

Subverting the Stereotyped Images of the Ottoman Empire through Mimicry and Hybridity: A Postcolonial Critique of *The Stone Woman* (2014)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63163/jpehss.v4i1.1318>

Abstract

The novel is studied through a postcolonial lens. The study explores the traces of subversion of the Eurocentric images of Muslims and the Ottoman Empire in the selected novel. The novel *Stone Women* is a historical novel set in 19th century Ottoman rule. The focus is that how the Muslims are represented in the selected novel. The research is done particularly in the backdrop of Eurocentric images of Muslims in Western literature. The study seeks to explore the stance of writer for retelling history. In the novel history is told from an objective view point where the writer has neither eulogized nor villainized the Muslims unlike the Western literature. Further the novel has tried to subvert the fixed stereotyped image of Ottoman Empire portrayed in the canonical texts. The study concludes that the writer has challenged the concepts of fixity of identities and cultural purity by projecting a culture that is a by-product of mimicry and hybridity of cultures. The writer has told a story of history that is not based on any prejudice or bias but rather as a creative outlet of a writer's expression.

Keywords: Stereotyping, Post colonialism, Fixity, Mimicry, Hybridity, Ottoman Empire

1. Introduction

The East has always been depicted as *Orient, Exotic*. These words have their own connotation in Western literature which is contoured by Orientalist discourse. Such representation stereotyped eastern world, their identity thus was shaped according to these stamped images. The images were mainly negative, they were labelled backward, irrational and significantly different from the civilized West. The construction of these fixed images costs the colonized nations of their true identity, culture and history. These Eurocentric narratives were deliberately established to serve certain self-serving motives of the colonial masters. In order to challenge and destabilize these fixed identities, the postcolonial literature revisits, history, culture and identity. Tariq Ali's *The Stone Woman* is one such piece where the writer reconstructs the image of Ottoman Empire. The work foregrounds, hybrid identities, complexity of culture, act of mimicking the masters and rethinking about the roots.

The work investigates *The Stone Woman* from the lens of postcolonial theory particularly Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry. Bhabha's stance is the identities and histories are never fixed or static. The factors like convergence of cultures and then the aspect of adopting and mimicking other culture shatters the very concept of fixed rigid identity. The novel thus incorporating these aspects of hybridity and mimicry aims at exploring the element of fixed rigid representation of Ottoman Empire.

2. Literature Review

The Stone Woman is a historical novel written by Tariq Ali. Tariq Ali is a British-Pakistani writer and

he has his interest in history and he has been an activist and has written a lot on the subject of Marxism. Wald (2015) pronounced Ali as an important contributor to the Leftist activism. His writings mainly deal with current issues and history. Wald (2015) commented, Ali's political writings are his efforts to counteract history which is full of Western atrocities and its distorted interpretation of Eastern cultures. Tariq tried to reinterpret history from Other's perspective which is unbiased and does not contain Eurocentric impetus to it. Ali's writing searched for truth in the European-culture that dominated the world. As Wald (2015) mentioned, "Gifted with a remarkable eye for the way that daily routine conceals the absurd, Tariq Ali lives outside the propaganda bubble of the West's air-conditioned nightmare of imperial domination" (p. 31). His activism is about winnowing out popular lies from truths.

Similarly, Ali's fiction also entails his agenda of counteracting the singular view of history and he, in his signature style rewrites history from other's point of view. His famous fiction work is his series of five novels named Islam Quintet. Many research works have been done on his various novels. One such work is carried out by Abedpour (2018), where he commented about Islam Quintet, in all of his five books Ali has portrayed history in a way which is postcolonial in nature and is anti-orientalist and he rewrites history from other's standpoint.

Western history has always tried to overpower other nation's history by presenting itself as the most enlightened part of world history. However, Ali in his historiography challenges such notions and counteracts them with some truths that remained hidden. Ali's book Islam Quintet inspects the factors that prevented Islam to flourish like Christianity. His books shed light on Islam's part in the Renaissance movement. Ali's characters in his book *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* highlights the fact that Islam thrived in its culture, art, philosophy and he tries to look into reasons that prevented its political evolution (Abedpour, 2018). In this way, Ali removed the singularity of European history through the use of fiction which made a reinterpretation of history possible. Hassan et al (2014) also asserted about The Islam Qunitet that the important factor of the text is to defy the western views about Muslim world and to remodel a positive image. And to present his anti-colonialist approach, Ali has used certain strategies in his novels that make his agendas more clear. For instance, he has used the binary opposition technique to compare East and West. *Shadows of Pomegranate* by Ali portrays Muslim history which is tolerant and where the art of cuisine and culture of cleanliness are very visible trademarks which were in sheer contrast to Christian extremism (Wikander, 2013). This strategy is an answer to the Western East-West dichotomy.

Similarly, Ali has made use of other strategies in his novel writing which make his work an example of Postcolonial meta-fiction, which in the words of Gamal (2011), "is an attempt to rewrite the textual constructions of native subjectivity as grounded in its historical and cultural locations" (p. 2). Hence, by presenting the opposite aspects of Eastern history, Ali tries to put forth a subversive image of the East as well as the West. Ali, in his novels attempts at rewriting European history and presents a substitute version of modernity which is quite plausible and is a mix of the rationalism of West and the community sense of East (Gamal, 2011). Thus, the historical dichotomy is seen as a tool to subvert the dominant Western history. Along with these studies, one other work by Chandio and Kulsoom (2018) also analyzed the novel from a perspective of New Historicism. The work claimed novel to be a contrast of modern culture and is an extensive work on female characters, about their struggle and their emotional and psychological journey. However, they also criticized the novel to be a subjective worldview and therefore lack authenticity in terms of historical account. They commented; Although ideological conflict between Islam and Christianity is pictured with intensity and clarity, the historical background behind this conflict is briefly explored. Ali, thus, has added a flavor of creativity of fiction to the history. It is his way of countering the fixed history and discourses associated with history.

3. Theoretical Framework

Theory can be considered a guiding light when doing non-empirical research as it gives a guideline to

organize the research work. The theoretical lens used for this work will be Postcolonial. Post colonialism is the name given to studies that emerged as a reaction to colonial ideology. Karoupova (2008), has stated, Post colonialism is regarded as a reaction to colonialism. It studies the issues that deal with race and color. Along with studying race and color politics, post-colonialism also studies the ways in which civilizations are influenced by coming in contact with imperial powers. The body of knowledge produced by colonizers is now being scrutinized through the lens of the postcolonial theoretical framework. This field of learning is analyzing the western representation of other nations and putting forth the problematic of colonization and decolonization.

Colonial ideology is based on the concept of other, whereby colonizers made a distinctive boundary between themselves and everyone that was not like themselves. This parity further took a shape of imperialist behavior which labeled all colonized people as inferior and termed Europeans as of superior race. Tyson (2015) defines colonial ideology in these words: “Colonialist ideology, often referred to as colonialist discourse to mark its relationship to the language in which colonialist thinking was expressed, was based on the colonizers’ assumption of their own superiority, which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native (indigenous) peoples, the original inhabitants of the lands they invaded” (p. 419). This discourse, as a result, gave rise to an assumption of Westerners as civilized and all Non-Western people as uncivilized, and hence, this stereotyping by Europeans gave them a justification to overpower Others.

Other has been represented as an exotic entity in western literature that was mysterious as well as worth exploring. Hence, for the sake of knowing and later taking control of this exotic other became the mission of the white people. The concept of Orient was in contrast to the image of the West, thus this made West in a position of powerful subjects and consequently placed Orient in the place of object- an object that needed to be known, desired, and controlled (Naghibi, 2001).

The framework selected for this article is that given by Homi K. Bhaba. Particularly, the elements of Fixity, Hybridity and Mimicry will be the focus of this research. Representation of other has been a core issue related to the theory of post-colonialism. According to Bhabha’s book *Location of Culture* stereotyped images have always been associated with *other* whenever they were portrayed in canonical texts produced by west. They were negative and they were fixed. Contrary to the notion of fixity of history, Bhabha believes history is not something fixed but rather interruptive. He believes in the concept of hybridity and its power to bring newness to the fixed narratives. “Newness must be located outside the continuum of progress in a sort of interruptive history. Shaking post-imperial identity to its very foundations, the metropolis is seen as already transformed, even though it may not know it” (Poddar, 2001, p.64). The interruptive nature of history is beneficial for every culture as it will allow flexibility to the rigid ways of thinking and open up new dimensions for the global community. Bhabha favors the idea of contra-modernity whereby temporalities and historicities are intermixed with each other, as a consequence modern and traditional are juxtaposed making a way for newer possibilities. This will homogenize the supreme perceptions of history (Poddar, 2001). Fixing the characteristics of any identity has rendered one to be pure and the other as impure throughout the timeline of history. This has proved to be dangerously inscribed in the minds of generations delivering serious consequences.

These fixed images are constant stereotypical examples of post-colonial representation where others are portrayed as having an inherent identity of being savage and cannibalistic. As Bhabha (1994) asserted, this is because of this concept of fixity that has rendered certain titles like licentious for black, duplicitous for Asians, etc. that is why race has certain characteristics that apply to every individual belonging to that race and therefore hampers any other possibility for them.

3.1 Role of Mimicry and Hybridity in Altering the Fixed Identity

Mimicry and hybridity are the two concepts very vital in the theoretical framework of postcolonialism. Bhabha has used these two concepts in his prominent work *Location of Culture* related to

postcolonialism. Firstly, hybridity, in terms of postcolonial background, is a phenomenon arising out of cultural intermingling. The new culture after colonization takes place in old cultures and is a hybrid of the two previous cultures that came in contact. The text of *Location of Culture* by Homi Bhabha is one of the fundamental documents dealing with the hybridity of cultures.

Bhabha has claimed the phenomena of hybridity as a cause of ambivalence among the colonizing masters. The change in the characteristics of colonial subjects thus changes the authority of colonial masters, “ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 129). Bhabha claimed because of this ambivalence the presence of the colonizer becomes a partial presence and this presence amounts to the incomplete and non-existent presence and thus nullifies the effect of imperialism on the colonies.

The hybrid culture thus challenges the dominant culture, which is contaminated by the differences of race and language. Along with challenges, the process of hybridity also paves the way for transculturation and absorption of various cultures into one. According to Bhabha (1994), this may open the path to conceiving a diverse culture that does not value exoticism but on the gains of culture’s hybridity.

Secondly, mimicry is an act of letting the colonial subject mimic the masters. The subjects adopt cultural habits and their values so they become like their masters. Hence, mimicry produces an ambivalent relationship between colonized and colonizer, and this results in unfavorable situations for the masters. As in the words of Bhabha (1994), the consequence of the process of mimicry on the power of colonizers is disturbing and deep. The cause of ambivalence is the contest for power on the two sides, the subjects after adopting the master’s traits wish to replace the power of control. Another reason for ambivalence is the loss of one’s own identity.

Moreover, in the words of Ashcroft et al., (2000) mimicry is never very far from mockery as it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. Hence this mockery counts as the derogation of the masters. This then creates a danger for the colonizers as they start losing control. Mimicry hence produces slits in the authority and therefore make the colonizers lose their power over their subjects (Bhabha, 2014). The imitation causes one to suppress their recognition in order to achieve some other identification and the result is a blurred copy of oneself.

Conclusively, hybridity, and mimicry are the two phenomena that have a significant role to play in the concept of fixed identity. These two processes are dynamic in nature and have the potential to alter the narratives related to representation.

3.2 Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this work are:

1. How does the writer subvert fixity of narrative and the stereotyped images portrayed in the West?
2. What traces of mimicry and hybridity are found in the selected novel?

3.3 Research Objectives

- Firstly, to explore novel through a postcolonial lens and to analyze how the writer has tried to subvert the stereotyped images of Muslims portrayed in the west.
- Secondly, to study the elements of hybridity and mimicry in the light of Bhabha’s theoretical framework.
- Lastly, to analyze how the writer challenges the fixity of narrative and purity of one culture over other.

4. Critical Analysis/ Discussion

The *Stone Woman* novels tells story from the past and retell Muslim history from a perspective that is bold yet unconventional. It is about one of the eras of Islamic history, which is the Ottomans era, which

has not been penned down in the canonical history of the world as it should have been. Eurocentric history has completely ignored the contribution of Muslims granted in the field of science, arts, architecture, and civilization. Their heritage amounted to null or rather was distorted by Eurocentric mediums of knowledge and information. The representation of Turks in the European literature is formed upon the basis of initial contacts between Muslims and Christians through crusades. The stereotyped images of Turks are found in all the genres of British literature. The picture thus portrayed is based on assumptions and whims. Overseas expansion during the period of colonialism gave more chances to the travel writers to include the whims involving personal curiosities and imperial aspirations in their publications including wide range of perceptions about Ottoman lands and its people. (Raw, 1999). Different stories were made up and propagated that overlooked the real sketch of Ottomans. Ali has questioned these fixed perceptions through his writings. The novel under study employs the elements of hybridity and mimicry to subvert the stereotyped images of Ottoman Empire and Muslims.

4.1 Mimicry

Mimicry in simple words can be defined as imitating the colonial masters; their behavior, culture, and ways of living. But this term has broader consequences keeping in view the complexities that accompany the world scene post the colonial situation. One of the broader consequences is ambivalence. The reason as described by Ashcroft et al (2000), mimicry is never very far from mockery since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. Hence the intention of this mockery is plainly derogation of the masters. This then creates an impending danger for the masters as they start losing control. Mimicry hence produces slits in the authority and therefore make the colonizers lose their power over their subjects (Bhabha, 2014). Mimicry, therefore, breaks the linear progression of hegemonic control and by involving the element of repetition, it represents an ironic compromise in the words of Bhabha. It imposes a very significant effect on the colonizer as it disrupts the colonial discourse and all the ideologies related to it. Furthermore, Bhabha claimed the presence of colonizer, mainly because of inherent ambivalence, becomes a partial presence in the colony, this presence is uncertain, incomplete, and almost non-existent.

Mimicry in a way challenges the dominance of colonizers by making colonized the same but not quite where the subjects become alike yet intimidating. The novel also entails many examples of mimicry in the novel where pashas and their off springs are found imitating the ways of English people. Exiled Iskandar Pasha has made his ways more like an English man so does his children. He made his lifestyle less like an Ottoman and more like a Britisher. His palace has its main parts being decorated in a French style. "Father's sitting-room, organized and decorated on the model of French salon, was full today. Prior to his illness, Ottoman women had been barred from entering this sanctuary" (Ali, 2014, pg.26). The foreign relationships with England made Ottomans copy them. They made friends with Britishers and used to entertain them in their places. They had made their houses customized in order to amuse their English acquaintances. Not only the characters imitated their European counterparts but their frequent visits to their countries made them criticize and loathe their own land and the ways of living there. They started thinking lowly of everything that belonged to Turkey and the Ottomans. As stated in the text about Iskander Pasha, "He had once told us that whenever he returned to Istanbul after a stay in Paris or Berlin, he found the odor of stupidity at home extremely reassuring, but was terrified that it might suffocate him if, for whatever reason, he was never able to travel again" (Ali, 2014, pg. 57). The mimicking Ottomans in the novel could hardly find anything worth appreciating. This created not only copies of English people but rather an ambivalent nation that attacked its own culture, ways of living, and ways of thinking.

The characters in the novel looked up to Western philosophies and found those the only solution for the problems at home. By denouncing and degrading their own ways the characters create an out of place appeal. They seem to be trying to be like someone or something else and meanwhile creating

a menace to their cultural identity and their history as well. For instance, at one place we find Iskander Pasha after regaining his speech ability pronounced, “It was Comte, you see, and not Allah. So, my dear Hasan, from now on I want you to say ‘Comte be praised’ or ‘There is only one Comte and he is Comte and we are all his prophet” (Ali, 2014, pg. 126).

Hence, this ambiguous outlook of the novel exaggerates the liberal views which appear ahead of time of the setting of the novel. Here the writer by moving out of time and place counteracts the stereotypical representation. This exaggerated picture of Muslims is the writer’s response to the civilizing mission. Thus, the result is an ambiguous present, disgust for the past, and uncertainty for the future. Furthermore, the non-stereotyped presentation of the history of Muslims by Ali construct a flexible and innovative space to respond to the rigidity of Eurocentric perspectives. As Gamal (2011) claimed about Ali; Ali’ writings about East and West encounter encompass a dual agenda which aims at contending the religious extremism of East and imperialist fundamentalism of West so that such a space can be created in which freedom of expression and imagination is protected without any fear. Thus these strategies by postcolonial writers have rid the history of its stiffness and inflexibility and the literature is seen as a playground for a creative vent for the writers free of extremes of radicalism and imperialism.

4.2 Hybridity in The Stone Woman

Hybridity in the words of Ashcroft et al (2000) is “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization”. Hybridity is the very obvious result of the synergy of any two agents. In the postcolonial context, it is the process whereby the colonized as well colonizer is affected. This process of hybridity allows space for transculturation and assimilation of different cultural features and Bhabha claimed that this space “may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” (Bhabha, 1994 pg.38).

Similarly, the hybrid space is created by Ali in the novel. We observe different characters who are westerners but share the space with locals as they live in their own country. The most obvious example in the novel is the character of Baron. He is welcomed in the Iskander Pashas space like a family member. His romantic relationship with uncle Memed legitimate his position in the family furthermore. Moreover, Baron being an outsider feels so comfortable in criticizing the Ottomans lavishly as his very right. “YOUR OTTOMAN EMPIRE IS like a drunken prostitute, lying with her legs wide open, neither knowing nor caring who will take her next”. (Ali, 2014, pg. 24). This comment shows how he wishes to distinguish his position as not belonging to the place and also being a mere of the ruin of the Empire. Not only was he critical of the ways of Ottomans he also desired to transform them by introducing them to the world of Western literature. As a result, the people around them started seeing themselves from his eyes.

The locals themselves started finding faults in their ways of thinking and their systems. In the wake of new found awareness, the characters have exaggerated the faults and flaws of the Ottoman Empire. They have renounced their glorious past and the richness of their culture. They believed the only way to salvation from the rule of the Sultan will be to look up to the West. The characters appear to be embracing the new phenomena of intervention of alien culture. They do not seem to be fighting or opposing the Western culture rather they start demeaning their own culture. This form of demeaning represent one kind of resistance and complicity which according to Ashcroft et al. (2000) are the salient characteristics of the colonized subjects. Further, the novel pictures post Western intervention situation in Ottoman lands. The confused and resisting characters and situations refer to the sense of ambiguity among nations regarding their identity and past in the postcolonial situation. The characters are seen resisting their own ambivalent history.

Another example of hybridity is the favoring of the secular state by the majority of the characters in the novel. The novel showcases the frustration of the people of Istanbul at the interference of clergy in

the matter of state. Now they all want religion to be removed from the government as has been the case for centuries in the Ottoman states. This interrupts the old ways of life in order to bring something new. All progressive characters in the novel want a religion-free state but they do not seem to have any other substitute system of governance. Although we find everyone criticizing Ottomans, Sultans, and their ways, anyone hardly has any practical solution to the problems. This suggests the perplexity that arises as a result of hybridity. As commented by Bhabha (1990), hybridity gives rise to confusion and ambiguity in life as it creates hurdles in projecting the realness of life and its affairs. In the same way, religion merging with secular beliefs has created an ambivalent situation which presently does not seem to have any plausible solution. Consequently, the result is an unconventional, unorthodox image. This is an attempt on the writer's part to retell and reconstruct history for the sake of giving it a new perspective which shows the other side of Muslims which is a deliberate practice by Ali in his Islam Quintet series as confirmed by Ali et al., Islam Quintet aims at remodeling the reshape the way history is told previously, the book pictures Muslims from a perspective that is contrary to the stereotyped images rather a rich culture of education and progress, tolerance and diversity of culture is represented. Ali, however, does understand the perplexity that hybridity entails and how it somewhat ignores the very essence of colonial agendas but he also admits the unignorable impact of the consequences that arose as a result of the hybridity of two cultures and considers the assimilation of this new culture as an indispensable part of the global postcolonial conditions.

Though the hybrid result produced, as a result of the process of colonization, was purely on an unconscious level by the colonial masters and subjects but the ex-colonies now want to consciously break the cycle of effects of the imperialist culture of the West on the rest of the World.

4.3 Self-criticism as a Tool of Subversion (Unbiased Representation).

The novel is full of criticism on the working and ways of Ottomans. The writer has magnified the loophole of Muslim society. He questions the decline of Ottomans. Ali raises certain questions that haunt the history of Ottomans and Muslims altogether. The very pressing question being that of the fall of such a mighty Empire. The text contained a direct probe at such a heightened decline of Ottomans by comparing them to Russians and Austrian states "CAN ANY OF YOU EXPLAIN WHY WE DECLINE SO RAPIDLY? IF RUSSIAN TSAR AND AUSTRIAN EMPEROR ARE STILL SO POWERFUL, WHY NOT OUR SULTAN?" (Ali, 2014, pg. 51). The frustration and helplessness in the question are very obvious. And the writer attempts at answering to the question as well. He has considered religious dogmas and clergy to be the real culprits behind the downfall of Ottomans. Secondly, the writer also challenges the all-powerful Sultans and their Un-checked control over the states. Previously, when Sultans were obeyed without any word the masses feared them and they used to decree the orders as per their will, but the people of Turkey of the 19th century as shown in the novel started to realize their rights and they are no longer willing to favor the blind following of the Sultans. The text has generously criticized the Ottomans. It criticizes the art of Ottomans, literature produced during the period, and almost everything. "We can produce paintings that embarrass, poetry that pains the ear, love letters that destroy passion, but death to him who dares criticize our work. I suppose this attitude mirrors that of the palace where the Sultan is always above criticism. It is this dullness and inertia that has killed the Empire and retarded our development" (Ali, 2014, pg. 95). Ali has used self-criticism as one form of resistance. The people of colonies loathing oneself and looking up to the ways of the masters is one of the very obvious consequences of the process of colonization. And in the words of Foucault (1976), resistance disrupts the unities in the society, cuts the individuals and produces complexities in the personalities of the individuals. The novel also shows the complexity of society where individuals and states are seen working against each other. The writer demonstrates, new complex ideologies, disrupted society, and self-loathing individuals are what the colonization had given the colonies. This confusion and lack of identity shown in the novel is one of the significant features of colonized nations as more the confusion is lesser will be the confrontation on part of the

subjects. Hence, when the situation is fabricated, the subjects become inclined to adopt the ways of the masters as they feel their present state as dissatisfying and pathetic. Furthermore, the confused plot of the novel also points towards the ambivalence in the late Ottoman period. The structure of the plot does not have any proper pattern. This asynchronous and ambivalent past gives a very confused meaning to readers about the treatment of the history. As according to Bhabha's definition of ambivalence as "the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship of colonized and colonizer", Ali has formed a mix of two expression in his novel. The novel apparently supports the colonizers' ways of thinking but the hermeneutic interpretation of the text disregards the intervention of Western ways and thoughts in the Eastern ways of living and injuring their culture and identity.

Moreover, as this novel is a part of the quintet series by Tariq Ali, unlike the other three books, which glorify the Ottoman past, this book stated the un-glorious aspects which showed the real portrayal of history by the postcolonial writers who do not attempt at showing a one-sided or biased picture as was done by the ex-colonizers. These writers in their writings seek to project a non-stereotypical image so that the myth of racial purity and cultural supremacy is shunned. For these very stereotyped images are fixed representations which are the basis of forming the colonial discourse and thus the practice of colonization. Thus stereotyping promotes fixity and thereby rigidity in the representation. Furthermore, fixed representation or stereotyping, in the words of Bhabha (1994), is a simplification as it let the colonizers present a fixed typical presentation of the subject and meanwhile during the process out rightly denying any difference in the thoughts and behavior in the society and thereby giving no significance to the emotions, thoughts and individual identity of the colonized people. Contrary to the stereotyped representation postcolonial writers advocate unorthodox portrayal. Hence, these writers by portraying the opposite tend to challenge and threaten the dominant discourse. As Bhabha (1994) opined, the fullness of stereotyped presentation of colonies can only be counteracted by picturing the absence of it. Thereby the authority and power of the masters are confronted through contrary representations in the literature produced by the cultures affected by the process of colonization.

4.5 Subversion of Fixed Representations in The Stone Woman

Tariq Ali in this novel has reconstructed the image of Muslims. Muslims and particularly Turks have been projected in the western literature with negative connotations. They are represented as lecherous, filthy, corrupt, terrorists, etc. in all the genres of literature. As Kabbani (1986) wrote, Muslims were considered menacing creatures and portrayed as black", 'dog-headed', and 'ugly'. Muslim characters played villains in the stories of English people. But these representations were based on the whims and imaginations of the West about The East. As Kennedy (2017) claimed, many of the representations of the Orient are kind of exotic orientalism and hint towards promiscuity and despotism of Eastern men. But these representations are far from reality. They are the constructed ones and based on prejudice and were biased. The economic and power gains were the reasons for propagating such images as Loomba (2005), claimed the lucrative promises of Asian and African resources gave them another standpoint to look at non-European regions.

Thus, in order to counter these misrepresented images, postcolonial writers write back from the perspective of marginalized nations. Ali is also one of these writers. He has written works which are historical and hold a political significance. He is one of the important contributors to leftist activism in the words of Wald. Wald (2015), stated Ali's writings are his efforts to counteract history which has been distorted by Western interpretation of the culture of the East. The novel *The Stone Woman* is one of the four novels written in his *Islam Quintet Series*. The novels are set in different historical periods of Muslim history and according to Ali et al. (2014), *Islam quintet* came as a result to challenge the western notions about East. Hence, the novel also opposes the stereotyped representations of Muslims particularly Ottomans.

The Muslims in the novel are not seen in their stereotyped image as conservative, exotic, irrational,

and barbarous. It is observed that some characters in the novel seemed ahead of their time. They are liberal in their outlook and are ready to question and transgress the obsolete traditions which appear as hurdles in their progress. For instance, the women in the novel who are determined and know their rights. They are not the ones represented in Western literature. West presents Eastern women as a contrast to Eastern women. They are subjugated by their male counterparts. The image of Muslim women was shaped by the Orientalist view which made Islam to be seen as a rigid and inflexible religion that allocated a derogatory place to women in a Muslim family (Tug, 2012). However, the picture of women in *The Stone Woman* is unorthodox, they are seen as pursuing their dreams, love, and inquisitiveness. And the need for such women is pronounced by the male characters in the novel as well. For instance, as the comment by an officer in the text suggested, “We want to end the situation where women are considered good only for the affairs of the heart or the home or, indeed, for purposes of procreation. We want them also to become experts in organizing the affairs of the state” (Ali, 2014, pg. 174). Here, the typical authoritative dominant males in the Ottomans are not seen anywhere, as is depicted in world history. This new version of history told by Ali in his novel asks for the change of old fixed ways of thoughts and perceptions only in this way the postcolonial narratives can be endorsed that can transform the fixed colonial narratives which is already seen through the works of postcolonial writers. Shaking post-imperial identity to its very foundations, the metropolis is seen as already transformed, even though it may not know it” (Poddar, 2001, p.64). Furthermore, Ali by depicting the tolerant Muslims has tried to remove the stamped opinions and conceptions about Ottomans. More accepting Muslims are observed in the novel. It is observed how old traditions and thoughts are being relegated by progressive Muslims. For example, the acceptance of Nilofer by her family after knowing the truth that she was not the daughter of the family is interpreted as a significant act, as royalty of blood was considered as a matter of death and life. “I might not be related by blood, but this was my family. These were people I loved and would always love—despite the past, despite the future” (Ali, 2014, pg. 80). This comment by Nilofer defies the old notions of the blood of one’s family being superior to the blood of other humans.

Further, it is noticed how the rebellious nature of characters in the novel appears to bring new energy into the deteriorating state of the Empire. They are determined to challenge the authority and powers of Sultans who were considered the shadow of God on earth previously. These rebellious souls want to free their homeland from orthodox practices and vices. They believe in the success of a secular state. Not only that most characters in the novel are presented as non-religious and many simply indifferent to it. They are aware of the damage caused by fake aalims (religious scholars) and their scheming about having control over all state affairs. “Istanbul could have been the capital of invention and modernity like Cordoba and Baghdad in the old days, but these wretched beards that established the laws of our state were frightened of losing their monopoly of power and knowledge. I forget the name of the fool who told the Sultan that if the palace relaxed its control, our religion would be finished” (Ali, 2014, pg.52). This bold statement symbolizes Muslims were not religious heretics, they were conscious of the damages borne by some religious exploiters and they wanted to make their homeland a place that is tolerant, rational, and liberated.

Hence, the writer by subverting the fixed representation presents a flexible, more plausible, and believable image of Ottomans. This is in contrast to the fixed projection by Eurocentric writings which portrayed Turks with certain specific characteristics like cruelty, malice, and intrigues. Moreover, according to Hassan et al., 2014, Ali’s reason for writing *Islam Quintet* is not his religious affinity rather he wants to rewrite the history of Muslims so as to remove the misunderstandings of the West about them and to reclaim their eminent past. Thus, postcolonial writings are subverting the notion of fixity which in the words of Bhabha “connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy, and daemonic repetition” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 66). Thus, subversion makes space for inclusivity, flexibility, and expression. Along with that, it makes literature a medium of creativity rather than a hegemonic tool of suppression.

5. Conclusion

In *The Stone Woman*, Tariq Ali has portrayed the 19th-century Ottoman rule where he has pictured a liberal and modern picture of Muslims. The characters in the novel are seen as tolerant, unorthodox and an unconventional picture is portrayed by the writer. He has focused on the flaws of Ottomans and has exaggerated the liberal outlook which seems out of time. The women of Ottomans are seen taking up bold roles in the novel contrary to the canonical beliefs about women of the harem who were submissive and subordinates. By portraying such images of Ottomans, the writer has subverted the fixed representation.

Moreover, we observe old traditions and beliefs being forsaken by modern progressive Muslim characters in the novel. By doing this Ali has presented an image which is not a stereotypical one, one which is recorded in the books of history. By doing this Ali has challenged the notion of fixity of image and thereby negating the purity of one culture over others. It is also noticed that the hybridity of cultures is shown in the novel where Ottomans culture and Western culture are intermixed where Europeans can be seen visiting Istanbul and vice versa. The characters are shown mimicking the westerners in their ways and thoughts which creates ambivalence. It is thus observed that this ambiguity gives way to vagueness about the present, disgust for the past, and uncertainty for the future. The problems of the state are being viewed as problems but the solution is seen becoming out of sight due to ambiguity. Self-criticism is exaggerated to a heightened extent. In the novel, the writer preferred to overlook the past glory of the empire and has rather focused on the weaknesses of the Ottoman state which shows humble acceptance of flaws and faults of Ottomans on part of the writer.

Thus, the novel challenges the fixity of narrative and stereotypical representation in British literature. The writer through his novel has tried to eliminate the concept of racial purity. Contrary to the image of Ottomans presented by Europeans, Ali has reinterpreted history. He has used literature as a tool of free expression and creativity. He has subverted the fixed representation by experimenting with the art of retelling of history. The writer by portraying the cultural exchange of East and West depict universal harmony –which removes the discrimination of center and margin. Finally, Ali through his novel has attempted at contending imperialism of West and fundamentalism of East.

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