

PAKISTANI IDENTITIES AND POST-COLONIAL POWER STRUCTURES
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Abstract

For the purpose of this research, the novel *Best of Friends* by Kamila Shamsie has been analysed through the perspective of postcolonialism. The postcolonial environment of South Asia has been characterised by intricate power relations and identities that are up for debate, with the area standing out as a particularly powerful discourses of these tensions. Despite the fact that there is a vast body of literature that investigates the sociopolitical elements of Pakistan, there is a huge research vacuum in the area of understanding the formation and contestation of Pakistani identities within the context of postcolonial hegemonic frameworks. With reference to both the Pakistani setting and the diasporic position of Pakistani people, this thesis investigates how Foucauldian discourses of power and discursive practices might be employed to decode the diverse narratives of Pakistani identities that are found in Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends*. Additionally, the investigation of the function that historical narratives, state apparatuses, and hegemonic discourses play in the production and negotiation of Pakistani identities, based on subjectivities is a topic that has been investigated in the research. The purpose of this study was to uncover the ways in which these writings question or perpetuate the postcolonial hegemonic discourses in the context of Pakistani communities, both those living at home and those living in diaspora whose identities have been shaped. It was accomplished through the use of Foucauldian discourses. In addition to this, it investigates the ways in which literature serves as a place of resistance and subversion against hegemonic forces, therefore offering alternative narratives and points of view on Pakistani identities. While in Pakistan, this research makes a contribution to the larger discourse on postcolonialism, identity politics, and the function of literature in forming and resisting hegemonic narratives within the South Asian context. In particular, this research focusses on Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

This research examines how Foucauldian concepts of power and discourse can be applied

to decode the multifaceted narratives of Pakistani identities in these literary works. Furthermore, shedding light on the ways in which dominant

discourses have constructed and perpetuated hegemonic narratives. Foucault's theories of governmentality, surveillance and the production of knowledge provide a critical lens through which we can explore the variations of power relations that have operated in postcolonial context. The hegemony that has a very profound impact on the lives of the people residing in Pakistan and outside the country not only has incorporated their freedom to speech but also their rights to practice the justice. This long run interplay of dominance has submerged the lives of people in a way that it has made them captives of their own interests. Further, Pakistani people who feel themselves unsafe, or the economic disposition is not figuring out their standards of lives, forcing to move to diaspora. Therefore, the current identity is also submissive to changes. The identity remains no more static, liable to variation and multiplicities of roles which also intake different position of identities. The previous identity in postcolonial context is liable to be replaced by the identity of the host, deviating to give off the national or ethnic identity. Therefore, the study sees how power structures enable to at periphery while using, or opting the same power structures the popular identity is gain. So, the context of identities, particularly the national identity is questionable. Within the majority of social science and literary fields, the idea of identity is at the centre of the arguments that take place about national identity and the construction of national identity is liable to be above than all identities. Consequently, it is reasonable to provide a concise explanation of it prior to the discussion of the various views and opinions about identities. According to Jenkins (2008), the term "identity" refers to "the manner in which people and collectivities are distinguished in their social connections with other persons and collectivities." (18) The social identity hypothesis proposed by Tajfel and Turner (2001) implies that groups (such as socioeconomic class, family, football club, and so on) are a significant source of recognition. A social identity is created as a result of the fact that they provide its members with a sense of belonging and self-importance. When it comes to

the significance of identity, Bloom (1990) contends that a solid sense of identity is necessary for an individual's psychological well-being, and that the absence of such a feeling might result in "anxiety and disintegration" (p.50). Alterity and otherness are the concepts that poststructuralist and postmodern theorists use to describe identity. These thinkers believe that meanings are generated from what something is not. According to Derrida, as noted in Sweetman (1997), 'all identities, presences, predications, etc., depend for their existence on something outside themselves, something which is absent and distinct from themselves' (original emphasis) (237). In his argument, he asserts that "identities are only mental constructions, and language is the fundamental component of identity" (ibid). Lyotard (1984) is mentioned in Malpas (2005), remarking that he believes that the story is what informs us of who we are and enables us to articulate what we believe and aspire to. He believes that the narrative is what gives the foundation of human experience (21). In reference to the preceding statement, Malpas (2005) makes the argument that "the organisation of knowledge in society therefore affects the identity – the self-image, the beliefs, and the ambitions – of the individuals that make it up." (23). According to Lyotard (1984), the existence of a human being is contingent on a series of "linguistic games" (p.9) that are negotiated in societies through laws, politics, and legitimation. Lyotard proposes that these games provide the basis for human life. It is the 'other' of a person that, in the majority of civilisations, is the one that defines, identifies, and labels their identity. According to Hall (1991)), "identity is a process, identity is partitioned between two people." Rather than being a fixed point, identity is more of an ambiguous point. Along with this, identity is also the relationship that one has with the Other (10). According to Wodak et al. (2009), the concept of identity does not in any way represent something that can be described as "static, unchanging, or substantial" (p.11). Rather, it is "anything that is participating in a process, something that is always changing, and something that is placed in the flow of time"

(ibid). These are concepts that are important to understand in order to comprehend how Pakistani authors construct the self; who is positioned as their "other"; why this "other" and not other "others" is positioned; how the process of this particular othering influences people's understanding of society and the world in general; and the extent to which the British colonisation of India has contributed to the formation of this particular "other."

Coming to the concept of identity, how it has been caricatured and stereotyped in the postcolonial context when it is related with the postcolonial and third world. Therefore, it is necessary to first pay attention to the construction of Pakistani identity since long, which is somehow linked, with the decolonization of Indian Sub-continent. Regarding identity construction such concerns remain over 78 years after the establishment of Pakistan. "Why we are still debating this subject because...", Jalal (2016) argues during a panel debate, bringing up some important arguments. Regarding the rationale behind their independence from India, Pakistanis are not entirely in agreement. According to Cohen (2004), who maps the tensions arising from Pakistan's conflicting Islamic national identity, the true source of conflict in Pakistani society is the multiplicity of national identity variants in relation to Islamic identity. Kalin and Siddiqui (2017, p. 8) discuss the struggles of Pakistan's minority Muslim sects in this regard. They contend that "political figures aiming to utilise the state as an active force to define the bounds of Muslim citizenship" are contesting their claim to be Muslim. Pakistan is always struggling with how "to build a distinct nation based on cultural or ethnic features" since it places a strong emphasis on "supranational" Islam for its national identity (Ahmed, 2017: 64).

In the context of India's partition, the majority of the Muslim officers in the British-trained military and civil bureaucracy ended up controlling Pakistan. They justified the continuation of the colonial system of dominance, albeit in a new form, as explained in the part that follows. 95 of the 101 Muslim officers who served in the Indian

Political Service (IPS) and Indian Civil Service (ICS) migrated to Pakistan and established themselves as close allies in the country's civil bureaucracy (Braibanti, 1963). The majority of them were Mohajirs who spoke Urdu and came from the United and Central Provinces in north-central India. In the past, they were "at the core, throughout, of the Pakistan movement and they played a significant role in determining the style and direction of early Indian nationalist politics" (Alavi, 1989: 1527). They teamed up with Pakistan's Punjab province's influential landed elite-turned-politicians (Alavi, 1972).

In the context of struggle the identity of the common masses also caused serious questions, whereas in literary works the same struggle powers reflect largely. Minority groups always question the authority of the state and raised their voices against the political stratum and religious groups who equally blended the Pakistani identity, however, this aspect of identity formation, construction, restructuring and deconstruction is seen in the Pakistani diasporic writing. The fictional characters in both pain and happiness appreciate the host country but sometimes refer back to their native country Pakistan. In the said the research explores different factors underlying the loss of Pakistani Identities in Kamila Shamsie's *Best of friends*, implicating Postcolonial Hegemony practices, and imposing power dynamics through discursive practices to show the distorted identity of Pakistani people. Further, the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Power implications on Pakistani identities have been applied that are transformed through discursive practices from objectivity to subjectivity in the Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends*, retaining Pakistani national identity.

Thesis statement

Pakistani people have remained according to their perspectives unresolved victim from within due to is country political, social and economic disposition since long. The social, political and economic aspects of the country and multiple power dynamics manifested through state surveillance, militarization, and the control of

bodies has made this issue even more complex, forcing people to move to diaspora, largely the minority and marginalized groups. The framework of postcolonial subalternization is employed to analyze the *Best of Friends*, particularly focusing on the demonization, persecution, and the subsequent outcomes of ghettoization and marginalization experienced by the people and how they become subjective, adopting the power dynamics. Using Michel Foucault's theoretical framework to focus on the intertextual position of Pakistani from both objective and subjective position is the centre discussion of the research. The role discursive practices, applying Foucauldian discourse analysis along with the dominant discourses imposed by postcolonial hegemony influence the construction of Pakistani identities in the novel particularly in relation to religion, nationality and ethnicity.

Research objectives

- To explore different factors underlying the loss of Pakistani Identities in Kamila Shamsie's *Best of friends*.
- To explore Postcolonial Hegemony practices, imposing power dynamics through discursive practices to show the distorted identity of Pakistani people in Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends*.
- To show the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Power implications on Pakistani identities transformed through discursive practices from objectivity to subjectivity in the Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends*, retaining Pakistani national identity.

Pakistani Identities in Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends*

There are two timeframes and two parts of *Best of Friends*. The book's first part begins as Pakistan is about to undergo a significant transformation. Maryam Khan and Zahra Ali, the protagonists, are 14 years old and battling physical changes while learning to assert their femininity in a society that does not allow it. They are in the centre of Karachi in the 1980s, when Benazir Bhutto takes the oath of office as Pakistan's new

president, marking the end of a dictatorship and the seeming beginning of a new era. Their aspirations, both significant and modest, their challenges, both personal and political, but above all, their identities as girls from radically disparate socioeconomic backgrounds reflect Pakistan. These two girls stand in for the opposing sides of a nation that in the 1980s appeared to be on the verge of something extraordinary. Benazir was Prime Minister; she made the men around her appear like pygmies by taking the oath of office wearing a brilliant green shalwar and white dupatta, which are the colours of the Pakistani flag. I can so clearly recall feeling as though I was living two separate lives. There was a part of me that thought I could do anything. It was all doable. However, adolescence may be challenging, particularly for girls whose bodies seem to be acting in ways that are entirely beyond their control. At times, it seemed like everyone was determined to tell me how much room I should have in the world—none at all. It is the age at when you begin to lose your naive perspective on the world and are abruptly confronted with all of its large, evil creatures. Additionally, as a young lady, you come to the harsh realisation that your carefree days are over. Although I now know that this is a common experience for females in their early teens, it nevertheless seemed like a sense of recognition and understanding when I read about it in a book. Shamsie illustrates the little uprisings that females occasionally carry out to declare their independence or defy social expectations through Zahra and Maryam. They want and hate male attention at the same time. At 14, they find it difficult to walk the line between acceptability and inclination, and one bad night alters their lives and moulds them into the individuals they are now. Shamsie uses subliminal clues to illustrate the disparities between Maryam and Zahra's socioeconomic backgrounds—or, as Maryam cynically refers to it later in the novel, "class"—in this depiction of 1980s Pakistan. Their summers and family vacations, the kind of homes they own, and their access to material possessions all demonstrate this. Most significantly, though, it is

evident in their attitude on the present and their goals for the future.

However, Maryam saw schooling as only a stopgap measure before she could assume control of the family company. After leaving Karachi, Zahra had no plans to return to the city, therefore the only future that mattered to her was the one that would take place there. Maryam, who is accustomed to spending her summers in London, is aware that, like the majority of her peers, she will eventually attend a university overseas. It goes without saying. It is as clear as the fact that she will eventually go back to Karachi and inherit her grandfather's family firm, Khan Leather. She is certain that she will fit in with Pakistani society, interact with a specific type of person, and maintain her closeness to authority. She only has an impact on national politics when it comes to choosing who to invite to a party and how to get out of a jam by using a catchy moniker.

As though Maryam was the only one who objected to exclusivity, Layla had once observed, "You do not hate the exclusivity, you simply mind that you are not part of it."

However, in order to get admission to Oxbridge or an Ivy League school, Zahra, who is bright and committed, needs a scholarship—preferably not "financial help." In the same manner that she must struggle to gain a place in the upper classes of society, she must create her own destiny. She is terrified that if she says anything unkind about her father, a sports news telecaster, a dictator will become enraged. Additionally, Maryam's rebellions must remain buried in the background, even if they might be loud and visible.

Shamsie effectively conveys the minor differences between the two distinct worlds that individuals in South Asian nations might live in through these characters. I use the term "South Asian" because, as an Indian, I am well-versed in these differences.

In comparison, it would not really matter what happened to Maryam today. She would still inherit a company and a position in the community. The wealthy were in a separate world. The one night that alters the course of

their life is the one when this difference—some may even describe it as a power dynamic between the two despite their close friendship—is questionable. As she motioned to Zola to get up and remove the dishes, Maryam reflected that childhood friendship was the most enigmatic of all relationships; it was based on principles that did not apply to any other connection in adulthood. Blood, occupation, domesticity, or even same interests, as was the case with friendships formed in maturity, did not bind you together.

Even though Shamsie writes about Karachi via romanticised reminiscence, it is clear from her depiction of London that this is a person who has visited and fallen in love with the city. I recall visiting Finchley Road and Wembley when I first arrived in the UK in an attempt to follow the itineraries outlined in *Home Fire*. It was like strolling around the now-traveled streets as I read about the city in the many seasons. In the same way that Zahra discovered beauty in the blossoming flowers while she waited for Maryam on a spring Sunday in the park, I found beauty in Shamsie's descriptions.

At that point, the book's second half really takes off. Maryam is a prominent venture capitalist, and Zahra is the head of the Centre for Civil Liberties in 2019. They both currently reside in London. Both were absurdly successful, with the media vying for interviews and mingling with London society's elite and most influential people. (Perhaps I could have done a better job of controlling my resentment at the unachievable, unreasonable, and completely ridiculous expectations of what life is like for overseas students in this country.)

The effects of their disparate upbringings, which were hardly noticeable in the first part of the novel, are now more apparent. They have diametrically opposed worldviews, political philosophies, and moral standards. Zahra is a human rights attorney who is very idealistic and unyielding, in contrast to Maryam, who thinks that money is more important and that having power gives you money. But despite their disagreements, their relationship endures. Until

someone from their history show up in their present and completely upend their lives.

The methods in which the buddies respond to this reappearance further highlight their differences from one another. Maryam has a strong belief in justice and would stop at nothing to achieve it, while Zahra does not share this belief.

The story of *Burnt Shadows* crosses continents and decades. Both its scope and its remarks about world politics are wide-ranging. Shamsie, on the other hand, seems to have limited the range of her writing with this book. It concerns these two girls, who subsequently became middle-aged ladies. Conversations on childhood friendship take precedence over questions about identity, home, and family. Frequently straying into sentimental lines intended to evoke strong emotions in the reader, Shamsie seems almost desperate to demonstrate the nearly sacred nature of friendships that last a lifetime. (I am attempting to avoid using the phrases "in your face" and "sickly sweet.")

Beyond the initial joke, their laughter deepened into a deep laugh of joy for friendship, for each other, and for the knowledge that no matter what happened in the world, there would always be this one person—this rock, this alter ego, this north star—who knew every flaw in you down to the atoms and who still chose to stand by you through every heartache, disappointment, and dark moment the world had yet to throw at you. This friendship will always be light.

On the back burner are the truly intriguing storylines. I was interested in learning more about the repercussions of the fictitious social networking app Imij's face-tagging functionality. Though she leaves the reader waiting for a conversation that never materialises, she raises several intriguing points, such as the moral ambiguity of Maryam's ethics about the racial discrimination of the feature or the exploitation of comparable characteristics in law enforcement. The statements about persons having trouble with their citizenship and visa applications struck a chord with me the most. Shamsie masterfully depicts the terror of having to abandon one's existence and return to a place that no longer

seems like home. She gives detailed accounts of the detention facility and the extent individuals would go to in order to live in a nation, even if their dreams do not work out as planned.

They choose to allow their pals to tag them. The cops constantly monitoring you because you are a climate activist or a man who attends a mosque is something else entirely.

Then Shamsie does not even bother to look into it. These are issues that the supporting characters deal with, with the exception of a well-written but short chapter that details Zahra's difficulties when applying for a student visa.

That, I believe, was the main thing I disliked about this novel. This one only briefly touches on all of the aspects that I think Shamsie excels at. I felt like I was missing some portions of the plot from my copy, and it left me wanting more. This one lacked even Shamsie's love of dramatic climaxes. Even more bothersome is the book's abrupt ending, which includes a two-page epilogue set in 2020 and a fade to black concluding chapter.

Despite all of this, *Best of Friends* was still a compelling book, particularly since it allowed me to re-enjoy Shamsie's wonderful prose. I said at the conclusion of my *Burnt Shadows* assessment that I still intend to read Shamsie's whole bibliography. I simply have to accept that I will not adore every book, which is a little bitter.

Normative of Social Constructs & Inner Desire Constraints

An elaborate examination of the psychological subtleties between Maryam and Zahra, the main characters in Kamila Shamsie's book "*Best of Friends*," takes place. As the narrative goes on, the emphasis moves to the start of a new school year for these two people, which represents a significant turning point in their psychological and emotional development. As the main character, Zahra shows herself to be a shrewd, observant, and intelligent individual. Coming from a household that values education—her father is a cricket broadcaster, and her mother is a school principal in Karachi—Zahra is raised in a setting that values academic excellence and rigour. She was born with a profound respect for

tradition as a result of her upbringing, which also gave her an unusual level of mental maturity for her age. She has a strong desire to study in order to get a scholarship in Britain or financial help in America, which demonstrates her dedication to academic success (Shamsie, 6). Zahra, however, struggles with an inner maelstrom of repressed urges underneath this calm façade, which is representative of the social limitations ingrained in Pakistani society. Her desire for closeness with the other sex is contrasted with the social rules that severely limit the public display of such desires. In the sanctuary of Maryam's house, Zahra pauses before kissing a picture of a man, which quietly expresses this internal conflict. This gesture, which reflects her commitment to maintaining the norms and expectations imposed upon her, is a moving example of Zahra's internal conflict (Shamsie, 15). Zahra's inner monologue highlights the conflict between her natural impulses and the social norms that control her actions. Zahra is always suppressing herself in an attempt to live up to the expectations of a model citizen, student, and daughter. Even while Pakistani society values its customs and cultural history, it sometimes restricts personal freedom. Although not explicitly defiant, Zahra moves through this surroundings with a sense of inner unease, constantly reflecting on her seeming alienation from her cultural background. Zahra's dreams for the UK, which reflect her sense of estrangement from her own country and its customs, are the clearest manifestation of this underlying conflict. The story reveals Zahra's private yet constrained feelings, which lead to actions that reveal the depths of her inner turmoil. If ignored, this internal struggle may lead to a repressed feeling of individuality or, in extreme situations, even a defiant attitude. Even while Zahra does not engage in overt rebellion, there is a noticeable gap in her character. A major subject in her character development is the delicate interaction between societal expectations and personal desires, which provides a deep understanding of the complex web of human psychology and cultural impact. "She made herself feel that way late at night, and I wanted someone else to do the same" (Shamsie 20). The

book portrays Pakistani society, exposing inconsistencies in her behaviour and thoughts, which causes psychological turmoil as a result of having to acknowledge sexual cravings as fundamental necessities. In Shamsie, a cheerful girl named Zahra indulges her repressed passions in her fantasy world. She is unable to let go of her inner aspirations in spite of her family's customs. She surprises Maryam and the reader by confessing at 40 that she likes Hammad. This insight emphasises the difference between love and friendship. With the help of her father, Habib Ali, Zahra's family cherishes her knowledge, simplicity, and purity. Maryam's parents also think highly of her, seeing her as a considerate, intelligent, and well-behaved friend (Shamsie, 15). "Rundi," the middle-aged guy replies, and Zahra later feels ashamed of her unethical behaviour. "She was instantly aware of the guilt that had overcome her when the man referred to her as a prostitute." Shamsie, 30 It suggests that she understands morals and ethical principles. She is old enough to know the difference between right and wrong. Against her instincts, she is powerless. For her, the important societal conventions are a major obstacle. In Pakistani culture, men control women's feelings as well. (A. Faheem, 2022) A vehicle journey with Jimmy is the most startling sequence in the book, exposing the terrible reality of Pakistan. Because of her family history and repressed desires, Zahra is unable to publicly express them, casting doubt on their friendship. Later on, Maryam discloses this fact. However, it was you that unlocked the automobile door. The person who entered was you. However, I was unable to refuse you (Shamsie, 204). In the end, Zahra and Maryam's relationship ends in nothing, underscoring how society shapes personal fate. She had a failed marriage in spite of her social standing. When my husband received a job offer in New York, he felt he could not refuse it. The marriage ended when I made the decision to remain in London (Shamsie, 94). Zahra feels herself restricted by social conventions, unable to freely pursue her own aspirations. Rather, she withdraws into her own thoughts and explores fictitious intimate relationships with people of the opposite gender.

Due to cultural norms that imply such conversations are improper and uncultured, this internal conflict is still too sensitive to speak with her confidante, Maryam. This pervasive restriction prevents people from getting the help they need while experiencing such feelings, and it disproportionately impacts women in this situation. In alone, Zahra bears the burden of this internal conflict while deftly masking her feelings. Psychologically speaking, Zahra's character exhibits dualism as a direct result of her repressed urges, which distinguishes her from Maryam's more plain personality. One of the most devastating examples of Zahra's internal turmoil is when she falls in love with a mathematician from Sri Lanka and then has an affair with her legal professor. Given Zahra's tendency towards complex emotional dynamics, this sequence of events highlights how complex her character is (Shamsie 120). By revealing the many facets of her inner world, these acts provide insight into the significant influence that social constraints have on her ability to express her emotions and make decisions. Maryam's family's repression of her desire for vengeance causes her mental anguish and discontent. She sacrifices everything to operate Khan Leather, sacrificing her dream, profession, and family. This socially acceptable behaviour impairs her self-respect and prevents her personality from developing. She is 40 years old and depressed when she thinks back on this terrible event. The psychological struggle between Maryam and Zahra gives the story a twist that keeps the reader interested. Zahra's familial constraints and Maryam's patriarchal father are two outside factors that might affect how she develops as a person.

Feminine Identity and Expression

"The nation's prevailing patriarchal culture encourages women's subjugation and therefore marginalises them in society." In other words, women have faced and still face gender-based discrimination and under-representation in the socio-political, economic, and educational domains (Women's Marginalisation, 2021). The novel "Best of Friends" by Kamila Shamsie deftly explores the limitations and undervaluations that

women encounter in Pakistani culture. As the expected heir to her grandfather's leather business, Maryam struggles with the heavy load of high expectations while living up to the luxury of wealth, which includes a home reinforced by the accoutrements of military might. Zahra, on the other hand, comes from a well-educated and sophisticated family but has fewer worldly possessions. With Maryam and Zahra being restricted and marginalised by the dominant notions of femininity and gender prejudice, the story offers a moving critique on the patriarchal conventions that are deeply ingrained in Pakistani culture. The statement "In Karachi, guys stared if you were a girl" (Shamsie, 8) serves as an example of this. In her book "Women in Pakistan," Dr. Naima Tabassum discusses how a variety of ethnic, religious, and sectarian subcultures have shaped Pakistani society. She emphasises the strict restrictions placed on women's duties and position as a result of this fusion. In Pakistan's patriarchal society, men rule over women in every aspect of social interaction. The dominant social, political, economic, and religious structures maintain and reinforce Pakistani men's power in a large portion of society. As a result, women face fewer favourable circumstances than males in fields like politics, economics, health, and education (2016). A significant influence in Maryam's upbringing, her grandfather always pushes her to be confident and strong, which finally inspires her to take over his leather business as he has no male successor. From an early age, he has fostered in her a sense of confidence that is usually associated with men. Her grandpa frequently conveys this emotion with a hint of melancholy: "Three daughters and no boys" (Shamsie, 14). Nevertheless, there is a noticeable sense of sadness in his sentiments for having just three granddaughters and no grandsons. Maryam is the obvious option in this situation, and she takes on this duty with a mix of happiness and emotion: "Responsibility must fall to Maryam" (Shamsie, 8). As a result of her gender, Maryam's mother, Zeno, tends to prioritise her schooling above her family responsibilities at first. In the end, Maryam's grandfather's patriarchal power triumphs over

Zeno's doubts, and Maryam also adopts her grandfather's viewpoint, thereby supporting the continuation of traditional gender standards. The supposedly modern "Patriarch Maryam's granddad" seems chained to archaic and bourgeois ideas of womanhood, even on the cricket pitch. Kamila Shamsie skilfully presents Pakistani culture from a unique angle, showing a population that may be educated and tolerant but nevertheless has a certain, sometimes conservative, viewpoint on women (Faheem, A. 2022). The local traditions, religious convictions, and cultural standards that influence how society views gender dynamics are the foundation of this viewpoint. This patriarchal system places women in subservient positions, allowing men to exercise power over them. "There is no justice in this world for females, is there?" is a statement that encapsulates this. Shamsie, 79. The research "Pakistani Women and Traditional Values: The Role of Culture in Work Life Balance" comes to the conclusion that cultural elements have a crucial role in the lives of Pakistani women, especially when it comes to their capacity to manage the demands of both work and family life. The growing number of women in Pakistan's employment and prevalent cultural norms have a significant impact on the fragile balance between these domains (Ibrahim and Shakir, 2021). In the story, Shamsie skilfully depicts the typical views of Pakistani men towards women. In addition to giving his daughter a pleasant upbringing and showing real affection, Zahra's father also shows some faith in her skills. Habib Ali assertively responds to his cousin's rejection of co-education when Zahra overhears her father having a discussion, confirming his undying trust in Zahra. This episode makes Zahra feel a complicated mixture of pride and the pressure to live up to such high expectations. But it is important to highlight that, in contrast to her parents' more liberal views, Zahra is raised in a conventional manner from an early age, representing obedience and self-control. These ladies are carrying a great deal of responsibility, which clearly puts a heavy load on them. A woman must frequently strike a fine balance by repressing her ambitions and aspirations when

she is keenly aware of social expectations and works to preserve her family's honour. Zahra's experiences strongly mirror this concept. According to Maryam's grandpa, she will have a bright and self-assured future—possibly even as a corporate leader. But his vision stems from his deeply ingrained way of thinking, which results in times of severe rebuke, as is seen when Maryam enters his office, a place where she is supposed to take responsibility in the future. "Get away!" was her grandfather's stern reprimand, which stands in sharp contrast to their typical exchanges. Shamsie, 28. His unwillingness to allow Maryam to meet Billu because he was at the workplace is a sign of unwarranted prejudice. While Maryam's treatment is mostly a result of her gender, Billu is a stranger and engages in illegal activity. It is an expression of conventional masculine views and a display of gender prejudice. The contemptuous responses Maryam receives when she tries to assert herself and insist on her future position in the company are an example of the patriarchal intent to manipulate and control her: "Do not enter my office looking like you are in one of those Indian films where the woman in a white sari is soaked by rain if you want me to introduce you to people who will eventually have to take you seriously" (Shamsie 29).

Maryam's grandpa continues to exhibit patriarchal tendencies by wanting her to be courageous, which he views as radically different from the softness and folly he connects with other ladies (Shamsie, 43). Shamsie skilfully conveys the deeply rooted conventional ideas of Pakistani men, providing readers with a chance to contemplate via the complex experiences of these two young ladies. Their formerly straightforward relationship takes on a hint of uncertainty as they work through their own difficulties. The unfortunate automobile trip scenario serves as a powerful example of these deeply ingrained beliefs. Even if the events of the evening are unplanned, there is a significant impact. Although Hammad's withdrawal from school is a result, Maryam and Zahra's consequences—both of whom are female—are even more significant. Shamsie's moving depiction of this occurrence highlights the unfair

burden that women bear because of their gender. Maryam's protective behaviour towards Zahra is a moving reminder of the difficulties women encounter in similar situations and their ability to bounce back from hardship. As she struggles with the burden of being a woman, Maryam confides in Zahra, "I am simply a girl" (Shamsie, 89). "There is no justice in this world for girls," she asked poignantly. Is there? (79), sums up the difficulties and injustices that women encounter in society. In her insightful analysis of the political environment, Kamila Shamsie names Benazir as Pakistan's prime minister. Despite these significant advancements, patriarchal ideals are still ingrained in our culture, making it difficult for males to completely accept women in leadership roles, even if they so want. Maryam's grandpa responds patriarchally to her remarks on women's empowerment by using Benazir as an example: "A girl is ruling a country" (Shamsie, 83). His response, "She will never run anything," captures the enduring difficulties experienced by women in leadership roles. Even now, her spouse continues to receive more attention than she does (Shamsie, 84). The plot's development in the second part of the novel may seem a little rushed, with aspects of the original plotline coming together in a way that seems planned. As the Guardian correctly puts it, Zahra is "a Muslim immigrant lady who has emerged as the conscience of Britain since assuming the post of director of Britain's oldest civil rights organisation a decade ago (Shamsie)" (Shamsie, 6). This description highlights Zahra's enormous influence on the larger sociopolitical scene, since she is a strong advocate for social justice and civil freedoms. Maryam's sense of self suffers as a result of the widespread impact of patriarchal authority. Her early adolescence's harsh circumstances have permanently altered her mental landscape. She now sees the basic distinctions between the ways that men and women present themselves: "Men marched, owning the universe." Women were cautious, monitored, and took lesser moves (Shamsie 75). It is shocking how her viewpoint has changed. She is a transformed person who struggles with inner anguish, even though she has a prominent

position in her social circle. Her incapacity to get revenge on Jimmy for the humiliation she experienced plagues her throughout the story: "The outgoing Maryam of their adolescence had been replaced by a woman who guarded family time too much to be lured into new friendships" (Shamsie, 106). In the second part of the story, Maryam is shocked and extremely afraid when her daughter, Zola, says she wants to go out on her own. Because Zola is so young, Maryam is worried about this sudden request and does not want to let her deal with any threats alone: "The racists, the homophobes, the Jimmys—so many paths to girl terror" (Shamsie 115). A newspaper article from London highlights the tragic instance of a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl who attempted suicide as a result of bullying, underscoring the serious realities of gender discrimination and marginalisation (Shamsie, 113). As the story progresses, it becomes clear that society's governing structures reflect the complexity and imperfections of its human citizens. As the world becomes more and more controlled by sound bites and tweets, Kamila Shamsie, a talented and sympathetic writer, utilises her voice to address important topics. She has such faith in her audience that she trusts them to recognise the emotional relevance in her adult characters' memories of girlhood and their experiences in a foreign country. As women, Maryam and Zahra are the epitome of unselfish devotion to their families. They eventually experience a sense of estrangement and a complicated friendship as a result of their readiness to make sacrifices for their loved ones. This moving depiction is a potent reminder of the difficulties women have in negotiating gendered roles and cultural expectations.

Political Realities and Ethical Decision-Making

Kamila Shamsie's book "Best of Friends" illuminates Pakistan's complex political environment while also effectively capturing the country's social fabric. As a modern author, Shamsie always finds herself investigating current affairs and attempting to educate her audience about important national concerns. "All those posts about 'losing your friends with politics'— I

will be astonished if very many of them originated from Pakistanis," Shamsie said in response to a topic concerning friendship and politics in an interview with Torsa Ghosal titled "The Politics of Being Best of Friends." People began commenting on my work when I was attending an American institution, as if politics were something that existed outside of fiction. However, it was not something that stood apart from everyday life while I was growing up. At the age of six, I witnessed the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, which is among my first recollections (Shamsie, Interview 2022). The book tracks the political scene as it moves from the rule of General Zia ul-Haq to the upcoming Benazir Bhutto administration. It shocks the country that General Zia ul-Haq, the military ruler of Pakistan, died in a terrible plane accident only hours after Zahra's father disobeyed one of his orders. Shehnaz Ali's cry, "He's dead!," captures the sense of shock and turmoil that permeates Zahra's family as word of his death spreads. "He is dead—someone murdered him at last" (Shamsie 39). All around the nation, this incident causes a wave of unrest. Concurrently, Maryam is keen to speak with Zahra about the situation, but she holds back since she understands the limitations of a phone call: "His plane exploded" (Shamsie, 40). Along with the political unrest, Shamsie reveals the complex networks of conspiracies and Machiavellian strategies used by politicians, giving readers a perceptive picture of how they ensnare the public in their schemes. Journalists who work to reveal such crafty tactics frequently encounter unlawful obstacles. Three Slips broadcaster Habib Ali struggles with the emotional stress of this setting. Because she loves her father so much, Zahra cautions that "They'll damage you" when negotiating such dangerous political seas (Shamsie, 35). "At worst, he'll ban me from the airwave, like they did to Iqbal Bano" (Shamsie 35) is how Habib Ali, aware of the possible consequences, describes the widespread repression of dissident voices. Bano endured limitations for performing a poem by Faiz. Habib Ali's determination, however, shows that even in the face of such unfair treatment, sincere voices will find a way to be heard: "I'll still have the

newspaper column" (Shamsie, 35). Three decades later, Zahra finds himself dealing with the predicament of an Afghan friend who has had his request for an indefinite stay in a London jail denied. However, the confrontation between the key characters feels like it should have happened thirty years earlier, and Zahra appears to understand this far sooner than the plot's development indicates. The girls entered maturity in 1988, when Pakistan emerged from the legacy of dictatorship and embraced a bright future under Benazir Bhutto's leadership, but they were unsure of how this new age would affect their lives ("Benazir elections" Shamsie, 40). A fresh understanding of the complexity of the world they are entering replaces the innocence of their early years. Recently, Kamila Shamsie talked with Scott Simon about the political context that influences her book "Best of Friends." She considers Zia ul-Haq's long reign, pointing out that it started when she was just four years old. At the time, she found it impossible to imagine his death and the onset of democratic elections ("Kamila Shamsie's book Best of Friends Asks whether All Friendships are Meant to Last" 2022). Maryam, on the other hand, anticipates good improvements in a country returning to democracy and tackles the political transformation with heightened awareness. She sees a time when women will have equal rights and be able to completely express their femininity. Benazir Bhutto took over as prime minister of the PPP government after Zia's rule. In sharp contrast to the time she suffered the death of her father, incarceration, and exile, the military today salutes her. This change in power highlights how unstable and frequently self-serving politics can be, when dominating the public and their opinions is a sought-after goal. Essays like "On Female Body Experience, Throwing like a Girl," among others, demonstrate how Shamsie's writings align with the views of well-known feminist and political philosopher Iris Marion Young (1949-2006). Young wisely notes that women frequently do not make the most of their bodies' spatial potential in contemporary consumerist culture, acting cautiously, uncertainly, and reticently while

moving. Both social scepticism of their physical strength and a lack of self-belief are the causes of this twofold hesitation (Young 2005). Maryam's recognition of her increased susceptibility and the necessity of managing her evolving physique highlights this discrepancy: "a target now, her body a target" (Shamsie, 75). She starts to see that men and women behave quite differently in the world: "Men walked, owning the planet." Women were cautious, monitored, and took lesser moves (Shamsie 75). "Best of Friends" is a moving and thought-provoking piece of writing that explores the complexity of its characters, highlighting their flaws, selfishness, and love potential without turning to easy fixes for difficult moral conundrums. The novel reveals the mechanics of power, its transformational potential, and how easily the downtrodden may turn into oppressors through its gripping tale. Maryam and Zahra, who are both still growing up and relatively young, are at the centre of the story as they navigate their lives during the latter years of Zia-ul-Haq's military government in Pakistan. The novel's first half takes place in Karachi in the late 1980s, engrossing the reader in the adolescent world of school, fashion, infatuations, illegal movies, Walkman music, and George Michael posters. While Maryam is a symbol of vitality and affluence, coming from an affluent leather industry family used to chauffeur-driven trips and London holidays, Zahra is the politically conscious and academically motivated daughter of a well-known TV cricket presenter. However, their disparate upbringings do not prevent their bond from growing. Paradoxically, Maryam greets a female head of state with joy as Benazir Bhutto takes over as leader, seeing it as a symbol of women's liberation. This idea gives the girls of that time, who look up to Benazir, a sense of value, importance, and self-assurance. In this way, Maryam turns into a moving illustration of the feelings and goals of regular women negotiating a patriarchal society. "Maryam frequently reflected about the possibility of meeting Benazir" (Shamsie 68). But an unanticipated event—a vehicle journey with two young men—fundamentally changes both characters' paths. This passage, which is notable for its length,

emotional depth, and shrewd depiction, effectively conveys the hypersensitive nature of teenage females, or what Maryam appropriately refers to as "female dread." Shamsie does a fantastic job of illustrating how conventional bourgeois ideals continue to have an impact. Rather than welcoming a female-led nation, males are unable to embrace Pakistani society's changing standards. They stubbornly adhere to outdated ideas that do not improve women's standing. "A female is ruling a country," Maryam argues (Shamsie, 83). The patriarchal grandfather responds to this by saying, "She will never run anything." Even now, her spouse continues to receive more attention than she does (Shamsie, 84).

Conclusion

The novel "Best of Friends" by Kamila Shamsie examines the intricacies of friendship, cultural norms, political realities, and the urge for belonging. The relationship between Maryam and Zahra is at the centre of the narrative, which emphasises how interactions and expectations shift as individuals age. In exploring the idea of "undecided friendship," the book emphasises the emotional and mental upheaval that genuine relationships founded on support, acceptance, and trust entail. Friendship is a special and complicated bond that requires support, acceptance, and trust. Women in Pakistan have more sensitive friendships and seek for physical contact, emotional support, and direct communication. Social conventions can influence female friendships, resulting in sacrifices and concessions, especially in traditional bonding communities. One prevalent sign of mental illness is suppression, which can result in psychological trauma. The story highlights how societal conventions must be flexible in order to sustain female friendships and encourage the worth of every person, irrespective of gender prejudice, for the benefit of society as a whole. Acting in a girlish or feminine way with varying cultural interpretations is a component of feminism. It is important for society to respect women and let them follow their intuition. The patriarchal system need to be flexible and support

women in showcasing their strengths. Shamsie delves into Zahra and Maryam's life, exposing their unusual conduct and difficulties. A nation's growth, prosperity, and existence all depend on its political stability. Being homeless, or feeling torn between two opposing cultures, ruins human activity and mental tranquilly. Health advantages of positive and passionate relationships include less stress, faster recovery, better behaviours, and longer lifespans. Families are essential to socialisation, education, raising, and social development. Generational differences should not impede the development of a person's personality; positive understanding among family members is crucial. While Zahra's family repressed her individuality because of overbearing family traditions, Maryam's family mistrusted her. A supportive and healthy atmosphere requires family ownership and flexible family norms.

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