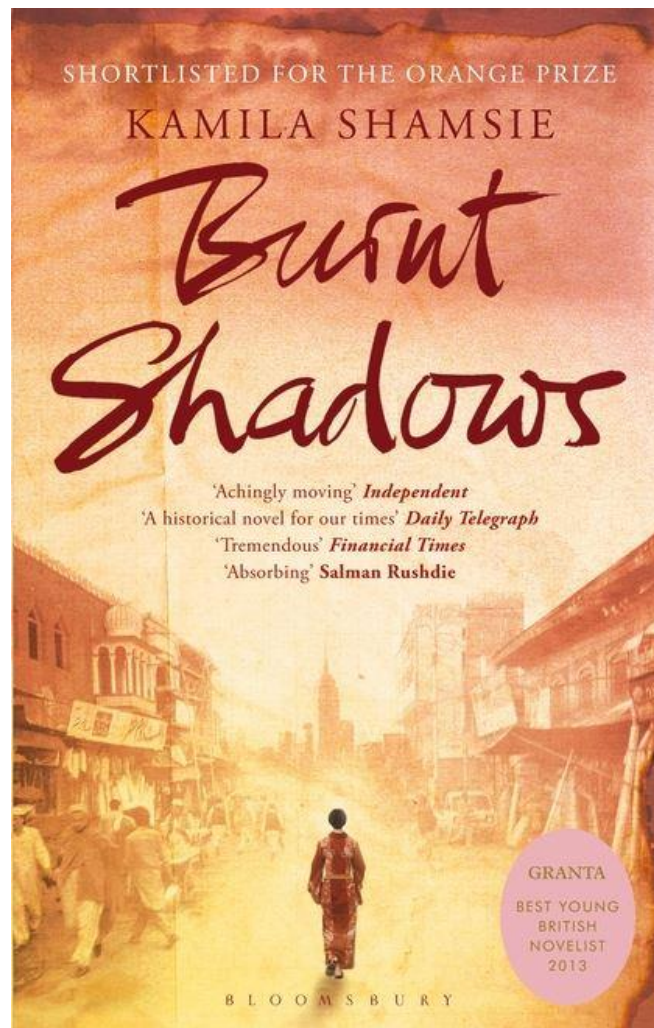


**Various Strands of Women Experience in  
Kamala Shamsie's Novel *Burnt Shadows***

**Sami Ullah, Ghulam Ali and Muhammad Imran, Ph.D. Scholar**

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**Abstract**

*Burnt Shadows*, with its most significant efforts, reveal the devoted existence of women, with regard to their experiences of self exploration. Kamala Shamsie has very truly given various abilities to her female characters, to idealize the life with all its bounties and ill experiences, which shadow the conscious approach of female mentality and sacred vision. 'Burnt Shadows' is the creation of certain facts which represent the world with women

associations. It's a deliberate effort to give exploration to the sights of women world, representing the crusaders of sincere feelings and love. These affectionate feelings mould the very existence what we call 'the women part'. Kamala Shamsie has stretched the story to comprise four different worlds of human existence and experiences, just to make the world realize the role, character and significance of pure dedication, which adore women. Hiroko is a character with all the beauties, sharpness and intellectual approaches, symbolizing the capabilities of all those legends who change the course of lives of many others in surroundings. Her hope and belief in herself slice the darkness, which has enveloped her existence and associations. It's all transformation for Hiroko Tanaka, right from her days of established intimacies with Konrad till the last days of her life in New York, where she faces the related consequence of the life of Raza Ashraf, her son.

**Key Words:** Kamila Shamsie, adaptation, shattered intimacies, self exploring experiences, identification, languages.

## **Introduction**

The literature, idealizing women experiences in the practical and fictional world, owns significant values and characteristics. It's like holding the mirror to the most mesmerizing realities of human co- existence, specially the connotation of women existence around. Kamala Shamsie has this gift to make her characters appealing. particularly the female characters, serve as her mouthpiece to convey her ideas of female existence. The magical possession of four different worlds from Hiroko, with the desperation of loss at the end, is an imitation of the life with its experiences. Hiroko Tanaka, first distinguished as a youthful school teacher in August, 1945 in Nagasaki, turns a munitions factory worker and her artist father, is sorted out as a traitor. Right from those days, when she falls in love with Konrad Weiss, till the immensity of all those questions, asked and applied to a prisoner at the Guantanamo, reveal the inner and outer experiences of this epic character. Her experiences illustrate the image which she constructed of the life in this chaotic world. The adaptation phenomena shows her longing for identification, and then the loss of that identification in itself. She accepts the very truth and realities associated and concerned with the intimacies of all those, she knew and loved. 'Burnt Shadows' truly is the world of Hiroko Tanaka, with her burnt desires , wishes and recognition of self, even the shadows of her intimacies are burnt down to test her nature of acceptance. Kamala Shamsie's category of fiction is characterized by great scope of genuineness and

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reliability. Her protagonist female characters emerge to be like Shamsie herself significant representation. Reasonably, her female characters in that regard are knowledgeable, cultured, liberated, unconstrained, diasporic and sophisticated like herself.

### **The Adaptation, and Transformation, A Self-Serving Blessing for Hiroko Tanaka's Shattered Intimacies**

The experience of adaptation is a self deserved need than any happening by chance. It's a kind of an obligation to adjust. For Hiroko Tanaka, this adjustment is a relief to all those expectations which brings her closer to all those, whom she truly identifies herself with. Her intimacy with Konrad Weiss leads to deep affiliation of love, leaving aside the past. Let bygones be bygones. It's never like to shatter the present moment of care and love with past. Her this adaptation is highly esteemed by Konrad Weiss, as he reports:

"why should the rules of conduct be the only things untouched by the war, ... everything from the past is passed" (Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows*)

It's something strange for her to imagine and follow certain rules of conduct, where one is guided by the true light of trusted intimacy and identification. The relation with Konrad Weiss is a need. A source of guidance and inner enlightenment. She is ready to be guided by this spirit and values highly the importance of some trusted self beyond her existence. "*for Hiroko to know was to want*" (Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows*). She needs the confirmation to rightly bestow her feelings with. She knew deeply in her heart that Konrad's visit to her was an exclamation of that image, she had already portrayed herself in with him. But to value her thinking, she expresses a surprise to further intimate him. The acceptance has already been done. "*last week when we talked about travelling around the world after the war---in which capacity do you think I was agreeing to go with you, if not as your wife.*"

### **Melancholic Meditations**

But there is an aspect of melancholic meditations from the past after the bomb hits the city and leaves her to be "hibakusha" (bomb stricken forever). She wishes to forget the pains associated with all the burns. These burns remind her all those who were dear but then dead, leaving her past inscribed on her mind, traumatizing her consciousness. "*like these burns, her trauma is inscribed in her body*" (Ichiro Itakura, 2014). Here too, she forbears every glance at

her past and adapts for her life coming ahead. She visualizes her future and to make it a reality finds a source to reach Delhi. A place where she tries to find Konrad's connections, which she thought able enough to mould and shape her future. Her past with Konrad makes her assure of her belief in Sajjad. Konrad being not physically there with her in Delhi, still guides her towards the right person, Sajjad. Hiroko feels intimate enough to share her memories with Sajjad Ali. That was Konrad's trust in Sajjad Ali which brought Hiroko close enough to him, and where he could hear and feel the very intuition of her intimacy with Konrad. How best the emotions are shared and esteemed. How her grief is recognized and how emotionally this adaptation is acknowledged.

*" there is a phrase I have heard in English: to leave someone alone with their grief. Urdu has no equivalent phrase. It only understands the concept of gathering around and becoming "ghum-khaur"—grief eaters—who take in the mourners' sorrow. would you like me to be in English or Urdu right now?" (Shamsie, p.55). How exactly Hiroko adapts and identifies herself, creating in her mind the world which she could call, her world. " this is an urdu lesson, ... and returned to sit at the bridge table, pen poised to write the word 'ghum- khaur'. Shamsie, p.55).*

### **Individuality to Adjust and Adapt**

During the development of the various strands of her experiences, her whole individuality to adjust in and adapt every new situation, is exceedingly supported by her gift of speaking different languages. During her initial days of intimacy with Konrad Weiss, her intent and approach was valued by her honour of speaking Japanese, English and German. This competence of having command on these mentioned languages made her able to develop her stance accordingly. By having command on these languages, she faced every traumatic experience and developed new intimacies with Konrad Weiss. This translation of languages enabled her for self translation. By translation it means the transformation of her aptitude in situations and experiences, accordingly. So, this language transformation do carries a physical transformation, which in a sense, is a blessing for Hiroko. As it can be quoted, referring to the readings of Salman Rushdie that, Hiroko is a *" translated women"*. For further elaboration, again to quote Salman Rushdie,

*" something always gets lost in translation, ' but' something can also be gained 'producing new meanings and thus contributing to the enactment of identity. (Salman Rushdie, Step Across This Line. Collected Non- Fiction.1992-2002.)*

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Equally, from her early days in Dilhi, learning Urdu from Sajjad, till those days in which she teaches all those languages to Raza and other boys in school, she has assisted herself with those languages to bridge the gulf for herself. She has utilized the significance of all her learned languages to mend her shattered intimacies accordingly.

*" come, look. I found a world I recognize. ' she pointed to some part of the Arabic inscription on the minaret, and Sajjad moved closer to her to better see where she was directing his attention, their two dark heads almost touching'. (Shamsie, Burnt Shadows, p. 60) .*

### **Multiple Uses of Languages**

That is how, languages proved wonders for her. Languages proved more than mediums of instructions and communications for her. They served her cause of transformation and identification, in creating self serving intimacies.

Shamsie's main idea in presenting her protagonist character Hiroko was to highlight the concept of conflicts in her life. That is, to bring in comparison, the past years, and the life lived in those past years with the present bounties of peace and strangeness. The conflicts, both inner and outer provide enough scope for her self-exploration. Each shattered intimacy is actually an initiative of her better present and expected bright future. Each new experience corresponds exactly to her approach of adaptation. Each moment of critical happening in her life is actually a source of self exploration. Each new beginning is positively accepted, relying on her personal abilities to cope with the situation. The socio-political condition and historical factors are analyzed with deep psychoanalysis of a woman experience. The nature of adaptation is more cherished aesthetically. Hiroko's migration with Sajjad, after marriage and their initial troubled days of migration are not cursed, but in fact, are esteemed for self transformation and self exploration. Hiroko knows the challenges, and confidently faces each moment of the deep-rooted system and norms. As her character is rightly presented alike:

*"She had become in fact, a figure out of myth. The character who loses everything and is born anew in blood". (Shamsie)*

Pratt very affectively sums up the mannerism and peculiarities of such protagonist woman characters:

*"The vitality and hopefulness characterizing the adolescent hero's attitude toward her future here meet and conflict with the expectations and dictates of surrounding society. Every element of her desired world-freedom to come and go, allegiance to nature, meaningful work, exercise of the intellect, and use of her own erotic capabilities- inevitably clashes with patriarchal norms" (1981.p 110)*

### **Dilemma of a Woman Life**

The real dilemma of a woman life is truly personified in Hiroko's character. All the traumatic proceedings through which she passes are like a sorted destiny for the women. From boarder to boarder, and country to country, it seems that stages were being set for Hiroko to perform her part and represent the most sincere affection of love, as a beloved fiancée, beloved wife, beloved mother, a beloved friend and self-assurance in herself for others. As Khan has summed up her role by exactly portraying her role:

*"Her physical body serves as a manuscript upon which national and political upheavals are literally and metaphorically transcribed, reflecting the novels demonstration of women's bodies as sights of conflicts between nationalism and colonialism." (Khan 2011, p54)*

### **On Way to Self-Discovery**

All of the occurrences of different experiences actually serve a source of self-discovery and adaptation, keeping above her stature of a conscious observant. For Hiroko, the two happenings of love, one with Konrad and other with Sajjad are worth narrations. Hiroko happily accepts these prospects without much of turmoil within herself. she easily identifies herself in her second love with Sajjad, and her this soul's attachment serves her for the best part of her life. This identification with Sajjad helps her negate the breaches. She very deservingly bridges the gulf concerning the national and cultural differences among them. She accordingly copes and embraces this new relationship with Sajjad Ali, and efficiently convinces Elizabeth by narrating her best experience of acceptance.

*"And she, Hiroko Tanaka, was the one to show both Sajjad and the Burtons that there was no need to imagine such walls between their worlds. Konrad had been right to say that barriers were made of metal that could turn fluid when touched simultaneously by both on either side." (shamsie.p.82)*

Another bright aspect of Hiroko's character is her realization of the sufferings of others. It's truly exhibited that the sufferings of others are best felt by those who have themselves suffered in their practical life. Rights and respects of others act reciprocally. Hiroko's role is that of a representative of peace. A peace-loving woman who idealizes peace for all her near and dear ones. Peace will serve every of her school children as it will serve her son Raza. She realizes that the conflicts both inner and outer will bring the concerned to the verge of adversity. These conflicts will never allow to groom the characters of those who are predestined. The burns on Hiroko's body, is the justification to the fact, that she is a sensitive woman. She can sympathize with others in their sufferings because of her own hard dealings in practical life.

As Emmanuel Levinas (1998) puts the concerned idea forward in his book *Entre Nous: On Thinking Of The Others, as*;  
*In this perspective there is a radical difference between the sufferings in other, where it is unforgivable to me, solicits me and calls me, and suffering in me, my own experience in sufferings, whose constitutional or congenital usefulness can take on a meaning, the only one of which suffering is capable, in becoming a suffering for the suffering... of someone else." (p 94 ).*

### **Issues of Identity and Race in Relation to Self-appraisal**

Issues of identity and race, and the confusion related to both, is never allowed to hamper the inner self appraisal. Hiroko happily believes that the present moment, her living with husband and a dear son ,is itself a blessing. Past is remembered, but that past is considered past. These memories of pain and shattered intimacies are not allowed to disturb her present, and her this natural aptitude of acceptance serves a blessing for her. This blessing is the appreciation of her deep love with present moment. She accepts her relation with her family, and in fact, all those who have remained next of kin. Her this nature of acceptance and adaptation testifies the fact, that human beings are good by birth. The humane goodness is something inborn. She truly displays her intent and good nature of acceptance, which makes her face the realities as truth, associated with our lives.

That is how, Hiroko Tanaka, conveys her belief in things while discussing the very topic of bad omen experiences. That is how she relate things, depending on herself, and her good-natured competence.

*"But I don't want you to think my life is haunted by the past," Hiroko continued. "I'm told most hibakusha have survivor's guilt. Believe me, I don't. Here I am breathing in the sea air, watching for salamanders and hermit crabs with a Weiss while my husband and son build forts on the sand." (Shamsie p.134).*

### **Change in Concept of Loss**

After living with Sajjad for more than thirty six years, her concept of loss changes altogether. She could not have felt the same impulse of loss at the age of twenty-one when she lost Konrad. All of her loss has given her an image of horror. She convincingly believed that loss was but a horror. The love of a mother and wife taught her to apprehend the departure of loved ones a misfortune that could never be so easily restored. She feels nostalgic about her life in Nagasaki with Konrad, her fiancé. She can't get rid of those images from past. Those images from past, shaped her life with a new courage of transformation, and made her vigilant enough to shape the ways of her future life. The death of Sajjad Ali Ashraf, and the absence of her son from home, made her conscious towards the real unforgettable impact of loss. She faced the inner pain and the loss but remained composed. She has the true courageous nature of a mother who makes herself composed enough to save her son against any unfortunate happenings. That's what seems destined for her, like every mother. She recognizes the importance of every single moment of her life, with her family and other relations. As she narrates;

*"There was too much, too much that had been such a part of her life with him that it had become indistinguishable from the mere process of living... at twenty one it had been impossible for her to learn all the facets of loss. She couldn't have known then what it was to lose the man you loved for thirty- six years." (Shamsie, p.181)*

### **Putting the Blame on the Child**

The tussle between Harry and Raza creates an issue which Hiroko tried her level best to avoid. That is her love for her son, which in spite of her husband's death, compels her to behave like very a composed person. Harry, returns the blame by saying, "*He's dead, you idiot, because he went to the harbor looking for you*". Hiroko wished this statement never to be voiced in the presence of her son.



*'Hiroko saw that he would be haunted now, by this for the rest of his life . He was too young for such pain, just a boy, her little boy. She held open her arms and he rushed into them.'*  
(Shamsie p. 184)

That is a drastic change seen in her approach of acceptance. The transformation and adaptation development has traveled a lot from the mere seasonal change in weather and geography to the higher sensitive level of acceptance. Where the presence of herself beyond her existence is felt, identified and experienced.

### **Change in Behavior**

An aspect of change in her behavior can be observed towards the last years of her life. She had not lived years, but indeed, she has actually lived life in her years. Her observance and adaptation takes mild aggressions, might be because of her desperation, as she knows she has to tolerate something, her son is going to face. We do feel a wave of sadness when she talks about her daughter, Hana, who was dead and not exactly lived, because of miscarriage. A certain parental love and association can be observed with Hana. If she laments, she laments for her children, and that is something of a natural impulse. She has experienced life, and through those experiences, she has explored her real self. Her real self of a woman, who has the strength and courage to mould the ways of life. An impressive existence where she defeats the odds and lives her life . Her transformation accordingly was a requirement as she had to prove herself triumphant. The problems, she faced were not self indulged or self created problems. She can have the proclamation that the world was too much with her. But like a crusader, she owns her destiny. She owns her life and never wants to lament the past.

But when it comes to her children, a slight change in her temperament is obviously monitored. What impulse could have forced her to meet Abullah? Why even she agrees to take Abdullah across the border? Similarly, why is there a disbelief in her acceptance of Kim's offer to do the job for her.?

### **Image of Motherhood**

This drastic change, against her own temperament, is the result of her affectionate identification with the true image of motherhood. This is not any outer force which compels her doing so. Its natural instinct which guides her physical powers in her old age to secure,

what ties to her son's life, with his associations and relations. It's the life she lives for her son now. The ultimate pleasure she has in her life is the truth that Raza is her son, alive, and her guiding spirit. She guides all of her strength of her old age towards the light and attraction, her son Raza. All of the knowledge of her practical life helps her explore her love for intimacies; which one wishes against the natural phenomenon of loss. The question she asks can shed light on her disturbance and worries about her son's life. It is like some bad omen had warned her concerning her son, Raza. One can feel the impulse of worries expressed in the question. Her question really shocks Kim,

*" where's my son, Kim? (Shamsie p.273)*

The strange gesture in her approach is felt, as recognized by Kim herself, and acknowledged by Hiroko herself.

*" I don't remember ever being like this. I don't like it at all. She clenched her fists and shook them in front of her--- a strange gesture that only stopped short of being foolish by its surprising venom. ' Hse once accused Sajjad of being a rapist. For all of two minutes she thought he was rapist. She told me afterwards, those were two minutes in which she was lost. And look at you now, Hse's granddaughter.you don't even know you are lost" (Shamsie p.274).*

One can imagine easily why the lights dimmed less for her. Why life for her needs empathy and compassion. Her life that she has lived flashes back on her inward eye of conscious adaptation, testing her tolerance of her identification beyond her existence.

## **Conclusion**

The voice on the other side of the phone constricts the world for her. At least her world. Harry himself would have never wished how his life torments that of Hiroko. Hiroko a name, a history, an individual who shaped life for herself to live, but the nature never allowed her to shape life for all those, whom she cared more of than her own life. Now at that stage of her life, she asks for a borrowed life, a life that is now not hers, but she wants to live. The world outside may not glorify what she has in her heart. Loss on her part, her life was something of women destined to face. The struggles made her life appreciative of her intimacies. Truly, like a devoted woman she valued her life. Partly for herself and partly for more than her own self. The negation of self , glorifies the existence of those living with her in an association. Kamala Shamsie has truly depicted the nature of a responsive woman. The boundaries, the difference

of geography and culture cant alter the true real nature of a woman, a mother. Hiroko Tanaka proves that life is worth living. Worthy enough to play her part for the best. The woman with all her experiences and good nature need not suffer beyond her patience, but none can design the boundaries to limit the world of a woman which is a world of her own perception.

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