

Relocating the Roots and Life: A Study on Generational Variations in Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*

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Abstract

Journey plays a vital role in every mortal's life. They either migrate for essential needs or for the obligations of power dynamics. Being a form of displacement, migration has been happening for many years and generations. Leaving one's home and entering into the new land indicates the novel journey one may embark in their life. It has both positive and negative aspects. Migration may destroy someone's beautiful life which has already been written or it may rewrite a beautiful life for someone. To comprehend the variations of migration, looking into the generational shifts is a significant aspect and to analyse such changes, this paper explores the narrative of Kamila Shamsie. In her work, *Kartography*, Shamsie presents two different generational characters from the same household who migrate to different places for various reasons. Their different perspectives play a crucial role in this paper to aid the core idea. Society and Culture influences in shaping the characters and how each character from different generation responds to displacement. The older generation may show their resentment for leaving their roots since they have lived their entire life there. On the contrary the younger generation may accept the new life that awaits to explore the novelty of their potential. Migration may be a source of fear; it depends on the individual to change it into the source of strength by shaping themselves. This paper strives to project the positive ways of accepting the migration which provides the strength to create a strong identity in life.

Keywords: Migration, Displacement, Generational differences, Identity, Roots, Culture and Society.

Introduction

The initial knowledge of migration is acquired in school days, where students learn a whole lesson about 'bird migration.' Birds migrate across the globe for food, shelter, breeding, and many other reasons. As one grows up, they realize it also happens with human beings. It may also be considered a form of displacement where they leave their roots and travel to a completely new place, which may make their situation difficult or give them ways to explore new things. There are various reasons for a person to displace from one place to

another - education, employment, political conflicts and even for a better life, which come under different categories like internal, external, social and academic reasons. Migration may not be a basic need like food or water, but it happens due to an inevitable situation in an individual's life or family.

The primary aspects of migration can be categorised into two main areas. One, migration due to personal reasons, like a person in a family moves to the other country temporarily for educational or employment purposes, or even that entire family permanently settles there for upliftment. Another reason is environmental, where a group or a community is forced to migrate to some other place due to the landscape affected by poverty, drought, and even because of losing their lives in natural disasters like floods and cyclones. This results in the government declaring that those places are considered undeserving to live.

One more major reason for people's migration is the political issues, like conflicts or civil war, happening in a country. It causes people to migrate to other places by taking their belongings. Though they are seen as refugees, they are victims who are being forced to migrate by violence that pushed them out of their own country. This migration results in either their upliftment or resentment. It varies from person to person, generation to generation, depending on their life experience (De Haas 232).

Generation bridges between the present life of a person and their future family cycle. It marches to a never-ending path through the ages. Every generation is not the same as it was. It evolves according to the way people live and their behaviour, and the culture they follow (Cassum et al.). The societal influence and the memories of places they lived, friends they met, and families they were born in show the differences of opinion and understanding in every generation. In addition, technologies are the biggest contribution in all generations. According to its development, the style and standard of a generation are updated.

Previous generations were used to having a life, where they played with friends on vacation, naturally followed healthy food routines without focusing or forcing themselves to the numerous types of dieting that one follows now. The whole generation laid their physical work in everything they did comparing to the current generation. After the existence of technological devices, there was a monstrous change in human lives over the years. The situation of the current generation people is that they cannot even live without mobile phones. They are more into the virtual world rather than the real world, like our previous generations were. They developed the intolerance due to the easiest ways in every field made available by technology. Some use it for the betterment of life, which paves the way to a broader mind in accepting the new inventions along with the culture to improve themselves to compete with the evolving speed of the world. Many older generations find it hard to accept new inventions as they are used to and comfortable with the old ways of handling everything, which shows the psychology of humans where they feel satisfied with what they are already used to and refuse to learn new things for various reasons. They may even take a mile extra than adapting to the new era.

Intergeneration talks about different generations of the same family. The culture, their way of thinking, the adaptation and many such characteristics change with generation. The

psyche works following their environment, and that differs from generation to generation. The migration plays a significant role in showing the differences between generations, as one may hold onto the memories, they had with the places they lived, while struggling to adapt to the new places they migrated to. On the other hand, some explore the new land and adapt to their culture, seeking it as an opportunity to develop themselves. The attachment to places explicates the similarities and dissimilarities between generations (Cassum et al.). This concept is exquisitely analysed through the lens of Irvin Altman and Setha M. Low using the Place attachment theory proposed by them.

Place attachment theory describes the connection one has with the places they live or come across for several reasons. It not only focuses on the attachment one may have due to the sight attraction of the place, but it dives deeply into the psyche and investigates the emotional, thought-based, action-based, societal, familial and such relations with any specific place. (Hernández et al.) In addition to these ideas, this theory analyses the attachment of places with diverse perceptions and multifaceted contexts like age factor, cultural factor, life course and many more, which assists the ideology of this paper, that is, generational shifts in migration. Many writers strived to capture the essence of these generational differences through their works, and one among such versatile writers is Kamila Shamsie.

Background

Kamila Shamsie, born in Pakistan, is a major writer who also shares the nationality of the British since she lives there. Born in a literary lineage, Shamsie started writing from the age of 12. Her aunt Attia Hosain was a well-known writer, her grandmother Jahanara Habibullah was a memoirist, and her mother is an editor and journalist. This shows how the family of Shamsie inspired her to portray women through enriched characterisation in her novels. ("Kamila Shamsie," *Bloomsbury Publishing*). Author of more than nine works such as *In the City by the Sea* (1998), *Salt and Saffron* (2000), *Katrography* (2002), *Broken Verses* (2005), *Offence: The Muslim Case* (2009), *Burnt Shadows* (2009), *A God in Every Stone* (2014), *Home Fire* (2017), *Duckling: A Fairy Tale Revolution* (2020) and many more. All her works have a strong framework of characters. As she says in one interview, "I always want the very intimate stories of my characters to also reflect larger stories and conflicts" ("Kamila Shamsie," *Bloomsbury Publishing*). Her novels have been translated into more than 30 languages. She is honoured as Fellow and Vice president in the Royal Society of Literature and was named a Granta Best of Young British Novelist in 2013. She was awarded the Prime Minister's Award for Literature in Pakistan in 1999, the Patras Bokhari Award from the Academy of Letters in Pakistan in 2002, the Patras Bokhari Award for *Broken Verses* in 2005, and the Nelly Sachs Prize in 2019. Recognized as one of the BBC's 100 women in 2013 and named on Granta Best of Young British Novelists ("Kamila Shamsie," *The Booker Prizes*). This paper focuses on her award-winning novel *Kartography*.

Set on the foundation of the Civil War in 1971, this novel beautifully explores how the personal and political lives of people in Karachi, Pakistan, are intertwined. The protagonist's personal life has been influenced and shaped by the political tensions of the country. Raheen and Karim, being two peas in a pod, share a memorable childhood in upper-

class Karachi. Their parents share a history that later affects their children's Interpersonal life. Due to political tensions, Karim's family shifts to a foreign country, leaving a break between him and Raheen. Karim indulges himself in the maps, whereas Raheen investigates their Parents' past. 'The fiancée swap' of their parents connects with the turbulent history of the country, which eventually drew a big line between the protagonists Karim and Raheen. This novel takes the readers to a place where one may not be there normally be. It gives insightful thoughts about how the environment affects personal life with a realistic narrative.

Many researchers have shared their critical acumen and discussed various themes such as Love, Friendship, Politics, Mapping and Discrimination. This paper highlights the characters Ali and Karim. A father and son duo, who were moved out of their native country due to the social unrest in the country. Analysing the behavioural pattern and emotions that are transferred through the generations, this paper strives to provide how one can overcome the generational cycle for the good cause of their family. It also portrays how migration, instead of being a source of fear, becomes a source of strength, shaped by their experiences and perspectives.

Changing Roots and Evolving Streotypes

Around the time of the 1980s, the story of the novel opens with a description of the bond between the protagonists and reveals that they were both family friends. Their parents were linked with each other even before the protagonists were born. The very first chapter of the novel shares the political tensions of Karachi at that time. There were disputes in Karachi during the time of the Civil War, and it cost hundreds of lives, breaking families and their occupation for a living. When disputes similar to that arose in the present time of the protagonists, their parents were troubled and worried about the future of their kids, who are Karim and Raheen. Thinking back to their history of survival of the 1971 war, the protagonists' parents did not want their children to go through the same pain they went through.

Karim's parents, Ali and Maheen, were so troubled about this political dispute since they thought they might have a larger impact compared to the Raheen family due to the ethnic differences. They moved from Pakistan to London, considering the safety of the family. This goes back to the history of 1971, the Civil War, where the parents of the two protagonists, Zafar, Ali, Yasmin and Maheen, were in their youth. "Civil war treated as a long-distant memory." (Shamsie 44) Their twisted fate took place here at this moment of war. 1971 was the time of Pakistan being divided into two; they were already partitioned internally based on their ethnicity, but in 1971, they officially separated into Pakistan and Bangladesh "The year of the Civil War. East Pakistan became Bangladesh." (Shamsie 75) East Pakistan had the majority of Bengali and Sindhi people who followed the traditions and religion of Hinduism, whereas the West consisted of only Urdu-speaking Muslims. There were divisions between Bengali, Sindhi and Muhajirs. During the war, Bangladesh gained the support of India and attacked Pakistan in defence of their own place. In the end, East and West Pakistan were separated as Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The parents of Karim and Raheen, Zafar, Ali and Yasmin belonged to the Muhajirs, while Maheen belonged to the Sindhi community. Zafar was engaged to Maheen, and they were so in love. Yasmin and Ali were quite good friends, but deep down, Yasmin had feelings for Zafar. The political tensions arose when the partition was declared in 1971. Many people moved from West to East Pakistan, and all the Bengalis were attacked and even killed by the Muslims. This was the worst nightmare of Bengali people who still belonged to the western part of Pakistan. They were born and lived there even before the partition of India and Pakistan; thus, it was so crucial, and it made them vulnerable to leave their land for some other place by force. “Who among us has never been moved to tears, or to tears’ invisible counterparts, by mention of the word ‘home’? is there any other word that can feel so heavy as you hold it in your mouth?” (Shamsie 63).

While this was the case, Zafar was afraid, and his family was not ready to accept Maheen since she belonged to the Bengali heritage. He tried to safeguard both himself and Maheen “when he mentioned moving he’d thought that would mean leaving home for him, and leaving what was rapidly becoming enemy territory for Maheen” (Shamsie 187), but was scared to do so because of the threat he received from one of his friends who was searching for revenge for his brother’s death, caused by the opposite community. When Zafar saw him with a gun in his hands, he immediately thought of Maheen, and to save her life, he cancelled the engagement. He also tried convincing his friends to flee Maheen from the place, but she was not ready to do so because Karachi is home like the others.

Because of the political partition and war tensions, how can one forget and leave their roots, all those which gave their life and meaning to their life. “Karachi’s home to both of you” (Shamsie 187). Maheen was facing issues in the society and felt very sick of leaving her own home for such political issues; she felt they were deprived of their right to live in their home. Zafar was afraid that someone could kill them both if they got married. Zafar’s refusal to the marriage was like adding fuel to the burning fire, which killed Maheen on her inside. But she had no other choice but to accept the betrayal and marry Ali. Eventually, after all the disputes, the country settled down and was at peace, reconciling all four friends. Zafar and Yasmin gave birth to Raheen, meanwhile Ali and Maheen gave birth to Karim.

As a burnt child dreads the fire, Ali experienced a sense of fear when he heard about the socio-political unrest of the country, which broke out again after years, and he wanted his family to move from Karachi “Sometimes you have trouble leaving your own orbit” (Shamsie 203), since they might be attacked because of their mixed ethnicity. This worries the Raheen and Karim, but they were left with no alternative but to listen to their parents. On the departure of Karim, Raheen realises how much she misses him. To express his love towards Raheen and the country, Pakistan, where he belongs, Karim wrote letters and created maps to send them to Raheen. He tried to be connected with his country, where he had a sense of belonging, yet he was very cheerful in learning about the new country they migrated to.

Karim's way of expressing his love is mapping all the emotions into the places he went while he was in Karachi. Though he misses Pakistan, he never ignores the chance to explore the new country. He studies in London, has made new friends and developed his passion for being a cartographer and worked towards it. The memories one has from their childhood are connected with their adulthood through some objects, places they lived and so on. (Altman and Low 7) They intentionally or unintentionally reproduce the same pattern to feel at home in the new life they start to lead in the new country they live in. (Altman and Low 8) This shows how Karim, with his mapping passion he had in Karachi, in his childhood days, has travelled with him during his adult life he has in London. The way he creates maps about Karachi while being in London shows his attachment to their native city. The theory suggests that healthy development involves the strands of attachment to the place one lived while trying to adapt to the new place one moved into, the process of separation and individuation that foster relatedness. (Altman and Low 74) Similarly, Karim accepts the migration as a new challenge and strives to develop himself in the new environment while not forgetting his roots.

Ali, on the other hand, developed a hatred towards Karachi. Though it was his native land, he was outraged by the situation that made them move out of the country. He sees the cause of the problems that made their situations worse. Disruptions, a severe loss that happens in any individual's life, may ruin their connection with the past, present or future, with the emotions and memories they held in those places. This leads to the fragmentation of their routines, goals, patterns of living and such that. This disruption disturbs the ordinary life of human functioning. (Altman and Low 232) Ali was so fed up since he experienced a similar situation in his past, the violence, the change of relationships, the horror of living, and the acknowledgement of limits in life. All of these drained his soul, which led to the aversion he developed towards Karachi. At this age, all he wanted was for his son to have a happy life while Ali and his wife enjoy their life playing with their grandchildren. This is the common yet desirable dream of most humans at this age; therefore, it was so hard for Ali to accept the new country and move along with them in everything. Though he migrated for their safety, it was hard for him to get along with the new culture and people; they all seemed different, and he felt alienated.

Karim, being a young generation, may not have the same strong sense of belonging towards Karachi as his father. He was born and brought up in Karachi, and all his friends and family live there "Karim would know, that 'belonging' is a spider-plant shaped, sea-bordering, dusty word." (Shamsie 165) Once he moved out of the country, he tried to make up for what he lost in Karachi. He made new friends; he followed his passion by creating maps and exploring the culture of the new country, and used it for the growth of his life. He turned out to be a great gentleman who has connections in both Karachi and London. Karachi gave him roots, and London gave him routes to succeed in life. Attachment provides the anchor in life for the people who migrate, which helps them to return to their roots as well as to reincarnate their experiences. (Altman and Low 281) Karim came back to Karachi after years and graduation. Looking like the typical handsome immigrant, he navigated his way back to Karachi out of love and emotional affiliation. He did not give up on his traditions,

and he did not turn down new changes in life. This shows the enthusiasm that the younger generation consists which adds spark to their life.

The difference between the generations is visible here. Ali, who was born, brought up and spent most of his life in Karachi, was forced to move out due to the political tensions and the safety of his family. Here, though he decides to move out of the country, the political turmoil made him take this decision “‘We’re migrating.’ At Aunt Maheen’s noise of disbelief, he added, ‘At least, I’m taking Karim with me’” (Shamsie 103).

When he moved out of the country, all he felt was rage and longing. Rage on the people who were the reasons behind the political issues and longing because he has to leave his mother town which was corrupted by the biased officials “This is not about accepting grey areas anymore; it’s a value system that’s totally bankrupt.” (Shamsie 99) By calling it as mother town, one should understand how much the native place relates to the family and blood. It also reveals the numerous emotions it contains. This surely makes the situation hard for Ali to fit into the new place. He compares and connects everything in the new place with his native place and feel even more disconnected from London. All these were the significant reasons that show how hard for people of his age to accept the change that they must do because of external forces.

Karim was born in Karachi and grew up there until a certain age. He moved to London when he was growing up, and this made him adapt to the new place easily. Though his native was Karachi, he was related to London as he studied and learnt to live a life there. This demonstrates how younger generations are more inclined to learn. He makes new friends, finds his passion and lives a well-to-do life in London. This does not mean that he has no love for his roots. His return to Karachi and subsequent incidents involving him with his friends in Karachi and Raheen demonstrate how much he missed Karachi, and his bond with the city was stronger than his bond with London. But he makes a very good life in London, adapting to their current scenario, proving that his age and generation have the mind to adapt and explore new culture and place more than his father’s generation.

Towards the end of the novel one can see how Karim shows his love towards Karachi by his maps and letters, also the connection he has when he returned to Karachi “Maps, Raheen, are amazing things. They define a city as a single territorial unit, they give a sense of connectedness” (Shamsie 244). London gave him the life he lives at present which shows how he uplifted his life by adapting to the migrated country’s culture. On the other hand, Ali, though adamant at first, learned to live his life in the new country which is London. He also grew his son well in the new country which shows how he changed his stereotypes for the betterment of his family. This positive end note of Ali and Karim’s lives shows how one should adapt to the changing circumstances to enhance their life in a better way.

Conclusion

Kamila Shamsie beautifully furnished the differences between the two generations and the way they adapt to the new culture. Migration happens for many reasons, and to many

people nowadays but the choice of changing it in a positive aspect and learning a way to live through it depends on the individual. It shows that being migrated for worst scenario should not necessarily reflect on life in a bad way. One can take the chance and uplift their life using whatever he/she is provided with. Adapting to new culture may be difficult for some especially the old generation, therefore it is appreciated that they try to live through it. But changing it into a positive environment for the development of their life and uplifting their roots through migration tells their story and history. Forced migration is not a good thing, but one can make a good life by adapting to the new culture while retaining their heritage and ethnicity.

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