

EXTRICATING THE SELF: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITIES IN KAMILA SHAMSIE'S *SALT AND SAFFRON*

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Abstract

Identities are unravelled through language and culture, as shown in Salt & Saffron by Kamila Shamsie. Language plays a fundamental role in shaping a person's personality. The study centres on language, which helps in untying tangled identities through cultural influences. We focus on syncretism, code-switching, borrowing, and glossing over language while reminiscing about the past and living in the present. This research is founded on the struggle to find oneself through connecting words and identifying one's identity. In this qualitative research study, Kamila Shamsie's Salt and Saffron is the focus. The language variation in the novel's author is the primary objective of this investigation. The research is conducted in the context of Erving Goffman's framing theory (1974). The investigation examines the utilisation of English in South Asian culture, as well as language strategies such as code-switching, plagiarism, and code-mixing.

Keywords: syncretism, code-switching, borrowing, glossing, identity, language

Introduction

Language plays a vital role in shaping the identities that are either lost or not yet found a home. This book is a story that revolves around the people who have either lost themselves in the chaos or are in search of the not-yet-discovered identity. Some individuals are kind enough to talk to others for help, while others remain quiet and grieving. Either way, language is significant enough to lead to the lost and hidden paths.

Kamila Shamsie is a well-known South Asian writer. She has written six novels to her name, and her exceptional use of language has given her novels a unique touch. Her stories are very well driven through her choice of words. *Salt and Saffron* (2000) is an exclusive novel that revolves around the story of the *Dard-e-Dil* family. The narrator, Aliya, is very fond of telling stories, and so she takes the reader along with her story, starting with her ancestors, or, as Aliya says, "all families are possessed of prejudice" (1). The family was broken after independence, and the love-hate relationship between the families developed soon after it, which hides the family's true identity. The strongest character that the reader comes across is the head of the family, who controls each and every person in the household with her strict and stubborn norms, and so the family follows the culture which Dadi wants to show only. Bill Ashcroft and his colleagues state that the recovery of the past, "...will work best if the concepts of traditional aesthetics are subject to adaptation and change. They can be discovered and kept alive...not by academic study, but by being 'lived' and molded through use." (120)

Aliya, on the other hand, is a bit different from the rest of the family. Not only in looks, Aliya studies in the US and holds a strong personality in shaping the Dadi's perspective of hiding the truth even from herself. Through her words, she takes everyone into a world full of happiness and tranquillity.

The novel is a mixture of cultural identities, some lost and some in pursuit of finding. The humour and intellect of the writer make the novel even more interesting for the reader. It helps the readers to understand and relate to the cultural barriers in South Asian households. As Bloch and Trager (1942) suggest, language serves as a structure for communication, “arbitrary vocal symbols through which the society co-operates” (4). Correspondingly Hall terms “language as an institution through which human beings communicate and interact with each other in a social group by using various oral and auditory symbols” (249). As rightly said by the linguists, language is an important factor in determining the scenario for the communicators. Words play an important role in making or breaking a situation, and this is what Kamila Shamsie has done in her novel. She has used her words wisely to shape her characters as strong and independent in all the eras they reside. There is a lot of research done on this matter, but this paper aims to fill the gaps left in the previous research. The paper is significant for highlighting the relationship between language, culture, and identity. Previously, these were done separately, but here the study will be merged to explore the connection between the two in Kamila Shamsie's novel.

This qualitative piece of research study sights Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron*. This study aims to explore the language variation in the novel's author. The study is done under the shadow of the framing theory (1974) by Erving Goffman. The study discusses language techniques such as code-switching, borrowing, and code-mixing, as well as how English is used within South Asian culture.

Research Questions

1. What language tools did Kamila Shamsie use in her novel, *Salt and Saffron*?
2. How does her use of language cast the identities?
3. What is the relationship between the language and the cultural barrier in the novel?

Literature Review

Any text is incomplete without the use of language. Language is a necessary tool without which nobody can carry out a conversation, whether it be between the writer and the reader or between the writer and the society. As Bloch and Trager (1942) suggest, language is a structure of “arbitrary vocal symbols through which the society co-operates” (4). Correspondingly, Hall describes language as an institution that enables human beings to communicate and interact with one another in a social group by using various oral and auditory symbols (249). Both these simpler definitions suggest that the language is a whole idea that brings people together through communication. It is the speaker who decides which aspect of language needs priority at the time: the language variation in society or the idea that the language conveys at the moment.

Kamila Shamsie is a South Asian novelist who has given recognition to the problems that arose after colonialism. She discussed those seeking answers and those fleeing. Postcolonial writers indigenised the English language and made it their own. A well-known South Asian author, Bapsi Sidhwa, states that English is not only part of Britain anymore; we have taken this language, twisted it, and moulded its shape to our liking, making it our own. Now it is a part of us (212). Baumgardner (1993) expresses his sentiments in an article as, ‘Transplanted in undivided India through British colonialism in the seventeenth century, English from the outset began to absorb many of the indigenous linguistic and cultural traits of its Sub continental users’ (14). Thus, English has acquired new grammatical meanings by blending its elements with those of several regional languages in South Asia, which were regarded as Western languages and have been shaped according to the culture and identities of the local people.

Methodology

A qualitative method is applied in this research. This research paper aims to focus on a text presented in 2000 by Kamila Shamsie, titled *Salt and Saffron*. This paper aims to study the language variations in *Salt and Saffron*. The study is nearly impossible to carry out without exploring the language tools used. Erving Goffman introduced the framing theory in 1974, which is a concept that explains how individuals and groups construct meaning through language and social interactions. The language variations are put under the light to examine the impacts of the use of language in shaping identities. These identities will include both those that have already been lost and those that are seeking discovery. Furthermore, this paper also studies the clashes between language and culture. The paper examines the causes of cultural clashes over language.

Data Analysis

This research paper specifically delves into Kamila Shamsie's 2000 text, *Salt and Saffron*, focussing on language variations within it. The examination of these variations is essential, requiring an exploration of language tools to understand their impact on shaping identities—both those lost and those seeking discovery. Additionally, the paper delves into clashes between language and culture, scrutinising the elements contributing to cultural conflicts arising from linguistic differences.

Writers employ various tools in their work to effectively communicate with readers, enhance comprehension, add humour, advance the plot, and develop characters. These tools have an important effect on determining both the narrative and the personalities within the story. The framing of the novel allows the reader to highlight the multicultural differences and the intricacies between the cultures as a whole, especially in terms of their language. The framing also puts forward the power dynamics within the culture of the society and the roles played around it.

Syncretism, as a linguistic device, facilitates the integration of two beliefs, cultures, or traditions within a singular piece of writing. This tool serves to establish a more effective connection between the two aspects, enabling readers to easily relate to the subject. Through the characters, the writer imparts a specific meaning to the cultures involved, and this synthesis can extend to religious contexts, amplifying the potency of the narrative.

In the novel, Aliya tells the story where Dadi used to take her to show her 'kathak' (116) dance practices to connect her to her origins. When I was very young she had taken me to a kathak performance. It was my first experience of classical dance and Which accompanied with table and bells- the ghungroo. (116)

This framing accentuates identity formation through religion, culture, and family dynamics. It also shows how traditions play a significant role in determining a person as an individual and a social being.

Authors employ appropriation to enhance the accessibility of their text, a technique commonly embraced by post-colonial writers given their bilingual readership. This method involves incorporating words from one culture into another, essentially adopting them as part of the author's own language. By doing so, the writer establishes a direct connection with the reader, fostering a sense of relatability and facilitating an understanding of the intended implications of the narrative. 'Huzoor! Aadaab!' (52) Aliya greets and then further asks the health as she writes a letter to her grandmother's cousin, Taimur. Similarly, whenever it came to food, she never uses the English names for them rather she utters the dishes with its original names and some in *desi* accent, as the family is shown to be fond of food and the food plays a decent role in the novel, for instance, 'Cheeng-gum and chaaklait.' (212)

This framing holds the readers of several cultures together. It allows the readers of assorted backgrounds to relate to and enjoy the setting and the story through their linguistic references. The storytelling plays a crucial role in framing multiple cultures together.

Glossing serves as a tool within the text, offering concise explanations of words that convey meaning to the reader. These short clarifications can be definitions, phrases, or clauses in the original language or another. Whether inside or outside quotation marks, glossing, also known as interlinear glossing, is often used to annotate bilingual text, enhance relatability, and facilitate reader comprehension.

Glossing has been used on a few occasions in the novel, first when Aliya shows displeasure and uses the words '*Qaidida Saleeqa*' (36). She says, 'Manners above all. *Qaidida Saleeqa*. Hadn't anyone ever taught her that?' (36-37). Similarly, she also uses the word '*ghazal*' (37) to show her particular taste of music. Then there was the use of the word, '*kathak*' (116). Aliya's lost in the 'jingles' (116) of the '*ghungroo*' (116) that she had to see the things clearly in order to concentrate on the things around her.

The framing in the form of glossing allows the readers to fully indulge in the story, as glossing develops the relation between the reader and the author. This framing enables readers to fully relate to the situation by drawing on instances from their own culture.

The technique of borrowing is employed by writers to immerse readers in another culture. These are words that neither revert to the native language nor get translated into another. The act of borrowing occurs at the writer's discretion, driven by a subjective sense of appropriateness. In novels, speakers or narrators often engage in borrowing to adapt their language to the prevailing conditions and convey their message more impactfully. This borrowing is characterised by a lack of adherence to specific rules, which allows the speaker to use words in a manner that suits their expression.

Borrowing has been made mostly where the food had to be addressed, on every occasion when the food was mentioned, the original Urdu names were used instead of translated English words, like, '*jalaibeas*' (75), '*Alu ka bhurta, achaar gosht, pulao, masoor ki daal, kachoomar*' (56). To talk about the 'chief administrator' (45), the word '*subehdar*' (45) has been used.

Code-switching involves transitioning from one language or code to another during speech, commonly employed when addressing a bilingual audience. Post-colonial writers frequently use this technique to enhance the clarity and richness of their speeches, aiming to make them more accessible to listeners. In the context of a novel, this practice assists readers in connecting with the story, enabling them to position themselves in alignment with the writer's intended perspective.

The novel has shown a lot of code-switching, starting until the end; the narrator as well as her story characters utter the words from the Urdu language. For instance, in the first chapter, Aliya addresses the people of Pakistan as '*Desis*' (7). Similarly, in chapter two, she says, '*qatra* more credit' (16) to convince Samia to appreciate Dadi. Aliya frequently switches her language from English to Urdu, creating the impression that she is speaking directly to the readers.

Code-mixing serves as a writing tool where writers employ two or more codes, blending multiple languages within a single expression. In this method, the conveyance of the message takes precedence over adhering strictly to grammar rules. The speaker or writer utilises languages based on personal preferences, allowing for flexibility in sentence structure and grammar considerations. The novel is full of code-mixing; when the narrator of the story, Aliya, addresses an incident with Sameer, she says, that 'The bloody *chhipkali* practically attacked him' (17). On another occasion,

while talking to her friend, she says, ‘*Racy desi* viciously and vigorously checking you out. Sitting next to purple haired woman’ (28).

These framing techniques allow the readers to blend within the setting of several cultures and beliefs. The imitation of the cultures allows the readers to enjoy and probe deep into the setting of the story as the readers fully relate to it.

Conclusion

Kamila Shamsie has put forth her novel *Salt and Saffron* under the light of Framing Theory (1974). The study shows the cultural differences faced by the people and the difficulties they faced in shaping their identities, both individually and collectively as a society. Shamsie’s characters face a lot of difficulty in shaping themselves, as they are bound to carry their personal beliefs along with the beliefs of the society they are born in and the beliefs they generate through the exposure they get while living in another society. The multicultural differences are very artistically portrayed through the use of linguistic variations. She has integrated the text with a blend of appropriation, syncretism, borrowing, code-switching and code-mixing. The brilliant choice of words indulges the reader in the setting of the story and relates to every bit of the detail. The study shows how a relationship between the author and the reader is created through language. The art of framing is used to generate a reader’s perception through their understanding of the cultures and power dynamics of society.

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