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**AUTHORITY AND EMOTIONAL SABOTAGE: A STUDY OF INTERFERENCE,  
LOSS, AND DESTINY IN MARJAN KAMALI'S *THE STATIONERY SHOP OF  
TEHRAN***

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**Abstract**

*Marjan Kamali's *The Stationery Shop of Tehran* (2019) focuses on the tangled connection between authority, emotional sabotage, interference, loss, and destiny. It is set against the socio-political upheaval of 1953 Iran, the novel sheds light on the tragic separation of Roya and Bahman. Their unconditional love faces disruption from familial authority, political unrest, and emotional manipulation that is not only deliberate but also covert. The study argues that Kamali shows authority as more than just an external force; it acts as an internal mechanism that drives emotional sabotage. Through characters such as Mrs. Aslan and Mr. Fakhri, the novel reflects on how interference reshapes human destiny, resulting in prolonged loss and psychological torment. Destiny in the novel is depicted as influenced by circumstances but also subject to change. Ultimately, Kamali's work presents a profound reflection on how human actions impact love and fate.*

**Keywords**

*Authority, Emotional Sabotage, Interference, Loss, Destiny, Love, Life, Trauma, Memory, etc.*

**Full Article**

Marjan Kamali in *The Stationery Shop of Tehran* (2019) poignantly captures the idea of destiny as an inevitable, and invisible force which shapes human life. As she mentions,

Our fate is written on our foreheads when we're born. It can't be seen, can't be read, but it's there in invisible ink all right, and life follows that fate. No matter what (Kamali, 04).

It is set during the chaotic time around the 1953 Iranian coup, the story looks at how personal lives are shaped, disrupted, and often torn apart by larger social and political forces. Young, passionate lovers- Roya Khanom and Bahman Aslan endures the games of destiny at the hands of familial and political authorities, societal interference which ultimately leads them towards emotional sabotage and profound loss. The *Missourian*, a weekly newspaper reviews it as, "*The Stationery Shop* is an exemplary novel about families, and how our secrets build walls and make us ill. It's a passionate book about love that endures and how fate often intervenes, forcing us to take paths we never would have envisioned." In addition, Bookreporter.com mentions that *The Stationery Shop* is a beautiful and timely exploration of devastating loss, unbreakable family bonds



and the overwhelming power of love. In the novel to seventeen-year-old Roya, Bahman meant her entire world. She weaved her dreams around him as she fell deeply, hopelessly in love with him. The intensity of Roya's love is captured as, 'She had loved him with force of blast. It had been impossible to imagine a future in which she didn't hear his voice every day.' (Kamali 09) As the story progresses, Kamali narrates,

If she believed in fate, she would know that they were meant to meet, to fall in love like this, to want only to be together. It was as though she'd found her home. She was meant to have been in that Stationery Shop when he strode in whistling; she was meant to share Rumi's poetry with him, to feel this connection with him. These things were meant to happen—it was impossible to think of life without him now. She was his. It was that simple. It was more than destiny (Kamali, 84).

Bahman's love, genuine affection towards Roya is articulated through letters he sends her after their engagement when he was into hiding. In one of his letters Bahman writes, "My dearest Roya, I think of you all the time—every single day, every night. Truth is there are no times when you are not on my mind, and I wouldn't want it any other way. One day we'll look back on this separation and laugh. I can't wait till it's all behind us. Everywhere I see your beautiful face. If you are worried about me, please know I am safe, healthy, I only lack you, which means that I lack everything, of course. I am counting down the days, Roya *Joon*... Well, then, let me tell you that I can't wait to be married. I dare to dream of our children. I have it all planned out. I should be back in a few weeks. In the hopes of seeing, you again—the sooner the better" (Kamali. 97).

One of the important characters- Mrs. Aslan, Bahman's own mother unfortunately distorts things for Roya and Bahman. Her interference, manipulative authority represents a form of emotional sabotage disguised as a protection. Her actions are not openly violent yet they carry destructive and long-lasting consequences. By hiding the truth, creating distance and controlling communication, she successfully alters the trajectory of their lives. Kamali emphasizes the nuanced nature of such authority by revealing how some people hold power not by force, but by knowing exactly when to act and vice versa.

It is evident that Mrs. Aslan's actions are deeply rooted in her own psychological struggles and trauma. As once she belonged to the lower class of the society and had to endure a lot of shame and pain which ultimately turned her into a woman full of rage, hatred and controlling persona.

Mr. Fakhri, the owner of the stationery shop, who helped the lovers-Roya and Bahman, to unite and is a person who mentored their love story to bloom and engagement. In fact, he turned out to be the person who caused all the miseries in the past. He made Badri (Bahman's mother) fall in love with him, promised to marry her but due to the class differences refused to marry her and made her kill their four children at her own hands. As Badri turns to Mr. Fakhri while saying,

You made me kill my baby. By myself ...Because you are a coward. After I killed it, my body was wrecked. She looked at her stomach as if she were talking to some force she had pleaded with before. My body was so broken it killed all the others. All of them (Kamali, 276).

As Mr. Fakhri moved on with his own life, the melon-seller girl Badri married to upper class elite Mr. Aslan and had given birth to Bahman. She made him the center of her life and controlled him in every possible way. She wants Bahman to marry an elite class girl named Shahla instead of middle-class girl Roya to whom her son loved madly. She tried everything in her power to make it happen. She expresses her concern and fear as, "If Bahman marries that girl, I'll lose him, I know.



Roya won't be like Shahla. She won't let me stay close to him. As if losing the others wasn't enough" (Kamali. 271).

Mrs. Aslan tries to ruin the joyous celebration of their engagement through her tantrums, taunts and pretentious drama. This is evident in Bahman's an emotional letter to his beloved Roya in which he mentions, 'Dearest Roya Joon, 'The fact that my mother tried to sabotage our joyful celebrations saddened me to no end. All I wanted was a normal mother, someone kind, someone who didn't dominate my life with her strategies and calculations and endless plans to manufacture the life she wanted for me. She wanted me to climb up in that fake, bourgeois world that she coveted. Her rage episodes left my father and me bereft. They barreled through like a force of nature, like a hurricane out of control, and once whatever semblance of peace we had in the home had been destroyed, we were left exhausted and brittle. My mother was sick. She needed help. But we did not know how to help her (Kamali, 269).

Further, Kamli narrates what Bahman wants his mother to be. As Bahman says,  
I wanted my mother to be normal, to be like other mothers. She was herself. She had rage, she had depression, she was violent, she was cruel, she refused to let me live in peace. She wanted to control my life, she told me she loved me so much that she wanted the best for me. That she had been too poor and given up too much to have me squander it away (Kamali, 280).

Bahman's obedience strengthens Mrs.Aslan's authority and sheds light on how authority is internalized, leading individuals to become contributors to their own emotional loss and turmoil. After their engagement she tried to commit a suicide to gain control over her son and to create a distance between Bahman and Roya she took him to stay in the villa up north without letting him be informed to Roya and her family. When she learned that Bahman is trying contact Roya, she threatened him with committing suicide again. She utters,

You call that girl, you tell that girl where we are, you let on to any of this, and guess what, Bahman? A smile spread across her pale face. I'll do it again. And this time, I'll do it all the way. I promise you. She sucked in her breath and held her hand to her neck. Just let her go, Bahman. For me. You communicate with her and I will do it again (Kamali, 279).

Moreover, Mrs. Aslan creates misunderstanding between the lovers with the help of Mr. Fakhri while fabricating letters from both the sides. She comes to know that despite her warnings Bahman is writing letters to Roya and even asked her to see him in order to get married secretly. As she learns, Mr. Fakhri is the one whom Roya and Bahman trust the most and is helping them by acting as a bridge between them so they can communicate via letters kept in the books. She confronts him and convinces him to act upon everything she told him to do. Despite knowing the consequences, Mr. Fakhri joins hands with her, 'Because he owed her. He owed her for completely abandoning her and leaving her with her unborn baby. Which she, well... there was no legal abortion in Iran then. She took matters into her own hands. (Kamali, 279)

Their deliberate interference and manipulations cause a missed meeting of Roya and Bahman which entirely changes their fate and leads to decades of separation. Mr. Fakhri, an expert in calligraphy upon the instructions of Mrs. Aslan, writes letters in the handwriting of Roya and Bahman which ultimately creates havoc in their lives. As Mr. Fakhri changes the name of the square, they are supposed to meet to get married and also political upheavals during that time adds



to the misery in their lives. This emphasizes the fragility of human relationships when subjected to external force.

As a result of all these things lead to create void, misunderstandings, silence and unanswered questions continued by changing, shaping the course of their lives. The absence of truth and clarity left Roya in a state of lingering emotional uncertainty. She made to believe that Bahman left her due to his overpowering love for politics. Her sister reminded her as saying, ‘The worst thing in the world was to fall in love with someone who was in love with politics (Kamali, 124) She is forced to move forward in life by the script written for her destiny. A part of her always remains anchored in the past, constantly seeking answers that were deliberately, and manipulatively withheld from her. She has to endure the pain of not only losing Bahman, but also never truly understanding why she has to lose him. Kamali conveys this notion in the following lines,

We do not always get what we want, Roya Khanom. Things do not always work out the way we planned. Those who are young tend to think that life’s tragedies, and miseries and its bullets will somehow miss them. That they can buoy themselves with naive hope and energy. They think, wrongly, that somehow youth or desire or even love can outmatch the hand of fate. The truth is, my young lady, that fate has written the script for your destiny on your forehead from the very beginning. We can’t see it. But it’s there. And the young, who love so passionately, have no idea how ugly this world is (Kamali, 126-27).

On the contrary Bahman was misled into believing that Roya can’t live with his mother due to the scenes she caused at their engagement. His mother’s illness and tantrums were unbearable to her. For him, she can’t give up on her dreams. The following quote clearly reflects Bahman’s portrayal of this experience,

When I got your last letter, when you said that you didn’t want to spend your life with me after all, that my mother’s condition was just too much for you to bear, that you could not marry into a family with this mental instability—what could I do? I wasn’t going to force my family on you. I couldn’t change her condition, much as I would have liked to. I was so hurt, Roya Joon, by your shunning of her, of me. What could I say to that? She’s my mother, and there was no possible way she would not be in our lives. I didn’t want to stop your dreams. I had to let you go. You didn’t want to see me and I respected that (Kamali, 179).

Years later, when the truth finally unfolds, it deepens the sense of tragedy instead of offering relief. The delayed revelation makes it evident that their separation was not merely the work of destiny, but the result of human interference, manipulation, and silence. This realization compels both Roya and Bahman to confront the reality that their lives were shaped by the decisions and choices that were never truly their own. Silence and absence of communication intensified the emotional rupture between the lovers and proves more destructive than any articulated truth. Deprived of clarity, Roya is forced to interpret the events herself, leading to assumptions, confusion and prolonged suffering. Bahman, meanwhile, remains bound by the authority of his mother, powerless to challenge her dominance or escape her control. Consequently, silence becomes a mechanism of emotional sabotage, widening the gap between reality and belief.



Although Roya and Bahman eventually reunite, the moment does not wipe out the years of heartache, separation and suffering. Instead, it sharpens their awareness of what was lost and what could have been. Their encounter serves as a moment of closure, yet simultaneously underscores the irreversible passage of time and the weight of missed opportunities. Their love persists, but only as something remembered, not lived. Through this narrative, it becomes evident that destiny in the novel is not entirely fixed but shaped by human action. Actions rooted in authority and fear actively reshape outcomes, as seen in the interference of Mrs. Aslan and Mr. Fakhri, which diverts and distorts the intended course of events and even ruptures by deliberate decisions.

To conclude, *The Stationery Shop of Tehran* emerges as a significant exploration of the ways authority and emotional sabotage impacts human relationships and influence the course of destiny. The novel reveals that any means of interference can profoundly and permanently transform lives in irreversible ways. The tragic separation of Roya and Bahman is not solely the work of fate, but an outcome of deliberate acts of control, manipulation and emotional interference.

Elinor Lipman describes Marjan Kamali's *The Stationery Shop of Tehran* as a masterfully plotted and beautiful novel, calling it a pleasure to read. She describes the book as being filled with characters who are arresting, lovable and so real. Similarly, *The Wall Street Journal* states it as, a moving tale of lost love. Whereas, Kirkus reviews it as a sweeping romantic tale of thwarted love. Jasmin Darznik quotes it as a beautifully immersive tale; *The Stationery Shop* brings to life a lost and complex world and the captivating characters who once called it home.

In short, Marjan Kamali in *The Stationery Shop of Tehran* draws attention to the delicate nature of love, the enduring consequences, and weight of human actions on the course of life through the story of Roya Khanom and Bahman Aslan. It serves as a reminder that even the smallest act of interference can alter destiny, leaving lasting emotional imprints and unresolved longing of human beings.

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