



RESEARCH PAPER

Exotic Othering of Indigeneity in Khan's *In the Company of Strangers*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to analyze *othering* of Pakistani people and cultural markers, in addition to, oriental narrative strategies used in Khan's *In the Company of Strangers*. The theoretical framework is based on Lau's *Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals* (2009) and Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* (1994) to investigate renewal of oriental discourse with the materialization of new trends including the authorial repositioning and experiential authority of native writers. The textual interpretation is based on McKee's *Textual Analysis: A beginner's guide* (2003). The results of this research reveal that representation of Pakistani Muslims is replete with oriental *othering* through gender stereotypes to depict men as violent and women as oppressed yet seductive creatures. Moreover, it includes exotic portrayal of Pakistani culture, food and urban spaces as a paradox of sensuousness and mayhem. A re-oriental analysis of Pakistani poetry in English is recommended for further research in this area.

KEYWORDS

Re-orientalism, Representation, Pakistani Fiction, Orientalism

Introduction

Re-Orientalism is the othering of eastern culture and people by Orientals in contemporary literature in English (Lau, 2009). The *other* is constructed through projection of a set of stereotypical exotic images proliferated through international platforms of mainstream media, discursive strategies and publishing industry. Although the representation of east has been a pressing matter, the situation is aggravated by contribution of native writers to intensify the reductive, totalizing and generalized representation of cultural, religious and communal practices. The presence of orient in literature was never transparent reflection of east's true existence. As "European invention" Orient was "created" as alter ego of west as "full of exotic beings" and "remarkable experiences" (Said, 1978, p. 01). The Eurocentric oriental discourse constructs binary oppositions out of western fantasy as a tool of domination and hegemony to legitimize the colonialization by institutionalizing it. (Said, 1978)

The initial stage of Pakistani Literature in English was rooted in the practice of "cultural appropriation", then as a medium to "counter orientalist representations" and to modernize cultural aspects. (Cilano, 2018, p. 850) The Pakistani literary pieces that deviate from stereotypical extremes meet with disinterest from international readership because these stories do not "fit their concept of Pakistan" (Cilano, 2009, p. p.184). With preconceived notions about Pakistan and Islam, readers anticipate certain thematic aspects that interest them. Pakistani literature written in English "inherently or even self-consciously mirror colonial sensibilities" in addition to association with ideas, historical and aesthetic association with Islamic Heritage which sets it apart from its Indian

counterpart (Cilano, 2009, p.184). The implication of intricate cultural nuances in which Pakistan's Literary production is contextualized is hard to overlook.

The literary cannon focused on writing back to the empire led by acclaimed Pakistani authors including Mohsin Hamid, Nadeem Aslam and Kamila Shamsie reflected challenges of Pakistani identity in postcolonial context highlighting themes of migration, globalization, and national conflicts (Ramiz, 2023). Apart from recurrent themes of religious extremism and violence, the emergence of "new cultural expressions" in Literature exhibits multilayered legacy of "ancient past" and "current geography" (Shamsie, 2011. P.119). Rehman (2019) emphasizes the need to decolonize Pakistani Literature in English through revival of formerly silenced voices "counter discourses from the peripheries suppressed by "colonial authority" and national regimes (p.190). Ensnared in a mesh of local and global, Pakistani Anglophone Literature is facing the "charges of being elitist and a colonial hangover" (Kanwal & Aslam, 2021, p.381). Additionally, the inclusion of playful narrative strategies have flourished over the last decade in contrast to the usual gloomy miserable portrayal of everyday life in Pakistan.

Salgado (2011) explains that re-orientalism refers to the complicated system of constructing and marketing differences through disseminating cultural commodities which strengthen the binary logic of orientalism. The exotic representation of native differences from the west emerges out of the need for "cultural translation" and "cultural materialism" to commoditize east (Salgado, 2011, p.209). Used as a currency in the global marketplace, Cultural authenticity is a twofold weapon which exerts domination over the entity it requires access to for cultural representation. The contradiction in re-orientalist discourse paves way to explore "re-orientation of discursive authorization" in "global cultural economy" (p.210).

Literature Review

Building on Foucault's (1972) conceptualization of relationship between power and discourse, Said (1978) delineates the binary mode of representation of east as an antithesis to west which establishes east as "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" while west as "contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" in colonial discourse (pp. 1-2). As a western style of thought, orientalism reconstructs, dominates and exerts authority over the orient instead of translucent depiction of an entity which is "merely there" (p.4). Orientalism is traced out to be "distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts" (p.12). Moreover, the relationship between east and west is that of "power", "domination" and "complex hegemony" relying on "flexible positional superiority" (Said, 1978, p.7) (Gramsci, 1971). This distorted representation has a devastating effect on the psyche of colonized who deems itself inferior through internalized gaze of the colonizer (Fanon, 1952).

The writers from the indigenous regions specifically diaspora authors supported by their positional superiority have taken over the position of western orientalist in the contemporary discourse about the east resulting in snatching voice and platform from the native majority once more. Instead of being subversive, the subaltern is silenced and marginalized in postcolonial texts as "Other" is confined to being "Self's shadow" (Spivak, 1995, p.25). Based on their "truth claims" and authenticity, postcolonial authors, the subalterns, manufacture their narrative as "cultural commodity" through employment of "exoticism" and "remoteness" as discursive strategies to limit orient in the periphery (Lau, 2009, pp.571-586) (Spivak, 1995) (Huggan, 1994, p.27). The authenticity in itself is commercialized as part of the wider representational process in which images of the other

are produced and distributed by the dominant culture (Huggan, 2003). This representation is never transparent but always dialogic due to the “shared cultural codes” which mediate the interpretation of texts (Hall, 1997, p.10). Although this representation is not an exact replica of the oriental representation, it shows consistency in the narrative and the emergence of issues such as authenticity or accuracy.

Mitchell (1998) explains the difference between these two positions of narrative construction by delineating how European representation was constructed as objective while the orient’s representation of its own communities is securing its authenticity from its positionality and being subjective. This trend also known as, new orientalism, allows modification of literary texts to adapt the “western multicultural taste” for “instant marketability” resulting in staging a new form of colonialism in postcolonial era (Shivani, 2006, p.22). According to Fish (1997), this western tendency to admire aesthetic elements of indigenous culture meant for consumerism at its convenience while drawing the line for its core tenants is “Boutique Multiculturalism” (p.379). This “cultural appropriation” by cultural informers for western consumption whether emerged out of political objectives or instinct to survive in competitive publishing industry compromises national repute at global stage (Aman & Dodhy, 2022).

Raja (2018), talking about the issues of representation in Pakistani fiction, argues that these artistic pieces curated by writers of Pakistani origin are woven with the intricacies of “politics of the nation and national representation” (p.1). It results in negation of Pakistani culture’s richness and diversity and thwarted expectations of Pakistani readers. Even if they strive to be “cultural critics”, the writers bear the burden of twofold representation as expected both by the metropolitan reader to show the glimpse of the essence of their culture and local reader to portray a wholistic image globally (Raja, 2018, p. 02).

Saeed and Ain (2020) pointed out the self-othering in *Austenistan* (2018) through gender stereotyping, exoticism and partial truths instead of contesting misconceptions about orient. Perseverance and reinforcement of such elements into south Asian texts reestablishes the “grand colonial narratives” which postcolonial fiction had set out to contest (p.205). In addition to distortion of cultural narratives, the self-presentation in Pakistani fiction in English intensifies the differences of the margins from global centre. The focus on the selective aspects in Aslam’s *The Wasted Vigil* inculcates re-oriental themes for sombre, generalized and totalized portrayal of East (Ahmad & Ahmed, 2024). A re-orientalist analysis of Moni Mohsin’s *The end of innocence* unravels the “formulaic”, “sensual” and “stereotypical” representation of Pakistani people and Culture (Jadoon & Noureen, 2024).

This research explores how Khan’s *In the Company of Strangers* (2019) use orientalist stereotypes and fetishism to depict Pakistani people in contemporary discourse. The focus of the research is on exploring how Muslims are othered and exoticized in Pakistani fiction written in English despite having access to international platform which can be used as subversive tool to contradict former orientalist binaries.

Material and Methods

This research takes up Lisa Lau’s theory of Re-orientalism and Graham Huggan’s “The postcolonial Exotic” to conduct textual analysis of *In the Company of Strangers* by Khan to trace out othering and exoticization of Pakistani people, culture and spaces as a part of commoditization. McKee’s *Textual analysis: A beginner’s guide* (2003) provides guidance for text interpretation.

Theoretical Perspective

Lau (2009) elucidates the replacement of “occidentals” with “Orientals” as a narrative voice in the contemporary literature from postcolonial regions. With this position, novel orientalist elements emerge including “generalization and totalization” in representation of indigenous people based on “truth claims”. It gives the author a unique positionality of an “insider and outsider” being self and other at the same time to represent the subaltern other (p.571). Through imposition of specific culture, values and attitudes, “the diverse majority” is represented as a reflection of “select minority” (p.573). This positional superiority of native writers who are “geographically better located”, having access to western publishers, results in re-orientalism as an indispensable factor of literary texts (p.580). As these texts take south Asia as a point of identity construction of protagonists, the local cultural nuances and sensitivities are exoticized to reappropriate it to the taste of international readers. Lau (2009) identifies three major aspects of these writings: South Asian region as an identity marker emphasizing the native cultural norms, generalized, distorted, stereotypical reflection of locals, and emphasis of truth claim in skewed representations (p.585). This narrative technique often blurs the boundaries of fact and fiction in literary texts.

Huggan (1994) highlights the comprador intelligentsia’s tendency to package their culture as a commodity and sell it to unfamiliar metropolitan reader for its “exotic appeal” (p.24). Their writings are inherently contradictory as they aim to write and market for the very center they challenge. As the “exoticist myths and stereotypes” they are to write against become the part of their books’ “commercial packaging” (p.26). This genre not only has an appeal to the western readership as it “rejuvenates” and serves as a source of “escapism” but also “politicizes the act of reading” (p.26). The layer of exoticism leads to the celebration of multiculturalism as well as commercialization of “exotic artifacts” as commodities to be sold on global platform (p.65). The postcolonial writings are defamiliarized through “creation of cultural distance” to enhance its market value as a “cultural commodity” (p.27). Several literary techniques like magical realism are utilized to enhance aesthetic aspect of indigenous setting.

Results and Discussion

Exotic Othering of Pakistan in *In the Company of Strangers*

In the Company of Strangers exoticizes Pakistani people through the assertion of their strangeness and unfamiliarity. It utilizes cultural-specific traditions and stereotypes about Pakistan to exoticize Pakistanis.

The older Pathan spat a gob of chewed paan on the floor. He had been aiming for the dustbin in the corner, but instead the bits of betel leaf, stained red with spices and supari landed on the white marble. (p.19)

Paan is a symbol of the culinary traditions of south-Asia. It is one of the food that are considered exotic. The text carefully mentions this to hint at the exotic flavour of Pakistani food. It is mentioned as something contemptible. As it stains the white marble, the image suggests the untidiness of things related to Pakistan. Pathan can be taken as a symbol of indigenous people and paan symbolizes indigenous food while white marble can be taken as a symbol of cleanliness specific to modernity. The landing of paan on the white marble and the resulting stain indicates the domination of chaos and filth in Pakistan.

The text emphasizes the backwardness and filthiness of the community through images of foul smells caused by faeces and excrements that overpower the senses. "The air was so full of the stench of sweat and blood that a bitter metallic taste hung in his mouth. (p.24). The stench symbolizes chaos and disorder in Pakistan resulting from the ongoing terroristic activities. It indicates the poor living conditions of people as a reflection of social or material deprivation. People are forced to live in devastating circumstances caused by their own natural caprice of evil. The image drawn through description is of utter chaos as there are dead bodies everywhere and screaming people as well as the exploding population of people as well. "A lingering smell of faeces hung in the room, a smell that grew more pronounced in the bathroom where the absence of a flush system prevented a complete disposal of waste" (p.221). Mir stands for Pakistani people who are extremists, backward and conservative. The smell of faeces suggests the filth and mire of the whole community. The absence of flush suggests the premodern living conditions. As the flush system is a symbol of modern lifestyle. The absence of it hints at the absence of modern aspects and highlights the backward and underdeveloped community standards. The lack of basic resources is highlighted multiple times through images invoked by mentioning specific details such as "open drain" (p.244).

Foreign flavour through language

In order to highlight the unfamiliarity of the Pakistani culture, the text excessively mentions Urdu words in the description of people and activities. Language is used to enhance the difference of Pakistan through the mention of food or traditional things such as *paan* (p.19), *agarbati* (p.267), *pakorras* (p.138) and *kheer* and *jalebis* (p.134). As these descriptions intensify the peculiarity and indigenous quality of the Lahori community, using food to exoticize a culture is an old oriental tradition which highlights the aspects that are distinct and unfamiliar to the western people. In addition to this, certain Urdu expressions are also used to enhance this image of exotic culture such as *Dekho Ali* (p.163), *tonga wallahs* (p.30), *Jaldi karo!* (p.37), *Yaar* (p.77), *beta* (p.125) and *Haye Ji* (p.116). Such expressions are used to add local flavour to the text. It deepens the ethnic and cultural distinction.

Lahore-A symbol of exoticity.

In the text, Lahore stands as a symbol of Pakistan and the exotic chaos it envelopes. It is evident in the description of people, mundane things, and historical insinuations. The opening scene of the text has a description of Lahore which is laden with stereotypes. "The early morning scent of damp earth and mown grass greeted him as the doors of the overcrowded bus were thrown open" (p.10). The 'scent 'of damp earth and grass is a symbol of the alluring beauty of the city that is alluring and asserts its exotic nature. The images of scents and odours are utilized to enhance the strange yet captivating lifestyle of the city. "the stench bore the unmistakable stamp of home, of mud walls and open drains...the familiar sight of steaming dung, round cakes of which had been plastered on the walls lining the field" (p.11) The garbage and excrement are used to exemplify the notion that refuse and manure is the essential part of the city. The dung symbolizes the idea that the residents have embraced the filth as a part of their living

The image of an overcrowded bus enhances the stereotype about the population explosion in eastern communities and oriental regions. People are swarming while there is a clear lack of resources. Consequently, the "old bus groaned" (p.10). By reading the text, there seems to be noise all around. Everyone and everything is screaming out loud as if in pain. "The fruit vendors shouted out tempting prices from their carts" (p.10). The description of the street includes shouting fruit sellers while navigating through a street

that is overcrowded. The absence of traffic wardens and “dysfunctional traffic signal” (p.11) adds to the idea of disorder and a primal lifestyle. By comparison of the early morning scene to the “silent ghost” (p.11) creates an aura of eeriness which is a salient feature of the exotic othering of the orient. The other images such as “A tangy smell”, “antiquated lawn mowers” and “the crisp March breeze” reinforce the exotic beauty of the city (p.11).

Lahore is a symbol of the mystery and seductive nature of the orient. The contradiction in the representation of Lahore reveals the juxtaposition of Lahore as backward, premodern and oppressed yet seductive and evil at the same time. During the daytime, the city is swarming with populated crowds and screams that indicate a struggle for survival. The description of night refers to its alluring charms, glory, and mesmerizing rhythm. “As night fell, Lahore seemed to rise again from the ashes, pulsing with the same sensuality that had once lured the Mughals into making it their capital city” (p.30). The reference to its past grandeur adds to its exotic charms.

“Lahore was like a capricious woman that vacillated between happiness and sorrow, order and disorder” (p.30).

Through comparison of Lahore to a capricious woman, the text re-invokes the disparity of the city’s temperament. It also refers to the stereotype of disorder and chaos specific to the representation of the Orient. It highlights the instability and unpredictable nature of the orient. The idea of the seductive and lusty nature of the orient is heightened through the excessive mentioning of “mujra” a type of dance performed by “Dancers from Heera Mandi” (p.166). Heera Mandi symbolizes the Muslims’ obsession with sex and the sensuousness of the east. It does not only depict the present state of the city but also hints at the presence of such elements in the past when the Mughals were ruling the sub-continent. It represents sex-slavery and prostitution as an integral part of Pakistan. At the same time, violence and extremism are also depicted as an inherent component of Lahore as the text narrates a story against the backdrop of ongoing terroristic activities in Pakistan. “A bomb. Right in the heart of Lahore. Dozens dead. Scores injured.” (p.241). The city is a hub of destruction, violent activities and disorder.

In oriental writings, the trope of Harem, belly dancers and Muslim prostitutes is very frequent. And the selected texts invoke that recurrently. The dancers are also present at the parties arranged by Lahori elite Class.

From the excited whispers of the men that passed him, Ali gleaned that a mujra was going on inside one of the haveli rooms. ‘Dancers from Heera Mandi itself,’ Jamal remarked, fixing his red silk tie in place, an avid expression on his face. (Khan, 2019, p. 166).

Heera Mandi is a symbol of prostitution in Pakistan. It has been the centre of attention of Europeans who visited the oriental lands during and after the British Raj. It is the Red-Light area of Lahore where courtesans and dancers resided, and it was a popular hub of Music and culture at one time. In the selected text, Lahore is described in a similar stereotypical way. It is a centre of lavish parties and entertainment industries, and people arrange get-togethers where they drink and please themselves by inviting dancers from Heera Mandi.

Othering through Gender Stereotypes

The selected text portrays Pakistani Men as Sex Maniacs and Women as Sex Objects. Even in oriental depictions, Eastern men were lustful and obsessed with sex. The distorted image of polygamy contributed to the stereotypes and so did the harem fantasy of the orientalist. The representation of eastern women as Sex objects is prevalent all through the oriental discourse. *In the Company of Strangers*, People who present themselves as more devout and religious are overindulged in such activities. Mir Rabiullah, a religious leader who also runs an NGO is depicted as a hypocrite person. He pretends to be a social worker and a man of faith but in reality, he is behind the ongoing bombings in the country and indulgent in lustful activities. He orders sex workers and some of them are underage girls who are too young to be doing such work. He even gifts them to his men who treat them violently. 'As a token of my appreciation for what you're about to do, Usman, you may spend some time with these girls. Bring your friends too.' 'But Mir Sahab,' one the girls gasped, 'they are animals. We were only instructed to—' 'Silence,' Rabiullah shouted. (Khan, 2019, pp. 112-113).

Through the portrayal of these men in a negative manner, the text enhances stereotypes about east. It suggests that buying women to satisfy men is a norm in Pakistan and not surprising at all. The text highlights another image of violence and destruction in the context of Pakistan. Mir Rabiullah, although he himself was engaged in such activities, persuaded Ali that they are going to kill men who committed all the wrongs just because of their sexual desire. Most characters in the texts are having sexual relationships without marriage and committing adultery. One of the men from Lahore's rich community is depicted to be having a relationship with multiple people at times and with girls and boys both.

Did you know her husband is dating an eighteen-year-old? Bloody eighteen! And there's debate on whether it's a girl or a boy. Apparently, our Elahi is diverse in his tastes. (Khan, 2019, p. 47)

Elahi is a symbol of the practice of homosexuality in Pakistan. The text suggests that men are too lustful to be content with women only. Elahi being Homosexual and licentious highlights the theme of Harem which is often repeated in Oriental portrayals of the orient. Promiscuity and adultery are shown to be a customary part of these people who marry as part of business deals and then turn to kothas and extramarital affairs to satisfy themselves. Although Elahi is an old man, he has a relationship with boys and girls half his age and even younger which shows that he is a paedophile.

Mona, one of the protagonists is in an abusive marriage. She resorts to the extramarital affair as an escape. Her husband, Bilal is also an adulterer who relishes having affairs with other women. As a result of this affair, Mona gets pregnant and gets ready to abandon her husband and children as well. In her college days, she was raped by her friend's boyfriend, and it led to pregnancy. It creates the impression that Muslim societies are not safe, men are lustful and their obsession with sex result in the sexual assault of women.

She had no way of knowing that Iftikhar was the father of the child that was never born, but something inside her knew that it had been him. His uneven, jagged teeth that had grazed against her neck, the viciousness of his bites, the curiosity of his hands that went everywhere, sweaty and eager in their groping. (Khan, 2020, p.230).

The theme of sexual violence in Pakistan is ever present in the text. 'Jagged teeth', 'viciousness of his bites and 'groping' create an image of sexual assault and animalistic desire. Just as the Oriental texts were the result of European male fantasy, re-orientalists also project their own imaginations in their writings. It is visible in the text's take on sexual relations. Everything is over-heightened, and the women present in the text seem to be straight out of the male imaginings about women. Not only men are portrayed as having multiple relationships simultaneously, but women are also promiscuous. Mona is also treated by her husband as a commodity and sex-object. He has no regard for her feelings at all and their relationship turned rusty. Their relationship was reduced to just sex and the occasional beatings she received from him. Their marriage started deteriorating when she "discovered lipstick marks on his collar." (Khan, 2019, p. 144). Another character, Meera is also shown as a woman who enjoys the company of men and is married multiple times. The men around her think of her as desirable and detestable at the same time which is enough to expose their hypocritical values. They expect women to be modest and naïve but drool at every woman they come across. She herself enjoys the freedom of not being tied to one person for long. When Mona asked her about kids when they meet after two decades, she shrugged it off by saying,

'Oh you know, with all the husbands I've been juggling, I never got the chance. Besides, I didn't want one man's child to be raised by another. You know me! Can I really stay with one man for so long?' (Khan, 2020, p. 49)

Meera is a symbol of oriental women's promiscuity. She does not stay long in marriage. When she moves back to her home city, she became the centre of attention again and is sought after by men. Even in college, Mona and Meera, both had boyfriends and set no boundaries in terms of intimacy in premarital relationships. Catcalling and groping seem to be a normal part of Pakistani society where women are thought of as public property and objectified by their husbands and even strangers. The parties provide the chance for such people to do what they want to women and there is nothing that can stop them. "all I can see are drunk men. Drunk and' – she cleared her throat – 'lusty. I've been groped three times tonight" (Khan, 2019, p.169).

There is another image of sexual harassment that invokes the idea of Pakistan being a hazardous place for women. Even when she told Ali that she was harassed, he took no notice of it. He responded by praising her for her looks, and it reflects the women's situation in Pakistani society where her value is attached to her appearance. She is treated merely as an object. Men in the public openly grope her. She is objectified by men around her repeatedly even by her husband and her lover. At one party where Policemen are also present to provide protocol and safety to men of higher status, Mona gets disturbed by their constant stare on her. "They watched her with an unreserved stare, their eyes shining like a hungry dog's. One of them... licked his lips at her" (Khan, 2019, p.41) 'Their eyes shining like hungry dogs' creates an image of the animalistic tendency of Pakistani men who have no self-control just like dogs. Such a display of licentiousness makes her uncomfortable and sick. The flash of hunger and the lips licking is the sign of their moral degeneration. It makes women awkward stepping out of their houses without the company of their male relatives. It also normalizes the fact that husbands no matter how much violent, are necessary for women's survival which is made difficult by the advancements of these men. Women are not spared from this even in the social gatherings arranged in high societies.

The selected text hints at the ongoing practice of Sex Slavery and prostitution in Lahore. The old oriental stereotypes of eastern men indulging in prostitution are accentuated. In the past, Lahore was famous for such people dwelling in the

neighbourhoods of Shahi Mohallah. The text suggests that instead of dying out over the years, this practice continued to exist. Muslims men are habitual in visiting such places regularly. This is shown to be the part and parcel of Pakistan as it is a Muslim society. It generalizes the Pakistani people through their association with sexual transgressions.

Back then a girl showing you a finger was considered a taxi. 'That's the name for a woman of bad character,'...A taxi accepts anyone who is willing to pay for its services just like a woman from Heera Mandi is ready to sleep with anyone who throws her money.' (Khan, 2019, p.21)

The women who do not fit into the category of passive, docile women and somehow resist male domination are labelled as 'whores. Meera and mona, when responded to men's stare by staring back at them are called *Taxi*. It has been shown that staring, groping, and catcalling are indispensable components of Pakistani society.

Another character, Ali is also indulged in sexual activities and sometimes works as a male escort for money. Not only women are involved in sex work, but also young men are doing the same for financial reasons. Pakistani society is morally putrescent and immersed in filth. Ali sells himself to women elder than him for the sake of money. The text portrays women in an offensive and hateful way. "Lipstick marks from previous visitors stained the rim of the glass." (Khan, 2019, p.70) 'Lipstick marks' symbolizes male prostitution in Pakistan. This retreat included the excessive use of alcohol too. The women he works for are married women who are rich enough to lavish money on him so he could afford his extravagancies. The involvement in such activities cost him a great deal. It affected him mentally to the extent that he abandoned it all including his work. The image of Pakistan presented in the text is a farfetched reflection of Pakistan in which every bad aspect is heightened to a great extent.

Pakistani women as victims of domestic abuse.

The common perception about Pakistani women is that they are oppressed by men around them. Cultural and social factors contribute greatly to this condition. To have them under control, they can be coerced through psychological pressure and oftentimes outright physical violence. Abusing women can be a consequence of a man's desire to keep his partner or daughter subservient. Through this exertion of power, fear is instilled into women so they can yield to their partner's wishes. In today's world, violence as an integral part of eastern communities is depicted as a Muslim problem specifically. It can be seen in the widely produced re-orientalist texts. Through such content, a fabricated version of Muslim lives is told to the international audience or readers. In the selected text, women are portrayed as feeble creatures who are controlled by men around them. Often times, it is achieved through assault.

Many women like the main character Mona are living in a subservient marriage. Her relationship with her husband is full of complexity and abuse, verbal and physical as well. The first time she was beaten was when she confronted her husband for committing adultery. Instead of apologizing or being ashamed of his behaviour, he resorted to physical abuse, and thus began the decline of their relationship.

When the first slap landed on her cheek, she didn't flinch. That made him hit her more - the first time he had ever raised his hand to her. 'Women are wanderers,' was the first thing his father had told him when he was old enough to understand. 'Keep them shackled, and they'll stay loyal to you (Khan, 2019, p.144)

'Slap' and 'hit' create a visual image of domestic abuse. Bilal symbolizes habitual abusers while Mona stands for the victims of domestic violence. Growing up, Bilal witnessed her mother being beaten by his father and this affected how he treated women in his adulthood. His father instilled his rotten patriarchal beliefs in his son and ruined his psyche. In his father's view, women are immoral by nature, and they must be kept chained so they have no chance to roam around. To strip women of their freedom and put them under restrictions to keep them away from going astray is a notion rooted in Male chauvinism. Not only did his father, hit his mother but he also tried to retain this frightful legacy by teaching his son to treat women as if they are sub-humans. To keep them in check, they are to be guarded by men around them. When Bilal had no other way with his wife, he resorted to physical violence to exert his power over her. By keeping her under fear of abuse, he could enjoy the feeling of power over her wife's emotions as he could not probe into her heart otherwise.

He stopped in front of her, his leather moccasins stepping over her front toes as he leaned forward to face her. She gasped in pain. 'You disgust me.' His shoes pressed hard on her toes, squashing the nails so that they bit into the soft flesh underneath. (Khan, 2019, p.142)

The selected text normalizes the inhumane treatment of women and occasionally romanticizes this abuse as well. 'Squashing the nails' and 'gasping in pain' create another image of assault. The way abuse is presented in the text reveals the sadistic personality of Bilal who enjoys the infliction of pain over his spouse. His behaviour arose from his desire to feel a sense of control or power over Mona, who was emotionally inaccessible to him.

The text illustrates an example of the glorification of domestic abuse. Nighat becomes a symbol of women with internalized misogyny. When Mona answers her back, her mother-in-law justified the beatings received by women. To beat a woman as a way of teaching her to behave is favoured by her. As women themselves are the product of social traditions, they in return strive hard to regulate coercive tools as well. With their own hands, they build communities in which women are ill-treated and have unequal status.

Uneducated and Homebound Oriental Woman

The selected text presents the fabricated and biased mindset of Pakistani people regarding women's education, independence, and role in society. Most of the women in the text are dependent on their husbands or the men around them. Even though, educated women like Mona are relying on their husbands and live their lives in a passive state. Their only role is to look after their houses and stay in abusive marriages due to their lack of financial independence. They are not encouraged to be independent and pursue careers of their own even if they are educated. Mona and Bilal's daughter is one such example of young girl who is forced into early marriages and it is considered inappropriate for them to think about living independently. "I don't want her to get involved in the wrong crowd and get fancy ideas of building a career for herself" (Khan, 2019, p.131). People who came to ask her hand in marriage corroborate this belief further. "I only meant that independence and audacity are things that a girl should set aside once she assumes marriageable age" (Khan, 2019, p.136). Her potential mother-in-law is against the idea of independent living for young girls who reach the age of marriage. They must be submissive, meek, docile and dependent on their families to be compromising in relationships. She adds to the stereotype that Muslim women are forced to stay confined to their houses and that their whole purpose in life is to look after their families and husbands.

‘Our job is to manage the home and take an active interest in the welfare of our husbands...building a career, well it does sound preposterous if you know what I mean. (Khan, 2019, p.136).

For them, being a good woman and independent are mutually exclusive conditions and one cannot exist side by side with the other. “‘But that is simply not acceptable,’ ... ‘No daughter-in-law of mine will work in the barns or factories like some farmhand.’” (Khan, 2019, p.137). The responsibility of homemaking is put on women’s shoulders and Pakistani rural people are depicted as conservative folks who discourage women from stepping out of the house and somehow associate career-building with the possession of bad character which is absurd.

Female suppression linked to Burqa

In the present discourse, Veil has become a sign of Pakistani Muslim women’s oppressed state.

In the Company of Strangers follows the same trend and stereotypes the veil repeatedly. The flood of suicide bombings and terrorist attacks is shown to have taken over the country. As if the only agenda of the terrorists is to cloak women in veil. The veil is depicted as the attire of women who are oppressed and backward. Being uneducated and lower in the social hierarchy is also identified with it. Modern women who belong to the elite class discuss it in a scornful manner. Taking on hijab is thought to be the result of the ongoing practice of Islamism. While the country is under terrorist attacks and the women are forced into veiling, it becomes a rather complex phenomenon. Hijab is not willfully observed by women as a marker of their modesty but to please the extremists around them.

There have been so many casualties; it simply boggles the mind. So much grief, and for what? So that the women of this country can be wrapped in those ugly burqas...They’ll have to kill me before I allow a damned burqa on my head (Khan, 2019, p.180).

The tone adopted by Nighat is to ridicule the veil. ‘Ugly burqas’ and ‘damned burqas’ illustrate her contempt for this Islamic practice. She does not only resist the imposition of the veil which she regards as the usurper of women’s freedom but also exhibits her hate for the practice itself. It provides authenticity to the western assertion that Women are forced to take on the veil against their will by Muslim men. Nighat, as a stand-in for the Muslim women of the modern Pakistani elite class, speaks against the practice of the veil and associates it with extremist ideology.

Instability and Political Upheaval

Political Instability or civil disorder in South Asia is reflected in most re-oriental texts. The selected text gives prominence to the degenerating Pakistani society and the chaos brought upon it by terrorists. The whole country is entangled in disruption and political mayhem. Ordinary day-to-day life is disrupted by it.

The severed, mutilated head of a young man, allegedly the suicide bomber, had been recovered...This had become the norm. Bomb. Head. Investigation. Case closed. (Khan, 2019, p.34)

Suicide, bombings, terrorist attacks and the butchering of the layman have become the norm in the country. Bombing symbolizes active terrorism in the country. This also insinuates the ineffectiveness of the Judiciary in Pakistan which has failed to investigate

ceaseless bombings. There seems to be no proper law and order in Pakistan which could reassemble the declining society. It gives the impression that living in a tremulous situation with scrappy interrogations has been normalized in Pakistan. The work's been bad with the recession and these bloody bomb blasts. (Khan, 2019, p.38-39) recession' and 'bomb blasts' create an image of disorder and chaos in the country. The ongoing commotion in the country affects the economic and social lives of citizens immensely. This reveals the underlying neocolonial impact on Pakistani Society. It leads to disruption in every area of the system, including foreign investments and local businesses and to poor living and health conditions. The uncertainty created by it causes the lack of tourism and the destruction of public property. The selected text highlights the grave effects of the situation on the artists who are shaken up by it completely. "We want destruction. We want buildings to come down. We want terror to reign over Karachi tonight." (Khan, 2019, p.249). Lahore and Karachi, the biggest cities of Pakistan with millions of populations are under siege. The government is incapable of eradicating terrorist groups from Pakistan and the country is ruled over by the fear created by constant blasts. Among other places, Waziristan is also engulfed by ominous events. 'A bomb. Right in the heart of Lahore. Dozens dead. Scores injured. The list goes on and on.' (Khan, 2019, p.241)

The selected text, by establishing the chaotic living conditions in Pakistan, gives the impression that pandemonium rising in the eastern countries results from its inhabitant's congenital destructive nature. It poses Pakistani Muslim people as a threat to the stability of the West. It also strengthens the political stance of Western leaders against Pakistani Muslims as a potential menace.

Conclusion

The textual analysis of *In the Company of Strangers* reveals that portrayal of Pakistani people in the text is totalized, misconstrued and distorted. Pakistani people and local culture through exoticizing local food, defamiliarizing urban areas and poor sanitary conditions which is ironical because these resulted from neocolonial impact in Postcolonial Pakistani society. The city of Lahore is also glamorized by highlighting its regal past, precolonial glory and inclination towards feminine insanity. Another important element of othering is the recurrent mention of gender related stereotypes to emphasize vile nature of Pakistani men by linking them with violence while women are depicted as suppressed, victimized and capricious. The political instability and terrorism lays the background for the narrative to evoke the familiar tropes about Pakistan in the mind of Western readers.

Recommendation

As most of the existing research on re-orientalism focuses on novels, short stories and memoirs, the focus of further research should be on the South Asian poetry in English especially by Pakistani writers.

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