



WOMEN'S STRUGGLE AND AGENCY IN THE NOVEL *BEST OF FRIENDS* BY KAMILA SHAMSIE

1. Syed Abuzar Naqvi

Lecturer, Minhaj University Lahore
Abuzar.eng@mul.edu.pk

2. Waqas Yousaf

Lecturer, Minhaj University Lahore
waqas.eng@mul.edu.pk

3. Muhammad Sultan

Abstract

This research project explores the portrayal of hardship and women's agency in Kamila Shamsie's novel Best of Friends. The study aims to uncover the intricate interplay between personal aspirations and societal expectations while assessing Shamsie's contributions to feminist discourse. Shamsie's narratives, rooted in British-Pakistani heritage, offer valuable insights into the complexities of gender roles, agency, and cultural norms. The study employs feminist literary theory to analyze how the female protagonists in Best of Friends navigate challenges, exercise agency, and redefine their roles within patriarchal contexts. Through a multi-perspective narrative style, Shamsie highlights the collective agency of her characters, emphasizing the strength and support found in female friendships. Ultimately, the research showcases the resilience and autonomy of women in the face of cultural constraints, contributing to a broader understanding of gender dynamics, identity, and social restrictions within diverse cultural contexts. The methodology selected serves as a powerful lens for understanding human emotions and societal influences beyond the immediate novel analysis. It bridges the gap between the fictional world and real-world emotions, enriching the discussion surrounding human nature and interpersonal interactions. This research contributes to the exploration of language and gender bias, drawing from the perspectives of various feminist theorists. Ultimately, it underscores feminism's core principle of achieving social, economic, and political equality for women while offering a profound insight into the complexities of female relationships and human experiences.

Keywords: Portrayal, Hardship, Women's agency, Feminist discourse, Female friendships.

Introduction

This study will examine how hardship and women's agency are portrayed in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Best of Friends*. Doing so will shed light on the complex interaction between personal goals and social expectations. This study aims to assess how Shamsie's works contribute to the discourse on feminism and enable women to assert their agency in a variety of circumstances through a detailed examination of characters, plots, and thematic aspects. Stories written by women authors frequently provide priceless insights into the complex dynamics of gender roles, agency, and cultural expectations in feminist literary analysis. Modern British-Pakistani author Kamila Shamsie is notable for her ability to write stories that deftly explore women's lives, their hardships, and the agency they exercise within the boundaries of their cultures. *Best of Friends*, one of her well-known works, is an excellent example of her nuanced investigation of women's experiences and invites readers to consider the complex interplay between cultural norms and personal agency.

1.2 Research objectives

1. To examine how female friendship is portrayed in Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends*.
2. To examine the ideas of loyalty and betrayal within the female relationship shown in Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends*.

1.3 Rationale/ Significance

The current study will concentrate on an intense female friendship, betrayal, separation, and loss in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Best of Friends*. It attempts to investigate the development of a close relationship and the strength and significance of friendship in providing people with meaning in their lives and hope in a world that is otherwise repressive. It examines how power imbalances, social influence, resentment, political leanings, racial profiling, personality differences, vested interests, treachery, and unresolved trauma contributed to the breakup and eventual severance of a friendship that seemed to last forever.

1.3 Research questions

1. How is the female friendship portrayed in Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends*?

2. How are the ideas of loyalty and betrayal shown within the female connection in Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends*?

Literature Review

Home Fire, *Antigone*, and the grievability of life are discussed in depth in Pishotti's article from 2022, *Materializing Grief: The Reclamation of Loss* in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* has been widely adopted within postcolonial contexts over the past few decades due to its capacity to conflate the boundaries between family, nation, and law. It is the perfect book for presenting alternatives to the justice systems of authoritarian regimes, as demonstrated by *Materializing Grief: The Reclamation of Loss* in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. The British Muslim family provides a prism through which to analyze the themes of *Antigone* in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire*. In order to examine how Islamophobic politics and media in Britain after September 11 have made Muslim living unpleasant, this article draws on the studies of Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed. The article's next section examines how the *Home Fire* protagonists and antagonists combat their dehumanization through the materiality of sorrow. Finally, this essay employs affect theory to investigate how the materiality of sorrow communicates across distinctions and reclaims drivability for those living in danger due to international conflict. Shamsie draws attention to the ridiculousness of British criticism of Muslim women's bodily rights in *Home Fire* by using the media's treatment of Aneeka.. Aneeka referred to as "Knickers", dehumanizes and reduces her to a sexual object. In addition, Aneeka is compared to a prostitute using the disparaging epithet "ho," which is slang for "whore" in the West (Pishotti, 2022, p. 353). This is juxtaposed with the image of the hijab, one type of Islamic covering that many Western countries, including Britain, frequently demonize as a symbol of physical tyranny. In doing so, the post's title denigrates and vilifies Aneeka as a supporter of Parvaiz while making fun of her for being promiscuous and subjected to sexual abuse. *Home Fire* addresses how some bodies are denied the liberties and protections accorded to more normal bodies because they are deemed potentially harmful or abnormal to Others. It demonstrates how the subjectivity of Muslim people can be destroyed when they are the targets of increased body policing and control, as well as acts of hatred and fear. In *Home Fire*, however, challenges this denial of humanity through



the actions of sadness carried out by Parvaiz for his father and Aneeka for Parvaiz (Pishotti, 2022).

Asserting that not all Partition migrants can be categorized as diasporas, Kumar (2016) authored this article, *Muhajirs as a Diaspora in Intizar Husain's The Sea Lies Ahead* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* to analyze specific migrant populations. She illustrates how the Urdu-speaking diaspora in post-Partition Pakistan has established and maintained itself in the urban centres of Sindh by analyzing the books *The Sea Lies Ahead* by Intizar Husain and *Kartography* by Kamila Shamsie. Both works demonstrate how the Muhajirs built their society on a shared exile ideology that is still relevant today. This essay intends to start a conversation between Partition scholars and researchers focusing on the South Asian diaspora. Discussions on South Asian diasporas and Partition have rarely intersected because it is often believed that refugees and migrants from Partition were eventually incorporated into the new national orders of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. *The Sea Lies Ahead* highlights the distinguishing traits of diasporas, including nostalgia for the lost country brought on by partition/independence, and homesickness for the dispersed communities. This article has demonstrated how the heterogeneous group of Indian migrants known as Muhajirs came to identify as a diaspora and sustained this feeling of identity over time despite their many differences. The author shows how the Muhajirs have created themselves as a diaspora and, ultimately, as an ethnic community through the repeated memorialization of their Partition-induced experience of displacement in both the migrant generation and subsequent generations by analyzing the books *The Sea Lies Ahead* and *Kartography*.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The portrayal of female friendship in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Best of Friends* Novel by Kamila Shamsie *Best of Friends* delves into the subtleties of camaraderie, support, and women's difficulties as they negotiate their particular paths within friendship. It is an elaborate examination of how female friendship is portrayed. The story provides a rich tapestry of female connections that represent the richness and depth of women's bonds against a backdrop of altering cultural norms and personal aspirations.

The relationship between Leila, Maryam and Zahra, three separate women who develop a strong bond despite having different upbringings and difficulties, is at the centre of the story. Shamsie's depiction of their connection is characterized by sincerity and intricacy, illuminating the complex nature of female relationships. Their relationship becomes a haven where they may freely discuss their hopes, anxieties, and weaknesses. This portrayal shows the possibility of real, empowering bonds among women, providing a solid contrast to storylines that frequently set women against one another.

In her masterful depiction of the intricacies of female friendships, Shamsie highlights the camaraderie that develops when women band together. A tangible sense of intimacy that is both relevant and heartwarming is created by the characters' interactions, talks, and shared experiences. Their constant support of one another in the face of difficulty is a testament to friendships' resilience. Zahra's desire for independence, Maryam's desire for education, and Leila's love of art all find a haven within the setting of their friendship,

highlighting the empowerment that comes from being understood and welcomed by friends who share your interests.

Shamsie's portrayal, albeit not straightforward, emphasizes the difficulties and complexities that can occur in female friendships. The book expertly handles tense and contentious situations, exposing the possibility of miscommunication, resentment, and even betrayal. This multi-faceted view of friendship offers a more accurate portrayal by highlighting the possibility for development and resolution while noting that no relationship is exempt from problems.

The characters' autonomy and uniqueness strongly influence *Best of Friends'* depiction of female friendship. Leila, Maryam, and Zahra have a close relationship but are still unique people with their own goals and difficulties. By enabling each character to have her own storyline and character development, Shamsie avoids turning them into one another's mere counterbalances. This dimensionality supports the notion that genuine friendship recognizes individuality and fosters rather than stifles personal growth (Shamsie, *Best of Friends*, 2022).

The underlying concern surrounding the concepts of 'conditioning' and 'socialization' forms the basis for an important set of distinctions, namely those between the labels 'feminist', 'female', and 'feminine'. According to Toril Moi, the initial concept can be seen as a political stance, the second as a biological aspect, and the third as a collection of culturally determined attributes. The differentiation between the second and third aspects mentioned above holds significant importance within the realm of feminism, as highlighted in Moi's article found in *The Feminist Reader*, edited by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore.

The portrayal of women in literature was considered a significant means of socialization, as it presented role models that defined acceptable notions of femininity and legitimate female objectives and ambitions for both women and men. Feminist scholars have highlighted the scarcity of female characters engaged in gainful employment within nineteenth-century fiction, unless their circumstances necessitate such labor. The primary subject of attention pertains to the heroine's selection of a spouse, since it will ultimately determine her social status and exclusively dictate her level of happiness and fulfillment in life, or the absence thereof.

Therefore, during the 1970s, feminist criticism primarily focused on the revelation of the mechanisms of patriarchy. These mechanisms refer to the cultural mindset present in both men and women that perpetuates sexual inequity. Considerable scholarly focus was directed towards literary works authored by men, wherein significant or representative portrayals of women were fashioned. The critique that engaged with this work was inherently confrontational and characterized by a contentious tone. Subsequently, during the 1980s, a shift in sentiment occurred within feminism, mirroring similar transformations observed in other critical frameworks. Initially, feminist criticism had a notable shift towards eclecticism, when it started incorporating the discoveries and methodologies of several other forms of criticism, such as Marxism, structuralism, linguistics, and similar disciplines. Additionally, there was a shift in focus from critiquing the male-centric worldview to examining the characteristics and perspectives of the feminine realm. This shift also involved the restoration and examination of historical accounts of female experiences that had been either lost or deliberately concealed. In addition, there was a shift in focus towards the necessity of creating a fresh Canon of women's literature through the

revision of the historical accounts of the novel and poetry. This revision aimed to elevate the status of overlooked women writers and grant them renewed recognition.

Furthermore, the cultural and social environment enhances the portrayal of female friendship. Along with overcoming their obstacles, the characters also have to deal with the expectations and restrictions their families and communities put on them. Their connections gain depth as a result of the setting since their friendships serve as a tool for balancing the demands of society and their own goals. Their bonds are strengthened even more potent by their shared experiences with gender dynamics and cultural expectations (Belsey&Moore, 1989).

Best of Friends by Kamila Shamsie follows its titular protagonists from their childhood in Pakistan to their adult lives in London.

The beginning of *Best of Friends* by Kamila Shamsie occurs in Karachi in 1988, during this turbulent era. Zahra Ali and Maryam Khan are the best friends. Zahra is analytical and sceptical, but Maryam is romantic and intuitive. They are both 14 years old. Both are privileged, but only Maryam is exceptionally wealthy, with a guarantee that she will inherit her grandfather's luxury leather goods company and private protection guarding the family mansion.

Highways are about to split. Maryam experiences puberty first. When she accidentally knocks breast-first into strangers, she initially believes she has lost the ability to assess her size, like someone getting into a rental car and cutting off the side mirror, until she notices that the strangers are always, and suspiciously, guys. Soon after, Zahra undergoes a comparable transition. Initially, the character of Hammad exhibits an interest in Maryam. However, with time, he engages in a physical relationship with Zahra. Hammad lacks commitment towards both individuals and holds a perspective that objectifies women, perceiving them as commodities.

Zahra and Maryam have had a close friendship since their early years. They disclose all of their confidential information to one another. The individuals in question play a significant role in each other's lives. The presence of loyalty is evident in the early stages of the narrative, as observed within their friendship. However, as the narrative progresses, the characters engage in deceitful behaviour. This is primarily due to Hammad, as Zahra first harbours negative feelings towards him (Young, 2022).

Additionally, Maryam conceals her relationship with Hammad from Zahra, betraying her trust. Subsequently, Zahra also engaged in the activity mentioned earlier after a certain period. In the novel's opening chapters, it becomes evident that the two protagonists exhibit loyalty and openly share their experiences. However, as the narrative progresses, jealousy manifests inside them. Upon concluding the work, one must contemplate how Maryam and Zara maintained their friendship over an extended period despite harbouring profound animosity. Shamsie addresses this inquiry in the initial chapters by suggesting that the enduring nature of childhood friendships may be attributed to concealed meanings exclusive to the individuals involved. The presence of shared subtexts may have been perceived as increasingly essential, mainly when both individuals resided at a considerable distance from their respective childhood urban environments, which served as an underlying theme in their narratives. However, the underlying message loses its impact when confronted with the initial crisis, and the intricacies skillfully crafted by Shamsie in the first portion of the novel *Best of Friends* disintegrate much like the friendship between Zahra and Maryam.

For a moment, their sudden prominence is pleasurable. Being a beautiful young girl brings all the benefits of celebrity without any effort usually needed to obtain it: people are

kind to Maryam and Zahra, males are in awe of them, and random strangers are happy to do favours for them. However, there is a considerable drawback. An episode where a classmate's driver kidnaps the two but is not physically harmed brings an ambient thrum of impending sexual violence to a head (Hussein, 2022).

We fast-forward three decades to London in 2019 at the novel is halfway point. This is where it becomes apparent that *Best of Friends* is more like two novellas, the first lively and the second dull. The transition from the Karachi to the London half is like leaving a quirky little eatery and joining a Starbucks.

A profile of Maryam in Yahoo! Finance and one of Zahra in The Guardian serve as its first two articles. Here is what we learn: Zahra obtained a scholarship to Cambridge, got married and divorced, manages Britain's oldest civil rights group, and hangs out with George Clooney. It is a strange device for injecting 30 years of exposition, but this is what we learn. Maryam, a fellow Londoner who became a tech millionaire at age 26, lost everything when the dot-com bubble burst and then bounced back to become a successful venture capitalist. Her company's name is Venture Further, which is a terrible choice.

It is difficult to avoid making an unfavourable comparison between the novel and Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan quartet because it is a narrative of intimate female friendship. Ferrante wrote about the suffering from realizing that the person you love the most is better than you. In those books, Lila was clever and Lila was irresistibly appealing; Elena was merely intelligent. The girls' personalities, however, were complementary in other respects, and their mutual understanding was sufficient for them to approach a profound and sacredredundancy.

The rivalry, crises, and unequal gift distribution that heightened Elena and Lila's friendship are still evident in *Best of Friends* but have lost their intensity. Likewise, the setting. Ferrante portrayed a setting with the same electricity that she did in a romance. Shamsie comes near in her recreations of Karachi in the 1980s, but the narrative lacks coherence due to the featureless portrayal of London. Zahra and Maryam's drama is taking place on a green screen. The characters and all they do, the whats and whys, take on the flavour of tales without a tangible sense of where we are and when.

Returning to Ferrante, this writer explored the idea of spatial belonging and estrangement using the dialectic device. There is no such fortunate metaphor for Maryam and Zahra because they have been learning English since they were young. Shamsie plays around with language a little bit, and by "a little bit," I mean a few phrases concerning the lack of legal vocabulary and the insertion of an Urdu phrase in a crucial passage. However, these are not exploratory motions; instead, they are casual ones.

Language is not a barrier for the women, and neither is moving. The journey from Karachi to London is straightforward for Maryam and Zahra. Perhaps this is the book's thesis, or at least one of them: that with the right resources, credentials, and networks, immigration can be as easy as tapping a credit card on a reader to pay for a venti oat milk latte.

Readers who enjoyed *Home Fire*, Shamsie's previous book, which retells *Antigone*, would think twice before reading *Best of Friends*. There are many lines to treasure, such as when a politician is called a sadistic flapjack or when Zahra, who is four years old, thinks her father's face has an odd texture since she does not understand that grownups can cry.

A version of this book could have succeeded even without the framework of a Greek tragedy. Zahra and Maryam's lives contain plenty of turmoil by nature. Many fictional characters enjoy monetary luxury despite going through emotional or spiritual hardships. The issue is that these two are never truly tormented; they are just hassled, and their replies are bloodlessly commensurate.

1988 in Karachi, Pakistan. a secure party where 14-year-olds dance with their upper school friends. Drivers from their families are waiting outside the gate by the parked automobiles to transport them home. Teenagers, however, may not necessarily desire to be kept safe. The best friends in this book, Maryam and Zahra, depart with an older lad named Hammad. They soon find themselves in a car being driven by Jimmy, Hammad's scary friend, who is much too old to flirt with them, appears to have criminal ties and is determined to frighten them out of their wits rather than a dependable servant.

Nothing dreadful occurs. Even though all three events were sure to occur that night, there is no kidnapping, rape, or vehicle crash, but the lives of the three teenagers are severely disturbed. The complicated ideas of loyalty and betrayal are carefully woven into the fabric of female relationships in Kamila Shamsie's book *Best of Friends*, providing a nuanced analysis of the ties that bind women together and the weaknesses that might sever those links. The novel explores the complex nature of loyalty and the potential for betrayal within the context of friendship against a backdrop of altering social standards and individual goals.

The relationships that develop between Leila, Maya, and Zee—three women who traverse the difficulties of friendship while addressing their particular struggles—are at the centre of the story. Shamsie portrays the intense loyalty that first ties them together. As a result of their friendship, which gives them a safe place to talk about their hopes, concerns, and secrets, they find comfort, understanding, and empowerment. Their commitment to one another deepens as they assist one another on their journeys, serving as a metaphor for the power that may result from female friendships.

By the time the book's final conflict and betrayal occur, Maryam is a venture capitalist working on an unethical social media platform courting the UK's Conservative government, and Zahra is the director of the Centre for Civil Liberties, fighting against restrictive British immigration policies.

Maryam's apparent lack of morality is repulsing Zahra more and more. She says, "A part of me has always hated you." Maryam finds comprehending Zahra's apparent lack of interest in interpersonal relationships challenging. She starts to believe that her friendship with Zahra shows how unknowable other people are.

The narrative also emphasizes how brittle these links are and how even the strongest of connections can be destroyed by betrayal. Shamsie expertly navigates the intricacies of human emotions, showing how personal preferences and outside forces can result in behaviours that undermine the basis of mutual trust. For instance, Maryam's desire to further her studies strains her friendship with Leila because it conflicts with the latter's obligations to her family. This conflict highlights the conflicts between individual goals and the responsibilities of friendship.

Zahra's actions, which highlight the complex interaction between individual choices and their effects on relationships, best illustrate the concept of betrayal. The boundaries of their friendship are tested by Zahra's romantic involvement with Leila's brother, Ali. Not only is the love relationship itself betrayed, but also the secrecy that surrounds it. Zahra's decision to keep this knowledge from Leila reveals the flaws that can appear when devotion is questioned and causes their friendship to fall apart.

Shamsie emphasizes the ambiguities around devotion and betrayal via the experiences of these characters. She steers clear of oversimplified depictions of right and wrong in favour of exploring the nuanced motivations and environmental factors that influence these behaviours. This storytelling strategy gives the characters' conflicts more depth and forces viewers to think carefully about the subtleties of relationship interactions.

Furthermore, these women's experiences of loyalty and betrayal are further complicated by the cultural and socioeconomic setting in which they live. Women's decisions and relationships are influenced by the conventional expectations that are placed on them by their families and communities. The characters must balance their desires with their commitment to their families, frequently resulting in internal tensions that make their friendships more difficult.

Shamsie examines the repercussions of devotion and betrayal in her novel *Best of Friends*, stressing the influence these ideas may have on female relationships. Instead of offering simple solutions, the book encourages readers to consider the complex moral and emotional quandaries that arise when allegiance is put to the test. Shamsie's characters, with all of their flaws and complexity, mirror the difficulties many women have in the real world when juggling relationships with their personal objectives.

People only confide in one another because they have mutual trust and are willing to share their deepest hopes and desires. Despite Maryam's parents' opposition, Zahra wholeheartedly endorses Maryam's choice to finish her studies abroad and return to Pakistan. Though initially difficult to believe, General Zia's passing news becomes more plausible when solely addressed with Maryam. In 1988, while Pakistanis were eagerly awaiting the results of the country's first genuine party-based democratic elections, two young women were seen seated nearby and absorbed in the televised coverage. They alternated taking breaks, ensuring they got all the important historical events. The dawn of a democratic period in Pakistan is symbolized by the two people who have a deep friendship watching the sun appear on the horizon. Both buddies jointly witness this momentous event of great historical significance. The individuals have a strong belief that their relationship will endure indefinitely despite being physically apart or having their own partners. Their relationship is founded on true friendship rather than simple proximity. Shamsie describes how having one other's company gave their individual lives a feeling of stability and purpose.

The females show a genuine emotional connection and a readiness to sacrifice themselves for the group's good. There is an understanding of each other's weaknesses. Maryam is fully aware of the crucial significance that Zahra's reputation has in her personal and familial domains. She was aware that it had something to do with her socioeconomic position being unclear. Despite her innocence, Maryam is held responsible by Hammad and Jimmy for the kidnapping of both people on the aforementioned night in the FX. Instead of defending herself, she decides to save Zahra's name, reputation, and future from harm. Maryam does not, therefore, respond to any accusations or take any responsibility. Jimmy's acts that alarmed and upset her closest friend have left her with a great dislike for him. Even though much time has passed and both people have become quite busy with their many responsibilities, they still set aside Sundays to spend time together. Maryam intentionally shows her enmity toward Zahra's adversary, the Valkyrie, internalizing the familiar playground maxim that one should unite one's adversaries with those of one's friends.

Hammad, whose character is essential to moving the plot forward, is to blame for the initial breakdown in their relationship. He believes Maryam's choice to trick Zahra came about primarily because of him when she was fourteen. Due to Zahra's apparent disdain for Hammad, Maryam decides to converse with him alone whenever she is not with Zahra. The main character also chooses not to tell Zahra about her covert encounter with Hammad in the video store during their first meeting. She continues to treat this covert meeting as her adventure. Withholding information could be seen as a grave personal slight in a relationship that values open communication. Shamsie claims that a gradual change has already started and will inevitably worsen with time. When they are both forced to be held captive by Jimmy and Hammad, it marks the beginning of a transformation in both their lives and their relationship.

Their interpersonal relationship has deteriorated due to hiding facts and committing covert acts of disloyalty, creating a hostile environment. Zahra is significantly impacted by Maryam's membership at the High Table because of the government's severe anti-immigrant policies and rampant Islamophobia, which causes her to take part in protests. Maryam is also quite dissatisfied with Zahra's hidden relationship with Hammad. Unbeknownst to the participants, the conversation accidentally devolves into a string of treasonous deeds. Zahra explains her recent communication with Hammad and acknowledges Maryam's evident scorn before explaining her decision to end the exchange because she understands the intense sense of betrayal it would cause in Maryam. However, I felt betrayed by you the day before, which is what motivated my current feelings. She is puzzled and enraged by Zahra's act of hospitality and her offer to help Jimmy with his legal issues.

Disagreements on the type and quantity of theory that should be included in feminist criticism have been a significant source of division. The so-called "Anglo-American" version of feminism has a reputation for being more sceptical of and cautious about recent critical theory than "French" feminists, who have adopted and adapted a significant amount of (primarily) post-structuralist and psychoanalytic criticism as the foundation of much of their work. The 'Anglo-Americans' (not all English or Americans) continue to be keenly interested in traditional critical concepts like theme, motif, and characterization. They accept literary realism's conventions and view literature as a collection of portrayals of women's lives and experiences that can be contrasted and

assessed with reality. According to them, the main objective of feminist critique is the close reading and analysis of specific literary works. Although feminists also emphasize the use of historical information and non-literary material (such as diaries, memoirs, and social and medical history), feminist criticism generally shares much in common with the methods and underlying assumptions of the liberal humanist approach to literature. The American critic Elaine Showalter is frequently cited as the leading example of this strategy, but Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Patricia Stubbs, and Rachel Brownstein are notable examples.

For instance, English feminist critique differs frequently from American feminist criticism. It tends to be a 'socialist feminist' in orientation and is associated with cultural materialism or Marxism. Thus, attempting to fit it into a 'non-theoretical' category is unsatisfying. The fact that several well-known publications summarizing feminist criticism, such as K. K. Ruthven's *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction* and Toril Moi's *Sexual/ Textual Politics*, do not mention it as a separate category has made the existence of this type of feminism somewhat ambiguous. This kind of work includes, for instance:

Maryam is mentally and emotionally prepared for the impending confrontation that she has been actively avoiding for a while, thanks to Zahra's formal declaration urging the current government to address the activities of Imij, Maryam's company, and Babar's admission that the High Table's secret information had accidentally been made known to Zahra. Regular meetings with the Chancellor are made possible via the High Table, an administrative structure that gives people access to the Prime Minister. The High Table can be described as a select group of donors that serves as a safety for her business and investments, which are her main areas of interest. She cleverly negotiates with the Prime Minister to accept his offer to represent the government's 'Britain's Open for Business' initiative. She successfully convinces him to change his mind and abandon the government's position on charging fees and taking action against Imij through indirect means. Zahra suffers severe mental suffering due to Maryam's treachery, which serves as a cause for Jimmy's arrest and subsequent deportation, and she boldly says, "I aspire to assume the role of a Global Business Envoy." Ultimately, this anxiety forces the two parties involved into a confrontation that cannot be avoided. Maryam successfully pursued retaliation on Jimmy's behalf by using her ties with the High Table. She achieved this by providing the Home Office with crucial information and proof, which accelerated the process of his deportation and the ensuing separation from his daughters. Shamsie claims that the main character's life had been centred around him, highlighting the importance of his influence. The person in question had racked up enormous costs for the woman, including those of the city of Karachi, the company Khan Leather, and her paternal grandpa. There would be an injustice in this particular case in any court of law. It is important to remember that historical examples of justice do exist and predate modern systems. There is nothing in the user's text that has to be rewritten. However, it is essential to recognize that personality differences don't always lead to arguments or difficulties in female friendships. The presence of multiple personalities in a relationship can help to make it more prosperous and more balanced. The key to navigating potential obstacles and fostering the growth and fortification of female friendships over time is to develop an understanding of and respect for one another's unique personalities, use effective communication techniques, and be willing to tolerate differences. In the book *Best of*

Friends, loyalty and betrayal are recurring themes that frequently mirror the complexities of interpersonal relationships and emotions. Authors frequently examine the strong links of sisterhood, companionship, and friendship while focusing on these subjects in female relationships and the possible rifts that might develop because of interpersonal disagreements, external influences, or personal aspirations.

Female friendships are described in this book as being sources of unwavering support, comprehension, and loyalty. Characters' relationships with these people might give them strength and support as they face problems in life. Conflicts and betrayals within these connections, however, can also provide for compelling storylines. Betraying someone might result from jealousy, rivalry, divergent values, miscommunication, or selfish aspirations. These betrayals can be particularly painful because female friendships frequently include intimacy and trust.

Feminism can be seen in the elements of the novel. Maryam's father instructed her mother to visit Oxford Street and get their daughter a new wardrobe because everything she wore was 'indecent' and utterly embarrassing. Thus, she removed her favourite garments, including the Madonna shirt, the tiger shirt with diamond eyes, and the nautical-striped shirt. The new shirts were more flowy and had no decorations or graphics that would attract attention to her chest. It didn't matter to the men who ran into her on the subway or to the parent's friend who had started gently hugging her shoulders and pulling her close like her 'uncles' always did, but never him.

Another element is Zahra's parents had made it clear when they first moved in that she was never to go to the beach alone, but Maryam had been over a few days later and persuaded her that they should sneak off when her parents weren't at home. Together, they had crossed the silver-grey sand to one of the street vendors, who was cooking corn over blazing flames on a wooden cart. Maryam strolled while whistling a tune Zahra was unfamiliar with, but Zahra simply felt exposed as her thoughts drifted to the rumours of kidnappings circulating the schoolyard. One of the girls in Class 8 missed three days of class the previous year. Although she claimed she had a stomach bug when she returned, rumours circulated that she had been kidnapped and ransomed. Her parents didn't want anyone to know because they feared people would wonder what had been done to the girl during those three days spent with criminal men. Instead of continuing to hang around outside, Zahra had requested they take the corn home and eat it in her room.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the current research was to investigate and understand female friendship, loyalty, and fidelity. The difficulties that female friendships experience are examined in this study. A variety of papers have been studied and analyzed for this study in order to get findings and conclusions that are based on the goals of the investigation. In the book, Maryam and Zahra, two closest friends in their early teens, are followed as communal tensions increase due to the dictatorship.

Maryam and Zahra concur that the key to friendship is finding those "common subtexts no one else could see. Shamsie paints their relationship as an alliance of opposites, but their personal histories are similar. Maryam and Zahra have a friendship that is full of differences. While Maryam is a member of the top class, both girls are from the affluent class. The characters' autonomy and uniqueness strongly influence *Best of Friends'* depiction of female friendship.

Shamsie's representation is realistic; it considers the difficulties and complexities that can often exist in female friendships. The book expertly handles tense and contentious situations, exposing the possibility of miscommunication, resentment, and even betrayal.

This multi-faceted view of friendship offers a more accurate portrayal by highlighting the possibility for development and resolution while noting that no relationship is exempt from problems. Childhood connections differ from later friendships in that they are not built on the same notion of "things in common," according to Shamsie, who speaks to *The New Arab*. We also discuss the subject of loyalty and fidelity in this study. Hammad, whose character is essential to moving the plot forward, is to blame for the initial breakdown in their relationship. He believes Maryam's choice to trick Zahra came about primarily because of him when she was fourteen.

In sum, the introduction and literature review together throw a wide net across the complex terrain of this research project, poised to reveal the numerous layers within *Best of Friends*, Kamila Shamsie's engaging novel. The groundwork set by the introduction echoes as a symphony of purpose as we begin this voyage of feminist literary analysis, illuminating the study's goals and the fundamental significance of feminist theory in analyzing the narrative's core. This introduction also shines a light on the author, Kamila Shamsie, a storyteller with a unique perspective as a British-Pakistani who skillfully incorporates political undercurrents, identity discovery, and cultural disputes into the fabric of her novels.

As we delve deeper into the review of the literature, we discover a maze of academic discoveries that delicately intertwine with the themes and patterns in Shamsie's literary tapestry. The review uncovers a wealth of viewpoints and offers a bird's eye view of the thematic landscapes our study tries to explore. As contemporary authors like Kamila Shamsie and Zia Hader Rahman represent globalism, multiculturalism, and the complex dance of identity and violence in their respective storylines, a symbiotic relationship between them becomes clear. We are asked to embark on an intellectual trip that crosses geographic boundaries through this exploration, fusing diverse narratives into a broad patchwork of comprehension. As the literature review explores Shamsie's talent for expressing the emotional turmoil of displacement and exile, a theme that reverberates vividly in her writings, it becomes clear how brilliant she is. The review paints a moving portrait of people navigating the currents of change, skillfully capturing the significant effect of historical events on her characters' lives. The book *Kartography* stands out as an example of Shamsie's ability to delve into ideas of home and belonging, particularly within the complex fabric of the Muhajir community in Karachi. The literary review develops into a symposium of insights as a result of these debates, with each piece serving as a torchbearer illuminating our investigation's direction.

Our feminist interpretation of *Best of Friends* is made possible by synthesizing these insights. We seek to analyze the interplay of societal norms, rhetoric, and power dynamics that mould the lives of our characters with a keen Foucauldian eye. This study aims to comprehend the intricate interplay between society's expectations, individual desires, and the unyielding resilience that defines women's agency within the narrative. To do this, the study will draw on the diverse experiences of women.

The following chapters will take us on a trip with the characters as we discover the intricate tapestry of their friendships, hardships, and victories by peeling back the layers. We will examine their decisions, difficulties, and crucial turning points via the feminist lens. We will explore the depths of loyalty and betrayal to understand better how they interact in the intricate web of interpersonal connections.

We set out to respect the author's intent, explore the core of her story, and provide readers and academics with a glimpse into the profound complexities underlying the relationships between women, the tapestry of cultures they travel through, and the terrain

they traverse. The introduction and literature review have laid a solid foundation, creating the ideal environment for a thorough investigation of *Best of Friends*. With the feminist north star serving as our guide, we start on a voyage that promises to reveal the complexities of friendship and agency and advance the continuing discussion surrounding Kamila Shamsie's literary genius. Feminist theory, sometimes known as feminism, is a socio-political movement traditionally spearheaded by women, advocating for eradicating sexism in its various manifestations. By employing the theoretical framework of feminism, we undertake an analysis of the interactions between male and female characters, as well as the dynamics among female characters themselves. Maryam's father instructed her mother to purchase plain, unadorned shirts for Maryam as she entered her youth. Zahra's parents prohibit her from visiting the beach unaccompanied by an adult. The female protagonists, Zahra and Maryam, first exhibit a close friendship akin to that of closest friends. However, as time progresses, they begin to conceal certain aspects of their lives from one another. However, by the novel's conclusion, their friendship remains resilient due to their longstanding companionship since infancy.

REFERENCES

- Keeble & Annesley. (2021). Globalism, Multiculturalism and violence in Zia Hader Rehman's *In the Light of What We Know* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. *Routledge Taylor and Francis Group*.
- Liaqat & Mukhtar. (2022). Poetics and politics of post-partition cultural memories in Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*. *Contemporary South Asia*.
- Ahmed. (2020). Towards an ethics of reading Muslims; encountering difference in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. *Routledge Taylor and Francis Group*.
- Akhtar, Q. U. (2016). Repression and resistance; A Foucauldian discourse analysis of power structures in the novel *A God in Every Stone* by Kamila Shamsie. *Humanities*, 7.
- Chandra, P. (2022). Gynocriticism: A Female Framework For The Analysis Of Women's Literature. In E. Showalter, *Towards a Feminist Poetics* (p. 6). Print ISBN.
- Doroszuk, M. (2019). Personality and Friendships. In *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences* (p. 9). Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019.
- Hussein, A. (2022, January 2). Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1667205/non-fiction-friendship-heritage-and-time>
- King, B. (2011). Kamila Shamsie's novels of history, exile and desire. *Routledge Taylor and Francis Group*.
- Kumar. (2017). Karachi as Home and the Uncanny Homecoming of Muhajirs in Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*. *Routledge Taylor and Francis Group*.
- Mill, J. S. (1869). The Subjection of Women. *British Library*, 8413.p.36.
- Pishotti. (2022). Materializing grief: The reclamation of loss in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. *Routledge Taylor and Francis Group*, 13.