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Memory and Thirdspace in Nadeem Aslam's the Golden Legend

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ABSTRACT

This study draws on Foucauldian concept of heterotopia and Soja's Thirdspace to read Nadeem Aslam's novel The Golden Legend. Placing heterotopia within the Pakistani sociopolitical context, it examines how Aslam uses certain spaces as heterotopias or Thirdspace, allowing his characters to form mental and physical alliances to counter the hostility of outside spaces. The novel shows that these spaces can be gender-based domestic spaces of intimacy and agency, palimpsestic urban spaces, ritualistic or religious spaces, real-and-imagined spaces of historical significance, and spaces of continuum of memory. Taken together, they can be read as counterspaces or sites of resistance, symbolising possibility and beauty in the face of brutality and oppression. The study offers an intersection between memory studies and spatial studies, recontextualising Foucault's heterotopia and Soja's Thirdspace in the South Asian setting.

Introduction

Heterotopia, as Foucault (1986) puts it, are institutional, or discursive spaces that function as physical and symbolic counter-sites to the prevalent or normal spaces. They are places that stand in contrast to their surroundings and help 'otherness' grow and thrive. As a result, they may be considered inappropriate or disturbing by the dominant culture. Prisons, cemeteries, theatres, and gardens are zones that contradict the social spaces in the normal realm. These spaces can be both physical and mental (Savitskaya, 2022). Related to this idea of the psychological and physical spaces is Soja's Thirdspace. Soja built on Lefebvre and Foucault to offer a more nuanced understanding of spatiality. He integrated both conceived and perceived spaces with lived experiences to form a 'real-and-imagined' realm where hybrid identities and cultural ambivalence emerge. This integrated approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of how the novel's characters navigate and construct their identities within their spatial contexts and from the memories of their individual and collective experiences, particularly in the face of colonial legacies and internal conflicts.

Nadeem Aslam, one of the most important literary figures from Pakistan, has written fiction dealing with the plights of Pakistanis and Afghans during the conflict-ridden decades following 9/11. Like in his previous novels, in *The Golden Legend* (Aslam, 2017), Nadeem Aslam continues his exploration of the spatial dimensions of trauma and memory. The novel is set in a Pakistani city named Zamana. The city is experiencing the worst outcomes of religious bigotry, sectarian violence, and state surveillance. It narrates the story of tragedy befalling two families whose lives are closely connected. The main focus of the novel is the Christian communities living in Pakistan. The plot follows these characters, who get entangled in a tense and volatile religious conflict, while also commenting on the country's sociopolitical situation. Nargis, an architect, hides her Christian past, which resurfaces when her Christian friends, Helen and her father Lily,

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become entangled in a confrontation with the conservative Muslim faction of the community. The main tragedies are the death of Massud by a stray bullet fired by an undercover American agent, and the lynching of Lily, a Christian man, by a radicalised mob. The novel is set in the decades following the radicalisation of the region, following the Taliban insurgency and the fallout of the Soviet-Afghan war. Pakistan, once a host to cosmopolitan Sufi traditions and diverse religious cultures, became a battleground for religious militancy and sectarian violence. Post 9/11 era intensified the ideological discriminations against religious minorities. Pakistan became a frontline ally in America's war on terror and suffered from strict military surveillance, authoritarianism, American drone strikes and military operations, and a heightened spurt of terror and suicidal attacks from militants angry with the government for supporting the American agenda. This devastated civilian life, especially in the tribal regions, all the while, the country's religious fabric became more rigid and fundamental.

In *The Golden Legend*, spatial sites are receptacles of memory and become battlegrounds for contests between personal and historical truths. This article examines how the novel utilises spatial forms to narrate memory and challenge dominant historiographies. It argues that Aslam's use of geography and domestic space constitutes a mode of counter-narration. It resists the ideological territorialisation of these sites. The novel's spatial logic can be understood through Foucault's heterotopia and Edward Soja's concept of thirdspace, which refers to the fluid and often contradictory spaces where material reality and imagination converge. As Soja notes, 'Thirdspace…is a space of extraordinary openness, a space of critical exchange' (Soja, 1996, p. 5). The article presents Aslam's novel as a case study for space turning into contested sites, and is used as both a propagation of ideology and a countering of these ideologies.

Theoretical Foundations

For literary studies, heterotopias can offer insights into analysing how authors construct layered geographies that challenge dominant ideologies. Knight (2014) comments on the utility of this concept in literary analysis and contends that the concept of heterotopias is best applied to fictional places rather than to real urban spaces. He further draws five principles on which heterotopias operate, three of them being the following: firstly, that heterotopias in their most effective formation will distort the 'conventional experience of time' (ibid., p. 17), either by indefinitely accumulating time, as in museums and libraries, or by making time fleeting and temporary, as in festivals and carnivals. Secondly, heterotopias have systems of entry and exit and certain codes of conduct that isolate them from other spaces. Thirdly, heterotopias bring seemingly divergent spaces to one inclusive space.

Edward Soja (Soja, 1996) presented the concept of Thirdspace. Thirdspace transcends the binary of physical and mental spaces and instead offers an inclusive and open-ended spatiality. It acknowledges real-and-imagined geographies by interweaving materiality with memory, ideology, and desire. Bertrand Westphal's *Geocriticism* (Westphal, 2011) further expands the field by emphasising the polysensorial and plural nature of literary spaces and calls for a 'multiperspectival' reading of space. Lefebvre strove for a unitary theory of space, a *rapprochement* between *physical* space (nature), *mental* space (formal abstractions about space) and *social* space (the space occupied by "sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopia" [Lefebvre, 1991]. (p. 523, emphasis original).

Lefebvre's social spatial triad consists of three aspects, namely: (i) spatial practice, corresponding to perceived or the physical category of space, meaning the production and reproduction of space reflecting the behaviours and experiences of the producers, (ii) representations of space, corresponding to conceived the mental category of space, meaning the physical makeup of space, influencing also our perception of it, space as planned by 'scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers' (Lefebvre, 1991) and (iii) representational space or what Soja (1996) calls spaces of representation (p. 61), corresponding to lived space, the social category. Lived space served as a model for Soja's own concept of Thirdspace. It includes both conceived and perceived space and is the space of inhabitants and users, artists and philosophers. It is fraught with associations of symbols and images and is linked to the underground social life of the inhabitants and their imaginative and artistic sides. Inhabitants can appropriate it according to their needs. It carries with it politics and ideologies, with the real and the imagined intertwined and working simultaneously, forming a coherent system of signs and symbols. Soja (ibid.) describes it as 'a strategic location from which to encompass, understand, and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously' and the limitless 'space of all inclusive simultaneities, perils as well as possibilities…radical openness… [and] social struggle' (p. 68). These components are not independent of each other and constitute the whole of a society's spatial product.

Soja (ibid.) has expanded the scope of Thirdspace to include the spaces of marginalisation and alterity. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters of the book, he explores Thirdspace from the perspective of

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gender, postcolonialism, the discourse of power, and historicism. The most important theorists he includes are bell hooks (margin as a political choice), Michel Foucault (heterotopia), and Homi K Bhabha, whose idea of Thirdspace can be useful if studied in combination with Soja's.

The City as a Site of Historical and Personal Memory

Azimzadeh and Bjur (2007) draw their concept of palimpsest from Freud's use of the term. The original meaning of the word is a document which contains layers of text written on top of each other in such a way that the older words are visible beneath the new. Freud used this term to refer to the construction of Rome and likened it to the human psyche, from which nothing, once written, is removed. Recently, the term has been adapted to refer to layered urban architectural constructions that display a history of development over time. The researchers, however, contend that the different layers and their interaction, despite their appearance, are dynamic and ever-changing. I use the term palimpsest to describe the cartography of Zamana. Like any major city in the Indian subcontinent, Zamana exhibits its history written on its spatial planning, as well as the memories of its inhabitants. Aslam has portrayed the historical and spatial multiplicity as being interdependent. Interestingly, the inhabitants of Zamana have no conscious sense of history, yet they unconsciously carry the glory and scars of the past, directing their reactions to the current circumstances.

The Zamana palimpsest is a configuration of the ancient invasions, up to the time of the Muslim rule, followed by the colonial period precipitated by the 1857 Mutiny. The city has ancient temples, mosques, and gardens planted by Mughal emperors. The Independence Movement led to the partition of India and Pakistan. Post-partition Pakistan had indirect forms of colonialism in store for it. Right after the separation of Bangladesh, Ahmed (1974) noted the interrelation between separatism and fascism. Cooley (2002) traces the history of terrorism and terror support groups in Pakistan, how the US cashed in on the anti-Communist sentiment in Islam to give rise to armed militant forces that fought against the Soviet Union, brainwashing and recruiting men from both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The aftermath was the 9/11 attacks in the US, which led to a fresh chapter in world history. An all-out War Against Terror, as the then US president George W Bush called it, was waged, and Pakistan was a natural ally. As many terror groups still operated in and from Pakistan, the war resulted in compromising Pakistan's state security. Aslam's Zamana is a place where traces of history and its victims converge.

The eight bazaars diverging from the central clock tower, like the Union Jack, are reflective of the Union Jack. Shop names were Regal, Majestic, Royal, Imperial Crown or Palace. The 1985 Mutiny, or the War of Independence, as the natives called it, is mentioned multiple times to highlight the city's significance in rebellion against the colonising powers. The city is littered with signs of resistance and resentment against neo-imperial countries, including flag and effigy burning. The resentment stems not only from the decadent Western civilisation but also because of the infiltration of their intelligence agencies in the country and their covert support of the militant factions, harming civilian lives. The recent surge in drone attacks by the CIA and deaths of civilians, conveniently passed as collateral damage, added fuel to the fire.

The Christian neighbourhood in the area was called Badami Bagh, meaning 'Almond Orchard'. Badami Bagh had a spectre of colonialism hanging over its head. The leaders of the 1857 mutiny had made it a hideout for their attacks against the British, only to be hanged by branches of the same trees when the conflict ended. Many corpses were later thrown into the River Vela that flowed through the city. The orchard was later converted into a colony with small houses, mostly rented out to Christians. Over time, the colony became the poorest neighbourhood in Zamana and was a ghetto for all intents and purposes. The city began encroaching on the community's freedom and gradually surrounded the colony. All the trees except one in Lily's house were felled. Stories circulated about the ghost of a hanged mutineer still present in its branches.

The resistance against the foreign control, though violent and resentful, is juxtaposed with the anti-colonial resistance of the past. With the state policy of countering terror and policing on one hand and the bloodshed caused by the militant groups on the other, the city is between the devil and the deep sea. The colonial legacy of oppression still lives on in the way the current state behaves: controlling people, dividing communities, and using religion as a tool of power. But just as there were resistors during British rule, the characters in the novel resist today's forms of control. The novel's main characters exhibit a dignified form of resistance. They have no political agenda or resentment, despite being direct victims of the violence. Nargis, whose husband was killed by the bullet of an American spy; Helen, whose mother was killed in an anti-Christian hate crime; her father and she are falsely accused of blasphemy; Imran, a Kashmiri runaway, whose whole family, one by one, became victims of the Indian military; Aysha, whose husband died in a drone attack. Their different life trajectories bring them together in the city centre.

Commenting on the character of the city, Aslam remarks:

My novel is set in a fictional city called Zamana–which in Persian and Urdu means 'the world and all it

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contains'; or 'the age'; the zeitgeist. The Golden Legend is the story of our times, of the encounter between worlds and cultures. I wanted to look for the moral centre of today's world, and wanted the characters to be like a series of icons (not unlike the saints), representing grace, love, honesty, endurance, sacrifice, etc. (Faber, 2021)

In Aslam's words, the city stands as the era or Time, the river passing through it is called Vela, a Punjabi word with more or less the same meaning as the word Zamana. It is a richly symbolic place where the forces of good and evil coexist and are in constant conflict. Hence, the moral and temporal crisis of today's world is encapsulated in its confines, as Nargis remarks: 'Everything this land and others were going through was about power and influence. All of it. And these struggles of Pakistanis were not just about Pakistan, they were about the survival of the entire human race. They were about the whole planet' (Aslam, 2017, p. 40). It carries marks of history, leading to the present crises and their effects on its inhabitants. The country has an unstable political system, heavily influenced by external events, having 'the politicians who were ambitious snakes, the cynically resigned rich, the arrogant military men, and the fraudulent and superstitious mullahs' (p. 84). The lives of common citizens are unsafe, and in the hierarchy of power, those on the lower rung lead lives like animals. Their only recourse is to leave the country or be content with their fate. The complexity of the system of violence makes the situation tragicomic. Nargis remarks on the situation where Muslims 'kill non-Muslims for not being Muslims [and K]ill Muslims for not being the right kind of Muslims' (p. 299).

Despite the city being unsafe, all the characters are shown to have an attachment to it. Nargis, who found refuge in the Arts College at Zamana, found her calling, and later her life partner, sees it as a safe space. It is reminiscent of her life with Massud and her youth. Helen, a minority who has faced discrimination and violence, holds the city dear because of her loved ones. Unlike Lily, she is part of the more educated sector of the city, having been educated at a well-reputed college and now running a magazine. However, she is not ready to leave the country for better prospects of education and a safer life. Despite Massud and Nargis's insistence that Helen leave Pakistan by availing herself of the scholarship opportunity. She refuses because she is too deeply connected to her family and her Pakistani roots to sever her ties. She felt that this was the city of her parents and her foster parents: 'She thought of them as presences. One day, this would be the city of her children. She had told them she would never leave' (p. 123). However, her relation with the city is not as raw and deep as Lily's. The city, thus, is shaping and is in turn shaped by the characters. It exists as a physical and mental space in the characters' minds, being both a providing and a hostile force.

Fear rules Zamana. The social life of people is disrupted by imperial intrusion, religious fanaticism, and state surveillance. These factors interact with each other and fan the flames of hatred, thereby making people's lives insecure and vulnerable. The atmosphere of fear is intensified when, from the mosque's minarets, an unknown man began announcing the secrets of its citizens. These were tales of concealed vices that, when revealed, led to the persecution of the doer. From a religiously sacred space, dread and fear are created to subdue and control personal lives. The citizens are leading lives of precariousness, a term Butler (2009) used to mean the ontological condition of interdependency, vulnerability, and bodily exposure to socioeconomic and political forces (Mulaj, 2024, p. 493). These are inherent conditions of social existence for human beings, but 'the risk of statelessness, homelessness, and destitution' is augmented by the 'unjust and unequal political conditions' (Butler, 2015, p. 118). Nargis comments on the resilience of her countrymen: 'no country should ever require its citizens to be this brave' (p. 10). However, Christians as religious minorities are treated with the most hostility, verging on brutality. In the hierarchy of human value, they are at the lowest level, so much so that their very humanity is questioned.

An example of breeding hatred for Christians is when a child, running errands for Nargis, finds Helen in Nargis's home and asks her whether she is an infidel. The child is the victim of structural hate and the doctrine of religious essentialism. Later, he attempts to cut Helen's skin to see the colour of her blood because 'Christians have black blood' (p. 26) indicates the pathological hatred embedded in the system. Despite being in a dream-like state, the boy cowers and trembles before giving up, and cries when Helen slices up her finger herself to show him the red fluid. She makes him promise not to hurt anyone, and he agrees. This shows that the boy is not inherently evil but a victim of collective psychosis and that early inculcation can naturalise violence. This is a stark example of the process of marginalisation and dehumanisation of a minority.

Badami Bagh, the Christian colony, has been reduced to a state of a ghetto, and the inhabitants are considered non-citizens. Any sign of their social uplifting is frowned upon and looked at with suspicion by the Muslim neighbours. Lily manages to build a modest life for himself with the help of Massud and Nargis. He owns a small two-room house, a rare privilege for a Christian in the area. His fortunes appear to improve

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when a mobile phone company selects his property to install a tower, offering him an annual royalty of 300,000 rupees. However, this upward mobility unsettles Babur, a powerful Muslim landlord who controls most of the neighbourhood and cannot tolerate the idea of a Christian man prospering on land he believes should remain under his authority. He taunts Lily, saying, 'You think you'll climb that tower all the way to Paradise?' (p. 47). Christian control over their personal space is challenged because ownership of land confers dignity on the owner.

Exploiting the charged religious atmosphere, Babur manipulates public sentiment to incite violence, accusing Lily of desecrating a mosque to exact his revenge on Lily. Framing the situation as an attack on Islam, he rouses a furious mob, urging them to burn down Lily's house and destroy the phone tower. The crowd, armed and in a blind rage, follows his command, setting fire to Christian homes and killing at least six innocent people. Lily is dehumanised, called an 'ugly black dog,' (p. 139) and targeted for 'mob justice,' with the violence extending even to Christians who had no part in the supposed offence. Christian houses were marked days before the burning incident happened, indicating that the event was pre-planned and the accusation was just a pretext.

Lily's character has the most dynamic interaction with the urban cityscape. Lily was a 'bright-blooded' (p. 3) man since his youth, an angry young man, his deterritorialised existence finding rootedness only in a matrimonial relationship. When Grace dies, his hot-headedness returns; the city becomes an enemy once more. The danger is the confines of the home when the mob burns their house down and forces them to flee. When Lily moves about the city as an outcast, the space offers him little intimacy. The spatial coordinates for him are degraded: flyovers, teashops, alleys, and labour markets. He did not belong to the society before, but at least his own Christian community accepted him as its own. Now he has been abandoned and attacked by them for being the perceived cause of the fire that consumed Badami Bagh and killed eleven Christians. The city is now a place of constant concealment for him. He is destitute and is being hunted; wanted posters with his picture are plastered on the walls. He disfigures his face and changes his clothes, a willing erasure of identity to save his life.

He finds sanctuary under a concrete flyover, a place of refuge for the homeless. The flyover shelters those whom the state and society have disowned. He finds kinship in this abjection, lying by the spine of a dog. He is bruised, vulnerable, starved, and afraid. He is haunted by guilt and memories. In the public spaces such as the tandoor and the labourers' intersection, he becomes both visible and hypervisible. He has disguised himself under another identity and given himself multiple names. Yet he remains fully exposed. The urban spaces, like the tea shop, are stratified by class and religion. These are the sites of acceptance and othering. Starving and desperate for work, he seeks employment among day labourers in the city. he adopts a Muslim name and receives a cup of tea from a kind stranger. But when four sanitation workers from Badami Bagh appear, two of them his childhood friends, he is recognised, and one of them, Hector, attacks him violently, blaming him for the death of his daughter Martha in a fire. Lily's assumed identity is exposed. One moment, he is offered tea by a stranger, the next, he is exposed and assaulted for sullying a Muslim space with his presence. They turn into a mob and start pelting him with stones. Lily narrowly escapes death.

For Lily, three places offer an inclusive counterpoint: The Vela River, the Sufi shrine of Saint Charagar, and the Museum of Glass Flowers. Farid Alvie, the museum's caretaker, offers the fugitive Lily food and shelter. It shows that despite being a generally inimical space to Christians, there are small cracks in the rigid wall where the persecuted sections find comfort and acceptance. The Vela River was associated with the memory of a Sufi saint and was believed to hold healing properties. These spaces are associated with healing and continuity. They help Lily transcend his personal grief. Yet even they are not exempt from the overlays of pain. The river flows past the factories and dead-end streets, the timeless flow juxtaposed with industrial decay.

Thirdspaces of Memory, Intimacy, and Resistance

This section highlights how spaces may become counterspaces of resistance and resilience by their inhabitants. In a hostile environment, they convert these spaces into sites of refuge. The sites are inscribed by their memories and their personal identity.

Massud and Nargis's home is a hybrid of domestic and intellectual refuge. A significant part of the house is the study, a large room also used by the couple for working on their architectural designs, as both are architects by profession. 'They lived surrounded by objects from which they might draw inspiration' (p. 8). The objects are an eclectic mix of historical items, coming from different countries and their pasts, and many natural objects. It is described in this prologue of the novel as a sanctuary for Helen, a place of 'silence and stillness' (p. 1) and 'fertile solitude' (p. 2). It is a treasure trove of art and literature memorabilia from various parts of the world and functions as an architectural metaphor for Aslam's aesthetic and political vision. The place is, therefore, an archive of the global, cosmopolitan memory and radical intellectual

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freedom. Nargis and Massud have designed a miniature replica of the Hagia Sophia Mosque and the Great Mosque of Cordoba. They are made of cardboard and are suspended in the library. Lily, Helen's father and a Christian, has helped in the construction of these mosques. Hence, these buildings embody pluralistic pasts and the religious syncretism of past Islamic states. These miniature models are hung aloft by strings from the ceiling. The nine-year-old Helen wonders at buildings being inside rooms instead of rooms being inside buildings, thus highlighting their inverted, rebellious nature. Later, Nargis and Massud assigned a desk specifically for Helen to work. The miniature buildings and their walls give a sense of closeness and safety to Nargis.

Similarly, the buildings that Massud and Nargis have constructed, particularly their home, are a spatial metaphor for resistance to historical amnesia and pluralism in contemporary Pakistan. Massud was a kind and gentle man holding a cosmopolitan vision. He stood against inequality, intolerance, shallow nationalism, and imperial hegemony. Therefore, his house is an intellectual archive and a memorial to personal and national loss. It contains more than fifteen thousand books, miniature models of historical Islamic buildings, a garden containing a variety of plants and trees, and birds. This home functions as a thirdspace, a kind of heterotopia where memory, dissent, and beauty survive despite the ideologically written geography of Zamana. Childless themselves, they are supporting and rearing a Christian child as their own daughter and funding her father's rickshaw. Their mutual care and intimacy create a culture of resistance and counter-history and a counterspace in a place where public life is constantly permeated by sectarianism and state surveillance. The house is, thus, a hybrid Thirdspace, where binaries do not exist.

Apart from carrying a global memory, the house is also an emblem of Massud and Nargis's personal lives and relationship. When Massud is assassinated early in the novel, the house becomes an inscription of his memory for Nargis. There is a strong sensation of his presence in the architecture of the house, for example, the study was built keeping in mind the alignment of shadows, as Nargis recalls, 'what shadows the sun would cast where as it rose on Massud's birthday'. There was 'a sequence of his wet footprints' (p. 9) on the floor when he walked with wet feet and 'a permanent suggestion of his cologne' on the sofa he used to sit on (p. 21). Later, she thinks how 'the house felt haunted by Massud' (p. 28). She recollected gestures and words, everyday things that had now been made monumental. On several occasions during the previous week, she had walked around the rooms, wondering what might be the last object Massud had touched. What was the one thing his gaze landed on as he left the house that morning ten days ago, the last colour he thought of, his last ever sensation? (p. 28). The house also contains Massud's belongings and signs of the couple's mutual personal, professional, and intellectual growth. She repeatedly engages with his belongings, indicating the tactile rituals that resist the erasure of a person, keeping him alive in her memory.

However, the novel's main theme is the violation of these very spaces of sanctuary, thus highlighting how vulnerable these spaces can be in the face of extreme invasion by the state. Nargis's sanctuary is violated by state institutions. The intelligence agent who intrudes on her home is an embodiment of state hypocrisy and its relentlessness. He haughtily demands, without offering any condolences, that Nargis publicly forgive her husband's killer, because the killer is an American citizen and the state is an accomplice to the imperial power and is allowing the covert intelligence operations in the country. Nargis's quiet refusal is her need to process her grief. Her reference to the murder of Massud's brother, murdered for his journalistic inquiry into the military, shows that violence in the country is not random but systematic and institutionalised.

Another important site that can be construed as the Thirdspace is the Charagar Mausoleum, which is probably the equivalent of the shrine of Data Gunj Bakhsh in Lahore. The shrine is the setting for the novel's climactic events. It is a sacred refuge, the shrine of a Sufi saint, offering promise to people with its spiritual traditions of healing and transcendence. Its temporal and spatial existence is separate from the outside world. The shrine provides Helen and Nargis with the physical and metaphysical space to breathe, sit in silence, and remember. It is a place at once private and public. People come with their dreams and hope to be healed and given solace from their distress. These people carry memories of grief (Helen), torture (Imran), and forbidden love (Aysha). All these people gather in this space packed with other dreamers and people in distress. However, the same place is disfigured by the sectarian violence, a suicide attack, whose perpetrators originate from a banned terrorist outfit. People's sacred prayers are desecrated. On the day of the saint's anniversary, the shrine is packed with devotees. People are allowed entry through metal detectors. At Charagar, the spiritual, the personal, and the political converge disastrously. The religious policing and the absurdity of the condition are highlighted when, after the suicide bomb, people are cooped into a room because of the suspicion of the suicide bomber being among them, and then Imran is strip-searched to check whether he is circumcised because the policeman suspects him to be a foreign spy. The shrine, which is and has been a place of Sufi cosmopolitanism, has now been reduced to a site of sectarian paranoia.

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The third important site that acts as a Thirdspace for the novel's characters is the tear-shaped island to which Nargis, Helen, and Imran escape. As 'a pan-religious, pan-national haven' (Feigel, 2016), it carries a symbolic significance. At its heart lies the abandoned mosque, once imagined by Nargis and Massud as a symbol of unity. The mosque has four entrances for four Islamic sects converging at a shared prayer hall, conceived as a spatial embodiment of inter-sectarian harmony. Its cube form evokes the Kaaba, while the calligraphic frieze, on which Nargis calligraphed the Quranic verses herself, sanctifies the structure with Quranic memory. The mosque, intended as a unifying thirdspace, instead is now dormant as a stark emblem of the nation's spiritual and ideological fragmentation. It is sealed off and has been lying dormant for years. It is considered to be one of the most beautiful mosques in the country. Its loudspeakers are now bird nests, and its prayer hall has cobwebs. The island had a mosque, a church, and a Hindu temple. However, over time, the followers of the four sects grew increasingly hostile, resulting in open violence against one another.

It is in this Thirdspace of memory that memory resurfaces. In the silence of the island, surrounded by trees and the wind, the characters begin to see themselves and share intimacy. Both Imran and Helen tell each other about their past traumas. Imran and his family, living in the Indian Occupied Kashmir, were subject to the ruthless atrocities of the Indian army. It is a deeply harrowing tale. For him, Kashmir is a place inscribed in his memory as a place of trauma. The desolate mosque and the library on the island, the cracked walls and peeling paint, overgrown bushes and untended gardens, make the island a metaphor for the tortured yet resilient minds of its current inhabitants. Both Kashmir and the island, in this sense, are places of death and memory. They mirror the island's own dual identity as a site of spiritual construction and sectarian collapse.

The island also becomes a space for the characters to repair and heal their wounds. Imran and Helen develop a romantic attachment in the heat of the summer and mosquitoes. Nargis tries to mend Massud's book, a sort of practice of kintsugi. They try to restore a sense of order in their chaotic world. Imran finds love, comfort, human companionship, and hope for a future with Helen. Their memory is a form of resistance, a countermemory that runs counter to the official narratives. The three have a sense of the aesthetic, a love for beauty and art that survives all external systematic erasure. These gestures affirm Michel Foucault's argument that power is never total, that where there is power there is resistance (Foucault 1978, p. 95).

The island has its own history too, and serves as a book for inscribing the histories of its inhabitants. The library atop the mosque is filled with books in different languages, most of them religious texts, exegesis and commentaries, and Islamic history. The garden surrounding the mosque is patterned after the Islamic Paradise Garden and has thirty kinds of fruit that, according to tradition, Adam carried from Eden and planted on the earth. This memory of the original banishment from Eden, as Imran is banished from Kashmir and Nargis and Helen from their home, strengthens the sense of history in the novel. These histories sit in juxtaposition with Imran, Nargis, and Helen's lives. The island, in its purity of design, has been contaminated by the impurity of sectarian violence. However, its spirit remains unscathed and untouched. As such, the island functions as heterotopia: a space that reflects and subverts all other spaces. Here, Aslam juxtaposes Kashmir with the island. Both are sites of beauty and memory, yet marred by ideological violence and brutality. Both resist erasure through insistence on memory.

The island becomes for them a sanctuary. The island mosque functions as a house for Helen and Imran. The past exists as a continuum with the present through their shared intimacy. Ultimately, the island does not offer salvation, but the possibility of cohabiting with grief. Imran's relationship with Helen on the island indicates his yearning for belonging and home. He becomes hopeful about the future. The island becomes a home for them, and he dreams of building a future with her. Here, the island is more than a hiding place. It is a dream of rootedness and a return to the sacred. It stands in contrast to the fragmented, violent city, where new identities might be imagined, away from ideological divisions and hatred. However, in the end, both Helen and Imran are captured by the police for evading capture. The space is violated again by discriminatory laws, the policeman taking care not to touch Helen and dragging her by her sleeve because she is a Christian.

Aslam is acutely aware of women moulding their domestic spaces into personal histories. For Nargis, her home and the rituals related to her grief for Massud are natural acts. She undertakes the repair of the shredded pages of Massud's book as a ritual of remembrance. This act denotes that individuals nurture the memories of their lost loved ones as sacred relics. Nargis stitching pages of the mutilated book with golden thread is a literal suturing of memory. She uses golden thread to repair the mutilated pages, turning the book into a piece of *kintsugi*. The word originated from Japanese philosophy and denotes an act where the fracture is neither erased nor hidden but rather gilded, made beautiful through healing. The process signifies Nargis's healing from the wound of loss, and yet keeps the memory as sacred. To her, the dead

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were a constant presence because they did not disappear but were 'erased into memory' (p. 29). Hence, the pages, rather than being erased and discarded, are illumined in gold, thus sanctifying Massud's memory. In this way, the characters themselves become the living archives of the past, as Nargis notes that 'a human being was nothing but her memories' (p. 97). Massud's father authored the book, which had been returned to her after Massud's death.

The Badami Bagh neighbourhood is not women-friendly. Women are not allowed to go out into the streets, and those who do are branded as loose women. Aysha, the imam's widowed daughter, is confined mostly to her house. After her relationship with Lily is revealed, she is forbidden from leaving the room and her son from attending school. Her windows are boarded, preventing all contact from the outside world. However, the same domestic walls allow Aysha room to exercise her agency. She sanctifies the room and the balcony with her presence and her love for her son. The room also carries memories of her time with Lily. She is the complete master of the little section of space she is allowed to occupy freely.

Conclusion

Spaces are embedded with the signs and memories of their inhabitants. In the case of public spaces, memory is collective and culturally significant. Both Soja's Thirdspace and Foucault's heterotopia provided a useful framework to analyse how the novel's characters interact with the spaces they occupy and imbue them with their personal touch. Hence, the existence of these spaces becomes both physically and metaphorically significant. The gestures centred around these spaces challenge the spatial histories authorised by the powerful hegemony of the state, thus acting as Thirdspaces that resist control and brutality. As Aslam has written the novel in a country ridden with political and social crises, the spaces in the novel are represented as both a means of control and resistance. The novel demonstrates the many forms that heterotopias can take and provides shelter and comfort to the inhabitants.

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