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## Consolidating Imperialist Ideology: The New Great Game in Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*

Amir Iqbal Abbasi<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

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The article examines *The Wasted Vigil*, a post-9/11 novel by Nadeem Aslam, to find out how the writer articulates imperialist ideology in his composition. The study reveals that the writer internalizes the imperialist discourses on the war in Afghanistan and becomes a voice of the imperialist powers by consolidating their ideology. Some of the ideologies that the novel incorporates are Western cultural supremacy, fear of the 'evil empire', mystic East, human rights violation, stereotyping, Islamophobia, patriarchy, white man's burden, rehabilitation and political economy. Invoking the theoretical positions of Said, Dabashi, and Chomsky, this paper argues that the writer, overlooking some ground realities germane to the New Great Game, regularly tends to misrepresent the local culture and, thus, stereotypes the war-affected people of Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** *imperialist ideology, consolidation, misrepresentation, stereotypes, the New Great Game*

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<sup>1</sup>Amir Iqbal Abbasi PhD scholar (English Literature), National University of Modern Languages & Lecturer in English, OPF Boys College, Islamabad



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This paper attempts to explore the role of literature in consolidating the dominant imperialist ideologies. It also investigates how a literary composition reinforces the dominant ideologies established during the New Great Game in Afghanistan. In order to examine the selected text, Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*, the study employs multiple theoretical perspectives proposed by Said, Dabashi and Chomsky. Before I justify my choice of theoretical positions, providing a quick historical and political background to it would be in order.

In the age of uncertainty in which historical material conditions took a new turn, literary traditions also redefined their course. Many non-native anglophone writers thronged the Western academy with their local cultural themes in their works to make their presence felt. Like others, Pakistani anglophone writers also found a scope due to geopolitical importance of their region in the wake of War on Terror. Pakistan and Afghanistan were the real battleground for the US and her allies. In order to justify this war, the Western academy strengthened the war narratives constructed by the US and these narratives were impressed upon the minds of both the US citizens and the citizens of the world. The readers wanted to know more about the 'villain' in this battle. So, this gap was filled by the non-native anglophone writers belonging to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

*The Wasted Vigil* is a novel set in the backdrop of the Cold War and the War on Terror. Russia waged a war against Mujahideen at the request of the pro-Soviet Afghan government. On the other hand, the Mujahideen were funded by CIA to create a fence against communist Russia. Russian took control of the urban centers very quickly. Fueled into nationalist fervour, the war grew fierce between Soviets and guerilla. One superpower was at the forefront and the second was covertly supporting Mujahideen. In 1989, with the exit of Soviets, the US also withdrew her support from Mujahideen and the country fell into civil war until the Taliban took hold of Afghanistan. The events mentioned above contributed to the New Great Game.

Afghanistan was an arena for two empires—Great Britain and Russia (the then USSR)—during the old Great Game. Advancement of Russia into Afghanistan meant a direct threat to British Baluchistan while Russia suspected the role of Great Britain in undermining Russian in Central Asia. Both empires wanted to make Afghanistan a protectorate or a buffer zone to trace the moves of each other. To protect their borders, both the empires built railway lines—Russia across Central Asia to her borders with Afghanistan, China and Persia and British across India and her borders with Afghanistan.

During the Cold War, the West and America focused on the unholy communism of Russia and added fuel to the fire by supporting Mujahideens fighting in Afghanistan. Kaplan describes how 'Soldiers of God' (Mujahideens) were trained and devoted to ousting the Soviet forces. He reveals how the country which was the focus of the world. America had her hidden intentions and, to hegemonize the covert interest, she took the help of religion and considered to jump into the 'holy' war to defeat communist Russia. Finally, the US government convinced General Zia of Pakistan to accept the US's offer for a joint venture (Riedel, 2012).

But when this so-called 'holy' war ended in the victory of Mujahideens and their allies, America and Pakistan in particular, two major players in the region, left the country at the mercy of the warlords, setting aside the consequences. When another group, Taliban, declared their 'holy' war, it was taken as an abnormal reaction of some fanatics and as a result, those 'zealots' were pronounced as terrorists because their version of 'holy' war was not from the camp of imperialist powers.

Esposito, in his 2010 book, explaining the misconceptions associated with Islam as a terrorist religion, tries to prove that the war fought in the region is unholy and it does not have anything to do with religion. This is the most popular discourse of the times which urges the people affected in Afghanistan or Pakistan to opt for moderation and denounce every form of extremism because this extremism is no longer required.

After the Russian revolution in 1917, interference of Afghanistan in Central Asia decreased, as Russia sealed her borders with Afghanistan. However, the reopening of the borders in 1991 marked the beginning of the new Great Game. Sharing border with states having large energy resources has become a continuous source of trouble for vulnerable Afghanistan.

The New Great Game is also about expansion and contraction of empires for creating more markets. Russia, though struggling, has a watch on the borders of Central Asia to monitor the transport of oil from the Caspian basin. The USA is also maintaining her hegemony on the region and working to materialize her own proposed pipeline to transport resources from Central Asia. China is another actor wishing stability in the Central Asian states to fuel its economic growth from the Caspian reserves. Central Asian states themselves have got entangled in their local issues as well as their connection with the outer world. The geopolitical importance of Afghanistan is doubled in the region with the looming interest of international oil companies, especially those backed by Washington. A competitive influence of Iran, Turkey, India, and Russia on the one side and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, America on the other has brought the region on the front seat. In addition, the entry of the Taliban gave a new twist to the New Great Game (Rashid, 2002). Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* was written in this context.

With this historical perspective in sight, this paper attempts to answer two questions: What imperialist ideologies, constructed during the New Great Game, does the writer incorporate in *The Wasted Vigil*? And how is the writer a 'native informer' extending on Western perception about Afghanistan?

As mentioned earlier, this research invokes multiple theoretical positions to read Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*. A rationale for employing those positions is instructive. Said (1994) proposes that the writer, in his/her writing, willingly or unwillingly, participates in promoting the imperialist agenda. Referring to Dickens's *Great Expectations*, he highlights how the writer like Dickens is an ally to

the imperialist agenda. Australia, the then white British colony, is meant for the culprits, notorious for their delinquencies. Magwitch, a convict in this novel, is sent to Australia as a punishment but he returns to London illegally. Nobody welcomes him back to England because of the law of the land. Said forwards his argument saying that Dickens, portraying norms established by the empire, makes him questionable, as sending criminals to Australia is not only penal but also imperial. Besides this, Pip is shown disturbed on his second meeting with Magwitch, but he is revived after he takes his new career with his friend in the East, another colony offering the white normality. So, this trade and travel with the Orient are typical of imperialists and Dickens shares this aspect in his novel.

Similarly, Dabashi (2011) theorizes that the Iranian writers are 'native informers' who consistently misrepresent the local culture to enjoy their position in the Western academy. He criticizes the writers like Azar Nafisi for their being 'comprador intellectuals' who, while sitting in the master's camp, portray their own culture with the lens of their masters. He argues how such writer are able to demonize Muslims and urge their readers to surrender to white racism. The study also takes help from the political insight of Chomsky (1992) who is of the view that construction of ideology to maintain hegemonic control is core to the US foreign policy and war is an ideological construct of the US for her vested interests in the rest of the world, especially the global South. In order to read my selected text, I have adapted the theoretical positions of the theorists mentioned as my conceptual framework in the South Asian context.

The research is qualitative in nature and it opts for Critical Discourse Analysis as a method to investigate the text. Fairclough (2001) proposes three-pronged approach of analyzing a discourse: micro, meso and macro. At micro-level, the researcher finds out linguistic features of a text, at meso-level the analyst considers the production and consumption of the text, and macro-level involves intertextuality and interdiscursivity that affect the text. The analysis shows how the socio-political conditions influence a text. The current study uses macro-level approach of analyzing the discourses operative in the text, *The Wasted Vigil*.

Before undertaking analysis of the text, it is important to understand what imperialism is and how it establishes its hegemonic control. Imperialism is the policy of the big empires to gain territorial control or politico-economic dominance over other weaker nations. In order to subdue the latter, the imperialists proliferate certain statements finding plausible justifications to manipulate. Mooers (2006) states that the defenders of old imperialism used the language evocative of "the racial and cultural superiority of the time; the "civilizing mission" of the Christianized West was still thought by many to constitute the "white man's burden" in the non-European world" (p. 2). After World War II, however, the trend of physical occupation of a territory changes and imperialist powers find new ways of humanist justification that maintain hegemony over the weak groups that, eventually, get inspired by the 'rich' foreign cultures. Nineteenth-century and the first half of the twentieth century are marked with British imperialism with its ancient manifestation, i.e., physical occupation or colonization of the foreign lands

and cultures. Nevertheless, in the second half of the twentieth century, the US replaces British colonization with their kind of imperialism. The Americans believed in maintaining their hegemony over the target countries for grabbing and exploiting their resources without taking physical control or setting up a government. This latest form of imperialism is practised in corporate culture that binds the mentally subjugated nations to surrender to the economic models of the powerful countries.

Imperialist ideology is a series of sugar-coated signifiers, demonstrated in philanthropy but its latent function is to strengthen its executor for material gains. It creates an environment in which the corporate culture flourishes without hindrance and the weak nations consider themselves equal to the rich. Wood in Mooers (2006) says that imperialist ideology embraces freedom, equality and human dignity to create a suitable environment for capitalism to flourish. Capitalism has a strong connection with liberal democracy that gives equal rights to both the labourer and the capitalist. These equal rights urge the labourers to exchange their work with wages. Mixing of political and economic spheres in democracy blurs the class relation and evades tension (pp. 9-10).

So, ideology largely rests on certain appealing narratives that apparently are unquestionable. However, the cannon behind a bouquet is treacherous to trap its prey. Mooers's (2006) classification of the imperialist ideologies arranges in a rising order the following: democracy and human rights, freedom and dignity, respect for difference, gender equality, alleviation of poverty, the good governess and sustainable development and the inevitability of war and empire.

These ideals of the modern world appear attractive when written or pronounced but in reality these have glaring contradictions. Mooers (2006) also highlights some of the contradictions of imperialists—retrogressive and modern, clash of civilization and democratic ideals, racism and postmodern multiculturalism, gender equality and religious oppression, old-fashioned propaganda and newfangled 'soft-power', torture and human rights— in pronouncing and executing their agenda (pp. 2-3).

Development and modernization are alluring concepts for the underdeveloped or comparatively poor countries. In their days of power, the colonizers convinced the colonized that they could liberate themselves through modernity. In fact, it was for the benefit of the colonizers who achieved the willing participation of the colonized in the process of development and modernization in order to explore new markets. The colonized started to think that their culture(s) were inferior to the western culture; hence, losing their own voice (Arisaka, 1997, pp. 556-557).

Imperialism spreads its policies through a set of ideologies which pave the way for the dominant groups to achieve their goals in a particular region. Political economy, expanding to new captive markets, is a driving force to attract the imperialists towards any resourceful country. Kunzle (1990) highlights that

destroying the local culture due to their personal interests, corporations urge the Third World countries to follow their economic patterns. Although the US remains unquestioned at home, yet she is resisted massively abroad. But she crushes challenges to hegemony through military force, economic sanctions, and exploitation through her capitalistic values. Kunzle further unfolds the strategy of imperialists explaining that these powers take control of any region after winning the sympathies of the relatively poor locals who are dazzled by the gleams of development and ultimately leave their traditions and cultural mores easily, thinking that their values are inferior to the values offered by the foreign culture (pp.159-160).

Hegemony is core to the Western discourses on war throughout. The Great Game provides a field of exercise for strengthening the discourses of both sides, the Great Britain and Russia. With every Russian venture, the British government got alarmed on the reducing distance of Russia from the Empire (Hopkirk, 2010, p.2, my paraphrase).

## **Imperialism-literature nexus**

There are various forms through which the imperial powers transform hegemony and literature is one of them. Liberal Humanists view literature in various perspectives in which two prime views to read or write literature are to entertain or to educate. From Sir Philip Sidney down to Mathew Arnold and T. S. Eliot, literature has been considered either to entertain or to give moral education (Klages, 2015, pp. 10-31). However, this naïve perspective and other text-centered approaches are disregarded by historicists.

What is the connection between imperialism and literature? Among many determiners of reinforcing the ideology of powerful groups, literature, as Greenblatt (2000) observes, is one that actively takes part in the construction and dissemination of discursive practices. Reviving Marxist traditions, William (1977) proposes that any culture is the constituent of three hegemonies: residual, dominant and emergent. According to him, residual is not exactly past but part of the dominant culture, which started in the past and is still present in the dominant, on a small scale though. Dominant culture or ideology exists in present; it covers the human experiences and values which suit it. Since it is very difficult to cover all human experiences, it erases or ignores some of the experiences. Such erasure and ignorance are resisted or opposed by giving an alternative culture: emergent. All three—residual, dominant and emergent—are interrelated and one cannot be defined without the other. Literature which does not resist or oppose becomes part of the dominant culture but the one that opposes or gives an alternative to the dominant becomes part of the emergent culture (pp. 121-127, my paraphrase).

Literature is simultaneously “a poison and a medicine”, as it may result in the internalization of ideologies and become the *raison d’être* of “epistemic

transformation” in a positive sense. Spivak (2013), proposing ways of approaching a text for aesthetic pleasure, says that literature can have both negative and positive impacts on the readers. She says that literature may be an aide to “ideological transformation” but the intelligent reader is able to figure out the “value system” implicit in literature. She extends her argument saying that literature takes the assent of the reader, secretly, making itself an instrument of transformation and this transformation may be useful or harmful or a blend of both. It is the duty of a teacher to introduce the readers to the latent aspect of literature by exposing what is implicit in the text (pp. 35-38).

Foucault (1990) also considers literature as one of the sources to disseminate the dominant discourses. He elaborates how, through some tools, the dominant ideologies or discourses are reinforced in order to increase their validity and strength in the minds of people. He says, “Those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again. We know them in our own cultural system; they are religious or juridical texts, but also those texts (curious ones, when we consider their status) which are called ‘literary’: and to a certain extent, scientific texts” (p. 59).

Presence of big empires in Afghanistan is not void of their interests and outlook of Afghanistan is the reflection of framing which these empires have constructed to maintain their hegemony. The writers sometimes overlook such construction and portray a picture already framed by the imperialists.

### **Situating the text**

In this section, I have reviewed the research already carried out on the post 9/11 novel, *The Wasted Vigil*, and tried to contextualize my study with the available scholarship. Women’s suffering is one of the major themes in *The Wasted Vigil*. Investigating into the traumatic suffering of women at the hands of patriarchal structures of Afghan society, Nasir (2015) states that hegemony and power are tools with which the power mongers subdue women. Comparing Afghan society with a panopticon, she says that Afghani women are in constant torture. She is of the view that *The Wasted Vigil* has unveiled the nexus of patriarchy and hegemony to control women, as women being the heirs of Eve are considered unholy; hence, legitimate to be tormented. Nasir has carefully selected the instance—which could strengthen her point of view—from the novel; however, her study reflects a skin-deep analysis on the situation. It is because she has opted for the established interpretation of Afghan society against a critical inquiry backed by historical political events in the region.

Kiran (2018) also places *The Wasted Vigil* in a global space of enunciation. She is of the view that Aslam has been able to transgress the regional boundaries to make local Afghani trauma internationalized. Through his characters from the US, England, Russia, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Aslam has portrayed a world that has been responsible for the destruction of Afghanistan. The portrayal of different

nationalities rarely establishes equal treatment. In this novel, the foreign characters receive a different treatment than the local characters.

Flannery (2013) ranks *The Wasted Vigil* as one of the authentic documents recording contemporary history in the wake of 9/11. Internationalized in its projection, *The Wasted Vigil* brings into the limelight the vulnerable victims of international politics. Moreover, it stages events which are connected with some larger events occurring in the world and 9/11 is one of them. He concludes that the novel suggests being vigilant not only of the political happening in one's surroundings but also of the historical lessons. Even amidst the ruins of Afghanistan, there is a ray of hope for a bright future. Although the study warns the reader of political crookedness, yet it is silent on the ideology of commemorating big events to justify the repercussions following those events.

Parveen (2014) offers a postmodern perspective on *The Wasted Vigil*. She establishes that Aslam's novel is an extension of already existing discourses on multiculturalism. Aslam's discourse on a heterogeneous community appears more a 'postmodern simulacrum' rather than a fixed reality.

Madeline Clements (2013), in her doctoral thesis, mentions that Aslam is one of those Muslim writers who wish to 're-culture' Islam through their writings. In *The Wasted Vigil*, the writer highlights how Islamic scripturalists hijacked Islamic values. Comparing Aslam with Rushdie and Hamid, Clement claims that Aslam's writing has the capability of attracting his Western readers and make them identify themselves with the characters in the novel. Clement overlooks one facet of imperialist ideology, i.e., moulding 'Jihad ideology' to 'peace ideology'.

## **Affirming imperialist ideologies**

The current study examines *The Wasted Vigil* and investigates various aspects that strengthen the dominant imperialist ideologies—Western cultural supremacy, 'evil empire', mystic East, human rights violation, stereotyping, Islamophobia, patriarchy, white man's burden, rehabilitation and political economy.

The structure of binary opposites is dominant in western imperial cultural values; racial classification is one of the examples of such opposition. The white race is considered superior to other races—black, brown, yellow, etc. and the term 'white' is loaded with all positive connotations, such as protagonist, enlightened, civilized, and modern, opposite to the connotations associated with black/brown antagonist—passive, uncivilized, and primitive. Said (1994) says that in most of the Hollywood movies, the white is portrayed as a protagonist. In *The Wasted Vigil*, Aslam promotes the western ideology, 'cultural superiority and the white man's burden', by presenting two of his main 'white Western' characters as heroes, one British and the other American. After reading the novel, it appears that there is not a single Afghan who is capable enough to be appreciated, and all are villains, barbarians or terrorists. He fashions his main (largely white and western) characters in a way that the reader falls in sympathy with them and willingly accepts their role



as motivators, saviours, helping, and philanthropists. Marcus, who marries a Muslim woman, settles in Afghanistan in *The Wasted Vigil* and he is not ready to leave this country even if his wife was stoned to death, his daughter kidnapped and his own hand cut off. He shows his desire to contribute to the welfare of this country provided that he has some money. Despite obstacles and racial-cum-religious discrimination that he has faced, he is persistent to stay in the country, as if he had some 'duty' to perform.

The second main character is an American agent, David, working in Afghanistan, who is apparently helping the locals against 'evil' Russians or cruel Taliban but, in reality, is working for CIA's agenda in the country. All of his evils are camouflaged under civilized clothes and the writer seems to be impressed with his mores. His good-natured flirting with Zameen, a Muslim woman, is not immodest behaviour but love; whereas the Russian who slept with Zameen is seen as a villain, a rapist and uncivilized. His watching and following Casa to mend his behaviour shows his philanthropic attitude which makes him a hero. The hero finally sacrifices his life while having a scuffle with Casa for mending his behaviour.

The writer's level of information about Afghans is reflected through the name of his characters. Marcus is an English name given to an English living in Afghanistan; David is an American name given to a CIA agent; Lara is a Russian name given to a Russian, but four names--Zameen, Qatrina, Dunya and Casa--given to Afghan characters are not Afghani. Zameen is an Urdu word and not popular in Afghanistan; Qatrina is a variant of Katerina, which is a Dutch and German name; Dunya is an Arabic name and Casa is a Portuguese word. It shows that the writer is more knowledgeable about the Western names than the local Afghani names. It also reflects that knowledge of the writer about the local culture is not first hand, which makes his representation weak.

Imperialism shapes and reshapes the identities of war-affected people as per its requirement. During the Cold War, those fighters were called guerillas but when the war was over and those fighters started controlling Afghanistan, the US found this activity as a disruption in the way of peace process necessary to establish a trade route through Afghanistan, the new Great Game. The 9/11 gave justification to the empire to reshape the identities of those fighters as terrorists.

Aslam also talks in terms of the new identities established by the US Empire. In events that take place during the 1980s, the writer uses the word 'guerrillas' to describe the Afghan fighters: "David remembers how back in the 1980s when the Salang Tunnel to the north of Kabul was an important supply route for the Soviet Army, there were several plans by the US-backed guerrillas to blow it up" (p. 75). But with the change in imperialist ideology, the writer also alters his way of labelling those fighters. Once 'guerrillas' now become 'terrorists' because the later suits more to the ideology of the Empire "And now Comanche helicopters bring sizeable crates of bottled water for America's Special Forces teams that are operating in the region, the hunt for terrorists continuing out there" (P. 9).

The lovers of Muhammad (PBUH) were hailed as holy warriors during the Cold War but after the war was over, every evil was associated with Muslims. Aslam also contributes to the US discourse on Muslims:

The statement from the terrorists appeared after four hours. . . .We have hundred more young men like him, lovers of Muhammad, peace be upon him, who are willing and eager to give their lives in this jihad against the infidels. (p. 74)

The phrase 'the lovers of Muhammad' or 'Muhammadan' is well-known to the orientalist or imperialist to spread negative propaganda because the West thinks that Islam is an archrival to capitalism and democracy and its founder is Muhammad (PBUH). Every reaction of Muslims is viewed as dispositional, not situational; hence stereotyping. Said (1997) is of the view that the West has made its mind that any action of Muslim is genetically determined and not the result of any policies or action prior to their reaction (Said, p. xxxiii, my paraphrase).

The writer exaggerates some of the values pronounced by Islam. For instance, Muslims are not hand-shakers with women and a Muslim society does not mind following it. In the following lines, the writer mocks this understanding of Muslim communities and states something which is even not known to Muslims about the holy prophet:

He was someone who would not shake hands with women, so in order to make a pact he would put his hand in a vessel containing water and withdraw it, and then the woman would put her hand into the water. (pp. 12-13)

A prevalent narrative in the region is that Americans are ever ready to help Afghans against their enemy. David, the main character in the novel, assures one of the Afghans that their government will help Afghanistan rebuild: 'Just wait until the Soviets are defeated', David said, 'Then we'll help you Afghans sweep away the landlords and mullahs' (167).

It reveals that panacea of every trouble is the defeat of Soviets and theocracy. All other agents working in this region for their political and economic interests are not contributing to the destruction of the country. Americans are also shown, very limited though, having the willingness to participate in the rehabilitation of the crippled infrastructure:

He had kept himself in the background, just letting a group of committed and intelligent local people get on with the details. Even the selection of the name has been left to them they want Tameer-e-Nau Afghanistan School. Building the New Afghanistan. (P. 55)

The writer does not reveal the US political economy behind the restructuring of the country which he clearly highlights while mentioning the role of Russians in developing infrastructure of Afghanistan. An Afghan, a Communist though,

appreciating Russians for their interest in the reconstruction of Afghanistan says, “The Soviets are helping us now. Building roads, hospitals, dams—which your people keep destroying” (p.167). But the writer links this development with political economy saying: “[T]hey weren’t building anything. It was all either third rate or just for show, and either way they were billing Afghanistan millions for it” (p.167). It reveals two different treatments of two different empires on a similar agenda; hence supporting one imperial power against the other.

Every culture is unique and has a connected value system and this system resists the values which are not compatible with its traditions, let alone imposing a set a belief on someone. The education system is one of the determiners that explains the fabric of any culture. While in war, the affectees are instinctively bound to resist any form of captivity. Afghanistan is also a country in which the Afghans are in a continuous state of war; consequently, resistance has become an integral part of their character. The writer, not realizing the state of Afghans, satirizes the resistance of Casa in accepting modern education or school:

Earlier Casa had said Bihzad was being given the honour of doing this for Islam and for Afghanistan. ‘Aren’t you troubled that boys are being brainwashed in there,’ Casa asks now, ‘and girls were taught to be immodest?’ (p. 59)

If Casa’s words are re-written in a question as to why ever any foreigner has this right to modify the cultural values of any other country, it becomes evident that the writer has written what the ‘superior’ culture has fed in him. He tries to project the locals as evils and extremists, not ready to adopt the white western values but overlooks the situational impact on the locals.

Chomsky (1992) states that the ideology of the Cold War was constructed by the US for its larger gains. Russia is an evil Empire is another ideology that framed the view of the US during the Cold War. It suited the US more because she did not want Russia to advance in Afghanistan due to its Communist agenda. Afghanistan had been a buffer zone between two great empires—Great Britain and Russia during the Great Game. In the New Great Game, it is a contesting region for the US and Russia.

In *The Wasted Vigil*, the writer holds Russia responsible more than the USA for havoc in Afghanistan and rarely highlights the USA’s brutalities. He writes:

Because Lara is Russian, Marcus’s immediate fear regarding her illness was that she had been fed a poison during the hours she had spent waiting for him in Usha, her country having precipitated much of present-day Afghanistan’s destruction by invading in 1979. (P. 10)

While making a comparison of cruelties launched by both Americans and Russians, the hero of the novel, David, says, “You don’t know what you are talking about. Communism has killed millions upon millions of people. . .” (p.167). The readers

do not come across any instance in which the US and her allies are shown brutal, which strengthens the discourse during the Cold War and the War on Terror. The writer portrays that Russia is not even sincere with her soldiers who are sacrificing their lives for their country:

Always hungry, always ill, the weak Soviet antibiotics were of little use if ever they were to be had, many soldiers had thought of and talked about deserting, about defecting—an arc of movements in their minds, from Afghanistan to a country in western Europe, perhaps even the United States of America. (p. 31)

The veil is another most debated issue in Europe or America and this matter is dealt with mockingly in the west. The writer contributes to white western agenda of defaming veil or showing a woman as oppressed or an object of humiliation. The following paragraph reveals the mocking attitude of the writer:

Just the previous week a man was said to have trapped a green bee-eater and taken it to his bride, but the pious girl who was versed in all seven branches of Islamic knowledge had veiled her face immediately, exclaiming that was no way for an honourable husband to behave, bringing a stranger into the presence of his wife. She explained that the bird was, in fact, a human male who had been given his current form by the djinn (p.23).

Patriarchy and polygamy are some negative connotations associated with Islam without looking into the context. The four-wife discourse is a frequently referred to dislocation of Islam, which has become almost a tool in the hands of anti-Islamic scholars. Aslam also takes the life of a cleric as a sample to generalize it to the whole religion of Islam:

Zameen and the boy were in the demon-strewn expanse of trees when they saw the cleric of the Usha mosque, a torch burning beside him. He was a powerfully built man in his late thirties who had four wives, the maximum simultaneous number allowed to a Muslim. (p. 23)

The words ‘the maximum simultaneous number allowed to a Muslim’ reveal how the writer is ardent to highlight polygamy and is silent on the contextual importance of having more wives.

Said (1997) observes that small groups of Muslims are taken as representative of Islam. If we apply Saidian notion on Afghanistan, it reveals that Taliban is just another group fighting in Afghanistan to rule according to their understanding, but Islam defined by this group is unfortunately taken as a sample or modal and is a subject to propaganda. The writer also generalizes the Taliban sample of Islam in the world and mixes some Islamic injunctions with the misinterpretation of the Taliban in the context of Afghanistan. For example, he writes about the event of Taliban’s stoning Katrina to death right after the Friday prayer because of her sinful marriage (adultery) with Marcus for thirty nine years just because the ceremony had been conducted by a female (p.38, my paraphrase).

Stereotyping is quite common in imperialism because it helps the imperial powers to classify any group or nation. Although terrorists have no country or a region with a boundary, they are identified as nationals. The writer also reinforces this type of stereotyping which labels the terrorists with nationality even if they are not recognized by the countries they belong to:

It was not a thief, she reassured herself, nor a Taliban fighter looking for somewhere to hide. Nor an Arab, Pakistani, Uzbek, Chechen, Indonesian terrorist -- seed sprouted from the blood-soaked soil of Muslim countries. On the run since the autumn of 2001, al-Qaeda appeared to be regrouping, to kidnap foreigners, organize suicide bombings, and behead those it deemed traitors, those it suspected of informing the Americans. (p. 14)

The Mystic East is yet another narrative disseminated by Orientalists to equate them with characteristics, such as primitive, superstitious, irrational, subjective, etc. (Said, 1978). The writer touches an area in which he shows the belief system of the people in supernatural entities. Marcus informs that area around the lake is haunted (because of djin) and the Muslims believe that “the air is . . . alive with the good and bad invisible tribes of the universe” (p.15). The writer seems to be intent upon furnishing every possible information that may excite his Anglophone reader to an approving smile.

To conclude, literature is one of the useful agents in setting or reinforcing imperialist ideology. Said (1994) is of the view that the writer(s), intentionally or unintentionally, internalize the dominant discourses and becomes an ally in the imperialist agenda. In *The Wasted Vigil*, the writer consolidates the ‘reality’ already established by the imperialist powers and observes silence—knowingly or unknowingly— on the historical, political and economic motives behind engagement in Afghanistan: the abundance of resources in Central Asia and a trade route through Afghanistan. In order to obliterate the political and economic agendas, other discourses such as terrorism, Islamization, development, women’s empowerment, education, etc. are highlighted more so that no one questions the prevalence of imperialist ideology in the region. Owing to its geopolitical importance, Afghanistan is significant for the economically powerful countries.

The Great Game in the region is about creating more markets and extracting resources from Central Asia and to attain a stronghold, and it is imperative for either of the empires to make Afghanistan a protectorate. Afghan culture, affected by various wars in the region, is vulnerable to stereotyping emanating from foreign ideology. Chomsky (1992) points to a common practice of the imperialist that they frequently construct and reconstruct ideology in order to gain control. Besides using war tactics, the empires also use soft power to maintain hegemony in the region to achieve long term goals. The imperialist policy justifies the presence of the powerful empires, taking help from enchanting signifiers, such as democracy, freedom, women’s empowerment, equality, modernization, etc., but this ideology associates negativity with the local culture; hence constructing the desired ‘reality’.

The writer, internalizing this constructed 'reality', becomes an agent of power in articulating the imperialist ideology. Dabashi (2011) indicates that the services of the native informers in the US are more profitable as they have war against Muslims to cover. Aslam becomes a 'native informer' who tries to win sympathies of the deluded western audience carrying the baggage of their biases about South Asia, specifically Afghanistan.

**Note:** This article has been extracted from the author's unpublished PhD dissertation.

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