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# A Critique of American Supremacist Politics in Cold War in Sorayya Khan's *City of Spies*

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**Abstract** *The present study investigates the representation of America in Anglophone Pakistani Literature with a special focus on Sorayya Khan's City of Spies with the assumption to trace some possible connection between American intervention and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the context of Pakistan's politics. Given the American intervention in Pakistani politics and its indelible impact on the domestic and international scenario had made the country a virtual battleground for the superpowers of the world. Khan's novel situates this conflict in the aftermath of the military coup of General Zia, followed by the Afghan war and (c)overt American alliance in it, which brought about serious implications for the Pakistani state. The story of the novel offers some pertinent extracts which deal, literally or metaphorically, with the role and representation of America in these geostrategic events. The article has used the critical cultural angle by investing the theoretical views of Ziauddin Sardar in terms of the Muslim world's apathy for America in the aftermath of cold war politics are used to get a better insight into the central problem by underscoring how this foreign policy of America has been responsible for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan.*

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## Introduction

### American Representation in Literature

The representation of America in the literature of many colonized nations of Asia and Africa has remained a significant and pervasive subject in recent history (King, 2007; Ali, 2002). The American intervention has left indelible imprints on the political and social domains of these nations. In the case of Pakistan, the subject has assumed extraordinary significance and has been argued by some renowned intellectuals, including Ziauddin Sardar (2003), Tariq Ali (2002) and Eqbal Ahmad (1988) etc. These voices, some of which are obviously influenced by left-wing progressive politics, have raised substantial questions about the deep fissures that Pakistani society has experienced in its national history, from political to economic and from cultural to strategic realm. They have also highlighted the effects and after-effects of this intervention on the lives of common people in Pakistan who have been directly or indirectly influenced by the cold-war politics and Pakistan's strategic ties with America to defeat the Communist bloc of the former Soviet Union. For this reason, the representation of America in the discursive accounts of Anglophone Pakistani writers has remained one of the central themes starting from the rise of the Cold War and the emergence of Islamic militants (Mujahideen) as the first line of defense against Soviet invasion in Afghanistan.

### Statement of the Problem

The present study has investigated the image and representation of America and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistani in Sorayya Khan's novel *City of Spies* as a representative text by Anglophone Pakistani writers with an objective to highlight how this (un)holy alliance between American and Mujahideen was contrived with

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the neoliberal imperative of globalization and impacted Pakistan's geostrategic interests in past, present and future.

In the backdrop of emerging political realities on the national and international front, the argument in the following lines has used the word (un) holy in order to emphasize American alliance with a bunch of Islamic militant outfits who were ambitious to wage war against infidel Soviet Army in Afghanistan. That a multitude of people, under the influence of this political outlook of the militant, were conditioned to act/respond in the name of Jihad (holy war), which was actually triggered by the Americans to achieve their political interests and eventually proved to be disastrous in the form of an unprecedented increase in militancy and extremism in Pakistani society.

## Literature Review

Many writers have written on the role of American intervention in shaping Pakistan's past and present politics, especially in the backdrop of military regimes and their alliance with America to cater for its geostrategic interests in South Asia (Rashid, 2002; Raja, 2011; Haqqani, 2004). Likewise, the same theme has been dealt with differently in the fictional accounts by Anglophone Pakistani writers (Hanif, 2008; Khan, 2009; Ali, 2002). The fertility of Anglophone Pakistani literature is particularly evident when we see diverse themes and stories appearing in fiction that are multidimensional yet interconnected with each other.

Masood Ashraf Raja's *Neoliberal Dispositif and the Rise of Fundamentalism: The Case of Pakistan* (2011) links the Neo-liberal imperative of globalization in the context of American politics and the consequent rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan. He also argues about the subjectivity of the Taliban as a signifier of an orthodox and limits interpretation of the Islamic concept of Jihad, a notion which became a major strategic asset for American policy during the Afghan war. For Raja, this Talibanistic subjectivity in unison with American and Pakistan's military intelligence was responsible for an increasing surge in religious extremism in the region, excluding and othering religious and gendered minorities – the Zoe – from the larger nomos of the Pakistani state (pp. 22-30). Moreover, this particular political and religious outlook of the Taliban eventually facilitated the neo-liberal and strategic interest of Americans in the region and brought about serious implications for the polity in Pakistan, especially during the Afghan war and the military rule of General Zia.

On account of this fundamental influence and intervention of America in Pakistan's political history, this theme has been the leitmotif of many discursive accounts on the subject written in the past and even now, and fiction is no exception to this influence. Hence Bruce King (2007) portrays the positive image of America in Anglophone Pakistan fiction, especially in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Feryal Ali Gauhar's *No Space for Further Burial* (2007) and Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses* (2005). These novels are primarily concerned with the identities of Americans and the general perception of Pakistani people about them, especially from the Afghan war to 9/11. For example, King argues that in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the most frequent motif is the assumption of the narrator that Afghanistan is to some extent part of Pakistan and it is the most victimized nation due to the American invasion. Hamid also demonstrates that America destroyed the internal structure of Afghanistan by ignoring that the current groups of Taliban were once its greatest strategic allies in fighting a tough battle against communist Russia. In this way, the novel aptly highlights the dual role of America in using these mujahedeen in the Afghan war and then abandoning them after 9/11 by adopting Islamophobia as an almost de-facto state policy (Scanlan, 2010).

Eqbal Ahmad (1988) in *Blood Games* relates the story of the American invasion of Afghanistan. He highlights the dual nature of American policies toward this impoverished state. It was the first time in the history of the United States of America that it supported a guerrilla army firing on Soviet troops. In the year 1987, America gave six hundred and sixty million dollars of aid to Mujahedeen, who were fighting in Afghanistan against the USSR, which was more than the total amount of aid given by America to the guerilla war in Nicaragua. Ahmad highlights that there is a difference between the aid to Nicaragua's war and Afghanistan because, for the former, Congress had many apprehensions, but, for the latter, it appropriated more money than the administration requested. American diplomatic strategy was against the Soviet as,


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according to Ahmad, the officials in the American state department were having an interest in Afghanistan only because the Soviets were there.

This American policy, in later years, gave way to an acutely conspiratorial yet widespread perception implying as if the American invasion was not the result of 9/11; rather, they plotted this incident by themselves to invade Afghanistan (Ali, 2002). In either case, Afghanistan became and remained a battlefield for the two superpowers of the world. Ahmad also elaborates the role played by Pakistan's civil as well as military governments, particularly after 1970, in using Afghan resistance as a means to strengthen American interests in the region. In *A Land Without Music* (et al. 1993), Ahmad describes the devastating effects of American intervention in Afghanistan by arguing how the domestic life in the country was ruined by the foreigners. He says that Qandahar became a vast architectural ruin and its spirit and soul hid under the garbage. According to Ahmad, there are two kinds of destruction caused by Americans, the first is physical, and the second is mental. Physical destruction is of the infrastructures which can be rehabilitated, but the mental destruction in the form of stress and oppression would last for the next many generations.

Sumita Kumar (2009) investigates the work of Tariq Ali, who portrays the underlying realities of 9/11 and the killings of Americans that it uses as an excuse in waging a long war across the globe. Though the main part of Ali's work has focused on critical scrutiny of different historical episodes, however, the narrative discusses Musharraf's policy of supporting the American led War on Terror (WoT). Kumar argues that Ali highlights the strong role and support of the Pakistan military in deepening strategic connection with America, which eventually brought forth the malaise of religious orthodoxy and extremism in Pakistani society. In his *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010), Ali even goes to the extent of calling America, military and mullah the three malignancies of Fatherland – a metaphoric representation of Pakistan in his imaginary settings. He also explicates the reasons for this American domination and control in Pakistan's politics by pointing to the long-standing relationship between religious clerics and American intelligence mediated by the Pakistan military.

## Theoretical Framework

Though cultural criticism is a multilayered theoretical standpoint, however, it mainly postulates how a discursive act is embedded in a network of material practices grounded in a given culture. It explicitly indicates the context in which a particular text is produced primarily out of the material practices and experiences of the writer, which definitely reflect in his/her writings. In other words, every act of unmasking, critiquing and opposing an ideological position is bound to use the tools it condemns; hence it risks falling prey to the practice it exposes. It also means that when a writer or critic evaluates a piece of literature, it influences his/her perception, either positively or negatively. Moreover, literary and non-literary texts are inseparably and mutually interconnected in a way that one gets a better, if not total, understanding of social reality by viewing literature and history simultaneously in a parallel fashion. No discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature. It means that there are different perspectives; hence a piece of literature has different interpretations and evaluations.

The present article has been informed by the views of contemporary Muslim polymath, and cultural critic Ziauddin Sardar that he expressed in different books, especially in his *An Introduction to Cultural Studies* (2007) and *Why Do People Hate America?* (2003). The reason behind this selection is that unlike the mainstream cultural criticism in the Anglo-American context, Sardar, on account of his origin in Pakistan as well as South Asia, offers a more indigenous understanding of many problems and issues which are related to the present study. Unlike metropolitan critics, Sardar knows the grounded political and historical realities of Pakistan hence offers an insight in understanding the effects and after-effects of American intervention and the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism and their dire consequences for Pakistan. Sardar's theoretical views are also helpful in analyzing the representations of America and its role and interventions in Anglophone Pakistani literature.

As a starting point, Sardar introduces a broad and all-inclusive notion of culture that describes a whole range of practices and norms adopted by people. Sardar defined the key characteristics of Cultural Studies as follows:

- Cultural Studies aims to examine its subject matter in terms of *cultural practices* and their *relation to power*. Its constant goal is to expose power relationships and examine how these relationships influence and shape cultural practices?
- Cultural Studies is not simply the study of culture as a discrete entity divorced from its social or political context. Its objective is to understand the culture in all its complex forms and to analyze the *social and political context* within which it manifests itself.
- Culture in Cultural Studies always performs two functions: it is both the *object* of study and the *location* of political criticism and action. In this way, Cultural Studies aims to be both an intellectual and a pragmatic enterprise. (p. 9)

By using the above views of Sardar, the present article has argued how the discursive representation of Afghan war and American intervention in the delimited literary text wavers between literal and figurative scales implying a curious overlap between fiction and historical accounts.

## Analysis and Discussion

As stated before, the article has engaged in a critical reading of Sorayya Khan's *City of Spies* by highlighting the role and representation of America in Pakistan's politics in the backdrop of the Afghan war and military rule by General Zia and its lasting consequences on the lives of Pakistani polity. Sorayya Khan is one of the most celebrated contemporary novelists of Pakistan. She has written the novels like *Noor* (2003) and *Five Queen's Road* (2009), which paved the road to her success in the field of literature. Her latest work, *City of Spies,* is set in Islamabad and Lahore. The central action takes place from mid-1977 through late-1979. This period in the history of Pakistan is of much importance because of the demolition of the government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, followed by his execution by Zia ul Haq, which changed the whole scenario of Pakistani politics. The protagonist of the novel, Aliya, is directly affected by these political incidents. Although Bhutto and Gen Zia are mentioned in the story, rather sporadically, yet their names serve to create an interesting comparison between the historical and fictional narratives. This oscillation also allows the fiction to explore many interrelated themes, such as the Islamization of Zia combined with his policy of intimidation and violence against his opponents. In many ways, the narrative coalesces with history and politics in a way that it becomes difficult to understand fiction without considering these political and historical events in Pakistan's national history.

## Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism and American Role

Since literature reflects the society in its complex historical and cultural totality, the Anglophone Pakistani literature is not an exception when it shows the impact of Islamic fundamentalism and its consequences in shaping the future of Pakistan. It also represents the deep imprints of American influence on the political destiny of Pakistan during and after the Cold War era. Sorayya Khan has a lived experience of the times of Military coup in the 1970s; thus her personal context is also an impetus in extracting the true picture of that era when the external forces were interfering in the domestic affairs and politics of Pakistan by using the local demagogues including religious and political leaders. Americans fulfilled their political and strategic agenda by manipulating the indigenous political scene and by molding the situation in their favor. Khan describes it by way of Aliya's father, Javed, who says that "Little men, unelected men, stand no chance without the hand of a greater power" (Khan, 2015, p. 17). In the same way, she criticized General Zia-ul-Haq for his connivance and complicity with American control as Javed gets upset if anybody mentions the general since he considers him " a traitor who had usurped power and was sure to ruin the country" (p. 17). Though he is shown to be reluctant in expressing his views openly, however, he is convinced of Zia's overt links with the Americans to grab power and control. Khan presented Zia as primarily responsible for this American intervention in domestic politics as the whole nation suffered badly due to this individual decision even many years after the Afghan war and Zia's rule.

Likewise, Sorayya Khan has portrayed in the novel that the Americans needed Pakistan's help

desperately to defeat the USSR in Afghanistan. The novel is a live description of the Cold War decade, and it encapsulates the shrewd and violent American politics along with many important events in the national history itself. The novel depicts how the politicians and intellectuals who did not favor Zia's policy were persecuted or exiled from the country, including Bhutto, who was executed by the military dictator. This is made quite evident in the novel when the night before Zia's military coup in 1977, Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was a guest at the Independence Day celebration of the American Embassy. While he was standing near the swimming pool, an American official waved a tumbler of whiskey in his face and cried, "The party's over! The party's over!" (p.10). His words symbolize the radical shift in the American policy of backing military rule in Pakistan by sabotaging Bhutto's popularly-elected government. In this way, the novel highlights this American control in the political matters of the country by linking Bhutto's execution as part of the wider American policy as Aliya says: "I did not want to go because how much more humiliating could it be part of an American school on the day the CIA fathers of my classmates had sanctioned the hanging of my country's prime minister?" (p. 97).

Needless to say, this American policy tolled Pakistan many years of unrest and internal damage by maintaining American hegemony and by putting the country in a war-like situation. Khan, through her novel, raised her voice against the nefarious nature of American policy to gain its political ends, and like many other Anglophone novels, it has become a significant representation of Anglophone Pakistani literature when it highlights a series of political conflict and national crises that Pakistan has faced in different times of its history.

## Fake Alignments of Zia with Religious Figures

The novel *City of Spies* also highlights Zia's alliance with the religious groups by portraying him as a fake religious figure. Khan has shown that in the name of Islam, Zia manipulated the rules and regulations of the constitution, hence adversely influenced the state and society. She refers to General Zia-ul-Haq's famous address to the nation where he has presented himself as "the servant of God" (p. 9). However, the novel demonstrates how his move had the effect of exerting power in the name of religion because nobody dares to ask whether someone is doing right or wrong, especially if it is done in the name of religion. General Zia precisely knew it, and he used this religious rhetoric to legitimize and maintain his rule in the country and to manoeuvre his control by presenting himself synonymous with Islam and Pakistan. The total effect of this policy was the consolidation of power that gave him eleven long years to rule over Pakistan by exercising absolute control in the name of religion.

## Supremacist and Violent Politics of America

In his interesting analysis of American politics, Ziauddin Sardar has argued that it is customary for Americans to use one country against another country in order to maintain their domination and control. During the cold war, America followed a similar policy when it used the Pakistani military and political apparatus to fight a tough war against its arch enemy USSR in Afghanistan.

Since literature is a means to preserve the historical and social realities via its symbolic and imaginative power, the novel presents the crucial moments in Pakistan's national history when it portrays the story of Aliya's servant Sadiq and his son Hanif who is mysteriously killed in a car accident, most probably by an American diplomat. However, since Americans were entitled to enjoy full diplomatic immunity, Hanif's tragic death is never redeemed in the story, and the culprit is never brought to justice. The novel portrays this horrific accident of his death when Sadiq loses his consciousness and "fell to the ground, crouching over Hanif, softly speaking to the crumpled body while Yunis focused on the car" (p. 39). Besides this supremacy of America over the elite class of Pakistani politicians and bureaucrats, the incident of Hanif's tragic murder unmasks the bitter reality of how American enjoyed special rights and discretionary powers while staying on Pakistani soil, making the ordinary citizens of Pakistan vulnerable and victim of their ruthless domination. In representing this story, the novel seems to reverberate a similar incident of an American Diplomat, Raymond Davies, who was given diplomatic immunity despite having killed Pakistani citizens on Pakistan soil. In a curious comparison with this actual event, the story of the novel gets a new dimension and relevance when it is contextualized in the real politics on

the ground vis-a-vis Pakistan's strategic ties with America. In this way, the novel represents the authoritarian and colonizing nature of America and the impact of this American supremacist policy on the lives of ordinary people.

In this backdrop, it is not surprising to see the attitude of the general public towards Americans as they were having mixed feelings of hatred and confusion towards them, not knowing what were they doing in Pakistan? The novel shows this apathy and resentment on the part of ordinary Pakistanis by referring to the incident when an angry mob sets the American Embassy on fire, "the US embassy was burned to the ground [, and nothing is left" (p. 182). This incident, on the one hand, represents the general feeling of dislike that common Pakistanis have for the Americans; on the other hand, it highlights the strange love-hate relationship between the Pakistani state and American diplomats in the tangled politics of the country.

Through the character of Aliya, Khan shows the derogation even victimization of local Pakistanis by American boys. On her return from school, she sees some wanton American boys making spitballs and throwing them on Pakistanis. Parallel to representing the subordinate position of the bus driver who cannot stop them from such acts, this incident can be read as a metaphor for American arrogance and control of the Pakistani state, especially the powerful military and civil bureaucracy as it was dominated by Americans. As an illustration of this, we see that when Aliya receives an invitation from Lizzy to attend a party at the American embassy, it is not at all easy for her to go there without letting her parents know because the invitation comes from an American friend who is not considered trust-worthy by her parents. The novel describes her feelings of unrest and ambivalence in the following manner:

I accepted the invitation immediately and without asking for my parents' permission or informing them. I had good reason not to tell them because recently, my father had forbidden me to go to the American Embassy and had cautioned me against speaking to Americans about Pakistani politics entirely. (p. 56)

It is not surprising to see that even the elite people like Aliya and her family, despite their privileged social position that allowed them to intermingle with Americans, feel discomfort when they see the overbearing and haughty conduct and outlook of Americans towards Pakistanis: "I was *not* one of them. I was not American. I didn't look like them, and try as I might; the details of trying to pass for one were exhausting" (p. 53). Side by side with her anxiety and unrest regarding her identity, the novel also portrays the so-called superiority of American culture, especially in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan. Ironically, people are crazy about American culture but have no love and passion for their own cultural and moral values. In other words, this individual sense of confusion in Aliya's identity takes the form of collective unrest about the cultural identity of being Pakistanis. Khan has inferred how Pakistani culture was deteriorated by the American interference and control in the times to come with the effect that a popular American culture gained grounds in the country where it became quite fashionable to dress and eat like Americans and to talk and walk like them. This not only led to the general deterioration of indigenous culture and its values as more and more people were becoming crazy about American culture. It also constituted a so-called sense of superior American values and standards, as they were adopted by people like Aliya when they feel themselves out of place in their native settings.

## American Power Politics at Global Level

One interesting dimension of this reading of the novel is to explore the link between regional and global politics, especially during the decade of 1970s in Pakistan's national history and politics. In 1979, the incident of the Grand Mosque (*Masjid ul Haram*) in Mecca had been "seized by gunmen" happened in Mecca when allegedly some gunmen of American forces seized the Mosque for more than two weeks and the American President Jimmy Carter "ordered the USS *Kitty Hawk* to the Persian Gulf" (p. 166). In Pakistan and elsewhere in the world, it was perceived as if America had seized the Mosque with the result that common people in Pakistan launched a series of riots in the whole country against America. In the novel, Khan portrays Zia as almost helpless against such strong public sentiments as he tells his American friends that no matter how "good and mighty friends (though) they were, they could not control everything that happened in Pakistan" (p.182). Moreover, the novel has used the historical

reference of the burning of the American Embassy by connecting it as a reaction of ordinary Pakistanis against the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Since a majority of Pakistani people were moved by religious sentiments, so they did not hesitate to burn the American embassy by chanting the slogans of "*Amrika Murdabad*, Death to America" (p. 172).

## Conclusion

Before concluding the discussion, it is very appropriate to once again highlight an intertextual comparison between a range of Anglophone Pakistani novels as they share many similarities in terms of their representation of American foreign policy towards Pakistan. For instance, Shamsie in her *Burnt Shadows also* underscores the overt American politics and its alignment with Pakistani powerful civil and military junta. Another novel, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* by Mohammad Hanif (2008), can be read in comparison to *City of Spies* as it represents the consequences of Zia's military regime and his alliance with Americans side by side with his rigid campaign of Islamization that brought about lasting changes in Pakistani society. These novels also point out the missing links in Zia's Islamization by showing the darker picture of his regime when he used religious ideology as a political tool in order to win massive support for his political gains.

Summing up the discussion, the article has attempted to highlight the complex role of America in Pakistani politics and its over alignment with Pakistan in the power corridor in the wake of cold war politics, along with some historically valid connections between this state policy and the rise of religious fundamentalism in the country. The analysis of the novel *City of Spies* has shown that American intervention in Pakistan's politics has brought about a kind of turmoil and crisis that it couldn't recover from even after a long time since the Afghan war in 1979. The current situation indicates the validity of this premise as American still wants Pakistan to be an ally in its infamous war on terror in the wake of 9/11. The discussion in the above lines demonstrates how Khan has taken the main bulk of her story from the real political and social events from Pakistan's history, hence validating the theoretical premise that sees no rigid separation between literature and history. Rather both literary and historical narratives go side by side by cross-fertilizing and cross-interrogating each other. The novel has neatly incorporated the international crises and political events that changed the cold war political scenario in Pakistan and elsewhere in the region. Every character of the novel has represented these themes by highlighting the insidious effects of this foreign intervention and control, hence portrayed the real image of national history and politics in the form of an imaginative setting and fictional narrative which becomes more than fiction by simultaneously transcending the strict and fixed boundaries of historical accounts.

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