



RESEARCH PAPER

Revising the Account of South Asian Great Game in Rahman's 'In The Light of What We Know'

Atta-ul-Mstafa¹ Sahar Javaid² Fatima Saleem³

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities & Linguistics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Lecturer, Department of English, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages Faisalabad, Pakistan

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**Corresponding
Author**
saharjavaid@gcuf.ed
u.pk

ABSTRACT

South Asian Anglophone literature of the current era now frequently concentrates on a great game being played by global forces. Zia Haider Rahman in his work, 'In The Light Of What We Know'(2014) has shown this game analogizing it with a game of chess. The current game is the continuity of the past great games played by Britain and Russian empires in Central Asia. There are strong clues that prove how all the present and past great games played by global players have been aimed at attaining their monetary benefits by extorting the local assets i.e. oil and gas reservoirs. The study shows that the current game is being played in cooperation with proxies who set their own rules of the game apart from performing the assigned duties of great and local players. The study concludes that the great game in the South Asian region of Afghanistan is being played for the land and resources and not for the emancipation of the people.

Introduction

South Asian Anglophone fiction such as Zia Haider Rahman's novel, 'In The Light Of What We Know', exposes the reality of the imperialist designs of global forces covert behind the great game played by them which is, in fact, a continuity of past games played by Britain and Russian empires in various phases of the South and Central Asian history. Britain, after becoming the first industrialized state of the world, made efforts to render itself as the first world power; it poked nose into Afghan geographical boundaries and its strategic affairs. Facing defeat there, the British played a *Great Game* in 1830 by opening up a new trade route to Bokhara. If the term is taken as a struggle for control of Central Asia, it is going on even today;

the phrase describes what the British, and not Russians and Chinese, were doing (Ingram, 2010). The very purpose of the Great Game, past or present, has always been economic. Colonial knowledge and the Elphinstonian episteme through which Afghanistan was understood showed a substantial impact in the shape of the so-called 'Great Game'. When East India Company (EIC) strengthened its position in Subcontinent in the 19th century, its look turned outwards to pre-empt infringement on its wildernesses and horrible inside misfortune. In doing so, it recognized the powers it would bargain with them and the closings to which those dealings would be coordinated. The company considered it the most approved to counter dangers it recognized as most associated with itself in form. The Russian invasions into Central Asia, if seen in that commonplace frame, are comparative to the Company's claim of extension in South Asia. Moreover, the Company had to bargain with a neighborhood possessing more than 2000 kilometers by isolating its region from the closest lasting Tsarist station (Hopkins, 2008).

Contemporary South Asian Anglophone fiction reveals the muddled interplay between nation and globalization in many different ways. It shows how global nations/ forces instigate an economically venturesome political game of chess to vanquish the non-McDonald nations. Aslam's (2013) fictional work traces clues of the great game back in the 19th century when a 'white man' was captured by Amir of Bukhara's soldiers (during his alleged spying of Asian region for imperialists under the fake name of 'Khan Ali'; later became known as Connolly), and was executed in 1842 after facing torch in detention. 'Connolly' was the first person who had coined the term "*Great Game*" (p. 278). Later on, Connolly Medical centers were established on his sister's request in regard to acknowledging his services for the then *imperialists*. The global political game in South Asia is not new. Historically, the West brought its internal war into the tribal areas long before Pakistan came into being; while the freedom fighters of *Fakir of Ippiwere* were running a resistance movement against Britain, Hitler sent his advisors to train them in fighting and gun-making (p. 229); the Europeans converted the area into a weapon-market and sold all their manufactured weapons at that time. The current American policies damage world peace; its foreign policy towards Muslims has endangered global stability. Unlike *Falling Man* that largely presents an American viewpoint about internalizing 9/11 trauma without discovering terrorists' characters in profundity and hence renders the game of demonizing Muslim characters, *The Blind Man's Garden* sees 9/11 invasions in an international perspective by a stereotypical game of characters i.e. orientalist representations of Muslims. Both works critique the U.S. foreign policy, suggesting that the U.S. is not the only victim of the 9/11 attacks but she has also aggrandized international geopolitical crises that followed 9/11 (Wijngaarden, 2015).

Literature Review

Inquiring about Russian, Uzbek, British and Indian chronicles, Alexander Morrison explains (2017) how a quick Russian attempt to put weight on the British in Central Asia unintentionally caused the Anglo-Afghan War of 1878-80. As a rule, this strife is translated inside the system of the so-called 'Great Game', which anticipated that the European 'Great Powers' had an organization in Central Asia

and were seeking a coherent procedure with a clearly-defined set of objectives and mutually-understood rules. Taking advantage of this Anglo-Afghan War, the Russians entangled the British in Afghan affairs by the inevitable positioning of 'Abd al-Rahman Khan on Afghan royalty who was already facilitated by them in Samarkand. In truth, the Russians did not predict any of this. Abd al-Rahman's ascent to the Afghan throne owed nothing to Russian bolster and everything to British franticness. What at first appears like a classic Great Game scene was a story of unintended results on both sides. Central Asian rulers were not merely detached bystanders who had given beautiful scenery for Anglo-Russian relations, but vital on-screen characters in their possessed right (2017).

Hosseini shows the economic games of the USSR and USA in his two novels respectively. The Soviet Union started its 'Great Game' of finding access to 'warm-water ports and Gulf oilfields' via its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 (Hauner, 1991). These imperialists transmitted communism in local comrades to tackle the expected Afghan resistance (Hosseini, 2007). Soviets committed direct aggressions as if they were the internal party and not the foreign invaders. Soon after ascending puppet rulers on the Afghan throne against natives' political will, the Soviets marched into Afghanistan with the April 1978 Coup (pp. 101, 103). The game of spreading land mines and hiding "explosives inside brightly colored toys" was played to maim innocent Afghans and victimize children who mistook them as toys (Zhang & Jacobs, 2001).

Pointing to the history of struggle, Hosseini critiques (2013) that the movies of Afghan battles were picturized with changing casts of supposed heroes and villains (amounted to white and black pieces as are used in the game of chess) but every time the film ended up leaving an impression with a "new hero making one increasing nostalgic for the old villain" (p. 121). Every new battle was fought for a detestable reaction since the hero would try to make his entry a legendary one by letting down the outgoing persona's position to a rascal in the eyes of the masses. The game of frivolous glorifying heroes/ or stereotyping villains brought about absolute destruction through severe gambits of expert sharpshooters, landmines, bombarding attacks, rockets, plunder, assaulting and killing (2013).

Adiga critiques (2008) the meritocratic norm of metropolitan cities that could fulfill only aspirants' dreams of progress and cause suffrage to 'half-baked' Indians since the 'light India' is quite unwelcoming to the denizens of 'dark India': globalization widened space between two cultures. Balram, the protagonist is, therefore, allowed to enter the shopping center only after he dresses himself up as a rich man (Sebastian, 2009). The deprived people join the Naxal Communists for their rights and sometimes they become indulged in perpetration; the state often accuses China of helping these communists, implying what Raemdonck (Watson, Covarrubias, Lansford, & Van Raemdonck, 2013) says great global game being played between global players.

James Wood's study of Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* (2014) tells about the unrelenting influence of aristocracy and of Oxbridge upon a frantic, globalized world as strongholds of Britishness. Hayat (2017) shows how an individual like Rahman's protagonist, trapped by great global powers' machinations becomes disenchanted. Rahman reveals (2014) a game of chess being played by great global players in Afghanistan in collaboration with (when serving as white pieces) or in enmity of (when playing as black pieces) the little and local players (this is how global game assimilates with the game of chess) just for the sake of gaining capitalistic designs. The real issue is, of course, the immense trouble of the large-scale social building that the USA is endeavoring to construct in a nation so exceptionally diverse from it. Rahman (2014) shows Afghanistan as a victim of tripartite –economic, cultural, political– globalization. The study explores how Afghanistan has been gripped by the forces of globalization. Raemdonck's (2013) conceptualization of three-dimensional global games of chess –great game, little game, and domestic game– being played by America, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, ISI and NGOs in Afghanistan chalk out the American designs of getting access to the oil and gas reservoirs in Afghanistan and Central Asian states (Mustafa, Murtaza & Bhatti, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

The 2008-9 world financial crises modified the nature of globalization from a mere economic mission (Geogantzas et al., 1984) to a structure encompassing other facets including that of the political dimension of the state sovereignty ramified through a set of intergovernmental organizations and future prospects of regional and global governance (Steger, 2003). The political dynamics involve the post-9/11 scenario when enormous changes around the globe flattened Globalizers' concept of a borderless world; thus facing enormous troubles in performing their traditional functions, the nation-states felt that only the '*interventional cooperation*' and not the conventional security structures could guarantee their security. However, it was the impending demise of states. Hence the second decade of the 21st Century brought a transitional phase for nation-states by converting them into an amalgamation of the modern nation-state system and postmodern form of global governance (Steger, 2003). Keeping the agenda of capitalist economic globalization at the core, a global political game of chess is being played in South Asia, with Afghanistan as the chessboard (Rahman, 2014, p.35) in it.

Account of South Asian Great Game in 'In The Light of What We Know'

The multi-dimensional and mutually coherent or interestingly divergent game is being played by international, local, and domestic players in Afghanistan to attain their global capitalist and geostrategic designs. According to Rahman (2014):

"[...] there are as many sides as there are opportunities to steal a march. There are no sides to tell us who is doing what, for whom, and why. There are only exigencies, strategies, short-term objectives, at the level of governments, regions, clans, families, and individuals: fractals of interests, overlapping here, mutually

exclusive there, and sometimes coinciding. No side. Which should not surprise us. [...] good people do bad things, that friends will hurt you, that everyone is from first to last on his own side" (p. 537).

Raemdonck opines that terrorism in South Asia is explicable in the context of the tridimensional game of chess being played there (Watson, Covarrubias, Lansford, & Van Raemdonck, 2013) since amidst the fuss, nobody is certain on whose behalf he is playing and one-time white pieces suddenly become black ones for the chess players.

Cultural clashes were a great hurdle in meeting the objectives the globalizers/ neo-imperialists sought during their ventures. Neo-empire, quite determined to achieve motives, laid the foundations of new humanity on the monumental rock of "human rights" (p. 245). The targeted nations were besieged in two ways: politically the global neo-empire wanted to get hold of the economic pulse of South Asia to have an access to win a lion's share from the Central Asian oil and gas reservoirs. This avarice knows no limits since "[...] they cannot abandon their imperialist mentality, every utterance steeped in Orientalist bullshit. And back they come for the same, over and over" (Rahman, 2014, p. 361); what might it be saved for assets of Asian lands.

A Game of Characters within Little Game

The little game does not seem to be so simple. Even characters of the novel, which are on duties assigned by their concerned employers, have set their own rules of game themselves apart from what has been fixed by their respective agencies. Hence a comprehensive 'little game' is revealed to us in the final pages of the novel since there is a difference between appearance and reality and there is a "need to get the bigger picture in order to understand what's going on" (p. 451) in this part of South Asia i.e. Afghanistan.

A study of each character's dispositions familiarizes us with "whose side were they each on" (p. 536) in respect of their play in Afghanistan. We happen to know that "everyone is first to last on his own side" (p. 537) besides obliging his/her employer. The colonel, who is from ISI officials, manages some rules of the game from his own side besides following what is advised to him by his Pakistan agency. Thus ISI officer himself "decided to step in" [without the orders from Pakistan - the little player], "a more limited operation" (p. 541) started by America through rendering Crane a pedophile for entrapping Suleiman, the program manager at AfDARI and a graduate from Indiana University in the US to know about his allegiance apart from using him as a ladder to reach his group. Apparently, Suleiman is playing for Americans but his allegiances are with "insurgents" (p. 540); the group which is all the way ready to get the two worlds entangled into the arena by flaring up the wrestlers to combat upon their economic vs. religious fundamental might. Moreover, Suleiman is distantly controlled by the ISI without his knowing

that ISI was "working with the Americans on this" (p. 541) project. Zafar reveals his aggressive mindset on foreigners' violation of the local culture.

Being a part of the American trap of '*envelope game*', the US mariner as well as the son of an American senator Crane was assigned the duty to feign himself a pedophile before Suleiman to entrap him and through him thus detect his group/elders. This game played with Suleiman annoyed him over Crane's loose character' to deceive that the parcels were contained '*alleged American military plans*'. Apart from that, Crane not only contacted a private military contractor but also intended to develop his own military outfit in Afghanistan. Suaif, presently a guard at AfDARI who was a professor of engineering at Kabul University, was also a part of the double game. Besides serving AfDARI as a guard, Suaif was also allegedly working for Pakistani ISI as the colonel Mushtaq admitted that Zafar's arrival to *Café Europa* was delayed by messaging through Suaif (Rahman, 2014). The incident *Café Europa* explosion shows that the impending incident was also to the notice of little and global players.

Even Zafar, the UN representative in Afghanistan was playing a double game; besides representing the UN as a rapporteur in Afghanistan, he was also serving as an adviser for the Afghan government. But he had also set his own rules as a "*confidential informant*" (p. 542). Out of his training as a spy adviser, he poked his nose into *Crane affair* by covertly involving with Suleiman. However, he showed his resentment upon American aggression in Afghanistan, saying: "We should get out and steer clear. I have no place here!" (p. 431). He had already coupled his integrity "to the integrity of Afghanistan" (p. 498). He claimed to be in a state of "[a]rousal" (p. 534) after *Café Europa's* destruction in which Crane had lost his life. But he was only shocked by the miserable state of Afghanistan for which he could do nothing.

Spies and Advisers – Key Players of 'The Game of Espionage'

The most crucial role in establishing a '*supranational government*' in the South Asian countries of Bangladesh and Afghanistan was played by spies/ advisers through the game of espionage for global players/ forces. Two types of spies; white and whitewashed played local games.

White Spies

Apparently, Nicky, the white lady was "leading some kind of charge, sporting the combined personality of a campaigning journalist, Miss Money penny, and a determined nun" (Rahman, 2014) but covertly she was the part of those women who were largely dependent on a *US charitable foundation* for arranging exchange programs of professionals' visits to developing countries so that they might add up to the world economy through their visionary experiences that they would gain by visiting these countries. We find Nicky serving as the deputy director of an *international microfinance organization* (besides spying for NGO) which dealt in helping the small/less developed countries (LDCs) by giving the small loans for the purpose (pp. 144-45). This is how Appadurai's finance escapes become activated in

the smooth flow and investment of money for trade and this is how Giddens' fourth dimension i.e. the worldwide division of labour is running global industrial enterprises.

Zafar assessed from Nicky's embarrassment that the enterprise initiated by global forces in Afghanistan to contribute to the world economy is being managed by the untrained aid workers and advisers who cannot run the assigned tasks appropriately due to their inability to judge human nature (p. 144). Nicky points to Britain's great avarice for land for which they could play with others' lives, even if it "does not belong to them" (p. 143). She adds that the crooked-natured Americans had come to Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan war to let down communist rivals by Cold War strategy i.e. they equipped the local fighters with weapons that fought as their proxy against USSR. The Americans had pretended as if they were the sole sympathizers of Afghans but after the Russians' absolute defeat by Afghani fighters, those sympathizers left the ruinous Afghans in the lurch with all their miseries and never looked back (Rahman, 2014, p. 143) to know their situation. Perhaps Nicky might have been the part of those departing Americans; the horrifying wreckage that Afghans had to face, rendered the place dreadful before her eyes.

One can easily determine the level of their sincerity in regard to the hollow claims of initiating projects for the local welfare. Like past imperialists, they go to different corners of the world in the name of human welfare i.e. modern '*civilizing mission*' but in reality, the deeds of welfare are commenced with a motive to run these projects for economic gains particularly in poverty and war-afflicted nations such as Afghanistan. While gaining economic interests through global enterprises and peace missions, they not only assassinate the cultural values of the land but also circulate negative political misinformation against it. Moreover, westerners never give an account of the nature of the business which they do unless they are not asked (Rahman, 2014). Moreover, Emily though was the assistant/ an advisor of Jalaluddin yet she would espionage the person.

White Washed Spies

Zafar came to South Asia with two projects; first to render advisory to facilitate financing for some economic and political projects in his homeland, Bangladesh, and secondly to serve in Afghanistan on behalf of the UN rapporteur, HasanKabir. He reacts to the neo-orientalist treatment of Americans with Afghans. A festive gathering of workers belonging to various NGOs and UN organizations was held at a UN compound in Kabul for which the area was "cordoned off by soldiers in blue berets" (p. 146). Zafar reached there in the company of almost one dozen western women and came to know through a gatekeeper that Maurice Touvier had ordered for a crate of wine to entertain the guests.

These get-together games point to the cultural variation that those western NGOs brought along them to Afghanistan. Such functions start with social snobbery

and end up drinking. Even if these be the social gatherings, they were not in accordance with indigenous/aboriginal cultural norms of Afghanistan. Nothing practical work was visible there regarding their claim to consult about the projects they had started in the remote districts for human welfare other than the swift pouring of technology including those of Land Cruisers, computers, satellite-phones, etc. These were the aid workers of NGOs like AfDARI and UNAMA –international division of labour(Giddens, 1990) that features ethnoscape (Appadurai, 2005)– who while are equipped with all technologies attempt to attain cultural globalization by disseminating cultural ideologies – ideoscape (2005) through social gatherings– and through mediascape (2005). The new unit is setup for reconstruction. The cultural flow in the form of the importation of technology, investment of finance and conduct of social gatherings is sped up to destroy the norms of an already destroyed nation. Since the local people are irritated by undesirable Western cultural trends (Haseeb, 2020) spread through Media as we see the diehard response of Suleiman over the objectionable activities of NGO director, Maurice Touvier including those of his dissipation with ladies and drinking. But they do not show an aggressive attitude over typical practices even if these belong to other cultures such as “wearing a suit in South Asia had a normalizing effect” (Rahman, 2014, p. 148) and particularly people of past Western colonies proudly adopt such traces of Western civilization. Capitalism, therefore, wins all the time and everywhere (Haseeb, 2020).

These alluring and fascinating missions to make the nations civilized are furnished with a long evolutionary history. America had to change its founding belief of a perfect union in favour of its current belief of reconstructing “another country in the image of its hopes for itself” (Rahman, 2014, p. 148). But in covering this distance; from pride to narcissism, America had to extend its military might and the road of this destiny seems to be filled with innumerable “corpses” (p. 148) of others. The world of today has acquired the current shape due to a universal military order which is used by global capital forces to attack the places wherever they confront hurdles in the way of their capital designs.

Game Changer Slipups

Zafar found a reflection of “little game” (cited. in Raemdonck, 2014) of Pakistani civilian and ISI officers during his stay at “diplomatic enclave” (p. 252) in Islamabad where he was hosted by Colonel Mushtaq Ali Sikander, retired (p. 254).

The Pakistani Colonel Mushtaq Ali Sikander paradoxically says the game of chess –being played strategically by great, little and local players in Afghanistan– is about the board (Afghan land and resources) and not about the pieces i.e. no plan for people’s welfare and salvation as misconceived commonly. Although pieces change their position according to the player’s strategy and one-time white pieces become another time’s black yet the fact that the game is about the board (and not pieces) comes to perception after many rounds in the game. “As the game starts, half of the board is covered with pieces while one finds the other half open” (p. 254) wherein one has to use a stratagem to battle with others’ deceptive turns and tricks. Given that “[c]hess teaches patience” (p. 254), it requires great stamina for the reason that

when one feels that one's victory is definite, the goal becomes difficult for the victor to win; hence one has to meet the worst failure. Only a player with an 'obtuse notion' and a sense of 'arrogance' can be engaged in the given game taking it apart from the past as well as future since each turn in the game, even each game is a part of a great game (Rahman, 2014).

Being the subject of truth, Zafar hoists the banner of truth whereas Suleiman commits deeds of violence in the name of supposed patriotism. Both are not mere individuals grown in isolation rather each of them is part of a whole (system) that does not provide an atmosphere conducive to all and sundry and compels individuals to depart from the mainstream; some join perpetrators whereas others are besieged in the supranational clutches. Whether they do self-accountability by incrimination or show aggression towards fellows, the fault is not theirs, nor is they the root of the problem. In fact, the contemporary world politics as well as the living condition of the people that have entrapped them into the cage of economic exploitation, instigate them to express resentment/ or rebellion against the merciless treatment of their government "in hope of creating anarchy or commotion to disrupt the current making others take note of the value of their "counter conduct" (Hayat, 2017). The outlet of reaction takes different forms in different people. Zafar, a non-state actor reacts to the brutality of global forces in form aggressive but non-violent counter-discourse (counter orientalism) while Suleiman, a citizen becomes involved in violent counterproductive activities; both however are part of the Great Game in one way or the other aimed at weakening the writ of the nation-state of Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The investigation amply proves that South Asia's importance is continuously growing in America's strategic calculus; it is penetrating deeper with all-out efforts to achieve its critical objectives. India's strategic position and power potential to dominate the sub-continent have immensely influenced Pakistan's policy projections towards Afghanistan, as proved from Rahman's novel (2014). After 9/11 American measures in Afghanistan, fierce competition emerged between India and Pakistan in the region to achieve a dominant and influential status with one overtaking the other and vice-versa. India is heavily involved in making large investments and building infrastructure in Afghanistan to play a game against Pakistan. Despite the current unfavorable strategic situation, India is unable to work thoughtfully and judiciously in devising her policies towards neighbours; she, however, seeks to consolidate her position by extending cooperation with America. The top U.S. officials emphasized the need for enhanced cooperation to confront Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region (Pasricha, 2020). All are proactive in grabbing the opportunities to establish their benign image in Afghanistan.

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