



Decentered Culture and Dislocated Identity in Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*

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Abstract— *In the age of global modernity where human life is increasingly shaped by the change in cultural pattern, the concept of shared culture is often debated and discussed. Modern life marked by geographical dislocations and displacement is no longer centered on the notion of purity of culture. The present paper analyses the effect of cultural decentralization affected by dislocation in Nadeem Aslam's Maps for Lost Lovers. The reading focuses in analyzing the novel, based on the effect of shared experiences in shaping and establishing their life ranging from intercultural interactions, transnational patterns, and connected life styles. The paper also traces how the decentered culture results in dislocated identity formation.*

Keywords— *acculturation , assimilation, cultural trauma, displacement, hybridity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Cultural effects in midst of dislocations welcome new cultural formations through acceptance and assimilation. The society that progress under displaced settings are tamed to adapt and assimilate where new cultural forming is generated out of hybrid representations. The novels of British Pakistani writer Nadeem Aslam presents the nuanced representations of cultural, social and political instabilities in which immigrant community particularly the grass root sections are immersed into . His works projects the complexities of nationalism, tradition, community, culture and religion through various perspectives. His *Maps for lost lovers* is about the life of conservative Pakistani immigrant family living in an isolated place for immigrants named Dash E Tanhai. The narration reveals how the characters are assimilating themselves to the foreign culture from which they cannot escape. Many readings are done in Nadeem Aslam's works which focused on identity crisis out of cultural mixedness. In this context, the present reading initiate a new perspective focusing on how the characters frame a new life out of the dislocations in which they are immersed in. The paper analyzes the effect of cross cultural encounters in the identity establishments resulting from different cultural

representations. Built around a culturally hybrid world, the novel presents the space of decentered world marked by polarization, hybridity, assimilations and at times rejections

II. THIRD SPACE AND CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTION IN MAPS FOR LOST LOVERS

Maps for Lost Lovers by Nadeem Aslam, centers around the life experiences of Shamas and his wife Kaukab living in Dash E Tanhai, a place where a group immigrants are living together. Being migrated from Pakistan during the time of partition, the characters frame a new life in the midst of cultural dislocation and de representation. Set in UK town named Dash E Tanhai inherited by Pakistani immigrants, the novel highlights the effect of mixed cultural representations in ordinary lives. . Dash E Tanhai, the land of solitude can be read as a space of cultural reconstruction. According to Baba, hybridity is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge '(Bhaba ,Third Space 211). The shared life resulting from cultural encounters develops a new space that breaks the fixity of cultures, where fluidity of cultural establishments is promoted. The Geographical locations of immigrants are also affected by their cultural impacts. The processes of re-naming places reflect the transitional

attitude of immigrants who are ready to encompass and accept difference. Although the characters share related cultural background as exiles, their religious differences of being Hindu, Sikh and Muslim along with their fear of interacting with white people place them in a more conflicted state.

The inhabitants in *Dash E Tanhai* are victims of cultural trauma marked by

exile and forced dislocations. Kaukab represents the contradictory woman self struggling to find a third space for herself. Kaukab, the direct victim of migration could not escape from the memories of her past and take double positions, where an absolute fixation in new land is not possible. Shamas' is not absolutely displaced from his old identity while he struggles to adapt himself to the new land. Charang and Stella couldn't fix them within a code of fixed national identity and are struggled within the ambivalent thought regarding their homeland. The new space created by their immigrants' life promotes a space guaranteed by the principles of adaptation and acceptance where an absolute separation is hardly done. The re-naming of streets and landmarks within their life remembrances reflect how the characters deny an absolute replacement.

Most of the characters in the novel like Kaukab, Shamas and Surayya are from immigrant background who struggles to adjust their new life. The rest of the characters like Charang, Kiran and Stella represent the second generation of immigrants who face the trauma of in-between homeliness, being born in UK, yet inclined towards their home roots through their parents. The novel exposes the conflicts of inhabitants out of their multiple coexistence. Kaukab and Shamas are symbols of contradicting identities. The characters as migrants are caught in the dilemma of in-between. One group, the direct immigrants represented in the novel as Shamas and Kaukab are not free from the past memories which fix them in the state of in-between as said in transcultural theories. The confusion of cultural identity results in direct confrontation between two cultures, which at times result in the rejection of new. They are struggled with the confusing notion regarding their home land. Kaukab, "... wonders why her children refer to Bangladesh as 'abroad' because Bangladesh isn't abroad, England is abroad; Bangladesh is home" (Aslam 65). Kaukab openly criticizes western culture as filthy out of her contradictory self. Shamas tries to adjust with the changed life circumstances, but is caught within his old remembrances where an absolute relocation is not attained. The second group represented by Charj, Ujala, MahJabin, Chanda and Junju are more inclined to the culture of new land and consider themselves as British.

III. HYBRIDITY AND CULTURAL FUSION IN *MAPS FOR LOST LOVERS*

The novel foregrounds hybridity as a new light over global existence. Cultural hybridity offers solutions to much cultural confrontation removing the conflicts of space and time. Surayya's life in England is not totally uprooted from the land of Pakistan as her thoughts are emotionally connected to her son. The characters in the midst of their dislocated life experiences try to socialized themselves in the new world where they exhibit a tendency to adapt and accept. The experiences of characters in *Dash E Tanhai*, positions them within a state of ambivalence, where they could not escape from the effect of cultural impacts that surrounds them. Though they try for a stage of acculturation an absolute replacement is hardly attained. Shamas, could not challenge the laws of their homeland which is closely tied with the laws of their religion. MahJabin accuses her mother for all the hardships she suffered in Pakistan. As stated in *The Routes of Cultural Identity*, identities are "about becoming who we want to be or being who we think we should be in particular context" (Storney 86).

The context in which the characters are subjected to reassert their need for change. They are guided by conflicted thought combined with forced acceptance and rejections. Their displacement to the new land is marked by adjustments and adaptations, where they strive to be the part of new law.

In "Looking Back, Moving Forward: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism", Homi K. Bhabha's

observes that 'In another's country that is also your own, your person divides, and in following the

forked path you encounter yourself in a double movement [...] once as stranger, and then as friend' (Bhabha 25). The characters in *Maps for Lost Lovers* are the products of double movement resulting from cultural fusion. In the midst of fixed surroundings resulting from cultural mixedness characters are guided by double thoughts, motifs and attitude, which turns their stand occasionally ambivalent.

Kaukab feels herself alienated from her family as the result of cultural contradictions. MahJabin and Kaukab symbolize converging and contradictory side of two cultures.

The characters in the novel are placed within the confused self of accepting new and rejecting old where they couldn't fix themselves on a cause. This state of in-between is erased where they willingly accepts and create a space, a hybrid state of existence marked by no rejections. The new space created by them is no longer a separate distinct

space, but a continuous space that connects them to the old and new. In this space of perfect assimilation, they exist in no conflict of culture and tradition. The novel projects the reality of fluidity of culture in a space where the very concept of being pure is nullified. The state of living establishments in the sphere of global modernity has to be judged not on the notion of purity but on the frame of fluidity. The characters come out successful in their living state while they develop a strategy to adapt and accept where past is not absolutely denied. The third space created never displaces the characters from their root establishments but replaces them to the new establishment where an accepted acculturated space is framed.

Routes of Cultural Identity. In: Cultural Studies Conference.

IV. CONCLUSION

The reading in the context of mixed life representations traced how the characters struggle to come out of their mixed identities engraved upon them out of the residue of being immigrant. All the characters are the products of a struggled psyche created out of their unsecured state which haunts them in the first phase of their path towards hybridity. While the first generation immigrants, Kaukab and Shamas who are the victims of double displacement find their new space as absolutely strange, the new generation embodied through Stella and Surayya are towards their path for acceptance. The set of traditional values inscribed as culture in the characters' bones on them with the responsibility of holding and preserving it. These responsibilities as protectors and preservers of culture stigmatize their position as alien, where they identify themselves as strange, alien or foreign. Though caught in a strange space created out of their cultural and psychological residue, the characters willfully initiate an effort towards assimilation and acceptance triggered by the need for survival. These paths towards assimilation and acceptance lead them to the hybrid state, where total rejection of the new is abandoned.

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