

# Strategies of Cognitive Decoloniality in Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend*

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## Abstract

The colonial matrix of power (CMP) is a machine that continues to produce inequality, injustice, and hierarchies in the world. As a result, the process of liberation failed in many postcolonial worlds. In this context, the current study explores the cognitive strategies in Nadeem Aslam's fiction. The researchers have developed a conceptual framework of decoloniality based on the theories of Anibal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo. Through the textual analysis method, the study delves into pluriversity, border thinking, and epistemic disobedience as strategies employed by Aslam in his novel, *The Golden Legend* (2017), to subvert and challenge the colonial matrix of power (CMP). The study identifies and analyses these strategies to examine their implications for cognitive decoloniality. This study is significant as it provides the first comprehensive exploration of decolonial strategies in Aslam's fiction, fostering alternative narratives and amplifying the voices of the marginalized. The study underscores the transformative potential of decolonial studies for the de-westernization of the postcolonial world. This goal is more urgent than ever in the face of ongoing inequality and injustice.

**Keywords:** Decolonization, Colonial matrix of power (CMP), Pluriversity, Border thinking, Epistemic disobedience, cognitive Decoloniality

## Introduction

The legacies of colonialism continue to shape contemporary postcolonial societies and perpetual exclusion, binary thinking, inequality and epistemic injustice. Consequently, the process of decolonization remains incomplete. As scholars like Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano have pointed out, coloniality is not merely a historical artefact but an ongoing process that controls how knowledge is

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produced, how identities are formed and how power is distributed in the world. Therefore, we need decoloniality, a call to challenge the dominance of Western paradigms. It is time to give space to subaltern knowledge and diverse perspectives that have long been marginalized or erased. The current study explores how the fiction of Nadeem Aslam uses strategies to resist and subvert colonial structures. It focuses on the strategies of pluriversity border thinking and epistemic disobedience, concepts central to the decolonial theory. Aslam fiction offers a space for reimagining a world that resists the epistemological violence of coloniality. The study also invites a broader conversation about the transformative potential of literature.

Latin American scholars critically engage with modernity to historicize geopolitical developments that led to Latin America's conquest. This helped them to understand the process of social change in their region. Structures of the powers initiated by colonization are the subject of study and analysis of Quijano. Nadeem Aslam's fiction, however, is a powerful force that challenges and subverts the complex ways in which the colonial matrix of power operates. His novels often display characters caught between two worlds, and he exploits their stories to explore the possibilities of decoloniality. Decoloniality has been called a form of "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo, 2011, pp.122-123), epistemic delinking (Mignolo, 2007, p.450), and "epistemic reconstruction" (Quijano, 2007.p.176).

In this sense, "decolonial thinking is the recognition and implementation of a broader gnosis or subaltern reason" (Mignolo, 2000, p.88), "a means of eliminating the provincial tendency to pretend that Western European modes of thinking are universal ones" (Quijano, 2000, p.544). Decoloniality is the process of dismantling and subverting the coloniality of power, being, and knowledge. It reclaims and re-centers Indigenous knowledge and marginalized perspectives. In its less theoretical and more practical applications as movements for Indigenous autonomy, like "Zapatista self-government-decoloniality, is called a 'programmatic' of delinking from contemporary legacies of coloniality" (Mignolo, 2007, p.452), "a response to needs unmet by the modern Rightist or Leftist governments" (Mignolo, 2012,p.217), or, "most broadly, social movements in search of a 'new humanity,'" (Mignolo, 2012, p.52) or "search for the social liberation from all power organized as equality, discrimination, exploitation, and domination" (Quijano, 2007, p.178).

Nadeem Aslam's fiction employs various strategies to achieve decoloniality. These strategies include Pluriversity, Border thinking, and Epistemic disobedience. Nadeem Aslam has written five novels so far. However, the researcher selected *The Golden Legend* (2017) for the present study because it yields its objectives. Nadeem Aslam's novels celebrate the diversity of human knowledge and experience. They display various and multiple ways of knowing and being in the world. Aslam's novels the space between cultures, languages, and social classes. His characters often cross borders, both physical and metaphorical. In this way, monolithic narratives of coloniality are challenged. In the works, dominant narratives and epistemologies are subverted. His characters often question the authority of the powerful and the methods and ways in which knowledge is produced and disseminated.

These works provide a complex and rich exploration of Pluriversity, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience strategies. The study argues that Nadeem Aslam's fiction is crucial to decolonial studies. The primary purpose of the present research is to explore Nadeem Aslam's fiction as a decolonial project. It shows how Nadeem Aslam's novels can help us to develop new ways of thinking about the world. It foregrounds the complex ways in which coloniality has shaped our lives today. The present study is innovative and original in many ways. Nadeem Aslam's novels are explored from different angles like the Feminist, Marxist, Historical, and psychological lenses. Some researchers examined his works from re-orientalist angles, and some studied them from postcolonial and cultural angles, but no one yet explored these works from a decolonial perspective. Nadeem Aslam is a deep and complex author who has created multilayered, complex novels. That is why some researchers label him a re-orientalist. This is due to its complexity and depth, and a proper understanding of these masterpieces has not yet been achieved. The present study is the first genuine effort to understand the collective message of fiction. It is the first comprehensive research project on decoloniality in Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* (2017). This study interests many scholars in cultural studies, education, literature, and postcolonial studies.

#### ❖ **Significance of the Study**

This research is crucial because it provides the first comprehensive study of decoloniality in Aslam's novels. It uses a decolonial theoretical approach to examine how Nadeem Aslam's novels employ the strategies of pluriversity, border thinking, and epistemic disobedience to subvert and challenge the colonial matrix of power. It is also essential because it contributes to the growing field of decolonial studies.

It tells us that the CMP shapes our present world's ways of knowing and being. This study highlights the concerns about challenging and dismantling the colonial matrix of power (CMP). Nadeem Aslam is a critically acclaimed and influential author whose novels are not yet well-studied in the context of decoloniality. These are significant works that promote inclusivity and broad thinking to achieve universality. The researchers study Aslam's work as part of the decolonial project. This study's findings interest a wide range of scholars in literature, critical theory, cultural studies, and postcolonial and decolonial studies. The findings also have implications for pedagogical practices and the educational needs of postcolonial society, which yearns for indigenous ways of knowing, thinking, and being. It can be used to develop new ways of learning and teaching.

The study is significant because it contributes to our understanding of Nadeem Aslam's novels, the colonial matrix of power, and its role in shaping our lives and decoloniality. The study explores the strategies of decoloniality in Nadeem Aslam's fiction. Decoloniality is dismantling and challenging the colonial matrix of power (CMP). It is a process of re-centering and reclaiming Indigenous pieces of knowledge and marginalized perspectives.

The present study contributes to the field of decolonial studies. It generates a new understanding of the application of the decolonial theory for the analysis of Pakistani fiction in English. The researchers developed a conceptual framework from the principles laid down by Walter D. Mignolo in his groundbreaking books. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of decolonial thinking. This study shows how Nadeem Aslam's text subverts and challenges the colonial power matrix. It promotes new ways of thinking about the world and how coloniality has shaped our lives. This study provides a deep, thorough, and complex understanding of Nadeem Aslam's works. His stories explore the possibilities of alternative perspectives and border thinking, and in this way, they promote plurality. His works have not yet been well-understood and well-studied in CPM. It has implications for pedagogical practices in education. These decolonial strategies can be used for learning and teaching postcolonial literature.

## **Review of the Literature**

In recent years, the field of decolonial studies has multiplied. Scholars from diverse disciplines have sought to dismantle and disrupt the colonial matrix of power

(CMP). “Decoloniality undoes, disobeys, and delinks from this matrix, constructing paths and praxis toward an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing, doing, and living” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p.04). Decoloniality is a multifaceted and complex concept. It questions the dominant narratives and epistemologies generated and disseminated by the colonial power matrix. It involves valuing and recognizing marginalized people’s perspectives and stories. Decolonial studies seek to re-centre the Indigenous, diverse, and alternative stories. It aims to develop new ways of knowing, understanding, and being that are not controlled by the colonial matrix of power. In short, decolonial studies focus on the following.

Decolonial studies have grown significantly as scholars from various disciplines have sought to challenge and dismantle the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being. Decoloniality is a complex and multifaceted concept, but it can be broadly understood as involving the following concepts: Challenging the coloniality of knowledge, Reclaiming and re-centering Indigenous and other marginalized knowledge, and Promoting new ways of thinking about the world.

According to Arias (2013), Quijano was the first scholar to introduce the concept of coloniality in 1989. Quijano is part of the larger community of scholars who have been interrogating the idea of modernity in the context of Latin America. According to Escobar, Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, and Walter Mignolo are the primary intellectual sources of this Latin American intellectual enterprise. Latin American scholars critically engage with modernity to historicize geopolitical developments that led to Latin America's conquest. This helped them to understand the process of social change in their region. Structures of the powers initiated by colonization are the subject of study and analysis of Quijano.

### ❖ Coloniality

Coloniality has shaped our world. According to Arias (2013, p.214), Anibal Quijano was the first scholar who introduced the concept of coloniality in 1989. Quijano is part of the larger community of scholars interrogating the idea of modernity in Latin America. Walter D. Mignolo deeply explored the notion of coloniality. “However, the idea of an ongoing pattern of colonial power can be witnessed in the thought of many, including Frantz Fanon and the lesser-known Colombian thinker Manuel Zapata Olivella, who both thought from their colonial differences” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, pp. 23-24). It refers to the enduring system of power and structures initiated by colonization. Coloniality is a lens through which researchers and

theorists examine the historical and geopolitical developments that have led to the conquest and plunder of the world. Walter D. Mignolo mainly focuses on studying and examining power structures and their impact on society, culture, and people's lives. Through this concept of coloniality, decolonial writers study how colonial legacies continue to shape our world today.

### ❖ Colonial Matrix of Power

CMP is the iron dome that encapsulates the interplay of power dynamics. It is a larger comprehensive framework that governs, controls, organizes, and maintains power, knowledge, economics, and identities. Since its inception in the Renaissance, it continues to shape social, economic, and cultural aspects of life. Mignolo & Walsh (2018) argue that decolonial analytics aims at understanding the formation and transformation of the colonial matrix of power, of 'understanding the past to speak the present, "as explained in the introduction of *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995), "Delinking requires knowing what and how to delink. That is the power struggle within the colonial matrix of power" (p.115). For a decolonial project, it is necessary to understand the CMP to unravel and dismantle it. It aims to discover and locate the cracks and loopholes and illuminate the mechanisms that must be challenged and subverted. The whole edifice is built on the construction of knowledge, the episteme. The literature can play a crucial role in uprooting the base of this matrix. The researchers explore Nadeem Aslam's fiction and its role in confronting and dismantling the CMP through strategies like epistemic disobedience, border thinking, and pluriversity.

### ❖ What Is Decoloniality?

Decoloniality has been called a form of "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo, 2011, P.122-123), "epistemic delinking" (Mignolo, 2007, p.450), and "epistemic reconstruction" (Quijano, 2007.p.176). In this sense, "decolonial thinking is the recognition and implementation of a broader gnosis or subaltern reason" (Mignolo, 2000, p.88), "a means of eliminating the provincial tendency to pretend that Western European modes of thinking are universal ones" (Quijano, 2000, p.544). In its less theoretical and more practical applications as movements for Indigenous autonomy, like "Zapatista self-government-decoloniality, is called a 'programmatic' of delinking from contemporary legacies of coloniality" (Mignolo, 2007, p.452), a response to needs unmet by the modern Rightist or Leftist governments" (Mignolo, 2011,p.217), or, "most broadly, social movements in search of a 'new humanity'

(Mignolo, 2011, p.52) or “search for the social liberation from all power organized as equality, discrimination, exploitation, and domination” (Quijano, 2007, p.178).

The Eurocentric version is based on two principal founding myths: first, the idea of the history of the human civilization as a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe; second, a view of the differences between Europe and non-Europe as natural (racial) differences and not consequences of a history of power. Both myths can be unequivocally recognized in the foundations of evolutionism and dualism, two of the nuclear elements of Eurocentrism. Coloniality of power as a heuristic device to re-construct our modes of knowledge and the world around us finds its fuller statement in that work.

Production of knowledge from a Eurocentric perspective has led to the distortion of reality, and he elaborates on his findings in a later piece (Quijano, 2007a). It is clarified that even though the political form of coloniality has ended with the birth of new nation-states in America, Asia, and Africa, coloniality permeated the new nation-states in the form of hierarchies, identities, value systems, and knowledge systems used to understand and reflect on social realities.

Quijano illustrates the process of domination and Eurocentrifcation of the global order. Political domination necessitated the classification and understanding of colonial subjects. The colonial structure of power created social categories centered on racial divisions. Racial categorization was done on biological grounds, and a sense of superiority and inferiority was constructed. Division of labour was organized along racial lines. These constructions were seen as objective and scientific, legitimizing colonial domination. The construction of categories and knowledge were European in orientation, and a Eurocentric form of knowledge was created. Political and economic domination enabled the European knowledge system to emerge as a hegemonic discourse. European knowledge systems and ways of life were made aspirational by controlling access to them. Political, military, and technological power were used to impose cultural superiority or cultural colonialism over the dominant cultures. Quijano argues the decolonization theory case and presents this attempt as an epistemological reconstitution. The decolonial lens is a vital framework for understanding how stories and narratives can deconstruct and challenge the colonial matrix of power (CMP). Among critical theorists is Walter D. Mignolo, who has played a vital role in shaping the discourse on decoloniality.

Critical Scholarship on Nadeem Aslam's Fiction

Nadeem Aslam's fiction has undergone comprehensive study from various angles. It reveals a tapestry of styles, themes, and socio-cultural contexts embedded in his works. The literature has been subject to extensive study from different critical lenses, ranging from gender studies to postcolonialism.

#### ❖ **Subversion in Pakistani Anglophone Literature**

The diverse perspectives and critical reevaluations are seen in the article 'The review then shifts to diverse perspectives and critical reevaluations, as seen in the article 'South Asian Literatures: Beyond Borders, Across Boundaries' (Gokhale & Lal, 2020). This article comprehensively overviews South Asian literature beyond cultural and geographical boundaries. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of cultures and societies for growth and progress. Alex Houen's article, 'Reckoning Sacrifice in 'War on Terror' Literature,' portrays the notion of sacrifice in the backdrop of the war on terror. It gives us a comparative study of literary genres. Its focus spans wars in Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. It provides insights into how writers address issues of war and intercultural communication.

Naeem Inayatullah critically studies the book, "Pulling Threads: Intimate Systematicity in 'The Politics of Exile' by Elizabeth Dauphine. In this examination, he contrasts portrayals of vilified groups and showcases the book's transcendence of academic limits. This article provides valuable lessons for theorists in systematic social theorizing. It probes the deeper purposes of intellectual life. Michele Levy's review of Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* admires its complex portrayal of post-9/11 Pakistan and Afghanistan. This review showcases the geopolitical forces shaping the characters' fates. It emphasizes the impact of history on the individual life. Ruth Maxey's chapter, 'Close Encounters with Ancestral Space,' from the book 'South Asian Atlantic Literature, 1970-2010,' shows the complex dynamic of diasporic identity and the question of the return to the ancestral homeland. It contributes to the broader discussion on diaspora literature and identity.

The article *The Cultural Appropriation of Urdu in Usman T. Malik's Collection Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan (2022)* by Batool et al. explores how language appropriation is used to subvert colonial linguistic dominance. This study uses corpus software (AntiConc 3.5.9) for qualitative textual analysis to examine the Urdu terms and phrases. Similarly, Malik et al., in their article *Translations of Perveen Shakir's Selected Poems: A Pragmatic Analysis (2022)*, explain the role of language in conveying underlying meanings in poetry. This research article focuses

on the pragmatic analysis of five poems by Parveen Shakir. It applies the preliminary Pragmatic Model (PPM) developed by Pallavi and Mojibur (2011). The study examines how translation preserves or distorts the pragmatism of the original work. It emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural and linguistic elements while translating. In Contrast, the article *An Exploration of Metafunctions and Binary Oppositions in Pakistani Paintings and Poems* (2023) by Gohar et al. studies the intersection of poetry and visual art and how they work together to create meaning. It takes the *Maritime Treasures of Pakistan*, where paintings and poems are together, and studies through the lens of the Visual Grammar framework and deconstruction notion of Derrida. This study uncovers the multilayered meanings embedded in the multimodal work. Additionally, In the article "Faith and Identity in Stephen Crane's *In Heaven* and Taufiq Rafat's *This Blade of Grass: Linguistic Relativity Leading to Worlds within Words*" (2024), the authors Ali et el. Analyze the lexical choices and semantic choices in the texts. It says that linguistic constructions reflect cultural identity. Crane's poem employs biblical imagery, while Rafat's incorporates mystical elements. The study employs descriptive and interpretive research methods to do contrastive analysis. The study centers on linguistic choices that shape identity. Lastly, the article *Exploring Colonial Legacies: Resistance and Decoloniality in Nadeem Aslam's The Blind Man's Garden* (2024) by Altaf et al. critically examines the colonial legacies in postcolonial literature; it uses a decolonial framework. It highlights the text's engagement with resistance, identity and marginalization of the global south. At the same time, this study shares some common elements; the current research paper is diverse by focusing on another novel, *The Golden Legend* (2017), to explore the particular strategies employed in the text for cognitive decoloniality.

#### ❖ Re-Orientalism & Self-Orientalization

The heart of the critical discussion is Aslam's engagement with the issue of re-orientalism. This review examines Aslam's engagement with colonial legacies using recent scholarship on his works. It highlights that cognitive decoloniality offers new insights into his displays of global South identities.

Aman and Dodhy (2022) explored the concept of Re-orientalism. They suggested that authors from postcolonial societies unintentionally perpetuate the exoticized representations of the East that the West historically and politically constructed. *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) provide fertile ground for such studies. Nadeem Aslam's fiction often depicts cultural conflict,

religious orthodoxy, and violence. For example, Gecikli (2015) argues that *Maps for Lost Lovers* is set in an oriental city in the heart of the West. While Aslam's text addresses the complexities of diasporic identities, it also reinforces Western stereotypes about the East. That notion is further explored by Azhar (2021), who criticizes Aslam's portrayal of extremism and violence in Pakistan. Though it shows sociopolitical realists, it caters to Western desires for the East.

Kanwal and Mansoor (2021) extend this critique by arguing how Nadeem Aslam's text aligns with self-Orientalization. Text framed oriental culture as Chaotic, religiously conservative, extremist and intolerant. In this way, it reproduces colonial binaries of us versus them. They accuse Aslam of reinforcing the image of South Asia as violent and dogmatic. Critics like Azhar (2021) and Batoo et al. (2022) criticize Aslam for perpetuating stereotypes. Aslam's characters negotiate between their heritage and their diasporic lives in the West. In *Maps for Lost Lovers*, for example, the characters experience identity crises as they attempt to reconsider their past and face the pressure of their new environment. Mirza (2017) focuses on portraying masculinity within the diasporic Pakistani Muslim community in the West. It explores gender, sexuality, and violence. Characters negate identity in the new environment and legacies of patriarchal structures. Chambers et al. (2022) argue that Aslam's text centers on Muslim masculinities and sexualities, and the depiction of the Muslim community in the West feeds into ongoing Islamophobia narratives. Some scholars analyzed the Aslam text from the 9/11 perspective, especially the War on Terror notion. The article by Houen (2020) offers insights into how the text engages with resistance in ongoing politics and conflict. *The Blind Man's Garden* is usually discussed in their grade, where the characters are caught between the contemporary realities of war and the legacies of colonialism. Moreover, Altaf et al. (2024) focused on Aslam's portrayal of colonial legacies in *The Blind Man's Garden*. They argue that the text portrays the global south's perspective and raises the voices of marginalized classes. They explored the role of knowledge production and epistemological resistance in the texts of Nadeem Aslam.

### ❖ Research Gap

This literature review has undertaken a journey through foundational theories, historical perspectives, contemporary trends, and the intricacies of Nadeem Aslam's fiction. Though there is a wealth of scholarship on Nadeem Aslam's works, there remains a significant gap in the critical understanding of his works. Much of the existing research tries to prove that his works are re-orientalism. Few studies have

analyzed his text's use of epistemological resistance in the narrative. Still, there is a lack of research that analyses the work from a decolonial lens. This gap shows an opportunity to explore how Aslam's characters navigate the complexity of knowledge production, identity formation and resistance to coloniality. The historical survey reveals the evolution of decolonial discourse over time. The current focus on pluriversity and border thinking marks a significant shift in decolonial studies. Recent Studies reflect a growing interest in border thinking, epistemic defiance, and plurality.

## **Methodology**

The researchers use a qualitative research methodology to explore the strategies of cognitive decoloniality in Nadeem Aslam's fiction. The present study is conducted in the following stages.

### **❖ Qualitative Research Design**

The researchers employ a qualitative approach because it involves exploring and understanding meanings and themes within the text rather than quantifying data. In this study, the researchers focus on interpretation and understanding. The study design involves the application of a decolonial lens to examine Nadeem Aslam's fiction. The theoretical framework guides the research process, and the researchers plan to utilize three key concepts such as pluriversity, border thinking, and epistemic disobedience, as strategies employed by Nadeem Aslam in his fiction to dismantle the colonial matrix of power (CMP). Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex themes and meanings embedded in literature. The study uses qualitative research methods to uncover the nuances of how decolonial strategies are woven into the fabric of the novels. The researcher uses the qualitative method of study. It involves close reading, coding, and interpretation. The qualitative method allows researchers to delve deep into the complexities of human perspective and experiences.

### **❖ Textual Analysis**

The present research systematically analyses the text (lines, passages, quotes) to derive strategies and patterns related to decoloniality. The focus is on understanding the text qualitatively rather than quantitatively. The researchers classify the data according to these three strategies of decoloniality.

❖ **Pluriversity**

It means acknowledging diverse ways of knowing and being. The study applies this concept to analyze how Nadeem Aslam's work challenges dominant colonial narratives and epistemologies.

❖ **Border Thinking**

It means challenging hierarchies and binary categories that divide the world. In this study, the researcher Appears to Examine how Aslam's fiction develops new perspectives on history, society, culture, and identity.

❖ **Epistemic Disobedience**

It means challenging the colonial matrix of power by proposing alternative narratives. The study applies this concept to explore how Aslam's fiction counters hegemonic stories and contributes to cognitive decoloniality.

❖ **Data Collection**

The researchers take all five novels of Nadeem Aslam as data for this study. The researchers also collect and consider secondary data, such as critical essays, interviews with Nadeem Aslam, and some other works on decolonial studies as well as postcolonial literature

❖ **Data Analysis**

The researchers outline a three-stage data analysis process:

❖ **Close Reading**

The researcher uses the close reading method to analyze Nadeem Aslam's works in depth to identify strategies of pluriversity, border thinking, and epistemic disobedience. The study also examines the characters, setting, plot, symbolism, imagery, language, and style of cognitive decoloniality. The researchers conduct a close reading of Nadeem Aslam's fiction to identify how strategies of cognitive decoloniality have been employed. They also examine how Nadeem Aslam's fiction challenges the colonial matrix of power (CMP).

❖ **Data Interpretation**

The researchers interpret the text to explore strategies of cognitive decoloniality. It challenges and dismantles the colonial matrix of power and promotes cognitive

decoloniality. The researchers also examine the implications of Aslam's fiction for the field of decolonial studies.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on the decolonial theoretical framework to explore strategies of decoloniality in Nadeem Aslam's fiction. Decolonial studies challenge and disrupt the colonial matrix of power (CMP). It seeks to dismantle the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being. Decolonial scholars like Anibal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo argue that colonialism was not simply a historical phenomenon but an ongoing process in the form of a colonial power matrix. Coloniality still shapes our world today. The researchers have taken Nadeem Aslam's fiction and considered postcolonial literature centered on the issue of coloniality and neo-colonialism. Walter D. Mignolo writes that coloniality has profoundly impacted these societies, and the literary productions must be understood in this context. Decoloniality challenges the social construct that is used to justify and maintain inequality. In the present time, cognitive decolonization is badly required in Pakistani society. Specifically, the researchers use the following concepts from decolonial studies to analyze Nadeem Aslam's novels:

### **❖ Pluriversity**

Pluriversity is the decolonial concept that there are many different ways of knowing and being. Walter D. Mignolo argues that pluriversity is essential for cognitive decoloniality because it allows us to challenge the dominant colonial narratives and epistemologies.

### **❖ Border Thinking**

This way of thinking challenges the hierarchies and binary categories that divide the world. Walter Mignolo says that border thinking is essential and central to decoloniality as it allows us to see the world in new ways. Border thinking develops new ways of seeing, knowing, and thinking about history, society, culture, and identity.

### **❖ Epistemic Disobedience**

Epistemic disobedience challenges the colonial matrix of power (CMP) and breaks the structure of coloniality. It is a crucial strategy for achieving cognitive

decoloniality. It proposes alternative stories and counters the hegemonic story produced, disseminated, and controlled by the colonial power matrix.

The researchers believe this theoretical approach provides a solid framework for studying and analyzing strategies of cognitive decoloniality in Nadeem Aslam's fiction. They are confident that this research study will significantly contribute to decolonial studies, provide an in-depth understanding of Nadeem Aslam's fiction, and open new avenues of research and scholarship in decolonial studies.

### ❖ Data Analysis

#### **Border Thinking & Pluriversity in Action: Navigating Cultures & Perspectives**

This segment of the analysis explores the concept of Border Thinking and pluriversity. The *Golden Legend* unfolds the threads of colonial impact on Pakistani society. It scrutinizes the established norms and ideologies. The text engages the discourse of cognitive decoloniality. It urges the readers to rethink the norms and established patterns of thinking. Sewing the torn book in the text with the thread of gold symbolizes epistemic disobedience against CMP's distortion of human history. It reinforces the importance of reconnecting severed cultural links through golden stories. On the one hand, the text celebrates pluriversity; on the other hand, it challenges cultural essentialism. It uncovers the layers of resistance and resilience against colonial legacies.

Mignolo's idea of border thinking highlights the awareness of borders not just as geographical but as cultural borders that shape identities. The *Golden Legend* (2017) portrays the divisions in society on religious lines. When the teacher demands a justification for taking the place of a Muslim in the school, it is a blatant act of reinforcement of the established borders. "At the beginning of high school, when she (Helen) was fourteen years old, a teacher had asked her to stand up in class and justify taking the place of a Muslim" (Aslam, 2017, p.22)—the author of the novel questions the division and unequal relations of the members of the same society. The text counters the narrative of the imposition of a single identity. Helen's experience becomes the alternative story and paints the injustices and discrimination faced by the few who reside on the margins of the constructed borders. It indicates the need for an inclusive educational environment that respects and accepts differences. Here, the author rejects the story of a monolithic worldview and advocates the value of multiple ways of knowing and being. "The headquarters of the East India Company in Leadenhall Street in London had a portico that

depicted Britannia, holding out her hand to a kneeling India who offered her treasures” (P.244-245). According to Shashi Tharoor, When the British landed in India, it contained twenty per cent of the world’s wealth. When they left 200 years later, in 1947, only three per cent of the known world’s wealth remained.

The contemporary Pakistani society’s ills are rooted in the colonial past. The colonial matrix of power shaped societal structures and human lives but left lasting imprints on the physical landscapes. The text mentions Zaman city, having eight expansive bazaars radiating from a central clock tower designed by the British to mirror the Union Jack. It shows the enduring impact of colonial design on urban planning. “As in India, as in Kashmir, every third shop here in Pakistan was named Regal or Majestic, Royal or Imperial, Crown, Palace, Empire – a reminder of the recent past” (P.153). It further attests to the enduring legacy of the colonial era. In Walter Mignolo’s terms, it underscores the ongoing influences of the colonial matrix of power. It highlights how the colonial legacy continues to shape the sociocultural fabric of present-day Pakistan. It requires broad thinking with historical narratives to understand and address contemporary challenges.

The *Golden Legend* (2017) exemplifies the narrative that embraces border thinking to challenge the dominant narratives. It connects contemporary Pakistani society to its rich historical roots. It links Pakistani society to the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. The text engages border thinking by establishing connections between the ancient Indus Valley civilization and contemporary Pakistan. The reference to “the monthly Tilla Jogian” (p.110) is a textual marker linking the present to the ancient past. It highlights the broader understanding of Pakistani history by acknowledging its multifaceted past and diverse cultural background.

The text resists the colonial matrix of power by challenging the selective and often distorted historical narratives imposed by the colonizers. It suggests reclaiming Pakistan’s forgotten past and rich and diverse civilizational heritage. This act of reclamation is a form of border thinking as it transcends established boundaries and challenges the CMP.

Pakistani landscapes have been the centre of many different ideas and have a diverse history of civilization that passed through various stages of development. Border thinking subverts the present-day polarization. Understanding and acknowledging the diverse historical stages disrupt the linear narrative and showcase the

complexity of Pakistan's historical trajectory. It rejects simplistic dichotomies, and this polarization resistance aligns with border thinking.

The *Golden Legend* (2017) engages in intellectual and cultural resistance against the CMP through border thinking. It fosters a more inclusive and multisided narrative connecting Pakistan to its rich ancient cultural heritage. Doing this contributes to a broader decolonial discourse that subverts hegemonic perspectives and embraces a holistic understanding of history, culture, and identity.

The text celebrates diversity and evades cultural essentialism. It embraces inclusivity by challenging binary opposition and promotes plurality. The text acknowledges various diverse perspectives and cultural traditions. The text of *The Golden Legend* (2017) does not assert the superiority of any culture; instead, it advocates the coexistence of multiple traditions and norms. *The Golden Legend* (2017) actively engages in border thinking by incorporating diverse cultural practices and ideas. It showcases and suggests a borderless approach to knowledge and celebrates the possibility of adopting the best ideas from any cultural tradition, including the West. Border thinking in the text challenges rigid boundaries and endorses a more fluid understanding of cultural exchange. "There, at the Get Close Coffeehouse, a celebration had been held on St Valentine's Day, despite the city's clerics denouncing it as a Western custom that promoted hedonism, debauchery, and secularism among Pakistanis" (p.129). This celebration exemplifies border thinking. It recognizes the diversity of perspectives within Pakistani society and showcases the possibility of coexistence. It resists the imposition of a singular narrative and asserts the right to choose from diverse traditions without falling into essentialist traps. The text employs border thinking and embraces pluriversity. It exemplifies a space where diverse cultural expressions coexist and critically engage with each other. This approach subverts cultural essentialism and promotes that the best ideas can be taken from various cultural contexts.

The text also suggests that the continuity of the spiritual tradition in this land has been tarnished by colonization. It was a colonial strategy to divide and sever the holistic experiences of the land. This capitalist colonialism disrupts the spiritual traditions of the society. The colonial matrix of power is crucial in creating disunity in society. CMP fosters intolerance and sow discord among the local communities. Local Saints were the symbol of unity and religious harmony in this culture. "Imran knew about the saint and had known about him even in Kashmir. He was fabled and

loved. Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, and Muslims of many sects came to him for blessing. Female, male, and hijra” (P.279). Individuals from diverse religious backgrounds and different gender identities, female, male, and hijra, come together for blessings. Border thinking subverts the CMP exclusivity and the narrative of segregation.

The text references a small but graceful mosque constructed by a Mughal noblewoman in the eighteenth century. The cyclic abandonment and revival of the mosque over the centuries due to the objections of the clerics reflects the ongoing struggle against patriarchal norms. ‘The fact that it bore a woman’s name had caused it to be abandoned on several occasions over the centuries, the city’s clerics casting doubts on the validity of prayers offered in such a place. The building would fall into disrepair, becoming home to jackals, wild peafowl, hornbills and bats, but time would pass, and the objectors would be replaced and forgotten, and the faithful would return’ (p.359). Patriarchal thinking wants to marginalize and devalue women’s role and contribution to human history. Before colonization, the mosque was built in a woman’s name without any objection. Colonizers altered the cognition of the colonized. Coloniality is implicated in the perpetuation of the patriarchal system. The present-day strict patriarchal norms are a legacy of colonization and coloniality. The colonial Matrix of power plays a crucial role in altering the perception of spaces associated with women. This shift from acceptance to objection portrays the enduring impact of colonial structures on local cultural norms. Coloniality marginalizes and devalues women as an inferior class in society. CMP perpetuates hierarchies and inequalities.

In conclusion, the author of *The Golden Legend* (2017) skillfully employs university and border thinking to subvert coloniality. The text celebrates university, resists colonialism’s impact, and promotes inclusivity for a more just world.

### **Counter Stories Unveiled: Challenging Dominant Narratives**

Nadeem Aslam skillfully unfolds the counter stories on the pages of *The Golden Legend* to dismantle the coloniality. One of the concepts of coloniality he targeted is the idea of purity. The text ventures into the alternative narrative to foreground the unvoiced, unaccepted, unrecognized contributions from diverse cultures and peoples to the collective tapestry of human knowledge. Aslam writes in *The Golden Legend* (2017) that traditions and histories have always mingled, and nothing in the East or the West has ever been pure. “Dante Alighieri had, in all probability, read

accounts of Prophet Muhammad’s miraculous journey to Paradise and Hell before he wrote *The Divine Comedy*” (pp.18-19). Aslam embraces the concept of pluriversity, and the text of *The Golden Legend* (2017) resists the constraints of exclusive nationalism rooted in religion. Diverse cultural sources and their transformative nature are illustrated. In the wording of Aslam, “Tracing the umbilical connections between places” (p.34). Countless ideas travelled from one part to another and played an essential role in history.

The Turkish rulers of Athens converted the Parthenon into a mosque in the 1460s. At the time, it had been a Christian church and a pagan temple. A minaret and dome were now constructed. This Muslim place of worship was surrounded by the Greek friezes of humans and animals, immodestly appareled gods and goddesses. Some of these marble figures had been destroyed earlier by Christians as idols. A traveler had described it as the finest mosque in the world. (Aslam, 2017, p.34)

**Table 01: Summary of Key Strategies and Textual Examples**

Strategy	Definition	Textual Example
Pluriversity	Acknowledging multiple ways of knowing and being. Challenges dominant colonial epistemologies.	<i>The Golden Legend</i> : Aslam depicts diverse cultural practices and religious beliefs through the characters, such as interfaith relationships and the coexistence of contrasting values.
Border Thinking	Critiques hierarchies and binary divisions (e.g., East/West, Self/Other). Promotes new ways of perceiving history, culture, and identity.	<i>The Golden Legend</i> : The portrayal of characters who exist on the margins of society, exploring how their identities transcend traditional cultural boundaries.
Epistemic Disobedience	A resistance to the colonial matrix of power by proposing alternative narratives, offering counter-hegemonic stories that disrupt the status quo.	<i>The Blind Man’s Garden</i> : Characters challenge the dominant narratives of war and conflict by providing nuanced perspectives on identity, war, and loss, rejecting colonial-imposed truths.

## Conclusion

The researcher employs decolonial theoretical framework to analyze Nadeem Aslam’s fiction. The study explores the strategies of decoloniality in the selected texts, studying how pluriversity, border thinking, and epistemic disobedience challenge the colonial matrix of power (CMP) to achieve cognitive decolonization. In his fiction, Nadeem Aslam employs the strategies of pluriversity, border thinking, and epistemic disobedience. These strategies challenge the monolithic narratives of the colonial matrix of power (CMP), which boxed the world into binary categories, for instance, East and the West, colonizer and the colonized, male and female, etc. It explores the spaces between languages, social classes, and cultures. This helps to break down the fixed binaries and hierarchies often used to divide the world. It

opens up new possibilities for an alternative, equal, and just world. It challenges the dominant narratives and epistemologies. It breaks us free from the coloniality of knowledge. This study shows the possibility of alternative stories and producing new knowledge that is more inclusive and equitable. The study showcases the subversion of the coloniality of being and identity. These texts show that people can challenge the coloniality of being and create new ways of being. It shows the possibility of creating new political, social, and economic systems that are more just and equitable.

Nadeem Aslam's narrative actively engages strategies to subvert coloniality. Pluriversity is manifested in the novel's multiplicity of voices, identities, and perspectives that resist the Eurocentric singular dominant worldview. His characters live in imaginary spaces and embody different ways of being. The text showcases a pluralistic epistemology that questions the Western hegemony in the form of coloniality of knowledge production and representation. Similarly, border thinking emerges in the narrative thought metaphor of physical and ideological boundaries. Charade experiences beyond-borders phenomena, literal as well as psychosocial. This crossing of borders subverts the dichotomies imposed by coloniality. The text instead offers a fluid vision of interconnected words, where diverse experiences and knowledge forms converge. Finally, epistemic disobedience is in characters related to colonial stereotypes and categories. Characters continue to challenge the hegemonic discourse imposed by colonial forces. Aslam's characters show how decolonization involves reconfiguring external social circumstances, political structures, and internal cognitive structures. Together, these strategies work to disrupt the structure of epistemic violence. It highlights the lived realities of marginalized people. This study exemplifies how cognitive decoloniality can be articulated through literature.

The current study showcased fiction's potential to influence broader decolonial movements and contribute to ongoing struggles for social justice. The *Golden Legend* serves as a fine example of how storytelling can disrupt hegemonic power structures. It shows how fiction can contribute to the ongoing project of decolonization within postcolonial societies. Aslam fiction offers insights for decolonial scholars. It showed that fiction reflects society and can actively shape how we understand the world. The study also underscores the urgency of fostering new theories and frameworks for dismantling coloniality. Aslam fiction is a rich source for understanding the complexities of postcolonial identities, and it also calls

to action for the creation of new social, cultural and political paradigms that reflect the aspirations of a more just and equitable global society.

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