
Living in the Third Space: A Postcolonial Study of Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*

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Abstract

*The Postcoloniality of Pakistani Literature in English is manifest in all the works produced both by the local and the diasporic writers representing the nation. Multifarious postcolonial dimensions of these literary yields, ranging from the personal exilic agonies to the collective traumas triggered by displacement, have been explored. Among these sociocultural dimensions represented in the creative works and theorized in the critical works, the notions of the Third Space and exilic consciousness remain the central ones. Invoking Homi Bhabha's theoretical articulations on the issue, the researchers engage with Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* for an understanding of the condition of the characters oscillating between the native and adopted cultures. This is a qualitative study and the method of textual analysis has been used. Through a thorough analysis of the text of the novel, the perplexing positionality of the characters living in the third space, as represented by Aslam, has been exposed and critiqued. To contribute to the understanding of the Pakistani diasporic community's problem, the findings have been located in the broader cultural context.*

Keywords: Maps for Lost Lovers, Postcolonialism, Third Space

Introduction

Postcolonial literature has won critical acclaim and gained worldwide popularity during recent decades. Some eminent figures like Said, Bhabha, and Spivak have theorized the postcolonial themes and contributed to creating awareness on the issues concerning the nations and regions that remained in the colonial clutch. Some issues such as cultural assimilation and identity crisis have been important debates since the rise of postcolonial literature and theory. These issues have affected human relations in the postcolonial era, and continue to do so; particularly the diaspora in the western metropolitan centers have been the center of this debate (Iqbal, 2013). Many writers with colonial backgrounds have been writing about the issue of identity, immigration, and the theme of *third space* (Moore, 2020).

The creative writers from across the globe — Nadeem Aslam, Jhumpa Lahiri, Michael Ondaatje, and an array of other writers — have addresses the exilic conditions and the predicament rooted in the experience of dislocation. The Anglophone writers of Pakistani origin do throw light on, sometimes deliberately, the issues like an identity crisis, liminal space, or living in third space (Perveen, 2015). Few ascertained immigrants or expatriates have been found enthusiastic in the endeavor of making Pakistani narratives known to the world (Choubey, 2019). All these varying narratives of displacement and acculturation produced in a variety of contexts, ranging from America and Canada to Australia and England, form a corpus of Pakistani diasporic consciousness.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the fictional representation of diasporic conditions is the creation of the dislocated characters. These characters living in the third space (also called liminal characters) can be explored in Pakistani fictional narratives. The notion of *third space* is introduced by Homi K. Bhabha who influenced by Said's *Orientalism*, as Mondal (2018) argued, used the term "hybrid" for the people at 'liminal state', between two cultures, and whose behavior and culture was neither native nor the foreign one (Chambers, 2019). The present study aims to explore the characters living in the third space concerning Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*. The characters have been thrashed out using postcolonialism as the framework of the study whereas Bhabha's notion of third space has been explored.

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Review of the Literature

The article engages with a topic that revolves around the domains like postcolonialism and Pakistani Anglophone literature. Postcolonialism is a postmodern discourse that has a set of theories to take the reaction/s to the cultural legacy of colonialism under discussion (Kitson & McHugh, 2015). As a literary theory, postcolonialism talks about the works of literature produced in the countries that were once the colonies of the European colonial powers like France, Spain, and Britain (Nawaz & Mehboob, 2018). It deals with the arts and literature produced by the artists of countries or regions with a colonial background. It also deals with the identity crisis of those who are from a colonized or decolonized society (Chambers, 2019). Besides, postcolonialism emphasizes the resistance against the Western colonizer. This resistance intellectually has been enunciated by a lot of authors and critics who have been representing the marginalized masses. (Moore, 2020). It also takes under discussion the issues like hybridity and transculturality for the sake of awareness among the peoples with the colonial background (Kagoyire & Vysma, 2020).

Krishnamoorthy and Krishnamurthy (2016) point out that Postcolonialism is such a progression that sheds off the western skin, thought, and ideology and emerges the awareness of identity and freedom of self-expressiveness (Bromley, 2017). Sometimes, the common readers are unable to explore the identity of a character because the circumstances describe an ‘inbetween’ space in which a cultural transformation occurs (Mirza, 2017). The in-between space has been critically analyzed by the critics like Bhabha and Ashcroft. This ‘in-between’ space is called liminal space or/and third space which may be helpful to identify the transcultural space (Morton, 2018). It also helps to elaborate the personal or communal self-hood. According to Bhabha, being in liminal/third space prevents identities from polarizing between different arbitraries like black and white, lower and upper (Ashcroft et al, 2004, p. 131). (Wale 2020).

According to Ashcroft et al., the colonized subjects may inhabit the space between colonial discourse and the assumption of the new ‘noncolonial’ identity (Mirza, 2017). On the other hand, such identification usually is not a simple movement from one identity to another rather it is a continuous process of engagement, contestation, and appropriation (Ashcroft et al, 2004, p. 130). The study focuses on the characters living in the third space by studying the selected text: *Maps for Lost Lovers* by Nadeem Aslam.

Pakistani fiction in English is a distinctive body of Anglophone literature that attracts “worldwide anglophone audiences” (Cilano, 2009). Pakistani literature was developed by the writers living in the geographical borders of Pakistan and by expatriates or/and diaspora writers enveloping various issues such as multiculturalism, mimicry, and liminality. (Hajiyeva, 2016). Liminality and hybridity are among the problematized notions in postcolonial literary studies. Postcolonial issues are being explored by researchers who are interested in studying Pakistani literature in English. (Iqbal, 2018).

Theoretical Framework and Methodological Approach:

The method adopted belongs to the paradigm of qualitative research and focuses on “interpretation of the content of text data through identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The analysis of the text and development of the argument is based on the qualitative “inferences and conclusions” (Kumar, 1996, p.20). Specifically, textual analysis is the method used in the study: “textual analysis is indispensable to research” (Belsey in Griffin, 2013, p. 160). McKee (2003) states the significance of the textual analysis by mentioning its role for those “who want to understand how members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are and of how they fit into the world in which they live” (p. 1).

The theoretical framework is framed by negotiating Homi K. Bhabha’s seminal ideas regarding diasporic culture realities and anxieties. He has highlighted some postcolonial issues that have been left untouched for years such as hybridity, liminality, ambivalence, mimicry, and identity crisis. Bhabha also raises the question of cultural identity and enables readers to understand “what happens on the borderlines of cultures, to see what happens in-between cultures” (Huddart, 2006). He uses the term mimicry to indicate the Westernization of native cultures and liminality to indicate the space or position of characters that could dwell in a third space. Summarily, he theorizes the condition of the third space that has been “continually questioned and problematized (Ashcroft et al. 2004, p. 131).

Data Analysis & Discussion

Maps for Lost Lovers is written by a Pakistani expatriate writer Nadeem Aslam. It is set in an unnamed town of England where a large number of Pakistani families live as immigrants. The story of *Maps for Lost Lovers* is told through the perspective of an elder brother of Jugnu, Shamas, with his better half, Kaukab get settled in an area which is in the north of London, that the immigrants call *Dasht-e-Tanhaii* (Desert of Loneliness), it gets open with the disappearances of a pair of lovers, Chanda and Jugnu. Jugnu is portrayed as a mid-aged naturalist who keeps on studying rare butterflies. Chanda who is much younger than Jugnu is divorced by two of her husbands and gets abandoned by the third husband. The couple breaks Islamic law by living together before their marriage and their disappearance turns the peace of the small community into chaos. Police suspects and arrests Chanda's brothers for murdering and disposing of the lovers' dead bodies to remove the endless shame which is brought on their family by that couple's affair. There are even witnesses who claim that they have seen the brothers murdering them. However, there are no dead bodies as strong evidence for their conviction. Other members of their community believe that Jugnu and Chanda are hiding themselves to protect themselves from conviction and they are alive. The whole community wait for the trial, the reader in the novel learns more about the narrator's background and narrator. Shamas, in his sixties, behaves like a cultured man but at the same time, he confronts his wife Kaukab due to the disappearance of the lost lovers. Kaukab is a strict lady who never approves of their relationship. Shamas is comparatively a less patient man of a strict religious background, but not enough to refuse his wife from raising their children as Muslims. He is a fluent English speaker who used to bridge the gap between his community and the world they live in now. The novel turns into the personal life of Shamas and his wife before the disappearance, illustrating the affair of Shams and his separation from the wife before three years, however, they ultimately return together. The novel also points out some other events about the residents of the *Dasht-e-Tanhaii*. A family subjects a daughter to the exorcism that eventually became the cause of her death. A mother of an adolescent bride told her son-in-law to assault her daughter sexually because she does not sleep with her husband for seven days. A young girl is stopped to seek medical care in the fear of losing or damaging her virginity. These events are explained through the eyes of Shamas therefore they are often stressed with a tone of disdain and anger for culture, according to him, is based on superstition. A reader also has an encounter with the three children of the Koukab and shams who emerged as a reflection of the Western culture that is taking root in the community. In her opinion, she has failed to nourish her children properly, because all three have rejected the strict Muslim rules in varying intensities. Her son, Ujala, left home when he was 16 and he is an outspoken atheist. Her other son becomes an artist rather than a doctor, by going against her will. Her daughter is sent to Pakistan to get married but she has left her husband and wears moderate clothes and cut her hair short. One of the climaxes of the novel happens when Koukab indulges in fights with her daughter and slaps her on her face. Her fear of keeping up appearances for the neighbors keeps her away from connecting with her children, especially with her daughter. Although the family sits to dinner and finally talks about the murder of Jugnu, where each person expresses their point of view, yet the rift is too deep and strong to repair.

The novel exhibits the twelve-month investigation of two lovers' murder who belong to immigrant families living in a claustrophobically oppressive community. The members of immigrant families of the novel are given non-English names even if they are born English and have adapted to the British lifestyle. Characterization of Aslam is optimal and most of the characters, being immigrants, are living in the space in-between.

One of the major characters of the novel is named Shamas who is an immigrant from Pakistan. All of the Pakistani characters as described by the novelist are immigrants there in England and they are struggling to become part of the society they live in. Shamas, again and again, behaves like a liminal character in the society where the British treat him as an outsider. Shamas is a director of the Community Relations Council, and he is the one with whom immigrants discuss their matters considering him a bridge between them and the white people. He is a non-practicing Muslim with profane thinking. She considers her father responsible for misjudging her husband particularly about his (her husband's) religious reviews. She is unhappy with her fate for she is the wife of an irreligious person.

Shamas plays his role enthusiastically, on another occasion in the novel, conversing profanely with Jugnu, his younger brother, about Islam, and the white woman, a guest, acts as a catalyst.

Shamas speaks to the white lady that he is still surprised an illiterate person influences the masses to follow a foolproof system.

Kaukab behaves like a passive listener during the time they were conversing impiously. Shamas does not feel bitter about Jugnu passing another profane comment before him while his wife at first tried to know it and then demonstrates her response.

I cannot be expected to believe what an illiterate merchant-turned-opportunist-preacher – for he was no systematic theologian – in the seventh-century Arabian Desert had to say about the origin of life. (Aslam, 2005 p. 38)

The lines state that Shamas and Jugnu are endorsing the white lady who has been invited on dinner that the Prophet (Peace Be upon Him) could never be as good preacher or theologian as he is known. The two brothers enjoy blasphemous discussion during the dinner and Kaukab does not participate in the discussion.

Shamas, an immigrant, was born in Lahore, Pakistan. His father, by birth, was Hindu but afterward, he converted to Islam. As an immigrant in England, he is forgetting his ancestors' culture and tradition, and the way to respect others' religious views. He exposes his defamatory views on his wife's beliefs, especially, whenever he finds someone of a similar nature nearby. The novel does not reflect his love of Hinduism. Besides, he is neither a follower of Islam nor of Hinduism. Therefore, he lives in a gap between the two religions. Moreover, he tries to become a part of the English society but, being an immigrant he is not to be considered a native, therefore, he lives in the third space.

Jugnu, a lepidopterologist is the lost lover. He is the one who has adapted to the British culture. Very often, he brings his white girlfriend for dinner at Shamas' home but such activities were never liked by Kaukab, his brother's wife. Both the brothers used to talk and behave irreligiously over there in the dining hall whereas the white woman works as a catalyst. Having been involved in such activities as irreligious, western, or blasphemous, they try to befit in the English society where they are misfit yet. The two brothers seem *Muslim* accidentally but actually, they are a non-believer. They are highly influenced, culturally and socially, by British social values. Such longing or belonging for/with a foreign culture can also be seen in other Pakistani narratives as in *Twilight in Delhi*, Asghar does.

Kaukab is a major character of the novel and she acts as a practicing Muslim, a religious-minded lady, a moral teacher, and a representative eastern lady who marries Shamas and ultimately has to move to England along with her husband. Kaukab, like all other immigrants, struggles for becoming a part of the foreign society and culture but in vain. She tries her best in understanding the language and behavior of local English and other immigrants.

... She had to restrain herself because she had also to practice her English in the mirror. And it is too hopeless: what was a person to do when even *things* in England spoke a different language than the one they did in Pakistan? In England the heart said *boom boom* instead of *dhak*; a gun said *bang!* Instead of *thah!* Things fell with a 'thud' not a *Dharam*; a small bell said 'jingle' instead of *chaan-chaan*; the train said '*choonchoon*' instead of *Chuk Chuk*... (Aslam, 2005, p. 35-36).

Her struggle for learning the English language seems to end in smoke but over time, she succeeds to express herself in the English language. She is eagerly learning the English language but she cannot help the interruption of her mother tongue or national language.

Kaukab appears to be a representative Muslim character in that society that cares for and defends Islamic ideology. Kaukab is strong enough to keep everything at a certain distance that gives the impression of anti-Islamic culture. When Shamas invites Jugnu and a white lady, at dinner, he enjoys wine with Jugnu and the white lady on the dining table but Kaukab's strong offense interrupts. Kaukab's effort to avoid British social and cultural norms let her live in a third space.

Shamas' family along with all others, being Pakistani migrants, finds themselves living somewhere in the third or in-between space because they are far away from Pakistan and could not become part of the culture and society they are living in. Kaukab does blame the two major forces like English society and culture who have driven away from the children from her.

There is nothing on this planet that I loathe more than this country, but I won't go to Pakistan as long as my children are here. This accursed land has taken my children away from me. My Charag, my Mah-Jabin, my Ujala. Each time they went out they

return with a new layer of strangeness on them until finally, I didn't recognize them anymore. (Aslam, 2005, p. 146)

Her hatred against England does not let her adapt to British society. She considers the English land responsible for the disloyalty of her innocent children.

Kiran, a Pakistani migrant, idealizes the foreign culture as Feroza does in *American Brat* by Sidhwa. As an immigrant, he, too, lives in the middle. He is the protagonist in the novel as he feels that he is not of this world and will never be part of the society in which he lives. Moreover, being a black woman cannot be part of a white community or family; he has to live in the middle space.

Ujala, the son of Shamas and Kaukab, has a deep hatred for his mother and shows that he hates his mother many times in the novel. He may be considered a true lover of British culture and its freedom. Wherever in English he moves, he cannot hide his identity as the son of non-British or darkie parents and this is something that would make him misbehave. He is living in the third space where he cannot become a part of the English society as he belongs to a family with roots in the East. Toiling in the syndrome of identity, such characters as Ujala, Mah-Jabin and Kiran get away from the parents especially when they are called Darkie or non-British. Being non-English and immigrants they too have to face racial fanaticism of the local white people and thus, the local people never let the immigrants become a part of their society. They, consequently, have to live in the third space as liminal characters.

The lovers, as the title suggests, Chanda and Jugnu, whom some people prefer to imagine as being in hiding rather than being dead, do love each other both passionately and illicitly, and it leads them to their destruction. The title, also, suggests that the lovers have lost true spirits and they, ultimately, have to face destruction. The lovers are supposed to be the lovers of the roots: culture, values, religion, customs, and rituals but they have driven away themselves from the roots and they are to face demolition.

Some of the immigrants like Pakistanis have different views as described by a Radio-commentator they are an oppressed minority, therefore, should be forgiven for everything.

As for the murderers themselves, after the verdict had been announced they begin to shout in the court, the litanies including words like 'racism' and 'prejudice'. The judge's remarks would be deemed to have 'insulted our culture and our religion. 'They'd said that England was the country of 'prostitutes and homosexuals.' Being led away, the younger, the younger, Chotta, would shout: 'It's a kangaroo court.' (Aslam, 2005, p. 348)

These lines show that being part of the minority does not mean that Pakistani immigrants will be given more opportunities to make unforgivable mistakes. He, on the one hand, criticizes Pakistani migrants but, on the other hand, he deems Pakistani culture and identity.

All the instances mentioned and the characters discussed to provide a clear picture of the diasporic world as conceived, also created, by Nadeem Aslam in his most representative novel. Especially, discussion of an array of the major and the minor characters show how the word "loss" has been placed at the thematic center of the fictional narrative and how the "maps" have been shown to have failed in the multicultural world brimming with confusions and problematic social patterns. Thus, both the essential constituent elements of the novel, the events, and the characters, equally contribute to the creation of the fictional world where identity crises regulate life.

Conclusion

The analysis has brought forth various dimensions of the exilic condition and diasporic predicament of the people living in the third space marked by transcultural, liminality, and oscillations. The characterization and events of Aslam's fictional work *Maps for Lost Lovers* suggest that Pakistani migrants like Kaukab, Shamas, Jugnu, and Kiran try to be a part of the foreign culture and society where they live but fail to do so. Their inability for the consummate acculturation is rooted in various personal and cultural aspects ranging from language to religion. In the struggle for finding a proper location in the foreign society, they live in the third space, where they are neither Pakistani nor British and they have to struggle for their identity. Therefore, they keep struggling and oscillating in the cultural crucible where their life remains a sight of constant contestation and socio-psychological crises.

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