

**HOW ORIENT PERCEIVES OCCIDENT: A STUDY OF
NADEEM ASLAM'S *MAPS FOR LOST LOVERS***

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the novel *Maps For Lost Lovers* to provide a precise and meticulous illustration of how East/orient perceives West/occident, and how East has created a discourse about the occident exactly in the same way that West has created about the orient. The novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* is set in Dasht-e-Tanhaii, a place located somewhere in England mostly populated with people of south Asian communities who have limited their interaction with the white people and avoid to keep any ties with them thereby, creating them into an “other”. South Asian people (like Kaukab) have created a discourse about the West that, the occident is dirty, evil, sensual, uncultured, Godless and morally decayed. They see the western women as temptresses and prostitutes. Kaukab who disdains western people comes to lower her guards and lessen her biases towards western people only after Stella becomes part of her family by marrying Charag and visiting the family on different occasions. Through close interaction with Stella, Kaukab realizes the falseness of her discourse towards West and gradually comes to like Stella and welcomes her in her house hold.

Keywords: Orient, Occident, Discourse, perceive

According to Edward Wadie Said ‘orient’ is not, just a word or signifier to represent East but a discourse. Orient is a discursive creation of the East by the West. It is a fancy of the West about East. West has attributed all the negative qualities, which they can’t acknowledge in themselves to the East. They don’t think themselves as exotic, cruel, effeminate, sensual, uncivilized, violent, irrational, dirty, weak etc, so they attribute all these qualities to the East. West authenticated this discourse of East by producing knowledge – paintings, art, and literature - about orient. In the same way, orient has created a discourse about the West and has attributed all

the negative qualities, which they can't acknowledge in themselves in the occident. East sees occident as precarious, sensual, dirty, evil, Godless, uncultured, lacking morality, and its women as temptresses and prostitutes. East creates occident as an 'other' by stereotyping it and pushing it to the margin while forming East as centre/self/norm and superior.

The novel *Maps For Lost Lovers* explores the experiences of South Asian people, mainly Pakistanis Muslims, who have migrated to the West. Here while encountering western people and culture, the latent ideology of East gets manifested as they see West through the prism of the discourse they have already created about it. They see west as the other and the unacceptable. They live "in the cities that have tall buildings and even taller loneliness" (Aslam 12). They disdain English culture in which they have migrated and do not accept England as their home. They consider West as, "[the] nest of devilry from where God has been exiled. No, not exiled – denied and slain. It's even worse" (41). Occident, according to them, is a hellish place whose inhabitants will burn in hell.

Kaukab hardly leaves the neighborhood of Dasht-e-Tanhaii, which is mostly populated by South Asian people. She avoids going to Ustad Allah Bux Street because "white people's houses start soon after that street" (Aslam 159). Her exchange with the delivery boy is her third exchange with any white person current year, "there were five last year, none the year before, if she remembers correctly; three the year before that..." (98). She considers England/occident: An unsacred country full of people filthy with disgusting habits and practices, where, for all one knew, unclean dogs and cats, or unwashed people, or people who have not bathed after sexual congress, or drunks and people with invisible dried drops of alcohol on their shirts and trousers, or menstruating women, could very possibly have come into contact with the bus seat a good Muslim has just chosen to sit on, or touched an item in the shop that he or she has just picked up – and so most Muslim men and women of the neighborhood have a few sets of clothing reserved solely for outdoors, taking them off the moment they get home to put on the ones they know to be clean. (Aslam 380)

Kaukab's first intimate encounter with a white person happens on the night when Jugnu brings his white girlfriend to his house for the dinner. Kaukab thinks about the white girlfriend of Jugnu, "how clean was she, for instance: did she know that a person must bath after sexual intercourse, or remain polluted, contaminating everything one comes into contact with" (Aslam 54). When the white woman tries to put her hand on Kaukab's shoulder, Kaukab retreats with disgust saying, "don't touch me please. May Allah forgive me, but I don't know where you've been" (55). She feels that it is the presence of the white woman, which enables Jugnu and Shamas to voice their criticism of Islam and to drink alcohol in the cover of darkness. She considers the Godless ideas of her husband and Jugnu's western attitude and behavior responsible for misguiding Charag, and making it possible for him to have a white girlfriend and impregnating her. Kaukab considers West to be responsible for taking away her son, Ujala, from her who has left the house of his parents to be on his own, and for making Mah-Jabin a shameless girl to divorce her husband, cut her hair and to answer back to her mother. Kaukab tells Mah-Jabin, "how your tongue has lengthened in the past few years. Is this what they taught you at University, to talk like this..." (158). Kaukab despises Jugnu's relationship with his white girlfriend. When Jugnu's girlfriend transmits a sexual disease to him and he is admitted to the hospital, Kaukab visits him. She hisses on sitting besides Jugnu "that diseased woman, this diseased, vice – ridden and lecherous race" (61). When Jugnu told Kaukab that his girlfriend got the disease in Tunisia, she refuses to believe it saying, "Tunisia is a Muslim country. She must've got on holiday somewhere else, a country populated by the whites or non-Muslims.

She's trying to malign our faith" (62). A white woman lives on the outskirts of Dasht-e-Tanhaii that is mostly populated by South Asian people. No one knows exactly, who she is? What is her name? and she is generally believed to be a prostitute by the South Asian people inhabiting Dasht-e-Tanhaii who avoid any interaction with her. A woman in Chanda's family store convinces her daughter to buy one lolly instead of two by frightening her that if she does not behave herself, "she'll be given away to a white person who'll make her eat pork and drink alcohol and not wash her bottom after going to the toilet – forcing her to use only toilet paper" (317). Husband of Mah-Jabin calls her "shameless English whore" (138). Chanda's first and second husbands in Pakistan divorce her because she is an English woman. Suraya is punished by her husband by divorcing her as she exhibits the boldness she has gained in England by going to the house of their enemies who spread rumors about her that they raped her. In Pakistan, when Mah-Jabin's husband approaches Chanda in the middle of the night, he writes in his letter to Mah-Jabin, "satin made me approach her bed and beg her for comfort. Satan told me she was from the west and therefore would have easy morals. She said she would make a noise and awaken my father and Jugnu in the other room. I came to my senses and left" (436-437).

Eastern people do not consider West as a safe place. For them West is potentially an evil and morally degraded place where anything can happen. One of the South Asian women living in Dasht-e-Tanhaii calls Kaukab to keep eye on her grandson who is not letting her to walk him to the mosque and wants to go alone. The woman tells Kaukab that she has telephoned everyone she knows on his way to the mosque to keep eye on him. She tells Kaukab that she is just careful because white men are "doing unspeakable things to little children" (Aslam 11). When Chanda's mother encounters Shamas one early morning on the bridge, she advises him not to go out of home so early "anything could happen. You should remember this is not our country" (112). This is the place where a teenaged Pakistani boy was found dead in his cell, his white inmate in jail beat Chanda's brother to death, and a white passenger humiliated a South Asian cab driver for asking white boys to pay him in full.

East tries to avoid any mixing of race with occident. Therefore, they prohibit their sons and daughters from dating and marrying whites. Chanda, Mah-Jabin, Suraya are married at the tender age of 16 to their cousins in Pakistan. The Pakistani boy, Mah-Jabin love with, is married to his cousin brought from Pakistan before he leaves for medical school to avoid the chance of him marrying a white. "It is being a neighborhood curse to say may your son marry a white woman; Mah-Jabin remembers being sent into her brother's room by her mother to look for condoms, and addresses, photographs or phone numbers of white girls, and remembers being told about a family that was tragic because father has cancer and daughter had just married a white boy" (Aslam 169). So when Jugnu expresses his wish to marry a white woman it comes as a shock to Kaukab. She thinks that Jugnu marrying a white woman will make it possible for Ujala also to marry a white woman. Charag's news that he has impregnated a white girl comes as a disaster to Kaukab. Son of Charag and Stella is described as "half Pakistani and half human" (13-14). His identity is baffling and confusing to both Kiran and Shamas and other eastern people, as he is a hybrid of both the cultures (western and eastern) like the second generation diaspora - Mah-Jabin, Charag, Ujala, Chanda and Suraya who are cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic hybrid. Second generation diaspora who have access to both orient and occident does not consider west as other. Western cultural and social norms like having sex before marriage, marrying a white girl/boy, being an atheist is not something bad for them. Mah-Jabin studies in some university in London and has many white friends and associations, Ujala lives outside Dasht-e-Tanhaii among whites, Charag marries a white woman, Jugnu has a white girlfriend

before he falls in love with Chanda. Jugnu and Shamas who have been in close affinity with western culture and people have confronted the discursive image of west created by east and have come to realize that western culture is progressive and accepting, and its people are more open-minded towards the issues like sex, marriage etc. Even when Kaukab confronts west by meeting Stella at an intimate level many of her biases towards the west are exorcised and the discourse created by making some distant culture as other and object of fear and disgust is broken as she comes to like Stella.

Orient especially Muslims of east perceive occident in a discursive way and the novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* explores this discursive “othering” of west by the South Asian people. Discourse about west gets manifested when eastern people arrive in the western culture after emigration. This discourse about west is subverted when the characters like Jugnu, Mah-Jabin, Charag, Kaukab and other South Asian people encounter west at a personal and intimate level. This individualistic encounter with the west enables South Asian people to understand and accept west with all its positive and negative qualities and to be critical of their own culture. Second generation diaspora people in the novel like Charag, Mah-Jabin, Ujala and Chanda who are the hybrids of both the cultures (east and west) approach both the cultures without bias and provides a balanced representation of both east and west.

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