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CONCEPT OF ISLAM IN NADEEM ASLAM'S *MAPS FOR LOST LOVERS* (2004)

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**Key Words: *Misrepresentation, Dual Nature, Hypocrisy, Mullahs, Extremism and Islam***

## ABSTRACT

September 11, 2001 incident changed the entire scenario for the Muslims. It affected the lives of the westerners as well as the immigrant Muslims. It revived their ideas, thoughts and concepts about Islam. It brought changes in their attitudes regarding Islam. Islam has been looked down upon after the 9/11 event. Many Pakistani immigrants writers like Mohsin Hamid, Hanif Kureishi and Monica Ali have responded to the situation in their own way. They have discussed the major impact of the 9/11 that came in the lives of the immigrants. Nadeem Aslam was one of them. He has dealt with the same issue in his novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004). Through this novel he has expressed his dissatisfaction over the representation of Islam by the immigrant Muslims after the event. In his novel he has shown the negative portrayal of Islam by the Muslims. Misrepresentation of Islam, the dual standards of the mullahs, the using of Islam for personal benefits, the robbing of innocent, the secular characters' approach towards Islam and the disinterestedness in religion will be discussed in this research thesis with special reference to *Maps for Lost Lovers*. This research is qualitative and descriptive in mode. The specific areas and contents of the corpus will be analyzed in the light of the post 9/11 scenario.

**Key Words: *Misrepresentation, Dual Nature, Hypocrisy, Mullahs, Extremism and Islam.***

## INTRODUCTION

September 11 attack on the US proved very crucial in revising world politics. The incident left far-reaching influence on international relations and individual life. The event also has its impact upon socio-political, ethnic and cultural scenario. The attack has a long lasting effect on the international politics and attitudes of individuals. Due to this tragedy, the US revised its policies. The new policies were a direct response to the attack. In 2001, the US passed the Act of Patriotism. The act affected the lives of immigrants in the US. Certain immigrant groups were exiled from New York and Washington DC as they were suspected to be terrorists.

The event changed the perception and image of Islam and the Muslims in the US and the whole west because they were considered terrorists. The image of Islam was revised. Islam and its followers were seen with distrust and reservation. After the tragedy, Muslims and South Asians faced hate crimes, agony and torments. Muslims were attacked and targeted. Sikhs also became the victim of the tragedy because of their beards and turbans. Attacks on mosques and other religious buildings were also reported. The immigrants, especially the Muslim immigrants suffered a lot due to this incident. They became powerless. They were given unimportant position in the society. They were suspected as terrorists and they were marginalized in every field of life.

After Sept. 11 attack on World Trade Center and Pentagon, the west defined Islam as producer and supporter of terrorists. The western educated and common people formed stereotypical attitudes towards Islam. They considered it the begetter of terrorists and terrorism. Due to these events many Muslims and Pakistani expatriates living in the west especially in America faced racial harassment. Muslims throughout the world paid the heavier price for 9/11 event. Those Muslims who had migrated to European countries in order to make their fortunes observed an alteration and difference in the attitudes and stances of the westerners and confronted opposition from their side.

A change can also be seen in the works of western writers. Before the event, Islam was just a religion for them. Muslims were just faithful followers of it. But after the incident a drastic change came in the mentality of the writers. Writers like Ralph Peter dealt with the changing situation in his two novels *The War in 2020* (1991) and *The War after Armageddon* (2009). In the first novel, the Muslims were just the lovers of their religion. They were considered the well-wishers of the US. But after the tragedy the Muslims were targeted and they became the victim of the horrific change in the attitude of the westerners. They were of the view that the Muslims led the world to the verge of destruction. Other western writers like Angel M. Rabasa in his book *The Muslim World after 9/11* (2004) and JE Richardson in his work (*Miss representing*) (2004) associated wrong things with Islam. Muslim novelists like Mohsin Hamid felt the same change in the western society for the Muslims. In his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), he dealt with both situations. The protagonist of the novel faced racial differences and discrimination. Before 9/11, the situation for the Muslims was different. They ate together with westerners at one table. They enjoyed the company of one another. But after the attack the Muslims were treated bitterly. They were separated from the English people. They were exiled from the US. They were asked what their purpose in the US was. Other Muslims like Kamila Shamsie in *Broken Verses* (2005), H. M. Naqvi in *Home Boy* (2010) and Hanif Kureishi in *My Son the Fanatic* (1997) highlighted the same issue. There came boredom, disregard and indifference in the lives of immigrant Muslims. They started looking down upon their religion. For them "Islam has a particular firm way and it says no to all sorts of things" (Kureishi, 1997, p. 7)

### **Research Questions**

This research paper deals with the following research questions.

1. How Islam and Muslims were redefined in post 9/11 scenario?
2. How does Nadeem Aslam present Islam in his novel *Maps for Lost Lovers*?

### **Significance of the Study**

There is an intense need of the time to evaluate and analyze critically and recognize the noteworthy contribution made by the Pakistani literary writers in English literature, both on the national as well as international level. The literary works of the novelists and poets from the other parts of the South Asia have been the subject of a number of research works and critical studies. Unfortunately, Pakistani writers have rarely been taken into consideration. The current research study helps in paving the way for other future researchers to choose such literary works as their research topics. The research also adds to the understanding of Pakistani novelists especially immigrant novelist. It highlights how do the immigrants feel suffer due to such tragedies as 9/11.

### **Literature Review**

The incident changed the views, opinions and attitudes of not only the westerners but the Muslims especially the immigrant Muslims regarding Islam. It reinterpreted the Islamic world. Many novelists and critics depicted that change in their literary works.

After 9/11 many western writers, thinkers and philosophers criticized Islam. They called it the religion of violence, bloodshed and extremism. They placed Islam in an opposition to Christianity. They represented Islam as barbaric and backward with the help of print and electronic media. Islam was nothing but just a threat to the western culture.

Pipes (1995) expresses his own opinions about the Muslims. He is of the view that all the Muslims are dangerous and informed the US to form such policies that can reduce the power of Islamic countries. He says:

The seizure of power by the Islamic countries would lead to disastrous consequences, including the threat to the survival of Israel, political unrest in the Gulf, high energy cost, an accelerated arms race, more international terrorism and unending wars.” (Pipes, 1995, p. 38)

Huntington (2002) associated Islam with violence. He is of the opinion that the present age is the age of war started by Muslims. Muslims not only fight with non-muslims but they also fight with each other. There are wars of terrorism, civil war and inter-state conflict. Samuel Huntington is of the view that 9/11 incident was nothing but the extension of terrorist attacks in the United States. According to him, the roots of the wars lie in the Islamic consciousness. (Huntington, 2002)

Pillar (2004) informs his readers about the Muslims' extremism in his articles *Counter Terrorism after Al-Qaeda*. He says that the Muslims are against the many opportunities with the help of which youth can make their lives and this attitude of muslims results in the failure of the economic systems. According to him, “the centralized organization that carried out the post 9/11 attack is no more. Now that radical Islamist threat will come from an electronic array of groups, cells and individuals.” (Pillar, 2004, p. 118)

Richard Lowry (2002) is of the view that the muslims always face hurdles and resistance in telling the truth. They live in a complete unfamiliar and alien situation. They always support the strong side against the weak. (Lowry, 2002)

Poole (2002) analyzes the theme of a British newspaper by saying that Islam does not suit to be the part of the western especially British society. It is nothing but a threat. Islam and Muslims are irrational, barbaric and do not suit to be the part of western society. Christianity is a free

religion where everyone is free but in Islam there are strict rules and laws and where everyone is bound. So, the religion Islam cannot be the part of the society of the west. She is of the view that Islam is just like a villain on the front page of the mass media of the west. According to her, the British as well as the western media portrayal of the Muslims must be barbaric and horrific. (Poole, 2002)

Kepel (1997) in his book *Allah in the West* rejected the perforation of the muslims in the United States and their widespread activities in it. The author has negative attitude about the activities of the followers of Islam in America. According to him, muslims have spread nothing but terrorism in the US. He says that it is the duty of the government to critically analyze the activities of the followers of Islam. The United States must limit their actions and remove them if necessary. (Kepel, 1997)

The western intellectuals have deliberately demarcated a line between the east and west to show the west, having a superior culture and race. They looked down upon the inferior culture, religion, and race of east. Balfour and Cromer also accepted this demarcation and used many terms like 'Binarism' to explain the relation between the 'we/us' and 'they/them'. Loomba (1990) narrates Rudyard Kipling "East is east, west is west and ne'er the twain shall meet." (Loomba, 1990, p. 23)

According to Allen (2001), The British National Party (BNP) published a leaflet which interpreted Islam as I.S.L.A.M which means Intolerance, Slaughter, Looting, Arson, and Molestation of women. This attitude of the BNP showed nothing but hatred towards Islam. The party presented the most despicable and contemptible picture of Quran. The party also added that Islam was a threat to our freedom, democracy and identity. (Allen, 2001)

According to Rabasa (2004), muslims used various recruitment centers such as mosques, cultural centers, etc. for terrorist activities. They did not even spare the children for their purpose. The children were convinced and controlled by muslim scholars. After many years of training they were made ready for committing any terrible act. The muslim scholars urged them, encouraged them to join even terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda to serve the purpose of Islam. (Rabasa, 2004)

Richardson (2004) is of the view that Islam is the religion of others which is far away from the advanced and modern world. It is the religion of strangers who are alien to the world. It is the religion of those who do not have any sense and are irrational, passive and far from modernity. The western people have such opinions about them as backward and immature. They must be tolerated, guided and represented because they do not have their own senses. (Richardson, 2004)

Agha (2006) reported in his article *Islamic Fundamentalism and its Image in the Western Media* that Muslims were anti-rational, barbaric and anti-democratic. They were bloodthirsty, erotic, slave traders, primitive and ignorant. They were hostile and threat to the freedom and democracy of the west. They showed no mercy to the innocent people. They were just like animals that did not have any sense of good and bad or right and wrong. Islam was the name of holy war, violence and the oppression of its followers. (Agha, 2006)

Ergun and Emir (2002) state in their book *Unveiling Islam* that the only purpose of Islam is to give the teaching of violence and it forces its followers to indulge in such activities and to engage themselves in holy war to be called martyrs. For these writers Muslims are the symbol

of terror. They also place the faithful followers in the category of killers. According to the two brothers Muslims kill those who refuse to accept Islam as a religion. They state that Islam injects various Quranic verses related to jihad in the minds of its followers. They also attempt to explain the so-called hidden agenda of Islam. They give preference to Bible over Quran by saying that Bible starts with the phrase that God loves you but we cannot find such love for humanity at the beginning of Quran. (Ergun & Emir, 2002)

According to Dunn (2001), phrases such as fanatics or terrorists were used for Muslims. The women of the Muslim world were considered as oppressed because they wore hijab and led the lives of oppressed women. The western world with its strong mass media, presented the Muslims as others, fanatics, orthodox and irrationals. Islam was represented as the religion of meanness, abusive language, violence and contradictory ideas. Race was also interlinked with Islam. This racism was the direct result of anti-Muslim feelings. All the Muslims were considered as dirty, sensual and a major threat to the westerners. It was the effect of media that presented Muslims as wicked and backward. (Dunn, 2001)

According to Allen (2001), the United States and other western countries reached to the climax in the negative depiction and portrayal of Islam and Muslims. They created a climate and an atmosphere in which it was difficult for the Muslims to live an honorable life. They were regarded irrational and were expelled from the circle of humanity. Islam was considered a violent religion because it oppressed its followers and it limited the activities of the Muslims to a selected area. (Allen, 2001)

### **Research Design**

As the present research study is qualitative and descriptive, it is basically library oriented study. The researcher has basically taken help from library and internet to access reading critical and research material in order to achieve research objectives and answer the research questions set in the chapter one. The data is analyzed qualitatively with reference to the issues of the representation, which also forms the basic theoretical framework for the research study. It will lead to the conclusion of the study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Post modern theory has many key concepts like alterity, marginalization, representation, justification, etc. There are clashes of cultures, traditions and religions, of which one of them tries to make the representation of other as subservient and less important. These differences can be seen in literary and other discourses.

### **Analysis of the Text of Novel, *Maps for Lost Lovers***

Nadeem Aslam, in his novel, *Maps for Lost Lovers*, portrayed characters that misrepresented Islam. He highlighted the meanest views of characters that harmed Islam. He has showed in his novel that the culture of the west has such an effect upon the lives of the immigrant Muslims that they have forgotten their own religion and they use abusive language for their religion. Nadeem Aslam put forward the same issue in his novel.

Nadeem Aslam in his novel, *Maps for Lost Lovers* shows deep concern with the Muslims and their behavior in the contemporary world. He, in this novel is specifically concerned with the image of Islam. Through various characters he gives voice to his own concept of Islam. He

believes that Islam is not the religion of extremism and violence. He makes fun of the extremist characters. He thinks that some Muslims, by their extremist and violent attitude, are defaming Islam. He wants to show the real face of Islam to the world.

Pakistani immigrant writers like Hanif Kureishi, Nadeem Aslam explores the disinterested nature of his characters about Islam in his novel. Shams, the major character in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, is portrayed as secular. He is completely detached from Islamic life. His wife disapproves of his critique on Islam. She even blames her father for choosing a secular husband for her. Islam has no meaning for Shams. Nadeem Aslam shows the careless nature of Shams. He humiliates Islam when he calls her wife and says:

Come sit with us, Kaukab, and talk. Let us prove to our guest that Pakistanis are the most talkative people on earth. My goodness, we use seven syllables to say hello: Assalamaulaikum. (Aslam, 2004, p. 26)

In the course of the novel, Kaukab criticizes the character of Jugnu. She wants to keep her children away from Jugnu. He is away from religion. He does not let a single opportunity of degrading his religion. Jugnu narrates:

I was born into a Muslim household, but I object to the idea that automatically makes me a Muslim, Jugnu said. The fact of the matter is that had I lived at the time of Muhammad, and he came to me with his heavenly message, I would have walked away. (Aslam, 2004, p. 27)

Here, just like Hanif Kureishi, Nadeem Aslam puts forward the negative attitude of the characters in the novel. In his novel he presents Shams and Jugnu and many other characters the product of the western culture. Like Parvez they are open-minded. They are mixed with the westerners. Just like the westerners who oppose the religion Islam and Prophet (SAW) same is the case with the characters of the novel *Maps for Lost Lovers*. They object Islam and give preference to the western society.

The foreign writers like Ergun Caner and Emir which opposed the Prophet (SAW). They considered him unaware from the fact of his revelation. They presented him just like ignorant. (214) Nadeem Aslam states the same issue in his novels. His characters are against the Prophet of Islam. They give preference to scientists over him. His teachings are illusions and the prophecies of the scientists are reality for them. In the science they can find the answers of their questions. He mentions:

I am still inclined to believe the scientists, because, unlike the prophets, they readily admit that they are *working towards* an answer, they don't have the *final* and absolute answer." Kaukab had still not recovered from this when Jugnu added anyway...I can see the result of scientific methods all around me. I cannot be expected to believe what an illiterate merchant-turned-opportunistic-preacher. (Ibid)

Shams and his family members, except Kaukab, never let a single occasion of degrading the Muslims. Kaukab neither talks herself about Islam nor does she allow other to talk about it in the presence of Shams, his sons and Jugnu. Whenever they listen to her speaking about or defending her religion, they start degrading it. According to Nadeem Aslam, our young generation has completely rejected Islam. They have made the western culture an important part of their lives. That is way they speak irrelevant things about Islam. Kaukab tells us about the disinterested nature of her family members. Nadeem Aslam expresses Kaukab's dissatisfaction in these words:

Kaukab would have asked the matchmaker to lower her voice to whisper, not wishing her children to hear anything bad about Pakistan or Pakistanis, not wishing to provide Shams with the opportunity to make a disrespectful comment about Islam, or hint through his expression that he harbored contrary views on Allah's inherent greatness; but she is alone in the house, so she lets the women talk. (Aslam, 2004, p. 29)

Nadeem Aslam presents the extremist clerics or imams in his novel. The clerics forbid their muslim followers from meeting with the white people. They stop the immigrant muslims from marrying with the women. They advise them to wait for *Hoors* of paradise.

Nadeem Aslam is of the view that Islam is not the religion of ambiguity. He laughs at the ignorance of the muslims towards their religion. The so-called mullahs have strong effect on their lives. The muslims accept them as holy men but they spread false news in the society. They associate wrong things with Islam. They make the lives of their followers terrible. The well-wishers of the clerics consider their saying the words of Quran. They blindly believe their sayings. They know nothing about the reality. Matchmaker, a minor character in the novel, states:

Who else but a cleric's daughter would have been blessed by such an event!" said one visitor, the matchmaker, in tones of wonderment and awe. "I knew someone in Peshawar who was born like that. I remember the lullaby his mother used to sing to him—O nurses with milk too white and sweet: wean him soon as can be, for the black hearts of infidel kings will be his meat. The boy had learned the entire Koran by heart by the time he was three years old, and he was teaching Arabic to the djinns by the time he was five. A number of profligate djinns converted to Islam at his hand. (Ibid)

Once again in his novel, Nadeem Aslam highlights the character of the clerics or the holy men. He makes fun of such villainous and wicked characters. Through his novel he reveals to the world the reality of the vicious clerics. Such people are threat to Islam. Because of such people Islam faces deformation, disgrace and distortion. He says that all such type of men deceive those who follow them. Even they rob the innocents and snatch the property and their lives from them. They make tall claims of curing the jinn and black magic but they know nothing but deceive the people in the name of Allah. Nadeem Aslam observes the situation like this:

The girl was taken into the cellar and the beatings lasted several days with the mother and father in the room directly above reading the Koran out loud. She was not fed or given water for the duration and wasn't allowed to fall asleep even for five minutes, and when she soiled herself she was taken upstairs to the bathroom by her mother to be cleaned and brought back down for the beating to continue. The holy man heated a metal tray until it was red hot and forced her to stand on it. It was obvious that she *was* possessed because she began to speak in Punjabi, her mother-tongue, which she had never spoken with her parents, the cunning djinn inside her realizing that the holy man could not speak English and could only be reasoned with in Punjabi, pleading for mercy. (Aslam, 2004, p. 136)

Muslims have many myths about Islam. They have poor understanding of the religion. They associate all these myths to Islam. They accept all such stories and make them the part of their tradition and religion. They act like ignorant. The birth of a child is the blessing of Allah but child must be inclined to religion cannot be guessed at the time of its birth, if it is born before or after Ramadan. Nadeem Aslam highlights the superstitious beliefs that some muslims

entertain because such beliefs are propagated by so-called clerics who do not understand the real message of Islam and stick to such superficial issues. Kaukab mentions her feelings: Ujala was born in the middle of April just a few days before the Muslim month of Ramadan began. Dozens of people came to see the baby because the word immediately spread that he was a blessed child destined to be an especially pious Muslim: he was one of those rare boys who are born without a foreskin, the Muslims believing that such children have been marked by Allah for an exemplary virtuous existence in the world. (Aslam, 2004, p. 101)

In the novel, *Maps for Lost Lovers*, male members of Shams' family are presented secular and anti-Islamic. Neither they respect their religion nor do they permit Kaukab to perform her religious duties. Whenever there is a situation in which she is at fault, they start saying unlawful things regarding her religion. They relate such things to the issue which is not the part of the religion. In anger, they associate all abusive things to their religion. Such examples are captured by the pen of Nadeem Aslam. He narrates:

"I am empty and raw. I've just fed him." "Have you remembered to give him his medicine?" For a moment he thought he was going to black out. "Of course I have." He was clenching and unclenching his fists, the palms feeling cold. "I just thought you might have forgotten: you are after all fasting, and people become forgetful when they fast. Or are you making the baby fast too? Not giving him anything—milk or water or his medicine—from dusk till dawn?" (Aslam, 2004, p. 102)

Nadeem Aslam in his novel brings forth another character Suraya that has the same attitude about Islam like the male members of Shams' family. She faces the problem of divorce. She wants to marry for the second time so that she can get her first husband. For this purpose she is in search of a husband. She confronts problems and starts commenting upon the laws of Allah. She admits that Allah is only compassionate toward the male characters. Nadeem Aslam presents the situation like this,

Limitless is Allah's kindness towards his creation. Allah is not being equally compassionate towards the poor woman who is having to go through another marriage through no fault of her own is a thought that has occasionally crossed Suraya's mind, along with It's as though Allah forgot there were women in the world when he made some of his laws, thinking only of men—but she has banished these thoughts as all good Muslims must. (Aslam, 2004, p. 109)

Suraya is an important character in the novel. She is divorced by her husband. She wants to get her husband and son back for that purpose she wants to marry for a short period of time with other person. She exploits her femininity and her religion. She wants to get Shams for her own purpose. She does not care for the aftermaths. She tries to make legal her affairs with Shams through her own perception of Islam. She wishes to get her first husband for that she moulds and reshapes her religion and her ethnic. For her own purpose she tries to bend the laws but actually she breaks the very laws in spending nights with a man other than her own husband. She does all such things to gain her purposes. Nadeem Aslam laughs at such characters. He wants to reveal the dual nature of his characters.

### **Conclusion**

*Maps for Lost Lovers* is a severe critique on the secular muslims. Majority of the characters in Aslam's novel are disinterested in their religion. There are mullahs who are respected as pious and sacred men, pollute the society by their actions. They take advantages of their position.



They in the guise of holy men do the deeds of wicked people. There is group of other characters in *Maps for Lost Lovers*. The members are Shams, his brother Jugnu and his sons Charagh and Ujala. The members of this group are secular. They are against their religion. Then there is Suraya, who gives shapes to her religion in order to achieve her purpose. The only character that supports Islam in the novel is Kaukab. She keeps herself away from all the above mentioned characters. Nadeem Aslam shows different ways of coping with Islam of the characters in *Maps for Lost Lovers*.

Nadeem Aslam has portrayed the indifferent, disinterested and secular type of characters in the novel. Shams, Jugnu, Charagh and Ujala were far away from Islam. They were even against Islam. Neither they said anything in favor of the religion nor did they allow anyone to say in support of Islam. They criticized Islam negatively. They considered Islam the religion of rules and laws. They were the source of the misrepresentation of Islam. They incorrectly defined Islam in front of the westerners. They never missed a single occasion of downgrading and reducing the image of their religion. Nadeem Aslam depicted such characters in the novel with the purpose to show the response of the immigrants to their religion. Nadeem Aslam drew that the immigrants had more inclined to the western culture. They have kept behind their own values. Aslam told that objected Islam as a religion of boundaries but they found no satisfaction in the free western life. The free life style of the west proved very expensive for Jugnu. He gave his life because of his illicit relation with Chanda.

*Maps for Lost Lovers* is written in the defense of Islam. Nadeem Aslam promotes the true picture of Islam. His representation of Islam strengthens the position of it. With the help of his novel, he criticizes severely the nonreligious and profane attitudes of the Muslims towards their religion. In the novel, he highlights those evils that have spread their roots in the society. In *Maps for Lost Lovers*, he presents the evil deeds in order to avoid and abrogate the evils from Islam as well as from society.

To wind up, we can say that Nadeem Aslam tries to point out the corruption, hypocrisy, dualism, disinterestedness, and extremism, the incorrect explanation of the religion and intolerance of the Muslims. Nadeem Aslam is not against good Muslims, but he condemns and disapproves those who do not understand the true spirit of Islam. He dispraises those who associate graceless and awkward things to Islam. He denounces those who are not sincere to the religion. He declares those who present various forms of Islam for worldly gain. He is against the mullahs who misguide the followers and attribute self-designed ideas to Islam. He criticizes those Muslims who draw the distorted image of Islam and show it to the world.

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