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## Religious Chauvinism: An Emerging Counterproductive Dilemma of Post 9/11 Pakistani Nationalism in Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*

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### Abstract

*This study explores the emergence of religious chauvinism in post 9/11 Pakistan in Aslam's 'The Blind Man's Garden'. The rise of chauvinism and militant connotations is not only provenance of great disintegration but also a menace to a prestigious survival of the state, a setback to the moderate majority of Pakistanis that takes pride in their nationality. Some extremist voices, which, no doubt nationalist though they are, yet stigmatize the soft image of Pakistan and Islam due to a harsher stand and their infatuation with blind religiosity. Focusing on Aslam's 'The Blind Man's Garden' (2013), this article argues about how religious seminaries in Pakistan misinterpret religious scripts to distribute hate among the masses to create an 'other' that suits their ideology and politics. The paper argues that fundamentalization in general and institutional radicalization in particular, which through state-controlled mechanisms, are let loose to the extent that they not only control society but also challenge the writ of the state.*

**Key Words:** Nation, Nationalism, Chauvinism, Jingoism, Identity, Institutional Radicalization

### Introduction

Nadeem Aslam's work, "The Blind Man's Garden" (2013), portrays South Asian Muslims as religious fanatics and dangerous terrorists of the sort that conservative media have already been showing to American viewers after 9/11. It reinforces the binary between "good" and "bad" Muslims (Mamdani, 2005), i.e. between the pious and the wayward (Aslam, 2013). According to Keniston (2013), the direct capturing of 9/11 events with an emotional touch has gradually shifted to a more nuanced approach. This shift is exemplified by the novel, which, while dealing with the attacks very differently, projects a broad compass and includes a fairer

counterproductive perspective to the attacks. As 9/11 changed the world from what it was earlier, so did it happen in Pakistan, where religious chauvinism took the place of real nationalism. A fair analysis of the work presents the split of Muslims in Pakistani society. But the novel is fair in holding both – indigenous religious militants and Western economic fundamentalists– responsible for bringing a change in the national character of Pakistan.

Nadeem Aslam's novel, *'The Blind Man's Garden'* (2013), leavens with the subtlety of a writer who can reside in the hot mind of a Jihadist as naturally as he can in the lamenting soul of a country drowning in religious radicalism. Besides, the novel bridges the

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gap between the East and the West created by extremism through the Muslim protagonist, Mikal's reconciliation with an American soldier.

## Review of Literature

Pakistan, a state with diverse ethnic, religious, cultural and political dispositions and established not in remote past, is facing the issues of national identity formation that became worst after the 9/11 trauma. Nationalism through a positive trait yet gets negative connotation when one's fervency for the superiority of one's own culture and civilization to all others is mutated into blatant chauvinism/ jingoism and troubles the situation due to militancy. This is what happened in post 9/11 Pakistan. Instead of true nationalism, that to Searle-White means a sense of identification with a group of people who share a common history, language, territory, culture, or a combination of all these (2001), chauvinism, which to Merriam-Webster is synonymous with jingoism, nationalism or superpatriotism (2020), is flourishing due to radicalized education in religious schools. The Ardent Spirit in '*The Blind Man's Garden*' is one such example. This article analyses how education is used as a tool to artificially create antagonistic national identities based on religious and racial definitions of who is Pakistani or Muslim.

Pakistan came into being on the basis of Two Nation Theory. The idea that Muslims of the Subcontinent form a separate nation received political endorsement with the Pakistan Movement and led to the ultimate creation of Pakistan in 1947. All groups –ethnic, linguistic, regional and sectarian– stood united for an independent homeland (Dani, 1998). Islam served as a uniting force to collect people having different racial, cultural, ethnic and regional milieus. Cilano (2013) writes, "[...] idea, nation and state. In the Pakistani context these three terms interrelate; the boundaries between them blur". Cilano grounds this thought on the notion of "Two Nations Theory", which guarded the idea of an independent Muslim state in the subcontinent. It was the idea that had led the Muslims to community, from community to nation

and finally to the formation of a country defining its political, national identity. The brilliance of nationalism that to Birch (2012) refers to a political doctrine about the organization of political authority can be seen in the foundations of Pakistan from the very beginning. As Mr. Jinnah says:

We are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of values and proportion, history and tradition, aptitudes and ambitions; in short, and we have our own distinctive outlook on life and of life. By all canons of international law, we are a nation (cited in Hussain & Khan 2012).

But the same uniting force now seems to be splitting the nation just because of misreading and misrepresentation of religious teachings. The extremists have promoted violence, prejudice and hatred by abusing the passages contained in sacred religious writings. The tendency to misinterpret the imperatives according to one's own bent of mind is found in human nature as an ineradicable part to filter through all our actions and deeds (Armstrong, 2011, p.10). As a result, the norms of specific culture and civilization, tolerance and mutual survival, the enriched philosophy of literature and art which Sardar describes (cited in Inayatullah & Boxwell, 2003) as the secondary petals of the 'Flower Shaped Schema' of Muslim civilization, are no more desirable to help build up the soft image of Islam and Pakistan.

Despite the fact that the Quran is a religious book rather than a book of science, there are hundreds of verses in it that invite humanity to ponder over the natural phenomena. These holy verses attract our attention to several natural revelations and leave the issue of research upon the readers to probe into those phenomenal occurrences; follow them blindly or overlook what they have read in Quran about signs. It is in need of the hour that instead of keeping oneself away from science by assuming it a 'conspiracy of others' or taking it simply as a tool of inventions, one must try to evaluate Quranic teachings in the light of scientific

observations/ experimentation. Natural revelations are the signs of Allah, the Almighty; they must be pondered over and used to search out the secrets of the universe since this is the invitation of the Quran as well as the matter of human welfare. In his address, the Vice-Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University stresses the need of judging religion by using reasoning power. He advises that Muslims should pay attention to what they must do rather than what they did; this is the way that could lead them to progress (Amjid, 2019).

Apart from a lacuna in the nationhood, the graph of Pakistani nationalism has been fluctuating up and down during the past '70' years due to foreign hand, especially that of India and the USA. The 'divide and rule' policy by the USA continues to influence the Pakistani state and the people (Hussain et al., 2012). But the current wave of radicalization has really posed a menace to the very survival of Pakistan. Religious chauvinism is rising day by day, and the emerging face of the Pakistani nation is quite deplorable in the world community. Pakistan witnessed a rise of religious extremism in the form of sectarian terrorism, suicidal attacks, Church bombing attacks on minorities, the misuse of blasphemy laws, Governor Taseer's assassination and the massacre of innocents at the Army Public School in Peshawar (Dawn, October 2015). Analyzing the deplorable state of Pakistan, Fateh Muhammad Malik opines that, "The whole debate about Pakistani culture revolves around two prongs: exclusivity and inclusivity" (Nayyar, 2019). Conviction in the exclusivity of its Islamic culture rebuffs the chances of any space for nonconformist impacts, whereas the thought of inclusiveness gives sufficient space to 'other' and 'different' social conventions. Fundamentalists have been steadfast devotees of the notion of exclusivity of the country's customs. The Muslims of the Subcontinent has been fighting to construct an elite culture in accordance with Islamic teachings that ended in the creation of Pakistan. The inclusive idea of culture is essentially plural, yielding to numerous histories and conventions investigating conceivable outcomes of exchange and intercultural

concordance. So, the 'selective inclusive notion' of culture has political underpinnings (Nayyar, 2019).

### **Nationalism in Pakistan**

Since the inception of Pakistan, a strong group has been ruling out the very phenomenon of Pakistani nationalism because, according to them, Pakistan came into being on the basis of Islam which is the ultimate source of unity among people of the country (Jones, 2002, p. 261). For them, being the common bond among the people of Pakistan, Islam rules out seeking any other sources of unity based on language, ethnicity and culture. They viewed that instead of Pakistani nationalism, religious nationalism based on Islam should have been the policy of successive regimes which came to power in the country since August 1947 (Ahmer, 2014). This traditional approach, says Sardar (as cited in Inayatullah & Boxwell, 2003), lays emphasis on the theoretical form of Islam such as piety, righteousness and morality rather than experimenting with a pragmatic form of Islam in all spheres of life.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Thomas Faist (1998) holds the view that some of the fundamental Islamic movements succeeded in running their political regimes in certain realms such as Iran and Afghanistan. Those movements have been clung to the concept of 'Ummah', that shows a belief in a universal (Muslim) community existing beyond the confines of any geographical boundaries with a notion of annihilating all distinctions – racial, ethnic, cultural, economic, political– in favour of a uniformed identity (cited by Spencer & Wollman, 2002, p. 170). Still, some factions search for security by adopting new forms of ethnic, religious or racial identities notwithstanding worldwide. There deliver, then, new movements focused on converting the status of the nation-states by taking control of the state either for their ethnic agenda or by projecting religious chauvinism to accomplish their fundamentalist designs. Seeking purity from any cultural or political mingling is their sole purpose. These 'purity seekers' belong to the majority who not

only react to preserve their home rule from any cultural invasion but also show trepidation for the economic insecurity of the nation-state. The 'oppressed minorities' with their ethnic biases and racial susceptibilities launch far-right movements to safeguard national cause and provide a cohesive bond of strength to the nation through a projection of fraternity among the purity seekers, as [Gilroy \(2004\)](#) termed it. Apart from nationalism, racialism emerges, too, as a reaction to economic and cultural impacts of globalization as Michael and Keating put forward that an all-inclusive meaningful growth of authority and decision-making lets down a nation state's claims on autonomy (cited by Spencer & Wollman, 2002).

## Analysis

### Religious Chauvinism vs Foreign Cultural Invasion

The process of globalizing the Western cultural norms has caused counter-productivity such as an increase of exceedingly traditionalist and diehard religious fundamentalism among the Muslims during the last thirty years. Islamic fundamentalism is taken as the main challenging force to globalization; the Taliban militants, for instance, have offered the most decisive resistance to the modern global cultural secularity and democratic politics ([Kahn & Kellner, 2007](#)). The Muslim extremist groups, in particular, took West's armed intervention in Afghanistan as an attack on their culture and civilization. Reregulating another country's foundations and occupying it militarily to seek immediate results always give birth to hatred. These interventions caused a counterproductive chauvinism in Pakistanis as, "a green flag designed with six flames rising out of a pair of crossed swords" ([Aslam, 2013, p. 42](#)) was hoisted every day on the roof of Ardent Spirit in reaction to the Americans' invasion of Afghanistan in milieu of 9/11 attacks. The followers of Ardent Spirit's 'school of thought' were advised to wear green turbans that revealed the same "six-swords-and-flames" (p. 42). A jingoistic culture flourished; rallies and huge demonstrations were conducted by people from all walks of life in favour

of the 'victims' (p. 45) of Afghan war and several Pakistani organizations became active to send boys to Afghanistan for Jihad (p. 92). In fact, the huge protests were conducted all over the world against the wistful warmongers from within the G8 who had observed themselves the anti-capitalist demonstrations against their nasty game of bloodbath. Soon this movement was converted into a combined resistance against war and crushing neo-liberalism ([Hubbard & Miller, 2005](#)).

It became talk of the town that the 9/11 incident was a planted conspiracy against the Muslim world or else the 'Empire' should have investigated and explored as to why did those 3000 Jews had made themselves absent from their jobs on the very day of attacks at WTC ([Aslam, 2013, p. 45](#)). West's sole purpose in managing the incident was to snatch away Pakistan's nuclear weapon (p. 45) through convening a war on terror in her neighbouring country. Pakistan's atomic bomb that renders it 'Bumfuckisitan' ([Naqvi, 2010, p. 107](#)) in Western view and discourse is considered to be Islamic bomb. Besides, the US fears have a history. During the 1991 Gulf War, America allegedly discovered that Pakistani scientists had been helping Iraq with its nuclearization program. So, they have a kind of phobia about its nuclear program instead of perceiving that non-proliferation can be achieved only by stopping discrimination which America does in Pak-India case. It was Pakistan that had proposed a 'Nuclear Free South Asia' ([Kazimi, 2008, pp. 296-97](#)).

### Reversal of Religious Identities and Civilizational Clashes

The awakening of the Muslims regarding re-Islamization (Huntington, 1997), no doubt, is on its due course but the global forces' undue interference into Muslim world has provided the extremists an opportunity to impose their own version of religion by finding fault with majority's practices; the old people like Rohan were rudely misbehaved by fanatics and they were held responsible for the invasion of "[f]ilthy, disgusting, repulsive infidels"

upon Islamic world with ‘impunity’, because they were “superior in Allah’s eyes” and that Allah has granted them the right to scold at detestable mean people ([Aslam, 2013, pp. 93-94](#)). [Maleeha Lodhi \(2011\)](#) says that the collection of groups after hijacking Islamic narrative, has exploited religion for multiple purposes such as the protection of political and territorial power, elimination of sarcastic Western manipulation, engagement in class struggle, and rectification of alleged injustices (2011, p. 130).

Moreover, the 9/11 incident reverted past religious and civilizational identities ([Naqvi, 2010](#)); the identity of past unknown enemy was now revealed upon each party. When a Western journalist was attacked in the rally convened at Peshawar by certain religious parties against the post-9/11 American invasion of Afghanistan, he could perceive the anger of victims whose land was invaded by Westerns. Keeping himself in place of locals, he expressed that he himself would have targeted whoever Westerner had he first seen ([Aslam, 2013, p. 46](#)). By using military force, the Center had to take vengeance on the culprits of 9/11 incident hidden in the ‘safe heavens’ to write the phrase used by Bush (cited in [Naqvi, 2010](#)) while the Muslim extremists (apart from settling accounts of the current invasion of Afghanistan) had to avenge with “blade and fire” upon the loss of vanished glory they once had in six centers of their civilization” ([Aslam, 2013, p. 42](#)). Hence the American invasion of Afghanistan sowed the seeds of civilizational clashes in the sense that the Christian West had bombed out hundreds of mosques in Afghanistan; so, it would be absolutely just if churches in Pakistan were annihilated (2013, p. 83).

### **Fundamentalism – A Counterproductive to Globalization**

Culturally and civilizational, Muslims all over the world are facing the invasion of Western life style besides aggression of a theology of godless naturalism not matched with their doctrines and beliefs; the same that Sofia had believed in ([Aslam, 2013](#)). The propagation of such apostasies, pagan

theologies and godless communist secularity lead the conservative Muslims to confrontation with westernized Muslims as Rohan, feeling offensive at his ailing wife Sofia’s digression, stopped her medication and yet this might be called the balanced reaction shown by him in comparison with what the religious fundamentalists had shown by besieging and subjecting the Western seminary: St. Joseph’s Christian school.

By dramatizing the besiege of St. Joseph’s School and other incidents of bombing the churches out in Pakistan, Aslam points out that the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan as part of its foreign policy, adds up to radicalization of the area, sparking violence against moderate forces within Islamic area (2013). Butler argues as well that “in pursuing a willful military solution, the United States perpetrates and displays its own violence, offering a breeding ground for new waves of young Muslims to join terrorist organizations” (2004, p. 17). The siege of the St. Joseph’s by Major Khyra and his followers bears similarities with the reality of situation in the East after 9/11. In December 2014, a similar siege was carried out in Peshawar, Pakistan, where a group of seven terrorists equipped with bombs and jackets attacked an Army Public School and killed 141 people, of whom 132 were children ([Boone, 2014](#)). Major Khyra’s suggestion to record the beheadings reminds, in particular, the reader of the actual situation in the Middle East and the violent beheadings recorded by ISIS, which occurred shortly after publication of the novel. These correlations between events in the book and the terrorist attacks on schools in real life prove how compelling and relevant the events in ‘*The Blind Man’s Garden*’ are. Somehow 9/11 trauma effected people throughout the world, though Americans internalized it (Wijngaarden, 2015). The crafty use of electronic media, especially internet has played a pivotal role in broadcasting its mission at global level because this media strategy helps the organization to win sympathies of Muslims around the globe ([Rabasa et al., 2006](#)). Media gave a, “partisan and sports-event-like coverage” to the mismatch war fought between

the newest well-equipped "American bombers and the ill-equipped and ill-fed Afghan tribesmen below ([Hamid, 2008](#)). Kidnapping of Father Mede (the white-man and the head of St. Joseph's) is the central point of besiege (cultural clash); all the students along with teachers are held hostage and a demand list is released saying:

We are followers of Allah's mission and let it be known that that mission is spreading the truth, not killing people. Peace not war. We ourselves are victims of murder, massacre and incarceration. The West's invasion of Afghanistan—the only true Islamic country in the world—is an unprecedented global crime, and our brothers and sisters and children are being killed as we write this, abducted and taken away to be tortured. ([Aslam, 2013, pp. 287-88](#))

Since the American invasion is taken as an attack on Islamic civilization, so a strong warning is given to all crusaders, Jews and their operatives in Muslim kinhood for committing their global crime of invading Afghanistan (pp. 286-87). The errant Muslims are "apostate and are worthy of death besides taking away their money" (p. 289) which was essential to purchase weapons to go to Jihad since a *'piety document'* had been introduced to motivate (p. 16) the Muslims for Jihad after Western attack.

The peak level of radicalization is visible in veiled women's attempt of forbidding Muslim women from visiting and saying prayers over the graves of their dear-departed souls; they called this practice as "innovation" ([Aslam, 2013, p. 92](#)) i.e., fundamentalism has not only disturbed the world peace but also twisted the Muslim society out of shape through a reactionary rise of militancy, Talibanization and pivotal role of Madrassas; all is but an effort to find footing in society. The browbeaten segments are easily exploited by politically motivated religious leaders. Hundreds of students qualified from the Ardent Spirit were misused by Major Khyra and company for accomplishing their avarice as being *'Ahle Havas'* ([Aslam, 2013](#)). The burning of American flags in demonstration was also a political tactic used by Jihadists to earn cheap fame (2013).

## **Nationalism**

Fundamentalism with its discordant feature weakens cohesiveness and unity in the society and renders it to susceptibility and fragility. The whole mess, to Umbreen Javaid, surfaces extremist religious movements originated particularly following identity threat to various groups and leads to radicalization (2011) in society. But for one thing these extremists (Mjor Khyra & his group) are, however, proud of their country's being seventh nuclear power of the world ([Aslam, 2013, p. 172](#)), and disapprove of their government's "bidding of the Americans, as though [they] were nothing but beggars" (p. 172). When the mother of a former student of the school, for instance, comes to Major Khyra and seeks his favor for her son's admission in America by imploring him not to reveal her son's past studentship of Ardent Spirit before any investigating agency, he disagrees with her saying that in the first place learning in any western country is quite injurious to a Muslim student and secondly his own school is teaching decency and love for Islam and it is need of the hour to instill in Pakistanis the love for their own country and that if a dollar is worth seventy-two Pakistani rupees, "it is because each American person loves America seventy-two times more than each Pakistani loves Pakistan" (pp. 175-76).

## **Running Dogs of Imperialism and Thugs of Koran**

What happened in the Post 9/11 charged South Asian environment was but a combat between (economic) fundamentalists and (religious) fundamentalists (Ali, 2002) i.e., between running dogs of imperialism and religious thugs ([Aslam, 2013, p. 272](#)); both belonging to the category of *Ahle Havas* i.e. *the men of greed* whereas their avarice brought tribulations, sufferings and hardships for *Ahle Dil* i.e. *the men of heart* (pp. 85-87) who bear everything with patience. Men, when stoop so low to appease their hunger for worldly gains, do bring disaster for the land; they work as slave-agents and even *'misuse sacred religious writings for their own desires'*, as described by [Armstrong \(2011\)](#). Imperialists and their running dogs never resign to defeat since they pursue their

goals by ganging them up and smuggling “their agents to sow dissent and make trouble” ([Mao Tse Tung, n. d.](#)). Not only do they incite the locals but also use forces to blockade the targeted ports and lands. Basie, Rohan’s son-in-law and the brother of Mikal, was charged as a ‘*running dog*’ of imperialism by a terrorist during siege but in actuality those Afghan warlords who did espionage for Americans besides selling them the wanted-warriors were the running dogs of imperialism ([Aslam, 2013](#)); they earned very little for mean act of spying whereas the terrorists as well as the people of Basie’s (secular) school of thought were ‘*the thugs with Koran*’ (2013) since they misread the teachings by taking two extreme positions about the teachings of Quran. This is what handicaps their progress and these are the people who serve as the running dogs of imperialists whereas to quote Deng Xiaoping, one must always strive for upholding the task of national self-strengthening as the primary principle provided if one wants to enjoy the track of development and avoid being bullied (cited in [Mishra, 2018](#)). This fake combat did disaster the lives of devout citizens such as Rohan, Jeo, Basie, Mikal, Naheed and Tara etc.

### **Talibanization – A Complicated Nationalist Approach**

The so-called good Muslims backed by America are indulged in some immoral activities like the game of “Nail” ([Aslam, 2013, p. 120](#)) as the bird pardoner’s teenage boy tells, “[t]hey do things to you that make you kill yourself” (p. 120). Even they did not provide them food for many days and the boy had to eat a *leftover hoopoe* brought there by a cat (p. 130). The American claim of welfare in Afghanistan bluntly exposes when Rohan halts the American jeep to ask the soldiers for help in liberating the children from a warlord’s detention cell kept there for abusive purposes. The soldiers refuse saying that it is not their “problem” (p. 131). So what remains the moral justification of their invasion of Afghanistan, if they are not there to save the suffering humanity? Western media never exhausts in depicting lopsided view of Muslims on the grounds that they are brutal, sexist

and demonic. Americans had invaded Afghanistan in the name of stopping Talibans’ inhumane maltreatment with women and children, but their flat refusal is enough proof of their covert designs; at least they had not come on a ‘civilizing mission’ as it was repeatedly experienced throughout history. Moreover, the whole jihadist campaign was engineered by the same America that had entitled Afghan freedom fighters as ‘Mujahidin’, and welcomed their leaders in Washington; those same Mujahidin, the *Allah’s beloved* (Aslam, 2013, p. 52) ones, afterwards became founding fathers of Taliban ([Naqvi, 2010, p. 11](#)). Taliban were, however, unacceptable due to their rigid interpretation of Islam; the unfaithfulness to those specific interpretations would be but to convene one’s wreckage; one time’s white pieces (crony) became another time’s black (enemy) ones ([Rahman, 2014](#)). It exposes the limits of global vision that is confined just to crush Muslim power by orientalizing them. As [Shahid Alam \(2006\)](#) puts it: What forms this repackaged Orientalism new are its ends, its exponents, and the enemy it has embattled for pulling down.... Whatever the term, it holds all Islamicate movements, no matter what their positions on political uses of violence.

### **Blemish Split**

The split is visible in Pakistani Muslims. Major Kyra is a *bad* Muslim (in Western connotation) having Islamic fundamentalist approach which does not harmonize with norms of a civil society and Western vision of civilization, political order and society” (Bernard, Riddile, Wilson, & Popper, 2004). He is a hateful, violent, extremist character who assumes the charge of Ardent Spirit after his brother Ahmad’s killing in Afghan Jihad ([Aslam, 2013, p. 31](#)) by misusing whom he had already usurped the school from Rohan because of Rohan’s opposition to Ahmed’s conduct of Jihadist activities at school (p. 33). He has links with radical Islamists and substantiates the (neo-)orientalist view of the Center about extremists; that many Muslims are Islamic fundamentalists who are ‘irreconcilable’ with

modern Western democratic values and culture (Bernard, 2003). He dislikes U.S. for invading Afghanistan and believes that 9/11 is “a conspiracy” that was “staged to invent an excuse to begin invading Muslim lands one by one” (Aslam, 2013, p. 30). He dislikes common Muslims, too, for their waywardness and infidelity. Moreover, he considers the teachers at St. Joseph's school as well as the founding runners of Ardent Spirit, Rohan and Sofia as, “Muslims but traitors to Islam”, since they are “filling the heads of children with un-Islamic things like music and biology and English literature” (p. 173) and he wants to see Rohan's son (Jeo) to be caught up in some war ridden area in memory of his brother, Ahmed (Aslam, 2013, p. 32).

Under Ahmad, the school had developed links with Pakistan's intelligence agency, ISI (p. 31) for which Khyra was previously working. But Khyra resigns from service of Pak Army in view of changing its assisting policy towards religious seminaries (p. 30) besides making alliance with U.S. (p. 30) that had already staged Afghan war as an excuse to invade the Muslim lands (2013) in order to snatch those away one after the other (Thomas E. Ricks, 2014). Ahmed's death meant the dissolution of that connection; now Ardent Spirit and its pupils became the property of Major Khyra alone who by positioning them adequately would be “molding them to be warrior saints, brilliant in deceit against the West and its sympathizers here” (p. 31) as national cause; doing so would be just, not detestable (p. 31). Hence churches are attacked every day and those incurring the perpetration say that since Western Christians were destroying mosques in Afghanistan, they are doing so as a counterproductive activity in Pakistan (p. 83).

Major Khyra projects an extremist image of the school; first he replaces the liberal inscription on archway of the school like “*Education is the basis of law and order*” with “*Islam is the basis of law*” and then with “*Islam is the purpose of life*” (pp. 30-31). He, therefore, turns it into a strictly Islamic school and converts it into a practical Jihadist camp to plan and prepare the students for how to take revenge of the American aggression in Afghanistan (p. 173). But

the extreme image of school had already been developed when clues of bomb-blasting at various places were traced back to it in Ahmed's days (p. 32). Under Major Khyra's leadership, a group of radicalized students of the Ardent Spirit plans a terrorist attack on the Christian St. Joseph's school in Heer, in revenge against America's foreign policy and interference in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The plan is to “raid the school and hold everyone hostage” (p. 173) to force the Americans to leave Afghanistan and free “all our brothers who are being held prisoners by them” (p. 173). Their aim is to remove the Western influence and military presence from Afghanistan, and they are willing to resort to extreme violence to reach this goal; Khyra even proposes, “We must purchase a camcorder—to film the beheadings” (p. 214).

## Conclusion

Aslam's rhetoric genuinely probes into the matter to detect the seminaries of fundamentalism that deteriorate our national identity all over the world. Rather than preaching love, serenity and calm, they are projecting hate, militancy and jingoistic chauvinism. Hence, the responsibility of the state and state-led institutions such as schools/ educational organizations double up. But unfortunately, the concerned corners have failed in accomplishing their duties. Resultantly, we are still a crowd gathered up at some station, waiting for a train to lead us away to our destiNation. Being emotional and having strong affinities with the religion of Islam, we are not ready to compromise on our ideology that is figured out and reshaped over time. The current wave of radicalization has emerged as counterproductive to 9/11 incident that projected antagonistic national identities and fake chauvinism in the national character.

The novel explores how war and terror have irrevocably changed the way we live, perceive the world and cast our opinions, no matter what continent we call home. It has even more successfully understood those who strive wrongfully in the name of religion and those who try to do the right thing

because it is their basic human duty. It portrays the twisting of religion and how people are goaded into believing that they are acting on the teachings of Islam. Religion plays an integral role in the decision-making process of almost every character in the novel. People in both extremes are deviating from the mainstream line of action; neither the fundamentalists' stance of taking Quran as only a religious book and misreading of it with their narrow lens is right nor the people keeping science and religion apart are true. If, on the one hand, religious

fanatics have confined the application of Quran to religious practices only by misconceiving science as opposite to religion or vice-versa, the seculars, too, have done injustice, on the other, by confining the role of religion to private life in favor of their too much dependence on science. Keeping both these extremities in mind, some corners now render science and religion as opposite to one another. The regrettable fact is that both these constituencies have taken up an extreme line to refute each other and this is not a likable stance for Pakistan.

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