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Glocal Game of Chess in South Asia: A Tridimensional Study of Rahman's 'In the Light of What We Know'

Abstract *With Dirk C. Van Raemdonck's theory of 'tridimensional game of chess in South Asia', this study explores how the Great Game of chess has encompassed the board of Afghanistan into the strategic and economical range of global as well as local nations. In this regard, this study delimits Zia Haider Rahman's 'In the Light of What We Know' to examine the role of great (US, India), little (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia), and local (ISI, UNAMA, AfDARI, militants, etc.) players respectively. The three-level players struggle to win their politico-economic and geostrategic motives. The delimited novel exposes that the little and local players are playing the game of proxy to fetch their own designs. This study concludes that great global players/forces ensnare little and local players and misuse them as white and/or black pieces respectively to win their gains.*

Key Words: Globalization, Glocalization, Great Game, South Asia, War on Terror

Introduction

This study explores how the 'Great Game' of chess has encompassed the board of Afghanistan into the strategic and economical range of global as well as local nations where players tactfully use their white and black pieces to win either by checkmate or forfeiting techniques. Apart from discussing the issues of homelessness, love, knowledge of literature, mathematics, physics, human psychology, law, and the capitalistic and 'the kick and spit' racial discrimination of American and Britain racists of C18 neo-Nazis against Asians such as Anglo-Banglo Zafar, the protagonist, 1971 Liberation war of Bangladesh, the incident of 9/11 and 2008 financial crisis, Rahman's, *'In the Light of What We Know'* (2014), recounts the saga of how political motives are attained by global players at the cost of state-sovereignty. Revealing the reality of 'War on Terror', the unnamed narrator shares the eye-witness experience of his friend, Zafar a UN rapporteur in Afghanistan; a new chessboard (Rahman, 2014) for the global players that have renewed their already started "Great Game" (Aslam, 2013, p. 278) the clues of which could be traced back in 1842 when a *'white man'*, a spy and the coiner of the term (Great Game) doing his alleged job under 'Khan Ali (later renowned as Connolly)' was captured and executed by Amir of Bukhara. The novel depicts the covert game of players being played at three levels – great, little and local – respectively where players are avulsing their due share from the economic, cultural and political organs of the Afghan body after having sharpened their beaks by the [so-called] sharpener of *'European enlightenment'* (Rahman, 2014).

Literature Review

Globalization, according to Janice Ho (2019), has retarded the competence, nature and functions of nation-states by affecting their cultural, economic, and political domains besides leaving patchy marks on progression. Manfred B. Steger (2003) argues that unlike hyper-globalizers who find no role of nation-state other than social formation in today's borderless global world due to despotic political power of the global network, the skeptics' group maintains that, "territory still matters" since global activity, under politics of global forces, is neither confined to a natural law of market nor to the projection of computer technology which was mobilized by political decisions of the governments working under neo-liberalist shade; the global markets and new technologies rendered quick

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permeation of the same new global setup that had caused their own arrival to new worlds. Both views may, however, be compared with a "vexing version of the chicken–and–the egg problem" (Steger, 2003, p. 66) since without taking political decisions, economic independence cannot be attained. No paradigm shift is occurred in the then land-covetous colonizer and today's borderless globalizer's attitude except for the increased ratio of interruptions into others' affairs through different games played in the name of military, economic and political cooperation.

The 'hyperglobalizers', to Steger (2003), see a new phase of world history where governments would but perform only one new role of a "superconductor for global Capitalism" (p. 65) while the global forces would play an economic, political, strategic game of their own interests. The weak are still exploited; now in the charming attire of globalization. Ghulam Ali Khan (2010) observes the economic, cultural and political gambits of the developed world lie in globalizers' endgame of disturbing the aboriginal ethics, particularly those of the Muslim world. Such discriminatory gauges can lead to renewed nationalism or strengthening of borders as has been the case since the 9/11 attacks. For Jamil Marghuz (2018), unlike classical nationalism that placates with exploitive global forces, the emerging neo-nationalism fights for national values and sovereignty with the object to safeguard nation-states from shrinking under the injurious effects of globalization. Steger (2003), hence, claims that the rapid phenomenal occurrence of globalization has driven the state into a global web of political interdependencies by annihilating the traditional shapes of national sovereignty. Globalization disintegrates and weakens nations through TNCs' networks and their control of global markets that destabilize a nation's economy by boosting the interdependence of the countries and weakening their grasp over geographical borders.

Theoretical Framework

Today's projection of global governance as the political dimension of globalization has fastened several setups of supranational institutions by a coordinating knot for their common objectives. Several international organizations such as the UN, NATO, WTO and OCED are working together to establish a global government in the name of a worldwide civil society. Concurring to researchers' expectation, democratic rights would eventually be gotten to be withdrawn from their limited relationship to separate regional units by giving birth to a democratic rule–a global governance structure based on Western cosmopolitan median, universal lawful courses of action and a web of extending linkages between different governments and (non-governmental) organizations–exertion to render a 'cosmopolitan democracy for achieving a plurality of identities prospering inside a structure of mutual toleration and accountability (Steger, 2003).

For Van Raemdonck (2013), terrorism is a means to a set of political ends conducted to annihilate the citizens, representative institutional setup or infrastructure of any state by blackmailing, kidnapping, killing or fundraising to create insecurity or manipulate opponents' political actions (Watson, Covarrubias, Lansford, & Van Raemdonck, 2013). For him, the global game has three dimensions: in its first dimension, the international players of globalism–USA, USSR, China, and India (here it is the US alone in case of Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know*)–are involved in playing on Afghan board and capturing pieces (soil and the sons) (Watson, Covarrubias, Lansford, & Van Raemdonck, 2013). After crushing Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan; once white and now black pieces, the US appeared on the Central and South Asian scene to control the increasing power of China and the nuclear capacity of Iran for attaining its due share from the oil and gas enriched area of Central Asia. The discoveries in Afghanistan and Central Asian states allured global players to strategize the game on the political front for capturing the resources without taking care of the sovereignty of local states; hence the extensive increase in supplies and pipeline projects under discussion (Blank, 2007; Raemdonck, 2013). The sovereignty of a government is used as a gauge to assess its independence level, legal character, and monopoly (Foroohi & Moradi, 2017). On the second level, for Raemdonck (2013), the little game is being played by the regional powers: Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the South and Central Asian states (In Rahman's novel, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are seen play a little game). This can be a dicey practice due to the lopsided nature of power distribution among the players (Watson, Covarrubias, Lansford, & Van Raemdonck, 2013). Numerous ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, tribal, clans are playing the political game of chess on the third

level. Besides, terrorism runs through all levels of the Central and South Asian chessboard. On the third level, the local – ISI, UNAMA, AfDARI, militants, etc. – play their own role to win the political motives.

Glocal Game of Chess in '*In the Light of What We Know.*'

Fresh discoveries of oil and gas reservoirs in Central Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan allured the great powers to these states. Together with globally rising militants/extremists' movements and their activities in the region, augmented disturbance in the region (Watson, Covarrubias, Lansford, & Van Raemdonck, 2013). According to Rahman (2014), the economically hungry Americans would uphold stable foundations inside Afghanistan to capture Central Asian oil wells and to control Iran. But the economic hunger is not confined to Americans (globalizers) alone; the regional states and groups, too, are part of this game. What are their motives and on which terms they play is quite confusing? A crucial politics is in progress in this region. As Hilary Clinton once stated, "the future of global politics will be decided in Central Asia, not in Afghanistan or Iraq, and the US will be right at the center of the action" (as cited in) (Rahim, 2017); this points to the political-cum-economic game that America tends to play on Afghan grounds (chessboard). In the novel, the great game is played by the USA, a little game by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and a domestic game by UNAMA, AfDARI (TNC), Taliban and tribal groups besides Pakistani intelligence agency (ISI), etc. The matter, however, is not so simple. Rahman (2014) urges readers to have a vast perception of the state of affairs going on because the things often show them up before us quite the opposite to what they really are, though "[r]eality seeps through the cracks" (Rahman, 2014, p. 381) and a slight effort can acquaint us with it. The question is whether globalizers' humanizing mission was striving for human rights or doing murder of reality since war always crushes truth and the killing of truth takes place at the hands of both – vanquishers and vanquished.

Preplanned Global Project – A Great Game

USA–the great player–seems to be playing the global game of chess in South Asia. Rahman claims (2014) that Afghanistan – the land of lost facts (p. 406) – is another *"chessboard"* (p. 35, emphasis added) where economic chess was played by the US after the 9/11 terrorist attacks for which Islamic group al-Qaeda was allegedly accused. These attacks were carried out by the United States itself as per thousands of individuals' argumentation can be presented to counter the American official discourse (Thomas, 2011). The subsequent investigations regarding the internalization of this trauma (Wijngaarden, 2015) proved that "the WTC's structural integrity was destroyed by intense fire as well as the severe damage inflicted on the planes". But the conspiracy theorists firmly squabble that all three buildings were demolished by controlled explosive material set earlier than the collision of planes ("Debunking the 9/11 Myths: Special Report - The World Trade Center," 2019). But all these gambits were deliberately placed on the war-afflicted Afghanistan, the land of which was misused for a foul play of deteriorating the facts just for economic gains.

The United States had decided to attack Afghanistan two months earlier than the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Coll, 2004). Rahman argues (2014) that the great global player had already planned to invade Afghanistan even before the incident of 9/11. The ex-UN staffer, Rodiger Dornhaff, a retired UN employee who remained clung to it like an 'old sheepdog' (p. 134) for consultancy, phoned his past beloved and the mother of Emily, Mrs. Penelope Hampton Wyvern in June 2001 (i.e., approximately 12 weeks earlier than the occurrence of 9/11) to inform her about his former UN colleague's search for hiring a Harvard qualified junior consultant who could render reconstruction services in Afghanistan under Mohammad Jalaluddin. The point to be noted here is why did UN start seeking the services of a consultant for a prospective reconstruction task that it would have to furnish in Afghanistan and why Dornhaff had phoned Mrs. Wyvern to prepare her daughter, Emily as a 'soldier of beneficence' (Rahman, 2014, p. 134) for the services (Emily is Britain by birth; hence symbolizing the Bush-Blair alliance in the great game of Afghanistan). Zafar's analysis of Millay's quote that, "it's [life] one damn thing over and over" and that human choices are made, will flex in the teeth of [unexpected] events that overwhelm them (p. 132) together with his curiosity of how Dornhaff had information from behind enemy lines, reveals the whole contrivance of conspiracy; that is how

unexpected external events define everything, change everything, not only subsequently but also previously (p. 131). If attacks had to occur on September 11, 2001, then why the services of a junior consultant were required in June 2001, i.e., before the time for which Emily, a woman was proposed by Dornhaff to a UN colleague especially when we know that before 9/11 Afghanistan was in full possession of the Taliban who did not allow any welfare deeds. America had already envisaged the game plan to invade black pieces of the Afghan chessboard. Moreover, the US power can be experienced, not through the moment but the focused light of "umpteen film depictions of US military might" (p. 19), i.e., the game is fascinated and turned in favor of America through the foul play of lopsided electronic media.

Little Game

Rahman (2014) has unveiled the chief motive working behind American attacks on Afghanistan and courageously criticizes the hypocritical role of Saudi Arabia. "[….] oil is at the root. Oil and business" (p. 359) as it is pointed out by Tariq Ali (2002), i.e. "oil, oil, oil" in his book. Hence Saudi Arabia played a 'little game' of stabilizing cheap oil prices solely in favor of the US. Rahman's lines also reverberate the voice of Steve Coll (2004). But a replica of Rashid's ideas is also reflected in Zafar's asking of the narrator whether how many, he thinks, had read Rashid Ahmed's book entitled *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* before September 11, 2001 (p. 130). Rashid (2000) daringly surveys the impending danger in this part of the world. He opines that part of the background to this decision was the United States' permanent favor for UNOCAL 's (Union Oil Company California) planned pipeline for the transportation of oil and natural gas from the Caspian Sea region to the Indian Ocean via Afghanistan and Pakistan. The most shocking role of Saudi-Arabia has been described by Rahman in its little game played after the 9/11 attacks (2014; also authenticated by Rashid, 2000). The following day of the 9/11 incident, Saudis drew off about nine million extra barrels of oil for the sustenance of American markets; the Saudi royal family played their part in the game of keeping oil prices low because in retaliation they had to earn fortification or indifference of America towards Saudia while hitting any other Muslim country (pp. 359-60). This Saudi royal fraud not only enraged the Muslim world but also helped great players such as Britain and Americans to "justify their invasion of Afghanistan with platitudes about freedom and liberating the Afghani people" (p. 361) whereas Afghanis only wanted "peace and security" (p. 361) in their lives. Quite like Deleuze and Foucault who spoke for a crying Hindu woman at the time of *Sati* (Spivak, 1983), America, however, assuming the itinerary role of Afghan agency, started to "blight on their home" (p. 400) for which she did not seek their permission even.

Pakistan also played a crucial little game. The General told that in handing over the Pakistani air-bases to the US for the Afghan war, the "American lackey *Bush-arraf,*" i.e., Musharraf's administration had played the trick of 'strategic depth' (Rahman, 2014, p. 350) just to keep Indians left out of the game; lest they should be the co-partners of Americans instead of Pakistan. But Americans blamed Pakistan of playing a double game; Musharraf though cooperated in the context of Al-Qaeda, but he was deceived by doing nothing against the Taliban; he rather did controversial deals with them (Gupta, 2009). According to Stephen M. Walt (2019), the Taliban had safe havens in neighboring Pakistan and were being backed by Islamabad that had its own justifications to help them which implied that Islamabad might pull back its support for them when essential, constrain its costs, and obstruct it out; a double game by Pakistan. But Raemdonck points (2013) to how the US had efficiently propped up Pakistan all through the Cold War as the strategic partner. Pakistan took this co-partnership as an indemnity in the 'Little Game' with India (p. 191). Therefore, if Pakistan had not given its bases, says the ISI official, they would have fought from Indian bases. This might render Indians militarily allied to Americans besides bringing a denture in Pak-US relations; even a loss of American support for Pakistan (Rahman, 2014, p. 350). But the strategic partnership has now received a dent in the context of new ground realities. It is inevitable for the US to sustain and develop India as a part of its geostrategic schemata to keep balance and stability in the region besides confining Chinese influence since her rise there has challenged US global power (Rahim, 2017). Pakistan is definitely feeling disturbed by Indo–US nexus in the Afghan game of chess. The atomic encounter between Pakistan and India, rising geostrategic and geopolitical pressures between China, the US and Russia

and their combined intrigues within the Indian Sea are key variables that will set Pakistan in the center of an unused era of intermediary war within the backdrop (Rahim, 2017). Pakistan is moving ahead haltingly due to its strategic position and momentous role in the Great Game. Cold War chaotic situation continues as a basic divergence between the strategic interests of Pakistan and the global and regional strategic interests of the West.

Local Game/ or Domestic Game(s)

The local game is played by two players in the novel; AfDARI and UNAMA workers (on behalf of great players) and ISI (on behalf of Pakistan; the little player). The UNAMA had established its network in Afghanistan in March 2002 just after the American invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001 to conduct a global phenomenal function, i.e., reconstruction after annihilating the aboriginal geography, culture (Olsson & Tejpar, 2009). It started its operation of rehabilitating war-ridden people under Muhammad Jalaluddin and Emily while all around in Kabul its Land Cruisers were running, and US helicopters laden with UNAMA staff were landing in the remote and backward districts of Afghanistan. Approximately one hundred staff members of UNAMA were brought and kept in a compound (Rahman, 2014, p. 136) to set an ethnoscape of the globalizers in Appadurai's phrase (2005). Moreover, ISAF was closely coordinating with UNAMA to provide security to UN mission (2014); it was a coalition of the willing with the peace-enforcement mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (Olsson & Tejpar, 2009).

The reason behind this preplanned invasion was that of economic for which "Emily was fighting" (Rahman, 2014, p. 400) by assisting Jalaluddin in his affairs and becoming the destiny-maker of twenty-five million Afghanis because nobody else could have so easily influenced the senior Afghani as 'reliable, bright' Emily (feminizing globalization), i.e., "a woman so vulnerable to the father figure, a pilgrim from one shrine to another, in search of the ideal (p. 135). Now the lot of poor Afghanis was in the hands of transcultural, transnational person Jalaluddin (a little player of the political game having American passport) but "he could not do it all on his own and there beside him would be Emily" (p. 135); the global forces engage women to get desired results because the intricate men like Jalaluddin are always influenced by young ladies' company. Evil always alludes to the onlookers by revealing through a bright complexion rather than an ugly image (p. 135).

West, being the champion of enlightened values like freedom, liberty, and democracy has double standards; they run real democratic systems at home but their institutes, aimed at transforming Musharraf into "Bush-arraf" (p. 350), impart ruling culture in the students who come from their past colonies and it is easy for West to entrap this educated breed into any bargain rather than the real sons of the soil (as cited in Naqvi, 2010). Hence studying at colonial institutes in colonizers' language and learning their version of history, the comprador class projects the norms and dispositions of their past masters without suffering from any inferiority complex. Seeking the will of their masters, they never bother about their subjects' deprivations. Say, for instance, the poverty-hunted people of South Asian countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and India are the victims of exploitation but the aristocrats who "lord over" (Rahman, 2014, p. 255) them are quite indifferent to their issues, having no soft corner rather look down upon them, denying all their rights. These elites mimic "the Westerners" (p. 255), their past colonial masters though apparently, they pretend to "hate them" (p. 255) but in actuality, they come home with a ruling mentality and behave in the same way as their colonial masters have been doing. "We brought their values wholesale in exchange for our dignity, grafted their subject-ruler mentality onto our own so that these countries of ours are incapable of anything" (p. 255).

One local game played by Pakistani ISI is witnessed by Zafar. Pakistani officials such as a retired colonel Mushtaq, an ISI official, Mohammed Hassan, General Fidous Khan and a scientist, Dr. Reza Mehrani discuss the pros and cons of the American invasion and General says that Americans have always been fighting their wars by proxies (p. 349). The issue is often costly since Americans cannot tolerate their bloodshed. It often fights its proxies by "providing intelligence, using special-operations forces, and deploying drones to maintain a light footprint" (Byman, 2018). But Americans always seek mercenaries to fight their wars.

"The Americans cannot stomach casualties, said Reza Mehrani. When the body bags are airlifted by the dozen to the Dover airbase, that's when they pack up and leave their wars. So, this time, they

will be using drones. The technology is ready for it". (Rahman, 2014, p. 348).

This time, they decide to use drone technology because "American elites" (p. 349) do not join the US Army. War is fought for a noble cause, but herein the objective is to plunder someone's economy; how can loyalty be expected, if the cause of Afghan war is ignoble? Moreover, soldiers fight for their comrades than for their country (p. 349). Rahman says (2014) that only the troops of Crane[(s) except for the crusader Crane, the son of Forrester II; a US Senator who has quit everything to become the part of marines] are sent to war just because the US would never have gone to war if they had to give off the "sons of Wall Street or Capitol Hill" (p. 370) for the fight. The fact is that "the West sends its working-class heroes to fight and die" (p., 400).

Pakistani intelligence agency ISI coordinates with the US in the war on terror but plays 'local game' (Raembonck's concept; 2013) to gain its motive of 'strategic depth' for Pakistan which to Rahman (2014, p. 351) must be attained by tackling health and education issues of the people rather than combating militarily with a country having a budget seven times more than that of Pakistan. Despite adopting American inclined policies since 1980, the ISI has openly been berated by US officials for its alleged operational assistance to the Haqqani network (Yusuf, 2013). But the answer to Rahman's objection is found in his own presentation of the facts about the miserable condition of Pakistan besides the aggressive covert designs of neighboring India. Like Hassan, the ISI official says that the nation-state enjoys extremely potent moral obligations (p. 352) though West highlights it as a failed state (p. 352). Pakistan is ranked as the ninth most failed state (Javed, 2009). Even experts like Ahmed Rashid have long contended that Pakistan is failing. But it will never be allowed to fail since the American war in Afghanistan, and the game of AF-Pak dollar strategy would stop it from collapsing (Gupta, 2009). The nation is fastened by strong ties of kinships and loyalties that run in the racial/ national ancestry of Pakistanis (p. 352). Moreover, the public stanchly trusts that their army is "the only island of sanity in an ocean of madness" (p. 353) due to the rule of "meritocracy" (p. 353) there; even the civilian governments seek their help to maintain law and order in the country.

Finally, Colonel Mushtaq successfully determines the reality of Zafar in the 'local game' of lock-picking. Both are spies and doing the job for their respective employers. Tracing 'Zen Buddhist' (Zen Buddhism is attempted to understand the meaning of life directly than by logical thought/ or language) type of secretive nature in Zafar as well as "a soft spot for Etonians" (p. 362) in him, the colonel says, "We are a dangerous breed, you and I. We are lock-pickers. We are dangerous to others and to ourselves" (p. 363). General Khan, pointing to diasporic South Asians – assimilates Zafar with "[a] coconut. The South Asian who has become white in all but (brown) skin colour" (p. 355). The colonel also alerts Zafar about the impending 'local game' of "envelops' and in particular about Crane (p. 364) which Zafar does not understand at the spot.

Conclusion

With the US-led network of nations, wherein most of them were western; the global forces have apparently come to make the Afghanis civilized. Previously they were acceptable as 'white pieces of chess' in their war against the Soviet Union when "jihadis" were supported by the Americans just because they were the "enemy's enemy", but now they had become 'black pieces' (Rahman, 2014, p. 537); hence not acceptable. The miscellaneous lists shared by Emily with meeting participants included the estimates of destructions, the very images of which were being blurted out by CNN channel with, "– volume turned down, closed captions on" (pp. 242-43) to the people crowded there. But there were also lists of things to be discussed regarding the developmental projects that AfDARI and UNAMA were going to initiate in remote and backward areas of Afghanistan. On the one hand, "these white males [were] doing Lord's work" since they were pondering over the proposed measures of rehabilitation but on the other hand, being 'on the side of the angels' (p. 244) they were violating the cultural values of the land by dissipating in heavy drinking. Rahman exposes that apart from misusing the forums of UNAMA and AfDARI to subjugate the Afghanis, Americans also make efforts to get access to the Central Asian oil and gas reservoirs. Since the way to these sources passes through Afghanistan, so by subjugating the Afghanis culturally and politically through its proxies, whether be they the little players or local (domestic) players, Americans, in an acrobatic manner, manipulate the

old Indo-Pak rivalries to grind their own axe of geo-economic ventures apart from exploiting Saudi Arabia to lower oil prices for keeping American morale rise and sound.

It is a great mockery, that the local people "even live [their] lives by the lists of others", (p. 243) as mere puppets by playing in others' hands. The lists made by others are to furnish their days with *'orderings'*, by others since a man feels that his fellow's path is not straight and it is his prime duty to smooth the path of his fellow beings. The concept of *'othering'* is so much pervasive in the human heart that no facet of life is free of its impact. First, the Afghanis were destroyed and deserted as they were *'others'* and the enemies of civilization, but the same destroyers reappeared, this time, with an agenda or list of developments in which, "[e]verything is made simple" (p. 243) so much so that it will reduce "the complexity of the world" (p. 243), since "the simplicity of a line" could render that the estimated "missions of development" were "the modest means" to triumph "over the terror of the world" which was perhaps unreachable before the world got satisfied that if construction work had started it would mean that the lurking danger had to be overcome. But these were the predatory measures taken gradually by the predator that had first fed upon the physical body of the prey destroying it to the utmost and then started sucking the cultural and economic blood by politicizing that renovation was in process (Rahman, 2014, pp. 243-44).

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