

## Reconstructing Home In Ethno-Religious Conflict Of Diaspora: A Study Of Nadeem Aslam's *Maps For Lost Lovers*

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### Abstract:

Migration leaves certain consequences, like the coalition between the homeland tradition and the social structure of the hostland where migrants try to maintain their homely associations in the newly settled place, which is dynamic with time and generations. The formation of diaspora community, thus, in some point shows the adaptability of the migrants in the new land. Even journeying to some other place provides a space to the individual where one can have a choice of the way of living which is somewhat indiscernible in a religiously rigid society. Religion in this process becomes an intricate part of the migrants especially for people of South-Asian Muslim descent. As religious beliefs and practices form an essential link between migrant and his place of origin and acts as the backbone of the community, integration is often perceived as a process of conversion or to negotiate with one's own cultural values. The present study tries to explore the conflict of religious belief system and the concept of home for migrants with reference to the novel written by Nadeem Aslam, *Maps for Lost Lovers*. Aslam's novel dramatizes ethno-religious conflict of Pakistani migrant community living in England. The tight knot of the community creates a boundary between the host and home culture where each and every extraneous element is either equated to strangeness or the alien. Even home signifies a different concept for each individual in the text. While some characters presented in this novel are very conscious about their home, culture and religious practices, some are trying to cross the religious orthodox belief system.

**Keywords:** Migration, Home, Religion, Conflict, Identity.

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Migration leaves certain consequences, like the coalition between the homeland tradition and the social structure of the hostland where migrants try to maintain their homely associations in newly settled place, which later gradually changes with time and generations. The formation of diaspora community thus in some point shows the adaptability of the migrants in the new land. Even journeying to some other place provides a space to the individual where one can have a choice of the way of living which is somewhat indiscernible in a religiously rigid society. Religion in this process becomes an intricate part of the migrants especially for people of South Asian Muslim descent. As religious beliefs and practices form an essential link between migrant and his place of origin and acts as the backbone of the community, integration is often perceived as a process of conversion or to negotiate with one's own cultural values. The present study tries to epitomise this conflict of religious belief system and the concept of home for migrants with reference to Nadeem Aslam's novel *Maps for Lost Lovers*.

Ethnicity, a complex phenomenon, understood in different perception based on the social structure. It is a culture specific practice, a distinctive set of cosmology and symbols. It can also be stated as a belief system based on a commonly accepted organism and broadly recognized history which provides an 'inheritance of symbol, heroes, values and hierarchies, and conform social identities of both insider and outsider' (Fawole and Bello 212). Moreover, ethnic culture is another important concept in which people perceive themselves as an active agent, thus culture and identity get intertwined. In this way, ethnicity within a social structure determines the identity of an individual. In the context of ethnic credence, religion can be the common belief system of a community, which create a tight nought among the individuals. Religion can be defined as a body of laws, rituals and rites. Fawole and Bello mark, "religion is man's intuition of the sacred and ultimate reality and his expression of that awareness in concrete life" (213). Through religious practices, individuals within diaspora communities asserts their cultural presence. They utilize their cultural heritage as a lens to interpret and express their intuitive understanding of the sacred. This connection among religion, diaspora and culture confirms the delicate reciprocity between personal spirituality and collective identity. Thus, individuals draw upon ancestral traditions and customs to navigate their positionality within the framework of diaspora.

To engage with the understanding of diasporic community in the midst of the multifaceted nature of belonging and cultural identity it is important to search the further implications of the dynamics of home. Home and the concept of belonging are related to the special existence which Salman Rushdie termed as "Belonging-to -your- place" (55). The concept illuminates the intricate balance between acceptance and difference, within individual's perception of home. The hyphenated exitance of diaspora is also reflected through the dichotomy of "separation and entanglement, of living here and

remembering/desiring another place” (Clifford 311). This complex interplay of the socio-cultural ties defines the identity formation of diaspora. Moreover, the concept of ‘home’ extends beyond physical space and extended towards the complex network among tradition, social relations and shared experience. Thus, the fluidity of culture challenges the traditional notion of geo-political boundaries and emphasises the dynamic confluence of identity in the context of diaspora. The metaphorical home which denotes the familiarity, belongingness and emotional bound with a certain geo-political territory marks the fluidity of the concept. At the same time, it addresses the duality of exitance where both the present and the past home comprises equal importance; as one is the physical home and other is the ‘imaginary homeland’. Further fluxional postulation of home announces the interplay between space and identity.

In Nadeem Aslam’s novel the juxtaposition of space and identity grapples with the process of hybridisation. Through multinarrative the novel frames scattered identity, culture and ethnic-belonging of the migrants in diaspora. The image of deracinated migrants in the narrative emphasis the reclamation of space. Thus, the interdependence of past and present home acts as the anecdote of in-betweenness which emphasises the idea of metamorphosis in the context of diasporic individual. The transnational relation though tries to dissolve the difference between the ‘minority community and the majority society’ (Clifford 311) but also stimulates the notion of carrying ethnic identity and culture. Additionally, the intersection of gender, ethnicity and individual’s perception of religion complicates the understanding of belonging among diasporic community. Despite all these challenges, the maintenance of culture and traditions serve as a source of resilience of affirming identity for women within the diaspora. Community support serves as a foundation in preserving ethnic identity and traditions, as well as, it perpetuates societal norms and expectations which limits the agency and autonomy of women. Thus, the interconnection between cultural transmission and belonging makes “women in diaspora attached to ... a “home” culture and tradition” (Clifford 314). The community ties thus act both as a support to nurture ones’ ethnic identity and also acts like a barrier for women as it oppresses their individual identity. Apart from culture and its transmission throughout diaspora, the religion and its associated inference moulds the experience of the community within the majority society. Vijay Mishra marks, “Religion is a key lived experience, arguably one that touches more than most, especially those forms of religion by which subjects define their identity” (231). The ethnic tapestry rejects the element of other, among them religion is the most self-consciously confined entity. Moreover, it electricizes the idea of ‘diasporic imaginary’ which according to Mishra is “any ethnic enclave in a nation-state that defines itself, consciously, unconsciously or because of the political self-interest of a racialized nation-state, as a group that lives in displacement” (14). In the context of religion and self-proclamation the diasporic imaginary defines the conscious engagement of religious identity in the host nation. In the novel the ‘diasporic imaginary’ portrays the multiple layers of displacement. The characters in the novel are entangled with their cultural roots and at the same time tries to find their solace in the host nation. Thus, religion acts like an anchor to their identity, symbolising their quest for meaning within the world of displacement and cultural hybridity. It pronounces the existence of the minority groups within the socio-political circumference of the host nation.

Further, Aslam’s novel engages with the experiences of Pakistani migrants in a town in UK. The characters in this narrative are the expression of Pakistani diaspora, which suggests that though they are residing in UK still they emotionally engaged with the cultural roots and homeland. Thus, Vijay Mishra points out that “the postcolonial diaspora attempts to penetrate the grand narrative of the nation-state itself, to reconfigure its own narratives in an independent, secular fashion” (230). The grand narrative of nation-state often explores the dominant political, historical and cultural accounts; and fails to address immigrant expressions. Thus, Aslam’s narrative tries to put forward the extension of the ideological expression of the idea of nation-state. In the novel the characters are dealing with the tension between cultural belonging and assimilation within the British society. The novel thus explores the challenges such as cultural marginalisation, racism and xenophobia, which are in a circumlocutionary manner contests the dominant narrative to establish the counter narrative of nation-state. Further, when different ethnic groups come into contact, a kind of difference in attitude and belief occur. In addition, Aslam’s novel *Maps for the Lost Lovers* depicts this conflict by portraying the lives of Pakistani migrant community living in England.

Nadeem Aslam, a Pakistani born English writer, currently lives in United Kingdom. He has migrated to U.K when he was twelve. He is a prolific writer and recipient of many awards for his literary contribution. His second novel *Maps for the Lost Lovers* is a multidimensional novel where he portrays the life of the migrants from Pakistan. As a diasporic writer, he embarks on the issues of race, religion, ethnicity, homeland under the canopy of cultural identity in this novel. Moreover, through the lens of culture and religion, he beautifully places the character in the plot. The projection of female characters in the narration are mainly targeted towards the homeland bond and through them the point of view of many a people towards home and hostland are traced. Aslam’s novel dramatizes ethno-religious conflict of Pakistani migrant community in England. The community represented in this novel is a prototype diaspora community trapped in between longing and belonging. The concept of home is different for each individual character here. A mythical projection of home or of Pakistan exist in the memory, which in some sense shapes the life of the characters. It is this socio-cultural dilemma to which Stuart Hall refers and said- “New World is constituted for us as place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to ‘lost origin’, to be again with the mother, to go back to the beginning” (Hall 236). The narrative of dislocation is leading towards a relocation of migrant

communities where they are residing after dislocated from their home-land. The concept of relocation of the migrant communities in the host-land is also exemplified through renaming the names of the streets after their homeland.

Because it was difficult to pronounce the English names, the men who arrived in this town in the 1950s had rechristened everything they saw before them. They had come from across the Subcontinent, lived together ten to a room, and the name that one of them happened to give to a street or landmark was taken up by the others, regardless of where they themselves were from. But over the decades, as more and more people came, the various nationalities of the Subcontinent have changed the names according to the specific country they themselves are from- Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan. (Aslam 34)

The act of renaming suggests the recreation of home in a different land, as well as the strong determination of the community to contempt the new and foreign location. Aslam himself confronts that “One of my ideas for the cover was a map of England with all city names in Urdu, which I thought would be a strange, powerful image” (Chambers 149). Therefore, it also shows a kind of resistance towards the host society where every element they are involved with creates a separate space as it becomes “a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity” (Hooks 343). On the contrary the name of the town “Dasht-e-Tanhaii, (The Wilderness of Solitude) The Desert of Loneliness” (Aslam 34) itself suggest the failure of the utopian phantasy of recreating home in a different space and time. As if it echoes the words of Rushdie that it as “a lost home in a lost city in the mists of a lost time” (9). The absence of the real home is prominently exposed in the text as well as in the life of the characters. James Clifford in this regard mentions that “diaspora cultures thus mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place” (311).

Thus, the diaspora community is not rooted in a specific place and always have a desire to return to the ideal home. In some way or other, home becomes synonymous with the cultural identity where the social rituals are part of their identity. The novel opens with Shamas who greets the first snowfall with his open arm as well as he mourns the absence of the fifth season between summer and autumn in U.K.

Among the innumerable other losses, to come to England was to lose a season, because, in the part of Pakistan that he is from, there are five seasons in a year, not our, the schoolchildren learning their names and sequence through classroom chants: Mausam-e-Sarma, Bahar, Mausam-e-Garma, Barsat, Khizan. Winter, Spring, Summer, Monsoon, Autumn. (Aslam 16)

Mentioning the fact that the season of monsoon is absent in Britain is pointing to a very common thing, but this makes a difference in situation and brings the feeling of being an alien in a strange land. In this way for the first time the concept of longing is introduced in the narrative. The novel *Maps for the Lost Lovers* revolves around a murder case of two lovers Chanda and Jugnu. The novel projects the complexity of human relationships under certain unwanted circumstances. The setting of the novel is a fictional town, Dasht-e-Tanhaii (The Desert of Loneliness), in England, where the two lovers engage in an illicit relation. Jugnu’s family, except Kaukab, does not object to their relation. Kaukab considers them sinners. Chanda’s family considers her a whore who brought shame and dishonour to their family. One day, on of a sudden, the two lovers disappeared and Chanda’s brothers were arrested under suspicion. The story starts with this and weaves around retrospective stories of past mostly from the perspective of Jugnu’s brother Shamas and his wife Kaukab. The narration is all about the migrant community in Britain who tries to avoid integration. As the plot suggests the novel deals with the migrant life and human relations and a continuous longing for the homeland.

Through different social strata and their concurrent incidents, the challenging status of the diaspora become clear to the readers. When Shamas and his wife came to England, they were full of optimistic thoughts about their new life and future. However, as the time passes the tendency to preserve the homeland beliefs and practices make their life complex. The migrant community creates a familial space for themselves where the white British are considered as the other. This othering creates an enclosed atmosphere where religion rules over the people. Thus, Yaqin precisely points out that:

Aslam’s novel offers a syncretic view of Asian identities and influences but the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh inhabitants of Dasht-e-Tanhaii are torn apart by communal tensions, mixed love affairs and honour crimes destined to live separate lives. It is a claustrophobic town and its geography is superimposed with the religious beliefs of its inhabitants with a lasting image of the cultural clash between Muslims and Christians reflected in the architectural mapping of the streets. (14-15)

Kaukab throughout the novel maintains the religious stigma where she feels safe. The children of Shamas and Kaukab represent the young generation migrants who are very susceptible to the foreign culture and questions the belief system of the older generation. The rejection of culture and values of Pakistan by her children causes disturbance to Kaukab, as she believes that her purpose is to transmit the cultural values and social norm of her ancestors to the next generation. Thus, she always complains about Charag’s (her son) white wife Stella who is not aware of the Muslim belief system and is not educating her grandson properly. She strictly believes that a mother’s role is to pass the values and tradition of culture to the next generation and children’s demeanour mirrors the quality of a mother. Thus, she mourns their migration to Britain, which leads her children towards westernisation. Therefore, she grieves that she can never be able to return to Pakistan, as her children are probably not going to follow her:

We'll go for a visit of course, but I refuse to settle there permanently even though there is nothing I would like better. There is nothing on this planet that I loathe more than this country, but I won't go to live in 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 returned with a new layer of stranger-ness on them until finally I didn't recognize them anymore. (Aslam 126)

It can thus be said that Kaukab in this novel represents the fear of the migrant community of losing the purity of culture. Here religion serves as a distinguished factor for the Pakistani community in the host society. Religion permits an ethnic community to segregate itself from any new element and treat it as an alien to the preserved culture.

Thus, in a very natural manner, a comparison between Islam and Christianity comes into contact. Kaukab considers Islam as one and only legitimate faith and treats the Christian elements as other and evil. Threatened by the possibility of Christian penetration of elements into their culture, Kaukab tries to raise her children into good Muslims, away from the influence of their uncle Jugnu as well as from the western values:

Allah gave her everything, so how can Kaukab not be thankful... how could she have not tried to make sure that her children grew up to be Allah's servants, and how could she approve of Jugnu marrying the white woman, or later, approve of him living in sin with Chanda? For the people in the West, an offence that did no harm to another human or to the wider society was no offence at all, but to her – to all Muslims – there was always another party involved – Allah. (Aslam 44)

However, Kaukab is not able to prevent her children from the British influence, as their immediate surrounding is western. Even she considers the vasectomy of Chirag a "Christian conspiracy to stop the number of Muslims from increasing" (57). She did not like her daughter using foreign expressions as she says, "do not try to sound white by saying things like 'Oh Christ', because you don't impress me" (90). The other 'denied knowledges' (Bhabha 162) here the western customs are radically entering into the dominant discourse of Islam and make weak the pillars of authority. Moreover, this fear of losing the ethnic purity is prevalent in Kaukab. She despises any kind of transaction with the British community. In fact, "they were not particularly keen on learning the local language, accepting the local dress code and tasting the local cuisine, but preferred sticking to their traditional ones" (Radeljic 244). Though she is residing in another land, she creates her own home within her religious and ethnic belief.

Mawani and Mukadam in the essay 'Spaces of Religious, Social and Cultural Interaction of Nizair Ismaili Muslims in the United Kingdom' rightly point out this fact as they said

It has examined the way in which the production, transformation and function of religious landscapes impact adherents' religious and national identities in new cultural contexts. Individuals from minority ethno-religious communities, particularly the younger second and third generations are greatly influenced by the majority culture and there is a fear of assimilation rather than acculturation. (294).

Even, Waterman reads this novel as 'clash of civilization' - "there is nevertheless a cross-examination of concepts such as traditional and modern which comes to the surface in the wake of rapid social change and the ensuing feeling of cultural vulnerability, especially within a diaspora" (18). Further, he mentions the 'cultural plurality in today's transcultural world', which Aslam enquires with all its intricacies. The portrayal of binary opposition of 'traditional versus progressive' is portrayed through the characters of Kaukab and Shamas. They exemplified the- complex aggregation of competing myths, packed with variables which are negotiated differently: notions of cultural contamination and integration, Islam and the community/nation, permissible margins to question orthodoxy, altercation on the domestic level, the mediation of absolutes through cultural representations, and the next generations' as they look to the future (Aslam 19).

Apart from the fear of amalgamation, Aslam depicts the hope of the migrant community through the character of Shamas. Not only the young generation of Dasht-e-Tanhai are affected by the infiltration of the British culture but also it is very prominent in the character of Shamas. He is posted as the director of the community Relation Council and works as a link between the Pakistani migrants and British Society. Shamas is "the person the neighbourhood turns to when unable to negotiate the white world on its own, visiting his office in the town centre or bringing the problems to his front door" (25). He is perhaps the only person in the locality who is being in regular contact with the broader outer world through his work. He has a benevolent approach towards the British society. Moreover, he condemns neither his children's acquaintance with white people nor their western lifestyle. In addition, he is less religious and does not believe in the orthodox practices of the community. Unlike his wife Kaukab, he is critical to the stark influence of religion on people's life. His benevolent nature toward other religion and community and his rejection of the conventional Islam places him as a threat to migrant community. Even Kaukab blames him of the distance between her and her children "you brought me here. To this accursed country. You made me lose my children... I hold you responsible for the fact that my children hate me" (268).

Other than the consequences of dislocation, some push factor always work behind the migration of a person to an entirely unknown country. In the case of Shamas, it is his parentage, that he has a mix parentage, as his father "was born a Hindu and had lost his memory as a ten-year-old boy and drifted into a Muslim life, remembering his true identity only in adulthood, by which time it was too late" (47). After realising his true identity, Shamas's father wished not to be buried rather to be burned like a Hindu after death. However, the conventional Muslim society did not permit it so "knowing himself to be near death, out of his mind with the excruciating pain, he had decided to cremate himself" (77). This

revelation of his father's religion brings a doom upon the whole family, the marriage between his mother and father come into question and consequently Shamas and his family face humiliation in Pakistan. Thus, with the hope of a better life for him as well for his family, he migrated to Britain. Due to this ethnic conflict, he migrated as religious belief does not permit him to lead a normal life in his homeland. The concept of home is thus for Shamas is not in the memory of Pakistan but with his family. Here Akeel Bilgrami's word become relevant; that:

There may be some for whom Islam is nothing short of a monolithic commitment, overriding all other commitments, whenever history or personal encounter poses a conflict. But I think it is safe to say, despite a familiar tradition of colonial and postcolonial caricature in western representation of Islam, that such an absolutist project is the exception in a highly diverse and internally conflicted religious community. (823)

Therefore, Pakistan resides in Shama's memory not as a longing rather as a moment in past, he remembers his childhood with his mother and father but does not blame his migration like his wife. He in this novel represents the hope of changing the situations in the rigid religious society like Pakistan. He practices his own religion and respect the other. Even he tries to help his son Charag who bears a hybrid identity as a British-Muslim. Charag plans a new project where he can incorporate some old photos taken by immigrants as he said-

I bought all the photographs and negatives from a photographer in town the last time I was here. They are from the '50s, '60s and the early '70s, of Pakistani and Indian immigrants... perhaps I should try to incorporate into my art the lives of the people I grew up amongst. (Aslam 260)

Thus, Charag tries to re-narrate the history by including different ethnic community under one platform and become an appropriate mediator between Pakistani and British culture. This gives a hope to build a multi-ethnic community. Shamas also supports his son though he does not want to amalgamate all the communities into one, but he wants to strengthen the secluded position of diaspora.

*Maps for the Lost Lovers* is a narration of profound feelings of faith and love among the British Muslim community. It is also a tale of diasporic sentiments regarding religion, community, nationality and multiculturalism. It also deals with the complex human engagement such as identity and religious belief. Aslam depicts the process of identity building of the migrant people through othering themselves from the host culture and vice versa. Kaukab, the female character in the novel, has created a separate space for herself and her community where she is able to practice her homeland culture. Thus, she moulds her identity based on the denial of existence of the white, which she sees as other. The Pakistani community in Dasht-e-Tanhai is excluded from the white world but this otherness finds its way through the younger generation. They are more flexible toward cultural practices and keener to adopt the foreign customs. The eagerness of the younger generation towards assimilation and western ideals become a threat to the rigid boundaries of the community. In addition, the two lovers Jugnu and Chanda become the warning instance of the dissolution of rules. The lovers made the entire community enraged as they represent the otherness influenced by the west. The Pakistani community in Britain alienated and murdered the two lovers for disrespecting and undermining the proper value system of Islam. Kaukab suffers her personal inability to hold her children from the western influence. Her fear of losing the purity of culture she rejects all the western otherness, even due to her unyielding nature towards religion distance her from her family. Thus, the novel within one canopy through various characters discussed the problems of belonging, home, religious and cultural belief. The ethnic conflict in the character of Kaukab is very prominent on the other her husband Shamas symbolises hope that host country also can be a place to call home. Home thus here has multiple dimensions in homeland, memory and family. Nadeem Aslam has transferred his emphasis from the national identity and minority to the inter-community conflict and religious engagement of the migrant. *Maps for Lost Lovers* engrosses with real issues faced by the migrant community away from the familiar space. The negative impact of over consciousness to one's own religion and culture is also projected here. It offers a story of conflict and honour crime where the people come later than religion. Aslam appropriately discussed otherness and fear through literary angle. The social structure where religious ideas determine people's life is here criticised. Apart from the concerned focus here, the novel has its further scope in dealing with the feminist aspects of the narrative.

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