

The Progressive Face of Contemporary Pakistani English Novel: A Study of Ali's *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010)

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Abstract

The present study is based in a departure from the currently abounding academic researches into contemporary Pakistani English novel exploring the cultural and religious identity crises of the local and diasporic Pakistani characters in the wake of 9/11 which constitute a single, superstructure-related segment of the aggregate social reality. The present research aims to bring to the fore a holistic and progressive strain within this corpus. Formulating a theoretical paradigm out of Marxist literary criticism as expounded in the seminal works of Leon Trotsky and K. Damodaran, the study thematically scrutinizes the narrative of *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) by Tariq Ali for a realistic depiction of the socio-economic and political conditions of present-day Pakistan, and the delineation of the multiple spheres of life such as the economic, political, institutional, moral and intellectual as interconnected components of the composite unit of society. The study also appraises the novel for the representation of a vision for better collective future and suggestiveness in relation to the means and modes for a radical transformation of the social order.

Key Words: *Contemporary Pakistani English Novel, Marxist Literary Theory, Critical Realism, Organic Social Dynamic, Progressive vision*

Introduction

Contemporary Pakistani novel in English has flourished tremendously in the last few decades and the number of novelists in English has multiplied considerably. In *A History of Pakistani Literature in English* published in 1991, Tariq Rahman evaluated only a few Pakistani English novelists to be worthy of literary merit and acclaim. The number of Pakistani English novelists whose work, according to his appraisal, was comparable in creative content and expression to the standard produced in other parts of the Third world did not exceed three. Rahman also declared Pakistani English novel to be "less politically aware or committed" and unresponsive to momentous socio-political issues in the history of the country in comparison with the post-independence African or Indian English novel, for instance (p.229).

The Pakistani English novelists whose works are critically analyzed and assessed by Rahman in 1991 are termed as "first-generation writers" while those following them as the "second-generation" by Aroosa Kanwal in her book *Rethinking*

Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction published in 2015 (p.18-23). The basis for categorization is partly temporal and partly, but not exclusively, thematic. According to her, the first-generation Pakistani writers of novel largely represent the post-independence issues of the trauma of partition, ethnic conflicts and the identity crises of the first-generation of diaspora whereas the second- generation novelists (mostly diasporic) weave their stories out of a sense of displacement and the national-cum-religious identity crises in the immediate pre-9/11 and post-9/11 socio-political backdrop. In addition to the temporal and thematic gap between the two generations of novelists, the third most noticeable gulf is the increased creation of novels by a comparatively larger number of second- generation English novelists.

In introduction to a recent book *Writing Pakistan*, a collection of interviews with selected Pakistani novelists in English, the interviewer Mushtaq Bilal contests the prevalent notion of “boom” associated with the production of Pakistani English novel since the number of novelists still remains a little more than a dozen (2016,p.1-2). The fact, however, is that the number of the second- generation novelists has risen considerably in recent times. Moreover, these writers keep on receiving critical acclaim both at home and abroad in addition to their works being translated into many foreign languages. Bilal posits the argument that both the growth and the international acknowledgement owe to the specific geo-political context and significance the country first held as US proxy in the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s and maintains presently in the US-led Global War on Terror. Unlike Rahman, Kanwal and Bilal are of the opinion that contemporary Pakistani English novel actively engages with socio-political subjects of both national and global import. The appraisal goes in tandem with Cilano’s broader assessment that present Pakistani fictions “face head-on the realities” of the national context and are seriously engaged with and critical of the socio-economic inequities prevalent in the Pakistani society as well as the inefficient role played by the state in improving social conditions (2018, p. 852).

The researcher agrees with the latter stance and aims to carry the argument ahead in a specific direction. The objective is to adopt a Marxist perspective and raise significant questions pertaining to the subject matter of this contemporaneous body of narrative fiction in prose. The questions are: does Pakistani English novel delineate the basic issues of the political economy of Pakistan as a postcolonial Third World nation-state? Which social formations and politico-economic modes does it evoke as responsible for the dependent and underdeveloped economy of the country and the concomitant client political status? Does this emerging novel suggest, implicitly or explicitly, alternatives to the dual, exploitative model of capitalist economy and liberal democracy for the transformation and progress of the society? All the above-mentioned questions can be encapsulated into a single all-encompassing question on which the present research is premised: Is contemporary Pakistani English novel progressive in its content?

One of the basic reasons which triggers these questions concerning contemporary Pakistani English novel is the fact that, hitherto, most research studies have engaged with the formalistic aspects of this novel i.e. these have been linguistic, stylistic and discourse analyses. When it comes to the content-based studies, the

theoretical paradigms most often highlight issues pertaining to Ecocriticism, Feminism, Cultural Studies, Nationalism, Sociology and Politics. Representational aspects such as the depiction of Islam and Muslims and, in particular, the impact of 9/11 on the identity formation of Pakistani diaspora have lately been the subjects dominating the field of research studies in connection with contemporary Pakistani English novel. The progressive dimension, which is the most significant aspect of this flourishing genre of literature according to the researcher's perspective, has been granted little or no attention. The present research in the form of a Marxist analysis of Tariq Ali's novel *Night of the Golden Butterfly*, exploring the progressive aspects of the text i.e. the narration of themes pertinent to the politico- economic and social progress of the country, is hence meant to fill the gap in these researches.

The novel *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) by Tariq Ali, the last of his Islam Quintet, makes up the primary source of the present study. The major reasons in response to the question "Why Tariq Ali?" are manifold. Tariq Ali is a contemporary Pakistani English literary writer, historian, essayist, journalist, biographer, editor, filmmaker, left activist and a social and political public commentator. He has penned around fifty books and stands in a class of his own due to the broad range of the subjects he tackles and the extremely diverse genres he has adopted for expression. Within the domain of non-fiction, he has written on the subjects of history, national and global political economy, colonialism, class-struggle, the evolution of capitalism as a world economic system, neo-imperialism and socialist struggles in various parts of the world. In fiction, he has seven novels and nine plays to his credit the locales and characters of which are positioned across the globe. On the thematic level, his fictional works persist with the subjects explored in his non-fiction instituting a harmony and continuity between his works in both the genres. In 1992, his fiction took a new direction when he published the first of Islam Quintet, a series of novels based in Islamic history. Within the Pakistani context, not a single event from the immediate pre-partition time to date has gone unanalyzed and unsketched in his works which is the reason he can be conveniently categorized as one of both the first-generation and the second- generation literary writers. In fact his fiction, encompassing the themes engaged with by both the generations, is symbolic of the link and continuity between the two. The researcher hopes to find a delineation of the pertinent issues afflicting present-day national political economy and a progressive perspective on these subjects in his novel. Moreover, these subjects form the core debates of Marxist literary criticism which is the theoretical paradigm adopted for the present study.

The research is qualitative in form and based on a close textual study of the selected novel *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) by Tariq Ali, the primary source of the study. The analysis is delimited to the discussion of the thematic content of the work and focuses on the categorization of themes delineated in the text under scrutiny. The categorization of the thematic content of the selected novel is done on the basis of the theoretical paradigm comprising three concepts, derived from Marxists literary theory as explicated in the works of the two Marxist literary critics Leon Trotsky and K. Damodaran. For the purpose, it employs the method of qualitative analysis propounded by Miles & Huberman (1994) which comprises three inter-linked stages of qualitative analysis: Data Reduction, Data Display, and Conclusion Drawing and

Verification. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the first phase in the process of qualitative analysis involves multiple readings and interpretations of content leading to identification and codification of themes significant to study while a simultaneous exclusion of those not relevant. The phase results in a substantial reducing of information provided by the transcript. The stage also comprises selection of sentences and paragraphs i.e. excerpts from text to serve as textual evidence and validate thematic categories. The second phase of the process is termed as Data Display which centers on an organization of thematic codes and collated details in a coherent order. The interrelationships among categorized thematic content supported by textual details and selected excerpts are clarified further, with one idea logically leading to other. The last stage of analysis posited by Miles & Huberman (1994), applied in the present study, is the deduction of findings and conclusions from unified thematic codes and supportive textual data, in the light of research questions followed by a broad assessment of the validity of findings. A detailed thematic description of the text provides rich and complex yet interconnected information of all major themes, building a comprehensive image of the whole work both for the researcher as well as the reader.

Marxist Reading of a Progressive Literary Text

The present study employs Marxist literary theory for the analysis of the novel *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) by Tariq Ali. Marxist literary criticism is a vast theoretical domain, therefore, the researcher has delimited the study to the application of three theoretical concepts, elucidated in the works of two major Marxist literary critics Leon Trotsky and K. Damodaran to the selected text. The three defining concepts and attributes marking a progressive literary text, laid out in the seminal works of the two theorists, in the light of which Ali's novel is scrutinized are: *i*) a quintessentially realistic portrayal of existing social conditions *ii*) the realistic representation being based in the conception of society as an organic whole in which the subjective, objective, the social, economic and political are interwoven *iii*) the expression of a historic vision of collective progress rooted in the evolution of an egalitarian social organization.

Marxist theory applies a social method of literary criticism stemming from the conviction that literature and society are inextricably and indivisibly linked together. It follows naturally that the dictum of Art for Art's sake or the creation of an artistic work for purely aesthetic and imaginative fulfillment is regarded as a spurious and ahistoric conception. Literature, like any other human activity, is comprehended to be utilitarian in essence, imbued with social meaning and purpose. The first major attribute of progressive literature, in view of Marxist literary critique, is the dynamic engagement of literature with social life and a realistic portrayal of existing social conditions.

Highlighting the first doctrine, Trotsky (1924/2005) explicates that literary creativity is an integral component of the composite social existence experienced by the same humans who are the affectees as well as transformers of their socio-historical conditions. It is, therefore, erroneous to assume that literature can survive as an activity

self-sufficient in itself and isolated from the realities which form people's lives. Damodaran (1937) also perceives a dynamic interaction between the evolving forms of social life and literary themes. He assesses that literature, with all of its connotations of aestheticism and creativity, cannot remain dissociated from real and historic living conditions. Both theorists surmise that the writer, like any other member of the human society, has a specific relation to social life and holds a certain outlook on it. Artistic creativity is largely determined by the writer's social attitude, though the interconnectivity between the two assumes various shapes in literary representations. According to Trotsky: "the spirit of an epoch is reflected in everybody, in those who accept it and who embody it, as well as in those who hopelessly struggle against it, and in those who passively try to hide from it" (1924/2005, p.10). In a literary piece of writing, the writer's individual philosophical and aesthetic values synthesize with his perceptions of the social realities common to a particular historical epoch and it is this shared, universal factor which serves as a bridge between the reader and the writer. The reader gains access to the artistic individuality of the writer through the common elements in the absence of which he remains incapable of identifying, empathizing and associating with the writer.

A socialist and progressive work of literature, therefore, does not fly above social realities and passions. In Trotsky's view (1924/2005), it is dynamically engaged with life and aims to build society progressively: an objective it cannot fulfill if it fails to depict life realistically. Such literature is predominantly concerned with the present though it touches upon the past and envisions the future. A realistic portrayal of life also demands that the pitfalls of romanticism, mysticism, subjectivism and unearthly symbolism be avoided because all these trends lead to the mystification of real life processes, resulting in the regression and degeneration of the collective formation. According to Damodaran (1937), the realist literary narrative is incisively critical where it challenges the status quo and expresses dissatisfaction with the existing order of things. A critical realist literary work exposes the minutiae of and scathingly criticizes regressive social attitudes and practices. A progressive strain in literature signifies a sketching of the obstacles to the progress of the society in all domains of life of which the economic and the political are the most significant ones. The themes in such works point to the exploitative social segments and mirror empathetically the exploited and the marginalized ones. Instead of hiding fundamental problems under the cover of convoluted and obfuscated depictions of individual, intellectual, spiritual, cultural, ethnic and institutional conflicts, a progressive literary work identifies the means and modes of economic exploitation which are the root cause of all other kinds of extraction and manipulation both on the intra-society and inter-society level. Damodaran regards Socialist realism, which focuses on the literary reproduction of the living conditions of the workers, as an integral part of the realist literature. However, according to Ali, it remains crucial to differentiate between a broader, creative socialist-realist representation of society and the monotonous, restricted practice of this literary tendency under the censorship exercised by the Stalinist regime in Soviet Union (2006).

The second principle outlined by Trotsky for a progressive literary work is that it should grasp the manifold realities of a society in synthesis and not in its individual,

seemingly fragmented entities (1924/2005). Individual beliefs and events on the domestic, institutional and provincial levels are significant constituents making up the unity of the collective existence. All spheres of social life such as art, economy, culture and politics are perpetually in a dialectical interaction with one another and the entire social formation; and a complete picture of the entire social dynamic should be the focus of attention in the literary narrative. According to him, the vision of society as a composite whole in which multiple dynamics function in correlation, however, demands a broader historical perspective. Similarly, each stratum of society such as peasants, workers, soldiers, women, intelligentsia, petty bourgeoisie and ethnic minorities has its own specific role in the formation of the social whole. The impacts of the social entirety on each section and vice versa need to be viewed in unity. Since the degeneration or progression of a society is not determined by individual beliefs, domestic events or by institutional ethos but by the combined practices of the whole, the guiding mechanism of the entire social operation needs to be taken into account and its objectives critically analyzed in order to determine where the society stands and what it is heading towards.

In Damodaran's evaluation (1937), the economic modes which largely determine the political and social systems must be viewed in their impact on the majority. A socio-economic system might be serving the interests of one section of a society but results in the exploitation and oppression of other sections. A collective vision of reality is, therefore, crucial to the eradication of inequality, discrimination and exploitation on all social levels. A social foundation propped on inegalitarianism and exclusion can only be a stultified growth unable to augur progress for the human majority. The vision foresees that only a collective struggle of masses can transform the social landscape and therefore, a progressive writer will voice their concerns and interests in addition to suggesting means which motivate masses towards radical transformation of the social system.

The third fundamental feature demarcated by Trotsky (1924/2005) for a literary work bearing a socialist and progressive outlook is that, in addition to being creative in the literary domain, it also offers active engagement with subjects which are pertinent to the creation of an equitable, just and advanced human society. Instead of embodying the dominant yet reactionary ideologies, it challenges the ideas and bodies forth ways which guide the movement of society and the epoch to a better state. For the purpose, aided by historical insight and foresight, the literary writer attempts to resolve the contradictions and chaos inherent in individual notions, literary values and real life events influencing the everyday momentum of a society in its national and global layers to reach a definitive conclusion. Such literature represents the flux, the contradictions and transitory phases of the collective life yet never loses sight of the historical objective of the elevation of masses on every social plane. The vision of a better social future is the driving force of a supreme literary work the lack of which signifies the social death of the author. Therefore, the most significant question for Trotsky concerning a literary composition is: "what place does a literary work occupy in the historic development of a society and of a class?" (1924/2005, p. 81).

The class is, incontrovertibly, the most marginalized and impoverished class of industrial laborers the living conditions of which deteriorate perpetually. It is evident unequivocally that Marxist literary theory requires the writer to adopt a position of resistance to social depredation and one of support in relation to the progressive building of social life, suggesting methods for the accomplishment of the task. The three doctrines of the theory concerning the content of a literary work can be put forth comprehensively and tersely in a single statement by Trotsky: “what is necessary here is a stable, flexible, activist point of view, saturated with facts and with an artistic feeling for the world” (1924/2005, p. 100).

Religious and Cultural Representation and Marginalization of the Progressive Strain in Ali’s fiction

Tariq Ali has written seven novels five of which form Islam Quintet. His first two novels *Redemption* (1990) and *Fear of Mirrors* (1998) are parts of the Fall of Communism Trilogy the third part of which is yet to be written. Both novels are centered on the theme of the fall of communism in Soviet Union and East as well as Central Europe. *Redemption* (1990) is a political satire on the policies of the Bolsheviks which led to the rise of Stalin to power and loss of the direction of the 1917 revolution. *Fear of Mirrors* (1998) portrays the same downfall but is full of pathos and nostalgia in relation to the historical accomplishment, the loss of which caused disappointment and disillusionment. The subjects of the establishment of a socialist government in Russia and socialist struggles in Europe are the most momentous events of the 20th century. Looked at from this angle, the fact that Ali’s two novels portray significant aspects of the historical development of the contemporary world is undoubtable (Hashmi, 1992). In the critical review of *Fear of Mirrors*, King (1999), also appraises that the novel deals with the historical events of almost the whole of the 20th century. He adds: “Like many political novels, it attempts a grand story and has an epic feel resulting from the characters’ involvement in major historical events” (p. 219). According to him, what makes these two novels universal in their appeal is the fact that these delineate the vision, hopes, fears and disillusionment of characters in relation to the most cosmic subject of all: social justice. In the researcher’s view, the novels depict the rise and fall of these communist struggles from a radical viewpoint and are particularly engaging and informative for readers who are interested in knowing about these historical developments from a leftist perspective.

Nevertheless, the two novels have remained the lesser known fictional works of Ali and have been granted little attention by critics and academic researchers in comparison with Islam Quintet. In addition, the two novels have been criticized for what Hashmi puts as “a lack of understanding of ethics, morality, and, dare I say it, spirituality” (1992, p.210-211). In the researcher’s opinion, based on an in-depth examination of the novel *Night of the golden Butterfly* (2010) selected for the present study, the critique is valid to the extent that Ali’s novels focus more on material conditions in the social context rather than representing philosophical, moral and spiritual questions. However, it is erroneous to claim that his novels neglect altogether or exhibit a lack of concern towards these cultural dimensions of social activities. In

Ali's novels, the intellectual, moral, cultural and political spheres are constantly highlighted to be degenerating under the influence of capitalist economy.

Ali's novels have also been scathingly criticized for a number of other reasons as well. In King's evaluation propounded in his review of *Fear of Mirrors*, the themes of Ali's novels are strictly confined to political and economic issues and therefore, fail to attract common readership (1999). In the researcher's estimation, King's argument is ahistoric and Eurocentric since these form the major concerns of postcolonial societies at large and contemporary postcolonial English novel, of which Ali's novels are a part, actively engages with the subjects, implicitly or explicitly. King also disproves of Ali's novel on the grounds that it has improbable characters, unreal dialogues, diffused plots and unnecessary elaborations of political subjects (1999). Hattori (2006) and Hashmi (1992) view Ali's vision of the socialist transformation of societies, projected in his fictional works, in a negative light. In their opinion, the vision leads to flights of fancy in prose and a kind of utopianism which is useful only for readers sharing the same hopes.

The two novels are followed by Islam Quintet based in Islamic history the writing of which spans almost over two decades. Islam Quintet comprises *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), *The Book of Saladin* (1998), *The Stone Woman* (2000), *A Sultan in Palermo* (2005) and *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) representing Islamic societies in 15th century Spain, 12th century Egypt and Syria, 19th century Ottoman Empire, 12th century Sicily and present-day Pakistan respectively. In the vast corpus of long narrative prose fiction Ali has produced, the first four novels of Islam Quintet have been granted unparalleled attention by readers, critics and academic scholars. In fact, the first four novels have become symbolic of Ali's works sidelining all other significant texts which has been a crudely unfair development in relation to his novel. The reason behind the popularity of the first four novels has been the contemporary global geo-political context in which narratives pertaining to the fundamentalist and orthodox nature of Islamic societies have emanated from the West in bulk, in the aftermath of the suicidal plane attacks on World Trade Centre and Pentagon on September 11, 2001. These narratives have dominated media, literature and public discussions in recent times when the West vs. Communism debate has cleared space for the clash between West and Islam. The first four novels of Islam Quintet counter these narratives and portray Islamic societies of the past as rooted in rationalism, liberalism and multiculturalism.

According to Shamsie, the currently global subject of Islamist terrorism and the clash between Islam and West has found a new treatment in Ali's historical novels for the writing of which the time could not be more apt (2011). In her view, Ali traces the encounter to its roots in the expansion of the Islamic empire to Europe and the ensuing Crusades, a series of wars between Christians and Muslims beginning in the 11th century. In a review of *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, King finds it refreshing to know the 'other's' perspective of history in these historical novels since most of history and historical literature has been written from a European viewpoint (2000).

Waterman appraises the first four novels of Islam Quintet as quintessentially postcolonial texts in their rejection of Eurocentric narratives and representations of history, exposing the link between the production of these narratives and the material interests of Europe, (2016). He considers Ali's fictional writing of history to be "strongly linked to contemporary postcolonial issues in its refusal to accept official, dogmatic versions of history, preferring instead a critical approach which understands that history is often narrated from a particular perspective, serving someone's interests and biases in one way or another" (2016, p.157). Ali, by representing Islamic history and cultures from the viewpoint of dissident and secular Muslims in certain historical periods, offers a version of history which is diverse and complex. Gamal brings to the fore the writing strategies in the first four novels of Quintet and views them as part of postcolonial metafiction which challenges the essentialist images of Islamic civilization and Muslims propagated in colonial texts (2010). According to him, Ali's historical novels not only deconstruct Euro-American representations of Islamic culture but also reconstruct "native agency and language" (p.32).

Ali's own statements also substantiate the critics' appraisal of the Quintet novels as written with the objective of the deconstruction of Euro-American representations of Islamic history and culture. He explains that he initiated writing *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992) in response to the derogatory comment of "a BBC commentator who, at the start of the first Gulf War, derided the peoples, civilizations and histories of the Middle East by asserting that Arabs were without political culture"(qtd. in Cilano, 2016, p.189). The first novel led to a series of novels portraying the dynamism and liberalism of Islamic societies in the intellectual, cultural, political and economic domains.

Nevertheless, the first four novels of Islam Quintet also have had their share of depreciation and devaluation from several critical quarters on various grounds. The first critique counters the appreciation granted by postcolonial critics to the Quintet for its contestation of Eurocentric historical narratives. Reviewing *The Book of Saladin* (1998), King argues that the text is indeed postcolonial in its essence since it presents a stereotypical or essentialist image of European Christians (2001). According to his evaluation, all the European Christian characters in the novel are portrayed as religious bigots and homicidal savages. King extends his critique to the narrative style of the novel as well. According to him, Ali's portrayal of history is punctuated with political jargon and unnecessary elaborations of political subjects by characters which mar the flow of the narrative and reduce the literariness of the text. The details of sexual acts, in particular of those involving lesbian relationships, are narrated in an offhand manner, and meant more to amuse rather than to highlight a serious social subject meriting attention in its own right. Erol (2001) categorizes *The Stone Woman* (2000) as a Romance since it is full of improbable characters and events which denote an escapist rather than a materialist treatment of history. In his review of *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, King finds the characters insipid and one-dimensional, enunciating dialogues lacking vitality (1992).

In the researcher's appraisal, Ali's positive depiction of Islamic societies, located at various points of time between the 11th and 19th centuries, as rationalistic,

secular and pluralist formations is not far from reality since the historical period, documented copiously, had been one of material, political and cultural growth as well as stability in Islamic history. These fictional narratives by Ali are produced at a point of time when an essentialist discourse pertaining to Islamic culture produced by Euro-American writers needs to be challenged by voices from within these societies. Moreover, these fictional portrayals bring to the fore images of Islamic culture which contrast with the fundamentalist depictions of Islamic societies propagated from various quarters of the Islamic world itself through a variety of literature and serve to highlight the loss of many positive attributes Islamic culture upheld in the past.

In the case of the last novel of the Islam Quintet *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010), which does not portray Islamic history but present-day Pakistani society in the backdrop of the global scenario, Chambers points out that the novel delineates the rise of Islamist fundamentalism in Pakistan in the political void created by the suppression of popular and leftist struggles (2011). In other studies on Islam Quintet, the last novel *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) is strangely and markedly omitted from discussion. In her analysis of the Quintet, Shamsie focuses attention on the first four texts and pronounces the last novel as “comparatively slight” (2011, p.151). According to the researcher, Shamsie’s undue remark makes sense only when the novel is juxtaposed with the first four texts for a representation of the rich and diverse Islamic history. However, the novel is “slight” in no other sense and, in fact, the researcher considers it as the most contemporary and pertinent of all the novels of Islam Quintet as it vividly delineates the socio-economic and political dilemmas of present-day Pakistan placed in the broader global context.

The limited number of academic research studies on Tariq Ali’s novel have been focused exclusively on the first four novels of Islam Quintet investigating into the deconstructive, historiographic, metafictional and representational aspects of these novels. The situation has not been dissimilar in the case of critical reviews and studies on Tariq Ali’s novel discussed in the present section. A great number of critics whose critiques have been reviewed above, such as Chambers (2011), Cilano (2016), Shamsie (2011), King(2001), Waterman (2016), Erol (2001) and Gamal (2010), have centered their studies on the currently pertinent theme of West-Islam clash, rewriting of Islamic history and culture, and subversion of Euro-American narratives in the first four novels of Islam quintet. King (2001), Waterman (2016) and Gamal (2010) also link these attributes to perspectives and practices rooted in Postcolonial theory.

In the researcher’s view, Ali’s novel engages with fundamental socio-economic and political issues, of the globe in general and the postcolonial Pakistani context in particular, rather than the subjects of the clash between Islam and West, the nature of Islamic culture and history or identity crises based in religion and nationality. The most dominant thematic strain in his novel i.e. the Marxist dimension of his fictional representations, rooted in an incisive critique of capitalism and vision of socialist formation of society, has hitherto remained unexplored and unappreciated in both academic researches and critical studies. The researcher regards it as a serious gap in the critique of Ali’s novel as well as in the evaluation of Ali’s standing as a literary writer and the present study, by underscoring the progressive aspects of the novel

Night of the Golden Butterfly (2010), aims to fill this gap and contribute to a more comprehensive appraisal of the thematic content of Ali's fiction.

***Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) as a Progressive Narrative**

Tariq Ali's novel *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) is the last of his Islam Quintet, a series of fiction based in Islamic history. The narrative has contemporary Pakistan at its center but moves back and forth in time, offering a panoramic view of the country's history. Individual characters are sketched, in their personal, interrelational and professional capacities, yet the socio-economic and political developments in the country form the core of the account. The historical events recounted expand over a span of almost half a century i.e. the period from the early 1960s to the first decade of the 21st century, suffused with a stinging depiction of the six decades of social, intellectual, moral and institutional degeneration the country has undergone in parallel with economic and political dilapidation. The narrator Dara voices at the onset that he is creating the fictional work on the demand of his friend Plato who wants his life and artistic work to be written about. However, he finds the composition of a literary work a painstaking job because it does not weave only the story of an individual life but that of the whole social milieu the character is situated in. According to him, individuals do not exist in isolation but are the product of specific socio-economic conditions; therefore, the story of Plato's life has to be told largely within the context of the material realities of Pakistan and partly within that of the globe (2010, p. 4-5).

The plot of the novel unfolds in London with Dara receiving Plato's request for the book but within no time takes the reader forty-five years back, in retrospect, to the Lahore of the 1960s where young Dara, Zahid and Plato become friends. The country has been under a long spell of General Ayub's military dictatorship which is "entrusted by Washington to run Fatherland" (p.30). The political repression exercised by the military-bureaucratic oligarchy in power is delineated through the ban on the communist party and the brutal tortures meted out to political dissidents in the Lahore Fort where, according to Dara, "radical students we knew were having icicles shoved up their backsides, political leaders and poets were in prison and the debacle of East Pakistan hovered in the background (p.214). The new-found state is being built on an autocratic political system and a polarizing capitalist economy; therefore, budding industrialists, like Zahid's father, pave the way to rise in the murky business world by buying favors from the government. The landed elite are shown to be yet another major building block of the ruling class since the inception of the state in 1947. According to Dara, the overriding concern of the feudalists reigning over the rural areas is the protection of their landed estates and holdings. Confronted with the threats posed by industrialization and urbanization to its power, the feudal class educates its progenies to form the top ranks of the armed forces and civil services as well as ministries in the government. It collaborates politically with the military-bureaucratic oligarchy and capitalists to whom its interests are linked as it did with the British imperialists in the past. Economic despair takes root in the heart of the common citizens when twenty-two industrialist-cum-feudalist families start owning a lion's share of the country's wealth; a fact elaborated in detail by Ali in *Can Pakistan Survive?* (1983). The trauma of partition, post-partition disillusionment and acquiescence to authoritarianism and

class division form the defining features of the zeitgeist of the period. The three sections of ruling elite class i.e. the military-bureaucratic, capitalist and feudal oligarchies, legacies of British colonialism in Nkrumah's analysis (1970), determine the politico-economic structure of the society. In the novel, these are termed as "tyrannies that break a people's heart and their pride" by Dara (p.14) and painted, along with the neo-imperialist United States, as "The Four Cancers of Fatherland" by Plato (p.266). Plato's original, non-conformist attitude and the political activism of Marxist students, enthused by the Chinese revolution, are the only rays of hope in an otherwise bleak social scenario.

When the narrative moves to the late 1980s, Jindie, the Chinese cobbler's daughter married to Zahid, compares the Han domination of China as equal to the Punjabi domination of Pakistan excluding Sindhis, Baluchs and Pathans from all significant state institutions. In the same period, Plato's settlement as a middle-aged painter in the biggest metropolis in the country i.e. Karachi invokes reflections from Dara on the persistent civil war like situation in the city in the form of gang encounters between religious and secular groups. In the first decade of the 21st century, Zaynab expresses the same fears related to Karachi where Sindhis are pushed to living in primitive conditions and a Punjab dominated army is eternally deployed to quell the ethnic battles, between working-class Pathans and immigrant Urdu speaking capitalists and white-collared workers, through brute force (p.164). The denial of regional autonomy and economic equality by the state to various provinces and ethnicities is a recurrent theme throughout the book. The politico-economic problem resulted in the secession of East Bengal as Bangladesh and the national question still afflicts the present-day state.

The country's abject dependence on economic and military aid from the neo-imperialist power of the United States resulting in the superpower's perpetual interventions in the political economy of the country constitutes a major part of the historical reality represented in the novel. Dara refers to the retrograde trends in society in the form of religious extremism and a profuse use of drugs and arms as inheritances from the US-backed military dictatorship of General Zia (1977-88) and the proxy role played by Pakistan army in the Soviet-Afghan war (p.147). The narrative centered on contemporary events constantly refers to the military dictatorship of General Musharraf, Pakistan's engagement in the US-led, on-going War on Terror and American drones dropping bombs on the northern border of Pakistan where streams turn red with the blood of the civilians. The comprador character of the military oligarchy, its usurpation of the political power for more than half the life of the country and its monopoly over key economic sectors have been highlighted as the most regressive element blocking the country's progress and serving as the strongest link in the chain of what Bannerjee terms as "the superpower-client" relation (1987, p. 202).

As if the already existing monstrosities were not enough, "the bearded subjects" of Plato's "clandestine caricatures" point to another degenerative social development in the history of the country (p.125). The 9/11 venture on the part of the religious fundamentalists, recruited by CIA and nurtured in the religious seminaries established for the purpose by General Zia's regime, has embroiled the country in yet

another politico-economic crisis. Ali portrays the remnants of the fundamentalists to have transformed into an armed social force laying siege to cities and towns in the country, eyeing takeover of the very state which created them. The pro-West and Pro-Islamist rift in the armed forces is shown through the conflict between General Rafiq who commands the Special Services Assault Battalion against the *Taliban* and General Baghlol and General Rifaat who leak secret information concerning the assaults to the *Taliban* (p.177-78). The ultimate political objective of the fundamentalists, according to Ali, is to impose on the country their fabricated version of Medieval Islamic laws which stand in complete contrast to the liberal tradition of the period. The present narrative as well as Ali's non-fictional work *The Clash of Fundamentalisms* (2002, p.191-95) persistently imply that these groups have negligible mass support but their violent attempts to seize state power remain a bitter tangible reality.

The corrupt and incompetent bourgeois and feudalist politicians having ruled over the country for half of its history are referred to as "Scum of the earth. Blind, uncaring monsters. Fatherland needs a tsunami to drown them and their ill-gotten gains" (p.164). Most of Ali's fictional and non-fictional works underscore the fact that these politicians connive both with the internally powerful sections of the elite class and the imperialists to hold on to power. The neo-liberalization of the economy provides them with innumerable opportunities to buy national assets at nominal prices or sell these at the same to global companies for huge kickbacks. Their disregard for the poverty, illiteracy, hunger and homelessness afflicting the majority of the country makes Dara comment that living conditions during the Mohenjo-Daro civilization in 3600 BCE were better than these are in the present-day Pakistan (p.235).

The social edifice erected on the corrupt and self-seeking politico-economic base is shown to be rotten to the core in totality. The *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) portrays that the educational system of the country is dichotomized along class lines with elite schools and colleges accessible only to the scions of the landlords and *nouveau riche* traders who spare no occasion to display a snobbish and callous attitude towards their social inferiors. Aware of the growing power of the bureaucracy and the wealth it accumulates in the form of kickbacks from the emerging bourgeoisie, a substantial number of students aspire only for lucrative positions in the civil service though the disrepute of the institution is a common knowledge. Struggling within a capitalist economic order generating money-based social values, many characters let go of their ideological past and integrate into the prevalent order. They wholeheartedly join the processes of exploitation and start exercising third-rate maneuvers to climb up the social ladder in the manner of those in the higher echelons of power. Zahid's father, once an active communist, reverts to being a capitalist and sets up an import and export business which thrives by managing to get the patronage of the bureaucracy. Jamshed, another communist friend of Dara and Zahid, turns into a corrupt businessman in alliance with both the military oligarchy and the bureaucracy. Tipu, the Bengali student who once took pride in the fact that every college worth the name in East Pakistan harbored a communist group, becomes an arms dealer smuggling illegal arms to China and other countries.

The intellectual decline of the society, reflected throughout the narrative, goes in tandem with decadence in other social spheres. Under the first military dictatorship, the intellectual and cultural spirit of sycophancy and acquiescence takes root. The literary writers and critics in the tea houses of Lahore in the 1960s are hypocritical, narcissistic and servile to both those in political power as well as to those whose publications are best sellers in the market (p.3). Artist creativity is driven by the sole purpose of making money out of the local and global capitalist market which centers on uncritical production, consumption and conformity, disregarding artistic ideology and merit. The dilemma is global and Alice as well as Mathurin, the art critic and publisher based in London and Paris respectively, decry the business market determining the fate of art and literature. Since the economic and political system of the country is subservient to the new empire, the art in the neocolonial market is also assessed by the fact whether it has been praised in London and New York or not.

The majority of characters in the novel are either diasporic or local residents striving for a supranational, largely, Western experience. Ali portrays the socio-economic reasons to be the major cause behind the migratory mind-set. The novel depicts how autocratic military and civilian governments as well as dogmatic religious sections make it impossible for intellectual dissidents, ethnic minorities, homosexuals and women to demand their basic rights such as the right to property and self-expression. In Dara's opinion, social life in the country is filth which has turned people into living-dead. In *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2006), Ali explicates that the qualitative gap on the intellectual and artistic levels as well as on the level of living conditions between the First and the Third World is caused by the economic divide which drives people in the postcolonial states to escape from the economic misery generating all other varieties of conflicts and repressions.

A glance at the diversity of characters in the novel attests to the broad, unified vision which takes into account all the strata of the society. Tufail, Babuji and Younis, the juice bar tender, the tea stall owner and the sub-postmaster respectively, represent the lower class of the society. Their old stalls are demolished to be replaced with modernized, business-like cafes owned by *nouveau riche* managers. The peasants on Samir Shah's lands in interior Sindh and their laboring, oppressed lives are testimony to the impoverished existence of the majority of population living in the rural areas of the country. Pir Samir Shah, tyrannizing the serfs and marrying off his sister to The Holy Book in order to get her share of the property, stands for the rich and politically influential feudal class. The local *Pirs* are images of the profit-centered nature of the religious clerics. General Riffat, General Rafiq, General Baghlol and their fraternity symbolize the military oligarchy commanding the huge military- industrial complex and the country's foreign affairs. Jindie, the Chinese cobbler's daughter, offers the outsider's insights into the country's affairs. Dara and Zahid represent the upper middle class which is educated better in history, literature and politics and therefore, cherish hopes for a better future. They have to migrate to the West in order to avoid political persecution at the hands of the first military dictatorship in the country. Plato is the middle class, self-made teacher who despairs of the decadent social norms and migrates to London where he rises in the world by discovering his painting talent.

The characters of Zaynab and Khalida Latif and the unnamed wife of Plato's friend whose honor killing was carried out in cold blood tell tales about the dual economic and sexual exploitation of women in a morally bankrupt society. Zaynab is married off to The Holy Book and robbed of her wealth by her brother: a "Sindhi feudal engaged in sordid calculations about his property" (p.27). The situation of Khalida Lateef known as Naughty Lateef, as that of a woman exploited by her husband for promotion through the military ranks and by the Generals within the armed forces for sexual gratification, displays multiple layers of exploitation. It exposes not only the moral corruption rampant within the military institution in the form of all sorts of underhand dealing of women but also the political and sexual manipulation exercised by the Western media which uses her as propaganda material for justification of the War on Terror narrative. The individual account of her oppression is distorted to prove to the Western audience that the War on Terror is another humanitarian intervention to shield liberty, democracy and women's rights from Islamic primitivism and barbarism.

The last chapter of the novel is a detailed description of Plato's last painting which according to him is: "... a call to arms ... which would set Fatherland on fire" by inspiring people to a revolutionary transformation of the present society (p.5). The narrative in this part is motivated by the historic vision of a better social future and sees the united effort of the majority as the only means through which radical change can be effectuated (p.263-275). In Plato's painting triptych, the subtlest part is the wall of humanity forming the peripheral border of the country's shape as well as the canvas. The people on the margins, making a fence around the country, are the toiling and suffering masses of Pakistan with varying emotions on their faces: misery, disappointment, deliberation, anticipation, resentment and indifference. They are the ones whose plight deteriorates with each successive government of the capitalist-cum-feudal politicians and military-bureaucratic elite. Their strength lies in their collectivity as is symbolized by the wall like structure they form together. Dara opines that their united effort can beat all the cancers away, only if they discard apathy and rise to action before the cancers devour them completely. Plato has painted some people with their hands behind their backs as if trying to hide weapons. Dara's response to this sight is: "Is the artist implying the existence of concealed weapons? Will the last attempt to save fatherland come from below and sweep every malignancy away?" (p. 268). Both Plato's painting and Dara's interpretation convey the message that the only solution to the transformation of the existing bankrupt social conditions and alternative to the decrepit political economy of Pakistan is a social movement and united struggle of the masses from below. The second panel of the triptych illustrates the liberal intellectual culture in Islamic history through the figures of renowned Islamic scholars and dissidents like Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Hazm, Abu Ala Al Mari and Muhammad Idrisi. Plato contrasts the receptive, critical and broad-minded spirit of the past with the fundamentalist and narrow vision of the majority of Muslims today which is atavistic and incapable of resolving the material problems of the postcolonial states containing them. The narrative emphasizes the need for Islamic culture to go through a phase of reformation and enlightenment if it is to progress on the present-day globe. The third part of the painting pays tribute to the socialist poets of the subcontinent: Faiz Ahmed

Faiz and Sahir Ludhianvi whose poetry envisions a socialist future for the country and region.

Conclusion

The objective of the present research was an exploration of the novel *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) by Tariq Ali, to foreground the progressive aspects of the narrative. The delimitation of the study to the theoretical paradigm formulated from the works of Leon Trotsky and K. Damodaran provided a compact and coherent framework for the analysis of the text. The first tenet required a progressive literary work to depict the social order in a realistic manner, without touches of mysticism, romanticism, surrealism or any other metaphysical strain. The thematic analysis of the text affirms that the author has adopted a critical realist angle to portray issues pertaining to the underdeveloped capitalist economy, opportunist political system, corruption of the elite sections of bureaucracy, army, feudal and industrialists, regional inequities, the rise of religious fundamentalism and, above all, the country's satellite status to the United States. The second criterion of Marxist literary criticism for progressive literature was its delineation of the larger, synthesized picture of the social formation in which all the social activities are interlinked exerting influence on one another as well as the whole. The diversity of characterization in the novel which encompasses the lower, middle, upper middle and elite classes and the ways these affect each other attests to a historic, collective vision taking into account each single part and its role in the broader, united whole. The novel depicts that the intellectual, moral, gender-related and ideological dimensions of the society are deformed by the politico-economic practices. The text also meets the third criterion for progressive literature by delineating and suggesting that the organized, united movement of masses from below is the only remedial measure which can eradicate reactionary socio-economic and political practices and guide the society on the path of progress and amelioration of the human condition.

The researcher considers *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) as the most contemporary and pertinent of all novels of Islam Quintet as it realistically portrays the socio-economic and political context of present-day Pakistan placed in the broader global scenario. The historical period of five decades the novel encompasses and the broader social panorama it represents validates King's appraisal that Ali's fiction "has a large canvas" portraying "epic like subject matter" (2000, p. 112). Though the literary propagation of socialist political ideology is an aspect in the novel which has been criticized as "propagandist" and "utopian" by critics such as Chapman (2006, p. 9), King (1999) and Feinberg (2007), in the researcher's view, it would be erroneous to dismiss Ali's delineation as purely propagandist since all the characters in the novel expressing different socio-political ideologies are granted full voice making it a realistic and pluralistic literary representation of Pakistani society instead of a monolithic and one-dimensional portrayal. The critical realist and radical as well as collective vision adopted by Ali stands out as one of the chief merits of *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) and the present study, by exploring the progressive facets of the novel, contributes to a comprehensive interpretation of its thematic content and to a more holistic and nuanced evaluation of Tariq Ali as a literary writer.

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