

Pakistani Science Fiction: Glocalizing the Genre

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Abstract

The dissertation provides the first introductory survey of Pakistani science fiction (sf) in diverse media in Urdu and English from the 1980s to the present. Using the insights of Western and Indian sf scholars along with Pakistani literary scholarship, this study employs a comparative approach to provide an eclectic and interdisciplinary perspective mainly through a glocal lens in combination with historical, postcolonial, feminist, and eco-critical frameworks. This dissertation studies speculative works published, produced, and labelled as science fiction, with chapters on Tarzan as a model of glocalized proto sf in Urdu; religion as a subject and as an episteme; varied treatment of the alien figure; post 9/11 identity crisis; and futuristic and other visions. It uses a thematic organization for the chapters to structure the close reading of multiple works produced in diverse media, in two different languages, and from time periods spanning from 1980s to the present.

The discussion analyzes films such as *Shaani* (dir. Saeed Rizvi 1989) and *Sar Kata Insan* (The Beheaded Man: dir. Rizvi 1994); sf stories in *Tilism i Hosh Afza* (The Enlightenment of the Senses 2013) by Ashfaq Ahmed; the cartoon series *Burka Avenger* presenting a female superhero (Haroon Rashid 2013-2016); the comic series *Buraaq* presenting a Muslim superhero (Adil Imtiaz and Kamil Imtiaz 2011- present); the animated bilingual cyberpunk films *Shehre Tabassum* (A City of Smiles 2020) and *Swipe* (2020) by Arafat Mazhar; and literary contributions to the field made by Usman T. Malik, Sidra Sheikh, Bina Shah, and Muhammad Omar Iftikhar, with works like *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan* (2021), *The Light Blue Jumper* (2017), *Before She Sleeps* (2018), and *Divided Species* (2020). These works incorporate Western and *desi* elements in their world- building to imagine Pakistan's past, present, and future.

Utilizing the glocalization theory by Roland Robertson, the dissertation argues that Pakistani sf reshapes the science fiction genre by not only borrowing from Western and Indian sf traditions but also incorporating the local and *desi* elements. Pakistani sf reflects attempts to reconfigure Pakistani identity in both national and international forums by including the gendered and religious others as well as by challenging the Western negative perception and representation of Muslims and Islam. It not only addresses the local issues of corruption, extremism, and class and gender discrimination but also highlights the problems generated by global capitalism and foreign interference. In addition, Pakistani sf works try to dissociate Pakistan's and generally Islam's association with fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism in the glocal context of rising Islamophobia. By identifying the main motifs, and patterns in Pakistani sf, the dissertation introduces a new field in the global sf studies and opens a dialogic space for the future scholars to contribute to the emerging field. The study holds the potential to attract readers, scholars, and students interested in Pakistani Science Fiction, Pakistani Speculative Fiction, Western Science Fiction, Indian Science Fiction, South Asian Futurisms, and Global sf Studies.

Keywords: Pakistani Speculative Fiction, Pakistani Science Fiction, Western Science Fiction, Indian Science Fiction, South Asian literature, Global SF Studies.

Dedication

To Allah the Most Merciful the Most Beneficent

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Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
Contents.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Rationale.....	1
Context.....	5
Genre: The Problem of Terminology.....	8
Sf Criticism.....	22
Pakistani sf and Globalization.....	24
The Gap in the sf Studies.....	25
Methodology.....	28
Chapter-breakdown.....	31
Chapter 1: Tarzan and its Glocalization through Translation into Urdu in Pakistan.....	36
Dehlvi's <i>Tarzan</i>	40
Glocal Context.....	41
The Problem of Translation.....	43
Dehlvi's Translation.....	46
Dehlvi and the Dark Continent.....	49
Dehlvi and <i>Tarzan's</i> sequels.....	55
Dehlvi and the Gendered Others.....	59
Last Word on Dehlvi's Translation.....	62

Local Tarzan: An Ecocritical Perspective.....	63
Tarzan’s Revisited Plot.....	70
Tarzan as an Indigenous/ Native Hero.....	71
Tarzan and Revisited Racialism.....	73
Tarzan and Nationalism/Territorialization.....	76
Glocalized Gender-roles	79
Last Word on the Local Stories.....	79
Chapter 2: Locating Religion and its Diverse Treatment in Science Fiction.....	81
Science vs Religion.....	83
Western sf and Religion.....	84
Indian sf and Religion.....	92
Religion in Pakistani Science Fiction.....	97
Islam and Science Nexus.....	97
Historical Context.....	98
Swirling Epistemes (Islam and Science) in Pakistani sf Films.....	105
Technology and Religion.....	121
Religious Extremism and Pakistani sf.....	122
Sufism and Pakistani sf.....	131
Conclusion.....	142
Chapter 3: The Alien’s Journey from Western and Indian sf to Pakistani sf.....	143
Alien in Western Science Fiction.....	144
Historical Context.....	144
Alien in Indian Science Fiction.....	153

Alien in Pakistani Science Fiction.....	159
The Alien in Space: Sidra f. Sheikh's <i>The Light Blue Jumper</i> (2017).....	160
Aliens as Messiah Figures.....	172
Aliens in Karachi: Muhammad Omar Iftikhar's <i>Divided Species</i> (2020).....	172
Alien in <i>Shaani</i> (1989) by Saeed Rizvi.....	185
Conclusion.....	192
Chapter 4: Pakistani sf in the Glocal Context of Islamophobia and War on Terror.....	193
Major Trends of American sf in the Post-9/11 Context.....	195
Misrepresentation of Muslims and Islamophobia in the Post-9/11 Context.....	199
Pakistani English Fiction and 9/11.....	205
Post 9/11 Identity Crisis and Pakistani sf.....	208
<i>Burraq</i> (Adil Imtiaz and Kamil Imtiaz 2011- present).....	209
<i>Burka Avenger</i> (Haroon Rashid 2013-2016).....	227
Conclusion.....	243
Chapter 5: Dystopia: Futuristic and Other Visions in Pakistani Science Fiction.....	244
Defining Dystopia.....	244
Pakistani Dystopic Visions.....	248
<i>Before She Sleeps</i> (2018) by Bina Shah: A Tale of Resistance.....	249
<i>Shehr e Tabassum</i> (A City of Smiles) (2020) by Arafat Mazhar.....	265
Other Visions: Usman T. Malik's <i>Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan</i> (2021).....	281
Last words.....	306
Conclusion: A New Beginning.....	308
Works Cited.....	318

Introduction

Rationale: Joan Gordon, in her introduction to the special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* on Indian science fiction (2016), appreciates Indian science fiction (sf) scholars for doing well in the field since the 1990s and invites scholars from other parts of the sub-continent like Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh to make “diasporic, and other subcontinental sf and sf scholarship available to Anglo-European audiences” (434). Her call is pertinent in the global context given that science fiction (sf) is acknowledged as global literature with the global popularity of sf literature especially sf films, which is evident in the global hegemony of Hollywood and Bollywood cinemas. While a considerable amount of sf scholarship has been produced on Indian sf since then, this dissertation aims to answer Gordon’s scholarly invitation by studying Pakistani sf in diverse media from a literary perspective with the hope that this pioneering work would attract many other Pakistani scholars interested in the field. This research becomes even more important in the context of the dearth of Pakistani sf and literary scholarship in global sf studies.

Pakistani sf follows the tradition of Urdu speculative fiction written in the sub-continent, and sf elements can be traced in tales as old as *Tilism-e-Hoshrubah* (The Enchantment of the Senses), almost traced back to 13th century with its roots in an older tradition of *Dastan e Amir Hamza* of Arabic/Persian origins in the seventh century (Ahmad *Hosh Afzah* 6). It was translated originally by Muhammad Hussain Jah into Urdu from Arabic and Persian languages (Farooqi 70). Pakistani science fiction in English, as a genre category, started appearing in the twenty-first century with the works of Usman T. Malik whose stories were published in several sf magazines and anthologies and won prominent sf awards. Still, the roots of Pakistani sf can be traced back to centuries-old *dastan* tradition and speculative fiction (horror fiction, fantasy, and mythological

fiction)¹, “which brings together tropes and motifs from imaginative worlds of local folklores as well as Islamic mythical worlds of South Asian civilization” (Kanwal & Mansoor 244). These speculative works blend their magical mysterious worlds with novel technologies and other sf elements, but they cannot be categorized as science fiction due to a lack of scientific rigour. Similarly, other genre categories also utilize scientific elements, as genres have “fuzzy borders” frequently interacting with other genres (Weiss 2). For example, detective fiction writers like Ibne Safi (1928-1980) and Akram Allahbadi (1923-1990) also wrote novels like *Gum Shuda Shehzadi* (The Lost Princess) (1956), *Challees-Aik-Bavan* (Forty One Fifty Two) (1958), *Sputnik* (n.d.) and *Mareekh ka Dictator* (Dictator of Mars) (n.d.) respectively with identifiable sf tropes of interplanetary travel, alternate worlds, novel technology, ambitious scientists, and aliens. However, it is due to their “content” and “function” that they are not sold and consumed as sf works, as Weiss writes that “some genres are defined by content: detective fiction, romance fiction, and so on” (2).

In the 1970s, writers like Mazhar Ansar Dehlvi translated a few novels of the *Tarzan* series by Edgar Rice Burroughs into Urdu. The figure of *Tarzan*, as an adventure hero, started his independent journey in local stories, as a protector of wildlife and the environment in many children’s novels written by different authors. These stories were marketed and sold following the tradition of the penny or dime novels in the West, enjoying great popularity among Pakistani children and young adults. The first chapter of the dissertation discusses these translations and

¹ The Oxford Dictionary defines speculative fiction as “literature that uses tropes or themes of science fiction, but which is not considered to be “science fiction” for one reason or another, often to avoid a perceived stigma associated with the term “science fiction,” or because a work is perceived to lack scientific rigor” (n.p.).

local Tarzan stories as proto-science fiction² because of their scientific elements as well as their break away from traditional adventure tales with supernatural and magical elements.

Moreover, children's magazines like *Bachon Ka Baagh* (Children's Garden), *Bachon ki Dunya* (Children's World), and *Taalim-o-Tarbiyat* (Education and Training) also offered speculative fiction stories and science non-fiction to popularize science among the younger population. Children's writers like Abdul Hameed (1928-1997), besides writing fantasies, experimented with novel series like *Ainak Wala Djinn* (Gennie with Glasses), serialized on Pakistan National Television (1993-1996, 2005-2008). In it he combined tradition, myth, and fantasy with science, setting the narrative in a modern urban space diverging from the "once upon a time" pattern. Though these works provided inspiration for contemporary Pakistani sf writers, along with Western and Indian sf writers, they still were not produced or marketed as science fiction despite having sf elements in them.

For example, Malik in a talk show on Indusdot News (7th March 2020) mentions his reading of speculative fiction ranging from *Tilism e Hoshrubah*, *Dastan e Amir Hamza* (Hussain 2:15), to the stories in children's magazines like *Bachon ki Dunya* (Children's World), *Bachon ka Bagh* (Children's Garden), *Phool* (Flower), *Jugnoo* (Firefly), and *Talim o Tarbyat* (Education and Training), Islamic mysticism, and Tarzan stories in his childhood without any knowledge about the source text written by Edgar Rice Burroughs (Hussain 23:10). These children's magazines published a combination of fantasy, horror, detective, historical, and adventure fiction mixing supernatural with scientific elements in addition to reserving a section for science non-fiction introducing great inventions and scientists to children and young adults.

² The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction defines proto- sf as "literature written before the emergence of science fiction as a distinct genre (usually thought of as being sometime in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century) that contains elements that would later be associated with science fiction, such as futuristic settings, voyages to other planets, fictional inventions, etc." (n.p.).

Despite acknowledging the roots of Pakistani sf in the rich history of speculative fiction, so popular in the subcontinent, this dissertation aims to study only the works published, produced, and labelled as science fiction. Though the dissertation discusses *Tarzan* translations and local Tarzan stories as proto-sf, its major focus remains on Pakistani sf produced in Urdu and English in diverse media (literature, animation, comics, and films) after the 1980s with the advent of globalization. Moreover, the dissertation does not include the discussion of pre-partition texts, as Indian sf scholars have already extensively discussed the sf texts produced in the united subcontinent. The dissertation confines itself to the sf works produced in Pakistan from the 1980s to the present time.

The dissertation does not include other forms of speculative fiction like *Tilism e Hoshrubah*, *Dastan e Amir Hamza*, *Ainak Wala Djinn*, Osama Siddique's *Snuffing out the Moon* (historical fantasy) (2017), Maha Khan Phillips's *The Curse of Mohenjodaro* (historical fantasy) (2016), Shazaf Fatima Haider's *A Firefly in the Dark* (fantasy fiction) (2018), Sami Shah's *Boy of Fire and Earth* (horror, fantasy) and horror or fantasy tales using magic, combining automata or mechanical devices with supernatural beings like *paris* (fairies), *churrails* (witches), and devs or djinn (giants and genies). The dissertation maintains the distinction between science fiction and fantasy as stated by Allan Weiss: "Whereas in science fiction the fantastic elements are attributed to natural phenomena, and involve scientific and technological developments, in fantasy the fantastic elements are attributed to supernatural causes, and occasionally to no defined cause at all" (18). However, I argue that Pakistani sf extends and stretches these genre boundaries outlined by Weiss, as it incorporates local epistemologies such as religion and sufi beliefs, and thus blends material and rational with spiritual, moral, psychological, and emotional elements in

its world building. This element of hybridity is important in the reading and understanding of Pakistani science fiction.

As Taryne Jade Taylor notes, while discussing Ryan O' D'Souza's insights on "Desi Futurism" which means "the application of a desi lens to interpret the past, present, and future" (qtd. 4) that this along with South Asian Futurisms has special relevance in the works produced by South Asian diaspora. The purpose is to highlight the use of local and indigenous epistemes in the works produced by writers of color across the globe. Therefore, the dissertation uses a glocal lens based on the theory of glocalization which means "the global outlook adopted to the local conditions" (Robertson 28), to highlight the hybridity of Pakistani sf which incorporates *desi* elements besides science and technology to create a relatable world for the glocal consumers.

Moreover, the dissertation confines itself to the works produced in Urdu and English first because of the proficiency of the researcher in these languages, second because both Urdu (national language) and English (official language) are spoken and read across ethnically and linguistically diverse Pakistan, and also because of the researcher's inability to read and thus access works in other languages like Punjabi, Pashto, Saraiki, Sindhi, and Balochi. The references from Urdu sf and Urdu literary articles are translated by the researcher into English unless mentioned otherwise.

Context: John Rieder asserts that "attribution of the identity of sf to a text constitutes an active intervention in its distribution and reception" ("On Defining" 200). The generic attribution affects the production, marketing, and reading of the text by placing it in a certain category on the shelf for a specific class of readers. In Pakistan, the works in diverse media labeled as sf started getting produced in the late 1980s. A few low-budget sf movies were produced like *Shaani* (Saeed Rizvi 1989) and *Sar Kata Insaan* (Beheaded Man) (Saeed Rizvi 1994). The prolific

Pakistani writer Ashfaq Ahmad (1925-2005) paid tribute to *Tilism e Hoshrubah* by publishing his science fiction stories titled *Tilism i Hosh Afza* (The Enlightenment of the Senses 2013) by replacing the magical and supernatural elements with scientific explanation of the events.

Most Pakistani sf (Urdu and English) emerged after 9/11 including the cartoon series *Burka Avenger* (Haroon Rashid 2013-2016) (translated into many languages); the comic series *Buraaq* (Adil Imtiaz and Kamil Imtiaz 2011- present) presenting a Muslim superhero; animated bilingual cyberpunk films *Shehre Tabassum* (A City of Smiles 2020) and *Swipe* (2020) by Arafat Mazhar; *Ismail Ka Urdu Sheher (Ismail's Urdu City): An Illustrated Sci-Fi Novel and Music Album* (2015) by Zohaib Kazi; *Project Ghazi* (Nadir Shah 2019); and literary contributions to the field made by Usman T. Malik (a winner of the Bram Stoker award in 2014, Crawford award 2022 and a nominee for World Fantasy, Nebula, Locus, and Eugis Foster awards) (News Desk n.p.), Sidra Sheikh, Bina Shah, and Muhammad Omar Iftikhar with works like *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan* (2021), *The Light Blue Jumper* (2017), *Before She Sleeps* (2018), and *Divided Species* (2020) respectively.

Malik with Tehseen Bewaja also has the credit for launching “The Salam Award for Imaginative Fiction” (2017), “named in honor of Pakistan’s only Nobel Prize winner in science to-date” Dr. Abdul Salam (Dubois n.p.). The purpose of this award is “to promote science fiction and related genres of writing in Pakistan” which include “everything from regular science fiction and steampunk to magic realism and weird fiction” (n.p.)³ . Tehseen Bewaja, a publisher based in America, has also initiated *Tasavvur* (2022),⁴ a South Asian speculative fiction magazine to provide young writers “a warm and cozy space for imaginative short stories from South Asia” (see footnote 3 n.p.).

³ Award website <http://thesalamaward.com/#>

⁴ Magazine website: <https://tasavvurnama.com/about/>

Pakistani sf is the result of globalization and will be viewed here as a response to the need for local sf literature to teach children not only the importance of science for the national progress but also to keep them rooted in their cultural traditions, and to avoid assimilation as a result of the growing wave of Westernization and Indianization. Another purpose is to participate in the global sf history by drawing attention to the abundance of sf elements in Pakistani Urdu and English narratives in diverse media. Moreover, Pakistani sf like other postcolonial sf reflects identity politics by trying to reconstruct Pakistani identity at both national and international forums. This especially is true of Pakistani English sf like the *Burraq* comic series (2011-present), and *Burka Avenger* cartoon series (2013-2016) which try to redefine Pakistani identity in the global context of Islamophobia. This makes sense if we remember that Pakistani English sf, being a post 9/11 phenomenon, has a defensive side and works to dissociate especially Pakistan and generally Islam's association with fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism. It revisits these tropes to change the perspective by drawing attention to the victimization of Pakistan in particular and Muslims in general by the terrorists and extremists as well as by the global forces that contribute to the construction and dissemination of such images and the rise of Islamophobia by ignoring Pakistan's role as an American ally in the War on Terror. Pakistani sf works try to revise the negative representation of Muslim characters in the Western and Indian cultures by presenting Muslim characters engaged in a fight against extremist elements to humanize Pakistanis as peace loving people.

As a "literature of thought experiment" (Roberts 9) with the potential to bring about change, Pakistani sf presents alternate worlds where the global subaltern speaks from a marginalized space to rectify its self-image and to claim its true identity as an agent of peace and a victim of asymmetrical power relationships manifested in "the global technological regime" (Csicsery-

Ronay “Empire” 231). For example, Malik looks at sf as “a great way of crystallizing the anxieties of the time” when Pakistan, as a nation, “has been at a perpetual war for a long time”, and the people are “desensitized to violence” moving through a constant discourse around “violence, bombs, and terrorism” (Hussain 31:40). He views sf as a tool to rethink the issues anew to “optimistically change the world for the better” (32:15). For Sheikh also, sf genre provides a useful tool to create an alternate world to laugh at the absurdities of the world we live in (Sheikh 0:35). Similarly, Iftikhar has chosen sf because it allows us to ask “what if questions” and also because “this genre is a neglected one in Pakistani literature” (Iftikhar n.p.).

Simultaneously, Pakistani sf addresses the local issues of corruption, extremism, lack of law and order, class, and gender discrimination using the tropes of aliens, space-travels, futuristic visions, and religious and gender dystopias. For example, Iftikhar, while writing his novel *Divided Species* (2020), makes a conscious effort to make the text culturally relevant by choosing Karachi as a site for the alien contact: “Of course, western material was just one part of the content absorption process. I still had to consciously focus on keeping my novel localised and as ‘desi’ as possible” (Iftikhar n.p.). Similarly, Rizvi, Mazhar, and Malik also use local places as sites of action with familiar characters in their science fiction. They subvert the genre to meet the local needs by bringing the local culture into the center of their narratives to examine the problems facing Pakistanis in the present or future times. In both ways, their imagined worlds invite us to reflect on our course of action to avoid the undesired results produced by overlooking the problems like sectarianism, extremism, and corruption.

Genre: The Problem of Terminology: Defining science fiction has been problematic for different scholars in the field. For historians of science fiction like Mark Bould, Adam Roberts, and David Seed, it is a genre of change and “thought experiment” (Roberts 9) with the potential

to challenge the established notions of race, gender, and nation. The purpose of science in sf is “the entry into a particular material and often rational discourse” (Roberts 9). Bould, taking genres as “ongoing processes of negotiation rather than fixed entities,” observes that sf as a genre emerged much later (early twentieth century), while the texts containing sf elements circulated in the market with different labels (1). He posits that there are “multiple and continuing ways of producing and marketing, distributing, consuming and understanding texts as SF” (1). Therefore, sf as a term has no fixed meaning, as it moves through negotiation between different discursive agents over time and space. Sf is defined in different cultures a little differently, even if we compare two sf traditions: Western and Indian (as discussed later in the section).

Hugo Gernsback’s scientifiction differs from what Darko Suvin thinks of science fiction or what John Rieder conceives it to be. We can find contradictions even in the definition by one actant. For example, Gernsback brings together writers as different as Edgar Allan Poe, “a romantic or gothic writer” (Bould 7), Jules Verne, with a commitment to perseverance in “scientific investigation” (10), and H. G. Wells, with his focus on “social than technological transformations” (13). Therefore, Bould rightly observes that “such differences in their work defy the imposition of a singular identity” (13). Still, Gernsback pulled them together with one common element: their ability to conceive a different kind of story, “a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision” (qtd. in Bould 6).

Similarly, Brian Aldiss and Darko Suvin, who try to extend sf’s borders “far beyond the US magazine and paperback tradition” (Bould 4), display a very different understanding of sf. While the former focuses on sf’s literary roots in Gothic literature, the latter looks for a “rigorous taxonomy which would position texts conducive to particular social and political aims at the core of SF” (4). Moreover, Suvin not only considers the magazine tradition as “an aberrant, debased

form” of science fiction, but also his definition of sf as a literature of “cognitive estrangement” brings him closer “with Wells’ speculative approach than with Verne or Poe” (17). Though he excludes fantasy, Suvin includes scientific speculations of a Wellsian kind by including not only natural but also “the cultural or historical sciences” (ibid). In his process of enrollment of the texts into genre, technological gadgets take the back seat, and hence utopias with socio-political transformations find place in science fiction. This indicates that unlike Gernsback and John W. Campbell, for Suvin sf is “a means of social critique and political transformation rather than a source of prophetic visions and patent applications” (18).

The idea of family resemblance is also very important as Bould asserts that genres “come into being ‘after the fact’, as writers, producers, fans, critics and other discursive and material actants select and emphasize certain elements of various texts and connect them to similar features in other texts” (2). Though within a genre, it is difficult to find the consensus on the same definition, and it is easy to find contradictions within the application of the same definition as is evident in the exclusion and then the inclusion of space opera, utopia, and dystopia from science fiction by various discursive actants. The discursive process of negotiating the genre indicates that “the processes of enrolment and exclusion are active and ongoing, contradictory, and never-ending” (19). Nonetheless, the variations and contradictions in the definitions only suggest the richness of the genre, and its adaptability to diverse contexts.

Moreover, John Rieder also observes that genres are historical processes and that “an historical approach seems to undermine any fixed definition” (191). Like Bould, he also considers genre a construct by the interaction of the discursive agents (ibid). He asserts that genre “as a way of using texts” enables sf to be more suitable for different media and cultural practices (195). He finds Paul Kincaid’s argument based on Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of

“family resemblance useful” (192) to assert that sf has neither “a unique, common thread” nor “a unique, common origin” (qtd. in 192). For example, different sf historians disagree on the origin of the sf genre by taking Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895), or Hugo Gernsback’s *Amazing Stories* (1926) as the starting points (195). While the formal approach limits itself to the question of “whether the story is or is not a legitimate member of the genre” (193), the historical approach to the genre would analyze “how and why the field is being stretched to include these texts” (194). Rieder prefers the historical approach and makes five propositions:

- 1) sf is historical and mutable;
- 2) sf has no essence, no single unifying characteristic, and no point of origin;
- 3) sf is not a set of texts, but rather a way of using texts and of drawing relationships among them;
- 4) sf’s identity is a differentially articulated position in an historical and mutable field of genres;
- 5) attribution of the identity of sf to a text constitutes an active intervention in its distribution and reception (192-3).

This openness of sf as a genre to change, as reiterated by Rieder, enables its rapid transference/translation across cultures and languages. Opening its origins to multivalent points also enables various sf historians across the globe to write local histories of the genre. By considering it as “a way of using texts”, Rieder opens a dialogic space for various actants in the genre across the globe to register indigenous texts so far unknown and inaccessible to global readers. These propositions warn against any essentialist definition, as in varying cultural and

historical contexts, sf is redefined by the local actants as can be seen in the review of the Indian sf scholarship in the later discussion.

Rieder mentions Roger Luckhurst's observation about sf's "death wish" with a desire to "stop being sf and become literature" (198). Sometimes, the genre becomes a confining element; thus many writers, for example, Margret Atwood in the West, Anil Menon and Vandana Singh in India, and Usman Malik in Pakistan seem to avoid being labeled as science fiction writers. Instead, by the nature of their work as well as to attract a larger readership across generic borders, they prefer the broad term of speculative fiction for their work. Atwood, drawing on the insights of Robert Heinlein and Judith Merril, distinguishes between speculative and science fiction by considering the latter dealing with things that we "can't yet do or begin to do, talking beings we could never meet, and places we can't go" (qtd. in Weiss 5). Weiss notes that the term over time has undergone transformation in definition to include other kinds of speculations, and this indicates different understanding of the terms and their use by different authors. Interestingly, she considers Verne's type of story more speculative than those written by Wells. This observation is contrary to what Verne considered while comparing his work with that of Wells, and despite such differences, both were enrolled by Gernsback into science fiction. Nonetheless, Atwood considers her fiction more in line with that of Verne with "things that really could happen" (Weiss 6). Despite her claim, she is considered a sf writer by many and has received the Arthur C. Clarke award for science fiction.

The same is true of Pakistani writer Usman T. Malik, a winner and nominee of several sf awards, and the distinguished Indian sf writer Vandana Singh. Malik considers himself to be a genre writer working under the broad field of speculative fiction of which sf is a subset (Hussain 2:15). This perspective is shared by Pakistani scholars such as Nudrat Kamal, Aroosa Kanwal,

and Shazia Sadaf, as they consider speculative fiction inclusive of science fiction, horror, and fantasy (Sadaf & Kanwal 2). Malik mentions John Clute's preference for the term *Fantastica* which covers everything from science fiction, slipstream, horror to fantasy, but considers speculative fiction more suitable for the kinds of works he produces ranging from horror fiction, fantasy to science fiction (2:40). Thus, Allan Weiss fairly asserts that there are no "universally agreed-upon definitions of science fiction and speculative fiction", and that different "authors, readers, and scholars use these terms and others in very different ways" (9). This reflects the contradictions in the enrollment of various works into the genre by various discursive agents including authors, readers, and the reviewing committees for the awards.

Besides speculative fiction, another term is science fiction and fantasy (SFF) which is used to include both things that are either plausible or implausible to happen. Weiss observes that this confusion was caused during the pulp magazine period (1930s and 1940s), which published both science fiction and fantasy despite using the label of science fiction (8). Moreover, the popularity of fantasy along with science fiction also encourages the use of the general term like speculative fiction while "seeing science fiction as a subset or genre within that category" (8). Weiss, in his history of Canadian fantastic literature, prefers to use the broad term "fantastic fiction" to include "two broad genres... speculative fiction and fantasy..." (13). This personal preference of various actants for different terms validates Rieder's observation of genre as a way of using texts suitable for an actant in a particular cultural context. Speculative fiction is preferred by Atwood for a particular kind of fantastic fiction. Malik, and Singh for the broad range of their work and to avoid the "literary ghetto" (5), while simultaneously, it gives them freedom to produce works that can be considered science fiction.

Weiss distinguishes speculative fiction from fantasy with the former concerned with “what if” questions speculating on “political, social, scientific, technological, and philosophical issues”, and the latter with the “creation of a secondary world” where ideas “are not the main focus” (12). On the contrary, Malik and Singh do not consider fantasy and speculative fiction as mutually exclusive, as they bring in mythological and supernatural elements in their fiction. For example, Singh considers speculative fiction to include both science fiction and fantasy and loves this genre for making “literary thought experiments about our interaction with the physical world, including other worlds and new technologies” (Singh n.p.). Similarly, fantastic fiction, as an umbrella term to include both speculative fiction and fantasy (Weiss 13), suits Weiss’s project of writing a history of Canadian literature that portrays “things that violate our understanding of reality” (9) as distinguished from the realist fiction.

It is the “uses of protocols and rhetorical strategies that distinguish the genre from other forms of writing and reading” (Rieder “On Defining” 197). There are various conventions and tropes to distinguish one genre from the other (Weiss 3). For example, detective fiction has a detective in the story and a mystery plot; fantasy has a magical world with wizards, fairies, and other supernatural beings with a romantic plot; adventure fiction has a hero exploring a far-off land with hidden treasures or a lost race motif; horror fiction has monsters, witches, and spirits to frighten the readers by invoking the fear of the unknown; and science fiction has aliens, spaceships, time and space travel, and futuristic visions which are presented using scientific/rational “rather than emotional or instinctual” discourse (Roberts 9). At the same time, some texts may present “generic hybridity” which Rieder does not consider “a special case” but a common phenomenon, and thus it is possible to position a text “within a field of generic possibilities” (“On Defining” 197). Hence, Ryan Vu provides “an overview of ancient, classical,

and early modern texts that have been or could be counted as twentieth-century SF's antecedents without endorsing any one definitional paradigm" (14) He examines the relationship of sf with fantastical imaginary voyages, adventures, folk-tales, utopias, lunar travels, romances, and underground journeys. He discusses works like Plutarch's *On the Face in the Moon*, Cicero's "Dream of Scipio," *The Ramayana*, *One Thousand One Nights*, Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* (The Dream) (1634), Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1638), Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Francis Bacon's unfinished *New Atlantis* (1627), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Bernard Le Bouvier de Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686), and Louis Sébastien Mercier's *The Year 2440* (1771). He views sf as "a tendency inherent to narrative itself rather than a distinct genre or even literary mode" (13).

Similarly, Eric Carl Link and Gerry Canavan also assert that "Science fiction, in one form or another, is something artists have seemingly always participated in, but which was named less than a century ago" (1). They aim to tell a transmedia and transnational story of diverse manifestations of sf, "as it has intersected with the larger cultural movements and sociopolitical fluctuations of its age" (3). Citing Suvin, they suggest that works such as "the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Tower of Babel, the Book of Revelation, and the Garden of Eden" might be considered "as proto-science fictions" (2). Though some scholars such as Weiss challenge this proposition as modern-centric because the authors of these myths did not try to portray secondary or fantastic worlds (11), Link and Canavan note that "science fiction" is "only the latest iteration of some larger tendency of the human imagination that in some sense truly is innate and transhistorical" (2). Like Bould and Rieder, they also take "SF as a historical process in which many sorts of people have intervened – or can be seen, retroactively, to have been intervening – in different ways, to different extents, as far back as human memory goes" (8).

The plasticity of the term science fiction by the above-mentioned historians of sf makes it open to include texts new and ancient and paves a way for an ecumenical approach to include texts produced across spatial-temporal planes as sf or proto-sf. Indian sf scholar Suparno Banerjee, in *Indian Science Fiction* (2020), uses a combination of “a community of practice and cultural history approach” and a postcolonial perspective to examine Indian sf texts produced from 1835 to 2019 (8). He draws a close comparison between definitions advanced by Suvin and Rieder with different variants of the term available in local languages Bangla, Hindi, Marathi, and Tamil. He cites works of indigenous scholars to describe local definitions of these terms and their relations with science fiction in terms of soft⁵ or Wellsian sf and hard⁶ or Vernian sf (5). Banerjee observes that several terms which correspond to English sf circulate in different Indian languages, for example, *kalpabigyan* in Bangla (stories of imaginative science), *vijnana katha* in Hindi and Marathi (science stories), besides English terms “science fantasy, ‘science fiction’ and the larger umbrella term ‘speculative fiction’” (5). The Sanskrit term *vijnana*, “specialized knowledge”, though equivalent to science, is more closely associated with traditional Vedic science (6). Citing Chattopadhyay, Banerjee asserts:

...in the Indian context ‘vijnana’ often provides a pathway to a greater transcendental knowledge of the world, and hence ‘science’ must be understood in the context of the specific society in spite of its universalising tendencies while discussing SF. According to Chattopadhyay, the mythical associationism inherent in the ‘jnana’/‘vijnana’ binary lends this cultural specificity” (6-7).

⁵ Soft sf is defined “by analogy to hard science fiction [as] science fiction that deals primarily with advancements in, or extrapolations based on, the soft sciences (e.g., anthropology, psychology, sociology, etc.)...1978 G. S. Elrick *SF Handbook* 6 Soft science fiction is basically based on sociology, anthropology, political science, theology, or mythology” (n.p.).

⁶ Hard sf is defined as “science fiction in which the technology or science portrayed in the story has been extrapolated from current scientific theories, especially in which the laws of nature (as understood at the time of writing) are not violated” (n.p.). The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction

Banerjee claims that the cultural specificity of science is responsible in the different understanding of sf genre in different cultural contexts (Western and Indian).

Therefore, even in the Indian context, different understanding of *vijnana* results in different kinds of science fiction. Banerjee observes that those who follow the model of Jayant Vishnu Narlikar “prefer a stronger allegiance to science and logic” (5), while to those who follow the example of Adrish Bardhan, “SF and fantasy are rarely distinguishable” despite the presence of “cognition effect” (6). Banerjee finds Carl Freedman’s variation of Suvin’s definition with his term “cognition effect” useful to avoid the restrictions imposed by Suvin’s formalist taxonomy and to “include texts that present an appearance of a cognitive approach though without strictly being cognitive” (4). Nonetheless, he prefers to use a combination of Suvin’s taxonomic approach and Rieder’s historical approach because “any taxonomic category must be examined within its own continually evolving socio-historical perspectives” (8). Within Indian sf scholarship, he considers Adrish Bardhan’s term *kalpabigyan* in Bangla more useful for its “open-ended attitude” than the rigid specificity of *vijnana katha* (8).

Citing Roger Luckhurst who considers “culturally specific notions” as ‘science’ and ‘modernity’ important in the evolution of sf as a genre, Banerjee highlights the importance of “the cultural specificity of science and the diverging understanding between Indian and western concepts and the effect of such understanding on conceiving of SF” (Banerjee 7). Banerjee asserts that Indian sf tries to “recontextualize modernity” by combining science with the mythic traditions “that question modernity itself by imagining alternative ways of being” (7). The problematic relationship with the notions like modernity and progress is explicable in the context of India’s colonial experience, and thus Indian sf resists “fantasies of imperialism resulting from progress and modernity” (7). This resistance takes the dialogic form, as Indian sf is discussed in

comparison with the Western sf tradition to argue that “almost every aspect of Indian SF is dependent on this relationship between Indian and western culture, making the genre a cultural hybrid par excellence” (7).

Similarly, Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay explores the connotations of Bangla term *Kalpavigyan* for sf to include stories using fantasy, science, myth, religion, horror as well as futuristic visions. He uses this flexible term to study Indian sf in Bangla, Marathi, and English produced after the 1960s (“On the Mythologerm” 435). He highlights the subversion of sf genre in the Indian context with an emphasis on *mythologerm*: “the mythic as a source of alternative or unknown or advanced science”, thus producing a different kind of science fiction (437). Though Chattopadhyay acknowledges the importance of science as a distinctive feature of sf, he argues that the relation with science is constructed differently in every culture (437). This is also true in Pakistani context where science and religion are not considered two binary opposites; rather they both contribute to the world building in Pakistani sf thus making it different from Western sf. This is discussed in detail in chapter on religion in science fiction.

Besides *mythologerm*, Chattopadhyay proposes another term Cofutures keeping in view the rise of various ethnic and regional futurisms such as Afrofuturism, Indigenous futurism, Asian futurism, and Arab futurism to decolonize Western centric understanding of the sf genre. These all futurisms highlight the importance of “multiple futures or multiplicity of futures” (“Manifestos” 20). These futurisms deconstruct the genre boundaries and go beyond “the prison of global sf” (ibid). He presents Cofutures as an anticolonial as well an anti-global move: “deeper and more diverse” by inculcating values of “complexity, coevalness and compossibility” (21). Cofutures does not only propose diversity and plurality of futures in fiction but also in praxes “to decolonize the infrastructures of the future” with an aim to realize “a better world for

all” (ibid). This is a more radical stance and a futuristic theoretical framework to analyze the texts “that do not seek cognitive estrangement: they seek cognitive reconstructions” (20), which I hope to use in my future works on Pakistani futurisms.

Sami Ahmad Khan, in his book on Indian science fiction in English (ISFE), gets inspiration from the works of Banerjee, Chattopadhyay, and Vandana Singh to present “a fan’s alternative to a Eurocentric perspective of SF, a beginner’s guide which avoids an essentialist understanding of the genre” (xiii), though he also intends to avoid “the fixities of ‘explicitly postcolonial’ tendencies” (ibid). He presents a ‘trans MIT’ thesis to examine ISFE under the three terms of Mythology, Ideology/materiality, and Technology to metaphorize “the fusion of mythology, ideology, and technology within India’s SF” (xv). While Ideology examines the modes of Otherization based on class, caste, gender, religion, and nationality, Mythology explores “the literary manifestations of divine beings in ISFE as differing epistemological categories” (xiv), and Technology examines the use of technological novums and their social implications in ISFE (xv).

Khan, like Bould, Rieder, Roberts, and Weiss, not only considers sf to be “a literature of ideas and a literature of change” but also a genre “about *ideas that change* [emphasis in original]” (3). Because of its “adaptability”, sf thrives in different “languages, cultures, and mediums” (ibid). In fact, Khan asserts that sf as a genre is evolving and “there can be as many kinds of SF as there can be ways of approaching science, society and culture” (ibid). Using chaos theory “to comprehend the inherent patterns within the ostensible randomness of complex systems”, he avoids any essentialist definition (4). Moreover, like Banerjee and Chattopadhyay, he gives importance to the cultural and historical context in the production of science fiction, and “since India has different ‘initial conditions’ at different times...it produces a different kind of

SF” (4). Keeping in view the different relationship of Indian society with science by simultaneously engaging with its “mythic past”, Khan considers it hard to define sf in the Indian context. Like Banerjee, he acknowledges the hybridity of ISFE, as it intersects with “multiple genres/modes over centuries” (15).

Overall, Indian sf scholars try to trace the similarities of Indian sf as well as its differences with the Western sf to carve out a unique Indian sf tradition. While the postcolonial approach helps them to locate the “writing back” element of Indian sf by studying its subversion of the Western genre and by valuing indigenous epistemologies along with the Western science, the comparative approach helps to highlight the instances of hybridity and mimicry as well as a departure from the norm by introducing mythological elements. Hence, Indian sf scholars, in Khan’s words, try to construct “an unstable Einstein-Rosen-Chandrasekhar bridge” to connect “traditions that are always in flux” (xiii). Khan observes that Indian sf is informed by both Western and local traditions to highlight its hybridity (xiii).

On the other hand, Urdu sf does not have any local or indigenous term for sf. Urdu, a young language and an “outcome of the Indo-Muslim or the *ganga-jamni* culture” (Farooqi Mehr 188), has evolved by interaction with other languages since its origin from lingual and racial mixing among Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and native speakers of Indian languages. The colonial period resulted in the incorporation of many English words into its lexicon with science fiction being one such term. Though Kaleemuddin Ahmed in his *Farhang-i-Adabi Istelahaat* (1986) translates science fiction as *scienci afsane*, science fiction is a preferred term for an Urdu speaker (173). In children’s magazines one also finds the use of the term *Sceinci Kahanian* (science stories). Moreover, there has been no local attempt at defining science fiction except for the use of broad term of speculative fiction, and that might be evident from the fact that sf in diverse

media is in its infancy and can be read as a response to the dominating influence of Western and Indian sf on young adults. Nonetheless, Pakistani sf like Indian sf subverts the genre to meet the glocal needs to project Pakistani problems and futuristic visions, as Kanwal and Mansoor note in case of Pakistani speculative fiction: “new generation of Pakistani writers are engaging directly with Western science fiction and fantasy by modifying the same genre tropes and applying them to South Asian cultural, religious, and historical concerns” (5). Therefore, while this dissertation confines itself to the discussion of the works produced, labelled, and marketed as science fiction (except Tarzan stories), it accepts its subversion and glocalization of the genre to meet the local needs.

Rieder rightly concludes:

The multiplicity of definitions of sf does not reflect widespread confusion about what sf is, but rather results from the variety of motives the definitions express and the many ways of intervening in the genre's production, distribution, and reception that they pursue (“On Defining” 204).

I draw on the broad parameters suggested by the above-mentioned Western and Indian sf scholars in their definitions making space for the sf genre’s hybridity in Pakistani context. I avoid broad terms like speculative fiction, fantastic, and SFF (science fiction and fantasy) because using such broad terms would make it difficult to narrow down the scope of the dissertation both in terms of works and authors as well as the period. The dissertation does not include horror fiction, spy fiction, fantasy, and its sub-genres due to the time and space limits imposed by the PhD project; rather, it limits itself to the study of one subset of speculative fiction that is science fiction. Pakistani science fiction is produced and shaped by its colonial and postcolonial interactions with Western and Indian sf traditions, and thus borrows elements from

both in its world building. Like Western sf it stresses the element of cognitive estrangement and the protentional to ask what if questions, and like Indian sf it also blends science and technology with religion, and local elements. At the same time, like Sami Khan, I acknowledge that this dissertation is “neither a comprehensive literary history nor an exhaustive survey” (xiii). It is just a preliminary attempt to define an emerging local sf tradition in diverse media in Pakistan by drawing on the insights of the above-mentioned Western and Indian sf scholars due to the dearth of sf scholarship in Pakistan.

Sf Criticism: Both Western and Indian sf scholars have studied colonial and imperial themes in the context of their historical experiences with the rise of the genre in the countries pursuing imperialism and its dissemination in the rest of the world. Therefore, both Western and Indian sf works have been studied from a postcolonial perspective. However, it should be different for Pakistani sf which emerges in the context of globalization. Though colonialism has been an important motif in the works of the Progressive Urdu writers⁷, it seldom finds its place as a dominant theme in Pakistani Urdu or English sf other than in the works translated from English into Urdu like *Tarzan* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, as will be discussed in the first chapter.

This might be due to the difference in the historical experience of the Muslims and other inhabitants of the subcontinent. 1857 proved to be the watershed in their history, as it marked the end of the Muslim empire in the subcontinent. This resulted in the scapegoating of the Muslim community since they were taken as the mutual enemy by the new rulers and other inhabitants of the region. Hindus and Muslims, who had been living together for a long time, became two nations fighting for separate homelands to protect their individual cultural identities. For Muslims it was not only the fear of assimilation but also a threat of persecution because a

⁷ The progressive Movement in Urdu literature started in the subcontinent in 1935 by Sajjad Zaheer and Raj Anand who in their manifesto emphasized the social and political role of literature (Kiran 177).

majority government could easily control the minorities. It was from this displaced position that much of Urdu literature post-1857 was produced. It projected nostalgia for the lost prestige and a wake-up call for regeneration. It reflected the desire to restore the lost identity as a result of the loss of power and humiliation of the colonial experience, as is evident in the works of Allama Iqbal, Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali, Josh Malihabadi, and Hafeez Jalandhari (Qureshi 5-15).

After the partition in 1947, most Pakistani Urdu writers such as Saadat Hassan Manto, Intezar Hussain, Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi, Abdullah Hussain, and Nasim Hijazi, like their contemporaries in the sub-continent, reflected on the partition and its collateral after-effects on human relations on both sides of the border. Simultaneously, Pakistani prose, poetry, fiction, and non-fiction engaged with such issues to create a literature with a more nationalistic impulse to validate the independence. Most of the Pakistani literature, both Urdu and English, in the first three decades after the partition was written dealing with the postcolonial issues like “socio-political, ideological and ethnic problems of Pakistani society” (Riaz 1). However, Pakistani sf is the product of a much later period, and hence, it has less to do with partition and its problems and instead more with the problems facing Pakistan entangled in global relations in a post 9/11 world.

As far as Pakistani sf criticism is concerned, one cannot find any serious scholarship in the field either in Urdu or English except recently published book by Shazia Sadaf and Aroosa Kanwal on contemporary Pakistani speculative fiction, a few newspaper or journal articles, some open-access scholarship online, and the interviews with the authors and directors published in newspapers/magazines or recorded for various tv and youtube channels. Another problem with this limited data apart from some articles and the above-mentioned book is the quality of

research which can be challenged because it relies on “Wikipedia”, personal opinions, and other popular sites. Therefore, this dissertation makes a humble effort to locate the trajectory of Pakistani sf tradition highlighting its major tropes, motifs, and themes.

Pakistani sf and Globalization

As far as Pakistani Urdu sf is concerned, the journey starts with the translation of English works in the 1970s, the era of globalization. Scholars such as Sebastian Conrad, Bruce Mazlish, Richard Drayton, David Motadel, Jurgen Osterhammel, and A. G. Hopkins date globalization differently. Conrad and Mazlish consider the 1990s communications revolution important in leading historians to revisit the past in terms of connections and networks. Hopkins and Osterhammel, on the contrary, trace the roots of globalization as a process in the advent of European imperialism, which got momentum in the nineteenth century with steam engines, telegraphs, and railroads. Global connections were mainly formed because of the colonial experience, wherefore Hopkins considers imperialism as “an agent of globalization” (27). If we agree with Hopkins and Osterhammel, then globalization is nothing more than the continuation of asymmetrical power relations of the colonial times disseminating similar stereotypes of the marginalized others based on racial hierarchies. This exclusionary discourse gets only strengthened after 9/11, the period in which most diasporic Pakistani English literature including sf is produced.

Globalization has always been a central motif in sf, as is evident in the *Voyages Extraordinaire* by Jules Verne and sf about interplanetary travel. Scholars like David M. Higgins, Susie O’ Brian, Imre Szeman, and Istvan Csicsery-Ronay consider globalization to be an important “vector of sf” (Csicsery-Ronay “Global” 488), and sf as an important art to imagine a “technoscientifically constructed and deconstructed-world” (489), or a site to investigate

“globalization’s conditions and consequences” (Higgins 370). O’ Brien and Szeman posit that literature had already been globalized at the time of imperial expansion even before Marx and Goethe started writing about world literature (603). The global community brought together by imperialism found its place in nineteenth-century sf in the same way, as global issues like global warming, consumerism, global capitalism, nuclear fears, and space programs find place in contemporary sf. Science fictional consciousness is encouraged by globalization that thrives on “technoscientific’ literate populations entangled in the networks of international corporations” (Csicsery-Ronay “Global” 481). Global culture, in short, is “sf culture” thriving on English, “the lingua franca of globalization” (483). It maintains Western hegemony in both transnational exchanges of capital as well as cultural artifacts. Thus, U.S. rules by “cultural diffusion” and not by “direct governance” (483).

The agenda of globalization is not non-political. It has its own power structures and new divisions of the world. In the global blurring of boundaries “lurks an implicit subscription to an updated version of American manifest destiny” (O’ Brien and Szeman 614). Global literature and global culture mean the dominance of Anglophone literature and culture in this context, with light shades of difference and hybridity (612). Globalization plays its role in the production, distribution, and consumption of literature and at the same time, literature treats globalization in different ways as “transculturation” or neo-imperialism in the form of global capitalism (604). The move towards globalization is made to avoid Eurocentrism, though it restores the centrality of (much-criticized concept) modernity. It is in this context that Pakistani sf is produced, and hence it should be studied as a critical response to these various connotations and challenges of globalization.

The Gap in the sf Studies: As far as Indian sf is concerned its roots can be traced back to the ancient religious texts, myths, as well as later works produced during the colonial era both in local and English languages. Indian sf history, on the other hand, is a recent phenomenon, in which sf scholars like Banerjee, Chattopadhyay, and Khan confine themselves to the history of Indian sf starting from the colonial era to the present times focusing on Hindi, Bangla, Marathi, and Anglophone Indian science fiction. They study the alternate worlds/futures, dystopias, the relationship between Indian sf and technological progress, and the use of mythology as *novum* to create cognition effects.

On the other hand, no parallel history of science fiction in Pakistan is available in either Urdu or English except recently published seminal work on Pakistani speculative fiction *Contemporary Pakistani Speculative Fiction and the Global Imaginary: Democratizing Human Futures* (2023) by Sadaf and Kanwal in which they study Pakistani speculative fiction in relation to human rights; the works that challenge “the cognitive majoritarianism (usually Western)” by incorporating *djinn* and other mythology, Quranic eschatology, folklore and other local elements (4). They take speculative fiction as a broad term which includes fantasy, horror, and science fiction blending mythological and *Desi* traditions, but in their discussion, they do not engage in the distinctions among these subgenres. They aim to “decolonize a Western understanding of speculative genre with an intention, not to criticize Eurocentric modes of thinking, but to discover imaginative trajectories in which such a project can flourish and position a *Desi* approach in conversation with Western-centric worldviews of the future” (4). They confine their study to the analysis of contemporary Pakistani speculative fiction in English and do not include stories in diverse media (3). There are also a few articles published by Nudrat Kamal (2022) on

Pakistani speculative fiction and futurism, Claire Chambers's (2022) article on Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps*, and Miranda Brar's (2014) article on "Burka Avengers".

There are two major reasons for this literary and critical gap in Pakistani context: i) popular fiction in any form is considered low-brow and thus not worthy of literary criticism, and ii) the academic research and teaching is predominantly focused on the teaching of mainstream literature which means realist literature. The courses on English, American, and Pakistani English literature exclude speculative and sf authors and focus on the canonical figures by designing courses on Renaissance drama, Victorian novel, Victorian Poetry, American drama, American novel, Modern Drama, Modern Poetry, Pakistani English novel so on and so forth. It is only recently that institutions like Kinnaird College University Lahore, Beaconhouse National University Lahore, Lahore University of Management Sciences, and Institute of Business Administration Karachi have offered some undergraduate courses on speculative fiction focusing on Western and Indian authors.

In addition, Pakistani sf in diverse media is still in its early stage of evolution due to the lack of patronage by the government as well as private and public publishing and production industries. It is only recently that Pakistani publishers like Reverie, Auraq, and Mongrel have started accepting works by genre writers (Khan 24:00). This gives hope to the emerging Pakistani writers in English by breaking the established tradition of first getting published abroad, as Faiqa Mansab observes:

The fact that Pakistani writers are not being published at home whereas Indian writers are, is often questioned and with the current mood of overt nationalism, it becomes a question of India versus Pakistan. Why did you publish in India? A

question that seems absurd to Pakistani writers because there is hardly anyone to publish fiction written in English in Pakistan (n.p.).

Most genre writers get published in India because they fail to find any publishers in Pakistan. Also, the Indian publishing industry is “connected to mainstream publishing globally and because it is well-structured” (Mita Kapur qtd. in Mansab n.p.). The publication of Malik, Iftikhar, and Sheikh’s sf works in Pakistan holds hope for the emerging Pakistani genre writers, as previously there has been a little welcoming space for comic, sf, and graphic writers.

Methodology: This dissertation uses an eclectic and interdisciplinary approach incorporating mainly a glocal lens in combination with historical, postcolonial, feminist, and eco-critical perspectives to study Pakistani Urdu and English sf. The dissertation relies on the use of the terms glocal and glocalization as defined by Roland Robertson as “the simultaneity and the interpenetration” of “the global and the local” and “the universal and the particular” (30). Robertson prefers the term glocalization to globalization, as he considers homogenization and heterogenization as interdependent processes. He takes this position because usually globalization is misunderstood as “a process which overrides locality” (26). He, on the other hand, insists that what is considered local “even contemporary assertion of ethnicity and/or nationality is made within the global terms of identity and particularity” (26).). Hybridity is the distinct feature of glocalization, as all local cultures are hybrid. Both local and global processes shape hybrid identities, which Robertson using Abu-Lughod’s term calls “halfies” “who combine in themselves as individuals a number of cultural, ethnic, and general features” (40). This aspect of “global hybridization” is especially relevant to Pakistan and other postcolonial nations.

In Pakistani context, Kanwal and Mansoor rightly observe that Pakistani speculative fiction:

[engages] in a more critical introspection of its political past, present and future, perhaps with the ostensible purpose of initiating a re-thinking of not only what means to be Pakistanis but in terms of being citizens of a bigger world where battle lines are constantly being re-drawn as the world's economic, political and ecological interests are being reframed with the exponential rise of technology coupled with a simultaneous sharp decline in natural resources. (249)

Similarly, the Pakistani sf reflects a glocal approach, as it addresses the local issues with an awareness of the global context.

Cara Cilano's judgement about the contemporary Pakistani writers in English, citing Kamila Shamsie's dissatisfaction with the postcolonial theory, holds equally true for Pakistani sf with its emergence in the last few decades: "other events and issues eclipse the relevance of Partition in their works. Critical expectations need to be altered, then, to allow for the range of topics this younger generation of writers presents" (189). Thus, the dissertation does not use postcolonial theory as a major critical framework and instead unravels the glocal aspects of Pakistani sf. The approach of Pakistani sf works in diverse media remains glocal, as they address the issues and problems facing the local society as well as the problems generated by the global forces. Just as Indian sf addresses the problems of caste and class system, the rising right-wing, gender discrimination as well as the changes the society is undergoing in response to the technological progress, Pakistani sf also responds to the local issues of rising extremism, terrorism, gender discrimination, and corruption. At the same time, as Indian sf is competing with Western sf with its locally produced works representing their own heroes, suggesting their own solutions to the national problems, Pakistani sf also tries to reconstruct Pakistani identity

blemished by the global metanarrative on terrorism and radicalism which has disseminated Islamophobia across the globe.

This dissertation uses a comparative approach to outline the trajectory of Pakistani sf tradition as distinguished from Western and Indian sf traditions. This comparison is important because of three reasons: i) both Western and Indian cultural products (literature, films, brands) have huge markets in Pakistan, ii) due to a dearth of critical work on Pakistani sf, following Western and Indian sf histories as models helps to construct a meaningful discussion of the major patterns and motifs of Pakistani sf to create a dialogic space for it in the global sf studies, and iii) the dissertation aims to attract readers both in Pakistan who need the critical context provided by a discussion of Western and Indian traditions (all in one place), and the readers in the West who need a familiar context to understand the (so far) unfamiliar Pakistani sf. Last but not the least, the discussion of Western and Indian sf traditions also makes sense keeping in view that Pakistani sf writers and directors took inspiration from Western sf authors like Ursula K Le Guin, Margret Atwood, William Gibson, and Douglas Adams in addition to the local or regional authors such as Anil Menon and Vandana Singh.

The dissertation studies Pakistani science fiction by tracing its origins in the translation of *Tarzan* novels into Urdu in the 1970s and *Tarzan*'s local adaptations, produced and marketed in the 1980s, considering them as proto-science fiction. *Tarzan*'s world, unlike the contemporary *dastan* and fantasy fiction, uses a documentary journalistic style to present the African jungle, its natives, and animals drawing on the pseudoscientific race theories. This inter-cultural translation of the text paves way for the local *Tarzan* stories with a concern for the environment and the homeland in the local culture inspiring future science fiction writers like Malik and Sheikh.

Otherwise, this dissertation confines its discussion to the works in diverse media produced, marketed, and categorized as science fiction by discursive agents (authors, reviewers, directors, and publishers) by maintaining the distinction between science fiction and fantasy. Therefore, this dissertation does not discuss examples from detective fiction, with some elements of science fiction, such as by Ibn e Safi and Ishtiaq Ahmad or fantasy stories such as by A. Hameed to maintain the generic boundaries.

In the 1980s, the first Pakistani sf film *Shaani* (Saeed Rizvi 1989) was produced with an alien visiting a Pakistani village in his spaceship. This film was followed by Rizvi's *Sar Kata Insaan* (The Beheaded Man 1994) with the trope of a mad scientist performing his diabolic experiments for the criminals. With such humble origins, Pakistani sf started forming its tradition in the twenty-first century with Ashfaq Ahmad's collection of sf stories in *Tilism i Hosh Afza* (The Enchantment of the Senses 2013) to be followed by writers like Usman T. Malik, Sidra Sheikh, Muhammad Omar Iftikhar, and Bina Shah. Pakistani sf also flourished in diverse media with works like *Burka Avengers*, *Buraaq*, *Swipe*, and *Shehr-e-Tabassum*. These works are examined in the dissertation to identify the major motifs and patterns of Pakistani sf.

Chapter-breakdown: The first chapter discusses how *Tarzan* by Edgar Rice Burroughs got translated into Urdu with a twist from its original source. The discussion draws on Mazhar Dehlvi's translations (starting from 1971 onwards) of three novels by Burroughs: *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), *The Beasts of Tarzan* (1914), *The Son of Tarzan* (1916), and some very popular local Tarzan stories among Pakistani children. Tarzan stories were different from other local fantasy and adventure fiction, as they did not include supernatural beings like *djinns* (giants), *churrails* (witches), or fantastic devices of transportation like a flying carpet or a flying horse; rather, they explained Tarzan's heroic qualities using scientific and rational discourse drawing on

the evolutionary biology and anthropology. At the same time, Tarzan's world introduces the readers to a new geographical region of Africa instead of some imagined and fantastic land like *koh Kaaf* (an imagined land used in *dastan* and other fantasy tales where supernatural beings exist and which serves as the main setting for the adventurous action).

The chapter has two parts. The first part discusses the challenges of translation of the narrative and the ideology along with the adaptation of the central figure and his transformation into a local hero. The second part discusses the local Tarzan stories as proto sf without the supernatural elements associated with fantasy and adventure stories in the subcontinent. Eco-criticism is used as a suitable approach to study these locally produced texts, as Tarzan here plays the role of the savior of the jungle and animals by challenging the positions of anthropocentrism, imperialism, and capitalism claiming the rights of the environment.

The second chapter discusses the role of religion in Pakistani sf. The discussion starts with a review of the scholarship on the use of religion as a motif in Western and Indian sf traditions. This develops a critical context to inform the examination of the use of religion in Pakistani sf using a comparative approach. Like Western sf, Pakistani sf presents Manichean plots with the good pitted against the evil but with a difference. Religion or faith is not discarded as superstition or displaced altogether with faith in science or "force"; rather, God plays the central role in redemption at the personal and public levels. Like Indian sf, religion serves as an important episteme in the world-building in Pakistani sf. Unlike Western sf, selected Pakistani sf places faith at the center with a belief that there is no disparity or contradiction between science and religion; rather, both are complementary in establishing a strong and informed relationship with God ensuring peace and prosperity both at the individual and public levels.

Moreover, Pakistani sf also addresses the issues of religious extremism resulting from the misinterpretation of religion by certain so-called religious groups for their vested interests leading to terrorism. Another important religious motif visible in Pakistani sf is its intersection with shades of Sufism. Here too, one can identify the glocal approach, as these stories revolve around the national issues of sectarianism, extremism, illiteracy, gender discrimination, and class system besides leaving an important message of peace, co-existence, and harmony valuable at the global scale. The first part of the chapter discusses the Islam-science nexus in Pakistani sf films *Shaani* (Saeed Rizvi 1989) and *Sar Kata Insaan* (Beheaded Man) (Saeed Rizvi 1994); the second part discusses the critique of religious extremism in Arafat Mazhar's *SWIPE* (2020), while the third part evaluates Pakistani sf *Tilism i Hosh Afza* (2013) by Ashfaq Ahmad to discuss the intersection of sf with Sufism.

The third chapter discusses how the alien gets transformed in its journey from the Western sf to the Pakistani sf. The chapter has two parts. The first part discusses the use of the alien-motif in Western and Indian sf traditions to set a critical context to later inform its discussion of the use of the alien motif in Pakistani sf. The alien has been used as a metaphor for alterity and difference with both positive and negative projections. This part discusses how the alien has been used as a novum to represent diverse fears, anxieties, racial/ideological otherness, and a hope to embrace the difference, intersecting with historical events and moments. The second part of the chapter discusses the use of the alien motif as another example of the subversive nature of Pakistani science fiction. Unlike Western and Indian sf traditions, Pakistani sf does not use the alien figure as an encounter with alterity or Otherness to construct the redeemed self. The aliens usually appear as the messiah-figures or allies to resolve the local problems facing common Pakistanis, or they simply serve as tools to portray the socio-political

problems plaguing the globe by displacing them into an imagined world. This part examines the role of aliens to critique the flawed systems of society in the Pakistani Urdu film *Shaani* (Saeed Rizvi 1989), and Pakistani English sf novels *The Light Blue Jumper* (2017) by Sidra Sheikh and *Divided Species* (2020) by Muhammad Omer Iftikhar. These Pakistani sf works utilize the alien motif to treat glocal problems like corruption, terrorism, dangers lurking in any sort of ism (dogmatism, extremism), foreign/external interference, and global power politics.

The fourth chapter discusses the identity politics of Pakistani sf in the glocal context of rising Islamophobia. Khan and Banerjee have studied Indian sf literature in English in detail from historical and postcolonial perspectives to locate its positionality in response to the Western image of India, its present and future. They present Indian sf as an attempt to take their story in their own hands. Similarly, Pakistani sf (post 9/11) can be studied as an attempt to resolve the identity crisis that Pakistan in particular and Islam in general have to face in the post 9/11 context. Sophia Rose Arjana in her rigorous research *Muslims in the Western Imagination* (2015), claims that the anti-Islam narrative has evolved since Medieval times to the present day, and studies “Muslim monsters” in diverse fields of cultural production ranging from literature to cinema (1). This negative representation of Muslims and Islam has its material effects in the form of Islamophobia, hate-crimes, detention, torture, and foreign policies practiced across the globe against Muslims. Pakistani sf should be studied as an attempt to deconstruct such dehumanized representation of Islam/Muslims. The chapter examines Pakistani English sf such as *Burraq* (Imtiaz Brothers 2011- present) and *Burka Avenger* (Haroon Rashid 2013-2016) (Urdu but translated into other languages) offering an alternate perspective challenging the global perspective based on the Western fantasy.

The fifth chapter discusses the futuristic visions and dystopic themes presented in Pakistani sf during the contemporary socially and politically disturbing times. The chapter has two parts. The first part discusses the feminist dystopia *Before She Sleeps* by Bina Shah and political dystopia *Shehr e Tabassum (A City of Smiles)* (2020) by Arafat Mazhar, while the second part discusses the sf stories by Usman T. Malik to examine the problems faced by Pakistan. The approach of these works is also glocal, as they reflect the awareness of a global context while addressing the local issues. The stories discussed in this chapter highlight the need for self-criticism and self-analysis much needed to redefine a uniform national identity based on religion. Shah, Mazhar, and Malik encourage the readers to revisit and revise the idea of nation to make it more inclusive of those marginalized based on gender, class, and religion.

The concluding chapter wraps up the discussion by reviewing the main arguments with a hope to encourage future Pakistani scholars to participate in the dialogic space in the global sf studies created by this work.

Chapter 1: Tarzan and its Glocalization through Translation into Urdu in Pakistan

I am starting the story of Pakistani science fiction with Mazhar Ansar Dehlvi's translation of Edgar Rice Burrough's Tarzan series (three parts) in the 1970s, as before that point, both popular fiction and children's literature were of more fantastic nature with supernatural elements like djinn, magicians, and fairies lacking the element of "cognitive estrangement" and 'What if' questions: both important elements of sf. Darko Suvin defines science fiction as "literature of cognitive estrangement" (1). He cites Brecht to define estrangement as a representation "which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (2). SF approaches the world and its norms as changeable and "subject to cognitive glance" (3). The element of estrangement distinguishes it from realistic literature, while cognitive element distinguishes it from fantasy. Moreover, Adam Roberts asserts that science in SF is not used for any truth claims but as a point to extrapolate, to ask what if questions because SF is a "thought experiment" (note 19) with a potential to challenge the established notions of race, gender, and nation.

As far as Edgar Rice Burroughs is concerned, he produced Tarzan series as adventure fiction for adolescents, and so does Dehlvi in his Tarzan translations. Mark Bould considers "scientific extrapolation and adventure fiction" as basic traditions of science fiction (103). If the fantastic speculation of Burroughs's Barsoom series can be (and has been) considered an extrapolation on scientific ideas (race, cosmology, anthropology, natural laws) to create a plausible world, by the same principle, the Tarzan series can (and should) be studied as proto sf⁸ for extrapolating on scientific ideas (evolutionary theory, anthropology, race) to imagine questions: what if a (white)

⁸The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction defines proto- sf as "literature written before the emergence of science fiction as a distinct genre (usually thought of as being sometime in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century) that contains elements that would later be associated with science fiction, such as futuristic settings, voyages to other planets, fictional inventions, etc." (n.p.).

man is brought up by anthropoids in an African jungle? Would he recapitulate all steps of evolution to conquer the wilderness? The text becomes a thought experiment to prove the superiority of white man as a complement to his historical achievements at the peak of Western colonialism. Thus, such scientific aspects of the narrative enable its examination as proto sf and its Urdu translation as a precursor of Pakistani sf because of its scientific elements as well as its break away from the traditional adventure tales with supernatural and magical elements.

Mazhar Ansar Dehlvi translated a few novels of the *Tarzan* series by Edgar Rice Burroughs into Urdu in the 1970s. Later, the figure of *Tarzan* as an adventure hero started an independent journey as a local figure and a protector of the wildlife and environment in many of the children's novels written by different authors. These stories were marketed and sold following the tradition of the penny or dime novels in the West, enjoying great popularity among Pakistani children and young adults. *Tarzan's* world, unlike the contemporary *dastan* and fantasy fiction in Pakistan, presents the African jungle, its natives, and animals in a documentary journalistic way drawing on pseudoscientific race theories. This inter-cultural translation of the text paves a way for the local *Tarzan* stories with the concern for the environment and the homeland in the local culture inspiring future science fiction writers like Usman Malik and Sidra Sheikh. For example, Malik in a talk show on Indusdot News (7th March 2020) mentions his reading of speculative fiction ranging from *Tilism e Hoshrubah*, *Dastan e Amir Hamza* (Hussain 2:15), to the stories in children's magazines like *Bachon ki Dunya* (Children's World), *Bachon ka Bagh* (Children's Garden), *Phool* (Flower), *Jugnoo* (Firefly), and *Talim o Tarbyat* (Education and Training), Islamic mysticism, and *Tarzan* stories in his childhood without any knowledge about the source text written by Edgar Rice Burroughs (Hussain 23:10).

This chapter has two parts. The first part discusses global outreach of Tarzan drawing on the insights of Annette Wannamaker, Michelle Ann Abate, and Ronie Parclack, and how Tarzan gets glocalized in different parts of the world to suit the local needs. The part especially focuses on the evaluation of Mazhar Dehlvi's translations *Tarzan* (1971), *Tarzan aur Darinde* (1976), and *Tarzan ka Beta* (1977) of three novels *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), *The Beasts of Tarzan* (1914), *The Son of Tarzan* (1916) by Burroughs. The translations are compared with the original texts to look at the differences and similarities resulting in the process of glocalization. This part discusses the challenges of translation of the narrative, and the ideology along with the adaptation of the central figure and his transformation into a local hero without any link to the original source. The second part examines local versions of the Tarzan story which enjoyed greater popularity than the translations and circulated widely in the market without giving any credit to Burroughs. Translated Tarzan stories and local Tarzan stories are treated as proto sf without the supernatural elements associated with fantasy and adventure stories in the subcontinent. Eco-criticism is used as a suitable approach to study these locally produced texts, as Tarzan here plays the role of the savior of the jungle and animals by challenging the positions of anthropocentrism, imperialism, and capitalism claiming the rights of the environment. Both Dehlvi's translations and local variations of the Tarzan story highlight the glocal approach, as changes are brought about in the characters and themes to suit the needs of the local readers.

The chapter relies on the use of glocal and glocalization as defined by Roland Robertson as "the simultaneity and the interpenetration" of "the global and the local" and "the universal and the particular" (30). He prefers the term glocalization to globalization, as he considers homogenization and heterogenization as interdependent processes. He takes this position because usually globalization is misunderstood as "a process which overrides locality" (26). He, on the

other hand, insists that what is considered local “even contemporary assertion of ethnicity and/or nationality is made within the global terms of identity and particularity” (26).

Global and local are often assumed to be opposing processes or as having “action-reaction relationship” (27). This misconception results from taking globalization as “a consequence of modernity” thus continuing the discourse of homogenization “of institutions and basic experiments in a temporal, historical mode” eschewing the element of space where modernity emerged “relatively autonomously” (27). Glocalization is the blend of two processes with its ideological roots in the Japanese language (Japan also being a model Asian country in emulation of Western progress/modernity not just according to Robertson but also Osterhammel and Hopkins) to signify “a global outlook adapted to local conditions” (28). All local cultures are hybridized to some extent as “selective incorporation” is a “widespread tendency” of nations to learn from other societies by engaging in “projects of importation and hybridization” (41). Thus, for Robertson, global and local are not binary opposites. For him, global culture is the result of “interconnectedness of cultures both large and small” (31).

Robertson, like Osterhammel and Hopkins, acknowledges the asymmetry of such connections with the hegemony of Western culture and warns against equating such cultural interconnections with “the notion of homogenization of all cultures” (31). Cultural ideas and representations flowing across the globe are “differentially received and interpreted” by local communities. Moreover, producers and marketers of global ideas, for example, Hollywood and publishers also tailor cultural ideas by including multinational characters and settings to attract global customers (38).

Robertson prefers the term “globality” to globalization for its ability to signify “the interpenetration of geographical distinct civilizations” to avoid the flawed proposition that

“globalization is simply a consequence of modernity” (27). He rejects the notion of “local assertions” to be always considered as “resistance to the hegemonically global” (30). On the contrary, citing Lila Abu Lughod, he posits that “globalization has involved the reconstruction, in a sense, the production of ‘home,’ ‘community,’ and ‘locality’” (30). He argues that even ‘local’ cultures are not particular and unique in an essentialist sense; rather, they are “organically binding and sharply bound” (39). He asserts the hybridity of local cultures, where global-local (glocal) processes have shaped hybrid identities in the form of Abu-Lughod’s term “halfies”, “who combine in themselves as individuals a number of cultural, ethnic, and general features” (40).

This aspect of “global hybridization” is especially relevant to Pakistan and other postcolonial nations, who despite their resistance to Western colonialism, inherit many colonial systems including education, banking, legal system, and above all democracy. These nations continue to emulate, appropriate, or incorporate the cultural ideas (political/technological) to meet their local demands by culturally sanitizing them. However, I would like to maintain the distinction between global and glocal with the former having an element of export (serving as a model usually from the West), and the latter focusing on the aspect of import and adaptation to the needs of the local cultures.

I

Dehlvi’s *Tarzan*

Though sf emerged as a genre in the West in the context of industrial revolution and labelled in the early twentieth century, Ryan Vu argues that the global appeal of the genre justifies “the search for antecedents” in older Western and non-Western literatures (21) including the stories produced in medieval Islamic culture with “familiar examples of pre-modern or proto-

SF” (23). As discussed in the introduction chapter, many Urdu stories for children incorporate sf elements but mostly work, as Vu observes about other literatures from the past, “according to the logic of myth and folklore” (22). Though many texts published in Pakistani children’s magazines and texts from detective fiction by writers like Ibn e Safi and Ishtiaq Ahmad utilize sf elements such as aliens, spaceships, and novel weapons, yet this part of the chapter confines itself to the discussion of *Tarzan* stories as proto sf due to the limits of space and time imposed by the PhD project. In Western sf context Eric Carl Link, Gerry Canavan, and Vu examine many examples of proto sf from ancient times such as Lucian’s *True Histories* (2 CE), Plutarch’s *On the Face in the Moon* (2 CE), Kepler’s *Somnium* (1634), Fontenelle’s *Conversation on the Plurality of the Worlds* (1686), Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) etc. in which the writers imagined “strange alternate worlds, in the process reflecting on current philosophical, anthropological, and other theories in a manner that would be repeated in medieval and early modern voyage...” (Vu 17). This part examines *Tarzan*’s translations as proto sf in Pakistani context as instead of incorporating supernatural elements, they use scientific and anthropological elements in constructing an imaginary world.

Glocal Context: *Tarzan* has succeeded in gripping the global imagination as a global cultural icon adapted by diverse cultures as their own with some changes. Should we take it as an example of cultural imperialism, or should we look at it as something different? If imperialism inspired forced integration into the imposed culture through English language and literature, globalization involves both a voluntary and forced integration into the global connections that seem to be an extension of asymmetrical power relations organized by imperialism (Hopkins 284). It is forced because it has an aspect of economic interdependence, where free trade and international corporations render the power of governments largely ineffective. It is voluntary

because most (post-colonial) countries chose imperial language and global lingua-franca as their official language and funded English language and literature departments to participate in global business and political debates.

One may argue otherwise that they had no choice, for choosing otherwise would exclude them from the global market and politics. This integration became a need to be included in the list of progressive countries. The standards of progress and modernity divided the world into First, Second, and Third Worlds, and even though these terms lost value and prestige after the 1980s, the division between the Global North and the Global South still points towards the same hierarchy on the scale of Western progress and modernity. Other parts of the world like Turkey and China also adopted “Western improvements but sought to do so in ways that would preserve the core values that held their societies together” (Hopkins 284). Overall, the process of Westernization continues in/voluntarily with the help of translation and use of English as lingua franca facilitating the process of glocalization.

Michelle Ann Abate and Annette Wannamaker study Tarzan’s global journey: “Burroughs’s eponymous character has become just as popular a literary character and cultural myth in countries around the world as in the United States, perhaps more so” (2). Tarzan had been translated into more than twenty-six languages by 1950 (2). They include in their discussion the cinematic adaptations, comics, television shows, and performances of Tarzan and their immense popularity across the globe to construct “an immensely complex picture of an enduring, multifaceted global pop culture icon” (6), but the treatment of Tarzan’s story in Pakistan is not included in their discussion. They credit the global success of Tarzan to its ability to “transcend socio-cultural differences” (3) by providing “a vehicle for both nationalistic discourse and for light romantic fantasy” (4). It

has been adapted, “appropriated, reimagined and rewritten” (6) to be enjoyed in local contexts as diverse as Jerusalem, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Indonesia, India, and Japan besides European countries. They assert that Tarzan’s popularity is an indicator of the effect of “past white imperialism and, correspondingly, of present colonization of the world by American culture” (5). As a symbol of cultural imperialism, it has been rejected, parodied, and even banned (for some time) by countries like Belgium, Hungary, Egypt, Russia, France, and Germany (5).

Tarzan got glocalized by getting translated into other languages to meet the needs of the recipient cultures as discussed by Wannamaker, Ann Abate, and Ronie Parclack, and this is also true in case of Pakistan, as is discussed in this part of the chapter. This part discusses how translations of three Tarzan novels by Mazhar Ansar Dehlvi⁹ resemble and differ from the original texts especially in its treatment of the character of Tarzan, theme of imperialism and evolutionary plot, and representation of Africa and its natives. I argue that these differences result from the mediating/negotiating processes of translation as well as globalization. Despite many changes in the process of translation and globalization, the narrative retains the sociological/anthropological aspects (elements of soft science fiction) of the source text to a great extent in its depiction of Africa and its natives. To explore these aspects, this part will first discuss the role of translation in the globalization of *Tarzan*, and second will discuss the points of similarities and differences between Dehlvi’s *Tarzan* and the source text.

The Problem of Translation

Translation is at the center of Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur* to exchange and circulate the best of each nation. Translation has served to decenter the monolingual world of national literature and to establish world literature, yet as Kathleen Shields argues “translation is

⁹ Not much information about the translator is available despite an email sent to the Ferozsons Publishers with no response. Dehlvi has also written historical fiction about prominent Muslim figures for children.

important for the creation of world literature but fades into the background once the ambition is achieved” (4). Historically, the translator’s role vacillates between visibility and invisibility, significance, and insignificance according to the need of the time to translate the works as a result of cultural or imperial encounters or under the pressure of globalizing forces. Despite bridging the linguistic gap between the reader and the source text, the translator carries the burden of widening the gap between the reader and the original text.

Most repeated charges against translation highlight Emily Apter’s concern of “untranslatability” or what is lost in translation:

- 1) The work is not and cannot be the true copy of the original, as not everything can be translated.
- 2) The work is but a reading/interpretation of the original, which removed from its source language loses its cultural context.

Apter defines untranslatables differently in her essay. For example, she points out culturally and nationally specific references that cannot be translated, thus implying the difficulty of cultural translation (354). The intermediary position of translator becomes problematic because of uneven demands of a hierarchical world literary system that uses translator and translation as proletariats to meet the demands of production and circulation yet denying them any share in the literary surplus.

Apter’s complaint is against the failure of literary studies to carry out an anti-capitalist critique of “corporate privatization in arts” where translated literature is but “a model of downed literature” and translation but “authorized plagiarism” (353). This concept can be read in complete contrast to that of David Damrosch’s idea of circulation where a text travels from its own culture to other cultures and thus gains in translation.

Damrosch's treatment of translation is more balanced because, despite his argument for the "gain" in translation, he admits that "some works are not translatable without substantial loss" because they are too local/national to secure "an effective life as world literature" (288-289). Damrosch also acknowledges that a work in the process of getting translated undergoes a transformation "by the host culture's national tradition" (283), as we will observe in our examination of Dehlvi's translation of *Tarzan*.

Jeremy Munday in "Literary Translation and Reviser" posits: "For the translator, coherence and 'intelligibility' are the paramount criteria, yet so also is an awareness of the importance of retaining the style of the ST [source text] author because of his status" (106). Similarly, Susan Bassnett also views translation as "both literary and linguistic" practice (3), which promises not only meaningful transfer of contents but also endeavors to retain the style of ST. This remains a challenge as no two languages have equivalent idioms with the same connotations which hinder word-to-word translation. At the same time, idiomatic translation decreases or increases the impact of description, narration, and representation by degrees. Munday argues that translation "produces a new version of text for a new cultural context" (30). Translation serves as a space for intercultural exchange and dialogue: "Without translation, the world would have been less informed, ignorant of authors like Tolstoy, Brecht, Beckett and so many more that make the world what it is today" (Kiran 295). At the same time though, the fact must be acknowledged that the world remains ignorant of bulk of literature produced in indigenous/local languages (other than European particularly English) because the process of translation like other processes is asymmetrical with most traffic flowing from the West to the rest of the world.

If we take translation as an act of creation as well as dialogue between two cultures, what becomes of pivotal importance is not just the transfer of stories but ideas, biases, attitudes, prejudices, preferences, power relationships, and hierarchical worldviews. This unavoidable outcome is the result of a lack of the equivalent medium in the target language, in which different words with different connotations are used, but they do not exactly translate what is intended in the first language. Every translation lacks this “exactness” or “authenticity” or “truthfulness” to the source language. For example, in Urdu, *habshi* is used as a translation for “negro”, which refers to the people native to Africa, (especially *Habsha* now Ethiopia mentioned in hadiths and Islamic history). Another word in Urdu is *Siah fam* which is equivalent to black skin. Similarly, savage in Urdu is translated as *jangli*, though it also means a native to “jungle” and ignorant of civilized norms. However, we find even local Pakistani Tarzan stories reflecting these racial attitudes and biases though several degrees less than those reflected in Burroughs’s original text.

Dehlvi’s Translation

Dehlvi’s *Tarzan* follows Burroughs’ *Tarzan’s* trajectory, but we find many differences that result in the process of translation. Burroughs’s text has twenty eight chapters, while Dehlvi’s *Tarzan* has only eighteen chapters, out of which only four match the chapter titles in English: (III) “Life and Death” is translated as *Baghawat* (Mutiny/Rebellion), (IV) “The Apes” as *Gorillon ka Hamla* (The attack of apes), (VI) Jungle Battles as *Khofnak Jang* (Terrible battle), and (XI) King of apes as *Gorillon ka Badshah*, while the rest are modified to meet the local interest emphasizing the adventure narrative in which Tarzan’s physical agility is highlighted in confrontation with animals

and cannibals. The plot remains evolutionary, as it tells the story of Tarzan's growth and adaptation in comparison with others, but his superiority owes itself to his nurture, his hard training in the jungle among the beasts, and his intelligence to learn things quickly. Burroughs's contents highlight the evolutionary narrative of the text by including chapter titles like (II) "The Savage Home", (IV) "The Apes", (V) "The White Ape", (VII) "The Light of Knowledge", (XII) "Man's Reason", (XV) "The Forest God", (XIX) "The Call of the Primitive" (XX) "Heredity", and (XXVI) "The Height of Civilization". These titles not only get changed in the translation but also are merged to tell the story in fewer chapters.

Dehlvi's story presents Lord Greystoke as a government servant as well as a lord without any reference to his link with the British Colonial Office and his responsibility to oversee the maltreatment of British black subjects in West Africa, though a slight reference is made to European colonialism in Africa without giving it much emphasis. Imperialism does not become the main theme in Dehlvi's plot; rather, it is pushed to the background as of no importance to the main narrative. No trip dates are given to avoid any fixed chronology thus leaving Tarzan to enjoy an eternal youth. The novel starts with "Rebellion/ Mutiny" (the title of the first chapter) to fast forward things to launch Lord Clayton and Alice in the secluded African jungle. The text does not honour Clayton and Alice with their titles as frequently and fervently as does Burroughs' text despite acknowledging their high status in the beginning. From the very beginning, it is the story about Tarzan, and thus the role of his parents is over in the second chapter with Alice's death and Clayton's tragic encounter with the apes.

Dehlvi's text undermines emphasis on heredity despite acknowledging Tarzan's lordship. Anglo-Saxonism and heredity are excluded from his plot after paying only a little attention to it as just one aspect of Tarzan's character. Dehlvi mentions the meaning of Tarzan's name as

“white skin” but without establishing it as a sign of natural superiority. No doubt, in Pakistani culture white skin is privileged as a beauty symbol but not as a sign of racial superiority. Tarzan’s literacy skills as well as his quickness in learning the use of tools is emphasized as much as in the source text. The remaining modified chapters focus on his battles with big apes, lions, and cannibals in his rescue missions of the white people visiting the jungle like William Clayton, Prof. Porter, his friend, Jane, and D’Arnot.

The fifth chapter from the ST “The White Ape” gets translated as *Nannah Tarzan* (Little Tarzan) by Dehlvi to emphasize man’s superiority to the animal kingdom as the crown of the creation. Adopting a very anthropocentric approach, Tarzan’s superiority is achieved by the fact that he is a human child bestowed with intelligence, who can outsmart all animals with his reason and use of tools and weapons. Dehlvi’s text focuses on Tarzan’s physical agility, his ability to jump high, to swing from trees swiftly, and his strength to outdo thirty men despite his shorter height at the age of ten (Dehlvi 28). Dehlvi translates all the details of the chapter (unlike other chapters) to stress the physical strength and intelligence of Tarzan comparing him to another ape-child in their encounter with Sabor the lioness. Thus, unlike heroes in other Pakistani children’s magazines and fantasy stories, Tarzan does not use magic or supernatural powers; rather, he uses reason and tools including literacy to overpower his antagonists.

Tarzan’s two qualities become the locus of Dehlvi’s translation, his intelligent use of physical power, and his self-education with almost a didactic zeal to make readers (children) learn the importance of getting educated (especially in English) despite the difficult circumstances. Tarzan is ready to learn language even in the absence of adult guidance just because of his drive to discover the meaning of the letters in the book. It is

surprising that chapter title (VII) “The Light of Knowledge” is translated with Urdu letters, though the whole chapter deals with Tarzan’s learning of English language emphasizing its importance in getting to know his position in relation to others. The rest of the chapter advocates the importance of literacy and emphasizes it as an important aspect of Tarzan’s accomplishment as a hero blessed with both physical and intellectual competence. This emphasis seems in line with the contemporary Urdu literature for children, which stresses the literacy of children as studied by Abida Khanam Savanur in her dissertation on twentieth century children’s literature (Urdu). Savanur argues that stories play a significant role in children’s education, by teaching them good values, shaping their positive or negative attitudes, and their general upbringing (16). The emphasis on Tarzan’s self-education in Dehlvi’s translation has a didactic element that is central to sf as conceived by sf scholars such as Darko Suvin who like Hugo Gernsback considers sf to be “educational literature” (9).

Dehlvi and the Dark Continent

In the source text, Burroughs’ representation of Africa is textual and based on popular assumptions of the time. In his translations, for the depiction of Africans and Africa, Dehlvi is relying on the textual knowledge of Burroughs. Thus, his representation of Africa is many times removed from reality and may serve as a good example of dissemination of local (Western) racial stereotypes across the globe. However, the primitiveness of the savages is attributed to nurture, their ignorance, lack of knowledge and not to their nature or innate inability to learn and evolve. Unlike in the source text, their cannibalism and savagery are attributed to their aloofness and segregation from the civilized world and not to some biological inferiority.

The act of translation mediates between two cultures by transferring information and ideologies contained in the source language into the target language, thus transforming the local

culture with new angles (different and contrary to the native tradition) of looking at the world. Hence, with Tarzan stories racial ideas and biases get translated too, which find place in the translations as well as some local Tarzan stories (very popular among Pakistani children in 1980s-90s), where savagery and barbarity are attributed to black natives and Africa. How the representation of racial other as a savage and Africa as a dark continent find their place in local literature is a good example of imperial legacy in a glocalized world.

The myth of the Dark Continent attained popularity in the nineteenth century spurred by imperial ambition and pseudoscientific race theories: “And when scientific race theory combined with imperialist urge to conquer, there was no end to the primitiveness that could be found” (Keim, and Somerville 46). Such pseudoscientific theories provided an ideological justification for imperialism by justifying the tutelage of other nations and races considered to be less evolved and incapable of governing themselves. Curtis Keim and Carolyn Somerville consider cannibalism as “an extreme metaphor for otherness” (106) and posit that “In baser circumstances, cannibalism can come to symbolize the barbarism of others, or our fear of others” (105). This idea was introduced by Columbus’s description of the people of Caribbean islands in 1492 and found its place in diverse forms of literature and writers as different as “Shakespeare, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. But they were mythical cannibals” (104). They assert that it is hard to find evidence of actual cannibalism in African history: “In fact, whatever cannibalism had existed was largely in the conquerors’ own minds” (104).

European travelers propagated this fantasy in the nineteenth century (1880s onwards) “to justify the conquest of Central Africa” (104). Their assumptions were based on “Dark Continent” myth (Reference to Henry Morton Stanley’s book *Through the Dark Continent* 1890), which

enjoyed great popularity in the nineteenth century. (103). Pakistanis had limited historical experience positive or negative with Africans as some of them served in Africa as employees of the British Empire during colonial era. There might be some pre-existing racial bias against Africa, but colonial experience and imperial tutelage stoked the dehumanization and demonization of Africans. As far as local epistemology rooted in Islam is concerned, there is no place for racism. In Pakistani context, such bias does not emerge from either indigenous studies or theories about Africa and its natives but is the product of translation. That is how imperial and global attitudes get translated and disseminated because of the hegemonic processes of past-day imperialism and present-day globalization.

In the American context, “The most public examples of Dark Continent thinking come from Henry Morton Stanley and Theodore Roosevelt” (Keim and Somerville 48). Both were imperialists and acknowledged adventurers and heroes on both sides of the Atlantic. Burroughs was greatly inspired by both, and his representation of Africa draws on their description of the continent (Keim and Somerville 49). Their description of Africa aimed to justify “upper-class white males—to serve people at the bottom of the racial hierarchy,” described as “half-devil and half-child” (Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” quoted in Keim and Somerville 48). Whitla and Shea cite an example of an anti-imperialist, William Booth, whose book *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890) takes inspiration from Stanley’s story about “Darkest Africa” (31), and compares London with the continent with its savage spaces as the result of industrialization and urbanization. But such deconstruction of the myth of the dark continent did not reduce or change significantly its popularity in the Western cultural imaginary.

A postcolonial nation like Pakistan had itself been a victim of colonial experience and had no imperial ambition against Africa. Still, the process of Western tutelage continued with the

shift from previous masters to the new hegemon in the global era. Evolutionary discourse disguised in the authentic scientific language contained in the fictional text got translated into Urdu with a nuanced description of Africans and Africa despite the local religious belief in the equality of all human beings regardless of color differences. This shows the result of domineering role of global entanglement of a nation with its position as a developing country and its acceptance of the superiority (also accuracy) of Western knowledge as a norm.

This dissemination of Western biases is not a new phenomenon; rather, this flow of ideas started with the flow of people and goods and teaching of English language and literature during the colonial era. This process has only gained momentum with globalization when English is no more a foreign language but a lingua franca of global markets and business, and when Western culture has emerged as a global culture despite the indigenous cultural resistance in different parts of the world. People living in different parts of the world must read Western history, language, and literature at the expense of local history and literature to participate in global economies. This particularly is true of the so-called developing world, where people pay high fees to send their children to English-medium schools to become successful professionals, and those confined to public schools or “madrassas” hardly secure high positions.

Nonetheless, Dehlvi’s text maintains the binaries of white/black and good/evil of the source text by the misrepresentation of Africa and black natives and hence transfers the racialized attitudes into the target culture. It serves as a window on the world with which local readers form their perception of Africa and its natives. Dehlvi’s text introduces the dark continent and its natives without freeing them from the prejudice of

the source text. Two chapters are titled *Adamkhoron ke Gaon mein* (In the village of cannibals), and *Habshion ka Hamla* (The attack of “Negroes”), which highlight the savagery of the native blacks living in the dark continent. They are excluded from the civilized world, wallowing in their ignorance in the interior of the jungle. The stereotypical portrayal of cannibalism, rituals performed by the black natives in such ceremonies, and their superstitious nature is depicted with intricate details to (mis) inform the target readers about a remote region of the world. The narrative gives a lot of space to the depiction of the natives, their primitive culture, and fear of the other in other chapters too. They become the highlights in the back-cover blurb on Dehlvi’s translations:

Tarzan: Bachon ke liye bohat hi dilchasp novel. Tarzan isaan ka bacha tha magar usko Africa ke jangal me Gorilon ne pala posa tha. Log use gorilla hi samjhte the.

Wo itna taqatwar tha ke barre barre sher ki gardan chuhe ki tarah marror dia karta tha. Khofnak se khofnak hathi ko pal bhar me bebas kar deta tha. Adam khor vehshi insaan uske nam se thar thar kanpte the. Ye novel us buhadur aur dilair Tarzan ke hairat angez karnamo ki dastan he.

Translation:

Tarzan: a very interesting novel for children. Tarzan, though brought up by apes in the dreadful jungles of Africa, was a human child. To other people, he looked like an ape.

He

would kill a lion as easily as someone would kill a mouse. He could subdue the most fearsome elephant in a matter of moments. He was extremely feared by cannibals and

savages. This novel is about the amazing adventures of the brave and powerful Tarzan.¹⁰

This marketing description of the book attracts potential buyers by promising them a narration of Tarzan's heroic adventures in the African jungle and his encounters with animals and cannibals. Thus, like the source text, the black natives are associated with animals and presented as threats to the so-called civilized outsiders and their protector Tarzan. They are portrayed as superstitious and irrational in declarative sentences as if stating a universal truth: "Savages are very superstitious. They believe and fear ghosts and spirits" (Dehlvi *Tarzan* 82). Tarzan takes advantage of their gullibility and befools them by playing tricks on them to reinforce their fear of Tarzan to rob them of their weapons and food which they present to him as an offering to save their lives. This doing away with the superstition and the supernatural element again distinguishes Tarzan from other stories that validate the use of such elements and enable its reading as proto sf.

The myth of dark continent is translated with all the savagery and barbarity attached to its black natives. The text presents a stereotypical portrayal of cannibalistic rituals with a human being tied to the pole, cannibals dancing around them on the beating of drums, women making cauldrons ready, men with feathered caps, masked and colored faces, displaying their arrows and knives ready to cut the victim into pieces (Dehlvi 81, 137). Their role is reduced either to killing or getting killed. They are not treated as persons, and their resistance against European imperialism to win freedom is vilified by their killing of French soldiers. Both ST and Dehlvi's text exempt Tarzan from any ethical accountability by justifying the slaughter of black natives to save the civilization

¹⁰ All references are transliterated and translated by the scholar unless mentioned otherwise.

and its dominance on the dark continent. Tarzan's violence is rendered necessary and justified to restore his domination and ensure safety of the Europeans.

Dehlvi and *Tarzan's* sequels

In translations of Burroughs' *The Beasts of Tarzan* as *Tarzan aur Darinde*, and Burroughs' *The Son of Tarzan* as *Tarzan ka Beta*, Africa is presented in the same negative light. Africa is described as a "hell" (Dehlvi 9) due to its hot climate, horrible beasts, and dreadful jungles. This primitive space provides a haven to Tarzan, who has by now become not only a lord but also a member of the British Parliament. However, he is ready to regress from his civilized state and become a "white ape" to fight other beasts (Dehlvi *Tarzan aur Darinde* 14). The natives are described repeating the same imagery of coloured faces with feathered caps, almost nude, with necklaces of bones, dancing on the drums, carrying arrows and spears in their hands (Dehlvi *Tarzan aur Darinde* 56). Just as in the source text, they are compared with simians (Dehlvi *Tarzan aur Darinde* 108). These repetitions reiterate the same stereotypes in every series to hammer the image of the dark continent into the local cultural imaginary.

At the same time, Tarzan holds an interstitial space between the jungle and the civilization, beast, and man, as he is treated as a racial other despite his white skin. Jane looks at him as a white giant, and William Clayton associates him with some native tribe of cannibals. Tarzan has to face this exclusion in later novels in the series too, where Rockoff views him as an outsider:

You were born an ape. You lived naked in the jungles__ to your own we have returned you; but your son shall rise a step above his sire. It is the immutable law of evolution. The father was a beast, but the son shall be a man he shall take the next ascending step in the scale of progress. He shall be no naked beast of the

jungle, but shall wear a loincloth and copper anklets, and, perchance, a ring in his nose, for he is to be reared by men a tribe of savage cannibals” (Burroughs *Beasts of Tarzan* 18).

Rockoff wants Tarzan’s abducted son Jack to be brought up by cannibals. To rescue his son Jack and wife Jane, Tarzan keeps vacillating between the two opposing worlds.

Michelle J. Smith argues that Tarzan’s narrative reflects “a complex web of popular understandings of Darwinism, evolution, sexual selection, American boyhood and adolescence” (166), but Dehlvi’s text generalizes this idea of boyhood by emphasizing Tarzan’s position as a man more than as an American or Anglo-Saxon. Dehlvi’s text *Tarzan ka Beta (The Son of Tarzan)* like the source text stresses the evolutionary plot of the narrative by repeating several times in the text that Jack inherited Tarzan’s acquired characteristics to overpower animals even though his parents tried to keep him ignorant of his father’s adventures in Africa. He was not even allowed to visit a circus or a zoo (13-14). Nonetheless, Jack follows his nature and not only returns to the jungle but also lures Tarzan back to the jungle to continue his adventures. The recourse to evolutionary theory and the emphasis on heredity in depiction of Tarzan’s character besides the use of pseudoscience (race) in the portrayal of Africa and its natives qualify Tarzan as proto sf.

Tarzan not only returns to the jungle to save his son but also to form alliances with apes and cheetah on the principle of mutual help against the enemy to defend their freedom (Dehlvi *Tarzan aur Darinde* 31, Burroughs *The Beasts of Tarzan* 31). Tarzan gives little choice with his offer of friendship with pre-emptive rights to destroy those who refuse to submit by counting them as enemies. These texts rely on repetitions of

encounters with apes, lions, and cannibals, also adding crocodiles to increase the level of thrill. Much space is covered by such battles with the eventual victory of Tarzan and his son over their enemies by winning allies from among animals as well as some natives.

The imperial theme of the source text, despite getting sanitized by Dehlvi in the process of translation, becomes evident in Tarzan's and Jack's treatment of Africans. Africa becomes Jack's safari, a land of adventure, where, like his father, he has encounters with apes, lions, and cannibals. Like his father, he also resorts to stealing the goods and weapons of the natives, and thus his relationship with the natives is manipulative and exploitative (Dehlvi *Tarzan ka Beta* 53-56, Burroughs' *The Son of Tarzan* n.p.). Nevertheless, the imperialist intervention creates an interstitial space, and Tarzan can communicate with animals and humans alike. Even Jack learns language of the apes (Dehlvi *Tarzan ka Beta* 28, Burroughs' *Son of Tarzan* n.p.).

On a few occasions, white people are depicted as oppressors dragging slaves in chains (Dehlvi *Tarzan aur Drinde* 55). Like Tarzan, Jack also denounces the maltreatment of the black slaves (Dehlvi *Tarzan ka Beta* 57-58). The reason why the natives feared the white people is also hinted at briefly when Mogambi tells Tarzan that despite their hospitality to the white men, the latter bombarded their villages, killed their people, and looted their goods and livestock (Dehlvi *Tarzan aur Drinde* 58). In the source text, this maltreatment of the black natives is to depict the brutality of the imperial rivals like Russia and Germany and to justify the benevolence of British imperialism. Matt Cohen asserts that "Burroughs's novels tend to argue that the only leadership under which Africa can fully prosper is Tarzan's brand of enlightened despotism. Any European presence (of whatever nationality) in the jungle inevitably leads to unjustifiable violence and the disruption" (159). For example, Burroughs' *The Son of Tarzan* negatively portrays Arabs and Swedes. *The Return of Tarzan* (1913) and *The Beasts of Tarzan* (1914)

project Russians in a diabolic light. Similarly, *Tarzan the Untamed* (1920) gives vent to animosity against Germans.

On the contrary, Dehlvi's text privileges no imperial power over another. In Dehlvi's text, white travellers appear as representative of civilization in a very general sense, not particularly associated (as in Burroughs's text) with Anglo-Saxondom despite whiteness of skin. Therefore, all imperial figures are homogenized as Europeans or white men eschewing their clearly identified nationalities in the source texts. Dehlvi's translations sanitize Burroughs' racist treatment of other national rivals. Dehlvi's *Tarzan ka Beta (The Son of Tarzan)* presents Jack's rescue of Meriem, an abducted daughter of a French general, in a momentary encounter with the black tribal chief (57-58). This abduction again adds to the villainy of the African natives to exclude them from civilization. Jack, like Tarzan, kills black natives indiscriminately to take revenge for Meriem's abduction (Dehlvi 115). However, Dehlvi's text eschews Burroughs's obvious demonization of Islam in clear references to camels, and names like Sheik, Abdul Kamak, Arabs, and Meriem. In the source text, while highlighting the villainy of Hanson, a Swede, Meriem thinks of the Arabs: "She was in the power of equally villainous men—brutal savages of the lowest order" (Burroughs *The Son of Tarzan* n.p.). Dehlvi's text changes this by keeping the chief anonymous and omitting any racially biased references to avoid controversy in the target culture.

The details of the story are changed significantly, by omitting several chapters. Also, the nationality of Rockoff and Paulvitch is not mentioned. Hence, they are not rendered hideous as Russians because of national rivalry as in the case of the ST, rather due to their moral flaws. Similarly, the nationality of Meriem's abductor Malbihn

(Swede) is not mentioned in the translation. Thus, Burroughs's nationalist perspective gets glocalized in translation by Mazhar Dehlvi in selective omissions. Here, Dehlvi seems to avoid any controversy by eschewing nationalities of all the villains.

Overall, Dehlvi's *Tarzan ka Beta* follows the formulaic plot of the source text. The abduction plot is repeated with Meriem's abductions by the tribal chief as well as by a giant ape (76). The love plot also follows the trajectory of the first novel by introducing Morrison, Jack's rival to claim Meriem in his absence (Dehlvi 137). Like Tarzan, he also accepts Meriem's decision, though she later changes her mind and chooses Jack (Korak) (Dehlvi 186). Like the source text, Dehlvi's text also establishes the uniqueness of Tarzan: "There is only one Tarzan. There can never be another" (Burroughs *Son of Tarzan* n.p. & Dehlvi 197). However, both do it for a different reason. Burroughs writes the rest of the sequels with Tarzan as the central character. As William Gleason asserts, "Korak's willingness to turn the novels back over to Tarzan rather than play the role of narrative usurper removes the threat of supersession, leaves Tarzan king of his terrain for another twenty volumes and preserves family harmony" (49). On the other hand, Dehlvi ends the translation series with *Tarzan ka Beta* as the final novel. But in this end lies the beginning of Tarzan's independent journey as a local hero into popular Pakistani Tarzan stories.

Dehlvi and the Gendered Others

As far as gender roles are concerned, Dehlvi's text presents a patriarchal world, in which roles of both Lady Alice and Jane are reduced significantly. The role of Alice is reduced to fainting, bearing a child, and then dying silently in her sleep. She does not appear as a round character, and no exchange of dialogue is assigned to her. Moreover, Jane is introduced to protect the white racial purity threatened by the fear of miscegenation in the source text. On the

contrary, in Dehlvi's text Jane is presented as a romantic figure and a would-be wife without any fear of miscegenation. Dehlvi follows Burroughs in his description of the racialized female character of Kala as different from other apes. Her intelligence is highlighted in her different treatment of Tarzan keeping in view his physical fragility. She is anthropomorphized and feminized by giving her intelligence, affection, and kindness thus making her a mother-figure, a perfect raiser of a child in a patriarchal community against all odds.

Furthermore, Dehlvi reduces the romantic encounters between Jane and Tarzan and Jane is not developed as a character with dialogue and action. Jane appears as a stock heroine of local adventure fiction with a sole purpose to attract male readers. Jane's presence in Dehlvi's text is introduced as a romantic element, though interestingly Jane's physical intimacy with Tarzan, her inner conflict, and detailed romantic dialogues are completely eschewed leaving only mention of Tarzan's proposal and Jane's rejection because of her commitment to William Clayton (Dehlvi 186). Her rejection of the proposal is also narrated in third person thus limiting her agency that she enjoys in the source text. The chapters dealing with her engagement with Mr. Canler are omitted to reduce the length of the story as well as to restrict it to Tarzan's adventures involving his strength and abilities. Jane's strong expressions of love for Tarzan are not translated at all. In the translation of Jane's letter the following lines are left out.

I found a note you wrote me lying among the leaves beneath a tree near the cabin.

I do not know how you learned to love me, who have never spoken to me, and I am very sorry if it is true, for I have already given my heart to another. But know that I am always your friend (Burroughs *Tarzan of the Apes* 131).

Dehlvi's treatment of the love theme is not surprising keeping in view the conservative approach to the treatment of love in Pakistani children's literature in Urdu which postpones the marriage of a princess to the end of the story, usually arranged by her father, to the worthiest suitor who fights many battles to win her hand. The story is about the male hero and the perils he faces in his journey. The woman comes at the end as a reward for his victory. Dehlvi's text follows this tradition in the target language and thus reduces Jane's role to that of a damsel in distress rescued by Tarzan to legitimize his proposal for her. The 1970s was a time of Zia's Islamization when Pakistani television and cinema would censor expressions of physical intimacy or exchange of romantic dialogues, and instead used symbols of flowers and lovebirds to communicate love scenes. Thus, Jane does not embrace Tarzan after he saves her from Terkoz, nor are her strong feelings translated from ST into the target language. Their mutual attraction is briefly mentioned with fruit-gifts and a locket presented to Jane, and the narrative moves on quickly to the rescue of D'Arnot, Prof. Porter, and his friend.

Nonetheless, Dehlvi's translation *Tarzan aur Darinde* of Burroughs' *The Beasts of Tarzan*, like the ST, depicts Jane as a powerful woman subverting her role as a damsel in distress. She not only uses a pistol to fire at her enemies, but also rows a boat, and fends for herself till Tarzan's intervention to rescue her near the end of the book (*Tarzan aur Darinde* 143). Similarly, in *Tarzan Ka Beta (The Son of Tarzan)*, Meriem not only learns the language of apes but also other skills and tricks to survive in the jungle (Dehlvi 73). The text includes her several encounters with wild animals to prove her a worthy mate for Jack (Korak). Later, after being adopted by Tarzan and Jane, she also learns English to resume her lost connection with the civilization. Thus, Dehlvi's text uses a glocal approach in the treatment of gender by making women more conservative despite empowering them with action and weapons.

Last Word on Dehlvi's Translation

The discussion above illustrates the transforming effect exercised by the processes of translation and glocalization. Both mediate and negotiate between two cultures to translate global into local to cater to the needs of the target readers/audience/consumers. Dehlvi's approach to translation is glocal, as he selects and translates the parts (with modified details and titles) which could be sold and received well in the target culture. Like Burroughs's text, his text also focuses on Tarzan's adventures to establish his superiority to animals and the blacks but without any emphasis on his Anglo-Saxon manhood and lordship. The plot remains evolutionary by restoring man's centrality to the story of life. But here too, the local (theological) worldview (like the Holy Bible, the Holy Quran also establishes man as the crown of creation and a caliph to God) plays its role to bring man to the centre of the tale of existence. At the same time, Dehlvi resorts to the omission of nationalities of characters, perhaps, to avoid controversy under the strong censorship of a dictatorial regime. The text downplays Burrough's Anglophilic description of Tarzan's heredity, British imperialism, and primitivity of the blacks. Nonetheless, Dehlvi's text restricts itself to the pseudoscientific description of Africa (of Burroughs's times) and its natives drawing on the ST (though the traditional Islamic worldview believes in equality of all mankind regardless of racial/regional differences).

Hence, where Dehlvi's text modifies the ST keeping in view the local context, he also gets entangled in the nuances of translation to glocalize the racial (pseudoscientific) biases. Still, Dehlvi's translation becomes a creative gesture, as in this process of glocalization, Tarzan starts his local journey, distinct from both the ST and translations, as a local hero to be continued for decades. These local Tarzan stories can be read as

proto sf because of their eco-friendly element which is also an important motif in the contemporary Western science fiction because of the global climate change. Four of the local Tarzan stories are discussed in the next part of the chapter using an eco-critical lens.

III

Local Tarzan: An Ecocritical Perspective

Burroughs lived at a time before academia took a posthuman and environmental turn. Both posthumanism and environmentalism remove man from his central position “as the sole source or object of value in the world” (Clark 13), and both are concerned with Anthropocene, a term that denotes the “attitudes of destructive human domination over the natural world” (Clark 1), with a consciousness of climate change and looming disaster. Lawrence Buell posits that “the term ‘ecocriticism’ was coined in the late 1970s (Rueckert 1996), but its antecedents stretch back much further” (13). The environmental movement is dated back to the 1960s with the publication of works such as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), Leo Marx’s *The Machine and the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in American Culture* (1964), and Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City* (1973) (Buell 13-14) in the context of Cold War and nuclear destruction. However, the environmental consciousness can be traced back to the works of Medieval writers, Romantic poets, and pastoral novelists as studied by Jonathan Bate and Robert Pogue Harrison (Buell 25, 26), and M. Jimmie Killingworth’s work on Walt Whitman (*Slovic Handbook* 4), though their worldview remained anthropocentric.

For ecocritics not only environmental conditions matter; rather, “human abuse of the natural world is best understood as the corollary of unjust or oppressive systems of government and economics, and forms of social organization (hierarchy, plutocracy, patriarchy)” (Clark 3), thus bringing into debate imperialism and gender discrimination as do ecofeminism or

postcolonial ecocriticism. The environmental concerns became important after the emergence of the global environmental movement in the 1960s, which brought humanity together against the common challenges of climate change as well as nuclear destruction that threatened the globe. In this historical context, “Ecocritics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a ‘green’ moral and political agenda.” (Greg Gerrard qtd. in Clark 3). Though Burroughs had no such agenda at the time of production of the text, its Pakistani adaptations do assert the rights of the jungle and the animals living in it.

Lawrence Buell emphasizes the elasticity of the term ecocriticism: “ecocriticism gathers itself around a commitment to environmentality from whatever critical vantage point” by drawing on the loose definition of Cheryl Glotfelty as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,” (qtd. in Buell 11). Buell distinguishes between the approaches of first and second-wave ecocriticism, though he does not give any definite time periods for these waves. The first wave ecocriticism translated environment into “natural environment” leaving out the urban spaces working with “the aims of earthcare” (21). On the other hand, the second wave ecocriticism does not draw this line between natural and human (built) environments to “accommodate the claims of environmental justice” (22). But despite the difference in both cases “the understanding of personhood is defined for better or for worse by environmental entanglement” (23). Nevertheless, this section follows the approach of first wave-ecocriticism in its analysis of Pakistani Tarzan stories to find the extent to which they model “ecocentric values” (Buell 22).

Timothy Clark defines the role of ecocriticism as raising “fundamental questions about the nature and causes of environmental crises, the ways they are represented in

language and culture, or contested or interpreted in literature, in art or daily discourse” (5). The description of environment in relation to the main characters in a story enables eco-critical reading of any text. Burroughs’s text becomes even more important for this kind of reading because of its setting in the jungle and Africa which provides a place for self-discovery, growth, and an escape from the debilitating effects of urban life.

Eco-critical reading of the series by recent scholars draws attention to the role of Tarzan as Lord of the Jungle protecting the environment. Hadi Q. Alseed asserts that Tarzan series reflects “an eco-bonding sensitivity” (a term used by Clinebell) defined as the interdependence of man and environment (Alseed 120). The novel was produced at a time when the US government was spending lavishly on national parks, and groups like the Audubon society were raising awareness about conservation areas, and protection of natural environment (120). Such societies were trying to draw attention to the debilitating effects of urbanization. Alseed asserts: “The novel thus presented the groundwork for the nation’s need for unspoiled nature which may save the country from corruption and decadence of the new urban lifestyle which was aimed at more urbanization” (120).

Clark posits that “It was the US and Western Europe that saw the rise to visibility of the environmental movement as a cultural phenomenon, and, later, from c. 1990 the advocacy of green values in the study of literature (‘ecocriticism’)” (2). I agree with the first part of the argument, yet advocacy of green values has been part and parcel of literature in the subcontinent in all its varied forms like prose, poetry, drama, and fiction in which village life is idealized, and the pastoral is celebrated. For example, in India, Mahatma Gandhi raised concern about “the environment, urbanization and mechanization”, and therefore in India “the major movements to protect environment such as the Chipko movement ... and Sunder Lal Bahuguna and the

Narmada Bachao Andolan ... derived inspiration from Gandhi” (Tiwari 141). Similarly, in Pakistan many examples can be found in the stories by Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, Intezar Hussain, and Ashfaq Ahmed which celebrate the simplicity and purity of village life. Furthermore, Nature is invoked as literal and metaphorical embodiment of signs to teach mankind serious lessons. Ample examples can be found in Allama Iqbal’s poetry¹¹ in which natural world serves as an analogue for the human/social world. Nature becomes an academy for the knowledge seeker, who wanders in search of truth, and Truth is but God (Al-Haq), thus making it an imperative to explore the universe in the love of God. His metaphorical use of eagle “Shaheen” aimed at character-building of the youth by teaching values of integrity, self-reliance, and independence at a time when they felt displaced by colonial violence. The use of natural objects as symbols makes his message global transcending the spatial boundaries imposed by nationalism, as he hopes for the unity of all Muslims as an ummah overlooking all the divisions. Thus, the eagle speaks¹²:

*(Ye Poorab, Ye Pacham Chakoron Ki Dunya
Mera Neelgun Asman Baikarana
Prindon Ki Dunya Ka Dervaish Hun Mein
Ke Shaheen Banata Nahin Ashiyana)*

Translation:

¹¹ Following are the links to English translation of Iqbal’s poetry.

1. [Armaghan-e-Hijaz \(ارمغان حجاز - The Gift of Hijaz \(1938\)](#)
 2. [Bal-e-Jibril \(بال جبریل - Wings of Gabriel \(1935\)](#)
 3. [Bang-e-Dra \(بانگ درا - The Call of the Marching Bell \(1924\)](#)
 4. [Zarb-e-Kaleem \(ضرب کلیم - The Rod of Moses \(1936\)](#)
 5. [Asrar-e-Khudi \(اسرار خودی - Secrets of the Self \(1915\)](#)
 6. [Rumuz-e-Bekhudi \(رموز بیخودی - Mysteries of the Selflessness \(1917\)](#)
 7. [Payam-e-Mashriq \(پیام مشرق - A Message From The East \(1924\)](#)
 8. [Zabur-e-Ajam \(زبور عجم - Persian Psalms \(1927\)](#)
- <http://iqbalurdu.blogspot.com>

¹² Transliteration and translation taken from (<http://iqbalurdu.blogspot.com/2011/04/bal-e-jibril-176-shaheen.html>)

East and West -these belong to the world of the pheasant,

The blue sky—vast, boundless—is mine!

I am the dervish of the kingdom of birds—

The eagle does not make nests

(*Baal-e-Jibril*-176)

Recently, scholars like Shazia Rahman, Sonia Irum, Jeet Singh, and Saba Pirzadeh have explored mainstream Pakistani fiction by Mohsin Hamid, Uzma Aslam Khan, and Saadat Hassan Manto using ecocritical lens to analyze “issues of power, violence, and agency in a country ... depicting the buildup of postcolonial ecological vulnerability” as a result of “neo-liberal development” (Pirzadeh 99). Rahman in her ecocritical reading of Uzma Aslam Khan’s *Trespassing* examines how the text breaks the national boundaries “by rooting oneself in our planet, its geography, and animals, which are local and global” (Rahman 262). Irum also explores environmental concerns in Khan’s novels *The Story of Noble Rot* (2001), *Trespassing* (2003), *The Geometry of God* (2009) and *Thinner than Skin* (2012). Singh, using ecotheory, studies “how material space is represented in literature... belittling its connection to nature” in Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh” (Singh 384). Similarly, Sami Siddiqui evaluates ecocritical aspects of Urdu poetry in which nature serves not only as “a source of solace” but also of “wisdom” and as “a connecting link between Man and God” (Siddiqui 31). He surveys poetry by poets as diverse as Nazeer Akbar Abadi, Altaf Hussain Hali, Allama Iqbal, Israr-ul-Haq Majaz, Sahir Ludhianvi, Nida Fazli, and Zafar Gorakhpuri to examine their range from romantic to more philosophical approach to nature.

Despite recent scholarly eco-critical reading of mainstream Pakistani literature, no such critical work can be found on Pakistani sf. Bina Shah, a Pakistani feminist dystopian writer,

asserts in an online webinar at the Islamabad Literature Festival (2020) that mostly “sf is really a conversation about what we are doing as human beings to nature” (Zahoor), referring to Western and Indian sf (themes of impending doom, gender roles, and water crisis), despite acknowledging the fact that Pakistani sf does not have many examples of dystopia. Though emerging Pakistani sf has not been studied from eco-critical lens, I will highlight this commitment to environment in Pakistani Tarzan stories.

Hundreds of Tarzan stories circulated in the Pakistani markets written by different (often anonymous) writers (1980s-1990s). These stories enjoyed immense popularity among children who were hardly aware of the story’s Western origin. This again illustrates the effect of glocalization, where a text becomes part of the local culture by merging the global with the local. These stories do not provide any biographical details of Tarzan’s childhood or his ancestry. On the contrary, Tarzan is assumed to be a local *desi* hero without any connection with the Anglo-Saxon race.

Clark posits that “The story of ecocriticism since its inception has been one of a gradual and still unfinished cultural decolonization, or even de- Americanization, of older norms of ‘nature’ or the ‘human’” (137). Local Pakistani stories accomplish this by removing Tarzan from his Anglo-Saxon roots, imperialist behavior, and racial attitudes to make him an indigenous hero representing the cause of the marginalized and disenfranchised segments of the society. It is from this ethos of Tarzan as a marginalized figure that local Pakistani Tarzan stories are produced.

In these stories, Tarzan resists oppression in all forms and fights for the freedom of animals and natives whom he treats as his fellow beings. He does not reflect any racial bias. All his decisions to resort to violence are made on one principle: to defend the

jungle and its inhabitants, and to protect its resources and boundaries alike. He never looks at himself as different from the natives or as an outsider to the world he inhabits. Some cover-art examples from Pakistani Tarzan stories might speak more than my words do about the eco-friendly trope embedded in the narrative.



Fig. 1 Mazhar Kaleem. *Khunkhwar Sher* (Tarzan and a Ferocious Lion) n.d.

Tarzan can be seen with his friend Minko sitting on a tree fighting a lion (a rebel figure and an outlaw here) who has been ruthlessly killing other animals in this context.

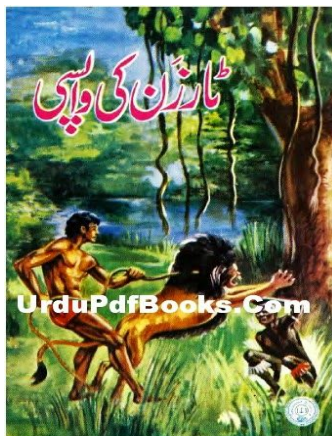


Fig. 2 Maqbool Jahangir. *Tarzan ki Wapsi* (Return of Tarzan). 2011

Tarzan can be seen with his friends as the maintainer of peace and order among diverse and antagonistic factions of society presented in different groups in the jungle.

Tarzan emerges as the saviour and protector of the jungle, animals, and other natives, as he fights for their freedom against the intruders and invaders, who are most often described as

white men from the so-called civilized world. It is the reverse homogenization of the white race as Europeans without considering their national and political divisions, following the western tradition of universalization and homogenization of the racial others. These white men appear as avaricious hunters killing animals ruthlessly, capturing them to sell them in the international market at a great price, looking for treasure and local resources, while trying to establish their colonies by use of force and oppression. Tarzan, sometimes alone and at other times with his companions, both animals and native tribes, successfully fights these greedy invaders and safeguards the territory of his jungle as a just and legitimate ruler and a freedom fighter. This formulaic plot, which is repeated in most Pakistani variations, indicates how Tarzan gets glocalized in a different culture. Four Pakistani Tarzan stories will be discussed as examples of the local formulaic nature of these stories from an ecocritical perspective.

Tarzan's Revisited Plot

The remarkable differences that distinguish Pakistani Tarzan stories from ST (source text) and its translation also demonstrate how the process of globalization further distances the story from the ST to meet the needs and desires of the local culture. The plot usually emerges from the colonial anxiety (based on historical experience) of being invaded or colonized, and Tarzan appears as a one-man army to fend off this fear by defeating the enemy. Thus, imperial desire is replaced by the nationalistic desire to defend the territory against a possible invasion. The narrative gets revisited by shuffling the position of characters in a Manichean world by assigning legitimacy to the local rule of the land and villainy to the intruders. The natives are not racialized, though the intruders and invaders are.

Most of these local stories follow the same formula of presenting Tarzan as the king/lord of the jungle with animals as his friends and subjects without his imperialist position as in Burroughs's narratives and Dehlvi's translations. The jungle becomes the native land, its natural environment as harmonious with the natives, as an abode for co-existence and not as a wild/primitive space to be tamed or civilized. Tarzan, as a legitimate ruler, becomes a symbol of courage and bravery with a strong sense of justice, someone who exercises his power to protect the rights of the weak and the oppressed. He is depicted not only as expert in different human languages but also adept at communicating with animals. He has staple friends: Minko, a monkey, and Makhna, an elephant. Minko performs the roles of Tarzan's secretary, informer, and jester all at the same time. The narrative is no more anthropocentric, as animals are not only anthropomorphized but also given equal rights to freedom and peaceful life. In this way the ethos of these stories is closer to that of the New Wave sf (post 1960s) in the West with a focus on the rights of the marginalized including animals and the natives. These aspects of concern for nature and environment (another element of recent sf), as discussed above, enable a reading of local Tarzan stories as proto science fiction.

Tarzan as an Indigenous/ Native Hero

Clark asserts: "Anthropocene entails abandoning the idea of some kind of pristine 'nature' that might be restored or be preserved without intervention" (143). Human intervention becomes necessary even for the preservation as much as for the colonization of nature. Burroughs's Tarzan appears at once as an imperialist and as a protector of the jungle (though following the principle of racial allegiance), but local Pakistani variations project a different Tarzan who is an anti-imperialist as well as the protector of the jungle and defender of the rights of the animals and natives against all imperial, capitalist, and corporate forces. The ruling elite

continue the colonial practices even into the global era, plundering the resources of their own countries “in a quest for ‘development’, for modernization or ‘catching- up’” (Clark 141). Tarzan becomes an icon of resistance against such plunderers of natural resources: “Tarzan, indeed, did not tolerate the troublemakers and miscreants in his jungle and eliminated them to protect his subjects” (*Tarzan aur Khunkhwar Sher* (Tarzan and a Ferocious Lion) n.d.).

Mazhar Kaleem’s *Tarzan aur Dushman Mehman* (Tarzan and an Enemy Guest n.d.) presents Tarzan as a defender of the jungle and its natives. Neither Tarzan nor the tribal chief, (Sardar) Nasu, is racialized as brown and black. Both treat each other on equal terms sharing mutual respect by addressing each other as *Sardar* (chief/lord) (Kaleem 2). Similarly, in *Tarzan aur Khunkhwar Sher* (Tarzan and a Ferocious Lion n.d.) Sardar Jogomu, the chief of red apes, is treated respectfully as an equal (6). Both Nasu and Jogomu approach Tarzan for his help to fight against the external and internal enemies to maintain the peace in the jungle. Tarzan appears as an anti-imperial figure and a freedom fighter to protect his state/territory (jungle) against the foreign invasion. Unlike ST and translations, Tarzan does not impose friendship or alliances by engaging in politics of fear; rather, his rule is legitimized by his kind and just treatment of his subjects.

Tarzan’s communication with animals and his friendship with them become the major features of Pakistani Tarzan stories. He can communicate with both animals and human beings from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Hence, despite his roots in the local culture, he is entangled in a global network in his encounters with the white intruders. His ability to speak different languages makes him a unique figure in the eyes

of the foreign intruders. He bridges the gap between the local and the global communities through the process of translation, for he translates the laws of the jungle and intentions of the animals and natives for the outsiders besides translating the threats imposed by the foreign intruders on the jungle and its natives. He is the spokesperson for the natural habitat and its inhabitants, as he mediates and negotiates to protect them. He is not constructed in contrast to others. He is one of them. The interdependence of Tarzan and natives and his environment does not present Tarzan as a scion of the civilized world taming the wild.

Tarzan and Revisited Racialism

Like ST and its translations, local Tarzan also holds an interstitial space, but this time, not between savagery and civilization, or the Old and the New World, but between the local and the global. The jungle and its natives are not presented as primitive, nor are they excluded from civilization. The jungle becomes a paradise, an eco-friendly space in which diverse living beings live together peacefully. For example, Jogomu praises the peace of the jungle before the ferocious lion intrudes the peace of his tribe: (*Mera qabila is ghane aur saya dar jangal me hanshi khushi aur aman ke sath rehta he... hamare sab jangal ke basion ke saath bohat ache marasim hen*) “My tribe lives happily and peacefully in the thick and dark forest in the jungle...we have good terms with all inhabitants of the jungle” (*Tarzan aur Khunkhwar Sher* (Tarzan and a Ferocious Lion n.d.). The depiction of Africa is usually humanized, as it no more appears as a dark continent but as a victim of oppression and colonization. Some stories, though, are exceptions in their stereotypical treatment of Africa and cannibals. Otherwise, the jungle is not a wild space; rather, it is presented as a natural environment, an eco-system, in which man and animals are living harmoniously together. Tarzan as a just leader is aware of the disparate

groups living in the jungle and tries to maintain the balance of power by exercising the rule of law to guard everyone's right to freedom.

The trope of Africa as a dark continent with cannibal tribes appears in some stories, for example in "Tarzan aur Adamkhor Vehshi" (Tarzan and the Cannibals) (Anonymous n.d.). The repetition of dark and racially biased images continues their journey past the translations into the local stories. Tarzan is captured by cannibals, who are caricatured drawing on the descriptions of Dehlvi's texts. They are presented as huge, bulky men, half-nude, with painted bodies and faces. In their stereotypical representation, they are dancing around Tarzan, who is tied to a pole, with spears in their hands. Tarzan is saved because Minko, the monkey, arrives with an army of animals led by Kalu, the lion, to rescue him. Overall, most local stories exclude cannibalism from their narratives and depict natives as friends and loyal subjects of Tarzan with their right to the land. They are neither racialized nor are they depicted as inferior to Tarzan or the white intruders. These stories decolonize the jungle/Africa and establish the legitimate rule of the natives led by Tarzan as their chief/lord.

Moreover, unlike the ST and translations, Tarzan is no more a killer of the beasts and the black natives, but their noble king and kind ruler. His eco-friendliness is evident in his harmonious co-existence with other living beings on the principle of mutual respect. The local stories do not boast of his role as a hunter or a fighter but as a just ruler. He does not thrive on hunting or eating raw meat, rather fruits are his staple food which are picked and served by his loyal servant Minko, the monkey. He makes his own weapons (spears, arrows etc.), and does not steal from the natives as depicted in the ST. Tarzan is no longer presented engaging in battles with animals except as a punishment for

a transgression of the law of the jungle in which the killer must be killed, and the traitor and oppressor must be banished. Tarzan tells the white intruders and hunters in *Tarzan aur Sunehri Bagla* (Tarzan and the Golden Seagal): (*me dostonon ka dost or dushmanon ka dushman hun*) “I am the guardian of the friends and an enemy of the enemies” (Shaheen 56). The enemy can also be forgiven on the condition of self-reform, as in this case the intruders promise to return without hunting animals. In this eco-friendly space, Tarzan is always on the side of the weak and the marginalized.

The only racialized others in *Tarzan aur Dushman Mehman* (Tarzan and an Enemy Guest) (Kaleem n.d.), and Athar Shaheen’s *Tarzan aur Sunehri Bagla* (Tarzan and the Golden Seagull) are the white men from the so-called “civilized world” (Enemy Guest 3, and Golden Seagull 2) who intrude this imaginary paradise with their violence directed at the environment and the natives. The white color is used to homogenize them as foreign intruders and European imperialists without specifying their nationalities and other differences. In *Tarzan aur Dushman Mehman* (Tarzan and an Enemy Guest), the white men invade and kill many men of Sardar Nasu’s tribe to steal local resources and to occupy the diamond mines. They threaten to kill the natives if they show any resistance (3). Sardar Nasu seeks Tarzan’s help to fight these invaders. Their intrusion and invasion delegitimize their presence in the jungle, and their senseless killing of the natives and unprovoked attack on Tarzan and animals further vilifies them. They are presented as cruel, mean, avaricious, and treacherous fellows who will violate the environment and use any means for the material gains. They are dehumanized because of their moral flaws and not because of some biological essentialism.

Tarzan exercises force and violence only to defend his jungle and its inhabitants against the intruders. However, there is a twist in the story, as the intruders claim to be some university

researchers who have come there to conduct a field survey. Tarzan mediates between the researchers and the local tribesmen, who insist on killing as many men as are killed by the white men. As the law of the jungle decrees: “life for life” (Kaleem 14). Finally, Sardar Nasu forgives the culprits, who promise Tarzan to leave the jungle peacefully as soon as their research is over, thus the white intruders get away easily without paying any price for their misdeeds. This is an unusual ending, as in other stories violation of the borders of this eco-friendly space is rightfully avenged.

Tarzan and Nationalism/Territorialization

Unlike the ST and translations, Pakistani Tarzan’s protection is reserved for the animals and the natives against the white men. The jungle gets transformed into a state with borders, and Tarzan is its protector. This course of action is traceable in the hardline Pakistan-US relations since the inception of Pakistan in 1947. Pakistan, unlike India, had no option to follow the policy of non-alignment. Because of US interests in the region during the Cold War, the USSR’s invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and US policy on the Middle East, (and later, the War on Terror), Pakistan had no choice but to side with the US in return for US aid, and to maintain its stability against the permanent threat from India (Leake 800). As an ally to the US, the short-term friendship spans remained full of strains due to the asymmetrical nature of the relationship, with US’s cold shoulder in the Pak-India wars of 1965 and 1971, with social isolation of Pakistan as a result of “US proxy aid to Afghan Rebels [Talibans]” (Leake 800) to fight the USSR’s invasion in Afghanistan, and later, the rise of terrorist attacks in Pakistan as the aftermath of US War on Terror in Afghanistan. The relationship remained asymmetrical, and Pakistan always felt at a disadvantage with a pressure to do more (Amin 97).

In *Tarzan aur Sunehri Bagla* (Tarzan and Golden Seagull n.d.), the white men come to the jungle to steal some birds and animals to be smuggled to the so-called civilized world to accumulate wealth. Their violation of the environment embodied in their imperial extortion of local resources villainizes them. This theme of imperialism by the West is linked with stealing and plundering of the indigenous resources in the postcolonial literature. Tarzan again emerges as an anti-imperial and a pro-environment figure safeguarding the boundaries of the jungle against these greedy imperialists looking for animals and hidden treasure (14). This time, they are there to capture a golden seagull to sell it to a zoo in the West. The mercenary motives of the white men, their greed, and their willingness to exercise violence with the use of weapons are described to portray them as dark characters. They are intruders into the pristine natural environment and cause an imbalance by ruthlessly killing the animals including four lions in the jungle (29). Tarzan appears as a savior figure to rescue the bird from the imperialist thieves.

Tarzan is presented as a generous, hospitable, and trusting figure, who despite his power resorts to forgive others and settle matters peacefully. He offers to forgive the white men for killing four lions on the condition of leaving the jungle peacefully, but their greed leads them astray (35-36). The white men plot to befriend Tarzan to steal the golden seagull. Thus, they act as treacherously as the imperialists did in colonizing India by befriend the local elites and later betraying them. Their betrayal of Tarzan in the guise of friendship, stealing of the golden seagull, and murderous attempt at Tarzan enrages him and motivates him for revenge. These thieves and exploiters of natural environment are avenged with death for killing animals, stealing the golden seagull, and betraying Tarzan (Shaheen 78-80).

Besides protecting the jungle against the white intruders, Tarzan also restores peace by maintaining the balance of power to avoid internal conflicts. *Tarzan aur Khunkhwar Sher*

(Tarzan and a Ferocious Lion), again presents Tarzan as the legitimate king who maintains peace among diverse and disparate factions of his state. Jogumu, the chief of red gorillas, complains to Tarzan against a ferocious lion killing the members of his tribe. Tarzan decides to kill the lion, as it is identified as a murderer, and because it is not ready to mend its ways (6). The battle with the lion ends with Tarzan's victory and chants raised by Jogumu and Minko: (*Tarzan Zindabad*), translation "Long live Tarzan" (15) to legitimize his just rule on the jungle to maintain peace and balance of power among disparate groups. Here, Tarzan serves as an army leader to maintain peace both within the state to avoid civil war and to guard the territory against the foreign invasion.

This story becomes interesting in the context of Pakistanis living under dictatorship/s which always tried to justify itself with the pretense of guarding the country against both internal and external threats. It sounds more relevant after the loss of East Pakistan in 1971 which due to censorship led to limited literary response pushing the tragedy into "official and public amnesia" (Shamsie 23). The issue was considered a cause of humiliation in the context of "the repatriation of the ninety thousand Pakistani prisoners of war (POWs) in Indian prison camps" (Memon 106). Very few Urdu writers like Intezar Hussain, Masud Mufti, Parvin Sarvar, and Nadim Bari wrote on the issue, and Qudratullah Shahab mourned this intellectual disregard for the issue due to "the fear of being dubbed a traitor" (Memon 108). After 2000, several works can be found on the subject: Sorayya Y. Khan's novel *Noor* (2003), Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2003), Shahbano Bilgrami's *Without Dreams* (2007), and Moni Mohsin's *The End of Innocence* (2006). Local Tarzan's territorialization to protect the jungle boundaries and to maintain the balance of power among conflicting groups might be read as nationalistic enthusiasm spurred by the defeat at the hands of Indian army and the creation of Bangladesh.

Glocalized Gender-roles

As far as gender roles are concerned, the local stories usually exclude any female characters and present an all-male world, in which the protagonist must defend his territory consistently against the invaders. The characters of Alice, Kala, and Jane are not retained, as the focus remains on Tarzan's autonomy and his eternal youth. In most stories, he is presented in his early teens, burdened only by the matters of governance. The exclusion of Jane might be a result of the conservative period under General Zia's dictatorship (1978-1988) whose "Islamization has had serious concrete effects on both civil society and the possibility of democracy in Pakistan" (Cilano 107), or it might be considered a cultural gesture to free Tarzan from the Western and Indian traditions of presenting a hypersexualized Jane. This reason seems more valid, as in Pakistan, no film is made on Tarzan in contrast to India where hundreds of Tarzan films have been produced with a "narrative formula" focusing on two lovers "far away from civilization, thus hinting at a "raw," unconstrained sexuality" (Parciack 107).

Last Word on the Local Stories

To sum up, Pakistani Tarzan does not follow the trajectory of ST and translations and takes a different course by establishing an indigenous hero protecting the jungle and its natives. Unlike ST and translations, Tarzan is inseparable from his environment. He never moves to the "civilized" world, nor does he view his environment and its inhabitants as uncivilized. Hence, Tarzan continues his journey beyond translations by Dehlvi taking a life of his own. The local writers, like Dehlvi, use a glocal approach, by revisiting the plot, themes, and characterization to transcend the limits imposed by both ST and translations, to attract the local readers. Though they borrow tropes drawing on anthropological and sociological aspects of ST and translations of Tarzan as a man brought up in the jungle with his ability to communicate with both humans and

animals, they use them to assert his (locally valued) traits of anti-imperialism, love of freedom, rule of law, protection of the environment, and use of force only against the unjustified intruders and invaders. Such elements distinguish these stories from speculative fiction produced at the time and enable their reading as proto sf.

While Western sf reads like a colonial fantasy, Pakistani sf makes a contrary move by decolonizing Tarzan's world. Local Tarzan is not pitted against the natives or a harsh environment. Different species of animals and humans can co-exist peacefully in this imagined world. Though, like the ST, translations and local stories were intended and produced for younger readers as adventure fiction, yet the extrapolation of scientific ideas to create a plausible world with an element of "cognitive estrangement" and an ability to engage with 'What if' situations make them antecedents to Pakistani science fiction.

Chapter 2: Locating Religion and its Diverse Treatment in Science Fiction

This chapter discusses the role of religion in Pakistani science fiction. Unlike Western sf, religion or faith is not discarded in Pakistani sf as a superstition or displaced altogether with faith in science or "force"; rather, God plays an important role in the redemption at both personal and public levels. There are some points of similarity too; for example, one can find the common

theme of the mad scientists or humans filled with hubris provoking nothing but doom. Usually, Pakistani sf places faith at the center with a belief that there is no disparity or contradiction between science and religion; rather, both are complementary in establishing a strong and informed relationship with God ensuring peace and prosperity both at the individual and collective levels. The centrality of this Islam-science nexus does not mean that Pakistani sf is missionary in spirit; rather, it reflects a liberal and egalitarian approach to resolving the sociopolitical problems facing Pakistanis as well as humankind in general. Other important religious motifs in Pakistani sf include the alliance between technology and religious extremism and the combination of technology with spiritual experiences. Here too, one can identify the glocal approach, as these stories imagine worlds where characters try to resolve the national issues of sectarianism, extremism, illiteracy, gender discrimination, and class/caste system besides leaving an important message of peace, co-existence, and harmony valuable at the global scale.

The first part of this chapter discusses the treatment of religion in Western and Indian science fiction traditions drawing on the insights of many Western and Indian sf scholars. This review, as already stated in the introduction of the dissertation, is important because Pakistani sf is in its initial stages of evolution and follows these global traditions despite subverting the genre to meet the local needs. The discussion, in this part, focuses on the relationship between science and religion in two different cultures (Western and Indian), and how it is presented in their sf. The second part discusses religious and scientific discourse emerging from Islamic scientific tradition to highlight the Islam-science nexus drawing on the scholarly works of Mazhar Iqbal and Georges Anawati. This review of the relationship between science and Islam helps to contextualize the treatment of religion in Pakistani sf. This part discusses two Pakistani sf films

*Shaani*¹³ (Saeed Rizvi 1989) and *Sar Kata Insaan* (Beheaded Man) (Saeed Rizvi 1994) to discuss how both religion and science contribute to the world-building without depicting any contradictions between the two epistemological frameworks. The third part discusses two motifs: i) religion (its distortion in the form of Pakistani blasphemy laws) as a problem with a focus on the alliance between technology and religious extremism, and ii) the combination of technology with spirituality to highlight shades of Sufism in Pakistani sf. The misinterpretation of religion to incite religious extremism using technology also becomes part of Pakistani science fiction as highlighted in the critique of Pakistani blasphemy laws in a short, animated sf film *SWIPE* (Arafat Mazhar 2020). The third part also discusses the treatment of religion with shades of Sufism in Pakistani sf *Tilism i Hosh Afza* (The Enlightenment of the Senses) (2013) written by the prolific Pakistani writer Ashfaq Ahmad as a dedication to *Tilism e Hoshruha* (The Enchantment of the Senses).

I. Science vs Religion

In the Western sf, ample examples can be found of presenting religion and science as opposite poles, with science as a guarantee for world progress while religion as an opium in Marx's words (qtd. Clark 99) and bone of contention reminiscent of the history of religious wars and bloodshed. On the other hand, Indian sf accepts science as a necessity to compete in the modern world but without forgetting its colonial roots and, simultaneously, trying to reconcile it with Vedic science to reconstruct a precolonial past. The following review of Western and Indian sf traditions will help our understanding of both the similarities and differences in the treatment of religion in Pakistani science fiction in the next parts of this chapter.

Western sf and Religion

¹³ *Shaani* (name of the film and the alien) is also spelled as *Shanee* at some places. I use *Shaani* for consistency.

The Western science-fictional approach is marked by doubt, as it emerged at a time of great conflict between religion and science in the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Sanders analyzes science fiction and fantasy as genres of doubt. She posits that these genres emerged because of the Victorian “crisis of faith” (4) which resulted from the challenge posed by various scientific theories (especially evolutionary and racialist theories). Sanders tries to link the development of the genre of science fiction with the Victorian religious unsettlement that provided literary space for speculative fiction, “fairy tales”, and “romances” (3). She considers Reformation philosophers like Spinoza and Descartes responsible for inducing the spirit of doubt into Western culture, with the latter’s belief in doubt as “the only way to reliable science” (7). Later, this spirit of doubt got strengthened by imperial ventures, the experience of the other cultures, and new scientific theories; for example, the evolutionary theory challenged the biblical creation myth.

Before Darwin, natural theology dominated scientific works in the West. Geological facts supported by fossil records were explained using religious frameworks. The major trend was “to negotiate, reconcile, or accommodate religion and science” (Shea and Whitla 116). Victor Shea and William Whitla cite examples of works by William Paley, Frederick Temple, and Anne Wright. After Darwin, three factors, “agency, causality and temporality” became the cause of conflict between religion and science, as geology and the theory of evolution challenged Biblical creationism and its chronology devised by James Ussher in 1654 about the world’s creation in 4004 BCE (113-114). Though Charles Lyell and Darwin did not openly challenge the religious worldview, their theories based on uniformitarianism (gradual change over a long period of time and no special creation or sudden change) challenged the established theological worldview. The Oxford debate (1860) between Thomas Huxley and Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, vice-president of BAAS, at the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, is

considered the starting point of “the supposed war between science and religion” (note 11, 3) by winning the public support for Huxley in response to Wilberforce’s objections. The popularizers like Huxley and Alfred Russel Wallace changed the discourse of reconciliation into that of conflict between the two fields. Though others rejected the presence of any design and argued for randomness in the process of natural selection, scientists like William Whewell used evolutionary theory as a religious analogy to propose life on other planets with a conviction that Enlightenment principles alone cannot help comprehend “God’s purposes” and to understand “the final causes of things” (Clark 97). Thus, sf developed in this context of the conflict between religion and science.

Farah Mendlesohn, tracing roots of sf in scientific romances and pulp magazines, asserts that while the former gave birth to space opera without projecting “a religious interpretation of the world”, the latter reflected “a much more ritualistic understanding of religion” (1). She posits that from 1920s onwards, despite the popularity of spiritualism, there was a push towards secularization of education and from the 1960s onwards, secularism became “an apparently hegemonic intellectual tradition in the USA” (1). In such a social environment, sf usually treated religion contemptuously aiming at futuristic visions of more liberal and secular worlds in which religion belonged to “the ‘Other,’ the backward and the primitive” (1). She cites the example of Edgar Rice Burroughs’s *Barsoom* series in which religion is presented as a set of superstitions in a “neo-Arabic Mars” and hence is defeated by John Carter (2). She suggests that Burroughs presents various cultures practising polytheism, and this might have been inspired by “American fascination with Hinduism” (3). Such texts exoticized other races/aliens to highlight their backwardness. This image remained dominant in the Golden Age sf (2).

Mendlesohn asserts that religion is usually associated with the lack of reason and scientific thinking, a tool of exploiting the masses or as a way to explain “an incomprehensible world” such as in Isaac Asimov’s “Nightfall” (1941) and Robert Heinlein’s “If This Goes On” (1940), and *Orphans of the Sky* (1963). Religion is usually used as a symbol of the level of evolution of a culture/civilization with a focus on the rituals. Some sf presents priests as the main explorers following the tradition of anthropology and adventure fiction of the nineteenth century with a role to challenge the faith of the people the priest encounters and to speculate over his own (3). She discusses the example of James Blish’s *A Case of Conscience* (1958). She notes that this suspicion of religion continues in the post-nuclear era (3). She goes as far as to say that “religion became essentially unAmerican, or at least marginal to the definition of an Earthman” (4).

Scholars like Douglas E. Cowan discuss the potential of sf to ask religious questions usually not considered by other kinds of fiction: “Do robots have souls? Will aliens worship God? Will religious prophecy guide us among the stars as it has on Earth?” (52). He argues that sf, by engaging with such questions, provides a space for “inter-religious dialogue” both in the imaginary and the real world (51). Sf depicts manichean plots in which characters are placed at “the centre of great salvation dramas” (42). He cites the example of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* as an illustration of a multicultural world with the representation of different religions to encourage “interspecies tolerance” (49). However, he admits that like most sf, many episodes of *Star Trek* depict religion “as a relic of cultures less enlightened than those in the Federation” (44).

Rudy V. Busto also posits that sf encourages “religious speculation” by citing examples from works by Afro-American and “ethnic minority writers” (399). According to Suvin the basic

element of sf is the experience of “cognitive estrangement”. The “cognitive” or rational world still makes new imagined realities (estrangement) accessible (Suvin 6-10). Foregrounding Suvin’s idea of “cognitive estrangement”, he states, “Religious experience can exist in science fiction but only if we can ‘cognitively’ account for it”, though he complicates the matter by enquiring, “But what if we cannot cognitively account for religious experience?” (400). He contends that Afro-American and other ethnic-minority writers have not been victims of religion as much as that of science and technology as embodied in the history of slavery, genocide, and eugenics. He argues that Afro-American writers have deconstructed the boundary between “science fiction and fantasy... between what is conventionally accepted and recognized as ‘scientific and not ‘magical,’ ‘superstitious,’ or ‘religious’” (400). They use sf to revisit “the problematic history of science and technology” and to present myth and religion as “alternate ways of knowing” the world (401). Busto rightly observes in his discussion of works by Octavia Butler and Nalo Hopkinson, “the dominant sf episteme” gets challenged by writers of colour to make room for saints, spirits, (gods/even djinns) and other “indigenous ways of knowing” (401). This is also very much true of Indian and Pakistani sf, as we shall see in the later sections.

Moreover, scholars like Stephen R. L. Clark observe that despite the general assumption of viewing religion as an outsider to science fiction, it is common to find religious symbolism in an sf world. Clark discusses works like Ray Bradbury’s “The Man” (1948), James Blish’s *Black Easter* (1968), and C. S. Lewis’s interplanetary trilogy as examples of the use of Christian mythology like the rebirth of Christ, the beginning of Armageddon, and survival of Christian monastic orders (95). He asserts that sf deals with religion “in a wider sense” by exploring it as a subject, its effects on a society “most often with pejorative intent,” sometimes suggesting new forms of ethical systems to replace the older ones (95). Clark observes that “science fiction is

concerned with a natural universe, and the technological capacity to manipulate or control it” and finds the roots of sf in the Enlightenment, which due to the realization of the vastness of the universe, introduced “story-telling, thought experiment of a kind that later ages class as science fiction” (96).

Clark classifies sf’s entanglement with religion under four comprehensive categories: Authority and Anticlericalism, Realizing the Dream, Apotheosis and the Day of Days, and Science Fiction as Religion which I rename to add relevant critique by other scholars to elaborate on the four main trends in Western sf tradition as far as religion/sf nexus is concerned.

i) Religion as a controlling mechanism: Clark examines the depiction of organized religion in science fiction by emphasizing sf’s roots in the Enlightenment ideals of teleological progress by using the scientific method and winning emancipation from “medieval scholasticism” (98), keeping in view religious challenges to Copernicus and Galileo. In the historical context of this antagonism between science and religion, some sf presents evil clerics using “technologies and propaganda to deceive the faithful” (98). He cites examples of Robert Heinlein’s *Future History* (1939-1941, & 1945-1950) and Gordon Dickson’s *Childe Cycle* (1960-1988) which present the protestant fundamentalists and sectarian fanatics respectively, controlling and manipulating the common people denying them individual freedom (98). Even Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Red Mars*, *Green Mars*, and *Blue Mars* (1992-1996) depict an anti-religious element motivated by environmental problems (99). These works depict religion as a tool of oppression.

Similarly, Steven Hrotic considers this oppressive and manipulative side of religion to be an important motif traceable in early sf such as by H.G. Wells. He discusses two works by Wells: *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1898-99), in which Graham, who wakes up after two hundred years into the year 2100, finds himself in a society ruled by plutocracy, where organized religion is

commodified (46); while “In the Abyss” (1896) presents an explorer into an underwater world who is taken as a god. This provides another important schema for sf: religion as “a problem” waiting to be resolved by scientific knowledge/insight (48). He observes that even the feminist alternate world presented in Mary Bradley Lane’s *Mizora* (1880) omits religion replacing it with science (35).

ii) Religion as a source of cohesion: Clark examines the positive treatment of religious myths and legends in sf where religion serves as a hope for a better world. For example, in Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* (1951-53), the religion demands a complete allegiance to the “Galactic Spirit” with emphasis on “conventional morality and reverence to the Foundation” (Clark 100). In this work, religion plays a positive role in promoting a vision to build the Second Empire and to sustain a faith in victory realized by the psychohistorians.

Similarly, Mendlesohn notes the examples in sf which treat religion positively and take a human tendency to faith “as natural to the human condition” by citing examples from William Tenn’s and James Tiptree’s works which depict human inability to win freedom from religion and a willingness to submit to various myths (4). In the same way, Hrotic also notes that sf is not always dismissive of religion. Hrotic discusses Frank Herbert’s *Dune* (1965) as an example of a more complicated treatment of religion with a great emphasis on individual transformation (117). Similarly, in the 1970s, Michael Moorcock’s *Behold the Man* (1969) and Ray Bradbury’s “The Messiah” (1971) present the importance of myth in shaping human behaviour and course of action.

iii) Religion and the question of transcendence: Clark examines sf which imagines godlike heroes like Superman. A few works may include Theodore Surgeon’s *More than Human* (1953), and Olaf Stapledon’s *Last and First Men* (1930) which depict powerful men getting unified into

“a corporate intelligence, a god entirely human” (102). Both Mendelsohn and Hrotic also cite the example of Olaf Stapledon’s *Last and First Men* (1930) and *Star Maker* (1937) which depict human evolution culminating in transcendence (Mendelsohn 5). Humans keep changing because of interaction with their cultural and historical antecedents (covering eighteen species) and the environment, retaining religion in different forms, passing through phases of devotion and rationalism (Hrotic 50). Similarly, virtual reality in works like Greg Egan’s *Permutation City* (1994) offers godlike power to some individuals (Clark 104).

Hrotic traces roots of the sf motif of humans attaining a godlike power in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), which has become a myth to be revisited, since it was first conceived (44). He takes the text not as a denunciation of scientific progress but of Frankenstein’s irresponsible attitude towards his creature. The text is neither anti-science nor pro-religion, yet it makes a significant contribution to the meta-narrative by highlighting the danger lurking in scientific knowledge which may lead to transgression (44). Still, like a myth, it involves ethical questions by looking at the relation between the Creator and creatures. The influence of this myth can be traced in Isaac Asimov’s *I Robot* (1950), as pointed out by Douglas E. Cowan, in raising ethical questions about transcending human limits by producing sentient machines (51).

iv) Science Fiction as Religion examines the potential of sf to initiate some religions/cults (Clark 107). Clark views participation in sf culture as a kind of ritual in imagining distant future worlds. Sf fans form their cults and cherish their own beliefs in the possible worlds. They can “imagine themselves in league with that eventual future _ the Federation, or the Empire, or the Omega point of cosmic evolution” (107). Clark reads their skepticism as “a religious pattern” (108). He cites examples of suicide (1997) of the “Heaven Gate” sectarians in the hope for their passage into a new world, and those who cherish hope for a continuous existence in cyberspace (108).

Mendlesohn also points out sf's potential to start countercultures. She discusses Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) which became "a bible for the counter culture" (5). Similarly, James Thrall mentions *Star Wars* (1977) as an inspiration for Jedi groups (344).

Hrotic also notes sf's prophetic vision in the actualization of the novums or disasters in real life. For example, H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, Edward Bellamy, and Aldous Huxley precisely predicted several aspects of the future world. John Dewey called Edward Bellamy "a great American prophet" (31). His work *Looking Backward* (1888) inspired people to form several clubs to "put his lessons into practice" (31). Finally, Bina Nir posits that a basic element of sf narratives is the presence of a sense of mission "with faith and the desire to influence the future" with a hope for salvation (66).

This review of the scholarly discussion of the treatment of religion in Western sf highlights the importance of faith in science fiction. Hrotic claims that "humans need to have transcendence, and religion and science fiction both fill that need" (10). Hrotic explores many schemas for religion in sf to conclude that "there are no characteristic schemas" (53). Religion can be a sign of backwardness, a source of war, but at other times, a source of social cohesion. Mostly, Western sf projects a secular world, and religion is usually dismissed as irrelevant to humanity's future. Despite the preference for science as an alternative episteme to religion, the positive and negative portrayals of the latter stress the universality of faith. Hence, Thrall paraphrases Doris Lessing's observation: "The sacred literatures of all races and nations have many things in common. Almost as if they can be regarded as the products of a single mind"(343).

Indian sf and Religion

As mentioned earlier, Rudy V. Busto's claim about Afro-American and ethnic minority writers for challenging the traditional science as the only epistemology with alternate ways of knowing and explaining the world holds much relevance for Indian and Pakistani sf. Suparno Banerjee draws attention to the Western (now global) trend to privilege scientific epistemology over "metaphysical and mythical understanding of the world" (*Indian SF* 63). He does so to highlight the hybridity of Indian sf as a product of intersections of diverse epistemologies valued in Indian culture (63).

As a result of the colonial experience, India faced "epistemic violence", as the local traditions got delegitimized by Western science as well as postcolonial local elites (Banerjee *Indian SF* 66). Indian sf, unlike Western sf, does not present religion and science as opposite binaries; rather, it acknowledges the importance of science as a specific kind of human "cognitive activity" and mediates its relationship with other "multiple epistemes" like Vedic science and folk knowledge (64). These competing sources of knowledge, Banerjee posits, "are not always polarised, but synthetic and syncretic" (64). Therefore, the world-building in Indian sf may include simultaneously "aliens, high-tech gadgets, Vedic science, and local ghosts within the same universe without any epistemic rupture" (69).

Banerjee considers the emergence of Indian sf as a response to the familiarization with European science as a result of colonial contact (*Other Tomorrows* 28). He discusses the establishment of various universities and the emergence of sf genre dealing with technology in Bengali and Hindi at the close of the nineteenth century (29). The colonial science not only challenged "pre-colonial epistemology based on religion and philosophy", but also served as "a tool for progressive Indian nationalists to root out social evils and create a 'modern' India" (28). While the Orientalists in the West played on the binary between the East and the West, so did

Hindu nationalists who “exploited this divide by extending the religion/science binary as Indian/European binary” (30). The tensions between Western science and Indian tradition increased with the rise of nationalism. While many proclaimed the authority of Vedic science, there came a paradigm shift as a result of colonial tutelage towards Western science and its adherents (*Indian SF* 68) with social reformists like Rammohan Ray and Debendranath Tagore (nineteenth century) who emphasized opening up to Western knowledge by deconstructing such binaries (*Other Tomorrows* 31).

Banerjee asserts that though it has become a norm to associate Indian sf with myths and legends, such a relationship should be distinguished from “the relationship of myths with fantasies” (*Other Tomorrows* 31). In the case of Indian sf, the myths and legends are used with a desire “to foreground the Indian tradition as a scientific one to legitimize Hinduism through the discourse of Vedic science” (45). He posits that unlike Western sf, Indian sf tries “to utilize and legitimize mythical elements in the modern discourse” (45). He cites examples of Dayanand Sarasvati’s reinterpretation of Vedas to foreground “India’s precedence in everything scientific the world has seen” (45). He discusses many examples from Marathi works with even titles based on Hindu myths to illustrate how the protagonists of such works are Hindus, well-versed in Vedic science with a firm belief in its superiority to other world traditions, marginalizing non-Hindus as Others (46). In this way, Indian sf follows the Western sf tradition of excluding and marginalizing anything different from its standard of modernity. The proponents of Vedic science believe in the scientific age of India disrupted by many colonizers and the West. They believe that “all scientific knowledge available to the modern world can be traced back to the Vedic sages of ancient India” (81).

Banerjee mentions several Indian sf writers like Lakshman Londhe, J. V. Narlikar, and Chintamani Deshmukh who were influenced by Vedic science (188). These writers use the Hindu mythological framework in their sf to present contemporary issues (46). He discusses their translated works like *They Killed the Gods Alive* (1991) and *Yaksopher* (1991) as examples of a “nativist trend in Indian sf not only for the blending of myth and science fiction, but because of a serious contemplation of Vedic knowledge” (46). They use myths to claim the roots of scientific knowledge in ancient India (47). As compared to Western material science, Vedic science is also transcendental in nature. This different kind of sf is the result of a different understanding of (Vedic) science in Indian context that lays importance on both material and metaphysical.

Banerjee discusses the intersection of myth and science in Indian sf with a conviction that technological and scientific elements in sf distinguish it from the genre of fantasy. Such stories appropriate science and technology to deal with contemporary issues facing Indian society (*Indian SF* 72). He discusses Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) as an example of the interdependence of imperial and local scientific traditions by revisiting “Ronald Ross’s (1857-1932) discovery of the malaria parasite in colonial India” (82). This novel is a good example of subversion of Western sf tradition by deploying competing epistemologies to build a world: “Bridging the gap between horror, folktale, SF, historical fiction, Ghosh’s work provides an outstanding example of subaltern knowledge questioning the dominant modes of knowing” (82). This mixture of sf with the supernatural is also visible in other Indian sf by writers like Sukanya Datta and Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay (83).

Similarly, Sami A. Khan studies mediation between mythology and sf in three stories from *Breaking the Bow* (2012) to illustrate how myth is used to reinterpret the *Ramayana* to

critique social ills like patriarchy, misogyny, and gender discrimination. He argues that these stories trace roots of gender discrimination in the *Ramayana* in which Lord Rama banished his chaste wife Sita due to the public opinion affected by victim-blaming. Sita appears as an artificial intelligence in Indrapramit Das's "Sita's Descent", as an extra-terrestrial in Pervin Saket's "Test of Fire", and as a time traveller in Swapna Kishore's "Regressions" (19). These stories by blending mythology with technology expose "the misogyny of the original text" (18) by revisiting "the Agni Pareeksha of Sita- the ordeal by fire" (19).

Uppinder Mehan, in his examination of stories from *It Happened Tomorrow* (1992) edited by Bal Phondke, observes that Indian sf draws on Indian mythology despite having "the cognitive and scientific aspect" (2). These stories allude to the *Vedas* (a collection of ancient texts) as a source for "modern and future technology" (5). The Indianness of Indian sf, he quotes Phondke, depends on "the cultural and social ambiance which gives it its soul" with "the complex relation, in India, between technology and cultural experience of colonialism" (3). He observes that transfer of technology is uni-directional and is filtered through "technological protectionism" to keep the colonized under control (3). The inferiority complex induced through the colonial experience produces a sort of resistance in the postcolonial nations, and hence "they try to stress local culture and values even while borrowing from the heart of the West" (4). He argues that stories like Jayat V. Narlikar's "The Ice Age Cometh", Arun Mande's "Ruby", and Debabarata Dash's "Encounter with God" (from Phondke's collection 1992) domesticate technology to deal with the local issues of casteism, transcendentalism, and marriage by engaging with the reality of "double-consciousness and conversely, the impossibility of living without hybridity" (11).

Nonetheless, like Western sf, the trope of religion as a problem, being a source of conflict and fundamentalism, is also evident in Indian sf. Banerjee cites the example of Suknaya Dutta's stories dealing with the conflict between religion and science in the life of newly educated people (*Other Tomorrows* 56). He also discusses Rimi B. Chaterjee's *Signal Red* (2005) as an example of treating religion as a problem leading to the rise of fundamentalism (79). The novel depicts the dangers lurking in Hindu nationalism, a reality since the 1990s, or Hindutva which excludes all non-Hindus especially the Muslims who "act as the Other to the definition of the Hindu Self" (80). The novel does not present religion as opposed to science; rather, it presents dangers of an "uneasy alliance between science, religion, and fundamentalism" (94). Religion is presented as a tool of manipulation and exploitation. The fundamentalists use science and technology for their advantage "to establish a Hindu hegemony" (80). Another example of the negative portrayal of religion discussed by Banerjee is Priya Sarukkai Chabria's *Generation 14* (2008), which critiques any form of ideology leading to oppression of the common masses including "religion, politics, or nationalism" (*Other Tomorrows* 133). Chabria uses Indian myths "as subtexts of her critique against all forms of domination" (166).

It is obvious from the discussion of Indian scholars that religion is integral to Indian science fiction. Banerjee illustrates how myths are used in Indian sf either i) to legitimize Hindu tradition as in the works of Lakshman Londhe, J. V. Narlikar, and Chintamani Deshmukh, or ii) to critique fundamentalism and "challenge the patriarchal structure of Indian society" as in the works of Chaterjee, Chabria, Vandana Singh, Anil Menon, and Ruchir Joshi. Mehan also highlights the domestication of technology to complement mythology in Indian sf dealing with social issues. Finally, Khan, considering religion to be an integral part of Indian sf, asks a pertinent question based on his observation: "SF becomes mythology of the rocket age – it tells a

story, explains a speculative dimension, and simultaneously ensures the interrogation of external reality. Cannot SF be read as mythology of and from the twenty first century?” (23).

This discussion of the scholarly works on Western and Indian sf has made it clear that religion is an important element in both Western and Indian sf, though they approach it differently. Western sf usually marginalizes religion as a relic of the past suggesting scientific solutions to human problems dealing with alien encounters, apocalypse, doomsday, and survival, but despite the negative portrayal of religion, we can find some positive representation of religion as a source of social cohesion. In addition, we find several cults emerging from Western sf fan-following. Indian sf, on the other hand, embraces religion as an equally important episteme with science in its world-building. Sometimes, like Western sf, it also presents the negative side of religion as a source of conflict and fundamentalism. Hence, Indian sf transforms or subverts the genre by blending mythology with technology. Pakistani science fiction follows suit as is illustrated by the discussion in the second part.

II. Religion in Pakistani Science Fiction

Islam and Science Nexus

Just as Western and Indian sf scholars discuss the growth of sf genre in the context of scientific progress, similarly, it is important to understand the Islam-science nexus to contextualize Pakistani science fiction. Unlike the nineteenth-century crisis of faith experienced by the West as a result of discoveries by Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin which pointed out the contradictions between religious and scientific narratives, the Islamic world did not face such challenges from science to the basic claims of Islam. On the contrary, scientific knowledge complemented other ways of understanding the multilayered text of the Holy Quran with new insights into the laws of nature. Despite the decline of Islamic scientific tradition and the popular

assumption of the Islamic world as regressive or antagonistic to Western science, the facts are otherwise (Iqbal xv).

Both the Holy Quran and the hadiths emphasize the importance of observation, investigation, and re/search for the truth based on evidence in all matters of life. In fact, in the Islamic world, during the Golden Age from the eighth to the fifteenth century, Islam and science were never conceived as “separate entities” (Iqbal xix) and like other branches of knowledge, science was “fully integrated into the hierarchy of Islamic thought” (xix). Therefore, it seems pertinent, before the discussion of the primary texts, to examine the Islam-science nexus to highlight that in Pakistani sf both religion and science serve as esteemed epistemological frameworks.

Critical Context:

Despite a different national identity, Pakistanis feel themselves a part of the bigger world of Islam (*Ummah*¹⁴) and often look back nostalgically towards the Golden Age of Islam. Many examples of nostalgia can be found in mainstream literature in the works of Allama Iqbal, Altaf Hussain Hali, Hafeez Jalandhari, Nasim Hijazi, Tariq Ali, and Ilyas Sitapuri. This nostalgia of Muslim scholars is comparable with the postcolonial revival of Vedic science in Indian sf as recapitulated by Banerjee and Mehan. Dr. Bina Nir observes citing Henri Bergson that “ethics, law, and scientific method originated in religion, and remain steeped in its spirit” (55). A very short review of the Islamic scientific tradition, drawing on the scholarly works of Mazhar Iqbal and Georges Anawati in this section, will prove Nir’s observation also valid in the context of Islam and science nexus. This review of the Islamic scientific tradition is needed to understand

¹⁴ The concept of oneness (unity) is based on faith. Islam does not believe in racial, national, regional divisions. (Most Muslim scholars, like Allama Iqbal, consider the present lack of unity as the main cause of the decline of the Islamic Golden Age.)

the rationale involved in Pakistani sf's world-building which uses Islam-science nexus as an important motif.

Mazhar Iqbal posits that the Holy Quran holds the central place in “the development of the Islamic scientific tradition” (3). The Holy Quran consistently draws attention to “the harmony, symmetry and order present in the natural world” (3) raising pertinent questions about the vastness of the universe, planetary movements, and other natural phenomenon with God as the Law-Giver: “Surely in these are signs for people who understand” (Quran 2. 164-165)¹⁵. This way, science and religion are not contrary but complementary in understanding the universe, by observing these signs to deduce knowledge (32). The first generation of Muslims, while engaging with the work of “Tafsir” (exegesis) of the Holy Quran, developed Arabic grammar and “technical terminology” (4). This intellectual exercise to understand “the multilayered prose” of the Holy Book helped define some concepts and approaches to study nature including “knowledge (*al-ilm*) and its related concepts gnosis (*marifa*) and comprehension (*idrak*)” (4), with a tradition of learning able to “absorb new branches as it grew” (4).

Islam, like the other two monotheistic Abrahamic religions, provides a holistic view of the world in which “God is the originator of everything that exists” (29), and where metaphysical and spiritual cannot be separated from the physical experience. Therefore, while a Muslim engages in his daily business, he returns to five-times prayer as a reminder of the ultimate purpose of his life, “to worship Me [Allah]” (Quran 51. 56-57). This unity of physical and metaphysical experience is “a recurrent theme of the Quran which relates it to its central concept of Tawhid, the Unicity of God” (29). Georges Anawati asserts that being religious in personal life did not hinder Muslim scientists from the path of scientific investigation because “they were

¹⁵ English translation of the Holy Quran is taken from <https://myislam.org/>

not seeking any the less to work for the glory of God and the service of religion” with their devotion to “the science derived from Greece, Persia or from India” (741).

Iqbal asserts that Islamic scientific tradition emerged from “a larger tradition of learning” (72, Anawati 741) inspired by both the Holy Quran and the hadiths. Seeking knowledge is an important part of the Islamic faith. The revelation started with the first command *Iqra* (Read) (Quran 62. 1-2), and hence the hadiths (sayings of the Holy Prophet) constantly reinforced the pursuit of knowledge both religious and secular. Therefore, the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) not only made it a religious obligation for all Muslim men and women to get education from birth to death (Sunan Ibn Mājah 224), but also freed non-Muslim prisoners for teaching Muslims to read and to write (Iqbal 14). He advised Muslims to pursue knowledge, as knowledge seekers enjoy special blessings of Allah: “No one leaves their house in search of knowledge but that angels will lower their wings in approval of what he is doing” (Sunan Ibn Mājah 226)¹⁶. The Quranic verse “O my Lord, increase me in knowledge” (20. 114-115) was a favourite prayer of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him).

The rapid expansion of the Islamic world also contributed to the development of the Islamic scientific tradition by their contact with “three advanced civilizations: the Persian, the Egyptian, and the Byzantine (632-800)” which brought about a social revolution by “a phenomenal intermixing of people of different races and religions” (Iqbal 6). The result was an incorporation of a large corpus of Hellenic and Persian sciences through “one of the most startling translation movements in history” (750-1050) (6-7). The contact with Persia made Greek, Christian, Indian, Zoroastrian, and other ancient texts accessible (18). Persian medical works were translated into Arabic after the arrival of Nestorian physicians (17). The

¹⁶ All hadiths are taken from <https://www.abuaminaelias.com/forty-hadith-on-knowledge/>

multicultural nature of the Muslim world provided a welcoming space to scholars from diverse racial and religious backgrounds. Kufa, Basra, Baghdad, and Samarqand became centres of knowledge.

At the same time, both Iqbal and Anawati challenge the Orientalist argument that Islamic scientific tradition was all derivative, “a passive vehicle for the transfer of Greek science to Europe” (Iqbal 59, Anawati 747), and instead, Iqbal posits that Islamic scientific tradition preceded the translation movement and that “Astronomy, medicine, and mathematics were already established fields”, and translations enriched the tradition (Iqbal 23). Muslim scientists in the Umayyad period (660-750) made significant contributions to the fields of “medicine, astrology, and alchemy” (14). He cites the example of Yaqub b. Tariq (d. 796) and other astronomers whose “astronomical tradition was related to the Quranic cosmology” (24). Jabir bin Hayyan’s (d. 806) large corpus of work is also cited as evidence of an established scientific tradition that led to the production of the huge corpus of his “mature” work (24). His works precede the translation movement, and hence he paraphrases or explains Greek references in his own words (26). Hayyan considered his “Science of Balance” “a divine science (*Ilm e Lahuti*) whose aim was to reduce all facts of human knowledge to a system of quantity and measure”, as the principle of balance can be traced in “the Quranic theme of balance and order in the created universe” (28).

Similarly, Anawati posits that “ultimately, Muslim scientists surpassed their masters in powers of observation and care in investigation” (750). They checked the received sciences by revising “calculations and measurements instead of accepting them passively” (750). Al Razi devised new laboratory apparatus for his chemical experiments “unknown to the ancients”; Al Biruni successfully determined “specific gravities with an exactitude quite remarkable for his

time”; Al Battani also devised new instruments of measurements “to reduce the margin of error” (750); Al Haytham emerged as a great practitioner of optics “experimenting with different mirrors” (755); Ibn Sina’s *The Canon of Medicine (al-Qanun fil Tibb)* was taught in different institutions for years (773). Building on the translated works, scientists like Al Khuwarizmi, Al Farghani, and Al Battani transformed geography into “a cosmography” with significant works produced by Al Madusi and Al Biruni (762). Their works served as models for the West before the latter took over in scientific progress.

This brief review of Islamic scientific tradition establishes two things: i) religion laid no embargo on critical thinking and reasoning: The religious/mystical aspect was associated with seeking knowledge with a hope for success in both this world and the hereafter; and ii) the regressive and backward image associated with Islam is contrary to the history of science and technology, in which among other civilizations, participation of Muslims is a well-noted chapter. The Islamic scientific tradition (from the eighth to the fifteenth century) makes it evident that, despite the presence of “theologians of a narrow and defensive orthodoxy” who later led to the decline of this tradition, Muslim scholars eagerly embraced ancient and foreign texts besides making their contributions (Anawati 741).

Both Iqbal and Anawati assert that Islam has emphasized the search for knowledge without drawing a line between religion and science, though Iqbal mourns over the loss of scientific tradition due to material decadence, political conflicts, deviation from the right path, internal divisions, shift of priorities, and marginalization of Muslims on the international/global scale. Over time, the rulers became corrupt with worldly power, shifting their focus to material gains and manipulating religion as a tool to subjugate common masses by misinterpreting its basic principles for their vested interests. On the withering of

this tradition, Anawati highlights the complicated nature of the political crisis: “When the time comes, however, for the triumph of a narrow and defensive theology, which, in the name of official orthodoxy, puts fetters on free research, persecutes the scientists and confines them, then science is not slow to disappear” (778).

As far as Mughal India is concerned, though local industries flourished with India’s splendid economic growth, the natural sciences were not developed and taught as they were in the West. Histories written from European perspective commonly blame the Mughals “for neglecting mass-scale education, ignoring scientific and technological advancements and following traditional system of rote learning which gradually became out-dated and irrelevant” (Anjum 83). Dr. Faraz Anjum challenges such “colonial perception” based on “colonial estimation” and asserts that such perceptions belong to the “conceptual framework of Orientalist discourse” (ibid). They do not take into their account the local and indigenous sources. He takes education and learning as “a cultural process” developed in a specific “social context” (ibid), and social-cultural conditions of the Mughal India differed from those of the West. Citing W. H. Moreland, he asserts that the Mughal India became “the largest producer of industrial goods in the world” (90). He argues that “high level of economic output and productivity was not possible without innovative methods and novel techniques of trade and industry” (90).

Citing indigenous scholars such as K. M. Pannikar, Abul Fazal, M. A. Alvi, and A. Rahman, he notes that the Mughal India had many schools with “the ratio of one elementary school to every 400 persons” (88) for offering education in indigenous languages. In Emperor Akbar’s time, the subjects included “theology and ethics, history and politics, accounting and arithmetic, mensuration and agriculture, engineering and astronomy, domestic science and medicine, logic and philosophy, and physical and mechanical sciences” (89). Nonetheless, the

printing technology was rejected by the ruling elite of the Mughal period which hindered the cultural and scientific revolution in India (92). Therefore, by most European travellers, visitors, and scholars including Edward Terry, John Fryer, and William Jones Indians were considered as “mere children in science proper” (84). Most early historians such as Alexander Dow and James Mill mostly viewed Mughal history “as a monotonous tale of unprovoked aggression, unprincipled ambition, insurrection, disorder, insecurity, and tyranny as well as of dynastic revolutions” (85). In the nineteenth century, Thomas Macaulay dismissed Indian and Arabian literature as inferior to European knowledge, reflecting the dominant colonial perception of Indian culture during the Mughal period (87). Macaulay's stance also played a role in shaping colonial educational policies that prioritized European knowledge over indigenous knowledge systems. This colonial attitude alienated the Muslims in the subcontinent who resisted English as the medium of education because of its association with colonialism.

Several Muslim scholars like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Allama Muhammad Iqbal, in the nineteenth-century sub-continent, tried to awaken the sleeping Muslims to the evolving realities around them with a need to pursue the path to enlightenment they had forsaken by forgetting the teachings of Islam. When the religious fundamentalists, a product of nationalism, boycotted Western education and English language as foreign/colonial tools, Khan and Iqbal stressed the need to embrace them without any prejudice following the spirit of the Islamic Golden Age, which welcomed the scholars of all cultures and religions without any bias.

This effort is still ongoing even after the partition, as the religious fundamentalist groups are still active (though disliked and feared by most liberal Pakistanis), and a huge portion of the Government wealth is devoted to military and security forces (to guard

against the external and internal threats) with little attention to the scientific development. Many scholars like Pervez Hoodbhoy keep drawing attention to the importance of STEM, freeing the institutions from political and religious manipulation to promote meritocracy to nourish and produce world-class scholars: “Science suffocates when scientists are judged by their religion, race, ethnicity or any other criterion other than scientific achievement” (n.p.). He is especially discussing the marginalization of scientists like Dr. Har Gobind Khorana (1922-2011), Dr. Subramanyan Chandrasekhar (1910-1995), and Dr. Abdul Salam (1926-1996) on a religious basis in Pakistan. Like Sir Syed and Allama Iqbal, Hoodbhoy also is giving a wake-up call to the government to reset its priorities to re-establish a culture of learning by overcoming political prejudices fanned by the so-called religious groups.

However, the purpose of this review of Islamic scientific tradition is to clarify that religion and science are not necessarily dichotomous in the context of Pakistani culture including its science fiction. Both religion and science complement each other to create a thought experiment or a narrative with an effect of cognitive estrangement. Pakistani science fiction, like what Banerjee observes about Indian science fiction, fits into the category of “something like science in it” stories (89). Therefore, religion and science work together to inform the world-building in Pakistani sf, as is discussed in the succeeding sections.

Swirling epistemes (Islam and science) in Pakistani sf films

Suparno Banerjee in his history of Indian science fiction asserts:

In these strata ghosts, magic, the divine, and advanced science are often put at a similar level of wonder without any special sense of rupture, thus foregrounding

the hybrid syncretic potential of Indian mass psychology and mass entertainment that arises out of a society at the eye of swirling epistemologies (85).

Banerjee's judgement, I argue, is equally applicable to Pakistani science fiction by substituting Vedic science with Islamic epistemology. Pakistani sf displays intersectionality of Western (global) and local epistemes, and hence, science and religion work together to create an understandable universe. The world-building in Pakistani sf combines science/ technology with the belief in God Almighty as the Ultimate Cause and Source of peace and order to resolve the conflict in the narrative, as the following discussion of two Pakistani sf films, *Shaani* (Saeed Rizvi 1989) and *Sar Kata Insaan* (Beheaded Man) (Saeed Rizvi 1994) illustrates.

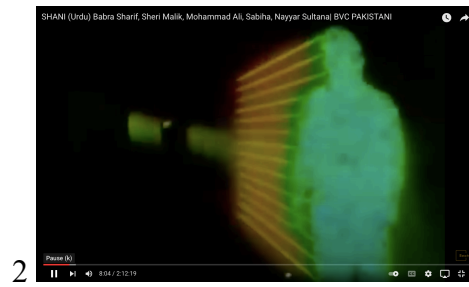
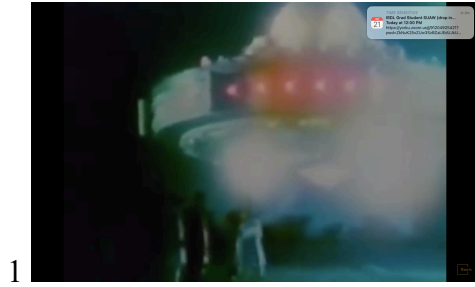
Shaani (Saeed Rizvi 1989) is the Urdu Pakistani science fiction film that uses the novum of an alien coming to a Pakistani local village in a spaceship (his role as an alien is discussed in the next chapter). Saeed Rizvi, the director of the film (a winner of many awards), was an enthusiastic innovator who introduced new technology (visual effects, blue screen, or single-frame animation) into Pakistani cinema (Amjad 2016). The film was a superhit in Pakistan. It also got translated into Russian and was very popular in Ukraine. The film won seven *Nigar* awards in Pakistan and an award in the "Moscow Film Festival for best technical value in 1990. The only Movie of Pakistan" (Saeed Rizvi)¹⁷. Rizvi also made some films as a co-production with Russia (Amjad 2016).

Rizvi, as a science graduate, had the vision to do something new, but unfortunately, the sf tradition could not develop beyond Rizvi's efforts to make some thought experiments, and mainstream Pakistani cinema confined itself to the making of romantic, and *Gandasa culture*

¹⁷ Saeed Rizvi's comment is copied from the youtube channel BVC's page, followed by many comments by fans advising him to make more such movies even one fan William Ruffin says, "MAKE MORE!! Reboot this and start a franchise!! Somebody pitch this to NETFLIX!" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFRRdFyQ9ew&t=40s> accessed Jan 2021.

(feudal culture) films. Rizvi considers the lack of interest and funding by the government as a major cause of the dearth of new productions in the underdeveloped film industry (Lollywood) in Pakistan (Amjad 2016). Presently, the Pakistani film industry is being revived by the writers and directors from television networks, but no serious effort is being made in the science fiction genre.

The film is about an alien Shaani who comes to the Earth to survey its suitability as a destination of migration for his people on a dying planet. The film starts with Hina spending a sleepless night in memory of her fiancé Shaani, a vigilante, who was brutally murdered by the villain Shamsheer while trying to rescue the kidnapped children from the latter's gang involved in smuggling, human-trafficking, and terrorist activities. Shaani's father Haider Ali, a secret police officer, was also murdered by Shamsheer while trying to arrest him. Hina still cherishes hope for Shaani's return someday. Her reverie is broken by the appearance of a spaceship (2:22), which also awakens other people in the village surprised by this unidentified object. The spaceship follows the conventions established in the descriptions found in the Western sf. It is designed like a saucer with lots of dazzling lights and a door in the front as can be seen in screenshot 1. Hina follows the spaceship which lands in a deserted place. A light figure (screenshot 2) appears in the manner of teleportation of Western sf (5:15). Hina gets terrified and rushes back home to hide herself in a room from the light figure following her. The light figure enters her room and after finding Shaani's picture on a wall, decides to take human form on this planet to study its people. Thus, he becomes Shaani, an outsider disguised as a local.



When Dilawar, son of Dinu, insists on knowing about this spaceship wondering: (*Allah ke bande to zameen per rehte hain magar baat he upar se anne wale ki*) “Men of God live on earth, then who came from the outer space on the spaceship?” (12:58), he is answered by the schoolmaster: (*Dekho bhai, Allah ki makhoolq to har jaga per pai ja sakti he*) “Dear brother! God has created abundantly, and His creation is possible in other parts of the universe too” (13:10). This debate is not much different from the Western debate on extraterrestrial life based “on arguments from analogy and such broad principles and ideas as the Copernican Principle, the Principle of Plenitude, and the Great Chain of Being” (Crowe and Dowd 3). Using religious discourse, the possibility of extraterrestrial life is taken for granted in the constructed world, as Dinu Chacha advises the villagers not to be surprised at the sight of the spaceship. Another person tells the villagers that the spaceship has been sighted in other parts across the globe, so it is not an unusual phenomenon, thus making it a possibility (10:48). As the crowd of villagers is puzzled by this phenomenon, they are informed: (*Sahani a gaya he*) “Shaani has come” (11:40), an announcement that shocks everyone. They welcome Shaani’s return as (*Khuda ka mojza*) “a miracle of God” (18:03), unaware of his reality, while the alien’s silence and strange attitude are translated as his loss of memory due to Shamsheer’s torture (18:16).

In an interview with Saeed Rizvi, Jahangir Syed introduces him as a creator of films which upheld local traditions and religious values by using some verses of the Holy Quran as the main message (0:52). He asserts that the main theme of *Shaani* is the verse, (*Alhamdo Lillahe*

Rabbil Alameen) “All praise is for Allah—Lord of all worlds” (Quran 1. 1-2) (1:24), and the film attributes all superpowers of Shaani to Allah Almighty, the Creator of all, as Shaani humbly acknowledges himself as a humble creature/servant of God. Rizvi acknowledges the religious inspiration by this verse serving as a “nucleus” in the film and as a fundamental message (4:40).

The religious element is embedded in this sf film keeping in view the local culture’s tradition of holding faith in high esteem. Since the audience might be curious about Shaani’s faith in a world where other villagers are performing religious rituals, the film does not delay revealing that Islam (*din-e-fitrat*¹⁸, natural religion) is his faith (28:36). While fighting with Shamsher’s gangsters, he jumps to hold the Holy Quran with respect and kisses it to express his devotion to the sacred text. On this gesture of respect, an old man blesses him, (*Beta tum ne Quran e pak ko uncha Rakha Allah tumhen bhi uncha rakhe*) “Son! may Allah give you honour, as you have honoured His Book” (30:58). Rizvi says that this scene was an afterthought to make Shaani acceptable in an Islamic society and to win the public applause, which it successfully accomplished (Syed 2016, 6:18).

Shaani’s story becomes one of acculturation as well as alienation in a different world. When Shaani is accused of deceiving the villagers by concealing his identity, Shaani tries to clarify that he took up the human form to move safely among other human beings and not to deceive anyone (1:28:20). He continues with his role as Shaani only to make Hina and Shaani’s family happy. He does not wish them to be unhappy again (1:29: 15). Despite his good intentions, he is ready to be punished for his kindness and faithfulness (1:29:40). Dinu Chacha acknowledges his goodness but wants to know more about his religious beliefs. Then, Shaani

¹⁸ The Prophet (peace be upon him) said in a *Qudsi* Hadith, “Allah Almighty says, ‘I created all My servants hunafa’ (following the original religion of monotheism), then the devils misled them from their religion and forbade them from what I made lawful for them and commanded them to associate with Me that which I have not sent down any authority for.” (Sahih Muslim) <https://aboutislam.net/counseling/ask-the-scholar/dawah-principles/are-all-people-born-muslims/>

asserts: (*khuda ki khudai sirf is zameen tak mehdood nahi he or na hi uske Akhari rasool ka pekham sirf tum logon ke liye tha*) “Allah is not only God of the earth but of all worlds” and “Prophet Muhammad’s message is not only for the earthlings”¹⁹ (1:34:08) claiming to believe in the same God. Thus, Islam is set as a norm, as a natural faith, *Din-ul Fitrah*. This declaration of the shared religion removes his alienation, completes his acculturation, and makes him a part of the family and community once more.

Steven Hrotic, as discussed in the earlier section, observes that some (Western) sf presents messiah figures to rescue the world from impending disasters (136). In this film, Shaani takes up the role as a messiah, who is ready to defend the villagers against the criminals and a corrupt system. He is horrified at the spectacle of bloodshed in the village by Shamsher’s gang: (*Aadmi aadmi ko marta he. Kitni ajeeb baat he*) “Man kills another man. What a pity” (35:19). He decides to help them not by taking up weapons but using his superpowers: telepathy, invisibility, and electromagnetic radiation to mobilize the objects and animals to stop the violence. Shaani uses these powers to protect himself and others from the attackers. The villagers and Hina are still unaware of his superpowers of invisibility and telepathy. Hina gets surprised, as by making himself and Hina invisible, he saves both from the gangsters following them in a blind chase and a fatal accident that sets their bike on fire. While accompanying Shaani all the time, Hina usually ends up as a damsel in distress to be rescued while also sometimes teaching gangsters a lesson for their crimes. He saves her from crocodiles and snakes and heals her from a gunshot wound using his electric and heat energy. He also saves the villagers from the attacks of Shamsher and his gang.

¹⁹ The prophet (peace be upon him) is called *Rehmatul lil Alamin* (Mercy for all the worlds): “And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds” (Quran 21. 107-108).

Despite being on a mission from his planet, Shaani cannot leave his new friends (humans) in trouble. He takes up the responsibility to protect the vulnerable people from the cruelties of Shamsheer's gang using his superpowers in their service. He emerges as a perfect man on Earth, just like some Western or Indian superheroes, though in a local context. Weapons and bullets do not affect him, and he can fight hundreds of men single-handedly using his physical prowess and other superpowers. He faints only once when he gets shocked by a high-tension wire from a pole. Even when the spaceship returns with a messenger to take him back to his world, he refuses to go without accomplishing his mission despite the risk highlighted by the messenger: (*Apki soch, apke khayalat or kirdar sab badal rahe hain. Bilkul Insaanon jese bante ja rahe hain*) "Your thoughts, feelings and behavior are changing. You are becoming like them" (48:25). He does not fear "going native" and instead wants to stay to help the locals whom he begins to like despite their follies. Shaani reflects what Douglas E. Cowan, as mentioned in the previous section calls: "interspecies tolerance" (49), and a hope for coexistence.

Multiple epistemes like religion and science work together in the world-building of the film, where superstition and magic have no place. As soon as Shamsheer discovers that Shaani is no ordinary human being but an alien, he invites a scientist, Doctor Jahanzeb, to make some device or mechanism to destroy Shaani by working against his superpowers. The doctor demands huge funds and coordination with other experts to invent some mechanism to destroy the alien. It takes him six years to make a powerful laser (ray) gun experimenting on a metal statue, a proto-alien (1:43:10- 1:45:30). See screenshot 3 and 4:



Another scientific element is the theme of heredity, as Shaani's and Hina's son (a hybrid), Jibrán, inherits the qualities of his father. This aspect is introduced near the end of the film when Shaani's departure from the earth becomes inevitable after he gets wounded by Shamsher's laser gun. The spaceship returns to take the wounded Shaani back to his planet (2:06:00), but Shaani does not want to leave without seeing his son Jibrán. As Shamsher's gang appears to attack Shaani once more, Jibrán also appears from the other side using telepathy like his father to prevent the attack (2:10:00). The scene makes it clear that Jibrán has inherited his father's superpowers. Shaani leaves his family behind with a promise to return and with advice to Jibrán: (*Beta apni taqat ka kabhi ghalat istemal mat karna*) "My son! Never use your power for the wrong cause" (2:14:55).

Though *Shaani* is the first attempt at science fiction in Pakistani cinema, it draws heavily on other popular genres in Pakistani cinema by incorporating science, religion, romance, social realism, and action to create a Manichean world in which a local vigilante Shaani is pitted against the criminal gangsters led by Shamsher to protect the oppressed villagers. The hybridity of these elements in this sf film glocalizes the Western science-fictional approach by upholding local traditions and values in both locating and resolving the problems. This sf film like other films of the time (family movies with high standards of censorship) aims to teach people good values besides entertaining them.

Romance is also added to make the first Pakistani sf film appealing to the local viewers accustomed to romantic films (a major genre of Pakistani cinema). The love stories dominate Pakistani cinema; thus, the first Pakistani sf film also utilizes romance to attract the regular cinema goers. As a marketing strategy it works successfully in the same way as do sexy women on Western sf covers like Burroughs' *Tarzan* and *Barsoom* series. Hina's mother and Dinu Chacha arrange Shaani's marriage with Hina to bring him back to normal life. The whole village is happy at this announcement, as marriage in Pakistani culture is an arranged event in which all relatives and extended family members are involved. That romance is part of this sf film highlights the hybridity of Pakistani sf as a genre.

Besides romance, another central element is action. *Shaani*, like Western and Indian sf, has many action scenes which are prolonged to entertain the local viewers. Most of the story takes place in the jungle, running from the gangsters or fighting with them, hiding in Hina's uncle's house (who is also killed by Shamsheer for protecting Shaani), and finally facing Shamsheer to take revenge for killing Hina's brother, Shaani's father, and real Shaani, besides rescuing the villagers from violent attacks. Hina's role also gets transformed with the evolving story, and from her role as a passive heroine of a romance she turns into an action heroine fighting with the gangsters and using a motorbike to rescue Shaani.

Thus, *Shaani*, in the national language, addresses local issues like smuggling, kidnapping, gang violence, and terrorism. It also creates a world in which both science and local traditions are valued and religion and science work together to resolve the local issues. Religion becomes a source of social cohesion and not a problem. It is the deviation from the right path that causes problems in this Manichean plot, in which the heroism of Shaani is established based on his

strong faith, his use of power in service of other people and against the outlaws like Shamsheer and his gang, involved in kidnapping, smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorist activities.

In the same way, *Sar Kata Insaan (The Beheaded Man)* (Saeed Rizvi 1994), presents a Manichean world with the central sf motif of the mad scientist. The film, though produced and marketed as a horror film, can also be qualified as science fiction, because the horror is not generated by using some supernatural element or magic, but by the experiments of a mad scientist in his laboratory. It can be classified as science fiction in the same way as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1885), and H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) are considered science fiction by Western science fiction scholars. Like these Western thrillers, this Pakistani sf film combines Gothic and scientific elements to produce a cognitively estranged world. *Sar Kata Insaan* depicts the horror that may result from an experiment gone wrong, though, unlike the Western texts, it underlines the religious aspect by considering the scientist's overzealous ambition as a transgression and a mortal sin. Hrotic's observation regarding *Frankenstein*, discussed in the earlier section, might sound relevant in this case too, as he posits that *Frankenstein* is not an anti-science text; rather, it highlights the dangers of abuse of power resulting from human transgression (44).

The laboratory of the Professor (without any personal name) becomes an important setting in the film for his (Frankensteinian) experiments with the dead bodies to create a novum, "the supermission" (9:50). The film starts with the desecration of a newly built grave by the villain, KP (5:30), a grave sin in Islamic culture. KP not only kills the gravedigger who tries to intervene in the desecration of the grave but also decapitates inspector Anwar's dead body in the grave (7:10). The scene shifts to a laboratory, and KP gives the head of inspector Anwar to the Professor who had directed him to bring it for his (*sub se anokha*) "most innovative" experiment

(8:18). He injects a serum into the head claiming that (*ye injection uske damagh ke khulion ko zinda kar dega*) “This injection will resuscitate the brain cells” (8:24) to create a being with a dual personality. It is revealed that the Professor had been engaged in such horrific experiments in the past too. He aims to join the body of a ruthless criminal Nadar with the head of the brave inspector Anwar, “a combination of negative and positive” (9:00) (See screenshots 3 & 4). He wants to create the most dangerous being “the supermission” on the earth to cause destruction on a large scale.



The Professor and his team are funded by Chief, a don of the underworld and a foreign agent, who wants to use the “supermission” to spread terrorism in the country (11:20) without any fear of being caught, as (*ik murda insan kisi ko kuch nahi bata sakta*) “the dead man cannot tell anything” (11:50). The Professor, like Frankenstein, uses electricity and chemicals to perform his experiment and succeeds in bringing the body and head to life but (*siraf chaar din*) “only for four days” (13:40). His experiment also goes wrong as the body of the criminal (beheaded man) takes an independent course of action and starts ruthlessly killing the scientists in the laboratory. The Professor forgets the purpose of his life as a human being and follows his desire and ambition to become all-powerful. He creates the supermission with sponsorship by Chief, but he works in his laboratory driven by his ambition and megalomania to attain the power that no scientist has ever known. His megalomania and ambition shared with the

underworld become the target of criticism reinforcing Rizvi's earlier message in *Shaani* of not abusing one's power.

The supermission becomes 'Anwar' in the eyes of the world but 'Nadar' inside, leading a double life just like Jekyll and Hyde. In daylight, he lives as Anwar, but at night he moves around as Nadar: the beheaded man on a killing spree. While Anwar tries to bring the Chief and his gang to book, Nadar as the beheaded man becomes the terror of the night. The supermission is no more under control of the Professor who starts hiding to save his own life. The terrified Professor (just like Frankenstein at the making of his creature) advises KP to search for the "supermission" who needs sunlight to maintain his body temperature (21:00). They need to find him to regenerate him to complete the ultimate mission of large-scale destruction. The Professor fears that if they fail to find the supermission in time, he will die without fulfilling their mission, and the forensics of his dead body would betray their secret plan (2:14:40). He and the Chief decide to kidnap relatives of the supermission using them as a bait to trap him. There is a twist in the plot, as instead of dying, the positive brain of Anwar overpowers Nadar's negative body, and starts its journey as a vigilante to take revenge on the underworld for the criminal experiment and bloodshed of the innocent people including Anwar's mother and sister. The supermission turns out to be a rebel unable to be dictated to carry out the Chief's mission. The Professor, like Frankenstein, succeeds in creating the supermission but fails to write his destiny.

The supermission, a combination of (*zahanat, taaqat aur science ka imtizaj*) "intelligence, strength, and science" (33:50), with four days to live, leaves the laboratory, and enters the human world, vacillating between Anwar's (positive) and Nadar's (negative) life. He is spotted by Inspector Taimoor (Inspector Anwar's cousin), who gets baffled on seeing Anwar, to whom he gave a decent burial in the morning. This spectacle is not considered a supernatural

phenomenon like a spirit or a ghost. On the contrary, Inspector Taimoor considers it to be someone's mischief. He visits Anwar's house, where he finds Anwar's mother and sister still mourning Anwar's death. On Inspector Taimoor's report, they visit the graveyard where they find police already investigating the murder of the gravedigger, the desecration of Anwar's grave, and the beheading of his body (18:00). The desecration of the grave indicates the transgression of some sinful person. Anwar's mother is repeatedly shown as praying to Allah for His mercy, for justice to prevail and the turmoil to end (for example, 18:30, 2:03:00, 2:04:10).

The repentance scene by presenting the scientist suffering from remorse at a moment of epiphany serves as the conclusion of the film underlying the film's theme, a Quranic verse, as Rizvi mentions in his interview: (*InnAllaha ala qulle shae in Qdeer*) "Indeed Allah has power over everything"²⁰ (Syed 1:48 & 5:05). The fleeing Professor is arrested, and Inspector Taimoor makes a speech on the ills not of science but of the path chosen by the Professor, the abuse of his esteemed knowledge and sacred profession: (*Professor tum ne science ki roshni ko kale jadoo ki tarah istemal kia he, tum ne zindagi aur mout ke asrar jo khuda ke raaz hen se khelne ki koshish ki he. Na inasan aur na hi khuda tumhen muaaf kar sakta he*) "You have used the light of scientific knowledge like satanic black magic, Professor. You have tried to play god by manipulating the secrets of life and death. Neither any man nor God may forgive you for this sin" (2:26:00). His words are followed by *Adhan* (Islamic call to prayer) "*Allah Hu Akbar Allah Hu Akbar*" (Allah is the Greatest), which melts the Professor's heart, as he falls on his knees praying for God's Mercy on himself seeking His forgiveness for his sins by admitting the human limits: (*Insan tam ter tarraqi aur ilm ke bawajud madai se tou khel sakta he magar zindagi nahi*

²⁰ This phrase is taken from the full verse "Allah has full knowledge of the truths beyond the reach of perception both in the heavens and the earth; and the coming of the Hour will take no more than the twinkling of an eye; it may take even less. Indeed, Allah has power over everything" (16. 77-78).

bana sakta. Science se atom bomb tou ban sakta he magar khun nahi ban sakta) “Despite all the progress, a man, with all his knowledge, may play with matter, but he cannot create life. Science can make the atom bomb, but it cannot make a drop of blood” (2:27:00). The film ends with the Quranic verse on the screen asserting the Unicity of Allah, “Verily! Allah will not pardon those who associate a partner with Him. Apart from him, He will pardon all others. Who ascribe partners to Allah has gone far astray” (4. 116-117). Thus, the religion is invoked to resolve the problems caused by the mad scientist’s transgression in his creation of the technological novum.

However, the religious theme of the film is presented using scientific discourse. There are no *maulvis* (priests) in the film to explain the phenomenon of the supermission; rather, the Professor, the crime reporter Ambreen, and inspector Taimoor all use rational scientific discourse to describe the supermission instead of holding some superstition. On the second night, the supermission goes out into the city and starts killing people who come his way. The Professor is quick to claim that the supermission is behind these murders, even though KP argues that news reports mention a beheaded man (without Anwar’s head) (40:55). The Professor logically explains, (*Raat ke waqt neagative jism Anwar ke positive zehan ko qabool nahi karta aur is liye sark e bighair mujrimana raste per chlata he*) “At night, the evil (negative) body does not accept the positive mind of Anwar, and therefore separates itself from it to follow the criminal path” (41:20). He proves his claim with Nadar’s fingerprints found on the weapons and places of murder. The press, on the other side, is making fun of the police who claims to have found fingerprints of a dead man from the crime scenes: (*Ik murd admi kese kisi ka qatal ker sakta he?*) “How can a dead man kill someone?” (43:00). Inspector Taimoor, despite the fingerprints recovered from the crime scenes, is unwilling to accept that Nadar is still alive. He tells Ambreen (the crime reporter investigating the issue) how Nadar murdered and looted people

including his mother. Inspector Taimoor with his team chased him, but they found only his head without any trace of his body near the train track (46:10). Hence magic and supernatural, a major part of Indian horror and sf films, are missing from *Sar Kata Insaan*.

The scientific rationalist discourse in the film becomes evident in its engagement with two investigation departments: police and crime reporters. On the third day, when the supermission appears as Anwar, he comes to see Ambreen whom he has attacked as Nadar at night for investigating the issue and for taking his photograph. She takes Anwar (supermission) to an amusement park to know more about him. When Ambreen goes to get some popcorn, accidentally Anwar's head falls, but he grabs it and runs away. This spectacle is seen by many people and is reported to the police. With the help of a sketch, Inspector Taimoor discovers that it is Inspector Anwar. He starts investigating and tries to convince his senior officers that Anwar might be alive, despite being present at his funeral. He cites examples of some organizations like *Alcor Life Extension Foundation* (1972), Los Angeles USA, which preserve the dead bodies in the hope of resurrecting them with some new technology or mechanism (1:26:45). He thinks that some mad scientist might be engaging with such experiments in this part of the globe too.

Moreover, like *Shaani*, *Sar Kata Insaan* also intersects with other genres like social realism, action, and romance besides combining the religious and scientific elements to tell a story about the transgression of a mad scientist and its consequences. One of the recurrent themes in local Pakistani films is the fight against systemic corruption in all fields of life. For example, on the third day Anwar meets inspector Taimoor (1:28:00) to tell him about the place where he got murdered in a raid on the criminals and terrorists. He asks Taimoor to complete his mission by fighting against such traitors (1:30:00). With this information, Inspector Taimoor raids the place with his team and arrests KP and some of his gangsters. Thus, Inspector Taimoor

carries forward inspector Anwar's mission in the Manichean plot by arresting the criminals to establish peace and order in the society. Like inspector Anwar, Taimoor also refuses to surrender to the pressure of ministers to release KP and stands up against the mafia (1:39:00). In this way, the socio-realist aspect of the film highlights the systemic corruption in the society.

Like *Shaani*, this film adopts a glocal approach, by using sf to address the local issues. The supermission highlights the exploitation of common people at the hands of ministers and criminals simultaneously. The supermission exposes the hypocrisy of people in power, leading a dual life by engaging in criminal activities in the disguise of honest officers and ministers. The scientific base of this creation highlights the organized nature and structure of the underworld which operates under the protection of corrupt politicians. The Professor's link with the underworld with heavy funding for creating the supermission underlines the danger of a scenario in which science joins hands with the outlaws disturbing the moral and social order. In this case, it is not religion but the drift away from the religion that becomes a problem.

As far as gender roles are concerned, this film also like *Shaani* (1989) presents strong women. Both Ambreen as a foreign qualified urban working woman and Chandni as an educated village girl are presented as romantic-cum-action heroines; they emerge as ladies in action when confronted with attackers. This depiction of commando action by women, at that time, was a departure from the contemporary film tradition usually restricting female role to damsels in distress or romantic heroines. In this way, both Rizvi's films break the norms by assigning powerful roles to women. They have the agency to make their decisions without being manipulated by the patriarchal structure around them. These sf films by Rizvi show that both science and religion empower women with education and enlightenment as contrary to the common assumption about the repressed Muslim women.

Thus, both sf films *Shaani* and *Sar Kata Insaan* combine science and religion to build their science fictional worlds. While *Shaani* uses the sf motifs of the spaceship and alien to reinstate the Grandeur and Glory of God as a Creator, *Sar Kata Insaan* uses the motif of the mad scientist with a Faustian or Frankensteinian ambition to warn us against the abuse of power. Clark's observation about the religion as a source of social cohesion in "Realizing the Dream" (100), discussed in the earlier section, seems relevant in case of these Pakistani sf films with the central motif of Islam-science nexus. Both films do not project religion and science as incompatible; rather, they are complementary for each other to create a better world. The characters are presented as educated and enlightened, and none of them is superstitious. Science is power and religion provides a code of conduct to use that power wisely in the service of God and His world. Both films as thought-experiments endorse the traditional perspective on Islam-Science nexus, thus presenting a positive side of religion.

III: Technology and Religion

The third part aims to discuss further two religious motifs: i) religion (its distortion and misuse) as a problem with a focus on an alliance between technology and religious extremism; and ii) the combination of technology with spiritual experience to highlight shades of Sufism in Pakistani sf. This part examines how the misinterpretation of religion to radicalize common people using technology becomes the subject of Pakistani science fiction as in the critique of Pakistani blasphemy laws in a short, animated sf film *SWIPE* (Arafat Mazhar 2020). Clark's and Mendlesohn's discussion of religion as a problem (with a slight difference) in the first section seems relevant to the world-building of *SWIPE* in its critique of the danger lying in dogmatism and fundamentalism. The film critiques not religion but people for misreading and misrepresenting it. The third part also discusses the hybridity of metaphysical and technological

experience with shades of Sufism in Pakistani sf *Tilism i Hosh Afza* (The Enlightenment of the Senses) (2013) written by Ashfaq Ahmad as a dedication to *Tilism e Hoshruha* (The Enchantment of the Senses).

Religious Extremism and Pakistani sf

Just like mainstream Urdu literature, Pakistani sf also critiques religious extremism and dogmatism as a threat to the social and political stability of the country. In mainstream literature, the religious dogma manifested in the figure of a *mullah* (priest/clergy) has always been a target of critique, though not without unpleasant consequences. Baba Bulleh Shah's, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib's, and Allama Iqbal's criticism of religious dogmatism and extremism compelled some groups of *mullahs* to consider them kafirs (heretics). Even Muhammad Ali Jinnah (Quaid-e-Azam), the founder of Pakistan, was not spared from such dogmatic verdicts because of his liberal conception of Pakistan. Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Ahmad Faraz, Nasir Kazmi, Saadat Hassan Manto, and Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi are among many Urdu writers who challenge divisions based on religion and other kinds of communalism. Ibn e Insha (1927-1978), a famous Pakistani poet, humorist, and columnist makes fun of the rising extremism in *Urdu ki Akhri Kitab* (*The Last Book of Urdu* 1974) by ridiculing the *mullahs* for expelling people from the fraternity of Islam instead of welcoming them as was the case in the earlier periods of Islam (43).

Like Western and Indian sf, we may find the glimpse of religion (its abuse) as a problem in Pakistani sf. The film *SWIPE* vividly depicts the problems of rising extremism, sectarianism, and intolerance in Pakistani society. The film specifically engages with Pakistani blasphemy laws to expose their arbitrary and discriminatory application to target the vulnerable sectors of Pakistani society. It highlights how misinterpretation of the Islamic Legal Tradition in the making of these laws has resulted in radicalizing the common people, who put their trust in their

(dogmatic) religious leaders. This manipulation of religion to mobilize common masses to serve the personal interests of the government and religious groups has resulted in the rise of extremism, lack of tolerance, extra-judicial killings, mob lynching, court cases, imprisonment, and migration of people to other countries.

The British Penal Code of 1860 was adopted by Pakistan (also by India) as its Penal Code in 1947 to curb blasphemy. During General Zia ul-Haq's regime, further clauses were added, "as a part of his top-down policies of Islamization" (Badry 95). Roswitha Badry observes that unlike the British, "Zia's ordinances were not directly caused by communal riots and intra-faith violence. They were rather influenced by Islamist ideology, and anti-Ahmadiyya as well as anti-Shia sentiments" (97). With General Zia's Islamization (1978-1988), the small plant of religious extremism developed into a strong tree with branches in all parts of the country. The religious extremist groups and their *madrasas* (religious schools) were funded to support and secure the dictator's position and to prepare *mujahidin* as fodder to be used in the US vs USSR Cold War by misrepresenting it as *Afghan Jihad* (defensive struggle) for the US dollars (Badry 101). The succeeding governments, both democratic and dictatorships, continued to support and use these religious right wings to stay in power. The results are disastrous: a few among them are the misuse of blasphemy laws, the rise of sectarianism, and finally the spread of terrorism across the country.

Arafat Mazhar, a graduate in computer science, an activist, writer, and director, is the founder of *Engage Pakistan* and an alternative critical history channel *Hashiya*, working to promote research and reform religious laws in Pakistan. In his lecture at the Woodrow Wilson Centre on Pakistan's blasphemy laws, Mazhar asserts: "Pakistan's Blasphemy law and supporting discourse is an institutionalized and deliberate perversion of the Islamic Legal

Tradition” (*Woodrow Wilson Centre* 2016 9:00). The assassination of Governor Salman Taseer (who pointed out the flaws in the Blasphemy Law and sought forgiveness for Asia Bibi) by his security guard, Mumtaz Qadri in 2011 inspired Mazhar to investigate the issue in theology.

Mazhar argues that the tradition of Imam Abu Hanifa has been misquoted to form the law which has no authentic support from both the Holy Quran which considers all sins pardonable by Allah except *Shirk* or polytheism in any form (4. 48-49) and the sayings of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), who forgave his worst enemies when the Muslims conquered Makkah.

In his article “The Untold Story of Pakistan’s Blasphemy Laws” in *Dawn*, Mazhar cites several examples of religious intolerance resulting from the Blasphemy laws without having any basis in the Islamic Legal Tradition: “The stance that ‘blasphemers who ask for a pardon would be spared the death penalty has already been established by the founder of the Hanafi school of thought, Abu Hanifa” (Mazhar *Dawn* n.p.). He asserts that the makers of the 295 C²¹ not only misinterpreted and misquoted the Hanafi scholars to include the death penalty as the only punishment, but also they made it an unpardonable offense: “Simply put-you blaspheme, you die. No ifs and buts about it” (Mazhar *Dawn* n.p.). In a country where ninety-seven percent population is Muslim, non-Muslims, with a three percent population, are “twenty-six times more likely to be accused of blasphemy” (*Woodrow* 39:20). He is trying to remind people of the initial message of peace in the primary sources of the Islamic Legal Tradition, to unlearn the (recent) violence, and instead to plant trees, to love animals, and to be charitable to express their love for the Prophet (peace be upon him).

²¹ For detailed discussion of blasphemy laws see: Mazhar, Arafat. “The Untold Story of Pakistan’s Blasphemy Laws.” *Dawn*, December 9, 2014. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1149558>

Mazhar is not the only one to point out the misinterpretation of Islamic Hanafi tradition; rather, it has also been pointed out by religious scholars like Javed Ahmad Ghamidi, who had to leave the country for the fear of persecution. Ghamidi has consistently pointed out the flaws in the Blasphemy laws by drawing attention to the teachings of the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) which unanimously honour the human life as highly sacred (2:00). Ghamidi cites from the Holy Quran, “whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind” (5. 32-33).

On another occasion, condemning the incident of mob lynching in Sialkot²², Ghamidi asserts that four groups are responsible: “the religious leaders” for misleading and indoctrinating the common masses, the “legislators of this law”, “the anti-constitutional powers”, and all those politicians, leaders, and intellectuals who endorse this law or remain silent observers (10:00-12:00). This is an unfortunate condition, where this misinterpretation has gained acceptance among the common people, who do not verify such mis/claims themselves, and the religious scholars and politicians who, despite knowing the reality, are holding criminal silence (as confession would lead to losing face and accountability) to maintain their monopoly.

Scholars like Raza Rumi also analyze the laws from the perspective of Islamic Legal Tradition (Hanafi) to declare present law as the deviation and misrepresentation of the Hanafi scholars like Ibn Abidin and Al Tahawi. Rumi presents the historical context for this misrepresentation. He finds its roots in the process of Islamization, rooted in the nationalist movement (pre-partition), which continued to develop even after Pakistan came into being. The religious card, which was played against other religions, began to be used against various

22 For details see “Pakistan: Killing of Sri Lankan accused of blasphemy sparks protests” <https://www.bbc.com/news/59501368>

denominations within the Muslim population (majority *Sunni*). Both dictatorships and democratic governments “capitalised on this, and used religion as a political tool” (320). Contrary to Jinnah’s vision, Pakistan became an “Islamic Republic” in 1973 and “secular” Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto joined hands with the religious lobbies to declare the Ahmadiyya Sect non-Muslim in 1974 (Rumi 320).

This process of Islamization gained momentum in General Zia ul Haq’s period (1977-1988). Not only did he join hands with radical religious groups to form *Jihadis* to fight the US Cold War but also brought about significant changes in the curriculum by introducing Islamic studies and Pakistan studies as compulsory subjects (321). Later governments also followed suit with their “alliance with both violent and non-violent religious, sectarian, and extremist groups to bolster Pakistan’s defence against much-feared Indian aggression” (321). Little could they foresee that soon such groups would become “pressure groups with massive street power, gained through networks of mosques, religious seminaries and charities” (321). Rumi, like Ghamidi and Mazhar, underlines the risk of losing power that prevents the government and religious scholars to rectify the law: “What is missing in Pakistan is not the technical solutions but the will of a state that remains beholden to a variant religious nationalism that makes Islam an easy instrument of political control and public mobilisation” (336).

Roswitha Badry, like Rumi, points out the application of this law to persecute minorities and to settle personal and political rivalries (Badry 92, Rumi 328). Where Rumi cites the examples of Salman Taseer, Shahbaz²³ Bhatti, Junaid Hafeez²⁴, and Rashid Rehman²⁵, Badry

23 For details see “Pakistan Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti shot dead.” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12617562>

24 For details see “Junaid Hafeez: Academic sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan.” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50878432>

25 For details see “Pakistan 'blasphemy lawyer' shot dead in Multan office.” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27319433>

cites examples of Mashal Khan,²⁶ Asia Bibi²⁷, and Taimoor Raza²⁸ (Badry 92-93) to highlight the intolerance caused by this law in the society. Rumi cites data according to which “from 1987 to July 2012, at least 426 persons were apprehended under this law” (Rumi 327), and “60 people have been killed” (327). Both political and religious groups hesitate to bell the cat keeping in view the assassination of Taseer and Bhatti and migration of the scholars like Ghamidi. Ordinary people feel divided “between the avowedly secularist civil society and the religiously inclined majority who speak an altogether different language” (335).

Keeping in view this historical context, *SWIPE* (an Urdu animated film with English subtitles) tells a story about people living in a contemporary Pakistani city, Multan. The characters appear as addicted to playing online games. Especially, a new app *ifatwa* becomes the craze of the time, which reduces the most complicated religious matter to a mockery. *Ifatwa* “crowdsources religious death sentences” giving the option to the player to swipe right to kill the person on screen or to swipe left to forgive. Only ten thousand right swipes lead to the execution of a person on ridiculous issues like not taking a shawl, not forwarding a message, or making some poster. It offers the participant the highest level of *Ghazi* (a victorious warrior) with maximum right swipes (killings), and this hardly leaves an option to swipe left to forgive someone. Thus, “Bloodshed essentially becomes a video game” (Das n.p.).

The narrative follows the daily routine of a boy, Jugnu (representative of others like him), spending his day detached from the real world and embedded in the cyber-world playing the game *ifatwa* all the time, in bed, on his way to school, and in the class. People around him are also depicted absorbed in playing this game all the time. He is compulsively swiping right to kill

26 For details see “Pakistan student killed over 'blasphemy' on the university campus.” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-39593302>

27 For more details see “Asia Bibi: I always believed I would be freed.” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51658141>

47 For details see “Pakistan: man sentenced to death for blasphemy on Facebook” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/11/pakistan-man-sentenced-to-death-for-blasphemy-on-facebook>

as many strangers as possible in the minimum time possible to reach the title of *Ghazi*. Little does he realize that like him many others are also playing the same game with the same ruthless ambition little caring about the lives of others. On leaving his school, he sees chaos all around. The buildings are broken and vandalized, while people are getting massacred. He is too late to realize that he has accidentally swiped right on his father's picture on the screen. As he rushes back home, he finds his home destroyed and all his family members killed to make someone a *Ghazi*.

SWIPE presents a dystopic world, in which religion becomes a game in the hands of the most ignorant and inexperienced people (children), who without knowing the solemnity of religious jurisprudence and sanctity of human life start deciding about the faith and conduct of others. As Maleeha Durrani notes, with a swipe to render someone “*Wajib-ul-Qatl* [Must be killed]— a term so self-consciously authoritarian that its contrast with the juvenile layout of the app and the puerility of its ‘judges’ passing the sentences feels unsettlingly idiotic...” (n.p.). The result is disastrous, as everybody starts killing everybody else over petty issues and disagreements.

The film ends with the scene of destruction and Ahamad Faraz's verses are sung in the background as a wake-up call to revise the course of action, to de-radicalize common people. Faraz wrote much of his poetry as a protest against Zia's dictatorial and fundamentalist regime.

We are people of love
 Why do you swing your swords
 What will you see in this place
 When every letter dies
 When melodies are murdered

When voices are no longer heard

When cities are a wreck

Who will you cast your stones upon? (11:05)

(Translation is taken from the English subtitles of the film *SWIPE*.)

These poetic verses serve well as an epilogue to the tragic end of a society in this dystopian world. It enhances the impact of the message that the film aims to give. Mazhar in his film's description on the youtube channel of the Puffball Studios writes: "*SWIPE* is our attempt confronting a growing crisis resulting from a culmination of the nexus of technology, extremism and fascism. At the heart of this story is a confrontation with increasingly hostile, alienating, divisive circumstances and a plea for greater empathy, before it's too late".

Like Mazhar's other film *Shehr e Tabassum*²⁹ (*A City of Smiles* 2020), *SWIPE* also uses cyberpunk elements in the narrative presented in the local context. Cyberpunk, a sub-genre of sf, "catalyzed speculative treatments of subjectivity and embodiment in relation to virtuality and genetic engineering" (Bould 146). In the West, cyberpunk became popular with William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *Mirrorshades* (1986). Images and ideas include a direct human interface with computer systems, information networks, and hegemonic AIs. This way, Mazhar's approach is also glocal, where he is not only playing with Western sf conventions of dystopia and cyberpunk, but also is appropriating them to deal with contemporary problems like radicalization, religious extremism, and terrorism. He is trying to highlight the hurdles in the way of the realization of Jinnah's vision of a modern and progressive Pakistan after its hijacking by the religious lobbies who are pushing it backward. Durrani appreciates the courage of the Puffball Studios to engage with such a sensitive topic in their film. She also notes the *local*

²⁹ *Shehr e Tabassum* is discussed in another chapter of the thesis.

aspect of the film “not just in the premise of the app but more strikingly, ... its accurately vernacular milieu. It is as if a Black Mirror episode got a Pakistani makeover with a literal ‘trial by social media’ as its premise” (n.p.).

Poulomi Das also considers *SWIPE* “a cautionary tale of technology and intolerance” and quotes Mazhar’s objective: “I want us to confront our own biases and all the ways in which we enact power over others” (n.p.). Mazhar wants to rethink our contemporary socio-political environment and its shaping of a grim future for the children. In his interview with *Hyperallergic*, Mazhar uses the term “cyberkhilafat”, a pun on cyberpunk for his two films *SWIPE* and *Shehr e Tabassum* (2020), another reflection of his glocal approach, and explains the objective to “explore how modern forms of Islam, technology and power are combined to dictate political and social norms that mute individual identity” (qtd. in Das n.p.).

Manik Sharma, in his review of the film, also credits the Puffball team with the excellent portrayal of the reality using the metaphor of technology with a pertinent lesson, “If empathy and humanism are shown the door, the natural course culture takes is the commodification of everything human — from faith to love” (n.p.). Despite the grimness of the message, Mazhar remains hopeful that through his socio-political activism through various forums, his message will get across far and wide communities to restore much-lost sanity and tolerance: “I think our viewers recognize and appreciate that though our films are uncomfortable to watch, they go beyond mere cynicism and derision” (Mazhar qtd. in Sharma n.p.). The comments under the film and Mazhar’s interviews encourage him to produce more such works to enlighten the audience in a medium more accessible to the wider public. Hence, as Mazhar’s mission against religious extremism is ongoing, one may hope for the growth of cyberpunk and dystopia in Pakistani sf. *SWIPE* is the first Pakistani animated film to be screened at the *Annecy International Festival*

and *AnimaFest Zagreb 2021 (Images)*. It is a point to be noted that despite critique of religious misinterpretation, Mendlesohn's observation about Western sf treating religion contemptuously as "primitive" (1) does not find place in Pakistani sf; rather, it is the people to be blamed for misrepresenting it.

Sufism and Pakistani sf

The third important religious motif in Pakistani sf is that of Sufism, which blends the technological with the spiritual experience in world-building. Sufism is an early inspiration for mainstream Urdu literature. Asghar Ali Engineer asserts, "Urdu literature is basically inspired by humanistic values, both poetry as well as prose" (n.p.). From Mirza Ghalib and Allama Iqbal to Quadratullah Shahab, Wasif Ali Wasif, Mumtaz Mufti, Bano Qudsia, and Ashfaq Ahmad, numerous writers can be found who got immensely inspired by "Sufi humanism" (n.p.) to create a more humanistic religious worldview, though Ashfaq Ahmad (1925-2004) is the only one to experiment with science fiction, whose work *Tilism i Hosh Afza* (The Enlightenment of the Senses 2013) is discussed in this section.

Scholars such as Sarwar Alam assert that the trend to Sufism emerged as a response to the religious dogmatism because "Sufi Islam is more sensitive to other cultures, more accommodative to other traditions", which may explain the quick spread of Islam in the subcontinent by the Sufis (1). Historians of Islamic Sufism trace its roots in the Umayyad period (661-750 & 756-1031), as a reaction against material decadence and moral corruption (5). At the same time, Alam finds it hard to define Sufism, as there is no one Sufi tradition but many with several cultures "infused into Sufi Islam in many ways" (1). He posits, "Sufism is an umbrella term for a special type of Islamic piety that is expressed in the forms of extensive prayer, night vigil, fasting, and bodily mortification; other worldliness; devotion, and love of God and the

Prophet and, by extension, all the creatures of God” (4). Sufism is also defined as “madhab-i-ishq” (religion of love) by presenting love as the locus of Islamic life (7).

Islamic Sufism was also influenced by the mystical traditions of Christian asceticism, Buddhism, and Hinduism (Alam 11). It aimed to revive the spirit of Islam by opening its arms to other faiths and influences following the Quranic verse, “And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it” (5. 48-49). Early Sufis like Hasan al Basri followed in the footsteps of Prophets like Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them) to live a life of “poverty and abstinence” (Alam 14). Similarly, Bistami got inspired by “the Vedantic mysticism developed by Sankara (788-820)” and developed the idea of “the union with God” which resonated in the works of later Sufis like al Hallaj, and al Arabi (15-16). The openness of Sufism to various faith traditions, as Alam asserts, makes it “the most powerful antidote to the religious radicalism called fundamentalism” (21).

Ashfaq Ahmad’s works are marked by otherworldliness. His characters do not lead an ascetic life, yet they live it on different levels, and their daily routine is marked by reflection/introspection connecting them with God. In his drama, *Mann Chale Ka Sauda* (As the Heart/Soul Chooses to be) (TV serial 1990-1991), he considers scientists like Einstein, Max Planck, and Niels Bohr as “*Saain*” (Sufis/saints), for knowledge was revealed to them because of their devotion and meditation (Ahmad 108). Ahmad’s character Mauchi (Cobbler) Ramzan asserts: (*Duniya me sirf dou sahib e ilm aise hen jo amal ke ukharre me utar ker ilm hasil karte hen... aik saain aur dusra scientist*) “The knowledge of both a *Saain* and a scientist is rooted in their experience” (Ahmad *Mann Chale* 60). He advises Irshad, the main character, to study science to become a *Saain* (60).

Ahmad writes in his introduction to *Mann Chale Ka Sauda* (As the Heart/Soul Chooses to be) that his proof-reading of books on science and religion, during his service at the Urdu Science Board, convinced him that “science and religion are but two sides of the same coin” (Ahmad 1). These two worlds serve as a premise for this work as well as his many short stories published and serialized under *Ek Mohabbat Sau Afsane* (One Love and Hundred Stories) (1975-1976). The focus is usually on the restless life of some character wandering in search of meaning in his life. The inner satisfaction can be found despite all the worldly success and material wealth, if a man gets closer to God and not away from him. The process involves devotion, dedication³⁰, inner purification, and self-reformation. In an interview with Javed Gulzar, Ahmad emphasized that besides material and scientific progress what is needed is spiritual development. He said that his work should be read as a warning that by ignoring the spiritual aspect of life, and without curing man of his greed, selfishness, and lust for power, “scientific and technological progress would end in chaos and destruction” (Vikram 33).

Ahmad served as a professor of Urdu literature and a radio broadcaster both in Pakistan (1951-52) and Italy (1952-54), and as the director-general of the Urdu Science Board (1965-1990), besides serving as a publisher and editor of various magazines like *Dastan Gau* (storyteller) and in Urdu literature, he is well-known with the same title (1957-59) (Vikram 12). He travelled widely across the globe and held diplomas in various European languages. He wrote many short stories, novels, dramas, film scripts, radio programs including *Talqeen Shah* (which was serialized for forty-one years since 1962) and translated works by Ernest Hemingway and Rita Ritchie (13). He also hosted a philosophical discussion program *Zavia* (Perspective) on Pakistan Television (2004) (13). He won many awards including the most

³⁰ For Ashfaq Ahmad, worship is not restricted to prayer and fasting but includes performing one’s job honestly. The shepherd Abdullah, a character in *Mann Chale Ka Sauda* asserts, “A man’s job is his worship . . . , and dishonesty in one’s job leads to one’s destruction” (Ahmad 65).

prestigious the *Pride of Performance Award* and *Sitara-e-Imtiaz* (the Star of distinction) by the Government of Pakistan (13).

Tilism i Hosh Afza (2013) is Ahmad's only collection of science fiction stories, which he dedicates to *Tilism e Hoshruha*, a famous Indo-Islamic *dastan* (oral tale, published in the nineteenth century) rooted in an older tradition of *Dastan e Amir Hamza* (of Arabic/Persian origins in the seventh century), considering it to be "the greatest and oldest Urdu Science fiction" (Ahmad *Hosh Afzah* 6). Muhammad Hussain Jah's *Hoshruha* tale (1880-1889) creates a magical world, full of sorcerers, tricksters, and supernatural elements enchanting the readers by taking them into a world of wonders like Emperor Afrasyab's *piala* (bowl), in which he could see the future, and locate the spatial-temporal positions of persons and things; Amar Ayyar's *Zambil* (magical bag), which possessed all the required tools, devices, and talismans to fight the opponents. Ahmad beautifully changes the title from *Tilism e Hoshruha* to *Tilism i Hosh Afza* (The Enlightenment of the Senses), by replacing the magical elements with scientific and spiritual elements to construct the cognitively estranged world of his stories in this collection. In each story we find a *saain* character (human/animal/machine) that blurs the line between spiritual and physical experience thus transcending the material world.

Musharraf Ali Farooqi, the translator of Jah's *Tilism e Hoshruha* into English (2009), digs deeper into the origins of the *Hoshruha* tale in his introduction, and its narrative development by many competing Indian authors.³¹ From 1883-93, two Indian storytellers, Muhammad Hussain Jah and Ahmad Hussain Qamar competed with each other to write *Tilism e Hoshruha*, an eight thousand pages long *dastan* (tale, an oral story) inherited from generation to generation of "storytellers going back hundreds of years" (Farooqi viii). Some trace its roots in

³¹ Farooqi also translated *The Adventures of Amir Hamza* (2008 published by Random House) in English.

the *Dastan e Amir Hamza* (The Adventures of Amir Hamza), which started its journey in the seventh-century Arab world to narrate “brave deeds of Prophet Muhammad’s Uncle Amir Hamza” (viii), but over time, moving through various geographical regions (the Middle East, Central Asia, and finally India), the tale “incorporated many local fictions and histories and became an entirely fictional legend” (viii). The tales were favourite of Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605), who “commissioned an illustrated album of the legend” (viii). In India, this *dastan* incorporated elements of local oral tradition, especially the elements of black magic, sorcerers, and evil spirits to already existing magical elements like “*jinns* (genies), giants, *devs* (demons), *peris* (fairies), *gao-sars* (cow-headed creatures)” (ix).

Within this tradition, a Lucknow writer, Mir Ahmad Ali, tried to exploit the tale anew by adding “the occult heritage” to create a new “magical world called a *tilism*” (ix-x). Though the magical element was part of *Amir Hamza* tales, yet Mir Ahmad Ali created a thorough magical world in his *Tilism e Hoshrubah*, which Farooqi considers to be “the first, the longest, and the greatest fantasy of the *dastan* genre” (xii). The storyline follows the adventures of Amir Hamza’s grandson Prince Asad and his five tricksters headed by Amar Ayyar in fighting with sorcerers and sorceresses to conquer the land of *Hoshrubah*. The tale became so popular (1840-1850) that Mir Ahmad Ali was soon hired as a storyteller by the Prince of Rampur (xvi). In the 1880s, its popularity attracted Naval Kishore Press of Lucknow to publish the whole cycle of *Dastan e Amir Hamza* along with *Hoshrubah* and sought the service of Muhammad Hussain Jah (xvii).

Adam Roberts posits that science in sf is not used for any truth claims but as a point to extrapolate because sf is a “thought experiment” (Roberts 9). The purpose of science in sf is “the entry into a particular, material and often rational discourse” (9). Ashfaq Ahmad in *i Hosh Afza* (2013) uses both religion and science as important epistemes in his thought experiments (sf

stories): the former to create *Saain* characters to engage with ethical issues, and the latter to provide rational explanation of the events. He uses the local Pakistani cities and villages as the spatial setting of his stories to remove the mythical and magical elements of *Hoshrubah*, and most of his characters are common people living in Pakistani rural and urban spaces. In every story, there is a Sufi or *Saain* figure that connects the material with the spiritual world to signify the importance of spiritual development as much as material progress. The stories deconstruct the boundary between human and mechanical or animal other by presenting the Sufi figure or *Saain* as a human, animal, or machine. The purpose of the *Saain* figure is to stress the need for ethical aspect of human experience in a rational and scientific world.

The first story “Qisas”³² (Retributive Justice) is about a land rover that avenges the brutal murder of its owners Dinu and Sabu, two friends and cousins, on their way from Pattoki (a village) to Lahore (city) in Punjab, Pakistan. The story follows the plotline of a story about Kartar Singh, within the main story, being narrated by Dinu to Sabu. Dinu tells the story of the loyalty of Kartar Singh’s mare “Natni” who avenged his murder by killing the murderers released on bail. The plot takes a sudden twist when Sabu and Dinu are themselves attacked by their enemies and killed before reaching their destination. The police fail to arrest the culprits, and the land rover is parked beside a wall on Wahdat Road, Lahore, near the crime scene. As the policeman on duty leaves for tea break, the criminals visit the place to check the vehicle, which starts suddenly mowing them down, breaking all their bones until they die, and finally getting parked in its place.

³² based on the Quranic idea of justice “You who believe, fair retribution is prescribed for you in cases of murder: the free man for the free man, the slave for the slave, the female for the female. But if the culprit is pardoned by his aggrieved brother, this shall be adhered to fairly, and the culprit shall pay what is due in a good way. This is an alleviation from your Lord and an act of mercy. If anyone then exceeds these limits, grievous suffering awaits him” (Quran 2. 178-179).

Adam Roberts posits that in sf physical transformation, space, and time travel are made “plausible” using “material, physical rationalization, rather than a supernatural or arbitrary one” (5). So, in this story, the *qisas* executed by the car is not explained using some supernatural phenomenon of spirit or ghost or magical element but the rationalist scientific discourse. When the policeman on duty fails to account for the accidental deaths of the murderers to the D.I.G. police, the auto-mechanic intervenes with his wild guess, (*Sir ji wese tou kuch khas samajh me nahi aya, lekin aise lagta he ke battery erath ho gai aur ignition on ho gai tou garri khud bakhud start ho gai...gear me hone ki waja secharrapa mar ker age barrhi aur phir sb ko lapetti chali gai*) “Sir, I am not certain, but I guess that the battery was earthed incidentally, triggering the ignition and thus starting the vehicle, which was already in gear, leading to crush the two persons in its way” (Ahmad 16). Unlike Indian sf, the car is not operated by some ghost or spirit; rather, a mechanical fault is used to explain the accident leading it to take revenge on the murderers of its owners. Simultaneously, the car is depicted as a sentient being that not only gets inspiration from Natni’s loyalty but also chooses the same path of retributive justice (*Qisas*). The story deals with an important question of sf: what makes us human, by blurring the line between machine, animal, and human. Like Natni, the car also acts like a *Saain* with a moral conscience and allegiance to its owners. Like Western sf, *Qisas* uses scientific discourse to produce the effect of cognitive estrangement, and simultaneously like Indian sf, it combines technology with religion, as the car becomes an embodied conscience or moral sense, as it chooses to decide for itself to bring the closure to the story.

Mark Bould asserts that sf deals with “social and cultural consequences of technological change” (40). In the short story “Sony”, the Sony VCR serves as a metaphor for alienation caused by dependence on technological gadgets. The Sony VCR becomes an important character

like the car in “Qisas”, and like an AI in contemporary sf, it controls its owner Bakhtiar who holds it dearer than his life. When Bakhtiar goes abroad on a business tour, Sony records his wife’s (Khijasta’s) extra-marital affair in his absence. Feeling betrayed, Bakhtiar chooses Sony over his wife and moves into his basement full of gadgets. The story depicts a world obsessed with technological consumerism, where love relationships, marriage, intimacy, honeymoon, all serve as occasions to spend lavishly on gadgets that gradually become more important (dearer) than relationships. The characters spend more time on their gadgets for pleasure than with one another. The result is the alienation leading the wife to cheat on her distant husband, and the man to desert his wife to lead his life among his gadgets. The story has the posthuman elements questioning the impact of machines on human life and relationships. Like “Qisas”, the story imagines a world where machines become sentient and control human lives.

Another story “Che Chika Batees” (six sixes are thirty-two) critiques global capitalism and its effects on the third world countries like Pakistan. Ahmad sets the story in the period of a dictator, who follows the policy of self-interest without caring for his country and people. The story revolves around a world-famous professor of Economics, Saati, who is very competent and knowledgeable in his subject with one weird thing: his belief that “six sixes are thirty-two” (41). Except for this flaw, his expertise in his field is widely acknowledged. This error in his scientific knowledge becomes so visible that all his publications, lectures, and theories fail to secure him freedom to live a normal life. This error is perceived as a sign of resistance by the global elites as soon as they become aware of it.

The dictator, who is ready to compromise anything for the foreign aid or loan from the international organizations (World Bank), willingly submits to the foreign pressure to imprison the poor professor. Despite the foreign minister’s clarification that the professor is a harmless

person and a *Saain* (Sufi), the foreigners are not willing to spare him. The American ambassador, along with the British and Belgian ambassadors, convinces the dictator that the professor's scientific error is a symptom that he can rebel against the system, and he may mislead others by proposing a theory of an interest-free system, thus he is a dangerous man who may cause a revolution (44-45). The dictator gets convinced and imprisons the professor to get the loan. The story records not only the pressure of global capitalism but also the exploitation of the intellectuals in a dictatorial regime. Ahmad's global approach is evident in this imagined world where not only the damaging effects of dictatorship are illustrated, but also foreign interference in internal and foreign policies of the developing countries (Pakistan in particular) is critiqued.

“Puri Jankari” (Complete knowledge) is another sf story critiquing human follies by inventing the history of an imagined civilization Mahirra near Harappa. The foreign scholars devoted to the study of the ancient civilization get surprised to discover the clues of another civilization Mahirra, ten thousand years older than Harappa. This civilization had all the modern technology and scientific inventions ever known and even unknown to the present world. They had resolved all the mysteries of nature, solved all the problems in the universe, answered all the questions facing mankind, mastered space travel, time travel, teleportation, and thus were leading their life without knowing what mystery, wonder, or ignorance meant. With all and sundry having the same degree of knowledge, there were no disputes, debates, fights, conflicts, and disagreements (78). The height of enlightenment and peak of progress had left them idle, and their ennui “led them to decline and degeneration, as did other civilizations due to their ignorance, incompetence, and material decadence” (80). They became hollow men leading their life without any purpose. Both extremes of ignorance and knowledge are convenient tools to destroy civilizations when they go astray or become stagnant. The story, like *A Canticle for*

Leibowitz by Walter M. Miller (1959), warns against the dangers lurking in scientific progress though with a slight difference, as its focus is on moral degeneration than on physical destruction caused by nuclear holocaust.

Ahmad's two stories "Badni Zaroorat" (Physical Need) and "Akhri Hamla" (Final Attack) deal with germs and pathogens in the human body not only affecting health, but also determining human behavior and relationships. In "Badni Zaroorat", Razia and Siddique fall in love with each other, and Ahmad explains their spiritual experience of love and conjugal relations in biological terms: "As the chronic pathogens in their bodies got strongly attracted to one another, so did their bodies, and they could not live without each other" (109). The pathogens get agency and control their behaviour and destiny. Later, they fall out of love with each other only when the healthy environment of the Northern city of Mingora kills their germs and thus eliminates the cause of attraction between the two. Their mutual love depends on the pathogens, and as their bodies heal their love also wanes as does their disease. The fatalistic nature of the story undermines human agency against nature. In "Akhri Hamla" the diphtheria germs and white blood cells are pitted against each other in a war in Raheela's body. The emotional support by her fiancé keeps her spirits high, and she clings to life even when others lose hope around her. The war between the pathogens and Raheela's white blood cells is projected as a war between life and death. The white blood cells, aided by antibiotics, and emotional support by Raheela's fiancé, defeat the germs and restore her to life. Her narrow escape from the clutches of death is underscored by the religious belief that no one can die before the destined time.

The last two stories "Bolta Bandar" (A Talking Monkey) and "Kot Dadu Power Station" critique the blind following of the West and undervaluing the local epistemes. The result is

confusion, as the application of foreign research to different local situations produces contradictory results. In “Bolta Bandar”, Horu, the talking monkey, is a *Saain* who tries to deconstruct the binarism of faith and science. He evaluates evolutionary and big bang theories philosophically to highlight the scientific progress made at the expense of faith in God. Horu claims that his ancestors were men but were turned into monkeys because they chose to fall from the stature of man, the crown of creation. They chose to live like animals without obeying any moral codes revealed to man. After Darwin’s theory, many of his fellows are waiting for evolution to work on them to make men out of them. The three intellectuals in the story confront the monkey using scientific discourse to support evolutionary and big bang theories, who answers thus, “We [monkeys] have no objection [to these theories] We only want to say, dear men! Why don’t you accept that God willed it so by saying *Kun [Be]* ... Why do they [scientists] insist that there was a big bang but no one behind it?”³³ (133). Horu’s question is at the centre of the story to bridge the gap between science and faith. It seems explicable in the context of the earlier discussion of Islam-science nexus. Ahmad’s story critiques the binarism between science and religion by highlighting that religion and science are not contrary to each other. Neither does religion impose limits on the use of reason, nor does science challenge the unicity of God.

In “Kot Dadu Power Station”, an electrical engineer Rizwan discovers a strange thing during his experiments to produce electricity from water and solar energy. Rizwan is a scientist (*Saain*) working not for material gain or fame but to serve humanity. He tries to find spiritual solutions to material problems. He discovers that loving souls have strong charges to create a strong magnetic field to produce electricity. Thus, Rizwan finds Kot Dadu a place without

³³ Reference to the Holy Quran, “He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth, and when He decrees something, He says only, ‘Be,’ and it is” (2. 117-118).

hypocrisy, greed, pride, and enmity. The villagers live a simple life loving their relatives and neighbours alike. Their love and brotherhood create a strong electric field to establish a power station to produce electricity for the whole village without costing people a penny. Some neighbourhood villages, following the principles of love and brotherhood, also get their power stations producing free electricity. Kot Dadu power station becomes famous both on national and international levels. Several foreign scholars (American, British, Canadian, and Japanese) come for the survey and to bribe engineer Rizwan to sell his secret. They do not believe in Rizwan's theory, and instead, warn the locals to be wary of such schemes suggesting disagreement and dissent to be important for progress. Rizwan refuses to be bribed, but the seed of dissent sprouts, and the power stations gradually stop producing electricity. This story like "Che Chika Batees" critiques global entanglement that puts the developing countries like Pakistan in compromising situations due to foreign interference. It does so by emphasising the local social values that get replaced due to westernization and mechanization of daily life. The story reiterates his warning against turning a blind eye to the spiritual development for the sake of material progress.

Conclusion: This examination of the selected works in this part of the chapter illustrates that like Western and Indian sf, religion serves as an important subject and theme in Pakistani sf. However, unlike Western sf, Pakistani sf does not take religion and science as binaries. Religion not only serves as an important episteme next to science in Pakistani sf, but also as a subject, which usually gets a positive treatment. The important motifs in Pakistani sf discussed are: i) Islam-science nexus, ii) misinterpretation of religion as a problem, and iii) shades of Sufism. Pakistani sf films like *Shaani* and *Sar Kata Insaan* present religion as a source of social cohesion and redemption. Furthermore, Pakistani sf critiques religious extremism and sectarianism as a major cause of the social disorder and political instability. *SWIPE* depicts the dangers of

religious misinterpretation and its misuse by frivolous people without understanding the dire consequences. *Tilism i Hosh Afza* on the other hand, presents shades of Sufism in sf stories. Religion in Pakistani sf is not presented as irrelevant or as a sign of backwardness; rather, religion is upheld as a symbol of morality and civilization. The approach of these writers and directors remains glocal, as by responding to the local issues like feudalism, corruption, sectarianism, fundamentalism, materialism, global capitalism, and foreign interference, set in the glocal context, they are trying to appropriate the global knowledge (both sf genre and science) to meet the local needs.

Chapter 3: The Alien's Journey from Western and Indian sf to Pakistani sf

This chapter discusses the treatment of alien in Pakistani science fiction comparing it with the use of the alien motif in the Western and Indian sf traditions. It has two parts. The first part will discuss the varied treatment of the alien motif in the Western and Indian sf traditions. In the Western sf tradition, alien has been used as a metaphor for alterity and difference with both (rarely) positive and (mostly) negative projections. The figure of alien has its roots in pseudoscientific racial and evolutionary theories, and it often serves as the Other (savage or advanced) against which the Self is constructed. Drawing on the insights of scholars such as David Higgins, David Seed, Steffen Hantke, Lincoln Geraghty, and Rebecca Janicker, the chapter discusses how alien has been used as a novum to represent diverse fears, anxieties, racial/ideological otherness, and hope to embrace the difference, intersecting with historical events and moments.

The first part of this chapter, drawing on the insights of scholars like Suparno Banerjee and Sami Khan, also examines the use of the alien motif in Indian science fiction. The use of alien in Indian sf indicates the subversion of sf genre in the Indian cultural context. It uses the alien figure either to project the Self by using Occidental discourse in response to Oriental othering in Western sf (Banerjee *Indian SF* 162), or it uses the alien motif to engage with its politics of othering by constructing racial, national, religious, and gendered others. Also, Banerjee deconstructs or destabilizes the semantics associated with the alien motif by including clones, mutants, and AIs besides extraterrestrials in his "loose definition" of alien (164). Similarly, Khan discusses the use of the alien motif in contemporary Indian sf in English to engage with the identity politics, socio-political problems, and internal/external threats facing India.

The second part of the chapter discusses the use of the alien motif as another example of the subversive nature of Pakistani science fiction. Unlike Western and Indian sf traditions, Pakistani sf does not use the alien figure as an encounter with alterity or Otherness to construct the redeemed self. The aliens usually appear as the messiah figures or allies to resolve the local problems facing common Pakistanis, or they simply serve as tools to portray the socio-political problems plaguing the globe by displacing them into an imagined world. This part will examine the role of aliens to critique the flawed systems of Pakistani society in the film *Shaani* (Saeed Rizvi 1989), and effects of globalization in Pakistani English sf novels *The Light Blue Jumper* (2017) by Sidra Sheikh and *Divided Species* (2020) by Muhammad Omer Iftikhar. The approach of these works remains glocal just like the works discussed in the first two chapters. These Pakistani sf works utilize the alien motif to treat the glocal problems like corruption, terrorism, dangers lurking in any sort of ism (dogmatism, extremism), foreign/external interference, and global power politics.

I

Alien in Western Science Fiction

Historical Context:

In Western science fiction, the alien motif has its roots in the pseudo-scientific discourse about otherness (Seed *Introduction* 28) which became more crucial because of the imperial encounter with the racial and national others in the nineteenth century. Edward Beasley argues that the idea of race was “reinvented” in the nineteenth century, with the rise of polygenesis with an emphasis on “separate, stable, physically distinct, and physically inheritable races with different mental and moral characters” (1). In England, Charles Darwin, Walter Bagehot, Robert Knox, and James Hunt promoted racial ideas based on heredity. Besides naturalists, other popularizers and men of

letters also contributed to the popularity of racial ideas. In America, some journalists promoted the idea of physical races “to justify slavery against the arguments of abolitionists” (13).

Beth Lew-Williams discusses the development of American alienage parallel with American citizenship. The postbellum period (after the Civil War 1861-1865) in America produced many aliens based on their race and gender to deny them “full inclusion and equality” (242). He argues that America was hesitant to include the Chinese through the Restriction Act (1882), policies of exclusion (1888), and expulsion (1892) despite opening its border to others. This exclusionary attitude aimed to deter what the Supreme Court considered “an Oriental invasion” and “a menace to our civilization” (240). American citizenship came to be defined in the postbellum era, and this necessitated defining American aliens. Besides Chinese, people from Asian countries (Japanese, Koreans, and South Asians), paupers, “unfit”, and criminals were also restricted through the Immigration Act (1882) and later through a more comprehensive law of immigration (1924) (240-241).

The alien in the Western sf comes from the Western interaction with alterity, as “the very term ‘alien’ suggests otherness and difference” (Seed 28). The social attitudes intersecting with historical events like imperialism, World Wars, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and 9/11 impact the diverse representation of the alien in Western sf. Therefore, depiction of the alien in Western sf tradition ranges from an imperialist alien invasion as depicted in H.G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds* (1898), to the colonization of aliens as described in its American adaptations, the fear of communism as portrayed in the sf works produced in the 1950s, and the friendly aliens as presented in *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg 1982).

What is an alien?

Gordon Lichfield contends that our stories about aliens are basically about humans. Citing examples of the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* series, he asserts that these films address moral dilemmas that humans face such as “the nature of friendship, loyalty, or leadership among humans in the face of adversity” (373). Aliens stand for either allies or foes of human beings. Some stories address the issue of otherness by critically analyzing our treatment of the racial and gendered others. In others, aliens appear as invaders and colonizers with advanced technology reminding us of oppression in human history in the form of fascism and imperialism. He also gives examples of films like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and *Interstellar* (2014) as the positive representation of aliens “as benevolent, super-intelligent beings who take the place of old-time deities, sent to remind us of our insignificance and pettiness, or to lift us up into a new phase of human development” (373).

It is difficult to conceive some formula for alien representation in the Western sf tradition, as it varies from work to work, and period to period with a varying degree of inclusivity and exclusivity (Hankte 143). The selected scholars, as discussed below, view alien to signify i) the real fears, anxieties, or the threats of wars and invasion, ii) an imperial fantasy with the triumph of humanity, iii) the otherness ascribed to differences based on race, gender, and culture, and iv) a hope to embrace the difference leading to a peaceful co-existence.

i) Alien Fears: Steffen Hankte claims that aliens represent threats and fears of the other. For example, in the 1950s, alien invasion in sf became popular because of the threatening environment of the Cold War. In the new millennium, the War on Terror, and threats of the unknown have once again brought the alien motif to the center (143). America has been haunted by alien invasions just after the launch of an “interminable War on Terror” (148). He discusses three television shows, *Invasion*, *Threshold*, and *Surface* (in the 2000s) which follow the ideological paradigm of invasion

films of the 1950s. He posits that this resemblance indicates that our response to otherness is limited by two positions: inclusionary and exclusionary (149), mainly playing on the fear of the other due to their difference from the norm.

Similarly, Rocio Carrasco posits that aliens in invasion films stand “as metaphors for a range of perceived threats to humanity, or particular groups, ranging from 1950s communism to the AIDS virus and contemporary ‘illegal aliens’ of human origin” (7). Alien invasions in films threaten the established political and social values and as such endanger the contemporary Western order. He cites examples of films like *The War of the Worlds* (Haskin, 1953) or *The Thing from Another World* (Nyby, 1952) which, in the context of the Cold War paranoia, present the “challenge of power structures through the topic of the foreign alien attack” (8). He also asserts that films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel, 1956) and *Invaders from Mars* (Sears, 1953) present the Cold War paranoia with a threat imposed by a different system (8). After 9/11, another fear (terrorism) threatens the peace of the imagined world. He cites the example of *The War of the Worlds* (Spielberg 2005), which “re-imagines Wells’ scenario to provide us with a metaphor of the terrorist threat in the U.S.A. after September 11” by alluding to the trauma and fear experienced by Americans in 2001 (11).

The alien motif has also been exploited by sf writers writing in favour of or against the Vietnam War (1964-1975). David M. Higgins asserts that the experience in the Vietnam War was painful, as this war damaged the self-image of America with “the widespread sense” that “the United States had become an unjust and repressive police state” (415). This loss of confidence was reflected in “the SF of the era and its aftermath” (415). He gives examples of several *Star Trek* episodes which address the United States’ involvement in Vietnam. For example, early episodes such as “City on the Edge of Forever” (April 6, 1967) and “A Private

Little War” (February 2, 1968), endorse the US role in the conflict, but later episodes such as “The Omega Glory” (March 1, 1968) and “Let That Be Your Last Battlefield” (January 10, 1969) reveal disillusionment with “the US military and political leaders” (416).

ii) Alien and Imperial fantasy: The alien in some works serves as a symbol of the backward other and thus in need of the imperial tutelage. Their otherness embodies the primitive stage in human evolution thus justifying the agenda of imperialism to spread civilization. David Seed explores “the imperial themes of invasion and conquest” in the Anglophone SF around the turn of the twentieth century, drawing on the insights of Istvan Csicsery-Ronay and John Rieder (“Course of Empire” 230). He links the emergence of sf with imperialism and traces the manifestation of imperial desire in sf underpinned by an evolutionary discourse of progress and race. Darwinian discourse is evident in these novels in their special focus on progress embodied in the advanced races with sophisticated military technology illustrating the “inseparability of technology and empire” (232). Seed posits that many future-war novels express the anxieties of foreign invasion and the unpreparedness of the nations to fight the wars. He cites examples of William Le Queux’s *The Invasion of 1910* (1906) and Cleveland Moffett’s *The Conquest of America* (1916). Also, H. G. Wells’ novel was recycled in many American invasion narratives which changed Wells’s narrative to fight back the Martians and restore confidence in the central position of the humans.

Moreover, Gregory Pfitzer examines the use of frontier myth in sf: “The most persistent myth in American culture, that of the frontier, has shown remarkable resiliency in its life cycle” (52). This myth emerged in the nineteenth century to justify the Westward expansion. Since then, it continues to play its role in defining the American self-image. As soon as the west was colonized, outer space became the imaginary frontier to be explored. Pfitzer cites the example of

Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Barsoom* series, which utilized Mars as a new frontier, "and not surprisingly he [Burroughs] was indebted to Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902) for his vision of the West" (52). His aliens are based on the politics of difference that render the 'Native Indians' as "a reflection of nightmarish fears on the part of whites about the vindictive quality of Nature" (52). John Carter not only notes the resemblance of the aliens with 'Native Indians' to establish them as the evil others but also uses this assumption to kill dozens of Martians. Burroughs relies on "the conventions of Western captivity narratives" by depicting the admiration of Martians for Carter's bravery and courage and their readiness to take him as their legitimate leader (54).

However, Pfitzer also notes that the frontier ideology is challenged in some sf works after witnessing the horrors of the Second World War and "the excesses of the Space Race" (58). He cites the example of *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) by Ray Bradbury which subverts the frontier myth in a story of the conflict "between space-traveling Americans and native Martians in the language of western conflict and conquest" (56). The main protagonist, Spender, tries to protect the Martians from the destruction experienced by Native Americans in history by fighting against his former cowboy friends.

David Higgins, on the other hand, ironically notes the prevalence of the element of imperial masochism in American sf, which he describes as the identification of the colonizers with the victims of imperialism. He observes that "SF narratives often turned toward heroic tales of counter-imperial struggle and anti-authoritarian uprising, especially during and after the Vietnam War" (426). He analyzes two novels criticizing the Vietnam War, Joe Haldeman's novel *The Forever War* (1972-4) and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest* (1972). He

observes that Le Guin and Haldeman use aliens to explore the world from the perspectives of “both perpetrators and victims of imperial militarization” (428).

iii) Racial and Gendered Aliens: The alien motif is also utilized to present racial attitudes and conflicts by transporting them into the imagined worlds. John T. Flautz asserts that *Barsoom* novels by Burroughs such as *A Princess of Mars* (1912), *The Gods of Mars* (1918), and *The Warlord of Mars* (1919) offer “fantasies of power and glory” and address the American soul, as “they touch on race, on religion, on personal morality, and political destiny” (263). John Carter, a Southern hero and a confederate soldier, achieves the leading position on Mars not only because of “his ambition” but also “his destiny” (265). He encounters races of different colors, each marked by different characteristics. For example, the green Martians are modeled on American Indians and presented as noble savages (266). The red race behaves like Europeans, as they are descendants of some higher civilization. Burroughs transcends the contemporary fear of miscegenation to suggest their higher rank despite their racial hybridity. The yellow race is modeled on the Chinese, who live in isolation. On the other hand, the white and the black races represent the dark side, conspiring to rise to power (267). Following a Darwinian plot, “these races are constantly in conflict with one another” (267).

Similarly, Kim Edwards asserts that alien figures are often used to “reflect contemporary issues of race and difference in the real world” (59). He discusses two films, *District 9* (Neill Blomkamp 2009) and *Avatar* (James Cameron 2009), as they have “provoked significant criticism and debate because of their constructions of race” (61). He observes that *District 9* uses the threat of alien invasion to offer “a heavy-handed analysis of apartheid and the nature of humanity” (61). The action takes place in South Africa, where a white government agent Wikus gets infected with alien DNA. Due to his physical transformation, he faces racial discrimination

and experiences “the ‘black’ situation of poverty, hunger and segregation, loss of civil and human rights and personal dignity, and constant fear for one’s life” (61). Wikus gets cured of his racism and insensitivity during this process. Still, Edwards considers the representation of race problematic in the film. First, the aliens are presented as “violent, stupid, criminally inclined, physically repellent”, and their comparison with black South Africans becomes disturbing (62). Second, Nigerian characters are presented “as uneducated, scamming, vicious criminals” (62).

Similarly, in *Avatar* (James Cameron 2009), Edwards considers mimicry on the part of the colonizers of the native culture as offensive as “racism implicit in blackface parodies or the mimicry of Aboriginal tribal dress” (63). Moreover, Sully’s decision to give up his own culture and settle with Navi links him with the agenda of colonization. He argues that both films show that “land issues and racial tensions can only be successfully solved through violence” (64).

iv) Embracing the Alien: The alien motif is also utilized to emphasize the values of diversity and inclusivity with a hope to accept the difference. Lincoln Geraghty and Rebecca Janicker aim to explore “how the ‘idea of the alien’ has been portrayed on screen since the late 1970s” (1). In the first section on alien relations, they examine films such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg 1977) and *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg 1982), to highlight “the ways in which alien/human relationships provide hope and direction in an increasingly secular society” (4). They posit that these two films present the enlightened alien beings who bring “‘salvation’ to America” (4). They are childlike and have genuine kindness to become friends with their human hosts (4). They do not have any evil motives; rather, they become a source of “social cohesion” (5). The optimism of these films reveals “Spielberg’s desire to suggest a new beginning for the post-Vietnam America and to open the door to a new era” of peace and co-existence (5).

The writers of colour also use alien to emphasize the need of cooperation and co-existence. Irene Alonso critically examines Octavia Butler's trilogy *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989), "later collected in the single volume *Lilith's Brood* (2000)," from an ecofeminist perspective. The novels present aliens the Oankali as helpful beings who try to rescue humanity after a nuclear war. They deconstruct the gender and race binaries. They try to form their society based on the values of interdependence and cooperation. They embrace the differences and consider hybridity to be a source of strength, though the establishment of such relationships involves a degree of violence.

Alonso asserts that these novels critique the exploitation of nature by human beings and their disregard for the difference. The humans have used their intelligence "to devise ways of exterminating other humans, as well as to exploit nature for their own purposes" (227). The Oankali hope that a hybrid race would use human intelligence for better purposes and would benefit from Oankali genes to modify and heal the limbs; "Our children won't destroy themselves in a war, and if they need to regrow a limb or to change themselves in some other way, they'll be able to do it" (Butler qtd. in Alonso 229). Alonso posits that this disillusionment with humans reflects Butler's own disillusionment with Reagan-era politics which promoted militarism and fostered nuclear arms race (225). The survival of humanity depends on its readiness to embrace alterity and difference by making some difficult compromises.

This brief review of the treatment of the alien motif in Western sf illustrates that alien serves as a novum to deal with socio-political fears, imperial fantasies, racial anxieties, and the dream of co-existence in a world engulfed by the politics of difference. The difference and alterity of the alien keep shifting on the scale of inclusivity and exclusivity with a difference of degree negotiating with the historical context in which the works are produced.

Alien in Indian Science Fiction

Suparno Banerjee, citing Anil Menon, considers Indian sf as a product of “an alien encounter– contact with the British colonizers” (*Other Tomorrows* 25). He discusses the use of the alien motif in Indian sf comparing it with Western sf as “a tool to negotiate the intrinsic relationship between the ‘self’ and the ‘Other’” (*Indian SF* 161). He draws on postcolonial theory, especially Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism, to explain the use of the alien motif in Western sf in the imperial and colonial context to define “its own civilizational identity” (162). He asserts that in Indian sf the alien motif helps to construct Indian identity in contrast with “the British and western Others” (162). By using the alien motif, Indian sf achieves two different purposes:

On the one hand, by ‘writing back’, the empire (in this case India) deconstructs Orientalist discourse perpetuated by colonial narratives, and on the other hand, through its own identity politics it engages in Occidentalism, or exoticizing, stereotyping and producing a specific idea of the West, against which essential Indian identity can be established (162).

Banerjee mentions the dominant tendency of Occidentalism in Indian sf’s use of the alien motif. This Occidental discourse defines India “in opposition to the West”, hence this is also “an exclusionary and essentialist discourse that reverses the Orientalist gaze in stereotyping and objectifying acts” (174). The Indian identity is formed by stressing the spirituality of the East as opposed to the materialism of the West: “a rigid modernity of the West needs to be tempered by the spirituality of the East” (176). This Othering, which he calls “western dystopia” using Alastair Bonnett’s term, has become an important characteristic of Indian sf since the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1990s (180). He asserts that the advanced technology of the friendly

aliens should not be viewed as an attempt at an “Occidental Utopia– the idea that liberal democracy and technological innovations have led to overall progress in western societies” (178). He cites examples of several works like Laxman Londhe and Chintamani Deshmukh’s “Devamsi Jive Marile” (They killed the gods alive 1991), Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay’s *Patalghar* (The Underground Chamber 1996), and several stories published in sf magazines such as *Fantastic*, *Bishmay*, and *Vigyan Katha* (182) in which the West is not presented as a model with friendly aliens; rather, such works try to reclaim “a prehistoric scientific eminence for India” ignoring “western contributions” (178).

Though Banerjee affirms that the creation of an essential Indian Hindu identity is based on three principles of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism): “Pitrabhoomi (Fatherland), jati (bloodline) and sanskriti (culture)” (162), it not only requires exclusion of the West but also several Others: religious minorities and the people of lower castes, especially Muslims. This idea of racial allegiance in Indian nationalism, despite its emphasis on religion, is quite like Anglo-Saxonism in the West with its aim of excluding Others to define the Self. Both demand complete assimilation into their respective local cultures, and both treat difference and alterity from the norm as an alien/other to be feared.

Indian sf does not limit itself to the treatment of alterity only in the colonial context; rather, it includes racial and gendered others suffering from various kinds of alienation in both local and diasporic contexts. Banerjee cites Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who highlights the marginalization of a subaltern as Other by positioning it in “a dominant social order with or without any external imperial context,” to illustrate the representation of social and economic inequalities in Indian sf (163). He includes the subaltern perspective to highlight Indian sf’s “full spectrum of this representation of the Other” by using the alien motif (163). By emphasizing the

notion of Otherness, Banerjee defines an alien as a character with “visible or invisible physical alterity from the general human (*homo sapiens*) form”, thus including mutants, AIs, cyborgs, robots, besides extra-terrestrials in his “loose definition” (164).

Nonetheless, Banerjee identifies two categories for these different forms of alterity represented by the alien motif: “the alien/Other as the self and the alien/Other as the Other” (164). As far as the first category is concerned, alien as the self “disrupts the hegemonic identity politics of imperial and post-industrial world systems, and sometimes that of the indigenous hierarchies” (166). Using a postcolonial framework, Banerjee argues that the colonized and postcolonial writers often use aliens for self-representation to highlight the experiences of alienation and estrangement not only to deconstruct the colonial stereotypes but also “to confront the disjunctions and disconnections within Indian society” (165). He discusses the works like Jagadananda Roy’s “Shukra Bhraman” (Travel to Venus 1914), Arun Mande’s “Ruby” (1993), Vandana Singh’s *Of Love and Other Monsters* (2007) and *Distances* (2008), and Samit Basu’s *Turbulence* (2012) which use the alien motif, with its manifestation in diverse forms (robots, AIs, mutants, and extraterrestrials), to highlight the problems like “gender and cultural suppressions” facing the marginalized factions within Indian social hierarchies or alienation and the identity crisis faced by immigrants in a global context (166).

The second category, like Western sf, uses the alien as the Other, “an inscrutable entity that threatens and defines the self” (174). The aliens appear both as friends and enemies depending on the differences considered significant in the Indian identity politics. The friendly aliens usually appear as messiah figures who bring the gifts of progress and modernity without causing destruction. Banerjee cites examples of works such as Satyajit Ray’s “Bankubabur Bandhu” (Mr. Banku’s Friend 1962), Vandana Singh’s “Tetrahedron” and “Infinities” (2008),

and Arvind Mishra's "Antim Sanskar" (Last Rites 2013) for presenting friendly aliens who benefit the locals with scientific wonders. Ray wrote "Bankubabur Bandhu" as a precursor to his (unmade) film script "Abatar", which Banerjee suggests being an inspiration for Steven Spielberg's *E.T.* (1982) (177). The "prototype" of a friendly alien Ang is introduced which later appears in several Indian sf novels and films like *Koi Mil Gaya* (Rakesh Roshan *I Found Someone* 2013) and Shirish Kunder's *Joker* (2012) helping the marginalized protagonists with the advanced technology and superhuman powers (178). Banerjee also gives examples of works like Rajashekar Bhoosnurmath's "Venus is Watching" (1993), R. N. Sharma's "The Paper and Cardboard Clothiers" (1994), and Sami Ahmad Khan's *Aliens in Delhi* (2017) for presenting hostile aliens threatening to destroy the world (176-7).

At the same time, there are many Others represented through aliens, mutants, robots, and AIs (185). For example, Muslims are another Other (alien) to represent "anxiety about Islamic Pakistan as a rogue state sponsoring terrorism" (175). Again, Banerjee uses Bonnett's term "radical Islamism" to indicate another characteristic of Indian sf to depict fear of the Other (181). He cites examples of Mainak Dhar's *Zombiestan* (The Land of Zombies 2012) and Sami Ahmad Khan's *Aliens in Delhi* (2017). *Aliens in Delhi* blends the alien invasion with Islamic terrorism. The novel, despite the defeat of the terrorists/aliens, ends with the fear of future attacks. *Zombiestan*, on the other hand, presents Islamic terrorism as a kind of Zombie pandemic infecting humans to become zombies/terrorists threatening the world peace. In such works, the West becomes an Indian ally to fight Islamic terrorism. Indian self is also established by foregrounding "a contentious human-AI relationship" as depicted in the films like Shanmugam Shankar's *Enthiran* (Robot 2010) and Anubhav Sinha's *Ra.One* (2011). Banerjee posits that such works through the human-machine relationship highlight "the connections between

westernization, mechanization, and deviation from Indian values, which result in various kinds of alienation...” by associating the destructive technology with the West (184).

Moreover, in his article “An Alien Nation”, Banerjee discusses several works by Vandana Singh including her two novels *Of Love and Other Monsters* (2007) and *Distances* (2008), arguing that “Singh is a writer of new postcolonial alienation” (285). These novels use the alien motif to depict the dilemma facing immigrants: “they are caught in the lure of better lives as immigrants in the “first world” as well as by the traps of traditional Indian values” (283). These characters are marginalized based on their class, gender, and religion. They suffer from “various levels of alienation” while trying to “negotiate their surroundings and identities in this new world order” (283). Their hyphenated and hybrid positionality makes their allegiance to opposing worlds questionable. Banerjee concludes that Singh like other Indian sf writers uses the alien motif to challenge “Western perceptions about the Other” as well as to present “the aliens produced within the postcolonial society” (302).

Sami Ahmad Khan, in his book *Star Warriors of the Modern Raj* (2021), discusses the examples of works like Shovon Chowdhury’s *The Competent Authority* (2013) and Mainak Dhar’s *Zombiestan* (2012) which imagine threats from the religious fundamentalism, China, and Pakistan. The social other has its roots in a caste and class system focusing on the plight of the laborers, farmers, and lower classes. He gives examples of the works such as Priya Sarukkai Chabria’s *Generation 14* (2008) and Payal Dhar’s “The Other Side” which use mutants and clones to project social otherness by magnifying “the inequalities” (74). The gendered other is constructed to depict the plight of the people marginalized on account of their sex like women, and sexual orientation like transgender people. He cites examples of works like Padmanabhan’s *Escape* (2008) and Shweta Taneja’s “The Daughter that Bleeds” which present the dangers of

technology by creating dystopias in which women are commodified, enslaved, and even eliminated.

Khan also discusses the works like Mainak Dhar's *Vimana* (2012) which present gods as aliens/extra-terrestrials playing an important role to fight contemporary global terrorism. Khan asserts that the novel "interprets the mythic in the light of the science fictional" (106), using "semantic elements associated with SF (such as spaceships, high-tech bases, aerial dogfights, etc)" (107). This novel is written in the tradition of validating the Vedic science to reclaim a golden past of India "as the point of origin of all technologically advanced marvels which redefine the new millennium" (108). He also discusses two stories, Pervin Saket's "Test of Fire" and Priya Sarukkai Chabria's "Fragments from the Book of Beauty", from *Breaking the Bow* (2012) (also discussed in the chapter on religion and science fiction), which present goddess Sita as an extraterrestrial to comment on the issues of patriarchy, misogyny, and alienation of women in a society that needs to keep them "in check" (113). Khan postulates that this mixing of technology with mythology redefines sf in the Indian context: "a mode of storytelling in which aliens, gods and lasers... technology and religion, exist not only within the same narrative but within the same frame or paragraph" (114).

This brief scholarly review of Indian sf tradition elucidates how the alien motif is used by Indian sf writers to discuss the problems emanating from the colonial experience, postcolonial hierarchies, and global entanglement facing the contemporary Indian society. Both Banerjee and Khan study the ways in which the alien motif engages with the politics of otherization on various levels. Moreover, Banerjee's "loose definition" of alien (164) allows the inclusion of clones, mutants, and AIs besides extraterrestrials in Indian sf. Sometimes, like Western sf, Indian sf

engages with the alien to reflect on the self/other relationship, at others it uses the Occidental discourse to construct its others as a response to the Oriental othering.

II

Alien in Pakistani Science Fiction

Pakistani sf like Western and Indian sf uses the alien motif to comment on the contemporary socio-political problems facing the society, but unlike them, it does not use the alien motif “to negotiate the intrinsic relationship between the ‘self’ and the ‘Other’” (Banerjee *Indian SF* 161). The depiction of aliens in Pakistani sf is more comparable to Indian sf like the *Krrish* film series in which aliens come to earth to make friends with humans and to help them realize their dreams. Sometimes, they appear as messiah figures and allies, and at others as people like us caught in the web of (global) asymmetrical power relationships on some other planets facing the same problems. Usually, aliens are outsiders with special powers who come to the Earth to help the locals to resolve their problems. At other times, they become tools to comment on the global power politics and its impacts on developing countries like Pakistan, though such Othering is mostly overt and carried out in a humorous way.

The approach of the Pakistani sf remains glocal, as in addressing the local problems it reflects awareness of the global context. Cara Cilano’s judgement about the contemporary Pakistani writers in English, citing Kamila Shamsie’s dissatisfaction with the postcolonial theory, sounds equally true for Pakistani sf with its emergence in the last few decades: “other events and issues eclipse the relevance of Partition in their works. Critical expectations need to be altered, then, to allow for the range of topics this younger generation of writers presents” (189). Pakistani sf uses the novum of alien without engaging in the Occidental discourse to

address glocal issues such as corruption, foreign interference, global capitalism, “Islamization, nuclearization, consumer culture, and extremism” (Cilano 189).

This part of the third chapter will examine the alien-motif only in the works considered science fiction by the directors, writers, and publishers of the selected works. An interdisciplinary approach, drawing on the insights of Western and Indian sf scholars and Pakistani literary critics, will be used to analyze the use of the alien motif in two Pakistani English sf novels, *The Light Blue Jumper* (2017) by Sidra F. Sheikh and *Divided Species* (2020) by Muhammad Omer Iftikhar, and the Pakistani film *Shaani* (Saeed Rizvi 1989). *The Light Blue Jumper* takes the readers to space where humans along with other species are living together under an intergalactic government of the IPF (Interplanetary Forces), and the alien appears as a tool to make us laugh at the blood-thirsty power politics in the imagined world. On the other hand, in film *Shaani*, and the novel *Divided Species*, the alien-contact takes place on Earth, particularly in Pakistan, and aliens emerge as messiah figures or allies to solve the problems facing the society. Unlike Western and Indian sf, Pakistani sf rarely presents hostile aliens to project fears and anxieties of the Other; rather, it mainly engages with the fourth pattern in using the alien motif that presents in alien contact a hope for co-operation and co-existence.

II.I. The Alien in Space: Sidra F. Sheikh’s *The Light Blue Jumper* (2017)

Sidra F. Sheikh has recently emerged on the literary scene with her sf novel *The Light Blue Jumper*. She is a practicing lawyer of the High Court of Pakistan and a member of the Managing Committee of the Gulab Devi Trust Hospital. *The Little Blue Jumper (TLBJ)* is Sheikh’s debut sf novel (with a sequel coming soon) published in Pakistan by Mongrel Books Karachi. Muhammad Omer Iftikhar in his review of the novel lauds Mongrel Books for publishing a science fiction novel (n.p.). This gives hope to the emerging Pakistani writers in

English by breaking the established tradition of first getting published abroad, as Faiqa Mansab observes: “The fact that Pakistani writers are not being published at home whereas Indian writers are, is often questioned... Why did you publish in India? ...because there is hardly anyone to publish fiction written in English in Pakistan” (n.p.).

Most genre writers get published in India because they fail to find any publishers in Pakistan. Also, the Indian publishing industry is “connected to mainstream publishing globally and because it is well-structured” (Mita Kapur qtd. in Mansab n.p.). The publication of Sheikh’s novel in Pakistan also provides hope for genre writers, as previously there has been little welcoming space for comic, sf, and graphic writers (ibid n.p.). With the publication of *The Light Blue Jumper*, this has started to change, as Sheikh expresses her satisfaction with her experience of getting published in Pakistan (ibid n.p.).

In a video to promote her book at Liberty Books, Sheikh claims her novel to be “a humorous sf novel” (Sheikh 0:22). She chose to write it because it provided her much freedom and liberty “to step back from this world that we live in and to look at it from a fresh and completely alien perspective and allow the reader to see the absurdities that we take for granted in this world of ours” (0:35). Being herself an avid reader and consumer of science fiction, she took inspiration from “The Expanse”, ‘Star Trek Discovery’ and ‘Outlander’ (Sheikh qtd. in Maheen n.p.). Sheikh creates a bald blue alien Zaaro Nian with the symptoms of flatulence and a great sense of “self-preservation” (26) as a tool to ridicule the power-hungry IPF and the rebels who are both competing to build their respective empires. Sheikh makes fun of both by exposing their flaws, redeeming none to legitimize their right to power. She hopes that anyone “with imagination and a sense of humor” can enjoy this “space romp built on a darker layer of political satire” (Sheikh qtd. in Maheen n.p.).

The plot of the novel revolves around the resistance of the rebels, a multiracial crew, led by Madam X, an Ulroneese, and her team against the hegemony of the IPF (Interplanetary Forces: both aliens and humans): “a single autocratic power – which peddles itself as a democracy and liberates entire planets with bombs” (Sheikh in the email-interview). The action follows not a linear path but a cyclical one, as the ending suggests another rebel movement forming against the new regime. This temporal structure enables telling a story of power politics shifting its balance from one to another political side (equally power-hungry) thus starting the story anew justifying the novel’s intended sequel.

The IPF builds an intergalactic empire “based solely on their technological superiority” (Sheikh *TLBJ* 231), with the motto of “Liberty, Equality, and Freedom” (264) and uses weaponry to destroy all dissent and colonize the planets under “the guise of being a civilised liberating force” (217). This might be taken as an overt critique of the global hegemon which has historically justified its exercise of violence to maintain peace. The infamous remark of an anonymous American officer in the context of the Vietnam War, “It became necessary to destroy the town to save it,”³⁴ is only one example to suggest so. The dark humor cannot be missed in Lieutenant Salaar’s story about the clash between the two powerful leaders to establish their control over the world assets by exercising violence, “yet they would be known as keepers of the peace” (54). The lust for power seems to ensue an endless struggle between the power-hungry agents, who monopolize to gain control and establish an autocratic government.

On the other hand, the rebels are waiting for a messiah, an alien to lead their mission to success. The leader of the rebels Madam X takes Zaaro: the blue alien, an agent of the IPF, and the sole survivor of Zaaron planet, as the promised messiah to lead their resistance against the

³⁴ This quote is taken from <http://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2010/02/it-became-necessary-to-destroy-town-to.html>.

IPF, reciting the lyrical prophecy she learnt at a planetary fair: “From within the enemy he will rise, appearing suddenly before your eyes. The way forward will he show, yet precious little will he know” (19). They are surprised to find Zaaro, by sheer accident, who happens to “bring top secret executable codes to the latest missiles with him” (21).

The sub-plot revolves around the confusion and misunderstandings of the characters about the art of jumping, an accomplishment that Zaaro is assumed to possess which means “the ability to transport itself across any amount of space” to save himself and others from disasters, thus making him a jumper (26). Every character from Madam X to Lieutenant Salaar to the Good Doctor wants to play “the guide, the guru, the visionary, the Jump Master of the Old” (36) of Zaaro who cannot understand what is going on. Together they fight against the IPF to accidentally replace it with a new government as autocratic as the previous one and inadvertently leading to a new resistance movement. The entanglement of these characters in outer space helps advance the action to create humor out of serious issues like expansionism, militarism, and global power politics. The action moves from the IPF’s attack on G125 sector to the accidental victory of the rebels against the IPF without giving a clear chronology of the events. The text opens when humans have already been living with other advanced species for centuries under the intergalactic IPF’s regime.

David Seed observes about space opera in Western sf context that “the adventure paradigm central to space opera has been described as the ‘myth-form of exploration and colonial context’” (*Introduction* 12). Sheikh’s novel subverts this tradition by using the alien motif to critique the militarism and expansionism underlying contemporary global politics and its effects on the rest of the world. Zaaro narrates the story of the colonization of his planet and the submission of Zaaronians to their fate. The critique of the soft empire in the form of the global

hegemony cannot be missed in his description: “Inch by inch, day by day, they colonized Zaaron, until the day of the Great Liberation” (Sheikh 8) which ended in complete incorporation of Zaaron into the empire. Many get killed, and the survivors are treated as “the second-class citizens of the Free World” (Sheikh 11).

In this way, this novel can be read as a subversion of the space opera, an sf sub-genre. Apparently following the set tradition of Western sf such as *Star Trek* (1966), *Star Wars* (1977), and Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* series, the novel’s action takes place in space, where different races have been living together under the intergalactic government formed by the IPF. Still, the rebels in *TLBJ* do not emerge as some sort of Jedis fighting against the evil empire, nor as the guardians of some liberal federation; rather, they are operating motivated by their lust for power. This space novel does not create a Manichean world, drawing a clear line between the evil and the good; rather, it presents both political sides as equally prone to violence, intolerance, and expansionism, with none better than the other. Moreover, the character of Zaaro subverts another characteristic of Western space opera mentioned by Seed, that of establishing “the idealized male hero” (14). Zaaro emerges as a timid and lazy character, without “militarism and masculinism” associated with a Western space cowboy (Seed 15), unwilling to participate in the action.

Zaaro with other Zaaronians works in the “Arms and Ammunitions” (16) department for the despotic regime of the IPF without realizing his subjugated position, as Sheikh writes in her email interview: “His level of apathy is such that he is content to design weapons for the empire – never questioning it as these weapons are deployed on his own people”. Zaaronians are presented as people without written history, non-violent, “polite, quiet folk” (Sheikh 12). Those who remember their past are killed. The survivors are put into labor in the highly mechanical system of the empire. Zaaro naively reveals the reason for putting up with the oppressive IPF

regime: “Things could have been much worse; we could have been unemployed and homeless...Or dead” (8). Zaaron’s plight can be read in parallel to some developing country like Pakistan whose existence is conditional on its alliance with the global powers, as Sheikh affirms in her email interview: “Surely there are parallels that may be drawn with our current world politics – economic control, displacement, oppression – all being packaged as benevolent intervention”.

Donna Haraway observes while presenting the cyborg figure to signify a possibility to create a genderless world by rejecting boundaries: “Irony is about humor and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method...” (293). The mild political satire in *TLBJ*, through the novum of alien, sheds light on the problems of the developing world (Pakistan in particular) which gets exploited by the global powers. Zaaro’s planet serves as a seat of power for the IPF, which uses it as a base to develop weapons and control the universe (Sheikh 5). The IPF uses propaganda to demonize Zaaronians as a threat to the world order after their role is over in serving the IPF cause. They are also bombed into annihilation by the IPF to keep its imperial plan a secret. As Zaaro survives the attack by transporting himself to the spaceship of the rebels, their shuttle also comes under attack by the IPF, highlighting its intolerance of any form of dissent.

The parallels to global politics in *TLBJ* cannot be missed. What Haraway in the Western context notes, “the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion,” (293) also seems relevant here. The description above is loaded with political meaning especially for a Pakistani reader whose real world is defined by the political discourse on foreign interference in Pakistan’s internal and foreign affairs against its national interests. Historically speaking, Pakistan supported the US in the Cold War and later in the War on Terror at the cost of

“Pakistan’s internal security and economic conditions” (Mirza n.p.). Despite facing many suicide and terrorist attacks in all major cities and losing more than “80,000 civilians” in the recent war, Pakistan feels betrayed by the US with a pressure “to do more” (Mirza n.p.).

Later in the novel, when a delegate asks the General of the IPF about a planet’s refusal to have an IPF base, she asserts: “Freedom is the absolute right of every being in the Universe, and we intend to make sure they have it” (178), by claiming an absolute right to “a pre-emptive measure” against anyone who disagrees (178). Again, this description of the IPF’s policy resonates with the political and historical records of the global hegemon’s aggressive policies in the name of national security and for “extending democracy, liberty, and security to all regions’ (White House, 2002)” (qtd. in Gupta 182). US’s policy, known as the “Bush doctrine” of “pre-emptive strike” against the weaker nations (so called “rogue states”) in the War on Terror, is astutely analyzed by Sanjay Gupta in his article as a bad example for a “unilateral military action” by other powerful countries against their weaker neighbours to safeguard their national interests (181). The UN fails to hold the global hegemon and its allies accountable for their war crimes and human massacre on a large scale even when their presumed accusations about weapons of mass destruction turn out to be a hoax.

Nevertheless, Fareesta Salima considers it a comic sf novel that intervenes in the dominant tradition of “gritty, intense works” which are focused on postcolonial problems and “terrorism or corruption” (n.p.). Most of the humor emerges from Zaaro’s simplicity and lack of understanding of his surroundings. Salima rightly observes, “Zaaro’s naivety is charming and the plethora of intrigues and misunderstandings in the story lead to some wonderfully farcical moments” (n.p.). Zaaro is at once humanized and glocalized with a hint of his favourite dish “chicken tikka” (very popular in Pakistan) (Sheikh 18). He, like his fellow Zaaronians, is born

with an “identical life-plan” of a thousand years, “which could be shortened only by random acts of love or violence” following a boring routine of life (39). After meeting the rebels, Zaaro assumes them to be the IPF agents working for the same cause, “The IPF of course” (Sheikh 9), who have captured him to test his loyalty (16). He does not even suspect IPF’s involvement in the destruction of all the Zaaronians in a nuclear test considering it to be an accident (19). He is a “cowardly” and “retiring” individual without any “ambition for power” (44). He is gullible to be exploited by both the IPF and the rebels for their respective causes. It is hard to discern on whose side he is, as *Zoeymuses* observes: “Or is the Zaaronian a double agent working alongside the IPF and aiding their plans for universal domination?” (n.p.).

The humor arises out of the mild satire of power politics, and the light-hearted treatment of serious issues like “apathy and intolerance” (Sheikh qtd. in Taqdees n.p.). The alien motif helps develop the themes of apathy and intolerance by bringing under discussion the disease “madness” infecting the colonized under the IPF regime, described as: “the overwhelming desire for homogeneity, otherwise known as tunnel vision. The sufferer only has one purpose, the destruction of all that is different, and will go to any lengths to achieve it” (57). Ironically, Salaaar’s suspicion of madness in Zaaro in terms of his tunnel vision is equally valid for other characters who are intolerant of the differences. Humor also arises out of Madam X’s ambitions to be the captain of the ship competing with her rival-come-lover: the Good Doctor. She is an anti-authority figure who forms the rebel movement to resist the oppressive regime of the IPF. In that very process, she turns out to be as authoritative as the IPF, so much so that another resistance movement emerges at the end. Sheikh makes us laugh at the power-hunger operating on both political sides sparing none.

As far as gender roles are concerned in this novel, “the major characters are women, and they are the strongest characters” (Sheikh qtd. in Hussain 33:30). For example, two very strong female characters are Madam X and the Princess Dinara. Madam X, an Ulroneese, “a scion of one of the oldest aristocratic families on Ulron”, with her education in “the politics of power” (28), leads the crew with a remarkable vigilance and an iron hand. She spies on everyone, trusts no one, and follows her inner voice to make judgements. Unhappy with her position as the first officer, she forms a rebel movement against the IPF for not making her the captain of her ship (28). She handles all the situations with shrewdness without giving in to her emotions. She holds her head high and cannot be taken in by either her foes or friends. She serves as a mastermind behind all the decisions thus driving the action of the novel. Like the rebel movement, the IPF is also controlled by a female leader known as the General, who with her astuteness has expanded the IPF empire through colonization of the planets. She is quick to condemn any sign of dissent with a heavy hand. On being asked about the IPF’s colonization project, she rewords it to be a liberation project and commands the immediate arrest of the delegate for inciting hatred (177).

Another intriguing character is the Central Command, the AI on the rebel ship, who engages the characters by controlling all the communication, recording all errors, spying on their actions, and holding them accountable to the law. The Central Command is feminized because of the female voice it uses to interact with all the characters inspiring shock and awe (167). Banerjee writes that “AIs and robots augment human existence, while also repeatedly emphasising the essential difference between the human and the non-human” (180). The Central Command blurs such boundaries between the human and the nonhuman like Samantha of *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2014). Much of the humor arises out of her manipulation of the characters by exposing their flaws and challenging their positions sparing not even the Good Doctor and

Madam X. Her position of power not only baffles but also inspires Commander Lethalwulf to fall in love with her: “If there was ever a woman who could keep me in line, it was her, she was all-powerful, invisible and unattainable; my ideal woman” (167). Her calm and cold voice intervenes to remind the characters of her presence at all crucial times as a reminder of the omnipresent surveillance system on board. Though the novel does not imagine a world without gender, it inverts the social hierarchies by placing women in positions of power with male subordinates in their service.

The general attitude towards women's looks, beauty standards, and bodies is also satirized. The alien Zaaro looks at humans as inferior ugly creatures. He happens to have a human wife “genetically matched with him” (10). The alien’s critique of his wife’s body alludes to the social attitude of body-shaming women for their looks and weight. Such social pressures coax women to undergo botox and other procedures to improve their looks to fit in the society. Zaaro’s wife’s selection of “a stupid detox program... from an irresponsible space broadcast” (9) draws attention to the effects of contemporary consumer culture. Zaaro’s attitude towards his wife betrays the gender inequalities in a patriarchal culture that underestimates the value of female labor and intellect by limiting her role to the domestic sphere. Zaaro betrays his patronizing attitude in his treatment of his human wife as well as his general perception of the human species when he makes fun of the appearance of Lieutenant Salaar. In an interview, when Aslam asks the author about how Zaaro would review her book, Sheikh, playing on the familiar sexist and racist tropes, answers thus:

“I cannot believe someone from the outer rims has written a text of sorts. I hadn’t realised that they’ve developed a coherent form of the written word... Please do read it as a study in how inferior species perceive the universe around them. I

already have experience in this area because of occasional conversations with my wife.” (Sheikh qtd. in Aslam n.p.).

This patronizing attitude can be read as reflective of the prejudices based on racial, gender, and class differences, as Sheikh writes, “This world is not colour-blind, it just has different prejudices, the absurdities of which, I hope, highlight those of our world” (email-interview).

Furthermore, the novel uses the alien motif to depict various kinds of alienation in the imagined world. The characters are portrayed as political, racial, and literal aliens in this intergalactic regime, ruled by an inter-galactic hegemon IPF. Zaaro is an alien not only in the literal sense but also a metaphorical one. He represents the Zaaronians who were long ago colonized and displaced by the IPF, but at the same time, he holds his allegiance to the latter as a supervisor of their weapons-development program. He is a displaced person, a refugee, living in the ghetto “G- 125” in “the Free world” (10) as well as a subject of an authoritarian regime. He is alienated from his past with no written history, and he is alienated from his present subjugation by the IPF’s propaganda. In his domestic sphere also, he feels alienated because of his racist and sexist views about his human wife.

Ultimately, *TLBJ* not only reflects the asymmetrical power relationships between the rebels and the IPF but also the power politics within the rebel movement, where their power-hunger alienates them from one another. The rebels also belong to different planets and species; and despite their unity for the shared cause in the rebel movement, they feel alienated suspecting one another of treason and disloyalty. The alienation of the rebels from the oppressive regime serves as a unifying force among these different characters, but as soon as they get a victory

against the IPF, their unity disintegrates into a resistance movement challenging the new authoritarian regime.

Finally, *TLBJ* tells the story from multiple perspectives by giving every character a chance to tell their side of the story of each event in one hundred and twelve chapters. As Iftikhar observes: “It is like a vantage point of scenes, action, views, and experiences blended in one book” (n.p.) Each character including the alien Zaaro, Madam X, Lieutenant Salaar with an ability to “manipulate space and time” (36), the Good Doctor, Commander Lethalwulf with a charm that “knew no bounds of race, religion, or species” (63), Princess Dinaara “the scion of the Royal House of Dinaar” (101), Colonel Bob, or The General, is given a unique voice. This narrative technique not only helps the readers to read somewhat objectively through shifting subjective positions, but also it unravels the motives, mistakes, suspicions, intrigues, and idiosyncrasies of various characters to laugh at their expense. The novel ends with a prologue to the sequel hinting at the future adventures of the alien Zaaro.

To sum up, despite the overt Othering of the IPF, and the alien’s displaced position, *TLBJ* does not present an alien encounter following the Western and Indian sf traditions of identity politics by creating self/Other binaries. On the contrary, Sheikh creates a world in which the alien can be taken as a double agent because of his divided allegiance to both the IPF and the rebels. The alien does not appear as a threat; rather, he is the victim of colonization. At the same time, he suffers from the same apathy and intolerance which is evident from his racist and sexist views about humans. Sheikh does not reduce this alien encounter into an invasion or friendly contact; rather, she makes it an occasion to expose the dangers of the global imbalance of power and its effects on the developing countries. Salima rightly observes: “For all the satiric

undertones, this is an optimistic book- a comic romp through intergalactic space with engaging characters and some fascinating ideas” (n.p.).

II.II. Aliens as Messiah figures

Pakistani sf, like Western and Indian sf, has examples of friendly aliens who visit their country and save the day for the local communities. In Western sf, friendly aliens appear in the films like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise 1951), *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg 1982), novels like Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End* (1953), and Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987-9). Seed observes that these works use “the concept of alien to explore human characteristics” (41). Similarly, in Indian sf, Banerjee cites examples of the works such as Satyajit Ray’s ‘Bankubabur Bandhu’ (Mr Banku’s Friend, 1962), Vandana Singh’s ‘Tetrahedron’ and ‘Infinities’ (2008), and Arvind Mishra’s ‘Antim Sanskar’ (Last Rites, 2013) in which aliens appear as benefactors foregrounding “the benefits of modernity” (*Indian SF* 177). In these works, from two different sf traditions, aliens usually do not pose a threat of invasion or fear of the difference. Their contact with humans, to use Seed’s words, is a sort of “a mission of goodwill” (41), bridging the gap between different groups and even species, and this serves as a major theme in *Divided Species* (Iftikhar 2020) and *Shaani* (Rizvi 1989).

i) Aliens in Karachi: Muhammad Omar Iftikhar’s *Divided Species* (2020)

Iftikhar, with a degree in business, serves as an Assistant Manager in the Public Relations, Marketing, and Communications department at the Institute of Business Management (IoBM) in Karachi. Besides being the President of Karvan.org, “a digital media interview-based initiative promoting Pakistani talent,” he has also served as an assistant editor of *Slogan Magazine* and *South Asia Magazine* (Iftikhar 220). He has published hundreds of articles on current affairs, sports, political issues, and science and technology (220). *Divided Species* is

Iftikhar's debut sf novel as well as the first sf novel set in Karachi. In an interview, when Iftikhar is asked about his choice of science fiction to tell his story, he responds: "They [sf stories] compel us to think ahead, to question possibilities, and to ask "what if" questions. I also chose it because this genre is a neglected one in Pakistani literature" (Syedain n.p.). In his article, "Challenges of Writing Science Fiction," Iftikhar discusses his writing process which began in 2011 by participating in a US-based creative writing initiative NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) (Iftikhar n.p.). Later, he revised the draft by adding details, incorporating multiple perspectives, and making it believable: "Since this was sci-fi, much focus had to be paid to the believability factor" (n.p.).

Iftikhar, being culturally conscious, revised his draft to make the story "acceptable to Pakistani readers, to our local market" (Iftikhar "Challenges" n.p.). Despite his inspiration from the Western sf, he tried to keep his "novel localised" (ibid). Encouraged by the fact that there are readers and audience of foreign (Western and Indian) sf works and films, he wanted to check the acceptance of a Pakistani sf writer in the market. On this creative journey, he got inspired by *Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) by Ursula K Le Guin, and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1981) by Douglas Adams. In Pakistan, he found inspiration in Sidra Sheikh's novel and *Ismail Ka Urdu Sheher: An Illustrated Sci-Fi Novel and Music Album* by Zohaib Kazi (2015) (ibid). Therefore, Iftikhar's approach remains glocal in his attempt to write an sf story "appropriate in terms of our social consciousness" (ibid).

The story is written from an omniscient third-person perspective alternating between alien and human worlds in forty-one chapters to describe the aliens, their ambitions, actions, and Rayan's student life and challenges in Karachi. The perspective limits the reader to make judgements about the characters and actions, as they are clearly presented as good and evil

without any shades of grey. This way the novel creates a Manichean world in which both aliens and humans are engaged in a conflict with the dark side: Commander Kropnock and his team fight against General Gooztan and his team, and so does Rayan against the corrupt bureaucratic system in Karachi. Afifa J. Maniar admires Iftikhar's ability to strike a balance between good and evil characters: "Despite several human and alien characters driving the story forward – with both good and evil ones – the readers will have no problem remembering each" (n.p).

The novel tells "a story about friendship, leadership, and sacrifice" (Iftikhar 11). The main plot revolves around the contact between the aliens called Taleykens from the Arplon planet from "the Cygnus Constellation of the Milky Way" and humans represented by Rayan, a twenty-one-year-old business student in Karachi, to save the Earth from the destruction caused by Hextanlo. Hextanlo is an important radio-active mineral resource with a radiation "hundred times powerful" than that emitted by the sun (20), hidden in the Earth in the nineteenth century by Taleykens to save it from Rezclan, "a rebel species on Planet Arplon" (22). Hextanlo serves as a major energy source to run "industries, homes, transportation" (161) on the Arplon planet. The problem is that some traitor Taleykens of the Arplon empire led by General Gooztan, "the Chief of army Staff" (21), aim to extract the hidden mineral without any regard for human life and the Earth, while those led by Commander Kropnock of the Mother Ship want to save the Earth by extracting Hextanlo using teleportation (162) or by keeping it hidden in the Earth under the supervision of their human friend Rayan (216). It is through mutual friendship and cooperation that Rayan and Taleykens save the Earth from the impending destruction.

The sub-plot works like a bildungsroman, focusing on Rayan's development from a timid boy into a confident and brave young man. It revolves around Rayan's life and the challenges and problems that he faces in his personal and academic life. He is in love with his class fellow

Naila but cannot tell her because she is from a different social class. Moreover, “Rayan’s love life was not the only area under jeopardy. He could not follow his life’s passion too – writing” (45). This way, Rayan’s character is the author-surrogate to some extent, as he pursues a business degree from the same institution in Karachi. Like the author, he is also discouraged by his father because of his passion for writing. The author’s family did not consider writing a reliable profession for providing “a sustainable income” (Khan 11:10). Rayan’s contact with aliens helps him navigate the bureaucratic problems plaguing the Pakistani society and to challenge the corporate mafia embodied in the T&M company owned by Naila’s father Taimur, and thus to help his community. He also learns to establish meaningful relationships with his friends and family besides winning Naila’s hand.

Like Western sf, the novel presents Taleykens as descendants of an advanced race: “the Raghner race” (Iftikhar 10), who taught humans to build pyramids in their earlier contact. Iftikhar works on minute details to create his aliens. Their appearance distinguishes them from humans with a different “biological and molecular structure” (11). Their faces resemble those of horses with green spotted skin. They have cat-like eyes, human-like hands with ten fingers, and feet with ten toes each (12). They live a longer life with an average of one hundred and ten years (78). They bury their dead in the volcano, as according to their spiritual belief “once the body was burned and its ashes rose in the air, the soul rejoined its place in nature” (63). On Earth, they can “walk with large strides for almost thirty kilometers without breaking a sweat” (117). Iftikhar creates a visually vivid picture of their physical features not only to help the readers to visualize his aliens but also for any future film based on his work (Khan 10:40).

Gordon Lichfield, in the context of Western sf, rightly observes that the aliens' behavior should be examined “in terms of our human value system...[as] Our stories about aliens are still

basically about humans” (372). Lichfield’s observation is equally relevant in Pakistani sf context, as in this novel, despite the differences, Taleykens are anthropomorphized: “There are honest humans and truthful Taleykens. There are traitors among humans and the Taleykens” (Iftikhar 11). They have been through civil wars as well as a four-decade-long war to win freedom from the Langron Race who colonized them for not accepting “a trade agreement” (18). Their Polmen War with the Vazken race caused as much destruction as “the two World Wars fought on Planet Earth combined” (33). They are comparable to humans in their lust for power and domination. Iftikhar posits that by portraying “courage, honesty, betrayal” and good and bad characters in both species, the text facilitates the readers to build connections between the imagined and the familiar world (Khan 20:25).

By finding similarities between the two species, the text resists the Western anthropological tendency to homogenize the entire race or culture. Therefore, Taleykens do not classify all humans as “intimidating” and “aggressive” (36). On the contrary, Daleyton uses caution in his judgement: “Some humans are brutal, but many of them are fun-loving, honest, environmentally friendly, and live a disciplined life” (36). Moreover, like humans, Taleykens experience emotions (38), thus deviating from Western and Indian sf traditions which usually present mechanical and rational aliens without any emotions. Similarly, some aliens led by General Gooztan are miscreants who reject peace which is “the Taleyken philosophy, the Taleyken way of life” (39). The local (Pakistani) readers, by analogy, can recognize the terrorists in their own country following an extremist ideology deviating from the peaceful Islamic code of life.

Moreover, the alien government system is described in terms of a military order with all the hierarchies and protocols complemented by a Council of Lords. Commander Kropnock is

presented as six feet and three inches tall with “muscular shoulders and a broad chest” (14). He controls the Command Deck of the Mother Ship. Next to him are the supervisor Lieutenant Jackter, General Estek: the advisor for strategic exploration, Lieutenant Daleyton, Lieutenant Bamberdon: “a special forces soldier” (a double-agent) (49), Lieutenant Tandez: “a weapons expert” (50), and Lieutenant Zaczon: “an expert in handling gadgets” (50). Despite having a strong military and advanced technology, Commander Kropnock is a pacifist who does not believe in invading other planets (16). His antagonist is General Gooztan “a symbol of fear” (18) with contrary ambitions to take control of the Mother Ship and to destroy the Earth and its “primate creatures” to extract Hextanlo (20).

Seed observes that “science fiction is popularly associated with the evolution of technology” (47). Taleykens, as “superior beings” (Ifikhar 32) are presented using advanced and sophisticated technology with an ability for space travel in “the Mother Ship” across different galaxies (10). They have been learning about human cultures and languages (Urdu, English, German, Spanish) for centuries. Their Mother Ship, with “a military base... and a research and development sector” (12), and other spaceships have the technology to remain invisible from human eyes and the satellite system. They are much bigger than the spaceships made by humans, and they can travel at the speed of “0.12 light years in 36 days” (13). These spaceships use solar energy from suns across the galaxies, and their command deck and other devices are operable through “hologram projections and by hand gestures” (14). They have an advanced communication system, and they use “Holographic Communication and Projection Device or Hocop” to communicate across the galaxies (17). They are also expert in bioengineering, as they have acquired the shape-shifting ability by using “the Molecular Transformation and Alteration process”; thus, on the Earth, they take up the human form (64). Their Uni-Guide navigating

system is much smarter than the human Global Positioning System (GPS) (66). Their spaceship to the Earth is far more advanced with an accelerated navigating speed and it remains invisible to human eyes as well as radars (80). They also use Hocops to teleport themselves (112). They use BodyScanx to read the mind and to understand the personality of the humans to find a trustworthy friend.

Both Western and Indian sf traditions have examples of the positive representation of aliens “as benevolent, super intelligent beings who take the place of old-time deities” as discussed by Lichfield (373) and Banerjee (177). The aliens in this text also appear as messiah figures who help Rayan and his community not only to protect the historical site the “Palace of Light” (Iftikhar 58) under which Hextanlo is hidden but also to save the Earth. Due to their shape-shifting ability, Taleykens disguise themselves by playing different roles to fight street crime, reform the corrupt policeman, and challenge the corporate mafia. Using BodyScanX, they recognize Rayan’s honesty and thus befriend him as a reliable person to share their secret mission to Earth (125). The mutual friendship between the aliens and Rayan takes them on an adventure with Rayan as a tourist guide in Karachi, while the aliens serve as informers about their mission and gadgets. The gifts of Hocop and special glasses help Rayan to see their invisible spaceship and learn about their culture. With the help of aliens, Rayan emerges as a hero at the end of the story entrusted with the protection of Hextanlo in the future. Their mutual friendship makes it possible for the aliens to defeat both General Gooztan’s gang and the corporate mafia to save the Earth from destruction.

Banerjee notes the use of the alien motif to represent “various levels of alienation” in Indian sf (“An Alien Nation” 283). This novel also uses the alien motif to develop the theme of alienation. The aliens are divided among themselves on racial and political grounds, feeling

alienated both at home and on Earth because of their literal alien form. Similarly, Rayan also feels alienated both at home and on campus, as his desire to become a writer gets hampered by the familial pressure to pursue a professional degree. His feeling of alienation increases because of his sister Faiza, an MBA graduate, who works as a successful professional in an advertising agency. As a shy person, he also feels alienated in the co-ed environment, so he cannot communicate with his dream girl, Naila (24). Interaction with girls causes him “social anxiety attacks”, and in class, “Rayan would stutter and lose his self-confidence” (24). Rayan and his community also feel alienated from the corrupt bureaucratic system that joined hands with corporate mafias without any regard for the environment and public opinion.

Though the major setting of the narrative is Karachi, the text also draws comparison between the Arplon planet and the Earth. Despite geographic and atmospheric similarities with the Earth, Arplon has “an increased level of carbon dioxide and mountains made of uranium” (32). Having no rain and water, Arplon has only two seasons of summer and winter (32). On the contrary, Karachi, “the City of Lights” (23), emerges as a familiar place with its sites including Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Do Darya, Zainab Market in Saddar, Nipa Chowrangi, Clifton, Malir, and Nazimabad, which make the text both culturally and spatially relevant. Ali Abbas Mirza, in his review, appreciates Iftikhar for writing the first sf set in Karachi: “The story takes the readers through the streets and lanes of Karachi, the ones whose iconic stature remains a part of the city’s sights and sounds” (n.p.).

Making Karachi a prime site of the alien-visit seems to be a move to displace Hollywood projections of American centrality in all alien visits. For example, Tandez appreciates American culture and discusses Hollywood movies that Taleykens watch: “All aliens, monsters, giant robots, sea creatures arrive in the United States of America. We could go there too!” (52).

Daleyton, on the contrary, justifies the visit to Pakistan for two reasons, for Hextanlo, and because “Pakistan is overflowing with political and social challenges of all shapes and sizes - whether they are internal or external” (53), thus making it an important case study.

This spatial relevance adds verisimilitude to the narrative besides bringing the local culture to the centre for the glocal readers. Pakistanis are presented as brave people facing many challenges with courage. Pakistan is presented as the home of the space program “Aerospace and Exosphere Research Agency or (AEXRA)” directed by Major General Yasir Ali (110) looking for extra-terrestrial life. The significance of Urdu, the national language, is reclaimed by aliens’ familiarity with Urdu which with other human languages is considered “part of a galactic linguistic tradition” (113). Later, when General Gooztan also lands in Karachi for Hextanlo in his Taleyken form, the Pakistan army also gets involved considering it a terrorist attack (210). Despite an inspiration from Western sf, Iftikhar writes about his spatial choice: “Of course, western material was just one part of the content absorption process. I still had to consciously focus on keeping my novel localised and as ‘desi’ as possible” (Iftikhar “Challenges” n.p.).

The problems the text highlights are the corporate mafia, bureaucratic system, corruption, and environmental concerns. The corporate mafia, by bribing the government officers (Iftikhar *Divided* 156), works to expand its control over Karachi’s historical sites. In the novel, one such historical site is the (imagined) “Palace of Lights” (58), which the corporate mafia led by Taimur wants to demolish to build plazas and apartment buildings thus destroying the natural environment. Taimur has connections with ministers, police, and bureaucrats, and thus, despite his corruption he remains above law (192). It was one of Taimur’s ancestors whom Taleykens entrusted with the secret of Hextanlo by a contract. Taimur not only breaks the contract but also plans to sell Hextanlo to Pakistan’s enemies (214) without considering the security risk to the

country. Taimur embodies the internal threats in the form of traitors and anti-state factors working against the sovereignty of Pakistan.

Another problem is the fear of external intervention as embodied in the war imposed on the Taleykens by the Langrons to impose their hegemony. As Commander Kropnock reminds General Gooztan: “The Langron Race were taking out their frustration and seeking retribution from us, as we did not obey their command to enter a trade agreement” (19). The presence of rebels, traitors, and internal and external security threats in the narrative reflect the importance of historical and political context, as these are familiar topics of glocal significance prevalent in the social and political discourse for Pakistani readers. Naveed Safdar, in his dissertation, observes that “Pakistan’s immediate threat grows from within, i.e., from its internal security problems” such as religious extremism, sectarianism, provincialism, and economic instability (1). These problems, due to bad governance and the criminal negligence of corrupt politicians, remain unattended and unresolved. In addition to these internal threats, Pakistan is also facing external threat from “(1) India, (2) Afghanistan, and (3) threat exuding from a changing residential circumstance”³⁵ (Malik et al.). The text projects these anxieties onto the alien world to build connections with the human world and to make the text glocally relevant. At the same time, the text subverts this anxiety posed by internal and external threats by presenting friendly aliens who despite their advanced technology do not pose any threat to a weaker species; rather, they are peaceful and aim “to carry out inter-galactic diplomatic endeavors - where both species can exchange technology and resources” (Iftikhar 61).

³⁵ By this Malik et al. mean American interference because of its national interests which has caused political instability and insecurity in the region with an increase in extremism and terrorism as a reaction to drone attacks and so-called War on Terror.

Moreover, the novel also highlights the problems resulting from power politics, the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, and the exploitation of the weak countries by the global powers. As Daleyton reports to Kropnock:

Sir, we have observed that the affluent ones on Planet Earth's countries are the ones exercising their hostility and resentment over the weak. We have also observed that the majority of human beings are peace-loving. They seldom care who is in power. They only want a peaceful world. The humans who rise to the helms of power create problems for others when they abuse authority (36).

This observation of the general human nature illustrates the condition of the developing countries particularly Pakistan where common people have been yearning for a peaceful time since the inception of the country amidst the security threats posed by sectarianism, ethnic conflicts, fundamentalism, economic instability, estranged neighbours, dictatorships, corrupt government, and foreign intervention (Please see footnotes 4 & 5 for details).

In addition, the novel depicts the problem of the suppression of individual desire by social and familial pressures embodied in Rayan's conflict of interest with his father's advice to study business. Rayan's desire to become a creative writer is trivialized by his father: "I have been trying to make you understand for so many days that your obsession with writing will not take you anywhere. It's foolish, it's stupid!" (25). Pakistani young adults can easily identify with Rayan, as many undergo such pressures to pursue the career choices made by their parents. Rayan also feels alienated on campus because of his upper-middle-class background with no "fashion sense", as most of his "up-beat and stylish" friends come from the elite class (28). His predicament represents a common problem in the glocal consumerist culture, where young adults face the pressure to wear brands to fit in the social circle.

As far as gender roles are concerned, the novel presents educated women in the form of Rabia, Rayan's mother; Faiza, his twenty-six-year sister; and Naila, Rayan's enthusiastic class fellow and love interest. Rabia is presented as a typical Pakistani homemaker busy with household responsibilities. Despite being a homemaker, she holds an independent opinion on socio-political conditions. She is open about her political views and speaks against the corporate mafia pushing her husband to take some action against it. Similarly, Faiza shows independence not only in managing her professional affairs but also in convincing her parents to put off her marriage for a few years, as she wants to focus on her career (25). Naila, on the other hand, is presented as a proud rich girl who wants to marry some rich man to lead a luxurious life (144). She is not sensitive to Rayan's feelings because of the class difference. Later, through experience (broken engagement), she learns to value good character more than wealth. Despite the presentation of enlightened women, the text does not develop them as round characters to make a significant contribution to the action of the story; rather it remains focused on the adventures of Ryan and Taleykens.

The narrative also has some historical discrepancies. For example, the text states that the Taleyken ambassador established first human contact in 1856 in "the subcontinent in South Asia – in the city that would years later be known as Karachi" (10), dismissing the history of the city known as Kolachi for a long time before the British came to the subcontinent and started using Karachi in the 1700s (Manahil & Nimra Bandukwala n.p). Similarly, humans sent the first space signals into space in 1974 (Steele n.p.), but the text presents this event as something that preceded man's landing on the moon in 1969. In addition, the pseudoscientific theories about aliens' involvement in the building of pyramids also find place in the novel and thus reflect the glocal popularity of this pseudo-archeological concept. We can find such myths

expressed even in a tweet by the founder of Space X Elon Musk: “Aliens built the pyramids obv” (qtd. in BBC n.p.). Such popular opinions get challenged by the Egyptian archeologists with the historical records to testify that the ancient Egyptians built the pyramids. Moreover, the idea of the possibility of life without water on the imagined planet is also striking, as it challenges the basic condition of Earthly life.

Overall, *Divided Species* does not construct binaries between the self and the Other except in terms of good and evil. Drawing on the similarities between two divided species, humans and Taleykens, the novel bridges the gap between the two by projecting a possibility of a friendly relationship between Taleykans and humans. Western sf by Le Guin and Butler highlights the need to embrace the difference as Lincoln Geraghty, Rebecca Janicker and Irene Alonso have discussed in their articles. Likewise, this text underscores the importance of a peaceful co-existence. Though these aliens engage in power politics like humans, they fight against the traitors among their own species as well as humans to save the Earth from annihilation. In this process, they help Rayan’s growth into a hero to solve the local problems. Unlike *The Light Blue Jumper*, the aliens do not create an autocratic regime to establish their hegemony despite their advanced technology; rather, they exercise restraint and use their power to resolve the problems to establish peace. This message of peace and co-existence has glocal significance at a time when Pakistan is entangled in a conflict between two blocs: capitalism and communism and has paid a heavy price in US proxy war against USSR and now in the War on Terror. Iftikhar, by creating this alien world, experiments with the sf genre to bring the glocal issues to the forefront. This may encourage future Pakistani sf writers, as he hopes by creating an online forum karvan.org. Afifa Maniar fairly applauds Iftikhar “for he ventured into science fiction – a literary genre that was pretty much ignored as far as Pakistani literature is concerned” (n.p.).

ii) Alien in *Shaani* (1989) by Saeed Rizvi

Saeed Rizvi, a science graduate from Karachi University, has a passion to produce different kinds of films in Pakistan. Making a sf film posed “a big challenge in the sub-continent, because this concept of space, flying saucers, [sic] Alien, and spaceship, was not produced before, [sic] nor a theme of a movie with this Genre was tried in India or Pakistan” (Rizvi in email interview). Inspired by the legends such as “Walt Disney, Ray Harryhausen, and William O’Brien, (inventor of Stop Motion Animation)”, he founded his production company by the name of “NOVITAS INTERNATIONAL” to make commercials (ibid). This helped him generate money to invest in his sf film *Shaani* with an objective to give the local audience “in their cultural surroundings and language a High-Tech movie” (ibid). He regrets the lack of government support in terms of funds to invest in the film industry to produce technically challenging films when the local directors “did not have good professional Processing Laboratories of 35mm nor a Telecine with a total immersed gate” (ibid). He was the first Pakistani film director, back in the 1980s, to own “the most expensive tool for producing Visual Effects and that is the ‘AERIAL IMAGE OPTICAL PRINTER’ from Staines U.K.” (ibid). Also, he took some professional training in London and “Hollywood Effects L.A.” (ibid). Afterwards, he started his career as “a VFX Creator & a Filmmaker” (ibid). Later in his career, he also experimented with horror and fantasy genres. His upcoming project is a horror film incorporating “Digital Visual Effects” (ibid).

Shaani has already been discussed in the chapter on sf and religion. The discussion in this part, after a brief review of the plot, will focus on Shaani’s role as an alien. The film is about an alien who comes to the Earth, in a village in Pakistan, to survey its suitability as a possible destination of migration for his people living on a dying planet. Due to his shape-shifting ability, he takes up the human form of Shaani: a young angry man who was murdered in an encounter

with the gangster Shamsheer. This transformation changes the alien's life. Entangled in the new familial relationships, he feels bound to meet the expectations of Shaani's parents, his fiancée Hina, and the local community.

Sofia Sjo observes: "Often the [messiah] myth appears among peoples who find themselves to be in a difficult situation..." (177). At the same time, she distinguishes the messiah figure in popular culture from the one found in various religions: "As heroes in general, the messiahs of popular culture strive to achieve a form of change, but this change is very directly connected to life here and now" (185). Shaani emerges as a messiah figure who not only saves the community from the gang's activities (human trafficking, drugs, and terrorism) but also takes revenge for Shaani's murder. He also marries Hina and has a son with her. Later, like a messiah-figure, he returns to his world to come again.

As far as the physical features of the alien are concerned, the film introduces the technique of transporting him into Shaani's house through light-effects. Since Rizvi started his career as a photographer and a lighting cameraman to make "seven movies" (Rizvi in email interview), his experience paid off in the production of *Shaani*. Rizvi effectively uses light effects to present the travel of the UFO and its landing in the village as well as the alien's landing on the Earth. Unlike Western sf films in which much effort is consumed in the portrayal of the alien with its distinct animal and mechanical features, Rizvi overcomes this costly technical challenge to create an other-worldly creature by keeping the alien invisible. Instead, the visual effects project a light figure travelling from the UFO through a jungle into Shaani's house (see figure 1). Shaani's power to remain invisible is justifiable back in the 1980s when Pakistani cinema had a limited budget and resources for film production.



(Figure 1)

Later, Shaani's transformation into human form serves a double purpose: i) it conceals his identity from the local people and the gangsters for his own security (for a short while); and ii) it gives him a chance to get an insider view of the local culture with all their problems. The alien in the human form can be found in Western sf too. As Kelly Reiber observes: "Like many messiahs in religion and mythology, Superman... concealing his alien origins... conceals himself in the guise of a human, Clark Kent" (37). Adapting the human form helps bridge the gap between the alien and the humans who embrace him as one of their own thus reducing his alien-ness, as Seed contends that "alien-ness can be a shifting relation dependent upon the context and perspective" (28).

Steven Hrotic observes that some (Western) sf presents messiah figures to rescue the world from impending disasters (136). In this film, Shaani takes up the role of the messiah, who is ready to defend the villagers against the criminals and a corrupt system. Shaani can objectively observe the local culture and still be the messiah helping the common people to fight against an oppressive system. Simultaneously, he is horrified at the spectacle of the bloodshed in the village by Shamsheer's gang: ":(. (*Aadmi aadmi ko marta he. Kitni ajeeb baat he*) "Man kills another man, What a pity" (35:19). Because of his human form, he gets surrounded by different relationships such as Shaani's mother, uncle, fiancée Hina, and many friends. He feels responsible to live up

to their expectations by marrying Hina, protecting her, and saving the day for the villagers by defeating the criminals.

Shaani decides to help the villagers not by taking up weapons but by using his superpowers: telepathy, invisibility, and electromagnetic radiation to mobilize the objects and animals to stop the violence. Weapons and bullets do not affect him, and he can fight hundreds of men single-handedly using his physical prowess and other superpowers. The villagers and Hina remain unaware of his superpowers of invisibility and telepathy for some time. Hina gets surprised, as by making himself and Hina invisible, he saves both from the gangsters following them in a blind chase and a fatal accident that sets the bike on fire.

Shaani, despite being on a mission from his planet, cannot leave his new friends (humans) in trouble. Even when the spaceship returns with a messenger to take him back to his world, he refuses to go without accomplishing his mission despite the risk highlighted by the messenger, “Your thoughts, feelings, and behavior are changing. You are becoming like them” (48:25). He overlooks his fear of “going native” and wants to stay to help the locals whom he begins to like despite their follies. He emerges as a perfect man on the Earth, just like some Western or Indian superhero, though in a local context. Shaani reflects what Douglas E. Cowan calls “interspecies tolerance” (49) and a hope for coexistence.

Shaani as a messiah figure remains humble and down to earth despite his superhuman powers. He does not want to reveal his identity to Hina and other people. It is only after Hina’s uncle’s murder by Shamsher that he has no choice but to fight back in public using his superpowers: telepathy, and electromagnetic radiation discharged by his body (1:19:15). Like a vigilante, he takes revenge for Shaani’s murder on Shamsher and his gangsters and rescues the local community from the anarchy they cause. Using teleportation, he gives Hina a tour through

the galaxy over his dying planet because of the volcanic eruptions resulting in the catastrophic changes in the environment (1:39:00). He remains a saviour figure till the end of the film when after rescuing the villagers from the criminals on Earth, he decides to return to his dying planet to save his people.

Like Western and Indian sf narratives, this film also uses the alien-motif to develop the theme of alienation. It is not only Shaani who feels alienated in the new culture but also the gangsters who operate against the state. The only difference is that they choose different paths. The community also feels alienated because of the corrupt system which fails to implement law and order effectively to protect them against the gangsters and to deliver justice in the case of Shaani's and his father's murders. Metaphorically, the outlaws are also aliens in their own community with their antisocial attitude and misplaced allegiance to the anti-state agents. Hina and her parents also feel alienated from Shaani at the discovery of his identity as an alien. This realization causes a rift, and her love changes into feelings of fear and betrayal. She becomes afraid of Shaani and wants to protect her child from him: "a cheater" (1:28:00). However, these feelings of alienation between both Shaani and Hina (and her parents) do not last long, and they embrace and accept each other despite all differences.

In Shaani's case, this feeling of alienation is reduced through his acculturation into the local community, while Hina overcomes this feeling through their shared faith (as discussed in the chapter on sf and religion), and her understanding of Shaani's love and sacrifice for her and her community. This way, the alien motif seems to question what makes us more human by humanizing the alien. It is the humanity of Shaani, his respect for human relations, his strength to fight for the weak, and his courage to stand for justice that eliminate the mutual feeling of alienation. Shaani's human form reduces his alienation and so do his superhuman powers which

he deploys to fight for the survival of the local people in a corrupt system by restoring law and order. The villagers fall in love with their messiah and do not wish him to go back to his world. They ask him to settle down forever, and willingly offer their land to other settlers. However, Shaani refuses to accept this offer because he cannot invite his fellow beings on Earth, as man has forgotten the message of humanity by engaging in violence: “Men kill other men” (1:33:00).

Seed identifies “survival” as “the paramount issue” in the alien narratives (39). Shaani comes into this world to study the planet Earth because his people are in danger of extinction (1:32:20). He is on a mission to search for a better place for the migration of his people, though he decides not to choose Earth because of the exploitation of humans by fellow humans. Hence, Shaani also represents the problems of refugees and immigrants, who are desperate to relocate themselves for survival. This reading becomes more plausible because of the film’s historical context. In the 1980s, Pakistan as a US ally was supporting Taliban in Afghanistan to fight the proxy war against USSR, and more than a million Afghans entered Pakistan as refugees, and the process continues in the post-9/11 War on Terror context. According to a report (2018) of UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) more than 1.3 million registered Afghans live in Pakistan (Gul n.p.), though according to government agencies the number of unregistered Afghan refugees is far greater than this. The people’s welcoming of Shaani with open arms is reminiscent of Pakistan’s welcome of their Afghan brothers at that time.

Moreover, the film also shows the possibility of interspecies marriage. Sharon DeGraw notes how Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *Barsoom* series overcomes the fear of miscegenation unlike his *Tarzan* series (43). After the 1960s, the idea of hybridity gets normalized in Western sf through the projection of mixed races and inter-species relations as depicted, for example, in Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy and *Star Trek* series. *Shaani* depicts no such fear of

miscegenation and embraces the notion of hybridity. Shaani not only marries Hina but also has a son with her, a human-alien hybrid with the same superhuman powers. Their son represents hope for the future in the absence of his father who is ready to leave to help his people on the dying planet. On the film's youtube page³⁶, some viewers have requested the director for a sequel to the film with Shaani or his son as the main character, as does happen in the Indian sf film *Krrish* series.

As far as the setting of the film is concerned, Saeed uses the Pakistani rural area as the setting of the film to add verisimilitude to the narrative. The film includes some long scenes focusing on the local customs and traditions. For example, one scene portrays the ceremonial village wedding by getting Hina married to Shaani, while another scene effectively depicts the village fair with all its charms and festivities like bhangra and the horse dance. This local setting helps reduce the feeling of alienation both on the part of the alien and the villagers due to Shaani's assimilation into the local culture. This spatial relevance also indicates the glocal approach of Saeed by making the alien acceptable to the local audience.

Conclusion: Like *Divided Species*, *Shaani* envisions the possibility to bridge the gap between different species and celebrates the possibility of a peaceful co-existence. Both narratives (in different media) hope for the people to overcome their differences to form a united front against the oppressive system embodied in criminals, bureaucratic system, and corrupt politicians. This message carries value in the present time more than ever in the history of Pakistan when polarization has reached its new peak with the people divided by their sectarian, political, and religious views. Still, both *Divided Species* and *Shaani* provide a message of hope by presenting friendly and messiah like aliens.

³⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMf82KMGUq4>

Overall, Pakistani sf, being in its early stage of development, has not as many examples to offer of a varied treatment of the alien motif as do Western and Indian sf traditions. Still, these few examples have started a tradition to be followed by future Pakistani sf writers. *The Light Blue Jumper* offers a good example of a light-hearted space opera that portrays the global power-politics with a tongue in cheek: “Kudos to Sidra F. Sheikh for writing this book full of wit, mirth and clever dialogues- there was never a dull moment!” (*Zoeymuses* n.p.). Sheikh uses the alien motif to expose intolerance and aggression in the global power politics. The parallels can be easily established with our own world where “we have absolutely no tolerance for perspectives that differ from our own and live in perpetual judgment and condemnation of all narratives other than our own” (Sheikh in email interview).

Similarly, *Divided Species* uses the alien motif to propose the possibility of good ties by overlooking the differences. Despite many differences in physical features and technological cultures, aliens and humans can be connected on various levels: both have feelings and beliefs, both have fought wars, both can be good or evil, and both can be friends or traitors. By setting the story in Karachi as a site for the aliens’ visit, Iftikhar brings the local issues to the forefront. Iftikhar also advises aspiring writers to “develop characters and settings that are relatable to the readers” (Syedain n.p.). Likewise, *Shaani*, being the first Pakistani sf film uses the alien motif as an awaited messiah who comes to the rescue of people trapped in a corrupt system operated by criminals. Thus, these sf texts bring Pakistan at the center of plot to highlight the problems it is facing in the global context. This subversion of geographical setting enables the texts to provide alternate view of a country facing political isolation and economic sanctions.

Chapter 4: Pakistani sf in the Glocal Context of Islamophobia and War on Terror

In *Writing Pakistan: Conversations on Identity, Nationhood, and Fiction* (2016), Mushtaq Iqbal observes, in his discussion of Pakistani fiction in English by Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Mohammed Hanif, and Uzma Khan, that “especially post-9/11, it has become virtually impossible to write about Pakistan without making it a political statement” (3). It is noteworthy that Pakistani English fiction responds to the identity crisis in the post-9/11 global context, and literary criticism of such works critically evaluates them from this perspective. However, no such critical work is available on Pakistani sf’s response to 9/11. The fourth chapter discusses the identity politics of Pakistani sf in the global context of rising Islamophobia³⁷ and post-9/11 War on Terror.

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay observes that “genre fiction is directly political: it politicises what is taken for granted” (7) by challenging the established myths and histories. Sami Khan and Suparno Banerjee have studied Indian sf in English in detail from historical and postcolonial perspectives to locate its positionality in response to the Western image of India, its present, and its future. They study Indian sf as an attempt by Indian sf writers to take their story in their own hands by freeing it from the colonial gaze. Similarly, Pakistani sf can be studied as an attempt to resolve the identity crisis that Pakistan and Islam in general face in the post-9/11 context. Pakistani sf, as a product of the post-9/11 period, critically responds to the hostile representation of Islam and Muslims in the global media and popular culture. It also tries to subvert such negative representation of Muslims by moving away from the projection of 9/11 as a personal

³⁷ Peter Morey, citing definition offered by the Runnymede Trust Report of 1997, defines Islamophobia as “the dread, hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims perpetrated by a series of closed views that imply and attribute negative and derogatory stereotypes and beliefs’ to Muslims” (12).

tragedy in the Western narratives by highlighting its disastrous effects on Muslims both abroad and in the Muslim world.

The first part of the chapter reviews three things to set a historical and critical context for the discussion of Pakistani sf: 1) the major trends of American sf in the post-9/11 context drawing on the insights of David M. Higgins and Michael C. Frank, 2) the negative representations of Muslims in Western narratives and rising Islamophobia drawing on the insights of Sophia Rose Arjana, Peter Morey, and Amina Yaqin; and 3) the response of Pakistani English fiction to the identity crisis produced by post-9/11 global politics as examined by scholars like Cara Cilano, and Faisal Nazir. The second part of the chapter investigates Pakistani sf's response to the identity crisis generated by the post-9/11 War on Terror and the rise of Islamophobia emerging from the binary emphasized by President George Bush and disseminated by global media in diverse forms.

The President in his speech recognized Al-Qaeda, with links with other terrorist organizations, especially Taliban in Afghanistan, as the perpetrator of violence and acknowledged that these terrorists practiced “a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics” (n.p.). Still, by linking the terrorists with “60 countries”, mainly Muslim majority, he built a connection between terrorism and Islam/Muslims (n.p.). A line is drawn between us and them using a Manichean parallelism: “Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them. (Applause.)” (n.p.). This biblical intonation aligns the terrorists with the demonic Other and projects them not as contemporary dissidents, but the ones pitted against goodness, embodied in America, since the creation of the world. He demanded: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the

terrorists. (Applause.) From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime” (n.p.). This set the tone for the contemporary social and political discourse about Islam and Muslims and their representation in fiction and non-fiction as a threat and danger to the West. This chapter argues that Pakistani English sf such as *Burraq* (Adil Imtiaz and Kamil Imtiaz 2011- present) and *Burka Avenger* (Haroon Rashid 2013-2016) (Urdu but translated into other languages) offer an alternate perspective challenging the global perspective of associating Islam with terrorism, which is based on the Western perception. The first section provides a brief scholarly review of post 9/11 American sf to discuss how 9/11 affects the representation politics in the context of anxieties and fears associated with terrorism.

Major Trends of American sf in the Post-9/11 Context:

David M. Higgins observes two major trends in American sf after 9/11: first is “the trope of alien encounter” that helps to address “an environment of spectacular and indeterminate ‘omnicrisis’” as well as “to interrogate contemporary issues such as military intervention, surveillance, extraordinary rendition, and torture” (2). Citing Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, he defines “omnicrisis” as a “permanent state of exception and the corresponding continual fear of invasion (from without and/or within) that enables global elites to deploy emergency powers in the name of a presumed greater good” (3). Higgins discusses the transformation of *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001–5) from an exploration narrative into an “invasion response narrative” in season three when the Earth faces “a catastrophic 9/11-style alien attack from the Xindi” (2). Also, more invasion TV shows became popular such as *Battlestar Galactica* (2003–9), *Falling Skies* (2011–), and *Fringe* (2008–13) (2). He also notes that Hollywood witnessed a “return to the alien invasion blockbuster, often in the form of remakes of 1950s alien invasion films” (2).

He reviews films like *Signs* (M. Night Shyamalan 2002), *Alien Trespass* (R. W. Goodwin 2009), Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005), Scott Derrickson's *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008), *The Invasion* (Oliver Hirschbiegel 2007), *The Mist* (Frank Darabont 2007), *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves 2008), *Oblivion* (Joseph Kosinski 2013), *Man of Steel* (Zack Snyder 2013), *Pacific Rim* (Guillermo del Toro 2013), and *The Avengers* (Joss Whedon 2012). As already discussed in the previous chapter, Higgins notes that in the 1950s the alien represented the anxieties generated by the Cold War. After 9/11, however, “the trope of alien invasion was appropriated...to directly address anxieties concerning terrorism, terrorist attacks, and America's war on terror, and aliens often functioned as direct allegories for terrorists” (2). These movies project Americans as victims “to draw on a kind of sacred power of reactionary violence in the service of the expansion of its global advantage” (3). Though playing the victim or imperial masochism is an important motif in the sf films produced in the Cold War context, post 9/11 films enhance this aspect by presenting America as “the absolute victim (and thus the bearer of absolute moral authority)” (3), thus justifying the exercise of violence without any ethical considerations (4).

The second trend, as Higgins notes, is that technological advancements enable science fiction to transcend its generic boundaries to merge “into nearly every aspect of life, and SF itself begins to register the difficulty of imagining any "outside" to the current regime of technoscientific and economic totality” (2). Citing Jaak Tomberg, Higgins asserts: “science fictional novum has become simultaneously banal and shocking within the operations of late capitalist totality” (6) because of the science-fictional quality of advertisements, slipstream fiction, and science-fictional aspect of everyday life. The environment of “omnicrisis” in the post 9/11 context has enabled “ever-greater deployments of technoscientific hegemony” over “the entire globe” (6). The dominance of technological advancements has resulted in dystopic visions

in science fiction that link scientific advancement with the world's destruction (6). He discusses works like David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013), and Max Brooks's *World War Z* (2006) (6). He also discusses the boom of postcolonial sf, in the post 9/11 context, that highlights the hierarchical nature of technological advancement and “the darker aspects of Empire's slippery regime of exploitation and differential inclusion” (7). He gives examples of works by North American postcolonial writers such as Karen Tei Yamashita, Larissa Lai, Alette de Bodard, Tananarive Due, Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor, Andrea Hairston, and Eden Robinson as well as global sf writers like Ian McDonald, Vandana Singh, Rosaura Sanchez, Beatrice Pita, and Kenji Siratori (7) to illustrate his point.

Michael Frank, on the other hand, discusses the relevance of the cinematic analogy deployed in the public discourse on 9/11 because of the spectacle associated with the images and footage of the event, and the presence of such scenes of disaster in sf films produced even before the event occurred. He argues that several sf films depict aliens invading America, targeting buildings like “the US Bank Tower, the Empire State Building, and the White House”, which are embodied “symbols of US power” (159). He discusses the examples of sf films from those produced in the 1950s, like Fred F. Sears' *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956), Byron Haskin's *The War of the Worlds* (1953), to the films produced in the 1990s such as Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1996) to illustrate this point. Frank also observes, citing examples of academics and journalists, that it is not surprising that many Americans witnessed the 9/11 event through “a cinematic prism” and reported it like a scene from a film (160); even terrorists were supposed to be inspired by such films and thus presenting “a case of life imitating art” (162).

Frank examines “how and for what reasons science fiction films have so persistently served as a frame of reference for the experience of September 11” (163). Like Higgins, Frank

also notes that pre-9/11 films of the 1950s to the 1990s with aliens, monsters, and zombies “confront the viewers with different kinds of threats”: for example, “threat of enemy invasion, on the one hand, and the threat of ideological infiltration, on the other hand” (165), and the destruction of cities, with apocalyptic spectacle, might also symbolize “the triumph of nature over a man-made world” (167). After 9/11, aliens, monsters, and zombies represent terrorists and the fear of sudden attacks. For example, he discusses Steven Spielberg’s *The War of the Worlds* (2005) for its use of the alien invasion trope to present an atmosphere of fear and anxiety in post-9/11 America. This film was “marketed as a post-9/11 update of Wells’ story”, and the director and screenwriters also “emphasized their deliberate evocation of post-9/11 fears” (182). He observes that film critics have critiqued this film “either as a beneficial confrontation with the trauma of 9/11 or as a negative reinforcement of that trauma” (188). Though the film does not present the destruction of American landmarks, the scenes of urban destruction and people fleeing from them evoke memories of the terrorist attack (193). What makes this film different from the pre-9/11 films is that it ends with the fear of a future attack (189). Frank’s observation seems justified considering the detailed discussion of the use of aliens in sf in the previous chapter, which reviews the diverse representation of aliens in Western sf in response to different historical events. The discussion above makes it clear that American sf in diverse media does not move beyond its national borders in its treatment of the threats facing a post-9/11 world; rather, it restricts itself to the revival of the invasion films or shows produced in the 1950s, or of the projection of imperial masochism in which the US is presented as a victim of terrorism. From this insular position, American sf generally excludes other victims of the event from its globally disseminated popular narratives. Though there are exceptions, as more recent films such as

Arrival (Denis Villeneuve 2016) and *Annihilation* (Alexander Garland 2018) offer more comprehensive scenarios.

Misrepresentation of Muslims and Islamophobia in the Post-9/11 Context

In the post- 9/11 global context, Islamophobia has become visible because of the faster than ever distribution and dissemination of (mis/dis/) information in a world entangled in global networks and webs of communication where the democratization of information channels has made it impossible to restrict the circulation of hate speech, biases, and prejudices. However, the anxiety around Islam and Muslims is not a new phenomenon, as its roots can be traced back to Medieval times. Sophia Rose Arjana in *Muslims in the Western Imagination* (2015) argues that the anti-Islam narrative has evolved since Medieval times to the present day. She studies “Muslim monsters” in diverse fields of cultural production “including medieval and Renaissance art, Shakespearean drama, Orientalist poetry, Gothic fiction, and cinema” and science fiction (1). She argues that “fantasies of Muslim monsters constitute the current imaginaire about Islam” (7).

Arjana observes that “The character of the homicidal terroristic Muslim stalks the Western social imaginary in print media, television, and film, but he has ancestors” (2). She argues that “anti-Muslim rhetoric” has evolved in thirteen hundred years and is not simply a result of 9/11, or other isolated events like Madrid 2004 and London 2005 (1) leading to pre-emptive attacks on countries like Iraq³⁸ and Afghanistan³⁹ causing large-scale massacres and whole-scale destruction of physical infrastructure without a prick of conscience. The presence of Muslim monsters in Western culture, for centuries, helps explain the recent visibility of “the Muslim problem” (1). Arjana likens these Muslim monsters to Jewish and African monsters in Western

³⁸ Please, see for details: “The Human Cost of War in Iraq.” <https://web.mit.edu/humancostiraq/>

³⁹ Please, see for details: “Civilians Killed and Wounded.” <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians>

cultural products and asserts that these monsters are the projection of anxieties related to race, “religion, gender, and sexuality” (1).

Arjana examines the projection of monsters in Medieval paintings and stories which usually were “identified as Muslim/Saracen, African, and Jewish, or some combination thereof, pointing to two aspects of medieval sensibilities about the Other” as antonyms of Christianity (5). However, in the Elizabethan age, the works (paintings, plays by Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare) signal “a shift from Saracen /Arab characters to Turkish ones” (5), probably due to the rise of the Ottoman Empire. During European colonization of North America, indigenous people or “Indians were described as Moors and their cities as New Cairo” (6). The figure of Black Saracen re-emerged, depicted as “the monsters of Africa”, as a new category of Muslim monsters in this period to project hatred against Islam as well as “Africans, later, African-Americans” (6). Arjana also evaluates the depiction of zombies, mummies, vampires, and aliens in films to discuss the prevalence of Muslim monsters and “the presence of Orientalism in science fiction and other genres” (6). She argues that such films, especially in the post-9/11 context, deploy Muslim monsters to present apocalyptic visions. She asserts that these multimedia representations “serve as the most dominant cultural force in the modern American milieu—a space in which Muslim monsters continue to be generated” (6).

Arjana postulates that this negative representation of Muslims and Islam has its material effects in the form of Islamophobia, hate crimes, detention, torture in places like Abu Ghraib, Bagram Air Base, and Guantanamo Bay, and the foreign policies practiced across the globe against Muslims. Muslims are dehumanized and stripped of their identity so much so that their torture is naturalized through “displays of sadomasochism and other sexual fantasies, and the

manipulation of multiple bodies through hooding and piles of naked bodies” (2)⁴⁰. She considers photos of Abu Ghraib, comparing them with photos of the lynching of black men by white supremacists, as “permanent mementos of the cruelty and depravity of American power and the helplessness of those who find themselves subjected to it” (182). She asserts that the prejudice and violence against Muslims in the real world are “an effect of fantasies about Muslims as non-human—fantasies that have spanned the ages” (2).

However, she distinguishes her history of Muslim monsters from the recent rise of Islamophobia in the context of the 9/11 attacks. Her work, on the other hand, is concerned with “the West’s *imaginaire* of Islam: the idea of the Muslim as a frightening adversary, an outside enemy that doesn’t belong in modernity, who, due to an intrinsic alterity, must be excluded from the American and European landscapes” (2). This exclusion not only reduces all Muslims, despite their ethnic, cultural, and regional differences, to stereotypes but also makes hate speech and crimes against Muslims tolerable, “a tolerance that is unthinkable for other communities” (3).

In her chapter “The Monsters of September 11,” Arjana asserts that fears generated by 9/11 affected the representation of Muslim characters in film, television, media, and political discourse using “the Saracen doxology first established in the medieval era that is substantiated by Orientalist neo-colonial ideologies in vogue in recent years” (166). Taking sf as a “political genre”, she considers alien as a “code for non-white Christians” (166). While in the Cold War context, aliens represented the fear of communism, in the post-9/11 context, “a new danger emerged—Islam” (166). She observes that the media covered 9/11 using the sf language. For

⁴⁰ Arjana mentions “human pyramids of naked bodies, prisoners on dog leashes, the gratified smiles of the captors” in Abu Ghraib (3), and again in her chapter on 9/11 she mentions “1,800 or so images of naked, tortured, sodomized, bloody, and dead Iraqis—[which] were interspersed with “selfies” of the soldiers performing sex acts on themselves and others” (182).

example, “Just one day after the attacks, CNN titled its coverage, ‘The Day After’ (also the title of a well-known 1980s made-for-TV nuclear disaster movie). Fox sported the slogan, ‘America Strikes Back’—based, of course, on the *Star Wars* trilogy” (176). She also discusses the examples of the Riddick films, *Pitch Black* (2000 David Twohy) and *Chronicle of Riddick* (2004) for presenting monsters trying to impose their “Necromonger religion” with an option “to convert or die,” resonating with “political discourse surrounding Islam” (167). She also discusses the films like *I Am Legend* (Francis Lawrence 2007) and *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg 2005) that present the fear of the other by incorporating “a stunning number of 9/11 references and images” (174).

Similarly, zombies in apocalyptic films, as Arjana observes, are also utilized to represent “Muslim terrorists” (168). Like terrorists, these zombies lack individual identity and agency and are programmed for “exterminating humans, acting out of a ‘psychic imperialism’” (168), as with their bite, they infect and convert the victims to their creed. She discusses *The Invasion* (Oliver Hirschbiegel 2007), a remake of the *Body Snatchers* (Philip Kaufman 1978), as an example of a “post-9/11 zombie invasion film” (172). Moreover, zombies embody contamination, disease, and infection, and Islam is also described using the “language of pathology” as a disease “‘creeping’ across the country like a mold..., and real Americans are sick of Muslims” (172).

In the same way, Peter Morey, in his seminal work, *Islamophobia and the Novel* (2018), cites eminent British novelist Martin Amis’s biased views about Muslims: “The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order,” justifying “deportation,” “curtailing of freedoms,” and “discriminatory stuff” (qtd. in Morey 1) to highlight the prevalence of Islamophobia even among the enlightened people having no

association with the political right wing. He notes that such views lacking “sophistication and historical awareness” are “symptomatic of the heated debate about Islam and Muslims as it occurs today” (1). He considers Islamophobia to be a political construct ensuing from the War on Terror “to bolster support for an illegal foreign policy” (13). Citing Stephen Sheehi, he argues that Islamophobia is “the latest ideological construct deployed to facilitate American power” (qtd.13), which also helps to distract attention from “intractable economic and social problems caused by late capitalism and the socially eviscerating tendencies of neoliberalism” (14).

Like Arjana, Morey also observes that Islamophobia is probably “the only form of prejudice now indulged and approved in the so-called liberal societies of the West” (2). In this work, Morey examines the “fictional dramatization of cultural difference and conflict” giving space to varied responses ranging from acceptance and rejection of “ideological biases” (2). His work includes discussion of works by Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, and even John Updike with their representation of Islam as “intolerant, closed-off, irrational” (24); works by Hanif Kureishi and Monica Ali with an obvious “disenchantment with the idea of political multiculturalism” which produces identity crisis leading to “fragmentation, special pleading, and reactionary community politics” (25); works by Azar Nafisi and Khalid Hosseini as “the Muslim misery memoir” (26); works by H. M. Naqvi and Amy Waldman that “chronicle the closing down of alternative and hybrid identities amid the chorus of patriotism demanded after the attacks, although in the end they vary in their commitment to articulating Otherness”; and finally, global novels by Nadeem Aslam and Kamila Shamsie that put the conflict in its historical context by highlighting the US role in sponsoring “international Islamist Extremism

in the fight against communism” and “globalization’s impact on the conduct of post 9/11 Campaigns” (27).

Moreover, in their book *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* (2011), Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin examine the “limited ways that Muslims are stereotyped and “framed” within the political, cultural, and media discourses of the West” (2). These stereotypes existed before, but 9/11 has added a new significance to such Orientalism (3). Their dress and appearances are not considered “cultural markers” but as symbols of backwardness (2). The Western discourse on terrorism not only undermines how terrorism and extremism are impacting the Muslim world (with almost unilateral damage); but also, it does “a gross disservice to the variety and vitality of Muslim life” as well as to those “who are genuinely concerned about addressing pressing social problems” (2).

Like Arjana, Morey and Yaqin also feel that this negative representation of Muslims has roots in the fear of the Islamic world since the Middle Ages as “the main ‘civilizational’ enemy, and its adherents as little better than animals” (9), and that this framing of Muslims through negative stereotypes in the media “has a complex but definite relation to the lived experience” (3). They also observe, citing Mohja Kahf, that the Muslim woman’s depiction also changed over time “from a medieval fascination with the symbolic figure of the powerful Eastern queen to post-eighteenth-century Romantic notions of the passive Oriental female, cooped up in the harem or behind the veil, waiting to be rescued by the Western male hero” (10). This image of the oppressed Muslim woman has “tremendous emotional appeal” to justify military intervention in the Muslim majority countries (10).

The discussion above draws attention to the negative representation of Muslims in Western narratives and the increase in Islamophobia in the post-9/11 context. In response to such

negative representation, some Pakistani English fiction writers have responded by revisiting the history and effects of 9/11, as reviewed in the following discussion. Mushtaq Bilal posits that works by Pakistani writers are read more often for specific information than for an aesthetic experience (5). He thinks that probably this “anthropologizing of the Pakistani fiction” is a response to the pressure of the global market (5). These works bring into discussion other victims of the post-9/11 world; though, Iqbal notes through his interviews, that challenging “Western stereotypes of Islam, Muslims, and Pakistan” is not the sole concern of these writers (20). However, these works “show Pakistanis as ordinary, normal human beings and not just as fundamentalists and terrorists” (Bilal 6).

Pakistani English Fiction and 9/11

In the post-9/11 context, Pakistani fiction in English (PEF) usually deals with either political or identity issues. Faisal Nazir in his essay “De/Reconstructing Identities” notes that the question of identity in “a global and transnational context” has become central in Pakistani fiction in English that depicts characters caught between “an Eastern, Islamic identity and a Western liberal/secular one” (361). He observes that literary critics like Cara Cilano, Peter Morey, Mushtaq Bilal, Aroosa Kanwal, and Claire Chambers also discuss these works to highlight the deconstruction of the “monolithic construction” of Pakistani identity as “overwhelmingly male, Muslim, and national” in “historical, cultural, and political discourses” (361). In his evaluation of the critical works on Pakistani English fiction, he notes that different critics have discussed the theme of Pakistani identity in different ways: “global/ cosmopolitan (Morey 2011), national (Cilano 2013), religious (Chambers 2011; Kanwal 2015), and regional (Clements 2016)” (363).

Cara Cilano, in *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State* (2013), examines Pakistani English fiction (PEF) to propose the “end of national identities” by claiming that PEF makes a case for “human identity” through her detailed analysis of Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* (2009) (1). I agree with Cilano’s observation, as novels by Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid, Uzma Khan, and Kamila Shamsie depict the problems attached to “collective mythologies”, nationalism, and “the brutalities committed by states to uphold these myths and ensure security” (1). She observes that PEF (from 1947 to the present), by incorporating the historical experience, transcends national boundaries and thus enables “a broader field of representation: as an imaginative alternative to dominant forms of identification” (1). She examines how PEF works to address idea, nation, and state, with all “linguistic, cultural, religious, and social diversities” (5), in formulating or challenging “a collective identity or sense of belonging to Pakistan” (1) by taking into consideration “contradictions that remain unresolved as Muslim nationalism achieved territorialization” (3).

In her chapter on 9/11, Cilano examines works like *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) by Nadeem Aslam, *Burnt Shadows* (2009) by Shamsie, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid, and *Home Boy* (2009) by H. M. Naqvi. She asserts that these works depict the “brutal cross-cultural and international encounters” in the context of the War on Terror (11). These texts, through drawing attention to the marginalized migrant experiences, highlight the difficulty of creating meaningful relations in a post-9/11 scenario. She asserts that “9/11” signifies both a peculiar absence and an ineluctable abstraction” because it “works to absent considerations of other perspectives or alternative courses of action” by ignoring the historical background of the American role in creating the Taliban to fight the proxy war against the USSR (in the 1980s), and also the attention is immediately transferred to the War on Terror against an abstract

“enemy” by justifying the US attacks on Iraq and Afghanistan (193), at a time when Pakistan is “caught between Islamists on the one hand, and a superpower, on the other” (194). She claims that these works by Pakistani writers challenge “this dominant tendency to absent and abstract” through the historicization of the events (193).

Similarly, Ulka Anjaria, in her chapter “Global Pakistan in the Wake of 9/11”, argues that Pakistani English fiction by writers like Mohsin Hamid, Nadeem Aslam, and Mohammed Hanif contest the contemporary “negative representations by offering a new understanding of Pakistan’s place in the global imaginary” and simultaneously “thinking the global novel anew” by considering “global power inequalities” and suggesting “alternative spatial formations” (49). While the Western texts cover the event by turning a blind eye to “America’s own action in the Cold War and beyond”, these texts expose another side of the multifaceted history. She appreciates the postcolonial globality embedded in Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* (2009) to draw attention to the problems associated with the “cosmopolitan fluidity and movement” (both spatial and temporal) (50) by presenting characters displaced by events like the 1945 nuclear holocaust, partition (1947), and 9/11. She observes that Hanif’s *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) uses “conspiracy-oriented logic” stemming from 9/11 as “a primary mode of meaning making” (51), as the whole narrative is built on conspiracies and mysterious actions of characters whose intentions are gradually exposed. It presents “the US as a constitutive part in order to counter the dominant narratives” (51). Similarly, Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *Exit West* also capture displacement in the post-9/11 context.

The analysis of the scholarly insights above depicts a bigger picture of post-9/11 global impacts on Muslims by moving beyond the dominant US trauma narratives and putting the event in its historical and global contexts. Pakistani English fiction, as examined by Cilano, Morey,

and Anjaria, addresses the post-9/11 crisis as a glocal issue by tracing its impact on the third world, especially Pakistan. They shift the focus away from the center (US) by presenting diasporic, immigrant, and displaced characters feeling lost and alienated in the post-9/11 context. Pakistani sf, as will be discussed in the second part, also engages with the post-9/11 identity crisis by challenging the negative representation of Muslim characters and the villainization of Islam in Western narratives. It does so by presenting Muslim superheroes fighting for peace, justice, and equality against the forces of tyranny and terrorism.

Part II

Post 9/11 Identity Crisis and Pakistani sf

While several scholars, as reviewed in the previous section, critically examine how Pakistani English fiction deals with the post-9/11 identity crisis, no such scholarly material is available on Pakistani sf. This part examines how the selected Pakistani sf works, as the post 9/11 products, not only share the political consciousness with PEF but also try to subvert the negative representation of Muslims by presenting them as peacemakers and victims of terrorism. David Lewis and Martin Lund rightly point out that Muslim superheroes are created “on an American template to provide role models for youth in the Muslim world (*The 99*, AK Comics) or to critique inequalities in Muslim majority countries (Qahera, *The Burka Avenger*)” (7). This part will critically evaluate the Pakistani sf comic (English) *Buraaq* (Adil Imtiaz and Kamil Imtiaz 2011- present) and the animated superhero series *Burka Avenger* (Haroon Rashid 2013-2016) (Urdu but translated into other languages), to argue that these works challenge the negative representation of Muslims and Islam and, instead, offer an alternate perspective in the post-9/11 context. Where *Buraaq* highlights the problems faced by Muslim immigrants, *Burka Avenger* draws attention to the effects of post-9/11 War on Terror on Pakistan.

i) ***Buraaq* (Adil Imtiaz and Kamil Imtiaz 2011- present)**

Aaron Kashtan, in his chapter on comic books in *Cambridge History of Science Fiction* (2019), asserts that since the 1980s “the superhero genre has dominated the American comic book industry, ... and has been the most prominent venue for SF in American comics” (617). Despite acknowledging superhero and science fiction to be “overlapping but distinct genres”, he argues: “Superhero narratives most often become science-fictional when the superhero’s powers have a counterfactual but scientifically plausible origin, however loosely defined (e.g., Superman, Green Lantern, or Iron Man) or when the comic takes place in a futuristic or outer-space setting” (617). The superheroes, who either have no powers such as “Batman”, or who use magic such as “Dr. Strange”, he argues, “may not be SF at all, or may become SF only through the introduction of fantastic inventions” (618).

Kashtan notes that several DC and Marvel comics have elements of time travel, alien encounters, and alternate futures, and some superheroes are men of science (618). Citing Pete Coogan, he notes “the three defining elements” of superheroes: “along with “mission” and “identity,” a superhero has “superpowers – extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental, or mystical skills” (617). He surveys comics from the 1980s to the 2010s to argue that “SF is the central element of many superhero comics” (618). He concludes that “SF comics are a major genre and are likely to grow in importance in the future”; therefore, “accounts of the contemporary SF genre will increasingly need to take comics into account” (631).

Buraaq, the Muslim superhero comic selected for the discussion in this chapter, also has strong sf elements, as the main hero Yusuf Abdullah does not use magic as a source of his power; rather, he gains his superpowers when he undergoes mutation as a result of a cosmic

event just as “in the Marvel Universe, the X-Men, the Hulk, and Spider-Man all get their powers as a result of radioactivity” (Kashtan 618). Similarly, as in DC and Marvel, many of the characters in *Buraaq*’s team of truth-Seekers, such as Dr. Troy, Joshua, and Karim, are scientists or IT experts. Moreover, the action is set in both a futuristic setting of Nova City and other urban settings in the US with portals and gateways to other dimensions and universes. It also includes elements of invasion and time travel.

Adil Imtiaz and Kamil Imtiaz, Pakistani American IT specialists and artists, in the first issue of their comic series *Buraaq (One Man One Mission 2011)*, write about their inspiration from DC and Marvel comics and superheroes. Adil and Kamil in an interview with David Andrews tell the readers that, in their childhood spent in Pakistan, they used to create their “own comic book characters and stories” (n.p.). In the year 1990, they immigrated to the US to pursue higher studies. The rising Islamophobia and the negative portrayal of Muslims in “the movies, news, and comic books” in the post-9/11 context inspired them to create *Buraaq*: a Muslim superhero⁴¹ (Andrews n.p.). The Imtiaz brothers chose to be comic writers keeping in view the popularity of this genre across the globe. In another interview, Adil says: “Sitting in a movie theatre or even standing in line to get in, I always wished for a Muslim hero or a movie that portrayed Muslims positively, not as sidekicks or villains. So, I thought the best way to express ourselves would be through a comic book series” (Evan n.p.). They have created this Muslim superhero because there are hardly any characters that Muslim youth can relate to (ibid).

Buraaq comic series tells a story about a young man: Yusuf Abdullah a.k.a. Buraaq. He is presented as an American Muslim whose parents get killed “at a university shootout” (n.p.). Yusuf, after losing his parents, gets transformed in “a cosmic event” into a superhero with

⁴¹ A. David Lewis and Martin Lund define “Muslim superhero” as a label “to signify a ‘Muslim’ identity, based in one conception of Islam or another” (3).

amazing powers (Andrews n.p.). He possesses several superhuman powers: the ability to fly, transmit electric rays, manipulate “magnetic fields”, and “control Earth elements” (n.p.). To show his gratitude to God, he sets on a mission “to stand up for truth and justice” with a motto: “Truth will prevail” (ibid).

In the preview guide, the Imtiaz brothers reveal that the title *Buraaq* is inspired by an Islamic event of “Isra wal Miraj (Ascent to Heaven)” (n.p.). They refer to the event of the Holy Prophet’s journey from Mecca to Al Aqsa Mosque on “Al-Buraaq ...the creature (winged)” (n.p.). These religious allusions in the comic affirm the significance of religion as an important epistemology in Pakistani sf, which has already been discussed in detail in the second chapter: “Religion in Science Fiction”. The superhero, Yusuf Abdullah, is presented as a “practicing Muslim” who prays and “always uses Islamic morals as his guide” (preview n.p.). However, the Imtiaz brothers clarify: “Our goal is not to preach or give sermons, rather our aim is to provide entertainment with a clean, inspirational message” (qtd. in Anwar n.p.). Kathleen Henry writes that while some readers might find it difficult to accept the religious aspect, the Imtiaz brothers believe that Islam promotes “the same values that every other major religion possesses: honesty, hard-work, compassion... and God-consciousness” (n.p.). Moreover, in their preview guide to the comic (n.d), the Imtiaz brothers make additions to their mission: to provide “an alternate media entertainment” to the Muslim youth, “to make them feel proud to be a Muslim” and to “enable interfaith dialogue and increase positive Islamic awareness” by taking inspiration from “Quran, Islamic values, and the teaching[s] of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH)” (n.p.).

The comic website, *splitmoonarts.com*, describes Yusuf Abdullah (aka Buraaq) as a “reluctant and humble hero” with a strong faith, despite being “brave and gallant” (n.p.). He is portrayed as an “Inter-Dimension Guardian of Earth” with superhuman powers. He can

“Generate Massive Amounts of Energy, [take] Inter-Dimension Travel, [and] Control Magnetic Fields” (n.p.). Though they claim to have created a superhero who “floats above the undercurrents of race, creed, and color”, the hero represents a strong Muslim identity (Issue 1 n.p.). Hammad Anwar rightly observes, in his review of the comic, that the Imtiaz brothers aim to create a positive role model for the Muslim youth as well as “to reach out to non-Muslim audiences and introduce them to the true face of Islam, dispelling the suspicions and misunderstanding associated with it” (n.p.). By presenting a young man who spends his day working in a charity organization and his night fighting against evil, the Imtiaz brothers hope “to break stereotypes across all communities” (ibid).

Similarly, the Imtiaz brothers, in the first issue of *Buraaq*, reiterate their concern about the presentation of “negative stereotypes of Muslims and the Islamic world” and the focus on war and violence (*One Man* n.p.). This misrepresentation, they assert, is dividing peoples by increasing “intolerance and extremism” (n.p.). Therefore, they aim to produce a comic book with a superhero, a Muslim American in his thirties, to establish “the sense of tolerance, justice, and morality” (n.p.). They assert: “The bridge between civilizations needs to be strengthened, and not destroyed” (n.p.). Their project has a mission, as with this comic series they want “to bring peoples together” (n.p.). This need for interfaith dialogue is expressed by several scholars from the Islamic world to counter Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis in a post-Cold War world (Karim & Eid 1), which predicts future conflicts based on cultural and religious differences.

For example, Karim H. Karim and Mahmoud Eid in their books, *Engaging the Other: Public Policy and Western-Muslim Intersections* (2014) and *Re-Imagining the Other: Culture, Media, and Western-Muslim Intersections* (2014), challenge the “clash of civilizations” thesis as a

product of “mutual cultural ignorance” and highlight “the possibilities of engaging constructively with each other” (ix). Karim and Eid assert that the works advancing the “clash of civilizations” thesis focus on “the current state of conflict between Western governments and militant Islamist groups” and ignore the history “of mutual interdependence for almost one and a half millennia” (1). Citing scholars like Barrie Wharton (2) and Richard Bulliet (3), they argue that, contrary to popular assumptions, Muslim and secular Western societies have “many commonalities” (3) and share similar “ideas of citizenship and sociopolitical organization” (2).

However, they observe that this othering has roots in colonial history when Europe experienced “a racial triumphalism” and started to overlook “the historical debts to other civilizations” (4). Western academia contributed to “furthering these discourses” based on ignorance (5). They argue that this “triumphalist discourse”, over a long period, “has become a dominant narrative that shapes the understanding of the Other” (immigrants or other nations) (5). They highlight the need to reject Huntington’s “dangerously simple-minded thesis” (9) leading to a path of conflict as is evident both in the actions of the Islamist groups and US attacks and ban on Muslim countries (11). This need for co-operation and co-existence is emphasized in Pakistani sf under discussion in this part.

No doubt, DC and Marvel comics also offer some Muslim superheroes to attract a global audience and global market. Some noteworthy examples are “Simon Baz a.k.a. Green Lantern”, the first Muslim hero introduced by DC, “Sooraya Qadir a.k.a. Dust”, as a veiled figure, introduced by Marvel, “Josiah Al-Hajj Sadiq a.k.a. Josiah X”, the African American Muslim counterpart of Captain America, introduced by Marvel, “Bilal Asselah a.k.a. The Nightrunner” or “Batman of Paris, introduced by DC, and “Kamala Khan a.k.a. Ms. Marvel”, introduced by Marvel (Machkour n.p.). Though these superheroes present the problems of ethnic

marginalization and immigration in the global context, they seldom display confidence in their Muslim identity to challenge the negative representation of Muslims in the media.

Besides these Muslim superheroes from the global franchises, some attempts have also been made in the Muslim world to create superheroes to address the misconceptions about Muslims in the global context and problems like injustice and discrimination in the global context. Some examples include: “The 99- Teshkeel Comics”, created by Naif Al-Mutawa, and endorsed by President Barack Obama as “the most innovative response to anti-Muslim sentiment in the US” (qtd. in Machkour n.p.), “Qahera- Webcomic by Deena Mohamed”, a veiled Egyptian superhero fighting against misogyny, and “Yusuf Abdullah a.k.a. Buraaq” created by *Split Moon Arts* (Machkour n.p.). These comic superheroes, though not as famous as DC and Marvel, offer some relatable characters and issues by expelling the stigma attached to being a Muslim in the current times.

David Lewis and Martin Lund in *Muslim Superheroes: Comics, Islam, and Representation* (2017) aim to examine “the ways in which Muslim superheroes embody, counter, or complicate Western stereotypes of Muslims” (2). They enlist some Muslim superheroes who appeared before DC & Marvel introduced Muslim superheroes: Kismet from “March 1944’s *Bomber Comics* #1”, “the Archer of Arabia (*Adventure Comics* #250, July 1958)”, “Black Tiger (*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #29, October 1976)”, “Arabian Knight (*Incredible Hulk* # 257, March 1981)”, and Batal (*New Warriors* # 58, April 1995)” (6). They note that these characters sometimes engaged with “stereotypes and hegemonic schemes of Muslim representation” but mostly overlooked them (6). Also, these characters soon disappeared from the scene “with no apparent market demand to sustain them” (6). Lewis and Lund also observe that most Muslim superheroes in the US comics usually “retreat into the periphery” or “submerge in the superhero ‘Melting

Pot” (6). They are not conscious of their Muslim identity and are “less distinguishable from other superheroes” (6).

Lewis and Lund assert that the US superhero genre “highlights how identity, inclusion, and exclusion are negotiated in the U.S.– particularly in relation to major political shifts and cultural anxieties” (1). However, they note that despite the increasing “debates about national identity and belonging since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001”, there is little representation of Muslims in the comics (1). They assert that Muslim superheroes, conceived in the Muslim world, not only play the conventional savior-figure role to meet “generic standards”, but “they are also engaging and influencing real-world comprehension of this world religion, its adherents, and twenty-first-century heroism” (2). They argue that the emergence of Muslim superheroes from countries “where superheroes have not historically been common” indicates “a real demand for new representations” (3). They view this cultural phenomenon as a dialogic process: “The U.S. can use Muslim superheroes to right its relationship with Islam; the Muslim world can use Muslim superheroes to articulate its relationship with the U.S.” (4). Thus, like the Imtiaz brothers, they also see an opportunity to move away from the ‘clash of civilizations thesis’ and to bring people together.

Lewis and Lund also cite some negative response to the emergence of Muslim superheroes from “American anti-Islamic pundits” who view them as another example of “creeping Shariah” (3) or an “insidious form of cultural jihad” (5). They cite the example of Debbie Schlusel (2013), a film critic, who, in response to the emergence of Ms. Marvel, criticized it for the special treatment of Islam and questioned the stories the comic would cover: “how many IEDs she’ll be carrying or how many Jews she’ll kill while saving Muslims from accidentally living near a pig farm...” (qtd. in 4). Additionally, in the Muslim world too, Muslim superhero comics

get repudiated by some “Islamic commentators” who look at them as opposed to “Islamic traditions and values” (3). Such negative criticism is directed at the Muslim superheroes conceived in the Muslim world too, as is discussed in the section on *Burka Avenger* (2013). Still, both positive and negative responses to them “illustrate the high stakes associated in the American public sphere with Muslim representation” in the post-9/11 context (6). They assert that the emergence of Muslim superheroes in Muslim countries is a response to the politics of representation. Therefore, it is not surprising that the number of Muslim comic writers and Muslim superheroes is growing.

Likewise, Adil and Kamil Imtiaz acknowledge some positive representation offered by Hollywood, yet they object to the presentation of such characters as struggling with their identity, “not sure about ...religion... why the rules are there” (Evan n.p.). A recent example is that of Ms. Marvel who is getting positive reviews across the world. The Imtiaz brothers appreciate Ms. Marvel’s representation of a girl with immigrant parents from Pakistan, but they also note that Ms. Marvel is often confused about her identity as a Muslim. She, like other Muslim characters, is presented on a journey of self-discovery, “going through this confusion” that results from “religious upbringing and secular world” (n.p.). Therefore, they aim to present a hero who as a Muslim is “confident and firm in his identity and roots” (n.p.). *Burraq* presents a Muslim superhero fighting for peace and justice for all in a glocal context.

Nevertheless, *Burraq*’s Muslim identity does not restrict the fun expected from a comic. Adil says in his interview: “You add to that mystery, action, and adventure and you have all the elements that a superhero story needs. Also taking on your conventional superpowered villains and the bad guys (sic)” (Evan n.p.). *Burraq* works with his friends, the “truth seekers,” both Muslims and non-Muslims, for the betterment of this world with the “vision of peace and

universal justice” (n.p.). For example, Dr. Troy leads the team of “truth seekers” as “the brain behind the operation to uncover the truth”; Joshua is “the tech Guru” and a “master of gadgetry”; and Karim is an ex-marine and “an ammunition and explosion expert” (n.p.). The diverse nature of this team once again reflects the text’s emphasis on the values of cooperation and coexistence to resolve the problems generated by conflicts. Like Western superheroes, Buraaq also has antagonists. For example, Xion, with abilities “to fly, teleport, and mind control”, is presented as “a commander of the world of darkness” with a mission to “create chaos and mayhem on earth” (n.p.), and Magog⁴² is depicted as a “mindless yet powerful warrior creature in Xion’s army” (n.p.). Also, there are Minions who are described as “creatures of darkness”; they possess abilities of “shapeshifting and stealth mode” and play an important role in Xion’s army (n.p.).

The major theme of the comic series is to dispel the negative representation of Islam and Muslims in mainstream media, and different episodes present different iterations of this theme. For example, the first issue tells a story of the hate crime against a Muslim *hijabi* woman shopping in a superstore and Buraaq’s intervention to rescue the woman. The action takes place in an imaginary futuristic place, Nova City: “The financial and cultural center of the world” inhabited mainly by immigrants. It is “a home shared by people of all faiths and culture [sic]” in the year 2011 (n.p.) The urban space of the futuristic Nova City resonates with a cosmopolitan city like New York both on the levels of plot and imagery. The characters from various ethnic backgrounds are presented as roaming around in the city. The skyscrapers, neon signs, the blonde characters, and the use of language all point to New York, and the analogy gets reinforced by the emergency number 911 to call the police (white characters). By choosing this

⁴² The name is based on the biblical and Quranic references to Gog and Magog. The Holy Quran mentions them in Surah kahf (Chapter 18), and their appearance at end times (around the time of the second coming of Jesus (pbuh)) leading to a large scale havoc and destruction.

urban setting, the writers not only set the story in a global context but also highlight the problems faced by Muslim immigrants in the post-9/11 context.

Lewis, in his interview with Robin Young, the host of *WUBR's* “Here and Now”, makes an interesting observation about the superhero genre, that it is “an immigrant's genre. We have Superman from another planet, we have Wonder Woman from her paradise island, we have aliens ...” (n.p.). Therefore, Lewis finds it a suitable forum to discuss the immigrant issues: “Yes, this is a great space and a great place for Muslims, and for Arabs — particularly if they're seen as other — to display non-otherness, to display a sense of shared humanity” (n.p.). So, it should not be surprising that *Buraaq's* first issue focuses on presenting the hate crimes and discrimination faced by Muslim immigrants in the post-9/11 context.

The conflict is introduced in the sixth panel with a paramedic and ambulance in the background: “...And Nova City has been hit with a rising wave of hate crimes...with certain forces fanning the flames of intolerance against new immigrants” (Imtiaz *One Man* n.p.). The next four panels focus on a *hijabi* woman leaving a superstore with two white men, Mike and Joey, staring at her. Joey speaks: “Damn terrorists ...Taking over our jobs... Our country... My blood boils just looking at' em!” (n.p.). Joey calls out some racist slurs and follows the *hijabi* woman. The storekeeper, another white man, tries to intervene, but he is punched in the chest by Mike, breaking his ribs. Joey tries to pull off the lady's scarf who gets terrified and screams for help, and then *Buraaq* makes his first entrance to save the woman.

The Imtiaz brothers, being themselves immigrants, feel disturbed by the hate crimes against Muslims in the post-9/11 context; thus, they present the effects of rising Islamophobia in the first episode of the comic. According to the official records on the web page of the US Department of Justice, around “800 incidents since 9/11 involving violence, threats, vandalism and arson”

against American Muslims have been investigated by the Civil Rights Division, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and United States Attorneys (n.p.). Similarly, data collected from the FBI illustrates that hate crimes against Muslims “jumped in the years after 2001... from 28 to 481 incidents” (Kauk Ser n.p.) and became “the second highest reported among religious-bias incidents, after anti-Jewish hate crimes” (ibid). In addition, according to research conducted by *European Union*, Muslim women are doubly marginalized because of their gender and religion. They are more vulnerable to “the Islamophobic hate crime and speech, and violence, especially if they wear a headscarf. For instance, in the Netherlands and France, respectively over 90% and 80% of the victims of Islamophobic incidents reported in 2015 and 2014 were Muslim women, most of them wearing a visible religious symbol” (Iocab n.p.)

In the twenty-seventh panel, “A cautious Samaritan” is seen making a 911 emergency call. Then, to the surprise of everyone, the superhero appears flying in the air to stop the perpetrators of the hate crime. Joey takes out a gun to shoot the superhero who uses his light force to defend himself against his antagonists. In the background, the *hijabi* woman is seen offering water to the injured storekeeper with broken ribs. The action lasts over a few panels until the police cruisers appear on the scene, and Buraaq makes an exit. Before leaving, in the forty-eighth panel, Buraaq advises the haters: “Let it be known! God’s Justice knows no race or color” (n.p.), again emphasizing the universal values of Islam with an emphasis on the equality of all mankind in the eyes of God and their judgment based on good deeds. The first issue does not provide biographical details about the superhero. The eyewitnesses’ accounts are limited to the description of him as a “tall...masked...” man with a “flying robe” (panel 55). Thus, the story ends with Buraaq standing atop a skyscraper, looking into the horizon with the caption: “the mystery continues” (n.p.).

The theme of negative representation of Islam and Muslims resonates in the second episode *The Trail of Fire* (2011) to highlight the role of mainstream media in disseminating racist tropes. It revolves around the news coverage of the Islamophobic event at the Shop More parking lot, and the bravery of “a flying security guard” who saved the day (n.p.). Maytha Alhassen in her report on Muslim tropes in Hollywood argues that in the post-9/11 context, the “Good Muslim vs Bad Muslim” trope became quite common in the political discourse, as “Political framing by then-President George W. Bush exacerbated an “us versus them” narrative” (24). While all Muslims were assumed to be terrorists and accountable for the 9/11 event, “Bad Muslim” was any Muslim “critical of U.S. foreign policy and/or American militarism” without understanding that the criticism resulted from the American invasion of Muslim countries and consequent massacre and destruction (24). “Good Muslims”, on the other hand, “are often secular assimilationists, defenders of U.S. imperialism, or submissive Muslim women in need of being “saved” by the West from “evil, oppressive” Muslim men” (24). She gives examples of films like *United 93* (Paul Greengrass 2006), *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow 2008), *Argo* (Ben Affleck 2012), *Zero Dark Thirty* (Kathryn Bigelow 2012), and *American Sniper* (Clint Eastwood 2014) to discuss their use of the “Good Muslim” trope in the form of “supporting character[s]” who operate as spies or CIA agents “serving the white man or woman's ultimate mission of decapitating a global terrorist network” (24).

Although *Buraaq*, indeed, presents a good Muslim superhero, he can get integrated without discarding his faith and defending US imperialism. By presenting Buraaq as a practicing Muslim superhero, the Imtiaz brothers try to dispel the conflation of Islam with terrorism, a common trope in the mainstream media. Yusuf (a.k.a. Buraaq) not only offers his prayers but also spends his time in the service of humanity. The Imtiaz brothers try to foreground the teachings of Islam

by presenting a Muslim hero working for peace in his neighborhood. Sometimes, he is shown helping an elderly man to cross the road who praises Yusuf for his uprightness and kindness. At other times, he is depicted greeting everyone around in the neighborhood, buying some apples for his neighbor Mrs. Morgan, and inspiring the shopkeeper to exclaim: “I wish I had a neighbor like you!!” (panel 21).

Yusuf is presented not only as a good Muslim but also as a responsible citizen, well integrated into his multicultural society. This depiction challenges the negative representation of Muslims as regressive and hostile to cultural integration. For example, in the *Battle Zone* (2011), Yusuf is presented as “in charge of the local and international outreach program”, known as IFH (The International Fund for Humanity), providing meals to the jobless and homeless people (panels 19-20). Besides performing these courteous actions, he is ready to perform his role as a superhero to save the day when people are in danger. For example, when Mrs. Morgan informs him about “a terrible fire raging downtown!” (*The Trail of Fire* 2011 panel 31), he gets into action to help the people in the building. The fire in a high-rise building is out of control, and it seems impossible to rescue the people trapped in the building. To the surprise of everyone, Buraaq appears in the sky; he enters the building and rescues many people; he extinguishes the fire, and he recites some verses and prays on his way to complete his mission (n.p). The main difference between him and other superheroes is his faith in God as the source of his powers, and he does so by resorting to prayers in every difficult situation and seeking God’s help in all heroic actions.

Moreover, Buraaq is presented not only as a good citizen, but also a trustworthy person working for the betterment of his City. For example, one of the injured persons in the fire is Prof. Coolidge who has a mysterious box that he hands over to Buraaq before dying. He is trying to

protect that box from Minions who want to steal it to establish their power over the world.

Buraaq is entrusted with the box to save it from the Minions who decide to release “the Magog” to steal the box and defeat Buraaq. Here, Buraaq emerges as a saviour-figure entrusted with the responsibility to save the world.

Such positive portrayal of Buraaq dissociates him from the negative tropes of Muslim representation and places him on the good side fighting against evil. For example, the issue *Battle Zone* (2011), stages a Manichean world by pitting the good embodied in Buraaq, Prof. Troy, and his team of truth seekers against the evil embodied in the Magog in “the Mojave Desert, Arizona” (n.p.). Buraaq not only delivers the box safely to Prof. Troy and his team but also joins their side in the war against an army of creatures from another dimension seeking to destroy mankind. Joining hands with his multi-ethnic team, he is ready to perform his role as a saviour for people. To safeguard his team, Buraaq uses electric charges to fight with the Magog who escapes with the help of Minions through a vortex. Buraaq’s depiction as a team-player challenges the negative perception of Muslims as people who do not integrate into society or take part in community service.

In addition, the Imtiaz brothers highlight the negative role played by media in ignoring a “lot of good stuff” and, instead, spreading misconceptions about Muslims (the *Battle Zone* 2011 n.p.). Halim Rane, Jacqui Ewart, and John Martinkus in *Media Framing of the Muslim World: Conflicts, Crises, and Contexts* (2014) examine the role “news values and media frames” play in shaping the Western perception of Islam and the rise of Islamophobia (1). By the term “news values”, they mean the criterion used for the selection of news (4). Citing Gans, they assert that media aims to break news about four kinds of disorder: “natural, technological, social and moral” to maintain order (5), and Muslims are usually framed in “the latter two categories” to project

them as a threat to the Western values of “equality, democracy and various personal freedoms” (5).

Furthermore, Rane, Ewart, and Martinkus, citing Robert Entman, define framing as a process that makes “certain aspects of reality known through ‘selection’ and thereby giving them prominence or ‘salience’” and to “define problems’, make ‘moral judgements’ and ‘suggest remedies’” (qtd. in 6). They posit that media leaves the audience with a “very narrow, skewed perspective” by restricting itself to the projection of stereotypical images revolving around terrorist individuals and groups and by avoiding “more representative stories and images that provide a more complete picture” (2). In post-9/11 context, the stories about Muslims revolve around “terrorism, immigration and integration...” (5). In the *Battle Zone* (2011), Yusuf is interviewed by Dan Tylor who is presented as a good journalist seeking “to counter the negativity that prevails in the mainstream media” (panel 22). The comic draws attention to the need for telling positive stories and the positive role that media can play through “good, honest reporting” (panel 21).

The Imtiaz brothers attempt to make Yusuf’s character more relatable in a diasporic context by telling the story of his personal transformation. For example, the *Origins* (2012) uses the time-travel motif and records Yusuf’s “journey back in time” to tell us more about the transformation of “his physical self and inner soul” (panel 2). This episode works as a bildungsroman by providing insight into Yusuf’s development as a person and as a superhero. The story begins with his journey in time through “unseen dimensions and secret portals” transporting him (and the readers) to his teenage period (panel 4). He is presented as a carefree high school teen, living in Arizona, participating in car races, and other activities with his friends (panels 21-26). Adil, in his interview, describes Yusuf as a typical American (Muslim), born to

an immigrant father and a Muslim revert mother (Evan n.p.). He faces the typical problems: “Growing up as a teen he got lost, wasn’t sure who he was, rebelled against his parents, and was influenced by others around him” (Evan n.p.).

One night, Yusuf has an argument with his parents who are concerned about his carefree lifestyle. His parents leave for Nova City and get killed in a shooting at a university where his father is supposed to deliver a lecture. Yusuf receives this news from his grandfather when he is planning to enjoy his time with his friends in his parents’ absence. This becomes a turning point in his life, as it awakens him to discover the real purpose of his life. He has regrets about not listening to his parents, not praying to God, and not being a responsible person. The loss of his parents works as a wake-up call for him to choose wisely and live his life more responsibly, as Adil notes: “After losing his parents he has a spiritual awakening, a reconnection with God” (Evan n.p.).

By using the loss of parents as a significant moment in Yusuf’s life, the Intiaz brothers connect his spiritual awakening with his physical transformation to reveal the secret of his powers. On his way to Nova City, Yusuf gets caught in a thunderstorm and then a meteor shower, which together result in radioactivity, leaving him unconscious (*Origins* panels 64-70). He experiences strange sensations in his body, as he tries to start the car, and incidentally releases electric charges starting the dead engine (panels 76-80). Later, when he slips on the stairs while carrying things into the basement, he discovers that he can fly. In the darkness of the basement, he notes strange light emitting from “a scar from the accident,” an eagle-like symbol, on his chest (panel 101). He realizes that he is blessed with the special powers for some “higher purpose” (ibid). He decides to exercise his powers with “great responsibility” and recites a Quranic prayer: “Our Lord, and burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear. And

pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us” (2:286 qtd. in panel 103). The issue depicts Yusuf’s transformation into a superhero by providing a scientific explanation: mutation caused by radioactivity, thus giving his powers “a counterfactual but scientifically plausible origin” (Kashtan 617) and not a supernatural one.

Besides focusing on his personal development as a person doing community service and a hero helping the people in need, the Imtiaz brothers present Buraaq as a typical superhero engaging in battles with the axis of evil presented by General Xion and his army. For example, the *Shadow of Xion* (2013) presents “the battle between truth and falsehood” revealing the identity of the dark figure: General Xion (panel 2). General Xion is presented as a diabolic figure with the power to tempt people by manipulating their desires or by instilling fear of death: “Man is slave to his desires_ his ego_ few can resist the temptations we lay in their paths” (panel 31). He claims to have his shapeshifting agents, Minions, who “never tire of whispering to weak souls” (ibid). They coax people to break laws and commit crimes. Two such men are the Lewinsky brothers who want the mayor of Nova City to sell them a community center. They aim to carry out Xion’s secret mission by building a “portal” to enable “a gateway” for their master who wants to establish “a new World Order!” (panel 30). Buraaq intervenes as a saviour figure to rescue the mayor from the brutal attack by General Xion’s team of Minions and Magog to restore the world-order. Again, the bravery and courage of Buraaq project him not only as a good Muslim but also as a good citizen helping his community.

Thus, the depiction of Yusuf’s religiosity as no threat to Western ideals and values challenges stereotypes propagated by mainstream media. His connection with God enables him to stay humble and resilient against all odds and be compassionate to his fellow beings. Yusuf is presented offering his prayers and seeking God’s help to tread the right path and resist all that is

evil (the *Shadow of Xion* 2013 panel 32). He can fight Xion's army because of his faith which enables him to resist temptation and frees him from the fear of death. He does not give up his fight because he believes that his fate is "in the hands of God" (panel 94).

Besides offering the entertainment and adventure of a sf comic, *Buraaq* stands out from DC and Marvel Muslim superheroes because of his consciousness of his faith and Muslim identity, which challenges the negative perception of Muslims in the society. He does not take his association with Islam for granted and illustrates through his actions such as charitable community work, helping neighbours, saving lives, and standing for justice and peace that faith is not a hindrance in his service to his fellow beings or his integration into society. Therefore, the Imtiaz brothers assert that though *Buraaq* "is a regular superhero story with action, fun, and adventure" (Evan n.p.), it offers a character that Muslim youth can relate to because of positive representation.

Besides comic books, the website, *Splitmoonarts.com* also provides access to the *Buraaq* animated series which consists of five episodes: "The Forest", "The Vaccine", "Stryker Drones", "The Hills", and "The Magog" (n.p.) available both in Urdu and English. The animated series also, like *Buraaq* comics, presents a Manichean world in which good characters from different faiths and ethnicities join hands together to fight against the evil embodied in Xion and his army. Good Muslim characters like Karim and Qasim appear to disrupt the negative representation of Muslims by reinstating the positive image. The Imtiaz brothers, here too, aim to show that "a good person and a good Muslim aren't two different things. If one person is a good Muslim, there is no way he won't be a good person" (Imtiaz "Burlog" n.p.).

The approach of the Imtiaz brothers remains glocal with their hope to attract readers across the globe. Hence, Anwar hopes that "with a following of over 141,000 followers on Facebook

and with their story being conducted by media houses all across the globe”, *Burraq* will grow, over time, in scope (n.p.). The Imtiaz brothers want to make “a big, epic movie” and “to see *Burraq* on the big screen” soon (Henry n.p.). To summarize, *Burraq* transcends the depiction of 9/11 as a personal tragedy in the Western narratives; instead, it offers its impacts on Muslims’ experience and villainization of Muslims/Islam in the global context. It subverts the projection of Muslims as terrorists by presenting a Muslim superhero and other ‘good’ Muslim characters working with their team members, with diverse ethnic backgrounds, to establish peace and justice in the world. Just as *Burraq* challenges the victimhood narratives of Western sf, *Burka Avenger* also draws attention to the impacts of the post-9/11 War on Terror on Pakistan, as is discussed in the following section.

ii) *Burka Avenger* (Haroon Rashid 2013-2016)

Burka Avenger presents the first Pakistani female superhero by the pop star Haroon Rashid a.k.a. Haroon and his team under the banner of the singer’s production company: Unicorn Black (pvt) Limited. Like *Burraq*, the series has its own website *burkaavenger.com* with links to both comics and videos. It is available both in the form of animation series and comics in more than eighteen languages including Urdu, English, Tamil, Afghani, Arabic, Turkish, and Persian (*burkaavenger.com*). In addition, its app is also available on both “Google Play” and “Apple App Store” (ibid). This is the only Pakistani animated TV series with a complete franchise having toys, T-shirts, and game series to be purchased online or in stores. The series has won many awards such as 73rd Peabody Award (2013), International Gender Equity Prize by Prix Jeunesse International (2013), the Rising Star Award for Animation by Canada International Film Festival (2014), Accolades Global Film Festival (2014), the Asian Media Award for the best TV show (2014), and National Innovation Award (2017), besides getting nominated for the International

Emmy Award in 2014 (ibid). As the purpose of *Burka Avenger* is to promote female empowerment through education, the website also offers free certified courses on “3D Animation, Unreal Engine”, and “Story Telling Training Program” under the “Peace Train” tab (ibid). In 2013, the *Burka Avenger* was named by *Time Magazine* as one of the most influential fictional characters (ibid).

The choice of dress ‘burka’ has created much controversy both at home and abroad. It has surprised many reviewers of the show and feminists (even in Pakistan) that a very modern and westernized pop singer Haroon has conceived a superhero clad in a burka, a piece of clothing associated with women’s oppression (Mohsin n.p.). Some critics like Sherry Rehman and Bina Shah allude to the pejorative term “ninja turtles” for veiled women, and they think: “Jiya, as she leaps and sneaks across the city’s rooftops, is all ninja” (Khazan n.p.). Haroon, on the other hand, considers these objections superficial and thinks that perhaps these reviewers have not watched any of the show episodes. He says: “She doesn’t use the burqa because she’s oppressed. She uses it, she chooses to wear it to hide her identity the way superheroes wear their costumes to hide an identity. Like Batman or Catwoman (sic)” (ibid). Besides Jiya, other female characters like Ashu and the newscaster do not wear burka or hijab and are bare headed in their routine life. The burka helps the superhero fly high in the sky and glide through the air to attack her antagonists with books and pens. The purpose of the show is not to promote burka wearing; rather, it aims to promote education, female empowerment, with a message that “the pen is mightier than the sword” (ibid). In Pakistan, women dress in all kinds of clothes ranging from traditional to Western dresses, and head covering is not mandatory.

Jiya is a regular young woman, in her early twenties, and does not wear a burka or headscarf in her daily life. Burka serves only as a costume for her as a superhero fighting against terrorists

and corrupt politicians. Every episode begins with a biographical flashback into Jiya’s life as an orphaned infant who was adopted by a kind man Kabbadi Jan. Kabbadi Jan raised her well by not only educating her but also teaching her the art of *Takht Kabbadi* (a fictitious martial art like kung fu) to defend herself by using books and pens as her weapons. She stands for “justice, peace, and education for all” (Haroon “Burka Avenger Episode 1” 0:42) with a motto to use her powers for good and to “fight against the forces of tyranny and ignorance” (0:48). In her routine life, she is an elementary teacher who is very popular among her students. Her three students, Ashu, Immu, and Mooli, play important roles in highlighting the social problems as well as serving as the children in distress to be rescued by the burka avenger.

Moreover, the burka is not a norm in the show, as it is not worn by any other women or girls in the show. Finally, Haroon states: “All superheroes have disguises. The burka simply is hers. But neither Jiya nor the Burka Avenger is invisible” (Neel n.p.). The figure shows Jiya/burka avenger.



(https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Jiya-and-Burka-Avenger-in-a-Burka-Avenger-Poster-2012_fig1_321656606)

Simultaneously, using the burka as a superhero costume has another significance, as Haroon asserts:

By wearing a burqa she is showing she is a Muslim woman and superhero. And that she stands for all the good things of Islam and the real Islamic values – which are equality, woman’s rights, education and peace – rather than the way Islam has been hijacked by radical elements. (Mohsin n.p.).

Garima Bakshi observes that the series subverts Western perceptions in several ways by presenting a veiled woman as a superhero and not as a woman in distress to be rescued: “The burka thus becomes a tool for empowerment, proving that religious identities and girls’ education are not exclusive of each other” (n.p.). Olga Khazan also notes that unlike Western superheroes in “spandex briefs”, the burka avenger “fights crime in a decidedly more modest getup” (n.p.). Again, in an interview with NDTV, Haroon said that he used the burka to “add a local relatable flavor” and to distinguish her from “objectified” Western female superheroes because the show is not about “her sexuality. It is about her deeds” (6:15- 6:45). Thus, the show adopts a glocal approach to attract the young adults in a Muslim majority country by presenting the protagonist in modest clothing because it is difficult for young girls with Islamic background to identify with scantily clad comic heroes. Furthermore, he claims that the “stylized burka” should not be associated with “oppression”, as in Pakistan, contrary to Afghanistan, majority of women do not wear a burka; those who do, do so by choice (7:10-7:25). Therefore, Lara Mazurski asserts that the show subverts the Orientalist tropes that “identify representations of women in burkas through simple binary forms of identification such as West-East, secular-religious, dominant-submissive, civilized-barbaric or modern-traditional” (1).

Richard Gray in *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11* (2011) argues that most fiction set in the context of 9/11 presents the insider view of the tragedy focusing only on the American perspective and treating it only as an American tragedy. He appreciates the novels that

offer a wider transnational and transcultural perspective, as they make “encounters with strangeness” and engage “a strategy of deterritorialization” (83). Citing examples of works by Mohsin Hamid, Joseph O’ Neill, Deborah Eisenberg, and Nadeem Aslam, he postulates that such works break the national and regional boundaries and, instead, provide an insight into the causes and effects of 9/11 by putting it in its historical context. Gray sets certain standards for the writers to avoid the trap of personalizing the tragedy by ignoring other ways of looking at it. He writes:

What the writer has to do in the face of all this, surely, is to pursue some form of mimesis that dips above and below the discourses of nationalism, combining closeness and distance, registering at once the communal tragedy (the devastation wrought on a particular place and people) and the structural connections to tragic experiences. (Gray 83)

He advises the writers to present a more impersonal view of the tragedy by considering its global implications. I contend that *Burka Avenger* deconstructs the trend of a domesticated traumatic projection of the 9/11 event and draws attention to its global implications by focusing on the tragic events taking place in Pakistan in the post-9/11 context.

Burka Avenger deconstructs the propaganda in the Western media which blames Pakistan for supporting the Taliban by overlooking Pakistan’s important role as an ally in the War on Terror and the sacrifice made by Pakistanis. It highlights the problems faced by common Pakistanis in the context of the post-9/11 War on Terror. Pakistani governments supported the US in the Cold War by training the Taliban, then *mujahedeen*, to fight against the USSR as well as the Afghan communist government from 1979-1989 (Britannica). All went well, but after the end of the withdrawal of the USSR, American interests changed, and the Taliban, with American weapons

in their hands, were left alone to continue their insurgencies in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan had to pay a heavy price as a US ally, as by 1982 around 2.8 million Afghans had claimed asylum in Pakistan contributing to a surge in Islamization and the formation of extremist organizations and groups in Pakistan (ibid). After 9/11, the US found an opportunity to solve the Taliban problem by attacking Afghanistan. The Taliban felt being used and betrayed by the US and its allies including Pakistan. Hence, they directed their aggression on Pakistan, the US ally, because of two reasons: first, its frontline role in the War on Terror, and second, its spatial proximity (because America was using Pakistan as a base). This resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and the destruction of infrastructure in suicide bombing and extremist attacks in Pakistan, as a report by the *Center for Research and Security Studies* observes:

Until 2001, Pakistan had not experienced a single suicide attack but by the end of 2009, the country had endured over 200 suicide attacks (including 87 in 2009 alone) and close to 500 bomb explosions and IED detonations, largely in the Northwestern Frontier Province (NWFP) and FATA regions, closing the year with a deadly attack on a Muharram procession in Karachi. (CRSS 4)

Besides the civilian attacks, the Taliban especially targeted girls' schools as well as "music shops, police stations, military convoys, and government buildings" mostly in the Northwestern Frontier Province (NWFP) and FATA regions (CRSS 10). The Taliban not only "burnt 409 educational institutions in the Malakand division and 64 in the federally administered tribal areas (FATA)", but also, they bombed 190 government and around 368 private schools in Swat (11). Besides girls' schools, boys and co-ed schools were also targeted; hence, by 2009, "Over 42 percent of the institutions destroyed had boys on their rolls with the consequence that nearly

150,000, students were deprived of education while 8,000 women teachers were left jobless” (11). Other schools, due to the fear of attack, were shut down endangering an already low literacy level in Pakistan. It is in this historical context that *Burka Avenger* was conceived, as Haroon tells CNN in an interview: “It was in 2010 and I was reading a lot of articles about girls’ schools being shut down by extremists so that was in my mind” (Mohsin n.p.). Haroon, like most Pakistanis, realized that “The Taliban have hijacked the religion...and use it for their own agenda” (Mohsin n.p.). As a celebrity, he felt duty-bound to address such social problems “staring you in the face constantly” (ibid).

Burka Avenger presents the story of a female teacher Jiya, who teaches in an elementary school in fictitious town of Halwapur in Pakistan. She is loved by her students: Ashu, Immu, and Mooli who also appear in every episode adding humor and fun to the adventurous series. As far as the plot is concerned, it follows a simple formula to be put in the English proverb: whoever digs a pit for others will fall into it. The villains of this imagined world are Baba Bandook, a symbol of extremism and Talibanization with a craze for weapons and destructive gadgets; his henchmen Munna, Khamba, Limoo, Tinda, and a killing Robot; and Vadero Pajero, a symbol of a corrupt feudal lord and a politician detached from the common people and a supporter of the extremists. Baba Bandook, his henchmen, and Vadero Pajero work out some evil plan to terrorize people to remain in power, while they are observed or overheard by Ashu, Mooli, and Immu who call *Burka Avenger* using a device connected with the latter’s wristwatch, and thus, *Burka Avenger* intervenes to fight the evil and to restore peace. This way *Burka Avenger* by fighting against Talibanization constructs itself against Western misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims and challenges the latter’s conflation of Islam with extremism and terrorism. It brings

focus on Pakistanis as the victims of terrorism and extremism and humanizes them by foregrounding their problems in the context of the War on Terror.

The series, with four seasons consisting of fifty-two episodes, addressing different issues such as education, extremism, terrorism, discrimination, child labor, vaccination, pollution, and sectarian violence, has enjoyed great popularity in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. The series aims to educate with “social messages” in all episodes by entertaining its audience (Mohsin n.p.). All these social messages are conveyed in a fun way blending humor, adventure, and music. The show has several amusing theme songs like “Don’t mess with the lady in the black” and “Baba Bandook”, to suit the subjects being addressed in the show, produced by famous Pakistani pop stars such as Ali Zafar, Ali Azamat, Haroon, the rapper Adil Omar, and Josh (a pop group).

The first episode, with the moral lesson, “If you want to be successful, make books and pens your friends” (20:10), presents the issue of rising extremism (Talibanization) in Pakistan. The Taliban are bombing and closing the schools. Ashu, Immu, and Mooli are presented as greatly disturbed to find out that the girls’ school is getting closed by an evil alliance between Baba Bandook and Vadero Pajero, both equally corrupt and misogynist characters. For example, Baba Bandook states: “What business do women have with education? They should stay at home, washing, scrubbing, and cleaning, toiling in the kitchen” (8:41-8:53). Similarly, Vadero Pajero endorses such ideas: “Whether they study or not they are going to make rotis in the kitchen” (9:00). The episode exposes the corruption of both the extremists and the corrupt politicians who embezzle the funds for schools to be used for their personal interests. Ashu gives voice to the helplessness of thousands of girls in the Northwestern Frontier Province and FATA whose schools were destroyed by the Taliban:

How can you shut down the school? We need education. It is our right. You

cannot take away this right from us. We are the future of this country. The girls of today are the mothers of tomorrow. Let us shape our own future. What will you get out [of] ruining our lives? ...If mothers are not educated then future generation will also be illiterate. Don't push us to the darkness of illiteracy.

(11:58-12:25)

Burka Avenger, using her superpowers of *Takht Kabbadi* and abilities to fly and glide, fights Baba Bandoon and his henchmen with books and pens in a thrilling action scene (15:30-17:00). The school reopens and the students celebrate with a music-concert of Haroon in their school who congratulates them for fighting the extremists (17:22). The children and other people enjoy the concert, and the episode ends with the message: "Don't ever let anyone stop you from gaining education. Whether you are a girl or boy, education is your right" (20:01).

There are striking similarities between the stance and struggle of the Burka Avenger and those of Malala Yusafzai, though Haroon conceived the series in 2010, and Malala was shot in 2012. CNN, in its news report "Viva Malala" (2013), compares Burka Avenger with Malala considering the former to be "another ally, another super girl" (0:10), with a burka "not as a sign of oppression but as a ninja-style costume to keep her identity secret" (0:23-0:30). The similarities between the two became noteworthy because the series was aired in 2013 when Malala had already emerged as a global figure. Both Malala and Burka Avenger highlight the importance of education for a country where "the female literacy rate ... stands at 47%, compared to 70% for men" (Bakshi n.p.). Malala also raised her voice for the girls' right to education and, in 2015, she started her "campaign #BooksNotBullets" (ibid), and Burka Avenger also aims to empower the youth with "books and education rather than guns and weapons" (ibid). While Malala addresses governments and world leaders to "to spend more on funding education than on funding

the military”, *Burka Avenger* motivates students and teachers to stand for the cause of education and to fight against the extremists with pen (ibid).

Miranda Brar, in her paper “The Nation and its Burka Avenger, the ‘Other’ and its Malala Yusafzai,” asserts that the way Western media portrays Malala needs critical scrutiny, as she observes that “Malala has been caricatured as the conflated image of Mariam Cooke’s ‘Muslimwoman,’ [sic] derived from westernist [sic] conceptions of the ‘Third World Woman’” (3). Brar describes “Muslimwoman” as “a faceless figure, simultaneously desexualized, dehumanized and glorified in the role of representing her community...[who] is defined by her transmission of either the patriarchy of western modernity or that of traditionalist Islam, becoming a damsel in distress who needs rescuing and protection” (2).

Such projection of Malala as “a western version of this Muslimwoman archetype” (4) sends the wrong message by conflating all Muslims with the Taliban and “reinforces a certain narrative justification of US hegemony from within the Islamic world” (3) by justifying “the perceived villainization of Islam” (4). Brar asserts that *Burka Avenger* challenges the perception of “Muslimwoman archetype” by presenting a superhero who “negotiate[s] with patriarchy and achieve[s] greater feminist agency” (5). She views this show as an attempt to construct a national identity as “both non-western and non-extremist /Afghani” (6). Though Brar acknowledges that Haroon does not use the burka “as a religious symbol, but merely a costume”, she contends that the show “represents the desired balance of Islamic tradition and the self-conscious need to modernize the nation” (5).

Apart from the cause of education, *Burka Avenger* also addresses the issues of vaccination and child labour. In the post-9/11 War on Terror context, the Taliban not only attacked civilians, students, and teachers but also the polio vaccination teams due to their anti-

vaccination stance. Many polio workers were attacked, tortured, or killed by the Taliban, even though around 5500 policemen were deployed to protect the polio workers (Yusufzai n.p.). Ashfaq Yusufzai reports that in the year 2014 alone, “in southwest Peshawar, 13 people were killed in a roadside attack on a vaccination team, including 12 guards and a child”, and in another attack, “two Pakistani polio vaccination teams of six apiece were abducted” (n.p.). The result was a surge in the number of polio cases in Pakistan. According to a report (2019): “In 2012, 58 cases were reported while in 2013 the number increased to 93. In 2014, 307 cases were reported, which is the highest number of polio cases in the country in recent years. In 2015, 54 cases were reported, 20 in 2016, 8 in 2017, 12 in 2018, and 8 so far in 2019” (Ahmad et al 1444). Because of the attacks on the polio teams, the vaccination rate dropped significantly low and “the incidence of polio was 73% greater in areas during high insecurity periods compared with secure periods” (ibid).

The episode “Burka Avenger Fights Polio” presents the confrontation between the polio worker and the villains: Baba Bandook and Vadero Pajero. The episode pays a tribute to the frontline workers by reiterating the importance of polio vaccination for children to guarantee a healthy future. The polio worker, Mr. Sheikh, who lost one leg to polio in his childhood, now lives with a mission to eradicate polio from the country (3:19). He entrusts the vaccination box to Vadero Pajero, who with his negligence, lets it be stolen by Baba Bandook and his henchmen: Munna, Khamba, Tinda, and an evil killing-robot. Baba Bandook kidnaps Mr. Sheikh and hides the vaccination box on a clock-tower. He plans to sell these expensive vaccines to “make a brand-new Doomsday machine”, since his business is death and destruction (8:44). Meanwhile, Mooli and his goat Golu climb up the clock tower to play there. They are spotted by Baba Bandook and his henchmen. Baba Bandook commands his robot to destroy them (13:50). Ashu

hears Mooli's screams and calls the Burka Avenger. There enters the Burka Avenger to save not only Mooli and Golu but also the vaccination box for the children of Halwapur. Through a spectacular action scene, Burka Avenger outwits her enemies, successfully flies through the sky, and glides down the tower (15:18-17:12). The episode ends with the message of the importance of getting vaccinated: "Polio is an incurable disease... Two drops of the polio vaccine can protect children from a lifelong disability" (19:51-20:09).

Another episode targets the issue of child labour which is closely associated with a high poverty level as well as the shutting down of schools by the Taliban. According to a report by *The Blog* (2019): "About 11 million children in Pakistan perform domestic tasks and work in agriculture. Other children work alongside their families as bonded laborers in the brick industry. The use of this type of forced child labour in Pakistan happens in the brick, carpet and coal industries" (n.p.). In the carpet industry, more than ninety percent of the workforce consists of children (n.p.). Though Pakistan introduced the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act in 1992, bonded labor is still in practice, especially in the rural areas run by feudal lords (n.p.). Such "hazardous" labour takes a toll on children's mental and physical development, and many suffer from health issues due to lack of food and rest: "Children working in carpet factories sometimes work up to 20 hours a day, seven days a week, and often sleep and eat at their place of work" (n.p.). Their work keeps them out of school, and consequently, "a lack of education contributes to the prevalence of poverty, which could otherwise help them change their socioeconomic standing" (n.p.).

The episode "Burka Avenger Fights Child Labour" presents, once more, an alliance between the corrupt feudal politicians and the Taliban in capitalizing on cheap child labour to run their businesses by keeping them out of schools. They hope to easily control and manipulate

people for their vested interests by putting an end to education and keeping them poor. Baba Bandook plans to achieve two goals by shutting down the schools: “I will put the children into the labour market to get the cheap labour” (“Burka Avenger Fights Child Labour” 4:17), and again he claims: “Baba Bandook will rule the whole city by depriving them of education” (4:35). Lisa Di Nuzzo, in *The Blog’s* report, cites UNICEF: “Pakistan has the world’s second-highest number of children who do not attend school. Only 60.6 percent of children in Sindh Province between the ages of 5 to 14 attend school with 11.6 percent combining work and school” (n.p.).

Baba Bandook’s henchmen tempt the young children to have a happy life free from homework in “Hallagulla Land”: a sewing factory, which later turns out to be a camp where the children are pushed into forced labour. The trapped children have no choice, as they remain under the watchful eyes of Baba Bandook’s henchmen carrying weapons to shoot them (11:27) in case they do not meet the order of “500 suits before 5 pm” (12:55). This way the episode offers a critique of capitalism, embodied in the Fordism⁴³ in a factory environment, forcing children to provide next to free labour to meet the demands of the market. The children are shown sweating and toiling hard in hapless conditions. As soon as the children try to escape through a window, they are attacked by Baba Bandook’s henchmen with guns. Right then appears the Burka Avenger, at the call of Ashu and Immu to rescue the children by shooting the villain with books and pens (18:10-18:50). The episode ends with the message of educating all children: “Childhood should be devoted to getting education and not spent in labour. Only good education can promise a bright future” (19:24-19:32). Thus, every time Burka Avenger promotes education to fight against the violent forces operating in the society.

⁴³ Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Fordism as: “a technological system that seeks to increase production efficiency primarily through carefully engineered breakdown and interlocking of production operations and that depends for its success on mass production by assembly-line methods”. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Fordism>

Burka Avenger also highlights another issue in the context of the post- 9/11 War on Terror: the Taliban’s anti-music campaign. The Taliban attacked music and film shops and concerts considering them to be anti-Islamic practices. For example, on 4th May 2007, “Suspected pro-Taliban militants in northwestern Pakistan attacked music shops with explosive devices early on Friday, destroying at least five outlets” (Reuters n.p.). Such attacks were also carried out in Islamabad, Peshawar, Charsadda, and Swabi. Many businessmen and shopkeepers dealing in music received threats from the militants as part of the Taliban’s campaign against music. A report on attacks on music shops from 2000-2011, by Pakistan Press Foundation, states that “Militants issued life threats and imposed bans on more than 13 musicians and musical bands; while over 580 shops were destroyed/ damaged in different attacks during last ten years” (n.p.). Many singers and musicians faced internal displacement or had to move abroad. The report records horrific details of many bomb attacks and shootings of innocent people. Some singers were brutally murdered; for example, “On January 30, 2011, the bullet-riddled body of a famous Balochi and Birahvi folk singer Ali Jan Issazai was found in Kanak, Khuzdar district” (n.p.), and “Ms. Shabana, one of Pakistan’s celebrated dancers, was shot dead in Mingora on 2 January 2009 after defying the Taliban’s ban on music and dance” (n.p.). In 2016, the Taliban attacked and killed a popular Pakistani singer Amjad Sabri, famous for his *qawwalis*⁴⁴, in Karachi in the Holy month of Ramadan (Tsioulcas n.p.). Music is an important part of Pakistani culture, and attacks on music shops as well as educational institutions threaten the values dear to common Pakistanis. In a Reuters report (2007), it is noted that “Progressive Pakistanis have become increasingly shocked by the boldness with which religious radicals are now spreading

⁴⁴ “In South Asia, qawwali [with a 700-year history] is also one of the most popular and relatable expressions of Islam and of Sufism — the hugely diverse, mystical branch of Islam that emphasizes having a personal connection to God, as well as embracing tolerance, peace and equality” (Tsioulcas n.p.).

their Taliban-style values in society” (n.p.). Musical programs offer a popular form of entertainment in Pakistani events and ceremonies.

The episode “Burka Avenger & the Peace Concert” presents the evil alliance between Baba Bandook, his henchmen, and Vadero Pajero to stop the musical concert by Pakistani famous pop group Josh and rockstar Haroon. This concert is organized in Halwapur to raise funds for the girls’ school. Teacher Jiya encourages her students to post the concert advertisements on the city walls to sell the concert tickets. To stop the concert, Baba Bandook commands his henchmen to tear off the posters and deploys his machinery: a rocket and a balloon, to stop the concert. His killing robot follows the children scaring them away, while he does the plotting with Vadero Pajero (5:40-7:00). He kidnaps the pop singers and traps them in a balloon (8:45), while Tinda, on a rocket, sets sail to confront Burka Avenger while the latter tries to save the pop singers. Baba Bandook launches his new gadget, a mechanical bird to destroy the balloon carrying the singers, but Burka Avenger, with her excellent agility and the art of *Takht Kabbadi*, manages to destroy both machines. This way the lady in the black saves the three men in distress. The concert is held in the school, where children, men, and women including Jiya (without burka) are presented rejoicing and dancing to the music. The episode, as usual, ends with a message by the Burka Avenger: “Music is a universal language across regions and cultures. It brings us together with a message of love and peace. No society can progress without nurturing its art and culture” (19:00). Talibanization is projected as a threat to Pakistan’s national and cultural identity, and this episode draws a line between Taliban’s rigid approach to music and local people’s love for music as an important part of Pakistani culture.

The show also deals with other issues of global significance such as air pollution, deforestation, and of local significance such as electricity shortage, election rigging, and match-

fixing, even though the central theme remains female empowerment with Burka Avenger in the lead both as a teacher and as a superhero. Therefore, Haroon, in an interview with the *Washington Post* (2013), says: “The Burka Avenger’ is all about women’s empowerment” (n.p.). However, as a show produced for youth, it has its limitations: one being its didacticism, as every show gives a moral lesson. This didactic element is in keeping with several Pakistani sf writers’ general aim of educating people through their works. For example, besides Haroon, Usman Malik, and Mazhar Arafat also aim at spreading awareness in society.

Historically, both dictators and political leaders have used extremist organizations to exercise control over masses and to resolve internal and external rifts, as Maryam Azam argues in her paper (6). As a children’s show, Burka Avenger treats these serious issues in a humorous way offering a balanced mixture of fun and adventure besides teaching good morals to its audience. The show has stock characters, mostly children, but the superhero’s fight against the alliance between the corrupt ruling elites and the extremists, embodied in Vadero Pajero and Baba Bandook, makes it an allegory of the contemporary Pakistan, where common people face the consequences of an unholy alliance between politicians and extremist organizations. Also, every episode makes us laugh at the narrow-mindedness of the religious extremists and the greed of the corrupt politicians and their henchmen.

This is the power of sf as a genre to create an elsewhere which is as strange as familiar in engaging its readers in critical reflection of the issues facing society, community, and even humanity. Though both *Burka Avenger* and *Burraq* target youth and children with stock characters in Manichean worlds and have limited universalist appeal due to their didacticism and parochialism, they draw attention to an important problem in the global context: Islamophobia and misrepresentation of Muslims. These texts, despite all their shortcomings, successfully build

imaginary worlds to ask pertinent questions about contemporary issues. Thomas Moylan, writing about sf in a different context, has rightly observed:

Such world-building is both the deepest pleasure of reading sf and the source of its most powerfully subversive potential, for if a reader can manage to see the world differently (in that Brechtian sense of overcoming alienation by becoming critically estranged and engaged), she or he might just...do something to alter it... so as to make that world a more just and congenial place for all who live in it. (6)

Conclusion: Chathopadhyay rightly observes the protentional of genre fiction in subverting the dominant narratives as “its popularity itself that can make genre fiction a fecund site for articulation of mass resistance and disillusionment with the status quo” (7). This is evident in our discussion of the two sf comic superheroes from Pakistan. Pakistani sf, like Pakistani English fiction, tries to resolve the post-9/11 identity crisis by not only challenging the stereotypical and negative representation of Muslims in the Western media; but also, it tries to present some alternative Muslim superheroes to highlight the glocal issues facing Pakistanis both in the local and diasporic contexts. While *Burraq* reflects on the identity crisis faced by Muslim immigrants in the post-9/11 context and tries to deconstruct the stereotypical representation of Muslims in media by presenting a superhero who is also a good Muslim, *Burka Avenger* brings forth the problems generated by the post-9/11 War on Terror and religious extremism on Pakistan. Both *Burraq* and *Burka Avenger* use a glocal approach by addressing the global problem of terrorism and its effects on Muslims, who in the dominant narratives are scapegoated and portrayed as perpetrators and not as victims of violence and terrorism.

Chapter 5: Dystopia: Futuristic and Other Visions in Pakistani Science Fiction

This chapter discusses the futuristic visions and some other themes, mainly dystopic, presented in Pakistani sf during contemporary socially and politically disturbing times. While the Western and Indian sf traditions offer several examples of both utopias and dystopias, in Pakistani sf, we do not find any example of utopia, and the works mostly depict a bleak future. In Pakistani futuristic visions, capitalist, political, and industrial structures emerge to grow fascist in their manipulation of Pakistanis, especially religious and gendered others by restricting their freedom of expression and action, thus leaving little room for individual fulfilment and intellectual growth. The chapter has two parts. The first part discusses the feminist dystopia *Before She Sleeps* (2018) by Bina Shah and the political dystopia *Shehr e Tabassum (A City of Smiles)* (2020) by Arafat Mazhar, while the second part discusses selected sf stories by Usman T. Malik to examine different problems faced by Pakistan. The approach of these works is also global, as they reflect awareness of the global context while addressing local issues.

Defining Dystopia

David Seed observes that utopia has its roots in “eu-topia’ (good place) or ‘ou-topia’ (no place)” starting the generic journey with Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) (73). Seed, by citing Darko Suvin, justifies the inclusion of utopia as a subgenre of sf, which the latter defined as a “historically alternative wishful construct” (emphasis in original Seed 73). The general formula of a utopia follows the depiction of an unfamiliar world removed by space and time following unfamiliar social customs and political systems “conflicting with the reader’s presumption of normality” (73). Seed asserts that utopia enjoyed its golden age during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (before WWI), when “over 200 utopias were published” in the West (75). He posits that the factors contributing to the surge in utopia production include “the rapid

pace of technological change, the concentration in the USA of capital in a small number of private hands, and an intensifying debate about social justice” (75). He gives examples of works such as Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon* (1872), James De Mille’s *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (1888), Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888), William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1892), and H. G. Wells’s *A Modern Utopia* (1905), though one may argue that Butler’s and De Mille’s works are more satirical than utopian in nature.

The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction defines utopia as a text depicting “a place, a state, location, or condition which is perfect or ideal with regard to politics, economy, social structure, etc”. On the contrary, it defines dystopia as “an imagined society or state of affairs in which conditions are extremely bad, especially in which these conditions result from the continuation of some current trend to an extreme”. In the context of the two World Wars, utopias were mainly replaced with dystopias, “a term suggesting a mis-functioning utopia”, sometimes with “a satirical dimension” (Seed 74). After the 1930s, several dystopias were published depicting the world withering under totalitarian regimes “which exploited the demand for orthodoxy to erase individuality” (81). Seed discusses examples of works such as James O’Neil’s *Land Under England* (1935), Katherine Burdekin’s *Swastika Night* (1937), Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1951), and George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).

On the other hand, Graham J. Murphy considers dystopia to be “a negative utopia” and “an inversion” constructed to critique the present socio-political structure by exaggerating its shortcomings (473). Citing Moylan, Murphy asserts that a dystopia aims “not to undermine Utopia but rather to make room for its reconsideration and refunctioning in even the worst of times” (Moylan qtd. in Murphy 473). Unlike Seed, he can record the simultaneous growth of

dystopia with utopia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by citing examples of works like Jules Verne's *The Begum's Millions* (1879), Walter Besant's *The Revolt of Man* (1882) and *The Inner House* (1888), H.G. Wells's "A Story of Days to Come" (1897) and *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), and E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" (1909).

Moreover, Murphy, citing Moylan, observes the emergence of critical dystopia which tends to "explore ways to change the present system so that . . . culturally and economically marginalized peoples not only survive but also try to move toward creating a social reality that is shaped by an impulse to human self-determination and ecological health..." (qtd. in Murphy 475). He cites examples of works such as Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Gold Coast* (1988), Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It* (1991), Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Telling* (2000). Both Seed and Murphy observe that dystopia continues to flourish in the late twentieth century and in the new millennium in their discussion of works by Philip K. Dick, Ray Bradbury, Anthony Burgess, and J. G. Ballard.

Furthermore, Thomas Moylan appreciates the potential of sf in creating "cognitively substantial yet estranged alternative worlds" (5) where the characters "are posing similar questions to the entire social reality: asking historically as well as individually where in the world they are, what in the world is going on, and what in the world they can do about it" (4). Besides, he also identifies another dystopian tendency: "anti-utopian" fiction which "has steadily attacked and refused Utopia and all that its authors claim for it" (122). He surveys various scholarly works to negotiate the distinction between utopia, dystopia, and anti-utopia. For example, Lyman Tower Sargent considers utopia those texts that present "a good place", and dystopia, by contrast, those texts that depict a "bad place", while anti-utopian works "are

directed against Utopia and utopian thought” (127). While utopian-dystopian texts differ in the depiction of desired and despised worlds, anti-utopia offers “a type of skeptical imagining that is opposed to the consistencies of utopia-dystopia” (128) and which challenges “the very articles of faith on which utopias themselves are built” (129). Citing Kumar, Moylan posits that “both conservative and liberal anti-utopian tendencies manage to attack Utopia” (130), though mostly it targets “communism and socialism” (132).

Dystopias, on the other hand, do not “temperamentally refuse the possibility of radical social transformation; rather, they look quizzically, skeptically, and critically not only at the present society but also at the means needed to transform it” (134). In his chapter on “Critical Dystopia”, Moylan highlights the increase in dystopian tendency in the 1980s and 1990s, when social and political conditions became dystopian with “the triumph of transnational capital and right-wing ideology” (184) contrary to the utopian claims made by President Ronald Reagan and President George Bush (183). He observes that works by Margret Atwood and Sheri Tepper contain a combination of “utopian and dystopian elements”, and drawing on the insights of Tower Sargent, he decides to use the term “critical dystopias” (188). Critical dystopias avoid the pessimism of dystopias, borrow from other genres, and usually depict resistance by the marginalized factions. They have mostly “open endings” to avoid “anti-utopian closure” (Raffaella Baccolini qtd. in 189). Critical dystopias, he adds, serve as a forum for not just feminist “but also anti-capitalist, democratically socialist, and radically ecological... stance” (190). Pakistani sf works mostly fall into the category of critical dystopias, as the parameters defined above can be easily identified in the selected Pakistani sf works under discussion.

In the Indian sf context, Suparno Banerjee observes that Indian sf has more examples of dystopia as compared to utopian texts. He considers some values in Moylan’s argument such as

“alliance politics’ and the tendency not only to ‘critique’ but to ‘transform’” applicable to Indian dystopic texts (*Indian SF* 139). He discusses examples of Indian works such as Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Harvest* (1997), Rimi B. Chatterjee’s *Signal Red* (2005), and Priya Sarukkai Chabria’s *Generation 14* (2008) which imagine Indian dystopic futures by employing earlier-mentioned devices. He also notes that in most dystopic texts “Indian geographical and cultural space is at the centre of attention” (ibid), and other dystopic texts also have some oblique relation with India or Asia (140) and thus involve an inward-looking process. This aspect of inward-looking trend is also visible in Pakistani futuristic visions, where most works focus on local problems in the local settings by clearly identifying the geographical space or making some connection with Pakistan or South Asia. Moreover, Pakistani sf, though much smaller in corpus than Indian sf, lacks utopias, and offers only dystopic visions, as I discuss in the next section.

Pakistani Dystopic Visions

In Pakistani sf, we hardly find any utopian vision; rather, dystopian tendencies dominate the literary texts corresponding to the political conditions in Pakistan. For example, Usman Malik in a talk show on *MM Talks* (2022) links this approach with the dystopic socio-political conditions of Pakistan: “Pakistan is a very dystopian country you know... when you are in Pakistan you don’t need to write dystopias. You are already living in dystopian reality. You have been living in it for a long, long time” (6:52). Malik’s observation about the everyday dystopic reality in Pakistan is reflected in Pakistani sf works that attempt to imagine its past, present, and future. While some present and futuristic visions in Pakistani sf are devoid of any hope, others hold some hope of escape or change through resistance and opposition. Keeping in view Moylan’s critical insights, this part will discuss the critical feminist dystopia *Before She Sleeps* (2018) by Bina Shah and critical dystopia *Shehr-e-Tabassum* (2020) by Mazhar Arafat.

1: *Before She Sleeps* (2018) by Bina Shah: A Tale of Resistance to the Oppressive Patriarchy

Bina Shah is a women's rights activist based in Karachi. She has produced well-acclaimed works such as *Where They Dream in Blue* (2001), *Slum Child* (2010), *A Season for Martyrs* (2014), and the short story collections *Blessings* (2008) and *Animal Medicine* (2000)⁴⁵. Moreover, she writes articles for the *Dawn*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Huffington Post*, and *Al Jazeera* (Shah "How I Came" n.p.). She has won several awards such as the *Agahi Award* for journalism in Pakistan (2013 and 2014), and Western Pennsylvania Press Club's the *Golden Quill Award* for the Best Blog (2014) (ibid).

Before She Sleeps (2018) is her only sf work so far, and she soon hopes to write its sequel. This novel is based on a story she read out in Copenhagen, and she was strongly encouraged "to turn [it] into a novel" (Shah *Before* 186). Among other inspirations were Claire Chambers and Susan Watkins who not only gave her constant feedback but also informed her about "the vast field of dystopian feminist fiction" (ibid). Further, she took inspiration from Aldous Huxley's treatment of reproductive technology to create a dystopic world (Shah "How I Came" n.p.). She also got inspired by George Orwell and Margret Atwood. The totalitarian and authoritarian regimes portrayed by these writers were not unfamiliar to her living in Pakistan facing "the deadly combination of dictatorship and patriarchy" (Shah "How I Came" n.p.). However, she considers her text to be very different from *The Handmaid's Tale*, as she believes that "no North American novel could relay the insecurities of a young girl or woman in the cultural wasteland of Zia's Pakistan" (ibid). *Before She Sleeps* got published in the United

⁴⁵ Details of her works and blogs etc can be found at her website <https://thefeministani.wordpress.com>

States, Germany, Turkey, India, and Pakistan besides getting translated into Turkish and German languages (Shah “in Conversation with Ayesha Mian” 3:05).

Moylan, citing Sargent, observes that in a critical dystopia, a writer depicts a society that is “worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia” (qtd. in 195). This definition is relevant to our discussion of *Before She Sleeps*, as it not only warns the readers but also gives hope. It creates a bleak world but not without the possibility of resistance and opposition to the oppressive patriarchy. A few women in this dystopic world succeed in creating an underworld enclave to exercise free will and self-determination despite some restrictions.

Bina Shah in her interview with Rachel Fogle De Souza says that this novel is an artistic expression of the “outrage and anger” at “the excesses committed on women because of a combination of religion, society and culture” (n.p.). She also affirms that the readers in the West might not “find the characters empowered enough, or independent enough, but this is what the world looks like to many women” in South Asian context (n.p.). There are other kinds of feminism and the resistance in this novel might not seem too revolutionary. She wants to make it clear that in a society where women are not free to choose their spouses, “even falling in love with a person of your choice is feminist” (n.p.). So, in the novel, the very act to defy the rules of the patriarchal world and to choose the *Panah* demand the exercise of individual agency which underpins the feminist debates in the glocal context. She clarifies that “We don’t smash the patriarchy here [in Pakistan]” (Shah “in Conversation” 24:16). In Pakistan, women find indirect ways to exercise their agency instead of directly confronting patriarchy: “When you are just trying to survive, you will bargain with patriarchy, you will negotiate with it, you will work with it to get what you want” (25:01). She affirms that Western readers might find this resistance to be

meeq, but she has portrayed this keeping in view Pakistani feminism. Shah notes that she has written this novel as “a paean to women’s resourcefulness, the importance of male allies and friends, and faith that we can redress the imbalances of our societies” (Shah “In Conversation” n.p.).

The novel presents a dark futuristic society after the year 2070, plagued with a disease as well as with patriarchal institutions that control all political and technological structures of the society. It presents an imagined world with an ironic name of Green City, the capital of “the Sub-West Asia Region” (27) built on the ruins caused by three waves of disasters: a drastic climate change, a nuclear holocaust that destroyed both India and Pakistan affecting the entire Southwest Asian region, and a large-scale death of women in a plague caused by a mutated virus exclusively hitting the female population with a kind of cervical cancer (94-95). Men are the asymptomatic carriers of the virus and transmit it to the women who, once infected, eventually die a painful death (140). These long-term disasters have changed the world map by eliminating the borders among countries and instead, new international entities have emerged forming regions, “trading corridors and economic zones” (28).

Chambers and Freya Lowden compare the novel with *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) in its exploration of “regulated reproduction mandates, which reduce women to objects in systems of capitalist exchange” (2). Though the virus-infected dystopian world foregrounds patriarchal control, misogyny, and authoritarianism, it also leads the marginalized to rebellion, and encourages the readers to “question the status quo” (3). At the same time, as they posit, Shah’s writing itself becomes a “form of resistance to pervasive social constraints, shown by the clandestine revolt of the women in her novel who refuse to marry or have children” (3).

Vineetha Mokkil also compares the novel with *The Handmaid's Tale* in its retelling of women's fate in an authoritarian regime, from a non-Western perspective, illustrating "how easily women's rights and bodily autonomy can be snatched away even in supposedly liberal set-ups" (n.p.). The novel offers a cautionary tale about the marginalization of women in a technologically controlled authoritarian world that manipulates their sexual and reproductive rights in a "state-of-the-art city where patriarchy harnesses the full force of technology to enslave women" (n.p.). It is interesting to note that the book also got international attention because of Atwood's blurb for it on twitter⁴⁶, appreciating Shah for writing from the East (Shah "in Conversation with Ayesha Mian" 26:35).

Shah, talking about the nuclear holocaust as the backdrop of her novel, reiterates her political stance as a writer against violence of all kinds and wars in all parts of the world including the "invasion of Ukraine unequivocally ... the invasion of Iraq, of Afghanistan, of military action in Syria and Kashmir, and the situation in Palestine" (Shah "in Conversation with Ayesha Mian" 4:40). She wants to draw attention to the fact that it is not only men who usually get killed in wars, but "it is women also who go through so much violence, so much displacement, and so much disruption because of war" (6:20). Further, she argues that women across the globe live their lives under a threat (though in different degrees) of being violated: "There is always a war enacted on women... on their bodies by the perpetual state of potential violence..." (13:11). She notes that the governments, instead of creating the just and safe societies, keep perpetuating the fixed gender roles leading to "a completely skewed society" (13:55).

⁴⁶ "Female-centered #Dystopia from #Pakistan: *Before She Sleeps*, Bina Shah. Fascinating new angle on 'emotional work'!" — Margaret Atwood on Twitter <https://www.penguinbookshop.com/book/9781883285807>

With human and natural disasters in the background, the Green City's government is run by a totalitarian Perpetuation Bureau intent on increasing the female population by providing monetary incentives for reproduction but not without a cost to women's life. As the population of women is disproportionate to that of men, women are forced to take more than one husband and bear their children. Fertility is an asset, and female children a highly desirable reward: "With each new baby, a new hope for Green City and South West Asia is born" (Shah *Before* 103). Female bodies are constantly under surveillance and their sexuality is regulated without their consent. A refusal to abide by the Bureau's policies is considered a revolt leading to "a swift trial, and elimination" (28). The women must take husbands, selected through strict medical screening, as advised by the Perpetuation Bureau, and they must get married at a very young age to produce children.

The Leaders (men) have carefully built this technologically advanced world where automatic vehicles run on the roads, people have codes besides names, and their data is saved to monitor their health record, sex life, and every movement. In this totalitarian regime, some women commit suicide, others submit to their fate, while some secretly co-ordinate to establish an underworld: the *Panah* (a Persian word which means refuge) for young girls who have dreams other than getting married and having children. The story revolves around the events that take place in the lives of these women before and after they come to the *Panah* thus contributing to the underlying feminist stance of the text. The *Panah* offers them a space to exercise their will to choose for themselves. Thus, they can choose their male clients wisely: "men placed highly enough to protect us and keep our activities hidden from the Agency or the Bureau" (48).

Nonetheless, the *Panah*, a feminist space, owes as much to the powerful men's generosity as to the women who dared to create it. The men in important positions in the Perpetuation

Bureau, who regularize women's sexuality for the benefit of Green City and create hard laws, become patrons of this space of resistance to bless their nights with Platonic affairs with these ladies. Even the *Panah* has its own rules of containing female sexuality by repressing it, thus pushing some women like Rupa to resist a different kind of oppression in this isolated world. While the patriarchal world forces them to have sex and produce children, the feminist space provided by the *Panah* denies both kinds of carnal pleasures permitting only "chaste kisses" and partnership for nights "that were not marked by sex, but rather to share sleep, a type of contact and comfort that had become impossible decades ago" (119). Moreover, in this world too, some twist the rules to enjoy conjugal bliss which they deny to others. For example, Lin exempts herself from the strict discipline of 'no sex rule' imposed on others living in the *Panah*. Thus, the freedom from the oppression of the patriarchal world does not offer a utopian world to these refugees.

The story is told from multiple perspectives, mostly by four women from the *Panah*; Lin, Sabine, Ilona, and Rupa; and, occasionally by men who are either their clients or lovers or both. Sonia Sahoo in her review contends: "Their individual backstories and separate life trajectories intersect at crucial moments to underscore the pain and the misery that are common to the lot of women living in Green City, past and present" (n.p.). Their diverse perspectives highlight the problems not only in the patriarchal world on the ground where women are subjected to polyandry but also with the women of the *Panah* underground whose fragile freedom rests on their compromises with the men in power. Sahoo rightly observes that the women of the *Panah* "are equally captive, objects of male desire, sexually vulnerable and without much agency to exercise a choice once they have joined the *Panah*" (n.p.).

Moylan, citing Samuel R. Delany, considers the setting in a sf text to be of pivotal importance: “for before a story can be followed or a character understood, the fictive world itself must be indulged in, grasped, learned, and detailed in readers' own minds so that the matters of plot or character can literally make sense” (5-6). The futuristic Green City, in which the story is set, has hardly anything green in it. Instead, it is often invaded by sandstorms that engulf everything in them and immobilize the traffic and threaten human life with suffocation. The city is marked by sky-scrappers, advanced technology, and the absence of nature (flora and fauna) with a “noir atmosphere” inspired by Chilly Gonzale’s song “Gentle Threat” (Shah *Before* 186). The city is marked by a lack of nature and prevalence of the industrial and technological landscape. People eat cultured eggs and meat: “All beef, eggs, in fact anything natural, is created in a lab with synthetic polymers, proteins, DNA” (66).

In addition, Green City with its Gender Emergency becomes “a police state” (28). The citizens cannot leave the city, and migration to another place is against the law. After completing high school, boys go to colleges and universities, while women are sent to the Markaz: “a weird mix of finishing school, indoctrination camp, and fairy castle” with training in “Household Technology, Health, and Reproductive Sciences” to raise them as good and subservient wives (22). Professional degrees are reserved for only the men of Green City. This situation is not very different from the reality of Pakistani society, where women face discrimination in the field of education and have limited access to higher education as compared to their male counterparts. Madiha Bhatti, in her dissertation *Pakistani Women, Higher Education & Marriage* (2013), observes that only “15.58% of the women are educated until secondary level (before grade 12) and a mere 4.7% percent enrolled in colleges and university” (85).

Furthermore, Green City not only limits the educational and professional opportunities for women but also confines them to live as wives and mothers. Chambers and Lowden citing Elisabetta Di Minico assert that “feminist dystopian texts often depict cities created for the use and advantage of men, so that women find themselves on the receiving end of the male gaze, robbed of any autonomy” (3). Thus, in Green City, women are pumped up with hormones “to produce children as if [they]’re cows” (Shah *Before* 102). The “Handbook for Female Citizens” clearly states that the use of contraceptives or recourse to abortion is completely prohibited with strict punishments by the Perpetuation Bureau (107). As women are not commonly accessible, three or four men must share a wife with rigidly regulated nights: “What else did they expect when they repressed the normal urges and behaviors in human beings?” (167). Since women are a rare commodity in this society, rape even of young boys is common. So, the city has arranged brothels with “prosbots”: robotic sex toys, to meet the sexual needs of young men without wives (85).

In the novel the women, though highly prized and valuable possessions, remain controlled by a patriarchal system: “women were to be valued, respected, shared, never the source of conflict between men. Men were, after all, the protectors, and guardians of Green City’s most precious resource” (Shah 126). This patronizing overprotection becomes problematic, as it curtails the autonomy and freedom of women to choose and decide for themselves. The restriction of women to the domestic sphere as wives and mothers is no different from other forms of violence, as it dehumanizes them by reducing their role to a kind of sexual and reproductive machine. The situation in Pakistani society is not very different where “the domestic sphere remains private and under the authoritative position of men” (Karmaliani, et al 821).

The cultural norms expect women to be “passive, submissive, and subservient” (ibid). Those who resist are frowned upon and face various forms of punishment justified as “deserving of punishment” (ibid). In the novel also, the women who refuse to submit to the sexual slavery of three or four husbands are either eliminated or pushed to commit suicide like Sabine’s mother and Lin do. They can enjoy all benefits and privileges as long as they comply with the assigned roles by the Perpetuation Bureau. Such women are presented as role models on the Networks regularly to reiterate the importance of compliance: “Those winsome puppets testified to the happiness and success of their blended families, how well looked after they were, how they were treated like queens by their Husbands: breathless, saccharine testimonials to the perfection of life in Green City” (Shah *Before* 127-128).

The women of the *Panah*, on the contrary, due to their non-compliance, are rendered illegal with no citizenship and no records. Therefore, Dr. Julien finds himself in serious trouble as soon as he finds that the woman (Sabine) he saved from death from pregnancy has no husband. As Sabine declares: “I’m nobody’s Wife. I’m not even supposed to be here in Green City. I’m illegal” (113). Still, the novel does not propose a genderless world or a world without men; rather, it invokes the need for a balance that can be created through relationships based on mutual respect and love. Lin, while chalking out the scheme of asexual relations with men in power, underlines the mutual need of the two sexes. If they need the patronage of these men, the latter want them for their emotional needs: “Even a man who’s achieved everything, fulfilled every ambition, won’t really be happy, feel truly at ease with himself” (43).

Shah, discussing the gender-assigned roles in the novel, reflects on the issue as a historical phenomenon that is not simply a problem of a specific religion or region with punitive systems (Shah “in Conversation with Ayesha Mian” 11:40). She notes that even scientists over a

century ago differentiated between men and women on the size of skulls, and their levels of intelligence (ibid). So, Shah claims that as a writer “all I was doing was taking that, stretching it out and amplifying it, taking it to an extreme, and trying to see how much this government can get away with?” (11:58). She admits that she is playing with political language in her critique of gender discrimination and violence against women. For example, the “Gender Emergency” is a political allusion to political emergencies such as martial laws “to take away constitutional rights and our freedom...” (12:25). She observes that some women in countries like India and Nepal are forced into polyandry even in recent times due to the decrease in women’s population caused by female infanticide over the years (28:28). She asserts that women’s elimination by a virus, domestic violence, rape, and murder or female feticide is bound to create “this kind of distortion...quite an amoral society in the end” (29:40).

The only escape possible for women in Green City from the life of “endless drudgery, washing and wiping and feeding and cleaning, spaced between unending pregnancies” (Shah *Before* 62) is to connect through the dark web with the *Panah* and then disappear in the underworld without leaving any trace of their existence. The *Panah* offers a feminist space that is run by two scientist friends Fairuza Dastani and Ilona Serfati. The shelter operates by the bond of mutual trust among its six refugees of various ages and backgrounds. F. Dastani and I. Serfati worked for the Perpetuation Bureau and applied for the permit to study the “radiation the land just outside Green City had absorbed from the nuclear explosions of the Final War” (98), to secretly establish the *Panah*. After Fairuza’s death, Ilona runs the place and trains Lin, her niece, to be the new leader after her death. The readers learn about Fairuza and Illona through Ilona’s diaries, as the story starts after Ilona’s death when Lin is the new manager of the *Panah*. It is

through Lin that Sabine and others find refuge in the *Panah* from the fearful destinies chalked out for them by the rules of the Perpetuation Bureau.

By choosing the *Panah*, the women also choose non-existence in the official records of Green City to avoid surveillance and persecution. Therefore, Sabine fears for the destruction of the *Panah*, as she ends up in a hospital impregnated without knowledge in her drug-induced sleep (183). She knows that with her discovery, her shelter would also be discovered and the haven for women will be eliminated for the collective benefit of the society, or they will be punished and re-educated to submit to the dictates of the City. Sabine is the only woman survivor from Green City to migrate to the neighbouring Semitia City in an ambulance with the generosity of two doctors: Bouthain and Julien. It is noteworthy that Sabine's character is based on Shah's friend Sabeen Mahmud⁴⁷, a feminist and a human rights activist, who was fatally shot in 2015 (Shah "in Conversation with Ayesha Mian" (30:47). Her escape in the book not only keeps Sabeen's feminist mission alive by giving hope but also leaves room for Shah to write its forthcoming sequel *The Monsoon War* (Shah "in Conversation with Ayesha Mian" 31:46).

Shah's feminist stance dominates all sections of the novel despite the constant shift in the point of view. The novel presents strong-headed women ready to give up their lives to exercise their right to freedom. For example, Lin uses her sexuality as a tool to win over the men in powerful positions to serve as patrons for the *Panah*. Reuben Faro remains mesmerized by her and breaks many laws to help her to protect the *Panah*: "He couldn't refuse her. He never could. Since they'd begun their affair, she'd ruled him, and he'd enjoyed it" (94). In the hierarchical world of Green City, the pragmatic use of Lin's sexuality guarantees protection for herself and

⁴⁷ More details about Sabeen Mahmud's murder can be found at Parshley, Lois. "The Life and Death of Sabeen Mahmud." *The New Yorker*, 28th April 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-life-and-death-of-sabeen-mahmud>

other women under her care. Though she breaks ‘the no sex rule’ set for others, she does so to ensure the safety of the *Panah*. Later, after Sabine’s hospitalization and discovery of the underground refuge, Lin refuses to surrender the *Panah* and its girls to Green City; rather, she uses the documents verifying Faro’s complicity in the project and his involvement in drugs to manipulate him to give the survivors a safe exit to live their lives (161). She prefers to end her own life by setting the *Panah* on fire to eliminate all the records and to save the girls from retribution.

In the Pakistani context, feminism means the struggle against domestic violence, child marriages, forced marriages, and gender discrimination both in personal and professional spheres and to fight for equal education and job opportunities. Chambers and Lowden note three waves of feminism in Pakistan: “the immediate post-Partition women’s movement; Zia-ul-Haq’s dictatorship countered by the Women’s Action Forum; and the present digital-activist wave” (7). Pakistan is considered one of the most dangerous countries for women and “ranks 125th out of 169 countries on the Gender Development Index and has high prevalence rates of Violence against Women (VAW)” (Karmaliani, et al 820). Violence against women takes diverse forms including physical, sexual, financial, and emotional abuse. Many factors such as poverty, lack of education, “entrenched patriarchal norms and values, and a lack of awareness of legal and other support systems” contribute to the normalization and acceptance of violence against women (ibid).

Due to “the acceptability of violence amongst both men and women,” such cases mostly go under or unreported (ibid). Even those that are highlighted by social media forums often fail to mobilize the justice system to punish the culprits and often fail to register First Incident Reports (FIRs). Consequently, the violence against women goes unpunished and the cases keep

rising over the years. For example, a report for the year 2011 by the Aurat Foundation notes that “Specifically, reported sexual assault cases increased by 49%, acid throwing by 37.5%, honor killings by 27%, and domestic violence by 26%” (qtd. in 820). Claudia Kramatschek, in her review of the novel, astutely observes that the novel’s feminist stance, though overt, does not establish explicit links with Pakistan; rather, like in the *Panah*, “The work of ‘the sleeping women’ is hidden in every sense. In countries like Pakistan, this conspiratorial approach is the best way to go about making lasting changes” (n.p.). She considers it to be a smart move on Shah’s behalf to “foment an outwardly silent revolt, from the protection of the invisibility into which women have been gradually banished” (n.p.).

Nonetheless, this feminist space does not thrive without the cooperation of the powerful men, who lead a double life as Bureau’s officials during the day implementing the law to regulate female sexuality, while at night, they break the same law to enjoy the bliss of romantic relationships denied to them in the new world. Simultaneously, their actions are not always motivated by altruistic and philanthropic impulses, as they do not fail to take advantage of the *Panah*’s women from their privileged positions. These men trespass the ‘no sex rule’ either voluntarily as in the case of Lin or without consent as in the case of Sabine who is raped and impregnated by one of her lovers. Faro, also, pushes the law so long as he can do so without risking his social position to help Lin and the women under her care. However, he does not sacrifice his public reputation and status, when the *Panah* is discovered by the authorities.

Hence, he betrays his double game to Lin:

...that was part of my job: keeping an eye on you and the Panah, in case it ever got out of hand. I had it all worked out in my mind, how to help if it all went wrong. I’d bring you all in, discreetly, cleanly, and neatly. A few months of re-education and no harm done:

you'd all be put in the system and things would go back to normal. (160)

Regardless, men are not portrayed as the truly Other in this dystopia; rather, some men serve as the facilitators of this free space. While Faro and Joseph do so for their interests and can back out to save their skin when the *Panah* gets exposed, other men like Dr. Julien and Dr. Bouthain with their assistants work selflessly to save Sabine despite the rigid surveillance system of Green City. Dr. Julien operates on Sabine to save her life with full knowledge that Green City's law does not allow abortion in any circumstances and anyone doing so will face "the full wrath of Green City's authority" (107). Similarly, Dr. Bouthain not only changes the record of the hospital but also plans to save Dr. Julien from the charges of treason for helping Sabine. Dr. Julien also agrees to give up his life in Green City and accompany Sabine to her new life in another city. They wittingly break all the rules, though "flouting the protocols was classified as rebellion, and everyone sooner or later paid for the crime" (81). Thus, Shah does not present men as enemies but as possible allies in bringing about a positive change.

An important motif in this dystopic world is the virus-induced infection exclusively killing women. Chambers and Lowden argue that *Before She Sleeps*, though written before the pandemic, "imagines apt spaces for rebellion. Both in her imaginative universe and the wider society, transformative action and liberation are identifiable in the aftermath of infection outbreaks" (1). They observe, citing from Shah's email interview, that this novel is "an exploration of misogyny as a disease" (4). Shah also told them that besides getting inspired by George Orwell and Atwood, she got inspired by Kate Mann's work *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (2018) which defines misogyny as "the control system that has developed to keep women in their place" (4). Shah says that she feels greatly perturbed by the misogyny prevalent in Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan and wonders "if men hate women so much that they want

them all to cease to exist. Then I wonder what a world without women would look like” (ibid). Such questions led her to imagine this dystopic world and to use virus as a metaphor for misogyny destroying the lives of women. Such dystopic visions about misogynistic societies are projected in Indian sf works too such as *Escape* (2008) by Manjula Padmanabhan, which depicts a bleak world in which everything female is destroyed and the movie *Matrubhumi* (2003) by Manish Jha, which depicts the issue of polyandry in the context of female infanticide.

Besides, the virus and drug serve a double purpose. The virus, “which morphed from a rare strain of HPV into a fast-spreading cervical cancer epidemic” (47), is responsible for the large-scale death of the women in Green City. However, it also becomes a source of exit not only from this world but also from the oppression of Green City. The bodies of the virus victims are immediately removed from the City to the crematorium near the border of the Semitia City “to be burned and to be forgotten” (140). Dr. Bouthain realizes that the virus could serve as “the perfect pretext” to smuggle Sabine to another city far from the persecution of Green City (140). Similarly, Faro gives a prohibited drug, used to induce sleep in those who suffer from insomnia to Lin with a caution that it should not be taken with alcohol. Lin, in good faith, administers that drug to Sabine to help her with her sleepless nights, but the latter gets raped by one of her clients and ends up in a hospital thus inadvertently leaking her links with the *Panah*. Still, the same drug is used by Dr. Bouthain to stage the viral deaths of Julien and Sabine to transport them out of Green City. Thus, the drug that ruins Sabine’s life in the first place also saves her life along with her newfound love Julien.

Chambers and Lowden observe that in the novel “sleep is a source of frustration, dissent, and even revolt for many of the female characters” (10). The women in the *Panah* work as sleep mates for the powerful and rich men in exchange for security and protection. Sleep stands for

chaste companionship in contrast to the imposed sexual relationships with multiple husbands. Moreover, sleeping is an expression of a more fulfilling desire than that of copulation and provides “greater intimacy than sex itself” (De Souza n.p.). Shah, in her interview with De Souza, quotes from the preface of Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*: “Love does not make itself felt in the desire for copulation (a desire that extends to an infinite number of women) but in the desire for shared sleep (a desire limited to one woman)” (n.p.). Thus, in the novel, Lin emphasizes capitalizing on this desire of men to run the project of the *Panah*. On another occasion, Shah considers sleep to be the dominant motif in the book closely connected with death, nighttime, and having the poetic significance reminding of Robert Frost’s line “I have miles to go before I sleep” (Shah “in Conversation” (33:37)).

In addition, sleep works as a metaphor for Sabine’s transformation into a new person, capable of choosing for herself and her transition into a different world both literally and metaphorically. It is her lack of sleep that keeps her alert about the intentions of her male clients. She does not want to be sexually and emotionally violated; hence, she moves to a couch or sofa as soon as her client goes to sleep. She also cannot sleep because her childhood trauma associated with the suicide of her mother still haunts her. She unknowingly falls prey to the well-intended plans of Lin to help her sleep and Rupa’s plot to make her sleep with the lustful Joseph to wake up into a different reality. After she sleeps, she becomes aware not only of the extent of exploitation of women in Green City but also of the genuine and kind men like Bouthain and Julien, who help her on her way out of Green City.

Furthermore, Shah argues that sex, though important in marital life, is not everything. The value of women is greater than what their bodies offer in terms of sex and reproduction: “Even when you are not having sex or having a baby with a woman, you still want a woman in

your life. What for?" (Shah "in Conversation with Ayesha Mian" 21:13). She is trying to examine the relationship between man and woman and the value of a woman when both sex and childbearing are taken "out of the equation" (21:28). By not playing the traditional roles as providers of sex and childbearing in exchange for the benefits from their patrons, these six women are participating in "a form of resistance, that in itself is a form of rebellion" (22:56).

It follows then that this critical dystopia highlights the effects of women's marginalization by imagining a technologically constructed authoritarian regime. Shah agrees with Atwood's claim that the world the latter conceived in *The Handmaid's Tale* was not simply futuristic; rather, some women in some parts of the world were already going through oppression in various forms (Shah "In Conversation" 30:01). Similarly, what Shah has imagined in this dystopic world is already happening to some women in the world, as she alludes to the cases in India and Nepal where women are pushed into polyandric relationships (28:30). Still, as a critical dystopia, the book encourages the importance of resilience and resistance and ends with a note of hope in Sabine's escape from the oppression of Green City.

2. *Shehr e Tabassum (A City of Smiles) (2020) by Arafat Mazhar.*

Lyman Tower Sargent in "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" discusses utopianism as social dreaming by including not only hopeful dreams but also nightmares:

...the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live. But not all are radical, for some people at any time dream of something basically familiar." (3)

Shehr e Tabassum (A City of Smiles) falls into the latter category of envisioning a nightmare by extrapolating on a familiar social condition: rise of extremism in Pakistan. Sargent describes

dystopia as a bad place usually conceived “with an extrapolation from the present” with a “warning” (8), and this definition helps our discussion of the selected animated film.

Shehr e Tabassum is produced as a part of his cyberkhilafat series by Arafat Mazhar, also the director of *SWIPE* (2020)⁴⁸. Mazhar asserts that cyberkhilafat examines “modern forms of Islam, technology and power combined to corrupt language and dictate political and social norms to mute individual identity” (qtd. in Kamal 24). Like *SWIPE*, *Shehr e Tabassum* presents a world enveloped in the grim atmosphere of oppression, where the smile, a symbol of hope associated with utopia, is inverted to symbolize the enforcement of authoritarian laws in a totalitarian regime, where “people have to smile to survive” (Masood n.p.). Those who resist or disobey the law are eliminated immediately, thus resistance provides no relief or escape. Manik Sharma rightly observes that “Pakistan's Puffball Studio and its founder Arafat Mazhar skewer the mechanisms of intolerance and hate through their films [*Shehr-e Tabassum* and *SWIPE*]” (n.p.). These two cyberpunk animated films offer an artistic expression of Mazhar’s social activism, which also gets actualized in “other initiatives like *Engage Pakistan*, a project that counters the country’s blasphemy laws with research and alternative histories” and “an alternative critical histories [sic] channel called *Hashiya*” (n.p.).

Anna McFarlane et al, in the Western context, note that cyberpunk, which emerged through its intersection with postmodernism and posthumanism and other counter-culture movements and “cultural and critical moment(s)”, soon transformed into a “cultural formation” (Thomas Foster qtd. 2). It tried to interrogate “the future of identity from feminist, queer, Indigenous, and Afrofuturist perspectives, as well as broader cultural interrogations of (sur)veilance and cultural activism...” (2). Moreover, they observe in their chapter “Cultural Locales”

⁴⁸ For a detailed discussion of the *SWIPE*, please, check the 3rd chapter: “Religion and Science Fiction.”

that cyberpunk, due to its ability to critique our technocultural world, has found place in other cultures as a “cultural mode” that makes possible “the expression of the complex systems that govern 21st-century societies and lives” (3). For example, in Indian sf, Suparno Banerjee considers cyberpunk “a relative anomaly in India, at least in its familiar form” because India is “still experiencing the transformative powers of industrialization, turning a primarily rural agrarian society into a more urban industrial one” (408). He states that after the IT boom in India in the 1990s “occasional works exhibiting cyberpunk qualities have begun to surface” (ibid), though he also distinguishes the use of cyberpunk elements in Indian sf from Western sf “in which cybernetics and human elements create a posthuman cyborg existence often functioning as a social and individual liberatory device” (ibid). On the other hand, as Banerjee argues, in Indian sf, cyberpunk ethos and aesthetics are deployed “as subaltern discourses, sometimes as humanistic condemnation of the posthuman, and sometimes as postmodern mimicry of western cyberpunk” (ibid). He discusses three Indian sf works, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), Manjula Padmanabhan’s play *Harvest* (1997), and Bollywood film *Ra One* (Sinha 2011) to illustrate his point about the subversion of cyberpunk tropes in Indian sf.

Similarly, Pakistani sf also subverts cyberpunk to meet the needs of the local audience. The short, “hand painted”⁴⁹ animated Urdu film *Shehr-e-Tabassum* follows the Western cyberpunk tradition with Mazhar’s inspiration from “cyberpunk classics like *Blade Runner* [Scott 1982] and *Akira* [Otomo 1988] as well as classic novels such as George Orwell’s *1984* [1949]” (Masood n.p.). Mazhar coins the term *cyberkhilafat* to use the cyberpunk ethos and aesthetics to critique the religious extremism popularized and normalized through various technology-dependent media. The film’s idea is credited by Mazhar to a psychologist and co-

⁴⁹ As described in the YouTube description of the film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Guio-TOXFoo>

founder of *Shehri Pakistan*⁵⁰, Ayesha Iftikhar (Masood n.p.). Mazhar's film, in a Pakistani context, aims to allegorize the alliance between technology and extremism to highlight the role of technology in the perpetuation of disinformation and dogmas. While *SWIPE* presents the danger of rising religious extremism diffused through media technology, *Shehr-e Tabassum* depicts the danger of enforcement of oppressive laws by using surveillance technologies. The totalitarian regime deploys such technologies to curb basic human rights especially their freedom of speech and expression to suppress all forms of dissent and non-compliance. Sharma quotes Mazhar's concern about the growing intolerance in Pakistan and weaponization of various ideologies through manipulation of young minds: "My research has been centered around the way ideas like *ghairat* (honour), *ishq* (love) *ghaddar* (traitor) and *tauheen* (insult) have been distorted in the recent past and forcibly circumscribed to violence while at the same time, the definition for blasphemous or traitorous acts continue to broaden" (n.p.).

In an interview with *Dawn*, Mazhar says: "The film is located in a dystopian Pakistan where freedom of expression has been repressed entirely in the name of social order, stability, and peace. This is done through the passing of an ordinance that criminalizes all forms of expressions except smiling" (Masood n.p.). Mazhar admits that the film projects a dark future by extrapolating on the contemporary conditions persisting in contemporary Pakistan where "surveillance companies [are] collaborating with the government to monitor citizens, ostensibly for purposes of security, but also for suppressing and persecuting free speech" (n.p.). In a country where strong surveillance threatens those who voice their concerns on state policies and anti-democratic laws, science fiction provides a safe forum to voice reasonable concerns. Hence, Mazhar thinks that "dystopia is a solid genre to present situations and conditions which are

⁵⁰ *Shehri Pakistan* is an organization (private) that makes videos and animations for civic education in regional languages.

familiar and ordinary or relatable, but also alien enough to seem distant and strange” (n.p.). This way, like Bina Shah, he hopes to escape the censorship faced by journalists and writers who do not use the medium of speculative fiction. He also chose the sub-genre cyberpunk to make his film attract a wider range of viewers with diverse backgrounds. The film, besides running on youtube, is also streamed on *Dust* “the biggest Sci-Fi channel online”⁵¹.

The film is set in the year 2071, when technology has mechanized all fields of life, and people live under constant surveillance, haunted by the fear of persecution at the slight deviation from the law obligating them to smile all the time. The film plays upon the tropes of a utopia only to betray the impossibility to actualize such a place. For example, the country is depicted as heaven, “one of the happiest countries in the world” (Mazhar 3:45), where people are living their lives without cruelty, terrorism, and crime, which all came to an end after a great Civil War of 2038 with the rise of the Supreme Leader. It sounds utopian to imagine a Pakistan free from all such long-rooted troubles in a technologically-controlled future, but soon the mood changes when the shallowness of the smiles is exposed by highlighting the day-to-day problems of the characters in the film who live under constant fear for their lives in an environment of perpetual surveillance.

The voice of the narrator introduces the premise of the film with a caption on the screen announcing the smile-rule of Pakistan in 2071. The conversations of the people are overlapped with robotic announcements in the background indicating the impossibility of some genuine human communication to take place in this technologically constructed world. The anxiety and fear-filled voice of Danial’s mother, the voice of the old man choked with coughs, and the grim expression of gratitude by Imtiaz all contradict their facial gestures: a constant smile. This

⁵¹ *Shehr-e-Tabassum* facebook page post on 8th September 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/shehretabassum/>

juxtaposition belies the common understanding that body language is more authentic in conveying true feelings. Their smiles are dissociated from the state of their day-to-day existence.

The film shows Lahore as being overlooked by the bot-police, who keep issuing tickets and charges to the civilians on the slight deviation, as “Any expression other than smiling is a crime” (2:42). The surveillance system is also epitomized in a panopticon-like-tower designed by Isma Gul Hassan to create a sinister environment following the examples of *1984* and *Blade Runner* (TDC 19:46). The people wear helmet-like *Hansmukh* devices with blue lights beaming on their smiling faces creating a utopic picture only to be overturned in the next few seconds with the announcement in the background, not only informing about the transportation but also monitoring the civilians’ behaviour: “The sign of a good citizen – a smile and loyalty” (Mahar 0:40). By linking the former with the latter, it makes all citizens bound to the law to smile all the time to prove their allegiance to the country, and doing otherwise may classify them as “traitors” (3:32). This “subjugation of human emotion” (Masood n.p.), which results from the political gesture, deprives citizens of any real pleasure; and instead, it creates an atmosphere of fear where to smile is a mandatory civic duty.

The short film presents parallel stories of a mother, whose son Danial is undergoing an emotional breakdown; Imtiaz, with no money for the treatment of his son who is critically ill; and an old man, coughing in pain. What connects them all is the forced smile on their faces regardless of their feelings and hard conditions of their lives with an ironical statement made emphatically by the old man: “Everything will be fine! Everything is fine” (1:58). The unfolding events gradually crush such hopes for betterment, as things get darker with time. The old man wisely observes: “There was a time when people knew what cruelty was. Now the bastards look

you right in the eye and smile” (2:10), thus indicating that people are not able to distinguish the bad from the good people.

The civilians, in this dark world, are alerted as soon as their *Hansmukh*, headgear devices, monitoring their smiles, reach near expiry date (0:46), with offers of the upgraded *Hansmukh* devices, followed by a creepy warning: “Remember! under Clause 9 of the Code of Conduct, removing or tampering with your device is a crime...Keep smiling!” (1:00). The users cannot grow beards for the proper function of the device, lest their facial features while smiling may not be easily detected. Those who break the law and try to express their anger are punished, mostly with execution, and the surveillance system ensures that no dissident may escape the punishment. The screams of Danial’s mother can be heard in the background desperately trying to make her son smile, but Danial’s refusal to smile and his attempt at the expression of angst are enough for the state to take his life (Mazhar 2:57). His photo is displayed on the public screen with a cross on him to warn others of the same fate in the case of non-compliance. Later, two men are electrocuted for not taking the medication to enhance their smile (4:54). The medication seems to work like soma in *Brave New World* to suppress the anxiety and to maintain the illusion of utopia.

At the end of the film, the female protagonist can be heard sobbing and desperately running towards her home through the dark alleys presenting the city life, flying cars, beggars, vagabonds, and some men harassing her. Her face is only revealed when she enters her house, cleans the misty mirror, and looks at her face with tearful eyes and smiling lips (7:06). The juxtaposition of the opposites, fake smile with the grief-torn eyes, closes the film on a darker note where no escape is possible from the oppression of a totalitarian regime except death which comes either as a punishment or as a personal choice as in case of Danial. The film ends with the

protagonist's smile also changing into an expression of rage with her device flickering red, as it did when Danial refused to smile. The open ending of the film leaves it to the imagination of the viewers to decide whether the protagonist like other dissident characters is exterminated, or she succeeds in setting herself free from the vicious cycle, though what precedes the last scene casts a looming shadow on her fate.

Mazhar, in his interview, states that the central question of the film is “What if the ideas of surveillance, offense and persecution were taken further and subjected to technology?” (qtd. in Masood n.p.). In the film's world, the professed freedom of the citizens from cruelty and terrorism is no more than an illusion disseminated by the totalitarian regime through the state machinery. The laws, imposed on the citizens, are implemented using the political jargon of national interest and security. Such nationalistic discourse disseminated through technology helps the state to force its ideology upon its citizens who must behave accordingly. The movements and behaviour of the people are controlled by the state, and they move like conditioned animals or automata in their response to the state's orders with no right to choose for themselves. Tooba Masood finds the suffocating surveillance system in the film comparable to “films and comics such as *Persepolis* [Marjane Satrapi 2007] and *Watchmen* [Zack Snyder 2009]” (n.p.), which depict the infringement of individual freedom by totalitarian governments, the former in the context of the Iranian revolution (1979), and the latter in the Cold War context.

The totalitarian regime depicted in the film serves as an allegory for the repressive environment under several dictatorships and mock democracies in Pakistan with violations of human rights and limits on freedom of speech. Pakistan is one of the most dangerous states for journalists and human rights activists, and those who raise their voice against state policies and oppression face dire consequences. Rukhsana Aslam studies the vulnerability of the journalists

trying to exercise their freedom of speech which has exposed them to threats from both the state and anti-state factions in the context of the War on Terror. Though Article 19 of Pakistan's Constitution grants freedom of speech and expression besides freedom of the press, these freedoms are declared conditional to "any restrictions imposed by law" which is often subject to the "individual interpretation or interests" (Aslam 185). Moreover, the torture and murder of hundreds of journalists, over the years, challenge the availability of any such freedom. Even the boom of private TV news channels, since 2004, and other media groups does not guarantee free and independent reporting due to the state's interference and surveillance (186). Most channels and journalists resort to self-censorship to avoid charges of treason and other allegations. Citing a report on journalists in Balochistan, Aslam notes that more than 76 journalists were killed in only over two years (2010 & 2011) (179). She discusses the high-profile cases of the murders of journalists like Hayatullah Khan, Syed Saleem Shehzad, Abdul Razik Cheema, Shan Dahar, and Bakhtaj Ali as well as the attacks on Hamid Mir, Raza Rumi, and Umar Cheema as penalty for neutral and fair reporting.

As far as the setting is concerned, the film presents a technologically advanced Pakistan, set in the urban space of Lahore, where flying rickshaws are being used for public transportation from bazaar like *New Anar Kali*, decorated with digital neon signs. The action takes place at nighttime, and the artificial lights contrast with the darkness enveloping the highly mechanized city. Fahad Naveed, comparing the film with Orwell's *1984*, notes that the film shows how "people who refuse to conform to the state's version become 'unpersons' — disappearing and leaving no evidence of ever having existed" (n.p.). He also quotes Mazhar's tweet about strict censorship policies and limits on freedom of speech in Pakistan: "...the short film we made is timely considering the outrageous instruments of control and policing we saw on *Zindagi*

Tamasha” (n.p.): Sarmad Khoosat’s film that was banned temporarily after protests by Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan. Mazhar shows his concern for the repression of art in various media, especially film and literature, that often get banned or censored in Pakistan because of the threats posed by extremist groups.

Similarly, Haya Bokhari, in her review, comments on the Orwellian setting of this dystopic world (n.p.), where common masses are technologically monitored and pursued by a fear of persecution. The restriction to express any emotion other than happiness may symbolize the suppression not only of journalists, but also of feminists, liberal scholars, and human rights activists. Bokhari also notes that the film offers different “layers of meanings” to its audience with different political backgrounds “limited only by the audience’s understanding and political leanings” (n.p.). For example, feminists may see the rigid control exercised on women, and human rights activists might see it as a comment on missing persons’ cases⁵² (due to political dissent), while others might see “the mental anguish that can be caused by constant suppression and self-censorship” (n.p.). *Shehre-Tabassum* constructs a world at once strange but familiar with an environment of strict censorship, “creating a feeling of fear and anxiety” not only for the people in this world but also for its viewers experiencing this situation in their daily life (Masood n.p.). It projects the tension caused by the clash between an individual’s right to freedom and their duty to the social order. In an interview, Mazhar asserts that his film aims to ask: “what is the cost of giving up your freedom or your rights for social order and stability?” (qtd. in *ibid*). The film is trying to highlight the dangers of indoctrination of state-engineered histories and policies that are only leading to the rising dogma at the cost of basic human rights.

⁵² For details on missing persons please check: Kazmi, Zahra. “Enforced Disappearances in Pakistan raises Questions.” DW, 9th May 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/enforced-disappearances-in-pakistan-raise-questions-over-role-of-secret-services/a-62969115> &

The film is presented from the first-person perspective, that of a quiet female protagonist, who moves through a busy bazaar (*New Anar Kali*) seeing people and overhearing their words. Haseeb Rehman, the lead animator of the film, in an interview panel of *Indus TV* (2020), discusses the challenges he faced in presenting the story through first person perspective. He and his team spent one and a half years to draw hundreds of frames to present the environment, the movement of characters, and the action because it was difficult to show things happening through someone's eyes (Hussain 9:30). The film opens while the protagonist is leaving for home from her workplace with a pill in her hand, which is later revealed to be an anti-depressant consumed by all citizens. The film through her eyes projects a world of broken images and broken conversations. The protagonist herself remains silent and invisible throughout the film to the last moment when she sees herself in the mirror and the camera, thus looking into the eyes of the viewers with a paradoxical combination of a frown and a smile on her face. Her eye-contact synchronizes with the mixed emotions of the film, which gradually frustrates any hope for a better time in a society that rules through surveillance and abuse of human rights.

In addition, the film uses a flash-back technique to provide the context of this dystopic world, where the readers learn about the Civil War of 2038 resulting from “the difference of opinion”, with a sequence of shots of protests, and killings (3:07). The Civil War provides the context for this bleak future and its causes: polarization, intolerance, and violence which are no different from the problems facing Pakistan today. Thus, the film warns the viewers of the possible conflicts, if a course of cooperation and coexistence is not taken. Rasti Farooq, the co-writer of the film, in a discussion panel discusses the graphic journal written to support the film as a back-story of the Civil War of 2038 as “a story-telling device beyond the film” (TDC 1:14:10), with fictional events commenting on the circumstances that pushed Pakistan towards

this dark future (23:03). The democratic system seems to be replaced, after the Civil War, by a totalitarian government run by an “Ameer-Mamlakat” (the Supreme leader) (Mazhar 3:15). This term is ironical and a pun on the religious term *ameer-ul momineen* to reflect the rising religious extremism in Pakistan as a move away from democracy and towards totalitarianism as well as a comment on the past shadowed by dictatorships which politicized and weaponized the religion. This term is not different from Orwell’s Big Brother, to highlight the danger of mixing politics with religion/ideology to control the masses through surveillance technologies. Not only do the Supreme Leader “Ameer-e-Mamlakat” and his government successfully defeat the miscreants and curb dissent, but also they pass the “ordinance 512 E” to make the smile a rule of existence in a post-war world (3:18).

Technological advancement in a totalitarian regime provides only manipulative tools to the authorities who use them to stay in power, exercise violence, and maintain social hierarchies. Nudrat Kamal, in her brief review of South Asian futurist visions (mainly Indian), observes that the late twentieth-century works mostly reflect “a dark futurity”, as the countries faced “geopolitics and the effects of neocolonialism” (23). She asserts that this darker tone has increased in the twenty-first century with the additional challenges posed by climate change, global capitalism, and last but not least “the sinister and rapidly advancing surveillance technologies in the hands of corporations and state governments” (23). The last anxiety becomes the dominant theme of *Shehr-e-Tabassum*, as it portrays an alliance of technology with a totalitarian state in controlling the common people and enforcing draconian laws infringing their basic rights to freedom.

The technologically controlled world makes it impossible for the characters to engage in any genuine communication and to develop any real relations; instead, it keeps them in fear of

persecution for the slight lapse in smiling. The electrocution of two persons, the execution of a twelve-year-old child Danial, and the helplessness of other characters show the oppression of civilians at the hands of a technologically advanced totalitarian regime. The surveillance technologies like *Hansmukh* devices and police bots create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety by watching over people all the time. The dark, mysterious world, illuminated only by neon signs, artificial lights, and transportation lights projects the darker side of technological advancement with looming shadows symbolizing their negative impact on human life.

Manik Sharma astutely observes that “Both *Shehr e Tabasum* and *Swipe* cross paths with technology, intolerance and the brutalizing nature of consumerist economies” (n.p.). While in *SWIPE*, people consume advertisements, alerts, and notifications promoting religious intolerance, *Shehr-e-Tabassum* targets people with products, medicines, alerts, and even warnings to keep them smiling. In both worlds, technology encroaches upon individual freedom by exercising violence, mostly capital punishment, to curb any form of dissent. Mazhar, in this film, extrapolates from the present lack of freedom to imagine a dark future of Pakistan, if a different path is not chosen: “So when we wanted to explore how different fundamental freedoms — to express, to protest, etc. — are stifled in a hyper-surveillant and increasingly oppressive society, we used the allegory of a smile as the only expression allowed to citizens” (qtd. in Sharma n.p.). The seemingly innocent expression of a smile becomes oppressive when it becomes the only course of action without any alternative.

The film uses irony where all the announcements about happy people only indicate their suffering. For example, the dark humor cannot be missed when the narrator justifies the smile rule: “Pakistan has become one of the happiest countries of the world. Now, every Pakistani is happy, safe, successful, united, disciplined, progressive, loyal, and thankful. A Smiling Pakistan

is a happy Pakistan” (3:45). This word picture is juxtaposed with the advertisements of the products, all sharing the smile-labels such as *Muskan* (smile) anti-depressants, medicines, children’s syrups, and other products to control the stress hormones and to improve smiles. Besides, the civilians are encouraged to report on those not taking support medicines or deviating from the norm of smiling, to win prizes (4:43). Thus, the depiction of the people’s pain despite their compulsive smiles exposes the irony of the situation by contrasting it with the government’s shallow claims and false propaganda about a happy Pakistan.

Moreover, smile becomes a metaphor for the hard fate of the people living a life of “emotional subjugation” (Mazhar qtd. in Masood n.p.) without any individual freedom to express themselves honestly. The situation is no different from the grim reality in which most Pakistanis live their lives controlled by state-sanctioned political and religious narratives. Those who do not comply are kidnapped, tortured, charged with treason, and put into jail. Many ex-main-stream journalists (now social media vloggers) like Imran Riaz Khan, Moeed Peerzada, and Sabir Shakir, and scholars like Prof. Pervez Hoodbhoy and Javed Ahmad Ghamidi have been charged with treason and threatened with death for discussing issues such as religious extremism, Talibanization, and blasphemy laws, and for criticizing the alliance between army, mullahs, and feudal elites exercising a fascist control over people. According to a recent report by International Press Institute (2023), Pakistani journalists face increased “violent attacks, judicial harassment, censorship” (1), while the government frequently blocks “investigative news site FactFocus”, shuts down internet services, and blocks websites besides banning “all media broadcasts of former Prime Minister Imran Khan’s recorded and live speeches” (5).

The dearth of freedom of speech is often attributed to the martial laws in the country, but recent scholars differ and blame multiple agents for creating a suffocating environment. For

example, Muhammad Ahsan Bhatti et al. assert that politicians, “establishment”, state institutions, society, colleagues, and religious groups join hands together in creating an atmosphere of fear to impose censorship on the voices challenging or criticizing the state policies (4866-4868). They define the term establishment as a “powerful and dominant group in a society” including ruling elites, bureaucracy, judiciary, and above all military establishment who take all the state decisions and control the media groups (4869). *Shehr-e-Tabassum*, by extrapolating from the present limits on the freedom of speech in Pakistan to a futuristic setting, invites the viewers to think about the change. Kamal rightly points out that “futuristic visions can play a role in jarring readers out of their complacency and allowing them to view their own present through a more critical lens” (19).

Mazhar and his team use a striking combination of music and light to convey the darkness of the bleak future, oppressed by draconian laws. The characters constantly move through the nighttime without any daybreak or sunlight. The only light in the film is that of the neon signs, flying cars, and rickshaws, an ever-seeing eye shining from a tower, and of *Hansmukh* devices which are used to police the smiles of their bearers. These lights, by imposing similar expressions on all faces, take away any form of individuality and their “identity is sort of muted” (Mazhar in TDC 15:55). The blue lights attached to the *Hansmukh* devices are lit all the time to keep the faces visible from a distance and to keep them under constant check. They turn red to indicate the extermination faced by the wearers in the case of non-compliance. The darker tones of red and black colors are used to highlight the bloody consequences of breaking the law. While the nighttime symbolizes the dark times through which Pakistan is passing, the red color is used when the killings happen or are about to take place. The red color also symbolizes the

emotional breakdown of characters like Danial and the protagonist by turning their faces red to imply rage and anger besides their deaths.

Moreover, the background music also creates a sinister mood adding to the dark atmosphere created by dark colors. The film incorporates a combination of diegetic (heard by both characters and the audience) and non-diegetic sounds (heard only by the audience). For example, the characters hear the public and security announcements, but there are also non-diegetic sounds to convey various emotions such as agony, rage, and sadness. Shahrukh Aslam, the audio-designer of the film, in an interview panel on Indus TV, says that he was advised to compose something “*AKIRA/ Blade Runner* type” (Hussain 12:33) to imagine “what a cyberpunk-future-Pakistan might sound like?” (12:43). He tried to include the authentic sounds from *Anar Kali Bazar*, such as of hawkers, taka tak, rickshaws, and other desi things to bring the future Lahore city to life as an important setting playing active part in people’s lives.

Overall, the animated sf film deploys cyberpunk elements to create a dystopic world where technological progress becomes a mode of oppression for common people. Rasti Farooq asserts that Mazhar created an unfamiliar world to pose a difficult question about the future of Pakistan with a continuation of the present environment of intolerance (Hussain 20:48). These questions need to be asked by Pakistanis to find peaceful solutions before it is too late. Aslam claims that the only authentic portrayal of Pakistan’s problems can be done by Pakistani writers and directors. His concern is no different from that voiced by the postcolonial South Asian scholar Uppinder Mehan: “If we do not imagine our futures, postcolonial peoples risk being condemned to be spoken about and for again” (270). Kamal also distinguishes South Asian “futurism” from Western futuristic visions because “the subcontinent’s own relationship to modernity has been shaped by its colonial past and continues to be mediated by neocolonialism

and global capitalism” (19). Thus Kamal, by comparing South Asian futurism to Afrofuturism, insists that “South Asian speculative fiction envisions futures for South Asia without necessarily centring the Western gaze” (ibid).

Mazhar, like other Pakistani sf writers and directors, uses a glocal approach, as he successfully borrows the cyberpunk ethos and aesthetics to give them a local twist of *cyberkhilafat* to create dystopic worlds, where technology starts consuming those subjected to it by its producers. Therefore, Bokhari rightly asserts that “For Pakistan’s first attempt at animated dystopia, it is ground-breaking and heralds the beginning of a new digital platform to help voice civic concerns and critiques” (n.p.). Banerjee associates the emergence of cyberpunk elements in Indian sf with the IT boom in India (408), but in Pakistan, such revolution is still awaited, and hence, as compared to the growing corpus of Indian sf, Pakistan has not much to offer. Still, as the precursor in the field, Mazhar has made a good start with two films to present Pakistani problems and to voice his questions about Pakistan’s future.

Other Visions: Usman T. Malik’s *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan* (2021)

Besides the dystopic visions, as discussed in the previous section, Pakistani sf also presents other visions of the present and the past by fusing nostalgia and melancholy with apprehension. This part will discuss some sf stories from Usman Malik’s collection *Midnight Doorways* to examine other visions of the past, present, and future, mainly dark and gloomy. Usman Malik is the most prolific of sf authors discussed in this dissertation with many awards to his credit. Professionally, he is an American-qualified rheumatologist practicing in Lahore, and this explains his use of physical imagery, detailed descriptions of human anatomy, and chemical processes taking place as the result of various diseases in his stories. He is a winner of the Bram Stoker Award (2014), the British Fantasy Award (2016), Crawford Award (2022), and his work

has been nominated for the World Fantasy Award, and the Million Writers Award, besides being nominated as the finalist for the Locus Award, and the Nebula Award (twice) (Coleman n.p., Saurabh Sharma n.p.). Besides, he together with Tehseen Bewaja has founded the Salam Award to encourage upcoming sf writers from Pakistan and South Asia. He wants “science fiction and fantastika” to be treated as a primary subject in literary festivals in Pakistan (Malik “Rockets, Robots” n.p.). *Midnight Doorways* is the second book ever published outside the Anglophone world to win the Crawford Award in 2022 (Malik “At the Intersection” 9:05).

Malik started his literary career in 2012 with the publication of his story in *Daily Science Fiction* (an online magazine) in America when he was completing his residency there (Malik *Ted Talks* 10:18). For him, sf is a “literature of ideas” asking “what if questions” (8:21), and a genre about “exploring boundaries of knowledge” (Malik “Rockets, Robots n.p.). He prefers Ted Chiang’s functional definition of sf as “adventure stories dressed up with lasers” (ibid). His fiction is published in horror, fantasy, and science fiction magazines and several year’s best anthologies. As an avid reader of both Urdu and English stories, he got inspired by writers like Naiyer Masud, MA Rahat, A. Hameed, Mazhar Kaleem, Musharraf Ali Farooqi, Anil Menon, Vandana Singh, Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Ted Chiang, Jeff VanderMeer, Samuel R. Delany, Kelly Link, Mughal and Pre-Mughal histories, and many Urdu and Sufi poets. He admits that “All these have certainly seeped into the fabric of my worldbuilding and prose-building” (Sharma n.p.)

Malik, while discussing the title of his book, justifies his use of the term fable because “fable is a fiction or a lie that tells the truth in an imaginative way” (Anwar 26:48). He also uses this term because his stories draw on the past nostalgically, and for him fables are “torchbearers of history” (Malik “Book Launch” 4:21). In addition, he uses the term fables because most

Pakistanis confuse “stories” with “realism”, while his stories are “genre stories” (5:30). In an interview, he tells that in the title of his book, *Midnight Doorways*, midnight highlights the darker mood of his stories, while ‘doorways’ presents a point “where two worlds meet” (Anwar 26:00). On another occasion, he defines ‘doorways’ as “portals, ...options and opportunities... choices” (Malik “Book Launch” 2:49). His stories deal with “human choices voluntary or involuntary” (ibid 3:04). Furthermore, the ‘doorways’ reflect interaction between “rational and the irrational, science and religion/mythology, with beliefs in gennies, magic, and astrology” (Anwar 36:20).

Like J. G. Ballard, Malik also is more interested in the inner space with a greater focus on the psychological state of his characters. Ballard stresses the importance of the role that “the landscapes of one's childhood, as much as its emotional experiences” play as “an inescapable background to all one's imaginative writing” (n.p.). Ballard posits that “the more serious fringe of science fiction is an especially potent method of using one's imagination to construct a paradoxical universe where dream and reality become fused together” (n.p.). Similarly, in Malik’s stories, his childhood memories about the people with their emotional turmoil and the settings play a significant role. Malik, citing E. M. Forster, asserts that we humans spend one third of our lives dreaming, so to ignore the irrationalities of the dreams means “missing one third of human condition and one-third of human experience” (37:40). His stories create a world with a dream-like quality by synthesizing the material and the spiritual/psychological domains.

Malik imagines himself to be a citizen of two worlds with his hyphenated identity as a Pakistani American “that brings with it more layers of distress, displacement, and disillusionment” (Coleman n.p.), and thus his work also presents a fusion of these two worlds “with a tug of war between the real and the unreal” (Anwar 34:43). As a writer, he looks at

Pakistan's present and past critically to alert us about its future. He writes with concern in one of his news articles: "We Pakistanis are living in a country that has become the perfect dystopian setting, and we are so visionless and inured to the grim dark that we simply do not care" (Malik "Rockets, Robots" n.p.). Still, he finds some hope in bringing about a change through literacy and scientific education and speculation. He hopes that "reading escapist, fabulist, or symbolical fiction is one way to regain hope, mutual tolerance and empathy" (ibid). His stories present a fusion of "magic realism, slipstream, cross genre, fantasy, science fiction... uncanny literature and weird fiction... and other literary influences..." (25:07). Like Banerjee and Sami Khan, he views the fusion of science and mythology not dichotomous with science fictional world-building in the South Asian context, where even doctors and engineers travel through streets full of advertisements of astrologers and experts in black magic etc.

Victoria de Zwaan, citing Bruce Sterling who introduced the term "slipstream", defines it as:

an "emerging genre" on the borderlines between sf and "mainstream fiction," in which sf techniques – no longer able to service what Sterling called the "coherent social vision" of genre sf – were adapted by non-sf writers to produce more imaginative, estranging, counter-realist, and innovative works than sf proper could produce. (500)

Zwaan, by giving examples of works by William Burroughs, Thomas Disch, Marge Piercy, Kathy Acker, and Thomas Pynchon, posits that these works have some thematic relationship with science and technology, but their main characteristic is their "counter realism", as they undermine "the idea of a solid, knowable "consensual" reality" (502). The term includes the works that "undermine the conventions of the genre" and also such non-sf works that deploy

“themes or techniques of estrangement” (502). Zwaan expands the meaning of the term, by citing James Kelly and John Kessel who “carefully steer away from the idea of genre and focus instead on the literary effect of “feeling very strange” (503). Malik’s stories also provide a similar experience by creating strange worlds that blur the genre boundaries.

The story “Ishq” presents an odd love story set in the context of a (fictitious) 1967 flood in Lahore. Malik uses pathology and natural calamity to narrate a story of loss at both personal and community levels. This alternate history of Lahore, using environmental forces such as disease and flood, intertwines personal loss of its characters with national socio-political problems like government’s negligence in maintaining historical sites and managing disasters. While disease and flood destroy human lives and thwart the fulfilment of human desires, they also destroy the historic part of the city (Old Lahore). The story critiques not only insensitivity of the society to the people marginalized by disease and disability but also sheds light on the government’s negligence in the face of natural disasters. It questions the lack of responsibility both on personal and institutional levels to the people marginalized due to gender, disability, and class. The characters in this story are entangled by their environment and diseases like cancer and polio which interact to define their state of mind, behaviour, and finally the course of their life and even death.

The transcendent experience of love is also coded through the material conditions embodied in natural phenomenon, so much so that love also seems to be one of the diseases afflicting the human body. It creates a deterministic world in which external (environment) and internal (pathology), and material (diseases) and spiritual (feelings) interact to shape the human destiny. Malik notes that “it is at the interface of immune system and environment that most pathology and disease happens” (Malik “At the Intersection” 4:53). Pathology and disease play a

significant role in his stories colored with medical references. Several characters are patients or doctors, or *hakeems* (herbalists). Malik says that “the vocabulary of pathos and pathology does help when I’m creating the language of the story” (qtd. in Coleman n.p.). His profession as a rheumatologist plays a part in world-building and his creativity emerges at “the intersection of Art and medicine” (Malik “At the Intersection” 4:12).

The story is narrated through the memories of the protagonist who is retelling the story that his mother told him, as she was living through the last stage of ovarian cancer. The protagonist is skeptical about the truth of the story as the pathology affects a person’s state of mind making it delusional by blurring the line between reality and dream: “After cancer flooded my mother’s brain, Ammi brimmed with stories” (18). He especially likes the story about a polio-struck girl from Ammi’s childhood spent in *Teddy Gali* (Narrow Alley), Lahore, but he also doubts its credibility as Ammi’s doctor warns: “cancer metastases were in peculiar parts of her brain; they could make her cook up surreal histories. *Confabulation...*” (22). The story gains a surrealistic quality as it is conveyed through the memory of the protagonist who himself is navigating through the memory of his pathologically delusional Ammi. Thus, the story takes us into an inner world to portray the harshness of the outer world.

The plot revolves around the protagonist; his Ammi (mom), a cancer patient; her polio-afflicted sister Parveen; Hashim, Parveen’s lover, and the flood which is characterized as a destructive force as ruthless as the diseases. Parveen who limps because of her polio-affected leg is a laughingstock in the neighbourhood, whose disease becomes a stigma and disability a source of body-shaming as “*cripple, cripple!*” (23) so much so that she must drop out of school. She is not spared even by her sister (Ammi), who dislikes her sister’s physical deformity and feels isolated from society as a “Mutant by association” (23). The story takes a sudden turn when

Hashim, a *shkarkandi wala* (sweet-potato vendor), falls in love with Parveen despite her disability. Ammi becomes jealous of Parveen and wants to win over Hashim. Hashim, a social outcast himself as an orphan and as a poor man, can feel the suffering of Parveen. Their social ostracism based on disease and class makes them fall in love with each other.

The disease is portrayed as a destructive force that mutates and cripples not only the human body but also thwarts self-fulfilment and spoils human relationships. Parveen becomes an actual mutant with “her crippled leg that she swung like a bludgeon to seesaw across her bedroom” (24). At home, she is despised by her own jealous sister who wonders: “How could he (Hashim) love my older sister with her humiliating disability and her weird, quiet manner?” (24). In her lonely life, Parveen’s only refuge is the window from where she meets Hashim and exchanges a few words of love. The window becomes her portal into a different world where her disability does not matter anymore, through which she moves into Hashim’s world of love where she is no more a mutant or a cripple but a human being worthy of love, and where her pathology does not define her character.

Parveen’s hopes to marry Hashim get jeopardized when she develops “a rare bone cancer” (26) that rapidly consumes her despite Hashim’s devotion and *Ishq* (passionate spiritual love): “It means the state of a lover’s heart during separation, contemplation, or annihilation unto the lover. The point where the lover becomes the beloved” (41). Soon, she stops eating and talking, and starts smelling of “rot and inconvenience” (27), losing herself in a “battle with death” (26). This physical deterioration does not decrease Hashim’s love for her because for him physical consummation does not matter. He takes care of her day and night when her sister and parents leave her to die alone. He does not let her get buried and refuses to leave her alone.

Ammi drags him with her through the flood water to a safe place, but he goes back and drowns in it.

The experience of love is also explained in pathological terms. Love consumes Hashim as rapidly as cancer consumes Parveen: “His eyes were wide and more feverish than the dying girl’s” (26). Both seem to have no cure to their bodily afflictions or to the diseased mindset of a society that alienates the people marginalized due to gender, disability, and class. Hashim sells everything he has for Parveen’s chemotherapy, but the latter gradually slips away from his loving gaze. He looks after his dying beloved when others run away from her filthy body. Ammi looks at him in awe: “How could he still love her?... How could he bear to be with her, touch her, smell her, change her sheets, clean the inside of her yeasty mouth... murmur Sufi poetry to her...” (27). He is unwilling to leave his beloved even after her death, keeping away the mullah to give her a burial: “Please, she is afraid of the dark” (29). When everyone in the neighbourhood is leaving because of the flood, he decides to stay behind with his dead beloved.

Hashim’s love is translated by Parveen’s parents and people as signs of insanity: “The boy’s mad” (30). He is unable to move on in his life because he cannot let go of his dead beloved: “Everywhere I turn I see you” (28). His drowning in the floodwater becomes only a material manifestation of his drowning in blind passion of love. Discussing “Ishq” with Erika Holt, Malik says that the term “Ishq” with Arabic origins has changed its meaning over fourteen hundred years long journey across several languages like “Urdu, Hindi, and Farsi”, (n.p.) losing much of “its spiritual significance” (n.p.). He asserts that “pain and longing for one’s beloved, whether human or divine, is part of its meaning” (n.p.). However, the love experienced by Hashim is depicted in pathological terms with emphasis on his deteriorating health, losing

weight, and darkening eyes: “his ribs were serrated shadows under his vest. His collarbones were starvation girdles, the skin over them taut and pale” (30).

As far as Ammi is concerned, her cancer has made her delirious. By telling stories from her childhood, she is undergoing much-needed confession and catharsis. The protagonist could see that though cancer was not healing, “she didn’t look drained, as if bloodletting the past had vitalized her” (41). By recollecting her past, she could revisit her ambivalent relationship with her sister whom she loved and feared at the same time. Her pathological condition makes her experience life from her sister’s perspective, and she feels regrets for her jealousy in the past. In the end, the protagonist concludes that seemingly his mother died of cancer, but one cause of cancer was her longing for what Hashim and Parveen had, as she tells the protagonist: “All my life I’ve wanted only that” (41). The story shows how disease and flood influence human behaviour and human relations. Both disease and flood work as portals from life to death, from home to shelter, and from past to unknown future. The story takes the readers into the past to explain the present of the characters as well as the space. The characters entangled by these natural afflictions navigate through life trying to cling to each other. Hashim and Parveen stay together in life and death. Ammi moves on with her life but not without regret, which manifests itself in cancer. The story intertwines disease and natural disaster as the causes of the losses and destruction experienced by all the characters and the city of Lahore.

The setting of the story, old Lahore, plays an important part in the lives of the characters. The landscape, filtered through the memory, serves as a portal to the past and history washed away by the flood. Malik, like Samuel R. Delany, asserts that for him the setting of a story is very important, and therefore, he does “a lot of research” before writing a story (Holt n.p.). As a “displaced writer, he prefers to “treasure my hometown, my country of origin, its people and its

traditions...” (ibid). The fictitious flood of 1967 that destroyed the old Lahore serves as the background of the story to comment not only on the destruction of the characters but also to critique the negligence of the ruling elite of Pakistan: “Through calamity or governmental negligence many people died that year” (40). Such observations of the protagonist sound relevant in the context of the “biblical floods”⁵³ of 2022 that, though, resulted from climate change, caused unimaginable damage because of poor disaster management and the government’s negligence (Goodyear n.p.). The floods destroyed more than a million houses and displaced millions of people without food and shelter (n.p.).

The story’s setting, *Teddy Gali* (Narrow Alley) situated near Mochi Gate in Old Lahore, stands for the city’s history destroyed by the flood. It was marked by two-hundred years old “small double story, two fifty-square-foot” houses “modeled on Mughal architecture with facades made of faience tiles in ochre and turquoise” (21). The protagonist objects that the government failed to save the national heritage in the first place by not allocating funds to restore the “historical homes” which deteriorated over time (ibid). He raises the concern about the government’s disregard for the nation’s past: “Don’t they care about their culture?... Can they ask non-profits or UNESCO for help?” (ibid). Such questions by the protagonist echo the concerns of Pakistanis over the conservation of their cultural heritage. For example, Salima Hashmi, a renowned artist of Pakistan, complains that the “heritage conservation has never been a government priority”, and insists that “restoration and conservation of artworks should be taught as a discipline in visual art institutions and universities” (Ahmed n.p.). The ruling elites seem insensitive to the real issues facing Pakistanis such as disaster management and

⁵³ UNICEF reports that in 2022, the floods “submerged *one third of the country*, affecting 33 million people, half of whom were children” (n.p.). <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/devastating-floods-pakistan-2022>. The floods were reported as “biblical” by several news sources such as The New Yorker, CBC, and India Today.

preservation of historical sites, the former integral to the survival of Pakistanis and the latter significant to their national identity. This alternate history uses disease and natural calamity to test the humanity of characters and dutifulness of the government and to show their failure to meet such standards. This way the story presents the other (past) vision to comment on the present state of Pakistan, where physical and mental disability is still stigmatized, and historical sites are not well taken care of.

Similarly, the story “The Wandering City” uses Mughal Pura, a neighbourhood in Lahore, as its setting for the arrival of a wandering City “two kilometers in length; about a kilometer and a half in width!” (47), wandering from “a Florida wetland ... into Lahore”, once again fusing two different worlds: the East and the West, the real and the unreal (44). The story projects the transformation of Lahore from a live and jubilant city into a city filled with fear by the growing religious extremism and terrorism. The Wandering City, wherever it goes, stays there for three to five years (50). The City lands on Mughal Pura, deleting the neighbourhood and its inhabitants from their abode. While the common people gather to see this novelty, the family members mourn for their loved ones, and the mosques prepare for “a mass funeral” (45). The prime minister and the Army Chief address the people on TV, express grief at the loss of lives, and hope that the Wandering City “will be good for the economy” (47). Amidst all this commotion, the army, locksmiths, and civil engineers gather to find a way into the walled city.

The story imagines the effects of the Wandering City on the lives of common people. Malik, discussing this story, says that, in his childhood, he got inspired by an Arabian night story: “the City of Brass’ ...with people petrified in it forever ... a city lost forever in time... I wondered what would happen if I brought this City to Pakistan. How would Pakistanis react to it?” (Kressel 1:11:38). The story imagines that Pakistani tourism gets a boost by the advent of the

wandering City, and so do the vloggers and bloggers covering the event: “Pakistani Insta, Twitter, and Snapchat fill up with bird’s-eye views and selfies and filtered renderings” (Malik 51). The word spreads fast globally and UNESCO and WECC (World Enchanted City Co-operative) also get involved, as “the ninth-century heritage site has shifted to Lahore” (46); the latter also signs an MOU with the Pakistani government to visit and study the City (48).

In this chaos, a boy Subhan and other people climb up the walls and get so enchanted that they jump into it causing an alarm among the onlookers. Dr. Abida Parveen, director of the Lahore Museum, together with some VIPs and a few school children land inside the city in a military chopper. They can see the corpse of Subhan being eaten by the scavengers. While the delegation is inquisitive about the jumping of the climber to his death, Dr. Parveen rejects the rumours about the magical walls of the City by giving a scientific explanation: “WECC scientists believe the granite at the top of the walls is laced with pheromones and hallucinogens” (49). Besides, the sirens of the City also function as a “sentinel mechanism” making it difficult for the climbers to “resist their call” (48), and thus they jump to their death. The investigators discover that the City is an abode of marionettes, “motionless”, “stilled and preserved”, fixed in different playful positions in the markets, gardens, houses, towers, houses, and palaces (49). Dr. Parveen describes it as “A city haunted by its own people. Forever alive in death...trapped in a space-time rift” (ibid), while the physicists explain it as “*quasiparticle displacement*” (50).

It is interesting to note that Malik imagines a Pakistan that becomes a site of global traffic: “Historians, anthropologists, sociologists, biologists, and economists flock to Lahore to study the City and its impact on local populations, human and avian” (47). This especially creates an effect of estrangement when the real Pakistan is facing isolation in the world in a post 9/11 War on Terror context. Malik gives elaborate details of Lahore’s festivities and celebrations

around the City. The make-shift stalls by “photo-wallas, cigarette-wallas, toymakers, street magicians, cotton candy men” are installed around the City (48), people hang “flower garlands and ceremonial threads” on the walls (as usually they do on shrines) (50), boys celebrate Basant by flying “kites and drones with knockoff Go Pros and generic cameras across the City’s skyline” (51) taking photos of the City, its marionettes and nocturnal automatons, and the place becomes a site of an ongoing fair. The City boosts the local businesses, and Lahore seems to be brimming with life.

All is going well until Maulana P.J. (a dogmatic cleric) “glimpses the clockwork jinn that trundles out of the City’s mosque on a Friday, cups its hands over the mouth, and sounds the call to prayer” (51) which causes Maulana’s “atrial fibrillation” (ibid). He is rescued in a chopper, and upon his recovery “instant fatwas are passed” against the City using electronic and digital media, declaring it to be a “City of Infidels” and its presence in Pakistan as a “CONSPIRACY” of Israel and India (ibid). The people of Lahore uneasily watch, as “pseudo-mullahs and goons storm the barricades, hooting and spitting at the Army men” (ibid). The Lahoris feel helpless against the “Defend-the-Sharia marchers”, as they view the state machinery’s inability to curb the wave of religious extremism (ibid): “Nervously, the Chief and Prime Minister watch the anarchy churn” without taking any action (52). The Prime Minister’s address marked by his line “I want to tell my nation today: *ghabrana nahi hai*” (Don’t worry at all. Everything will be fine) (47), echoes in the background of the story when things regress from bad to worse.

A wave of fear envelopes Lahore, where riots may break out any moment, while Pakistanis are entangled by a non-functional government run by corrupt elites: “an Army hawaldar might be bribed; a sympathetic captain convinced to step aside” (51). These powerful actors do not care for common Pakistanis who are benefitting from the presence of the City:

without the City, Pakistan will become “a pariah” (52). Before the mullahs invade the City, it disappears leaving Lahore with “nothing but blankness” and “vast emptiness” (52). This emptiness leaves many people jobless and homeless, but it provides another opportunity to the corrupt elite, as the “bribed government officials” lease the land to “a property tycoon” for a residential colony, “Lahria Greens” (52), and Subhan’s grave is turned into a shrine to make money, paving way for illegal land encroachment by small businesses, while the LDA makes futile attempts to evacuate the place.

The story is told from a third-person perspective, which is limited to the narration of the events, and socio-political commentary but does not give insight into the motives and thoughts of all the characters. The narrator draws parallel word-pictures of Lahore and the City to portray problems facing contemporary Pakistan such as governmental incompetence and negligence in matters of public policy; the government’s complicity in the increase of religious extremism and fundamentalism; and how this alliance between the ruling elite, the establishment, and the religious organizations operates to serve the vested interests of those in power, overlooking the needs of the people for justice, rule of law, democracy, better education, and employment opportunities.

Maryam Azam discusses the rise of the militant groups in the context of the Cold War, sold in Pakistan as Afghan *Jihad* in return for US dollars in the 1980s, spearheaded by the dictator Zia-Ul-Haq’s agenda of Islamization. She argues that religion was used to fulfill “political objectives” to settle both internal and external affairs (1). These militant groups shared power and gradually grew in influence with political backing from both military dictators and democratic governments. Azam examines their links with political parties: “The emergence of sectarian groups in 1980s and their role in local and national politics of Pakistan strengthen the

roots of hatred, animosity and extremism within the societal cadres” (2). These militant organizations help politicians in running their election campaigns and persecuting the political opponents. They play religious card to create an atmosphere of fear where voices of dissent are hushed by exercising violence in the name of religion (3). For example, blasphemy laws are used to often settle personal disputes (discussed in the second chapter).

Moreover, the political factions spread sectarianism and terrorism, fighting against each other with the help of their militant wings. For example, Sipah-e- Sahabah (SSP) formed Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and Tehrik-e-Fiqah Jaffria (TFJ) formed Sipah-e Muhammad (SeM) (5). With links with the Taliban, SSP became more resourceful in influencing the political elites to listen to them as doing otherwise would lead to chaos and terrorism in Pakistan: “They aimed to challenge the writ of government by attacking government personnel and installations. Moreover, LeJ has strong anti-western and specifically anti-American agenda...” (5). In the context of Pakistan’s support for the American war on Terror, they have turned against Pakistan and are engaging in terrorist attacks across Pakistan. Nonetheless, the role of Pakistani governments, both military and democratic, cannot be underestimated in nurturing these groups overlooking the risks associated with their gaining power by granting them “electoral benefits and tactical advantages respectively” (6).

The story depicts the dangers of religious extremism in isolating a society from the rest of the world, where the departure of the City symbolizes the political isolation of Pakistan with shrinking tourism due to terrorism, a decaying economy, migrating people and businesses, and increasing poverty levels. The departure of the City signifies the missed opportunities, while the politicians remain silent, and the fundamentalist clerics use religion to isolate Pakistan from the rest of the world depriving them of access to the global market and free trade. The result is a

scene of chaos and desolation by putting an end to a vibrant culture enabled by the visit of the City. This reminds one of the shrinking cultural spaces and dearth of literary and cultural events in Pakistan, where both music and cinema industries are dying a slow death without the governmental patronage.

Malik's story "The Vaporization Enthalpy of a Peculiar Pakistani Family" also records the vaporization of society by comparing it with a family's disintegration and "vaporization" through growing terrorism, suicide attacks, drone attacks, intolerance, and floods. Malik uses the analogy of the transformation of matter from one state to another: from solid to liquid to gas to plasma, and finally to Bose-Einstein condensate to emphasize the role of the external conditions and environment in shaping the human character and destiny. In a talk show, Malik describes "Vaporization Enthalpy": "a strange story", depicting people who are "changing states due to external pressures" (Wade 1:30). He further states: "you hate people to a point of no return, and you squeeze them till they do something that either breaks them or makes them" (3:09). The story is dedicated to the victims of Peshawar terrorist attack on an Army Public School (16th December 2014), in which 150 people including 134 school children were gunned down by Taliban⁵⁴, and to "countless known and unknown" killed in American drone attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Coleman n.p.). He tells Saurabh Sharma that "the reality of contemporary Pakistan irritates me, like hair in a lover's eye. Love demands the lover to behold the Beloved in all her glorious and inglorious beauty, wanting the fullest *jalwa* (perception) of her..." (Sharma n.p.).

The story is presented through the main protagonist, a widow Tara's perspective who survives several hard experiences: a child marriage, a suicide attack in which her husband

⁵⁴ For details, please see: Lewis, Robert. "Peshawar school massacre". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 31 Jan. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Peshawar-school-massacre>. Accessed 16 April 2023.

Hashim gets killed; a drone attack in which his brother Sohail's wife Gulminay gets killed, alienating Sohail from this world, making him a beast filled with hatred; her mother's death, who dies grieving for her son; floods, which leave children without homes and parents; several suicide attacks in Lahore to where she migrates from the Northern areas; and finally her return home in Northern areas as an educated and enlightened person to fight her demons of anger and hatred with her faith in the possibility of life and love. The narrative takes the readers on a physical journey that also psychologically transforms Tara and makes her a new person despite her many losses. Her perspective works as a window on this dystopic world falling apart due to terrorism and growing intolerance besides her thoughtful reflection on how others around her break down in the face of the oppressive forces operating in the society.

The story is divided into five sections; each section starts with a description of a state of matter. The first section starts with a description of how the energy, "*heat of fusion*", can "transform a solid into liquid" by overcoming intermolecular bonds (156). This serves as an introduction to the section of the story focused on the disintegration of Tara's family, where bonds of love are broken by a drone attack, and many including her brother Sohail's beloved wife Gulminay are blown to smithereens, leaving Sohail filled with hatred and anguish to avenge the perpetrators of this violence (147). This depiction of Sohail's anger highlights the general anguish of the thousands of people who get affected by drone attacks and explains their anti-American sentiments and alienation from their own country Pakistan motivating them to join the extremists to commit suicide attacks. Despite Tara's pleas to Sohail to live for her and their mother, the latter leaves. By the end of this section, Tara has already lost her brother and mother: "everyone around her died or went missing" (150).

Gareth Porter observes that drone attacks that the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) primarily used to target al-Qaeda gradually became “primarily an adjunct of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, targeting almost entirely militant groups involved in the Afghan insurgency rather than al-Qaeda officials involved in plotting global terrorism” (34). He cites some examples of civilians from a report published by the Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict (CIVIC 2009), which discusses the civilian casualties in the drone attacks (ibid) with 460 civilians versus “66 leading officials in al-Qaeda or other anti-U.S. groups” (35). In 2008, the CIA was granted greater freedom to strike, and the result was “life or death decisions based on inferences rather than hard evidence” (ibid). Porter notes that these drone attacks on civilians increased anti-Americanism and “boosted recruitment for the Pakistani Taliban and al-Qaeda” (ibid). This also antagonized local militant groups like TTP (Tehrik-Taliban Pakistan) to align “with al-Qaeda against Pakistani government” (36). Muhammad Saleem Mazhar and Naheed Goraya, in their paper, argue that US drone attacks are “a clear violation of:

- The Charter of United Nations
- Rome Statute of International Criminal Court
- The Geneva Conventions of 1949” (190).

They also note that the drone attacks, due to civilian deaths, not only increased anti-Americanism but also caused a wave of suicide attacks by turning affected people against Pakistan for “logistic and military support to America” (188). Many militants, due to the “porous border” (ibid), hid in Pakistan giving rise to extremism and terrorism in Pakistan: “Every single Pakistani without any discrimination has been a victim in one way or the other. Thus, today the situation has come to the point that terror insecurity reigns far and wide in the country” (189).

The second section starts with a description of the liquid phase of matter with a “mobile and malleable” structure (151). Devoid of all relationships, Tara gains freedom to decide for herself, to continue her studies, and to contribute to the society. Married at the age of sixteen, she could not pursue her studies and became a widow at twenty-one, when Hashim died in a “suicide attack on his unit’s northern check post” (ibid). She leaves her village and moves to her distant Uncle’s house and pursues a bachelor’s degree in science. Her turmoil is not yet over, as the third section starts with “the *boiling point*” needed to convert the liquid into gas (154). She starts working as a volunteer to take care of the children displaced by the horrific floods and to “scour the ruins for usable supplies, and corpses” (155). While she sees the people mourning their world destroyed by floods, the city gets shaken by suicide bomb attacks, in the Holy month of Ramadan, targeting the shrine of Datta Sahib, a seat of a Sufi who all his life preached love and brotherhood of all mankind regardless of race and creed. Human limbs are scattered everywhere, and a second attack kills the health workers, humanitarians, and policemen trying to provide medical aid to the wounded (156).

The transformation of matter into Plasma phase imagines the city of Lahore destroyed with all its monuments: “the Tower of Pakistan, Lahore Fort, Iqbal’s Memorial, Shalimar Gardens, Anarkali’s Tomb, all the gates of the Walled City” are reduced to rubble (158). Even the tent city of the flood victims, where Tara is serving, comes under a suicide attack. Gulminay’s tattered body becomes a recurrent image that haunts the narrative woven together with consecutive bloody attacks, in which humanity gradually dies; the sanity shrinks, and the beast of hatred and anguish gets nurtured. Gulminay’s “shriveled head” haunts Tara as she sees the kites and vultures circle in the air to prey on the dead bodies and scattered human limbs

(159). The scavengers forebode the death and decay of a people and a way of life ended by rising extremism and terrorism.

The only thing that helps Tara survive through a series of losses is her escape in books and social work: “her books and her children” (158). The chaos around pushes her to deal with the beast of her mind: fear and hatred, and so she goes back to her home in the mountains where she finds the northerners “horrified by the atrocities they saw on TV and the ones she reported” (160). The last state of matter, Bose-Einstein condensate, in which “quantum effects become visible on a macroscopic scale” as “a large number of bosons occupy the lowest quantum state” (161), reflects Tara’s transformation into a new person, who overcomes her fear and hatred to realize that hatred would cause more chaos, more terror, and more bloodshed. She learns through her losses that Sohail’s path of revenge produces more violence and terrorism by producing a vicious cycle of drone attacks and counter-suicide attacks. Amidst the meaninglessness of existence, she holds on to her belief in love and empathy. Her confrontation with her brother’s rage and her choice of love and mercy in a world distraught by hatred and anger seems to voice the need of the hour in a Pakistan torn by decades of extremism and terrorism. She dreads the destructive path that her brother’s rage took. Hence, she rejects the path of revenge and hatred embodied in drone attacks and suicide attacks: “That in another time and universe there were not countless intemperate blood-children [suicide attackers] ...like vitriolic tides rising to obliterate the planet. That all this was not happening for one misdirected missile, one careless press of a button by a soldier eating junk food and licking his fingers” (166).

The story depicts a dystopic future where all historical and cultural monuments associated with Lahore’s glorious past and present, as a city, are destroyed in either drone or suicide attacks. The story highlights a symbiotic relationship between the foreign interference

materialized in drone attacks on civilians and the local growth of terrorist groups materialized in the suicide attacks on civilians. In this entanglement of local and global political agendas, it is common Pakistanis who pay the highest price with the destruction of their properties, lives, and culture, while living in an atmosphere of fear and anxiety. Malik, like his fellow Pakistani sf writers, uses a glocal approach to conceive the world of this story, where local and global powers operate ruthlessly without caring for the common people whose lives are at stake. Malik reflects on these fears and anxieties that plague the Pakistanis in their daily lives in his sf stories. Coleman quotes Malik that transformative experiences in his stories “Vaporization” and “Resurrection Points” (to be discussed next), “address my personal demons more than societal demons. Perhaps, in the end, there is no difference” (n.p.).

“Resurrection Points” also presents a dystopic picture of another Pakistani city, Karachi, plagued by sectarian violence, extrajudicial killings, religious extremism, persecution of minorities, and shrinking tolerance. The story is presented through Daoud’s perspective, and we get to know other characters and the narration of events through his eyes. Malik mentions two ways of doing his settings: “either doing it distantly ... or you can do it filtered through the character’s perception” (Wade 18:52). This story presents the transformation of Karachi, a multi-ethnic city into a “land of the dead” (78) reeking with “a sewerage nullah odor” (77). The protagonist of the story Daoud is a teenage boy, stepping into his ancestor’s business of healing people by doing massage of “resurrection points”, using his “biocurrent” (58) to bring their dead limbs back to life. The bodies seem to move just as the limbs do in the process of galvanization. He is homeschooled in medicine by his father Jamshed with textbooks and post-mortem of dead bodies of unidentified persons brought by his father from Clifton Beach to be given a decent burial by the Edhi Foundation (a charity organization).

The first body examined by Daoud turns out to be of a teenage boy with a cross around his neck. A close examination reveals signs of extreme torture on his body: “He was badly beaten. His teeth knocked out with a hammer... When he was near dead, they threw him in the river” (63). Daoud is agonized by his mutilated body and wants to know about the murderers, to which his father explains that some “animals” killed him because of sectarianism. The ‘cross’ recurs throughout the story, first around the dead boy’s neck, his friend Sadiq’s locket, and later in his mother’s drawer. Malik, in an interview, tells Saurabh Sharma that his stories “creep along, looking for... images” central to convey their themes (n.p.). In this story, the cross appears on different occasions to symbolize the persecution of minorities besides Daoud and his father’s Christ-like qualities, and the crucifixion of the innocent by the blind force of terrorism.

Daoud’s father does not charge his patients, nor does he allow Daoud to do so. Instead, he teaches him the values of being charitable and humble: “it’s the branch laden with fruit that bends the most” (62). Such charitable humanity is contrasted with the appearance of a dark figure embodied in a fundamentalist: “a gangly man with a squirrel tail moustache” (62) from “the local Defend-the-Sharia office” with a fatwa against the burial of the tortured Christian boy in “a Muslim cemetery” (63). Despite Daoud’s father’s various pleas, the mullah refuses to allow the burial with a threat to force them into silence: “you might be Muslim, but blasphemy is blasphemy” (64). The blasphemy laws (which have already been discussed in the section “Religious Extremism and Pakistani sf” in the second chapter) in Pakistan are often used to persecute minorities, marginalized Muslim sects, and political dissidents: “The law prescribes a fixed death penalty for all those who are found guilty. The option of life imprisonment was made defunct after a 1991 Federal Shariat Court judgement” (Mazhar n.p.). The Edhi driver is allowed to donate the body to the anatomy lab of Agha Khan Medical College. Daoud, shocked by such

dehumanization, goes to meet his Christian friend, Sadiq, in the Christian *Mohallah* (neighbourhood), who asks him to leave immediately (67). Later, he learns that riots have erupted because of the vandalization of the church and “feces strewn in the mosque” (Malik 68), which consumes many lives including Sadiq’s father, besides setting the *mohallah* ablaze (70).

Madeline Clements observes that Muhammad Ali Jinnah made it clear in his speech on 11th August 1947 that people of all religions will have the freedom to practice their faiths and will enjoy equality as Pakistanis, with Pakistan as a space where “minority religious communities’ ‘angularities’ would ‘vanish’” (133). At the time, not only Muslims but also Christians, living in Muslim-majority provinces, voted for the creation of Pakistan (ibid). Prof. Pervez Hoodbhoy and Dr. Naazir Mahmood observe that Ahmadis and Agha Khanis also played a significant role in the creation of Pakistan, but after Pakistan came into being, these communities were sidelined and ostracized (“Pakistan’s Religious Minorities” 1:41:54). The religious card was played against not only Hindus, Parsis, Sikhs, and Christians, but also marginalized Muslim sects. Clements notes: “The inclusion of minorities such as Christians was perhaps always problematic in a territory created in the name of Islam where a sense of patriotism and national commitment would (inevitably) be measured on the basis of religion” (133). Thus, the patriotism and loyalty of all those considered non-Muslims or less-Muslims have been questioned by the religious groups and politicians who hijacked the country after the demise of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The minorities are often perceived as British, Indian, or Israeli agents “by virtue of their divergent beliefs, as violators of Islamic tenets” (ibid). This story, by depicting the sectarian riots, challenges the monolithic image of the state/nation as well as the rights that the constitution grants to all citizens despite ethnic and religious differences.

Daoud's father tries to report to the police the torturous death of the Christian boy, but some extremists use the religious card to intercept him. Someone discovers a marriage certificate as evidence that Jamshed is married to a Christian woman, and that suffices for someone to shoot him to death. The marriage between Daoud's parents stands as a symbol of harmony between two faiths, as the Holy Quran⁵⁵ allows Muslim men interfaith marriages with the people of the Book. The killing of his father on this ground symbolizes the rise of an extremist ideology based on the misinterpretation of Islam. Daoud realizes at that moment that he "could have been "David" in a different world" (73); he can feel the agony of Sadiq, the pain of the mutilated Christian boy, and the suffering of Sadiq's mother who looks indistinguishable from his own mother. The brutality of the world around him makes him see death as an equalizer by reducing everything to dust: "dust has no religion" (ibid). He thinks of resurrecting his father to know about the murderer, but his mother stops him. Like his father, her mother also advises him: "Don't get consumed by anger or hatred or sides. There are no sides. Only love and not-love" (72).

This story also fuses the worlds of sf, slipstream, fantasy, and weird fiction, as the protagonist by practicing medicine also exhibits some spiritual qualities like the prophet Jesus (peace be on him), though such miracles are also explained in scientific/medical terms. Through the study of medical texts by his ancestors, Daoud has acquired knowledge to use his bio-current to resurrect the paralyzed limbs, and he heals Mr. Kurmully's lifeless diabetic foot. At the end of the story, he transforms into a Christ-like figure who resurrects all the victims of sectarian killing with "autopsy incisions crisscrossed their flesh" (77) in the Christian *mohallah* near Kala Pul, to follow him: "I raised my chin high and led my living thus on their final pilgrimage through this

⁵⁵ The Holy Quran Chapter 5 Verse 5 <https://legacy.quran.com/5/5>

land of the dead” (78), where the basic tenets of faith such as love, tolerance, and fraternity had died at the hands of the extremists.

Despite projecting the dark world in his stories, Malik does not lose hope in a dawn of a new day where darkness of ignorance will recede to give way to love, peace, and harmony: “the genesis of all religions, anthropologically speaking, is hope and fear...a religion (or faction) fuelled by hope, dream, and love will strive for light, betterment, and strength. One fuelled by fear will succumb to it [darkness]” (Sharma n.p.). Andrew M. Butler, in his chapter on the use of psychoanalysis in sf, discusses the importance of dreams in communicating repressed desires (291). Though he, citing Freud, focuses on sexual desires, Daoud’s vision communicates a desire for what he lacks in his dystopic world: love, peace, harmony, and tolerance. Moreover, Jungian archetypes are also relevant in this story with characters with Christ-like qualities, and the villain embodied in the figure of an archetypal rigid cleric. Malik, at his book launch, states that his stories have “sub-conscious notes” which he tries “to connect without the reader knowing about it. It is a very Freudian, Jungian way of approaching storytelling” (Malik “Book Launch” 14:33).

To conclude, Malik’s stories also use a glocal approach. As a Pakistani-American writer, he brings two worlds together, where global and local get entangled to depict the problems faced by Pakistanis in their familiar urban settings. As an immigrant, he thinks: “all immigrants are self-exiles... you are writing stories in exile” (Anwar 31:41). By extrapolating on the current socio-political crisis, religious extremism, and terrorism, Malik invites the readers to imagine confronting them in the future by asking what if those responsible for this situation do not take some serious action to change the path of self-destruction. He claims that sf “forces people to fill other people’s shoes. You are imagining alternate realities; you are imagining future Pakistan; you are writing future fiction” (Malik *MM Talks* 10:55). The four selected stories build dark

worlds in which characters navigate through the terrors confronting contemporary Pakistan. “Ishq,” “The Wandering City,” “Vaporization”, and “Resurrection Points” conflate personal and national tragedies, fears, anxieties, and missed opportunities. They depict how disease, natural calamities, religious extremism, and terrorism have destroyed people’s lives along with their way of life. The constraints of time and space of the chapter limit the analysis of Malik’s work to these four stories with an acknowledgement that this does not do any justice to the quality and quantity of work he has produced.

Last words: Jade Taryne Taylor observes that with the emergence of indigenous and other futurisms “we see more people of color and people from the Global South realizing that we do indeed belong in the science fiction field, that our futures matter, that we matter” (6). The brief review above reflects Pakistani sf’s participation in the futuristic discourse. Bina Shah, Mazhar Arafat, and Usman Malik, with their different styles and approaches, aim to caution the readers by presenting their characters suffering emotionally and psychologically in the dystopic and dark worlds. They use a glocal approach in addressing the problems facing Pakistan in a global context. While Bina Shah critically examines the gender problem, especially discussing the condition of women in an underground world, Mazhar draws attention to the dangers of dogma by imagining an authoritarian regime controlling the people with rigid rules, and Malik creates strange worlds to reflect on Pakistan’s problematic past, present, and future. Like Arafat, Malik also believes in the transformative role of sf: sf may help us imagine a way out of the socio-political quagmire, to figure out “peace strategies for our ongoing civil war against militancy and injustice. Envision a government that prioritizes healthcare, equal socio-economic opportunities, education, and long-term investment over military spending and concessions to the rich” (Malik “Rockets” n.p.). Shazia Sadaf rightly notes: “By accentuating a Desi identity, Pakistani authors

are employing speculative fiction, firstly, as a social commentary and secondly, to provide paradigms to interpret the processes of cultural decolonization” (12). The stories discussed in this chapter highlight the need for self-criticism and self-analysis much needed to redefine the national identity based on religion. Shah, Mazhar, and Malik encourage the readers to revisit and revise the idea of the nation to make it more inclusive of those marginalized based on gender, class, and religion.

Conclusion: A New Beginning

*(Har Cheez Hai Mehw-e-Khudnumai
Har Zarra Shaheed-e-Kibriyai
Be-Zauq-e-Namood Zindagi, Mout
Tameer-e-Khudi Mein Hai Khudai)*

Every atom pants for glory: greed

Of self-fruiting earth's whole creed!

Life that thirsts for no flowering—death:

Self-creation—a godlike deed; (Iqbal “051” n.p.)

Allama Muhammad Iqbal notes that nothing in this world is insignificant. Every living thing has an ingrained ambition to grow and to realize its potential. Even small gestures, efforts, actions, speculations, and acts of creativity have some purpose and direction. This study is but a small bud that may blossom with the watering of future scholars and thus may fulfil its purpose of flowering Pakistani sf scholarship. I end with an acknowledgement that my dissertation offers a preliminary view of an emerging field of science fiction in Pakistan with an open chronology and space, where more stories of Pakistani sf in indigenous languages from different regions of Pakistan from different time periods should be added.

This scholarly work organizes the discussion around some salient sf motifs identifiable in Western and Indian sf traditions to bring the Pakistani sf tradition into dialogue with these dominant cultural traditions keeping in view their influence on Pakistani authors, readers, and Pakistani science fiction. I also acknowledge the limits of the scope of my study, as it confines its discussion to a limited corpus of works marketed and sold as science fiction for two reasons: 1) the space and time constraints imposed by the Ph.D. project, and 2) the fluid genre boundaries of many works that can be studied as science fantasy more than as science fiction such as Tarzan stories. Moreover, detective stories by Ibn-e-Safi, Ishtiaq Ahmed, and Mazhar Kaleem, and

fantasy and horror stories by Abdul Hameed and M. A. Rahat contain sf novums such as interstellar travel, aliens, laser guns, and other technologies, but at the same time, they blend them with fantastical elements of ghosts, spirits, gennies, monsters, *churrails* (witches), and fairies.

At the most, this scholarly study offers a montage, following in the footsteps of Indian sf scholars Suparno Banerjee and Sami A. Khan, to identify some of Pakistani sf's patterns and its hybridity: its fusion of science and religion; alien and human; and local and global. In this process, my work evaluates the treatment of sf motifs in Western and Indian sf traditions before tracing their trajectory in Pakistani sf. The detailed discussion of the two model traditions in the first three chapters can be justified on two grounds: 1) these two traditions serve as the precursors as well as models: as Uppinder Mehan notes that the sf genre was mainly defined and established in the West and started its journey from there to the rest of the world (2), and 2) because of Pakistan's shared colonial past and cultural heritage with India. What Sami Khan observes in the case of Indian sf seems relevant for Pakistani sf also, as the latter also "comprises science and parascience- that is proto or quasi or pseudo or alternative or advanced science..." (206). The comparative discussion of these traditions (Western and Indian) grows slim in the last two chapters, as Pakistani sf emerges more distinguishable and identifiable as a genre. Nonetheless, the dissertation makes no truth claims, nor does it lay down rigid boundaries of Pakistani sf genre with a prescriptive definition and thus keeps the debate open for future sf scholars to consider other works (past, present, and future) to contribute to the field.

While in the West, sf emerged in the context of the scientific revolution with the Enlightenment in the background, in India sf emerged in response to scientific education during the colonial period in the nineteenth century. Banerjee depicts the indebtedness of Indian sf to

the British educational system, the gradual “consolidation of sf as a genre in popular culture”, the emergence of a nationalistic element in the 1940s, the experience of the golden age of indigenous sf from 1947-95, the development of Indian sf film in 1960s, and the rise of Indian sf in English in the 1990s with nationalistic concerns and “global ambitions” (14-15). In Pakistan, the relatively late emergence and limited production of sf can be blamed on the negligence of scientific education for a long time and the Islamization of education curriculum taught to the students in the institutions. This ideological control exercised through manipulating history and the science curriculum has played havoc with several generations since General Zia-ul-Haq’s period (1978-1988). It has never recovered since because the rigid ideological indoctrination has suppressed the inner curiosity and innate questioning nature of the people leading to a decline of the society (Hoodbhoy “Tracing the Roots” 58:30).

While India, today, is producing technology, Pakistan is mostly consuming it. Professor Pervez Hoodbhoy, through his columns and vlogs, consistently emphasizes the need for educational reforms to set Pakistan on the path of progress and to pull it out of the socio-political quagmire caused by the ruling elite and the establishment. He astutely observes:

When Galileo famously said “the Bible teaches us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go”, he was arguing the domains of science and belief do not overlap. This is how the West, China, and India developed modern scientific cultures. Centuries earlier, Muslim scholars had readily absorbed Greek learning while keeping their religious beliefs strictly personal. This made possible major discoveries and inventions. (“Muslims and Technology” n.p.)

Hoodbhoy takes a historical view of the present situation by comparing the different choices made by India in pursuing modern scientific education and Pakistan’s focus on traditional

education. Scientific education leads to innovation and new discoveries, while traditional education “lulls the mind into passivity by endless memorization and repetition” (“The Sad Story” n.p.). Hoodbhoy compares Pakistan with India and Iran and comes up with depressing figures that reflect Pakistan’s poor performance in all fields of science.

Table 1: Regional comparison with respect to prowess in science and technology.

	Academic Sciences	Space	Nuclear	Engineering	Biotech	Agrisciences
Pakistan	weak	weak	middle	weak	middle	middle
India	strong	strong	strong	strong	strong	middle
Iran	strong	middle	strong	middle	strong	middle

(ibid)

He considers educational reforms and scientific education to be the only way to progress for Pakistan in the global era. Similarly, other Pakistani scholars such as Qasim Jan and Kiramat Shah also stress the need of modernizing the education system to promote scientific inquiry “in order to develop a productive labor force and to identify better solutions for its economy and environment” (Shah 77).

Interestingly, Pakistani sf writers think no differently when they write about Pakistan’s problems in the glocal context. Usman Malik also criticizes Pakistan’s educational system which discourages the use of “imagination,” “vision,” and creation (“Rockets, Robots” n.p.), and instead, emphasizes memorization and reproduction of the textbook on paper. He wonders: “How many years are wasted ...in Pakistan studying everything but learning nothing” (ibid). He believes that by “encouraging science fiction, fantasy, and horror” readers can be motivated to think outside the box by imagining “alternate ways of living, learning, and growing as individuals or peoples” (ibid). He asserts that Pakistan “needs a scientific revolution” and this cannot happen unless our people “develop a healthy interest and curiosity in science...” (ibid). Curiosity and an inquisitive spirit are required to innovate and break new paths. Dr. Abdul

Salam, Pakistan's Noble Laureate in Physics (1979), in his speech "Islam and Science: Concordance or Conflict" (1984) delivered at the UNESCO House in Paris, cites many Quranic verses to invite Muslims to do away with the past philosophical debates between traditionalism and rationalism because the Holy Quran itself invites attention to the laws of nature "with examples drawn from cosmology, physics, biology, and medicine as signs for all men" (13). Therefore, he advises Muslims to pursue scientific knowledge as a moral obligation. He asserts: "Provide them [students] with facilities to create science in its standard norms of inquiry. We owe it to Islam. Let them know science and its limitations from the inside. There truly is no dissonance between Islam and modern science" (19).

Malik also cites Dr. Salam as his major inspiration, and thus he with Tehseen Bewaja founded the Salam award⁵⁶ named after the great Pakistani scientist (*Ted Talks* 5:20) to encourage new writers from South Asia experimenting in speculative fiction by inviting them not only to compete for the prize but also by connecting them with the editors and publishers (Anwar 20:50). Malik wants "science fiction/fantastika" to be included in literary festivals ("Rockets and Robots"), and to be taught as a subject in schools "to cultivate and expand scientific imagination and to increase the quality of education" (Malik *Ted Talks* 8:20). He cites Neil Gaiman to give an example of China for promoting sf to inspire the youth to imagine and create new things (7:15). China follows in the footsteps of the West where most scientists happen to be the ardent readers of science fiction (7:45). Malik and Tehseen Bewaja have also launched *Tasavvurnama*⁵⁷ (Tasavvur means imagination) to encourage the publication of speculative fiction. Some of the winners have been invited to attend international conferences such as International Conference

⁵⁶ Award website <http://thesalamaward.com/#>

⁵⁷ Magazine website: <https://tasavvurnama.com/about/>

for the Fantastic in the Arts (21:18). With such efforts, there is a hope for Pakistani sf to flourish and grow as a field in both the global market and academia.

Most sf works discussed in my work are produced by authors and directors who have received their education abroad or come from a diasporic background. This points out the relation between science fiction works and an education that prepares one for the realities of a globally entangled techno-scientific world. Most Pakistani sf writers such as Usman Malik, Sidra Sheikh, Omar Iftikhar, Bina Shah, and Mazhar Arafat take sf as a literature of ideas that intrigues its readers to think critically, imagine new worlds, rethink the problems in what-if contexts, and find their answers. Malik elevates the status of speculative fiction over “mimetic or realist literature” because of its educative quality and its openness to new possibilities and ways to “look at the world around us lighting up minds with revelation” (“Rockets, Robots” n.p.). In this way, he thinks no differently from Ashfaq Ahmad who does not distinguish between a scientist and a saint, as both work by inspiration to discover the truth. Shazia Sadaf also notes: “Many of the scientists during the golden period of Islam were great Sufi thinkers, for example the renowned physician Avicenna (d.1037), who made major medical discoveries but also wrote beautiful mystical treatises” (13).

Therefore, we find religion to be an important theme as well as a significant episteme in Pakistani sf. Sometimes, Pakistani sf presents Islam-science nexus to deconstruct the binarism associated with religion and science as is evident in Saeed Rizvi’s films *Shaani* (1989) and *Sar Kata Insaan* (Beheaded Man 1994) or in the stories of Ashfaq Ahmed which blend Sufism with science. Both Rizvi and Ahmad build worlds in which aliens, machines, and scientists exist in a world with people conscious of their faith with an understanding that transgression has dire consequences and faith can lead to salvation. Sadaf observes about the treatment of Islam in

Pakistani speculative fiction: “Such a reconciliation imagines a future based in wisdom of the past, a return to a combination of mythos and logos, imagination, and action” (14). At other times, Pakistani sf such as Mazhar Arafat’s animated films *SWIPE* (2020) and *Shehr-e-Tabassum* (City of Smiles 2020) project fear of alliance between technology and extremist ideology based on religious misinterpretation to cause social disorder in a futuristic setting.

Malik argues that a science fiction writer’s vision is not much different from a “scientist’s flash of intuition”, as both aspire for “a new, possibly utopian model” (ibid). Therefore, the sf works in diverse media examined in my work try to imagine alternate worlds in which Tarzan emerges as a local hero protecting the environment; aliens become allies to resolve the local problems or to critique global capitalism, imperialism, and socio-political issues; religion works as a source of social cohesion; religious extremism destroys the fabric of the society turning into dystopia; superheroes try to redefine Muslim identity in the post-9/11 context; authoritarian regimes are imagined to highlight gender discrimination and the issue of freedom of expression; and the worlds that take readers on a surreal journey of losses in the past, present, and future to self-critically reflect on the problems facing Pakistan in the glocal context.

Pakistani sf like Indian sf engages in identity politics, and what Banerjee observes about Indian sf is also relevant in the case of Pakistani sf: “Indian SF breaks down western perceptions about imagining India and the world, simultaneously creating its own visions...” (197). Pakistani sf writers try to revisit the politics of representation by telling stories from a nationalist perspective to dispel the effects of misrepresentation such as Islamophobia. At the same time, Pakistani sf writers like (mainstream) Pakistani writers in English should not be taken as representatives but as making individualistic interventions in the nationalist discourse in the

glocal context. Rightly does Sadaf note: “It is quite timely then that the Desi angle on the future has become a new literary project for decolonizing the field of speculative fiction” (13).

Peter Morey notes that there is a tradition of viewing “non-Western literatures as essentially anthropological ones” used by Western readers, in Gayatri C. Spivak’s words, for “information retrieval” (qtd. in Morey 6). The problem with this approach is that it limits the authors to deal with the themes and characters that will sell in the global market. The texts that deal with “the Muslim problem and that offer “some kind of authentic” anthropological insight will be published, circulated, reviewed, and critiqued more or less to the extent that they reproduce existing cultural viewpoints” (6). Such texts might aim to explode the assumed myths and misrepresentations, but to attract a global audience they seem to “accept a frame in which Muslim cultural values are contrasted with Western, more enlightened, more liberal ones” (7). Thus, the ‘authenticity’ of the text is not determined by the writer but by the decision makers like publishers and reviewers with a “predetermined criterion” (9).

On the other hand, taking all writing to be political, Mushtaq Bilal examines “how Pakistani English fiction writers articulate, implicitly or explicitly, their political stances vis-à-vis both domestic and international issues” (4). Most Pakistani English writers have dual nationalities, and mostly live abroad and thus hold dual perspectives “at once cosmopolitan as well as Pakistani” (3). He observes that the issue of the representativeness of their works is problematic, as many readers in Pakistan feel that these writers “address and/or appease the West in their works and contribute to stereotypical representations of Pakistan” (4). Similarly, in the Pakistani sf context, Malik asserts that his stories represent only his views and are limited by his experiences and influences, so he or other Pakistani writers should not be taken as representatives of Pakistan: “Writers are not representing anything but themselves and their

influences” (Anwar 28:35). Nonetheless, their works engage with the politics of representation, socio-economic and other problems facing Pakistan in the glocal context, as Nudrat Kamal notes:

The futurisms offered by South Asian science fiction and fantasy writers have responded to specific sociopolitical moments in the subcontinent’s history, offering alternate visions of the future in contrast to the varying discourses of (neo)colonialism, capitalism, ethno-religious nationalism and geopolitical conflict. (28)

Finally, the analysis offered in my work is limited by the available data, which includes both scholarly and popular material due to the dearth of scholarly material on the emerging field: Pakistani sf. I conclude an incomplete and brief story of Pakistani sf with an understanding that some works such as Faraz Talat’s dystopia *Seventy Four* (2020), Zohaib Kazi’s *Ismael ka Urdu Shehar* (2015), and Omar Gilani’s solo exhibition of sf artwork⁵⁸ (2018) have been overlooked because first, I found them late, and second, I had space and time constraints imposed by the PhD project.. New works are being written by Pakistani writers for the Salam award; some works have been published in international sf magazines by new authors such as Khizer Abbas, Umair Khan, Fatima Taqvi, and Mehak Khan; another team of superheroes *Paak Legion* by Umair Najeeb Khan is also added to the shelf of Pakistani superheroes; and many other works are in the tunnel by Malik, Shah, Mazhar, Iftikhar, and Sheikh inviting literary and sf scholars to include them in the debates of global sf studies.

I conclude with another extract of Iqbal’s poem that places wonder, the ethos of sf, at the center of human existence setting man on an endless quest for knowledge of world secrets.

⁵⁸ The quantity and quality of Gilani’s unconventional sf artwork deserves a whole chapter or an MRP. A glimpse of his work can be found at his website: <https://www.omargilani.com/about>

Wonder and curiosity motivate one to pursue the infinite path of self-discovery in a world where one gains multiple and alternate self-perspectives in a hall full of mirrors.

*(Qudrat Ka Ajeeb Ye Sitam Hai!
 Insan Ko Raaz Jo Banaya
 Raaz Uss Ki Nigah Se Chupaya
 Be-Taab Hai Zauq Aaghi Ka
 Khulta Nahin Bhaid Zindagi Ka
 Hairat Aaghaz-o-Intiha Hai
 Aaeene Ke Ghar Mein Aur Kya Hai)*

Nature has played a strange and wanton joke—

Making man a seeker of secrets,

But hiding the secrets from his view!

The urge for knowledge gives him no rest,

But the secret of life remains undiscovered.

Wonder is at the beginning and the end—

What else is there in this house of mirrors? (Iqbal *Insaan* “Man” n.p.)

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