

**SAUDI NOVELISTS' RESPONSE  
TO TERRORISM THROUGH FICTION:  
A STUDY IN COMPARISON TO WORLD LITERATURE**

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**Abstract.** The post-9/11 period has posited new questions for the Saudi society that required answers from different perspectives. The Saudi novelists tackled the issue of terrorism in their works and tried to define it and dig for its roots. Some blame the dominant religious-based culture for this phenomenon asking for more openness in the Saudi culture. Others take a defensive approach of the religious discourse blaming outside factors for this phenomenon. This positively connoted research uses the principles of deductive research and puts the Saudi novels that treat the theme of terrorism on par with some world literature that have the same concern excavating the common patterns such as (a) drive for terrorism and the lifestyle of a terrorist; (b) extreme religious groups and religious discourse; and (c) way of life: liberal West versus the Islamist. The selected novels are in three languages: Arabic, Urdu and English. *Al-Irhabi 20* and *Terrorist* explore the background and transformation of the terrorists. *Jangi*, and *Qila Jungi* share almost identical events and ideological background, they explain the reasons for apparently irresistible attraction for *Jihad*. Along such a dichotomy, one can find varied degrees of analysis through a psycho-analytical and textual perspective.

**Keywords:** Saudi novel, terrorism, religious discourse, extremism, Islamist, liberal West

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## **1. Introduction**

Finding its roots and essence in the drama proper, fiction always aspired for David vs. Goliath theme: one outcast, underground individual/group, both within and without, pitted against the supposedly tyrannical system always proved to be a nursery for the novelists. Since early 19th century, behind the backdrop of the Russian Revolution and Irish liberation movement, the novels on the theme of the thrill of violence, destruction and social upheaval have proliferated giving rise at

times to dime-novels. Fyodor Dostoevsky in *Demons* (1871–2) allows the ne'er-do-well Stephan Trofimovich a death-bed conversion. In *The Secret Agent* (1907), Joseph Conrad's protagonist is ordered to destroy the Greenwich Observatory but manages only to get his simple brother-in-law blown to bits. "Nevertheless, fiction," as Bili Melman observes, "is not preoccupied with terrorism as a concrete, historical phenomenon" (1980:560). It is coated with spiritual chaos and aesthetic dogmatism. The focus shifts from "the impact of violence to the psychological force of terror" (Houen 2002:80). For the modern fiction writers, in the age of Mass Media, the central tensions ensue from the positioning of the novelists as artists. Margaret Scanlan argues that writers face a reduced political role in an age of mass media and virtual entertainment. In response, postmodern writers have re-envisioned terrorists "both as rivals and as doubles of the novelist" (2001:06). In the *Mao II* (1991) by Don DeLillo, the reclusive novelist, Bill Gray laments that the violent political groups have usurped the roles formerly occupied by novelists in an age where terrorism has supplanted art as the "raids on consciousness" in order to "alter the inner life of the culture" (DeLillo 41). Scanlan sees both writers and terrorists in such novels as "remnants of a romantic belief in the power of marginalized persons to transform history" (2001:2).

The period after 9/11 witnessed an explosion of Anglophone literary texts gyrating on the theme of Islamist fundamentalism. The novels before the World Trade Centre debacle dealt with the identical theme behind the façade of a chaotic meaningless world. The spirit of free society in writers remained active. Doris Lessing raises the deep suspicious of public discourse in *The Good Terrorist* (1985) as she sees an affinity between police and terrorists; if the terrorists have time bombs, the government – or the Americans – have *the* bomb. Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) opens with a domestic terrorist group about to destroy the world's tallest building, while the novel *Survivor* (1999) opens with the narrator telling his life story into the black box of a hijacked jumbo jet he plans to crash.

Saudi novelists, like many writers from different countries, have addressed the issue of terrorism in their novels attempting to shape a public image to its causes and consequences. It is where the counter narrative from the soil of Saudi Arabia started to flourish. Saudi novelists had been vocal in denouncing the menace of terrorism: the extreme and deviant religious discourse that incites the youth against any anti-Islamic entity. Considering the impact of the attacks of 9/11 on Arab and Saudi fiction, it is obvious that it is much more than its impact on American fiction (Morley 2011:717). In her article, Catherine Morley shows how critics often accused writers after 9/11 of "'retreating' into the domestic; individual narratives, often set against sweeping historical backgrounds." Even in the novels that address the United States' relationship with the Middle East and the impact of globalization, the global and the personal are tightly intertwined" (2011:717). This self-indulgence in domestic affairs is in sharp contrast to what Yara El-Masry calls "(t)he proliferation of Terrorism discourse in the critical reception and framing of Middle Eastern fiction" (2016:6). She discusses the framing and labeling of

political violence in the Middle East and of the interpretation of fictional representations of this violence and the broader theoretical context that has facilitated its production (2016:22).

Terrorism has stricken Arab countries in the past and present, especially Algeria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Makhlof Amer foregrounds the issue of terrorism that has ripped apart the Algerian society as depicted in the Algerian novels he investigated. He discusses moral transgression by presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form with the gory tale of murder of prominent writers, thinkers, journalists by a gang of Islamist terrorists (1999:306). He further states that blind terrorism hits anyone, whosoever the target victim is (307). He calls terrorists, "the enemies of Culture, Literature, Art and Knowledge" (307). Similarly, Gaber Asfor, in his book about terrorism and fundamentalism mostly in Algerian and Egyptian novels, focuses on the terrorist characters and their drive for terrorism and violence in some works such as *Azilzal* (1974) by Tahar Ouettar, *Children of the Alley* (1959) by Naquib Mahfooz, ... etc. Asfor addresses the roots and causes of religious fundamentalism in the community pointing out the importance of literary genres in exposing the negative image of terrorism:

... presenting mirrors in which the terrorists can see the ugliness of their deeds and thought. I also mean to present the same mirrors to the recipients so that they know the ugly presence of terrorism and become much aware of the fossilized and frozen mental mechanisms of the terrorists, particularly when they justify for themselves and others the killing of innocents for a cause which has no relation to Islam (Asfor 2003:33).

Shadia bin Yahya has discussed war, terrorism, assassinations and violence as represented in the Algerian novel of Tahar Ouettar who fought against those atrocities and depicted them in *Al-Shamaah wa Al-Dahaleez* [The Candle and the Passageways] (1995) which contains terrorist scenes of men with veiled faces to terrorize people (62–63). Similarly, Nabil Suleiman has studied terrorism in Arabic novels in Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt. He has discussed *Al-Asforiah* (1996) by the famous Saudi novelist, Ghazi Algosaibi and how it presented extremism and fundamentalism through different characters and their impact on the society and the harmony of the nation which might lead to the end of Muslims and Arabs (Suleiman 2003:210–12).

Through a broad survey of the novels dealing with terrorism, the Egyptian and Algerian novels have gradually exposed Islamist terrorism since the early 1970s. The Saudi novel dealing with terrorism proliferated after the 9/11 attacks denouncing Islamist terrorism and extremism and exposing the looming threat of terrorist groups and deviant religious discourse. A recent work which deals with terrorism and exhibits natural aversion for extremist ideologies of terrorism in Saudi Novels is Abdullah Al-Ghanim's M.A. thesis (2012) on post-9/11 novels. He states the sources of terrorism as (a) misinterpretation of the text of The Holy Quran, (b) inability to understand the spirit of Sharia and the fundamentals of Islam, (c) believing that killing a non-Muslim is permitted, (d) misguiding and straying of some young people, (e) negligence and religious suppression, etc. (Al-Ghanim

2012:22). Furthermore, he points out the means of protection against terrorism and how Islam punishes terrorism against mankind with death penalty in a public place (23–25). He clarifies that Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance, cohabitation and religious coexistence (26–28). He also presents the stance of Saudi Arabia towards terrorism and the efforts put in to fight extremism and terrorism (29). In addition to the study of the novels tackling terrorism, the thesis is rich with literature review regarding Islamic anti-terrorism view.

Tami Mohamad Al-Sameeri has raised many questions about the Saudi novel and has referred to terrorism and extremism presented in some novels, which is considered new to the Saudi society as reflected in his dialogues with some Saudi novelists. Abdullah Thabet gives a brief account about *Al-Irhabi 20* [Terrorist no. 20] (2011), first published in 2006, and the factors that lead Zahi, the main character, to join the extreme groups (Al-Sameeri 2009:492–493). Khalid Al-Shaikh also mentions that he is the first to refer to terrorism and connect it to the West (Al-Sameeri 498). Fahad Al-Ateeq also discusses the lost generation of young men that crossed the red line and remained in the middle as a prey for fundamentalists and extremists due to their inability to grasp what is going on around them (Al-Sameeri 381).

Many Saudi male and female novelists deal with terrorism from different perspectives after the 9/11 attacks. They were shocked to know that the majority of the 19 hijackers were from their home country as reflected in the huge bulk of novels written after the attacks. Therefore, they started to dig for the roots of 'Islamist terrorism' that has shaken the West. The 1979 Seizure of the Grand Mosque in Macca led by Juhayman al-Utaibi was also considered to be a major terrorist event in Saudi Arabia which has been present in the Saudi novels such as *Al-Irhabi 20*. Novels like *Rihul Jannah* [Winds of Paradise] (2005) by Turki Al-Hamad, *Al-Hammam La Yateer Fi Buraida* [Pigeons don't fly in Buraida] (2009) by Yusuf Al-Mahimeed, *Bintul Jabal* [Daughter of the Mountain] (2007) by Salah Al-Qarshi, *Ainul Allah* [Eyes of Allah] (2009) by Khalid Al-Mujaddid, *Mahwaru Shar* [Axis of Evil] (2006) by Nabila Mahjoob, ... etc. have become famous anti-terrorism novels. Except for a few novels, most of their narratives have not traveled beyond the Arab World's periphery. They have been written in parallel line with other writers of the world like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid, *Agency Rules & Scorched Earth* (2014) by Khalid Muhammad, *Kite Runner* (2003) by Khalid Hosseini, *The Collaborator* (2009) by Waheed Mirza, *Jimmy the Terrorist* (2010) by Omair Khalid.

Behind this backdrop, recording the reactions and comparisons in some of the novels written by some of the novelists from Saudi Arabia and beyond its territory are of paramount importance to understand. Although terrorism has had this significance for the Saudi and Arab countries in particular, and the Muslim countries in general, it is a recurrent theme in many novels in different languages. These novels have various approaches and perspectives in tackling this theme. However, rarely have the Saudi novels been put in comparison with these wider

approaches and perspectives. They have been studied in isolation as if it is a local or regional issue neglecting its international dimension.

Putting Saudi novels that treated the theme of terrorism on par with some world literature that have the same concern excavating the common patterns such as (a) drive for terrorism and the lifestyle of a terrorist; (b) extreme religious groups and religious discourse; (c) way of life: liberal West versus the Islamist. For this purpose, four novels based on homogeneous themes are selected for the same: two by Saudi novelists and the other two by non-Arabs. Synthesizing their insights, the hermeneutics we would be looking for is the one that not only tests or probes the leitmotifs of the terrorist but also exposes the existential abyss in their lives through unpredictable interplay or collision of differences. The four novels feature terrorists as their main characters and demonstrate events leading to or resulting from terrorist attacks. The novels will be analyzed from a perspective that combines elements of psychoanalysis and cultural theory.

The first of the Saudi novels is *Al-Irhabi 20* (2011) by Abdullah Thabet (1973– ) who was born in Abha, Asir province. He belongs to the 1970s generation, a crucial span of time for “the rise of militant religious fundamentalism in the kingdom since the late 1970s” (Moaddel 2013:79), which he highlights as an active era of terrorism in the kingdom in his novel. Through several TV interviews and writings in *Al-Waten* Newspaper, where he has been a famous journalist, Thabet denounces religious extremism and extreme religious discourse as presented through Zahi, the main character, who has been recruited by extremists but fortunately escapes their circle at the right time, or else he would have been the terrorist number 20 of the 9/11 attacks at WTC.

The second is Taher Ahmed Al-Zahrani's *Jangi* (2007). Al-Zahrani (1978– ), born in Jeddah, belongs also to the generation of the 1970s. *Jangi* was his personal account of the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror. This experience is re-told through a seemingly real story of a friend who is unexpectedly caught in the US war in Afghanistan. The plight of the Arab fighters who went to help their ‘brothers’ there and their eventual detention in Guantanamo in Cuba and then in Alhayer Prison on Saudi Arabia is presented in a human framework of a very deep friendship between the narrator and the main character. Although Al-Zahrani does not seem judgemental in presenting this experience by stating if his friend was correct or not, if he was a terrorist or not, the novel stands as a unique Saudi account of this period and the people involved in its events.

The non-Arab novelists include Mustansar Hussain Tarar (1939– ) and John Hoyer Updike (1932–2009). Tarar is a Pakistani writer born in Lahore. In *Qila Jungi*, (2008), he delves deep into the psychology of the supposedly holy warriors from multiple nationalities caught in the inhospitable terrain of Afghanistan and facing the fury of aerial American bombardment from above. He seeks to explore what forces have conspired to bring them here and become *Mujahedeen*. Updike is an American novelist who populated his fiction with characters who frequently experience personal turmoil and must respond to crises relating to religion, family obligations, and marital infidelity. In *Terrorist* (2006), he is at his best in exploring

the gravitational attraction: Ahmad's fatal attraction for Straight Path as ordained in Quran, his ideological programming and recruitment by a Masjid Imam, his thrust for martyrdom through explosion and his later repulsion from it.

## 2. Drive for terrorism and the lifestyle of a terrorist

Many drives are usually blamed for terrorism like poverty, wealth accompanied with excessive leisure, improper religious education, frustration resulting from psychological and social factors, and the sense of injustice of all kinds. Albert Bandura observed that "the path to terrorism can be shaped by fortuitous factors as well as by the conjoint influence of personal predilections and social inducements" (1990:186). Many writers associate terrorism with young age: a category of people enthusiastic for new goals and adventure. "When you are young," explained one of the terrorists, "there is an excitement to it. You are seeing guns, you had only ever seen them on the TV..." (Victoroff 2006:10). Others look at it as an 'adventure', "Reports suggest that many Saudis who went to Afghanistan for Jihad in 1990s did so out of sense of adventure" (Helmus 2009:94).

Joining a terrorist group is a decision that is not easy to harbor in one's mind. Many drives and motives can account for such a step. Certain religious dispositions and intellectual orientations furnish its basis. When applied to literature, psychoanalysis pays much attention to the drives and motives that govern a fictional character's choices (Habib 2007:572). The analysis runs parallel to psychological concepts derived from Freud, Lacan and Jung and demonstrate how they influence the thoughts and behaviors of fictional characters.

This can be noticed in Zahi's life stages in Abdullah Thabet's *Al-Irhabi 20*. Zahi's question of his identity is crucial to his drive for an extreme religious group and his interaction with the community afterwards. His account manifests the society he lives in that has shaped his identity and the influence of extreme religious groups on him. The nature of Asir is tough and its people are sentimental and can be easily influenced by outside forces (Thabet 2011:14). Their immense passion can easily lead them to recruiters whosoever they are and whatever their goals are. Thabet projects that it is the society and the weak family ties that drive the person towards extreme actions. He also attributes religious extremism to the simple nature of the villagers, especially during the 1970s when extreme groups were active in Asir region, where Zahi was raised.

Thabet blames the family for taking strict measures against children that lead to extremism. Misery, deprivation and strict upbringing will certainly have its negative influence on Zahi which have forced him to search for another escape at an early age and make him ripe for recruitment. He looks after livestock while his friends play in their free time. He shares a bedroom with his two elder brothers who explicitly express their displeasure for intruding their privacy. His father has always neglected him and rejected his requests. Zahi has always complained of scolding and physical torture. He asserts all this, "Man cannot be other than of

what he lived and passed through from the first day of his life until the last moment of it" (Thabet 44).

In *Jangi*, Al-Zahrani presented the so-called terrorist formation and development process through a very contrasting model: a very deep friendship that characterized the relationship between the narrator and the main character. The deep contrast between friendship, sweet life and loyalty on the one hand and hatred, hardship and betrayal on the other, controls the novel and provides its underlying structure. *Jangi*, originally meaning 'fighter', alludes to the place, the protagonist and even the narrator of the novel. The protagonist fights for a cause he believes in; and the narrator fights for a friend he has deep loyalty for. The fighting atmosphere of the place, *Jangi*, is so predominant especially in the second half of the novel providing another contrast with the calmness and easiness of Jeddah, the original place of the characters.

Al-Ghanim shows the predominant presence of the place in most of the Saudi novels that treat the theme of terrorism. *Jangi* is a very clear example that Al-Ghanim uses to show how the place characterized the Saudi young people who lived in it with completely different traits that changed their life not only while they were there but even after they returned home (Al-Ghanim 167). Al-Zahrani's novel that carries the name of the place stands as a good example of the predominance of this place and its symbolic atmosphere. It has a great impact on the life of Khalid Alqorashi, the main character. He is an ordinary lively young man of the urban areas of Saudi Arabia, Jeddah. He is from a rich aristocratic family who lives his school and college life like all ordinary young people in Jeddah. He is enjoying his life to the utmost; an enjoyment that is circled in a very lively friendship with the narrator whom Khalid valued as it appears in his note to one of the letters, "Our friendship is genuine and true" (Al-Ghanim 28).

There are many details about their wondering together "down the streets of Jeddah, the wide and narrow ones, the avenues, boulevards and alleys" (Al-Zahrani 2007:17), even their romantic accounts of their beloved girls: Aziza and Mariam and their adventures in front of the girls' houses. Suddenly, an unexpected change overcomes Khalid's life:

*I did not expect, even in my wildest dreams, that he would change his life that much, make the move all the way to Afghanistan, without any warning. ... That man who never held cold steel would later hold an RPG to face the mightiest power in the world. The young man who used to go with me to flirt with the girls in Mahmal Mall on the corniche, believes now only in the "houris" of Paradise. ... It is he who would not expect to live in a dirty prison called Shapraghan in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan, and then to be moved from the extreme east to the extreme west in Cuba, living in cages in the detention prison of Guantanamo* (Al-Zahrani 17–18).

The novel does not present much justification for this sudden change. However, the account of Khalid's early life presents his belief in friendship and some sense of religious commitment. This will develop later in a wider feeling of commitment to all Muslims: one of the values Islam cherishes in all its followers. He is moved

by this feeling to try to do something for his Muslim brothers who are suffering injustice under the American war on terror. At the peak of the narrator's romantic story, he starts to notice this change: "he started to reflect on lofty matters that were beyond my philosophical boundaries" (Al-Zahrani 46).

The drive for joining a fighting group that is categorized as 'terrorist' might be ascribed to the search for a goal in life; a sense of obligation to fight for the big cause of the Muslim community in general. Arthur Bradley and Abir Hamdar describe the drive that led Khalid and his colleagues to join this war as "less a choice for these men than a kind of existential necessity ... an act of necessary Existential resistance" (2016:451). For those people, only two choices are available in their confrontation with such mighty powers: "either die like an animal or die fighting darkness, traitors and occupiers" (Al-Zahrani 84). The novel, hence, abandons the usual choices of most other novels that depict the drives of young Muslims who decide to join Jihadi groups: the search for an eternal life of *hoor al-ayn* [houris] (Bradley and Hamdar 2016:451). These novels characterize Jihadists as frustrated young people who are faced with a choice between earth and death. Their fight is only to obtain a place in paradise with *hoor al-ayn*. Al-Zahrani's *Jungi* has willful young people who are fighting for a cause that they believe in.

In many novels that treat the theme of 'terrorism', joining a terrorist group is usually ascribed to some unbearable circumstances in the family or the community such as *Al-Irhabi 20*. The decision is always presented as a shock that both the family and the community resist and scorn; they detach themselves from the act either out of their refusal of the ideology behind it or out of fear of the consequences that might face them. The 'terrorist' is usually pictured as a source of danger for those who surround him; and his fatal end presents a sense of relief to all, however tragic it might be.

Khalid's decision to join a fighting group in Afghanistan is different. The novel does not put his family in focus. So less is known about the family members and their attitude. What can be discerned from the novel is that it is a well-to-do family living in a good neighborhood completely different from the narrator's. They seem to have provided much freedom for Khalid to live his own life the way he likes; even his decision to travel to Afghanistan was negotiated in the family and they could not stop him. The family seemed unhappy for his departure, but it was not such a scornful act for them. The news of his detention in Guantanamo in Cuba and then in Alhayer Prison in Saudi Arabia was also treated with compassion and sympathy from all those who knew Khalid.

Tarar's novel '*Qila Jungi*' (2008) written in Urdu against the background of the downfall of Taliban and the consequent massacre, and approximated on the modules of Louis Althusser, examines the repressive state apparatus of American, as well as the ideological state apparatus of Taliban through ironic mode. The miscarriage of war strategies employed by Americans during their war on terror intended to exact verifiable information from foreign fighters about their possible links with Al-Qaeda led to an open grave of hundreds of defenceless Taliban soldiers. A handful of Taliban fighters along with foreign fighters who survived

the onslaught of heavy American bombardment are stuck in the basement of *Qila Jungi*, suffering unbearable agony and starvation, feeding on a dead horse's meat, waiting to meet their inevitable death. To reduce the agony of waiting, they share their stories of what political, social and psychological factors motivated them to join the Taliban.

The class of people who took part in the Afghan-Soviet War were either poor or rich, motivated either intrinsically or extrinsically. All of them came from different cultures and social milieus that obliquely hints at the depth of doctrinal radicalisation that the novelist intends to highlight. Abu Talib Chee Chee of Chechnya left behind the world of natural surroundings in Dagestan. Abdul Hamid John Walker Salman Al-Farsi from Britain forsake the luxurious life and his father's religion Judaism in pursuit of an 'ideal vision'. Hashim Mir of British nationality and Pakistan origin, fully disillusioned with the forms of Islam that his mean father was practising, left the bright career in London School of Economics to understand the horizontal concepts of Islam. Abdul Wahab Ghamadi, a Saudi national, son of a polygamous, lustful father, despite bagging a degree from Cambridge in Life Science/Human Science, considered the higher education as one form of mirage. Murtaza Beg, son of a Pakistani neo-colonialist Irtaza Beg who amassed wealth through a series of scandalous liaisons under the travesty of destroying the 'Evil Empire' during Afghan-Soviet war working as conduit between CIA and Pakistan's ISI in supplying arms and ammunitions to Jihadi groups, and by glamorizing his role in the overthrow of Soviet Union, left luxurious but idle life in favour of madness and simple life style of *Mujahedeen*. Allah Baksh, a Pakistani village entertainer of a Chaudhury while being always ready with the begging bowl, follows the figments of his imagination stimulated by *Molanas* to join Jihad. Gul Sheri Wali, a Pashtu, a Guyur Pathan, serving as an aid to his father in the stable of a sadist and cold-blooded feudal landlord, facing sheer penury and ignominy in most despicable form, says goodbye to the feudal world to witness egalitarianism in *Madarsa* as preached by Prophet Mohammad only to be duped by war monger 'sandwich' Maulvis.

During the Soviet Afghan war, the bulk of Taliban who were involved in Jihad came from the lower strata of society from villages. Clerics called the shot through bottom-up mobilisation. The novelist uses irony to spot rampant malpractice of the enlistment of such pool of volunteers for Jihad by wily *Mullahs* in *Madrasas*, alluring them, initially, in the name of free education, only to be sacrificed, later, at the altar of Jihad. The tales of Allah Bakhsh, Gulsher Mohammad, and Chee Chee Abu Talib – with minor variations – set precedent to such trends. They played into the hands of such *Moulvis*. Sorrowful stories, the cruelties of non-believers, the manifold reward of martyrdom, reference to messenger of Islam, narrated by the Afghan *Mujahid* during Juma Prayer would melt the heart of Allah Bakhsh (Tarar 2008:104). In mystic vision, he was advised to go immediately to Koda Khatak (Tarar 106). The evangelical zeal to establish *Sharia* in Pakistan by Sufi Moulvi, who earned the tag of "*Waliullah*" (Ally of Allah) (Tarar 135), would entice Gulsher Mohammad to join such forces. Monopoly of Imam Shamil

in the valley of Dagestan on spiritual issues and his mystic appearance in dream of his granny Nafisa Khatoon to urge him to join war with the message "... reach Gruzni" would change the course of life of CheeChee Abu Talib (Tarar 76).

Most of these situations were identical. However, through all these perils, *Mullah* remained unscathed. They saved themselves together with their kith and kin from such holy war, "Allah must have guarded him for any other *Jihad!*" (Tarar 138). The novelist, as he explains to Nasir Abbas Nayyar in an interview, truly stands up to his self-assertions that he never accepted "everything wholly". Even for the unquestionable things such as beliefs, he still has "questions about them" (2017: para. 30).

The rest of the characters were guided by intrinsic motivations to join *Jihad* in Afghanistan. For Hashim Mir, in London School of Economics, the thought-process of his Saudi friend Al-Mansoor was instrumental in bringing him here to join the Taliban: he would recite Quran and then explain it in English. Hashim Mir "would see the worlds which till now had been conspicuous by its absence" (Tarar 96). He did not come to pay *Kaffarah*, (recompense) for anything. He has come to pay his debt for lack of direction and to achieve the goal of his "horizontal concepts to get rid of the futility of life" (Tarar 96). In contrast, Murtaza Beg joined war to pay recompense for his elders. He had come for 'martyrdom'. He says: "I am ashamed of the works of my elders. Some compensation I wish to pay. I want to drop a heavy baggage of shame" (Tarar 89). Jaani had come in search of a 'perfect dream' (Tarar 116) after being fully disillusioned with Communism. A pony, a sport car and voluptuous body and long leg of a girl, availability of high-quality wine and heroine cannot be the part of dream (Tarar 117). He had convinced his father about his decision to change the religion from Judaism to Islam. He imbibes the lesson taught by his father that "passing life without any aim, high objective and vision is akin to animal act" and firmly believes that in "the whole world Jihad should be waged against evil power" (Tarar 119–120). In Islam, the concept of sin-reward, and hell-heaven has given him the "concept of brotherhood" (Tarar 121). These concepts are too present in Christianity and Judaism but "these are silent faiths and Islam is all evolving" (Tarar 121).

However, for Abdul Wahab, achieving exceedingly good marks at Cambridge could not quench the thirst he wished. Suddenly he "felt that these all forms of Education and knowledge is merely a mirage" (Tarar 149). Although liberal values gave impetus to his critical insights, he frankly admits: "Life in Cambridge completely transformed me" (Tarar 153). In front of a strict king, giving stamp of approval to every move and yielding to it, became increasingly difficult. In front of such kingship the punishment was exemplary, but in front of such strictness, whenever an American or European came underneath it, it became impotent (Tarar 149).

In the aftermath of the World Trade Centre, Updike turns the telescope from pictorial imagination of a free society pitted against communism towards contemporary realities in *Terrorist* (2006). In this large-scale ensemble novel, delineating the novel from the standpoint of a terrorist, the novelist offers full-

length criticism of eremitism revolving around and following one of the basic tenets of Islam 'Straight Path' through the caricature of a young and impressionable 18-year-old boy. Ahmad Mulloy Asmawy, a "very correct, intelligent and at the same time intolerant" boy (Kriebernegg 2011:220), unwittingly, plays into the hands of a New Jersey storefront jihadist: Shaikh Rashid, the imam of the mosque (Updike 2006:4).

Charged with excessive recitation of Quranic verses, Ahmad seems to witness the present with bifocal eyes. From psycho-analytical perspective, his character sketch built on puritanical distaste for the liberal values stems from the paradoxical relationship he had with his mother and the Imam: he is groomed by his mother to learn the American enterprise, which he defies with all his might, and at the same time he is trained to be a suicide bomber recruit by Sheikh Rashid. He is pitted against the forces of consumerism, Americanism, crony capitalism and the moral turpitude prevalent among female characters.

Ahmad, born out of mixed parentage, suffers most because of the absence of a fugitive father in surreal world. In corporeal world, he is looked after by two feminine characters: his mother Teresa and his school mate Joryleen whose life style is repulsive to him from Islamic perspective. Ahmad's personal life both at familial and social front is torn asunder by seeing the moral turpitude and ease of business prevalent among these feminine characters. His mother is "victim of American religion of freedom" (Updike 167). She does not mind sleeping with people out of marital wedlock. On the other hand, his school friend Joryleen Grant is leading a life of hedonism. Islam teaches him to avert one's eyes from the weaker sex. Ironically, he, a man of flesh and blood, could not resist the temptation to look down past her face, "with its gleam of mischief, to the tops of her breasts, exposed by a loose-necked springtime blouse" (Updike 38). For a fraction of a second, he thinks of sinking himself into her body and knows from its richness and ease that this is a devil's thought. In Ahmad's worldview, they are "uniformly degraded or ineffectual" (Alghamdi 2015:6).

In the flower of his youth, Ahmad was brainwashed by two malevolent characters to commit the heinous crime of terrorism: Shaikh Rashid and Charlie. They sow the seeds of dissension in him through the injudicious archetypes of Americanization, rising tide of consumerism, sexual promiscuity and the exercise of western hegemony upon the Muslim World. Charlie Chenab, playing the devil's advocate, fills him with stories of racial disparities and history of revolution in America. He explains to him, "in America, nothing is free, everything is a fight ... They forced a country of Jews into Palestine, right into the throat of the Middle East, and how they've forced their way into Iraq, to make it a little U.S. and have the oil (Updike 147)".

He generates the mood in Ahmad through paradoxes about the various sins committed by the Americans. Underprivileged black people resort to stealing owing to unequal distribution of income. Muslim nations are to be monitored, whereas America with its large size and immoral population can hardly be instructed. He goes on to say: "... they can't. It's like animals. You don't hold rats

and rabbits to the same standard as lions and elephants. You don't hold Iraq to the same standard as the U.S ...” (Updike 157). Ahmad's makeover is almost complete: he says 'no' to life, 'no' to clinging to women, 'yes' to the life after death.

### 3. Religious discourse and extremism

Extremism refers to the “activities (beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, strategies) of a character far removed from the ordinary” (Coleman and Bartoli 2003:2). Although it is not always easy to determine the ‘ordinary’, as its definition is usually a subjective and political matter (2003:2), religious extremism is usually foregrounded in discussing terrorism. It is said that all terrorists are extremists, but not all extremists are terrorists; it is not the cause that makes someone a terrorist, but rather the methods (tactics and strategies) they use to attain their goals, “they are terrorists because their attack is designed to spread fear, anxiety, and terror through a given population (Levin 2006:1). Terrorism, linked until the mid-1980s with political extremists on the far left, shifted dramatically to represent right-wing extremist causes (Levin 28-9). Many of these groups held extremist religious ideologies including the Islamist ideology. Al-Qaida, for example, fueled its agenda with a religious discourse that they are the only group that have the right understanding of Islam and they are fighting for the true cause of Islam against those who defy it.

Extreme religious discourse is, therefore, prominent in the four novels under discussion. It furnishes the underlying narrative of all the characters who resort to or employed by extremist groups. The ‘good vs. evil’ framing, one of the main resources of that discourse (Coleman and Bartoli 4), is recurrent in all these novels combined with the other elements like an other worldly orientation; a need for self-purification; divine sanctioning of horrendous violence; and the depiction of martyrdom as an act of self-purification and justice (4).

Thabet's *Al-Irhabi 20* asserts that there are outside factors playing a pivotal role in shaping the mind of individuals towards extremism. Muslim Fundamentalists, who came from neighboring countries during the 1970s, brought this new ideology of religious extremism (Thabet 30). Zahi's big brother was extremely religious because he was influenced by them during his work in Qur'anic schools. They managed, as Zahi confirms, to recruit him to their new ideology which forbids TV, for example, and considers it a devil invading the minds of the young people and Islamic ethics. One of those extreme groups, the writer refers to, was Juhayman's which was a product of those extreme ideologies that were prevailing in the 1970s that have affected negatively the international, local and social tranquility. Juhayman and his followers attempted to seize Kaaba believing that the people had become immoral as it appears through TV. This group aimed at revolting against the Saudi regime and intended to eliminate the “infidel government of the country”, as the group thought (Thabet 31). Through this account, Zahi shows that his big brother is similar to Juhayman. Therefore, he

could have been one of those terrorists but the police did not get any evidence proving that he was one of the members (Thabet 31).

Extreme religious discourse incites fundamentalists to commit extreme violence opposing those who do not follow them without any consideration for Islamic teachings which promotes peace. Extremists misinterpret Qur'an verses to serve their goals and brainwash young men, "Zahi ... The qur'anic school is your gate to heaven. You will be a big Shaikh loved by people who will request you to pray for them. In this school, you will have fun and money ... unlike the rest of you brothers..." (Thabet 52).

Thabet exposes the religious groups' tactics to attract young people to their ideology. He describes their camp as a source of love, unconditional brotherhood, sacrifice, altruism, submission ... etc. manifesting, as Jerrold M Post puts it, "the role of the leader ... in drawing together alienated, frustrated individuals into a coherent organization" (2006:21), as is the case of Zahi. The camp is organized into divisions and subdivisions headed by students' leaders from high school and supervisors from the university students as if one is living a thrill of establishing a new state (Thabet 78). The camp organizes lectures on worship, intimidation, Jihad and tyrannical governments and train members on night assaults with jihadi uniform (Thabet 79). This religious ideology has caused a rift between Zahi, on the one hand, and his family and his community on the other hand. He has firmly believed that others including his family are infidels and sinners: an extreme step adopted by Zahi and encouraged by the religious group. Zahi returns to his family to practice the true faith starting with his father: "Take this TV out," he tells his father, "you are cheating your family. He who dies cheating his subjects, will not smell the fragrance of Jannah" (Thabet 85). In the camp, Zahi has been trained to be an eloquent preacher calling others to follow the doctrine of the group. Yahya, depicted as an extremist, has tremendously influenced Zahi. He has taught him that Allah displays the right path through their tongues and that they should lead people to it. They have to accept it, else they do not deserve to live. Hating others who do not follow the same path is a pious act. He has convinced him that his elder brother who denied the true path and retreated after the events of Al-Haram is impudent and modernist. He advised him to leave home for the fear of being tempted by the sinners (Thabet 85). Through such lop-sided interpretations, he fills the existential void developed, over the years, through escapists tendencies.

Escapism, as John L. Longeway pinpoints, is "the attempt to avoid awareness of aversive beliefs" (1990:1). Similarly, Warren L. Young states that, "escape from a situation by creating one which appears to the creator before he has experienced it, to be better than in which he finds himself. This type of escapism is the attempt of the individual to escape the drudgery of the situation he finds himself in" (1976:377). This is true of Zahi and his inclination to escape as a reaction to his miserable past. He escapes to his animals in which he finds solace and ascribes this escape to the loss of one's fellow human (Thabet 48). Zahi frequently states his desire to escape and rebel against his family:

*the hell of my family makes me ready to be anywhere other than home which treat me as a teenager who has to be besieged ... and I will rebel against my family to be with that group whether they like it or not* (Thabet 73–72).

Later, he becomes the center of attention of a religious activity group in school and escapes to a more complicated circle, i.e. fundamentalists. This kind of irrational compensation leads to sophisticated issues in Zahi's life, though Zahi may not be responsible for them. It was his brother who directed him and pushed him at the beginning and activated the drive for extremism and the negative attitudes towards others on baseless grounds.

Thabet gives his readers a window into the first ground where children may be recruited and driven to extremism. He describes the religious teachers as harsh and the schoolmaster as a beast who beats a new student from Sham because he was wearing, "the clothes of unbelievers" (Thabet 53). He expresses his feelings of frustration and disappointment about school which turned "to be horrible ghosts with sharp teeth looking at me and giggle" (Thabet 53). He also narrates another horrible experience when he attempts to draw a butterfly, but the teacher beats him because, "drawing of animate beings is haram" (Thabet 54), in the view of extremists.

Zahi can neither be an entrenched escapist nor a rooted extremist as he progresses. He has not stayed for long with the fundamentalists and becomes their opponent. His repressed hatred for bearded men is demonstrated when he once throws a tin at a bearded man driving his car and runs away (Thabet 64). He joins the extremists and considers them the redeemers, "I have no doubt that they were the redeemers of the fatigue of life and of hell in the second world. He who redeems me of my loneliness and the hell of my family, will deserve my sacrifice ..." (Thabet 86). Later, he meets the great Shaikh of the district who instigates him a lot about the nature of the center and its mission "to demolish the states of the disbelievers and tyranny ..." (Thabet 90).

Zahi is transformed radically from a useless person to "a warrior in the path of Allah ... to establish the Sharia in a new state" (Thabet 91). He views the sect he joins as the only victorious sect while all others will go to hell. He also adds that he will be one of those who will renew the religion of the *Ummah* (Muslim Community) (Thabet 91). After spending a lot of time with extremists, he averts their thought, especially after 9/11, and returns to his family. He begins questioning using religion as a whip to humiliate others (Thabet 118), when a young man is imprisoned in a bathroom for listening to songs. Other factors which have distanced him and exacerbated his connection with the group are: the rift between Shaikhs over certain legal issues where more than one interpretation is possible; his friends' laughter over his failure in exam; his father's warning letter which gives him another chance to pass his exams lest he will be expelled from home; facing accusation of writing *ghazel* (love poetry) and of having sensual desires for young boys in his circles; being taken to an isolated place and beaten after they fail to bring him back to their circle. In Freudian perspective, his id is deeply wounded. His super-ego dictates the terms from now onwards. Zahi admits that

something begins to wake up inside him. He is turning to be tolerant discarding extreme views on certain matters. He turns against them publicly attempting to message that religion is not confined to one group but it is for all, breaking the restrictions the extreme group impose on him, reading for liberal writers. This open and tolerant ideology marks a new stage in Zahi's life as a reaction against religious radicalism.

Al-Zahrani's *Jangi* treats 'terrorism' and 'extremism' in a very special way. The fact that it is narrated from the point of view of a beloved friend of someone who decides to take this way of life makes it more focused on the human aspect than the ideological one. The Arab Afghans are represented as a group of enthusiastic people (mostly young) who came from different Muslim countries to fight America. They are portrayed as very courageous young people who were fighting for a cause they believe in. For the writer, their struggle and destiny deserve sympathy and praise. Khalid's adoption of the ideas that led him to join this group is described as – lofty matters' that were beyond the narrator's – philosophical boundaries' (Al-Zahrani 46). The drive for joining a fighting group that is categorized as "terrorist" might be ascribed to the search for a goal in life; a sense of obligation to fight for the big cause of the Muslim community in general.

This big goal led those young people to bear all types of hardship and face death in an unbalanced war with the most powerful forces in the world. Their fight, whether right or wrong, draw the admiration of all. The correspondent of the famous western newspaper *Time* introduces his coverage of the battle at *Qalati-Jangi* saying, "[i]n Afghanistan, nothing is ever what it seems. Including surrender" (Perry 2001).

In Tarar's *Qila Jungi*, the dialogue among a bevy of characters underlines the phenomena of Talibanization of Afghanistan. Most empirical of all is the dialogue between Jaani and his father. Jaani's father, at loggerhead with his son's world views, offers full length critique of Taliban getting hold in Afghanistan and warns him not to join them. He reiterates the stereotyped image of Taliban regime:

*... illiterate and savage Mullahs ... turned Afghanistan into stone age, .... where to play music is a crime ... whole women lot are buried behind veils and girls can't go to school. In hospitals, the lady doctors are given marching orders . . . menfolk's beards are scaled through the gasping palms and if their hair doesn't exceed the palm, they are whipped* (Tarar 121–122).

Whereas Jaani advocates for them vehemently: "hundreds of charges can be heaped upon them but not of corruption; in history, for the first time they have purged their country off weapons and narcotics" (Tarar 122). He farther adds: "they snatch the rights of women but return to them unexpected honour and dignity". Jaani concludes that while he is fully cognisant of their weakness and ignorance, he is an "admirer of their simplicity, immaculate honesty and unwavering faith" (Tarar 123).

Most of the characters in the novel do not feel guilty for their actions except a few like Hashim Mir and in a lighter vein Abdul Wahab. After joining them, Hashim Mir was at his wit's end to see among the rank and file of Talibans "short-

sightedness, racial feeling, and ignorance despite their being honest and upright and their visions being correct” (Tarar 97). He is with them for Taliban or to achieve the horizontal concept of Islam because of selfless and daredevil partners. On being probed whether his decision to join Taliban was right, he said “yes, no doubt” (Tarar 97). This is unlike Abdul Wahab’s disillusionment: “If education and knowledge was a mirage like the dessert of Najd so was this *Jihad*” (Tarar 154).

In Updike’s *Terrorist*, the bedrock of Ahmad’s belief provides the emotive arc of the religious discourse. It is exposed through excessive recitation of Quranic verses with frequent references to Prophet Mohammad. It is also coupled with complete submissions to the will of Allah resulting in the reward for the Muslims and damnation for the Infidels. Shaikh Rashid successfully weaves the thread of myth and fantasy in him around the weird ways of American society in contrast to the teachings of Sayyid Qutb: the Egyptian thinker who is tailor-made for Shaikh Rashid’s design, “[h]e came to the United States fifty years ago and was struck by the racial discrimination and the open wantonness between the sexes. He concluded that no people is more distant than the American people from God and piety” (Updike 171).

With his gift of gab, Shaikh Rashid takes pledge from him not to stray from the chosen path. Even in case of calamity, he guides his ‘prize pupil’ to run, march on and not hide. He goes on to explain giving the narrow interpretation through local touch: “If your spirit were to weaken in the long night ahead of you, open it, and let the only God speak to you through His last, perfect prophet” (Updike 155). As a result, Ahmad was ecstatic. On the other hand, Charlie, accompanying Ahmad, chillingly obliterates the distinction between rebellion and ‘Jihad’. In consequence, Ahmad agrees to play with fire and gives the stamp of approval through the myopic understanding of the following verse: “Mohammed is Allah’s apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another” (Updike 183).

The real transformation in Ahmad to abdicate his chosen evil path in favor of life-giving forces is brought in him by Mr. Jack Levy, a Jew. The good Samaritan in him craves to liberate him and show him the way of the world in spite of moral turpitude. Jack remains through thick and thin, risking even his own life occasionally. Witnessing a naysayer in Ahmad to his promising career and preferring the job of a truck driver to that of a college life, he yearns for a teenager who is misled by Imam who helped him to waste his high-school years (Updike 23). When Ahmad goes, finally, on a suicide bombing mission, risking his own life, Mr. Levy, in haste, meets him near off Route 80, in his mismatched suit not to let the nation encounter another 9/11. With the soothing conversation of Mr. Levy, while remaining in possession of explosives, Ahmad had become less bitter and somewhere accepted unity in diversity looking for agreement among the comity of nations. He echoes the established idea common among the Palestinians: “Before Israel, Muslims and Jews were brothers” (Updike 295).

Mr. Levy gives some guidance to Ahmad on American oneness: "... we all are Americans here. That's the idea, didn't they tell you that at Central High? Irish-Americans, African-Americans, Jewish Americans; there are even Arab-Americans" (Updike 301). He believes Ahmad can be a good lawyer. In the years to come, Arab-Americans are going to need plenty of lawyers. Ahmad, suddenly, feels the moment of epiphany, comes to find the Right Path through *Quran* itself. Ahmad thinks about *Quranic Suras* which have mention of life as God's gift. In the end, with Levy next to him in his truck bomb, Ahmad chooses not to go forward with his plan forsaking his chosen path. Suddenly he sees the world through his naked eye. In the beginning, he felt his life to be a burden 'as a needless blot – a botch, a prolonged blunder' (Updike 13). Now the mystery seems to be unfolded. He has a vision of God's purpose behind every fiat of creation from the initial point of nothingness.

#### 4. Way of life: liberal West versus the Islamist

In post-Cold War period, in Western discourse, democracy stopped wrestling with Communism; the focus shifted to the excavation of cultural conflicts as Samuel P. Huntington argued, "the most important distinctions among peoples are ... cultural" (1996:21). Building a national character became of paramount importance. In past, in Britain, Thomas Hobbes championed it through 'social contract'. In America, Emerson and Thoreau gave impetus to transcendental movement. Such historical cross-currents started rhyming with themselves in post-Cold War period. It resulted in the empirical study of complex interactions between the Western world view and Islamist way of life. American transcendental pantheism frowns at individual identity formation, advocates complete assimilation with national characters. Islamism is at the other side of the hedge. Its practitioners, of differing denominations, were viewed as forming selective identification and social atomization, and vehemently advocating the tyranny of regressive ideology resulting in the loss of national character. In view of Richard Hardack, the American notion of terrorism is "born from acute fear of collective identity based in a long Western literary tradition of fetishizing the individual" (2004:374). The selected novels examine these contesting views.

In *Al-Irhabi 20*, Thabet calls to discard extremism and terrorism and to accept moderate Islam with liberal views. Many Muslim thinkers promote Islamic tolerance and peace among nations and individuals and combat fundamentalism. For example, Abdulrahman Wahid believes that "this crisis of misunderstanding ... [and] ... failure to understand the true nature of Islam permits the continued radicalization of Muslims worldwide, while blinding the rest of humanity to a solution which hides in plain sight" (2008:114). Thabet calls to accept the 'other', in an orientalist paradigm, and to consider religion as private matter without the supervision of religious authorities. This view adopted by the writer is a reaction to the danger of the fundamental views of religious groups and the antagonistic

attitude they have towards individuals, community, governments and the world. Such extreme views are considered catastrophic since they contradict the traditional Islam based on tolerance according to the writer. Thabet's view related to militants and extremists who fail to understand the true nature of Islam, matches Roy's, "these militants broke with their own past, and with traditional Islam, and experienced an individual re-Islamization in a small cell of uprooted fellows, where they forged their own Islam" (Roy 2006:161).

Therefore, through Zahi, Thabet emphasizes the positive transformation or escape from extremism to tolerance and the liberal world. Zahi realizes how life is beautiful without restrictions imposed by the fundamentalists. He is excited to travel abroad, which was considered forbidden except for study or treatment during his times. The writer points out that meeting new circles of thinkers is productive for a positive step against terrorism. He has been fond of those who rebelled against fundamental views. As a famous writer, Zahi writes about religious misconceptions and its effects on the younger generation. He also writes about the benefits of music suggesting it should be included in school curricula for which he has been branded as an infidel by some religious scholars of Asir.

Like Wahid, who thinks that "to neutralize the virulent ideology that underlies fundamentalist terrorism and threatens the very foundations of modern civilization, we must identify its advocates ...etc." (2008:115), Thabet questions extreme religious institutions, which he considers responsible for the lost young generation. He also questions the anti-West views of some religious scholars. There were many people who denounced the 9/11 attacks but others looked at it as revenge for those who were killed in Palestine, Chechnya and Bosnia (Thabet 177). He criticizes some Shaikhs who "brand non-Muslims as descendants of monkeys and pigs" (Thabet 177), and he considers it as an "insult to mankind and religions" (Thabet 177). As a result, he was "accused of disloyalty and of becoming Americanized defending the Jews and the Christians" (Thabet 177). He is against extreme views of any religion that justify killing of innocents who have no relation to politics (Thabet 178) and believes that "humanism is a salvation for the world" (Thabet 179).

Thabet explores the conflict between religious extremism and modernity. The different situations Zahi has undergone demonstrates how society views modernity and liberal voices as invaders to Islamic culture and ethics. Zahi becomes a liberal voice towards the end of the novel participating in many literary and cultural activities organized by the Literary Club where he meets eminent writers of the Saudi modernist generation. Through comparison between the influence of literary clubs and religious extremism and their effect on society, especially after the 9/11, Thabet propagates the enlightenment the clubs produce on the young generation against the stream of deviant thought promoted by closed circles of religious extremists. Zahi leads a change towards a more tolerant and moderate society away from fundamentalism. Overwhelmed with many modernist poets and intellectuals promoting modernity, Zahi actively denounces religious extremism repenting his lost past and the backwardness of his nation in comparison to the

scientific and technological advancement of the world. He becomes open to other cultures and does not hesitate to meet a girl with whom he has been exchanging letters for almost seven months (Thabet 196). He demonstrates his dismay and unrest when the religious police caught him with a girl alone in one of the cafes (Thabet 197). He describes how they have eyes everywhere watching and reporting any illegitimate meeting. He swears that "he will not keep silent on those who assassinated humanity inside us" (Thabet 199).

Al-Zahrani's *Jangi* is about a struggle between two different ways of life: the Islamist way and the liberal West represented in the United States. The narrative of the novels reveals that the group of fighters believe that America, as the most powerful force on land, wants all people to live the way that suits its goals and serves its needs. Like many Muslims, they believe that the basics of the American way of life contradicts the basics of Islam. Any clash between America and any Muslim country is then taken out of its geopolitical frame into the ideological frame: America versus Islam. The novel holds this belief as the drive that put those young people in confrontation with the United States invasion of Afghanistan. The United States decided to occupy Afghanistan first to attack Al-Qaeda and end the Taliban control of the country and put an authority that can be in line with its goals. For many Muslims, whatever their attitude might be to Taliban and its acts, this is an occupation of a Muslim country. It is, as well, an opportunity to fight Americans and put a stop to their enmity to Islam. In his second letter to Khalid, the narrator states the fact that:

*The situation now has become so strange. The word "terrorist" is used without justification or cause, whatever America calls terrorism is terrorism! ... Saying a word of criticism about America, even publishing an article on that matter is considered terrorism. Any word about Zionism is considered terrorism. Any poet who might utter a word about resistance is considered a terrorist. Any person who has a different point of view is considered a terrorist. Whoever stands for his own rights is considered a terrorist* (Al-Zahrani 137–38).

"Al-Zahrani," affirm Bradley and Hamdar, "offer a more complex and less reductive picture of Islamic fundamentalism as an entirely rational response to a state of disorder; colonial intervention, dire economic conditions, and the collapse of alternative resistance imaginaries such as pan-Arabism" (2016:448). In the novel, the group that Khalid joined seemed to be fighting for their own cause. They are not Talibans nor are they defending its existence; they are just fighting America: "a state that claims to protect peace and security, but actually does far from that" (Al-Zahrani 150). Thus, what others present as 'Islamist violence' is transformed into an entirely "legitimate defensive reaction against neo-colonialist occupation" (Bradley and Hamdar 448). The novel confronts "the War on Terror's framing of Islamism as terrorism" (450). The war in Afghanistan is presented in the novel as a war between America: "the most powerful power in the world ... and its hypocritical allies" and "a bunch of barefooted Arabs: the victims of international treasons and conspiracies" (Al-Zahrani 15). The American warfare acts are depicted as merciless and beyond all human boundaries "surrounding the

Afghan fortress of Jangi, showering it with tons of bombs and rockets that kill every living thing” (Al-Zahrani 15).

In Tarar’s *Qila Jungi*, the savagery and barbarity of American imperialism, in this unequal war, is underlined in its most gruesome form. Be it their war strategy, murky dealings in arms race in coalition with Pakistan’s ISI, playing with words such as *Mujahideen* and *Terrorists*, or their overarching presence on Saudi soil as detested by Abdul Wahab; all have their fair share of criticism. The tale of Murtaza Beg mouths a shameless amount of historical background of American imperialism effected behind the curtain during Afghan-Russian war to jog the audience’s memory. Americans were mostly providing the arms in Afghanistan to eight Jihadi groups including the warlords. Disastrous impact of warmongering done by Americans, is conveyed in its filthiest form through ironic mode. The war planes would hover in the sky above the poor, helpless and emaciated people and their villages targeting the enemy from camera to flash it out on the World TV screens and then drop it on them with the sign “I got the bastard” euphemism (Tarar 109–110).

After the Afghan-Soviet war, the dual standard of America, vis-à-vis war rhetoric, fully resurfaced. Abdul Wahab spots the chink in the armour. During Afghan-Soviet war, Americans and the whole of Europe would back up the warriors. They would be addressed as *Mujahedeen* and their coffers were filled with dollars and weapons. This same America would incite the youths of the Muslim countries for the Holy war, recruit them, train them, and send them in the inhospitable terrain in Afghanistan. The number of camps linked with Al-Qaida and the wide web of caves in Tora Bora and in Gurdez have come into existence under the supervision of Americans. *Mujahedeen* were their heroes, but the moment the dominion of Evil Empire came to a grinding halt, the Americans left once their objectives had been fulfilled. These erstwhile *Mujahedeen*, became worst criminals after 9/11 though they “had been defending” themselves (Tarar 154).

In Updike’s *Terrorist*, Ahmad has been made to live in an American system of life steeped in monetarist orthodoxy and “obsessed with sex and luxury goods” (Updike 22). He feels alienation and estrangement: he is a victim as well as a pawn of ideological inebriation and indoctrination. The God attached to him like an “invisible twin, his other self, is a God not of enterprise but of submission” (Updike 107). He considers “America”, as Peter C. Herman puts it, “a threat to his personal faith” (2015:701). For Ahmad, beneath the veneer of social progress, ancient tribal cannibalism dominates and no class is immune from this malaise. Ahmad, refereeing them through the benchmark of Islamic mysticism, asserts, “[t]hey lack true faith; they are not on the Straight Path; they are unclean” (Updike 1–2). He judges the society from a Bergsonian perspective, “Western culture is Godless ... And because it has no God, it is obsessed with sex and luxury goods. Look at television, Mr. Levy, how it’s always using sex to sell you things you don’t need” (Updike 38). All American presidents just ask the Americans to be selfish and materialistic, to play their part in consumerism. Ahmad has deep and

concerning distaste for American system of Capitalism, "... capitalism was doomed, destined to get more and more oppressive until the proletariat stormed the barricades and set up the workers' paradise. ... To be on the safe side, they changed the label 'capitalism' to read 'free enterprise,' but it was still dog-eat dog" (Updike 136).

## 5. Conclusion

Saudi Arabian anti-terrorism and anti-extremism stance as noticed through the prism of post-9/11 novels is crystal clear; the selected Saudi novels address these issues boldly. It has, vehemently, denounced and combated it at all levels. Saudi novelists have attempted to portray the causes that may have led to terrorism through their novels warning their nation against terrorist groups and deviant thought perception pleading for more openness and more tolerance to the West. The other selected non-Arab novels addressed the same issue but from different perspectives. However, many similarities have been pinpointed. The focal point of this paper centered on the common patterns among the novels: (a) the role of the family and environmental conditioning in shaping the destiny of the leading characters in the novels, (b) the extreme religious discourse in the novels elaborated through examples and aphorisms, (c), the anti-west views presented in the novels through interplay of moral waywardness and a consumerist society.

Each novelist has dealt with factors leading to terrorism and extremism differently. Thabet has focused on the passive family role and religious extremism prevailing in the region of Asir during the adulthood of the main character. He has vividly presented the terrorist character and the factors behind his drive for terrorism. Al-Zahrani's main focus was the sudden transformation of the terrorist character without stating the factors behind it to let the readers question such kind of negative change. Tarar, through ironic mode, has hit hard upon the bottom-up mobilizations and enlistment of mercenaries for *Jihad*. For Updike, Ahmad is groomed to be a suicide bomber, only to be rescued by his friend.

Transformation of the terrorist characters is presented as a welcome change such as Zahi in *Al-Irhabi 20*, who become more tolerant and open to the liberal West. Ahmed in Updike's *Terrorist* is stripped of the craziness for monstrous form of *Jihad* through his Jewish counselor guide Mr. Levy. Khalid's return to his country in Al-Zahrani's *Jangi*, though still jailed, shows a positive change that is expected to transform his life as well. In Tarar's *Qila Jungi*, only Abdul Wahab and Hashim Mir feel, mildly, the pangs of anguish for joining *Jihad*.

There is no love lost for the flourishing Jihad industry in the novels. Thabet and Updike blame Quranic Schools for spreading the venom of extreme religious discourse among the youths who go astray to the path of terrorism. *Al-Irhabi 20* and *Terrorist*, in particular, addresses these burning issues. Some Shaikhs use the religion as a cloak and misinterpret religion to serve their nefarious designs and brainwash the young people to plant seeds of dissensions towards others whom

they consider *kafir* (infidel). Such stereotypical representation runs through most of the novels written on the theme of terrorism.

American imperialism has its fair share of criticism as well, particularly in Tarar's *Qila Jungi* and Al-Zahrani's *Jangi*. The novels exposed through a successive series of scenes, dialogues, and thought perceptions the gulf between the West and the Muslim world. Furthermore, the novelists delved deep both into nursery and the sanctuary of terrorism. Since 9/11, the West continues to exercise hegemony through demonization of Saudi Arabia and Muslim world. In stereotyping metaphysics, Western ontology has gone for the jugular through various media, including novels.

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