

Sacred Spaces and Fractured Geographies: Spatial Resistance, Heterotopia, and Postcolonial Dystopia in Nadeem Aslam's The Golden Legend.

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ABSTRACT

Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* presents a stark dilemma at the crossroads of power, identity, and geography in contemporary Zamana; it defines the dystopian city of Zamana as a microcosm of that country's fractured body politic. This paper explores how marginal figures within the novel use Lefebvre's triadic definition of space to exercise their agency over both mobile and immobile forms of counter-space. For example, the syncretic island worship place, a hybrid of styles from Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam, represents a type of architectural heterotopia. In contrast, Lily's rickshaw, which displays the slogan "The masses are asleep," functions as a mobile form of heterotopia. These two spaces function as counter-spaces against the dualities of the state-sanctioned homogenization of faith and hierarchy based on social class. The library, where Nargis sews together fragments of her husband's book with gold thread, also serves as a repository for decolonial memory and a force against erasure. Helen, a Christian woman who resists accusations of wickedness through bodily performance, and Imran, a Kashmiri refugee who navigates cartographic trauma, are but two examples of Zamana's colonial legacy and the current martial presence in that country. By comparing *The Golden Legend* to Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps*, we can see how gender-based resistance is exercised through these sites of heterotopic refuge. While the male-dominated heterotopias of *The Golden Legend* are compared to Shah's female-only sites of refuge in *Before She Sleeps*, the lack of resolution at the end of *The Golden Legend* (Helen disappears and Imran returns home) serves as an illustration of Zamana's liminal state, caught between mythical pasts and failed futures. Thanks to its stitching of spatial theory, postcolonial and feminist critique, this study redrafts *The Golden Legend* as an account of fragile resistance in a moment in which sacred sites and shifting mobilities provide temporary sanctuaries in the face of dystopian suppression, while also raising doubts about the long-term viability of these moves in a nation struggling with the fragility of the plural.

Keywords: Spatial Resistance, Heterotopia, Postcolonial Dystopia, Gendered Space, Feminist Praxis, Kashmir

INTRODUCTION

The Space of War in Postcolonial Zamana

In Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend*, space appears as contested ground where colonial legacies, extremism, and governance converge to shatter Zamana's socio-political fabric. In this dystopia, the novel's fictionalized city, Zamana, becomes a microcosm of postcolonial crisis; urban geographies morph into instruments of war to enforce hierarchies of power. Building on the work of Henri Lefebvre, who argued that "space is a political instrument" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 85), Aslam critiques the overarching habit of colonial-era urban planning, like neighbourhoods made to look like the Union Jack (Aslam, 2017, p. 112), that becomes the means by which regimes that emerge post-independence segregate those they have marginalized. Datta and Shaban (2020) are of the point of view that someone imagines a modern city; they see it as some technologically advanced city where people are kept under surveillance via high tech, and huge data is gathered and used to control them, but images ignore how cities actually work for common people. same can be observed in Zamana, where the still old colonial mechanism is in action; no effort is made to unite people, but rather their differences are exploited to make them further divided so that rule over them is easily maintained by their current rulers. Similarly, Cheema and Iqbal critically evaluate the situation and point out that colonial cartography re-inscribed by re-Orientalism, and say that Aslam's may be showing exoticisms that exaggerate the poverty and marginality of Pakistan's Christian community plainly, so in this way he complicates the novel's apparently resistant spatial politics (Cheema & Iqbal 2025). The country is dealing with problems. These problems are made worse by violence between groups and the government making public spaces more orthodox. Places like the Grand Trunk Road are where people are treated badly. The idea of heterotopia by Foucault is helpful in understanding the places in the novel. These places are like a mix of things. They are like an island where different things come together: a rickshaw that can move around and a temple that has been bombed. These places can help people take control of their lives again. The novel shows the situation in Zamana after it was a colony. The country is still dealing with the effects of being a colony. It is also hurting itself. The spaces in the novel are not the background of the story. They are actually a part of the struggle

to figure out who people are, what they remember, and how they can survive.

People in the novel resist the people in power by fighting back and by being defiant in a symbolic way. Space in the novel is like a character that helps people resist the people who are trying to control them. Zamana is a nation with problems, and the novel shows how people are trying to deal with these problems. The novel, by Aslam, shows the country's struggles with its identity, memory, and survival and how people are trying to take control of their lives in Zamana. The story of *The Golden Legend* is set in Zamana, where there is a lot of unrest. *The Golden Legend* looks at how extremism is connected to the pain of colonial rule that has not been dealt with. In the novel, the city of Zamana is like cities such as stereotypical post-colonial city. It still shows signs of rule in its neighbourhoods and roads like the Grand Trunk Road. These signs show how people are still separated from each other. The author, Aslam, talks about how the people in charge after colonial rule changed these structures. Old colonial buildings were replaced with checkpoints and surveillance towers. This created a system where the government has control over people's lives. A character like Burhan, an officer, shows how the government uses its power.

Violence also causes problems in the city. For example, a Christian woman named Helen is accused of saying something taboo and is punished. Some groups also destroy temples. Tensions about beliefs occur due to nationalism attached to belief systems; when every group contends for supremacy, then in postcolonial countries, majority rules and ethnic clashes occur, resulting in bloodshed (Mahmood & Dodhy 2026). But the island shown in the novel tells another narrative; it counters the idea of clash and shows harmony among such different ethnicities. So the novel projects the idea that if different architectural models are mixed, they promote harmony. *The Golden Legend* shows the struggles of Zamana to balance its identity with its diverse past. This is made harder by the pain of the Partition and the ongoing conflict in the region. *The Golden Legend* highlights these issues in Zamana. How they affect the people living there, like the characters in *The Golden Legend*. Imran's backstory as a refugee looking back on the violence wrought by the Indian army in Kashmir links regional geopolitics with personal dispossession, and depicts borders as sites of collective anaesthesia of remembering (Aslam, 2017, pp. 312-

313). Interlacing colonial urban planning with present-day militarism, Aslam critiques the cyclicity of oppression, positing postcolonial Zamana as still within the spatial proletarian frameworks organized by its colonizers, both physical and ideological. The Golden Legend reconfigures resistance through insurgent spatial practices that resist Zamana's own dystopian realities. Characters like Helen and Lily turn marginal spaces into sites of defiance: stitching her surrogate father's censored book with gold thread, Helen turns the library into an archive of memory (Aslam, 2017, p. 89), and Lily's rickshaw---embellished with the slogan "THE MASSES ARE ASLEEP" (Aslam, 2017, p. 167) becomes a mobile heterotopia critiquing class inequality. The tear-shaped island and its worship place, which incorporates Hindu, Christian, and Islamic motifs, represent an architectural refusal of state-enforced homogeneity (Aslam, 2017, p. 212). They are consistent with James C. Scott's notion of the "weapons of the weak," everyday forms of subversion that render oppressive systems unstable (Scott, 1985, p. 16). The novel is set in a world, and this shows how hard it is to resist the system. For example, when Helen disappears and the temple gets bombed, it shows how different groups can be hurt in areas with a lot of military presence. Aslam's idea is based on the struggle between a world with a lot of control and a utopian world with a lot of possibilities. The novel talks about spaces where people can resist, even if it is for a little while, and fight against being erased because of who they are. The novel puts stories into a bigger picture of power and geography. It shows that resisting in spaces is a way to survive and also a way to completely change the future for people who were colonized.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: LEFEBVRE, FOUCAULT AND THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* also looks at how places are used and how this affects people, similar to what Henri Lefebvre says in *The Production of Space* and Michel Foucault's idea of heterotopia from 1986. These ideas help us understand how people in power design spaces in countries that used to be colonies and how these spaces can also be changed by the people who live there. Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* is a book that thinks about *The Production of Space* and heterotopia and how these ideas apply to *The*

Golden Legend and other postcolonial landscapes. Lefebvre's spatial triad (of conceived, perceived, and lived spaces) dissects Zamana's colonial urban planning and power zones and acts of resistance. At the same time, Foucault's notion of heterotopia---places that "always attract several sites that are at once real, they are absolutely real" (Foucault, 1986, p. 24) gives us tools to examine counter-sites such as Lily's rickshaw or even the syncretic island. Collectively, these theories illuminate Aslam's critique of Zamana's postcolonial condition: spaces that are meant to administer control become nodes of insurgent memory and identity. As Leary-Owhin and McCarthy opine, using Lefebvre's ideas about cities, how people use space is a

good way to understand postcolonial cities. These cities have to deal with maps and layouts left behind by colonisers and resistance by indigenous people (Leary-Owhin & McCarthy 2020). This helps us understand the conflict present in buildings and spaces presented in the novel. The city seems trapped between old colonial things and people's own ways of living, and this tension is manifested in the architecture. To further this idea, Rehman and Wahab reveal through Lefebvre's construction of space and Foucault's heterotopias how literary narratives can rearrange spatial knowledge, producing counter-cartographies that imagine nationhood and connections (Rehman & Wahab 2025). This process is reflected in the novel's construction of the tear-shaped island as an archive of obstructed memory, where the physical fabric of the worship place becomes a palimpsest of obliterated communal histories.

Zamana's hierarchy of space is explored by Lefebvre's triad. Conceptual space, the British-designed neighbourhoods of the city in the shape of the Union Jack (Aslam, 2017, p. 112), exemplifies colonial sensibilities reserved for the use of the postcolonial elite. As an exemplification of how practices of space create division, the Grand Trunk Road's evolution from trade route to setting of sectarian violence shows a mapping of perceived space (Aslam, 2017, p. 67). On the page, lived space manifests as Helen's golden-thread patchwork reconstruction of her real surrogate father's book, a retrieval of the library as a site of cultural memory (Aslam, 2017, p. 89). These layers show Lefebvre's assertion that space is at once the product and producer of social relations (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 73).

Zamana's Union Jack-shaped neighbourhoods are what Lefebvre calls conceived space, a tool of colonial domination

repurposed to serve postcolonial segregation. The British "had given Zamana the shape of their flag," wrote Aslam, inscribing their imperial power into the city's geography (Aslam, 2017, p. 112). These neighbourhoods continue class and religious segregation, for instance: the descent of Almond Garden from orchard to Christian ghetto post-independence (Aslam, 2017, p. 45). The way cities are divided is like what Frantz Fanon said about cities that are split in two. Frantz Fanon said that the way cities are planned keeps some people on top and others at the bottom because of their skin colour and how much money they have. This kind of planning is what Frantz Fanon meant by cities being cut in two. It is still happening today with spatial fracturing. Spatial fracturing is a problem because it affects the way people live in cities, and it is similar to what Frantz Fanon was talking about. The Grand Trunk Road is a good example of what Lefebvre's representational space is all about. This road used to be a highway built by colonial powers. Now it is a place where people get violent and fight with each other. The famous road was once a route for trade and allowed people from different cultures to meet and exchange things. Now it is a place where bad things happen, like when a mob killed Massud, who was like a father, to Helen (Aslam, 2017, p. 67). The Grand Trunk Road has changed a lot over time. Now it has checkpoints where people are watched. Rallies where extremists speak. It shows how these things can make people divide into groups and fight with each other. As Lefebvre argued, space is "not a thing but a set of relations" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 83) and here, those relations are weaponized in order to erase pluralism. Zamana's counter-sites are framed along the lines of Foucault's heterotopia, places that "suspend, neutralize, or invert" the norms of society (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). The tear-shaped island, displaying Hindu, Christian, and Islamic architecture, subverts national uniformity (Aslam, 2017, p. 212), and Lily's rickshaw, labelled "THE MASSES ARE ASLEEP," for yoking a mobile heterotopia that denounces inequality of class (Aslam, 2017, p. 167). These spaces serve Foucault's claim that "heterotopias secretly undermine language" (Foucault, 1986, p. 25), providing a voice to once muted communities.

Foucault distinguishes between static heterotopias (cemeteries, etc.) and dynamic ones. The island and a destroyed cinema in The Golden Legend serve static counter sites: the former leaves space for pluralism, the latter hosts Helen and Imran in times of crisis (Aslam, 2017, p. 189). In contrast, Lily's

rickshaw, a "moving pocket of resistance," represents the subversive potential of mobility, transgressing Zamana's divided spaces (Aslam, 2017, p. 231). Foucault's model became expansive enough to account for postcolonial resistance, as mobility emerged as a tactic against spatial control.

Zamana as Postcolonial Dystopia: Urban Spaces of Control and Erasure

Zamana also appears as a postcolonial dystopia in Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend*, in which urban spaces operate as modalities of erasure and control. Colonial legacies, extremism and stern governance collide to fracture the city and render marginalised communities invisible. "Postmodern urban dystopia" (a term that Hicks 2018 introduces to respond to this process) provides the frame to critique Hicks' colonial urban development as the tool for oppression, while the state surveillance apparatus is illuminated with Foucault's (1977) panopticon. The fact that Kashmir is almost gone really shows how the novel is worried about maps and borders. It is like the borders are erasing who people are, and their bodies are becoming maps of the things that happened to them. Zamana is a place that has what Hicks talked about in 2018 as an "urban dystopia". This means that the city is a place because of the violence from the past and the violence that happened after that. The neighbourhoods that the British designed, like the ones shaped like the Union Jack, are still reminders of how people are divided. There are also checkpoints with guards and rallies with extremists that turn places into dangerous areas. The city is like a nightmare. It shows what Frantz Fanon said: that cities that were controlled by other countries become divided into two worlds. This means that the people in charge after the other country left are still treating some areas as more important than others. Badami Bagh used to be an orchard, but now it is a neighbourhood where only Christian people live. The original name "Almond Garden" is very sad because it is not like that anymore. This change is, like what Lefebvre called conceived space, which was first used by the people who controlled the country to separate people. Now it is used to separate people because of their beliefs. The British "had pulled up the almond trees to make way for barracks," as Aslam writes, and after independence, the ground and surrounding areas suffer systemic neglect (Aslam, 2017, p. 46). Such negligence is not new; studies about South Asian

societies show that poor planning has made life difficult for the poor and the minorities. Such instances can be observed in recent COVID-19. In Zamana, the same problem is prevalent; minorities are left to rot intentionally. Everything is controlled by authorities, for example when mango grooves are replaced with offices it is a methodological erasure of the city life shared by all, and it is termed urbicide. Here history and individuality are erased, and uniformity is produced. This ghetto's erasure reflects a criticism of colonial urbanism through the marginalization of marginalized groups, as being relegated to "zones of nonbeing" (Fanon, 1952, p. 8). Zamana's militarized surveillance apparatus, which is headed by Burhan, exemplifies Foucault's panopticon, wherein "visibility is a trap" (Foucault, 1977, p. 200). Checkpoints and phone towers track the citizens; Burhan's broaching of Nargis's private space through interrogation in the home (Aslam, 2017, p. 134). The omnipresence of the authorities enforces what Aslam terms "geographies of fear," where dissent is muted through the control of space (Aslam, 2017, p. 167). The politics of dispossession are evident in the Kashmir conflict shown in The Golden Legend, where histories and bodies are erased by borders (Said, 1993, p. 18). Imran's removal from Srinagar to Zamana exemplifies the trauma of cartographic violence, rendering Kashmiris stateless in postcolonial narratives. Imran carries the scars of Kashmir's violence: he is a child of a father "who disappeared into a crack in the earth" during an Indian martial raid (Aslam, 2017, p. 312). Nightmares of "snow stained with blood" (p. 315) recall Avery Gordon's "haunting," where histories that are not resolved come alive as corporeal trauma (Gordon, 2008, p. 3). Imran's displacement demonstrates how postcolonial borders fragment identities. The river island on which Imran and Helen hide parallels Kashmir's liminality --- a fractured territory caught between past and present. The island's soil, which originated mythically" (Aslam, 2017, p. 212), serves as a metaphor for Kashmir's mythical and geopolitical entrapment. Postcolonial borders produce "cartographic anxiety," and thus the island emerges as a heterotopic counter-site whose erasure the island resists (Krishna, 1994, p. 508).

Heterotopic Havens: Reclaiming Resistance in Fractured Landscapes

In The Golden Legend, however, heterotopic spaces become sites for insurgent memory and contestation of Zamana's

fractured geographies. Resting on Foucault, who conceptualized heterotopia---spaces that "contest and invert" dominant norms (Foucault 1986, 24). Aslam treats ruins, libraries, and vehicles as counter-sites where marginalized groups reclaim agency. Both these refuges- the static (the island) or the mobile (Lily's rickshaw) contest state-sponsored erasure, embodying what Homi Bhabha describes as the "third space" of cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). The island that Helen's surrogate father, Massud, inherited is shaped like a tear. This island is a place where people can be free from the rules that govern their lives. It is a place where people can be spiritual and also stand up for what they believe in. The island has different kinds of buildings and plants, which shows that it is a place that welcomes people from all walks of life. This is very different from the rest of Zamana, where one kind of belief is preferred for everyone. The island is a haven for people who are marginalized because of their beliefs.

The worship place on the island is very special. It is built on the foundation of a Hindu temple. Has Christian motifs. This shows that the people who built it believed in different things. The pillars of the worship place have carvings of lotus flowers. This reminds us of the time before Zamana was a country, when many different cultures lived together in harmony. The way the worship place is decorated is a way of resisting the idea that one kind of thinking is acceptable. This is like what the French philosopher Foucault said: that some places can bring together different kinds of spaces that do not normally go together.

Massud's garden is also a special place. It has fruit trees that are said to have come from myth. This is a way of thinking about the garden as a place where people can be free. The pomegranates and figs in the garden are symbols of fertility and knowledge. They remind us of a time when people were innocent and happy. The garden is a way of resisting the corruption and decay that is happening in the rest of the world. The soil in the garden is said to remember the stories and myths, and with the need to protect the environment. Nargis' library is a place too. It has a book called "That They Might Know Each Other," which was written by her husband. The library is a place where time stands still. Nargis mends the pages of the book with gold thread, which is a way of preserving the past. This is, like what the philosopher Walter Benjamin said, that we need to look at history in a certain way. Nargis is preserving the voices of people who are not normally

heard. She is resisting censorship by authorities. The island, the worship place, the garden, and the library are all places of resistance, where people can be free to be themselves. Khoirunnisa, Adipurwawidjana, and Maulana look at these havens using the idea of unhomeliness by Bhabha and Derrida's idea of the relationship between host and guests. They argue that these spaces actually have stories of pain for minorities. They live ambiguous lives of belonging and not belonging (Khoirunnisa, Adipurwawidjana, & Maulana 2024). Similar things are seen on the island from where people are pushed out of the haven. Here people can stay but on certain conditions set by others and have to quit ultimately. Miller says that the novel shows how personal contacts can stop violence and people live amiably in times of severe crisis (Miller, 2019). Nargis's library can be seen in the story, which is not merely a building with books; rather is an act of defiance. It offers a space where resistance against the colonial mindset is created. And the people enjoying power want to destroy it. The golden thread is a symbol for this effort of preservation. The state is doing epistemicide, but the library is fighting against it. Nargis's restoration refers to the fact that humans are created diverse for identification, to critique the violence in Zamana (Aslam, 2017, p. 276). Her stitching together of fragmented narratives constitutes what Chandra Mohanty refers to as "decolonial praxis," which re-ascribes authority to subaltern histories (Mohanty, 2003, p. 19). The golden thread represents resilience, and turns the library into a site of intersectional solidarity.

Lily's rickshaw, funded by Nargis, reimagines heterotopia through mobility. The slogan of THE MASSES ARE ASLEEP says something about how people are too comfortable with their lives. The inside of this place is a mix of things that challenge the way we think about space and who belongs where. The smell of jasmine in a rickshaw is an example of how different cultures can come together. It even covers up the smell of a dancing bear. This mix of smells is like what Bhabha called the "space" in 1994, where different things do not necessarily go together. In the story of Zamana, the main character Lily does something that James C. Scott would call "infrapolitics". This means he does acts of defiance in his daily life, like people who do not have a lot of power often do. Lily can move around the areas of Zamana even though he is not supposed to, and this is a kind of quiet rebellion. THE MASSES ARE ASLEEP. The story of Zamana and Lily shows

us that even small actions can be a way of challenging the status quo.

Spatializing Gender: Female Bodies, Contested Spaces, and Feminist Resistance

Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* and Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps* talk about how men control women's spaces in not-distant futures. They say that governments and men police women's bodies and spaces. The writers use ideas from feminist experts Judith Butler and bell hooks to show how women make these controlled spaces into places of resistance. Helen fights back against a boy who wants to prove his ideology. He cuts his palm to show his blood and challenges the idea that faith is in your blood. This act is like what Judith Butler says: our identity is shown through our actions and expressions. Helen's defiance changes her body from a place of hurt to a tool of resistance. This control over agency fits with what is said by feminists of past colonies. They support traditional knowledge to challenge gender biases. They also suggest the use of bodies by females. In the novel, Helen and Nargis challenge authorities through their actions. Their efforts are a part of the feminist movement presented in literature. In this way, violence from patriarchy and the state can be avoided. Even home is also presented as a space like a battleground for resistance and agency. (*The Politics of Home*, 2025). A woman married to Lily visits a temple. She takes back a place from extremists. Her act is based on bell hooks' idea of "black female subjectivity."

The shrine gets bombed. Her visit shows that we can make our own spaces of resistance. In *Before She Sleeps*, the government controls women's reproduction in Green City. The authorities in *The Golden Legend* also control Helen's identity by checking her blood. Both books show not-distant futures where governments and religious leaders treat women as things. The hidden city for women, Panah in *Before She Sleeps*, is different from the male-designed island in *The Golden Legend*. Panah helps women resist and be free from men's control. The island in *The Golden Legend* is based on a man's legacy. This shows that even spaces of resistance have limits because of men's control.

Spatial Haunting and Postcolonial Trauma

Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* is a book that looks at how people and places are affected by bad things that happened in the past. *The Golden Legend* is about trauma, and it shows how this trauma is still present in the world today. This idea is based on what Edward Said said about people being forced out of their homes and countries. *The Golden Legend* also uses Avery Gordon's idea that the past can haunt us and that these ghosts can help us understand what really happened.

The story is set in a place where bad things have happened and where people have been forced to leave their homes. Kashmir is one of these places. It is a big part of Imran's story. Imran is from Kashmir. He had to leave his home, and now he lives in a place called Zamana. This is like what Edward Said said about how powerful countries can be mean to countries and take their land. Imran's story is an example of what happens to people when countries fight over land. The

Golden Legend shows how Imran's experience is connected to the problem of India and Zamana fighting over Kashmir. Kashmir is a place that's important to Imran and, to many other people, and *The Golden Legend* shows how this place is still affecting people today. His father disappears in an Indian martial raid--- "swallowed by a crack in the earth, a literal and figurative vanishing act that captures Kashmir's removal from the geopolitical story (Aslam, 2017, p. 312). Aslam likens this erasure to Zamana's urban amnesia, in which the territory of colonial roadways and checkpoints overrides Indigenous histories. Imran's splintered identity embodies Said's claim that dispossession "perforates the present with absences" (Said, 1993, p. 214), his memories of Srinagar's "saffron fields and snow-lit peaks" at odds with Zamana's dystopian sprawl (Aslam, 2017, p. 315). The novel critiques the legacy of postcolonial states inheriting and amplifying the colonial violence of the map, which erases Kashmir as a "ghostly non-place" of nationalist discourses. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters*, which was written in 2008, says that haunting is when you see something that does not seem to be. This idea helps us see the effects of trauma in *The Golden Legend*. Imran has visions of snow that is stained with blood, as said by Aslam in 2017. This reminds us of the events that happened in Kashmir, and it is like his body is keeping a record of the harm caused by the state. In Zamana, the soil has a lot of history and mythology in it. It also shows the effects of colonial rule. The soil on the

island is special because it is said to have come from mythology. It shows how myth and violence are connected.

The land, as Aslam wrote in 2017, remembers the boots of British tax collectors. This shows what Gordon said in 2008: haunting is something that happens between what we can see and what we cannot see. The soil becomes a place where spirituality and colonial rule exist together. This mark in the soil is what Gordon calls a haunting. It is a mark that is respected in tradition, but it has been disrespected after colonial rule. This disrespect is, like the harm that was done to Kashmir, where the land has been hurt and has the marks of shoes on it. So, the island is a place where hidden histories come back, and it challenges the state's efforts to make people forget.

Feminist Praxis: Subverted Logics and Embodied Resistance

Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity is really important here. This is the idea that who we are is created by what we do with our bodies over again (Butler, 1990). We can see this idea in *The Golden Legend* with Helen. When a boy wants to see her blood, Helen does something very brave. She cuts her palm. Says "This red is the only colour under my skin" (Aslam, 2017).

Helen is saying that she is not one thing; she is many things. She is not just her faith or her skin colour. She is showing that these things are not fixed; they are by chance. By doing this, Helen is standing up against people who want to control her. She is standing up against the idea that she's just an "Other," different and not important. Judith Butler said that our bodies become who we are by what we do, and this happens over time. Helen's actions are a kind of resistance; they are saying that she will not be held back. Helen's body, with its scars and cuts, is a symbol of her resistance. She is showing that she will not be controlled by the rules of her community. This is similar to what's happening in real life in Zamana. Women are standing up against the rules that are made for them. For example, the poet Kishwar Naheed said: "We, the women, are not afraid of your chadors". This means that women are taking control of their bodies and lives. They are saying that they will not be afraid of what others think of them. Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity is very important here because it shows that our bodies are a way of resisting the rules that society

makes for us. Nargis's reclamation of her husband's text, *That They Might Know Each Other*, represents a 'decolonize knowledge' approach that Chandra Talpade.

Mohanty ascribes to cantering subaltern histories (Mohanty, 2003, p. 19). Ripped by state agents, the book is carefully sewn together with gold thread, a literal and figurative gesture of mending broken stories. Nargis, Aslam writes, "shortened the pages as though reknitting a new book, a gesture that calls upon the tradition of preserving texts even while critiquing Zamana's continued repression of pluralistic thought (Aslam, 2017, p. 276). According to Mohanty, decolonial praxis involves "reclaiming histories buried under colonialism and patriarchy," and Nargis's golden thread evinces this work (2003, p. 46). Her work mirrors Zamana's feminist collective Women March's use of art as a way to archive marginalized voices, stitching resistance into the social fabric. A female character's sneak visit in the novel to a temple in defiance of threats of violence embodies what bell hooks describes as "radical black female subjectivity"---the refusal of oppressive systems to dictate how one relates to space (hooks, 1990, p. 15). At the temple, people from different backgrounds come to worship together. This is where she can escape from the rules that Zamana has for her as a woman and as a person of faith. The temple is a place that is different from other places. But then something terrible happens. Extremists attack the temple. This shows how hard it is for women to stand up for themselves in a place with a lot of violence. The idea of a "homeplace" as a space where women can be strong and renew themselves is shown here. It is also shown that this space can be easily destroyed. This means that women's fight for what's right is strong, but it is also fragile. When she goes back to the temple that was bombed and throws jasmine petals, she is saying that she will not back down. She is also saying that she does not agree with what Malala Yousafzai said. That the people who do things are afraid of a girl who can read and write. Her actions at the temple show that feminist resistance is not about education; it is about taking a stand and fighting back. Clements asks a difficult question: Do modern Pakistani novels written in English about Christian characters end up reinforcing the very divide they are trying to challenge (Clements, 2022)? He is of the opinion that novels sometimes unwittingly strengthen the stereotypes as they portray one as good and the other as bad. So the novel may be favouring the Western point of view instead of fighting against it. Throwing

jasmine petals on the bombed temple site echoes what Liaquat and Raza point out: that Urdu poetry featuring gardens and beauty can resist oppression in a meaningful way (Liaquat & Raza 2020). And this would be a resistance employing local resources instead of borrowed ones. The temple and her actions represent the resistance in Zamana, where women like hers are fighting for their rights.

Conclusion: Fragmented Identities and the Liminality of Postcolonial Zamana

Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* is a book that talks about Zamana's *The Golden Legend* and how it is stuck between its past and its future. The city in the book, Zamana, is like some cities in reality, like many metropolises, where you can still see the influence of the British. The way the neighbourhoods are laid out is even shaped like the Union Jack, which's a reminder of the British colonial era. Now this city is dealing with a lot of violence and control. *The Golden Legend* is a story that shows how power and powerlessness are all mixed up. This is what *The Golden Legend* is trying to say. It is like what Bhabha said: when different cultures come together, they create identities. You can see this in the characters like Imran, a Kashmiri refugee who is haunted by what happened to him in Kashmir, and Helen, a woman who is accused of blasphemy.

Imran's story is very sad; his father just disappeared and this represents what happened to Kashmir it is like Kashmir is not even part of the story of Zamana's history. Helen is trying to fight against what people think she is because of her ideology. *The Golden Legend* is showing us that Zamana is still struggling with its past, and it is hard for *The Golden Legend* to figure out who it is because it is a place with a lot of cultures and ideologies.

Aslam's *The Golden Legend* is like a country that is stuck between its past and its future, and it is hard to become a free place. The characters in *The Golden Legend*, like Helen and Imran their stories are not finished and this is like Zamana's story it is not finished yet. *The Golden Legend* is trying to show us that even though there are some places that can resist oppression, like what Foucault said, these places are not always strong enough. *The Golden Legend* is a book that talks about *The Golden Legend* and how it is a place. But the tear-shaped island, which is a sanctuary fused with Hindu,

Christian, and Islamic architecture, is ultimately destroyed by extremists, leaving the counter-site vulnerable (Aslam, 2017, p. 315). Likewise, Lily's rickshaw, one of those mobile heterotopias calling out to the contradictions of class sometimes--is still temporary; itself never solidifying, its slogan "THE MASSES ARE ASLEEP" (Aslam, 2017, p.

167) an until-then provocation. These transitory oases represent James C. Scott's "weapons of the weak," in which dispossessed peoples participate in "everyday forms of resistance" (Scott, 1985, p. 16) that prove necessary but not sustainable. The island's destruction and the shrine's bombing are bites taken from an imaginary world, which reflects real-world attacks on pluralistic spaces in Zamana. As are Aslam's claims that paint the performance as ordinary acts of resistance followed by the fallout: since they take place in a heterotopic space, they'll last as long as that space is being actively contested by "other" spaces that are pedestrian and short-lived as long as there's no structural change. Foucault's claim that heterotopias 'secretly undermine language' is moderated by the novel's recognition of its physical and ideological precariousness (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). Despite these limitations, The Golden Legend imagines a

way out through intersectional solidarity. Restoring her husband's book, That They Might Know Each Other, Nargis stitches fragmented narratives with golden thread (Aslam, 2017, p. 276), echoing Chandra Mohanty's call to "decolonize knowledge," opinion (Mohanty, 2003, p. 19). It says that when governments try to make everyone the same, that is not right. Helen and Imran being together shows that people from different backgrounds can come together.

As bell hooks said, people should make places where they can support each other and be together. This is what the characters in the book are trying to do even though they are all broken in some way. The book does not have an ending with Helen gone and Imran back, which makes the readers think about how they have to keep working to make things right. The Golden Legend, despite its heterotopic imagination, may itself participate in what Shah, Damsaz, Khan, and Rahim term the "marginalizing of authenticity" (Khan & Rahim 2024). The narrative conforms to Western expectations of the 'other' while ignoring locally rooted resistance. The novel's unresolved ending thus shows Zamana's liminality and the theoretical stalemate situation of postcolonial dystopian fiction trapped between testimonial urgency and exoticization. The act of

mending the book by golden thread by Nargis is a good act of resistance, though it has no political radical impact. The novel does not give easy solutions, but it invites readers to think critically about how things can be made better. In a country that has been hurt by countries and, by itself, the writer Aslam is saying that we need to have many different kinds of people and ideas. This is not something that happened in the past, but it is something we need to keep working towards, and it is very important.

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