



NOMENCLATURE AND PAKISTANI ENGLISH FICTION: POLITICS, ISLAMIC IDEOLOGY AND HISTORY IN FICTION OR POLITICO/HISTORICAL FICTION

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Abstract


Pakistani English Fiction is a multifaceted genre with varied themes and ideas presented therein however a thorough study of this literature makes one realize that some topics and themes appear more often than others. It is therefore useful to highlight those themes and choose a nomenclature for this fiction based on that. History and politics seem to be the two recurrent themes in Pakistani English Fiction. The present research undertakes a historical study to prove that Pakistani English Fiction can be categorized as politico/historical fiction. The study uses purposive sampling method and qualitative content analysis technique for the data analysis.

Keywords: History, Politics, Fiction, Nomenclature, Pakista

1. Introduction

Much of contemporary Pakistani fiction is historical fiction (Waterman, 2015). What is in a name after all, but it is always useful to know things by their names. This research takes hint from Waterman to ascertain the nomenclature of this fiction. Pakistani English Fiction is a budding phenomenon and has particularly gained pace after the turn of the century, as the word, “boom”, is used whenever contemporary Pakistani English Fiction is mentioned (Bilal, 2016, p.1). As fiction tells the tales of people in their social, economic, cultural and political context, the themes have to be as diverse as these issues are. Early Pakistani English Fiction was mostly about, but not limited to, the partition and its socio-cultural, and economic consequences and issues of identity. Two nation theory had been the corner stone of Pakistan movement and Islam was used as the real dividing factor to pursue partition of India but after the independence it became obvious that Pakistan was in need of an identity that was inclusive of minorities. Objectives resolution of 1949 made it abundantly clear that Pakistan will be an Islamic republic which will give freedom of religion to minorities. It made it clear that constitution of Pakistan will be based on the ideology of Muslim faith, “Islam”. The state thus set about creating an identity for the people of a new country that mostly adhered to the same faith but identified as different nations. Bengalis, Balochis, Pathans, Punjabis and Sindhis therefore were provided with one uniting factor (Islam) that theoretically would be able to overshadow all other differences. The resistance against this scheme started very early on and provided fodder to the independence movement in East Pakistan which culminated in the partition of Pakistan in 1971. The issues of identity politics like other issues became subject of Pakistani English novels as this issue was and still is an integral part of Pakistani politics.

Politics is a broad term, but it can also be treated as a constant presence in Pakistani English Fiction. Pakistani politics is and has always been a very important part of people’s everyday life, and perhaps telling a tale without it would be leaving something crucial out. This broad area provides topics like, military interventions, bureaucratic machinations, political assassinations, and much more. Another



important theme that finds its way in Pakistani English Fiction quite often, is the conflict of 1971, and secession of East Pakistan. Similarly, Zia's islamization had real consequences for the society, and it too finds the novelists attention again and again. Then comes 9/11 and its related issues like war on terror, fundamentalism, extremism, and stereotyping the Muslim identity. Early Post-9/11 novels often deal with these themes and thus connect the local with the regional and global issues. Other than these, issues like marginalization of minorities, violence against women and children, quandary of immigrants, and other socio-economic disparities, become the focus of Pakistani English Fiction. As Waterman (2015) puts it that the events like, partition, 1971, and 9/11 inform much of Pakistani English fiction, while other themes are also important, e.g., immigration, status of women, role of Islam, role of military and politicians, and role of family. In the following section I will discuss these major themes in Pakistani English Fiction in some detail, and then try to place my area of research in the already present body of work. I am going for obvious groupings while talking about the major themes and issues that Pakistani English Fiction recounts, e.g., partition, 1971, and post 9/11 issues. Other than these main divisions, I shall also discuss various themes mentioned above.

2. Literature Review

The seminal work on history of Pakistani literature in English is Tariq Rahman's *A history of Pakistani Literature in English: 1947-1988* (Rahman, 1991). Second important work on this topic is Muneesa Shamsie's *Hybrid Tapestries: The Development of Pakistani Literature in English* (Shamsie, 2017). Both these works have detailed sections dealing with novels. These two works are my main source while discussing the history of Pakistani Fiction.

Two novels of some importance that were published after independence were, *The Heart Divided* by Mumtaz Shahnawaz and *Ocean of the Night* by Ahmed Ali. However, Zulfiqar Ghose's *The Murder of Aziz Khan* "gave Pakistani English novel a contemporary voice" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 337). *Snakes and Ladders* by Nasir Ahmad Farooki, satirized the military and bureaucratic elite of General Ayub's era. He was one of the earliest English novelists in Pakistan to make the state, subject of his work. His novel discusses the very real issues and ills of Pakistan like the manipulation of electoral results and corrupt bureaucracy. This theme of a corrupt and lawless society also becomes the focus of *The Murder of Aziz Khan*. *The Shadows of Time* by Mehr Nigar Masroor is an important political novel because it chronicles Pakistan's political history from pre-partition era till post-1971 Bhutto's regime and Zia's islamization. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Crow Eaters* was a milestone in Pakistani English fiction writing, as it gave this genre a wider audience and a new voice. In the 1980s and 1990s novelists like Tariq Mehmood, Adam Zameenzad and Nadeem Aslam produced works of great quality. Tehmina Durrani's, *Blasphemy*, gives voice to the women, rendered voiceless by the feudal structure and social practices. *Ice Bangles*, by Nazneen Sadiq, is a novel about cultural displacement, and experience of migration. Farhana Sheikh's, *The Red Box*, deals with the experiences of second-generation British Muslim women. *The Hope Chest* by Rukhsana Ahmad, also focuses on the lives of women in patriarchal structures. Zeeba Sadiq's *38 Bahadurabad*, is a creative memoir about the issues related to empowerment of women. Maniza Naqvi raises the issues related to discrimination against minorities in her novels like, *Mass Transit* and *A Matter of Detail*. At the turn of the century, Kamila Shamsie's novels, *Broken Verses*, *In the City by the Sea*, *Kartography*, and *Burnt Shadows* "examine the impact of politics on individuals" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 384). Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* is a tale of self-destruction, framed by the historical events of Mughal era, and his other famous novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, challenges the narratives of otherness in post-9/11 context. Uzma Aslam Khan's novels, *The Story of Noble Rot*, *Trespassing*, *The Geometry of God*, and *Thinner than skin* provide powerful commentary on the social injustices and violence prevalent in Pakistan. Musharraf Ali Farooqi's magic realist novel, *Passion in the Time of Termites*, tells the tale of a man whose life completely changed, as he migrated to Pakistan after partition of India. His second novel, *The Story of a Widow*, comments on stereotypical roles women have to play across generations in Pakistani society. *Papio*, by Abdul Basit Haqqani is a very interesting political allegory with characters like, "General Shamsheer-o-Sana Awwal", satirizes the Pakistani political structure and the role of military. Bina Shah's novels generally describe the lives of poverty stricken Karachites, but in A

Season of Martyrs, she divulges the tumultuous history of Sindh, culminating in the murder of Benazir Bhutto. Feryal Ali Gauhar's *The Scent of Wet Earth in August*, is a story of the marginalized in Pakistan's feudal culture and deals with issues related to violence and abuse of women and children. Sorayya Khan focuses on the traumatic and chaotic times of partition of India in 1947, and that of Pakistan in 1971, in her novels, *Five Queen's Road* and *Noor*. Qaisra Shahraz, in her romantic fiction, i.e., *Holy Woman*, and *Typhoon* also centers the lives of marginalized women in Pakistan's feudal culture. Issues of migration and cultural conflict become the themes of novelists like, Roshni Rustomji and Hina Haq. Partition of India and migration also become the themes of Saad Ashraf's *The Postmaster*. Suhayl Saadi's *Psychograag*, is "the first ever novel of Scottish Asian identity" (p.443). Pakistani English fiction saw the first work of science fiction in Azhar Abidi's *Passarola Rising*. The 1971 crisis and social structures of rural Punjab become the subject of Moni Mohsin's *The End of Innocence*. Her social and political satires, *Diary of a Social Butterfly* and, *The Return of the Butterfly*, portray a chaotic Pakistani society, bereft with, kidnappings, violence, suicide bombings and electricity failures. The 1971 conflict and political turmoil leading up to it, also becomes the theme of *Bengal Raag*, written by Ghazala Hameed and Durdana Soomro. This conflict is also central to, *Without Dreams* by Shahbano Bilgrami. Roopa Farooki published four novels between 2007 and 2010. She intertwines family histories with history of subcontinent. Partition and 1971 conflict also become subjects of her novels. Muhammad Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, is a political satire dealing with the last days of General Zia ul-Haq. *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* is a dark comedy portraying myriad of socioeconomic and minority issues in Pakistani society. H.M Naqvi's *Home Boy* is similar to Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, as it also adds to the debates of polarization after the events of 9/11. Nafisa Haji and Shaila Abdullah challenge the perceptions of Americans regarding Muslims as the alien other, in their novels, *Writing on My Forehead*, and *Saffron Dreams*. Ali Sethi's *The Wish Maker* tackles many themes, but particularly Pakistan's never ending political turmoil and quest for supremacy between the democratic and military forces. Maha Khan Phillips' *Beautiful from this Angle* is a political satire, and comments on the nexus between politics, crime, and deep state. Conflict of 1971 becomes the core issue once again in the novels of Shahryar Fazli and Aquila Ismail. Bilal Tanweer's *The Scatter Here is Too Great* centers Karachi with its many problems. Fatima Bhutto tells of violence and fear in *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*. Politics, sectarian divisions, deep state, and geopolitics become the themes of this novel. Omar Shahid Hamid's novel *The Prisoner* can be regarded as the first police thriller, but it also tells of intertwining of politics and crime in Karachi. *The Upstairs Wife* by Rafia Zakaria lays bare the tumultuous political history of Pakistan. General Zia and his regime once again become the focal point in Sorayya Khan's political novel, *City of Spies*. Plethora of new writers are writing fiction in Pakistan, and every year sees new novelists contribute to this now well-established genre, while the recognized novelists like Mohsin Hamid, Muhammad Hanif and Nadeem Aslam are further enhancing their already prestigious oeuvre. This brief history of Pakistani English fiction provides me with a perfect backdrop to discuss the recurrent themes in these novels in some detail. From partition of India to partition of Pakistan, from Ayub's martial law to Imran Khan's martial-democracy, and from Zia's islamized to Musharaaf's enlightened Pakistan, Pakistani English fiction makes the most of the tumultuous, chaotic and circular Pakistani politics.

3. Procedure of analysis

The present research is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is based on three core concepts of self-reflexivity, context, and thick description (Tracy, 2013, p.2). Content analysis method was used because it is a suitable method to identify the themes and patterns in the novels and because it, "focuses more on description" (Drisko & Maschi, 2016, p.83). Furthermore, this study uses unobtrusive method of content analysis which does not rely on interactive data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

4. Statement of the problem

Pakistani English Fiction deals with many socio, economic and cultural issues but there are certain themes and patterns that are explicitly recurrent. This research puts forth the question that whether

Pakistani English Fiction centers history and politics more often than other themes and whether it can be termed Political/historical fiction?

5. Historical/Political Fiction

Political novel “is a work of prose fiction which primarily focuses upon the exercise of power within the body politic and where political ambition, political plans and political acts permeate and unify the novel through plot and character” (Kempe, 1987, p. 1). Kempe further says that an essential element in political fiction is the spirit of the age. Partition, civil war of 1971, martial laws, post 9/11 events, are all political events of great significance in Pakistan’s history, and these events shaped the spirit of the age, which is reflected in novels like, *The Heart Divided*, *Ice Candy Man*, *Without Dreams*, and *Of Martyrs and Marigolds*. Waterman (2015) regards much of contemporary Pakistani fiction as historical. A cursory look at Pakistani English Fiction would remove any doubt regarding this argument. From early novelists, like Mumtaz Shahnawaz, Zulfiqar Ghose, Bapsi Sidhwa, Mehr Nigar Masroor, Sara Suleri, to more recent, Kamila Shamsie, Musharraf Ali Farooqi, Bina Shah, Saad Ashraf, Moni Mohsin, Shahbano Bilgrami, Roopa Farooki, Muhammad Hanif, Rafia Zakaria, Aquila Ismail, and Sorayya Khan have produced what Waterman terms, “historical fiction”. The novels produced by these writers throw a subjective gaze at the events of the past and try to bring to light what might have been left in the dark or what might have been obliterated from the pages of history. This subjective gaze itself, however, is bound to be biased, and thus might raise the question of authenticity. But, as Waterman says that historical fiction however creates a possible world, and that historical fiction is beyond truth valuation because it is the product of imagination, whereas historical work is truth-functional therefore subject to verification. Thus, it is not the job of fiction to enumerate facts or to “play amateur historical detective”, (Waterman, 2015, p. 163). He further says that fiction creates a possible world and tells a story that might be true and creates a “borderland” within which fictional characters and events may be interpreted by reader as fact. Hence Pakistani English historical fiction creates a possible world and tells the tale of Pakistan from partition to the new millennium. Besides this historical fiction is bound to be political fiction, because the major historical events that become the subject matter of these novels are primarily political events. Besides, as Waterman says that, “fiction that might be true, evolves into political fiction wherein truth becomes a matter of representational interpretation, perhaps even leaving ‘real’ history behind” (Waterman, 2015, p. 158).

The Heart Divided, by Mumtaz Shah Nawaz tells the story of two families, one Muslim and the other Hindu living through the struggle for independence of India but stops short of partition (Nawaz, 2004). The novel describes the bond between the families of Sheikh Jamaluddin and Diwan Jawala Prashad Kaul. According to Rehman (2015), it is a political novel that abnegates the concept of Hindu-Muslim unity and accepts the idea of separate Muslim state in the form of Pakistan. The doomed love affair of Mohini and Habib, primarily because of religious reasons, is used as a symbol for Hindu-Muslim divide in their political struggle, and the separate paths they will take later on. Muslims and Hindus who had coexisted for centuries in relative peace were not ready to move on together. One cause of this as presented in the novel, was the decline of Muslims and their culture after the arrival of the British. “She shows that with the British conquest of India, Muslims and Muslim culture underwent a decline in status and it made the Muslims attached to myth and history” (Jajja, 2012, p. 298). The novel in this sense also portrays the impact of colonialism on the indigenous cultures particularly the erstwhile privileged Muslim culture of India. According to Rehman this novel gives an honest representation of people’s response to the politics of India during the crucial years before partition. He further credits Mumtaz Shahnawaz for the novels’ objectivity regarding the, Two nation Theory. Cilano (2013), however contends that the novel leans towards the Muslim League although with some ambivalence. Irrespective of the question of neutrality, *The Heart Divided*, is one of the earliest novels in Pakistani English Fiction that makes the pre-partition politics the subject of historical fiction and thus creates that afore-mentioned “other world” which might or might not be a reality. Pre-partition politics had a great impact on the lives of both Hindus and Muslims of India, and this novel captures the lives of two families, whose feelings and emotions, choices and decisions, in a specific political context, have reverberations across ages, and this is what makes this novel very important,



the human element, that is above and beyond any interpretation of political facts. As the title, *The Heart Divided*, has an inherent human appeal, which compels the readers to feel and empathize with the characters, rather than to debate the varied political positions. And this is what makes this fictional work more than a factual reality.


The Murder of Aziz Khan written by Zulfiqar Ghose is the only important work of fiction about the emergent primitive capitalism in the 1960s Pakistan, set during General Ayub Khan's regime (Rahman, 2015). In Pakistan's history, this period is recognized as the era of industrialization. Textile industry flourished in Punjab, particularly in Faisalabd, and resulted in the rise of a new bourgeoisie class. The conflict was inevitable as the old rural structures of the agro based society were about to be shaken to their core. *The Murder* is the portrayal of this very conflict (Ghose, 1967). The protagonist Aziz Khan owns farmland and farms it with the help of his sons, Rafiq and Javed. This family's peaceful existence is shattered, when the industrialists Shah Brothers-Akram, Ayub, and Afaq-enter the scene. They want to buy Aziz Khan's land, but he refuses to sell. The rest of the story is about the annihilation of Aziz Khan's family at the hands of the Shah Brothers, and the final seizure of his land by them, as he is left helpless and landless. This novel according to Rahman, represents the ruthless exploitation by the capitalist class on the one hand and also the disruptiveness of capitalistic individualism as the Shah family also splits up at the end as a consequence of the predatory individualism. Other than that, this novel also recreates Pakistan in the 1950s and, "makes a telling comment on the privileged English-speaking coterie, which has replaced the colonial power and controls a network of corrupt officials and middlemen who bend the laws to rule and subdue a non-English speaking population" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 137). Though the colonialists had left but there were plenty of power centers to fill that gap and continue the process of exploitation of the powerless, as Shamsie further points to Ghose's criticism of Pakistan's healthcare system and its labor laws. This system is rigged against the poor peasants and in favor of the capitalists. The capitalists move around in their expensive cars which are the product of hard labor of the workers who rot in the factories because their farmland has been taken away. This concern of the novel as described by Shamsie, is very close to the core questions I am asking in this research regarding state failure.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* is one of the most important works in partition literature (Sidhwa, 1989). It is the story of partition of India in 1947 and the resulting riots that led to one of the largest migrations in the world, in terms of numbers. These riots also resulted in mass massacre and violence on unprecedented scale. People who had coexisted peacefully for a long time, became sworn enemies as communal violence broke out. The child narrator, Lenny, narrates the events as they unfold before her eyes, and details how the partition changes the people who are very close to her-Aya, the cook, the Ice-Candy-Man-in a relatively short span of time. Lenny's Aya, who is a Hindu, is abducted and raped by Muslims. Later she is turned into a dancing girl by the Ice-Candy-Man, who also marries her. Finally, she is rescued and sent to India by Lenny's godmother. This historical novel is very important because it comments on the traumatic experiences of a very tumultuous period in the history of Pakistan. According to Shamsie (2017) Sidhwa charts the history and changing social and political structures of Parsi community and Pakistan in her three novels, *The Crow Eaters*, *Ice-Candy-Man*, and *An American Brat*. The story of *Ice-Candy-Man* reflects many themes like, minority identities, feminist concerns, will to survive, but it is first and foremost a comment on the partition of India and resulting sense of loss and dejection. Child narrator's innocence is taken away as she witnesses the brutal political reality unfolding before her very eyes, i.e. when she sees a Hindu man being tortured and a child's dead body wielded by a Sikh mob as a trophy. According to Rahman (2015) this novel is very important in partition literature as there was Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* before it. "Bapsi Sidhwa has written one of the most powerful indictments of the riots during partition" (Rahman, 2015, p. 167). He further says that this novel shows human personality and society in stress, as a result of partition. This novel is very important because it sheds light on the birth of the county and pangs associated with it, and Rahman considers it one of the best works of twentieth century fiction, which it is, as it retells the past and also hints at the divisions that will not stop with the partition but will have carry-over affect and haunt generations to come.



Singh (1991) terms *Shadows of Time* to be encyclopedic in detail as it spans almost a century, beginning in 1883 and ending in Zia era. According to Singh, the novelist Mehr Nigar Masroor, highlights the forces that were responsible for pushing Muslims and Hindus apart to a point where partition became inevitable. This novel is a true historical novel and discusses in detail the causes that lead to the creation of Pakistan (Masroor, 1987). According to Shamsie (2017), Masroor justifies the Pakistan movement and the resulting partition of India. However, it does not stop there as it continues with the political developments of Pakistan after its independence, i.e. the first martial law, 1971 war, the Bhutto's regime and finally the martial law of General Zia and following islamization and fundamentalism. The protagonist, Maheen, is the daughter of a part-Bengali Muslim League activist, Farhan, who settles in Lahore. Maheen represents the dream of Muslim unity which will shatter in 1971 civil war and partition of Pakistan. Farhan's strained relationship with his wife, Nuzhat, and love for a Hindu activist Sarla, hint at complicated Hindu-Muslim coexistence. He in the end goes back to India as he cannot resist the desire to be in the land of his ancestors. Maheen commits suicide by jumping into Indus. According to Rehman (2015), this act makes her part of Pakistan as she travels the length of Indus. Rehman further says that this novel is similar to *The Heart Divided* in the sense that it too emphasizes the necessity of partition, even though it resulted in great trauma and suffering. This novel according to Rehman, is not a great work of art as it contains large chunks of historical narrative. That might be so, but the novel's historical narrative has its own significance as the historical fiction can comment on many issues that books of history shy away from. Partition of Bengal in 1905, partition of India in 1947, and partition of Pakistan in 1971, are realities of history that are perhaps too harsh for historians, and it falls to historical fiction to deal with them. Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* is another historical novel that begins in Japan at the end of World War II and ends in post-9/11 US (Shamsie, 2009). The novel tells the tale of Hiroko Tanaka, who leaves Japan for India, to begin a new life after escaping the atomic bomb dropped at Nagasaki. There she falls in love with Sajjad, and they leave for Istanbul to get married, but India is divided in the meanwhile, and they cannot return to Delhi. Instead, they settle in Karachi, and begin their life as a family. The narrative jumps to 1982, and now the couple has a young son, Raza, who suffers from anxiety. He gets involved with Abdullah, and ends up in a training camp in Afghanistan, which he eventually manages to leave. The story moves to post-9/11 era and Raza is now living in America with his mother. There he is falsely picked up by the police on suspicion of links with the terrorists. The novel ends with Hiroko left sullen and dejected and looks out of the window as the world moves on. Thus, the novel tells the tale of half of a century, spanning the entire globe, from east to west. World War-II, partition of India, and the 9/11 are all brought under the lens in one wide sweep. This novel above all, is about the impact of these events on the lives of ordinary people, who find themselves caught in the middle of overwhelming, cataclysmic historical events. Shamsie's focus in her novels is, "the effect of politics on people" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 386). This novel is also a story of traumatic displacement of, "the Pakistani prisoner, his Japanese mother, his Indian father and his Afghan friend" (Zahoor, 2015). The novel is a telling reminder of the unthinkable consequences of political decisions made by the powerful elite, for the indifferent individuals, who are oblivious to the horrors, until it is too late, and they are left stunned and stupefied, looking for answers when there is none: how is it that the son of a World War-II victim ends up in Guantanamo Bay? Politics is a brutal business and political decisions have no regard for the countless individuals who come in the way. Be it the bombing of a city, the partition of a country, or destruction of a building, it is the people who get burnt to bits.

Bina Shah's *A Season for Martyrs* takes the reader back to the Napier's occupation of Sindh in 1847 (Shah, 2016). The story begins in Karachi and spans the nine weeks from Benazir's arrival from exile until her murder in a campaign rally in December 2007. The protagonist Ali Sikandar, son of a pro-Bhutto feudal, is a television researcher who is disenchanted with his job, finds some comfort in the protests against the military dictator that he is covering and gets involved in the resistance movement. Ali's story is enmeshed between the greater story of Sindh. The novel brings to fore Sindh's culture and history, and highlights the contributions of many important men, e.g., Charles Napier, Khawaja Khizr, Jeandal Shah, G.M. Syed, Pir Pagaro, and Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai. These tales



from history are connected with the Bhuttos, with memories of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's hanging and assassination of Benazir. The story thus links the ancient history with more recent past, "focusing on one young man's experience of following the fatal return to Pakistan of the self-exiled Benazir Bhutto in 2007" (Clements, 2014). This novel then is about political history and political legacies, but it is about much more than that. It is about the way these legacies become the essential part of the spirit of the land, and how these tales become legends and live on as essential part of people's day to day lives. "Pakistan remains a place where political legacies and dynasties are dyed into the fabric of the nation, and where ambiguities, violence and muddled histories live on" (Lady, 2016). According to Shamsie (2017), Bina Shah expands her canvas in this novel and tells of Sindh, "its past and present" (p.431). Whereas other novels discussed so far in this section of historical fiction narrate the tales related to partition or post partition events, Shah's fictional history focuses on Sindh and its political history. In this sense it is a unique novel as it makes one region of Pakistan its focal point, but comments on the politics of entire country, because the politicians who become the main figures in this novel had impact much beyond the boundaries of one province. Similarly, the ancient Sindhi culture also carries a universal appeal that cannot be limited to a particular region, as the Sufi rhythms of Bhattai might be emanating from Sindh but their reverberations can be felt across time and space.

Moni Mohsin's novel *The End of Innocence*, is a coming-of-age story of two young girls, Laila and Rani (Mohsin, 2006). According to Shamsie (2017), "it is a novel which links the public and the personal to excavate memories of 1971 war" (p.447). As the civil war rages on in East Pakistan, life seems normal in the peaceful village of Punjab, Sabzbagh. While Laila, the daughter of a feudal lord, is living a privileged life, her friend Rani, the granddaughter of a maidservant becomes involved in a love affair after watching a romantic Punjabi movie. She gets pregnant and is tortured to death by her stepfather, Mashooq. Mashooq gets released from prison by the efforts of Sardar Begum, Laila's grandmother, thus preserving the honor of the family. This story runs parallel to the events of civil war in East Pakistan. Mohsin's novel draws upon the history of Pakistan, which is reflected in characters' attitude towards the events of 1971. Rani's desperate situation finds parallels in the growing unrest in East Pakistan. Rani is buried on 3rd December 1971, when war started between India and Pakistan. Similarly, the domestic violence meted out to Rani finds parallels in the images of West Pakistanis smashing the faces of their compatriots in East Pakistan, (Cilano, 2013). The break-up of Pakistan brought a lot of shame to the country and according to Cilano, the necessity of stain removal to preserve the honor of the nation "finds its echo in how the characters react to Pakistan's surrender to India" (p.81). She further says that just like the shame brought about by Rani is washed away by submission and silence, so is the stain of surrender in 1971 to be removed by "acquiescence to an enforced amnesia" (p.81). The novel thus might be about domestic violence and honor killing but it is foremost a comment on the important period in Pakistan's political history, when the country fought a civil war, and finally entered into a conflict with India, resulting in breakup of not just the country but the nation itself. At stake now was the ideology itself that Pakistan was created for the Muslims of India. This idea is presented in the novel when, Yasmin, the maternal grandmother of Laila, reminisces the creation of Pakistan in 1947, with the promise that it is going to be a country for all Muslims of India, irrespective of linguistic or geographical differences. Yasmeen's sadness and bewilderment at the break-up of Pakistan in 1971, is shared by many in this country, and perhaps this is one reason that this part of political history of this country finds its way in novels again and again.

Without Dreams by Shahbano Bilgrami is a novel about two boys, Haroon and Abdul, who are growing up in a house where violence is a norm (Bilgrami, 2007). 1971, is central to this work too, as there are parallels between Pakistan's amnesia over the fall of East Pakistan and childhood amnesia of two boys, (Shamsie, 2017). Abdul, an orphan child is brought to Karachi from East Pakistan where his mother was brutally murdered by the Pakistani soldiers. He ends up becoming a servant boy in the home of Tahira, Haroon's mother, who herself faces violence at the hands of her husband, until he is murdered by his own son, Haroon. Abdul becomes the sacrificial goat as Haroon is helped by Tahira to escape, while Abdul is tortured to death in the prison. According to Shamsie, the way Tahira allows



Abdul to be accused of the murder, “embodies a national tendency to obfuscate unpleasant truths” (p.451). Words like, amnesia and obfuscate, used in the context of 1971 make it clear that general discourse in Pakistan shies away from looking this embarrassing episode of history in the eye, and it is left to the writers like Bilgrami to fictionalize this history and thereby make it palatable. Haroon’s anxiety while he is attempting his history exam is important in this context. Through him the novel questions “the nationalist dismissal of the events of 1971” (Cilano, 2013, p. 77). This novel then looks at the division of Pakistan and also the divisions of class and ethnicity. Those who wield power and have a sense of belonging ultimately survive, as Tahira and Haroon are saved by the system that always works for the benefit of the mighty, whereas Abdul, the orphaned, alienated and abandoned child from East Pakistan has to pay the ultimate price for crimes he has never committed. But somebody has committed those crimes and the novel urges the readers to shun this cowardly silence, and begin to at least question the nationalist mythos, as silence is complicity (Shamsie, 2017). Cilano (2011), also refers to this silence when she says that in the absence of historical and official accounts of the war in 1971, literary narratives filled this gap.

Aquila Ismail’s *Of Martyrs and Marigolds* is another novel dealing with the 1971 partition of Pakistan, but from a generally neglected perspective, “the Biharis” (Ismail, 2011). This novel is unique because most other novels about this tumultuous period in Pakistan’s political history never even hint at the existence of this community. Fiction seems to have forgotten them just like the real world. Biharis were the people who migrated to East Pakistan after partition of India in 1947. When civil war of 1971 ensued the Biharis were faced with an incomprehensible dilemma. East Pakistan became Bangladesh, and they were tagged as unwanted aliens or West Pakistan sympathizers, because they were not Bengalis. Biharis were bundled up in camps, as Pakistan did not want them either, and they are still living in these camps, a people without any country. The protagonist of the novel, Suri, however, manages to escape such a camp with the help of her Bengali friend Rumi. This tale of love and longing is inspired by author’s own feelings, because Ismail herself was brought up in a Bihari family (Qizilbash, 2012). If fiction creates a world that might be real, then this novel creates a world that is real, but forgotten and expunged from the pages of history.

Muhammad Hanif’s *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is a political satire set in the last days of General Zia-ul-Haq (Hanif, 2008). This era in Pakistan’s political history is very important because the General not only removed a democratic government and imposed martial law, but he also took it upon himself to Islamize Pakistan. This Islamization ultimately morphed into fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism that became the subject of many a post-9/11 Pakistani English novel. According to Muhammad Hanif, other than the fact that Zia was killed in a plane crash, everything else in the novel is made up (Bilal, 2016). But he further says that the novel is set in a certain period and a certain institution, and that we have lived through that period, so we are aware of what it was like. “That is what might be over-the-top realistic” (p.122). The novel is about Ali Shigri, a cadet in Pakistan Air Force Academy, whose father colonel Quli Shigri supposedly has been killed at the behest of General Zia. Ali wants revenge, so he makes a plan to murder General Zia during a drill that he is going to witness in Bahawalpur. He fails to achieve his goal, but Zia is killed any ways when his plane crashes few minutes after take-off, may be because of exploding mangoes. Other than this fictional tale, the novel is awash with the images of Zia, confident in his role as a savior sent by God himself to save this country from the obscene ways of the non-believers. Characters like Zainab, a girl who has been raped and gets a sentence herself to be stoned to death, is a chilling reminder of that law enforced by Zia, “the Hudood ordinance”. “Thus, a minor, fictionalized character carries a strong ethical message” (Waterman, 2015, p. 165). Similarly, the character of general secretary incarcerated in Lahore fort, tells of the plight of the dissenting voices. The appearance of real-life figures like Arnold Raphael, and Osama bin Laden hint at the cold war deals that were going to have dire and unexpected consequences for the world in a not-too-distant future. *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* thus belongs to a group of novels that deal with Pakistan and America’s involvement in Afghanistan (Shamsie, 2017). The novel tries to solve the mystery of Zia’s death, which it or any other novel will never be able to do, but it does succeed in bringing to light a controversial and



consequential period in political history of Pakistan, and it does so by inducing a huge laughter, which is nothing short of a miracle.

Fiction discussed above is a proof that politics and history are very important themes in Pakistani English Fiction, however, these novels mostly deal with the political/historical events taking place in the previous century. At the turn of the century an event that changed the entire world forever also had far-reaching consequences for Pakistan. On September 11, USA was attacked by Al-Qaida, and America responded with global war on terror, with Taliban of Afghanistan as their first target. Pakistan once again found itself in the middle of this complicated geo-political occurrence of inordinate importance. As Pakistan became the center of global attention, so did Pakistani English Fiction, and this genre saw a boom as many new novelists began to produce work of great quality in increasing numbers. A separate research on post 9/11 fiction can be undertaken to prove whether it is political/historical fiction or not. This research however proves the likelihood of the same to a great extent.

Conclusion

Pakistani English fiction is rich and varied in themes and ideas but there is plenty of evidence as presented in this research to prove that a bulk of fictional work produced by Pakistani English Fiction writers centers history and politics. Partition, cessation of East Pakistan and martial laws, were all political and historical events that become the focus of Pakistani English Fiction. These can therefore be termed as major themes of Pakistani English Fiction and this fiction can be broadly termed as politico/historical fiction.

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