

Nation as Thirdspace in Kamila Shamsie's

Kartography

Gulam Ali Rahmani

Research Scholar, Department of English, Central University of Jammu
Email:-rahmanibhu22@gmail.com

Dr. Vandana Sharma

Associate Professor
Head, Department of English, Central University of Jammu

Abstract

The concept of nation as an ideology has been contested and debated since the early Eighteenth century. As time passed, people learned that the idea of nation in the present context of the world turned a deaf ear to the golden social mantras – liberty, equality and fraternity, and hence seems outdated. The present paper basically argues that the foundational ideas of Pakistan as a nation could not live up to the expectations of the people. Instead, it preaches things contrary to what nation (Pakistan) stood for. Consequently, this turned it into a biased and exclusionary phenomenon, therefore, an outdated principle. Given the above, the paper seeks to bring in an alternative to the biased, exclusionary and outdated ideas of nation. For this, the paper heavily banks upon Kamila Shamsie's overarching alternative manifested in her novel Kartography (2002) where she envisions a society based on spatial justice¹, tolerance, equality and social inclusion. The present paper throws light on how Kamila Shamsie envisions an alternative to nation which in the words of Edward Soja is called a Thirdspace society. Contrary to the concept of nation, Thirdspace is an inclusive phenomenon wherein exclusionary, discriminatory, biased, unjust, and binary driven ideas are subjected to reconstruction and recombination.

Key Words: Nation, Pakistan, Exclusionary, Alternative, Spatial Justice, Thirdspace.

Introduction

Kamila Shamsie is one of the literary doyens from Pakistan who is presently based in Britain. Her literary acumen and literary output has made her a powerful voice amongst women writers in Pakistan. She made her presence felt in the world of literature with her first novel titled *In the City by the Sea* (1998). Despite residing in Britain, her concrete and lively portrayal of her home city Karachi is remarkably kaleidoscopic. She truthfully captures the essence of a nation in turmoil in her novels. Creative identity of the author rests upon her politico-historical stance as a writer and her novels mirror an era of hope and despair in her country. She minutely captures and critically examines myriads of problems which the nation is surrounded with. Having done that, she comes to the conclusion that most of the problems which the nation is surrounded with are incorrigible; hence, she turns to

replace the very concept of nation with a dynamic, inclusive and tolerant society which closely resembles with Edward Soja's idea of *Thirdspace*.

Historical Background to Nation

The world history bears witness to the fact that human society is a dynamic one which keeps on evolving with the passage of time. It continuously seeks to mould itself so that it could stand the test of time, wind of revolution and reformation and scientific and technological advancement. Due to its flexible nature, human society keeps on adding progressive and tolerant features to its feather and also keeps on removing regressive and intolerant elements off its feathers. This dynamic or flexible approach of human society is one of the basic aspects which led to the formation of modern nations in the post eighteenth century. Modern nations should

not be considered to be an unprecedented phenomenon which evolved overnight. Rather, modern nations are the products of “a longer cycle of ethnic resurgence and decline over the *longue duree* (longer time) (Nationalism 13).

Defining Nation

The concept of nation is essentially a Western phenomenon, since it appeared as a full-fledged discourse for the first time in the West. Nation basically refers to a community of people willingly united for a common cause. Nation is a product of history which came into being due to the agglomeration of heterogeneous facts, ideologies, ideas and beliefs. Any debate or discussion regarding nation begins with Ernest Renan’s lecture delivered in 1882 which was later on compiled in a book under the title *What is a Nation? 1882*. Renan is considered to be one of the earliest and the frontline theorists in the discourse of nation, who opines,

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things . . . constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other is the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is the present consent, the desire to live together . . . to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received (*What is Nation 10*).

Renan is of the opinion that national affinity and belongingness should come from inside without any enforcement from outside. He also speaks about a system which will have the blend of past and present to which he calls “spiritual principle.”

Muhammad Ali Jinnah is considered to be the ideological backbone of Pakistan as nation. He is the main political architect of the nation. It is he who really spearheaded

the political battle for the establishment of a new nation called Pakistan. Jinnah envisions the basic ideas of nation thus, “an inclusive and impartial government, religious freedom, rule of law and equality for all” (Hasanie 2013:1). Jinnah is transparent in his statement regarding the future constitution of Pakistan wherein the differences of any sort be it religious, ethnic, racial, linguistics will be respected. Therefore, he further maintains, “You are free, free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the state” (Hardy 2010:60). . . In a nutshell, Jinnah claimed that every citizen will be free and will enjoy equal rights and opportunities irrespective of above mentioned differences.

Research Gap and Aim

The research paper argues that the idea of nation (Pakistan) as propounded by

Muhammad Ali Jinnah failed to sustain therefore went redundant and obsolete. Due to the failure of Jinnah’ idea, the nation found itself in a horrific void, therefore, the paper makes a candid attempt to replace it with author’s devised idea which resembles closely with Edward Soja’ idea called Thirdspace.

Defining *Thirdspace*

Thirdspace, a concept pertaining to social change, was introduced by Edward Soja in his celebrated text titled *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. It is a new critical or epistemological perspective which aims at unsettling and disrupting those ideologies which centre, build and revolve around binary categorization. To be more explicit, Thirdspace is basically an antidote to the discourse of reductionism which reduces knowledge to its rock-bottom value by fuelling the narrative of binarisms. It aims at bringing instead a multiplicitous

alternative which is much more than an originary dualism. Thirdspace, claims Edward Soja, fills a sense of revolution in the mind of the people to go beyond the age old established ways of thinking. It claims to make people go against the grain of time and move out of the box while thinking and taking decisions about their social space and its spatiality. Defining Thirdspace Soja claims that thirdspace encourages people:

to think differently about the meaning and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent *spatiality of human life*: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography. . . . I am not suggesting that you discard your old and familiar ways of thinking about space and

spatiality, but rather that you question them in new ways that are aimed at opening up and expanding the scope and critical sensibility of your already established spatial or geographical imaginations” (*Thirdspace* 1).

Discussion

Kamila Shamsie microscopically observes the authenticity of the concept of nation espoused by Jinnah from various angles in her novels. While observing the veracity of nation, she finds numerous loopholes, distortion and manipulation under different pretexts and circumstances. Shamsie does agree to Jinnah’ notion of nation if it is put in the then historical context (*Salt and Saffron* 218) but she believes that it is not able to hold ground in the present context, hence turned irrelevant. She, therefore, feels sceptic about its workability because she believes that the idea of Jinnah failed long back. As she asserts,

Pakistan died in 1971. Pakistan was a country . . . with a majority Bengali population and all its attendant richness of culture, history, language, topography, climate, clothing . . . oh, everything. . . . How can Pakistan still *be* when we have so abused that image – first by ensuring the Bengalis were minimized and marginalized both politically and economically . . . and representation with acts of savagery . . . How can Pakistan still *be* when the whole is gone . . . We should recognize that the dreams of Pakistan died and buried in the battle field of '71. (*Kartography* 312)

The above quoted lines vividly display the acts of savagery and marginalization which speak loud and clear that the ideas of nation held by Jinnah failed to sustain.

The reality as shown in the above quoted lines runs counter to what Jinnah dreamt of. Shamsie, as a result, concludes that the basic idea which Pakistan stood for since its inception is no longer intact; therefore it is a matter of history. Shamsie, nevertheless, foresees it to be the dawn of a fresh beginning. Seizing this opportunity with both hands, she visualises the future of the social space – Pakistan, thus,

But with no one to rely on except one another, Karachiites come together in times of crises with attitudes which suggest that no matter what else we are in our lives – bankers, teachers, hypochondriacs, cynics, Marxists, feudal, vegetarians, divorcees, bigamists, anorexics, dyslexics, sexists – our real vocation is friendship. (*Kartography* 209)

In the above quoted lines, the author highlights the spirit of fraternity and togetherness among people irrespective of their affiliation to different ideologies, professions, identity and personality. In the words of Kamila Shamsie they give rise to a novel kind of society where one is not disrespected, sidelined, ignored, looked down upon due to one's allegiance. Moreover, differences among them are not a matter of clash or confrontation; as opposed to that, they are more concerned about mutual progress by respecting the plurality of one another. Hence, in line with Shamsie, they enacted "a space of extraordinary openness" with which Edward Soja also agrees thus, "a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological referees to be incompatible, . . ." (*Thirdspace* 4-5). To conclude, Kamila Shamsie, like Edward

Soja, puts emphasis on the creation of a space or society having the attributes of multiplicity, tolerance, freedom and equality and this, believes Shamsie, like Soja to be the very base of a Thirdspace society.

Kamila Shamsie is of the opinion that steps regarding the reorganisation of the social space should have been taken in 1971 when Jinnah's ideas failed to provide lifeblood to the society. She painfully admits that no one paid any heed to that failure at that time instead the attempts were made to reapply those failed ideas of Jinnah once again in a present day truncated Pakistan. These attempts led to further deterioration and intensification of the already destabilized and uprooted social space.

Ethnic conflict, believes Shamsie, among other provided ammunition to the further deterioration of the social space by binarizing the Firstspace². She mostly recounts clashes between native Sindhis³

and Muhajirs⁴ to be the central elements in the binarization of the Firstspace. The natives Sindhis seem to have taken an endless dislike towards Muhajirs due to Muhajirs' affiliation to different race and ethnicity. Banking upon exclusive ethnic narrative, Sindhis don't consider Muhajirs to be a part of their space, since they believe themselves to be the real and sole owner of the space and its resources. Therefore, Muhajirs' arrival to this ancestral space of natives made them feel insecure about their culture, language, economy and existence since they hold the opinion that Muhajirs have occupied their space, resources and jobs and pushed them to live on the margins of the society, hence they feel a kind of spatial injustice. Sindhis claim, says Shamsie, Muhajirs are "convinced of the superiority of their culture, and whisk away all the best jobs from Sindhis who'd been living here for generations" (*Kartography* 223). The natives explicitly allege Muhajirs to be aggressor. Therefore, on the basis of above

allegations laid against Muhajirs by natives, it appears that they are just in their claim; therefore, their disappointment is justified.

Shamsie, on the other hand, looks at the entire scenario critically and unbiasedly and produces a counter argument which claims that Muhajirs are neither aggressor nor did they ever considered themselves to be culturally superior, therefore the question of spatial injustice does not occur. She justifies this thus, "... Muhajirs came here leaving everything behind. Our homes, our families, our ways of life. We can't be blamed if some – mind you, *some* – of us came from areas with education systems that made us qualified for office jobs instead of latrine-cleaning, which is the kind of job you seem to think immigrants should be grateful for" (*Kartography* 223). The author believes that the above mentioned charges laid against Muhajirs is unjustified and unfounded, therefore far removed from reality. Shamsie seems to be

highly impressed by Muhajirs decision of willingly stripping themselves off of their identity and coming to a new and strange space (Pakistan) identitiess in the hope of a new, dignified and equitable beginning. Their selfless and unconditional sacrifice underpins their humane feature.

Kamila Shamsie, furthermore, turns down the charges beautifully by claiming that muhajirs “. . . came here to be Pakistani, not to be Sindhi” (*Kartography* 224). The author, on the one hand, considers the charges laid by natives against Muhajirs to be biased and inhumane because it is a divisive idea which causes Firstspace to be binarized, on the other, she holds Muhajirs’ decision in high esteem because it does not cause Firstspace of the nation to be binarized rather it infuses a sense of unity among diversity under the solitary ideology called Pakistan. Muhajirs’ positive and constructive attempt was never honoured by the natives. Instead of getting respect, equality and spatial justice,

Muhajirs are being doubted of being outsider and unfaithful.

Therefore, the trust deficit between natives and Muhajirs further widened which led to the binarization of Firstspace. Recounting the instances which led to the Binarization of space, she claims, “. . . Muhajirs will never understand the way we feel about land. They all left their homes at partition. No understanding of ties to a place” (*Kartography* 39). She is speaking on behalf of natives who allege and doubt the attachment and love of Muhajirs to nation (Pakistan) where they have settled. Natives, on the other hand, boast themselves to be more attached and faithful to nation as compare to Muhajirs. Hence, the dividing line between indigenous and Muhajirs is visible where the former group allegedly belong to the faithful and patriotic whereas the latter not as much faithful and patriotic as that of former. The author considers it to be a systematic way of demonizing a particular

group of people called Muhajirs. Muhajirs have been projected to be something like untouchable or people to be scared of. There is one such instance where mere claims made by Muhajirs give a sense of uneasiness among natives. To be more explicit, Muhajirs are not considered to be the rightful and legitimate residents therefore indigenous people feel threatened by them. The author depicts the aforementioned instance thus,

What kind of immigrant is born in a city and spends his whole life here, and gets married there, and raises his daughter there? And I, an immigrant's daughter, was an immigrant too. . . ., if I told them Karachi was my home just as much as anyone else's, would they look at me and think: another Muhajir (*Kartography* 41).

Contrary to what binary narrative implies and does, Kamila Shamsie continues exploiting those branches – thirding-as-Othering⁵ and spatial justice, which facilitate thirdspace to get a foothold in the Firstspace divided against itself. For this she keeps on refuting those narratives – ethnic, racial, spatial injustice, which works as a tool to divide space in opposite groups. Being an advocate of a peaceful, tolerant and pluralistic space, she states,

But now, years later, I was forced to consider that Karim and I were separate in some way that seemed to matter terribly to people old enough to understand where significance lay. I wrapped my arms around the seat of the swing and rested my head on it. I was Muhajir with a trace of Pathan, and he was Bengali and . . . Punjabi? Sindhi? I considered. Probably Punjabi, I

decided. . . ., his Punjabiness would probably be more of an issue on the nation's ethnic battleground than his Bengaliness. But did any of it really have anything to do with Karim and me? Did differing ethnicities mean that there was something fundamental disparate about us at the core. (*Kartography* 43-44)

The author simply seeks to underline that the ethnic and cultural clash caused devastation to the Firstspace of Pakistan. In fact, she comes down heavily upon the endorsement and felicitation of these ideas and narratives which divide Firstspace into many opposite blocks. Since, she believes it to be digressive elements of the Firstspace and stresses upon shunning this narrative instead. Therefore, she implies that one should not think that people will have basic differences due to their distinct ethnicities. She puts a rhetorical question

“Did differing ethnicities mean that there was something fundamental disparate about us at the core” (*Kartography* 43-44) and answers thus,

Despite our closeness from the time of our births, I never made the claim that Karim was like a brother to me. I knew too many brothers to say a thing like that. But I believed that somewhere beneath skin and blood and bone, somewhere beyond personality and reflex, somewhere deep within the marrow of our marrow, we are the same. And so nothing in either of our lives needed to be inexplicable to the other; it was just laziness or stubbornness that created occasional baffled moments between us. (*Kartography* 44)

The author beautifully stated in the above quoted lines that “we are the same”

irrespective of numerous differences be it ethnic, racial, linguistics, spatial and so on. She is, in fact, trying to open a new platform for people to get united by restructuring the social space in line with the basic spirit of humanity, togetherness and fraternity. This attempt of Shamsie leads her mighty close to the concept of *thirthing-as-Othering* where the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to a creative process of *restructuring* that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives” (*Thirdspace* 5). Soja too believes it to be an essential tool to break down and disorder a rigid dichotomy and create a Thirdspace, an alternative “postmodern geography” of political choice and radical openness attuned to making practical sense of the contemporary world.

Conclusion

To conclude, Kamila Shamsie made a careful and minute study of both the

concepts – Nation and Thirdspace. This in – depth study of the author enabled her to opine that the concept of nation as espoused by Muhammad Ali Jinnah is not able to hold the society together. It failed to inject the blood of social inclusion, spatial justice, equality and freedom in the vein of nation. Shamsie, consequently, realized that the social ideology does not have permanent relevance; hence it needs to be either improvised or replaced with some alternatives which stand and match the mutation of time. The progressive approach of Shamsie encouraged her to valiantly replace the outdated concept of nation with a more vibrant and updated idea called Thirdspace. Shamsie exquisitely underlined the blessings of this social ideology in contrast to nation. She proved explicitly that the idea of Thirdspace provides spatial justice, equality, freedom, social inclusion and above all it stands the challenges of present scenario. To put an end to the present discussion; it could be stated that

Thirdspace establishes “a space of extraordinary openness” which Jinnah’s idea of nation lacks.

Acknowledgement: I would like to express my deep sincerity to my supervisor – Dr. Vandana Sharma for her unconditional guidance and support in writing this paper.

References

Shamsie, Kamila. *In the City by the Sea*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004.

- . *Kartography*. Harcourt, 2004.
- . *Broken Verses*, 2005.
- . *Salt and Saffron*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.
- Hasanie, A. Abbas. *Democracy in Pakistan: Crises, Conflicts and Hope for a Change*. Author House, 2013. P. 1.
- Hardy, Roger. *The Muslim Revolt: A Journey Through Political Islam*. Hurst Publisher, 2010. P. 60.
- Renan, Ernest. *What is a Nation*. Translated by Ethan Rundell, Paris, Press Pocket, 1992. PP. 10.
- Smith, Anthony D. and John Hutchinson, editors. *Nationalism*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2012. p. 13.
- Soja, Edward. *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real- and-Imagined Places*. Wiley Blackwell, 1996.