

Mimicry and diluted identity: A Postcolonial Critique of Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lover*

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Abstract:

The present research is the postcolonial critique of Maps for Lost Lovers written by the British Pakistani novelist Nadeem Aslam. The data source is the novel which is a story of a Pakistani immigrant family living in England that needs to adapt to British culture. They have to mimic British culture for their survival in society. In the narrative, the nature of mimicry shifts. There are characters and events that can be studied when it comes to mimic. England is a country with great diversity, and its society can be described as a heterogeneous one. In such a community, mixing can be observed, and this mixing leads to mimicry. The researcher assumes that this study will provide new information to readers, particularly students interested in postcolonial discourse. It is also intended that other researchers will do the research in this context, which will not only focus on imitation but also on other postcolonial issues. The findings from the data analysis demonstrate that new hybrid identities of immigrants in The Desert of Loneliness and in their original land are arising as a result of the biased and stereotyped attitude that they encounter from the inhabitants of their native land. The characters that had formed their new identities against the stereotyped ideas of the Western world are Mah-Jabin, the young daughter of Shamas and Kaukab, Charag, Shamas, and Ujala. To escape discriminatory and stereotyped attitudes toward them, the migrants adopt British culture and traditions. Aslam has represented this notion of identity crises with the help of the above-mentioned characters of the novel who try to mimic the Westerners and their culture in the making of a new identity. This practice of imitation leads all the major characters of the novel to identity crises by diluting identity. This study is significant because it highlights the issue of identity addressed by one of the British-Pakistani writers.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Mimicry, Diluted identity

Introduction:

Pakistani literature in English has been a significant area of study, particularly during the last few decades for researchers, scholars and academics because it addresses postcolonial like hybridity, mimicry, dislocation, identity crises etc. Moreover, Pakistani writers also deal with themes such as self, war, love, marriage experiences of Pakistani expatriates, the uncomfortable life of Pakistanis in the post-9/11 Western world, drug addiction, unemployment, emigration, and the 1947 partition. In addition, themes of political crisis in Pakistan, the interplay between dictatorship and democracy, violence, assassination of a head of the state, feminism, corruption in metropolitan cities, sexual exploitation, repression of women in Pakistani society and life of minorities in Pakistan have also been explored by Pakistani writers. The current study tries to explore the theme of mimicry and identity crisis in Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*.

The powerful people have the authority to influence the weaker groups. They practically define collective patterns of life. The power group always attempts to win privileges and exploit others. The colonized people are part of weaker groups and they need to follow the powerful. In their effort to follow, they mimic them and lose their personal identity. Thus, loss of identity is the price people pay to imitate the behaviour and culture of powerful people. The process of mimicry starts when the ambitious colonized tries to adopt the colonizer's culture. Nayar (2015) explains that according to Fanon, 'the aspirational African wanted to sound like Europeans and this is how to eliminate all African accents and inflections' (p.104). Bhabha further added that it was not only the language that the colonized but other aspects of European culture as well. Through their discourses, colonizers convinced colonized that they would be better and more civilized if they adopted European and English culture after having abandoned their native language and culture. The result is an identity crisis and disillusionment.

Nadeem Aslam's novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* is the story of the murder of two lovers, Jugnu and Chanda. The book also acts as a commentary on the religious traditions of working-class Pakistani immigrants in England. This novel was published in 2004 and has earned an expression of praise from a variety of publications. This is why, the researcher selected *Maps for Lost Lovers* for research. A good number of studies have already been conducted on Aslam's novel *Maps for Lost Lovers*, but still, it can be explored by focusing on mimicry that causes diluted identity. The issue of mimicry centers around the postcolonial dilemma faced by the colonized. The novel showcases the dilemma of people with colonial backgrounds in

postcolonial times and the researcher has tried to bring to light how Aslam tried to depict the dilemma from Pakistani perspectives. So, the current study proposes to read the novel from the point of view of Bhabha's concept of mimicry and Ashcraft's view of identity in the postcolonial paradigm. It explains how immigrants attempt to be "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994). *Maps for Lost Lovers* ends without clear conclusions provided by the novelists. In fact, such novels generate literary studies in which researchers try to unearth bigger meanings in the text.

Background of the study:

Postcolonial literature discusses the effects of colonization on the culture, language and living of the colonizers during colonization and after gaining independence. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2003) argue that the literature written by authors of African and South Asian countries (which were a part of colonization in the past or are still facing this colonization under another form) is included in this list of postcolonial literature. The postcolonial literature deals with the impacts of imperial domination and the effects of this domination upon the culture and lives of colonizers.

Edward Said is among the pioneer critics of Postcolonialism. His book *Orientalism* (1978) is a seminal work in postcolonial discourse. It defines East and West in binary opposition that is based on the supposition of "West is best". Said (1978) stresses that these boundaries between the so-called civilized West and the brutal East are artificial and nonsensical. The Western colonizers wanted to impose their language, dress and ways of living on the colonized natives. In such cases, the colonizers believe themselves as the teacher and the God-father of the colonized people. They suppress the originality of the natives by dominating them physically and mentally. Said (1995) very sharply puts forth his aim in these words; it would be important, nevertheless, never to let the orient go its own way or get out of hand the canonical view being that Orientals had no tradition of freedom.

Another prominent name in the history of postcolonial discourse is Bhabha. He gave views on ambivalence, hybridity and mimicry. Hybridity refers to mixing and mingling to produce something new. Bhabha is of the view that postcolonial cultures are complex and cosmopolitan. They cannot be understood if they are studied as polar opposites. He stresses that they should be studied in terms of hybrids. The effects of the Western culture over the Eastern or African cultures are due to power relations and the power spoils the purity of the

native cultures and a hybrid person develops a new identity. His concept of cultural hybridity maintains that no pure culture exists in this world all cultures are mixed.

This term mimicry includes the gap between the civilized West and the desire of the East to be alike the colonizers. According to Naipaul, the men of the New World mimicked one uncharted region of the new world, with all its reminders of the depravity that overwhelmed the new world so rapidly, while pretending to be real, educated, and training for life. A mimic man always attempts to be akin to the colonizer. In his attempt, he often forgets about the purity of his self. This process of mimicry shows the power relationship where might is always right.

Exilic and diasporic predicaments of people living in the third space characterized by transcultural, liminality, and oscillations have been revealed through the analysis. Aslam's fictional work *Maps for Lost Lovers* suggests that Pakistani migrants like Kaukab, Shamas, Jugnu, and Kiran attempt but fail to integrate into the foreign culture and community in which they reside. Their inability to complete acculturation is due to a variety of personal and cultural factors, including language and religion. They live in a third space, where they are neither Pakistani nor British, and they must fight for their identity in a strange environment. As a result, they continue to struggle and oscillate in the cultural crucible, where their lives are marked by continual conflict and socio-psychological crises.

Maps for Lost Lovers deals with cultural clashes, these clashes necessitate diversity and plurality. The human world as a whole is defined by a rich plurality of cultures. So, it would be interesting to explore how this diversity and plurality of cultures come into being. Actually, diversity and variety appear to be built-in features of the vast world of nature. Like geographical and climatic variations, there are several instances of how human cultures and lifestyles vary across the globe. Diversity and variety in the human world serve the purpose of imparting identity to human groups in the form of clans, families, tribes, nations and races. When a member of a weaker group travels to another region having a different culture, he or she is likely to be influenced by the culture of the target land. Traditionally, East and West have served as two ends of the earth not only in terms of their distant geographical locations but also in terms of distinct systems of cultural norms and values. Therefore, when an individual emigrates from East to West, he or she has to undergo an internal and mental

transition to fit into the target culture. This internal transition is seen differently by different human groups associated with the individual.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology:

The concept of mimicry is given by Homi K. Bhabha and it is one of the striking issues of postcolonial studies and literature. Mimicry appears when members of a colonized society imitate and take on the culture of the colonizers. Postcolonialism has been used as a framework for the study. The researcher aims at exploring the concepts of mimicry and identity in the selected text *Maps for Lost Lovers* using postcolonial lens. The present study is qualitative in nature and the selected text has been analyzed to explore mimicry that apparently leads the characters' to dilute their identity. The textual extracts have been taken to find mimicry in the characters' actions and the events of the novel.

Analysis and discussion

The story of Nadeem Aslam's novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* revolves around a working-class Pakistani immigrant family residing in a city having no specific name in northern England. This unnamed city in which they live is now known as Dasht-e-Tanhaii, The Desert of Loneliness. It is the colonized society that renames the colonists through the process of imitation. Renaming immigrants, however, is a sign of their attempt to heal their movements and build a representational space in which they feel they belong, as opposed to the colonist's ambition to own. The narrator of the story explains this disastrous renaming attempt in these words: 'It was difficult to pronounce English names, so men who came to the town in the 1950s changed all the names they saw' (p.28-29). The immigrants' failure to call the names of the English people is also a kind of mimicry of the colonial process of renaming and colonizing but they consider it a sign of arrogance. Although it is true that the migrants do not come to England with the intention of colonizing, the naming practice can only be seen as an effort to compensate for the losses brought on by immigration and to forge false identities.

With the passage of time, the assigned names of the streets and attractions around the Desert of Loneliness have changed due to the arrival of more and more nationalities from the subcontinent and all these people try to make room for their existence. But all the immigrants are satisfied with the name of the city as they accept that all the residents are facing

loneliness. They think that this is the most suitable name for the city which represents their inner self. In this "lonely wilderness," "shame, guilt, honour, and fear are like padlocks hanging from your mouth. No one makes a sound when noticed. No one speaks. No one speaks. "Do not breathe" (p.45). Most of the immigrants are from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh who either work there in different restaurants or as a taxi or bus driver and many of them are unemployed. Due to the prevailing continuous violation, invasion and oppression, the city is not considered a good place to live but Shamas who is the community-responsible idealist stays there against the will of his wife Kaukab who wants to move somewhere else for a better living.

The novel represents a contradictory but complementary perspective on the British and Asian immigrant experiences about the imitation of the culture. Aslam's multifocal narrative creates an open perspectival structure. This structure uses multiple perspectives on the story's events, revealing not only the characters' divergent views of identity, diaspora, religion, culture, and the world but also underlying patterns of identity crises through imitation. The novel describes a tight-knit Pakistani Muslim community geographically and culturally separated from the cultural space of an unnamed and fictional city in the north through the story of the honour killings of Jugnu and Chanda. The community adopts a Western culture, resulting in identity issues.

According to Homi K. Bhabha, mimicry is an exaggeration and a mimicking of ideas, language, culture, and manners. He claims that mimicry is a sign of presence. Mimicry arises when members of a colonial community copy and internalize the culture of the colonizers. Jacques Lacan describes, the effect of mimicry is camouflage; it's not about harmonizing with the background, but rather about standing out against a mottled background. Colonial imitation stems from colonists' need for a transformed, recognized Other, as a subject of a difference that is nearly the same, but not quite, as Bhabha defines it. As a result, imitation indicates a double enunciation; a tactic that adopts the Other while visualizing authority. In addition, mimicking is an indication of inappropriate behaviour. 'a disagreement or resistance that reinforces the colonial power's major strategic purpose, heightens surveillance, and poses an immediate threat to both 'normalized' knowledge and disciplining powers. As if the term 'colonial' depends on authoritative speech for its depiction, the colonial subject is therefore partially given existence through imitation. Contrary to popular belief, the colonists' attempt

to look ‘genuine’ is ironically accomplished by imitation—through writing and repetition—through this flawed portrayal.

Contrarily, according to Bhabha, imitation is not a narcissistic identification of the colonizer in which the colonised is not a person without the colonizer present in his identity. For him, mimicry is a double vision that both undermines the validity of colonial discourse and reveals its dualism. The result of what [he identified] as a partial recognition of the colonial object is figures of doubling, partial objects of metonymy of colonial desire that disengage the modality and normality of those prevailing discourses in which they seem as unfit colonial subjects. The desires of the colonized people have been reversed, and the diversion of the colonies has now created a partial vision of the existence of the colonists. The line of sight from others is a counterpoint to the line of sight of the colonists, which shares the insight of the line of sight of the genealogy that frees the individual who has reached the limit and breaks the unity of human beings for which he has expanded his authority. Identity is entirely reformulated and severed from its core, when the observer becomes the observed. Mimicry is simply stated as an activity of copying someone’s behaviour, culture and language. It is the inferior who tries to mimic the one who is considered superior. Similarly, in postcolonial discourse, the Eastern people always try to mimic the Western people. This notion of mimicry has been found and interpreted in the selected text *Maps for Lost Lovers*. The immigrants currently known as the inhabitants of the “Desert of Loneliness” strive to mimic the native people of that region to fit in society. They mimic the culture and language for their survival and to communicate with the people of the newly adopted community.

Seven years old, the little boy is ‘half Pakistani and half . . . er . . . er . . . er . . . human’—or so a child on his English mother’s side is reported to have described him in baffled groping innocence’ (Aslam, 2004, p.10)

The immigrants living in British society become a mixture of two cultures by adopting the norms and values of the native people. The immigrants try to adopt the culture to maintain their appearance in society. The newly residing inhabitants of “The Desert of Loneliness” strive to mimic the language, dresses and living style of the indigenous people to enjoy the social status of local people. By mimicking the lifestyle and other norms of the British, the immigrants become a hybrid and their purity becomes overshadowed.

Resultantly, the offspring they bring up by following the values of a new community, become a totally hybridized generation.

Mimicry of Manners:

Every society has its own social norms and manners which differ from the other societies. The Pakistani immigrants have some religious and social norms but the society in which they are living currently has a different set of beliefs. They strive to imitate the norms and values of that society. Of course, she was shocked that Chanda and Jugnu's lives ended in murder, but she was appalled when she heard that they had set up a home outside wedlock, sinning openly. (p. 201)

The story depicts a twelve-month investigation into the murders of two lovers from immigrant families who live in a terrifyingly oppressed society. Even if they were born in England and have assimilated into the British lifestyle, the members of the immigrant families, as depicted in the novel, are given non-English names. Aslam's characterization is excellent, and the majority of the characters, as immigrants, live on the periphery. Shamas tells Suraya about the murder of his brother Jugnu and Chanda with whom he has been living without marrying her. Jugnu and Chanda are the true lovers and stay in a living relationship. This practice of staying in a living relationship without marriage is not considered bad or illegal in Western society but it is not accepted in Eastern culture. They go to their homeland Pakistan to spend holidays but Chanda's brothers think that their sister is bringing shame to them by living with someone without marriage. As it is considered illegal and unethical in Pakistani society, Chanda's brothers make a plan to kill their sister and her boyfriend. This is the only thing that they can do to maintain their respect and social status. Resultantly, they kidnapped both of the lovers when they were going back to England and killed them. The writer narrates that there are some social differences in all the societies around the world. The immigrants always imitate the cultural values of the native people.

Like Charag and Mah-Jabin, the youngest son of Kaukab, Ujala has also imitated Western culture. He gets irritated by the religious and social norms taught by his mother and goes against them. He is the true mimic of English culture and hates Pakistani culture on an extreme level. He hates his parents, especially his mother just because of her religious beliefs. What happened next was this: Ujala brought out his hand from under the covers and jerked his fingers at them where they stood in the door so that the swipe of semen flew across the

room in an arc to spatter their faces, smelling of bleach, runny like the whites of a quarter-boiled egg. (p. 73)

When the immigrants living in the “Desert of Loneliness” try to adopt the Western cultural norms and values they do not reproduce the hybrid form but the results of this practice are even more threatening. Ujala, Shamas’ youngest son, is the true mimic of English society. His mother, Kaukab warns him to avoid all the irreligious activities but he does not find any interest in religion and moral values which his mother is trying to teach him. He wants to live his life according to the modern English culture but he is forced to do what his parents want. As a result, he gets isolated domestically. He dislikes any type of interference by his parents in his matters and gets involved in irreligious activities. He starts abusive language while talking to his parents, especially his mother.

Diluted Identity:

The issue of identity has resurfaced in the modern world due to the increase in immigration, hybrid nations, and the creation of countries with different levels of cultural diversity. Postcolonial theorists discussed and offered their theories about 54 constructing identity in previously colonised countries, as well as immigrants from these countries who had to deal with diaspora and the challenge of constructing their identity. Since postcolonial theorists regarded the subject of identity as one of its crucial themes, various novelists disclosed and depicted the circumstances of identity crises that happened during the postcolonial period. Bill Ashcroft et al state in *The Empire Writes Back* that "more than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives impacted by the experience of colonialism". Many nations have become independent and are no longer colonies; nonetheless, they still face numerous cultural and economic problems and crises, and many still firmly believe in their own culture and identity. The birth and endurance of this national and ethnic identity conflict is "defined and redefined after the fall of the empire, and the continual movement between edges and centres (spatial, social)" in the gap between the past and the present. In fact, colonialism is not only a seizure of power (whether restricted or figuratively restricted), but also the cultural power of the colonists whose colonized people are enslaved today. The struggle for the cultural identity of the colonized entity and the social emergence of a new independent state are two aspects of the cultural transition that lead to conflict with the colonial culture.

Diluted Identity of British Muslims in *Maps for Lost Lovers*

The novel represents the identity problem faced by second-generation British Muslims, primarily through the struggle faced by Kaukab and her children. Due to the belief-based nature of Kaukab, all disputes automatically escalate to dissent, and the inflexible nature of the latter is considered a direct challenge to the freedom offered by the former, so people in the United Kingdom are forced to negotiate the perspective of Islamic identity. As the older generation laments the loss of their hometown, The younger generation, who are British Muslims, adjusts to their new surroundings and looks to British liberal ideas for guidance as they deal with the issues they confront, which Kaukab publicly and verbally rejects in words, 'My religion is not the British legal system, it's Islam' (Aslam, 2004, p.115).

The storyline works through conceits and similes, which Aslam uses to problematize the issue of description of identity issues by fetching the ancient contradiction between appearance and reality to the surface. The narrator presents the setting as being both in and out of England in a rather sarcastic way. The snow tells the reader it's England, yet the street names and people on the streets point to a different existence. England appears to be "Orientalized" or rather "Pakistanized" in *Maps for Lost Lovers*. Aslam also uses magic realism to depict the religious and irreligious side by side while also enabling the portrayal of religious bigotry.

In *Maps*, the Pakistani community resists and feels hesitant to fully participate in conventional British culture, creating a situation where two communities live side by side, leading parallel lives with no interaction. Aslam tries to correct O'Connor's statement about England's absence, stating that only white England is absent from the novel. This illustrates how two worlds situated side by side can exist in completely different temporal and spatial planes. Romy Hasan's book *Multiculturalism: Some Inconvenient Truths* claims that this destructive habit is becoming more and more common among British Muslims.

Regarding this reluctance to communicate with the Britishers, Hasan states, 'In the times of the British Empire, it was the White colonial powers who made sure they did not socially interact with those of a darker colour, but in Britain, the situation seems to have been reversed: it is they who appear today to be mostly responsible for not mingling with those of a lighter hue.' (p.229).

The residents of Dasht-e-Tanhaii exhibit indications of the diasporic reluctance to mix. They avoid interaction with the country where they currently live, preferring to stay stuck inside the diaspora, because they are preoccupied with their group identification and the fantasy of purity.

Kaukab, finally understands that the parents' attempt to keep their children "pure" in the presence of the threat of racial integration is futile since it ignores youngster's actual understandings as British Muslims. The focus on these "ideals of purity" really causes a social crisis. In other words, during the age of defilement, people are more vulnerable to identity crises than ever before, and they must embrace miscegenation and hybridity in the sense of Homi Bhabha.

Conclusion

The findings from the data analysis demonstrate that new hybrid identities of immigrants in The Desert of Loneliness and in their original land are arising as a result of the biased and stereotyped attitude that they encounter from the inhabitants of their native land. The characters that had formed their new identities against the stereotyped ideas of the Western world are Mah-Jabin, the young daughter of Shamas and Kaukab, Charag, Shamas, and Ujala. To escape discriminatory and stereotyped sentiments toward them, the migrants adopt British culture and traditions. Aslam has represented this notion of identity crises with the help of above mentioned characters of the novel who try to mimic the Western culture to formulate a new identity. This practice of imitation leads all the major characters of the novel to identity crises by making them a hybrid version of in-between identity. This is how the characters of the novel become a victim of identity crises.

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