

## Exploration of False-behalfism in “Laila in the Wilderness”

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### Abstract:

*This research paper aims at exposing the disfigured portrait of Pakistani culture, traditions and customs, projected by Nadeem Aslam in his novella “Laila in the Wilderness” in the guise of accurate Pakistani cultural representation. Post-colonial theory is used as methodology. Aijaz Ahmed’s critique of National Allegory and Fanon’s critique of Comprador Class provide the basic framework for the research. This study concludes that our native intelligencia should cease this unintellectual vomiting against their own culture because it making it more and more vulnerable regarding the issues of Identity and Survival.*

**Key words:** Nadeem Aslam, “Laila in the Wilderness”, Pakistani cultural representation

### Introduction

This study explores marginalized and peripheral picture of Pakistani culture in **Laila in the Wilderness** by **Nadeem Aslam**. It is the story of a Northern feudal family of Pakistan who kills their daughters in desire of son. Moreover, Islam is manipulated for material gains as it is narrated in the story. Jihadi are presented as terrorists and a whole picture of Pakistani culture is there through the subjective experience of

the writer. All this depiction manifests the superficial and insufficient exposure of Aslam to the issues and problems of Pakistan which renders him giving a realistic and objective picture.

The process of “Othering” is continued in the novella through the inculcation of orthodox demerits to Pakistani culture. It seems as if Aslam is presenting ‘imagined’ characters from ‘another’ territory and, thus, creating a kind of ‘Imagi-Nation’ which has nothing to do with reality. In this way, Aslam is contributing in deteriorating the image of Pakistan and her culture.

### **Literature Review**

Aslam is a Diasporic writer and he visits Pakistan off and on. He says in his interview ‘How to write about Pakistan’ to [www.granta.com](http://www.granta.com) that he personally know a woman from Pakistan who aborted her child when she found it a female through ultrasound. And he also read about a woman in the newspaper who claimed to give birth to a boy in the hospital rather than a girl because of her husband’s threat of throwing off the baby if she was a girl. This is the reason that millions of women are missing from Pakistan. He doesn’t have the authority to generalize these incidents and present them as the only facts about Pakistani culture.

He claims that he has shown the real sufferings of Pakistani people. He says:

“In ‘Laila in the Wilderness’, I wished to explore what would happen if politics and geopolitics disappear from Pakistan tomorrow-----what are the issues if there is no CIA or Isa, no Al-Qaida or Taliban?”

Through these type statements he is making conform the presence of Terrorist groups in Pakistan which is just an American agenda to abolish the image of Pakistan.

Again he says that he meets a person in Pakistan who says “Your successful writings are your sons and unsuccessful

ones are your daughters.” This leads him to write this very novella about gender discrimination in Pakistan according to Aslam. Again a petty subjective experience leads him to a strong misrepresentation.

In this way, Aslam confirms **Fredrick Jameson’s** claim of National Allegory “story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled structure of the public.....culture and society.” (Jameson 1986:67)

While **Aijaz Ahmed** negates this “totalizing and universal tendency that failed to take into account the specificity of Third World cultures. (Ashcroft 2004:156)

The writings of Aslam like his novel ‘Maps for Lost Lovers’ as well are called “Literature of mourning and selling of sufferings” by Aijaz Ahmed. Our Diasporic writers ‘the Eastern intellectuals into Western lands’ are victims of fetish/phobia of Western culture.

This is “Politics of Inertia, the celebration of victimization” as **Katherine Belsey** refers.

**Carol Zall** says ironically “There aren’t always writers available who can tell their nation’s stories. But that’s exactly what’s happening right now with Pakistan.” If our writers will become Orientalists and puppets in the hands of West, who will show the positive side of Pakistani culture?

**Nayar** says “where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave?” (Nayar 2006:103) Pakistani writers should fulfill their duty because they belong to this very land.

**Frantz Fanon** refers to in the “Pitfalls of National Consciousness” that such writings are “the result of the intellectual laziness of the national middle class, of its spiritual penury, and of the profoundly cosmopolitan mold that its mind is set in.” (Reader 1989:156)

In his essay “Writers, Where do you stand?” Faiz pleads for writers to avoid purposelessness and intellectually superficial writings. “A mold writer” he says “is committed to his country and his people.” (Faiz 2005: XVI)

## Analysis

Nadeem Aslam is foregrounding the exaggerated negativity of Pakistani culture and putting all the positivity into background. His writings are an exploration of his own life and the workings of his own consciousness. But he presents his stories as the stories of billions of others. His writings are not the mirror which shows readers their own picture because of his hyperbolic presence in them.

[The writer] exercise an influence on the national consciousness. Aijaz Ahmed argues in “In Theory” that non-western post-colonial thinkers become part of the western pedagogic, scholarly, publishing, career programs that gives them massive capitalist modernity benefits from where it becomes possible the question of the modernity in “Third World Nations”. (Ahmed, 1987:30)

Pakistani culture is severely against child marriage while Laila in the story is just of 13 years old when she gets married. Aslam reference to family’s book of omens with portrait of Muhammad clearly refers to Holy Quran. Quran is not a book of omens and there are no portraits in it. Aslam must have a sense of differentiation between Quran and other books.

Aslam attributes false consciousness to the Islamic beliefs of Pakistani people. People of Pakistan are depicted as blind believers and religion is being exploited by a strong few. As Taimur is shown to build a mosque by him and spread the news that it is built by angels to capture the land of his rival. This is quite wrong as people over here are strongly committed to the respect towards Islam and belief in the Judgment day when everybody have to pay for the sins of this world. So, the Whole picture of the commercialization of mosque is factless and result of Aslam’s false imagination.

He portrays smuggling of weapons in the Northern areas of Pakistan as he says “bullets hidden in eggs and crates full of guns” reduces the image of Pakistan to a terrorist country.

There are again and again references of ‘Jihadi’ organizations in the novella. These organizations are represented as terrorist groups, in fact. While in Islam we have quite a different and legitimate definition of Islam. Jihad is actually a war against oppressor to regain one’s right to live freely and independently.

Aslam says in the novella “Jihadis who fantasized about nothing but what they’d do to the American President if ever they got hold of him.” This confirms to all allegations of America against Pakistan which are nothing else but just false allegations to degrade Pakistan on International platform and to exploit and blackmail Pakistan.

He writes about Faisalabad “the city full of textile factories from whose markets chemicals used in explosives could be bought in bulk without raising suspicion.” Again Aslam distorts the very picture of Pakistan.

The killing of daughters in desire of sons is expressed in the story as the biggest cultural flaw of Pakistan, while no such thing exists at all. Daughters are considered Blessings of God as Islam says. So women enjoy more respect and more rights in Pakistan and in all other Muslim countries than in the West. West is just promoting vulgarity on the name of liberty and modernization.

Aslam refers to separate graveyards “for those wives, mothers, sisters and daughters who had disgraced their families by running away from home.” This depiction presents a disgraced image of Pakistani Women and culture as well, while the facts are quite opposite to it. Women in Pakistan put veils and covered themselves properly unlike Western women who are almost naked and show their body openly and cash their beauty.

Aslam portrays Pakistani people having strong superstitious beliefs. He says: “A group of nine sacred men resided there now, renowned throughout the country---and throughout the Pakistani immigrant communities around the Planet---for helping women to have male children.”

If it is just the working of his imagination then why does he mention name of Pakistan? It is not based on truth but it's obvious that he is trying to low down the image of Pakistan.

He presents the young generation who has nothing to do but to read rubbish stories “the college boy reading a novel in which the only detailed descriptions occurred during sex.” The problems of child sex and homosexuality are uncontrollably prevalent in West but not in Pakistan. We have bright students in Pakistan like Mueen Nawazish and a number of others who are contributing in the progress of the country.

In the same way, he depicts the young girls “past the girl pasting a new picture into her Aishwarya Rai scrapbook”. While we had miraculous girls here like Arfa Karim and still many more are here who competing men in every field.

Aslam mark spots on the name of country by saying “Its unforgiveable brutality, and its unforgiveable dishonesty, and its unforgiveable cruelty”. He doesn't have the right to give such conclusions about Pakistan because he is a foreigner and know nothing about Pakistani culture. He hasn't lived a real Pakistani experience.

He is referring towards imaginative love stories, traffic jams, poverty, and superstitious beliefs and religious scholars' exploitation of common people. All these social evils are generalized in the story while this is just the one side of perceiving the picture which is of course very subjective. Here we have respect for elders, honor for ladies, strong religious belief etc. which make Pakistan much more better than West where there are old houses for elders, corruption, loss of virginity on the name of modernity and liberation.

## **Conclusion:**

Aslam proves himself to be a member of Fanon's Comprador Class who is an English surrogate. Most of them are Diasporic writers. He depicts all the characters as types not individuals. They are portrayed as the representatives of whole Pakistani

Public, which is quite illogical and irrational. He has attributed stereotypical characteristics like primitives, superstitious, unintellectual and Terrorists to all the Pakistani people. In this way, Aslam has become an Assimilationist and Orientalist. He has chosen to be on the Occident’s side and to serve the Master with his tool not to dismantle it.

The marginalized and discolored picture of Pakistani culture shown by Native Intelligencia reveals the fact that they have no sense of belonging. They have become ‘Mimic Men’ because of Western education which has inculcated in them the Idealization/Idolization of Western culture.

That’s why the very novella published in an international magazine Granta because West will never want to show our positive side to the world. It’s the duty of our writers to stop writing such rubbish details about our culture because if they will not show the positive image of our culture then West will represent us to fulfill their political and material gains as they does in the past. Said unveils this fact “Orient can’t represent itself, it must be represented” (Said 1978) While “representation is an act of annihilation” as Gerald Visenor refers. So, Our writers and Media as well should become defensive regarding our culture because Pakistan owns them and their loyalties.

Aslam claims to love Pakistan as he says: “I cannot subscribe to this notion that Pakistan will fall apart,” he said. “I mean, it might, but I am not going to begin from that point. I can’t.....because I love that place.” He must prove that love through his writings which he is not doing until now.

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