



Negotiating Gender, Migration and Identity: A Feminist Diaspora Reading of Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* and Saadia Faruqi's *Brick Walls*

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research to find answer of the question of how gender, migration and identity intersect in the Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* and Saadia Faruqi's *Brick Walls* using the perspective of feminist diaspora. Female writers manage to interpolate complex frameworks of women negotiating through the diasporic territories which are characterized by cultural hybridity, dislocation and changing conceptualizations of home and belonging. Using the feminist diaspora theory and postcolonialism, the paper looks at the way females of the protagonist challenge patriarchy without the negotiation of cultural and national identities in transnational settings. *Salt and Saffron* describes the psychological disintegration and cultural alienation of the diasporic women, whereas *Brick Walls* places emphasis on the everyday life and strength of the female characters living between the traditions of their ancestors and the diasporic modernity. In a comparative textual analysis, the study shows the workings of the gendered experiences of migration affecting diasporic identity and refuting exceptionless narratives of Western feminism and conformity of South-Asian cultures. The results highlight that female agency, memory and voice are significant to rethinking diasporic belonging through the lens of Pakistani feminism.

1. Background of the Study

The growing internationalization of the literary world has increased an interest in the stories of diaspora as a product of migration and gender studies that has taken a form of identity formation issue often associated with postcolonial world. The Pakistani English fiction has become a potent location to analyze the reality of life of the diaspora, particularly women, who trace their migration experience within an intricate combination of socio-cultural, historical and gendered contexts (Brah, 1996; Hall, 1990). Being among the modern Pakistani women writers, Kamila Shamsie and Saadia Faruqi have made their contribution to the depiction of female diaspora in the West, highlighting the themes of cultural dislocation, hybrid identity, generational division, and female marginalization.

The diasporic literature is usually characterized by such tension as that between home and exile, between tradition and modernity, between self and society and the tension even more so in the gendered experiences of the migrant women (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). As argued by feminist theorists, migration does not have the same impact on both men and women and women become exposed to simultaneous oppression by host and the home cultures (Mohanty, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Such issues

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are represented in simply marvellous terms in Pakistani English literature through the cultural pressure, racial discrimination, and seeking of independence in transnational territories by the characters.

Salt and Saffron (2000) by Kamila Shamsie concerns the issues of the lower classes, genealogy, and identity creation under the prism of the diasporic self of a young woman living in both worlds scarcely-understanding Pakistan and little-known to the West. By comparison, a short story collection (Brick Walls, 2017) by Saadia Faruqi, features several female protagonists who deal with the social limitations of women in Pakistan as well as in the diaspora, with an emphasis on the gender inequality, oppression, and liberation. The two readings can enlighten the manner in which diasporic women intervene in cultural hybridity, challenge the patriarchal realities, and redesign themselves into the multicultural contexts.

The present study aims to respond to the increasing academic interest in Pakistani diaspora literature by presenting a feminist diaspora reading of both Salt and Saffron and Brick Walls, and claiming that the two texts not only share a finely tuned critical discourse of the gendered displacement but also highlight the productive power of female agency and cross-cultural communication.

1.1. Problem Statement

Although the diasporic literature written by South Asian authors has become an object of scholarly interest during the past few decades, the gendered aspect of diasporic writing of the Pakistani authors is under-researched, especially concerning the way in which the female characters experience the cultural displacement, patriarchal regulation, and the group identity construction. The current literature on diaspora has either concentrated on male heroes or generalizing the diasporic life without the consideration of intersectionality between gender and migration. Both Salt and Saffron and Brick Walls, by Kamila Shamsie and Saadia Faruqi, respectively, richly and literarily represent women struggling through the complicated socio-cultural landscapes in both host and home cultures. Nonetheless, the literature on critical readings of such texts has not been able to address the texts through a feminist diaspora lens which can be used to highlight how female characters are rebellious, conform or reconstitute traditional roles of gender in relation to people in the diaspora. This paper seeks to address this gap and thus discusses how the novels present the diasporic female subjectivities and the pedagogical possibilities of migration that affects gender identity.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This study also adds value to the dynamic areas of Feminist diaspora studies and post-colonial writings on literature that are being pursued globally by paying attention to the gendered aspects of migration in the Pakistani English novels. Through the perspective of feminism, the study focuses on the experiences of women as actors in the process of cultural negotiation, as well as recovery of identities in diaspora by understanding Salt and Saffron and Brick Walls. It criticizes static images of the South Asian women and offers a subtle account of how immigration transforms the role of South Asian women in the social hierarchy, their identity, and sense of autonomy. The paper also contributes to current literature by bringing to the fore the Pakistani female writers whose works broaden the body of work in transnational identity, belonging, and resistance in both the eastern and western cultural contexts. This will be especially handy to the scholars in gender studies, in postcolonial studies and diaspora studies and South Asian studies.

1.3. Research Questions

- What is the picture created by Kamila Shamsie and Saadia Faruqi in relation to the gendered migration in Salt and Saffron and Brick Walls?
- How do the female characters in the two texts exercise negotiation regarding their identities in the context of the diasporic spaces of cultural hybridity and patriarchal traditions?
- In what way does a feminist diaspora approach shed light on themes of agency, belonging and resistance in the chosen novels?

2. Literature Review

Issues surrounding the diasporic literature have become an area of extreme interest in the setup of postcolonial and transnational literature, in particular it focuses on the isolation of intricate nature of migration, cultural identity and belonging. The critics like Hall (1990) and Brah (1996) have claimed that diasporic identity is quite fluid in nature, created out of the use of memory, displacement and in-betweenness. According to Hall (1990), identity in diaspora is both a matter of being and becoming which is implied by the history of migration and cultural negotiation. Brah (1996) coins the term, diaspora space, which denotes further that points of contact of national, ethnic, and gendered identities are always in the process of construction and negotiation.

In this regard, gender is one of the important axes concerning diasporic experiences. Feminists critics suggest that the situation of migration does not affect women the same way it affects men, as there is an overlapping of patriarchal society structures and cultural demands in that situation (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Mohanty, 2003). Yuval-Davis (1997) also argues that national and diasporic identities tend to be maintained in terms of control of women bodies, positions and movements thus rendering gender to be at the centre of analysing diasporic formations. The theoretical background of these insights reveals the necessity to analyze the way in which female characters negotiate their subjectivity in the diasporic spaces, especially in the postcolonial South Asian fiction.

In the Pakistani English literature, there was an accelerated use of themes related to transnational migration, cultural dislocation, gendered identity and writers such as Kamila Shamsie and Saadia Faruqi provided a sophisticated representation of the lives of the diaspora. *Salt and Saffron* of

Shamsie (2000) gained an academic response because of the way the author has approached her family history, social background, and cultural identity (Asif, 2015; Suleri, 2003). The transnational journey of the main character Aliya between Pakistan and the West raises the conflicts of the diasporic women forced to reconcile between the modern ideas and traditional heritage. According to Asif (2015), the negotiation of cultural legacies and self-governing seems to be characteristic of Shamsie (2015) narrative possibly because of the role of middle-class females who appeal to cultural and national borders in their relationship to socioeconomic and gender orders.

Brick Walls (2017), which depends less on research, another diasporic book by Saadia Faruqi, makes a useful addition to the diasporic body of literature because it brings to the forefront the commonality of the lives of ordinary Pakistani people and their attempts to achieve a sense of dignity and agency. Her tales present a variety of female protagonists both of whom live in Pakistan and those who are in the diaspora all struggling with the constraints and gender issues as portrayed by society. The fabric of the stories told by Faruqi (2017) requires a reader to realize that cultural conventions could either limit or enable women according to their socio-economic orientations and access to transnational areas. The plurality of narratives in *Brick Walls* exposes a comparative feminist aspect which could be used as an insight into determining the way in which the dimensions of class, gender, and location work together to form the diasporic female identity.

There are comparative studies concentrating on Pakistani female writers and the diaspora that are comparatively few. The majority of studies regarding diasporic Pakistani fiction focus on the political sources of the theme: terrorism, Islamophobia, and crisis of identity after 9/11 (Singh, 2012; Ahmad, 2019). Although these approaches are correct in their own sense, they generally ignore the gendered side of migration and cultural negotiation. Thus, the feminist diaspora interpretation of the writing by Shamsie and Faruqi is needed to prioritize the narrative of women, who appear not only to challenge the mainstream ideas of patriarchal culture but shape the reality of the diasporic identity as a domain of resistance, self-exploration, and personal change.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, we shall adopt qualitative and interpretive research conceptualized on the textual analysis of portrayal of gender, migration, and identity and how they are represented in *Salt and Saffron* by Kamila Shamsie and *Brick Walls* by Saadia Faruqi. By applying close reading and comparative literary analysis, the study dwells upon the female characters and the way they can be described as negotiating cultural hybridity and displacement in diasporic situations. Thematic reflection on primary texts also features emergence of themes and topics of narrative structure, character progression, and socio-cultural background. Secondary sources, i.e., scholarly articles, book chapters, and feminist critiques are also incorporated into the study as the means to place the findings within a wider academic discourse. Such methodology gives space to a subtle approach to the interpretation of the texts and places a face on intersectional experiences of women in diasporic space.

4. Theoretical Framework

The research derives its explanation on grounds that it relates to feminist diaspora theory based on theories used by various scholars like Avtar Brah (1996), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), and Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) to dive into the world of gender and its relation to migration into shaping the diasporic identity. The notion of diaspora space as offered by Brah allows looking at the nature of cultural and emotional negotiations that take place in transnational contexts whereas the postcolonial feminism as introduced by Mohanty critiques the homogenizing of experiences of the women of the Third World. The importance that Yuval-Davis attributes to the role of women in national and diasporic national construction and representations underscores the analysis of the role of patriarchal and cultural norm that the diasporic fiction challenges and reinstates. In combination, the theoretical consideration allows gaining an intersectional view of the female agency, cultural belonging, and resistance in the chosen Pakistani English novels.

5. Data Analysis

Both in *Salt and Saffron* and *Brick Walls*, women struggles in diaspora situations are placed to center stage, and the narratives reveal how gendered expectations interact with the displacement due to national culture to form identity and control.

Kamila Shamsie builds the character of Aliya in *Salt and Saffron* as a young woman who belongs to the elite Pakistani family and belongs to the diaspora community formed through her years of life overseas. One of the important scenes is when Aliya starts thinking about her identity:

“I hated the idea that our family tree had such firm roots in division... if there was a gene for dislocation, then I must have inherited it” (Shamsie, 2000, p. 122).

It is shown here that Aliya carries a displacement which is biologically transmitted within the family: the diasporic identity is not limited to exterior territory but is also reflected on the familial intra and inter structure and the relationship between sexes. Her unease with the class and patriarchal compartmentalization of her family will show how heavy the negative psychological toll can come upon diaspora women who have to negotiate cultural inheritance and self-identity. Indeed, the experience of Aliya according to feminist diaspora lens conforms to the definition of the diaspora space as described by Brah (1996) where the legacies of the past, gender and migration can be seen to complicate the sense of belonging and identity.

In the meantime, Saadia Faruqi in *Brick Walls* provides variety of portraits of Pakistani women who overcome personal and institutional obstacles, both in home country and in diaspora. In the short story- *A Good Match*, Pakistani-American woman is averse to cultural inferences of marriage, as she says:

“My mother’s words wrapped around me like a noose: ‘A good girl doesn’t say no to marriage.’ But I did.” (Faruqi, 2017, p. 45).

This scene is the reflection of agency that the protagonist is trying to exercise in the diasporic environment where conservative norms prevail even after the physical move. The tension between family norms and cultural norms on the personal freedom of the individuals characterizes the struggles of diasporic women in their attempts to overcome inherited patriarchal values. The objection to cultural essentialism put forward by Mohanty (2003) applies here because the character disputes the premise that the South Asian women are agents of tradition.

The other such submission, which comes to mind, is in the story of Saleha, that reads about a victim of domestic violence, who gains her identity back by becoming financially independent:

“Saleha looked at the sewing machine like it was a weapon. She had power now. Not fists, not rage. Skill.” (Faruqi, 2017, p. 102).

The way Saleha turns into her new self becomes a resistance based on self sufficiency and empowerment on the basis of skill, it is a breakage of stereotype of diasporic women being the victim of fixed cultural role. This is in agreement with what Yuval-Davis (1997) says that despite their limitation in discourse of cultures, women in diaspora can be initiators in transforming social and economic relations.

Table 1: Feminist Diaspora Analysis of Two Novels

Element	<i>Salt and Saffron</i> (Kamila Shamsie, 2000)	<i>Brick Walls</i> (Saadia Faruqi, 2017)
Genre	Novel	Short story collection
Narrative Voice	First-person (Aliya, female protagonist)	Multiple third-person and limited first-person narratives
Diasporic Context	Dual settings: Pakistan and the U.S. (New York)	Both Pakistan and U.S. (Houston, diaspora context varies per story)
Focus on Gender	Explores gender through elite family traditions, class, and memory	Centers on everyday struggles of women in middle/lower classes
Themes of Migration	Cultural dislocation, family lineage, generational divide	Survival, adaptation, marginalization, gendered violence
Cultural Conflict	Internal conflict between Western independence and Eastern expectations	External conflict with society’s norms; institutional and familial
Representation of Agency	Gradual assertion of voice and independence by Aliya	Strong, direct acts of resistance by various female protagonists
Use of Language	Lyrical, metafictional, rich in ancestral metaphor	Straightforward, realist, culturally grounded narrative tone
Class Lens	Upper-class elite family in Pakistan	Working-class, middle-class individuals in urban Pakistan and diaspora

In Table 1, we find that both *Salt and Saffron* and *Brick Walls* alternately tell a story concerning the main thematic premises of gender, migration and identity, but in different narrative approaches and sociocultural prisms. The novel under consideration by Shamsie *Salt and Saffron* dwells on such psychological and cultural disintegration of a woman of a privileged background living in the diaspora. The story of Aliya is typical of internal conflict of privilege through classes, burden of ancestry and patriarchal inheritance. This is a slow and internal process of empowerment which involves self-examination and narrative construction.

Brick Walls written by Faruqi, in its turn, has a much greater variety of female characters and many of them are fighting much more apparent and imminent patriarchal oppression in terms of domestic abuse, societal, and economic marginalization. The agency of the characters, performed by Faruqi, frequently is expressed by the way of doing certain visible things, such as a refusal to marry a person of their own will or to get a job and to report abusers. She tells her story in a way that is strongly realistic displaying strength through the usual perspectives of resilience and circumstances of empowerment.

In combination the texts provide an overlaying and supplementary feminist diaspora view. Shamsie paints the picture of internal conflicts when the diasporic women have to work through the inherited systems of power and discover what they can do in the modern world with freedom of choice, and Faruqi highlights the spirit of ordinary women who go against the system of their own cramping, despite all the restrictions inherent in this system. Comparative framework reveals the role of class and form (novel and short stories) and positionality in the manner in which diasporic women practice identity construction and resist oppression.

In comparison, although Shamsie follows the path of the diaspora identity as defined by memory, class and continuity of generations, Faruqi is centered on everyday solidarity and down to earth gains among common women. The whole gives us the continuum of female stories of diaspora, high culture of self-observation and low of survival, how migration both breaks rules of gender through dislocation and reinforces them in new contexts.

6. Discussion

The results of the present analysis coincide with and expand the current limited literature in the area of feminist diaspora studies and South Asian diasporic literature in terms of foregrounding the interconnected experiences of Pakistani women as they negotiate migration, identity and gender-based oppression. The analysis of *Salt and Saffron* and *Brick Walls* exposes the meaning of how diasporic female characters stray between cultural heritage and individual independence, which is celebrated extensively in the field of diasporic studies (Brah, 1996; Hall, 1990). To take an example, Aliya in *Salt and Saffron* is the desirable representation of the fractured and hybrid identity as espoused by Stuart Hall (1990) who believes that subjectivity of diaspora is not fixed but is constantly produced, through difference, history and memory.

Aliya narrative also shows the emotional and cultural bargaining that as postulated by Brah (1996) there is the existence of the diaspora space whereby there is an interaction of the various subject positions; especially the gender subject position, class subject position and history subject position. In the same manner, Shamsie writes, Asif (2015) has made the case that *Salt and Saffron* evokes what is referred to as transcultural memory, and a meaningful encounter with heredity family lore and its scourges, which find an updated translation here through a feminist postulation to explain how such memory expresses itself as gendered (female) and hence limiting or constraining, or both.

Conversely, the *Brick Walls* by Faruqi brings crucial element to the studies already available as it focuses on the agency, survival techniques of ordinary women both inside and outside Pakistan. Although the previous studies on Pakistani diasporic fiction concentrated mostly on the elite, urban characters and political issues (Ahmad, 2019; Singh, 2012), Faruqi targets the peripheral characters, including the survivors of domestic abuse and low-middle classes of women, thus diversifying the diasporic representation. This confirms the request by Mohanty (2003) to decolonize feminist discourse through focus on women actually living in the Third World but without converting their experiences to homogeny.

Tomorrow the pattern of resistance reflected in education, empowerment of the economy and independence of marriage in *Brick Walls* has been confusing in traditional depiction of South Asian women being restrained or disengaged. This falls in line with the assertion of Yuval-Davis (1997) that diaspora women are not only symbolic cultural endowers of the diaspora but they can equally transform into agents of social change. Such saying no of arranged marriage or gaining the economic power back, seen in the characters constructed by Faruqi, brings to light a detail feminist rewriting of the business of diasporic subjectivity that reproduces patriarchal discourses, yet nonetheless exists within the framework of the cultures.

Although scholars, including Suleri (2003) and Grewal and Kaplan (1994) already explored the relationship between gender and postcolonial identity, in the environment of transnational spaces, this paper is an addition because it introduces more ideas of a feminist diaspora yet pointing out the resistance and complexity. Such comparative analysis of works by Shamsie and Faruqi presents a wide field of diasporic female experiences, as one that is sprinkled by moments of elite brooding but dotted

with ordinary lives full of resilience, and as such it compels an avoidance of the monolithic representations of Pakistani womanhood in diaspora.

The paper finally demonstrates the usefulness of feminist diaspora reading in exposing how the narratives of women in Pakistani English fiction challenge, negotiate, and reconstruct identity in reaction to mass migration and cultural displacement. In addition to contributing to a lack of such a study in the literature of Pakistani diaspora, it suggests a more inclusive, intersectional way of thinking about transnational female identity.

7. Conclusion

This paper has explored how gender, migration and identity collide in *Salt and Saffron* and *Brick Walls* from a feminist diaspora perspective that gives priority to the local conditions and subjectivities of the Pakistani women living in the transnational spaces. By depicting a variety of female characters, both Kamila Shamsie and Saadia Faruqi question patriarchate order and cultural essentialism that characterize the discourse of diaspora. Aliya, the main character of *Shamsie*, perfectly represents psychological depths of elite diasporic identity as the legacies of family memory, class, heritage and Faruqi characters present approachable stories of survival and womanhood within and beyond the borders of Pakistan. Collectively, these texts offer a wide range of gendered experiences of diaspora at once characterized by negotiation, resistance and change.

Through readings of feminist theorists Brah, Mohanty, and Yuval-Davis, the analysis shows that the diasporic women in the Pakistani English fiction become not only subjects of displacement of the culture but also agents of identity re-formation. However apart from making contribution to the emerging debate on South Asian diaspora and gender, this research also requires more academic interest in Pakistani women writers whose writing not only generates the discourse of diaspora beyond the victim and passive people. Finally, the research also gives a re-affirmation of the role of literary fiction as a critical space to reflect and re-imagine the multiple lived experiences of gendered migration, and of diasporic belonging.

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