

Revisiting Indo-Pak History, Gender and Power Relations through Food Tropes in Kamila Shamsie's Novel Salt and Saffron

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ABSTRACT

Food is one of the basic human needs. But it also serves as the signifier of and is studied with a close relationship to the issues like cultural identity, history, gender relations, social status, behaviour, and intelligence. This research paper explores the subtle and complex significance of food and cuisine in a contemporary Pakistani author Kamila Shamsie's novel *Salt and Saffron* in which power, gender, class, race, history and cultural identity get produced and articulated through culinary negotiations. It will be seen that food, like history and mythology, has been used to centralize certain discourses about gender and power relations. Central to the present discussion is the role of kitchen as a space which is used by the novelist to construct the notion of cultural superiority, gender biases and class consciousness. Moreover, kitchen is also studied as a carnivalesque space which helps to resist and subvert the traditional binaries of male/female, master/servant and speech/silence. The paper further explores the subversive ways in which food and its imagery has been used to demythologize historical personages and deconstruct grand narratives in the Indo-Pak history. As the taste of a food is affected by the presence or absence of a minor ingredient like salt, the novel treats history of the Indian sub-continent like a dish whose course can be altered by the inclusion or exclusion of minor narratives and details.

Key Words: Subversion, Food, Identity, Culinary, Indo-Pak History, Discourse, Gender.

Introduction

Kamila Shamsie is an acclaimed Pakistani novelist. She has six novels to her credit. Born in a country where official and documented narratives hold strong as there is hardly any leeway for an alternative narrative, Shamsie is well aware of the challenges a writer has to face if he or she intends to question or re-write the official narrative. Her novels are an endeavour to question the verity of official history, personalities and ideologies that dominate the political and academic landscape of Pakistan. Therefore, in her novels, she challenges and subverts the official history and myths in favour of a more veritable history collected from often neglected sources. She provides alternative ways of looking at history, myths and beliefs which are taken for granted by most of the people. She also delves into

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small but significant moments of history which, if things had transpired differently, would have produced quite a different history. Her novel *Salt and Saffron* looks at the history of the Dard-e-Dil family living in India and Pakistan along with some big chunks of the history of the sub-continent. The novel “focuses on the polarized class system in the Pakistani city” (Ahmed 2002, p. 12) Karachi based on different indicators like food, locality, manners, and lineage. The Dard-e-Dils pride themselves on being royal blood. But Shamsie humorously points that these feelings of superiority are based on myth as there is as much probability as not that the Dard-e-Dils are the offspring of a wet nurse.

Literature review

Food is the basic necessity for the human body to survive. It may, however, signify different things in different cultures. If it is the source of pleasure on the one hand, it is the potential site of conflict amidst a number of political, economic, medical and moral issues, on the other. Taken in the entirety of these dimensions, food often comes to represent a culture in a way to differentiate it from other cultures. In the essays entitled “Wine and Milk” and “Steak and Chips” of his landmark work *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes highlights the semiotic value of food and food culture. He explains different meanings associated with food preparation and consumption. As a structuralist, he discusses the difference between the denotative and connotative meanings of the food items like steaks. In a discussion of the business lunch, he lays bare the implied meanings carried by food and food spaces:

To eat is a behavior that develops beyond its own ends, replacing, summing up, and signaling other behaviors. . . . What are these other behaviors? Today we might say all of them: activity, works, sports, effort, leisure, celebration – every one of these situations is expressed through food. We might almost say that this ‘polysemia’ of food characterizes modernity. (Barthes 1957, p. 25)

In “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption”, Barthes further discusses how food and culture influence each other. He says that the phenomenon of advertising has changed the nature of human relationship with food by making them brand-conscious. Now advertising has made eating more a social act and less a bodily need. Food has become a system of communication, a mass of images, and a signifier of behaviour, business needs and status.

French cultural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) makes a structuralist analysis of food and cuisine through his concept of culinary triangle of boiling, roasting and smoking. He conceives that cuisine marks difference between human beings and other animals because no other species cooks food as the human beings do. By cooking, man draws a distinction between nature and culture, the latter being the product of man. The practice of cuisine lays the foundation of the cultural world which is inhabited by human beings. In “Introduction: Food in Multi-Ethnic Literatures,” Gardaphé and Xu explain, “Ethnic identity formations have been shaped by experiences of food productions and services, culinary creativities, appetites, desires, hunger, and even vomit” (Gardaphe and Xu 2007, p.

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5). Mark Stein states, "Food does more than satisfy one's biological need for calories, nutrients, water. Food choice divides communities and has the power to delineate the boundaries between them. Food taboos can serve to mark outsiders as unclean, unhealthy, unholy" (134).

The subject of food has been widely studied and theorized within the fields of anthropology, sociology and cultural studies. It has not, however, been explored to that much depth in literary studies especially in South Asian English fiction. Anita Mannur's *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture* (2010) is a remarkable effort in this regard. The author "offers a synthetic approach, concerned with the micro- and macroepistemologies of food in South Asian diasporic cultural texts" (9). She contends that food plays a pivotal role in constructing cultural imagination for the diasporic communities. She seeks to explore the culinary dynamics of the South Asian diaspora in the West as depicted in the fiction by South Asian writers. The work goes on to prove how food figures prominently in the construction and articulation of identity among various diaspora communities in the West.

The food trope finds a fair representation in some postcolonial South Asian novelists. Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* frames food both as a site and a sign to understand how identities are constructed, differences are highlighted, and ideals are maintained through food representations on intercultural level. It discusses the construction of a Pakistani culinary self/tradition in order to counter and dispel certain American misconceptions about Pakistani culture. It analyzes how food can be used to dramatize notions of place, identity, cultural pride, and neglected forms of labor. The novel establishes the role of food as an alternative language, a sort of non-verbal communication between two cultures. Food is used by Changez not only to introduce Pakistani culture to his American interlocutor but it also constructs a looking glass self for him as he sees his own culture in the food being offered in Anarkali Bazar. Feryal Ali Guahar's novel *No Space for Further Burials* studies war and food crisis in conjunction with each other. Gauhar portrays ecological crisis and food shortage as two horrendous impacts of the Afghan war. Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* present women as saviours of cultural identity through culinary negotiations. For *Jasmine*, the title character of Mukherjee's novel, food becomes a cultural conduit connecting her with the white community surrounding her.

Historically, women have had closer relationship with food and cuisine than men. Avakian's anthology *Through the Kitchen Window: Women Writers Explore the Intimate Meanings of Food and Cooking* looks into the traditional relationship between women and food. The writings in the book provide glimpses into the lives of women in their various contexts and tell us about the meanings embedded in women's relationships to food. Fiction by women writers also needs to be studied in connection with the politics and poetics of food. In *Food, Consumption and the*

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Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction, Sarah Sceats brings into focus the significance of food as represented in women's fiction. She points out in detail how the act of eating is charged with multiple political and social meanings.

What people eat, how and with whom, what they feel about food and why—even who they eat—are of crucial significance to an understanding of human society.... Encoded in appetite, taste, ritual and ingestive etiquettes are unwritten rules and meanings, through which people communicate and are categorised within cultural contexts. (Sceats 2000, p. 1)

Sceats' focus is on the communicative aspect of food as the act of eating conveys a lot about our cultural identity, social background, economic status and gender relations. are more than mere nostalgic reversions to the past; these culinary transmogrifications are conscious. In short, food tropes in postcolonial South Asian fiction invite a complex critique of location and displacement, identity, memory, transculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and subalternity.

Research methodology

The premise of this research paper is to explore the dynamics of food politics as represented in Pakistani novelist Kamila Shamsie's novel *Salt and Saffron*. The study is qualitative and inductive in nature, and the research design adopted for this purpose is hermeneutic and interpretive. Textual analysis will be employed as a research method.

Data analysis

Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* employs the trope of food to study history, class system, and gender biases in the Pakistani society. It is the story of intersection between oral history of the Dare-e-Dil family and the history of the partition of India. The family myths and traditions are revisited by Aliya, the narrator, with a deconstructive look. The story "revolves around the tension between the traditional fears and prejudices guarded and cherished by the old generation and the skepticism rampant among the new generation" (Shirazi 2014, p. 25) about the credibility and viability of those prejudices. Aliya, a modern sensibility and educated in America, looks skeptical about the superiority of her family as claimed by the family elders. With the help of alternative narratives, the narrator seeks to shatter the myths that the Dard-e-Dils are royal blood, that the not-quite-twins bring curse to the family and that the Dard-e-Dils cannot marry into any other class or family. The novel presents a subtle depiction of food intertwined with history and memory, and provides the ground for the discussion of gender biases and patriarchal hold on history. Isabelle Meuret, in her essays on anorexia in contemporary literature, writes of Shamsie's novel that food serves as "a means to convey love and is such a powerful catalyst of feelings and sensations that it makes the barriers between class and gender collapse" (Meuret 2007, p. 209).

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The very title of the novel *Salt and Saffron* by Kamila Shamsie awakens the gustatory sense. Salt and saffron are often important ingredients in different foods, the former being very common and inexpensive while the latter being very expensive. Juxtaposing salt and saffron in the title hints at Shamsie's ideal of bringing the minor and major together. When Masood, the family cook of the Dard-e-Dils, serves unsalted food to the family, Aliya's father gets annoyed. The placement of 'salt' before 'saffron' in the title foregrounds the marginalized and neglected narratives in the novel. The idea is strengthened by Shamsie's treatment of the subject of history and the myth of the not-quite-twins in the Dard-e-Dil family from the perspective of her family as well as that of Taj, the family nurse. It is reinforced by her attempt at centralizing the discourse of her family cook and her aunt, Mariam whose voices are neglected on the basis of class and gender respectively. Salt may be small in quantity but important for the flavour of the meal. Aliya remembers Masood's words that he believed in God "because all of science can never explain the miracle of salt" (Shamsie 2000, p. 179). A significant parallel is drawn between food and history. The taste and quality of a food is determined by who cooks it. In the same way, the nature of history is determined by who is writing it. Shamsie treats the history of Aliya's family and the history of the sub-continent in a way that the inclusion or exclusion of a small detail may change the nature of history. The minor people like Taj, the wet nurse, and Masood may socially be poor and marginalized, yet they are like salt to the collective narrative i.e. the narrative is incomplete without them. These minor characters make a significant contribution to the way events unfold. Three not-quite-twins Akbar, Suleiman, and Taimur - the three brothers are born a few minutes apart. Unfortunately, the oldest of the triplets arrived just before the midnight of February 28, the next one at the midnight and the third a minute after the midnight, on February 29. All this was narrated by the family nurse of the Dard-e-Dils, Taj. No one is sure whether this narrative given by Taj is true or not because Taj had her own reasons to mislead the family. According to the legend, Taj's mother was raped by a member of the Dard-e-Dil family. In the same way, Masood, though a cook, makes the pride of Aliya's family crumble by secretly marrying Taimur's daughter, Mariam. If we take these minor characters out, the whole family narrative based on legends, superstitions and prejudices may just collapse.

The politics of food and the politics of language are intermingled in the novel. Looking at the significance of the title and its link with history from the perspective of style and language is quite illuminating. The Urdu words used at different places in the text add salt to the narrative. They may be fewer in number, but they do not fail to assert the cultural background of the Dard-e-Dil family. The use of Urdu words for different foods and cuisine lends strength to the idea that one's cultural identity is shrouded in one's food choices and manners. Furthermore, Shamsie mixes the politics and the poetics of food to prepare a

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unique kind of artistic and fictional dish. The act of storytelling is also like preparing a dish. Relating the importance of minor food ingredients like salt with that of small details of a story, the narrator thinks:

How the absence of a single ingredient can alter the meal before you. How the absence of a detail can alter a story. How much salt had been left out in all the stories I'd ever heard from, and about, my family? How much salt did I leave out when I turned my memories of Mariam and Masood into a story? (Shamsie 2000, p. 179)

Salt and saffron are also linked to memories and dreams. Aliya thinks if Mariam Apa ever sent her a message, it would be “a fistful of saffron sprinkling over my eyelids while I slept” (Shamsie 2000, p. 129). It shows that culinary signs functions as an alternative language between Aliya and Mariam.

The novel brings into focus how a great deal of politics is involved in the manner of consuming food. Food manners help one class differentiate itself from other classes. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu asserts that “social identity is defined and asserted through difference” (1984, p. 172), and the difference in the manner of eating and drinking helps in promoting the politics of othering. When Aliya meets Khaleel in a café in London, she comes to know about Khaleel's family background through his way of taking tea. Aliya says that Khaleel “poured his tea into a saucer, blew on it and sipped it into his mouth. My eyes swivelled round to check that no one I knew was watching” (Shamsie 2000, p. 63). Watching this, Aliya delves deep into the idea of many glaring differences between Khaleel's and her background which could never be removed. The meeting between Aliya and Khaleel points to the fact that food places not only bring people together but also set them apart. Shamsie shows how upper class people treat the lower classes as other even on the basis of difference in eating style as Khaleel's eating and drinking manners make him at first a social other in the eyes of Aliya. In the article “Food for Thought,” Andy Martin states that “our sense of identity . . . depends on the application of apartheid to taste.” He declares, “The truth is, we are what we do not eat” and that we “define ourselves in opposition to the menu of another country or community; conversely, we equate the Inedible with the Other.” (Martin 2016. n.p.). Moreover, some minor characters are depersonalized and named after their food choices. There are two maidservants in Aliya's house who are named on the basis of their eating habits: Hibiscus-Eating Ayah and Niswaar-spitting Ayah.

Besides functioning as a marker of identity, food practice is a cultural activity and its meanings go beyond its everyday use. As Linda Civitello remarks that human beings attach meaning to food “far beyond its survival function. It has been used in rituals to guarantee fertility, prosperity, a good marriage, and an afterlife. It has been used to display the power and wealth of the state, the church, corporations, a person” (Civitello 2003, p. xiii). In *Salt and Saffron*, Aliya gives a description of her kitchen in Karachi in order to impress Khaleel. The use of food and food space as an identity marker can also be found in Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* where Changez introduces his American listener to

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the food culture of Lahore by saying that the American “must not pass up such an authentic introduction to Lahori cuisine” (Hamid 2002, p. 60). He further explains the delicacies and nuances of Pakistani foods in the Anarkali Street.

We Pakistanis tend to take an inordinate pride in our food. Here in Anarkali that pride is visible in the purity of the fare on offer; not one of these worthy restaurants would consider placing a western dish on his menu. No, we are surrounded instead by the kebab of mutton, the tikka of chicken, the stewed foot of goat, the spiced brain of sheep!... Not for us the vegetarian recipes one finds across the border to the east, nor the sanitized, sterilized, processed meats so common in your homeland. (Hamid 2002, p. 60)

Changez also hints at his country's cultural differences with its arch-rival India; these differences are based on food choice. The narrator of *Salt and Saffron* may be shattering certain myths about racial and cultural superiority, but she cannot help idealizing the quality of the foods served at the dining tables of the Dard-e-Dils. Food plays a role in maintaining the status quo within the sexualized, gendered, and classed social space.

The Dard-e-Dil family is proud of its food choice and the excellence of its cooks. Translocating the Dard-e-Dil cuisine to the space of a London kitchen is also an endeavour to assert their culinary superiority. Kitchen and foods in London link Aliya with dreams and memories of her past. When she wakes up in Samia's house in London, she sees “chicken karahi on the stove and note instructing” (Shamsie 2000, p. 58) her to add some chillies etc. She broods on the superiority of the foods in her house in Karachi especially the ones prepared by her family's former cook, Masood. As the other Dard-e-Dils are prejudiced about the superiority of their family, Aliya has her prejudices about the superiority of the Dard-e-Dil cuisine. Food serves as an anchor to link her with her home through memory and nostalgia. The text positions culinary discourse as an always available script for negotiating the pangs of separation from Masood and Mariam. The taste forms a gustatory link that binds Aliya with Mariam and Masood despite the fact that her family abhors them after their marriage.

A spoon covered in spices and the juice of cooked chicken lay next to the haandi, but I ignored it and reached for a spoon to stir in the chillis and coriander. Masood always used to say that two hands on one spoon spoils the flavour of a dish... (‘How much time?’ I heard Masood's voice, incredulous. ‘How can I tell you how time it'll take? When the spices and the meat dissolve the boundaries between them and flavours seep, one into the other, then it is time.’ (Shamsie 2000, p. 58)

The narrative constructs Masood's identity as an expert cook. He is a constant source of inspiration for the Dare-e-Dils especially Aliya. When Mehar Dadi tells Aliya about about some Dard-e-Dil's visit to her house in Greece, Aliya asks her if she cooks in order to offer him “*murgh mussalum* to give him a taste of Dard-e-Dil” (Shamsie 2000, p. 222). When Nasser, Aliya's father, comes to know that

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Khaleel has brought a package of food for dinner, he is annoyed. "Dinner? Why? Does he think we're not capable of feeding our guests" (Shamsie 2000, p. 238). But when they open the package, they cannot help hurrying for the food for its "Masoodian" (Shamsie 2000, p. 240) taste.

Kamila Shamsie depicts the life of the upper class Pakistani families for whom the gatherings for food offer an opportunity for the discussion of the issues like politics, partition, family feuds, love and manipulation of historical discourse. Eating food "together lies at the heart of social relations; at meals we create family and friendships by sharing food, taste, values and ourselves" (Counihan 1999, p. 6). In Shamsie's novel *Kartography*, the catalyst in Karim's life appears to be an informal lesson given at the dinner table by Uncle Asif. "A history lesson," he said... turning his plate towards Karim and me. 'In 1947, East and West Pakistan were created, providing a pair of testicles for the phallus of India.' (Shamsie 2002, p. 22). In *Salt and Saffron*, when Aliya goes to her grandmother's sister's house in London, their discussion on the partition of the sub-continent and the family split goes side by side with eating. The food spaces like café and dining room function as important centers of discussion and communication. Aliya's first formal meeting with Khaleel takes place in a café on a cup of coffee. Even the most important event in the life of Aliya's grandmother, the fight between Akbar and Sulaiman, took place when the two brothers left the other members of the family at the dinner table. In *Salt and Saffron*, social gatherings and parties are also a source of pleasure "before hot weather and riots and curfew" (Shamsie 2000, p. 132) return and impede such activities.

Shamsie presents food as a tool used for the politics of social inclusion and exclusion. She uses the trope of food to embody the subtle phenomenon of power relations in the Pakistani society. The same cooking which is the source of Masood's excellence makes him alienated and other in the eyes of the Dard-e-Dil family. The Dard-e-Dils may enjoy the food cooked by Masood, and may not be able to live without it, but the same food helps them create the binary of master and servant. The more efficiently and excellently he cooks, the more his role as a cook is stereotyped on the basis of economic and social differences. The gulf between drawing room and kitchen can never be bridged. When Mariam elopes with and marries Masood, none of the Dard-e-Dils is ready to digest the idea of their blood marrying a cook. Their feelings of superiority as royal blood never let them accept Masood on human basis. Abida, Aliya's Dadi, even goes on to call Mariam a 'whore' (Shamsie 2000, p. 104). Though Aliya idealizes Masood for his excellent cooking and often empathizes with Masood and Maryam, her reaction to the elopement is very harsh. She feels disgusted by the idea that Mariam is "having sex with a servant.... Not Masood; just a servant" (Shamsie 2000, p. 113).

Appropriation of the kitchen space plays a helpful role in negotiating the boundaries between the master and the servant of the house. Hence, the kitchen serves as a carnivalesque space. Bakhtin (1965) introduces the concept of carnivalesque which includes, among other things, the subversion of the existing order through mask and laughter. *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies*

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elaborates the contemporary use of the term 'carnavalesque' that "connotes a form of resistance to power and authority" (2004, p. 21). Masood, the family cook of the Dard-e-Dils in Karachi, appropriates the kitchen space to challenge and counter the hegemonic politics of exclusion of the working class from the mainstream society. For Masood, kitchen is transformed into an empowering space where he can inscribe the discourse of resistance to the social stereotypes about servants. The character of Masood is constructed on the basis of his excellence in cooking. He is a 'cook to be hired but never fired' (Shamsie 2000, p. 56). The culinary emerges as an important counter-discourse. Food becomes language for Masood through which he proves his supremacy. The narrator uses the adjective 'Masoodian' for him. As Masood's words are rarely heard throughout the novel, we get to know about his character through Aliya's description of his cooking. He attains subjectivity through his cooking practices. Aliya remembers that she watched Masood cook and saw "shape and colour transformed into texture, witnessed odour becoming aroma, observed vegetables that grew away from each other in the garden wrapping around each other and rolling through spices in his frying pan" (Shamsie 2000, p. 95). Masood's cooking excellence is also revealed through his difference from other cooks hired by the Dard-e-Dil family. Thus, his absence reveals more about his character than his presence does. When Waseem replaces Masood as a cook, his cooking is good "by any standards other than Masood's" (Shamsie 2000, p. 95). Thus, Masood inscribes his ideals on cooking practices so that his talent and expertise do not succumb to what Lomaz (2001) calls "the alchemy of erasure" (p. 104).

Mariam's silence and framing in kitchen also highlights the issue of gender discrimination in the Pakistani society. She stands for the idea of woman in Pakistan where she is silenced and sidelined to the role of a cook. Her only expertise is in the art of cooking and house-keeping. She takes very little part in the mainstream activities of the family. Mariam, Taimur's daughter and the narrator's aunt, comes to Aliya's house on the same day the latter is born. So Aliya and Mariam are considered not-quite-twins. From her very arrival, Mariam hardly speaks to anyone but Masood, the family cook. On her first day, Mariam does not speak a word to anyone, but when the cook asks Aliya's mother what he should cook, Mariam replies that he should cook "*aloo ka bhurta, achaar gosht, pulao, masoor ki daal, kachoomar*" (Shamsie 2000, p. 56). Hearing these words, Aliya's mother goes into labour. As long as Mariam stays in the house, she eats only the food cooked by Masood, and talks only about food and with Masood if she ever talks. In Aliya's opinion, Mariam never spoke "because speaking would mean trying to explain Taimur, and that she was unable to do. So she hid in menus—hid in that wondrous yet confined world of lunch and dinner... marking out the boundaries of what she could and could not speak of" (Shamsie 2000, p. 179). Mariam's character also serves as the author's device to bring to the fore the marginalized discourse of the working class people like Masood. Mariam also

stands for the silent aspect of the history which needs to be explored, constructed and represented as an alternative discourse in order to break the hegemony of the mainstream written history. As the narrator brings in alternative ways of looking at the history of her family and the history of Indo-Pak, she also chooses an alternative way of peeping into the mind of the working class. Despite being the daughter of Taimur, one of the not-quite-twins, she indulges in love with a person of low class, Masood. When she spoke, she did so in questions not imperatives as she “was undercutting the whole employer-servant paradigm” (Shamsie 2000, p. 214). Food becomes synonymous with love and constructive relationship. It helps to strengthen the bond of love between Masood and Mariam. In their case, food is love, and love is food. As both of them are marginalized, they occupy the space of kitchen to subvert the power hierarchy that privileges drawing room discourse over the kitchen discourse. Even after their elopement and marriage, they go to Turkey and open up a restaurant there, and continue their relationship with the food space.

Avoiding food or hunger strike can be tantamount to resistance and revolt in Pakistani culture. It can be linked with women’s subordinate position in society, and their revolt against the same. Mariam’s anorexia after the departure of Masood adds to her already silent stay in the house. It stands for her refusal to be framed in the traditional narrative about women. With her whole body, she says ‘no’ to the boundaries created on the basis of class and gender. It is “the enactment of silent rebellion” (Meuret 2007, p. 209). Through her hunger strike, Mariam rewrites her family history. She may have Dard-e-Dil blood in her veins, but she shows stronger affiliation and relationship with Masood than with any of her blood relations. Mariam’s anorexia has also a symbolic significance. By remaining hungry for some days, Mariam cleanses her body of the last traces of the Dard-e-Dil food. So when she moves out of the house, she neither carries Dard-e-Dil ideology in her mind nor their food in her stomach.

The politics of food are extended by Kamila Shamsie to trans-border communication and the strengthening of relationships across classes. In food, Mariam and Masood find one way of reconnecting with the Dard-e-Dil family. After their elopement, Mariam and Masood are thought to be settled in Turkey. They open a restaurant there. The Dard-e-Dils in Karachi receive mysterious food from Turkey which has a Masoodian taste.

“In view of semiotics, food functions as communication. It transmits messages about identities and social relationships, and it develops and transforms over time due to social shifts. It can also facilitate transcultural communication through food sharing across cultural boundaries, and through altering and re-creating food habits according to contexts....” (Hinnerová 2007, p. 36).

Sending food from Turkey is a silent communication on the part of Mariam. It is the continuation of her silence in Aliya’s house in Karachi. It is the continuation of her use of the culinary language. Aliya finds that words are inadequate to describe the food sent by Mariam. She says that to eat the food sent by Mariam “was to eat centuries of artistry, refined in kitchens across the subcontinent” (Shamsie 2000, p. 241). The food sent from Turkey also highlights the idea that

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food and eating are more real than the abstract things like class and gender. When Khaleel brings food from Turkey for Aliya's family, their relationship undergoes a sudden transformation. The differences in his and Aliya's social background seem to have melted down.

Food is also used as a tool to subvert historical and religious discourses. Shamsie links historical personages with food images in an attempt to demythologize and humanize them. Thus, Taimur Lung from whom Aliya's family is descended reminds her of tamarind. Another kind of subversion takes place in Shamsie's account of Baburnama in which Emperor Babur mentions melons. The narrative, in a humorous manner, deconstructs the historical discourse about Babur invading India for establishing a kingdom.

The envoys found a man who spoke not of wars or empires, but of melons.... To him, India was an 'unpleasant and unharmonious' place, a second-best territory he had settled for...He was, in modern parlance, homesick. This homesickness primarily manifested itself primarily in his yearning for the honey-sweet melons of Central Asia. A great deal of attention is paid to fruit in the Baburnama and, by and large, India failed to impress Babur in that all important regard. (Shamsie 2000, p. 139)

The grandeur of the historical discourse about Babur is subverted here as Babur is shown wishing for the melons of his ancestral land. But as he could not go back to his native country, he settled for the Indian mangoes which he considered second to the melons in Central Asia. The religious significance of food is subverted through an examination of the act of cooking and eating. In the Dard-e-Dil household in Karachi, food is cooked and consumed not as a part of religious devotion but for eating itself. Aliya relates the details about the special types of dishes prepared during the month of Ramzan. During Ramzan, "abstaining from food and drink from sunrise to sunset had less to do with religious devotion than it did with culinary devotion" (Shamsie 2000, p. 74).

Conclusion

This paper has explored the dynamics of food politics in Pakistani novelist Kamila Shamsie's novel *Salt and Saffron* highlighting how food is not merely associated with eating, but charged with a lot of political and social meanings. The work has tried to lay bare the cultural meanings associated with food and the act of eating by pointing out that the culinary is intertwined with the questions of gender, class, history, power and identity. By drawing parallels between the cooking of food and the construction of Indo-Pak history, the research work has also looked into the subversion of the historical and religious discourse through culinary lens. Food is also used to marginalize and, at the same time, to counter such discourses. In this respect, the appropriation of the kitchen as a carnivalesque space to subvert the master/servant binary has been highlighted. The paper has also discussed the literal

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and metaphorical representation of food culture, the spaces associated with it and the use of food images by Kamila Shamsie.

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