

REFUGEE, MIGRATION, DIASPORA

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Lecture 33: Case Study: Reading Pakistani Diaspora and Partition in Kamila

Shamsie's Kartography

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the next series on refugees, migration, and diaspora. We are going to continue with our case study, and today we will be understanding the Pakistani diaspora and partition. Through our reading of Kamila Shamsie's novel Kartography. So, the novel Kartography was first published in the year 2001.



Kartography is Kamila Shamsie's third novel, which explores various themes, including trauma, migration, and intergenerational stories that are told against the backdrop of post-partition Karachi, located in Pakistan. So, the setting of Kartography is in Karachi, Pakistan. It is a sensitive collective memory reminiscence, which is related to the separation of East Pakistan from West Pakistan, and it greatly draws on and mentions at length the 1971 civil war. The novel is based on major ethnic and racial conflicts that arose in Pakistan, and it reflects on the consequences and aftermath of these major historical events following the partition of India.

So, Kamila Shamsie was born in 1973 in Karachi, and that's where she grew up. She graduated in creative writing from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. While she was at the University of Massachusetts, she wrote *In the City by the Sea*, and this work was

published by Granta Books in the UK in the year 1998. So, we see that this first novel by Shamsie was shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Award in the UK. Shamsie has also received the Prime Minister's Award for Literature in Pakistan in the year 1999.

Some of her notable works include *In the City by the Sea*, *Home Fire*, *Burnt Shadows*, and *Broken Verses*. Her novel *Kartography* mostly documents the ethnic clashes that erupted in Karachi in the 1990s. It is one of the novels that Shamsie had written in her early career when she was still living in Karachi before moving to London in 2007. Her other novels based on Karachi include *In the City by the Sea*, which came out in 1998, as well as *Salt and Saffron*, which came out in 2000. According to Ruvani Ranasinha, through her novels on Karachi, I quote Ranasinha here, Shamsie evokes the urban pleasures of the elite youth who inhabit the spider plant city by the sea.

The proximity of the Arabian Sea, mangoes, crabbing, bottles of creamy flavored milk from Rahat Milk Corner, and drives to the airport for coffee and warm sand at the beach, unquote. So this is what defines the essence of Karachi life, and this keeps coming back. This keeps inspiring Shamsie's different novels, her writings.

The narrator of *Kartography* celebrates the city of Karachi by saying that, to quote from Shamsie, the city has taught me to look between dust and rubbish to find a splinter of glass that looked like melting ice, unquote. So, to quote from *Kartography*, the pollution of Karachi simultaneously chokes you and makes you gasp at the beauty of unnatural sunsets. The representation of the relatively recent trauma of the Bangladeshi war for independence, which happened in 1971, plays as a prominent backdrop to Shamsie's story of returning or returned migrants. Set in the mid-1990s in the city of Karachi, *Kartography* spans over 30 years of Pakistani history. The central narrative in the novel is based on tracing the relationship of the young protagonists, whose names are Raheen and Karim.

Introduction

- The pollution of Karachi “simultaneously chokes you and makes you gasp at the beauty of unnatural sunsets” (Shamsie)
- The representation of the relatively recent trauma of the Bangladeshi War of Independence in 1971 sets the backdrop to Shamsie's story of returned migrants.
- Set in the mid-1990s Karachi, *Kartography* spans over 30 years of Pakistani history. The central narrative of the novel is based on tracing the relationship of the young protagonists Raheen and Karim, who grow up as best friends in the upper-middle-class enclaves of Karachi, sealed off from civil war in the 1970s. The narrative revolves around their separation, travelling abroad, and reunion.
- Moreover, the parents of the two children (Raheen and Karim) also share an intriguing past. Though seemingly best of friends, their fathers exchanged fiancées.



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So these are the two young protagonists we have in cartography, Raheen and Karim, who grew up as best friends in the upper-middle-class enclaves of Karachi. And this locality is sealed off from the civil war in the 1970s. The narrative revolves around Raheen and Karim's separation, their traveling abroad, and ultimately their reunion. We see that the parents of these two children, Raheen and Karim, also share an intriguing past—not a very easy past that they have. Although they are seemingly the best of friends, the reader learns that Raheen and Karim's fathers had exchanged fiancées.

So they were supposed to marry women that they did not end up marrying. They instead married each other's fiancées. It was kind of a cross marriage. Raheen's father, Zafar, is initially engaged to a Bengali Muslim woman named Maheen, but ultimately he succumbs to racial tension and violence that is prevalent during the East Pakistan War of Independence.

In the narrative, the reader finds that Zafar makes a racist remark against the Bengalis in the presence of Maheen as a way of condemning the killing of a relative's son in the war. So, he condemns the killing of a relative's son in the war, and that's how he makes a racist comment against the Bengali people. At this point, you know, there is a kind of a face-off between Maheen and Zafar, and his friend Ali agrees to marry Maheen, and Zafar, conversely, marries Ali's fiancée, Yasmin. So the past of Raheen and Karim's parents already poses a threat that tends to destabilize the uncannily close bond that they share.

And this bond gets further compromised. Their friendship gets further compromised. By the geographical distance, with Karim's father moving with his family to London in the 1980s as the turmoil and violence in Karachi increase. Over the several subsequent years that pass, Raheen and Karim communicate only sporadically. The friendship, in a way—the bond, in a way—is disrupted, with Karim becoming increasingly reticent and defensive in nature.

Introduction

- Raheen's father, Zafar, initially engaged to Maheen, a Bengali woman, succumbs to racial tension and violence during the East Pakistan War of Independence. In the narrative, Zafar makes a racist remark against Bengalis in the presence of Maheen to condemn the killing of a relative's son in the war. At this point, his friend Ali agrees to marry Maheen, and Zafar conversely marries Ali's fiancée, Yasmin.
- The past of Raheen and Karim's parents already poses a threat to destabilise the uncannily close bond between them, which gets further compromised by geographic distance, with Karim's father moving with his family to London in the 1980s, as the turmoil and violence in Karachi increase.
- Over the several subsequent years that pass, the friends communicate only sporadically, with Karim becoming increasingly reticent and defensive. Unusually for a diasporic novel, Karim's early migration and travel between London and Boston gets little space in the narrative.



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So, One significant point that the reader notices is that the novel is very unusual for diasporic writing because Shamsie's novel *Kartography* focuses less on the migration story—Karim's early migration and travel between London and Boston. So, this part of the narrative gets less mention or less focus, which is very unusual for a diasporic novel. The foreign travel or the foreign experience is not focused on so much. Instead, the narrative focuses on the protagonist's return home to Karachi and the different ways they reconfigure and engage with Karachi's space.

So, Karim and Rahim start mapping their spaces in the city of Karachi—where they belong, what part of Karachi they can reconnect with. That is at the heart of Shamsie's novel. So herein also lies the significance of the title of the novel, *Kartography*. They are kind of reorienting themselves with respect to Karachi's map, And they are also reorienting not only their physical belonging but also their mental belonging—their psychic map—with Karachi's space.

So they reunite in their home city again in the 1990s. Karim returns for the first time since his migration, and the readers are informed through the narrative that he is fully aware of what transpired between their parents. The fact that their respective fathers exchanged fiancées, they ultimately married the women that the other was supposed to marry. Each married the woman that the other was supposed to marry.

Upon return, Karim also realizes that the violence and negative attitudes toward the Bengali population, which repelled him before, now appear with renewed force against the migrant Muhajirs. So, there is this extensive study of the Muhajirs or the Muhajirs in this novel. So Muhajir refers to the refugee Muslims who traveled from a space, which is now post-colonial India. So they emigrated from India, what became India to what became Pakistan.

They moved their homes; they moved their base from India to Pakistan. Within such a violent backdrop and discord within their families, the romance of Rahim and Karim also remains something sporadic, something that is more like a work in progress, which appears occasionally. The smoothness of the relationship, the continuity of the relationship, and the easiness of the relationship are somewhere thwarted; somewhere it faces a setback against so many familial and larger socio-historical challenges that the two characters face. So this piece of home in the novel is mapped and reconfigured in journeys of migration and return, both real and imagined.

As Rana Sinha says, I quote at length, this mapping of home is one of the main thematic and contextual concerns with the figurative K in cartography representing Karachi, Pakistan's own metropolis. Those who return to the spaces and borders they once inhabited have a relationship with Karachi that is at once strained and romanticized, steeped in nostalgia. It is along these contours that Shamsi's characters make their own cartographical inscriptions. Karim remains obsessed with the maps and tries to find rationality in the map-making of Karachi. As in case of Rahim, on the other hand, the narrator points out maps were about helping someone hear the heartbeat of a place.

So, the differences in the two character's approach towards map-making in the novel becomes a metaphor for their different contrasting perspectives on Pakistan and its political scenario. Now, coming to cartographic lines and the watershed of partition, one sees that a cartography refers to the art, science and technology of expressing the known physical features of a geographical space as is represented through maps, charts as well as three-dimensional models and globes. The study of bias, influence and agenda that goes behind making a map is what comprises a deconstructive understanding of map. So, a map is not something which is a result of a neutral imagination.

Mapping 'Home' in *Kartography*

- The space of 'home' in the novel is mapped and reconfigured in journeys of migration and return, both real and imagined. Ranasinha says:
[this mapping of home is one of the] main thematic and contextual concerns, with the figurative 'K' representing Karachi, Pakistan's own metropolis. Those who return to the spaces and borders they once inhabited have a relationship with Karachi that is at once strained and romanticised, steeped in nostalgia. It is along these contours that Shamsie's characters make their own cartographical inscriptions.
- Karim remains obsessed with the maps and tries to find rationality in the map-making of Karachi. For Raheen, on the other hand, as the narrator points out, 'maps were about helping someone hear the heartbeat of a place'.
- The differences in their approach to map-making in the novel becomes a metaphor for their contrasting perspectives/viewpoints on Pakistan and its political scenario.





There are a lot of influences, agenda and biases which can be understood or examined once we are deconstructing a map. So, central tenet of deconstructionism in reading a map is that maps possess power, they are not neutral, they possess power. Cultural influences dominate the process of map making. Certain abstracts on maps and map-making society itself describe the array of social influences towards the production of maps. How states, how nation states engage in the consolidation of a group of people into a nation is



In order to solidify their territorial holdings. So, map-making is definitely power-driven and agenda-driven. It is a way of solidifying certain territorial holdings. Cartography is used to develop and translate imperial, political, and religious ideas into geographical imaginaries, which then produce effects at the ground level. Now, coming to the partition of India, the plan to partition India was announced on the 3rd of June, 1947.

However, the new border was not made public until the 17th of August in the same year. So, the 17th of August, 1947, which is two days after the partition took place, At the start of this period, India and Pakistan were not commonly understood as separate nation-states, but there were vastly more ambiguous and complicated ideological conceptions. So, for a long time, this ambiguity, these complicated ideological conceptions prevailed. Indians rallied behind local political leaders and mailed the leaders their own maps—their own desirable maps—often sketching on paper and sometimes even carving on wood, thereby expressing their hopes for the future of their country.

And what happens as a result is that each person wants to stay on the right side of the border. So, a Muslim always wants land to belong to what will become Pakistan, whereas a Hindu wants her land or his land to become part of what will become post-colonial India after the partition. So, at the same time, one sees that the real lines that would divide the British colony—the Indian subcontinent—were being drawn by a man who was flown in

from outside, a barrister called Cyril Radcliffe, who had no concept, no understanding whatsoever of Indian culture, of the different communities that lived in India, and their values. Indeed, the final border would separate people from their lands. In many cases, people would be separated from their families and communities, which provoked a mass migration of millions of people.

The idea that India's Muslims should be considered as a separate nation, apart from the population that followed other religions, was first recorded in 1888. This separatist notion that India's Muslims should have a separate nation apart from the followers of other religions was first conceived and recorded in 1888. Muslim as a nation was first attached to a given territory, an imagined territory by 1930 and the first call to create an independent state was put forward in 1933. In 1947, the nation state of Pakistan was ultimately carved out of the British Indian Empire.

So India's Muslim leaders did not only imbue an existing nationalism with aspirations towards statehood. They actually defined and oversaw the production of this nationalism and they had envisioned the production of this nationalism through mapping it to territory and then roused its development into a state. First, the whole concept was mapped in terms of the territory that the Muslims wanted to carve out as a separate nation. and then it was further developed

materialized. This entire process took 59 years and maps did not just document this transformation, this becoming of two states out of one. The maps in fact function as a key enabler of the process of two nation theory. So contentions and debates over the India-Pakistan border have led to three wars since partition, three major wars that is since partition, as well as frequent standoffs between the two nuclear armed countries.

And one of the sites of heightened tension is Kashmir, which remains a bone of contention years after independence. Now, coming back to Shamsi's novel *Kartography*, from our understanding of the power and agenda behind map-making, we see that Shamsi Muhajir as a diaspora is a very important theme in Shamsi's novel *Kartography*. A major theme that might be explored while reading the novel is the intersection of partition studies and South Asian diaspora studies. So, according to Priya Kumar, conversations on South Asian diaspora studies and partition displacements have hardly ever converged.

This is because of the assumption that partition refugees and migrants were eventually absorbed into the new national orders of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, which is not always true. A section, a substantial section of the populace actually lived in none of the

three countries. They actually went on to migrate to one of the Western countries or somewhere abroad, outside of South Asia. So it's not true that...

Muhajirs as a Diaspora

- A major theme that might be explored while reading the novel is the intersectionality of **Partition studies and South Asian Diaspora studies**:
Conversations on South Asian Diaspora studies and Partition displacements have hardly ever converged because the assumption has been that Partition refugees and migrants were eventually absorbed into the new national orders of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh... (Priya Kumar)
- Shamsie's novel *Kartography* makes an important exploration in understanding the Muhajirs of Sindh as migrants. The Muhajirs are a community based on a shared ideology of displacement, which can be understood as a collective narrative of their forced migration, and the subsequent challenges they faced in adapting to a new homeland.
- The novel shows how the Urdu-speaking Partition migrants of Sindh have invented themselves as a diaspora over time for various complicated reasons.



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The entire population that became refugees at that time settled in one of these three countries. Shamsie's novel *Kartography* makes an important exploration in understanding the Muhajirs of Sindh as migrants. So, the Muhajirs are a community based on a shared ideology of displacement, which can be understood as a collective narrative of their forced migration and the subsequent challenges they faced in adapting to a new homeland. Shamsie's novel shows how the Urdu-speaking partition migrants from Sindh have reinvented themselves as a diaspora over time for various complicated reasons. So, the term Muhajir in Urdu means an immigrant.

They are Muslim migrants of various ethnic groups and regional origins who migrated from various parts of India after the 1947 independence to settle in the newly formed state of Pakistan in search of an Islamic homeland. The Muhajirs predominantly supported the formation of Pakistan, and they are mostly settled in Karachi and other major urban centers of Pakistan. The novel discusses the discrimination toward the Muhajir through an episode of Karim and Rahim's interaction with a car thief. So, if we read at length from the novel itself, The car thief shares with them his frustrations about Karachi.

Educated yet illiterate, he originally wanted to join the civil service, but his decent marks were not enough because he took the exams in Karachi, and the quota system in the province discriminates against Karachaites. Particularly the migrant Muhajirs, who had no family domicile outside the city that they could claim as their own when government jobs and government-run university placements were allocated according to an absurd urban-rural divide. So here, we see the frustration of a man who is unemployed, who is not

adequately employed. Let's see. He is not employed according to the qualifications and criteria that he fulfills.

So, he is not employed; he is not absorbed into Karachi society as much as he should be, given his merit and qualifications. Further, we see Rahim's father, Zafar, reinforcing the link between ethnic discrimination and saying that this quota system is wreaking havoc on the Muhajirs who have education and ambition. This is somewhat different from the scenario one sees in post-colonial India and its refugee population. In fact, it is the reverse in the case of India, where the refugees—the sharanarthis, the *udvastus*—reaped many benefits after coming to the new land, in terms of the refugee card and the concessions it offered.

And the refugee card actually enabled and facilitated the process of repatriation and resettlement. So, in some sense, in the Indian scenario, the natives would complain that they are not getting as many benefits as the refugees are enjoying in education and employment with the help of the refugee card. So, Raheen is a member of the English-speaking elite of Karachi city and still feels the discrimination and hatred as part of the Muhajir population. She begins to understand what it means to be positioned as an outsider because of her family's migrant past and their origin in the northern part of India. So, she encounters the Sindhi narrative of nativism, which articulates the belief that Sindhis have a prior claim on Karachi by virtue of birth and origin and that the Muhajirs do not belong there as they are immigrants and outsiders who came from elsewhere and speak a different language.

This native-refugee clash or tension is something that keeps coming back in the Indian narratives of partition as well. However, this picture in India is by and large converse to what the Muhajirs are facing or have faced in Pakistan, the newly made nation of Pakistan. In India, the refugees, although they were facing some challenges—definitely in terms of refurbishing their new lives in a new land—were getting ample facilities from the government, which sparked debates, sometimes, about migrants enjoying undue advantages through government facilities. So, rather than nativism dominating in the Indian scenario, in many events we see the

immigrant population, especially from the upper echelons of society who were very well connected and socio-politically entrenched, enjoying some kinds of benefits that were not meant for the natives. This is something one finds in the Indian scenario by and large. So, on one occasion, Rahim overhears the parents' friends, Laila and Asif, who belong to the

Sindhi feudal elite. They are the natives, obviously, and they are discussing their fears about the newly established MQM or Muttahida Qaumi Movement. And in this conversation with Asif, Laila says the following.



Karachi is my home, you know. Why did these bloody muhajirs have to go and form a political group? Once they're united, they'll do God knows what. Demanding this, demanding that. Thinking that just because they are a majority in Karachi, they can trample over everyone else,

like they did in 47, coming across the border, thinking that we should be grateful for their presence. Do you hear the way people like Zafar and Yasmin talk about their Karachi? My family lived there for generations. Who the hell are these Mujahids to pretend it's their city? So to conclude, the novel thus highlights how discriminatory state policies have forced many working class muhajids to reconstruct, to rebuild their identity as a besieged diaspora within their own home, thereby getting shaped by the past experiences of displacement.

And there is always this reference to the migration that their ancestors have faced. So muhajir as a term one could conclude becomes a site of a struggle, a sight of power and new challenges as well as opportunities. So, the novel also offers diverse and complex insights into the exploration of diasporic experiences of the gendered subjects vis-a-vis the context of two nations, Pakistan on the one hand and Bangladesh on the other. Further, Shamsi explores the question of gender and nationalism with respect to the Pakistani experience, which is placed within the larger context and discourses of diaspora and globalization.

Scholars such as Christophe Jaffrelot, Ann Frotsher, Sarah Ansari, and Oskar Verkaaik—all these scholars have noted how government policies led to the emergence of the collective Mohajir ethnic identity in the 1970s. According to Priya Kumar, to quote Kumar, 'Muhajir ethnic consciousness arose in response to a perceived history of discrimination and relative loss of privilege over the decades,' unquote. So, with this, we come to the end of our lecture today. Let us meet with a new topic and another round of discussions in our next lecture.

Conclusion

- The novel thus highlights how discriminatory state policies have forced many working-class Muhajirs to reconstruct their identity as a besieged diaspora within their own 'home', thereby getting shaped by the past experiences of displacement (migration of ancestors)
- It also offers diverse and complex insights into the explorations of diasporic experiences of the gendered subjects from the context of two nations: Pakistan and Bangladesh. Further, Shamsie explores the question of gender and nationalism with respect to the Pakistani experience within the larger context of discourses of diaspora and globalisation. (Ranasinha)
- Scholars such as Christophe Jaffrelot, Ann Frotsher, Sarah Ansari and Oskar Verkaaik have noted how government policies led to the emergence of a Muhajir ethnic identity in the 1970s.
- Kumar – "Muhajir ethnic consciousness arose in response to a (perceived) history of discrimination and a relative loss of privilege over the decades".



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Thank you.