

## The Representation of Culture of Bangladesh in Adib Khan's *Spiral Road: An Exploration*

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### Abstract

In the name of presenting and flourishing the Bangladeshi culture and cultural aspects, Adib Khan, the Diaspora writer, does the representation of Bangladeshi culture and cultural objects through Hegemony making binary according to the interest, desire and philosophy of the European and the Western people of his novel *Spiral Road*. The present research paper searches for pointing out the probable causes and reasons behind this representation and how the representation has been taken place in a hegemonized and binary way. When the narrator talks about the varied cultural issues of Bangladesh i.e., Family, Marriage, Religion, Morality and other related factors which are regarded as the cultural objects, the narrator truly depends on the European and Western based media and news portals and besides, through the process and procedure of sketching these aspects, the narrator plays an unauthentic and a biased and mostly, a partial role too. The narrator further deals with a significant issue like- Religion and its different shapes, ideologies and practices capriciously which is a matter of concern and toxicity for the western people and it is a matter of great regret that the author has tremendous scarcity and deficiency of authenticity and impartiality when the narrator highlights these matters of Bangladesh. It has also been endeavored to scrutinize, clarify and decipher the latent and biased politics behind this representation.

**Key Words:** Culture, Representation, Family, Marriage, Morality, Religion, Second Generation and Hegemony

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Adib Khan, the author of *Spiral Road*, is a Bangladeshi born Australian writer who is at the same time regarded as a Diaspora writer deals with some factors in his book which are closely, intimately and very deeply affiliated to the culture and cultural objects of Bangladesh like- Family, Marriage, Religion, Morality and other related factors. The problem is that when he deals with those factors, he depends on the secondary sources and basically western media made and based news and consequently, he depicts in such a Bangladesh which is different and diverse from the actual and original Bangladesh as it is. Through Masud Alam, the protagonist of the novel, the narrator projects a relation with his parents and family. In the relation, Masud Alam is seen as a stranger. In terms of his brother Zia, he builds a Relation (live together) and he is at home in the relation. When he talks to his sister Nasreen, Nasreen is shocked about Masud. In the question of marriage, Masud is interested to be with live together in lieu of marriage. In the projection of the morality and courtesy of Bangladesh, the narrator wrongly judges the people of Bangladesh. In terms of projecting the Second Generation like Omar and Afreeen, Masud neglects the native culture of Bangladesh and puts emphasis on Australia and the culture of Australia. The narrator actually does his worst misperception when he depicts the religion of Islam and Muslim; the major cultural object of Bangladesh based on the light of the Westerners and in this specific spectrum, the narrator very partially and blindly projects it. Md. Alamgir Hossain in his *Islam, Terrorism and Bangladesh: Reading Adib Khan's Spiral Road* indicates that the narrator sketches religion according to the view point of the westerners. That literary critic says, "owing to the hegemonic control of media and publishing industry by the west "Islam" and "terrorism", nowadays, have become almost synonymous". Through the characters of uncle Musa and uncle Rafiq, the narrator delineates another deformed story of Islam and Muslim. Side by side, through the appearance of "a group of bearded Muslims", the narrator very prejudicially deals with their wrong doings but ultimately he wrongly depicts the code of conduct and morality of Bangladesh. And thus, the narrator does not present but represents the culture and cultural objects of Bangladesh unauthentically due to his tremendous lack of firsthand experience and information, indeed.

### THE CONCEPT REGARDING CULTURE

Culture is a vast and varied issue nowadays which involves all ways of life not only in the individual spectrum but also in the collective gamut too. Actually culture is what not culture in the existing civilization. According to the arrival of Cultural Studies, the concept and philosophy regarding culture has been dramatically changed and altered. In this nexus, Pramod K. Nayar is relevant. The scholar has discovered the ideas regarding culture based on the previous time and also on the basis of the Cultural Studies. Culture was once regarded very spiritual and sacrosanct aspect. According to Nayar,

“It (culture) also meant ‘to honor’ and ‘protect’. By the nineteenth century in Europe it meant the habits, customs and tastes of the upper classes (also known as the elite).” (Nayar, 2011, p-4, )

Besides, the expert also describes in respect of the present features of culture according to the concept of the Cultural Studies. The scholar Nayar says,

“Culture is the mode of generating meaning and ideas. This mode is a negotiation over which meanings are valid. Meanings are governed by power relations Elite culture controls meaning because it controls the terms of the debate...” (Nayar, 2011, p-4, )

It is worth to be cited that culture, according to the view of the liberal humanism, creates a timeless minds through the practices. Hans Bertens cites of his *Literary Theory: The Basics from Culture and Anarchy* by Matthew Arnold regarding culture on the basis of the liberal humanism.

“A timeless culture must be the creation of timeless minds that is of minds that can at least temporarily disregard the world around them...” (Bertens, 2001, p-5)

Through the statement, Arnold wants to create a universal form of culture which is very ambivalent. It is because Arnold always upholds Europe and the classical texts and he invites to follow the classics but the readers know that he wants to measure the world according to the view of the Europe. If people want to uphold a specific culture, he or she has to follow the European culture as Arnold makes it (European Culture) as the best “the best that has been thought and said in the world”. Actually, Arnold deals with the superiority of his culture by neglecting others.

On the other hand, Raymond Williams, the neo-Marxist talks about the culture and its varied factors through Marxist eyes in his *Marxism and Literature*. He tries to depict the political domain and diplomacy of culture and how it is shaped. Material is the thing that shapes the layers and levels of culture. The critic defines culture in the following way-

“culture as a constitutive social process, creating specific and different ‘ways of life’, which could have been remarkably deepened by the emphasis on a material and social process, were for a long time missed, and were often in practice superseded by abstracting unilinear universalism...” (Williams, 1997, p-19)

Therefore, it is depicted that culture is the amalgamation of all sorts of ways of our life including our belief, tradition, religion, food and clothing, morality and what not and the narrator of *Spiral Road* actually wrongly presents our culture and cultural objects to create a better market and reader in the western countries for his novel and popularity as a famous (notorious) writer.

## **REPRESENTATION AND ITS FORMATION**

The term representation refers to the presentation of the actual things through a series of modification and alteration by creating wrong assumption and experience. The writers use the form of representation as a device and ruse of writing and by doing so; they create a deformed and partial story and history of an actual event and achieve the authenticities to define the people wrongly who are involved within the event. Through this novel, the novelist Adib Khan creates an unauthentic story regarding Bangladeshi people and their cultural objects. In this context, Edward Said's *Orientalism* is very prevalent where the writer says that the elite class wrongly and falsely represents the common people and dominates them very diplomatically. The scholar says,

“-dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, settling it ruling over it.” (Said, 1995, p-3)

Besides this, Edward W. Said mentions in the very beginning of his renowned and ‘truly pathbreaking’ book *Orientalism* about the famous quotation of Karl Marx's book *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* where Marx says regarding the common and dominated people and how they are voiceless and for this reason they are falsely represented each and everywhere by the bourgeoisie society. Said cites this citation to clarify how the orientals are acutely dominated and exploited by the capitalistic society and also the westerners. According to Marx's quotation,

“They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented”.

The narrator through his protagonist Masud Alam sketches a story regarding the people of Bangladesh very prejudicially on the basis of culture.

## **FAMILY AND FAMILY RELATED ASPECTS**

The narrator of *Spiral Road* through Masud Alam presents a relation with his parents but how the relation is depicted has the tremendous lack of authenticity and reliability. Masud is unable to speak with his father. He does not know how to behave with his own father. In the text, the narrator is seen to be very passive

in terms of fatherly relation with his father. He appears before his father as an outsider like an alien. The narrator very confidently says regarding his father but the thing appears to us as a matter of great tremor and shock. The narrator says regarding his father,

"It upsets me that I cannot reach out to him. I confess, 'I don't know what to say. My own father. I can't help thinking of him as he was-strong and decisive, sensible and dutiful..." (Khan, *Spiral Road*, p-77)

It is very clear that in Bangladeshi culture, the relation between father and son is a relation of harmony and mutual respect and care. There is not a single son in our country who is seen to be stranger to his own father. The sons and daughters are never seen to be disrespectful to their father and mother except the drunker. The relation between father and son appears as an 'organic bond' and the son and daughter jointly do their 'filial gratitude' towards their father and mother. It is a fact of great regret and remorse how the narrator due to his affiliation with the Australian culture and western culture neglects our Bangladeshi cultural bondage between children and parents.

In terms of the mother, the narrator is also synonymous with the fatherly ignorance. The narrator does not like the ritualistic behavior and traditional pattern of attitude of his mother with him. According to the narrator,

"Ma held the view that it was the duty of sons to invite their parents to live with them..." (Khan, *Spiral Road*)

How the narrator depicts the scenario of the text particularly in terms of mother is very deplorable and mournful. He satirizes the idea of the mother of our country. In our culture, we love and respect deeply to our mothers. Our mothers are also very careful and lovable towards their children. How much more they sacrifice for the children are beyond the expression. The narrator also provides a series of insult and ignorance towards the mother. As he is beset with the Australian and western cultural objects like family bondage and owing to these aspects, he neglects our mother. Besides, the narrator portrays a parochial relation among Masud Alam and his brother Zia and sister Nasreen. Nasreen is shocked to see him when he says that he opts for 'live together' in lieu of marriage. The conversation between Zia and Masud Alam is not the bearer of any brotherhood although they speak between themselves for a long time. At the end, Masud Alam tells regarding Zia some negative words and finally states, "Zia is the trickiest of all" (Khan, *Spiral Road*). In the western union, it is seen that the joint familial bondage is getting shattered seriously and many nuclear families are grown up. The members of the family in the European countries are reluctant and averse to be united with the other members of the same family. Although the writer is a Bangladeshi born person but he is completely changed due to the affiliation with the western culture. Through the text, he actually wrongly exhibits his western based thought and philosophy towards our culture very cunningly and politically.

### **MARRIAGE AND MATRIMONIAL ASPECTS**

The narrator provides his western based ideas and concepts regarding marriage and marital aspects in *Spiral Road*. It is a matter of great regret and shame that the narrator consciously or unconsciously projects his western based belief which is not actually the marriage, and instead of this, the narrator delineates the importance of 'live together' and he himself is the real practitioner of this term. The narrator is completely indoctrinated by the western peoples' philosophy and idea and by neglecting our own culture; he actually shapes 'live together' as a paramount factor. Although he is seen as a follower of Bangladeshi culture at the earlier stage of his life while he was in Bangladesh, his psychology was changed after leaving that country. He had a passion and respect for love. During his early time, he had a bit of passion for Naheed, a female character of his novel. The author had an inclination over her and when the girl went away, the narrator felt a touch of absence and got a bit shock. According to the narrator regarding Naheed,

"I don't know what the feeling is but she leaves me sad and aching inside..." (Khan, *Spiral Road*)

Through the passage of time, when the narrator went to Australia, he was dramatically changed and started following the culture of Australia. She suddenly met with Amelia, the widow and gradually developed a relationship with the woman. He met with her and they passed their time. According to the narrator regarding Amelia,

"...sometimes we make love. I am an emotional Bedouin..." (Khan, *Spiral Road*)

The scenario of his mind is being tremendously changed when he is talking to Nasreen, the sister of Masud Alam. He thinks that Nasreen may realize about my different attitude and when Nasreen tells to him about marriage, Masud shows his reluctance. According to the narrator,

"Will you marry her?

I don't think so, may be live together." (Khan, *Spiral Road*)

Although Masud has a Bangladeshi root and heritage, he is completely changed by the culture of Australia. Therefore, it is told that through the representation by the western media and journals, the narrator is almost completely changed and how blindly he presents the culture of Bangladesh lacks the authenticity and impartiality.

## **MORALITY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SECOND GENERATION**

In *Spiral Road*, we find the issue of morality which is also altered by the narrator through representation and hegemony. In Bangladesh, there is the name and fame of morality and courtesy but the narrator through the narrative changes the form of hospitality of our country. The protagonist Masud Alam faces with some bearded Muslim when he visits Dhaka city and he is attacked by them in the name of American sly. According to Masud Alam,

“I am now surrounded by religious zealots...” (Khan, *Spiral Road*)

It is already established that people all around the world know about our humanity and hospitality but Masud Alam through the narrator is wrongly presented the story. It is not the culture of the Bangladeshi to irritate anyone in the first meeting whoever the person is but they try their level best to honor and respect the stranger and particularly, Masud Alam's root is a Bangladeshi, how he criticizes a person as a sly in the very first meeting? The narrator is actually very biased in the projection of our morality and culture.

In the text, it is seen that the narrator also deals with the agents of the second generations and he wrongly expresses his words towards them by neglecting Bangladesh. Afreen and Omar, the children of Zia went to visit Australia with Masud Alam and they are fascinated by the luxury of the Australians. Afreen says, “It must be a very just country,

No one's poor here...” (Khan, *Spiral Road*)

In the projection of Australia very luxuriously, the narrator neglects and ignores the people of Bangladesh along with the country. According to the narrator regarding Bangladesh,

“I suppose without chaos, this would be a dull country...” (Khan, *Spiral Road*)

Alongside of this shocking statement, the narrator again expresses two statements which are-

“Bandarban is a sleepy town...” (Khan: *Spiral Road*)

“Bangladesh is potentially a problem area...” (Khan, *Spiral Road*)

According to the point of view, to some extent, the narrator is seen to be a man of sadistic attitude due to his pleasure by neglecting the authenticity of Bangladesh and he gives importance to Australia and its culture. However, it is said that the narrator through the novel criticizes the culture of Bangladesh and thus, the narrator portrays an unauthentic Bangladesh.

## **RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS**

In terms of portraying the religion and religious activities predominantly Islam and Muslims, the narrator does the worst biasedness and partiality. According to Md. Alamgir Hossain's *Islam, Terrorism and Bangladesh: Reading Adib Khan's Spiral Road*, Adib Khan is seen to be biased to “tend to satisfy the expectations of western readers by dealing with issues like Islam, Muslims and Terrorism stereotypically. Through the characters of uncle Musa and uncle Rafiq, the narrator actually expresses his personal views towards Islam. In the text, it is seen that uncle Musa says, “Both are ready for fatherhood” (Khan: *Spiral Road*) but he wrongly delineates the law of religion. Later on uncle Musa wants to do his fourth marriage in the name of Islam but how Islam talks about marriage is partially depicted by the narrator. Uncle Musa is sexually hypnotized by the beauty of a young lady but he is a man of almost old in his age. When he is rejected and restricted by Masud, Zia and others, he becomes furious and says,

“Bastard! Even Birds conspire against me...” (Khan: *Spiral Road*)

Actually, through uncle Musa, the narrator allegorically expresses his partial ideas about the code of conduct of Islam.

The narrator is seemed to be a man out of Islam and for this; it has become easy for him to portray a biased religion Islam in the name of Terrorism. According to the narrator,

“Fragmentation is grown in me here. I feel emotionally torn. The wandering migrant. The roaming atheist...” (Khan: *Spiral Road*)

The narrator is now suffering from existential crisis and for this reason, he does not see any ray of hope. And therefore, he represents Islam and declares him as a man between dilemmas. According to the narrator,

“My current status wave between atheism and agnosticism...” (Khan: *Spiral Road*)

It is the most significant issue when the narrator in the name of Masud Alam talks about uncle Rafiq who is a scholar of Islam. The narrator and uncle Rafiq make a debate regarding the 9/11 incident and the idea of Islam in Australia. When Hamid, the customs officer, interrogates him in the airport, Masud says with proud in the following way,

“I am an Australian. I'm not prejudiced against Muslim...” (Khan: *Spiral Road*)

Later on, when uncle Rafiq asks, Masud Alam again says, “I am not a practice Muslim any more...” (Khan, *Spiral Road*). Actually, the narrator is in favor of Australia and the philosophy of them because he believes what the Australians say about the participation of war in Iraq by Australia. The western tells war against terrorism but ultimately they kill the Muslims and torture them inhumanly and brutally.

Next to, it is seen that the narrator wrongly depicts some political parties very partially how the westerners depict and create their opinion about us. The narrators deals with Bangladesh as a fundamentalist country which is beset with “Bangla Bhai, Taleban, Harkarul Jihad’ and so on but he forgets to depicts some secular parties like- Somajtantrik Dall, Jatio party and obviously the Bangladesh Awamileague party. According to Alamgir Hossain, Khan goes through a process of “intellectual metamorphosis” and he serves for the western purpose for individual profit and popularity. Maswood Akther through his article *Bangladesh Revisited: A Monograph of Adib Khan's Fiction* regards Khan as A man of “cultural ambidexterity”.

## HEGEMONY

Owing to the practice of hegemony, we observe how the narrator is completely hegemonized by the western media and journals which are visible in *Spiral Road*. Adib Khan willingly gives his ‘consent’ to the westerners to be dominated but he receives the domination only for his individual profit and popularity in the western market and reader. In this connection, the renowned philosopher Antonio Gramsci is prevalent and the scholar says his ideas regarding hegemony which is mentioned in Bertens’ *Literary Theory: The Basics*. In the book, Bertens cites from Gramsci which is as followed:

“The spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group. (Bertens, 2001, p-88.)

Actually the narrator has played with the culture of Bangladesh and deceits them for the westerners’ greater interest. In terms of cultural representation and its artifacts, ‘ideology’ is the main factor here, indeed. Raymond Williams depicts in his *Marxism and Literature* deals with the statement of Volosinov and then, the Marxist says,

“Volosinov, for example, uses ‘ideological’ to describe the process of the production of meaning through signs, and ‘ideology’ is taken as the dimension of social experience in which meanings and values are produced.” (Williams, 1977, p-70).

Actually hegemony is such a discourse which has not only a singular role but also so many plural roles which are prepared by the capitalistic minded people particularly the European and the Americans and they manipulate the Diaspora like Adib Khan to be dominated. It is the fault of Adib Khan because he also ignores the responsibility and duty towards his root, Bangladesh. In this nexus, Bertens is important and he says,

“Hegemony is not singular...its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended. (Bertens, p-890

The narrator plays with the culture of Bangladeshi people and represents it negatively for western’s attention. Jacques Lacan says the motto of the capitalists and westerners as “hails and interpellates”. The way of domination and exploitation is also described by the renowned Marxist critic Louis Althusser and he regards the means of domination through the technique of ‘Ideological State Apparatus’ (ISA) and Michel Foucault sees the domination through a ‘Discursive way’. With the help of their doctrines, Khan and *Spiral Road* is depicted as a means of representation of Bangladeshi culture through hegemonic practices. Thus, the narrator is failed to portray an authentic and impartial Bangladesh on the basis of Culture and cultural artefacts.

## II. CONCLUSION

At the denouement, it is justifiably opined that Adib Khan’s *Spiral Road* is not successful in terms of highlighting the true culture and cultural artifacts of Bangladesh which is actually compared with “operates, to a significant extent, within the (western) paradigm of negative stereotyping and clichéd generalizations” (Anther, “*Bangladesh Revisited*”, 318). And thus, the narrator Adib Khan is failed to establish an authentic and impartial Bangladesh on the basis of Culture and cultural artifacts and through his representation of the culture of Bangladesh of the novel *Spiral Road*, the people of Bangladesh become much more deplorable, mournful and highly shocked indeed.

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