

2018 WINNER

HOME FIRE BY KAMILA SHAMSIE

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Kamila Shamsie is the author of seven novels: *In the City by the Sea*; *Salt and Saffron*; *Kartography*; *Broken Verses*; *Burnt Shadows* (shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction), *A God in Every Stone* (shortlisted for the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction, the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction and the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature) and *Home Fire*. *Home Fire* was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2017, shortlisted for the Costa Best Novel Award, the Books Are My Bag Readers Awards 2018, and the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, and won the London Hellenic Prize and the Women's Prize for Fiction 2018.

Three of her novels have received awards from Pakistan's Academy of Letters. Kamila Shamsie is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and was named a *Granta* Best of Young British Novelist in 2013; she was also awarded a South Bank Arts Award in 2018. She grew up in Karachi and now lives in London.

PLOT SUMMARY

Isma is free. After years of watching out for her younger siblings in the wake of their mother's death, she's accepted an invitation from a mentor in America that allows her to resume a dream long deferred. But she can't stop worrying about Aneeka, her beautiful, headstrong sister back in London, or their brother Parvaiz, who has disappeared in pursuit of his own dream: to prove himself to the jihadist father he never knew. When he resurfaces half a globe away, Isma's worst fears are confirmed.

Then Eamonn enters the sisters' lives. The son of a powerful political figure, he has his own birthright to live up to, or defy. Is he a chance at love for Isma, who has until now accepted that she may never find it? Or is Eamonn the means of Parvaiz's salvation? Suddenly, the two families' fates are inextricably, devastatingly entwined, in this searing novel that asks: What sacrifices will we make in the name of love?

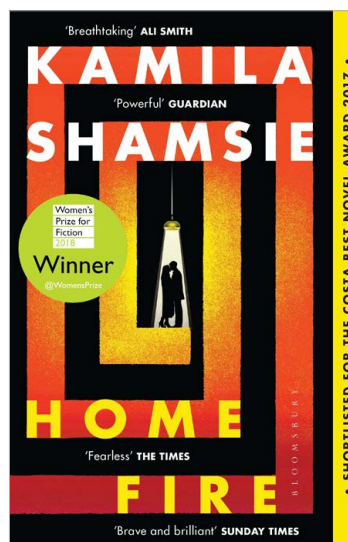
WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Kamila Shamsie's novel explores the differences and the overlap between two Pakistani families belonging to Isma and Eamonn. Isma's mother has died, and her father, a jihadi, is a stranger to her. Her brother, Parvaiz, has become radicalised and left the UK to join a jihadist movement, and her sister Aneeka has sworn never to speak to her again after she learns that Isma gave information to the police about Parvaiz.

Eamonn (the anglicised spelling of his Pakistani name Aymon, which in itself is representative of his character) is the son of a politician who becomes Home Secretary, and who is deeply disconnected from his cultural heritage.

His father, Karamat Lone, is a politician who is popular with a white majority and deeply unpopular with his previous predominantly Muslim constituency.

Shamsie's depiction of both characters and their families reminds us of the multiplicity of experience within any one cultural or religious group, and shines a light on British society and how it treats Asian families and particularly Asian women.



Isma's appalling treatment from border officials at a UK airport – despite being in possession of a valid academic visa – shows her being purposefully humiliated and asked a number of irrelevant questions. As readers, we feel Isma's anger and helplessness at having to comply so politely to such abuses of her rights as a British citizen.

Alongside this, Shamsie considers the theme of religious terrorism and how it has been used by the British state for political ends. Isma's academic paper *The Insecurity State: Britain and the Instrumentalisation of Fear*, on which she is working with her mentor Hira Shah, reminds the reader that the complexities of terrorism are much more layered than some would like to admit.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Fathers and their children are a key theme of *Home Fire*. Isma is estranged from her father, and Eamonn's relationship with his father is troubled; when Eamonn and Isma meet in New York, it's because he's avoiding the press in the UK around his father becoming Home Secretary. To what degree do our parents – particularly our fathers – shape us as people? Has Isma's distance from her father inspired her academic career? How has Eamonn responded to his father's choices to be apart from the Pakistani community, and how does he feel when he visits Aunt Naseem? How much of Isma and Eamonn's relationship is based on an understanding between them about how their fathers have shaped their lives?

QUESTIONS

Isma says at one point in the book that, "girls becoming women is inevitable, but boys becoming men is ambition". What does she mean by this? How has this proved true or untrue in Isma and Eamonn's lives, and the lives of Parvaiz and Aneeka?

How does Isma's experience of being a Muslim woman compare with Aneeka's, her mother's or Aunt Naseem's?

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

What characterises the womanhood Isma describes? Is there a sense of negativity attached to the inevitability?

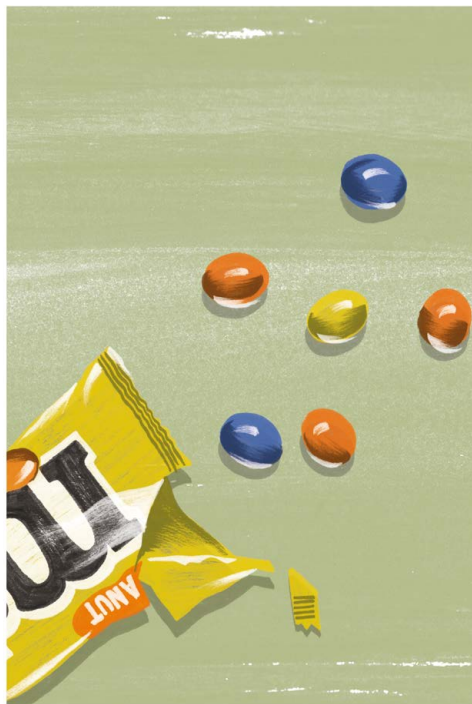
“ MY FELLOW JUDGES AND I CHOSE THE BOOK WHICH WE FELT SPOKE FOR OUR TIMES . . . HOME FIRE IS ABOUT IDENTITY, CONFLICTING LOYALTIES, LOVE AND POLITICS. AND IT SUSTAINS MASTERY OF ITS THEMES AND ITS FORM. IT IS A REMARKABLE BOOK WHICH WE PASSIONATELY RECOMMEND ”

SARAH SANDS
CHAIR OF JUDGES 2018

What does the title of the book, *Home Fire*, make you think of? What associations does it have from a modern viewpoint as opposed to the older phrase of “keep the home fires burning”? Is there an irony between the two?

NEXT STEPS

Taking the title as inspiration, write about what the words *Home Fire* mean to you. Is it about a sense of the warmth and belonging of home? Is it about a tragic event? Is it about a pensioner struggling to pay the heating bills? Whatever your immediate associations, write as freely as you can for fifteen minutes, putting all your ideas down quickly and without self-censoring. You might want to set an alarm so you know when the time's up. In that fifteen minutes, don't take your pen off the page and don't stop writing.



For a more involved task, write about your father, or someone who has been like a father to you. What are they like? Describe their personality, what they look like, their posture, their likes and dislikes, what they've done with their life. How has their family, their community, their culture influenced their life, if at all? Write about what they've taught you, or not taught you. What do they care about? What are they immune to caring about? Who do they love? Who have they loved? Do you love them? Is this something that, when you've written it, you will want to give to them? Or not?

KARTOGRAPHY BY KAMILA SHAMSIE
THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS BY KIRAN DESAI