension and strain with colonizers. Postcolonial

writers have chosen colonizers’ language to make them clear that how much they have exploited India during their reign. Colonizers believed that they had brought development in India on broad scale. Before their advent India was undeveloped and its people were uncivilized and backward. One of the greatest postcolonial theorists Homi K. Bhabha describes that form of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once colonized Third World come to be framed in the West” (Bhabha in P. Mongia, 1997, p. ix). Thus, Postcolonial Literary Discourse critically discusses the Britishers’ attitude to Indians. The treatment of English people with native people has microscopically been studied in the light of postcolonial theory. The elements of postcolonial theory which the present paper has selected are Metropolitan, Eurocentric, Other, Mimicry, Diaspora, Hybridity and Nationalism. These aspects of postcolonial literary discourse are very much relevant to the textual study of the novel “Burnt Shadows”.

### DATA ANALYSIS / DISCUSSION

#### Metropolitanism

According to metropolitanism colonizers consider “colonized” undeveloped, and think that without their assistance they can never be progressivists. In colonizers’ eyes their culture is superior to other. Europeans had colonized lands to develop backward people, but their argument was totally opposite to their actions. They basically occupied lands to loot natural resources of the area.

“The colonizers believe that only their own Anglo-European culture was civilized, sophisticated, or as Post-colonial critics put it, metropolitan. Therefore native people defined as savage, backward and undeveloped. Because their technology was more highly advanced, and they ignored or swept aside the religion, custom, and codes of behavior of the peoples they subjugated”. (Tyson, 419)

Elements of metropolitanisms can be noticed at the very outset of the novel when Sajjad ruminates on British India. Sajjad cast a glance at the downfall of his homeland and quick disappearance of its venerable culture. He contemplated that British came to India for trade but they slowly got power and occupied it and colonized them in their own homeland. Injustice of British Raj with Indians remained

unforgettable in the history of post-colonial literature.

After English had occupied India, they made their separate colonies. Their colonies were well organized and demarcated by the boundary of huge and strong walls. They always kept Indians away from their company.

Sajjad says: “there was Delhi; city of the Raj, where every Englishman’s bungalow had lush gardens, lined with red flowerpots. That was the end of Sajjad’s ruminations on British India. Flowerpots it summed it all up. No trees growing in courtyards for English, no rooms clustered around these courtyards; instead, separations and demarcation. (Shamsie, 33)

Whenever Sajjad looked at those demarcating flowerpots, his sorrows increased. Britishers’ Separate ways of living had proved that Indians were savage, backward and inferior to them. Sajjad wants to see British out of his country. Because he, living with Burtons, has known well that this English beaten with broom can never be sincere with Indians. India, Sajjad thinks, is just a guest house for English. They have to move back their home, if not in this century, must be over the next century. They have lived in India more than three hundred years but could not learn any native language, could not adopt any culture and always lived separate like strangers. Sajjad says: “yes these are interruptions-1857 was one, perhaps the departure of the British will be another-but believe me over the next century Dilli will continue to what it has been doing for the last two centuries. (Shamsie, 40) James Burton believed that before advent of English people India was undeveloped and its people were uneducated. In his eyes it is British Raj that endowed India with a new life by bringing modern technology in sub-continent. He thought that if British did not established communication system like railways, post-offices, telecommunication, bus stops and roads no one would bring such noticeable changes in India. Burton says “if that really is the case, then you are mistaken in thinking you will live and die there” (Shamsie, 40-41)

#### Hybridity

Hybridity represents transfer of culture. After colonization native people had been knotted between two cultures. They, willingly or unwillingly, had to adopt new culture. The same case was with Indians. When English occupied India, they ruled it India cruelly and crushed

people under their feet. Indians had to follow fixed rules set for them. During colonial period India had lost its identity because of amalgamation of English culture.

M.A.R. Habib says “the notion of Hybridity” is central to Bhabha’s work in challenging notions of identity, culture and nation as coherent and unified entities that exhibits a linear historical development. Hybrid expresses a state of in betweenness an in person who stands between two cultures. (Habib, 750)

Sajjad is a hybrid; he stands between two cultures. His family follows Delhi’s culture, interested in poetry. He enjoys memorizing early days of his life when he listens them saying poetry in gathering. Another side he, having English clothes, plays chess with James since dawn to dusk. Sajjad is chained between two cultures. He wears shalwar kameez at home and English dress on duty.

“His mind would occupy itself with thoughts of chess games which he and James Burton carried over from day to the next as though they were stories of sultans and djinnis. If there was to be honest, he missed the day when it was legal document rather than chess game which occupied his thoughts each morning but one day they would return to that no doubt. James Burton had promised him (Shamsie, 34)

Sajjad is obsessed with the thought of chess game that is hindrance to his success. For James Sajjad was a pawn; he has just appointed him for entertainment. Though Sajjad was appointed for domestic work, but Burton always kept Sajjad engaged in chess, and whenever Sajjad asked him to give time for law practice he just promised and postponed the matter. Sajjad had to bear all unjust behavior of Burton’s family. It is the character of Sajjad Ali through which readers get a picture of imperial India. *Burnt Shadows* has portrayed a world of cultural hybridity. The character of Hiroko Tanaka exactly falls in this category. She is victimized by the atomic bombing of Nagasaki which destroyed her home, killed her father, her lover and belongings with it. She travels from Japan to India, from India to Turkey, from Turkey to Pakistan, and from Pakistan to America at the wake of 9/11 attack. Her life has ever remained prey of a painful journey. She had entered India as a Japanese and left for America as a Pakistani. Her character opens new door for the readers to visit the world sitting at home. By reading her character readers come across different cultures of the world. Her ever shifting

identity speaks to the fluidity of culture and identity. Like Sajjad Ashraf she is as well knotted between two cultures. She was basically Japanese and preferred to wear Japanese clothes. After her marriage with Sajjad she brings changes in her life style because she does not want any of her action may appear cracks in their strong relation. Because of his wife’s wearing Japanese clothes he was ashamed to invite his friends at home. Therefore, Sajjad forbade her to wear such clothes. Hiroko followed her husband’s instruction and replaced them with Indians. (Shamsie, 132) Shamsie, like most of the postcolonial writers weds personal life of her characters with the public and political scenario.

After America’s attack of “Fat Man” and “Little Boy” on Japan Hiroko Tanaka escaped from the shadowing hands of Americans troops who considered all Japanese their enemies. In search of safe shelter she moved to Delhi where she was warmly welcomed by sister of her lover Ilse Weiss. She was a woman of different type who defies norms and resists stereotypes. In Burton’s house she was sheltered and facilitated. In nature she was totally different from Burtons. Her attitude to Sajjad Ali was friendly and she never considered him her servant. Miss Burton did not like their company and asked her to deal with him as servant is dealt. She wanted to learn Urdu so that she could talk to the native people and could get firsthand knowledge of their condition. When she showed her desire of learning Urdu Miss Burton said that English was sufficient to live in India. Burtons did not like that any member of their family would mingle with uncivilized and backward people. Her meeting with native in free environment was an insult for them. Many a time she was forbade to sit with Sajjad and to meet native people, but she never paid attention to such direction that was misdirection at her glance. Hiroko proved to be the torch-bearer for Sajjad. He was inspired from her bold actions. He kicked Burton’s job off and threw all borrowed clothes on his face.

### **Other**

Other as a Post-colonial element represents discarded people. Colonizers considered native people different; that’s why they kept them away. They treated brutally as though they would be worst creature of the world. They could not join their company and even their entrance was not allowed in their colonies and hotels. E.M Forster writes in “A passage to

India" that Indians and dogs were not allowed in their colonies and clubs (1924). It is discussed in detail in critical theory today by Lois Tyson.

"As the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper "self"; native people were considered "Other" different, and therefore inferior to the point of being less than fully human. This practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human is called Othering, and it divides the word between us (the "civilized") an "then" (the "other" or savages"). (Tyson, 420)

Research has analyzed post-colonial notion throughout the novel "Burnt Shadows". Kamila Shamsie expounded the concept of "other" and "Otherness" in the novel. For James Sajjad was other. James represents Occidentalism which is opposite of Orientalism. Sajjad was a servant of James Burton. His job was nothing except playing chess since dawn to dusk. Sajjad was interested in law and had an ambition to be a lawyer. He always requested James to give him time for practice of law, but James always promised and put Sajjad's request behind the shelf. He never helped Sajjad in his studies except lending books. Sajjad slowly and gradually understood that English can never be sincere with Indians; they never wanted Indians proceed in walk of life. Sajjad, once being completely disgruntled with James's constant attitude of avoidance of his request, says "is this what you call a flourishing life? Spending my days playing chess with". (Shamsie, 41) Sajjad is basically representing India and James to British Raj. Sajjad was living in fool's paradise created by James. He always made him fool by just promising to guide him in law practice someday. Peak of hatred of English with Indians can be noticed with this reality that English had lived in India more than three hundred years but even then they did not learn any single regional language. Moreover, if anyone would show their interest in learning native language his interest was weakened by throwing cold water. They said the interested person that English language was sufficient for living in India. This reality has beautifully been mention by Shamsie in the novel. Hiroko says "I'd like to learn the language they speak here, she had said. It's not necessary. English serves your fine. (Shamsie, 57)

Elizabeth Burton disliked James and Sajjad's gathering. She asked her husband to treat Sajjad like an employer. She says that Sajjad is our servant and he is paid for the work not for

playing chess. You should utilize his services. His gathering does not suit to your status. Elizabeth says "and in any case you and Sajjad do nothing but play chess all day; let the boy work for his salary again." (Shamsie, 20)

Hiroko was also "other" in Tokyo when she was taken for emergency treatment. After she had recovered; she worked as a translator for over a year. She was Japanese girl, different in look form Americans. Moreover, Japanese were considered their worst enemy. Her friend, to save Hiroko from Americans' attack, took her to parlor, where she got her hair done and wore American dress. She changed her appearance just to hide her identity. For Americans Hiroko was other. Even after the war their hatred with Japanese did not abate. That's why her friend, was a nurse, changed her look so that nobody could harm her. This event skillfully discussed by Shamsie in the novel when Hiroko says "I worked as a translator for over a year. Made friend with one American nurse in particular, who took me to take my hair cut short like hers, and let me borrow her clothes when we went to night clubs to gather. (Shamsie, 64) Though Sajjad was sincere servant of Burtons, but feelings of otherness was bitter for him. Sajjad belonged to poor family, can't buy new clothes. He took them from James to be on duty. But this was unbearable for Elizabeth.

She says "I wish you would not give him your clothes Elizabeth said without turning towards James. He's started looking at everything you wear as if it's his property; did you see how upset he was yesterday when you split ink on your shirt (Shamsie, 34-35)

It is the countries who call themselves super power are responsible for the cultural distortion of the world. (Sarwat, 472) Sajjad was appointed as a servant at Burton's home. He was conditioned to be on duty in English dress. Sajjad was a poor man; he could not arrange requirement at once. On his request Burton gave some old dresses which hurt his wife much. Miss Burton's behaviour shows that how much British were indifferent to Indians. Sajjad was a simple and sincere servant of James Burton. He never made any scheme to harm his employer.

### **Nativism (Nationalism)**

Nativism is basically an expression of lost culture, which shows that even now love of pre-colonial culture is alive in their heart. Post-colonial people adopting their past culture betray colonizers. Ex-colonials prove

themselves nativist rejecting imposed rules and culture of colonizers. Nativist prove that they were and will ever be civilized; no colonizer can crush their noble culture under their feet. To cast aside western ways of living and adopt native culture is called Nativism or nationalism. This element of post-colonialism is discussed in detail in critical theory today by Lois Tyson. She says “Many ex-colonial therefore feel they must assert a native culture both to avoid being swamped by western culture so firmly planted on their soil and to recuperate their national image in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. This emphasis on indigenous culture especially when accompanied by the attempt to eliminate western influences is called Nativism on nationalism. (Tyson, 423)

After Sajjad had decided to get married with Hiroko, he made his mind that he would be no more of James servant. The day of entrance of Hiroko in his life was the day of deliverance for him. He was now quite free from western culture. He put off English clothes and put on kurta payjama and demolished western cultural boundaries. Now Sajjad was follower of his native culture, cursing so called job and English culture. His read option of native culture and betraying of English culture showed Nativism.

“James turned. Walking through the moist towards him was Sajjad, dressed as had been the first time James saw him, and never since in white muslin kurta pyjama. A large umbrella was touched under his arm, leaving a wet imprint down one side of his body. My dear fellow James stepped forward, extending his hand. Sajjad looking at it in confusion, and James laughed and clasped the other man’s shoulder. Didn’t bring a chessboard with you I suppose; Sajjad pulled away I’m not here to return to my duties (Shamsie, 110-111)

Sajjad is determined to live in Dilli and drive out English from his homeland. Sajjad says “I will die in Dilli. Before that I will live in Dilli. Whether it’s in British, Hindustan, Pakistan that makes no difference. In Sajjad’s eyes, his colony is still saved from affects of the British culture. He says to James Burton that the next century India will be free from British Raj. And all lost culture of Dilli will revive soon. Sajjad says “not believe me over the next century Dilli will continue to be what it’s been doing for the last two centuries (Shamsie, 40)

Sajjad’s mother hates and detests English language and specially dislikes some key words, based on the meaning or definition of

demarcation or separation. She knows that English culture and language are disconnecting them from their native culture. The word “modern” shows newness or change with which she hates. Modern? His mother repeated the English word with disgust, and Sajjad tried not to imagine the Burtons laughing as her pronunciation; ‘Maa-dern’. Do they tell you that are what you English are? Modern? These are words created only to cut you off from people and your past.” (Shamsie 52) In the history of sub-continent, India had been conquered by Turk, Arab, Hun, Mongol and Persian whoever came here, mingled with native people and adopted their culture and ways of living. They were sincere with natives; treated them like brothers. They lived in India as they had lived in their own country. They had made India their home. When they were going back to their homelands; they were heartbroken and tears were running down from their eyes. But the case with English was totally different. They came in India for business but their greed changed their intention into occupying the land. English had live in India more than three hundred years but could not mingle with Indians. They always kept Indians away from themselves. They governed India cruelly and looked down upon its people. They could not make India their home.

Sajjad says “throughout India’s history conquerors have come from elsewhere, and all of them-Turk, Arab, Hun, Mongol, Persian-have become Indians. If- when- this Pakistan happens, those Muslims who leave Delhi and Lucknow and Hyderabad to go there, they will be leaving their home. But when the English leave, they’ll be going home. (Shamsie, 82)

### **Diaspora or Unhomliness**

In post-colonial theory people separated from their original homeland come in the category of Diaspora or unhomliness. During colonization native people were used for different purposes. They were taken for work far away from their residential areas. They were enslaved there and behaved like animals. Workers did hard work since dawn to dusk. Sometimes months and years passed, but they could not see the faces of their family members. They were provided low quality food and at night they were chained and locked. To separate someone from his native place where he was born and grew up is called Diaspora or unhomeliness. Feeling of Unhomliness is different from the feeling of homelessness. Unhomed people represent the

people who are away from their native place. Whether they are settled or unsettled in their new place but recollections of their birth place recall the days which are unforgettable. When they remember the days of separation, their sorrows renew and their rage reaches its peak of taking revenge from the people who caused separation of India.

“Being unhomed” is not like the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself, your culture identity critics has made you’re a psychological refugee, so to speak.” (Tyson, 421)

Sajjad never ever wanted to leave Dilli. He used to say that Dilli was his Dill (heart). Hindus and Muslims had lived together for nine hunder years. India had been attacked by different conquerors, but the concept of separation never came forward. British came to India and governed by applying the theory of divide and rule. They germinated seeds of hatred and detestation in the hearts of Muslims and Hindus which generated racial tense, schism, communal frenzy, enmity, killings, and then separation after a cold-blooded massacre of innocent citizens. Sajjad had to say farewell to his homeland, where he grew up, spent his childhood, and enjoyed his young hood which he could never forget. Though he is settled in Karachi but his recollection of Delhi’s life always give rise to his painful memories. Those memorable days begin again his pang and sorrows of separation from Delhi.

“he would not ever have believed that he would come to think of Karachi is home and that his bitter regard about his separation form Dilli would be the absence of safety nets that the joints family system had once provided. (Shamsie, 134)

### CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to discuss the novel ‘Burnt Shadows’ in the light of Postcolonial theory. So, the paper reveals that India had been governed by many rulers in past like Turk, Arab, Hun, Mongol, Persian but British occupied it differently. They basically came

here for trade, but, greed instigated them to become owner of all natural resources aroused them to occupy it. They, slowly and gradually, took power in their hands and made Indians their slaves. English considered Indians savage and backward. Previous all rulers were sincere and friendly to the natives. They made India their home.

When they left; they were disconsolate. Britishers’ injustice compelled Indians to take action against them. This is all shown in character of Sajjad. Sajjad and James Burton’s relation is technically mentioned. Sajjad is puppet in the hands of James. Sajjad represents India and James to English. Sajjad as Hybrid tied between eastern and western cultures. Hiroko’s arrival in sajjad’s life gives him sense of freedom. Her love enables him to prove himself nativist.

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**Citation:** Wahid Pervez, ” *British Raj in India: A Postcolonial Critique of the novel “Burnt Shadows”*. (2018) *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, 5(11), pp. 40-46

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