

“Burnt Shadows” by Kamila Shamsie

___Character List___

Hiroko Tanaka

Hiroko Tanaka (later Hiroko Ashef) is the protagonist of Burnt Shadows. She is the only character who appears in every section of the novel. Hiroko is from Nagasaki. She is 21 years old in 1945 when the United States military drops an atomic bomb on Nagasaki, killing her father and her fiancé, Konrad Weiss. Hiroko later moves to Delhi, where she meets Sajjad and falls in love. They get married and after Partition they move to Pakistan, where they have a son, Raza, and live happily for 35 years. After Sajjad dies in 1984, Hiroko moves to New York City.

Hiroko is a strong-willed character who is suspicious of nations and religion. She judges other people on their character rather than their stereotype. She is excellent at learning languages and is fluent in Japanese, English, German, and Urdu.

Konrad Weiss

Konrad Weiss is a German who was living in Nagasaki when the atomic bomb is dropped. He was studying the lives of foreigners in Nagasaki before the wartime atmosphere placed him under suspicion by the government. He was engaged to Hiroko Tanaka. Elizabeth Burton is his half-sister; they share the same father.

Sajjad Ashef

Sajjad is originally from Dehli, India. He is Muslim and his family originally intends to provide him with an arranged marriage. He works for James Burton in Delhi for eight years in the hopes of one day becoming a lawyer. He gives Hiroko Urdu lessons while she is staying with the Burtons and they fall in love. His employment with the Burtons is harshly terminated when they falsely accuse him of trying to sexually assault Hiroko. After his mother dies, he asks Hiroko to marry him. They take their honeymoon in Istanbul, which means that they are forced to move to Pakistan instead of returning to Dehli after Partition. This causes Sajjad great pain; he misses Dehli for the rest of his life. In Pakistan, Sajjad is a manager at a factory. He is shot and killed while looking for Raza, who goes missing.

Elizabeth Burton

Elizabeth Burton (also called Ilse) is a German woman living in Delhi during the British Raj. She is married to James Burton and they have one son, Harry. After Partition, she leaves her husband and moves in with her cousin in New York City. While she carries prejudices against Indians as a result of her colonial status in India, she is very kind to Hiroko.

James Burton

James Burton is Elizabeth's husband. He lives in Delhi with her until Partition, when he moves back to the UK. He is a solicitor.

Harry Burton

Harry is James and Elizabeth's son. He is sent to boarding school in England during his adolescence, leaving him constantly longing for home. He moves with his mother to NYC after she leaves his father. He falls in love with the United States and reveres it for its capitalism and acceptance of immigrants. Later in life, he becomes a CIA agent. He lives in Pakistan during the Afghan War, providing Afghan militants with weapons to support their war against the Soviets. Later, he leaves the CIA to become a private contractor that is hired by the U.S. government. This leads him to Afghanistan during the War on Terror, where he is shot and killed by an Afghan man.

Raza Ashef

Raza is Hiroko and Sajjad's son. He was born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan. Sajjad hopes that Raza will grow up to become a lawyer. Unfortunately, however, Raza fails his exams to graduate high school three times. Raza is treated like he is an outsider in Karachi because he is mixed-race (his mother is Japanese). Eventually, Raza makes friends with a young Afghan boy named Abdullah. They run away to a mujahideen training camp together, which tragically also causes Sajjad's death.

After his father dies, Raza moves to Dubai where he works in a convenience store with his cousins. Eventually, he gets in touch with Harry Burton who gives him a job at the private contractor company where he is working. They live near each other for ten years in Miami, doing contractor work on behalf of the U.S. government all over the world. This leads Raza to Afghanistan to support U.S. interests during the Afghanistan War. When Harry is killed, Steve (Harry's ex-CIA colleague) blames Raza. Raza goes on the run and gets smuggled into Canada.

There, he switches places with Abdullah, who is about to be arrested because Kim Burton turned him in. He is sent to Guantanamo Bay as a prisoner.

Kim Burton

Kim Burton is James' daughter. She is strong-willed, with a fiery character. Her loved ones see her as a kind, caring, and generous person. However, she also has strong patriotic sentiment, especially after the September 11 terrorist attack. She is an engineer who specializes in constructing buildings that are safe from disaster.

Abdullah

Abdullah is Raza's friend from Karachi. He is a Pashtun from Afghanistan. He and Raza go to a mujahideen training camp in the hopes of eventually joining the Afghan war against the Soviets. After the war, Abdullah moves to NYC, where he works as a taxi driver for several years. After 9/11, he is approached by the FBI, which causes him to flee. Kim Burton smuggles him into Canada, at Hiroko and Raza's request. She ends up regretting her decision and turns him in. However, Raza takes Abdullah's place and Abdullah is able to escape to safety.

Omar

Omar is a taxi driver in NYC from Pakistan. He is close friends with Hiroko.

Steve

Steve is Harry's colleague in the CIA. He goes with Harry to Pakistan in the 80s and also works alongside Harry in Afghanistan in 2001.

Sher Mohammed

Sher Mohammed is Harry's rickshaw driver in Karachi. He has ties to the CIA. When Sajjad identifies him in the fish harbour while looking for Raza, Sher Mohammed believes that Sajjad is there to kill him. He shoots Sajjad, killing him.

Bilal

Bilal is Raza's best friend and schoolmate. He and Raza live in the same molholla (neighborhood).

Salma

Salma is Bilal's sister. She and Raza keep up a secret relationship for several months before she breaks up with Raza because she believes her parents would never let her marry him.

Yoshi Wanatabe

Yoshi Wanatabe is Konrad's friend in Nagasaki. Because of the tense wartime atmosphere in Nagasaki where foreigners, especially Westerners, are under intense suspicion, Yoshi stops being friends with Konrad. He promises Konrad, however, that they will resume their friendship when the war is over.

After the bomb, Yoshi helps Hiroko move to Japan. He keeps in touch with Hiroko over the following decades. He eventually dies of cancer and tells Hiroko on the phone that he regrets his past life decisions.

