

Neo-Orientalism and the Representation of Muslim identity and Islam in Taslīma Nasrīn's *Lajja*

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Abstract

Islam and Muslims are not only maligned by the western experts on Islam, but also by indigenous native informers who claim to provide authentic representation of the Muslim majority countries. This kind of stereotypical and essentialist depiction of Islam and Muslims has been termed as neo-Orientalism by William and Behdād, they argue that neo-Orientalists disseminate Islamophobia by depicting Islam as an extremist religion. Islam is one of the dominant religions in the South Asian region which also includes Bangladesh; it is the dominant religion in Pakistan and Bangladesh and second largest religion in India. Keeping in view this issue, this study conducts the textual analysis of *Lajja* by Taslīma Nasrīn by following theoretical framework of Behdād and William's neo-Orientalism. The study examines how Nasrīn in her novel *Lajja* employs neo-Orientalist discourse in order to construct monolithic and essentialist identities of not only Muslims, but also Muslims majority government.

Keywords: Neo-Orientalism, Islam, Neo-Orientalism *Lajja*, Taslīma Nasrīn

1 Introduction

The present study aims to explore the neo-Orientalist's representation of Islam and the Muslims in Taslīma Nasrīn's novel *Lajja*. The novel under scrutiny has been hailed for exposing religious fundamentalism through the demonstration of emotional and mental turbulence of a Hindu family belonging to the minority. Ostensibly, the novel is based on the incident of demolition of Babri Mosque and its repercussions for Hindu people in Bangladesh. Babri Mosque was demolished by Hindu fundamentalists on 6th December 1992. In addition to that, approximately 2000 Muslims were assassinated by the Hindu fundamentalists in India (*Demolition of Babri Masjid*, 2020). This was an appalling and deplorable example of communal violence and caused ripples in the Islamic world by hurting Muslims' religious sentiments. Muslim countries witnessed protests

which also resulted in casualties. Bangladesh as a Muslim majority country also experienced protests; in addition to that, some of the Bengali Muslims killed Hindus and demolished temples in consequence of the destruction of Babri Mosque. Nevertheless, all Muslims did not commit violence; moreover, the government of Bangladesh endeavored to protect the lives and properties of the minorities. Nevertheless, Taslīma Nasrīn in her aforementioned novel criticizes Islam and the entire Muslim population of Bangladesh. According to William and Behdād, neo-Orientalists, in addition to western writers, comprise native scholars and writers, who in order to attain fame, produce and disseminate negative stereotypes of Islam and the Muslim world (2010, 289). In addition to that, their approach is premised on constricted native subjectivity and lack of perception of subtle intricacies (2010, 285). The following study examines how Nasrīn's views cement her position as a neo-Orientalist. Nasrīn's political views also reinforces her identity as neo-Orientalist; for instance, she considers *Burqa* as "mobile prison" (Taslīma Nasreen n.d.). Behdād and Williams are of view that the neo-orientalists criticize women veil and clothing and consider it as oppression (2010, 285).

1.1 Statement of the problem

In the present era, Neo-Orientalism has substituted Orientalism which basically advances the agenda of Orientalism. The British colonizers initiated the project of Orientalism which is based on the formulation of stereotypes regarding the colonized. Nevertheless, after the World War II, America became a new imperial power and thus began the neo-Orientalist project which is premised upon the representation stereotypes evoking negativity regarding Islam and the Muslim world. In order to demonstrate their work as dispassionate, they have started to support native informers (native writers who claim to have entire knowledge of their native land) who malign their country and its people. This study aims to expose and contest the neo-Orientalist approach of Taslīma Nasrīn in her novel *Lajja*.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To investigate what discursive strategies have been employed by Nasrīn to represent the Muslims of Bangladesh and Islam
- To Explore how Nasrīn's personal opinion regarding Islamization in the preface of the novel coincide with the political statement in the selected novel

1.3 Research Questions

- What are the discursive strategies employed by Nasrīn to represent the Muslims of Bangladesh and Islam?

- How does Nasrīn's personal opinion regarding Islamization in the preface of the novel coincide with the political statement in the selected novel?

1.4 Delimitation

The present study is delimited to the neo-Orientalist analysis of Taslīma Nasrīn's novel *Lajja*.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is of consequence due to its focus on neo-Orientalist discourse which maligns Islam and the Muslim world. The aforementioned discourse is formulated and disseminated by the self-proclaimed native scholars and writers. The study discusses how neo-Orientalists misrepresent Islam and the Bangladeshi Muslim society which emerged on the map as a part of the world owing to two-nation theory. Therefore, the study aspires to contest misrepresentation of Islam and Bangladeshi Muslims in Nasrīn's novel *Lajja*.

2 Literature Review

The term representation entails giving a new meaning that coincides with the ideology of the group that formulates it. This practice has also been utilized to assert European colonizer's superiority over the colonized. Numerous stereotypes were formulated in order to naturalize this self-proclaimed superiority; nevertheless, after attaining freedom from the colonizers, postcolonial critics dissected the colonial text in order to contest these stereotypes called and reclaim their identity. Edward Said termed this colonial practice of stereotyping as Orientalism. However, after WWII this Orientalism metamorphosed into neo-Orientalism when the baton of imperialism was passed into America.

2.1 Orientalism

The politics of representation has always been a cardinal part of colonial projects. In order to rule a land, one has to depict it as lacking in some manner. Numerous times the colonizers prey on the inhabitants of the land they intend to colonize. First, the colonizers establish the inferior and uncivilized image of the people they wish to colonize and then establish their colony on the pretext of civilizing the colonized. Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) expands on this procedure with intricate detail as to how various representational strategies are utilized to dominate the colonized.

These representational techniques have been discussed by Edward Said in one of his momentous projects *Orientalism* (1979). The project of Orientalism which began in 18th century aimed at consolidating the process of colonization by canonizing their inferior status (Said, *Orientalism* 1979, 9). But how do

colonizers accomplish it? Certainly, they succeed with the assistance of Language. In order to paint the colonized in the negative light, the colonizers make adroit use of the language; this has been termed as orientalism. The function of orientalist discourse is to create stereotypes. Being stereotyped means “reduced to a few essentials fixed in Nature by a few, simplified characteristics” (Hall 1997, 249). This further engenders fixed binary opposition in which the imperialists are portrayed as superior and the colonized is shown as inferior (McLeod 2010, 39). Nevertheless, these stereotypes in the orientalist discourse are erroneously premised upon western fantasy (McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* 2010, 40). They are actually fabricated to afford “positional superiority” to the colonizers. Hence, they are not premised on concrete and authentic information. However, the colonizers are required to legitimize these representations in order to establish the basis of their colonialism. Thus, according to Said, a whole new institution is created in which an oriental (the colonized) is relegated to the position of specimen, an object with fixed characteristics and no voice (1979, 3). In the same vein, David Richardson reveals that while representing a foreign culture, one is inclined to obscure the vision of those people (as cited in McLeod, 2010, p. 40). This demonstrates that the colonizers institutionalize the project of imperialism and scholars are engaged in maligning and misrepresenting the colonized. Moreover, according to Said, the literature of the colonizers also draws on these stereotypes. Orientalism is a project which encompasses and thus consolidates the government of the colonizers by instilling inferiority among the colonized.

The aforementioned binary opposition constructs fixed categories of us vs. them. Basically, the colonizers declare that they are the center of universe; their religion, culture, and language are universal. Therefore, the other (the colonized) on the periphery should strive to learn their superior language, religion and culture. Thus, the binary opposition is created for ideological and political purposes. Said develops his argument regarding Orientalism by drawing on Foucault’s Critical discourse theory. He infers that the Orientalism is a discourse produced and disseminated by the colonizers; the discourse, as mentioned earlier, comprises false stereotypes regarding the colonized (1979, 7).

Orientalism as a project has two layers: “latent” Orientalism and “manifest” Orientalism. Latent Orientalism is the basic idea of the notion of Orientalism; negative images and stereotypes regarding the colonized (as cited in McLeod, 2010, P. 41). Whereas, manifest Orientalism is the texts and documents which reflect the notion of Orientalism (as cited in McLeod, 2010, p. 41). For instance, Said has enumerated certain stereotypes created by European colonizers. First, the colonized will remain primitive and will never evolve. Second, they are bizarre. Third, they are violent, indolent, and inferior. Fourth,

the females of the colonized lands are portrayed as “exotic beings” (2010, 41-42). All these representations demonstrate that “Orientalism is literary and creative” and entire academia contributed to make it appear as objective truth (McLeod 2010, 40). In other words, the western fantasies and imagination created an entire academia where these depraved stereotypes are constructed and disseminated as facts and it had perceptible impact on the masses. By the same token, Rāna Kabbāni, in her book *Imperial Fiction: Europe’s Myths of Orient* (1994), endorses the idea that all the disciplines were utilized in construct rather fabricate these fictional truths that was to serve imperial ideologies (6). Consequently, orientalism became a proper subject and the people who studied it emerged as authorities called orientalists. The imperialists relied upon them in the matters of colonialism. These orientalists made career out of it. They invented a new history and new culture in which the colonizer was a supreme being and the colonized was the one to be dominated for their own good.

2.2 Neo-Orientalism

The stereotypical and demonized images of Islam and the Muslims have been present in the European literature owing to crusades. The Christians would stereotype Islam and the Muslims in their literature as explored by Daniel Norman in his book *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (2000) and Ian Jenkins in his book *Writing Islam: Representations of Muhammad, the Qur’an and Islamic Belief and the Construction of Muslim Identity in Early Modern Britain* (2007). Norman analyzes the polemical image of prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) as violent and warmongering person (2000, 100). Similarly, Ian Jenkins concludes that European literature depicted Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) as a corrupt person and Islam as treacherous and deceptive religion (2007, 58). These stereotypical images were disseminated throughout the colonial period which demonstrates the antiquity of representational practices to demonize and dominate other.

After World War II, Orientalism metamorphosed into Neo-Orientalism. In consequence of World War II, the USA emerged as the imperial power who wished to control oil production in the Middle East in 1945. This led to the belief that they must possess the comprehension of the orient (Islam and the Muslim world). In this manner, neo-Orientalism evolved. In 1946, Middle East Institute was established in order to concentrate on USA’s interest in the Middle Eastern region. Moreover, the institute launched *Middle East Journal* in order to publish the analysis regarding the region which had strategic importance for the USA (Kerboua 2016, 17). Gradually, the study of Islam and the Muslims became the duty of the American scholars and they shared a “policy-oriented interest in the Middle East” (Kerboua 2016, 18). Said has also studied the American Orientalism. He is of opinion that Neo-Orientalism, unlike the British

Orientalism, focuses on facts rather than arts and literature of the orient. Nevertheless, Neo-Orientalism, like its predecessors, constructs negative images of Islam and the Muslim World (1979, 290-291).

In the aftermath of 9/11, the project of neo-Orientalism reinvigorated and consequently the Muslims and the Muslim world were labeled as terrorists and extremists. The western countries constructed discourses which shrewdly connected extremism to Islam and the Muslims and hence, the notion of Islamophobia emerged. Consequently, the Muslims were entirely bothered. In addition to Western scholars and intellectuals, native writers also constructed libelous statements against Islam and the Muslim world. They furthered the agenda of the Western imperialists and thus attained authenticity. Behdād and Williams maintain that these self-proclaimed native scholars made maligning statements against Islam and the Muslims in order to attain fame in the Western academia (2010, 286). Likewise, Edward Said. In his book *Covering Islam* (1997) explores the reason for sudden prominence of people producing and propagating stereotypes of Islam and the Muslims. He concludes that all the departments in the west are employed to construct violent, blood-thirsty, and primitive image of the Muslims who are incensed at the progress and modernity of the west (xxxii). This demonstrates how the paradigm of the east vs. west has been created in order to create irreconcilable differences. This model of the western representation, following orientalist representational practices, has constructed westro centric canon and people who oppose it are labeled as primitive and anti-modern.

This demonstrates that the purpose of the neo-Orientalist project is to other the Muslims and the Muslim world.

2.3 Taslīma Nasrīn

Taslīma Nasrīn (25th August, 1962) is a writer, feminist and religious critic. She has written ferociously against religion and owing to this has faced exile not only from Bangladesh but also Indian Bengal. Her writings have been rendered into 30 languages. According to Nasrīn, Islam and all other religions are misogynic (Taslīma Nasreen n.d.). In addition to that, she has severely criticized Islam and *Sharia* (Islamic law); she advocates its elimination (Taslīma Nasreen n.d.). Furthermore, she has made inattentive comments against the Holy Prophet in her memoir *My Girlhood*. Lastly, as mentioned earlier, she condemns *burqa*. Owing to this, she has become an honorary associate of National Secular Society.

2.4 Lajja

Lajja is the story of Dutta family's circumstances in Bangladesh in consequence

of demolition of Babri Mosque. Dutta family comprises Suranjan Dutta (father), Kironmoyee (mother), Sudhamoy (son), and Nilanjana (daughter). Nasrīn depicts that the Duttas have to endure communal violence at the hands of the Muslims; Nilanjana is abducted and murdered by the Muslims. They also persecute Sudhamoy and Suranjan.

Shikha Thakur is of view that the novel accurately portrays the condition of women in the Islamic country Bangladesh (2016, 61). Nilanjana, Shamima Begum, Kironmoyee, and Maya are conditioned by the prevalent patriarchal norms. She further suggests that religion and societal system fail to provide constructive environment for the development of women. They are rendered frail, meek, and subversive (Thakur 2016, 61). Basically, Islamic government does not protect women and confines them to domestic roles.

Kaustubh K. Raut maintains that Nasrīn's *Lajja* exposes the religious fundamentalism of the Muslims (2018, 7). He analyses that even the friends of Sudhamoy become fundamentalists in the novel and government of Bangladesh refrains from providing security to Hindu families. Similarly, Maurya acclaims *Lajja* for exposing religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh (2015, 308).

The above review suggests that *Lajja*, up until now has been analyzed from the western theoretical models whereby religion, especially Islam, is the harbinger of sorrow, violence, and death. Thus, the researcher concludes that Islam has been marginalized by these critics, giving birth to research gap. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the representation of Islam and Bengali Muslims in the selected novel.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The present study follows the theoretical framework of neo-Orientalism presented by Ali Behdād and William Juliet. Neo-Orientalism is a discourse that formulates and distributes libelous stereotypes regarding Islam and the Muslim world. Neo-Orientalists are basically writers who claim to be connoisseur in the political, social and cultural aspects of their country (2010, 286). The category of neo-Orientalist comprises not only western writers and intellectuals but also indigenous men (native informers) and women who employ their “native subjectivity” in their writings with the aid of Western academia in order to further their agenda (2010, 285). It is “monolithic, totalizing, reliant on a binary logic, and based on an assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the Oriental other. To put the point more aphoristically, neo-Orientalism should be understood not as *sui generis*, but rather as a supplement to enduring modes or Orientalist

representation” (Behdād and Juliet 2010, 284). In addition to that, neo-Orientalists are connected with the Western neo-Orientalist institutions which assist them in order to unremorsefully inquire into the politics of their native country. In this manner, Westerners have found a way to establish these stereotypes as objective knowledge. However, these neo-Orientalists’ assumptions are based on mere observations and are consequently generalized.

In addition to that, women’s head scarf and veil are considered to be the demonstration of their oppression and subjugation (Behdād and Juliet 2010, 285). William and Behdād, after scrutinizing the memoirs of Iranian women, conclude that their knowledge although empirical is premised on utter lack of profound perception and thus, is a lie. They also infer that neo-Orientalists utilize their personal experiences to construct erroneous political statements which ostensibly aim at emancipating the people from the oppression of Islamic government. In a nutshell, personal observations are utilized in order to present them as objective and dispassionate. Historical events are misconstrued by entirely neglecting their complexities and presented as truth about a society. Moreover, Islamic society is portrayed as primitive. In conclusion facile “journalistic empiricism allows the neo-Orientalist to get to the heart of Middle Eastern societies, grasp their essential characteristics, and finally produce a generalized and generalizable cultural theory” (Behdād and Juliet 2010, 293).

3.2 Research Method

The researcher has selected the qualitative method entitled textual analysis in order to conduct the research. This qualitative method has been delineated by Alan Mckee in his book *A beginners Guide to Textual Analysis* (2003). The method allows the researcher to collect data regarding “how other human beings make sense of the world” (1). Textual analysis signifies that one establishes a well-informed and sophisticated conjecture regarding meaning of a particular text. In order to apply method of textual analysis, one is required to comprehend the meaning of ‘text’; a text comprises everything from which one extracts meaning (4). In other words, one reads and interprets a text. Nevertheless, a text can be interpreted from various perspectives; hence, one can have myriads of interpretation of a text. This leads to a question: How can one identify single correct interpretation of a text. The answer to this question is that one is required to discover the context in order to identify the interpretation correctly. Therefore, context is taken into consideration in order to conduct textual analysis. As mentioned earlier, textual analysis is a qualitative method; hence, this method does not generate outcomes in the form of numbers.

4 Discussion

As mentioned earlier, neo-Orientalists utilize their native subjectivity and experiential authority in order to legitimize and propagate western binaries and stereotypes regarding Islam. Furthermore, Hasan Majed contends that the western secular model aims to distort Islam owing to its opposite positionality (2012, 56). In the same vein, Sardar and Davis maintain that the depiction of Islam as uncivilized and anti-modern is part of western secular agenda (1990, 76). From this one may conclude that portrayal of Islam as violent, savage, fundamentalist religion is part of this campaign and in order to label it as objective and authentic, native informers are employed. Nasrīn, originally from Muslim-majority Bangladesh, disseminates this neo-Orientalist discourse by declaring in the preface of *Lajja* (1993) that she is a critic of religion (of Islam in the novel) owing to its ability to derive people towards fanaticism which leads to abandoning humanity and embracing savagery (2014, ix-x). She is of view that the Muslim majority state Bangladesh neglects the protection of the Hindus (2014, x). In these lines, she is exercising what Dag Tuastad called “thesis of barbarism”; that is “explanations of political violence [in the Middle East] that omit political and economic interests and contexts when describing violence and present violence as a result of traits embedded in local cultures [of the region]” (Behdād and Juliet 2010, 289). In addition to that, if one takes even a cursory glance at the Quran, one will find plethora of verses prohibiting the Muslims from extremism and violence; for instance, in the 21st chapter of Quran Allah says “Indeed, in this is a message for people who worship. 107. We did not send you except as mercy to mankind” (Itani 2012, 122). This demonstrates that Islam never derives the Muslims towards violence. Furthermore, Islam has forbidden the heinous act of murder “And do not kill the soul which Allah has made sacred, except in the course of justice” (2012, 103). Therefore, Nasrīn’s argument that religion promotes savageness falls short. Her open criticism on Islam therefore, authenticates William and Behdād inference that native self-proclaimed writers profess to have knowledge of their country and religion and uses their erroneous “native subjectivity” in order to present their knowledge. In addition to that, they talk about something which is beyond their perception and it is manifestly visible in Nasrīn erroneous opinion and inference regarding Islam in the above-mentioned lines.

In the novel, a Hindu family is depicted as petrified after the demolition of Babri Mosque in India for the event stimulates the Muslims to commit fundamentalist and extremist acts in the name of religion. Nasrīn dedicates chapters to apprise the reader of destruction and havoc caused by the extremists who are the Muslims:

There was nothing safe about the October of 1990. A group of men had set the

Dhakeshwari temple on fire. The police stood by and did nothing to stop them. The main temple burnt down, they destroyed the *naatmandir*- that is, the temple for the entertainment of the gods, The main temple of the Madhwa Gaudiya Math was destroyed.... these were attacks by one community on another. Torture. Persecution (2014, 7-8)

Similarly, in the Gopalgani district Hindus have to endure theft, rape of their women, and torture by police (Nasrīn 2014, 63). Suronjon neighbours and friends, with whom he once enjoyed bond of affinity, start beating him after the Babri Masjid incident. These instances illustrate that Nasrīn not only depicts all the Muslims as violent, but also the religious symbol Mosque as propeller towards violence. Nasrīn's depiction concludes that the government did not interfere to alleviate the situation. Nonetheless, factual information reveals otherwise. In October 1990, the government imposed an indefinite curfew on older sections of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, amid mounting tension over the storming of the Babri Mosque by the Hindus in Ayodhya, India. The curfew was ordered after an attempt by protesters to set fire to Hindu temples in old sections of Dhaka. Police foiled these attempts. Maulana F. H. Amini protested but warned that any harm to Hindus in Bangladesh or damage to their property is not permissible under Islam ("Chronology for Hindus in Bangladesh" 2004). In December 1992, police fired tear gas on people who attempted to enter the cricket stadium ("Chronology for Hindus in Bangladesh" 2004). The demolition of the Babri Mosque and not the Islamic fundamentalism stimulated the protests in Bangladesh. Nasrīn discusses this fact briefly and devotes the entire novel to the extremism of the Muslims. Nearly 2000 Muslims lost their lives in India due to Hindu extremism which finds little space in the novel. Religion did not cause riots and protests; rather it was stimulated by the intolerance of some extremists Hindus which hurt religious sentiments of the Muslims across the globe and they retaliated. Similar to William and Behdād's view, Nasrīn is essentially feeding the western neo-Orientalist model by using her feigned authority. Individuality of the Muslims is abandoned in an effort to conform to the neo-Orientalist framework to represent Muslims as an angry mob threatening peace of the region.

Another trait of the neo-Orientalists, according to William and Behdād, is unapologetic investment in the politics of Islamic government in order to criticize them (2010, 285). In the same vein, Nasrīn condemns Bangladesh's government supposedly fundamentalist acts. Firstly, she sets herself against the approval of National Religion Bill by stating that many Hindus lost their properties and lives in the wake of the Bill (Lajja 2014, 68). She attempts to demonstrate that Islamization leads to the persecution of minorities. In Bangladesh 90 percent people are professed Muslim and Islam is the state religion ("Religion in Bangladesh" n.d.). Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, Islam gives rights to

minorities also and therefore, people belonging to other religion have freedom to practice their religion. The article 2A of Bangladesh constitution states that "the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions" (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019). Therefore, Nasrīn's criticism on National Religion Bill is not accurate. Her essentialized and monolithic approach propagates negative image of the Muslims and Islam. William and Behdād, as mentioned earlier, argue that native writers have limited perception of their native country and they use their personal observation to make grand political statements.

Secondly, Nasrīn has also criticized the government for the ethnic cleansing of the Hindus. Similar to reports of Western academia, she propagates that the Islamization of the Country has destroyed the Hindus and democratic spirit of the Bangladesh. She says that the communal forces have destroyed the force of democracy (2014, 260). She morosely paints the picture of Islamization in the novel by showing the augmentation in the number of mosques and Islamic programs (2014, 268). She is of view that Islamization of the constitution made the Hindus insecure in the country. In order to support her argument, she depicts the growth rate of the Muslims and Hindus in the country, "In 1974 the Hindus were 13.5 percent of the total population; in 1981, they were 12.1 percent" (2014, 98). The reason for Hindus' dilemma is declared to be Islam and its "fundamentalist organization that had opposed the liberation war in 1971 and had hidden itself since the Liberation was now out of its hidey-hole" (2014, 17). In these lines, Nasrīn fortifies her earlier statement in the preface that Islam in Bangladesh is deriving the Muslims towards madness. Contrary to her libelous statements, Islam is the religion which gives protection to the minorities. Holy Prophet said that "whoever hurts a covenanted non-Muslim I will be his complainant and whoever I am the complainant for I will ask for his rights on The Day of Judgment" (tech@whyislam.org, n.d.). In another saying of the Prophet he says "whoever committed any act of injustice to a person who has a treaty with the Muslim, took away part of his rights, charged him with something he could not do (labor or other things) or too from him anything without his consent then I will be his complainant on The Day of Judgment" (tech@whyislam.org, n.d.). This demonstrates that in *Lajja* Nasrīn has propagated Western neo-Orientalist agenda as concluded by William and Behdād.

Furthermore, Suronjon friends are depicted as practicing Muslims that disappoints Sudhamoy who supports secularity. Sudhamoy is the main character of the novel through which Nasrīn propagates her neo-Orientalist propaganda. His friends towards the end of the novel become religious; for instance, his friends tell him to wait so that he may pray. In this manner, the very act of

praying becomes extremism and fundamentalism. Their very act of praying becomes disappointing for Suronjon who is a Hindu and who shudders at the thought of implementation of Sharia law in the Muslim majority country (Nasrīn 2014, 305). The Western academia has defamed Sharia by calling it black law and Nasrīn has disseminated the western agenda in the above-mentioned lines. Thus, the novel paints a bleak future for Hindus in Bangladesh.

Another neo-Orientalist trope that Nasrīn mentions in the novel is “Muslims are used to *hijrat* or migration. “We know from history that Muslims have travelled from one country to another. Hindus, however, have a strong tie with their land” (2014, 276). This demonstrates what William and Behdād calls ignorance of neo-Orientalists. Nasrīn in these lines completely neglects the reasons of the Muslims migration. They had to face persecution. Holy Prophet was tearful leaving Mecca “By Allah, you are the best and most beloved land to Allah. Had I not been driven away from you, I would not have left you” (Elias n.d.). Therefore, the Muslims ardently love their homeland. Hasan Majed also explores this theme in his book *Islam and Muslim Identities in Four Contemporary British Novels* (2012) as he says that Muslim identity is depicted as in conflict with national or societal identity (91). Likewise, in the novel under scrutiny Islam and the Muslim identity is completely alien or foreign to Bangladesh’s secular identity that was founded on “four main principles-nationalism, neutrality towards all religion, democracy and socialism” (Nasrīn 2014, 60). The above trope aims at separating Muslim identity from the Bengali identity in order to portray it as foreign. It is also connected with another neo-Orientalist trope that is distorting the history by using self-proclaimed authority on the regional politics.

History is an integral part of one’s cultural heritage. Nations record their history to pass on to next generations. Neo-Orientalists attack and distort the history of Muslims and Islam in the sub-continent. For instance, Nasrīn in her demonization of Islam condemns the Two-Nation theory which states that Hindus and Muslims are separate nations. In the novel, it is declared that the partition was the triumph of Islamic fundamentalism (Nasrīn 2014, 199). In order to reinforce her idea, she falsely announces “Jinnah himself had rejected the two-nation theory as a framework for the state” (Nasrīn 2014, 125). Contrary to her mutilated history, the Quaid-e-Azam was an ardent supporter of the two-nation theory who defined Islamic nationalism. In his address on 23rd March 1940, he declared “We are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, value and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendars, history and tradition, aptitudes and ambitions; in short, we have our own distinctive outlook of life and on life. By all canons of international law, we are a nation”. By equating the two-nation theory

with Islamization, Nasrīn endeavors to depict the very foundation of both East and West Pakistan as fundamentalist in nature and hence requires an overhaul, of course, with the help of a western framework. This attempt corroborates the statement of William and Behdād that the comprador intellectuals have no profound information and knowledge of their history of country and they use their limited experience to make grand political statements. In addition to that, they perpetuate western neo-Orientalist approach by making libelous statements against Islam and the Muslims.

There are approximately Six Hundred million Muslims in the South Asian region (*Islam in South Asia*, 2022). Moreover, Islam is the religion of the majority population in Pakistan and Bangladesh; whereas, it is the second largest religion in India (*Islam in South Asia*, 2022). The case of the demolition of Babri Masjid, that hurt Muslims' sentiments, is incorrectly represented in the novel under scrutiny. Nasrīn representation depicts that all the Muslims are extremists and fundamentalists and are, therefore, a threat to the peace and stability of South Asia. Nevertheless, she neglects to highlight the cause of protests which was the demolition of Babri Mosque by RSS. The aforementioned organization has now become a threat to the harmony and stability of South Asia region. The RSS is now a major force in the India and the amendment of citizenship bill is the evidence of this. Shashi Throor, a senior congress leader, has criticized the bill and has termed it as a victory of Jinnah (Delhi December 9 et al., n.d.). This demonstrates that the Muslims have not jeopardized peace; rather, they are being victimized in the South Asian region.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of the novel through the lens of William and Behdād's neo-Orientalism demonstrates that the author of the selected novel has drawn heavily on the discursive strategy of stereotyping in order to depict Islam and the Muslims in *Lajja*. Nasrīn, in the selected novel, constructs Muslim identity by heavily relying upon the western stereotypes; they have been depicted as extremists and fundamentalists. The Muslim leaders are shown as apathetic towards the minorities. The reason, according to her, is Islamization that is thrusting them into an incessant cycle of violence. At the various junctures of the selected novel, she stereotypically portrays the glimpses of the consequence of Islamization that leads the Muslims of Bangladesh to exterminate and violate the rights of minorities and thereby, against the intrinsic spirit of democracy; for instance, witnessing the calamity caused by the Muslims, Suronjon shudders with disgust at the thought of implementing Sharia or Islamic law. Therefore, representing the Muslims as violent, extremists, and Islam as disseminator of extremism, Nasrīn, following western model of stereotypes regarding Islam and

the Muslims, has represented distorted image of the Muslims of Bangladesh and Islam in *Lajja*.

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