

Meta Language of Gothic Images in Nadeem Aslam's Post-colonial World

Asma Khatoon
Salma Khatoon

Abstract

This article is an intensive post-colonial study of gothic meta language of images and reading of signs, symbols, images of anxiety, repulsion and loss conveyed through them. Howard L. Malchow, a renowned scholar of history, in his book Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain defines gothic "as a language of panic, of unreasoning anxiety, blind revulsion and distancing sensationalism" (4). In his writing Nadeem Aslam employs gothic language to bring forth even the tabooed realities and to convey physical and psychological states of anxiety and violence. He could have delved into social realism to evoke the effects of racism but he wields gothic medium to underscore the nuances and subtle effects without compromising on the aesthetic appeal of the works. What lends his postcolonial fiction an artistic appeal is the use of gothic vocabulary and the narrative structure as opposed to a dry factual account of history. One of the elements that contribute to aesthetic appeal of his fiction is the structure of metaphorical language and how it is woven into varying patterns to lend richness to its multiple meanings. He clearly divides his novels into seasons and each season either parallels or contrasts with the underlying meaning of the plot.

Keywords: *Meta language, Gothic images, post-colonial, anxiety, violence*

Introduction

This research essay an exhaustive study of gothic meta language and reading of signs, symbols, images and the deeper meaning of anxiety, repulsion and loss conveyed through them. Howard L. Malchow, a renowned scholar of history, in his book *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* defines gothic "as a language of panic, of unreasoning anxiety, blind revulsion and distancing sensationalism" (p. 4). In his writing Nadeem Aslam employs meta language of Gothic images to bring forth even the tabooed realities and to convey physical and psychological states of anxiety and violence. He could have delved into social realism to evoke the effects of racism but he wields gothic medium to underscore the nuances and subtle effects without compromising on the aesthetic appeal of the works. What lends his postcolonial fiction an artistic appeal is the use of gothic vocabulary and Gothic narrative structure as opposed to a dry factual account of the history. One of the elements that contribute to aesthetic appeal is the structure of metaphorical language and how it is woven into varying patterns in his novels to lend richness to its multiple meanings. He clearly divides his novels into seasons and each season either parallels or contrasts with the underlying meaning of the plot. The visible and subtle forms of anxiety in the life of those living by something dead, ambivalent and mysterious and invisible has been underpinned through the introduction of Gothic language of metaphors and symbols creating a meta language that defies all linguistic boundaries and transcends traditional meanings.

In traditional gothic opening, mostly the plot is predicted from the beginning of the work. S.T Coleridge's poem "Christabel", written in Romantic gothic style begins with words which set the tone of the entire poem:

Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,
 And the owls have awakened the crowing cock;
 Tu—whit !—Tu—whoo!
 And hark, again! The crowing cock,
 How drowsily it crew (1-5).

A strange elusive evil is introduced from the very beginning and the suggested darkness suggested reinforces the theme of vice and virtue. Similarly Victorian gothic fiction such as *The Picture of the Dorian Gray* introduces the portrait around which the entire plot is woven” in the centre of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extra-ordinary personal beauty and in front of it, some distance away, was sitting the artist himself...whose sudden disappearance...gave rise to so many strange speculations” (p. 11). The opening sentence sets the tone and unfolds how the entire story revolves around the artist and his art and how the artist disappears all of a sudden. Not only the Victorian gothic, but the American gothic form also possesses similar stylistic and thematic patterns as Henry James in *The Turn of The Screw* introduces the entire mood in the following words: “the case, I may mention, was that of an apparition in just such an old house...an appearance, of a dreadful kind, to a little boy” (p. 115). And the rest of the novel is an exploration of why the boy is possessed by such visions. In postmodern gothic and postcolonial gothic the same tradition continues as *Beloved* by Toni Morrison commences with the line “124 was spiteful, full of baby’s venom” (p. 3). Using a similar structure of a traditional gothic opening of the narrative, Aslam begins his work in a way that the moment of the novel is foreseen from the very first page and anticipated in initial words of the fiction. The overall tone adds gothic texture to these novels and sets the thematic web of his world of fiction. Faint streaks of gothic impulse can be discerned through the unconventional beginning of his first novel *Season of the Rainbirds* with a single word “fish” used as a narrative hook, to jolt the reader (p. 1). Quite unusually this novel opens with just a word fish which was an early symbol of Christian faith and it becomes an extended metaphor as throughout the novel religion and rigid religious values reverberate, affecting the lives of the characters. It further exposes the exploitative nature of religious mentors, and restrictive role of religion. The beginning of the second novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* also sets out the theme of the immigrant families and the suggestive theme of frozen life runs throughout the novel. To reinforce the thematic concerns, the narrator weaves the scene of a cold freezing environment, a traditional reference to winter season which is a conventional beginning of a novel about immigrants. The opening line; “Shamas stands in the open door and watches the earth, the magnet that is, pulling snowflakes out of the sky towards itself” is a guide to the rest of the novel (*Maps For Lost Lovers*, p. 3). The language employed corresponds to the way moths, shifting metaphor in his novels, are being charmed by the light, and then “with their deliberate almost – impaired pace, they fall like feathers sinking in water...but it is there even when absent, drawing attention to its own disappearance”. Here death, decay and destruction set in from the beginning like a traditional gothic opening with which the plot can be predicted. It also comments on the ghost of the lovers who are absent, remain present and make their presence felt throughout the novel. And again coldness like “An icicle breaks off from above and drops like a radiant dagger shames, shattering on the stone step he is standing on, turning into white powder the way a crystal of sugar loses its transparency when crushed” (*Maps For Lost Lovers*, p. 3). Aslam converges dexterously the whole course of action in the first paragraph of his work. In the title *Maps for Lost Lovers*, the words maps and lost are both culled from the gothic world. The word maps suggests the state of dislocation and is indicative of the fact

that the characters are caught in labyrinthine in foreign territory which furthers strengthens the point made in last paragraph. The tone and settings set the tragic plot in *Maps for Lost Lovers* as an emblem of the harrowing condition of immigrants. The tale is not specifically located within the emotional experience of the two individuals, ruthlessly murdered; rather it is a strenuous demonstration of the vast scale of immigrant's plight. *The Wasted Vigil* starts with "Her mind is the haunted house" (p. 5), which points towards something menacing lurking, which would continue throughout the novel. The haunted state of mind betrays that something painful occurred in the past which is stored for long that it returns to haunt now. He goes on further in the same traditional gothic mode when Lara, looking for evidence of her soldier brother, is shown to visit Marcus' house and the way she roams around like a traditional gothic heroine, exploring the castle's numerous rooms, to know the secrets as happens in traditional gothic tales of specters and enchantment with flickering candles, moving shadows, etc. The beginning in the traditional gothic mode leads to other similarities between his novels and standard gothic fiction such as contradictions and paradoxes which are pivotal to gothic work. His ability to conjure up vivid images through a profusion of nature's description highlights the suppressed nature of the lives depicted in his novels. The most telling symbols of the novels are drawn from the natural world i.e. moths, birds, peacocks, butterflies etc and he draws parallels between animal imagery and human characters in his novels. Each such image and symbol is analyzed in this essay in detail. Aslam's works are conscious unrelenting taps into the world of nature as natural imagery is set parallel to depressing environment. Nature is not only used to signal the events that follow in the text but it also sets the tone and the mood of the novels. This comparison enhances the aesthetic appeal of the narrative world as the comparison and contrast lend the plot a richer meaning. As in *Season of the Rainbirds*, the nature is used to signal the impending doom. The following line signals the decay and dullness and suffocation spreading throughout the novel. "It was dull windless morning, clouds brushed low over the roof of the house" (p. 11). After setting the tone through nature, he comes to the point where he mentions that there had been a death in the town, setting a parallel between the two. Similarly in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, nature has been set parallel to human world when Shamas, "Breathing quills of vapours he stands outside the building where plastic bags containing the animal's head and the blood soaked crystals of snow are lying against the stems of the apple tree" (p. 15). The narrator describes how the snow has been corrupted and polluted by the human blood. And again "This morning he saw a mass of snow that had slid off a roof and was lying in heap on the ground and from distance I thought it was Chanda and Jugnu's bodies" (p. 19). Furnishing the fact that even in nature the seething presence of ghosts, emblems of cruelty, can be felt.

The choice of words in *The Wasted Vigil*, such as "demon-striven expanse of trees"(p. 24), "nest of malevolent beings"(p. 25), "army of ghostly lovers"(p. 39), "Fever-haunted hours"(p. 88), "demonic forces roaming"(p. 136), "He was as though a ghost, watching himself"(p. 146), "demons had been set free"(p. 173), "The array of flowers ghostly at five a.m"(p. 341), "empty-handed as a ghost otherwise"(p. 345), "He moves his fingers over the phantom words"(p. 378), he employs is the same one finds in gothic writing with the difference that here he connects it well to the theme, and theme being the plight and issues of the postcolonial people. Not only the vocabulary has gothic overtones, the titles he gives to his novels and chapters are revelatory. The title "The Night of the Great Peacock Moths" of the first chapter of *Maps for Lost Lovers* starts from a word which in gothic world carries host of images. The word 'Night' for instance, sets out the entire mood of the chapter. It evokes multiple connotations of darkness, mystery, the fear of

the unknown and creates an impression of expectancy. In the same pattern most of the titles of the chapters also have gothic overtones like, "In Darkness", "Women with Tails", "Ghosts" etc. not only this, his titles hint towards things that are abject, as "Breakfast of Butterfly Eggs", "The Many Colors of Milk", "The Dance of the Wounded" and "The First Lovers on the Moon". Julia Kristeva, a critic "bringing together insights from fields as far flung as psychoanalytic theory, religious scholarship, avant-garde literature and philosophy"(McAfee, 3) establishes that abjection is the state of "rejecting what is other to oneself" (McAfee, 45). She further elaborates it in her book *Powers of Horror* as under: "There looms, written objection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable"(Roudiez, 1). According to Kristeva "abject" refers to human reaction towards something other than himself, the repulsive reaction towards a corpse, an open wound, human waste, sewage, vomit and pus etc. The feeling of repulsion issues as one is forced to face an object which is violently cast out of the cultural world. Each word contains a complete story in itself. Like the title the novel *Maps for Lost Lovers*, "Breakfast of the Butterfly Eggs" points towards a symbolic incident when one morning, Kaukab finds her three children Mah- Jabin, Ujala and Charag eating the tiny eggs of butterflies. Butterfly is the symbol of sexuality and the title is symbolic of the later happenings in the lives of these children revealing actions that her children indulge into later, Charag having an illegitimate relationship with Stella, Ujala being drawn towards other such evil and Mah-Jabin having a ruined married life. Through the use of abject images, the narrator sets the tone for the abhorrent sinful life Kaukab's boys lead. Likewise another such title "Women with tails" is pointed towards white women, who have been presented as aliens, "what kind of a tail does a white woman have? They wondered in excitement. Not dissimilar to a peacock's, capable of being jerked up to form a giant fan of five-hundred feathers? Or a small twitchy one, resembling a deer's, needled with white hair? (p. 48). The author uses abject image of women with tails for the white, which results from non communication between these white people and the immigrants who fail even to think of white in human terms. The title "Many Colours of Milk" again refers to a violent encounter between Kaukab and Shamas when Kaukab refuses to feed her child and Shamas in rage, drags her on floor, scratching with his fingernails at her breasts until the blood gets mixed with milk. Aslam chooses words that have connotation of the abject to comment upon situations that are repulsive to evoke the same abject response in the reader. The titles of Aslam's books give rise to the same sense of disgust that one scorns vehemently beyond the scope of the tolerable and thinkable. The concept conveyed through the titles of the chapters in the novel make them sound strongly abject i.e. women with white tails are beyond the scope of thinkable, the bleeding breasts are beyond the scope of tolerable, and the wounded dancing is beyond the limits of possibility. Each title symbolizes the thematic issues of cultural clash; violence as a result of suffocation, isolation as a result to dislocation with ever widening gap between the natives and the immigrants and how this leads to distinction between self and the other (Roudiez, p. 1). Aslam as an author doesn't intend his reader to go through his novels as a distant story and forget it the very next moment. Through such abject descriptions he wants to reduce the objective distance between the characters of his novels and the readers so that the readers undergo the same. The readers feel in a particular situation the same torture which Kaukab must have suffered when she was being dragged on the floor, and the repulsive truths she had to bear when she saw her children licking off butterfly eggs.

Postcolonial gothic is grounded in the desire to entertain the reader through the use of literary devices such as transgression, paradoxes created through ambivalence and blurred boundaries between feelings of love and hate, life and death etc. Such staple postcolonial gothic stylistics can be traced in Aslam's fiction which is redolent with gothic overtones. Not only contradictions and contrast set him as a postcolonial gothic writer, gothic tropes of ambiguity, transgression, and repetition are used in his fiction to intensify the paradoxes inherent in the characters' world. Just as gothic is a nebulous genre which blurs boundaries, in Aslam the same gothic ambivalence can be traced. It is usually believed that postcolonial is structured around clear boundaries such as white and black, self and other, good and evil etc, but despite being a postcolonial writer, his works defy clear binaries which make his work not only postcolonial but postcolonial gothic. The author portrays his characters as to leave them ambivalent and shadowy; never letting the readers enter the comfort zone where access to character's clouded psyches becomes easy. Kaukab in *Maps for Lost Lovers* is one such character whose feelings ostensibly filial in one situation, becomes heartless and violent in another. Her relationship with her husband has never been comfortable as she constantly compares her married life with her past years where she was brought up differently. But at the same she cares for him too, as if her life revolves around him. Worrying about his condition in old age, for her "It was equally unbearable to think of him stumbling around the no-man's-land of old age without her hand to steady him, a widower whose children were past caring, his corpse awaiting discovery at the bottom of the stairs for hours, days, perhaps even weeks (*Maps For Lost Lovers*, p. 73). Another such contradictory streak in her character is the way she condemns Jugnu for having a corrupting influence on her children. She feels ashamed of Jugnu and Chanda's act of marrying against the customs. But she feels empathy towards the couple when she thinks of the violence done to both of them in the name of honor and prays for their safety; "They will return, safe and sound. What are months and years in Allah's plans?" (*Maps For Lost Lovers*, p. 76). Suraya, is also one such example of a person living in contradictions when in an attempt to abide by one religious law, she violates another. Her husband in Pakistan divorced Suraya in a drunken state and she returns to England to find a man who she can marry for a short period so that after getting divorced from her second husband, she can remarry her first husband in Pakistan. As the Islamic law states she has to marry another man before she returns to the first husband. To abide by one law, she transgresses all others by deceptively alluring Shamas to have a union with her. Likewise Shamas, a communist, candid and flexible towards people of other religious and cultural background, fails to wield authority in his own home and his wife and children are left on their own.

Aslam gives concrete details to lend authenticity to a particular narrative. A clear graphic description through colours not only adds to the overall tone and effect of the novel but makes gothic and its excessive mod of representation more constructive and creative. The colour red, yellow, grey and black dominate to evoke the sense of death, disease and the threat of violence. Nadeem Aslam uses colour imagery to reinforce the theme of war, violence, evil in such a subtle and elusive way that even a single colour such as red is used in its varied forms with different and sometimes contrasting sense. For instance, in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Suraya's scarf is red, with a butterfly on it. The colour red has been used to signify threat and alarm and what follows evinces that the reader was given a clue to the emotional murder of Shamas. In *The Wasted Vigil* the same red colour stands for war, violence and death. Even the butterfly is red to underscore the gory nature of violence done to the humans. When Lara and Marcus treat an injured fellow who has "blood-soaked fabric tied to the back of his skull" (p. 165), to intensify the colour of blood, even

the butterfly flying near the patient, has been given this colour red “as though a small quantity of his spilled blood has become airborne” (p. 165). Bloodshed and cruelty done either in the name of religion or politics makes Marcus sick of the red colour. Talking about his wife, who is also a doctor by profession, he mentions that she is also “tired like me of the colour red” (p. 238). And what made her blood curdle is the incident where, after carrying out amputation, she was seen in a blood stained burka. For another amputation, she is guided towards the block of wood drenched in redness. And for next amputation her own husband is held down on bloody wood for amputation. She was screaming and she put aside the tray on which butcher’s knife was lying ominously. “when the blade came towards him he stretched his fingers to touch her palm. The last act his hand performed for him” (p. 244). And once visiting a patient’s home, he comes across the paintings his wife Qatrina had once painted. They all are coloured in “pale redness”, “haze of saffron” and “sustained shimmer of blue” (p. 241). The choice of colors reveals the agony of living in a land which refuses to allow her practice her profession even though during her captivity, “she would sneak off to give medical treatment to the villagers” (p. 239).

Not only contradictions in the conduct of the characters give Aslam’s fiction an ambivalent tone of a gothic novel, even the images, and symbols employed further give them a gothic colouring. In a narrow sense image means a picture in the mind, but in a broader context it consists of a set of ideas associated with it. The resulting collage in Aslam’s case is imbued with imagery spawned from gothic world, with his cryptic description of historical facts which elucidates certain thematic terrains weaving postcolonial with gothic. The symbolic language employed maintains the dark and stimulated feel of the novels that defines the postcolonial gothic. The images and symbols Aslam employs are shifted away from their original performative or ceremonial context such as the image of maps. Such subversion of traditionally deployed images and metaphors engender more complex reading of the works. It is believed that maps are used as guides, to ward off the threat of permanent closure and are consulted to escape containment and fixity. But Aslam subverts the image into something showing closure, entrapment, as are the characters in the novel, caught between the vicious cycle of love, hate, customs, religion etc. Moreover on literal level the word highlights the conditions of the immigrants, who need maps as if they are in foreign land, which can never give the feel of a home to those whose lives are structured around loss. Throughout the novel the hidden struggle of the characters can be noticed who fail to find ways to their own homes in some foreign land and their restless search for a moment of stability in suppressed environment becomes futile. For example in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Kaukab strives to bind her family together in an otherwise disintegrated society. The family is falling apart as a consequence of the clash between the opposing values she wants to impart to her children and the values they are exposed to being immigrants. Her daughter faces and shares similar circumstances with her mother as she spends two painful years with her husband. In an argument with her mother she says: “Every day—wishing I could rewrite the past—I relive the every day I came to this country where I have known nothing but pain” (p. 101). The words clearly show Mah-Jabin’s struggle to make a new beginning. These people do not bring maps assuming that they will find their ways but what they find is nothing but anxiety over their lost state. From the symbolic retrospective of language, the map symbolizes an experience inevitable in the attainment of the exact location. Shamas also is struggling to escape from his monotonous existence when, failing to find comfort in his house, and pleasure from his wife, he looks for satisfaction in Suraya. The narrator packs the plight of immigrants where through Shamas he speaks for all the immigrants. “No, no, he must resist these thoughts of death! He speeds up madly to make a way out of the

cemetery, going along the paved paths between the graves, getting lost, needing a map of this labyrinthine, a flaw in the net to burst through, this net made up of almost a thousand knots” (Maps For Lost Lovers, p. 197). In *Postcolonial Imaginings*, David Punter explores that; “one of the phenomena with which we are presented in postcolonial writing is, then, a whole panoply of maps, a treasure chest of charts, piled in heaps, lapped one over another, imaginary geographies, but ones in which the root of power that has nourished them in slow process of being exposed” (p. 33). The feeling of homelessness, triggered by the revelation that they have no home where they can expect comfortable domesticity, prevails and they find themselves being in an estranging foreign net having thousand knots. Even the title of the novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* becomes performative and somewhat ironic, as the characters enact the state of being entrapped wishing to find the maps, maps for lost lovers, failing to which they roam like ghosts.

Another striking characteristic of Aslam’s use of gothic diction is the unnatural union of presence and absence felt in the lives of those living abroad conveyed through narrative of containment and escape. It links the work with the metaphor of ghosts which dominates his fiction. As in *Maps for Lost Lovers* where ghosts stand not only for the dead, but for the living beings too. As a gothic device, ghost figures as the marginalized other who is given the rare opportunity to access to self-representation and to make them heard. They are used to assert continuity between omnipresent past and painful present. Possibly the most significant feature uniting Gothic and Postcolonial texts is their shared interest in the dissolution of differences and conceptions of identity. This interest leads to prominent gothic fascination with liminal states, borders and the sublime reality which is discernible in Aslam. What is haunting about the ghost are those unseen forces that make themselves felt every now and then. The ghostly couple of Chanda and Jugnu, in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, is comprehended repeatedly even though they are not seen. This is the effect the writer wanted to create through the metaphor which has an eerie potential. It has been mentioned by David McInnis in “Re-Orientating the Gothic Romance: Jean Rhys, Tayeb Salih, and Strategies of Representation in the Postcolonial Gothic” that; “At the heart of the gothic is an engagement with the unrepresented other, usually a monster and a madwoman, in the same way that at the heart of postcolonial writings in an attempt to represent the other, often depicted as subaltern or female. Indeed the two genres bear many point of comparison” (p. 85). The recurrent appearance of the ghosts is the threatening portent of the old, of neglected ones. Ghosts not only stand for the marginalized other, they signify the past as well, all entrapping, all-encompassing and unavoidable past. The ghostly presence of past can be noticed when Aslam, through the image of Buddha and his remains points out how past remains an essential element in our present though its presence is unwanted at times. Clearing the land to set up a factory: “As they worked away the earth, a slender ridge was found snaking around the small depression, and then they saw that the whole was in fact a large human ear. Continuing downwards and around the mass, they understood that they were excavating the head of a great Buddha, lying on its side...a face from another time...too heavy to move” (The Wasted Vigil, pp. 22-23). Buddha’s head is too heavy to be moved from the factory, which is a symbol of heavy past too heavy to be removed from present as after all the struggle to clear the land, the remains are still left. Ghosts are everywhere as if their pervasive gaze is fixed on the living. “I am frightened and timid, because I am obsessed by the presence of ghosts that I never can get rid of”, says Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts*, a play by Ibsen. “I am half inclined to think we are all ghosts, Mr. Manders. It is not only what we have inherited from our fathers and mothers that exists again in us, but all sorts of old dead ideas and all kinds of old dead beliefs and things of that kind. They are not actually alive in us but there they are dormant, all the same, and we can

never be rid of them” (p. 105). Here in this play ghosts haunt in form of worn ideals and abstract dogma that characters possess. Not only this, ghosts also signify hereditary sins which annihilate even the younger generations.

Not only the ghosts of the living and the dead haunt the text, appearing now and then, Urdu words also look like ghosts, ghosts from the colonized past, to make their presence felt. Here Aslam deviates from standard English vocabulary, incorporating Urdu words in his writings. The use of Urdu words is inextricably associated with the ability to portray, to suggest, loss even in its own absence the loss of one’s own language and identity in foreign land. Inability of mother language to show itself as other than a series of disturbances in the smooth flow of language is the loss immigrants’ face in the novels. Not only in *Season the Rainbirds* set in a small town in Pakistan, Urdu words are employed but in *Maps for lost Lovers* also which is set in England, Urdu words are deliberately left untranslated and these words are a trace of previous empire, things hidden or over laid, but the life is not a new life, but which is decayed, washed away, face of loss. For instance, Kaukab speaks Urdu words with her husband and children with a clear hint of things hidden and overlaid. Kaukab thinks while practicing her English in mirror; “What was a person to do when even *things* in England spoke a different language than the one they did back in Pakistan? In England the heart said *boom boom* instead of *dhak dhak*; a gun said *bang!* Instead of *thah*; things fell with a ‘thud’ not a *dharam*; small bells said ‘jingle’ instead of *chan-chan*; the trains said ‘choo choo’ instead of *chuk chuk*” (p. 36). Whenever these immigrant families are at home or in neighbourhood of that small town with other Pakistani people, they prefer their own mother tongue such as words used for dishes and clothes are left untranslated i.e “*masar*” (p. 55), “*pilau* rice, chapattis, *shami* kebabs” (p. 290), “*dhoti*” (p. 334), “*Burka*” (p. 342). Besides, even the birds have been named the way they are called in their homes in Pakistan. People are sitting in a mosque and listening to “the laughter of andleeb, the uproar of kumri, the wail of koyal, the beckoning of kubk and daraj” (p. 343), while having a discussion on cleric’s dream. And the characters use Urdu words to assimilate unfamiliar aspect of new home with familiar aspect of old home land and to have empathetic identification with the familiar motherland. Language creates a barrier between Kaukab and the outside world as “the ‘thank you’ she murmurs to the flower-deliveryman is the third exchange with a white person this year; there were five last year; none the year before, if she remembers correctly; three the year before that” (p. 69). She is equally concerned about her language limitations and hesitates to call lest some foreigner may pick up the phone and brand her as illiterate. The number of encounters between Kaukab and the white shows the fragmentary and broken link between the two. In an interview when Aslam is asked how being multilingual manifests in his writing, he replies; “I am grateful for my knowledge of Urdu. I don’t just have the twenty-six letters of English, I have the thirty-eight letters of Urdu, too... Sometimes when I write, I want language to become an active participant in the storytelling. Just as a filmmaker would make the camera shaky during a battle scene”. (Hong) and he wields his knowledge of Urdu as the tool of his trade as a writer.

The ghosts of the living and the dead, of dead past, of untranslated words contribute to the effect of uncanny-another gothic convention Aslam employs to create interplay of presence and absence of ghosts. Through this pattern of visibility and invisibility, the return of the uncanny erupts. Reading the text with the growing sense of familiarity, and amidst the complexities of life, the sense of unfamiliarity is what gives way to the feeling of uncanny. As Rhys interrogates in *Wide Sargasso Sea* that; “Is there another side?” and the answer she gets is; “There is always the other

side, always” (p. 77), and that side is the less familiar one. As there are certain historical narratives and perspective which are repressed or hidden from open historical knowledge or acknowledgement, and then uncannily return in distorted or strange form., hence creating the sense of unfamiliar though familiar previously. And defamiliarization further leads to uncanny effect- the intermediate and uneasy zone between past and present- which is prevalent in any gothic work. Julie Hakim reflects in *The Alien Within: Postcolonial Gothic and the Politics of Home* that; “The unheimlich is intensely cultural and bound up with the Enlightenment, as a metaphor for mystery, the concealed, and unknowable, the unheimlich may be seen as the Enlightenment’s dark, but necessary double.” (p. 15), and it’s the necessary double which haunts the living, it lives inside like a ghost, disturbing our senses of atmosphere and making us apprehensive of our understanding of framework of experience.

Apart from the metaphor of ghosts, there are other controlling symbols in his works which are taken from natural world, such as peacock, moths, butterflies etc. His attitude towards natural world in the midst of ruined landscapes is what sets him apart from other postcolonial writers. The image of peacock dominates his fiction as every incident, each life seems either contrasted or compared with peacocks. It is one of the most unique symbols Aslam deploys in his fiction which in myths and folklore carries portents of nobility, guidance, protection and watchfulness. In Greco-Roman mythology Peacock is identified with Hera (Juno) who created the Peacock from Argus whose hundred eyes which can be seen on the tail feathers of the peacock are symbolic of the vault of heaven and the eyes of the stars. In Hinduism the peacock is associated with lakshmi who represents benevolence, patience, kindness, compassion and good luck. In Christianity Peacock symbolizes the all-seeing church, and sanctity associated with it, additionally, the Peacock represents resurrections, renewal and immortality with the spiritual teachings of Christianity (*Whats-your-sign*). The symbol of peacock is constantly attached with the lives of the lovers as talking about Jugnu and Chanda and the revelation that the couple has come to England a week before the expected arrival, the police come for investigation, and what they find was ; “A peacock and a peahen burst out of a room and escaped it the freedom of the street this would eventually lead to the talk that Chanda and Jugnu had been transformed into a pair of peacocks, the corpse of another peacock was found in one of the downstairs rooms, the injuries revealing that it had been pecked to death by the other two” (Maps For Lost Lovers, p. 59). This was suggestive of the fact that the new couple has been tortured to death exactly the way peacocks are brutally killed. And again the narrator gives details of how a dozen strong flocks of peacocks roam the streets destroying and attacking everything they came across showing anger and revenge. There was a peacock which had laid an egg in one of the rooms, clearly showing that Chanda was expecting at the time when she was murdered. Again Jugnu and Chanda’s spending a night together was compared by the mating of peacock and peahen. Another such parallel is drawn between Jugnu’s death scene and that of peacock’s. “The house smelt of death when Chotta and Barra entered it at around two that night-a smell they knew from their butcher’s trade, and from the hours they had recently spent by the drowned-giant’s lake. It was a dead peacock...that was when he saw Jugnu’s body , on the floor behind a blue and green dotted veil that was suspended from the washing line, the edge touching the floor. Next to him lay the bright corpse of the peacock” (Maps For Lost Lovers, p. 357). Inpostcolonial gothic work, peacocks are symbolic of exotic East, of ‘orient’. Aslam skillfully employs symbol with all the mysteries inherent which link the image of peacocks with gothic.“Lamia”by John Keats, a poem written in Romantic gothic mode reverberates this exotic symbol of peacock when the female beauty has been described having the colours of

peacock, setting up the theme that passionate love is ultimately destructive. As in case of the lovers the presence of dead peacock is symbolic of abortive relationship and fatality of love. The dazzling hues, vermilion-spotted form lying dead on the grass reminds the reader of Keats' exotic yet fatal femme fatale Lamia. The deep colours of love are not for lovers to enjoy forever. The injured body of Jugnu lying near the dead peacock recalls a similar image in Keats' "Lamia".

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed, (47-51)

Not only controlling metaphors, Aslam also uses shifting metaphors in his works which have multiple layers of meaning, most of them exhausted in gothic texts. He adjusts and adopts the metaphor when the situation requires it. Moth is one such metaphor, with shifting meaning in different situations, which at one time stands for sincerity, in case of Jugnu and Chanda who were destroyed in love and deception in case of Shamas and Suraya. In Chanda and Jugnu's story, the moth dies in pure love, and devotion, but in Shamas and Suraya's case, moth is fatally seduced by the candle light. Although in both cases it stands for inevitability of self-destruction, but the emotional yield and empathy it generates vary in each case. The symbol of moth and its power to move from the invisible to visible and to retreat once more is a journey towards self-destruction. Even at the risk of losing its life, the moth is ever-vigilant in following its path of light, the way Chanda and Jugnu remained together in the face of ever increasing resistance from families, ultimately immortalizing them. As a creature of night, moth is highly influenced by the power of the moon. The female moth is said to know the art of subtle allure. *Maps for Lost Lovers* is finely woven on these lines, the way Suraya allures Shamus to increase intimacy with him, eventually making him succumb to his vile impulses. After the conventional rendering of the symbol moth, Aslam shifts from the traditional meaning, naming it as "Ghost Moth" (*Maps For Lost Lovers*, p.7). The coupling of the word ghost with moth makes it bitter and the name packs the lives of two lovers who are destroyed and crushed like moths and have turned into ghosts now. A master of disguise, the moth can blend into the point of invisibility. "The absolute darkness was light enough for them and with passionate impatience they floated up the stairwell to the leningrad-yellow room where Shamas slept beside Kaukab" (*Maps For Lost Lovers*, p. 21). Here the human beings have been brought after the mentioning of moths, developing constant link with the lives of Shamas and Kaukab, Chanda and Jugnu and later Shamas and Suraya. "The insects fluttered into room shared by the two younger children" (p. 25), suggests that some self-destruction threatens lives of the children which is later revealed in the course of the novel as the children turn into delinquents. And then talking about Jugnu, the narrator recalls: "No moth could resist drawn to his hands, but that night the interior was noisy with another call that only they could hear- that of a female moth". This is a summons to the destruction of both Jugnu and Chanda, as the noise was that of impending doom. Kaukab, when she learns that Jugnu could not sense the coming danger which even animals can sense and run for their safety thinks that; "Even animals know to retreat from obvious danger. For all his love of the natural world, Jugnu should have remembered that all animals retreat from fire. All, except moths" (*Maps For Lost Lovers*, p. 28). The last line is a clear indication that the symbol of moth is apt for the character of Jugnu who could not avoid his destructive end. Again the narrator himself attests this when he says: "For Kaukab to think of

Jugnu is to always see a moth or a butterfly around him, somewhere towards the edges, the way Charrag – her artist son – scores his name in the corner of his canvases, in the wet layers of paint” (Maps For Lost Lovers, p. 145).

Traditionally the symbol of butterfly stands for transformation because of its impressive process of metamorphosis, giving the deepest symbolic lesson of the butterfly-adaptability. The butterfly unquestioningly embraces the changes of her environment and her body, keeping belief intact to undergo transitions. But Aslam subverts the symbol and contrasts it with the character of Kaukab in *Maps for Lost Lovers*. The spring section of the novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* begins with the symbol of butterflies which marks the advent of meeting of Shamas and Suraya- a meeting having sexual contact. In gothic texts the symbol of butterflies is linked with sexual fantasies and this meaning is explored too in his novels. “This year’s butterflies would soon begin to emerge – a season hearing with life, the air above the river slightly fragrant like a garment still carrying the above of its vanished owner” (Maps For Lost Lovers, p. 134). Another such reference of sexuality is conveyed when children are observed to rub the butterfly wings in armpits with the belief that pubic hair will grow. “Along the ivory coast, pubescent boys hunt butterflies to gather the colors from their wings, which they rub into their armpits and genitals in the belief that pubic hair will grow, that it would bring on manhood and bestow virility” (Maps For Lost Lovers, p. 71).

Ann Williams, a scholar on Gothicism, points out in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* that gothic “is a narrative built over a culture fault line” (p. 95). It is commonly accepted that postcolonial gothic represented remotely and unconsciously the central tensions of an age of social liberation and political revolution. Through the gothic mode Aslam is also assuaging the anxieties of a troubled self by articulating inveterate human fears and by exposing the fissures of lives of immigrants. In *The Wasted Vigil* Aslam shows how even inanimate things have undergone torture as it is noticed that “The large book of Bihzad’s paintings had required three nails to stay in place on the ceiling”, the torture nbeing done not only to human beings but to books even (p. 53). In another such instance Bihzad, Zameen’s missing son “experienced this dread whenever he is in an area not yet swept for landmines- wanting always to pull his shadows closer to him, thinking the weight of it is enough to set off whatever death-dealing device is hidden there” (p. 69). They seem to be afraid of their own shadows and fear that they might cause the explosion of mines.

The stylistic mode employed is a means of concretizing an approach where gothic narrative formation resists the fixed pattern of narration. Gothic mode of writing is a challenge to the orderly form of narrative promoted by a postcolonial writing. In Aslam, narrator makes the present waver, through constant references to the past, himself remaining invisible and yet observing, less interruptive than that of the traditional omniscient narrator. Rather the reader is brought into an active participation with the narrator’s quest. In answer to question about how he managed to main objectivity in his works, Aslam replies;

I like to let the characters do the work -- let them condemn or elevate themselves in the reader's eye...I will show you their history, beliefs, and conduct, and then let you make up your mind about him. A novel is a democracy -- if it is about two characters, then you cannot have character A be fully developed and character B poorly developed. The reader would feel the lack. (Hong).

He further points out that “I always say that a novelist doesn't tell you what to think, a novelist tells you what to think about”. The absence of authorial comments gives the reader the liberty to be actively involved in character's quest and make his own comments. The open structure of the novels invites multi layered critique and resists any single interpretation. The characters' poly layered personalities keep the reader perplexed and engaged. The third person narrative allows access to multiple perspectives. He amplifies the effect by dismissing the conventional postcolonial narrative strategies through which themes are articulated in a single perspective structure. Although Shamas, Kaukab and Suraya in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, Marcus and Lara in *The Wasted Vigil* are the main characters, but voices of other minor characters are also produced and given equal chance of being heard, to undermine the stable truth of a single perspective. Malalai, who appears just in a few pages of the entire novel *The Wasted Vigil*, is treated with equal attention as is given to the major characters. In the chapter “The Silent Flutes” the narrator talks about her as a woman ancestor of a local tribe in Afghanistan, who was accused of adultery, when one afternoon was found with a traveler in bamboo grove. She told to the people of her town that it was rape but no one believed her. Now she revisits the same bamboo grove, with her body bruised and collarbone cracked, from the beatings she received as punishment. She has lost her senses but still manages to cut bamboo stems revealing that she plans to construct flutes as “sooner or later there would be found a flute that would speak with a human voice—announcing the truth of that afternoon to the world around her” (*The Wasted Vigil*, p. 300). Such flute with a human voice is constructed as the truth of her chastity is told to the world through “The Silent Flutes”. This constant shift in perspectives is what creates the gap for the reader to intrude and become a part of the text.

Contrary to many of the postcolonial writings where there is a clear line drawn between orient and occident, Aslam leaves blurred spaces and the narrator gives varied perspectives over an incident through each character. The author does not construct the other in simple one dimensional term as cruel or unjust etc. He equally blames the oppressor for being responsible for their condition. If in *Season the Rainbirds*, a Pakistani society is shown to be suppressed by fellow Pakistanis, in *Maps for Lost Lovers*, he presents how alien the immigrants feel being away from their country and how foreign land fails to create a sense of homeliness in people coming from other cultures. In *The Wasted Vigil* not only this side but other silent voices are also heard. These marginalized voices tell how the foreigners are treated in Afghanistan and what difficulties they have to undergo to adapt to a foreign environment.

In answer to a question about his writing which is loaded with imagery and unexpected metaphors and images, he replies that his intention “was to create a literary equivalent of a Persian miniature, in which there is a remarkable density of the detail” (Chambers). Images, metaphors and symbols enter the text as a mode of meaning and contest reader's perception of their world and to comment on how the characters in his novels undergo psychological instabilities failing to come to terms with the foreign environment. The visible and subtle forms of anxiety in the life of those living by something dead, ambivalent and mysterious and invisible has been underpinned through the introduction of Gothic language of metaphors and symbols creating a meta language that defies all linguistic boundaries and transcends traditional meanings.

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